

Research report

Qualitative study of offender employment review: final report

by Del Roy Fletcher, John Flint, Tony Gore, Ryan Powell,
Elaine Batty and Richard Crisp

Department for Work and Pensions

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Abbreviations and glossary of terms

BDC	Benefit Delivery Centre
CCG	Community Care Grant, a discretionary payment intended to help with expenses such as household items so that people can live independently in the community
CRESR	Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research
CSCS	Construction Skills Certification Scheme, a scheme designed to help the construction industry to improve occupational competence and reduce accidents
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EBA	Employment and Benefit Adviser
ESF	European Social Fund
ETE	Employment, Training and Education
FJF	Future Jobs Fund, a challenge fund designed to support the creation of jobs for young people
HMP	Her Majesty's Prison
HMRC	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
HMYOI	Her Majesty's Young Offender Institution
HOPE	Helping Offenders Provide Employment
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
IOM	Integrated Offender Management, an overarching framework that allows local agencies to come together to ensure that the offenders that cause most damage are managed in a co-ordinated way
LMS	Labour Market System, an administrative computer system covering all of the vacancies notified to Jobcentre Plus
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
NACRO	National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
NAO	National Audit Office
NOMS	National Offender Management Service

ROA	Rehabilitation of Offenders Act
REM	Regional Engagement Manager
ROTL	Release on Temporary Licence, a form of temporary parole which may be granted to allow prisoners to pursue work or training opportunities
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
SOVA	Society of Voluntary Associates
SPOC	Single Point of Contact
TSS	Transitional Support Team
UNLOCK	National Association of Reformed Offenders
YOI	Young Offenders Institution

Summary

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) to undertake a qualitative study of offender employment services, with a specific focus on the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations of the joint DWP/Ministry of Justice (MOJ) offender employment review. The key objectives of the study were to:

- identify how well the recommendations of the review have been implemented;
- identify the extent to which the changes implemented have contributed to improved offender employment services;
- establish what further reforms should be developed to maximise the employment outcomes for offenders;
- assist in developing future policy for the offender group;
- consider the role of drug treatment services in the offender employment journey.

The DWP and MOJ provide a range of support to offenders through their delivery organisations such as Jobcentre Plus and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) commissions the Offender Learning and Skills Service which provides the majority of prison education in the public sector and seeks to ensure that offenders have the skills and qualifications needed to hold down a job and play a positive role in society. In 2009, the Permanent Secretaries of the DWP and MOJ launched a joint strategic review of offender employment services. The aim was to *'improve offender employment support by conducting a strategic review of current services offered by DWP and MOJ and implementing improvements to make services more coherent and effective without increasing resources'*.

This summary presents the main findings and identifies how well key recommendations have been implemented 'on the ground' in both custodial and community settings; and assesses the extent to which changes have begun to improve offender employment services. It concludes with an overview of the main policy recommendations.

Research design

The study was conducted across four case study areas covering England and Wales. DWP and NOMS finalised the areas drawing upon intelligence gained from an internal survey of implementation across Jobcentre Plus Districts and Probation Trusts. The selection explicitly included areas where implementation was known to be proceeding smoothly as well as where difficulties had been encountered. It also sought to include a range of prison types.

The research has involved conducting 131 in-depth semi-structured interviews with policy leads, practitioners and offenders. This has included policy leads in DWP, Jobcentre Plus, MOJ and NOMS; Scottish policy leads; Employment and Benefit Advisers (EBAs) and Prison Resettlement staff; Jobcentre Plus staff; Probation Service staff; prisoners; offenders in the community and representatives from crime reduction charities. Interviews took place between March and August 2011. None of the interviews were recorded; rather the key points were written up by the individual researcher. A series of short summary reports (five to ten pages) were produced once a particular suite of interviews had been finalised. These were internal to the study team and were organised around key findings; emerging 'good practice'; and the implications for policy and practice.

The implementation of the review (Chapter 2)

The focus of the joint review was on improving the effectiveness of existing mainstream services, particularly those delivered by Jobcentre Plus and NOMS. At the outset, it is important to recognise four key features of the implementation context. First, embedding change takes time; less than one year had elapsed between the review and the commencement of the present study. Second, implementation was made more challenging because, as had been made clear under the remit of the review, there would be no increase to resources or funding to support key proposals. Third, delivery was further complicated by a dynamic context of policy and organisational change. In terms of the latter, both Jobcentre Plus and NOMS were undergoing a period of restructuring and headcount reductions which has often increased the workloads of front-line staff. Finally, the deteriorating economic climate has reduced the employment opportunities for offenders.

Table 1 summarises the key findings. The evaluation has found that the case study prisons have made strong progress with providing EBAs with appropriate interview space, broadband access and dedicated telephone lines, although this may not necessarily reflect the national picture. Similarly, EBAs now have a single point of contact within Benefit Delivery Centres (BDC) but staff turnover remains an issue in some areas. Some prisons have also made genuine progress with the co-location of EBAs with Prison Resettlement Teams. However, sharing physical space has not yet transformed the way which most EBAs have worked. Some were still too focused on benefit closure activity and were often marginal to broader resettlement support. Consequently, a significant issue in some prisons was the duration of interviews with prisoners (often a few minutes); their content (primarily focused on benefits) and timing (often just prior to release).

The review recommended that where appropriate offenders were to provide peer support to assist EBAs. This was meant to free up EBA time to allow them to focus more on job search and to improve the employment prospects of peer mentors by allowing them to be accredited for their work by the way of a formal qualification. The present study found that peer support has been a feature of very few participating prisons. Nevertheless, there was widespread recognition that, in principle, its development was possible and desirable.

The introduction of single points of contact within Jobcentre Plus and Probation to work together in the community has improved joint working at the strategic level. This was particularly apparent in the North East of England where much of the groundwork had been undertaken prior to the review. This has generated a number of practical benefits. These have included improving the flow of information on the restrictions that affect individual availability for work; better timetabling of probation activities that have reduced clashes with signing-on times and more effective use of scarce financial resources. However, the impact on front-line practice has hitherto been more modest in most case study areas.

The provision of a data sharing form was meant to be a key tool for improving partnership working between front-line staff particularly Jobcentre Plus staff and probation offenders managers. However, though a form was made available for use directly after the review took place, changes to include information relating to employment restrictions were not included until May 2011 when a new form was made available. It is still early stages but usage is uneven. It is being more widely used in areas characterised by strong pre-existing relationships between the two delivery organisations. The indications are that growing usage of the form has helped to improve the mutual knowledge about offenders and reduced the potential for duplication of resources.

Table 1 The implementation of key recommendations in the case study prisons

Recommendation/key findings	
Strong	<p>Introduce a revised EBA job description. EBAs had received the revised job description.</p> <p>Prisons to provide EBAs with appropriate interview space. This has included both dedicated offices and bookable rooms. However, the high level of demand for such space from other resettlement service providers can be an issue.</p> <p>Prisons to provide EBAs with broadband access and a dedicated telephone line. Most case study prisons have complied but the case studies may not reflect the national picture. However, a few EBAs have still not got access to broadband primarily due to technical and cost factors.</p> <p>EBAs to have a single point of contact within the BDC. Good progress has been made but staff turnover in some BDCs has been an issue in some areas.</p>
Medium	<p>Better integrate (and co-locate) EBAs with prison teams leading on skills, employment and resettlement. Good progress has been made but sharing physical space has not always changed the way EBAs have worked.</p> <p>Introduce a single point of contact within Jobcentre Plus and Probation to work together on offender issues. This has often improved joint working at the strategic level but the impact on front-line practice has been modest.</p> <p>Produce a legally approved data sharing form for use between front-line Probation and Jobcentre Plus staff. Significant delays have been encountered finalising the form. Usage is uneven across the case study areas.</p> <p>Jobcentre Plus and NOMS to join up employer engagement activity. Good progress has been made at the national level but progress has been slower at the local level.</p>
Weak	<p>Allow EBAs more time in Jobcentre Plus offices and rotating the role. Little evidence that EBAs have been able to spend more time in Jobcentre Plus offices. Considerable staff resistance to rotating the role.</p> <p>Use offenders to provide peer support to assist EBAs. This has been a feature of very few case study prisons.</p>

The extent to which changes have improved offender employment services (Chapter 3)

The principles and recommendations of the review were strongly supported by those interviewed but it was recognised that it would take time to embed these changes and for their impacts to become evident. The pre-review context was one of generally limited offender employment support; complex and fragmented operating environments; significant variation in regional and local practices and an increasingly challenging economic situation. Some local areas were already implementing changes prior to the review and identifying the specific impacts of the review was difficult.

The implementation of the review recommendations and the impacts of these changes were uneven, both geographically and between different actors and forms of offender employment support. However, it was apparent that the review had highlighted the importance of employment in reducing offending, increased the prioritisation of employment-related support and enhanced partnership working at strategic levels. This has resulted in a greater awareness of EBA's role in prisons and strengthened joint working, data sharing and tracking procedures. Attempts were being made to ensure that Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) and community sentence procedures could be linked to address the holistic and 'through the gate' needs of offenders.

The review had clarified the role of EBAs, including an increasing focus on job search as well as benefits processing, had raised the profile of EBAs in prisons and Jobcentre Plus and had supported greater integration of EBAs with prison resettlement teams. Facilities for EBAs, including interview space and broadband access, has been enhanced in many of the case study prisons. Although it was challenging to identify the measurable impacts of these changes, the research found some evidence of increasing satisfaction with EBAs among prison resettlement staff and there were several examples of innovation and good practice. In addition, there was improved partnership working between some EBAs and Jobcentre Plus centres, initiatives to provide offenders with official forms of identification and refined targeting of employment support on the most job-ready. Offenders themselves were less likely to understand EBAs' roles or to make connections between EBAs and employment-related support. Offenders remained concerned that employment support was not being delivered within a wider package of support addressing other, and sometimes more urgent, needs. There had been some improvements in employer engagement, but this was variable at the local level and peer support remained limited, although the research identified some local examples of good practice.

There had been some progress in data sharing and partnership working between prisons, Jobcentre Plus and probation trusts although this varied and the continuing limitations of data exchange mechanisms were widely acknowledged. However, the research identified some local initiatives where probation trusts had facilitated local multi-agency working, for example through co-location of staff and the establishment of job clubs. There were also examples of improved employment support and engagement for offenders in the community, based on holistic support packages, including 'through the gate' services. However, it was generally accepted that there remained a need to improve the linkages between employment support provided in prison and in the community. Probation managers indicated that resources needed to be allocated to support in the community as well as in prisons. The research found some evidence that the conditions and requirements of community sentences were being effectively utilised to enhance offenders' engagement with employment support services.

There was evidence that the holistic needs of offenders, including alcohol and drugs addictions, were recognised as important barriers to employment. At a strategic level there were increasing connections with drugs and alcohol partnerships and EBAs' integration within Prison Resettlement teams provided opportunities to link employment and drugs support services. There were also examples of good practice in through the gate support for offenders with addictions. However, providing mainstream and specialist voluntary drugs services in the community remained challenging.

There remains a need to link support to the different roles and populations of prisons and the different categories of offenders, and to distinguish prison-based and community-based employment support, which have different opportunities and challenges. There is also a need to recognise offenders as a distinct group who are uniquely and additionally disadvantaged by the requirement to disclose their criminal record. There are challenges arising from reducing resources, the impacts of the Work Programme and changing benefit entitlements. There are also challenges ensuring the status and continuation of EBAs and future equivalents of Regional Engagement Managers (REM), enhancing employer engagement and peer and 'through the gate' support. There are opportunities to develop baselines of employment needs, to increase offenders' engagement with mainstream services, to target support more appropriately and to ensure that community sentences enhance employability and access to employment support. This requires continuing national direction and coordination.

Recommendations (Chapter 4)

The research has been conducted during a period in which the Government's plans for reform of the criminal justice system and offender learning have become apparent. The Green Paper *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* puts work at the centre of rehabilitation, both in custody and in the community. More recently, *Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation* has set out a programme of reform for offender learning. In addition, since the completion of the fieldwork the Government have announced that from March 2012 all prison leavers that claim Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) will go straight onto the Work Programme from 'day one' of their release from custody. The intention here is to develop clear, actionable policy recommendations which complement these reforms.

The Work Programme is the Government's flagship employment programme. Key features include a prime-provider model and associated supply chains for delivery; outcome based funding; minimum service prescription; higher rewards for hard to help customers to minimise 'creaming' and 'parking'. The Deputy Prime Minister has also recently announced the piloting of an additional payment to incentivise Work Programme providers to work further with offenders, linked to reducing re-offending. The pilot aims to explore whether providers through employment can reduce the re-offending of eligible offenders released from custodial sentences of less than 12 months.

The introduction of the new 'day one' policy is to be welcomed because it represents a significant commitment to delivering more employment support for this vulnerable group. Furthermore, it is a more appropriate intervention point for those released from prison which has the potential to both improve the continuity of support offered to individuals and facilitate better tracking of the employment outcomes achieved. This will improve our intelligence about how ex-offenders fare in mainstream employment programmes and the impact of key reforms such as outcome-based funding. The new policy entails the introduction of the JSA New Jobseeker Interview process into the prison environment. It is our understanding that the vast majority of new claims will be taken by EBAs. We recommend that the way in which staff respond to these new responsibilities and the impact on the wider services that they are able to offer should be closely monitored.

It is still too early to assess its effectiveness at removing the barriers to work experienced by many offenders. The present study has, however, highlighted three issues which will warrant continuing attention. First, the hardest to help may be 'parked' and not offered the level of support necessary. Those that are not satisfied with the service received have recourse to a complaints process although this will inevitably favour the more articulate and confident. Second, a lack of specialist expertise among providers in some areas may frustrate the efforts to get offenders into work. Finally, offenders and those with 'chaotic lifestyles' may not understand the sanctioning regime and fall foul of its requirements with the risk that some will be driven off benefits altogether.

There remains significant potential to improve the service provided by EBAs in most prisons. This need has been made more pressing by the decision to mandate all prison leavers claiming JSA to the Work Programme from the day they make a claim for JSA. Policy makers need to raise awareness of the EBA role among Prison Governors so that they become regarded as a core part of the apparatus designed to help resettle offenders, with employment recognised as a key mechanism for reducing re-offending. To make the best use of available resources it is recommended that EBAs are deployed where they can have maximum impact on offender employment outcomes. This will need to take into account the diversity of prisons, their populations and functions. Support should be targeted at those where the most added-value may be realised and must be integrated with the reformed learning and skills provision. Some of the prisoners interviewed indicated that they would find work in the informal labour market and were unlikely to claim JSA. Consequently, a key part of the role of the EBA might be to help formalise the employment experiences of offenders and highlight the

additional employment support available through the Work Programme. We also believe that they should: help new arrivals to retain existing jobs; provide information on growth sectors so they can direct individuals to sectors with good employment prospects and link them to relevant learning and skills provision. We recommend investing in those offenders that display an aptitude for mentoring roles to support the work of the EBA; to provide continuing support in the community and as a route into employment in its own right.

The Minerva Project at Her Majesty's Prison (HMP) Hull represents an interesting model for preparing short-sentenced prisoners for work on their release. Offenders returning to live in Hull are met at the prison gates by Minerva staff on the day of release and then supported for the next twelve weeks to ensure their integration back into society. Participants undertake building work, working towards nationally agreed training standards. The core project team includes secondees from the prison and probation service and are supported by specialist staff in a number of service areas including accommodation, education, training, health, alcohol, drugs, financial and benefits advice. We believe that serious consideration should also be given to developing alternatives to custody for short-sentenced prisoners. The introduction of community-based training facilities for people with convictions and other disadvantaged groups merits serious consideration.

The study team make a number of recommendations designed to secure better offender employment outcomes that can be facilitated in the community by probation. We suggest that action should include: enhancing the links and continuity of 'through the gate' support for those leaving custody; setting additional employment targets for Probation; developing a brokerage role for staff to help provide holistic and tailored packages of support; and maximise the opportunities provided by community sentences to improve employment support. These measures should be supported by reform of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 so that it strikes a better balance between public protection and the rehabilitation of offenders. The act is confusing with the result that many ex-offenders do not know when and how to disclose criminal records to prospective employers. Sentence inflation also means that the current rehabilitation periods are in need of revision. A key area of work being undertaken by the Government as a result of the *Breaking the Cycle* Green Paper is a review of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (ROA). It is our understanding that the review is considering a number of proposals including broadening the scope of the Act so that it covers all offenders who receive a determinate sentence; reducing the length of rehabilitation periods; producing a clearer classification of rehabilitation periods; and simplifying the language of the legislation. This is to be welcomed.

A review of the criminal records regime in England and Wales is also being finalised. We welcome proposals for scaling back eligibility for criminal record checks and introducing a filter to remove old and minor conviction information from criminal record checks. However, the proposal to introduce basic level criminal record checks in England and Wales could heighten the discrimination faced by ex-offenders in the labour market. Consequently, we recommend that the Government does not proceed with this proposal. If implemented very careful consideration needs to be given so that basic disclosures do not become a further barrier to ex-offenders gaining employment. In these circumstances it would be vital that the review of the ROA leads to a significant reduction in the length of rehabilitation periods and considers the Exceptions Order since this dictates the scope and range of the criminal records regime.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In recent years around 250,000 people in England and Wales have entered the criminal justice system annually to serve a custodial sentence or undertake a period of Probation Service supervision. Many have not ever had employment and need support to help them into work. The level of support required by offenders varies widely with some individuals relatively close to the labour market but many others experience severe and multiple barriers to employment. These may include physical and mental health problems, literacy and numeracy difficulties, problems with drugs or alcohol, and poor vocational skills or employment experience (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 A profile of the prison population

	Prisoners (per cent)	General population (per cent)
Regular truant from school	59	2
Excluded from school	42	1
Reading below Level 1 (Level expected of an 11 year old)	37	16
No qualifications	47	15
Suffer from two or more mental disorders	72 per cent of men and 70 per cent of women	5 per cent of men and 2 per cent of women
Drug use in the previous year	66 per cent of men and 55 per cent of women	13 per cent of men and 8 per cent of women
Treatment for drug problem	44	N/A
Hazardous drinking	63 per cent of men and 39 per cent of women	38 per cent of men and 15 per cent of women
Treatment for drink problem	16	N/A
Attempted to take own life	24	N/A
Unemployment	67	5

Sources: Ministry of Justice (2010) Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction Wave 1 questionnaire tables; HM Government (2005) Reducing re-offending through skills and employment and Social Exclusion Unit (2002) Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners.

The DWP and MOJ provide a range of support to offenders through their delivery organisations such as Jobcentre Plus and the NOMS. The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) also seeks to ensure that offenders have the skills and qualifications needed to hold down a job and play a positive role in society. Nevertheless, it is clear that more could be done to ensure that offenders receive the right support at the right time.

In 2009, the Permanent Secretaries of the DWP and MOJ commissioned a joint strategic review of offender employment services. The aim was to *'improve offender employment support by conducting a strategic review of current services offered by DWP and MOJ and implementing improvements to make services more coherent and effective without increasing existing resources'*.

The recommendations of the review were announced on March 2010 and sought to:

- facilitate improvements to partnership working to ensure that services delivered to offenders by Jobcentre Plus and NOMS are joined-up;
- increase the effectiveness of employment-related services in custody and the community;
- join up employer engagement activity;
- facilitate joint data sharing between Jobcentre Plus and NOMS at a local, regional and national level; and
- explore the feasibility of future shared performance measures to improve performance across agencies.

1.2 The policy and organisational context

At the outset, it is important to appreciate that the focus of the review was on improving the effectiveness of existing mainstream services, particularly those delivered by Jobcentre Plus and NOMS, rather than commissioning new provision. Furthermore, the remit of the review was to come up with recommendations that could be implemented at no/or limited additional cost to each of the Department's. Implementation was further complicated by a dynamic context of policy and organisational change. The Coalition Government has, for instance, announced potentially far reaching changes to the criminal justice system and prison education (see Box 1.1). At the same time the MOJ budget will fall 23 per cent over the next four years. The DWP also has to cut costs by £20 billion in four years while achieving substantial reform of the welfare system. It is in this context that Jobcentre Plus is undergoing a major review of its structure and senior management to help deliver welfare reform and efficiency savings.

Box 1.1 A context of policy change

The Ministry of Justice Green Paper (2010) *'Breaking the cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders'* seeks to facilitate a 'rehabilitation revolution'. Key proposals include:

- Introducing 'working prisons' where prisoners are obliged to work a full working week.
- Introducing new drug recovery wings and testing options for intensive treatment in the community.
- Making offenders eligible for early entry onto the Work Programme.
- Rolling out liaison and diversion services for mentally ill offenders.
- Establishing new payment by results projects covering a significant proportion of the offender population.
- Reducing direct central control so that front-line staff have the freedom to innovate in the way that they work with offenders.
- Publishing a comprehensive competition strategy for prison and probation services.
- Reviewing the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

Box 1.1 (continued)

The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2011) *'Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation'* report proposes a series of reforms to the adult offender education system in England. There will be a greater emphasis on improving outcomes from education and training in prison. Key proposals include:

- Increasing the range and relevance of learning, focusing on the skills that employers need.
- Supporting more work opportunities in prison.
- Boosting activity to prepare prisoners for apprenticeships on release.
- Focusing learning towards the end of sentences and linking it directly to needs in the labour market on release.
- Trialling outcome incentive payments and giving training providers a greater stake in delivering learning successfully.
- Restructuring the delivery of offender learning around clusters of prisons within which prisoners normally move.

1.3 Aims and objectives of the research

The CRESR was commissioned by the DWP to determine the progress being made with the implementation of the recommendations of the joint DWP/MOJ offender employment review and also to assess what further can be done to improve offender employment services. The key objectives were to:

- Identify how well the recommendations of the review have been implemented.
- Identify the extent to which the changes implemented have contributed to improved offender employment services.
- Establish at a strategic level, in a changing policy context, what and how further reforms should be developed to maximise the employment outcomes for offenders.
- Assist in developing future policy for the offender group.
- Consider the role of drug treatment services in the offender employment journey.

1.4 Research design

CRESR has taken a qualitative approach to conducting the research. Qualitative methods are best suited to providing an in-depth understanding of the views, experiences and behaviours of key stakeholders as required by this study. The research was conducted across four case study areas. DWP and NOMS finalised the areas drawing upon intelligence gained from an internal survey of implementation across Jobcentre Plus Districts and Probation Trusts. The selection included areas where implementation was known to be proceeding smoothly as well as where difficulties had been encountered. It also sought to include a wide range of different types of prison (see Table 1.2).

The qualitative nature of the research means that the findings are not statistically significant. The findings do not provide any numerical evidence as to the extent or distribution of views and experiences outlined in the report. It is possible that the selection of case study areas may have missed some examples of good practice, in particular where Jobcentre Plus and NOMS are working closely together to achieve their collective aims. Nevertheless, we feel that the present study

provides a rich source of evidence upon which a sharper focus to recommendations of the joint review can be developed and in doing so ensure further improvement of offender employment services.

Table 1.2 Case study prisons

Probation/Jobcentre Plus areas			
South Wales	Usk/Prescoed	Cardiff	Parc
South East Wales	(Male closed)	(Male local)	(Male Young Offenders Institution (YOI))
Durham			
South Tyne and Wear	Durham (Male resettlement)	Low Newton (Female closed)	Deerbolt (Male YOI)
Cheshire	Risley	Styal	Thorn Cross
Cheshire, Halton and Warrington	(Male closed)	(Female closed)	(Male YOI)
Humberside	Hull	Wolds	Everthorpe
Humberside	(Male local)	(Male local)	(Male closed)

In-depth interviews were conducted with:

- Policy leads in DWP, Jobcentre Plus, MOJ and NOMS.
- Scottish Policy Leads.
- EBAs and Prison Resettlement staff.
- Jobcentre Plus staff.
- Probation Service staff.
- Prisoners.
- Offenders in the community.
- Policy leads in relevant community and voluntary sector organisations.

1.4.1 Policy interviews

The study began by exploring the views and expectations of key policy leads. Nine interviews were conducted with representatives from the DWP, Jobcentre Plus, MOJ, and NOMS in March and April 2011. The interviews discussed how key reforms were meant to work; explored the current situation; highlighted some of the barriers and facilitators to better joined-up working; and illuminated key issues for further study.

Five interviews were also undertaken with key policy leads in Scotland including the Scottish Government, Scottish Prison Service and Jobcentre Plus. The interviews were conducted in March 2011 to gain an understanding of the Scottish system and illuminate key lessons that may be relevant and applicable to policy and practice in England and Wales. A particular focus was on examining the way in which prison resettlement and employment services work within Scottish prisons and how policy makers and practitioners seek to ensure continuity of support once individuals are released into the community.

1.4.2 EBA and Prison Resettlement staff interviews

The review sought to improve the effectiveness of pre-release employment services. A key focus of activity was facilitating a shift away from benefit closure towards the provision of help with job search and strengthening the integration of EBAs with prison resettlement teams. Thirty two interviews were undertaken with EBAs and Prison Resettlement staff (including Heads of Learning and Skills, Reducing Re-offending, Offender Management and those providing drug/alcohol and housing services) in twelve participating prisons to discuss these issues. These interviews were conducted between April and July 2011.

1.4.3 Jobcentre Plus interviews

A key purpose of the review was to improve partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and the NOMS. Consequently, the research team conducted in-depth interviews with agency staff in each case study area. Fifteen interviews were completed with a mixture of Regional Leads, Partnership Managers, Office Managers, specialist offender staff and front-line advisers.

1.4.4 Probation interviews

Fifteen in-depth interviews were completed with Probation staff (including REMs, Chief Officers, Assistant Chief Officers Senior Probation Officers, Area Managers, Employment Training and Education (ETE) Managers and Offender Managers). The interviews examined the implementation of key review recommendations; the key barriers and facilitators; the impact on offender employment services; and suggestions for further improvements.

1.4.5 Prisoner interviews

Since the review was primarily focused on improving offender employment services it was essential that the team gathered a service user perspective. A total of 36 prisoner interviews were completed including five females, seven young offenders and ten individuals on short-sentences (i.e. sentences less than 12 months). The latter were included because they account for 65 per cent of all sentenced admissions and releases and because of concerns that short sentences makes it difficult to meet individual needs. The National Audit Office (2010) estimated that three-quarters of the £13 billion cost of re-offending can be attributed to short-sentenced prisoners.

Prisoners were accessed in close collaboration with EBA staff and/or Prison Resettlement Teams which meant that most were relatively job-ready. The intention was that individuals had been in receipt of employment support relatively recently. The interviews included an examination of previous employment experience and the ways in which individuals usually sought work and explored their experience of prison-based employment support. To aid recall many individuals were interviewed straight after they had met the EBA.

1.4.6 Offenders in the community

A total of sixteen interviews were conducted with offenders in the community including those who had recently been released from prison on licence and individuals serving community sentences. The community-based interviews were facilitated by the Probation Service and explored the present circumstances of individuals; their use of offender employment services; their participation in employment support measures as part of community sentences; and perceptions of service changes.

1.4.7 Community and voluntary sector interviews

The research culminated in three in-depth interviews with policy leads in community and voluntary sector organisations providing offender employment services. These interviews were an opportunity to discuss perceptions of the current system of provision; the implications of key research findings for policy and practice; and what further might be done to improve offender employment services.

1.4.8 Data analysis

None of the interviews were recorded. The key points of each interview were written up by the individual researcher. A series of short summary reports (five to ten pages) were produced once a particular suite of interviews had been completed. These were internal to the study team and were organised around key findings; emerging 'good practice'; and implications for policy and practice.

1.5 Structure of the report

The remainder of the report is organised in the following manner:

- **Chapter 2** outlines the key recommendations of the Joint Ministerial Review and discusses the extent to which they have been implemented. Where delays have been encountered some of the key barriers are identified.
- **Chapter 3** discusses the impact of the review on pre-release and post-release employment services.
- **Chapter 4** presents a series of recommendations for further reforms to help improve offender employment support.

2 The implementation of the review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the extent to which key recommendations of the Joint Ministerial Review have been implemented on the ground. Box 2.1 indicates the proposals covered by the present study. Table 2.1 summarises the key headline findings. Each recommendation is then considered in turn and some of the key barriers and facilitators to implementation are discussed.

Box 2.1 Relevant strategic review recommendations

Implement a framework for joint working and data sharing

- Better integrate (and co-locate) Jobcentre Plus Employment and Benefit Advisers (EBAs) with prison teams leading on skills, employment and resettlement.
- Introduce a single point of contact within Jobcentre Plus and Probation to work together on offender issues.
- Provide guidance to support partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and NOMS front-line staff – helping to understand the offender offer.
- Provide a legally approved data sharing consent form for use between front-line Probation and Jobcentre Plus staff.

To reintroduce a leaflet for EBA staff explaining the current Jobcentre Plus offer to offenders

Enable EBAs to focus more on job search

- Introduce a revised EBA job description.
- Maintain EBA knowledge of Jobcentre Plus provision by spending more time in Jobcentre Plus offices and rotating the role.
- Prisons are to provide EBAs with appropriate space to deliver face-to-face advice to prisoners.
- Prisons to provide EBAs with broadband access to allow on-line access to the Jobcentre Plus network (including the Labour Market System (LMS)) and a dedicated telephone line.
- Jobcentre Plus will provide the EBAs with a single point of contact within the BDC to action benefit closure activity.
- Use offenders to provide peer support to assist EBAs.

Jobcentre Plus and NOMS to join-up employer engagement activity

- Jobcentre Plus and prison resettlement teams to work together to engage local employers to train and recruit offenders. Jobcentre Plus and Probation will do this in the community.
- At the regional level, NOMS Regional Offender Employment Co-ordinators will work with Jobcentre Plus employer engagement staff to analyse labour market information to ensure a co-ordinated approach.
- At the national level, employer champions for offender training and recruitment who have signed up to the Reducing Re-offending Corporate Alliance should continue to support Jobcentre Plus efforts to engage with employers to take on offenders through Local Employment Partnerships.

Table 2.1 The implementation of key recommendations in the case study prisons

	Recommendation/key findings
Strong	<p>Introduce a revised EBA job description. EBAs had received the revised job description.</p> <p>Prisons to provide EBAs with appropriate interview space. This has included both dedicated offices and bookable rooms. However, the high level of demand for such space from other resettlement service providers can be an issue.</p> <p>Prisons to provide EBAs with broadband access and a dedicated telephone line. Most case study prisons have complied. However, a few EBAs have still not got access to broadband, primarily due to technical and cost factors and the case studies may not reflect the national picture according to recent figures.</p> <p>EBAs to have a single point of contact within the BDC. Good progress has been made but staff turnover in some BDCs has been an issue in some areas.</p>
Medium	<p>Better integrate (and co-locate) EBAs with prison teams leading on skills, employment and resettlement. Good progress has been made but sharing physical space has not always changed the way EBAs have worked.</p> <p>Introduce a single point of contact within Jobcentre Plus and Probation to work together on offender issues. This has often improved joint working at the strategic level but the impact on front-line practice has been modest.</p> <p>Produce a legally approved data sharing form for use between front-line Probation and Jobcentre Plus staff. Significant delays have been encountered finalising the form. Usage is uneven across the case study areas.</p> <p>Jobcentre Plus and NOMS to join up employer engagement activity. Good progress has been made at the national level but progress has been slower at the local level.</p>
Weak	<p>Allow EBAs more time in Jobcentre Plus offices and rotating the role. Little evidence that EBAs have been able to spend more time in Jobcentre Plus offices. Considerable staff resistance to rotating the role.</p> <p>Use offenders to provide peer support to assist EBAs. This has been a feature of very few case study prisons.</p>

2.2 Reintroduce a leaflet for EBA staff

Many offenders are reluctant to declare their criminal records and consequently do not always access the most appropriate Jobcentre Plus provision. The present research has also found that prison and probation staff may also be unaware of what support is potentially available to offenders. The EBA leaflet was intended to raise awareness of the range of available support via Jobcentre Plus. A draft leaflet was circulated for comment by Jobcentre Plus Head Office in 2010.

However, most EBAs interviewed by the study team had not seen the leaflet. Of those that had some expressed concerns with its usefulness. ‘It is wishy washy’ (EBA). Only three of the prisoners interviewed thought they had seen it. A Toe to Toe reading mentor (see Box 2.2) at HMP Hull felt that it was a good idea in practice but drew our attention to the large number of inmates that have reading difficulties. ‘*It is very helpful if you can read*’. He estimated that over 50 per cent of the prisoners making use of the Resettlement Unit at HMP Hull would need someone to talk them through it. It is salient to note that the Social Exclusion Unit (2002) estimated that 37 per cent of prisoners had a reading level below that expected of an 11 year old.

2.3 Introduce a revised EBA job description and maintain knowledge of Jobcentre Plus provision

The review signalled the intention of policy makers to re-focus the activities of EBAs on job search activity. Consequently, a revised job description was introduced which outlined the requirements of the EBA role. However, being prison-based has the potential to isolate EBAs with the attendant risk that individuals are unaware of the latest developments in Jobcentre Plus provision. Consequently, the review recommended that EBAs should spend some time each week based in a Jobcentre Plus office. It was also suggested that the role should be rotated.

All EBAs interviewed had seen the revised job description. However, the study team have uncovered little evidence that EBAs have been able to spend more time in Jobcentre Plus offices. On the contrary a few reported that the review had increased their workload which meant that they were now spending less time outside prison. The isolation of EBAs was occasionally compounded by a lack of effective management or the feeling that Jobcentre Plus managers did not understand the role. The result was that in one or two cases EBAs expressed a greater affinity with prison staff compared to their Jobcentre Plus colleagues. One exception was the North East where EBAs reported that they had been able to influence elements of Jobcentre Plus practice as a result of the knowledge gained working in prison. This has included challenging Jobcentre Plus colleagues about offenders' needs and entitlements and addressing missed payments of JSA. Another was in one part of Cheshire where the EBA had been incorporated into the local district's Partnerships Team, which had linked them in more closely with employer engagement activities.

There was considerable resistance from EBAs to rotating the role. It was pointed out that it may take several months or even years simply to get to grips with how prisons work and the myriad of external providers working in prisons. It is, perhaps, not a coincidence that the present study discovered that innovative practice was often found in prisons with experienced and well integrated teams. It is also the case that too much change can be counter-productive. An extreme example of the latter was found in South Wales where in one area the role is shared by six advisers and operated on a rota system. However, this arrangement risks undermining the continuity of support and may hinder the development of 'through the gate' work. This was appreciated by those on the ground. *'I might not even go out there [prison] for two months so I just seem to dip in and out'* (EBA).

2.4 Prisons to provide EBAs with appropriate interview space

Policy interviewees anticipated some difficulties with the implementation of recommendations that 'came with a price tag'. Some Prison Governors would, for example, require some persuading of the benefits of making such an investment especially where the link to the realisation of Key Performance Targets was not immediately apparent. NOMS pointed out that it had been necessary to take into account the needs of each prison so that in some cases a dedicated office had been provided and in others a bookable room had been made available.

The present study has uncovered a generally positive picture with regard to the provision of private interview space. This may allow individuals to disclose sensitive personal information that may have a direct bearing upon their prospects for rehabilitation and resettlement, e.g. drug problems or debt. It may also allow EBAs to better personalise the services that they provide to inmates. However, the high level of demand from other resettlement service providers and the layout of some prisons mean that some prisoners continue to be interviewed in public areas. This was observed to be a particular issue at HMP Hull and Her Majesty's Young Offender Institution (HMYOI) Low Newton. These local case study findings appear to reflect the national picture. Figures provided to the DWP

by Jobcentre Plus groups in June 2011 indicated that a minority of EBAs did not have access to private interview rooms, although this ranged from only ten per cent in the North East to 40 per cent in Wales. The figures revealed that most EBAs had access to shared rooms for interviews, although particular progress had been made in the Southern and London and the Home Counties areas, where 54 per cent and 44 per cent of EBAs respectively had access to their own rooms for interviews.

More generally, EBAs are dependent on the flexibility and prioritisation of prison regimes in ensuring that prisoners are able to attend their interviews. It is understandable that security concerns take precedence in prisons, but this may often frustrate the work of the EBAs. These difficulties have been exacerbated by the growth of the prison population and overcrowding which makes it more difficult to maintain decent prison conditions and intensifies the concern with managing prisoners.

2.5 Prisons to provide EBAs with broadband access and a dedicated telephone line

Policy interviewees felt that this would be a challenging recommendation to implement. The cost of broadband cabling was identified as a particular issue. It was feared that Prison Governors would be unwilling to make such investments because of a lack of awareness of the potential value of supporting the work of EBAs. This reflected a lack of understanding of the role which was often felt to be primarily about closing down benefit claims rather than providing employment support.

Despite these concerns many of the case study prisons have complied. This has delivered real benefits and has improved the quality of the service that EBAs are potentially able to provide. At HMP Hull broadband access was described as a 'godsend'. Previously, the EBA had to hand write vacancy information which was time consuming. Dial up meant that phone calls could not be made simultaneously to accessing on-line systems. More generally, the importance of broadband was highlighted due to its links with virtual campus development and enabling other, non Jobcentre Plus staff, to access the latest vacancies.

Nevertheless, a few EBAs interviewed by the study team had not got access to broadband. The study revealed three key barriers:

- Technological difficulties encountered installing the necessary cabling. This was reported to be an issue at HMP Everthorpe, HMYOI Low Newton and HMP Prescoed.
- The cost of cabling. In Yorkshire, for example, the REM reported that the cost of cabling was between £2k and £2.5k per establishment.
- At HMYOI Deerbolt broadband had been installed but ongoing security concerns mean that it was not being used.

Some prisons are spread across quite large areas and it is sometimes necessary for EBAs to visit different buildings. Two EBAs highlighted the difficulties encountered gaining remote access to broadband when they were working in different parts of the prison. At HMYOI Thorn Cross the use of a 'dongle' to facilitate remote access was judged to constitute a security risk. Consequently, it has been deemed necessary to develop a new set of procedures and protocols to allow the EBA to carry a dongle around the prison.

It should be noted that these local case studies do not appear to reflect the national picture. Figures provided to the DWP by Jobcentre Plus groups in June 2011 indicated that while only one in five EBAs in the North East and North West did not have access to IT systems, the proportions for the other regions ranged from 40 to 57 per cent. In Wales, 60 per cent of EBAs had IT access via Broadband or 3G card but in other regions this proportion was below 50 per cent and, in the

cases of Central England and London and the Home Counties it was ten per cent or less. Significant proportions of EBAs, where IT access is available continue therefore to be reliant upon Dial up connections.

The case studies do appear to be far more accurately indicative of the national trend in relation to telephone access according to these figures. In two areas all EBAs had some access to a telephone and in the four areas where this was not the case, the proportion of EBAs without any telephone access ranged from four to 13 per cent. In four areas around half of EBAs had access to a telephone in an interview room, although the proportions of EBAs in this category were lower in Wales and the North West.

2.6 EBAs to have a single point of contact within the BDC to action benefit closure activity

EBAs have traditionally focused on closing down benefit claims. This is important for the prevention of fraud and error. It can lead to substantial financial savings to the Exchequer and can help stop individuals sliding further into debt. At HMP Cardiff, for example, staff estimated that over £28,000 a month was saved in this way. The policy interviews indicated that Jobcentre Plus would find this recommendation relatively easy to implement.

This has been confirmed by the present study. Most of the EBAs interviewed were able to name a single point of contact within the BDC to help close down benefit claims. At HMP Cardiff, for example, having a named contact had made a big difference. *'Before you would phone them and it was just the luck of the draw who you got to speak to. Then the list came out which is far easier'* (EBA, HMP Cardiff). The EBA at HMP Hull had been on a 'taster day' at Hull BDC which was useful. Consequently, Hull BDC now prioritises the prison.

Nevertheless, two key problems remain:

- Difficulties have arisen due to staff turnover in some Benefit Delivery Centres.
- Some EBAs reported that it still took too long to close down claims.

2.7 Offenders to provide peer support to assist EBAs

The review recommended that where appropriate offenders were to provide peer support to assist the EBA in a wide range of ways including giving advice, signposting enquiries, or helping offenders to complete forms. This was to take into account the skills and abilities of prisoners who can fulfil the role. This was meant to both free-up EBA time to allow them to focus more on job search and improve the employment prospects of mentors by allowing them to be accredited for their work by way of a formal qualification. NOMS indicated that there may be up to forty prisons where peers have been deployed to support the EBA.

At the outset, it is important to appreciate that the provision of peer support is becoming increasingly important within the prison system. A growing number of schemes seek to provide emotional support to new arrivals or help support prisoners with poor reading skills (see Box 2.2). However, the present study has found that peer support to assist the EBA has been a feature of very few of the participating prisons:

- at **HMP Hull**: two prisoners (based on 'A' and 'G' wings) collect basic information on new arrivals (names, national insurance numbers etc.) to help the EBA close down benefit claims. It works well with few reported problems: *'I could not do my job without them'* (EBA).
- at **HMYOI Thorn Cross** prisoners help with the completion of forms for Community Care Grants (CCG). The latter provide extra financial help to people on income support or income-based JSA to live independently in the community. The aim is to have peer mentors in each unit to help prisoners with the forms. Mentors are given a session on what is involved and the limits to the help they are able to provide. They are also encouraged to take on a signposting role.

It should also be noted that in one or two other prisons inmates had an informal role assisting with the preparation of CCG applications.

Box 2.2 Peer Support Schemes in the Prison System

The majority of prisons in England and Wales have 'Listener' schemes. The Samaritans train and support volunteer prisoners, called Listeners, who provide confidential emotional support to other prisoners.

Some prisons run peer support initiatives known as 'Buddy' or 'Carer' schemes.

The 'Insiders' scheme involves the training of selected prisoner volunteers to provide basic information and reassurance to those new to prison shortly after their arrival.

The 'Toe to Toe Reading Plan', run by the Shannon Trust, is delivered in most prisons. Prisoners are trained as mentors to encourage and support prisoners with little or no reading skills.

The study has identified a range of contributory factors behind the lack of peer support. The principal factor appears to be the low profile of EBAs in many prisons which is compounded by the lack of available staff resources. It is in this context that prisons simply have not prioritised the development of peer support schemes for EBAs. A lack of resources to train mentors has been another barrier. *'Who is going to train them? - the EBA has no time'* (Prison Resettlement staff member). The retention of mentors given the 'churn' of prisoners was also frequently mentioned. Data protection and security concerns especially the risk of fraud resulting from the sharing of names and national insurance numbers were another issue. The potential for the abuse of trust with violent repercussions was highlighted. A Prison Resettlement staff member at one prison felt that: *'We could end up making prisoners more vulnerable to violent assaults'*.

Nevertheless, there was widespread recognition that, in principle, the development of peer support for EBAs was desirable. Some interviewees felt that it would be easier to deliver in custodial environments because there is a structure and motivation and supervisory capacity, which are not necessarily present in the community. However, it is important that the development of this support does not 'piggy back' on other peer support schemes. It is in this context that some of those interviewed called for the National tier to issue a job description of the peer support role to give greater clarity and assuage any concerns. Prisoners might be most usefully deployed to undertake the following activities:

- Publicising EBA support to fellow inmates.
- Signposting prisoners to EBA provision.
- Setting up referrals to the service.
- Collating key prisoner information.

2.8 Better integrate (and co-locate) EBAs with prison teams leading on skills, employment and resettlement

The review found that a lack of partnership working has led to missed opportunities to target timely and effective interventions at offenders and risks the duplication of interventions. Consequently, a key proposal was to better integrate (and co-locate) EBAs with prison teams leading on skills, employment and resettlement. Some of the policy interviewees indicated that this recommendation would be easier to implement because it is principally about making adaptations to existing services.

The present study has found that some prisons have made genuine progress with the co-location of EBAs with Prison Resettlement teams. At HMP Hull and HMYOI Thorn Cross, for example, they have their own space within the Resettlement Unit. Similarly, HMP Everthorpe is developing a Pre-Release Wing that will bring together key sources of resettlement support under one roof for those in the last 12 weeks of their sentence. However, sharing physical space had not always changed the way in which EBAs worked. Many were still focused on benefit closure activity and were marginal to broader resettlement support.

It is important to appreciate that the way in which EBAs have traditionally worked, focusing on closing benefit claims, has not required them to be well integrated with Prison Resettlement Teams. Non-employment issues (drugs, alcohol and housing) were, for example, frequently perceived to be the responsibility of others. *'I don't think there is a role in this [non-employment issues] for EBAs, we're not social workers'* (EBA). More generally, the potential for partnership working has been limited by the way in which some EBAs provide employment support only in the last few weeks or days of an individual's sentence. Consequently, 'entrenched practice' has been an issue in some prisons. *'They've become part of the furniture'* (REM). Partnership working has also been frustrated by staff turnover which has meant that some EBAs have lacked the knowledge of how prisons work and the role of other prison-based teams. When asked about what other resettlement teams did an EBA in one District confided: *'I don't know to be honest'*.

There is an enduring perception that EBAs focus on benefits. A few of the interviews with prison officers have also revealed a degree of scepticism about the effectiveness of the work of civilian staff. One Prison Resettlement staff member noted that: *'They [EBAs] have their own agenda so it's hard to say if they add value'*. It is also worth bearing in mind that some resettlement teams have their own mechanisms for providing employment support, accessing vacancies and engaging employers that are not linked to Jobcentre Plus systems (see Box 2.3). More broadly, the influence of different performance indicator targets for different prison teams and for Jobcentre Plus has not been helpful in promoting partnership working. *'Different parts of the prison focus on their own targets. They are judged on these. Their pay and prospects for promotion partly depend on their ability to meet their targets'* (Prison Resettlement staff member).

Box 2.3 Prison-based employer initiatives

HMP Everthorpe: A European Social Fund (ESF) project was the catalyst for brokering relationships with a range of local employers. The HOPE (Helping Offenders Provide Employment) project allowed the prison to recruit an individual to develop relationships with local employers to help prisoners into work. An Employer Open Day had attracted 40 employers to the prison. An employer brought an employee (a former prisoner) to the open day which had a 'powerful effect' on other prisoners. ESF resources lasted for six months but since the recruiter had made such an impact he was retained by the prison.

HMP Cardiff: Resettlement has developed strong links with several employers including: Holiday Inn, British Gas and McGinley's (rail track maintenance company). This has involved a series of visits to prospective employers, attendance at job fairs and inviting some into prison to view the training facilities. A representative from McGinley's (an ex-offender) regularly visits the prison and gives talks to prisoners about employment opportunities in the industry. This was reported to be popular because of the relatively high rates of pay and the manual nature of the work.

HMP Parc: Local employers are invited into the prison. *'We tend to get them in, show them the facilities, do a presentation and things...myth-busting stuff really'* (Prison Resettlement staff). This has led to a successful relationship with Timpsons, the High Street shoe retailer. This has resulted in the company recruiting 11 ex-prisoners to full-time posts in January 2011. Timpsons were reported to have positive policies towards the employment of those with criminal records. Representatives visit the prison to give presentations and conduct job interviews with individuals about to be released. In terms of the latter, five prisoners were being interviewed by the company on the day of our visit.

HMP Durham: Employers in several sectors including construction, waste management, hospitality and call centres have been targeted. A partnership with the Marriott hotel chain has, for example, included seconding a prison officer to mentor prisoners taking up employment opportunities with the company.

2.9 Introduce a single point of contact within Jobcentre Plus and Probation to work together on offender issues

The introduction of a single point of contact (SPOC) was a key means of improving the ability of front-line staff to work together to meet the employment needs of offenders. Most of the policy interviewees felt that this recommendation would be relatively straightforward to implement. It was, for example, pointed out that Jobcentre Plus had offender champions in place prior to the review. The key issue for the present study was the extent to which this innovation improved joint working on the ground.

The indications are that this has improved joint working at the strategic level. This was particularly apparent in the North East of England where much of the groundwork had been undertaken prior to the review. *'We're heading in the right direction. There are much better working relationships than before'* (Jobcentre Plus officer). This has had a number of practical benefits (see Box 2.4). These have included improving the flow of information on the restrictions that affect individual availability for work; better timetabling of probation activities that have reduced clashes with signing-on times; and more effective use of scarce financial resources. Similarly, improved links between Probation and Jobcentre Plus were the result in Cardiff. At a strategic level Jobcentre Plus and Probation sit on a number of boards, e.g. the Reducing Re-Offending Board and the Integrated Offender Management Cymru Strategy Board (see Box 2.5). A Jobcentre Plus representative is also co-located with Probation.

The impact on front-line practice has been more modest in most case study areas. Jobcentre Plus front-line staff in one district, for example, reported that: *'It hasn't affected my work one iota'*. In a similar vein Probation interviews in one district confirmed that there was little routine communication between Probation and Jobcentre Plus outside strategic partnership meetings. *'There are a small handful of occasions each month where we contact Jobcentre Plus about say clashes with appointments or drug using offenders'* (Probation interviewee). A particular issue in some areas has been that front-line staff were often unaware of the existence or identity of the single point of contact. This problem has been compounded in areas such as Humberside by staff discontinuities and/or SPOCs being given additional responsibilities which have made it difficult for them to prioritise offender work. A further complication has been that implementation has coincided with a period of major organisational restructuring of the delivery organisations. In April 2010 Probation, for instance, went from operating across four regions in Wales to just one with ten local delivery units plus two overarching leads for interventions. A further issue is that Probation and Jobcentre Plus operational areas are seldom co-terminous.

It may be necessary to break down the negative attitudes expressed by some front-line staff to working with offenders. A particular frustration expressed by Jobcentre Plus staff was that many offenders failed to attend their Freshstart interview. They were also widely seen as a challenging group to work with. In terms of the latter, interviewees acknowledged that some offenders played-off Probation against Jobcentre Plus. These problems are not insurmountable. A regional drugs lead drew our attention to the 'massive difference' that training delivered by recovering drug users had made to both Jobcentre Plus staff awareness and attitudes towards problem drug users.

Box 2.4 Multi-agency working in the North East

The North East had been proactive prior to the Joint Ministerial Review with Jobcentre Plus and Probation sharing information and developing multi-agency working. The establishment of a Pathways model in 2005/06 provided firm foundations along with the establishment of a multi-agency group including Jobcentre Plus, Probation and local employers. There are now Local Offender Partnerships so the structures are in place and people have taken responsibility for the agenda.

Better working relationships between Jobcentre Plus and Probation in the North East are reported to have secured a number of tangible benefits including: timetabling Probation activities to reduce clashes with signing on; probation provide information about restrictions, e.g. tagging that affect availability for work; reduced duplication of expenditure, e.g. on suits for job interviews; provision of additional funding for vocational training, e.g. sports coaching or fork lift truck driving.

Box 2.5 The Pont project

The Pont project (Welsh for bridge) was identified as a model of good practice as part of the consultation process that informed the Joint Review. It facilitates multi-agency partnership between the police, probation, local authority housing and employment advisers, drug intervention programmes, Jobcentre Plus and the youth offending service. Many of these agencies are co-located in a single Probation office in Cardiff city centre. The partnership works well so that activities are no longer co-ordinated through regular, joint multi-agency meetings but are ‘embedded in daily practices’. The project has also linked up with other employment interventions, e.g. the Future Jobs Fund (FJF).

It targets prolific offenders involved in serious acquisitive crime at any stage of the criminal justice system. It includes those who have not been arrested (non-statutory offenders) who are encouraged to attend on a voluntary basis through ‘assertive outreach’.

The Employment Liaison Officer works closely with prison teams. They recently arranged for three prisoners to attend training at Network Rail. This relationship benefits those who *‘like it when they know they’ve got someone looking after them on the inside and on the outside’* (Jobcentre Plus Probation Liaison Officer).

Probation staff identified several benefits to Jobcentre Plus involvement:

- Support with setting up benefit claims provides a ‘carrot’ to incentivise non-statutory offenders to attend.
- It makes it more difficult for offenders to ‘play agencies off against each other’.
- The involvement of Jobcentre Plus has reduced the time Probation staff spend identifying and liaising with Jobcentres.
- It can help to more speedily resolve any issues arising with individual benefit claims.

2.10 Provide a legally approved data sharing form for use between front-line Probation and Jobcentre Plus staff

The introduction of a data sharing form was meant to be a key tool for improving partnership working between front-line staff. The intention was to share information about prisoners and *‘to get the right people together and start conversations’* (Policy lead). Another policy lead likened it to a *‘vehicle for cultural change’*. However, though a form was made available for use directly after the review took place, changes to include information relating to employment restrictions were not included until May 2011. Nevertheless, staff now have a legally cleared form for sharing employment-related information about offenders.

The current use of the form is uneven across the case study areas. It is reportedly used in areas where it has been actively promoted by senior management such as Cumbria, Merseyside and Lancashire. It was also found to be more widely used in areas characterised by strong pre-existing relationships between the two delivery organisations. In Durham and Tees Valley, for example, it was claimed that data sharing had increased from one to two per cent of offenders to 18 per cent and possibly up to 30 per cent. However, it has not been possible to independently verify this claim. It is still very early but the initial indications are that this has helped to improve the mutual knowledge of clients and reduce the potential for duplication of resources and interventions.

The picture was less rosy in areas where there has traditionally been little partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and Probation. Consequently, the form is reflecting not directing change. A vital pre-requisite is that senior management are committed to its introduction. Yet in one area Probation senior management buy-in was conspicuous by its absence (see Box 2.6). More generally, the form is being introduced at a time where financial constraints and organisational changes have placed additional workload pressures on front-line staff. This had made it more difficult to embed change in the daily working practices of staff. The study has identified several other barriers:

- Poor communication which has meant that some staff have lacked awareness of the form.
- Higher caseloads which are squeezing the time front-line staff have with offenders. *'It's not a case of not wanting to do this but of not having the time because of other priorities'* (Jobcentre Plus front-line staff officer).
- The limited capacity of Offender Managers to provide intensive 'case management' type support and the fact that employment is often not the key priority for ex-prisoners or probation staff.
- A reluctance to use paper forms.
- The perceived adequacy of existing forms to gain consent to liaise with other agencies, e.g. DP1A.

Box 2.6 The importance of securing senior management buy-in

There was an acknowledgement that information exchange between Jobcentre Plus and Probation in one case study area had been limited for a number of years, although both agencies were now taking part in regular strategic partnership meetings. Nevertheless, senior probation interviewees expressed a high degree of scepticism about the utility of the ETE data sharing form which was variously described as: *'a box ticking exercise'*, and *'a waste of time'*. This view was founded on doubts about the ability of Jobcentre Plus to meet the employment needs of offenders:

- The view was expressed that Jobcentre Plus would not be able to cope with the scale of the information that Probation could provide on supervised offenders. *'Can Jobcentre Plus cope with the referrals that Probation can make?'*
- Jobcentre Plus is perceived to lack the flexibilities to meet the complex needs of many offenders: *'It is a huge tanker of an organisation with tiers of accountability and fixed processes'*.
- Offenders primarily engage with Jobcentre Plus to secure benefits rather than to find work. *'Offenders don't see Jobcentre Plus as a provider of employment opportunities. They see it as a benefits agency'*.
- The move towards a stricter benefit regime backed up by sanctions has created a *'credibility gap'*. *'Jobcentre Plus is a hassle for offenders'*.

A decision had been taken to trial the use of the ETE data sharing form by a small part of Probation rather than roll it out across the area. However, offender managers interviewed by the study team were unclear as to the purpose of the form. They complained that they filled it in, got the offender to sign it, photocopied it and sent it to Jobcentre Plus but had not received any feedback. It is in this context, that an offender manager likened it to a 'paper exercise'. Although the form was relatively straight-forward to complete another offender manager indicated that, in the absence of any feedback, it was an unwelcome distraction from his core duties.

2.11 Jobcentre Plus and NOMS to join up employer engagement activity

The review has sought to promote a more joined-up approach towards the engagement of employers to facilitate the training and recruitment of offenders. At the national level it has helped to re-energise the Reducing Re-offending Corporate Alliance. Employers have also been encouraged into prison through initiatives such as the Team Clean Challenge run by the Sector Skills Council for cleaning (see Box 2.7). More generally, it has forged closer working relationships between NOMS and Jobcentre Plus. This has been manifested in several recent activities:

- NOMS have shared information about employers with Jobcentre Plus and provided specialist information about the offender context.
- Jobcentre Plus has helped NOMS make submissions to Ministers and have furnished employer case studies. Economic sector reports outlining key growth areas have also been shared.

Box 2.7 The Team Clean Challenge

The Team Clean Challenge is run by Asset Skills, the Sector Skills Council for cleaning. It is now in its fourth year and the challenge seeks to showcase the high quality training that takes place within prisons as part of preparing offenders with the skills needed for work. The Challenge is also seen as an opportunity to get relevant employers actively involved in prisons. The 2010 challenge ran in several categories:

- Best prison.
- Best YOI.
- Best manager.
- Best supervisor.
- Best operative.

Despite the recession Asset Skills report that there is still a shortage of cleaners and there are now clear career paths in cleaning. Furthermore, through the Team Clean Challenge a number of former prisoners are reported to have found work in the industry.

The intention has also been to join-up the approach to employers at the regional level. In the East of England, for example, a series of workshops for employer-facing staff in prisons, probation and Jobcentre Plus have been held. NOMS national tier staff and a range of providers such as NACRO and Business in the Community are also reported to have attended. Jobcentre Plus has made available economic sector reports detailing areas of jobs growth at the regional level. Most of the other regions have followed this model.

At the local level progress has been slower. EBAs rarely have their own direct links with employers willing to recruit offenders. At HMYOI Deerbolt it was reported that the Jobcentre Plus Employer Engagement Team had just begun to supply some local information. At one prison employer links had been developed by a previous manager but had now lapsed. The change of manager coupled with a reduction in resources meant that these contacts had been lost. *'We used to have a list of employers under the old manager but that was six years ago. We were well ahead of the game then but now we've all lost touch and I'd say that's due to the emphasis on the multi-functioning pressures we all face'* (EBA). Nevertheless, some wanted to become more pro-active in making links with employers. A few highlighted the need for renewed efforts to encourage employers to recruit offenders. *'What about ex-offenders? The criminal record puts you straight at the back of the queue'* (EBA).

Prison resettlement teams have often developed their own relationships with employers (see Box 2.3). However, the lack of integration of most EBAs with resettlement support means that they are often unable to make use of this intelligence. Furthermore, the indications are that many EBAs do not make use of available data in providing help with job search. The Jobcentre Plus staff intranet has, for example, information on supply and demand at the regional level which is potentially useful in identifying areas of employment growth.

A similarly mixed picture emerges in terms of the approach to employer engagement taken by Probation areas. One Probation Trust has chosen not to go down the employer engagement route because of concerns that it does not readily translate into jobs for offenders. *'It gets nice shiny things for employers'* (Probation Interviewee). However, it may have value in changing the attitudes of some employers. Elsewhere, interviewees identified the value of a job broker whose role it is to furnish employment opportunities for offenders. The broker at HMP Everthorpe was specifically cited as a model of good practice. In other places activity tended to be more fragmented, with the probation service, certain prisons and Jobcentre Plus all undertaking employer engagement relatively independently.

3 The extent to which the changes have contributed to improved offender employment services

3.1 Introduction

This chapter identifies how the review and any changes arising from it have impacted upon offender employment services. It begins by exploring the generic issues and contexts relating to offender employment services and the impacts of the review on strategic and local partnerships, policies and delivery. It then examines in turn the impacts upon pre-release employment services and post-release and community-based employment services. The chapter concludes by identifying issues, opportunities and current and anticipated future challenges to improving offender employment services.

3.2 Pre-review contexts

The principles, direction and recommendations of the review were largely and strongly supported by the research participants. However, it was widely recognised that effective implementation required addressing long-standing and '*entrenched practices*', and that achieving the outcomes necessitated cultural shifts and '*a change of mindset*'. It would take time to embed changes and there would need to be a transitional period in which new mechanisms became integrated into everyday practice. As one Jobcentre Plus manager stated: '*It's a long walk, it doesn't happen overnight.*'

There are four characteristics of the pre-review context that need to be recognised in considering the impacts that the review has had on improving offender employment services:

- Although there is a range of effective credited and non-accredited programmes being delivered aimed at addressing offending behaviour, offender employment support has generally been limited, in terms of prioritisation, within both prison regimes (which have primarily been focused on managing their populations and addressing immediate wellbeing and security issues) and probation services (which have often focused on the myriad other immediate needs of offenders). Similarly, the specific employment support needs of offenders have not always been prioritised within Jobcentre Plus strategies, policies and procedures. This had been exacerbated by resource constraints, as one EBA described: '*Prison tends to take a backseat with all the other pressures [on Jobcentre Plus colleagues].*'
- Prisons and communities present very complex and fragmented operating environments. The delivery of custodial and community-based offender employment services is provided by a wide range of agencies and organisations; each with differing priorities, working practices and performance targets and funded from diverse sources. The overall offender employment support offer has not always been adequately coordinated or joined up. Within prisons there are constraints arising from resources, physical space and the movement of prisoners around the premises. The prison estate is also diverse, with each category of prison having its own priorities

and varying characteristics of offender populations and the challenges arising from this, for example the difficulties of providing robust support for prisoners serving short sentences (see Box 3.1)

- There was and is significant variation in the practices and performance of individual prisons, probation trusts, Jobcentre Plus and contracted external service providers. This means that local offender employment services were starting from very different bases and this will influence the nature, extent and timing of any improvements in services.
- The period following the review has been characterised by changing employer needs, a deteriorating economic and labour market situation and reduced public resourcing of key services. This creates additional challenges for some offenders in accessing employment (given that they are already disadvantaged in the labour market) and raises issues for the funding of further support services. This external context will have an important influence on the extent to which changes arising from the review are actually able to deliver enhanced employment opportunities and outcomes for offenders. The economic situation also varies between and within regions, for example the case study regions of the North East and the Welsh Valleys are being particularly badly affected as is the City of Hull in Humberside.

Box 3.1 Challenges posed by short-sentenced prisoners

A male prisoner interviewed at HMP Durham was serving a five month sentence and was due to be released in two weeks. He had not received any benefits advice and had not seen the EBA. He was concerned about his housing situation and a lack of bank account (and the linked issue of his credit blacklisting). These were both central to his employment prospects but he had not received any advice about them.

A male prisoner at HMP Durham had served six previous custodial sentences (the longest being 14 months). He was due to be released in two weeks but had no housing (he had lost entitlement to his previous accommodation) or family support to draw upon. He was acutely concerned about his lack of money prior to receiving benefits- the prisoner finance gap. He had not seen the EBA and reported that he would sort out his benefits himself. His social worker (he'd had the same one for five years) had been the most helpful and consistent practitioner in terms of offering support.

A female prisoner aged in her 50s was serving her first custodial sentence of 42 days at HMYOI Low Newton. Her main concern was finding appropriate housing on release. She had requested housing advice but had not received it. She would initially reside with her mother but this was not a viable long-term option. She was aware of two homeless centres that she might contact on release. An interview with the EBA had covered benefits and job search but not this housing issue.

Research respondents in some areas reported that the review had been influenced by existing local practices (including in their own localities) and that some of the key actions required by the review were already in the process of being developed and progressed. The review had therefore often 'cemented' local developments, although this in itself was welcomed. Therefore, attributing specific causality for changes and improvements to offender employment services to the review itself is far from straightforward, as one probation manager pointed out: *'There are better links between the different organisations but it's hard to establish cause and effect in terms of the impact of the review, especially as the agenda was already well underway [in the region].'*

It should also be recognised that there has been a limited time period between the review and this research. Many research participants, while able to provide detailed commentary on the progress

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with implementing the review recommendations (see Chapter 2), were less inclined to identify whether or not these processes had resulted in improved employment services, citing ‘a lack of evidence’ or that ‘it was difficult to say’.

Some research respondents were critical of the launch of the review. For example, one REM believed that there should have been a more substantive and coordinated national launch; that prison governors and probation services should have been more proactively engaged in the review and its launch; and that the review documentation should have highlighted models of good practice. However, other research participants described the consultation within the review process as ‘excellent’. It should be noted that a series of regional conferences were held and the feedback generated by these events had influenced the review recommendations. Nevertheless, some respondents suggested that implementation had been based upon a top down and impersonal approach that had not adequately engaged staff at a local level, and these were the people who needed to be convinced of the need for change and to feel a sense of ownership and stake holding in the processes of change.

3.3 Impacts on strategic and local partnership working

The impacts of the review and any subsequent or related improvements to offender employment services varied in two key dimensions: firstly, geographically between strategic-level developments and localised practice (and differentiation between localised practices) and secondly, between various elements of employment services, with improvements more evident in some elements than in others. The consequence has been that both implementation of the review and improvements to offender employment services have been uneven. Progress has been mixed, with some examples of good and innovative practice juxtaposed with more intractable challenges. However, the majority of practitioner research participants did indicate that there was a general sense of momentum and improvement.

There was a near universal view among Regional Engagement Managers, many EBAs, prison resettlement staff and Probation managers that the review had instigated a number of important developments. These included:

- Highlighted the need for prisons and probation services to engage with the offender employment agenda through the explicit recognition that employment was a central mechanism for reducing offending.
- Enhanced coordination and strengthened partnership working at strategic levels and the willingness of senior staff within organisations to be flexible, responsive and willing to ‘take calculated risks’ to progress this agenda.
- Increased prioritisation of offender employment issues within local strategies, Jobcentre Plus and prison regimes.
- Greater knowledge and awareness of EBAs’ presence and role within prisons and further reflection on the nature of this role and how it could be further integrated into prison resettlement procedures.
- Identification of the holistic needs of offenders (and the links between employment opportunities and other elements of offenders’ lives, including housing, personal finance, relationships, physical and mental health and addiction problems).
- Greater consideration of how prison and community sentence procedures and practices could be linked to employment services (for example, the role of ROTL)

- Better tracking of offenders through sharing of information and referral processes.
- Recognition of weaknesses in the current system based on the need for a journey to employment model (for example, the need to enhance ‘through the gate’ mechanisms and ensure support for offenders not returning to the local area in which a prison was situated).

Although these developments do not, in themselves, necessarily result in improved offender employment services, they are an important prerequisite for delivering these improvements. One example given of improved partnership working was the increase in the North East in the number of individual offenders about whom information is shared between agencies which had increased from one or two per cent to 18 per cent and was predicted to increase to between 20 and 30 per cent in the near future; although this was reported during an interview and the original data source for these figures was not made clear.

It was reported that the review had supported and given impetus to strengthened partnership structures and improved joint working and data sharing. Local areas have developed offender employment implementation and action plans which are regularly reviewed and new partnership arrangements have been developed to progress these (see Box 3.2).

Box 3.2 Improved partnership working

In the North East there is an Offender Steering Group comprising the REM, Jobcentre Plus strategic and local managers, Pertemps (a recruitment agency) and a prison head of learning and skills. There are also three Local Offender Partnerships which comprise all co-financing organisations (Jobcentre Plus, Probation and the Skills Funding Agency) and representatives from the prisons and contracted external delivery organisations. These partnerships exchange data, including updated local labour market information. Offender champions continue to be, or are being, established to develop coordinated working, based on linking up provision to each stage of an offenders’ journey to employment.

In the North West the REM, all EBAs and Jobcentre Plus District managers meet every two months to review progress and share information. Day events for Probation Trust and Jobcentre Plus staff have been held in Merseyside, Lancashire and Manchester in order to raise joint awareness of issues and to develop shared protocols.

In Yorkshire and Humberside Local Offender Skills and Employment Partnership meetings are held quarterly in each Probation Trust and are also attended by respective prison heads of learning and skills. Each Probation Trust has a locally agreed information shared agreement with Jobcentre Plus divisional offices.

In Wales, Jobcentre Plus are represented on the Integrated Offender Management (IOM) Cymru strategy group and reducing re-offending board.

Some of the wider issues and challenges relating to partnership work and integrated offender employment support are discussed in Section 3.6.

3.4 Impacts on pre-release offender employment services

A key impact of the review was the increased scrutiny of, and reflection upon, the EBA role. In particular, the process has examined how EBAs could be integrated more effectively with resettlement support and how they could better meet the needs of offenders and individual prison regimes. This had resulted in a number of process improvements, including:

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- The review had clarified the role of EBAs, as one EBA described: *‘What the review has done is to give EBAs clear parameters on what they can do and to give clear guidance.’* There was a better understanding among prison resettlement teams of the potential and willingness of EBAs to undertake job search activities rather than a narrower focus on just processing benefit claims and CCG applications.
- The review had raised the profile of EBAs in many prisons and, in some cases, within Jobcentre Plus. It was reported by several EBAs that this had increased their sense of empowerment and one EBA stated that the review had given EBAs ‘some teeth’, for example in negotiating their role within prison regimes. It was also reported that EBAs’ work in prison had informed wider Jobcentre Plus practices (see Box 3.5).
- The review’s focus on EBAs’ employment brokerage roles had resulted in EBAs (some of whom had a background in benefits rather than employment) becoming increasingly aware of what was required to undertake job search activities. As one EBA described: *‘It has improved my knowledge of my role here’*
- The review had supported improved facilities for EBAs. This included ensuring that they were able to access an appropriate space in which to interview offenders. In many prisons EBAs were physically located in the same units or areas as prison resettlement teams and skills and learning facilities, which enhanced integration. EBAs had also benefitted from improved access to broadband (and hence rapid links to current vacancy information), which was widely regarded as essential to the effectiveness of their work.

Although it was difficult to generate firm outcomes evidence, many research participants believed that these developments would enhance the service that EBAs provided as well as improving the wider employment service offer made to offenders in prison. One REM reported that there had been a ‘clear’ increase in the satisfaction of prison governors and resettlement teams with the EBAs’ performance and contribution to employment support. Two areas where the impact of the review could be linked to changing working practices were the shift towards EBAs engaging in job search activities for offenders and further integration of EBAs within prison resettlement teams (see Boxes 3.3 and 3.4). For example, an EBA at HMP Hull reported a shared referral procedure with prison staff and contracted external support providers within the resettlement unit: *‘I feel part of a team and have a great rapport with the other organisations under the resettlement umbrella.’*

Box 3.3 EBA job search initiatives

HMP Hull: The EBA runs a job club day each Monday and targets those in the last two weeks of their sentence. This has been facilitated by the provision of broadband which allows on-line access to the Jobcentre Plus network. The EBA has also provided a jobs notice board in the Resettlement Unit which gives details of vacancies in Hull, Grimsby, Leeds and York.

HMYOI Thorn Cross: The EBA role has traditionally involved conducting interviews with those due to be released and setting up Freshstart interviews. The review has prompted fresh thinking. It was found that challenges to arranging Freshstart interviews (caused by insufficient Jobcentre Plus staff resources) often delayed the receipt of benefit payments so the EBA has stopped setting them up. Instead individuals can now make a new claim at the Jobcentre on the release day. This has allowed the EBA to spend more time undertaking employment-related work. This has included a more thorough discussion of career options and training opportunities and help with job search. The latter is linked to a Work Club which is run inside the prison.

HMP Cardiff: The review has led to the splitting of the roles of the two current EBAs. One now focuses on closing benefit claims and the other on providing employment support. Previously prisoners did not declare their benefits and it was estimated that this was costing up to £28k per month in ongoing claims by HMP Cardiff prisoners.

HMYOI Deerbolt: There has been a movement away from solely stopping benefits and interviewing prisoners towards the end of a sentence. Instead, there is earlier engagement with prisoners and the pre-release interview now lasts about 30 minutes and includes help with job search.

Box 3.4 The integration of EBAs with other teams

There has been a stable EBA team at HMP Leeds for a considerable time – several having been in post for five or six years. The EBAs regularly see between 20-30 new inductions every week. Close working relationships have been established with the ‘first night centre’ staff which allows new arrivals to be interviewed in their cells in a sensitive and effective manner. The details of any prisoner who was in work immediately prior to imprisonment are passed onto the Support Officer Resettlement Team (SORT). SORT is a team of uniformed officers who contact employers to help prisoners retain employment. In March 2011, it was reported that the team helped offenders to retain 29 out of 46 jobs.

Two EBAs work together to maximise the number of pre-release interviews conducted. Tasks undertaken include: signing on arrangements, linking with local Jobcentre Plus offices and some job search activity. The EBA team have good links with ‘6th Hub’ which comprises seconded probation staff. Links are thus made with Offender Managers.

It was reported that EBAs had managed to improve communication between Jobcentre Plus and prisons and to increase the prioritisation of offender benefits and employment issues within Jobcentre Plus (see Box 3.5).

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Box 3.5 Improving Jobcentre Plus practices

An EBA at HMP Hull had spent time at a local BDC. This had both improved the EBA's knowledge of benefit processes and the work of Jobcentre Plus colleagues and had increased the priority given by Jobcentre Plus to processing benefit claims from offenders.

HMP Cardiff has developed a system where the EBA had a named contact in each benefit delivery centre and this had enhanced communication and relationships and the processing of benefits claims, although there were still issues arising from significant staff turnover.

It is instructive to note that a number of initiatives in prisons in Scotland have sought to engage with employers and to provide enhanced and targeted employment support to offenders (see Box 3.6)

Box 3.6 Prison-based initiatives in Scotland

A Jobcentre Plus initiative has taken employers into HMP Saughton (Edinburgh) where they have been linked to specifically identified individual offenders. An initiative in HMP Barlinnie (Glasgow) has involved employers offering flexible working hours to offenders, providing employment experiences negotiated around tag and curfew conditions.

The Changing Lanes Employability Programme in HMP Barlinnie is a four part course focusing on aspirations, confidence, motivation, holistic soft skills, rules of the workplace and job search techniques. The course has subsequently been refined and more directly targeted at particular offenders. Figures provided to the research team (based on a comparison with a random control group) indicate that, for the group participating in the programme, there were increases in the proportions of offenders in employment or training six months after release and a reduction in the proportion of offenders returning to custody.

The research also identified examples of innovative local good practice undertaken in the post-review period (see Box 3.7).

Box 3.7 Identity initiative in the North East

It is widely acknowledged that many prisoners lack official means of identification. This can constitute a significant barrier to individuals accessing mainstream services such as benefits and employment advice provided by Jobcentre Plus. The REM in the North East, working in close collaboration with prison and Jobcentre Plus colleagues has initiated a pilot initiative that includes inserting a prisoner's photograph onto the existing B79 Discharge Form. This initiative has gained national attention as it builds upon an existing procedure but incurs little extra cost. The form and procedures are subsequently being refined.

Our research with offenders confirmed the views of EBAs, prison resettlement teams and probation staff that employment support needed to be more effectively targeted at the most job ready. This is a key feature of the approach also being developed in Scotland. This Scottish approach has included developing more robust assessments and diagnostic testing of basic skills needs, and envisages a key role for prison officers in identifying offenders who would benefit from and achieve the most from support programmes. The criteria for this targeting were focused on 'soft skills' such as motivation, reliability and team working rather than existing qualifications or vocational expertise.

Some offenders had their jobs retained for them while they were in custody or were entering self-employment. Others were not seeking to enter the labour market on release and a significant

number of offenders in our sample also reported that they would be able to access employment informally and were therefore not dependent upon agency or organisational support. It was evident that a more refined and appropriate targeting of offenders for support was being developed in many prisons (see Box 3.8).

Box 3.8 Targeting employment support on the most job ready

The EBA at HMYOI Thorn Cross is based in the Resettlement Unit and is seen by all as integral to its functioning. Access to the prison IT system allows the EBA to determine which prisoners are coming towards the end of the sentences. Those that are more job-ready are prioritised. The EBA has a caseload of approximately 40 job-ready individuals. Each prisoner completes a pro forma setting out previous work experience, skills and qualifications before the first meeting with the EBA. During the meeting with the EBA, a discussion about possible jobs and aspirations is followed by prisoners receiving instruction from the EBA about how to conduct job searches in their home area on direct.gov. They are encouraged to do this independently between regular appointments with the EBA.

For each prisoner a target of ten possible job opportunities is set. This helps to demonstrate that there are jobs available which boosts prisoners' motivation. The EBA then prints off the list of vacancies with employer contact details. Individuals are encouraged to make enquiries by telephone and they are provided with some words to use in enquiring about the work opportunities. In some cases where a suitable vacancy is identified the EBA contacts the employer and seeks to arrange an interview in the week of release. Individuals also have access to a Work Club which provides themed sessions run on a rotational basis:

- Motivation and goal setting.
- Completing job application forms.
- CV writing and interview skills.
- External partners with a presence in the prison.
- Army careers.

Among offenders who had served (in some cases several) previous custodial sentences, it was not possible to identify a perspective of a discernible change or improvement in employment support over time. Offenders varied in their assessment of the efficacy of this support. A number of themes emerged from offenders' perspectives, including:

- Some offenders were uninformed about the EBAs, what they did and what services and support they could provide to offenders. Some offenders expressed reluctance to engage with EBAs and Jobcentre Plus more generally.
- Many offenders met with EBAs at a late stage of their sentence, often very close to their release date. This limited the extent to which job search activities could be undertaken, and uncertainty about actual release dates could make ensuring that offenders were given and attended a post-release interview with Jobcentre Plus challenging.
- Many offenders continued to report that the principal focus of their interview with the EBA was benefits and the CCG. However, several offenders did report that the EBA had facilitated a post-release interview with Jobcentre Plus which would focus upon employment and the offenders welcomed this.

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- Offenders were concerned that the EBA role, and the wider skills, learning and job search activities undertaken within prison resettlement teams, were not adequately linked to addressing other, and often more pressing, concerns, particularly those relating to housing and personal finance. This problem was exacerbated for those returning to communities beyond the locality of the prison. However, some EBAs were increasingly attempting to signpost offenders to sources of support (within and outside the prison) relating to these issues.
- Although not all offenders differentiated EBAs from other prison staff, some of those who did welcomed the specific presence of EBAs as ‘outsiders’ who could be more readily confided in and trusted with sensitive personal information. In this role, some offenders suggested that they were more likely to discuss the range of their personal problems and needs with EBAs. One offender also suggested that EBAs were less likely to be judgemental than other prison staff (and indeed other inmates playing a peer support role).

Several offenders reported receiving intensive and positive support with both employment-related skills and training on the one hand and job search activities on the other, but these were primarily delivered by directly employed prison resettlement staff or external education providers, rather than EBAs. It was not clear that the review had yet led to offenders making the connections between EBAs and other forms of employment related support within prisons.

However, in HMYOI Thorn Cross an offender reported that the EBA would accompany him to his first Jobcentre Plus post-release interview. The offender very strongly welcomed this proactive continuing support in the community and suggested that the EBA being able to share information with other Jobcentre Plus staff about his offending history and the courses he had undertaken in prison would be very beneficial.

The review has led to improvements in employer engagement at the national and regional levels but progress at the local level has been much slower and more variable. A number of prisons covered by the present study had developed their own employer initiatives. Some offenders welcomed the opportunity to meet employers and to learn about the potential range of employment opportunities, for example through the initiative at HMP Cardiff. Although research participants recognised the potential of ROTL to facilitate employment experience and enhanced responsibility and trust and opportunities to attend job interviews, research participants also highlighted continuing difficulties in utilising ROTL for these purposes.

Peer support in relation to employment support was limited, although there were some local initiatives and developments (see Box 3.9).

Box 3.9 Peer support

In HMP Hull two offenders assist in publicising the EBA role to other prisoners and help to collate basic personal information such as names and national insurance numbers. This initiative was viewed positively by the stakeholder interviewees.

In recognition of the concerns about the use of peer support relating to confidentiality and data protection and the risk of exploitation or extortion, an approach being developed in the North West has identified a specific role for peer support. Mentors would function as ‘go betweens’; signposting other offenders to services, identifying which forms offenders needed to complete, helping to access knowledge of suitable job vacancies and providing positive encouragement. This role would not require peer mentors to directly participate in the completion of forms or necessitate their access to sensitive personal information.

3.5 Impacts on post-release and community-based offender employment services

Some progress has been made in data sharing and partnership working, but this is variable and is complicated by each probation trust and each Jobcentre Plus district working in slightly different ways. Research participants suggested that the barriers to exchanging information (particularly those relating to security and confidentiality) were beginning to be removed and that this was essential to link ex-prisoners and those serving community sentences to local employment opportunities through engagement with employers and work placements. However, some probation managers indicated that the development of information sharing and data protocols between probation trusts and Jobcentre Plus remained limited and problematic.

It was recognised that improvements would be dependent upon each probation trust having multi-agency agreements with Jobcentre Plus but also contracted external providers, prison resettlement and learning and skills teams and other organisations and institutions such as colleges. The fact that trusts were developing at different stages provided opportunities for shared learning and the identification of good practice. In the North West a model introduced in Lancashire and likely to be replicated across the region is devolved local commissioning. This was premised on the grounds that local probation services would be more likely to accurately identify the employment needs of both offenders and employers in the localities and to combine this knowledge with their service brokering role.

The limitations of data exchange mechanisms were widely acknowledged. For example Jobcentre Plus or probation staff may not be able to access previous assessments of offenders' needs and employment skills, including those undertaken in prison and therefore this assessment has to be duplicated. Attempts were being made in the North West to develop a transportable portfolio for each offender which would include previous employment assessments, progress made and work capabilities in addition to training certificates and other formal qualifications. There were some other examples of probation services seeking to enhance local multi-agency working (see Box 3.10).

Box 3.10 Improving probation trusts' local multi-agency working

In the North West, one Probation Trust has established work clubs with ESF-funded engagement staff, such as the Thorn Cross initiative. They also run a similar scheme for those serving community sentences at their local offices.

In Yorkshire and Humberside two Probation Trusts have co-located SFA advisors in probation office premises to provide support to offenders.

In Wales, some Jobcentre Plus staff are co-located in Probation Wales offices and a named Jobcentre Plus staff member acts as a nominated and dedicated link to probation services, providing surgeries within probation premises.

Although, as stated above, most offenders did not identify discernible changes in employment support, one individual, aged in his 40s who had spent his entire adult life in the criminal justice system, did perceive that, more recently, probation had become increasingly supportive in relation to employment issues and were now actively engaged in linking him to vocational training courses such as information technology skills. The research identified some examples of probation services' enhanced engagement with employment support and employers (see Box 3.11).

Box 3.11 Employment support and engagement in the community

The Humberside Probation Trust had entered into a contract with SOVA to provide employment and skills advice, access to short vocational courses, links to employment agencies and advice to offenders on disclosure of criminal records to potential employers.

In the North East, attempts have been made to use the employer engagement expertise of Pertemps by establishing a continuum of support in prison, ‘through the gate’ and in the community. This has included engaging major local employers in offender rehabilitation projects (including delivering skills workshops) to provide sector-specific skills linked to NVQ qualifications. The results have exceeded targets ahead of schedule.

The work of the Offender Management Data Integration Group in Wales has enhanced information sharing and has been combined with efforts to increase the role of outreach services and mentors within prison and to provide this support continually ‘through the gates’ and into the community. For example at HMP Cardiff mentors have assisted released prisoners to complete benefit applications and to secure housing. Some probation services in Wales have also played a leading and proactive role in employer engagement, with links to major international retailers and large housing organisations. Some of these initiatives have also directly involved Jobcentre Plus, such as the National Association of Reformed Offenders (UNLOCK) project.

Almost all of the research participants identified the limitations of linkages between employment support (and wider resettlement support) provided in prison and continuing or further support in the community. One offender reflected the views of many in stating explicitly that ‘support stops at the gate’. Several examples were provided of where ‘through the gate’ support was being provided to address specific issues (see Box 3.12) but these were not identified as being primarily focused on offenders’ employment needs.

Box 3.12 Through the Gate Support for offenders with substance misuse problems

The G4S Transitional Support Scheme (TSS) provides mentoring support for offenders with substance misuse problems for up to 12 weeks after release throughout South Wales. The programme targets voluntary participants with drug and/or alcohol problems serving short-sentences (less than 12 months) and returning to Wales. TSS offers ‘hands-on’ support to offenders as soon as they come out of prison, with the aim of helping them to re-engage in the community quickly and effectively. Individuals are assigned to a mentor whose core function is to motivate and encourage participants to change while linking them to support agencies in the community – particularly drugs, housing and employment/benefits. Case management records are maintained to monitor the progress of each participant from first contact to the end of the programme and beyond- including records for each contact made with the participant on any level.

A number of through the gate initiatives have been developed in Scotland (see Box 3.13).

Box 3.13 Through the gate initiatives in Scotland

The Access to Industry Passport and Routes Out of Prison initiatives were piloted in HMYOI Polmont. This offered an integrated employment and skills service with through the gate support for offenders returning to the Edinburgh and Glasgow areas.

The WISE employment support group have been working in prisons in the West of Scotland to provide holistic support aimed at linking prison-based interventions with continuing support in the community.

The Moving On initiative provided throughcare support to young offenders returning to the Renfrewshire area. The initiative aimed to increase the co-ordination and integration of services provided by over 60 voluntary organisations.

Probation managers in more than one region expressed serious concerns that much of the resourcing of offender employment support remained overly focused on prisons. In their view, this does not reflect the fact that two thirds of offenders do not receive custodial sentences. However, it was also suggested that the increasing commissioning of externally-provided support to offenders in the community may be changing perceptions of offenders and how support should be delivered.

As stated previously, it is challenging to document improved employment outcomes for offenders arising from the review. However, a series of interviews with nine offenders serving community sentences in the North West provides some evidence about the role that probation services and community sentence requirements may play in facilitating employment support (see Box 3.14). It should be noted that these interviews were all conducted with offenders actively engaged in a work club supported by a probation trust, so will not be representative of all offenders.

Box 3.14 Offenders' perspectives of employment-related support in the community

The work club provides a range of support activities including: a series of training courses, basic literacy and numeracy skills, vocational skills (fork lift truck driving, plumbing), a computer course, a first aid course; obtaining CSCS cards; advising on career and employment options; undertaking job searches; registration with employment agencies; assistance with CVs, application letters and interview and presentational skills; links with local colleges; and advice on criminal records disclosure.

Although attendance at the work club is voluntary, some offenders reported that being able to use attendance at the work club as a means of delivering community sentence hours had been their original motivation, but they had since become engaged with the support that they had received. This illustrates how community sentences may direct offenders to constructive employment support and, as one offender stated, they may provide an opportunity to access employment advice services. Additionally, some offenders also stated that other practical tasks and services that they were required to undertake directly as conditions of their community sentences had enabled them to learn new skills, to take on more responsibility and to demonstrate that they could be trusted. One offender also stated that the probation service had been 'vital' in securing him voluntary work which had enabled him to gain additional skills and to demonstrate trust and responsibility. The organisations he volunteered with had provided a mentor and assisted him in preparing his CV. This demonstrates the potential synergies and additionality that may be achieved through including an employment focus within probation and community sentencing.

Box 3.14 (continued)

Offenders were more positive about the probation service (and other agencies such as Connexions), who they reported to be very committed and supportive, than Jobcentre Plus. For example, offenders suggested that the probation service had proactively assisted them in obtaining CSCS cards whereas Jobcentre Plus had not. The probation service had also directly supported offenders to find volunteering opportunities and had assisted offenders to sign up to employment agencies. Offenders believed that the probation service was delivering effective employment support, especially through the work club and its activities. In addition, the perception that probation staff were willing to 'do extra' for offenders had increased offenders' propensity to 'give something back' and had provided an importance source of motivation to them. There was an issue however about the capacity of the limited number of officers running the work clubs to meet the demands of all the offenders seeking support. Also, funding had recently been secured to maintain the provision through to 2013, but it was not clear what would happen after that.

Many of the offenders reported that they had resolved benefits issues themselves or with the assistance of relatives. However, one offender subject to curfew reported that the Jobcentre Plus staff had been helpful and had, for example, screened vacancy searches to ensure they match the hours he is available for work. None of the offenders reported seeing the Jobcentre Plus leaflet about employment support.

Offenders identified a number of positive outcomes arising from the support of the probation services and their participation in the work club. One offender stated that he believed that, as a result of the support he had received, he was now being invited to interviews for jobs where previously he was '*not getting a look in.*' Another offender stated that, as a result of the work club '*my eyes have been opened to what is on offer and how it can help me make more of my life.*' One offender made the point that he did not require substantial amounts of support but rather '*just little things to get me back on track.*'

3.6 Links to drugs services

This research has confirmed the impact of alcohol and drugs addictions as barriers to many offenders' rehabilitation and routes into employment. Along with issues of housing, relationships and personal finance, addictions are often pressing issues that offenders need to have addressed in order to provide a context in which they can seek employment. At a strategic level, the emphasis on multi-agency working and the holistic needs of offenders has strengthened the understanding of the links between employment and other elements of offenders' lives, including addictions.

As stated earlier, non-employment issues had not traditionally been identified as a responsibility for EBAs. However, the greater integration of EBAs into Prison Resettlement teams had enhanced mutual understanding between themselves and other providers, including those addressing addictions. In addition, the trend towards broadening EBAs' focus from stopping benefits to providing employment advice and seeing prisoners earlier in their sentences created opportunities for addiction to be recognised as a barrier to employment and for prisoners to be signposted by EBAs to other service providers. There was some evidence that Jobcentre Plus and Probation Trusts had organised and coordinated appointments for offenders in the community to facilitate drug treatments, medical appointments etc.

The research found examples of good practice in relation to support for offenders with substance misuse problems and linking this support to employment issues. These included the G4S Transitional Support Scheme providing post-release mentoring support for short sentence offenders in Wales (see Box 3.12) and the Throughcare Addiction Service in Scotland (see Box 3.15). The Local Delivery Units established in the North East aim to provide holistic support to offenders, working with a wide range of partner organisations, including drugs services.

Box 3.15 The Throughcare Addiction Service in Scotland

This is a service for offenders with drug and/or alcohol problems. The service is primarily aimed at individuals who wish to access addictions services in the community, although it seeks to address a range of issues including housing, personal finance, family and relationships, health and employment. Over a twelve-week period prisoners are visited three times prior to release and a community integration plan is developed, which includes six meetings with advisors in the community in the six week period post-release when offenders are viewed as being particularly vulnerable. Advisors aim to link offenders to relevant services in the community.

However, links to drugs services can be limited, in part as a reflection of the wider challenges to developing robust through the gate support identified in this research. There can be a lack of coordination of service providers. Services may often be available, (although there are issues of capacity, waiting times and uneven coverage across the country) but links between services and knowledge of their availability is weak. In situations where prisoners are not returning to the locality where a prison is situated, this can be exacerbated.

At a strategic level, there is a need for employment support for offenders to be closely aligned to crime and alcohol reduction partnerships and there was some evidence in this research that these links were developing. Offenders need to be able to access mainstream services, and there is an important brokerage role for Probation Trusts in this, but there are specific challenges about stigmatisation and the engagement of individuals with addiction problems with these services. There continues to be an important role for community and voluntary specialist organisations in providing addictions services, although many are facing acute funding challenges at present and this support needs to be robustly linked to mainstream and statutory agencies. It is also the case that there are many models of intensive support in the community, including the employment-related intervention of Pertemps and the support to the most vulnerable households through family intervention projects, but these are not always joined up. There is an opportunity to utilise community sentences to both ensure that mainstream drugs services are provided and to enhance offenders' engagement with these services.

3.7 Issues, challenges and opportunities

A series of issues, challenges and opportunities relating to the review and improving offender employment services emerged during the research.

3.7.1 Issues

- Although the review was based on developing a minimum specification of support, the differentiation within prisons had not been fully captured. The profile of prisoners in a particular institution determines what may be achieved in relation to employment and resettlement. It was argued by some research participants that the forms and levels of employment support on offer, and the resourcing of this support, should be determined by the resettlement stage of offenders.

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- There is also a need to differentiate different categories of offenders and what employment support can be provided to each category, as summarised by one probation manager: *‘Short-term prisoners are part of the ‘revolving door’ who are not in prison long enough to receive sufficient support to enable them to take this learning into the community upon release, nor are they on licence so they do not receive help from probation...It is crucial that policymakers adequately distinguish between three types of offenders: those on a community order, where probation conduct risk and care assessments; those released on licence serving more than 12 months, where there is a methodology picking them up and space for a consistent approach through the gate; and those in custody serving less than 12 months, who are not released on licence and where no one is picking them up, apart from Jobcentre Plus, who are predominately focused on benefits and can’t do more about employment as other issues are often more pressing for the individual’.*
- Similarly, there is a need to distinguish between prison-based and community-based employment support. The same contracts and working practices for employment support in prisons, for example virtual campus and peer support mechanisms, may not always be simply transferred or duplicated in the community. As one probation manager stated: *‘The key is not to assume that what works well in prison provides a template for support in the community’.*
- There is a need to recognise offenders as a distinct group, rather than merely a sub-group of vulnerability. They are uniquely and additionally disadvantaged by the requirement to disclose unspent convictions if asked by employers or spent convictions for certain types of job. Offenders rarely have single needs and may be trapped in a set of circumstances which mean that they are not always focused on employment. This indicates that there is a need for a holistic approach. For example, one resettlement manager identified the prime importance of housing: *‘Accommodation is the key. From stable accommodation flows employment and so on’.* There is a need for realism in what can be achieved, including valuing incremental improvements in offenders’ employability.

3.7.2 Challenges

- It has been difficult to translate the evidently improved partnership working at strategic levels into reforms at local and front line levels, particularly given the competing pressures on staff arising from organisational restructuring and diminishing resources. As one research participant stated: *‘There is a need to raise awareness of the review and get people at the local level signed up to it, but the big challenge here is time and resources’.*
- The loss of REMs at the end of 2011 risks undermining momentum. It is apparent that this agenda needs to be proactively driven forward and partnership coordination will continue to be required. The loss of NOMS regional infrastructure makes this more challenging.
- There are challenges in understanding and aligning the interactions between benefit eligibility, conditionality, the requirements, targets and performance indicators of prisons, Jobcentre Plus and Probation Trusts and the obligations and outcomes within the Work Programme. In particular the impact of payment by results in the Work Programme will need to be monitored, including the issue of potential ‘cherry picking’.
- EBAs’ role in prison is determined and constrained to some extent by the logistics of the prison regime, including the availability of space, the timing of interviews and the challenges of moving offenders around prisons. Some offenders were being released without receiving any EBA support and there is still a need to enhance the job search and employment support element.
- There is a continuing challenge to raise the status of EBAs, their links to colleagues and the prioritisation of offender employment issues within Jobcentre Plus structures and processes. Many EBAs are able to spend very limited time in Jobcentre Plus offices or to build further links with colleagues. For example, one EBA reported that only 44 per cent of offenders attended their Fresh

start interview and that this compounded negative perceptions of this customer group among some Jobcentre Plus staff.

- There is a challenge to ensure some stability of EBAs in their roles and that they may remain in place to build up knowledge and relationships through a familiarisation process which some research participants suggested required a period of years rather than months.
- Employer engagement remains a challenge, although the research found several examples of innovative and effective practice. The role of probation trusts in employer engagement varied. However, employers themselves may engage with prisons but find it more difficult to visualise how they could engage with probation and offenders in the community.
- Developing peer support remains a challenge in prisons and in the community. In addition to on-going concerns about confidentiality and security, there is a need to recognise that peer support brings its own costs in terms of adequate training and supervision which need to be considered alongside the benefits arising from this form of support.
- Enhancing ‘through the gate’ support remains an enduring challenge. The views of many research participants were reflected in the words of a probation manager: *‘It’s improving but I’m not sure it’s joined up yet in terms of the continuation and linking of the work that goes on inside prison and then on the outside...it needs to be continuous on release rather than starting again.’*
- As illustrated in this chapter, offenders serving short sentences are not well served by the current system of support, although issues relating to this cohort are being considered through the ESF NOMS Co-Financing Organisation programme.
- Resource constraints will become an increasingly significant challenge to the delivery of effective offender employment support. In the words of one Head of Learning and Skills: *‘It’s not a case of ‘doing more for less’ any more; all we can try to do is maintain existing provision with reduced resources’*. In particular, accessing sustained external funding sources for effective local projects and initiatives will be an important element of progressing further improvements in offender employment support. It is not clear what these resources might be, especially over the longer term, with the likelihood of a severe reduction of ESF monies from 2014 onwards.

3.7.3 Opportunities

- The implementation of the review provides an opportunity to establish a baseline of employment needs, informed by the local needs of offenders and employers.
- There is an opportunity to focus upon offenders’ access to, and engagement with, mainstream (as well as bespoke) services and for agencies including probation to play a bridging and brokering (rather than a direct provision) role. These services must be available to offenders but many will continue to require proactive and continuing support to access these services, beyond basic referrals or signposting.
- There are opportunities to develop individualised programmes of support linked to offender’s individual needs, albeit within limited resources. The contract between NOMS and Pertemps provides a template for this, as do local initiatives such as the Local Delivery Units recently established in the North East which provide such a focus on holistic needs, working with housing associations, debt advice services, family support services and other partners. There are opportunities to ensure that Jobcentre Plus focus on offenders being able to access benefits on release to assist these support processes.

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- There is an opportunity for national direction and partnership working in the coordination of the three co-financing organisations (DWP, NOMS and SFA) to ensure an integrated approach to commissioning. One EBA stated *'I'd like to see it centralised and led from the top'* and a probation manager said *'Local links between organisations need strengthening and there needs to be consistency across the piece'*. However, this centralisation may conflict with the localisation agenda and increasingly devolved local approaches.
- Although resource constraints are a significant challenge, some research participants also suggested that they may also provide opportunities for the development of innovative local practice as agencies and organisations are increasingly required to undertake joint commissioning, to pool information and resources, and to maximise their engagement with employers, voluntary and community organisations to deliver services. There is an opportunity to ensure that good practice in a locality is shared and, if appropriate, replicated in other areas. In Scotland, a national collating and mapping exercise is developing a directory and database of good practice.
- There is an opportunity to target support on those offenders with the most realistic opportunities to engage with and enter the labour market and to enhance the role of all stakeholders, including prison staff, in making these assessments- a model being developed in Scotland. However, the need for an economically and logistically viable and robust mechanism for tracking offenders through the systems of various organisations remains. Organisations must have the capacity to utilise additional data provided to them through enhanced partnership structures and procedures.
- There is an opportunity to ensure that learning, skills and employability are key elements of community sentencing. In Scotland, there is currently a focus on how Community Pay Back Orders may utilise unpaid work to enhance core skills, increasing the requirement of statutory mainstream services to support offenders and making engagement with this support a condition of an order.

4 Recommendations

4.1 Introduction

This final chapter presents a series of recommendations for improving offender employment support. The research has been conducted during a period in which the Government's plans for reform of the criminal justice system and offender learning became apparent. The Green Paper *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* puts work for offenders at the centre of rehabilitation, both in custody and the community. More recently, the results of the review of offender learning were finalised. *Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation* sets out a programme of reform for offender learning. In addition, since the completion of the fieldwork the Government have announced that from March 2012 JSA claiming prison leavers will go straight onto the Work Programme. The intention here is to help develop clear, actionable policy recommendations based on the present research, which complement these reforms.

The key recommendations made by the study team are organised into the following themes:

- Ensuring continuing leadership of the agenda.
- Maximising the impact of the Work Programme.
- Improving the service provided by EBAs.
- Meeting the needs of female prisoners.
- Working with young prisoners.
- Exploring opportunities to track support and outcomes for offenders.
- Facilitating holistic 'through the gate' support.
- Developing a strategy to meet the needs of short-sentenced prisoners.
- Longer-term reforms of the Prison system.
- Reforming the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.
- Improving the employment support brokered by Probation.

4.2 Ensuring continuing leadership of the offender employment agenda

There is a real need to ensure that, at a national level, the DWP, NOMS and the SFA take a co-ordinated and partnership-based approach to commissioning and that innovative and good local practice is identified and widely shared. There is also a need to ensure that the leadership and partnership co-ordination at a local level, which has to date often been driven by REMs, is maintained following the discontinuation of these posts.

4.3 Maximising the impact of the Work Programme

The Work Programme is the Coalition Governments' flagship employment programme. It involves giving providers from the private and voluntary sectors increased freedom and better incentives to deliver more sustained employment outcomes for those out of work. Key features include a prime-

provider model and associated supply chains for delivery; outcome-based funding; minimum service prescription; higher rewards for hard to help customers to minimise 'creaming' and 'parking'; and larger, longer contracts.

Recognising that early intervention is the key to preventing re-offending and that many prison leavers continue to experience significant barriers to work, the Government is bringing forward the mandatory JSA entry points on the Work Programme of nine or twelve months. From March 2012, all prison leavers who claim JSA will enter the programme from 'day one' of their release from custody. In addition, any individual claiming JSA within thirteen weeks of leaving custody will also be mandatory referred to the Work Programme. The Deputy Prime Minister has also announced the piloting of an additional payment to incentivise Work Programme providers to work with offenders, linked to reducing re-offending. The pilot aims to explore whether providers can reduce the re-offending of eligible offenders released from custodial sentences of less than 12 months. All of which is to be welcomed because it represents a significant commitment to delivering more employment support for this group. Furthermore, helping offenders into work may have wider social benefits since the Social Exclusion Unit (2002) has found that being in employment reduces the risk of re-offending by between a third and a half.

Jobcentre Plus staff will take claims for JSA in prison, to start entitlement on release and to facilitate mandatory referral to the Work Programme. The claim would then be triggered on release. This should help to secure three key benefits for JSA claiming prison leavers:

- 'Day one' represents a more appropriate intervention point for those released from prison. Previous research has shown that the first few days following release are crucial in terms of subsequent labour market experiences and offending behaviour. Probation staff suggested that many ex-prisoners are simply unwilling to wait to gain access to employment interventions. Some disappear into the informal economy or commit crime.
- The new policy will help to provide a degree of continuity of support for those released into the community since Work Programme providers will be able to offer a 'through the gate' service.
- Participation in the programme will facilitate better tracking of the support received by offenders and the employment outcomes achieved. This will improve our intelligence about how ex-offenders fare in mainstream employment programmes and the impact of key reforms such as outcome-based funding.

The 'day one' proposal entails the introduction of the JSA New Jobseeker Interview process into the prison environment. It is our understanding that the vast majority of new claims will be taken by EBAs. The way in which staff respond to these additional responsibilities and their impact on the wider services that they are able to provide should be closely monitored. It is salient to note that many EBAs interviewed during the course of the present research were of the opinion that they were already over-stretched. In addition, it is clear that NOMS will need to furnish appropriate office space, broadband access and phone lines for Jobcentre Plus staff to conduct these interviews. The present research suggests that this should not constitute an insurmountable barrier. There will also be a requirement for prison staff to escort some prisoners to and from Jobcentre Plus interviews in prison and ensuring a safe environment for the conduct of interviews.

The implementation of the Work Programme commenced in June 2011. It is, therefore, far too early to assess its effectiveness at removing the barriers to work experienced by many offenders. The present study has, however, highlighted three areas which warrant continuing attention:

- Providers may focus their support on those easier to help in order to maximise outcomes and thus payments ('creaming' or 'cherry picking'). Meanwhile, those harder to help such as many offenders may be 'parked' and not offered the level of support necessary. To encourage providers to support the hardest to help payments will be higher for getting these customer groups into work. However, this will not preclude providers from focusing on the easier to help within each customer group. The Department has consequently introduced a number of additional measures to address this concern. Providers have published minimum service standards which participants are made aware of prior to accessing the Programme. Those that are not satisfied with the service received have recourse to a complaints process. Although this inevitably will favour the more articulate and confident. The Department will also monitor the programme closely and review aspects of contracts if it becomes necessary.
- A lack of specialist expertise among providers in some areas may frustrate the efforts to get offenders into work. NACRO have reported that some providers have already contacted their resettlement helpline seeking advice on dealing with those with criminal records. This helpline is intended to provide information for people with a criminal record rather than Work Programme providers. However, it is our understanding that providers will need to ensure that their services are designed to address the specific barriers to work faced by socially excluded groups including ex-offenders. There is a broader concern that what some may see as the modest scale of the involvement of the voluntary sector risks losing a wealth of innovation and specialist knowledge. The Department has selected two voluntary organisations as prime providers and notes that many more will be involved as sub-contractors in delivery.
- The Coalition Government has further tightened conditionality so that progressively tougher sanctions are imposed on individuals who refuse an offer of work. There is a risk that offenders and those with 'chaotic lifestyles' may not understand the sanctioning regime and fall foul of its requirements. The attendant risk is that some will be driven off benefits altogether. There is a growing evidence-base about the limitations of formal sanctions as a mechanism for changing behaviour for such groups and ensuring engagement with support services (See Flint *et al.*, 2011a and Flint *et al.*, 2011b).

4.4 Improving the service provided by EBAs

The present research has shown that there is significant potential to further improve the service provided by EBAs in many prisons. We suggest that action should focus on five key issues:

- Raise the awareness of Prison Governors.
- Redistribute EBA resources to maximise employment outcomes.
- Examine the role of EBAs in relation to the new 'day one' policy.
- Improve support of the EBA role through mentoring.
- Better integrate the EBAs with the learning and skills system.

4.4.1 Raise awareness of the EBA role among Prison Governors

There is an urgent need to improve understanding of the EBA role among Prison Governors. A lack of awareness means that in many prisons EBAs are not regarded as a core part of the apparatus

designed to help resettle offenders. A related problem is that some view it primarily in terms of closing down benefit claims. A better appreciation of the contribution that EBAs can make to help prison leavers into employment and the Work Programme would also facilitate the integration of staff with other sources of resettlement support. There is a particular need to ensure that prison regimes and logistics facilitate EBA roles in terms of physical space, broadband access, timings and prioritisation of interviews.

Skills for rehabilitation provides an important opportunity to raise the profile of prison-based employment support and the role of EBAs in providing it. The former envisages that Governors will play an essential role in ensuring that skills provision is consistent with their prisons' offender management strategy, its population and its plans for getting offenders into work. A lead Governor for each delivery cluster of prisons will bring together a lead group (including Jobcentre Plus, employers and careers advisers) to develop the curriculum offer for prisoners with support from Heads of Learning and Skills.

4.4.2 Redistribute the EBA resource so it better matches the outcomes sought

The EBA resource in prisons varies widely. It is not clear to the study team how staff levels have been determined. To make the best use of relatively scarce resources it is recommended that EBAs are deployed where they can have maximum impact on offender employment outcomes while ensuring that benefit claims continue to be closed appropriately. This will need to take into account the diversity of prisons, their populations and prison functions. In terms of the latter, it makes sense to focus on the prisons that are able to offer dedicated education and training support and have an emphasis on preparing individuals for their release such as closed training prisons, open and semi-open prisons and young offender institutions (see Table 4.1).

Furthermore, the pattern of resources will need to complement the redistribution of learning resources sought by Skills for Rehabilitation. A National Audit Office (2008) report found that there was no evidence that the resources devoted to learning in individual prisons correlated to the levels of learning and skills needs. Consequently, Skills for Rehabilitation (2011: 26) asserts that: *'We will redistribute the offender learning resource in prisons so that it better matches the outcomes we are seeking. In doing this, we will take account of the prison population, particularly the population of the cluster of prisons through which most prisoners move on their journey through the custodial system'*.

Table 4.1 Prisons for males

Type	Description
Local prisons	Most inmates begin their time in a local prison, either on remand or as newly sentenced prisoners. These are the largest prisons and are subject to the greatest number of prisoner transfers, although many serve their whole sentence in local prisons.
High security prisons	These hold prisoners whose escape would be highly dangerous to the public, or would have national security implications.
Closed training prisons	These keep medium-risk inmates and usually offer dedicated education and training support.
Open and semi-open prisons	These hold the lowest risk prisoners and have an emphasis on phased progress towards eventual release. Inmates may be able to work outside the prison.
YOI/Units	These hold individuals aged 18-20 years, and can be open or closed.

Source: Based on information contained in Social Exclusion Unit (2002) Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners.

4.4.3 Examine the role of EBAs in relation to the new 'day one' policy

As previously noted the 'day one' proposal will necessitate the introduction of the JSA New Jobseekers Interview process into the prison environment. It is our understanding that the vast majority of new claims will be handled by EBAs. This will not involve substantial changes to the role of EBAs. However, it could significantly increase workloads and constrain their ability to focus more on job search. This makes it even more important that employment support is targeted at those where it can make most added-value and deadweight is minimised by avoiding those that do not require any support. Some of those interviewed were, for example, returning to previous jobs and did not require any assistance.

There may be a role for a range of prison-based staff to be involved in these assessments – an approach currently being considered in Scotland. The level of support required by prisoners varies widely with some individuals relatively close to the labour market but many others experience severe and multiple barriers to work. Some prisoners need to address other needs, e.g. literacy and numeracy, substance misuse, mental health issues. A small number of those interviewed by the study team reported that they had accessed drug treatment services. In general, prison-based drug services were praised and there was a sense that they had improved significantly in recent years. However, the indications were that links with post-release drug support were not always well developed. Some individuals, for example, reported that they would access community-based drug treatment via Probation or make the contact themselves. Activity to address employment needs should take account of these wider support needs.

The new 'day one' policy will significantly improve the employment support offered to JSA claiming prison leavers. However, many prisoners interviewed by the study team had experience of undertaking cash-in-hand work, especially but not exclusively in construction-related trades, to make ends meet. Informal work was usually episodic, a response to particular financial difficulties and opportunities, but some were spending the majority of their working lives in the informal labour market. These individuals indicated that they were unlikely to claim JSA following their release. This potentially puts them beyond the reach of policy makers. Consequently, a key part of the role of the EBA should be to help formalise the employment experiences of offenders and highlight the additional employment support available through the Work Programme.

We also believe that as part of their employment remit all EBAs across the system should:

- help new arrivals to retain existing jobs when they are sent to prison;
- provide information on job vacancies and where appropriate direct them to sectors with good employment prospects and link them to relevant learning and skills provision.

Box 4.1 Prisoners and job seeking

Thirty six prisoners were interviewed in the twelve participating prisons. The prisoners were often relatively job-ready, i.e. motivated to work and with fewer barriers given that they were recruited through EBAs and Prison Resettlement Teams. The interviews provided a valuable insight into the ways in which many prisoners currently seek work and the type of employment support that might be most valuable.

Previous employment experience: Most male prisoners had worked in low-skilled, male-dominated manual jobs in manufacturing and construction. A few had worked in services, e.g. retail, catering, and hospitality. There was much evidence of undertaking cash-in-hand work, especially but not exclusively in construction-related trades, to make ends meet. This suggests that a significant component of the EBA role might be to bring some offenders into mainstream employment support.

Job seeking: Most were seeking similar work on release from prison. However, a significant number would: 'Look for anything' or reported that they were seeking: 'any hands on work' or 'factory work'. Most will consult family and friends and acquaintances in the industry and make direct contact with previous employers. Many register with agencies to find work and had previously secured employment opportunities through word-of-mouth. The latter was said to have two key attractions:

- Individuals can vouch for the reliability of the prospective employees; and
- It can restrict the competition for available jobs. This is highly prized because offenders believe that their criminal record means that they often lose out in open competition.

Employment support: Some were returning to previous jobs and so did not require any support. The study suggested that more could be done to help prisoners retain existing jobs when they are sent to prison especially those on short sentences. The team also uncovered a few examples where employers were willing to offer prisoners a job but wanted an immediate start. Consequently, a few practitioners wanted greater flexibility over release dates to take advantage of such opportunities.

4.4.4 Improve support of the EBA through Peer Support

Some offenders can act as mentors to assist the EBAs and improve outcomes. Mentoring can also be particularly effective during release from prison and in supporting offenders in the community. This potential is not being fully realised. EBAs currently receive little support from mentors which constrains the service that they are able to provide. It is likely that the introduction of the 'day one' policy for JSA claiming prison leavers will increase their need for support. Moreover, this does not allow those that display an aptitude for mentoring to pursue it as a route into employment. We recommend investing in those offenders that display an aptitude for mentoring roles to support the work of the EBA; to provide continuing support in the community and as a route into employment in its own right. Skills for Rehabilitation has made a similar call in relation to the prison learning and skills system. Local initiatives identified during this research indicate that mentoring support can be delivered in ways that fully address issues of confidentiality and security.

4.4.5 Better integrate EBAs into the learning and skills system and link to Apprenticeship opportunities

Skills for Rehabilitation heralds a period of radical reform of prison-based learning and skills provision. The intention is to place a much greater emphasis on developing the vocational and employability skills that offenders need to find and keep jobs and Apprenticeships in the labour

markets where they will be released. Skills for Rehabilitation (2011:7) asserts: *'We will boost skills training and better target occupational training, shifting its delivery towards the end of prisoners sentences and linking it to apprenticeship opportunities and to specific demand within the broader labour market'*. Consequently, it will be important to integrate the employment support provided by EBAs with the reformed learning and skills provision. This should also ensure a focus on enhancing 'soft skills' linked to employability as well as vocational training and qualifications.

4.5 Meeting the needs of female prisoners

Breaking the Cycle recognises that women offenders have a different profile of risks and needs. Table 1.1 indicated that this includes higher levels of problems with drugs and alcohol, and mental health than men. CRESR were only able to interview five female prisoners. Nevertheless, the indications are that they were less likely than men to have had any previous employment experience and finding work was less of a priority. As primary carers, they often prioritised re-establishing family links especially with children but also other family members. This means that:

- many female offenders will need to be convinced that employment support might be beneficial to them. Skills for Rehabilitation highlights the need for motivational activities specifically for this purpose and proposes greater opportunities for women to work in prison to support this development. However, some women view prison work as a opportunity to occupy their time rather than a route to work on release;
- many will need to take a number of steps before they can be considered job-ready; and
- EBAs must be sensitive to the particular needs of female offenders.

4.6 Working with young prisoners

CRESR undertook seven interviews with young prisoners. These individuals were less likely to have had any employment experience. Moreover, they were also often unsure about the type of working that they were seeking. 'I'll look for anything' or 'Anything that pays' were not infrequent responses to questions about the type of work sought. A lack of a clear sense of direction, rather than a lack of motivation to work, was also evident in the employment histories of some. A young prisoner at HMYOI Thorne Cross, for instance, had 'done everything' including working as a personal training instructor, landscape gardener, child minder, shopping assistant, labourer on construction sites and a stint in the British Army.

All of this underlines the point that young prisoners, in particular, need access to realistic, relevant and up-to-date careers advice that will help them to make the right decisions about their future. Prisoners often have unrealistic expectations. An offender manager in Humberside reported that: *'Minimum wage jobs are often dismissed out of hand'*. Skills for rehabilitation proposes to put in place a suite of intensive, work-focused careers support (with a significant role for advisors from the prison careers information and advice service) and vocational learning in the run up to release. EBAs should work closely with careers counterparts to ensure that the service dovetails with the career support.

4.7 Explore opportunities to track support and outcomes for offenders

There is a need to build upon data sharing between agencies and to develop robust and affordable mechanisms for tracking the support provided to offenders and the employment outcomes achieved. This should be linked firstly to a baseline assessment of offender and employer needs in each prison and probation trust and secondly to employment progression and individual offender journey models. It is our understanding that significant progress has been made via a ‘groundbreaking’ DWP/MOJ/HMRC datashare that is providing real analytical insight. In addition, DWP will be able to track Work Programme ‘day one’ outcomes.

4.8 Facilitate holistic ‘through the gate’ support

This research has evidenced the wide range of support needs characterising many, albeit not all, offenders. Employment-related support should be embedded within an understanding of these diverse needs and barriers to employment, including housing, personal finance, health and addictions. It is important that this support is initially provided in prisons and then continued ‘through the gate’ into the community. This should include support for offenders who are released to communities beyond the locality of the prison. Work Programme ‘day one’ access should help facilitate continued ‘through the gate’ support for those claiming JSA.

4.9 Develop a strategy to meet the needs of short-sentenced prisoners

The present study has highlighted the particular difficulties encountered supporting this group. Prisoners serving sentences of less than twelve months account for the majority of those released each year. Most short-sentenced prisoners serve less than six weeks. On average they have 16 previous convictions and are leading chaotic lives characterised by drug and alcohol problems (National Audit Office, 2010). Between a third and half are not involved in work or courses and spend almost all day in their cells (National Audit Office, 2010). Consequently, they have the greatest level of need, receive the least help during their incarceration and are the group most likely to be reconvicted. Three quarters of the cost of re-offending can be attributed to short-sentenced prisoners, some £7 billion to £10 billion a year (National Audit Office, 2010). It should be noted that in Scotland there is now a presumption against custodial sentences of less than three months.

There is a pressing need to fill the gap in the current provision of employment-related services to these short-sentenced prisoners. This could include ensuring that they access EBAs at a much earlier stage in their sentence and a greater focus on support being provided ‘through the gate’ and in the community. In terms of the latter, the recent announcement that all prison leavers who claim JSA will enter the Work Programme immediately on release from custody will help to meet this pressing need.

4.10 Longer term reforms of the prison system

Payment by results for reducing reoffending is a key reform set out in *Breaking the Cycle*. The MoJ is piloting different approaches such as the integration of a reoffending outcome payment for Work Programme providers as recently announced by the Deputy Prime Minister. The intention is to incentivise providers to reduce the re-offending of eligible offenders released from custodial sentences of less than 12 months (see Section 4.3).

The Minerva Project at HMP Hull represents an example of an interesting model for preparing short-sentenced prisoners for work on their release. Offenders returning to live in Hull are met at the gates by Minerva staff on the day of release and then supported for the next twelve weeks to ensure their integration back into society. Participants undertake building work, working towards nationally agreed training standards. The core project team comprises secondees from the prison or probation service. They have been trained in coaching, mentoring and engagement of hard-to-reach offenders. The core team is supported by specialist staff in a number of service areas including accommodation, education, training, health, alcohol, drugs, financial and benefits advice staff.

We believe that serious consideration should be given to developing alternatives to custody for short-sentenced prisoners. The National Association of Reformed Offenders has, for example, lobbied for the introduction of community-based training facilities for people with convictions and other disadvantaged groups. The 'Diamond Project' would seek to train individuals to become electricians, plasterers, and plumbers to help meet skill shortages. Referral would be via the judiciary, parents and faith groups. The intention is that trainees would pass through three key stages focusing on building discipline and teamwork, acquiring vocational and life skills, and then gaining work experience. A range of other provision would be made available including courses on literacy and numeracy, information technology and financial capability.

4.11 Reforming the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974

Specialist organisations consulted during the course of this research identified a pressing need for changes to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 so that it strikes a better balance between public protection and the rehabilitation of offenders. Three key areas for action were highlighted:

- The Act is confusing with the result that many ex-offenders do not understand when and how to disclose criminal records to prospective employers. When applying for a job which is not exempt from the Act, a person need only declare an 'unspent' conviction, and only then if asked. However, a report by Bath and Edgar (2010) found that only two per cent of serving prisoners interviewed could demonstrate an accurate understanding of what the Act meant for them. This means that individuals either fail to disclose or unnecessarily provide information which is detrimental to their job application. All of which underlines the need to make available clear guidance to all people convicted of a criminal offence regarding the Act.
- Sentence inflation means that the current rehabilitation periods are too long. A custodial sentence of 30 months or more, for example, cannot currently become 'spent'. UNLOCK have called for rehabilitation periods to be reduced to those proposed by the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Amendment) Bill.
- Over the past 35 years an increasing number of jobs have been made exempt from the protections of the Act, requiring disclosure of criminal records. Consequently, the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (Exceptions) Order 1975 should be reviewed.

The Green Paper *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* recognised the need to reduce obstacles to successful rehabilitation. To this end a review of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (1974) is underway. It is our understanding that the review is considering a number of proposals including broadening the scope of the act so that it covers all offenders who receive a determinate sentence; reducing the length of rehabilitation periods; producing a clearer classification of rehabilitation periods; and simplifying the language of the legislation. This is to be welcomed.

A review of the criminal records regime in England and Wales is also being finalised. The aim is to create a proportionate and efficient criminal records vetting regime while still maintaining the necessary levels of public protection. Key recommendations include scaling back eligibility for criminal record checks and introducing a filter to remove old and minor conviction information from criminal record checks. This is positive. It is also proposed that basic level criminal record checks are introduced in England and Wales. These would provide details of an individual's 'unspent' convictions for all other types of occupation not covered by the higher-level disclosures. However, previous research conducted by Fletcher *et al.* (2001) has highlighted the potential for such a move to heighten the discrimination that ex-offenders face in the labour market. These concerns were also echoed by some of the specialist organisations consulted during the course of this research. Consequently, we recommend that the Government does not proceed with this potentially damaging proposal. If implemented very careful consideration needs to be given so that basic disclosures do not become a further labour market barrier for ex-offenders. In these circumstances it will be vital that the review of the ROA leads to a significant reduction in the length of rehabilitation periods and considers the Exceptions Order since this dictates the scope and range of the criminal record regime.

4.12 Improving the employment support brokered by Probation

There remains significant potential to improve the employment support provided by Probation to offenders in the community. We suggest that action should:

- set additional employment targets for Probation;
- develop a brokerage role for Probation staff;
- provide holistic and tailored packages of support;
- maximise opportunities provided by community sentences to improve employment support.

4.12.1 Set employment performance measures for Probation

We recommend that the feasibility of setting additional employment performance measures for Probation should be actively considered. This would help to make offender employment an even higher priority and will strengthen partnership working. However, this might not necessarily improve partnership working between Probation and Jobcentre Plus. The senior management of a participating Probation Trust felt, for example, that this would lead them to commission more employment services from private and voluntary providers rather than to work more closely with Jobcentre Plus.

4.12.2 Develop a support brokerage role for probation services

Probation Trusts and individual offender managers do not have the resources or capacity to directly deliver or provide bespoke employment-related support. Rather, probation services need to work with a range of partners and to play a key role in signposting offenders to appropriate services. These should include both universal mainstream services and tailored employment and/or offender specific services, provided by a range of agencies and organisations.

4.12.3 Provide holistic and tailored packages of support

As stated above offenders require holistic support that addresses their range of needs and the barriers to employment arising from these.

4.12.4 Maximise opportunities for activities required within community sentences to complement employment support

Participation in employment support projects, volunteering and mandated activities within community sentences provide significant opportunities for offenders to receive support, to learn new skills and to demonstrate trust and responsibility; all of these help to enhance their potential employability. Employment outcomes should, therefore, form a central element of community sentence planning.

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In 2009, the Permanent Secretaries of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Ministry of Justice (MOJ) commissioned a joint strategic review of offender employment services. The aim was to improve such support by conducting a strategic review of current services offered by DWP and MOJ and implementing improvements to make services more coherent and effective without increasing existing resources. The recommendations of the review were announced in March 2010.

DWP commissioned the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University to undertake a qualitative study of offender employment services, with a specific focus on the progress made with the implementation of the recommendations of the joint review. The objectives of the study were to:

- identify how well the recommendations of the review have been implemented;
- identify the extent to which the changes implemented have contributed to improved offender employment services;
- establish what further reforms should be developed to maximise the employment outcomes for offenders;
- assist in developing future policy for the offender group;
- consider the role of drug treatment services in the offender employment journey.

The study was conducted across four case study areas covering England and Wales in both custodial and community settings. In terms of the former, the study team has visited twelve prisons and young offender institutions. The research involved conducting 131 in-depth semi-structured interviews with policy leads, practitioners and offenders. This has included policy leads in DWP, Jobcentre Plus, MOJ and National Offender Management Service (NOMS); Scottish policy leads; Employment and Benefit Advisers (EBAs) and Prison Resettlement staff; Jobcentre Plus staff; Probation Service staff; prisoners; offenders in the community and representatives from crime reduction charities.

This report presents the main findings emanating from the study. It identifies how well key recommendations have been implemented ‘on the ground’ in both case study prisons and the community; and assesses the extent to which changes have begun to improve offender employment services. It concludes with a series of recommendations to help further strengthen such services.

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