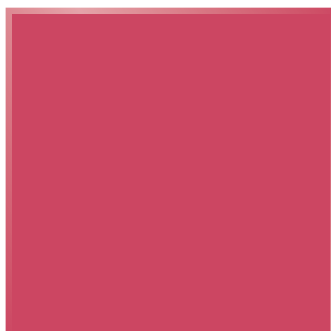
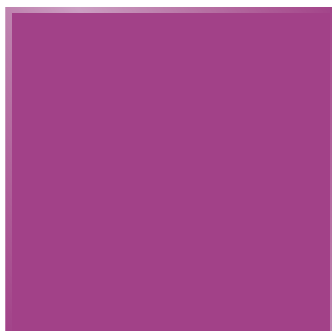


# PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OFFENDERS

## GROWING SUSTAINABLE WORK INTEGRATION SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

A REPORT OF LEARNING FROM THIS PROGRAMME | January 2014



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GROWING SUSTAINABLE  
WORK INTEGRATION  
SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

The views expressed in these case studies are those of the respective organisations and the publication of the case studies should not be viewed as an endorsement of these organisations and their work by the Home Office and Ministry of Justice. The data and statistics presented within the case studies have been locally collected and cannot be verified by the Home Office, Clinks and Social Firms UK.

## Background

Low qualifications and lack of employment are recognised within the Government's strategy for *Transforming Rehabilitation* as key social issues related to re-offending.\*

Some local areas have already developed social enterprises as one way to overcome barriers around the employability of ex-offenders. However at the time of writing, there is currently very little that brings together learning or examples of effective practice to assist others in doing this.

Recognising this gap, the Home Office commissioned a short term programme of work undertaken in February and March 2013 by Clinks and Social Firms UK.

The programme set out to explore and assess the role of social enterprises in enabling both adult and young offenders to access training and employment opportunities. The results provide a body of work that will significantly contribute to cross-Government thinking about how to embed and support social enterprises working with offenders.

The programme included two elements:

- The development and publication of a series of twenty Case Studies. The social enterprises featured in the case study series were invited, following a competitive application process, to write about their own experiences and insights into the opportunities and barriers confronting their development and sustainability.
- This Summary Report which brings together the key learning about developing and sustaining social enterprises offering employment and employability training to offenders.

Together they provide a valuable resource for newly established social enterprises, for those planning to establish social enterprises, for police, prisons and probation providers, for Police and Crime Commissioners, for local Integrated Offender Management (IOM) partnerships, and for policy makers.

These resources also complement previous work undertaken in partnership between Clinks and the Home Office aimed at increasing the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector's involvement in local IOM arrangements.

\* Ministry of Justice. May 2013. *Transforming Rehabilitation: A Strategy for Reform*: [www.justice.gov.uk/transforming-rehabilitation](http://www.justice.gov.uk/transforming-rehabilitation)

### Acknowledgements

The Home Office, Clinks, Social Firms UK would like to extend their thanks to all the organisations that participated in the programme by submitting an application or writing a case study. Thanks also to Nicky Stevenson who edited the case study series and wrote the final summary report, and to Bernard Lane and Simon Eglington (Home Office), Lesley Frazer (Clinks) and Michele Rigby (Social Firms UK), who oversaw and managed the programme.

## Overview of the case studies

The social enterprises and emergent social enterprises described in the series of twenty case studies commissioned through the programme provide a broad range of activities, approaches and types of organisation that are working to support offenders and ex-offenders. Some of these organisations are existing social enterprises and others are developing social enterprises that will employ or provide services to offenders and ex-offenders. The majority of these organisations are working specifically with people within the criminal justice system and with other disadvantaged groups.

### Types of organisation

The organisations providing these services fall into several main types, with some falling into more than one category:

Type	Number
Newly established social enterprises	10
Existing social enterprises	9
Support organisations (i.e. business development)	4
Housing Associations (Registered Social Landlords)	3
Employment agencies	2
Private sector led partnerships	1
Public sector externalisation	1

Ten organisations had previously worked with offenders or ex-offenders before embarking on the work described in the case study. Three had not worked with this group before. The remaining seven organisations are not working exclusively with offenders and ex-offenders or are newly established.

### Types of activity

Most case studies describe a range of activities provided within a programme or project and the learning from many of them is dominated by the importance of providing holistic solutions to address a range of issues that may be present in the lives of the individuals they are working with.

Activity	Number
Personal development	17
Vocational training	14
Paid work experience	12
Brokerage to permanent jobs	11
Volunteering/unpaid work experience	8
Accredited qualifications	8
Negotiation with potential employers	5
Business advice	2

Many of the case studies show that providers are working in partnership with others. These partner organisations offer specific expertise, resources, specific stages in a pathway and, in the case of criminal justice organisations, referrals on to the project or programme.

Partners	Number
Criminal Justice organisations	14
Private sector businesses	6
Specialist support organisations	3

The social enterprises described in the case studies are offering work in a range of different trade sectors, providing different types of employment or encouragement for entrepreneurship. Some are working in more than one sector, starting one social enterprise and then diversifying into another, or developing retail outlets to sell the products they have developed.

Sector	Number
Construction/decorating	5
Recycling	4
Food	4
Gardening/horticulture	4
Retail	3
Business administration	3
Craft	2
Cleaning	2
Business start up	2

Many of the organisations are selling services to more than one market.

Customer type	Number
Private sector businesses	9
Housing Associations	6
Public sector organisations	6
General public	3
Voluntary and community groups	1

## What works? Conclusions from the case studies

There is consistency in the experiences described in the case studies, providing learning on what can be done to help prevent offenders and ex-offenders from re-offending.

All of the case studies relate to creating employment opportunities and working with offenders and ex-offenders to help them to become more employable. Research studies as well as anecdotal evidence demonstrate the positive impact that employment can have on reducing the risk of re-offending. Research into interventions to improve employability suggests that interventions are more likely to be effective in helping offenders achieve employment where they take a holistic approach, and where they

are linked to tangible opportunities. Social enterprises, with their social as well as economic objectives, are well placed to offer employment or to provide training and work experience that can lead to employment in the mainstream labour market.

In addition, there is a recurring theme in the case studies about the importance of helping people not only to access the job market but also to address other issues associated with:

- Access to stable accommodation
- Debt management
- Substance misuse/addiction
- Family support
- Literacy/numeracy
- Lack of formal qualifications
- Lack of a work history
- Low self-esteem
- Identification documents
- Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) – formerly Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks.

Many case studies discuss and address employers' often negative perceptions of offenders and ex-offenders. Many providers have formed partnerships with employers in order to broker work experience for their clients, often leading to offers of permanent jobs. Others are providing specific advice to employers regarding the legalities and good practice of employing an ex-offender.

Several case studies refer to issues that ex-offenders often have when seeking jobs that require them to provide identification, for example to open a bank account through which they can be paid, and getting Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks (formerly Criminal Records Bureau). In some cases offenders do not have access to the right documentation as they have chaotic home lives, or may be homeless, and the possibility of being asked to undergo a DBS check can sometimes be enough to deter them from applying for a job. The social enterprises delivering these projects assist and support offenders to overcome these barriers.

The activities consistently described in the case studies show that social enterprises working to reduce re-offending can benefit from adopting combinations of the following actions:

- Developing good links with criminal justice agencies in order to get referrals and gain access to the target group; namely, the police, prisons, probation providers, National Offender Management Service (NOMS), and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ)
- Developing a staged process, starting with initial activities to build confidence and self-esteem
- Offering additional support during the programme to deal with other issues such as housing, debt and addictions
- Working in partnership with other agencies to bring in specialist support
- Offering basic skills and vocational skills training
- Providing accredited qualifications, particularly gateway certification to enter certain jobs
- Creating a pathway from training to work experience/volunteering to paid work placements to brokered permanent employment
- Developing good behaviours such as time keeping and maintaining attendance at work



- Making strong links with employers who can offer work experience and jobs
- Creating opportunities for previous programme graduates or other ex-offenders who have successfully re-engaged with society to act as role models and mentors
- The social enterprise employing ex-offenders as an example to ex-offenders and employers
- In many cases, offering through the gate support linking activities within prisons to support on release.

## Making a difference – key learning

Many of the social enterprises and the programmes they are running are still in their first year of operation, so there is as yet little data to evidence the impact of their initiatives over time. While the case studies do report observing reduced re-offending by their service users, further work would be needed to more systematically assess impact. Without a single, robust and transparent methodology being used by all the providers, it is difficult to make comparisons about the impact they have created.<sup>1</sup> However a range of useful insights and key learning are provided by the case studies and these are set out in the following sections.

## The market for social enterprises working to reduce re-offending

The case studies highlight the issue of where in the market they are most likely to succeed in creating opportunities. Types of market opportunities identified include:

- Markets from which the social enterprise can earn its income in order to provide the work experience for beneficiaries
- Labour market opportunities for beneficiaries to gain permanent jobs
- Parts of the economy where there are additional social and environmental benefits to be derived
- Awareness of the potential for displacement of jobs in the wider economy.

Overall, the markets that provide the greatest opportunity are summed up in one case study as requiring low skills, having easy entry and offering opportunities for permanent employment.

## Relationships with employers

Several case studies refer to the importance of building good relationships with local employers so that the individuals they work with can progress to permanent employment. It is clear that many social enterprises have established themselves as trusted intermediaries that will only send suitable candidates to employers, and that will offer considerable follow-up support to both employers and employees to help them address any problems that subsequently arise. Several conclude by saying that employers who have given jobs to ex-offenders have found them to be excellent, loyal and committed employees.

## Other learning from the case studies

Several case studies refer to the building of social capital. Ex-offenders appreciate working in an organisation that allows them to put something back into the community. Employers that host work placements also find that other staff can be extremely positive about this.

Many of the case studies describe a process of empowering individuals, supporting them to take responsibility for themselves and become active and involved members of the workforce. The case studies also refer to the difficulty of working with individuals who are experiencing multiple and deep-seated problems, including substance misuse/addictions, family problems, debt, literacy and numeracy problems, mental health/behavioural problems and homelessness. In many cases the social enterprises have developed their services to address these issues, in some cases developing partnerships with specialist organisations.

Some of the case studies also describe the importance of motivating people through offering interesting jobs, additional support and respect in the work place. Some of the social enterprises in the case studies are social firms, in that they have set out deliberately to employ ex-offenders in their organisations; others have done so opportunistically as vacancies have arisen.<sup>2</sup> Either way this seems to offer a real benefit to the individuals as they are working with people who have genuine understanding of their situations and good role models to prove that the process can work for them. It also clearly enables the employees themselves to shed their 'ex-offender' identities in a very empowering way.

## Business start up

Some of the case studies describe working with offenders and ex-offenders to help them to start up their own businesses. In some cases this is through self-employment and in others the aim is to assist groups of people to form their own social enterprises. The reason given for taking this approach is that many ex-offenders find it difficult to find employment as they find (or believe) that their record will mean employers are reluctant to take them on. Self-employment is a way of overcoming this barrier. Projects aiming to support people to set up businesses cite the importance of engaging with local entrepreneurs, people running their own businesses, as role models and sometimes as mentors.

## Conclusions

Both new and existing social enterprises are offering solutions that contribute to tackling re-offending. They are making interventions that are assisting offenders and ex-offenders to become more employable, to gain work experience and in some cases, to enter permanent employment. In the process they are addressing other associated issues experienced by offenders, including homelessness, addictions, debts and family problems, adopting an holistic approach to support people on their individual journeys to desistance from crime.

There is a very strong consensus in the case studies that working in partnership with other organisations, especially employers, is very important, as is taking early steps to build individuals' self-confidence and self-esteem. Many case studies show how they are enabling offenders to gain qualifications, particularly those that gain them entry to industries such as construction and catering.

An overwhelming impression created by the case studies is of the wide range of creative and innovative approaches to reducing re-offending that are being taken by social enterprises. Many of these are able to offer the support described in the case studies because of their ability and intention to earn at least some of their income from selling products and services, and to make themselves sustainable through their income generation. These provide important learning for emergent social enterprises as well as for other local partners (such as those involved in Integrated Offender Management arrangements) to help them consider new and sustainable approaches to training and employment for offenders. There are important lessons here too about the importance of building mutually supportive relationships with local businesses and the private sector.

Finally, it is clear that many of the social enterprises featured in the case studies embody the more flexible, holistic approach to reducing re-offending that the Government is seeking to encourage in its strategy for *Transforming Rehabilitation*.

1. The Ministry of Justice Data Lab pilot was launched in April 2013; this enables organisations working with offenders to access central re-offending data and help them assess the impact of their work on reducing re-offending. See [www.justice.gov.uk/justice-data-lab](http://www.justice.gov.uk/justice-data-lab) for further information.
2. Social firms are a category of social enterprise whose characteristics are that they earn 50% of income through trading and at least 25% of their employees are people severely disadvantaged in the labour market.



