

# Speech: From the wings to the workplace: the route to reducing reoffending

It's a pleasure to be at HMP Isis today to see some of the excellent work being done to help prisoners get a job when they are released.

The impressive workshops being run here are helping prisoners to learn a trade and gain the practical skills and confidence they need to succeed in that trade beyond these prison walls.

## **The power of work**

Why is that important? Well, I believe in the power of work to change people's lives.

As Work and Pensions Secretary, I saw how making work always pay supports people to take the right path in life and create a better future for themselves and their family.

It's not just the financial security of having a pay packet, although of course that is important. It's everything else that comes with being in work: purpose, structure, networks, having a stake in something. Nearly 400,000 more people have moved into work since this time last year; almost 3.3 million more people since 2010.

This sustained increase in employment and the strong jobs market that has supported it are great success stories.

Indeed, the employment rate in the UK has been increasing over the last few years. At over 75% – it is now the highest it has been since records began in 1971.

Yet, there is one group in society – former prisoners – where only 17% are in PAYE employment a year after they are released.

I want those ex-offenders who are committed to change to share in this country's remarkable jobs story.

Prisoners who come out of prison and do not get a job are a burden on our welfare state and on hard-working taxpayers. Without the focus of a job, they then often fall back into crime. That reoffending costs the UK economy £15 billion a year.

Ensuring ex-offenders come out of prison, not onto benefits but into work, reduces the financial burden on taxpayers and the welfare state. It reduces reoffending and, therefore, the number of victims of crime.

## **Prison as a turning-point**

In my first prisons speech as Secretary of State in March, I set out what I saw as the purpose of prison: to protect the public, to punish by depriving liberty and to rehabilitate.

I am clear that offenders are sent to prison as punishment, but they should leave with prison having been a turning-point in their lives.

Delivering on that third purpose – rehabilitation – is at the heart of the education and employment strategy I am launching today.

Although prison cannot help those who are not willing to help themselves, for those offenders who see prison as a crossroads in their lives, as a chance to change, I want prison to provide them with the impetus and incentives to set them on the path to a better life.

The foundation for creating that better life is work. This strategy will unlock opportunity and put prisoners on a path to employment.

Because the evidence is clear: if a prisoner gets a job after coming out of prison, they are less likely to commit more crime.

As a window on the world of work opens for a prisoner, we often see the door to their criminal past close behind them.

I want to make breaking through into that world a more realistic prospect for prisoners.

## **Education**

The first step is education – as Dame Sally Coates' 2016 report made clear.

Over half of offenders assessed on arrival into prison have the English and maths skills of an 11-year-old.

Now, we have made good progress over the last few years in improving the quality of education in prisons:

70% of the education provided by the Offender Learning and Skills Service is now rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding, That's up from 51% in 2015.

But we must go further.

We need to ensure that offenders not only leave prison with the basic skills they need to enter the workplace, but with the skills that employers are looking for.

Frankly, there are too many low-level qualifications being delivered that reap little or no reward for prisoners and are of little relevance for employers.

Education in prisons needs to be much more closely tailored to the skills

that employers in the local area need.

That's why our Prisoner Apprenticeship Pathway is helping link training with employment opportunities by giving a 12-month apprenticeship on release – that's a guaranteed job and a guaranteed income.

And governors know their prisoners and local areas best. I've said before that governors should govern. That's why from April next year, they will be given full control of over how education is delivered in their prisons, able to tailor it to meet the needs of local employers and the local labour market.

## **From jobs on the wings to jobs in the workplace**

Alongside education, it is also important to get experience of work.

At any one time, thousands of prisoners are working in prison. A third of prisoners have a job of some kind.

That could be a job working for one of the 300 businesses that have set up shop in prison, or it could be a job that directly helps with the running of a prison.

Whether working in a call centre, cleaning the wings, cooking in the kitchens or cutting hair in the prison barbers...

...prison work gives prisoners something purposeful to do and helps prisons run effectively. Prisoners can pick up some useful skills along the way.

However, that work has not been geared up in a way that properly prepares prisoners for employment or provides a clear route from a job on the wings to a job in the workplace.

This strategy will build on the success we have had in getting prisoners doing jobs in prison and translate that into supporting prisoners into jobs when they come out of prison.

## **The Clink Partnership**

We will be putting rehabilitation into the prison work routine by incorporating more on-the-job training and vocational qualifications into traditional prison jobs.

In three prisons – HMP Bristol, Styal and Risley – we will work with The Clink charity to give make working in a prison kitchen more focussed on training, work experience, placements out of prison and ultimately employment and mentoring on release. I hope this is a model that can be adopted more widely.

## **Workplace ROTL**

A key aspect of The Clink model is getting prisoners experience of work outside prison.

That real-world experience from is vital. The evidence shows that it can reduce the risk of reoffending.

So, for prisoners who have earned it, and who have been properly risk-assessed, we will get more prisoners out of their cells and into real workplaces.

We intend to do this by expanding and increasing the use of release of prisoners on temporary licence for work – or ‘workplace ROTL’.

This will give more prisoners the chance to prove themselves to an employer, to build relationships and their CV, and to get that real-world experience before they leave prison.

Prisoners who go to work under ROTL are treated just like any other employee: they earn the same wages and have similar deductions made for tax and national insurance, as well as making contributions from their pay packet to victims’ funds.

So this is a foot through the door to work and to many of the benefits of being a real employee and it is an important step towards re-joining society and committing to the obligations that are required in doing that.

Workplace ROTL is also a powerful incentive to promote good behaviour in prison.

If you do not cause trouble, if you take the right path and play by the rules, that behaviour will be recognised and you will be rewarded with a more liberal prison regime.

In that sense, expanding the use of positive incentives like workplace ROTL, has an important role to play in reducing the levels of violence and disorder in prisons, alongside the other measures we are taking.

## **Personal prisoner stories**

As part of the launch of this strategy today, you will see and hear stories of prisoners who have successfully taken that path, whose lives have been transformed from the opportunity workplace ROTL provides – and as a result of their own drive and determination.

Let me give you just three brief personal stories.

Yasmin used workplace ROTL to start work at an engineering firm in the West Midlands. Since then, she has successfully applied for an apprenticeship and started full time work. She is now hoping to study for a degree.

Mikey got three months of work experience under his belt before being released from prison. He now works for Balfour Beatty. His advice to others if they are given the same opportunity he had is: “grab it with both hands”.

And Luke, whose story features in one of our campaign videos, went to a jobs fair in HMP Brixton. There he met a lady who signposted him to construction

company Keltbray, who took him on. He says that if you have no prospects and nothing to lose, it's very easy to fall back into what you know.

Luke says it's a good feeling being self-sufficient. He doesn't have to claim benefits. He can pay his rent. He is grateful to Keltbray for giving him a chance and now wouldn't even consider doing anything that could put his new life at risk.

## **Employers**

These stories show what is possible.

But the fact is, half of employers wouldn't even consider hiring an ex-offender.

Beyond the prison walls, we need to change the mind-set of many employers.

We also recognise the argument in favour of financial incentives and will balance this against wider government objectives. We will consider how to take forward a national insurance contributions holiday alongside wider work on employer obligations and incentives.

However, the basic incentive for employers should be that prisons provide a pool of potential recruits just like Yasmin, Mikey and Luke – hard-working and loyal.

Some employers see that, including many of the employers here today.

But I want more employers to look past an offender's conviction to their future potential.

How do we do that?

Well, we do it by working more closely with employers so they open their eyes to the benefits of hiring ex-offenders.

Our New Futures Network will do just that. It will create stronger links between prisons and employers, championing prisoners and acting as a broker between prisoners and employers.

But this is not just about creating paths from institutions to employment, but about creating cultural change from within organisations themselves.

I want employees, from the shop floor to the boardroom, to call out and challenge their employers if they turn a blind eye to attracting and representing ex-offenders in their workplace.

Fostering that cultural change will send a message that says: we believe in what you can contribute now and in the future, not what you have done in the past.

And let me tell you why I believe now is the moment we can seize the opportunity to do that.

I think the public mood has changed somewhat in recognising that when an offender comes out of prison we, as a society, don't want them to return to crime and reoffend. The public expects them to get a job and become law-abiding citizens.

It makes good sense for society. It also makes good sense for business. In some ways, now more than ever.

## **Labour markets**

As I mentioned at the start of my speech, we currently have a thriving jobs market. We know that demand for workers in some sectors is very high.

Leaving the European Union is also likely to have an impact on the workforce in sectors such as catering, construction and agriculture.

I see an opportunity here for both prisoners and employers, particularly those operating in these sectors.

By expanding the use of ROTL for work, more prisoners will not only be able to get a foot through the door to sectors like these, but employers will be better able to fill short-term skills gaps whilst also developing potential permanent employees for the longer term.

That in my eyes is a 'win-win'.

Ultimately though, a lot of this is down to an employer's mind-set and their recruitment policies. I want an employer's head, as well as their heart, to be in the right place.

As a government, we are doing our part.

We have already 'banned the box'. That means we no longer ask about criminal convictions upfront in the recruitment process, which can put off ex-offenders from applying in the first place and lead to preconceptions on the part of the person recruiting.

We are also working with prisons to place ex-offenders into fixed-term jobs in the Civil Service. That way, an ex-offender can build up confidence and experience and have a good chance of being successful when they apply for a permanent role.

## **Conclusion**

For those prisoners who are prepared to change, this education and employment strategy will help to break down both the barriers and the prejudices prisoners have faced.

I say to prisoners: if you treat prison as a pivotal turning-point in your life, if you commit to change and to bettering yourself, if you are prepared to step up when you step out of prison, this strategy will work for you and empower you to prepare for, and move into, work.

I want prisons to be places of hope and aspiration that can propel prisoners into employment when they are released. In doing so, they will be able to start a new chapter in their lives, contribute to society and join their place in this country's extraordinary jobs story.

Thank you.