

Employment hotline opens for offenders in Scotland's largest prison

Minister for Welfare Delivery Will Quince will announce today, (Thursday 23rd January 2020) during a visit to HM Prison Barlinnie, that it is the latest prison to take part in a scheme where those close to release are to be offered dedicated work coaches.

They will look to support them back into employment as quickly as possible, and ensure they are able to access finance once they leave prison.

Working with the Scottish Prison Service, the scheme has been trialled in HM Prison Cornton Vale and HM Prison Perth since September.

The trial at HM Prison Barlinnie will be further enhanced, as it will include prisoners being given access to a new dedicated telephone line. This will mean they are able to make their Universal Credit claim over the telephone, with their identification being verified before they leave prison.

Will Quince, Minister for Welfare Delivery, said:

Better preparing prisoners for life on the outside helps them unlock employment opportunities once they're released.

Without access to work or money, some can feel pushed to re-offend, and this pilot aims to take prisoners out of the cycle of crime and get them into work. This has benefits for both them and the wider economy.

Working together with the Scottish Prison Service, the UK government is determined to ensure ex-offenders stay out of prison for good.

Jobcentre staff will support prisoners to obtain identification documents, prepare their CVs and identify training, work experience and other employment support.

They will be given help to fill in their benefit claims through restricted and supervised access to computers, and to the dedicated phone line where those eligible will be able to arrange a payment on the day of their release.

Currently, prisoners at HM Prison Barlinnie are unable to start a Universal Credit claim until they are released, and this can lead to delays in receiving support if they do not have proper identification documents, or are unable to get to the jobcentre to verify their identity.

Failure to find work is one of the biggest drivers of reoffending. Recent statistics show that in Scotland, one in four ex-offenders were reconvicted

within 12 months of being released.

Almost 250,000 people in Scotland are receiving Universal Credit, which includes tailored employment support. It is helping record numbers of people into work, with on average 1,000 more people in the UK going into work every day since 2010.

In Scotland there are 2.65 million people employed, which is up 18,000 on the quarter and up 217,000 on 2010.

- Department for Work and Pensions provides a range of support to help prisoners/ex-offenders re-establish themselves back in the community and into work
- ex-offenders are prioritised for access to Alternative Payments in Universal Credit, including benefit payments paid more frequently than monthly and housing costs paid direct to the landlord
- prisoners who are serving short-term sentences, or are on remand in custody, are able to retain support with housing costs to safeguard their tenancy and prevent them from becoming homeless on release
- 131 DWP Prison Work Coaches across Great Britain work with local partners and employers to help secure training, work experience and employment opportunities for prisoners
- our [See Potential guidance](#) encourages employers to recognise the benefits of employing people from disadvantaged groups, including ex-offenders
- the See Potential toolkit incorporates a range of tips on recruiting those with criminal records, including spent and unspent convictions. It also contains testimonials from businesses who have already hired ex-offenders
- between 2016 and 2017, [27.2% of offenders](#) were reconvicted within a year
- in Scotland, we are delivering flexibilities in Universal Credit payments known as Scottish Choices on behalf of the Scottish Government. People receiving full service Universal Credit can choose if they want to be paid twice monthly, and they have the option to have the housing element of their Universal Credit award paid directly to their landlords.

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