

An aerial photograph of a city, likely in the United States, showing a dense residential area with many houses and trees. In the center of the city, there is a large, multi-story institutional building complex, possibly a prison or a government facility, with several interconnected buildings and a large parking lot. The sky is clear and blue.

PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

November 2012 No 204

Working on the inside:

new approaches to increasing the employability of offenders

Chris Murray is Chair of social enterprise Fusion21.

Introduction

A large body of research now indicates that having a job directly influences whether an ex-offender commits further crimes. Studies show that if a former prisoner secures employment then they are between 30-50 per cent less likely to re-offend¹. Yet the routine of work is one that is unfamiliar to many offenders. Over two in three individuals have no job at the time they are sentenced to prison² and 13 per cent have never had a paid job³. Unemployment is also prevalent amongst newly released offenders. Three quarters of prisoners say they do not have paid work to go to when they leave custody⁴. A study of over 1,000 people on probation found that only 21 per cent were in employment compared to 60 per cent of the general population⁵.

Previous research has shown that there are a wide range of reasons why people re-offend. In 2002, the government's Social Exclusion Unit published a report called 'Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners'⁶. This wide-ranging research consisted of consultations with many prisoners and professionals both inside and outside the criminal justice system. The report identified nine factors which directly affect re-offending rates: education and training, employment, drugs and alcohol, mental and physical health, attitudes and self control, institutionalisation and life skills, housing, benefits and debt, and families.

Although employment is just one part of this complex boiling pot, the Social Exclusion Unit's research showed how pivotal work is in turning offenders away from a life of crime. The study showed that 68 per cent of offenders believe having a job is the most important factor to stop them re-offending⁷.

It is vital that other issues, which may obstruct employment, are addressed. Finding accommodation, beating drug and alcohol addiction and getting help for mental and physical health problems are all hugely important. But recent research and the latest government policy papers indicate that employment pathways are finally getting the recognition they deserve around reducing re-offending.

In June 2011, think tank Policy Exchange published a report stating that 'research has consistently identified employment and education as the two most significant risk factors correlated with recidivism; with employment-related interventions associated with the largest reductions in re-offending'⁸.

Employment must be seen as the central spine to prisoner rehabilitation, supported by other important interventions around housing, drug and alcohol addiction. Studies show that regular work can help ex-offenders remain in mainstream society and generate the life-style shift needed to break idleness and criminal habits and create a routine. A steady job on release helps to bridge the gap between inside and out, it gives ex-offenders stability and financial security and can provide a sense of purpose and satisfaction. Employment also provides former prisoners with a future trajectory, helping them to build up their CV and work towards career goals and an improved salary.

Government Policy

This strong link between work and reduced recidivism has been acknowledged through investment in offender skills programmes. Over recent years, money put into the prison skills systems has trebled as the government sought to make offenders more attractive to

1. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners* <http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/wp-content/uploads/reducing-re-offending.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.52.
2. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners* <http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/wp-content/uploads/reducing-re-offending.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.53.
3. Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/consultations/breaking-the-cycle.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.8.
4. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners* <http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/wp-content/uploads/reducing-re-offending.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.53.
5. G.Mair & C.May (1997) *Offenders on probation*, Home Office [Accessed 22/08/11] p.12. <http://www.ohrn.nhs.uk/resource/Policy/OffendersonProbation.pdf>
6. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners* <http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/wp-content/uploads/reducing-re-offending.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11]
7. Ministry of Justice (2010) *Compendium of reoffending statistics and analysis* <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/compendium-of-reoffending-statistics-and-analysis.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.136.
8. Policy Exchange (2011) *Inside Job* [Accessed 04/08/11] p.26. <http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/publications/publication.cgi?id=242>

employers⁹. This significant increase in budget did bring about improvements to learning in jails. Many more prisoners have taken part in training courses and other skills development opportunities than ever before and the quality of these opportunities has improved¹⁰.

But there is little evidence that cash ploughed into offender learning has helped a large number of ex-prisoners find regular work or encouraged them to take up educational opportunities on release. In the 2011 white paper, *Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation*, which sets out the government's reform programme for offender learning, Ministers admit that 'we are still failing to capitalise on the learning and training inside prison by finding ways to ensure prisoners continue their progress on release'¹¹.

In today's economic climate, where public service providers must increasingly demonstrate the value for money of their work and the tangible impact they are having, government is keen to hold services to account for the results they achieve. With unemployment at its highest level for 16 years at the end of 2011 and only a slight drop in 2012¹² — the onus is on the government to reduce the number of prisoners adding to this total on release. As a result, learning and employment pathways that aim to reduce re-offending are one such service that will, going forward, operate in a context of payment-by-results. The pressure is on the Ministry of Justice to use approaches that generate powerful outcomes — translating skills development inside into a high number of training and work opportunities on the outside.

In December 2010 the Ministry of Justice launched a green paper to begin the debate around these issues. *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders*¹³ was billed as a cornerstone of the Coalition's criminal justice system reforms and contained some radical policy ideas around rehabilitating ex-prisoners.

The paper was responding to pressures to halt the 'destructive cycle of crime'¹⁴ which costs the UK dear. The National Audit Office estimates that crimes committed by individuals released from short sentences cost the tax payer £7 — 10 billion every year¹⁵. The annual cost of convicting someone and keeping them in prison for one year is £126,500¹⁶.

Re-offending Rates

Despite significant investment in tackling re-offending, rates are still very high — particularly amongst young people and individuals serving short sentences — where, in the past, there has been little attempt at rehabilitation. Figures show that nearly 50 per cent of offenders released from prison re-offend within one year¹⁷. A staggering 75 per cent of young people released from custody and 68 per cent of young people on community sentences reoffend within a year¹⁸. One in five offenders spent some time in custody the year after they were released from prison or started a community sentence. Almost three quarters of those who were released from custody, or began a community order, in the first quarter year of 2000 were reconvicted of another offence within nine years¹⁹.

Recent evidence suggests there is a group of around 16,000 active offenders at any one time, who each have over 75 previous convictions. On average they have been to prison 14 times, usually for less than 12 months, with nine community sentences and 10 fines²⁰.

Reform of Prisoner Rehabilitation

Breaking the Cycle tackles a multitude of issues surrounding the punishment of offenders and the payback they must make. It looks at new ways to rehabilitate people who commit crime, addressing factors

9. Ministry of Justice (2011) *Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation* <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/m/11-828-making-prisons-work-skills-for-rehabilitation.pdf> [Accessed 14/07/11] p.5.
10. Ministry of Justice (2011) *Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation* <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/m/11-828-making-prisons-work-skills-for-rehabilitation.pdf> [Accessed 14/07/11] p.5.
11. Ministry of Justice (2011) *Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation* <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/m/11-828-making-prisons-work-skills-for-rehabilitation.pdf> [Accessed 14/07/11] p.3.
12. Office for National Statistics (2012) *Labour market statistics: February 2012* <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/february-2012/statistical-bulletin.html> [Accessed 20/02/12] p.1 and Office for National Statistics (2012) *Labour market statistics: August 2012* <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/august-2012/statistical-bulletin.html> (Accessed 04/10/12) p.1
13. Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/consultations/breaking-the-cycle.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11]
14. Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/consultations/breaking-the-cycle.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.5.
15. National Audit Office (2010) *Managing offenders on short custodial sentences* http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/0910/short_custodial_sentences.aspx [Accessed 22/08/11] p.4.
16. St Giles Trust <http://www.stgilestrust.org.uk/s/stats-and-info/p517/key-statistics.html>
17. Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/consultations/breaking-the-cycle.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.1.
18. Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/consultations/breaking-the-cycle.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.67.
19. Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/consultations/breaking-the-cycle.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.5.
20. Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/consultations/breaking-the-cycle.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.6.

around getting off drugs, mental health problems and how to make sure prisoners pay their way. It also tackles issues around sentencing reform and improving the youth justice system.

Employment is a central theme within this green paper, both in terms of improving an offender's prospects on release and also ensuring their punishment is meaningful and intensive.

One key proposition is to turn prisons into places of 'hard work and industry'²¹, ending the enforced idleness that has dominated the prison system for so long. Prisoners will be required to work a full working week of up to 40 hours, making punishments more rigorous and ensuring prisoners face the purposeful routine and 'tough discipline of regular working hours'²².

The criminal justice system will work more closely with voluntary and private organisations to develop working prisons. The 9,000 prisoners currently employed in prison workshops will be significantly increased, with more emphasis put on learning vocational skills in real work environments.

'In some cases, the prison might provide the work. In others, the prisons may have contracts with a diverse range of external providers. We want to make it easier for the private, voluntary and community sectors to use their expertise and innovation to develop the working prison. This includes building on the excellent role of companies such as DHL and Cisco in providing work and training in prisons'.²³

Fundamentally, Breaking the Cycle sets out that prisons should play a more central role in providing offenders with the skills needed to live a life free of crime on the outside.

Following a significant response from the voluntary, public and private sectors to Breaking the Cycle, the

Ministry of Justice and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills published 'Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation'²⁴. This white paper outlines a major re-think of how to equip offenders with the right skills needed to find a job and kick criminal habits for good.

The result is a focus on how offenders can develop vocational and employability skills inside prison, ensuring they are attractive to employers on release. As with Breaking the Cycle, Making Prisons Work emphasizes the importance of de-centralisation and local-level control. *'We will achieve the most effective results by making offender learning an authentic part of the skills and employment systems that operate at that same local level'.²⁵*

One idea is to engage with local employers and ask them to be involved in the design of prison training programmes. This would help to make offenders more competitive on release — specifically within their local job market and it could also help to plug regional skill shortages.

But in reality how can busy employers get involved with the delivery of learning and development programmes for offenders? What would this look like on the ground and what's in it for employers? What about health and safety issues, quality assurance and the costs involved?

Prison industry transfer

One solution is currently being tested in the north west of England. Fusion21 is liaising with local businesses so they can work with HMP Liverpool to train prisoners as part of a prison industry transfer pilot. Run by Merseyside-based social enterprise Fusion21, the pilot will test whether manufacturers and construction companies in the area can transfer part of their production process into prisons. If successful this industry transfer model would develop profit-generating businesses in prisons that are not reliant on state funding. Such enterprises would help prisoners all

Employment is a central theme within this green paper, both in terms of improving an offender's prospects on release and also ensuring their punishment is meaningful and intensive.

21. Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/consultations/breaking-the-cycle.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.1.

22. Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/consultations/breaking-the-cycle.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.9.

23. Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/consultations/breaking-the-cycle.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.15.

24. Ministry of Justice (2011) *Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation* <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/m/11-828-making-prisons-work-skills-for-rehabilitation.pdf> [Accessed 14/07/11]

25. Ministry of Justice (2011) *Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation* <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/m/11-828-making-prisons-work-skills-for-rehabilitation.pdf> [Accessed 14/07/11] p.5.

over the country to develop their CVs, gain accredited training and provide something of value back to society rather than 'simply being a burden on the state'.²⁶

Crucially, this model will not take jobs away from law-abiding people on the outside, something that is particularly important at this time of economic uncertainty and high unemployment. Instead it will work with those firms that want to grow or set up new parts of their business or companies that want to transfer work back to the UK that is currently being done off-shore. It will help these companies reduce their overheads and meet corporate social responsibility objectives.

The model also includes a skills and training levy, paid by employers, which is ploughed back into training opportunities for offenders. No state funding is required — this approach is self sustaining.

This could make good business sense for local organisations and also help to meet the demand for specific skills. If there is the need for skilled workers in a particular area, such as the production and installation of energy efficiency goods, then it makes sense to train prisoners up in that area so they can make a valuable contribution to their local economy on release. Fusion21's aim is to create an industry transfer framework that meets the demand of local job markets.

Such a model could work well for trades that currently import goods or outsource the assembly of products to foreign countries. Rather than going down the import road, prison workshops could help companies reduce their costs and carbon footprint by manufacturing or constructing products in the UK. The building, horticulture, manufacturing and housing maintenance sectors all lend themselves well to transfer into prisons. A large proportion of prisoners have a low skills base — almost half have no qualifications. So certain areas of these industries that are straightforward to learn and non-technical, yet in demand on the outside, would be ideal.

In the past, a common training model for ex-offenders has centred on giving individuals 'safe' jobs such as clearing or renovating empty properties — which they sometimes live in on completion. But we must be wary of creating an alternative economy for former prisoners. Training opportunities must be authentic, taking place in real work environments and helping offenders to gain mainstream careers. Rather than

receiving concessions, ex-offenders must get constructive skills support that makes them attractive in the increasingly competitive job market.

That's why Timpson's prison workshops have been so successful. Offenders learn how to engrave, repair watches and mend shoes. The business offers pre-release training and jobs on the outside. Repair and mending skills will always be needed and this type of work doesn't require strong literacy skills or lots of qualifications. Importantly it provides stable, secure job prospects on release²⁷.

New model for job creation

Increasing an offender's 'employability' is vital to helping them carve out a crime-free future. Fusion21 has been developing the employment skills of ex-offenders since it was set up in 2002. The social enterprise was founded by seven social landlords, initially as a consortium to drive collective procurement. It now helps over 130 organisations across the country to make savings when purchasing goods and services — everything from lifts and legal support to scaffolding and solar panels.

The key to Fusion21's model is how it links procurement to job creation. For every £1million worth of work awarded to a scaffolding

contractor for example, 1.5 people are trained through the social enterprise's Skills Programme and employed by that contractor. So far a total of 856 jobs for local people have been created, with approximately 300 of these positions going to known offenders.

This job creation has brought about an estimated £32million boost to the Merseyside area through a reduction in benefit claims and investment into the local economy. In addition to creating jobs, Fusion21 delivers training to thousands of Merseyside residents in construction, health and safety and up-skilling courses to help increase their chances of securing employment opportunities. Many of these trainees include ex-offenders²⁸.

Over the past year Fusion21 has also set up training workshops at HMP Liverpool with prisoners gaining City & Guilds Level 2 qualifications in a range of trades. Some workshop graduates have now been released, with one ex-offender coming to Fusion21 the day after he was

Training opportunities must be authentic, taking place in real work environments and helping offenders to gain mainstream careers.

26. Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/consultations/breaking-the-cycle.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.15.

27. Ministry of Justice (2011) <http://www.justice.gov.uk/news/features/features-180111a.htm>

28. Fusion21 <http://www.fusion21.co.uk/>

freed. He was able to train for a Construction Skills Certification Scheme card free of charge and quickly found employment with a local contractor through Fusion21's partner recruitment agency Employer Pool.

Working with social landlords

A large number of the apprentices and trainees Fusion21 works with find jobs in the social housing sector. The social enterprise is keen to develop links between housing associations, prisons and probation trusts in order to boost the employment prospects of ex-offenders.

The social housing sector itself has been employing former prisoners for years. Offenders often come from housing associations and go back to these communities on release. A Home Office criminality survey indicates that over 56 per cent of ex-prisoners surveyed in 2000 were living in accommodation provided by local authorities or housing associations²⁹.

Social landlords know all too well that the financial, social and personal effects of re-offending on neighbourhoods can be devastating, and it's in their interests to take a co-ordinated approach. Housing providers need to work together further, looking for effective solutions that are self funding and can be rolled out across the country.

A number of social housing providers already support former prisoners by employing them to clean or renovate empty properties, do gardening or window cleaning. These projects generate some great results but there is only so much a single housing association can do on their own, especially if their work is grant dependant.

Several social landlords are now working with Fusion21 and HMP Liverpool to create a pathway for offenders in custody and beyond the prison gate. Supporting an offender before their sentence ends can help housing providers to reduce the chance of that person re-offending in their local community. It can also help landlords to tackle skill shortages — a problem the sector faces around the green economy as it seeks to make housing stock more energy efficient in response to tough carbon reduction targets.

Beginning apprenticeships inside

Fusion21 is also speaking to the National Apprenticeship Service, social landlords and a range of other employers that take on apprentices. The aim is to see whether offenders can begin training programmes during the latter part of their sentence. This would help to maintain continuity beyond the prison gate and generate the lifestyle shift needed to root offenders firmly within mainstream society immediately on release.

If approved, then prisoners would be able to start apprenticeships such as those in housing maintenance, construction or horticulture whilst still inside, completing the first four levels of accreditation before they are released. This policy change would speed up the rehabilitation of offenders and their ability to contribute to the local economy while reducing their reliance on benefits.

Changing Community Payback

In *Breaking the Cycle*, the Ministry of Justice proposes reforms to community payback systems. There are plans to make this type of punishment more intensive and immediate, to enforce it properly and to create further opportunities for community payback to develop an offender's vocational skills and

chance of employment in the future³⁰. Significantly, the government wants to look at new approaches that allow local communities to influence the type of community payback work given to offenders. As a result more voluntary and community organisations will work with the criminal justice system to improve community payback opportunities.

Fusion21 is already in talks with probation trusts to explore a range of new approaches. One such idea is to work more closely with housing associations in the design of local community payback schemes.

Although community payback can be quite a disparate programme, there is some robust work already being delivered in this area by the probation service. Social landlords have a strong understanding of the needs of their local communities. Every housing provider has a neighbourhood plan, identifying the

Social landlords know all too well that the financial, social and personal effects of re-offending on neighbourhoods can be devastating, and it's in their interests to take a co-ordinated approach.

29. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners* <http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/wp-content/uploads/reducing-re-offending.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.98.

30. Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/consultations/breaking-the-cycle.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.14-19.

environmental changes they'd like to make if they had the money. Generally these plans remain aspirational, listing the things they would like to do if only they had the resources. If a more co-ordinated approach to delivering community payback was developed then offenders' free labour could be used to make neighbourhood plans a reality. Fusion21 is keen to work alongside the probation service in this area, supporting the significant progress it has already made.

The Merseyside-based social enterprise is also speaking to probation trusts to explore how community work schemes can train offenders, boosting their employability. Probation trusts have long recognised the importance of training and employment in helping offenders to exit the criminal justice system and make a positive contribution to their communities. For some time, trusts have supported Employment, Training and Education (ETE) programmes, working with a range of providers to create opportunities for offenders to gain qualifications and move into work.

Now community pay-back has now been opened up competitively, other providers will look to link court sentences with employability training. The focus will be on supporting those offenders with community sentences in excess of 150 hours and individuals who have been unemployed for more than two years.

But at the same time, pressure is increasing to make community-payback more robust. Offenders must be allowed to provide more reparation to the communities that have suffered as a consequence of their behaviour. Community projects will always feature in the work undertaken by offenders and increasingly more public sector organisations — in addition to housing associations — are recognising the role that community payback can play in their plans to tackle environmentally damaged areas.

One idea is to support probation trusts to manage land bought by property developers which is now sitting empty. Rather than attracting fly tipping or anti-social behaviour, land would be used and managed by community payback schemes until property developers want it back. Offenders would learn skills and boost their work history by managing the land and probation trusts would earn income.

Procurement

Fusion21 already runs dozens of purchasing contracts with local suppliers. To date around £45million has been saved through its collective procurement frameworks³¹. This experience has demonstrated that if housing organisations and construction firms procured goods from the prison estate then such a partnership could generate significant benefits for businesses and the prisoners making the products.

Examples of this are already happening on an ad hoc basis. A social landlord is currently looking to the prison estate to manufacture fencing for a multi million pound fencing programme. But a nation-wide, joined up approach is needed if this type of initiative is to have any major impact. If prison industries are expanded for their 80k-strong population then jails could become competitive, commercial suppliers to social landlords and the building industry. Companies working with prisons could open a percentage of their procurement frameworks to prisons — fulfilling social responsibility objectives and enabling them to buy cost-effective products.

Offenders must be allowed to provide more reparation to the communities that have suffered as a consequence of their behaviour.

Case study: Steve's story

'Steve' is 23. Four years ago he received a 21 month jail sentence for the supply of class A drugs. Apart from six GCSEs, Steve had no qualifications or employment records since leaving school. All he had on his CV was nine months experience as a trainee scaffolder. Getting a stable job on release wasn't going to be easy.

After Steve left prison he came to Fusion21 through one of the organisation's unemployment programmes. Through a work focused training course, Steve gained qualifications in first aid, manual handling, health and safety and construction.

After that Steve managed to secure a six month placement at a local housing association and completed another course, this time in cleaning and support services. His hard work paid off and the social housing association kept him on for an extra six months through Employer Pool — a group of businesses that recruit local workers such as Steve³². With more experience, qualifications and a good reference under his belt, Steve had the confidence to apply independently for a job with a large contractor and move on.

31. Fusion21 <http://www.fusion21.co.uk/>

32. Employer Pool <http://www.employerpool.co.uk/>

Like many ex-offenders it would have been easy for Steve to slip back into the cycle of re-offending without having the purpose and routine provided by regular employment. It's these softer skills such as discipline, motivation, time management and the ability to respond to instructions that work also provides.

The Policy Exchange elaborates on this wide range of benefits in their report 'Inside Job'. They cite evidence showing the positive impact work and skills development can have on an individual's mental health, their sense of achievement, satisfaction and self confidence. Vocational training provides structure and purpose to an offender's day as well boosting their own sense of identity³³.

Conclusion

If the government's ambitions for reducing re-offending through employment pathways are to be realised then innovative, holistic solutions are needed. Projects and agencies offering job and training opportunities to prisoners must join up their work and carve out a new route for offenders in custody and beyond the gate.

In *Breaking the Cycle*, Ministers ask an important question. 'How can prisons be made into places of hard work and discipline?'³⁴. This is a vast issue with a series of complex answers. A number of cities do already have successful prison industries in place — but the key to making all prisons places of meaningful work is to develop a model which can be replicated across the country. This model would vary locally in terms of labour demands and the different employers getting involved, but the overall framework would remain the same.

And this framework must be self sustaining. Prison industry systems should be profit-generating and non reliant on government grants, this will enhance the longevity of such schemes and help to gain support from the public and Ministers.

In the meantime, more pilots are needed — such as the one taking place in Merseyside — to identify how offenders' employment skills can be developed on a larger scale. Ultimately, leaders need to become advocates and champion this approach — it makes strong economic sense for government, employers and prisoners alike.

33. Policy Exchange (2011) *Inside Job* [Accessed 04/08/11] p.26-27. <http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/publications/publication.cgi?id=242>

34. Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders*. <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/consultations/breaking-the-cycle.pdf> [Accessed 15/08/11] p.16.