

**EMPLOYABILITY SUPPORT IN EDINBURGH  
FOR PEOPLE LEAVING PRISON**

**Final Report**

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## CONTENTS

1. Introduction	3
2. Ex-prisoners in Edinburgh – what do the figures tell us?	5
3. Employability support for ex-prisoners in Edinburgh	14
4. Conclusions and recommendations	31
Appendix 1: Process participants	

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## *1.1 Introduction*

This report provides the findings from a study commissioned by the Capital City Partnership (CCP) and other Edinburgh-based agencies<sup>1</sup> with an interest in the employability of ex-prisoners. The work was commissioned in June 2005 and undertaken between July and October of that year

## *1.2 Background*

The reduction of ex-prisoner re-offending rates is increasingly identified as a policy priority at the Scottish and UK government levels. Research, discussed in the following section, consistently identifies sustained employment as the biggest single determining factor in affecting ex-prisoner recidivism rates.

In Edinburgh, the key partners have been working together to improve the co-ordination of employability services across the city, through the development of the Joined Up For Jobs<sup>2</sup> strategy. This acknowledges the need to provide a seamless employability service. It also recognises the challenge in joining up services to particular client groups – including ex-prisoners – due to a range of factors explored in the following section.

The context for this work was a recognition of the need to improve employability services to people returning to Edinburgh following a custodial sentence. Our work specifically considers those leaving prison, as opposed to people with a criminal record who have served their sentence within the community.

Fragmentation and lack of co-ordination were identified as key barriers to providing a more connected service offer, and the partners commissioned this work to consider how these might be addressed. The study was undertaken at a time when the approach to employability across Scotland is being reviewed and the launch of the Scottish Employability Framework will heavily influence future ways of working. Equally, the Scottish Executive is introducing initiatives to improve Throughcare for short term prisoners returning to the community, which, also clearly links into this agenda.

We consider the changing policy context in Section 3 of this report.

## *1.3 Aims and Objectives*

The task set out in the study brief was to examine the challenges facing ex-prisoners in relation to entering employment and to consider optimum ways of delivering a more joined up service to those leaving prison.

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<sup>1</sup> City of Edinburgh Council, JobCentre Plus and Edinburgh Prison.

<sup>2</sup> [www.joinedupforjobs.org.uk](http://www.joinedupforjobs.org.uk)

### 1.4 Process

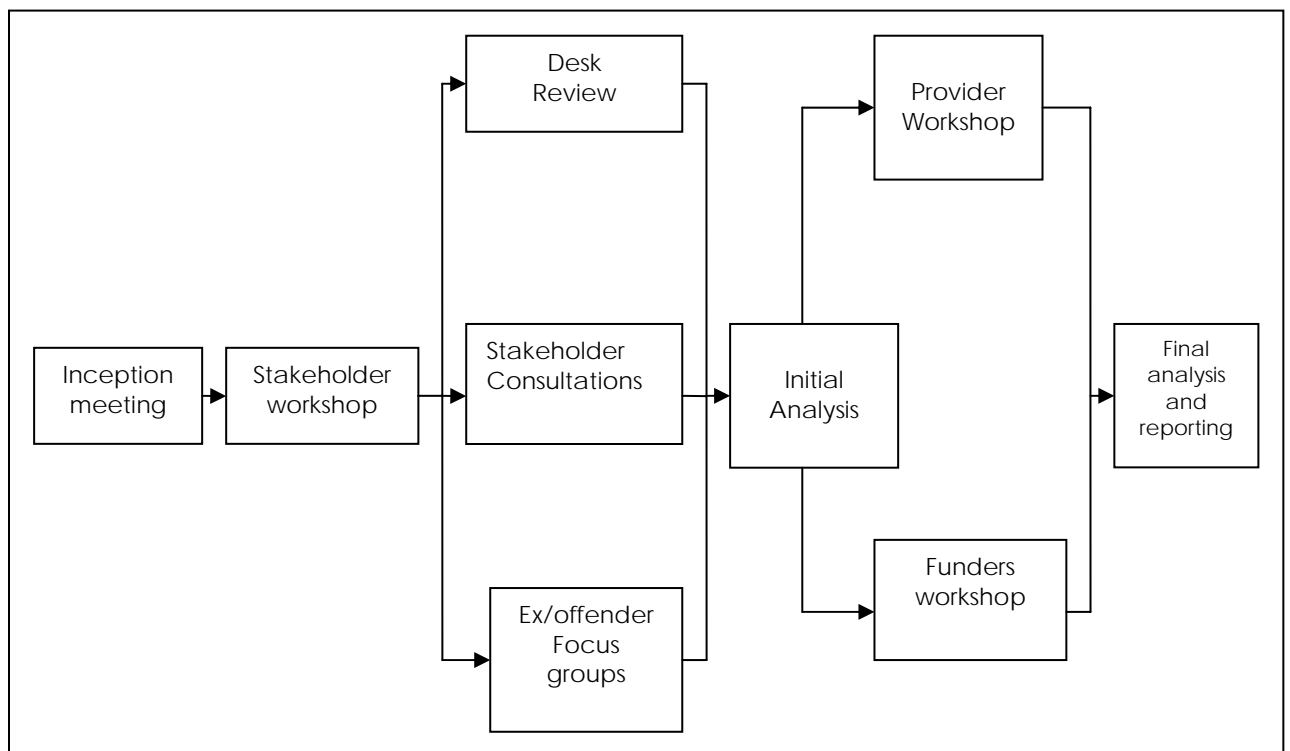
The study process has involved a range of elements including:

- Desk research
- Stakeholder workshops
- Individual consultations
- Prison-based focus groups
- Analysis and reporting

In addition, the process has included discussions with the Department for Employment and Skills (DfES) around the development of employability approaches to ex-prisoners in England and Wales. These are discussed in Section 3.

Details of individuals who have participated in our process are set out in Appendix 1.

Figure 1, below, sets out our study process.



### 1.5 Report Structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 - Ex-prisoners in Edinburgh – what the data tells us
- Section 3 – Employability support for ex-prisoners in Edinburgh
- Section 4 – Conclusions and Recommendations

## 2: Ex-Prisoners in Edinburgh – what do the figures tell us?

### 2.1 Introduction

This section of the report considers both the local and national context of working with ex-prisoners to improve their employability. It outlines some of the key issues that affect ex-prisoners on their release from prison, particularly in relation to their position in the labour market. It further highlights some of the findings from a number of national studies which have looked at ex-prisoners and the main barriers they face at this stage. Much of the focus of research in this area has increasingly been on the significant rate of re-offending amongst prisoners, and the role that inclusion and employability initiatives can play in addressing this.

From this national perspective, the section also presents the local context, giving a broad profile of the ex-prisoner population in Edinburgh, looking at trends over the past 3 years.

### 2.2 The national picture

In 2004/05, the average daily population of the prison population in Scotland was 6,779<sup>3</sup>. This represents a 2% increase on the 2003/04 figure and is the highest level ever recorded in one year. Latest figures show in fact that the average daily prison population in Scotland has increased by 13% over the last nine years, since 1996/1997. Within this, significantly, the average daily number of female prisoners has grown by 75%, compared to an 11% growth in the average daily male prison population.

Clearly, in parallel with a growing prison population is the challenge of addressing the issues associated with a rising number of ex-prisoners being released each year. Very closely linked to this is the understanding that a significant number of ex-prisoners re-offend and subsequently return to custody. A recently published study<sup>4</sup> which analysed a cohort of 45,245 offenders who were discharged from a custodial sentence (5,738) or given a non-custodial sentence (39, 507) in 1999, found that 31% were re-convicted within 1 year, 42% within 2 years, 49% within 3 years and 53% within 4 years. Other key points from the study were:

- Those discharged from a custodial sentence were more likely to be reconvicted within 2 years than those given a non custodial sentence. 60% of prisoners discharged from prison were reconvicted within 2 years, and 43% received a further custodial sentence
- Males were more likely to be reconvicted than females, with 44% of males and 34% of females reconvicted within 2 years, and males more than twice as likely to return to custody within 2 years

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<sup>3</sup> Scottish Executive Statistical Bulletin Cr/2005/8 Prison Statistics Scotland, 2004/05

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Executive Statistical Bulletin CrJ/2005/7 Reconvictions of Offenders discharged from custody or given non-custodial sentences in Scotland 1999, Scotland

- Reconviction rates tended to decrease by age, although this was more marked in males than in females
- The likelihood of reconviction increased significantly with the number of previous convictions, rising from 24% of offenders with no previous convictions reconvicted within 2 years, to 77% of offenders with 10 previous convictions reconvicted within the same time period

These findings are also broadly reflected in the latest bulletin published by the Scottish Prison Service on prisoners released from prison during 2001<sup>5</sup>, which showed that of the 6781 prisoners released in Scotland in 2001, 50% returned to prison within 2 years, and represented an increase of 1% on the return to custody rate for prisoners released in 2000. It also confirmed that males were more likely than females to return to prison and that young offenders are more likely than adults to return. The highest rates of return were amongst offenders who have committed a Crime of Dishonesty (69% for males and 61% for females) and the lowest rates of return were amongst prisoners who had served Life or who had been detained under Section 205 of the Criminal Procedure Act. Half of the prisoners who return to custody do so within 6 months of release and 75% within 12 months of release.

### *2.3 Ex-prisoners and employment*

Against this context, a central part of the employability agenda for ex-prisoners aims to reduce re-offending rates, and recognises that securing employment is one of the most significant factors in being able to meaningfully address this. Research undertaken by the Social Exclusion Unit<sup>6</sup> has shown that being in employment reduces the risk of re-offending by between a third and a half. Similarly, Apex Scotland<sup>7</sup> has shown a 37.5% reduction in offences by ex-offenders after participating in employment courses for 6 months.

In terms of the employability of ex-prisoners however, there are significant barriers to be overcome, both from the perspective of the ex-prisoner and from the perspective of potential future employers.

A number of studies<sup>8</sup> have sought to identify the main factors which might act as a barrier to employment amongst ex-prisoners. These have been mainly national or UK based in their scope, but are likely to be indicative in terms of the general issues amongst the prisoner/ex-prisoner population. Key findings from this research highlight some of the significant challenges facing intervention agencies in this regard:

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<sup>5</sup> Return to Custody in Scottish Prisons SPS Bulletin, 2005

<sup>6</sup> Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners, Social Exclusion Unit 2002,

<sup>7</sup> Apex Scotland Annual Report

<sup>8</sup> Studies cited here are in particular: New Deal Intelligence Report Article: Welfare to Work for Prisoners and Ex-offenders, Scottish Executive, March 2004; Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners, Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Your Guide 2...Engaging hard to reach adult learners – Ex-offenders, the Skills and Education Network, June 2005

- Poor education/lack of qualifications – 80% of prisoners have the writing skills, 65% the numeracy skills and 50% the reading skills at or below the level of an 11 year old child. Prisoners are over 20% more likely to have been excluded from school. Those who do not take part in education/training while in prison are 3 times more likely to be reconvicted
- Drug and alcohol misuse – 60-70% of prisoners entering prison have a drugs misuse problem, and 80% of these have never had any previous contact with drug treatment services (our consultations suggest that this figure is likely to be considerably higher for women prisoners)
- Mental and physical health – over 70% of prisoners suffer from at least 2 mental disorders and a considerable number have previously attempted suicide (20% of male and 37% of female prisoners). Around half of prisoners are not registered with a doctor prior to entering custody. Prisoners are also likely to suffer from low self esteem, confidence and motivation
- Poverty, debt and homelessness – 50% of prisoners have had previous debt problems and in one third of cases prisoners' debt gets worse while in prison. A third of prisoners lose their house while in prison. Over 80% of prisoners claim benefit on release

These are just some of the main issues which require to be tackled in engaging ex-prisoners. There are numerous other linked and causal factors which have a significant impact on efforts to improve employability amongst ex-prisoners. These might include for instance poor family networks, a mistrust of mainstream agencies, poor life skills as a result of institutionalism, and the danger of circumstances deteriorating while in prison.

Overall, the statistical evidence underlines the strong correlation between crime and deprivation, highlighting the complex interrelationship between the two. For example, recent research in Scotland<sup>9</sup> has shown that one in nine men aged 22-44 from the country's most deprived communities will spend some time in prison. This reminds us of the need for prospective solutions to ex-prisoner employability to be grounded within wider approaches.

Generally speaking, there are a number of problems which are often seen to take priority over action to improve training, education and employment opportunities. Whilst stabilising certain aspects of an ex-prisoner's life is central to providing support, it is increasingly recognised that gaining employment at an appropriate point can help to sustain a stable future lifestyle.

In addition to personal issues and social problems, there are further barriers which can act against ex-prisoners in terms of gaining employment, even

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<sup>9</sup> Social Exclusion and Imprisonment in Scotland: Houchin Roger 2005 page 77

those who might have participated in employment/training activity. It has been found for instance, that only 28% of ex-offenders who have participated in New Deal programmes<sup>10</sup> go into unsubsidised employment, compared to 39% of other participants, and furthermore, of those who go into employment, only 61% of ex-offenders obtain sustained employment, compared to 76% of other participants.

Main barriers at the employment end can include:

- Employer attitudes/discrimination
- Criminal records and a fear about disclosing these – a recent analysis of 824 ex-offenders who were clients on New Futures Fund projects<sup>11</sup> found that 63% perceived having a criminal record to be their main barrier to training or employment
- Lack of work experience/skills – 42% of ex-offenders on New Futures Fund project cited this as the main barrier to training/employment. UK research also shows that prisoners are 13 times as likely to have been unemployed on entering prison. In Scotland, two thirds of prisoners enter prison from unemployment and three quarters have no job to go to on release<sup>12</sup>
- Lack of informal contacts for jobs

Whilst employer attitudes are undoubtedly an issue, the barrier may be more significant in perception than in reality. A survey undertaken in 2002 for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)<sup>13</sup> looked at recruitment processes and attitudes towards the employment of ex-offenders amongst a sample of 510 HR professionals. Some of the findings are summarised below:

- Two fifths of HR managers said that they would always consider an application from someone with a criminal record. Only 5% said that they would never consider an applicant with a criminal record
- The key factor cited in relation to whether recruitment was considered was the nature of the conviction
- 28% of managers surveyed (144) had experience of employing people with a criminal record. 66% of these said that it had been a positive experience – only 6% said it had been a negative experience, and this was mainly due to the attitudes and concerns of other employees or customers

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<sup>10</sup> New Deal Intelligence Report Article: Welfare to Work for Prisoners and Ex-offenders, Scottish Executive, March 2004

<sup>11</sup> New Futures Fund database, Scottish Enterprise, June 2005

<sup>12</sup> Working together for employment and inclusion in Edinburgh: a baseline study

<sup>13</sup> Recruitment and Attitudes towards ex-offenders, CIPD 2003

- Of the 144 managers who had experience of employing ex-offenders, only 8 reported cases of re-offending

This section has attempted to provide a summary of what research has found to be the main barriers in relation to ex-prisoners and employment. As stated earlier, much of it has been drawn from national or UK sources, and may therefore represent a slightly different picture from the situation in Edinburgh. On the whole however, it is likely that even if different by degree, the same barriers and issues will face ex-prisoners in the Edinburgh area, and will contribute to the set of challenges faced by intervention agencies.

#### 2.4 The Edinburgh context – data profile

A total of **2040** prisoners left prison whose home address was Edinburgh in 2004. This represents a 1.6% rise in the number who left (whose home address was Edinburgh) the previous year, but a 2.3% fall since 2002. The following table provides a breakdown of the number of prisoners who come from (and who in the main it is assumed will return to) Edinburgh from 2002 to 2004.

Table 1: Prisoners leaving prison whose home address is Edinburgh 2002 -2004

Prisoners	2002		2003		2004	
	number	%of total	number	%of total	number	%of total
Males						
Under 16	0	0%	1	0.05%	1	0.05%
16-19	300	14.4%	268	13.3%	240	11.8%
20-49	1534	73.5%	1491	74.3%	1515	74.3%
50-64	63	3%	55	2.7%	76	3.7%
65+	5	0.2%	3	0.2%	4	0.2%
All	1902	92%	1818	90.5%	1836	90%
Females						
Under 16	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
16-19	23	1.1%	22	1.1%	15	0.7%
20-49	159	7.6%	164	8.2%	182	8.9%
50-64	4	0.2%	4	0.2%	7	0.3%
65+	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
All	186	8.9%	190	9.5%	204	10%
All	number	%of total	number	%of total	number	%of total
Under 16	0	0%	1	0.05%	1	0.05%
16-19	323	15.5%	290	14.4%	255	12.5%
20-49	1693	81%	1655	82.4%	1697	83.2%
50-64	67	3.2%	59	2.9%	83	4.1%
65+	5	0.2%	3	0.2%	4	0.2%
<b>All</b>	<b>2088</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2040</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Scottish Executive, Prison Statistics section, June 2005

- 90% of prisoners from Edinburgh who left prison in 2004 were male and 10% were female. The percentage of male prisoners who left prison

over the 3 years to 2004 decreased slightly, while the proportion of female prisoners increased slightly

- 12.5% of prisoners from Edinburgh who were released in 2004 were aged 16-19, and 83.2% were aged 20-49. Within this, a higher proportion of males were aged 16-19 (13%) compared to females (7.3%)
- The numbers of young males aged 16-19 leaving prison has dropped over the 3 year period, from 300 to 240, and proportionately from 14.4% of total leavers to 11.8%. Similarly, but less significantly, the proportion of young women has dropped from 1.1% to 0.7% of prisoners leaving prison from 2002 to 2004
- On the basis of the national rate of reconvictions, it could be expected that around 1224 ex-prisoners released will return to prison with 2 years

Improving future performance in this area will require establishing a baseline position around the number of ex-prisoners progressing into employment. However, there is currently no data set available for this, at either the local or national level. This was confirmed in the response provided to a Parliamentary Question in November 2005.

The best available data for progress into work comes from Jobcentre Plus, but this is limited to outcomes which are a direct result of job submissions made by their staff. Although not required to, advisers can report on outcomes achieved within the thirteen weeks following a prisoner's participation in the Employment and Benefit Surgeries (EBS). Jobcentre Plus has made it clear to us that the available data would be unlikely to provide the basis for a reliable baseline around ex-prisoner employability. This point is discussed further at other points in this report.

Finally, looking at sentences, the table below provides information on the type of sentence served by prisoners from Edinburgh released over the same time period:

Table 2: Prisoners leaving prison whose home address is Edinburgh by sentence, 2002 - 2004

Sentence	2002		2003		2004	
Remand	789	37.8%	702	35%	795	39%
Fine default	405	19.4%	399	19.9%	390	19.1
Less than 1 year	652	31.2%	633	31.5%	595	29.2
1-4 years	171	8.2%	209	10.4%	181	8.9%
Over 4 years	67	3.2%	58	2.9%	77	3.8%
Other	4	0.2%	7	0.3%	2	0.1%
<b>All</b>	<b>2088</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2040</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Scottish Executive, Prison Statistics section, June 2005

It can be seen that the majority of prisoners released have been serving relatively short term sentences, with less than 4% serving a sentence over 4 years. This rate of churn within the prison population is one of the major

challenges to effectively engaging clients in the employability agenda, as we discuss below.

In addition to the data from official sources, previous research undertaken by the Capital City Partnership<sup>14</sup> provides some rough estimates, based on historical local and national data, on the population of the (approximately) 2000 prisoners released in 2003. It estimates that around 1,750 were drug users; 800 had a mental health problem; 570 were homeless; 70 were NEET school leavers and 40 were from a black and minority ethnic background.

In terms of where in Edinburgh ex-prisoners are from, and therefore likely to return to, CCP figures suggest that around 40% of those who left prisons in 2003 were from the former SIP areas of South Edinburgh, North Edinburgh, Craigmillar, and West Edinburgh CCP, and just under 30% were from non-SIP areas. A further 30% of prisoners however did not supply valid postcodes, so it might be assumed that these percentages will be higher.

### *2.5 Labour market opportunities*

In parallel to understanding the barriers to employment faced by certain client groups, it is equally important in employability terms to understand local labour market conditions and make the appropriate connections to where there might be potential opportunities. Local labour market information is readily available from agencies such as Futureskills Scotland, the Lothian Labour Market Unit, the local authority, Jobcentre Plus and other official sources, enabling initiatives. JU4J makes extensive use of these sources as well as their direct links with employers and the Employment Academies to keep track of local economic conditions and employment trends.

A recent report on Employment and Inclusion in Edinburgh undertaken by the Employment Research Institute at Napier University<sup>15</sup> provides a detailed and up to date analysis of the labour market in Edinburgh and enables some comment on the current and potential opportunities for employment in the area. Some of the key points from this and other sources are listed below:

- Edinburgh has a fairly buoyant economy, characterised by a relatively high employment rate and unemployment levels that are below the national and UK average. Claimant count unemployment in Edinburgh and the Lothians was 2.2% in August 2005 compared to 2.8 across Scotland as a whole. In Edinburgh the rate is slightly higher, at 2.3%. In all Edinburgh and Lothian sub-regions, claimant count unemployment levels fell since the level in August 2004 (by 3 % in Edinburgh)
- In 2004, Edinburgh and Lothian had a 3.7% rate of vacancies as a proportion of employees, just marginally above the Scottish rate of 3.6%

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<sup>14</sup> The position of Joined Up For Jobs Target Groups (Ex-prisoners) in the City of Edinburgh, CCP 2005

<sup>15</sup> Working Together for Employment and Social Inclusion in Edinburgh: A Baseline Study, Employment Research Institute, August 2005

- Most recent information shows that 4,424 vacancies were recorded at Jobcentre Plus offices in Edinburgh and Lothian in August 2005 (2,680 in Edinburgh). This represented a fall of around 30% in the number of vacancies recorded in August 2004, although sectors such as agriculture, energy, transport & communications and other services, all experienced an increase in vacancies. The sectors which saw significant falls in the number of vacancies over the year were the financial services sector, distribution/hospitality and the public sector, together which represent around three quarters of the overall number of vacancies
- Despite the overall decline, there were some notable increases in vacancies in certain sectors between August 2004 and 2005: in Midlothian, there was a rise in the number of vacancies in distribution, hotels and restaurants, in East Lothian the number of public sector vacancies rose, Edinburgh saw significant increases in energy & water, and the manufacturing sectors, and in West Lothian recorded vacancies in construction and transport & communications had risen over the year
- In terms of the types of job opportunities available, 1,200 (27%) of the total vacancies in August 2005 were in elementary occupations, 877 (20%) in sales and customer services, 629 (14%) in skilled trades, 576 (13%) in administrative/secretarial jobs and 329 (7%) in process/plant/machine operative jobs
- From the Scottish Employers Skills Survey 2004, findings for the local area show that Edinburgh and Lothian had a hard to fill vacancy rate of 2.1%, higher than the corresponding national rate of 1.7%. Employers also reported a skills shortage rate of 1.3%, which again was higher than the rate of 0.9 % across Scotland as a whole
- The Skills Survey also highlighted that 21% of establishments in Edinburgh and Lothian had skills gaps in 2004, which was on a par with the rest of Scotland
- The major employment growth sectors in Edinburgh and Lothian are: Business and Financial Services, which is forecast to experience a growth in employment of 8% between 2003 and 2008; Distribution, Retail and Catering, growing by 5%, Other Services, growing by 4%, and in Public Services, which is expected to increase in employment terms by 2%
- Over the same period, it is expected that the number of jobs will decline in Utilities, Construction and Transport & Communications

Clearly, it is important through the JU4J strategy, and in any employability related initiatives, to continually target sectors where there are likely to be opportunities and where employers might find it more difficult to fill

vacancies. In the following section we address the extent to which this is the case in relation to the prisoner and ex-prisoner population.

### **3. Employability Support for ex-prisoners in Edinburgh**

#### *3.1 Introduction*

This section now focuses more directly on the Edinburgh response to the challenges summarised in the preceding chapter. It contains the key findings and analysis from our stakeholder consultations.

The format follows a logical sequence of enquiry by initially scoping the wider context within which development in Edinburgh takes place, and then outlines the SWOT analysis compiled and confirmed with stakeholders throughout the study. Following this, we consider “where are we now?” examining the service offer within the 3 main prisons from which people return to the city, and the range of “beyond the gate” support which seeks to ease their transition back into mainstream society.

The content for this section has been derived from our desk research, the stakeholder groupwork and bilateral consultations as well as from the focus group discussions held with clients.

#### *3.2 The employability context*

An increased focus on “employability” has become a recurrent feature of policy development in recent years at both local, Scottish, UK and European levels. The definition of what is meant by employability has matured and grown, increasing its relevance across a much wider range of policy domains.

Defining the term “employability” has become somewhat of an industry: but it remains a term that can convey different things to different people in different settings. To develop practical policy responses, we believe some common definition is important, and that a lack of common understanding on this in part explains the somewhat confused service delivery infrastructure detailed below, and replicated in most other parts of Scotland.

For this study we suggest the following working definition, which has been used within the development of the Scottish Employability Framework:

“...the combination of factors and processes which enable people to progress towards or get into employment, to stay in employment, and to move on in the workplace.”

Understanding “factors and processes” demands that much more than traditional vocational skills, qualifications, training and job-search support must be part of an integrated service response. Softer core skills and competencies, as well as key lifestyles and circumstances are clearly important. Consequently, the overlaps, synergy, and mutual gains between the employability agenda and services supporting health, housing, addictions, and criminal justice need to be better understood.

But with an increasing understanding of the breadth of “employability” has come a growing complexity in co-ordinating interagency inputs. There are a wide variety of contributions to employability for individuals, reflecting individual circumstances, and stages in the journey to labour market participation. In this context, the legitimate claim that many agencies contribute to supporting “employability” is, by itself, of little practical help in informing future action. Rather the key questions are: how? At what stage? For whom? What are the linkages to other relevant support mechanisms?

At the city, national and UK levels these key questions are now recognised in policy forums.

In **Edinburgh**, the “Joined up for Jobs” strategy is increasingly credited as good practice in providing a partnership based response to enabling access to employment for the city’s residents. Co-ordinated by the Capital City Partnership, it brings together all of the key local stakeholders around three key aspirations for employability services:

- That they are effective through being both demand led and client centred
- That they are co-ordinated and integrated across the city
- That they target identified excluded groups

This study, with its focus on ex-offenders, is a good example of “Joined up for Jobs” commitment across all of these aspirations. As we explain below, specific aspects of the JU4J approach can bring particular value to the way in which services to ex-prisoners are delivered. We would specifically focus on the need for harmonising service delivery and the scope for improved employer linkages. Examples of the former would be through the wider application of shared assessment and tracking tools – along the lines of those developed by Wisemove. In relation to the latter, we see closer working relationships emerging with some of the Employment Academies – most notably Construction – and see scope to develop this further.

At a **Scottish level**, the forthcoming “Scottish Employability Framework” is anticipated to be a significant and seminal addition to the policy context. It originates from the Cabinet Delivery Group on “Closing the Opportunity Gap”. It seeks to inform and support new actions to address the high number of Scots currently inactive but keen to consider work, against a backdrop of increasing unmet demand for employees in the labour market<sup>16</sup>.

The framework is likely to focus on the range of common barriers which prevent labour market entry: low/no qualifications; long term periods of unemployment; mental health problems; benefits etc. It will also recognise the particular barriers facing ex-offenders who, whilst relatively small in number, are at the sharp end of the inclusion challenge.

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<sup>16</sup> It is estimated that 553,000 Scots are economically inactive, mainly on Incapacity Benefit and Income Support. Futureskills Scotland estimate there will be 500,000 job opportunities in Scotland in the period to 2008.

Research leading to the framework has highlighted the scale of investment in employability services across Scotland. A conservative estimate suggested this totals over £514 million per annum. But co-ordination and integration, and increased practical understanding and action, is needed to ensure this collective response “joins up” more effectively.

Consequently, the framework is anticipated to endorse the need to further develop an integrated and co-ordinated series of interventions which enable easy access and progression for targeted beneficiaries. Further partnership development at local and national levels is likely to be recommended<sup>17</sup>. Again, the Edinburgh approach, co-ordinated by the Capital City Partnership, is cited as an exemplar of good practice, so there is scope to use this positive profile to influence the Executive’s wider thinking, as we suggest below.

A further key Scottish driver particularly relevant to this study is the Scottish Prisons Services “Learning, Skills and Employability” (LSE) policy. This was published in 2003, and signalled a significant shift in the SPS service delivery. It detailed the need to develop a future approach which linked “...basic education to job specific skills, while strengthening employability competencies”. Within SPS it specifically defined “employability skills” as “...the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that significantly impact on the ability of an individual to access, obtain and sustain employment”.

The SPS policy notes that the top principle underpinning its future approach to LSE work is the reduction in re-offending. four key approaches within prisons will support this:

- Accessing needs, and prioritising and targeting interventions
- Developing integrated learning, skills and employability pathways
- Creating appropriate delivery environments
- Recognising prisoner progression and achievements

The Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus continue to drive the **UK policy** agenda. This remains focused on the key principle of “welfare to work”, and the closely associated New Deal. The latter continues to evolve in response to changing labour market challenges, with the focus moving towards assisting groups further from the labour market into employment. Within this, particular emphasis will be placed on assisting people to move from Incapacity Benefit to work.

The above issues of context, whilst deriving from a number of sources, provide a series of consistent messages which inform our conclusions later in this report:

- A strong emphasis on partnership and co-ordinated interagency working
- The need to simplify a potentially “cluttered” landscape by improving our understanding of “who does what best”

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<sup>17</sup> At this stage, the Employability Framework is expected to be published in early 2006.

- A increased need to focus on helping people furthest from the labour market, and often with quite significant barriers to progression
- Real potential – particularly apparent in Edinburgh – to connect these groups to current and projected job opportunities
- A need to evidence tangible labour market impact

### 3.3: Stakeholder perception of where we are now

Three workshop sessions were held with stakeholders, each of whom is involved in the provision of support services to prisoners and ex-prisoners in Edinburgh. These include commissioners and providers of services, and details of the agencies which participated in these sessions is attached as Appendix 1.

During the initial stakeholder session, participants contributed to an exercise to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the current position. The snapshot created by this process was refined and further developed following our fieldwork consultations. The output, summarised in Figure 1, below, was then presented for further discussion at two workshops, one with funders another with service providers, in September.

There was agreement in both of these workshops that the snapshot of the current landscape is accurate.

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Good people &amp; increased commitment</li> <li>➤ Strong input from Edinburgh Prison</li> <li>➤ Inter-agency links improving</li> <li>➤ Improved framework at national &amp; local levels</li> <li>➤ Recognition of importance of soft skills</li> <li>➤ Buoyant local labour market</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Lack of coherent strategic/funding frame</li> <li>➤ Complex short term funding models</li> <li>➤ Lack of ownership</li> <li>➤ Poor employer engagement</li> <li>➤ Competition and poor communications between stakeholders</li> <li>➤ Lack of aftercare support</li> <li>➤ Limited range of career opportunities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Policy changes – Management of Offenders, SEF etc</li> <li>➤ Local initiatives e.g. CLC</li> <li>➤ Increased focus on outcomes – EDAT</li> <li>➤ Employer vacancies</li> <li>➤ Re-orientation of JC+ services</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Continued fragmented short term funding</li> <li>➤ Lack of trust between providers</li> <li>➤ Funding changes – e.g. ESF, NFF etc</li> <li>➤ Labour market competition – students and migrants</li> <li>➤ Lack of buy in and co-ordination – e.g. Health/Criminal Justice</li> </ul>

## *Strengths and Opportunities*

A number of strengths were identified. Firstly, participants felt that there is a significant number of committed, able and qualified people working with the prisoner and ex-prisoner community in the city. This is not an easy client group to work with, and the calibre and enthusiasm of people active in the field was recognised as a real asset. Within this, special mention was made of staff working in Edinburgh Prison, which was seen as being a model of good practice in terms of its clear commitment to the employability agenda. David Croft, the prison Governor, is widely seen to be the driving force behind this culture shift.

Within prisons, inter-agency links are perceived to be improving. Historically, linkages between support organisations within prisons was not strong. Levels of communication and awareness between service providers were frequently cited as being poor, and feedback suggests that the overall co-ordination of services within prisons was lacking. Although each of the three prisons featured in this report is quite different, there is a sense that on the whole this is improving across the prison estate.

In Edinburgh in particular, the agency interface is now better, although there is still work to be done. The physical collocation of services within the newly built Links Centre, has had an impact, allowing for ease of communication and interaction. Allied to this has been the prison's assumption of responsibility to actively facilitate regular meetings that bring the service providers together. This process is in its early stages, and represents something of a step change in culture. It is a move in the right direction that is welcomed and requires ongoing support.

Outside the prisons, moves to better co-ordinate employability at both the local and national levels were identified as positive steps. The Joined Up For Jobs strategy in Edinburgh is welcomed as providing a structure through which a wide range of diverse services can be aligned. The fact that this agenda is now being grasped at the national level – though the Employability Framework – was also recognised as a positive feature. In terms of opportunities, the introduction of the Management Of Offenders Bill was singled out as potentially helpful as it extends the role of prisons and clarifies the responsibilities of respective stakeholders.

This legislation is anticipated to become law in early 2006, and seeks to embed a series of measures to address Scotland's high levels of re-offending. Key aspects of the bill include:

- (a) the formation of new Criminal Justice Authorities (CJAs) to co-ordinate and improve the delivery of services to offenders, based on clusters of local authority areas working together
- (b) a new statutory requirement for local authorities, prisons and the police to work in partnership to implement local plans to manage offenders, and thereby reduce re-offending

- (c) establishment of a Home Detention Curfew (HDC) scheme to enable low risk offenders to finish their sentences in the community and gain earlier access to external rehabilitation services such as those supporting employability

Collectively these measures provide a further national framework and requirement to advance the service offer to ex-prisoners. The CJAs, in particular, provide the potential structures for closer working, and the HDC scheme signals an intention to begin to more closely align some aspects of sentencing policy with post prison employability opportunities.

Returning to the perceived strengths, partners reported that within these employability structures is an increasing understanding of the needs of employers and of the value of *soft skills*. By these, we mean those competencies which employers regularly cite as being prerequisites for increasing numbers of jobs – including reliability, teamworking, communication customer handling skills<sup>18</sup>. As a consequence, good providers are placing increased emphasis on these aspects, and moving away from slavishly routing their clients through courses focussing solely on the acquisition of qualifications.

These softer skills are in particular demand in Edinburgh, which at a city level enjoys historically low rates of unemployment. As we discuss in the previous section, a number of key sectors are experiencing robust job growth, and this buoyant local labour market was consistently seen as a positive feature for those working with these clients. For people with the right attitude and commitment, employment opportunities are available.

Looking at future developments that might have an impact, the establishment of the Community Links Centre (CLC) offers the prospect of creating a service hub for ex-prisoners which can offer employability support amongst others. There were, however, reservations around the developing model which are discussed in the following section.

Finally, this study coincides with a review being undertaken by Jobcentre Plus of their prison-based service. This agency's contribution to the work in prisons is a recent success story – as the figures discussed below demonstrate – and there is hope that their review process might lead to an even more effective use of resources.

### *Weaknesses and threats*

Stakeholders highlighted a number of weaknesses within the current set up, some of which confirm the study funders' concerns expressed in the opening section of our report.

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<sup>18</sup> These messages are clearly set out in the Futureskills Scotland Employer Survey [www.futureskillsscotland.org.uk](http://www.futureskillsscotland.org.uk)

The overarching problem was identified as being the current strategic framework. Although improving, this is characterised by a lack of coherence and clarity. Ex-prisoner employability is a theme which at the national level cuts across various policy domains and suffers from having no single point of ownership. Reflecting this, funds to promote their employability may come from the Criminal Justice, Health or Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (ETLL) Divisions, and participants outlined a picture that is complex, congested and lacking co-ordination.

Many of these funding streams are finite, and a culture has emerged where providers finance services through the acquisition of resources from a wide variety of sources<sup>19</sup>. Although this has favoured the more entrepreneurial providers, there are questions as to whether it has proportionately raised levels of service quality. This culture has also made it more difficult to measure and attribute impact, as funding streams are hard to unpick.

Without clear strategic direction at the national level, and the active buy in of key institutions – for example around Health – sustained progress with this client group will be difficult.

The current environment is also characterised by high levels of competition amongst service providers, who frequently bid against one another for resources. This discourages co-operation and encourages providers to retain clients even when another agency might be better placed to meet their needs. This culture does not promote a client-focused approach. It also encourages providers to claim that they can provide a full range of services, from elementary personal and social skills through to post-employment support. In our experience it is unusual to find organisations which can excel in all areas of this wide repertoire.

Consequently, the current Edinburgh service map for this client group is a kaleidoscope of organisations, many of which appear to offer a similar service offer. We consider this in greater detail below.

Where there is an agreed service gap is in the provision of an interface service with employers. We have discussed stakeholders' identification of the Edinburgh labour market as a strength, however our study suggests that links with employers and prisoner support agencies is currently weak. In addition, the Edinburgh baseline study indicates that, despite the health of the local economy, Edinburgh employers are less likely to report hard to fill vacancies than those in their neighbouring labour markets. The suggested reasons from this include:

- The accessibility of a large number of entry level positions
- In-commuting from other local authority areas
- Substantial numbers of student and migrant workers

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<sup>19</sup> The recent Edinburgh baseline study identified nineteen different funding sources supporting employability interventions across the city

So although local labour market conditions are favourable, in the words of one consultee, “there is an opportunity here – but it is not an open goal”.

### *3.4: Current employability support in prisons*

In this section we provide a summary of the current interventions in place within the three prisons under study. These have been assembled through our discussions with prison officers, from our review of materials provided by the prisons and by our focus group discussions held with inmates in Edinburgh, Polmont and Cornton Vale. A synthesised summary of these sessions is included at the end of this section.

#### ***Edinburgh Prison***

##### *General approach*

Edinburgh Prison has made great strides forward around the employability agenda, and it is now widely regarded as the pioneer in this area within the prison estate. The combination of capital investment and focus on culture change within the prison has sent out a powerful message to staff and inmates alike, in relation to the importance of building skills and moving inmates towards employability.

This drive comes from the top, and provides a clear example of the importance of senior management commitment to the change process. The shift to what the governor calls a *college culture* is an ambitious change agenda but its evidence is felt throughout the institution.

On the ground, the completion of the Link Centre wing provides a comfortable modern working environment where support services have been collocated. Service providers within the prison report that although there remains room for improvement, they now have a better idea of other services and how their respective inputs fit together. As we have already noted, the prison’s facilitation of regular meetings has helped this process.

The new wing also offers prisoners the opportunity to experience surroundings which are akin to a modern learning or working environment. Feedback from prisoners indicates that they respond well to this. They also commented on the changing attitude of prison staff, feeling that they are accorded more respect than previously.

##### *Assessment*

At the induction stage all prisoners go through the SPS Core Screening process which identifies their needs under seven different domains, including Employability, Health, Benefits and Family issues. This is reviewed at regular points during their stay in the prison and in the event of transfer elsewhere these details travel with the prisoner so their needs and progress against them are known.

A summary of these details is attached to the back page of the core screen document, and is known as the Community Integration Plan (CIP). This is being increasingly recognised as a passport which is accessed by other agencies involved in prisoner rehabilitation, such as the SACRO workers involved in providing the Community Links Centre, discussed in greater detail below.

### *Current support activities*

Prisoners in Edinburgh have access to a wide range of learning and skills development opportunities. Through Lauder College, which provides the LSE contract, they have access to a broad curriculum which complements the provision offered through the VT options, delivered by prison staff.

The Scottish Progression Award (SPA) has grown in popularity since its introduction in 2004, and offers prisoners the chance to try out a number of different skill areas relating to construction trades. After a modest start the SPA, which is undertaken on a voluntary basis, has developed to the current stage where there is a waiting list for prisoners to access it.

Alongside the skills development work, Jobcentre Plus staff have a presence in the prison which focuses on the entry and pre-release points. Although these cover benefits advice it also provides a chance for JC+ staff to support those prisoners interested in making progress towards work. At this pre-release stage clients are offered access to a pre-release employability programme – RESTART – as well as individual one to one sessions if desired.

The RESTART programme covers a wide range of employability inputs from JC+ and other service providers. It is delivered two weeks prior to release and content includes:

- Financial management/budgets and bank accounts
- Preparing for work – CV presentation and development
- Dealing with job adverts and application forms
- Telephone and communication skills
- Debt management and housing
- Handling disclosure
- Interview practice

Following the RESTART programme prisoners can undertake a Living Skills course which lasts for one week and is designed to prepare them for independent living. This includes issues such as Food and Nutrition, Road and Fire safety.

In the spring of 2005 the prison held an open event for local employers, in partnership with Jobcentre Plus. The aim of this was to build links whilst addressing some of the misconceptions HR staff might have around ex-prisoners as potential recruits.

Although this event was well attended, as we discuss below, the partners struggled to follow up on these links, and as a consequence the benefits may

have been lost. We consider the issues around employer engagement further in our final section.

At the time of writing this report, final details were being agreed on a new construction sector initiative at the prison. This builds on the success of the Laing O'Rourke pilot developed at Barlinnie, and is funded through the Enterprise Network. The project involves Capital Skills and the Construction Academy providing construction training for prisoners due for release, complemented by an employer liaison officer whose role will be to develop links with firms in the construction sector. The liaison officer will be employed by APEX.

### *Barriers to success*

There is a good deal of optimism amongst Edinburgh Prison staff, and a view that recent changes have led to significant improvements – reflected in the positive progression rates discussed elsewhere in this report. However, the consensus is that there remains some way to go, and in addition to the need for better employer links, the following areas were identified as priorities for future development.

- A high proportion of prisoners are on very short sentences, which makes it difficult for the prison to have any meaningful level of engagement with them. Given the high rates of re-offending, the pattern is one where people are serially recycled through the system without experiencing any interventions that is likely to impact upon their future behaviour. Prison staff realise that this raises some fundamental questions about the system – and the point of short prison sentences – but identify it as a key barrier to their making a more proportionate impact.
- At present, there is a limited sense of shared ownership of the client group, and there is a need to improve links back into communities for prisoners. Again, this is part of a wider process which is already under way, as the prison re-orientates to adopt a more local focus and as community-based facilities develop. The proposed Community Links Centre (CLC) discussed below, provides a good example of the opportunities – and challenges – that these developments present. At a strategic level, the introduction of the Criminal Justice Authorities should also promote higher levels of shared ownership of this agenda.
- Amongst the prison inmates we engaged with, ways to handle disclosure were identified as being significant barriers. Although part of their pre-release programme, focus group participants were unclear about the best way to handle this aspect of reintegration. Some advocated lying, on the grounds that being honest would immediately rule you out of contention for work. Others felt that there were employers who were prepared to offer ex-prisoners a chance, so it was important to be candid. We identify scope for more work to be done around handling disclosure where there would be merit in using case studies and successful role models in the prison, in addition to the work

currently being undertaken.

- Finally, although the construction pilot is good news, it is indicative of the piecemeal nature of many developments aimed at ex-prisoners. Opportunistic and short term, this pilot is symptomatic of the challenges in the current working environment identified in the SWOT analysis.

## ***Polmont YOI***

### *General approach*

Polmont YOI is now placing very considerable and renewed emphasis on employability support within the prison, recognising this is a key part of reducing re-offending rates, and avoiding a lifetime of episodic periods of imprisonment. Specific to Polmont, interventions are made at what is described as a "change age", and are rooted in a view that they have more potential to be effective than equivalent support for older age groups.

The key is to ensure that the young people do not in effect "write off" any future hope of labour market engagement because of their convictions. Before the age of 20 many of the longer, more deep seated and harder to address barriers have had little time to develop.

The link between support in prison and that which is likely to be available on liberation is critical. In recognition of this the new services now in development seek, as far as practicable, to mirror those on the outside, ensuring ex-prisoners have credible and portable skills to take into this environment.

### *Assessment*

Polmont has now replaced the term "Community Integration Plan" with a new "core screen" process. This assesses prisoners on arrival, at three monthly intervals, and four weeks prior to release. Seven areas of need are identified, including employability. "External" support agencies are engaged as required, but each of these can only see the section of need relevant to their service due to data protection concerns. These external supports are normally expected to begin in prison and continue into liberation.

### *Current support activities in Polmont*

A key development in the autumn of 2005 in Polmont has been the relocation of the Links Centre, employability, and pre release support to a new purpose built wing. This provides much improved physical resources for this work, and signals the importance now attached to it. Central to this has been a redesign of traditional prison industries, moving from repetitive, unskilled work linked to external contracts, to **focused SVQ related activities**. New workshops have been established for plumbing, plastering, tiling, bricklaying, and a further electrical workshop is planned. All of these have the potential to offer up to SVQ level 2.

The main employability support is provided by the full time **Jobcentre Plus** presence in the prison. This provides job-search support 3-4 weeks prior to release and includes: one to one interviews; the setup of job interviews; and linkage to the Jobcentre Plus vacancy database.

**Pre release employability courses** – delivered by prison staff and through the LSE contract - are linked to this, and address issues such as CV preparation and disclosure. A very recent development has been providing prisoners with their CV on disk to take to any subsequent job interviews.

Core screen also includes an alerting system for **literacy and numeracy** problems. This would then lead to intensive 1:1 support and group-work sessions.

Specific **career planning programmes** have been operated sporadically in the past, most recently a pilot of the WorkNet International programme in the summer of 2004. This was delivered by Careers Scotland staff, and reported as being successful by both partners in the process. Results for young people in terms of gaining jobs and not re-offending were encouraging. But after the pilot, the programme has not operated again: it is not clear who would provide the long term resources to do this.

Direct **links with employers** are limited. Polmont see this role as more appropriately sitting with outside agencies - Jobcentre Plus, Careers Scotland and potentially the criminal justice service in Social Work. A recent pilot led by the prison with a company in Airdrie was unsuccessful because the young people had unrealistic job expectations.

#### *Edinburgh specific links*

Whilst a significant number of prisoners return to Edinburgh, this is dwarfed by the numbers returning to the Glasgow area. In part, this then reflects the historic investment in respective local linkages. But this is changing due to the connections made available via the "Joined up for Jobs" strategy, which has provided Polmont with a much improved focus to connect to opportunities in the city. Specific links with agencies such as Wisemove have developed through this.

As yet, however, there are no formal links established with Edinburgh's criminal justice service, which Polmont view as a key part of the beyond the gate employability package. These links have been established in a number of west coast local authority areas, including Glasgow.

#### *Barriers to success*

Polmont staff involved in employability work cite a number of common barriers which limit successful access to the labour market for prisoners on release:

- The pattern of conviction and imprisonment is often limiting. Many young people are released and then re-incarcerated because of outstanding offences that were not processed before initial imprisonment. These can follow some people into their early 20s. Some of the young people genuinely forget about these, and then find any labour market progress is halted because they face new charges. Other prisoners, knowing that these new charges and likely re-imprisonment face them on release, simply don't see the point of engaging in employability support
- Prisoners often have unrealistic expectations of the labour market and the types of jobs they are likely to access. Given their background, skills and experience, entry level jobs are often the most likely option but these are often seen as unattractive and demeaning
- All of the employability interventions are voluntary and some prisoners – due to a combination of attitude, choice and immaturity - simply aren't interested. Anyone in this category taking part can quickly undermine groups sessions for everyone
- As with adult prisons, sentence lengths can sometimes be very short, lasting only a few days. Other than very basic assessment, nothing of value can be achieved in these timeframes

## ***Cornton Vale***

### *General approach*

The range of support services available to prisoners at Cornton Vale, in the first instance, centres on the need to stabilise the chaotic lifestyles of a significant proportion of its population. A very high percentage of women prisoners have drug related problems, many are mothers, and a considerable number have a history of abuse.

Whilst recognising that providing support around these and other issues is a priority, there is also a growing emphasis on employability within the prison and an understanding that gaining employment can be key to maintaining a stable lifestyle on leaving the establishment.

Prison staff are very enthusiastic about the Links Centre and the working arrangements with the partner agencies who come into Cornton Vale, but see the main issue as a lack of continuity of care, before entering prison, and after release.

### *Assessment*

In common with other prisons in Scotland, prisoners at Cornton Vale undergo initial Core Screening assessment on arrival and at various intervals in their sentence up to the time they are due for release. This process identifies particular areas of need, including employability support. In addition to core screening, specific literacy screening takes place at an early stage.

Particular needs relating to issues such as healthcare, addictions, accommodation and benefits are addressed and appropriate interventions are organised, involving specialists and external agencies where necessary. At three months, the prison carries out a Basic Skills Assessment and develops an Integrated Learning, Skills & Employability Plan as well as an Individual Learning Plan. Further assessments, including a Risk Assessment are carried out at subsequent points.

#### *Current support activities in Cornton Vale*

The Links Centre was established in a dedicated unit at Cornton Vale in November 2002. For short term prisoners, a core menu of services is provided which cover basic health and social care needs as outlined above. Although education and employability needs are identified, the priority is on stabilisation and there is limited scope to engage prisoners in dedicated employability interventions in this short time period. For prisoners serving longer sentences there are opportunities to engage in a range of education and employment related activities.

Sectoral skills training is offered across a number of industrial sectors, including the hotel trade, cleaning, laundry, kitchens/catering, hairdressing and office work, with the opportunity for prisoners to achieve up to SVQ level 2 standard qualifications. There are currently 154 workspaces available, and further learning/arts/recreational places available for prisoners not able to access work skills training.

The Links Centre brings together a number of agencies, who come into the prison on a regular basis, including APEX, Housing, Social Work, the Phoenix Centre, and Jobcentre Plus. Interviews and support are arranged as appropriate, and specifically prior to release. References from work placements are also made available if a prisoner has a job interview arranged. There are also efforts made to link up to local FE colleges to provide opportunities for women to continue education once they leave the prison.

Cornton Vale has a dedicated employability officer who has been developing strong links with employers and has had considerable success in organising work placements for prisoners and in securing jobs for prisoners on release. Local hotels, shops, hairdressers, care homes, Stirling and Falkirk Councils, Arnold Clark and cleaning companies have all taken on placements and have subsequently offered job opportunities to ex-prisoners.

The employability officer is a member of the HR Forum for Forth Valley Tourism and Hotel trade and through this has arranged for housekeeping staff from local hotels to come into the prison to offer training in silver service and other aspects of hospitality. Much is done through "walking the pavements", knocking on doors and persuading employers to become involved. She is also on the Raploch Regeneration Steering Group and is currently investigating potential placement/employment opportunities through this.

There are also plans to approach higher profile employers such as B&Q and Marks and Spencer.

Generally speaking, the Centre aims to maintain a strong emphasis on the importance of employability - an "Employability Day" for instance was held in the prison in late October – and there is a "good news" story board telling of women who have left and are now working.

#### *Edinburgh specific links*

Links are made with relevant agencies and potential employers in whichever area a prisoner is from, and although there are no specific links with Edinburgh based employers at the moment, the Centre is keen to develop these. There are however links with national agencies and local authorities through housing and social work departments if a prisoner requires support in their home area.

#### *Barriers to success*

Prison staff and prisoners from Cornton Vale consulted during the course of the study were generally positive about what the Links Centre was doing. There were however specific barriers recognised in relation to providing an effective package of support:

- There can only be limited impact made with short term prisoners, where the main focus of activity has to be on addressing immediate, generally non-employment related needs. Many of the short term prisoners re-offend and subsequently come back to Cornton Vale, but are not in long enough to properly stabilise and undertake employment/training activity
- Although employability is actively promoted within the prison, and efforts are made to support prisoners to gain employment, for many women, getting their homes and families back together remains the priority. The challenge for the prison and partner agencies is to make sure the momentum gained whilst in prison is not lost
- Continuity of care remains an issue – there is a perceived lack of a joined up approach – particularly before a prisoner comes in to prison. Many will have been in touch in some way or another with services in the community, but there seems to be limited communication between the agencies and with the prison. The links with agencies who come into the Links Centre addresses this at the other end, and the employability officer tries to keep in touch with prisoners once they leave, but this is often limited
- Better information, communication and tracking systems are needed, and there are plans to develop a database amongst agencies to address this issue and share information more effectively.

### *Jobcentre Plus role*

Jobcentre Plus has had its staff providing services within prisons across Scotland for around three years. This effort is split between involvement at the induction stage and support prior to release. The former is largely focussed on addressing the risk of benefit fraud reduction, by ensuring that prisoners' claims stop once they are inside. The latter consists of guidance and advice offered on a voluntary basis to prisoners at the pre-release point. Again, the primary focus here is on benefits and access to other funding sources such as Community Care Grants. The JCP input at the pre-release stage is limited in that advisers cannot start working with prisoners until they approach a point where they can be available for work. It may be worth investigating the flexibility around this in the light of the current review of their service input.

This work is labour intensive, and the view within Jobcentre Plus is that it does not represent a good use of their resources. Between January and June 2005 the two-person team at Edinburgh Prison worked with 1,902 clients, 77% of whom were induction cases<sup>20</sup>. Although the staff are trained Personal Advisers, much of this work is routine administration and the JC+ view is that this does not make best use of their skills. Through better alignment of the DWP and SPS database information they think it should be possible to iron out these front end benefits issues with administrative staff provided by the Prison. This would free up Jobcentre Plus staff time to focus on supporting prisoners engaging with the labour market.

Between April and the end of June 2005, of the 210 prisoners released from Edinburgh Prison who had had JC+ support, forty six went straight into employment whilst another thirty one found work after a short period on Jobseekers Allowance (JSA). Although a smaller figure than the 102 who went onto Incapacity Benefit, this still represents a respectable return, particularly given the barriers for this client group discussed above.

However, proactive work with employers – either directly or via intermediaries like the Academies – remains one of the main areas where we see scope for improvement. JC Plus argue that by enabling their staff to assume this role – by removing much of the benefits advice work – there is potential to strengthen this and to build better links with local employers. However, SPS has made it clear that it would be unable to provide additional staff resource to undertake this screening role and it is our understanding that this dialogue continues as JC+ completes its own service review.

#### *3.5: The perceptions from inside*

Our team held three focus group discussions with prisoners. These followed a shared format and the prisoners were selected for participation by prison staff. The groups consisted of prisoners due for release in the shortest term within weeks of the discussion and in the longest in early 2008.

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<sup>20</sup> Source: Jobcentre Plus

We spoke with twenty five individuals as part of this process, nine in Cornton Vale and eight in Edinburgh and Polmont.

### Background

The group in Polmont were all returning to Edinburgh with one exception. Almost all were repeat offenders and previous labour market experience was limited. One of the young men was in receipt of Incapacity Benefit prior to entering the institution.

Amongst the women in Cornton Vale, all bar one had a drug habit. Several were grateful for the time inside, which had given them time to address this. Some remarked that had they not been imprisoned they would probably be dead by now. All felt that there is insufficient support within the community and almost half had had no contact with any drug agency prior to prison.

The Edinburgh group was mixed in terms of age, experience and offending backgrounds. The majority were returning to Edinburgh locations. The older ones were more likely to have had previous work experience, which included twenty years in the army and for another a similar length of time as a skilled joiner. The younger inmates tended to have very limited – if any – work experience, although a couple had experienced vocational training. The prevailing pattern was regular experience of corrective establishments and several had been on Incapacity Benefit prior to prison. One of the inmates was bipolar, which he identified as being a major barrier to any job prospects, and several implied that they had issues around drug use.

### Experience of support in prison

The Polmont group was fairly negative of their experience. Around seven of the group had been on work parties – including painting, joinery, laundry and gardening – for which they earned £10 per week. Their view of this was that it was 'dirty work' and cheap labour for the prison – but better than spending all day in a cell.

Relieving the boredom of being in a cell was also identified as the primary motivation for prisoners participating in the education and training courses. Again, views on this provision were primarily negative. Similarly, feedback on the available support services<sup>21</sup> was not complementary, although one participant cited useful support he had received from Edinburgh West Action.

On the whole the young offenders agreed that it would be useful to be signposted to the various support agencies, but there was a limited sense of this happening in any structured way.

The feedback from female prisoners was more positive. All had been in for some months, during which time they had received a good support package. As well as support around their drugs use, this had included assistance around employability. All had been on work placements and had

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<sup>21</sup> Careers Scotland, Jobcentre Plus, SACRO and APEX were mentioned

gained a variety of qualifications whilst in prison – relating to hairdressing, industrial cleaning and catering. Several also spoke positively about the adult literacy and counselling support.

The feedback on support offered through the Links Centre was very constructive, and they felt able to approach prison officers with any problems they wanted to address. At the same time they recognised that their sentence length had enabled them to stabilise their situation in a way that was much more difficult for women passing through the system on much shorter sentences.

The Edinburgh picture was mostly positive. Those who had been there longer were very enthusiastic about the improvements, and in addition to the physical improvement to facilities they pointed to improved relations with prison staff. They also praised the improved range of interventions and in particular cited the support around CVs and the input from Jobcentre Plus.

Everyone agreed that in terms of vocational support options, provision is widening all the time and that the prison will support inmates who demonstrate an interest in most areas. The link with Lauder College was identified as being an important part of this. They recognised the practical barriers around some vocational areas – for example motor mechanics – but felt that even here steps were in train to create opportunities.

The SPA was identified as being especially useful as it offers a chance to try out a range of vocational areas over a two week period. Some felt that this was too short, and a general comment was that the ratio of staff to trainees was too low. The constant arrival of new trainees and the wide variation in skill levels makes it hard for instructors although the trend towards peer learning helped to some extent.

Finally, there was a view (amongst those with more work experience) that overall levels are too low and that there should be greater opportunity to follow programmes beyond the elementary stage. Their suggestions for improvement were:

1. More trained staff
2. More sheds – instead of halls
3. Enhanced pay – more financial incentives

### Aspirations on release

All of the young men wanted a job at some point, although most would like to 'chill out' for a while before taking this further. One had a job to return to, whilst another would be going back onto IB. One had been told that he was unemployable due to workplace violence.

Most aspire to get a trade job with a good income, but several were cynical about the prospects of this. They identified being in work as the best defence against them re-offending and think that more funds should be invested in developing their skills whilst inside. At the same time they recognise that the

responsibility for keeping out of prison is their own – and that even with a job there is a risk that they could go out on a Saturday night and after a few drinks end up back in Polmont.

The situation for the women prisoners was a little different. Although they also saw work as being important on release the main priority was getting home and bringing their families back together. However, although only two had worked prior to prison, all thought that the structure of work would help them to sort out their lives in future.

They hoped that the level of support they had received whilst inside would continue on their release into the community.

For the Edinburgh Prison group, the younger participants saw benefit levels being a major barrier to work. On Incapacity Benefit with children, they would have to earn reasonably high wages to make it worth their while – estimated at more than £350 net per week.

Their views of the local labour market opportunities were mixed. Although they were aware of job opportunities, these were perceived to be poorly paid and in unattractive sectors such as tourism and hospitality. They were concerned about the apparent lack of opportunities in the construction trades.

Their biggest concern was how to handle issues of disclosure with prospective employers. None were clear about the legal position and some intend to be open whilst others have decided to lie. All felt that having a record would be a major barrier to finding work. However, they also felt that getting into good habits by finding work early would be a key factor on keeping them out of jail in future.

In terms of post release support, they hoped to have some degree of continuity and saw the initial post-release period as being critical.

### *3.6: Employability support beyond prison*

We have seen that around 2,000 ex-prisoners return to live in the Edinburgh community each year. We have also seen that a very high proportion of them (almost 80%) have been in prison for less than one year, limiting the opportunities to assess their needs, develop a relationship and create a pathway that might enhance their employability.

Although the employability support within prisons has been improving, their legislative responsibility for prisoners ends once they leave the penal system. Research evidence and anecdotal feedback from ex-prisoners indicates that it is at the immediate post-release point that problems are most likely to arise. A consensus view coming from this work is the need to improve the connections between the work inside and beyond prisons, and to ensure that on leaving the system prisoners have adequate levels of support.

However, beyond the prison walls the picture is confusing, as we have already noted. The recent Edinburgh baseline identified ten agencies who identified this target group as their priority clients, as well as another seventeen who cited them as a secondary priority. This study suggests that far fewer actually offer a specialist service to ex-prisoners, although they may appear prominently amongst agencies working in areas such as homelessness and drugs. Our study indicates high levels of overlap amongst service providers, making it difficult for clients (and commissioners) to clearly know who does what. The environment is also one where providers are tempted to retain clients longer than is good for them, in order to continue drawing down resources.

We have noted that as a client group, ex-prisoners tend to present with a number of employability barriers, and as a consequence they are often supported by agencies working with clients groups such as the homeless and those with addictions issues. Recent and ongoing mapping work by Wisemove, funded through the EQUAL Programme, is encouraging a shared approach to assessment and activity amongst agencies delivering services to homeless people and those with addictions. This will help to achieve a more coherent approach between support agencies that will also impact upon services to ex-prisoners.

At the same time, the Edinburgh Drug and Alcohol Action Team (EDAAT) has been reviewing its contracting arrangements with the intention of establishing more consistent approaches and more clearly defining project outcomes. These complimentary developments are much needed, in areas where there has been too much confusion around return on service provision investment.

As we argue in our final section, there is a need to move towards shared objectives and more transparent funding models, in order to reduce duplication and to enhance service options for this client group. For example, there is no consistent approach to monitoring and evaluation with the consequence that it is not easy to compare performance. This is an area where the JU4J approach can make an important contribution.

A specific vehicle that could catalyse improved collaboration is the proposed Community Links Centre (CLC), now in very early stages of operation in the city. This concept is funded by Scottish Executive resources and managed by SACRO on behalf of the Social Work Department within City of Edinburgh Council. It focuses on improved throughcare support for high risk<sup>22</sup> short term prisoners returning to the community and aims to provide a seamless service which begins inside but continues beyond the prison walls.

Through the use of Community Integration Plans (CIPs), these prisoners' support needs will be confirmed six-eight weeks prior to release. SACRO will then provide the services of an advisor to support the prisoner beyond their release back into the community, either from a base that is being established in the city or at a point convenient to the client. This case management approach, delivered on an individualised basis, is designed to ensure that

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<sup>22</sup> Identified as those with serious addictions, sex-offenders and women

these prisoners are aware of and have access to any services they need to avoid re-offending.

Throughout the summer SACRO held a number of consultation events for stakeholders to input to the development of this concept. This raised a number of questions about the employability role of this service, and the potential for the CLC to provide a wrapper for a holistic range of services aimed at these clients. Although concerns have been raised about the priority afforded to employability within this initiative, it retains potential as a partnership vehicle, as we consider in our final section of the report. It is also important as the CLC model provides a flavour of things to come, as the Executive's legislation promotes an increased focus on community-based solutions, aligned to the forthcoming Community Justice Authorities.

In our concluding section we suggest that there is an opportunity to augment and extend the case management role within the CLC approach to specifically address employability issues. This could be based around the identification of an individual key support worker in the pre-release phase, with the responsibility to develop an employability action plan as a sub set of the prisoner's wider Community Integration Plan. This would include identification of specific employability goals, and the required interventions to realise these. The key worker's role would be a combination of directly delivering, accessing, and advocating for appropriate support services, and reviewing and recording progress.

We would not allocate this role to a single agency, but rather suggest that a range of key partners volunteer to support a specified number of case management roles per annum. It is further suggested this should be based on a redesigned use of existing resources rather than requiring new funding: this is premised on the fact that good case management should primarily be about improving access to resources already available.

In practical terms we suggest that case management is initially introduced on a limited pilot basis, and linked to CPD activity within partner support agencies. We believe it would be particularly useful if some of the case management/key worker role is assigned to prison service staff working partly "beyond the gate".

### *3.7: Developments further afield*

Within this work we have briefly reviewed developments in England and Wales around prisoner employability in order to see whether there are learning opportunities for the Scottish position. South of the border we can see some strong parallels – for example in the growing problems caused by prison overcrowding – but also some areas where the model is diverging widely from developments in Scotland – such as around infrastructure changes.

During the past two years employability of ex-prisoners has risen up the political agenda, driven by the policy aim of reducing re-offending rates. As a consequence, there has been a wholesale review and re-engineering of the

way in which learning and skills are provided to prisoners, underpinned by a new structure, the key features of which are:

- Responsibility for learning and skills being transferred away from the Home Office (and prisons) and awarded to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)
- The merging of the LSE and VT programmes, with tenders invited for the delivery of new combined contracts<sup>23</sup> undertaken in three regional pilot areas<sup>24</sup>, with another three coming on stream in 2006
- The establishment of a Regional Offender Management (ROM) service from April 2006 that will allocate an offender manager to every prison leaver through the probation stage

At the regional level these new interventions are being driven by a Regional Partnership Board (RPB). Each of these is chaired by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and also has representation from Prisons, Jobcentre Plus, Connexions, local employers and the Government Office for the region. Although early days, there is optimism that this model – which has taken significant commitment to establish – will raise quality and make it easier to track impacts and identify return on investment.

Although the infrastructure is different in some respects, this approach has been developed in response to some of the issues we share in Scotland. We therefore see merit in having a closer look at this emerging model<sup>25</sup>, and in the concluding section suggest ways of doing this.

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<sup>23</sup> This process has involved the transfer of prison staff delivering VT provision over to the newly appointed contractors

<sup>24</sup> The North East, North West and South West

<sup>25</sup> Further details can be found at [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk)

## 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

### 4.1: Introduction

In this final section we pull together the key messages emerging from this work and set out our recommendations for the partners to consider. In doing so we are mindful of a number of factors.

First, throughout this process we have stressed that this is a complex arena, with a wide range of stakeholders and a mixed set of priorities – which are not always aligned. Consequently, achieving progress will take time and will require significant commitment from across the board. It will require clear leadership and direction, underpinned by political will in order to move forward.

Second, in looking at the city of Edinburgh we can see that some of the barriers to progress are beyond the control of the local area partners. However, unless these barriers are addressed, sustainable change will not come. Consequently, our recommendations are in some cases aimed at national players – primarily the Scottish Executive – and in these cases the role of the local partners is one of lobbying for change.

There is much work to be done here, if any real impact is to be made with this difficult client group. In making our recommendations we have focussed on addressing the issues raised in our conclusions, but have tried not to overload the partnership. By setting out what we see as the development priorities we hope to help partners focus on the key issues.

### 4.2 Conclusions

On the basis of the available evidence we set out a wide range of conclusions under the following three headings:

- Structural/cultural
- Service rationalisation
- Prisons/Client group

#### ***Structural/cultural***

##### *Showing real commitment*

First off, all partners must be clear about the magnitude of this problem and the commitment that would be required to make sustainable impact on a meaningful scale. The prizes are high, as ex-prisoners remain one of the most stubborn groups to help in terms of employability support. However, the challenges are real and enduring.

At the city level, the starting point must be for the key players to fully commit to this agenda, and the scale of their ambition will reflect their will. Our process has raised some questions about some key partners' appetite and capacity for this, both at the commissioning and delivery levels. For example,

the scale of turnover amongst agencies on the steering group (personnel from three of the five agencies have moved on in the course of this assignment) creates problems around continuity and relationship management. Partners must be realistic if these and other capacity issues really enable them to deliver on a radical innovative agenda, or whether they are better placed to try and build on ongoing positive developments. Fortunately there are enough of these in place to create a platform for incremental progress.

### *Locus of control*

It is easy, in our experience, to point the finger of blame at national agencies when there are difficulties at the local level. It is true that some aspects of national policy – the focus on finite funding streams for example – have been unhelpful and have contributed to the problems we now face. It is also the case that resources to support ex-prisoner employability come from a variety of departments, and there is a need to improve communication and interaction within the Executive. There is some evidence – for example through the forthcoming Employability Framework – that the Executive recognises the need to tackle these issues. However, it is important that cities like Edinburgh clearly identify ways in which government can contribute to improving developments at the local level.

In Edinburgh, the Joined Up For Jobs strategy offers a clear framework for co-operation and a platform for establishing shared objectives around this client group. We believe it will be important through this forum to identify the areas where partners can make a difference at the city level. At the same time the profile of JU4J places the city well in terms of influencing the future policy decisions within the Executive.

### *Local leadership*

Effective partnership needs clear leadership. A persistent problem at the heart of this agenda is the lack of ownership around the post-prison destinations of prisoners, although this may now begin to alter with the Management of Offenders' legislation. In our view, agreeing a single agency to lead on this agenda within the city is a vital first step forward, and we see the most logical candidate being the local authority, with its shared responsibility for Inclusion, economic development and criminal justice.

Theoretically, the Social Work Department is best placed to lead on this, but with the recent departure of the relevant officer there are questions around their capacity for this role. There are also questions about the alignment of targets and the shared understanding between the respective partners that must be further developed.

There is also an argument for Job Centre Plus to lead on co-ordinating this agenda. Their role inside and beyond prison makes them well placed to co-ordinate the future development of more joined up provision. However, it is our view that JC+ lacks the capacity to provide this role, although partners may still wish to raise this point with them.

On receipt of this report partners will have to make a decision on how this leadership issue is to be resolved. This discussion will in any event take place around the emerging shape and role of the Criminal Justice Authority and this report should be used to influence and shape this.

This study has highlighted the fundamental data gaps around employment rates for ex-offenders. Without a baseline position, it will not be possible to measure progress and future performance, and we envisage that this will be an early priority for the CJAs. In the meantime, this work has identified a number of areas where partners can stimulate improvements. These relate to clarity of interventions and outcomes and to the development of shared approaches discussed below.

Establishing a baseline, identifying shared performance targets (relating to employment and re-offending rates) and driving up quality are the overarching objectives that should underpin this work.

### *Segmenting the client group*

Our work has presented a snapshot of the prisoner population at national and city levels. This shows that high proportions of inmates go through the penal system very quickly, making it difficult for employability services to engage with them. The data also shows that a high proportion have low skills levels and face major barriers in relation to their employment prospects.

Our fieldwork has also indicated that within the prison population, some individuals are more likely than others to make progress towards employability. Factors which affect this include their attitude, their learning and skills profile, their benefits situation and health issues. As we report above, the Saughton workshop with prisoners due for release included inmates with trade backgrounds and extensive previous work experience. It also included men in their early twenties with drug issues and no previous work experience. Several of the latter observed that they would not consider taking on any work that brought home less than £350 per week net, an unlikely prospect given their situation.

Although it is important to offer all prisoners access to the same opportunities, we believe that partners must focus resources on those most likely to make significant progress towards work. The assessment process should be able to rank prisoners in this way, so that their action plans can reflect this. This was our recommendation of the SPS two years ago when we reviewed their VT provision, and we remain convinced that this is the way forward.

There are a number of ways of segmenting interventions for the prisoner client group – many of which are cross cutting. Most apparent is the need to consider: sentence length; prisoner characteristics by gender or age; and levels of motivation. In addition, policy responses must seek to consider the options for the large number of remand prisoners.

This is a notoriously complex issue, and it is beyond the scope of this report to lay out a comprehensive interagency blueprint for future action. But overall we would suggest that in the real world partnership action should place considerable emphasis on “picking winners”. This is recommended in recognition that:

- there are few, if any, easy gains with this group – the dangers of “cherry picking” are minimal
- further investment and enthusiasm for employability actions will be critically dependant on building momentum through some early and evidenced success
- a significant number of prisoners have no serious aspirations or intentions of making labour market related progression in the short or medium term – many are a very long way from being “employable”. In practice, they will largely self select in this respect. There is little value in designing blunt and unfocused policy responses – politically convenient – but in which few practitioners have any serious belief

In practical terms, we would consequently suggest early actions focus on prioritising:

- employability support for young offenders – in the spirit of early intervention before some barriers are too embedded, and to avoid a life pattern of intermittent incarceration
- a segmented approach for adult prisoners – based on an assessment process in the pre release phase which identifies referrals to the suggested pilot case management support for prisoners identified as having significant motivation and a reasonable chance of labour market engagement in the short/medium term. This should maximise potential linkages to the forthcoming Home Detention Curfew scheme
- the offer of an employability assessment for all remand prisoners (recognising they will have the choice to opt in to this), and the offer of basic job-search support

In the meantime we note that the English regional pilots have adopted this segmented approach, and until this happens in Scotland we will be unable to make optimum use of our resources.

#### *Influencing the criminal justice debate*

Aligning the employability and criminal justice domains remains a challenge. We have seen examples during this work where these two worlds appear to co-exist in parallel with little apparent read across, due to the artificial boxes which they occupy within the policy sphere. The need to reinforce the message of connectedness must remain a priority for all of us wishing to make progress on this agenda.

Specifically, our work has underlined a number of areas where progress around employability, with consequent benefits related to reduced recidivism, requires changes within criminal justice. The first of these relates to outstanding convictions, and the way in which these can affect the opportunities available to inmates – especially the young. Is there scope within the system to take account of employability progress as a mitigating factor in considering outstanding convictions? The second area is where judges might be asked to consider an ‘employability support deal’ as part of sentencing.

These are ambitious suggestions, but they relate to real barriers to employability within the prison system – particularly for young people. They also require a ‘joined up’ dialogue within the Scottish Executive which is beyond the scope of local partners to secure. However, there may be opportunities created by this work to move this debate forward.

### ***Service rationalisation***

#### *Aligning service delivery*

Throughout this work, consistent messages have been fed in about the need for more aligned service delivery, both within and beyond the prison walls.

Some of this work is already under way. The review of services being undertaken by the EDAAT signifies a trend towards greater transparency in contracting, designed to provide greater clarity around performance. This is a very positive step, and it is hoped that the development and outcomes from this process will be shared with other partners.

Equally, we have seen the effectiveness of the work delivered by Wisemove in relation to homelessness – and now addictions – and the overlap with the ex-prisoner agenda is clear. It is our view that the Wisemove approach should be promoted by all funders supporting activity with these clients and that in particular this should mean a move towards:

- Common employability assessment
- Shared use of resources
- Case work approaches
- Shared approaches to tracking
- Common approaches to evaluation

Agreement amongst service commissioners to this approach would provide a number of benefits. It would make it much easier to compare performance and to understand the respective merits of the various support agencies. It would also strengthen our intelligence base around client destinations.

As a number of providers working with ex-prisoners are already involved in the Wisemove process, we would see an opportunity to widen this to engage others.

Our review has identified a number of other hooks upon which this alignment agenda can be hung. The proposed Community Links Centre is probably the most obvious of these in the short term, and the concept has generated much discussion amongst consultees. At this point we are conscious of the doubts held by some stakeholders around the employability element within the CLC concept, and it would be fair to say that its potential was perhaps underplayed in the early stages.

However, our clear view is that this is too good an opportunity to miss. Indeed, we would go further in saying that all stakeholders have a duty to ensure that the employability potential of this project is maximised to the full. Given the Executive's interest in Edinburgh's distinctive approach to throughcare support for these ex-prisoners, there is little to gain – and far too much to lose – from focusing energy elsewhere. In short, the pilot must be made to work, and must be made to show the potential benefits of collocating employability support within the CLC model.

There is some work to be done to define the employability 'offer' that might be located within the CLC. This may simply extend to the presence of an agency that can provide advice and signposting around employability provision. It may go further than this, and offer specific areas of support such as job-search, interview skills and support around disclosure. A number of agencies could offer this package, although there may be value in Job Centre Plus assuming the role as it could be combined with guidance around benefits. Whoever undertakes this role, it will be vital that it plugs into the wider support network, such as the skills academies.

Taking this forward will require discussion with SACRO around the centre's operations, and particularly their intelligence around the centre's emerging client group. This will provide an indication of whether a proportion of these clients would be open to considering progress towards the labour market. As we point out above, unless they are there is limited value in aiming resources at them.

We are mindful of the challenges that lie ahead in making this work on the ground. However, now is the time for those partners with in depth experience of employability issues to bring that to the table, rather than adopting a 'not invented here' attitude which will only dilute the value of the eventual model. We recognise that this will be a real test of local partnership resolve, but would again stress that the prizes for getting this right are significant.

*Going with the grain...*

We have concluded that partners should maximise the momentum already behind the CLC concept to provide some early wins for the city. We see similar issues around the development of Jobcentre Plus services within prisons. Part of the secret of successful partnership working is to be honest about where individual agencies add real value, and it is also about recognising the direction of travel where this is irresistible.

We agree that as things stand, more could be made from the role of Jobcentre Plus staff in relation to this client group. This is not to say that their role to date has been ineffective, and we have highlighted the added value their presence has brought to all three of the prisons considered in this study.

However, the agenda is shifting, and there is scope through improved intelligence sources for JC+ staff to spend much less of their time investigating benefits issues at the induction stage. This work could be done by SPS staff during the assessment process, utilising the DWP and SPS databases. Although this will require some front end HR input from JC+ staff and ongoing liaison, this can be done with a much lighter touch.

This would enable JC+ staff to focus their attention on the pre-release stage. Results to date this year in terms of job outcomes have been respectable – certainly in Edinburgh Prison – and there is scope to build upon this. However, we recognise the need to secure SPS buy in to any such changes and note that these are currently unlikely to be forthcoming.

### *Links with employers*

Employers are a key part of the solution to this problem, yet they remain on the fringes of our picture. The prejudices and concerns about employing ex-prisoners are well known, and there is an ongoing campaign required to improve links to employers. In particular we must focus our effort on those sectors with employment potential for ex-prisoners in order to break down misconceptions and to stress the opportunities this client group can offer.

This needs to be part of a focussed programme of work with employers. Although it is very important to host events like the employer open day held in Edinburgh earlier this year, it is vital to have the capacity to follow up these leads. In trying to do so more than six months later we found that all of the key personnel within suggested companies had changed and the opportunity to build on the event had been lost.

In thinking about this there are a number of considerations. This work requires an understanding of HR and labour market issues, and clearly strong communications skills and an ability to manage relationships well. Equally, it requires some understanding of the ex-prisoner client group, and knowledge of the process they will have been through as well as an understanding of the qualities they can bring to the workplace.

It also requires amongst partners a recognition of who is best placed to do what. In our recommendations section we consider how this might be taken forward.

### ***Prison/prisoner group specific***

Each of the prisons has a particular view of the employability agenda and its own strengths and weaknesses in relation to it. Our overall conclusion is that each is making progress under this theme, although much work remains to be

done. Of the three prisons, only Edinburgh is in a position at this stage to evidence these changes by way of improved levels of job outcomes.

Clearly, given its client group, it is particularly important that Polmont grasps this nettle, and the structural changes to the building are positive steps. However, the pattern of employability support in the prison is characterised by a wide range of short lived pilots, some of which, like Worknet, have been successful but unrepeated. Sustainable improvement is probably linked to the strengthening of relationships with some of the key stakeholders, which in Edinburgh includes the JU4J partners together with employers in the city.

At Cornton Vale we have also seen a growing focus on employability and a desire to improve post-prison linkages<sup>26</sup>. We are aware of the significant barriers women prisoners face on release – documented in Section 3 – and of the fact that targeted support around drugs and childcare is required if progress towards employment is to become a reality. Again, this is a slow process, but any ongoing forum which brings partners together in Edinburgh around ex-prisoners should seek to ensure that Cornton Vale's Employability Officer is involved.

### ***Recommendations***

We have limited our recommendations in the belief that it is better to focus on the priorities and on what can be achieved. We therefore recommend that:

1. **The key partners<sup>27</sup> with a stake in this client group establish a formal grouping to oversee the employability service offer for ex-prisoners in Edinburgh.** This will feed a model for addressing the employability agenda into the forthcoming Criminal Justice Authority. The principal responsibilities of this group will be to consider targets for job entry and re-offending levels in Edinburgh (in anticipation of those being introduced by the Scottish Executive), to share plans on investment and monitoring performance and to develop a programme to align service delivery which should aim to be demand-led, client-centred and joined-up.

While one task of this grouping is to work out the details of this programme, at this stage some key tasks can be identified: to establish the means by which the delivery of provision in the prison can be best tied into local demand; and given feedback on effectiveness post-release; to establish a division of labour between JCP, CLC and other organisations for picking up employability action plans on liberation and reporting back on progress; to ensure that the JU4J provider network has the capacity to deal with specific issues presented by prison-leavers and to monitor their participation in mainstream

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<sup>26</sup> For example, the prison held an employment event on 25<sup>th</sup> October

<sup>27</sup> City of Edinburgh Council Social Work and Economic Development departments, Capital City Partnership, Jobcentre Plus, Scottish Prison Service, Edinburgh, Polmont and Cornton Vale Prisons and the Edinburgh DAAT, Careers Scotland, Scottish Enterprise.

employability services.

2. **The local partners convene a high level event which highlights the issues arising from this study, particularly in relation to the interface between the Employability and Criminal Justice domains.** Filling the gaps in baseline data and establishing the importance of employability to the CLC and CJA agendas would be two obvious areas to focus upon. The key purpose of this event should be to underline those issues which this local experience identifies for national policy and to ensure that the relevant decision makers within the Scottish Executive and DWP/JCP are involved. In order to ensure the right level of engagement it might be best to organise this as an invitation only event.
3. **The partners establish a time limited pilot designed to improve linkages to employers in Edinburgh.** This should involve a proactive campaign to promote ex-prisoners as a genuine resource, allied to a targeted series of visits and events. These should be developed in partnership with those agencies in the city with close employer links – most obviously the Employment Academies – in order to focus on those sectors with job opportunities. This pilot should work to clearly defined targets and its progress should be carefully monitored, both in terms of inputs, outputs and outcomes. Jobcentre Plus personnel are well placed to undertake the role of steering this pilot. In addition, partners may want to integrate this with the forthcoming Construction pilot where APEX staff will undertake this function. In effect, this could form a sector specific pilot.
4. **The partners adopt/promote an employability caseworker approach to the support of prisoners after liberation,** which builds on their Community Integration Plan and identifies continuity or hand-over of responsibilities for its employability elements. This should be developed to integrate into the operation of Community Links Centre. The key features of such a role would be for a pool of experienced staff to be embedded within the CLC model so that they could ensure that ex-prisoners' employability needs were being met on release. This role would involve signposting and referral, as well as advocacy on the client's behalf. Options for the sharing, with client consent, of client information held in the SPS PR02 database with providers supporting them after liberation should be pursued.
5. **The Partners agree the need to plan services on the basis of an assessment of those in the prison population most likely to access and sustain employment on release.** This will involve developing criteria for segmenting the client group, as well as agreeing how this assessment will be conducted. We recommend that the SPS Core Screen and subsequent Community Integration Plans are the vehicle through which this is taken forward.
6. **Careers Scotland should be approached with a commission to deliver a series of Worknet courses in Polmont Prison** and integrate this with

their service provision outside the prison. This employability model, imported from the US, has been successfully introduced in a wide range of residential special schools across Scotland (including secure units) and was well received when initially piloted in Polmont YOI. Funding will be an issue here, although CS should be asked to match any resources invested by the city partners.

7. **Partners undertake a study visit to one of the English pilot regions** to explore their new approach to prisoners' employability and to consider the learning points for the Edinburgh context. Discussions with the DfES have indicated that the North East region would be prepared to host such a visit.

## APPENDIX 1: Process Participants

Deborah Walker	Jobcentre Plus
Anne Marshall	Jobcentre Plus
Ian Connolly	Jobcentre Plus
Brian Martin	City of Edinburgh Council
Dot Fraser	City of Edinburgh Council
Aiden McCorrie	APEX
Janice Hewitt	Stirling Council
Donald Dickie	SACRO
John Mathieson	Edinburgh Prison
David Croft	Edinburgh Prison
Bobby Wilson	Polmont Prison
Karen McNamara	Cornton Vale Prison
Billy Lynch	Wisemove
Sian Fillimore	Transitions
Bruce Penman	West Edinburgh Action
Madeleine Traynor	South Edinburgh Partnership
Martin Smith	Worktrack
Karen Bradford	Worktrack
Andrew Thomson	Sutherland of Scotland
Catherine Cranmer	Working Links
Matthew Crighton	Capital City Partnership
Jim Rafferty	Capital City Partnership
John Dalziell	Careers Scotland
Yvonne Edmond	Careers Scotland
Carmen McShane	Cranstoun
Gary Waddell	Scottish Prison Service
Bob Rudge	Edinburgh Construction Academy
Jim Dustin	Edinburgh Prison
Richard Ward	Department for Education and Skills