

PRD project – case study

Building effective practice in partnership working to support young adults (18- 24) to progress to employment, including apprenticeships



Project title - Employer Engagement: Getting NEET offenders (18 to 24) into training, employment and apprenticeships

Worth reading if you are interested in:

- Developing sustainable partnerships
- Engaging employers

Contact information

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Name of Peer Review and Development (PRD) group: HM Prisons North West PRD Group

Participating organisation(s):

HMP Kennet
HMP Risle
HMP Kirkham
HMP Preston
HMYOI Lancaster Farms

What the PRD group set out to do and why

The aim of this project was to identify and overcome the barriers to training, employment and apprenticeships faced by ex-offenders who were NEET on their entrance to custody.

Research has shown that 60% of 18- to 24-year-olds coming into custody have not been in education, employment or training for up to twelve months prior to being sentenced. Prison regimes recognise the fact that offenders, whilst requiring support to address their offending behaviour, also require support to develop functional and vocational skills to enhance employability. However, 'prison education' is, for the most part, voluntary and the NEET cohort on entry to custody can continue to be NEET if not encouraged to access the opportunities the regime provides. In addition, the particular barriers faced by the 18-24 cohorts have not been thoroughly explored and thus interventions provided to improve employability on release tend to be 'a one size fits all'.

To fulfil the aims of the project the PRD group sought to build partnerships and

extend membership of the group by approaching local training providers, employers, chambers of commerce and colleges.

The focus of this extended group would then be to identify the barriers NEET offenders face to accessing training, apprenticeships and employment.

Once the barriers were identified, the group would then use their expertise and resources to develop strategies to address these barriers. It was anticipated that this would be through the use of existing interventions available within each establishment regime together with new initiatives, eg. mentoring by employer, training provider or college, provision of 'tutorial' support, enrichment activities to include input from employers, trainers and colleges.

Ultimately the aim of this project was to identify and address the specific needs of this offender cohort and reduce the rate of re-offending. The lessons learned would inform on-going strategies to engage this group of offenders and provide relevant, sustainable support mechanisms in each PRD Prison. In addition the partnerships generated would be sustained beyond the timeline of the project and embedded into each establishment Employer Engagement Strategy to the benefit of not just NEET 18 to 24 offenders, but the whole of the establishment population.

What has been achieved so far

Partnerships

At an initial meeting of the PRD group it was agreed that a range of partners in the relevant discharge areas would be approached to join the project. A list of potential partners was drawn up and a project worker identified to liaise with these potential partners, provide information about the project and create the relevant links.

Of particular importance was the need to engage with employers. In the past, the individual establishments had worked on creating their own links, often approaching the same employers and thereby being in 'competition' for a link rather than having a co-ordinated approach. To overcome this issue the PRD group instead looked to link with the relevant Chambers of Commerce in discharge areas. This ensured access to a wide range of employers and a co-ordinated approach.

As a result of this initial work, the project now has active links with four Colleges of Further Education, all of which have a work-based training unit; one University; two Chambers of Commerce, one of which has a work-based training unit; a third sector organisation operating across Cumbria offering a range of services to 18- to 24-year-olds and two mentoring services.

Research

To establish the barriers to employment, training and apprenticeships experienced by this cohort, a series of 'offender forums' were held at each of the PRD establishments. Offenders, who corresponded to the project criteria, 18 – 24 and NEET for up to twelve months prior to coming into custody, were invited to the forums to take part in a structured discussion relevant to the barriers they faced. The forums were structured around the following points for discussion:

- background information, eg schooling, peer group, careers advice, employment experience, activity in custody, career aspirations;
- perceived barriers prior to custody;
- perceived barriers post custody;
- interventions to provide support.

Offenders identified a range of actual and perceived barriers that existed prior to custody and post custody, with a variety of issues being raised. Comments included:

'I didn't finish school. I don't have any qualifications. Who'd give me a job? So I never bothered looking!'

'I've always wanted to go to University and was thinking about social work, but now I have a drug offence on my record I won't be able to do that, will I?'

'People who haven't got a criminal record can't get a job, so what chance do I have?'

'I'd do anything, work for nothing, if I could have the chance to prove to somebody I was worth a job'

Research from the forums was collated and presented at the first meeting of the extended PRD group that included all the partners to the project. The group discussed the barriers identified by offenders, identified additional barriers that offenders had not considered and then looked at actions and interventions that could be implemented both in custody and on release to overcome these barriers. These were captured in the 'Intervention Implementation Plan'. (Project Research)

Proposed Actions and Interventions

Mentoring Support (in custody and on release)

- Create a structured model to ensure mentoring is focused on employability.
- Build on mentoring programmes already in existence at establishments, eg ACE Project and Newbridge.

Employer Engagement

- Link with local employers to provide the opportunity for offenders to be involved in mock interviews, receive advice on the application process and the skills being sought by employers
Information, Advice & Guidance.
- Provide relevant staff with up-to-date training and information on Apprenticeships, access to HE, FE and other appropriate pathways. Ensure that advice and guidance is 'realistic', ie paid work may be the goal but offenders will need to consider work experience or a 'work academy' model.
- Develop a comprehensive guide for offenders utilising the Virtual Campus and other appropriate 'media' that maps the services available to them.
- Develop a guide for staff that maps the services available in custody and on release in an effort to provide a 'joined up' service.
- Ensure that relevant staff have access to details of Apprenticeship vacancies.

Curriculum

- Review establishment provision to ensure it provides employability qualifications including Food Hygiene, CSCS, Health & Safety etc.
- Review access to provision at Level 3 and identify opportunities to extend provision available at Level 3.

Progress of Intervention Implementation Plan

Mentoring support – Two mentoring services have been identified to work with offenders prior to and on release in the Lancashire and Merseyside areas. A further link with a mentoring service in the Manchester area is being explored. The project worker is currently liaising with the mentoring service leads to build a 'mentoring model' for the NEET cohort that is specifically tailored to provide support for

employment, education and training. (Mentoring Model)

Employer engagement – Through the Chambers of Commerce, an Employer Engagement brief has been circulated to raise awareness amongst employers of the project and how they can contribute to it. There has been a good response from employers, particularly in the Lancashire area, and offers of support are being collated by the Chambers to be passed through to the project worker who will then make the information available to the appropriate establishments. (Employer Engagement Brief)

Information, advice and guidance – An ‘Information Event’ has been planned to ensure that advice and guidance staff from across the PRD prisons are fully informed about the following services to offenders on release in the relevant release areas:

- apprenticeships;
- further education;
- higher education;
- the work programme.

This event is due to take place in July and has been offered not just to advice and guidance staff from the five PRD prisons but to staff across the North West Prisons and partner staff from organisations in the community. Approximately twenty-five delegates are due to attend. Information from this event will then be used to develop a staff and offender ‘guide’ which, ultimately, will be placed on the Virtual Campus and updated on a quarterly basis. (Staff & Offender Guides)

Curriculum – The review of the present curriculum at each PRD establishment is now complete. All five establishments offer the generic work skills identified as being essential to employability, ie Food Hygiene, Health & Safety, Team Working etc. In addition, the education provider is looking to implement the PEARL programme, a ten week motivational course designed to encourage learners to identify their strengths and areas for development relevant to employability, build on their strengths and address their weaknesses.

The provision of Level 3 programmes across the PRD establishments is also complete. In general Level 3 and above is offered through distance learning via links with the Open University and the Prisoner Education Trust. The implementation of OLASS 4 in August 2012 will provide additional funding for Level 4 and the PRD establishments will be working with the provider to develop appropriate provision.

Identified Cohorts

Each establishment has identified or is in the process of identifying a cohort of NEET offenders who will act as the ‘pilot’ group for the newly developed interventions, ie work with employers, access to the mentoring service, access to the PEARL programme, and targeted advice and guidance. Each cohort will be monitored via the establishment offender management unit and ‘destinations’ recorded and monitored.

What still needs to be done

Employer Engagement – Employer events at each establishment that are offender focussed. The project worker together with Jobcentre Plus and CIAS staff will be arranging an event at each prison which will invite employers in to look at the skills being delivered to offenders and to meet with groups of offenders to discuss employer needs. It is envisaged that these events will be offender led with the agenda being set by offenders to showcase their skills to potential employers.

Information, advice and guidance – The development of paper-based ‘guides’ for relevant establishment staff and offenders together with the development of an electronic guide to be placed on the Virtual Campus. It is envisaged that further support from LSIS will be sought to support this initiative. (Staff & Offender Guides)

Curriculum – The development of appropriate Level 3 provision across the establishments in partnership with the OLASS 4 provider.

Resources to be shared with the sector

- project research;
- employer engagement brief;
- staff and offender ‘guides’ – under development;
- mentoring model – under development.

Key learning points

Employer engagement – Employers are receptive to working with offenders, particularly where the approach is to ask them, not for jobs or work placements, but for support to deliver employability skills. This brings employers into contact with offenders without pressuring them to offer work. As a result they are exposed to the benefits of employing an ex-offender and undergo a change in attitude when they see the skills and expertise an ex-offender can bring to their organisation.

Partnerships – The development of partnerships across this project has been the key to its success. All the partners that were initially approached have joined the project and contributed fully to the development and implementation of the relevant interventions. In addition, a number of the Colleges are looking to provide tailored provision for offenders on release.

All the partners have expressed a desire for the partnership to continue when the project comes to an end and this will be facilitated through the new ‘cluster’ arrangement which will be in place from 1st August. Partners value the work that has been done so far and comments have included:

‘There is so much untapped potential amongst this group of young people, it’s essential that we continue to support them to achieve’

‘Mentoring in a prison setting is not something, as an employer, I’d ever thought I’d see myself doing, but the lads are so appreciative and their attitudes to work and learning completely refreshing!’

‘We have had a number of ex-offenders join our HE programmes, all of them have completed successfully; they have just been so grateful for the opportunity’

Project Worker – The progress of the project has been enhanced by having an identified ‘project worker’ to ensure the implementation plan moves forward and milestones are achieved in a timely fashion.