

Position of Employability Priority Groups in Edinburgh –

Prison Leavers

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Robbie Pye

(this research project was compiled by Robbie Pye an intern with Capital City Partnership during 2010; if you require more information on this work or the work of the Job Strategy Team, please contact Capital City Partnership on 0131 270 6030)



Prison Leavers

Outline

The prison population of Scotland is currently about 7,422. 57% of custodial sentences are for 3 months or less and 26% are for 3 to 6 months, meaning that the majority of prisoners in Scotland are on short term sentences. Almost 75% of those who served short term sentences re-offend within 2 years (Scottish Government, 2010b). About 60% of those entering prison are unemployed, and 66% of those who are not lose their job whilst in prison (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). A study by Frontier Economics (2010) found that projects helping ex-prisoners with the transition back into society and employment can reduce re-offending rates by up to 40%.

Research has shown a clear difference over the perception of barriers to employment by those still in prison and those who have left. For example, in one survey no current prisoners felt that debt management would be a barrier to employment, yet 80% of prisoner leavers cited this as a barrier (Gillespie, Mulvey and Scott, 2005). This shows a lack of awareness of some barriers to employment among prisoners, leaving them less room to prepare for and preempt future problems after they leave prison.

In addition to some of the more common barriers to employment, prison leavers also face stigma from employers due to their criminal records. Research has shown that this can create a formidable barrier (Fahey, Roberts and Engel, 2006; Hartfree, Dearden and Pound, 2008). Investing money in helping ex-offenders into employment means less money spent due to re-offending.

Under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (1974) prison sentences of under 6 months are usually considered spent after 7 years, which increases to 10 years for sentences between 6 months and 2 and a half years. Once the necessary amount of time has passed, these past convictions will no longer be disclosed under Basic Disclosure. However, Standard or Enhanced Disclosure, which may be required for some jobs, contains all convictions, spent or unspent (Disclosure Scotland, n.d).

Definition

This section covers those who left prison in the last year as they face the most barriers to employment. Although, as stated above, ex-offenders will retain their criminal record for many years, other barriers associated with being in prison can be overcome in less time.

Scope

1,713 ex-prisoners put Edinburgh as their home address when released from prison in 2008-2009 (Scottish Government, 2009b).

Employment

Research has shown that about 20% of ex-offenders on probation are in employment and only 10% of ex-offenders enter employment upon leaving prison, mainly through personal contacts (Webster et al. 2001; Hartfree, Dearden and Pound, 2008). According to Apex Scotland, 94% of offenders were unemployed when entering prison and about 50% of prison leavers were employed. Therefore about 170 prison leavers went straight into employment and about **857** entered employment overall.

Barriers to Employment

- Criminal record and employer prejudice. About 60% of ex-offenders are refused jobs due to their criminal record
 - Curfew restrictions
 - Transport problems
 - Drug addiction
 - Lack of stable accommodation
 - Numeracy and literacy problems.
 - Low educational qualifications
- (Gillespie, Mulvey and Scott, 2005; Fahey, Roberts and Engel, 2006; Hartfree, Dearden and Pound, 2008; Scottish Government, 2010)

Overlaps

Information on overlaps for this target group is only available for those in prison. It is expected that a similar proportion of prison leavers will be in these overlaps. The proportion of prison leavers in Edinburgh is shown in brackets.

- Ethnic minorities are over represented in prisons. 12% of male prisoners and 18% of female prisoners are Black.
- 66% of people *entering* prisons have a drugs problem and 33% have an alcohol problem
- 27% (463) of prisoners have been in care as a child.
- 46% (789) of male prisoners have a physical disability or long-term illness
- About 75% (1,285) of offenders have at least two mental disorders and about 20% (343) have attempted suicide
- Between 1 (17) and 10% (171) of offenders have a learning disability

- 49% of male and 33% of female prisoners were excluded from school. 65% (1,113) and 82% (1,404) of all prisoners have very low numeracy and literacy skills, respectively.
- 33% (565) of prisoners lose their housing whilst in prison, creating a higher likelihood of homelessness. 32% were homeless prior to entering prison.

(Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Hartfree, Dearden and Pound, 2008; Department of Health, 2009; Scottish Government, 2010)

Services

***Passport** – Provided by Access to Industry, this project helps the homeless, care leavers, prison leavers, young offenders, and drug and alcohol addicts. Case workers work one on one with clients to help them into training, further education or employment.

Apex Scotland – They aim to reduce re-offending by helping prison leavers and young people at risk of offending address their barriers to employment. They offer advice, training courses and work placements, and include specialist programmes for those with learning disabilities and mental health conditions, and Progress 2 Work for drug problems.

Sacro – Provides a variety of services to prisoners and prison leavers to help make the transition back into the community and to reduce re-offending rates. This includes support with accommodation, drugs and alcohol dependency and other issues.

Job Centre Plus – is one of the main providers of programmes to help prisoners and prison leavers prepare for employment. They run a variety of programmes, covering issues such as CV writing, literacy and numeracy help, interview skills and advice with disclosure.

Research Issues

- Available data does not show the total amount of ex-offenders in Edinburgh
- Available employment data does not account for longer term barriers associated with leaving prison and having a criminal record.