

Business in
the

Community



Barrow Cadbury & Business in the Community Employability workshops 2009

1.0 Summary

In 2007 Business in the Community and Barrow Cadbury Trust developed a set of guidelines to support employers interested in employing ex-offenders - Getting out to Work: Employing Young Adults with Convictions. The Guide was lauded as a very practical toolkit for employers.

Subsequent to this, in 2009, Business in the Community facilitated a set of three workshops in London, East of England and in the West Midlands. The workshops were used to gauge company support of the Guide recommendations but also to check employer receptiveness to the employability of ex-offenders in a recession. Finally the workshops were used to raise the profile of employing ex-offenders and to explore the factors that would encourage more companies to come on board.

Each regional workshop convened local companies that employ ex-offenders or would like to employ ex-offenders. The workshops provided a forum for companies to discuss key challenges to the employability of ex-offenders and how to manage and overcome these. Each workshop presented an opportunity for local employers to talk about their experiences of supporting ex-offenders back into work. In addition the workshops also invited a representative of the local prison service to come along and explain how their particular prison supports the employability of offenders and how employers can link into this provision more effectively. The workshops were also an opportunity for Barrow Cadbury to consult with employers on some of the recommendations of 'A New Start: Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System' outlined below.

2.0 Benefits for Barrow Cadbury Trust

The workshops created a forum through which Barrow Cadbury Trust:

- Heard from leading Business in the Community members on their investment in this area
- Heard from companies in West Midlands, London and the East of England (where the workshops were held) regarding the local situation within which they operate and the major barriers they face when seeking to support the employability of ex-offenders
- Heard from the voluntary and prison service in each region on how they are supporting ex-offenders back into work
- Consulted on business recommendations of Transition to Adulthood's 'A New Start: Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System' with the groups
- Provided a platform for partner organisation Inner City Creative Media Group to present their work to companies from the region

3.0 Summary of workshop findings

The workshops were an opportunity to revisit the recommendations of Getting out to Work; they were also a chance to hear from members on any additional concerns or needs they have as companies interested in employing ex-offenders. The workshops presented a number of key findings for employers:

- **Need a robust business case for employing ex-offenders**
- **Need clear and simple information on employing ex-offenders**
- **Need pre and post release access to people as they move through the prison service**
- **Need more encouragement from prisons to support existing employability provision**
- **Need to raise the profile of employing ex-offenders as a key social issue**

3.1 Discussion of workshop findings

During the course of the workshops these points were discussed in more detail.

a) Information

Participants reflected a general lack of understanding about how to recruit ex-offenders, what the risks are and how to manage these risks. This lack of basic information seems to be the most fundamental barrier to changing societal perception of the employability of ex-offenders and creates a barrier to most employers who are concerned about risk and liability.

- Employers need support to employ ex-offenders – JobCheck run by Apex Trust¹ provides guidance and support to employers who want to employ ex-offenders.

b) Business case for employing ex-offenders

Participants felt that in order to encourage and support more companies to employ ex-offenders the business case for involvement must be articulated and communicated clearly. There are pros and cons to employing ex-offenders, both must be considered when building the business case:

Pros

- Individuals serving sentences in open prisons can act as a flexible source of labour
- An emphasis on the employment of the most marginalised groups in society will distinguish a company's reputation as socially responsible in a time of recession.
- Ex-offenders can make excellent employees and increase the diversity of the workforce

Cons

- Employers feel like they need to jump through a lot of hoops to employ ex-offenders in terms of the time-intensive nature of the relationships they must build with individual prisons, the human resource required to provide mentors to ex-offenders etc.

¹ <http://www.jobcheckhelpline.com/index.aspx>

- Some members of the group questioned whether in a recession commitment might waver, others felt that a recession was the time for companies to use CSR to distinguish themselves as responsible businesses with an interest and concern for the communities within which they operate and depend upon for income
- Some participants felt that employee relations might be difficult to manage when a policy to employ ex-offenders is first implemented – existing employees might feel threatened or worried about being associated with a company that is labelled as employing ex-offenders

General comments

- Most offenders can become employees, only a small minority has an offence that precludes them from employment
- A number of the companies represented at the workshops are committed to employing ex-offenders and the evidence of this can be found in their programmes – Redcliffe, Wates, Compass. This evidence can be used to convince others of the value of these programmes.
- Agreed need to articulate and share the benefits of employing ex-offenders and to communicate these to senior management within companies and more widely to other companies interested in the area.

c) Employers need pre-release access to ex-offenders

- To ensure their support is useful, employers need to get into prisons to support individuals pre-release and to ensure the skills they develop are relevant to the type of jobs that they want to secure post-release.

d) Employers want to be able to support individuals pre and post-release

- Some participants felt that programmes with recognised accreditation (e.g. training recommended by Sector Skills Councils) would help to support ex-offenders get a job and also move between jobs.
- To ensure that their support is useful, employers need to get into prisons to support individuals pre-release and ensure the skills they develop are relevant to the type of jobs that the individuals want to secure post-release.
- For the level of investment companies need to put behind a programme supporting ex-offenders, it is important that the people they work with while still in prison are available for engagement post-release. The relocation of prisoners post-release can make it difficult for employers to sustain a relationship with an individual on release.
- The number of people enrolled on employer-led programmes at any one time is small, therefore the personal relationship between the employer and the potential employee is paramount. To

build and sustain these relationships effectively, the employer needs better access to individual prisons. Employers feel that it would be easier to work with prisons if they were more linked up with each other.

e) Need more of a welcome for companies who want to work in prisons

- The workshop participants reported that they felt prisons are still working quite autonomously of each other and while in principle they are eager to see people come out of prison and into work, their approach to making this work is hugely varied. Employers seem to think that some prisons respond positively to employers' approaches and others respond less positively.

f) Ex-offenders can be more demanding and potentially more committed employees than people without convictions

- Employers agreed that to employ ex-offenders, a company needs to put aside resource and time to manage it.

HR and training support

Once an ex-offender has been employed they may need ongoing support from someone in the organisation with whom they can discuss any challenges the job is presenting for them. The group felt that diversity training for the rest of the team could be introduced to support the individual's integration, so long as this wouldn't single the individual out further and create more of a distinction between them and the rest of the workforce. Some participants suggested a need to recognise that some employees might not feel it was fair that someone with a criminal record could secure a job while others in the community with no record couldn't. This underlined the need for sensitivity training.

- Some participants felt that cultural sensitivity training for other employees would help both ex-offenders and the rest of the workforce
- Training would have to be managed in a way that avoided stigmatisation of the individual
- Mentor for individual and for the team

Need for bespoke support/mentor

The group discussed the profile of ex-offenders and agreed that when a person is entering or re-entering the workforce they may need a number of supports to help them with this transition. If this is their first job in a long time there will be a natural period of re-adjustment, the employer may need to take action to provide this additional support to the individual and to the rest of the team. Support required may include advice on housing, benefits, transport etc. as well as more generic employability development. While external agencies (like BITC's Ready for Work Programme) will do a lot of this work, ex-offenders may also need the support of a work-specific mentor during this

time of transition to help move into employment – soft skills development and employability preparation – and ongoing support once they are in post.

- The group agreed that ex-offenders, once they decide that they want to re-enter the workforce and secure a job, can display a level of determination and commitment that is more intense than that of their peers. Ex-offenders who have been given a chance by an employer to prove their ability will be well-motivated to achieve their potential in the workplace.
- Some participants felt that ex-offenders who face a number of personal problems as they readjust to work may need additional emotional support to deal with these
- The group agreed that work mentors are both time and financially-resource heavy

g) Need to raise the profile of the employability of ex-offenders within the CSR agenda

The employability of ex-offenders exists within a competitive marketplace of social issues, companies at the workshops were interested to discuss how companies already involved might raise the profile of this social issue further to bring others on board.

- The discussion underlined the competitive marketplace in which the employability of ex-offenders sits. Some participants felt the issue needs to be promoted more assertively within the CSR agenda because it can get lost among the myriad of other social issues on which companies are being asked to support.
- Employers felt that a national campaign would help to get others on board and the Corporate Alliance was identified as the channel through which employers could most effectively display their commitment and leadership.
- Some participants felt it was important to engage at the top of companies to get buy-in right through a company. However they noted that it is difficult to engage ‘cold’ senior contacts on any social issue. It is difficult to get people who are not already informed to give up half of a day to contribute to a discussion in which they have limited understanding. Some felt that it might be more useful to consider slots at conventions or in publications – eg Director Magazine.
- On the point of buy-in from senior champions, participants felt that this was particularly important in relation to HR. HR needs assurance from senior management that the company systematically supports the employability of ex-offenders.
- Employers who have established programmes can apply for recognition and awards; these can help with senior buy-in.

4.0 Feedback on business-specific recommendations of Transition to Adulthood

'A New Start: Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System'

During the workshops in Birmingham and London the group was split into three smaller groups and asked to feedback on a number of recommendations from the Transition to Adulthood '**A New Start: Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System**' that have particular relevance to employers.

4.1 We (Transition to Adulthood) recommend the establishment of a national employment programme for ex-offenders. In order to mitigate the perceived risks by business, we further recommend that the Government should provide financial incentives such as tax relief and cash rewards. Offenders should be able to count time in custody as being unemployed in order for business to receive the £2,500 currently offered to companies who employ unemployed young adults.

- Employers would welcome a national structure if it created advisory support for the companies involved. Such a national structure would create a sense of being involved in a collaborative effort rather than going it alone.
- Employers agree that cash incentives might get more companies on board but the group worried that such an approach could be abused and that there would need to be some conditions attached to releasing the money relating to the sustainability of employment offered, something in there to ensure that people were taken on and kept on for some set period of time – i.e. companies developing sustainable employment opportunities for individuals.
- Participants proposed that £2,500 could only be extended to employers who employed an individual who had been a model prisoner so one that was listed as having 'enhanced status'.

4.2 We (Transition to Adulthood) recommend the implementation of a new system of 'CRB Smart' for young adults. Criminal convictions should only be declared if relevant to the job being applied for. The Probation service could decide the relevant declarations on the basis of the job role.

- The group raised the issue of an underlying trend that sees companies and voluntary organizations doing blanket CRB checks on new recruits for jobs that don't involve responsibility for a young person or vulnerable person as a way of eliminating 'unsuitable' candidates (which is illegal but to date employers haven't been prosecuted for doing this).
- The group felt that the way in which the role of CRBs has remained unclear has meant that companies can and do abuse it and use it as a standard vetting procedure.
- The group suggested that the government seems to be putting a disproportionate amount of emphasis on CRB checking as a way to safeguard young people, they don't feel that

employers are being instructed on how to use it appropriately (i.e. not excessively). The current situation is acting as a barrier to potential employees with previous convictions from applying for jobs for which they are appropriately trained or skilled.

- Employers felt that the additional burden of checking should not fall exclusively on the employer.
- Group agree that not all criminal offences make an individual a risky or challenging employee and therefore the system should support their ability to do the job rather than exclude them by virtue of the fact that they have a criminal offence.
- Difficult to imagine a CRB Smart – the group preferred the idea of full disclosure (regardless of relevance of offence to position applied for) and of increasing education of employers about what different offences mean and how to manage the risk this presents.

4.3 We (Transition to Adulthood) recommend that every young adult (18-25 years-old) who requests it should be met at the gate on their release from prison and be supported by a positive role model through this transition. The voluntary and community sector has a proven track record in offering successful individualised support and quality mentoring that reduces re-offending and could provide this support.

- Group felt role models are vital to the successful reintegration of ex-offenders
- Group also recognized that providing a mentor for each person who comes into the company is time and financially resource-heavy
- T2A is an umbrella organization that provides support to role models

5.0 Conclusions and next steps

In terms of particular campaigning issues on which we would like to work further with government or with an interested voluntary sector organisation, we have drawn the following points from views expressed in the workshops and in the Guide:

- Employers need basic information on employing ex-offenders, including:
 - the recruitment procedure to follow
 - the way to discuss previous offences in interview
- Employers and prisons need a better understanding of what each can do to support an ex-offender back into employment
- Ideally employers should not have to build bespoke relationships with each prison; some co-ordination between regional prisons would make it easier for employers to extend involvement with the prison service in their area.

- CRBs should not be used as a way to eliminate able candidates from competing for jobs that are not with young or vulnerable people – we would like to see government issuing strict guidance to companies on how and when to use CRBs.
- Employers need confidence in CRB but also point of national contact for advice and guidance when employing ex-offenders

Workshops attendance and key contributors

East of England		
Name	Surname	Organisation
Key contributors:		
Mike	Brophy	BITC
Stephen	Bourne	Cambridge University Press
Mark	Shields	Credit 360
Godfrey	Allen	Apex Trust (JobCheck)
Kevin	Cooke	Morrison Utility Services
Lucie	Cox	Morrison Utility Services
Trevor	Williams	NOMS
Stephen	Hornby	Serco
Attendees		
Michael	Ladd	Adnams
Mike	Brophy	BITC
Edwina	Hughes	BITC
Stephen	Bourne	Cambridge University Press
Colin	Stroud	Contractors Machinery Ltd
Mark	Shields	Credit 360
Trish	Hopkinson	DHL
Sally	Young	DHL
Linda	Wood	Graducom
Godfrey	Allen	Job Check
Linda	Effah	Job Check
Kevin	Cooke	Morrison Utility Services
Lucie	Cox	Morrison Utility Services
Matthew	Kelly	NOMS
Trevor	Williams	NOMS
Paul	McIntee	Obsidian Consulting
Bill	Davies	People Surv
Josie	Coombes	Royal Mail
Stephen	Hornby	Serco
Gerry	Harsant	The Legacy Club
Jeff	Yeates	Wates Construction
London		
Key contributors		

Tapan	Baidya	NOMS
Geoff	Smith	Compass Group
Maggie	Walsh	NOMS
Alice	Murray	Barrow Cadbury
Sarah	Chowdhury	BITC
Attendees		
Tapan	Baidya	NOMS
John	Haddon	EDF Energy Networks
Mike	Jackson	Camden Garden Centre
Robin	Jenkin	The Browning Chantry Charity
Kathleen	Lucey	Veolia Environmental Group
Katy	Miles	UBS
Alice	Murray	Barrow Cadbury
Karen	Payne	Ministry of Justice
Harsha	Savani	DWP
Jon	Sayers	The Browning Chantry Charity
Andrew	Sich	City & Guilds
Geoff	Smith	Compass Group
Maggie	Walsh	NOMS
Emma	Yemoh	LBHF
Patsy	Francis	UBS
Diana	Sweeney	Compass Group
West Midlands		
Key contributors		
Edwina	Hughes	Business in the Community
Justice	Williams MBE	Inner City Creative Media
Soji	Olukunle	Working Links
Louise	Hadley	HMP Hewell
Louise Hyde	Hyde	Wates
Steve	Morgan	Wates
Alice	Murray	Barrow Cadbury Trust
Attendees		
Marina	David	Barrow Cadbury
Alice	Murray	Barrow Cadbury
Shan	Nicholas	Barrow Cadbury
Jim	Richards	Better Work
Kate	Van Der Plank	Better Work
Susan	O'Shea	Birmingham City Council
Edwina	Hughes	Business in the Community
Samerina	Sahota	Business in the Community
Naomi	Telfer	Cadbury
Susan	Bonnell	Compass Group
Louise	Hadley	HMP Hewell
Justice	Williams MBE	Inner City Creative Media

Pat	Pahal	Redcliffe Catering Ltd
Sara	Dimmer	Royal Mail
Norman	Mence	Royal Mail
Louise Hyde	Hyde	Wates
Steve	Morgan	Wates
Soji	Olukunle	Working Links
Jamie	Westwood	Working Links