

# Work and Pensions Committee

## Oral evidence: Support for Ex-offenders, HC 58-ii

Wednesday 14 September 2016

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Members present: Frank Field (Chair); Heidi Allen; Ms Karen Buck; Craig Mackinlay; Steve McCabe.

Questions 61 – 150

### Witnesses

I: Paul Anders, Policy Director, Revolving Doors, Janice Nix, Revolving Doors, Matt John, Revolving Doors, and Christopher Stacey, Co-director, Unlock.

II: Jocelyn Hillman, Chief Executive, Working Chance, Lisa Hubbard, Housing Officer, Working Chance, and Nathan Dick, Head of Policy and Communications, Clinks.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Paul Anders, Policy Director, Revolving Doors, Janice Nix, Revolving Doors, Matt John, Revolving Doors](#)
- [Christopher Stacey, Co-director, Unlock](#)
- [Jocelyn Hillman, Chief Executive, Working Chance, Lisa Hubbard, Housing Officer, Working Chance](#)
- [Nathan Dick, Head of Policy and Communications, Clinks](#)

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Paul Anders, Janice Nix, Matt John and Christopher Stacey.

Q61 **Chair:** I think Janice will be joining us as soon as the bus delivers her anywhere near the House of Commons. In the meantime, Christopher, might you introduce yourself to identify who you are for the record and we will go down to Paul and Matt?

**Christopher Stacey:** My name is Christopher Stacey. I am one of the Co-directors of Unlock, which is an independent charity for people with convictions. We provide information and advice to people on issues to do with criminal records and disclosure. We provide training to practitioners on those issues. We also work with employers in the way that they recruit and move barriers to employing people.

**Paul Anders:** My name is Paul Anders. I am Policy Manager at Revolving Doors. We are an organisation that works through policy and services for offenders and ex-offenders, people in contact with the criminal justice system with multiple and complex needs. I have a particular interest in the labour market programmes and policy.

**Matt John:** My name is Matt John. I am a member of Revolving Doors and I have personal experience of the issues that you are considering today.

Q62 **Craig Mackinlay:** First to you, Matt. Thank you for coming today. What help did you receive from Jobcentre staff when you tried to find employment upon your release. Were they helpful? What did they do for you?

**Matt John:** Prior to my release, I was referred to the Jobcentre within the prison. The member of staff was really helpful and they referred me to the Work Programme, so I was able to access that support straight away upon release. The agency that is delivering the Work Programme in the area where I am from was really supportive. In the event, I actually secured my own employment but the Work Programme offered support, and continues to offer support, in terms of enabling me to continue to work.

Q63 **Craig Mackinlay:** Did they find you a job?

**Matt John:** They didn't but I managed to find a job within two weeks of release, so they did not have a chance.

Q64 **Craig Mackinlay:** That was your own effort, having a snuffle round and finding it for yourself?

**Matt John:** Yes. That particular programme did put me in touch with an agency that exclusively works with ex-offenders to find them employment, and there was the opportunity of work through that agency,



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realistic opportunities, so that referral by that Work Programme scheme was positive.

Q65 **Chair:** Matt, can I interrupt? Janice, might you introduce yourself for the sake of the record?

**Janice Nix:** Hi, my name is Janice Nix and I am an engagement worker.

**Chair:** Great. Thank you.

Q66 **Craig Mackinlay:** Janice, sorry, you are probably hot and bothered getting here.

**Janice Nix:** I am.

**Craig Mackinlay:** I am trying to investigate what help Jobcentre gave you upon your release when you first went to them, or did they interact with you within the prison environment?

**Janice Nix:** I had no help from Jobcentre. If I had not had people in my background, in my network—they were the ones that helped me and pushed me into certain areas for me to excel myself and do what I am doing today.

Q67 **Craig Mackinlay:** Right. We have covered in the prisons. You found them quite helpful within the prison environment?

**Matt John:** Yes. But there is an issue within the prison of people being referred to the Work Programme. I am aware of individuals who have approached release and have not been referred to the Work Programme and then, upon release, they are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance. They do not have that support, so there is an inconsistency in terms of people being referred to that specific programme.

Q68 **Craig Mackinlay:** You probably only have experience of one institution, but yours was good. Do you have any evidence of other ones that are bad or does it seem to be quite piecemeal? Why do you think the relationship is breaking down?

**Matt John:** It is perhaps a lack of clarity from Jobcentre staff within prisons. There is certainly a problem within prisons, where people approaching release are not being engaged with by Jobcentre staff with enough time to complete applications to get things set up. People are getting to release with nothing set up for them and then they have to deal with that following release. That is certainly an issue and I am aware of several people where that has been the case.

Q69 **Chair:** Can I ask Janice: was Jobcentre Plus in the prison? Were you aware of their presence?

**Janice Nix:** No, we had REED. REED used to come to the prison many years ago. They would help offenders doing their CVs and some sort of office experience in everyday stuff. However, I felt that if we had more agencies from outside coming in, then they would grasp an understanding of how we feel and what we need to excel out here. The



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other thing I find is that some members outside in society are not happy with offenders that come out and try to live normal lives. I had a struggle when I decided to change my life and I came up against a lot of barriers.

I was released a little while ago and I started to work for the NHS. I stayed with them for five years and nine months and then I moved on. I got another appointment at another London hospital and I was suspended after three weeks because of my criminal record.

Q70 **Chair:** Which they would have known about?

**Janice Nix:** Yes, because I had to declare this in my application. I asked them if they wanted me to speak about this during interview, and it was not appropriate so we did not speak about it. I was employed. I started working, enjoyed my job and got through three weeks in to be told one morning when I went to work, "You're suspended and the reason why is your criminal record."

Q71 **Chair:** Would you tell us who it is, if you would not mind? Which is the Trust, Janice, that did this?

**Janice Nix:** It was King's College Hospital.

Q72 **Chair:** Gosh. Can you tell us what the story was after that?

**Janice Nix:** The story after that is I went into depression. I had to re-evaluate myself and re-evaluate what life is like living legal. I felt that society was not forgiving, even though you try your hardest to show people that you have changed. I certainly know that I tried in every single way to prove to society that I have changed, and I wasn't forgiven. However, luckily, I started working with an organisation called St Giles Trust and they pushed me forward, and I now work with a rehabilitation company.

Q73 **Chair:** What were the reasons they gave for calling you in after employing you and not discussing it when you offered to?

**Janice Nix:** I was told by a line manager that my record was not compatible with that of a customer care officer.

Q74 **Ms Karen Buck:** You had already been working for five years?

**Janice Nix:** Five years and nine months.

Q75 **Ms Karen Buck:** In a different role?

**Janice Nix:** In a different role in a different hospital, and then I had seen another job obviously for more money. I went forward for it. I got the job and then after three weeks I was suspended and then eventually sacked because of my criminal record.

Q76 **Ms Karen Buck:** But with a five-year employment history in another capacity before that?

**Janice Nix:** Yes, five years and nine months.



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Q77 **Chair:** Who was the first Trust, Janice?

**Janice Nix:** It was Woking Community, St Peter's.

**Chair:** At least they lived up to their name.

**Janice Nix:** Yes. Surprisingly, I applied for that job while I was away and they knew where I came from. They knew my history and I told them about myself, and they were still happy to employ me on my credibility.

**Chair:** A terrible story.

Q78 **Craig Mackinlay:** Yes, often there is a rest period upon release to get yourself on your feet. How did you find the transition between release and getting your first benefit payment? How did that system work? Did it work adequately? Was it muddled?

**Matt John:** There were no issues with it. I think there is quite a long delay in terms of receiving a first payment. As I say, luckily for me, I managed to secure employment within a couple of weeks, but as soon as I started that role any back payments were immediately paid by the Jobcentre. I cannot comment any further. I don't think I was on benefits long enough.

Q79 **Craig Mackinlay:** What is the system? How long ago was all of this?

**Matt John:** May this year.

**Craig Mackinlay:** So it is very recently?

**Matt John:** Yes.

Q80 **Craig Mackinlay:** What is the experience? You have left the door, you have had a bit of help and you are obviously quite pleased with the help from Jobcentre. Do you leave the door with some money in your pocket, and some sort of help and advice to get accommodation and all those other issues?

**Matt John:** As it stands at the moment, I believe the discharge grant is around £48, which is not even a week's money. I think the prisons are also authorised to fund £50 as well towards accommodation costs, which I understand is just to try to cover a first night if somebody has nowhere to stay.

This has been a longstanding issue in prisons and people being released, about the discharge grant. To me it would make much better sense for somebody to be given a two-week payment to cover those first two weeks until the normal payment starts to come through. I am aware of individuals who have got out who have found themselves with no money and have had to resort to crime to secure finances. That is simply because of the discharge grant, which I don't think has changed in years.

Q81 **Craig Mackinlay:** Does the system get hold of you before you are released and say, "Where are you going tonight? Are you going back to



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family? What are you doing?" Is it flexed to your circumstances or is it just, "Here's your money. Here's the door. Out you go."?

**Matt John:** It depends on why you are in prison. If you are a high risk offender, if you fall under MAPPA arrangements then there is a lot of support and you cannot be released without having secure accommodation to move to.

Q82 **Craig Mackinlay:** That is through NOMS I suppose, is it?

**Matt John:** Through NOMS, so in that sense appropriate accommodation is sorted. But for people who are in for less serious offences, the Prison Service and the Probation Service are quite happy for people to be released with very little money and perhaps nowhere to go.

Q83 **Craig Mackinlay:** Janice, I know your experience was some years before that so it may have changed.

**Janice Nix:** Yes, things have changed since.

**Craig Mackinlay:** It may not be for the better but—

**Janice Nix:** I certainly do feel that a lot more should be done certainly before the offender is released. I do feel that the process of claiming for benefits should certainly start within the prison before you come out. Housing should also be a big issue because somebody can come home and they have nowhere to sleep. Just going to sleep helps you to think. It relaxes you, and not having somewhere to put your head is a big, big issue, especially for somebody that has trouble with that.

Q84 **Ms Karen Buck:** Building on the same point, we know that the Work Programme for ex-offenders has been less effective than some of the other strands. I think this is probably aimed at Paul and Christopher initially. To what extent do you think that is? Part of it appears to be to do with low referrals, so it would be interesting to know why you think there are low referrals. But then—and possibly Matt and Janice can come back in on this—what is your assessment of the practical problems at discharge that can feed into a poorer performance of the Work Programme?

**Paul Anders:** If I can make a quick observation: the Work Programme overall is often maligned but I think we have to acknowledge that, in comparison to previous programmes, it has not done badly for standard jobseekers, if such a person exists. It is based on a services and sanctions model. The sanctions element of that has been somewhat problematic as well, but it has proven to be effective and cost effective.

Where the Work Programme has failed—and it is partly down to the design and resourcing that is available to it at the bottom line—is to bring in the type of specialist support that people will need on release from prison.



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We are about to publish a document soon that will go into the very high levels of very complex needs—physical, mental health and housing problems—that exist within the prison population. All of those need addressing to give people a stable foundation to move into employment. The bottom line is that the Work Programme is not geared up to do that in terms of its philosophy—it is a mass programme—and in terms of the resources that go into it.

The other big thing is that we have to acknowledge the relatively low levels of educational attainment that exist within the prison population, so we are looking at people that need a lot of support around education and skills—the stuff that will get them to the starting line in terms of competing for employment. Whether you are looking at the wider population or people who move into the Work Programme from prison into PG9, that join up with education and skills has not been strong enough across the board.

If I can make one very quick, further observation: this relates both to your question and to Mr Mackinlay's question earlier. I think there is a further problem, which I am sure the Committee will be aware of, that may exist in future. That is Universal Credit, which by design has a very substantial waiting period. Unless there are provisions put in place to mitigate it, that is going to prove hugely problematic for prisoners on release or anybody who is moving to Universal Credit from one of the legacy benefits or from employment.

**Q85 Ms Karen Buck:** In a sense, everything I am hearing this morning leads me to include there are two strands to this. One strand is the readiness of people leaving prison for the work environment—your point about skills and preparation—and the other is what is for many people a chaotic experience on leaving prison in terms of having money in their pocket, somewhere to stay, a bank account and so forth, and whether anybody in the system has enough resources to help people at that point of leaving through those first difficult weeks. Is that right? Christopher, do you want to add anything?

**Christopher Stacey:** Yes. I have worked at Unlock now for eight years and if you were to ask me the question, for example, "Who is it that is responsible for opening somebody up a bank account in a prison?", I would not be able to give you a clear answer, and that is not through lack of effort to know that. There is a real problem with a lack of co-ordination, and this is—

**Q86 Ms Karen Buck:** Sometimes you will get a good member of staff who will take it on, but that is not systematically built into someone's responsibility?

**Christopher Stacey:** Precisely. We provided some evidence to the Committee about the bank account work we have done and some fantastic evidence of good practice. There are some fantastic prison





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officers and some fantastic employment and benefit advisers for Jobcentre, but there is not clarity and consistency across the board.

On employment and benefit advisers, to what extent can you expect them to support people to get into work and to what extent are they resourced to do that? There has been a shift in their role over the years, but there is now the Work Programme.

If I can answer the question about why the Work Programme has not performed as well, there are reasons for that. The main one from our perspective is this. Unlock gets calls every day from people who have been released from prison or are in the community that have a criminal record, and they have been referred to us by the Jobcentre or the Work Programme because they disclosed that they have a criminal record and they don't know how to deal with them. They do not have a clue what they are talking about when it comes to questions like, "How long do I have to disclose?" and, "Do I have to disclose?"—the rights and responsibilities around that. That is, to some extent, why people have problems later down the line with employers because things have gone wrong.

There was some research that was done on the Work Programme and only 29% of people leaving prison had received advice from the Work Programme about their criminal record. That is really poor. I would say the same point relates to Jobcentre advisers as well. We and other organisations try to support those practitioners in understanding this, but there just isn't the investment in the skills of Jobcentre advisers and Work Programme providers. Work Programme providers specifically have not tailored their generic support to what are very specific groups of people, people coming out of prison.

There is a risk, if you are looking ahead to what could change with the Work Programme, of thinking that there need to be specialist ex-offender specific or prison release specific services. I would not go so far as to say that is the answer, but there is a bit of that and a bit more of that is needed. There are a lot of organisations that do some fantastic work with people coming out of prison in the community that are not part of the Work Programme. They are not part of the Jobcentre. They are doing charitably funded work, and there has to be a serious question for this Committee as to what extent is it ethical for those types of Work Programme providers, effectively, to be demonstrating that they are having an impact, when arguably it is questionable to what extent it is down to them. I think that is a real problem.

People leaving prison are a diverse group and not everybody should be going straight on to the Work Programme. They are not always ready for work, and I think there is a problem with this mandation element. Looking back at why the policy was developed, it was to start and advance claims for benefits before release.





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Maybe we can go on to why that is not working and how that isn't working, but I don't think the mandation element of the Work Programme helps with that. If people are ready for work and want support for work that should be available to them, so the Work Programme should reach back into prisons, but I think making that mandatory almost creates an interesting dynamic for some people leaving prison.

**Q87 Ms Karen Buck:** If you do not have day-one mandation, which I think isn't the case now, how do you make sure that the checklist approach is properly factored in? If it is not systematically following on from something like day-one mandation, how do you make sure that people don't slip through the net?

**Christopher Stacey:** The idea of the Work Programme is that it is there to support people into work. In a lot of the examples we have seen, people are leaving prison and the Work Programme is inappropriately putting them forward for certain jobs that, because of their criminal record, might make it difficult. There is almost an expectation that they have to be applying for jobs and they have to apply for 10 a week and demonstrate that. The Work Programme providers that I am talking about—and I am generalising here—are not listening or looking at the specific needs of those people applying for work.

I am not quite sure whether mandation exists in other parts of the Work Programme, but it does feel a strange element to mandate on to people leaving prison when, in fact, you are not trying to replicate the Probation Service. I would argue that in some cases the Work Programme, with the way that it is operated, has almost quasi-created that kind of relationship, which I don't think is helpful when you are trying to provide a supportive, pro-social programme.

**Q88 Steve McCabe:** I want to check, Christopher, from what you were saying, effectively are you arguing for some kind of earlier transitional or interim programme to help people make the very early preparation for work and the transition from prison to new accommodation? Are you saying that there needs to be something before you get to the Work Programme or whatever succeeds it? Is that in a sense what you are arguing for?

**Christopher Stacey:** The idea in policy terms, and I think what we have here is a real gap in a few of these issues between policy and practice and, hopefully, we can help unpick some of that.

**Q89 Chair:** How would you propose this?

**Christopher Stacey:** The idea of the Work Programme extending or reaching back into prison to cover a period of time well in advance of release, which can help people and support them in finding work on release, is what should be a good policy. In practice I do not think that is happening, so we have this gap. What we have is an understandable expectation that people are getting all of this support from the Work Programme and they are not. Don't get me wrong, in some cases they



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are and in other places fantastic organisations, charities and others, are filling that gap.

Q90 **Chair:** But who decides this? Is it up to the prison governor whether the Work Programme is in her or his prison?

**Christopher Stacey:** To some extent. Certainly, with changes in prison autonomy, that may become even more so, but I think some of these contracts and provision are co-ordinated outside in isolation from prisons. Let's not forget we have community rehabilitation companies. We have offender learning and skills services in prisons. We have the NOMS Co-Financing Organisation. We have Jobcentre and we have careers advisers. One of the points that I made in our evidence was: whose responsibility is it, at what stage, to do what? If we had that we would not even—

Q91 **Chair:** The key things that need to be fulfilled are what, Christopher: money, accommodation and job?

**Christopher Stacey:** Yes.

Q92 **Chair:** Maybe accommodation, money and job in that order. Would you agree, Janice, or not? Would the order be different?

**Janice Nix:** I do feel that we are all different and we have lots of complex needs. I certainly know that some women come from a very chaotic lifestyle and it is difficult for them to settle down. Unless we start working with those people—and I am not saying they are special or we should be treated differently—and get these people that have this chaotic thing going on settled down and then smoothed into what Christopher has suggested and yourself, sir, into living straight lives.

I felt grateful that I had support and was able to move on into this direction. I look back and I do feel angry at the system because the system failed me when I needed them most. It failed me at a time when I had started to enjoy my job, got level-headed and then, all of a sudden, "I am sorry we cannot help you anymore because you are no longer an offender". So where do I go? Where did I have to go?

Q93 **Chair:** If you had had a proper employer, you would not have needed to go anywhere would you?

**Janice Nix:** Yes. If the employer had looked at my previous record, I had letters from consultants that had expressed how well I did my job. It was on that basis that I believe I was employed at King's College and then after, when the CRB came back it was, "No, a mistake, sack you". What that did was it wrecked me. My father had to send me away because my thinking was, "What, do I go back and live a criminal lifestyle or do I press on?" Now I am happy that I pressed on.

Q94 **Chair:** In Merseyside in Birkenhead we have Tomorrow's Women who pick women up—it is terrible, they are thrown out of prison and they have to walk to the bus stop, all of this, whereas they are carted into



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prison the first time—and they are given a secure environment to come to, Janice. I think it is the most wonderful and spirit-lifting project.

Some of them have not made it as you made it on coming out, because in a sense yours was a success story until some clumsy old employer came along five years down the line.

**Janice Nix:** Thank you.

**Chair:** King's ought to be shamed by what they have done.

- Q95 **Steve McCabe:** I am wondering, Chair, if we are talking about two slightly different things here. On the one hand, Janice's experience is about a bad employer, the way the employer behaved and how you were moving on to quite a settled path and then that was disrupted. I wonder if we are also seeing that for some people there needs to be more enduring support, because simply trying to make the transition, sort out their life, move on, is not a straightforward linear path. Things go wrong. I wonder if you are also making the case for saying there needs to be some kind of broader support that recognises there will be dips along the way. Is that what you are arguing for?

**Janice Nix:** Absolutely. Yes.

- Q96 **Chair:** Paul, do you want to come in on that?

**Paul Anders:** Thanks, Chair, very quickly. One of the things that we need to acknowledge is that we are in the final year of the Work Programme now, so we need to have one eye on what comes next. What we know of the Work and Health Programme, which looks like it is going to be the successor programme, is that it is going to be much smaller. The level of resourcing I think is about 17%, 20% compared to the combined Work Programme/Work Choice level. It is probably not going to focus on people who have left prison or offenders in general, although some of them will probably come into contact with the programme by dint of being long-term JSA claimants or being on ESA.

What we are looking at there is probably a small mass programme that will have even less resources to bring in that specialist support, which we have been talking about. That will also leave people somewhat unsupported for up to two years before they reach that point.

One of the obvious things that spring to mind would be to look at Transforming Rehabilitation. It is still relatively early days but that is now available to all people leaving prison, including short sentence servers. I think there is also the possibility of building in something that reflects the complexity, which will vary from person to person. Some people will come out of prison and be readily employable. For other people that is going to be a much longer process.

At the moment, employment support is a part of the required provision under Transforming Rehabilitation, although—again, other people may be able to say more about this than I can—I have not been able to find out



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much at all about the quantity, quality and availability of employment support. It should be in scope for TR and I think there should be some potential to vary contracts perhaps in future.

**Q97 Craig Mackinlay:** Janice and Matt came out ready for work. What is your experience, Christopher and probably Paul, of people who have gone into prison with drug issues? That is not uncommon. I think naively the public think, "Oh, well, prison, they are going to be away from the drug environment. They will come out clean". That is completely naive, sadly. They come out of prison still with a drug problem, obviously not capable for work. How is the system picking those people up to continue any form of DRR process in your experience? These are a real problem batch that on the same day of release can go straight back into a life of crime very easily.

**Paul Anders:** It is hugely problematic. My background is in substance misuse, both in the health sector and within central Government. There are a number of co-existing issues that go on with that. First of all, the importance of effective resettlement, as it is with everybody, is absolutely essential. The pick up between prison drug treatment and community drug treatment: I believe Public Health England will be publishing some statistics on that shortly. My hunch is that there will be scope to improve them and they will probably turn out to be quite variable from location to location, with some areas being many, many times better performing than others.

One of the interesting bits of provision—which I think DWP will be publishing an evaluation of at some point soon—are the drug and alcohol pilots within the Work Programme. Again, no performance data has been formally published but my understanding is that those have not been successful. From a labour market programme perspective, that is quite interesting, because one of those approaches involved closer partnership working between prime contractors and their supply chains. Others involved putting more money into the programme. It appears that neither has been particularly successful. I think sometimes trying something and it not working is just as valuable as trying something and it being successful, so that might give a pointer to future programmes.

I am never entirely convinced of the merits of specific narrow programmes for people with backgrounds of offending, substance misuse or homelessness, and there have been programmes like that in the past, because you may be attaching a warning sign to people that you are working with. What we do need to find a way of doing is ensuring that that specialist support, which draws in support from health, and the social support that people need, is provided more effectively and more consistently. I hate to say resourcing again, but ultimately there is a limit to what you can expect for the amount of money that goes into things like the Work Programme.

**Q98 Craig Mackinlay:** We are hearing about a fairly disappointing picture. The transition to work is problematic. Matt had a good experience.



Janice's experience was bad. That is variable all over the place. We have a muddled situation in terms of release of money and benefits, and now we are getting what sounds like a very sketchy story on people with ongoing substance misuse problems within prison to out of prison. It all sounds very disappointing and not very encouraging.

**Paul Anders:** Outside the Work Programme, as is the case with the work going on in many prisons, a lot of treatment providers are doing fantastic work. They are commissioned via local authorities and are probably working outside of the Work Programme environment. I think commissioners, treatment providers, people working across a number of sectors, whether it is criminal justice, substance misuse, homelessness, recognise the positive impact that employment can have.

Q99 **Chair:** What are the best examples for us, Paul? What local authorities are doing that?

**Paul Anders:** If I can, I will talk about Clinical Commissioning Groups first because they are the ones that most readily spring to mind.

There is some great work going on in parts of London with the Central and North West London NHS Trust. They provide the individual placement and support model, which you may be aware of. That is an important support model that originated in the United States primarily for people with chronic and severe mental health problems. CNWL and some others have now started to extend that to substance misuse provision, because very often you are talking about people with very similar problems, very similar histories with similar barriers to employment.

That work has been hugely encouraging and they have achieved great results. With the employment, they have seen all the other benefits that you would expect from that as well, so lower re-presentation. Also, from a criminal justice perspective, they have seen a massive drop off in offending behaviour that you would also expect to a point.

That is a brilliant approach. It is a manual approach, in that you can take it off the shelf and deliver it. Greater provision of services like that could potentially be very useful. There is a different approach being used in East London—my mind has gone blank in terms of the organisation, but I will be happy to send it to the Committee afterwards—where they take a different approach. It is a more psychologically informed approach to employment support, which aims to ease the transition from a more therapeutic environment, from just treatment and support for offending behaviour into employment. I will be happy to provide the Committee with details of that.

Q100 **Ms Karen Buck:** You rightly flagged up the risks of having programmes that are labelled as applying to ex-offenders or any other group. The other side of the coin is that a generic welfare system that does not accommodate needs increases risks too. I want to ask particularly about your experience of housing support, where London, I think, is at a



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particularly high risk. With an increasing level of housing provision being in the private rented sector, my experience of ex-offenders is the near impossibility of people being able to raise a deposit and rent in advance to be able access the private rented sector, people getting into hostels and then not being able to move on from hostels because of that. What is your experience of housing support and helping people through the system to get into accommodation?

**Chair:** We will come to you, Matt. Where did the money come for your first accommodation when you left prison?

**Matt John:** That was a hostel. If I can give you an example, which I think shows a problem. One of the providers of move-on accommodation from hostels found accommodation for an individual that I know—just a one-bedroom flat. The normal going rate in that area is about £400 a month. He would be required to pay, if he secured employment, £600 a month because he would pay £200 more to the company that supplies the flat and provides support for him, even though he had found accommodation. He has a complete disincentive to find any employment whatsoever.

Q101 **Chair:** Can you explain that a bit more for us? Is it because he was on full Housing Benefit while not working and moving into work that his Housing Benefit changed?

**Matt John:** When he left the hostel and he was found accommodation through one of the housing associations, that was part of the deal of moving into the housing association flat. What he could do is give up his accommodation and move into normal private rented if he did secure employment, but that then destabilises people in terms of accommodation. If the aim in moving people on from supported accommodation, like hostels, is to keep people stable, then that is undermining the objective there.

**Chair:** Is it that the amount he got for Housing Benefit when he wasn't working was different from the amount he was entitled to for Housing Benefit when he was working, hence the change? We will look at it because these are the sort of rules—

**Ms Karen Buck:** We can take what you advise, regardless.

**Chair:** Yes. We can take this as a disincentive to work.

Q102 **Ms Karen Buck:** Yes. It should in theory mean that people still retain an equivalent amount of income after rent, because it is a sliding scale depending on the rent and income. The problem often occurs when people have variable income or it is a little bit tricky getting started and then suddenly people find they have arrears and then, if they have arrears, they cannot get themselves into housing.

**Christopher Stacey:** It may well be better if that accommodation provision in some way still supported housing. We have people that volunteer for us in the community. I can think of a couple of examples





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that are similar to that. I was reading some research on this issue of housing on release and the difficulty in local authorities not doing much in reach work. It is similar to what we were talking about with Jobcentre and Work Programme from a housing perspective—expecting somebody before release to be able to ring and do a housing assessment over the telephone. In prison that can be quite difficult because the prison does not have the local authority telephone number for you to be able to ring—practical issues that get in the way. Clearly local authority housing stock is limited.

There is an interesting question here for this Committee, insofar as how it overlaps with other areas of government, particularly the Ministry of Justice and Transforming Rehabilitation. It was mentioned earlier about TR and community rehabilitation companies and their role in supporting people into employment.

I would agree that there does not seem to be much evidence of specialist support there because at the moment they are relying on the Work Programme very often. If that is to change in the new version, I think the role of community rehabilitation companies in supporting people into employment also needs to change. I would make the same point insofar as housing as well because again a lot of community rehabilitation companies see their roles—whether this is right or not I don't know—in practice as case managers but really not providing support. You may say, "That is not their job. It is the job of local authorities or Work Programme providers," but they often rely on the CRC. I am making the same point, but there is a real lack of co-ordination.

**Q103 Steve McCabe:** I want to think about employers for a moment. If the aim is to try to help ex-offenders into work and to encourage employers to give people a chance, what is it that the Government could do that it is not doing to offer more support or incentives to employers to give people that opportunity?

**Paul Anders:** Looking at the international evidence, private sector wage incentives do appear to have a positive effect if you look at big meta-analysis of labour market programmes. They appear to be effective. What I would say is that in the United Kingdom, they have a somewhat mixed record. There was the Future Jobs Fund that was successful but entailed a fairly large upfront cost. There was the employment centred component of the Youth Contract, which offered an employer incentive which was about one-third as much, which was not particularly successful.

I think there has been research with employers that has focused on the need for guidance around dealing with criminal records, dealing with disclosure and dealing with risk, both in terms of whatever service they are providing but also in terms of the perceived risk that there may be to them as a business. Although I note that places like Timpson do it in a very high profile way, without any apparent damage to their reputation.





Also, for some businesses—and this is one that I have been contacted about several times—it is about insurance. Are there specific insurance problems in employing people with offending histories or substance misuse histories and so on?

**Q104 Steve McCabe:** Do you have any experience of how easy it would be to tackle that? I have certainly read about that. I cannot believe there isn't some kind of specialist policy you could offer or something.

**Christopher Stacey:** In truth? It is a myth. The need for guidance was mentioned. We have a project around fair access to employment and tomorrow we are launching a website that provides a significant amount of practical guidance to employers on all of these issues. Insurance is one of those areas that, in practice, it isn't a problem but there is a real myth that that is a problem for employers. It is about demystifying that.

I think there is a real role for the Government here in supporting employers to break down some of those perceived barriers. In practice, there are a lot of real barriers for employers and I think there is a role for Government there too. We may come on to things like the See Potential campaign and how things like that could be improved and could have additional elements to them that provide that kind of practical support.

**Q105 Steve McCabe:** Do you want to tell us what would be the additional elements of the See Potential programme? What is it? That is what I am interested in. What are we not doing?

**Chair:** What are the bullet points, Christopher?

**Christopher Stacey:** It needs to be co-ordinated with practical support on the ground. As it is, the See Potential campaign is a social media campaign. Many employers need practical support in changing policies and practices. They have structural problems that things like the Ban the Box campaign try to address but practically, DWP and employers—those facing people—all need to get on the ground and work with them and not simply rely on organisations like Unlock and Business in the Community to do that kind of work. It needs to be structural within the DWP, but See Potential 2.0 does have a potential to be quite effective in changing employer attitudes.

**Paul Anders:** See Potential is a reasonably high profile, very well-designed campaign. I would urge a note of caution though about the effectiveness of campaigns like this. They tend to be slow and incremental. If you look at the employers' evaluations of programmes like Time to Change—the big mental health programme—what you could probably say is that after many years of a large, well-resourced campaign employers' attitudes around mental health towards the staff they currently employed had changed and improved. However, there had not been much shift in terms of their recruitment intentions. So, yes, the campaign is brilliant and a turbo-charged version will be very welcome, but it is making direct connections with jobs—the brokerage, making introductions to employers—that is so essential.



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**Christopher Stacey:** I know that in the evidence session last week, Darren Burns from Timpson suggested the idea of tax incentives and that was just picked up on there. If we look at the fact that, as a group, people with convictions are the most likely disadvantaged group to be refused work by employers, there is a strong case to look seriously at other ways of doing this, as opposed to how you would deal with other groups.

Q106 **Chair:** Such as?

**Christopher Stacey:** Such as tax incentives; such as looking at what has been done in these other contracts that other experts can talk about.

Q107 **Steve McCabe:** Such as wage subsidies?

**Christopher Stacey:** Yes, we need to think about piloting schemes to see if they do have an impact, a bit like the idea of a campaign, and see if that has an impact. There is not much innovation from that perspective in trying to change the way that employers approach people with convictions. All the evidence from companies like Timpson, Greggs and Virgin shows that when an employer gives somebody with a criminal record a job, they turn out to be a fantastic employee and a benefit to the business. There is a real business case here; but the question is how we get behind that problem. We can provide guidance and there can be campaigns done, but on a practical level, we need to look at other ways such as incentives, and a way of piloting those to see if they could be effective.

Q108 **Steve McCabe:** I want to address this to Janice and Matt in particular. I am interested to know how effective, in your experience, the skills and education courses available in prison are when it comes to trying to find employment.

**Janice Nix:** I had some qualifications—NVQs—before I left prison, and they were not recognised out here. I don't know if it is because they were done in a prison and not through an award body like out here, but it was not worth the paper it was written on.

**Chair:** It is called Michael Gove. He changed them, sadly, but for good reasons, Janice. It is appalling, though, isn't it?

Q109 **Steve McCabe:** The point is you had spent time—

**Chair:** Acquiring them.

**Steve McCabe:** —doing training qualifications that is of no benefit as far as an employer was concerned.

**Janice Nix:** Yes.

**Matt John:** My experience is that I went to prison with no qualifications and came out with a degree. It is about being able to access education. I had my GCSEs, my A Levels and training to work on railways. There are a lot of resources in the prison service, but there is a lack of co-ordination



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in terms of guiding individuals towards specific professions or specific jobs. It seems to be that is just a general offering of qualifications and courses. The employability course is not worth the paper it is written on, and people in prison resent having to go and sit through that course for a week because it is not teaching them anything.

**Q110 Ms Karen Buck:** What does it teach you? What do they try to teach you?

**Matt John:** There is CV building, CV writing, but it is very generic. Because it is mandated, people have to sit in that course. It is very disruptive, so people are not really learning things.

My issue in terms of education and training is that too often people are forced to go on courses and engage in training that they do not want to do. Resources are geared to trying to engage people who don't want to achieve or succeed and the people who do are neglected because the resource has been spent on everybody else who don't want to do anything. Those resources could be invested in people who really do want to get on, and into qualifications that are recognised, as Janice said. Surely, that has to be a better way.

My experience is that there are loads of resources, loads of providers, loads of people in prisons working; it is just that they are not really geared towards what is required in that local area. They are not geared up towards that individual specifically; it is just very generic and generalised.

As a solution, it would be much better if a task force that involved ex-offenders could be settled in those local areas so they could input what they needed in terms of employment. One thing that people do get sick and tired of in prisons is people telling them what they need, rather than listening to them or people asking them, "What do you need? What can we do to improve your employment prospects?" There should be something like a task force, where there is service-user involvement and also engaging with local businesses.

I have been part of some fantastic schemes. There are some really good people working in the Prison Service and in some of the education providers, too, who were making massive inroads with global multinational corporations, trying to get people into work. I don't want to name the organisation at this stage because it is in its early stages, but eight people have secured permanent contracts with a global multinational company. That is down to individuals who have engaged with big business, broken down barriers and convinced these people that it is a good idea to employ ex-offenders, and that there are attributes to it.

**Chair:** On that happy note we will end. All right? Thank you very much, all of you. Janice, thank you for persevering with the bus.

**Janice Nix:** I apologise for being late.



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**Chair:** No, not at all. Greetings to your father, who was clearly crucial in your survival, wasn't he?

**Janice Nix:** Yes, he was.

**Chair:** Thank you very much.

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Jocelyn Hillman, Lisa Hubbard and Nathan Dick.

Q111 **Chair:** Lisa, might you begin by identifying yourself for the purpose of the record?

**Lisa Hubbard:** My name is Lisa Hubbard and I am a senior support worker for Working Chance. Working Chance is primarily a recruitment agency getting female ex-offenders back into work. My role is to support them with any barriers such as housing and every complex need they may have.

**Jocelyn Hillman:** I am Jocelyn Hillman. I am the founder and chief executive of Working Chance. We are a specialist recruitment consultancy for women ex-offenders.

After listening to the first witnesses, I would say that we do Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme's work for them but we do not get paid for it. We have even had Work Programme people—women, our candidates—who have been given permission to leave the Work Programme to come and work with us because they do not have the expertise.

**Chair:** Don't spoil your evidence. We just want you to identify yourselves at this stage.

**Nathan Dick:** I am Nathan Dick. I am head of policy and communications at Clinks. We are a national membership organisation supporting voluntary sector work in criminal justice across England and Wales. Our original submission was also in partnership with Homeless Link, a national charity covering England, supporting accommodation charities. I will do my best to represent their views as well.

**Chair:** Karen, Jocelyn has opened the questions for us.

Q112 **Ms Karen Buck:** You were listening to the previous evidence and what we are particularly interested in hearing about from you is the extent to which women face particular barriers—either inside prison or on release—and what they may be.

You heard the evidence about obtaining qualifications in prison—two very different experiences from our previous witnesses. What is your



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experience of the preparation in prison for women in obtaining qualifications and preparing themselves for release? How can it be improved?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** It is patchy and pretty third rate but you do get individual good experiences. We go into the prisons and run employability workshops. I forget who it was that said the employability courses run in prison are pretty useless.

Q113 **Ms Karen Buck:** Why is it patchy?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** It depends who the provider is, who the governor is and how involved the prison officers are.

Q114 **Ms Karen Buck:** Is there no sense from outside that there is a requirement to apply pressure to even up standards, and have not just a decent quality, but something that is fairly consistent?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** It is very difficult. There are 21 CRCs. You have different providers doing education and different providers doing work programmes. There are so many people that you have to have a really first-rate number one governor who is in control of what is happening. That is difficult and it is rare.

Q115 **Ms Karen Buck:** That answers the question, though. There is the Work Programme; there is an expectation that employment on release is an objective. If that priority that leans towards employment is there externally, how come some prisons are allowed to get away with providing such a poor quality of preparation, education and training?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** I don't know. I can't tell you why some people are allowed to get away with it, but we do know from our experience with the JCP inside and outside prison, that they do not have the experience and expertise. Some of our candidates have come to us and said they had been told to lie by their JCP—"Go to an employer and lie; don't tell them you've got a criminal conviction"—and that is a terrible thing because if you are on licence and you lie then you can be sent back into closed conditions. We find that the Jobcentre Plus people are just not trained; they do not have the experience. They just don't have the right advice to give people, so that is why they send them to us.

Q116 **Ms Karen Buck:** I am going to come on to some of the post-release questions and other people will too, but on the issue of qualifications inside prison, just fill us out a little bit in terms of the women's experience. A very high proportion of women in prison will have low or no qualifications and potentially other barriers, such as learning difficulties or mental health problems.

**Jocelyn Hillman:** They are not very high qualifications; I think the highest is NVQ 2. You can get degrees but you have to go and get money from lots of different sources to do that.



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The skills they are teaching, particularly in women's prisons, are not particularly applicable to today's world. They are not teaching them anything that you need in 21st century Britain. They are teaching them hairdressing. We don't need hairdressers. We have too many hairdressers in this country. They are teaching them sewing. Life has moved on. What they are getting taught in prisons is not really relevant and it is not how you go about getting a job. We send a job alert out to our candidates every week. Say we get 20 women come back and say, "We would like to apply for that job," and then we say, "You have to apply for it online". Nobody applies because they don't know how to apply for a job online, and yet this is how the world is today. Women in prison should be taught how to do Excel spreadsheets, coding and business administration, not sewing and hairdressing.

**Q117 Ms Karen Buck:** That does not happen because many governors simply do not give a priority to it or are not interested in it—why?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** The providers who come in, like Manchester College—who are not called Manchester College anymore, but I have forgotten what they are called; Novus or something like that—I think they are told what they do.

Employers nowadays do not ask for a qualification so much; it is more about attitude, personality and, "Are you going to show up? Do you have the right attitude?". A large part of our work is about engaging and educating employers. We go out and engage with employers, take them into the prisons, run assessment days. So, for Virgin Trains, Pret a Manger, William Hill—some of our big-volume employers—we run assessment days. We run them in their offices for them, we get 20 of our candidates and we do exercises with them. This is how employers today hire people. They do teamwork, they see how they interact, and then they pick the people they want and we bring them back for interview. So, they are more interested in, "Have you got the right attitude? Are you going to show up for work? Are you going to smile at the customers?".

**Q118 Chair:** Lisa, what would you add?

**Lisa Hubbard:** A lot of the women that come through Working Chance will come to us from different referral routes—from prison, community service, and we do have some who have qualifications. However, some that have come from prison cannot get on the course because they do not meet the right criteria, it is not in their sentence plan or they run out of time. So there are many reasons why some of the women do not get on the courses. Some women do not want to do sewing, or do not want to be hairdressers; they want to do something else. Some of the women say it is so hard to get into the education part of the prison. With short-term sentences, by the time the women have done all of their assessments and they have got through the first couple of weeks, time is running out and they will not even hit education. They are pushed to do sport or some other activity. With the longer sentences, they can get on





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the courses—but obviously they are not the courses they need for when they come out.

**Nathan Dick:** The co-ordination point is an interesting one that has been raised a lot previously, and also the point about who is responsible for the services that are being delivered. What we have noticed is that there are loads of different kinds of education and employment services being delivered. You have OLASS contracts working on education into employment-type services that are contracted across the country to a specification that a prison governor has no control over. Those things are in existence and I know that has already been part of the Dame Sally Coates review to relook at some of that, and think about how you could bring in the labour market to think more carefully about what gets provided in terms of education. We would support that.

Q119 **Chair:** What has been the impact of Dame Sally Coates's review?

**Nathan Dick:** We are yet to see an impact. The sector is waiting to see to what extent some of these changes could be made: whether or not executive governors in those six prisons that were announced can move away from those contracts or who they would commission to provide those; whether or not they would move to thinking about the provision of not just generic education. Unfortunately, there is no women's prison in those reform prisons.

**Jocelyn Hillman:** Exactly.

**Nathan Dick:** For those people in the male population, to what extent does that work with people who are really far away from the labour market; people who are very unlikely to get a job without addressing their mental health issues, drug addiction, alcohol abuse; to what extent is it talking to people who have multiple and complex need or even those people who are aspirational and want to do degrees or want to do very technical, specific courses; to what extent do they talk to the labour market? We don't know yet how that could be redesigned and what that would look like in local prisons. We are playing a waiting game, as are other partners such as the Prisoner Learning Alliance and Prisoners' Education Trust, to see where that review goes and how the new Secretary of State decides to implement it.

**Chair:** It was very much Michael Gove's baby, wasn't it? Maybe we could write to Dame Sally Coates and ask her.

Q120 **Heidi Allen:** Can I ask a very quick question? Jocelyn, you mentioned earlier that it is about what kind of governor you have; at the end of the day so much in life is like that, isn't it?

Do you think, this review aside, that governors on average have the skill, the wherewithal, the desire? Is the culture right, among governors, to own this for themselves if they could? Or do some governors think this is just about a job—"I am locking up and on you go"? How many of them are in the mindset that this about rehabilitation—"I want you to be





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running when you leave here, not stumbling”?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** Julia Killick, who used to be at Holloway, was excellent, and her deputy, Amy Frost, was excellent. Robin Eldridge, the new governor at HMP Downview, is excellent. They really want the women to succeed; they really want to help and get them out there. I can’t speak for the male prisons but most of the number one governors—the ones really in charge—do have the women’s best interests at heart, I would say.

Q121 **Heidi Allen:** It sounds like these contracts are put on them; these are the people that are going to come out here and deliver these courses for you. Would they have the skills to do it for themselves and organise their own providers and commission people like you directly for example?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** Robin Eldridge, at HMP Downview, definitely would, yes.

Q122 **Chair:** So they should have their own budgets?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** I think so, yes. They should be able to decide what they are teaching in the prisons and what they are doing.

Q123 **Heidi Allen:** It is the local market, isn’t it?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** Yes.

Q124 **Craig Mackinlay:** Can I develop that point, probably with you, Jocelyn?

What does the MOJ say to the prisons? Do they give any sort of diktat, that this is what they should be doing? Or are governors really in control of how much interaction and access they allow the Jobcentres, charities like your own and Clinks, with the different training organisations, with external employers coming in looking for contracts of work? Is this very much in the ambit of governors? If they do this right, I would say, or guess—and I think that is what we are all aiming for—they are going to get a lower reoffending rate. Are governors judged on reoffending rates?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** No.

Q125 **Craig Mackinlay:** I know it is going to be different from prison to prison because of the type of population they have.

**Jocelyn Hillman:** Their responsibility ends when the prisoner leaves.

Q126 **Craig Mackinlay:** What I am saying is, should they perhaps be incentivised financially, personally, if they have very low reoffending rates, because they have done all these right things, which some governors are obviously capable of doing?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** It is an interesting idea, which I have often thought of because as Chris was saying, if a prisoner leaves without a bank account, leaves without somewhere to live, whose responsibility is it?

**Craig Mackinlay:** It is not the governor’s anymore.



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**Jocelyn Hillman:** The buck does not end anywhere at the minute, but governors are not in charge of their prisons because everything is privatised and everything is outsourced.

**Nathan Dick:** There is an issue here about accountability, responsibility and what is measured. I am not entirely sure that giving governors solely the responsibility for reducing reoffending is a solution. Some kind of cross—

Q127 **Craig Mackinlay:** Do they have the tools to say, “Yes, your organisation, come in here. You, employer, come in here”? They must have the rights of access. They could make their prison more open to these ideas.

**Jocelyn Hillman:** The CRCs are meant to be in charge of that now. They are meant to come in 12 weeks before every prisoner leaves and do an analysis with them of their housing needs, all their needs. That was the idea behind TR, the through-the-gate idea, so that the same people looking after the prisoners in the prison would come out and do through-the-gate, but I think the jury is still out as to whether that is working or not.

**Nathan Dick:** I think that is true. Prisons are obviously the central part, the way they are run—the prison governors and all the staff within them are absolutely critical to getting this right. We see a responsibility among other providers, such as community rehabilitation companies and the national probation service, who are looking at high risk offenders in the target operating model for resettlement services—it is focused on CRCs—that would include providing direct support in custody, helping offenders find accommodation, providing assistance with retaining employment held pre-custody, and gaining employment and training opportunities post release.

There is also obviously a responsibility on Jobcentre Plus and what they are providing, and how they help people into employment. Then there is also a range of voluntary sector organisations that have a passionate interest in making sure this works well. The smaller ones, especially, can find themselves on the fringes of those bigger commissioning systems and processes. So the idea of having some ability to bring in the right providers to do the right thing at the right time is great; but if they are not joined up and doing things collaboratively under a reasonably good central strategy of why we are doing it, the danger is that that will fall down and be unco-ordinated.

**Chair:** I think we have to reform strategy. Thank you very much.

Q128 **Ms Karen Buck:** I have two things. First, Jocelyn, you are saying the jury is still out, but how would we know what the results are? Is anybody tracking some of that key post-release data? It is easy enough to establish whether somebody goes into employment, but is anybody tracking whether people do leave without a bank account? Otherwise, how do we possibly know? It all seems to be so nebulous and



fragmented.

**Jocelyn Hillman:** I cannot tell you whether they ask if they have a bank account. I know they get the BCTG 1 when they go in, then the BCTG 2, and then the BCTG 3 12 weeks before they leave, which is meant to see if they have they still got the same needs as when they first went into prison, and then what has changed, and do they need housing and so on. But we go into the prisons and take over at that 12-week point. We do not get paid for it but we go in and we have set up our office in Downview so that we work with the women 12 weeks before they leave. Lisa will go in and find out about their housing; find out about their children; do they have debts; domestic violence? We will find out all that before they come out of prison. Then when they come out they come to us, and we carry on with the support.

Q129 **Ms Karen Buck:** This is something we will probably have to pursue in other ways but just talk us through it. You referred to a couple of examples. What are the gender specific dimensions of pre and post-release arrangements that people need to be aware of? To what extent are the contracted and formal arrangements that are in place to support ex-offenders properly factoring in those gender specific dimensions?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** Women are more complex than men, I think everybody would agree with that, and so there are just more issues to deal with. Obviously, they usually have children—most of our candidates have children—and they may be main carers, so you have all that to deal with. Lisa spends half her time doing child custody work as a McKenzie friend—going into court and representing our candidates to get their children back. I will pass over to Lisa, but you get this Catch 22, where if they can't get their children back, they can't get the two-bedroom flat; but they can't get the two-bedroom flat till they get their children back.

**Lisa Hubbard:** Most women coming out of prison will not be eligible for legal aid for the Children and Family Court. This year I think we have represented three of our candidates in court, but it is a chicken and egg situation. They can see their children but they now have to pay to see their children in a contact centre because those have also been privatised, so some of them, who also have finance and debt problems, will also have to pay, or find money, to see their children. We have one lady now who is paying £200 a month to see her children twice a month because the service has been privatised. That is her priority, so all her other debts are backing up as well.

The court issue is that the children will be with either a parent or a foster carer when the women come out and their first priority is to get their children back. That is part of what they want to do. So they will be referred to us. We will do an assessment and then we will look at their support needs. We may have picked that up in the prison beforehand too. So then we start the court process. Because they are not eligible for legal aid, we go as McKenzie friend. We are not legally trained; we just have to sit there and encourage them through the court process.



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If they do not have accommodation the first thing the judge is going to say is, "You need suitable housing". The majority of women who come out of prison do not have housing in place. They might be staying with friends, sofa surfing. They are seen as the hidden homeless. Every local authority will have different criteria of vulnerability, so just because you are an ex-offender does not mean that you are entitled to housing. So, we then go through this whole process with the court, which can take up to a year at times, and sometimes women give up halfway through that process because it is too hard a battle.

**Chair:** While the cost of keeping the children in care mounts.

**Lisa Hubbard:** Exactly.

Q130 **Heidi Allen:** Supported housing follows on naturally from that. I have been doing quite a lot of work trying to nudge the Government into giving us an answer on when supported housing funding is going to get this brave new model; what is going to happen with it. I have visited a few supported housing schemes, though not for ex-offenders, to be fair. Talk to us about what is so special about them and why—as I am sure you are, as we are—desperate to hear what the Government's plans are.

**Lisa Hubbard:** I have read every review and I have read everything online, and female ex-offenders do not even get mentioned within the supported housing—

**Heidi Allen:** Offenders generally do.

**Lisa Hubbard:** Offenders generally do; however, it is not up there as a priority. There is mental health, domestic abuse and learning disabilities. From what I have read, ex-offenders are not very high on the priority list. There is not much provision out there for supported housing. A lot of people have lost their funding because it is the care element that needs to come with it.

Our women, who we have met through the prison system, might not be suitable for supported housing because they are quite ready to go into the workplace. However, we have to house them into supported housing because there is nothing else and then we snare them up in that for a year while we try to get them moved on. My experience of women in supported housing is, if they do have complex needs and they are not ready for employment, that is fine; but if they are ready for employment, we are doing them a disservice by putting them in supported housing because the rents are so high. As the gentleman mentioned before, why would they want to go back to work if they have full Housing Benefit that is paying everything and there is no pathway to move them on.

Our problem with supported housing is that we have no pathways to move them on and then they end up in the private rental sector. Who is going to pay the first month's rent? Who is going to pay the deposit? We have to seek creative ways of trying to get money from other charities to



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try to help our women move from supported housing to the private rental sector.

**Q131 Heidi Allen:** Do you have a feel for roughly what sort of percentage of women who come out really should go into supported housing and how many should not?

**Lisa Hubbard:** I could not give a percentage. When Holloway was open, we were part of the Holloway Hub; when women were released from prison they came straight up to the Hub. I would say 25% of those women had no housing on the day of release. As charities and agencies up in the Hub, we had to try to find them alternative housing. The only housing we could ever put them into was supported housing because they had come out of prison with no money—£46—and the £50 for first night accommodation is very rarely mentioned or used. We certainly did not have access to it when we were working in the Hub.

**Chair:** That is only one night, as well.

**Lisa Hubbard:** Yes, it is one night. At times we have had to pay to house somebody. I have sat for six hours in Croydon Council with 10 black bags, and at 5 pm they are still not a priority.

**Nathan Dick:** There are a number of worries in the sector about accommodation for people leaving prison. They are the experts on women so I will cut across here about the entire population. Some inspection reports that have come out recently show people are noticing quite steep declines in the amount of settled accommodation on release from prison. We had one example in Wormwood Scrubs where it fell recently from 95% into accommodation to 60%, with no explanation as to why that had happened. In the HMP and YOI Bronzefield it fell from 95% to 83%. We also heard examples of people being released with tents and sleeping bags, so they are going into street homeless situations, which we know costs the taxpayer a great deal of money. We know crisis care is very expensive and that is what those people are going into.

We also know that for those who do need supported accommodation, for those few who really require it, charities that Clinks represent and also that Homeless Links represent, are incredibly worried about caps to local housing allowance. We have charities telling us they would be set to lose 60% of their income on those properties, which would mean they would need to lose them. I don't think we can underestimate how difficult it is in this housing climate to buy those properties back for supporting people leaving prison and provide that supported accommodation.

**Q132 Heidi Allen:** I am still not getting a feel, though, for how many prisoners there are where supported housing is the right thing for them, as opposed to them being put there because there is nothing else. It is obviously for people who, as you say, need a little bit more of a helping hand before they are ready to stand on their own two feet. I don't know,



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Nathan, whether across the whole piece you have a feel for how many—forgetting the funding issues for the moment—it is right that they should go into supported housing as opposed to not. Whether there is an alternative is a different conversation.

**Lisa Hubbard:** For some women, it is the right place for them. Sometimes the first day they come out of prison is the first day of their sentence; they are rebuilding their life. In prison they have been a little bit protected; things have been put in place for them. There might not be the right courses or anything, but they have been a bit protected. So the first day they come out, with £46, and have not had to face all the issues they have had to face before—so, yes, I think for some women supported housing is the right way.

Q133 **Chair:** Do you think you might give us any figures? Maybe you can come back to us; not now.

**Lisa Hubbard:** Yes, we will come back to you.

Q134 **Heidi Allen:** I am just trying to understand how big a part of the accommodation jigsaw piece supported housing is.

**Nathan Dick:** I could talk to colleagues at Homeless Link as well, and other colleagues in the sector, to see what the proportion would look like. But if you look across the needs of people in prison and look at the prevalence of serious mental health issues, long-term unemployment, rough sleeping upon entering prison, no family support, the number of people who have come from the care system who find themselves in prison as well—

Q135 **Chair:** Nathan, if you could quantify these for us it would be very valuable.

**Nathan Dick:** Yes, I appreciate that. I will definitely try to get that information to the Committee.

Q136 **Craig Mackinlay:** Continuing the supported housing theme, after the current review period, what is the outcome you think would be satisfactory for ex-offender-type supported housing? I have stories of the most appalling supported-housing areas in Kent, truly appalling, that people end up going to. It is the worst place for them to be because you end up with a charity—I won't name them, they are simply appalling—that has created a ghetto by buying houses in one big area, earning huge amounts, with the chairman of this charity, who owns these properties, earning £1.3 million a year because he owns these properties personally and rents them to his own charity. It is legal but so sharp I cannot even describe it. People who go there come out worse than if they had never gone there in the first place because you have this sort of ghettoised problem of a huge area of 200 supported-housing units. So it is not always the great answer. I don't know if these exist elsewhere in the country but the example I have in Kent is probably the worst supported housing you will ever see in your life.





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**Lisa Hubbard:** I think there is good supported housing and there is bad supported housing. I have experience of working for a charity in Wales for 12 years; it was magnificent supported housing. But I think we need to look at supported housing and have a journey for those people. You need to bring in sources of employment, working with other charities that can link them back in to the job market. Yes, address their needs but also support them.

The charities you are talking about, and there are others, just put people in a house and they will get the support visit once a month. That is not enough. A female ex-offender coming out of prison will have a journey to put back together, so she will need more support than just once a month, and that is why some of our candidates get support from us. We give tailored, individual, one-to-one support and try to put that back together but we work with supported housing that will only see them once a month because, as you say, they have a vast number of people. I feel we need to be working with housing and other charities that can put together a plan for women, and men too, but also look at their journey. They cannot stay in supported housing forever and it is the move-on pathway that we need to be clear about, because we snare too many people up in supported housing.

Q137 **Craig Mackinlay:** We are worried about what the effect on offenders will be if the rates go down to LHA levels and stay there.

**Lisa Hubbard:** If they are not given any support, I think they will just stay there. We need to be clear on the support we give anybody, female or male, in that supported housing, and look at the level of support that is given, and what support, but also link it back into the other things, like recruitment, employment, and the move-on policy.

**Nathan Dick:** I might be able to add to that. We are aware of rogue landlords setting up charities that are doing things that we would not want to see done. We think this is small scale and we think it is the kind of thing that needs to be eradicated from the sector. The housing and homelessness sector has come a long way from some poor practices to far, far better practices that we have seen recently and we see that almost all the charities that are doing really good work are not holding big surpluses and are not making lots of profit from the rent. They really are just rolling that straight back into the support they are providing.

Q138 **Steve McCabe:** I want to move on from housing and go back to thinking about Jobcentre Plus. We heard earlier that the employability schemes in prisons are not very good—the CVs are poor; the interview preparation is not really consistent with how employers recruit people; and many of the skills taught are not really helpful either.

What do you think Jobcentre Plus staff can do to both help better prepare people while they are in prison and for their release so that they do have a better chance in the job market?



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**Jocelyn Hillman:** You have to hire quality people to do the job. As I said before, a lot of the people and the services given are third rate. You have to have people in there who really want to be there and really want to help the women—and the men—get what they are entitled to and get what they need to move on. But they are not incentivised; it is just a job; they become part of the system; it is third rate.

Q139 **Steve McCabe:** There was a suggestion, I think from someone on the previous panel, that maybe we should have some kind of specialist Jobcentre Plus-type staff with greater understanding of the difficulties facing people in prison and coming out of prison. Is that what you mean by better staff? Do you mean higher-quality people, but people with better training and understanding?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** Yes, better training and understanding, as I said earlier on. Some of our candidates come to us and say that the people in the prison at Jobcentre Plus have told them to go on to a disability allowance because they get their money faster and then they get caught up in that. That is the kind of advice they get. Then they get the advice where they come out and lie to the employer about their conviction, which is breaking the law if you are on licensed probation, so they can get sent back into closed conditions. It is either through ignorance or they don't care but whatever it is, I don't know, and I am sure there are some jolly good people in the Jobcentre Plus—

Q140 **Chair:** Have you seen any evidence of work coaches?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** I don't know what a work coach is. Sorry.

Q141 **Chair:** Those people who are going to provide this very specialist care, working with the individual and future employers.

**Jocelyn Hillman:** I have not come across them.

**Lisa Hubbard:** We sit in some of the Jobcentres, trying to get referrals, and we have done for the past 18 months. I have seen no difference. It is just a different title. Maybe it would be useful to have an ex-offender working within their teams; someone who knows the challenges and battles that they deal with, but also not putting them in another box where they have to go in and say, "All right, you go this way," and everybody else goes that way. But maybe Jobcentre Plus should employ ex-offenders who have had a journey.

**Chair:** Some experience; a great idea.

Q142 **Steve McCabe:** Just another job title? What is it these people are doing? Obviously, we were given a very glowing description of what a work coach does. You have not come across one.

**Lisa Hubbard:** A lot of the women will go to Jobcentre, will sign what they need to sign, maybe show a CV, and that will be it.

Q143 **Steve McCabe:** So they are essentially signing-on clerks.



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**Lisa Hubbard:** Yes, they are signing on. They may be asked to produce a history of jobs that they have applied for that week. Now, it could be that they are just copy-and-pasting from something because it is something else they have to do—

Q144 **Heidi Allen:** Can I just check? Are these Jobcentre staff inside the prisons? Or is this once they are out?

**Lisa Hubbard:** This is outside.

**Heidi Allen:** Outside.

**Lisa Hubbard:** Yes. A lot of the women, when we were sitting in the Jobcentres, saw their coach or their adviser: "Go and see Working Chance; they can help you". They do have a lot of people going through every day so—

Q145 **Heidi Allen:** You should just get paid for what you do.

**Lisa Hubbard:** Yes.

**Nathan Dick:** It is not the first time that we have heard that, referring straight from those services to another charity, who are not necessarily commissioned by that service, which I think is something that needs recognising.

On the work coach issue, we have only picked up anecdotal evidence on this, but what we have heard is that increasingly they are being asked to take on really complex and challenging cases but are not being provided with the training and expertise to work with those cases. So that is probably the experience you are hearing on the ground there.

We have seen one good example in the north-east—where I think they were originally trialled—probably with a bit more resource and maybe with a bit more guidance, and they were working with a north-east forum that brings together a range of organisations to support people with multiple needs. There they seem to have engaged with a range of providers in a much more joined-up way to do something that is quite creative. But that is just one example. It shows the possibility. If you were to work with specialist voluntary-sector organisations on these kinds of things and improve the training of the work coaches, you could potentially make them something they possibly are not in other areas and stop it from being just a change in job description.

Q146 **Chair:** Have you been asked to provide work coaches?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** No. We do provide them, despite whatever else is happening.

At HMP Downview we have gone in and opened up our own office and we have two women, serving prisoners, who we have trained up to act as our recruitment consultants in there. We pay them £20 a week. So we are paying them to run our office for us. We go in once a week and



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register women and Lisa will go in and do housing, and so on, with them, and we get the women to run the employability courses for them. I attended one a couple of weeks ago, with our two serving offenders in there. We have trained them up and they ran the employability workshop: how to disclose your conviction at interview; interview techniques; how to do this and that. They were brilliant, better than we could do it, and it is really good because it is peers teaching peers.

**Q147 Chair:** Job coaches are supposed to be much more than that, aren't they? They are supposed to link into the job market itself, with employers.

**Jocelyn Hillman:** Yes, well, I don't know whether they do or they don't. We do. We take employers into the prisons. We run employability fairs and we take our employers into the prisons and then we do—it is like speed dating but it is speed interviewing, so we take employers in and then the women, once they have done one of our courses, can be interviewed by 10 different employers and get the experience of being interviewed.

**Q148 Steve McCabe:** I dare say the danger in this that we can come up with trendy terms and give people new job titles, but nothing substantially changes.

What does tailored support for female offenders look like, apart from the things you have just said that you are doing with your staff? If you were to try to summarise tailored support for female offenders so that we know when we see it and we know what has to happen, what does it look like?

**Chair:** What would the training be of officers to provide that?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** It is treating people as individuals and it is treating people as human beings—those are the first two important things—and being aspirational for the women.

Sometimes we have women come out and say, "I want to be cleaner" and you say, "Why do you want to be a cleaner?" "Well, I have been told I have to be a cleaner." "Do you want to be a cleaner?" "No." "What do you want to do?" "I'd like to be a florist." "Okay, let's try to get you a job in a florist's shop."

So, it is exactly that kind of thing. You have to treat people as individuals. Every woman has a different story: she has kids; she hasn't got kids; her husband is rejecting her now because she is in prison; she hasn't got anywhere to go back to—you have to take it all. You have to listen to the whole story and not be a sausage factory. You have to treat everybody as an individual, which is what we do and why we have such an amazing success rate.

**Q149 Craig Mackinlay:** I do worry. We are trying to do a lot to educate employers that you can find some very good, value-added people, after



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they have been released. You have Timpson, you have Virgin, and others, that are doing this admirably. We could propose tax incentives, perhaps via National Insurance holidays for employers who take on offenders. But surely the easiest way to prevent these barriers that you have to disclose—all these problems that you face when you face an employer or try to get employment—surely self-employment would be a very good way forward. Are we doing anything in the system to say here are the tools to go down the self-employment route? You don't have all these worries and barriers but you have a means of getting into a job market in your own time, with your own enthusiasm, but a bit more simply. Are we doing any of these types of training for people?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** I don't believe in that. When I started Working Chance and I used to go into the prisons, the majority of the women would say to me, "I want to be self-employed," and you think, "Oh, yes," but you realise afterwards that it is only because they think they do not have to disclose at an interview and be treated as Janice was treated. Very few people can be self-employed. You have to work harder; it is more difficult; you have to do insurance; you have to be able to do your books. Very few people are successfully self-employed.

The other problem is that when people leaving prison are steered into self-employment it is often like the ghetto you were talking about. They are with other ex-offenders. Our theory is that if we get our women into mainstream employers they are learning a different way of living and the employers are also learning from them. Many of our employers say that they are humbled by employing our women. Can I just say that Damian Green, the Minister for the Department for Work and Pensions, has just hired one of our candidates?

Q150 **Chair:** As a political adviser?

**Jocelyn Hillman:** As a political adviser, we hope, yes; a researcher.

We need more MPs and more big names to hire our candidates and talk openly about it and say, "I have hired women ex-offenders and they are great and the world does not stop". That is the way to engage with more employers because they are really risk averse, really nervous. The way we find to do it is to just get employers to meet face to face with our candidates and they all come away saying, "They are just human beings, just like me. They are just wives, mothers, daughters. Wow, they are really quite nice. I didn't realise they could be so articulate. I didn't realise they could be so well-dressed".

**Nathan Dick:** There is something else as well as that in just the practicalities of getting employers into the prison to do some of the work. You had some good examples of big companies that have managed to work their way into a prison and have been really proactive. One of the key ways that we have seen people get out of the prison into the community, experiencing real-life work, is through release on temporary licence. Although only 1% of release on temporary licences fail, and only



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6.1% of the 1% involve arrestable offences—that is the equivalent of five arrests per 100,000 releases on temporary licence—we have seen a 37% drop in release on temporary licence since the changes to the Prison Service Instructions.

In a survey we did with the Prison Reform Trust of the private sector and charities, we heard two-thirds of them saying they found it much more difficult to engage with prisons, to get in there, to get people released on temporary licence. I think it was 68% of prisoners who reported that they were experiencing more difficulty trying to get on release on temporary licence. These are people who want to get out there and want to get into jobs, but it is just a policy that seems to be creating a bottleneck in the system that is stopping people from getting put on these really great work placements. It is running the risk of losing the sympathy and joint working of some of these really great employers.

We have heard there is going to be a review of this, but we have not heard anything recently. I appreciate a lot has been happening in the world of politics, so that might be why, but we would really like to see that progressed and a review of that policy. I think that would encourage employers to come into the prison—if they could see what great benefit they receive from people being released on temporary licence and working for them, and hopefully take up a permanent job with them on release.

**Chair:** Great. Thank you very much for your evidence. It was really helpful. If we could have those data, that would be immensely valuable to us.