

BRIDGING THE DATA DIVIDE

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT, HEALTH
AND SKILLS CONTINUITY FOR PRISON LEAVERS
SUBJECT TO MAPPA ARRANGEMENTS IN THE
NORTH EAST

PRIORITY 3.4 (EX-OFFENDERS, HEALTH, SKILLS, AND EMPLOYMENT)
NORTH EAST ECONOMIC INACTIVITY TRAILBLAZER

ABOUT

Authors: John Stubbins, James Stoddard, Lauren Marshall

March 2026

DWP Economic Inactivity Trailblazer

Priority 3.4: Ex-Offenders, Health, Skills and Employment

The authors wish to thank the police, probation, and prison professionals who gave their time and expertise to this project, the third-sector organisations who shared their experiences of working alongside the statutory system, and the people subject to MAPPA supervision who trusted us with their stories. This report exists because of their willingness to speak openly about a system that affects their lives. We hope it does justice to what they told us.

Cover Image by Saad Chaudhry on Unsplash

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
The Main Argument	10
Pillar 1: A Proven, Urgent And Costly Failure	11
Case Study: The Scale Of The Problem At Hmp Durham	13
Risk, Ownership, And Accountability	15
What Prison Leavers Told Us	18
Pillar 2: Three Practical Solutions, Ready Now	21
Pillar 3: An Overwhelming Investment Case	29
Recommendations	31
Year Two Investment 2026 – 2027	32
Longer-Term Policy Recommendations	33
Conclusion	34
Appendix A: Research Methodology	35
Appendix B: Transforming Rehabilitation And The Roots Of The Data Divide	37
Appendix C: International Comparisons	39
Appendix D: The North East And Neca Context	42
Appendix E: What Is Mappa?	44
Appendix F: Employers Handbook	46
Appendix G: Employers Leaflet	47
Appendix H: Prisoner Passport	48
Appendix I: Summery Of Research For Third Sector Partners	49

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The DWP Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programme (2024–2026) is a national test-and-learn initiative. In the North East, Priority 3.4 focuses on ex-offenders, a group disproportionately affected by barriers to employment, housing, health continuity, and information transfer that drive both economic inactivity and reoffending cycles. This three-month research project, led by The Oswin Project, mapped those systemic barriers and explored practical ways to address them. The Oswin Project brings unique credibility to this work: 70% of its staff have lived experience of the criminal justice system, and its model has achieved a 96% non-reoffending rate in the first year for low to high-risk service users. This compares starkly with the MOJ publication, January 2026 reporting a national average of 43.8% for the January to March 2024 cohort. That track record represents an estimated relative saving of £1,480,000 to £2,000,000 for a given cohort of 100 prison leavers who work with the Oswin Project every year.

WHAT WE DID

Using reflexive thematic analysis and a pragmatic realist approach, the study brought together evidence from:

- 18 prison leavers, including five detailed follow-up interviews with individuals under MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements) supervision
- Two employer confidence workshops with 24 participants from social care, housing, and customer service sectors
- One dedicated third-sector engagement day with 15 organisations
- Interviews with HMP Durham staff (Head of Education, Skills and Work; Prison Employment Lead)
- In-depth discussions with two senior MAPPA professionals: Deborah Alderson (retired Chief Inspector, Northumbria Police) and Winton Keenen (retired Chief Constable, Northumbria Police)

KEY FINDINGS

Why Vital Information Gets Lost When People Leave Prison

Information about prison leavers, including qualifications, health records, appointment details, and employment history, exists within statutory systems such as the DPS (digital prison system) and ETP (Education Training Portfolio). But it is routinely fragmented, inaccessible, or arrives in unusable formats at the point of release. This is not primarily a technology problem. It is a relational and cultural one. High remand turnover at HMP Durham (approximately 450 releases per month), short intervention windows, and post-Transforming Rehabilitation fragmentation all compound the issue. Even when documents are partially in place, people leave custody without the trusted relationships needed to use that information effectively.

Prison Leavers Face a ‘Cliff-Edge’ on Release

Across all 18 interviews, participants described the first weeks after release as profoundly overwhelming. Housing instability was the single most cited practical barrier, cited by 15 of 18 participants. Documentation gaps affected 14 of 18. Anxiety, boredom, and isolation were identified as key triggers for potential recall by 12 of 18. Without meaningful daily structure, and without trusted human connection, even people who had secured their ID and bank account while still in custody found themselves in a state of prolonged instability.

Third-Sector Support is the Critical Protective Factor

Seventeen of 18 participants credited third-sector relational support as a key protective factor in their resettlement, contrasting its flexibility and trust with the more bureaucratic, time-limited nature of statutory supervision. Senior MAPPAs confirmed that statutory services are “demand-rich and capacity-poor,” and that third-sector Information Bridge Workers could provide the relational scaffolding that statutory services cannot replicate at scale.

Employers Are Open, Not Hostile

Employer risk perception was moderate rather than averse: the mean risk score across workshops was 3.0 out of 5, with the most common descriptors being “Trusting,” “Opportunity,” and “Second chances.” When using a traffic light system to grade Employers readiness to hire someone who had a criminal offence, they consistently indicated they would move from an undecided “amber” to a “yes” when clear rehabilitation evidence and third-sector mentoring support were available. The primary barrier is not prejudice but the absence of accessible tools and structured support.

The case for inclusion of Third-Sector Organisations in the MAPPAs process.

Senior MAPPAs described statutory teams as “demand-rich and capacity-poor.” They lack the time and resources to gather detailed, day-to-day knowledge of prison leavers’ lives, needs and gaps. In contrast, third-sector organisations hold deep relational insight into the individuals they support, insight that prison leavers themselves repeatedly described as essential for successful resettlement. Despite this expertise in housing, employment, mental health and desistance, third-sector organisations are currently excluded from MAPPAs structures and meetings. Participants strongly agreed that giving vetted third-sector organisations a pathway to contribute to the MAPPAs process, with appropriate safeguards and information-sharing protocols would be common sense. It would strengthen both risk management and rehabilitation outcomes without compromising public protection.



Figure 1 HMP Northumberland

WHAT WE CO-DESIGNED

Three practical tools emerged from the project, developed with stakeholders rather than imposed on them:

- The Prisoner Passport: a hybrid physical folder combining redacted DPS data with an enhanced ETP-style document, containing verified certificates, health summaries, medication lists, appointment calendars, a disclosure letter template, and a local services map. Designed to be handed over on release day and carried by the individual.
- The Employer Confidence Handbook: a set of practical one-page guides on disclosure timing, GDPR-compliant handling, risk-assessment templates, and direct third-sector support contacts, co-produced by employers during the workshops.
- The Information Bridge Worker model: a proposed staffing model embedding lived-experience workers at prison reception and release hubs, supporting passport completion, disclosure coaching, and warm handovers into community services.
- None of these tools were implemented or piloted during the three-month test-and-learn phase; the work remained at the co-design and consultation stage. They are ready for development, implementation and evaluation in a funded second phase.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate Actions (2026)

- Mandate a standard physical Prisoner Passport as discharge documentation at every prison, beginning with HMP Durham and HMP Northumberland. Contents should include verified certificates, health summaries, medication lists, appointment calendars, a local services map, and a disclosure letter template. HMPPS should lead a formal design and consultation phase.
- Pilot third-sector Information Bridge Workers embedded in HMP Northumberland's reception and release hubs. These workers (four individuals suggested) would support passport completion, disclosure coaching, and warm handovers to community services. The Oswin Project is currently active within HMP Northumberland and is well placed to lead this.
- Adopt and distribute the co-produced Employer Confidence Handbook across all North East probation areas and employer networks. This directly addresses the moderate risk perception identified in workshops (mean 3.0/5) and provides practical tools to convert 'grey-area' cases into employment opportunities.
- Explore formal observer or contributor status for vetted third-sector Bridge Workers in MAPPA Level 2 and Level 3 meetings on a case-by-case basis, using existing information-sharing frameworks.

Year Two Investment Recommendations

- Scale the Prisoner Passport and Bridge Worker model to 60–80 high-risk leavers, including a higher proportion of MAPPA-managed individuals. This would require four additional Bridge Worker posts at approximately £50,000 per post (including on-costs), a total investment of £200,000. Using the Oswin Project's 96% non-reoffending rate as a benchmark, the projected public-value saving is estimated at £2.1m–£2.9m for this cohort alone.
- Formalise third-sector observer and contributor status in MAPPA Level 2/3 meetings through GDPR-compliant Memoranda of Understanding between NECA, Northumbria Police, probation services, HMPPS, and vetted third-sector organisations.
- Commission an independent cost-benefit evaluation of the Oswin Project's wrap-around mentoring model, using the 96% non-reoffending rate as a baseline and comparing it against the £37,000–£50,000 annual societal cost per reoffender.

Longer-Term Policy Recommendations

- Develop differentiated inspection frameworks for remand prisons such as HMP Durham. Applying the same performance standards as longer-stay training prisons creates unrealistic expectations and diverts resources away from the rapid, relationship-led support that high-turnover populations need.
- Reinstate embedded pre-release planning: community probation officers and third-sector workers should be placed inside prisons 12 weeks before release to conduct joint planning and co-produce resettlement documentation. This directly restores a proven practice lost after the 2014 Transforming Rehabilitation reforms.
- Fund Scandinavian-style ‘import teams’: community health, employment, and housing providers entering prisons 12–16 weeks pre-release to begin building the relational scaffolding that prison leavers consistently identified as the most important protective factor against recall.



Figure 2 HMP Deerbolt



Figure 3 Cafe 16 at HMP Northumberland

CONCLUSION

This test-and-learn project provides a robust evidence base for human-centred, third-sector-led approaches that complement rather than compete with statutory systems. Employment is the strongest protective factor against reoffending, yet only 17% of people leaving prison secure work within a year and almost 50% are returned to custody; the data divide, and the lack of relational support, are primary reasons why.

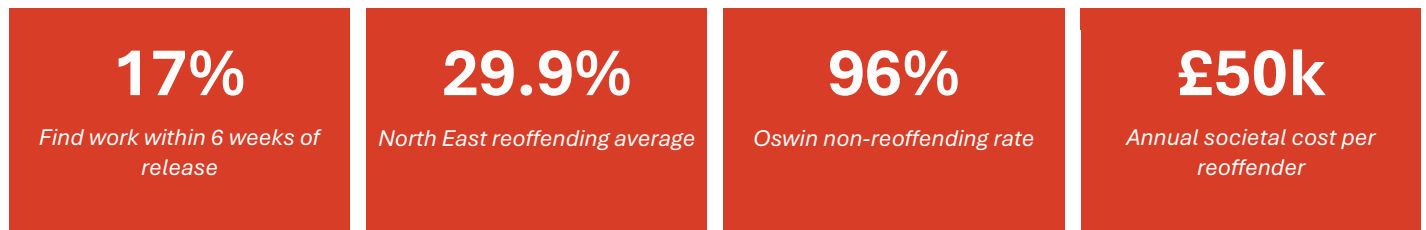
The solution is not a new system. It is better coordination of existing ones, anchored in trusted relationships. The Oswin Project's track record, and the breadth of stakeholder support gathered during this project, positions the North East to lead a national conversation on what effective, evidence-based resettlement looks like in practice.

This work also directly supports the Gauke Independent Sentencing Review's (2025) emphasis on rehabilitation-focused sentencing and improved through-the-gate support and aligns with NECA's devolution priorities around economic inclusion and upstream prevention.

THE MAIN ARGUMENT

THIS RESEARCH HAS IDENTIFIED A CLEAR RATIONAL FOR INVESTMENT IN BETTER SUPPORT FOR PRISONERS SUBJECT TO MAPPA ARRANGEMENTS ON RELEASE. THREE PRIORITY AREAS ARE IDENTIFIED EACH WITH A CLEAR PATHWAY TO DELIVER.

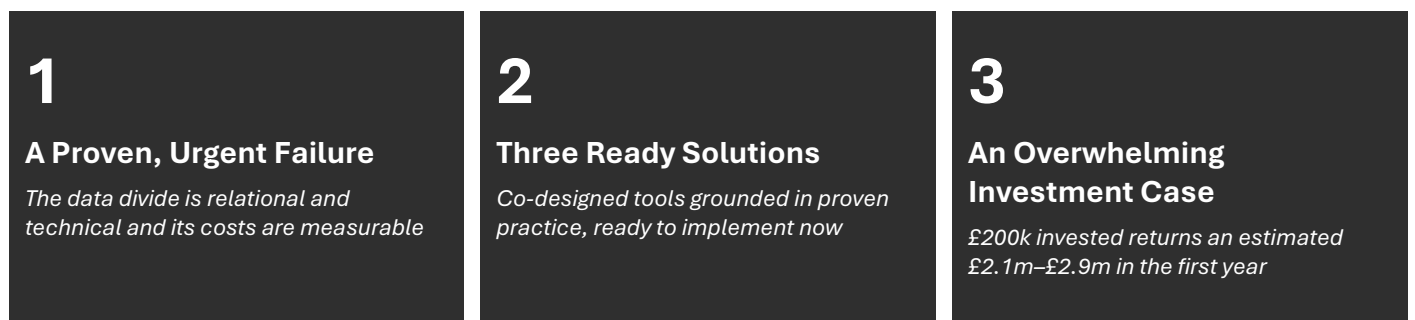
There is clear evidence that 'business as usual' will not address the systemic issues with reoffending. Pathways to employment have been shown to reduce the rates of reoffending. However, for an ex-offender to find employment a number of other support mechanisms need to be in place. This research has sought to explore how these routes, and the information required to facilitate them, can be developed with the ex-offender at the heart.



As part of this project, three co-designed tools were created: a Prisoner Passport, an Information Bridge Worker, and an Employer Confidence Handbook. These solutions emerged from three months of research across five distinct stakeholder groups. They are not innovative ideas. They restore and adapt what demonstrably worked before the 2014 Transforming Rehabilitation reform and what continues to work in Scandinavian systems where recidivism rates are around half of UK averages.

This research demonstrates that a £200,000 investment, as recommended in this report, would save between £2.1 million and £2.9 million annually in costs associated with reoffending: each person who reoffends costs the public on average £50,000 per year, not once, but repeatedly, as long as the cycle continues.

This is not an argument for further research or further consultation. The evidence is sufficient. The stakeholder consensus is clear. What is now required is action.



PILLAR 1: A PROVEN, URGENT AND COSTLY FAILURE

THE DATA DIVIDE IS RELATIONAL, NOT TECHNICAL

Every year in England and Wales, approximately 55,000 people are released from prison. In the North East, where unemployment and economic inactivity have over decades persistently exceeded the national average, only 17 per cent of individuals find work within six weeks of release. The regional reoffending rate regularly fluctuates above the national average. These are not inevitable statistics. They are the predictable outcome of a specific, identifiable failure: the collapse of the relational infrastructure and data sharing mechanisms that once connected prison to community.

It is important to be clear about where that failure sits, because not all information sharing between criminal justice agencies is broken. For the purposes of risk management and public protection, well-established systems exist and function effectively. The police use a range of tools, including ViSOR (the Violent and Sex Offender Register), the Police National Computer and many forces use RMS tools like NicheRMS to track and share intelligence on high-risk individuals. Probation services operate NDelius, a national case management system that records licence conditions, appointments, and supervision activity. OASys (the Offender Assessment System) provides structured risk and needs assessments that follow an individual from custody into community supervision. MAPPA brings police, probation, and prison services together through regular multi-agency meetings at three escalating levels, with clear protocols for sharing risk-relevant information. These systems were designed to keep the public safe, and within that remit they broadly work. The gap is not in risk management. It is in everything else.

The problem is that each of these systems was built to serve the needs of its own agency, not to support the person moving between them. Prison health services may record clinical information in SystemOne, a system widely used in custodial settings, but that record does not automatically transfer to a community GP. Probation can see licence conditions and risk flags on NDelius but may have no visibility of the qualifications someone completed in custody or the employment placement they held inside. The police hold intelligence relevant to public protection but have no mechanism for sharing positive information, such as sustained engagement with rehabilitative programmes, with employers or housing providers. Before 2014, probation trusts ran embedded resettlement teams inside prisons. Probation officers built relationships in the weeks before release, assembled physical resettlement packs, and coordinated multi-agency handovers. The Transforming Rehabilitation reforms broke that infrastructure apart: probation was split between the National Probation Service and privately-run Community Rehabilitation Companies, the embedded pre-release role was largely lost, and the coordinated handover became nobody's specific responsibility. The system was partially reunified in 2021, but the relational infrastructure that once made information flow has not been rebuilt. Beyond the statutory agencies, third-sector organisations and employers sit entirely outside all of these systems. They receive referrals with limited context, often learning about someone's needs only when the person discloses them directly.

Information about prison leavers, their qualifications, health records, employment history and upcoming appointments, exists within statutory systems. Digital record keeping in prison is distributed between three tools, the new DPS, virtual campus and NOMIS. These record qualifications, risk assessments, work history and other key data throughout a person's time in custody. The Education Training Portfolio (ETP) is a physical folder containing certificates, designed to travel with the individual. Both systems have significant practical limitations. Information from DPS or NOMIS cannot be downloaded or printed by the prisoner and becomes completely inaccessible the moment they leave the prison estate. Community services and employers cannot access it. The ETP folder is often under-resourced and incomplete: it may contain some certificates but typically lacks health summaries, medication information, appointment details or practical information about local services. Staff told us that the folder had once been a more comprehensive tool, but funding cuts had progressively reduced its scope.

CENTRAL FINDING

The data divide is not a technology problem. The information exists. The systems exist. The failure is relational and cultural: the absence of trusted human connections to make that information usable when it is most crucial — the day someone walks out of prison.



Figure 4 HMP Low Newton



Figure 5 HMP Durham

CASE STUDY: THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM AT HMP DURHAM

HMP Durham is a remand prison with extremely high throughput, approximately 450 releases and transfers per month. Many are at very short notice: bail decisions, sentence completions and transfer orders that give staff little or no time to organise documentation, let alone build the kind of pre-release relationships that might make a difference.

We transfer and release about 450 men a month. We don't have them here long.

HMP Durham, Head of Education, Skills and Work

The high remand volumes and short stays mean that most individuals leaving HMP Durham have had no sustained engagement with education, skills or employment workers. Staff are candid about the gap between what the systems are designed to do and what happens in practice: data that should travel with a person becomes a closed archive the moment the prison gate opens.

FIVE SPECIFIC BREAKDOWN POINTS IN THE RELEASE PROCESS

Research with HMP Durham staff identified five points where information is most commonly lost or made unusable:

- **Digital lock-out:** DPS records are effectively archived the moment someone is released. There is no mechanism for community services to access them, or for the individual to retrieve their own data — even though that data may represent months or years of documented qualifications, work experience and risk-relevant history. A contributing factor is institutional risk aversion around data protection: prisons are cautious about sharing information across system boundaries, and without clear governance frameworks, that caution defaults to non-sharing. The Prisoner Passport process directly addresses this by establishing a consent-based, co-produced record that the individual owns and controls, removing the data protection barrier by placing the person, not the institution, at the centre of information transfer.
- **The documentation gap:** The ETP folder rarely contains health information, medication lists, GP registration details or appointment calendars. People leave knowing they have appointments but not when, where or with whom. They know they are on medication but may not know the name, dosage or where to collect it in the community.
- **Short-stay settings:** Remand prisoners may spend only days or weeks in a prison before transfer or release, making meaningful pre-release preparation structurally impossible under current arrangements.
- **Inspection mismatch:** HMP Durham staff described being inspected against the same performance standards as longer-stay training prisons — a structural misalignment that diverts resources toward meeting targets designed for a different kind of establishment, at the expense of the rapid, relationship-led work that a high-turnover remand population requires.
- **The cold handover:** Even when documents are partially in place, there is typically no supported introduction to community services. People arrive at probation appointments, GP surgeries and Jobcentres as strangers, with no previous contact established, at precisely the moment when they are most vulnerable and most likely to disengage.

THE HEALTHCARE GAP AND DRUG-RELATED RECALL

HMP Durham staff identified drug misuse as the single greatest challenge in their establishment. The volume of people passing through compounds an already difficult clinical situation: stabilising someone on a medication programme takes time that the remand environment simply does not allow for. People are frequently released mid-programme, before medication regimes have stabilised and before community healthcare services have been notified, let alone engaged.

The seven-to-fourteen-day gap in prescription continuity in the community creates an immediate crisis for individuals who may have only recently achieved stability. This is not a problem unique to Durham. It is a structural consequence of designing healthcare handovers around administrative processes rather than clinical needs. The Prisoner Passport addresses this directly by including a medication summary on headed prison health paper, with the repeat prescription sent ahead to a community pharmacy before release. This simple intervention requires only coordination and planning, not new systems.

RISK, OWNERSHIP, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

RISK, OWNERSHIP, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

One of the most consistent findings to emerge from the research was a pattern in how risk is constructed and communicated across agencies. Put simply: the organisation that holds primary responsibility for managing an individual is the organisation that expresses the most risk about them. This is not a minor procedural observation. It shapes every aspect of how people leaving prison are understood, discussed, and supported, or not supported, across the system.

HOW RISK TRAVELS THROUGH THE SYSTEM

When someone is in custody, the prison holds responsibility. Risk is framed through the lens of institutional security: compliance with regime, adjudications, behaviour on the wing, engagement with sentence planning. That framing serves a purpose inside the prison, but it creates a particular narrative about the individual. By the time that narrative is passed to probation at the point of release, it has already been shaped by the priorities and anxieties of the institution that produced it. Positive information, such as sustained engagement with employment programmes, completion of qualifications, or months of stable behaviour, tends to be recorded but not emphasised. It sits in the system as data rather than as part of the story that travels with the person.

Once an individual is released, responsibility transfers to probation. At that point, probation becomes the agency that will be scrutinised if something goes wrong. And this is where the dynamic becomes most visible. The probation officer is now the professional whose name is on the file. If the individual commits a Serious Further Offence, it is the probation officer's risk assessment, their decision-making, their record-keeping that will be examined in a Serious Case Review. The weight of that accountability is enormous, and it produces a rational but corrosive effect: risk is expressed upwards. Assessments tend towards caution. Restrictions are maintained for longer than may be proportionate. Positive progress is acknowledged but treated with wariness rather than used as evidence for relaxing conditions. For the individual, this can feel like being punished for someone else's fear of being blamed.

The police occupy a different position again. Their role in MAPPA is primarily about public protection, intelligence, and enforcement. They are less likely to "own" the day-to-day management of the person, but they carry the institutional memory of the offence, sometimes across decades, and they bring that memory into multi-agency discussions. Police contributions to MAPPA meetings tend to be framed around what someone has done rather than what they are doing now. This is not negligence: it is a function of the police role. But it means that in a room where probation is already expressing caution because of accountability, and the prison has passed on a narrative shaped by security concerns, there is often no voice in the room whose primary function is to present the case for progress.

WHAT SENIOR MAPPA PROFESSIONALS TOLD US

Two senior figures with direct MAPPA experience spoke at length with our research team: Deborah Alderson, former Chief Inspector of Northumbria Police and co-developer of the Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination (MATAC) model, and Winton Keenen, former Chief Constable of Northumbria Police and current Oswin Project trustee.

Both described MAPPA as "demand-rich and capacity-poor." The volume of cases, particularly at Levels 2 and 3, means that meetings are often dominated by administrative risk management and public protection compliance, leaving little space for the rehabilitation-focused planning that would support long-term desistance. The system, in Keenen's words, is better designed to manage risk than to reduce it. Keenen described the bureaucracy surrounding MAPPA as functioning as both shield and sword: it protects agencies from scrutiny when things go wrong, but it also prevents the kind of relational, responsive decision-making that effective rehabilitation requires. The accountability framework is designed to catch under-assessment of risk. It has no equivalent mechanism for catching over-assessment. Nobody has ever faced a Serious Case Review for being too restrictive.

How people apply the statutory framework can be entirely different according to people's values. It's that culture and mindset element.

Deborah Alderson, retired Chief Inspector, Northumbria Police

Alderson drew on her experience developing the MATAC model to demonstrate that a perpetrator-focused, multi-agency approach to reducing risk can produce dramatically better outcomes than traditional risk management alone. The MATAC model, which embedded outreach workers to contact perpetrators and help them access appropriate agencies, achieved sustained reoffending reductions of between 65 and 72 per cent across all offence types tracked, maintained consistently since 2014. Alderson's central argument applies equally to MAPPA: risk reduction is not achieved by surveillance alone, but by engagement and trusted relationships with workers known to the individual. The statutory framework contains, in her words, significant wiggle room for this kind of approach. The question is whether agencies choose to use it, and the professional incentives overwhelmingly push them not to, because the consequences of being wrong in one direction are far greater than the consequences of being wrong in the other.

RISK AS INSTITUTIONAL PRODUCT

What we heard from professionals and from people under supervision confirmed a deeper pattern: risk is not a fixed, objective property of an individual. It is a product of institutional relationships, accountability structures, and professional culture. The same person can be described in markedly different terms depending on which agency is speaking and what consequences that agency faces if something goes wrong. In custody, the prison may describe someone as a model prisoner: compliant, engaged, low-risk within the institution. Three weeks later, the same person's probation officer may describe them as high-risk in the community, not because anything has changed about the individual, but because the accountability has shifted. The prison no longer carries the consequence. Probation does.

WHAT PEOPLE UNDER SUPERVISION EXPERIENCE

For the individuals subject to MAPPA, this pattern has real consequences. Several participants described a frustrating disconnect between their own experience of progress and the system's willingness to recognise it. Participant E had not missed a single appointment, had complied with every condition, and had followed every rule at his hostel for eight weeks. He was still on a 7pm to 9pm curfew. Participant D questioned the coherence of a system that classified him as the highest risk to the public while simultaneously preparing to release him onto the streets unsupported. These are not complaints about being supervised. They are complaints about a system in which the assessment of risk has become detached from the reality of the person being assessed, driven instead by the institutional needs of the agency doing the assessing.

THE COST OF OVER-CAUTION

None of this is to suggest that risk management is unnecessary. MAPPA exists for good reason, and the professionals we spoke to were clear-eyed about the genuine dangers some individuals pose. The problem is not that risk is assessed. The problem is that risk is the only lens through which the system consistently views people, and that the incentive structures surrounding risk assessment push relentlessly in one direction. A system that only counts the cost of under-caution, and never counts the cost of over-caution, will always tend towards restriction. And restriction, beyond a certain point, does not reduce risk. It increases it, by cutting people off from the employment, relationships, and stability that the evidence consistently shows are the strongest protective factors against reoffending. Alderson's MATAC results demonstrate this concretely: a model built on engagement and relationship rather than surveillance alone achieved reductions in reoffending that traditional risk management has never matched.

CENTRAL FINDING

The criminal justice system is better designed to manage institutions exposure to risk, protecting agencies from blame, than to manage individual risk, reducing the likelihood that a specific person will reoffend. Risk assessment follows accountability rather than following the person: whichever agency currently "owns" an individual expresses the most risk about them, not because the person has changed but because the consequences of getting it wrong have shifted.

WHAT PRISON LEAVERS TOLD US

We spoke in depth with 18 people who had recently left prison. Five of those conversations were detailed follow-up interviews, conducted several weeks after initial contact, with individuals under MAPPA supervision. Their accounts form the empirical heart of this report and directly inform every recommendation we make.

THE CLIFF-EDGE

Everyone we interviewed described the first weeks after release as overwhelming. The word that came up most often, from people who had never met each other and who described very different circumstances was 'battle'. The structured environment of custody, for all its problems, is replaced by a sudden and total freedom that many people find destabilising rather than liberating. The routines, the meals, the enforced timetable, even the social world of the prison, all disappear at once. What replaces them is an immediate encounter with a set of bureaucratic systems, housing, benefits, health, probation that each operate in their own silo and share almost no information with each other.

- 15 of 18 participants identified housing instability as their primary barrier. Without a fixed address, people cannot register with a GP, receive benefit payments, access employment support or demonstrate licence compliance. Housing insecurity cascades into every other area.
- 14 of 18 left prison with incomplete usable records, forcing them to repeatedly explain their situation to every new service they encountered. This was described as 'exhausting' and often led to disengagement from services that might otherwise have given valuable support.
- 12 of 18 identified boredom, isolation and the absence of meaningful daily structure as the key triggers for potential recall, not drugs, not old associates, but emptiness.
- 17 of 18 credited third-sector relational support as the single most significant factor in their resettlement, contrasting its flexibility and continuity with the more bureaucratic, time-limited nature of statutory supervision.

The only thing that I haven't got is my housing. That's it. That's no change.

Participant B — who had used his time in a Category D prison to organise his bank account, ID and driving licence before release, yet remained without stable housing months later

THE EMOTIONAL WEIGHT OF MAPPA SUPERVISION

For those on MAPPA or strict licence conditions, the weight of supervision added its own psychological dimension. People described probation as simultaneously supportive and burdensome. The structure was valued: appointments gave shape to otherwise shapeless days. But the feeling of being constantly monitored, even when fully compliant, was demoralising and several participants said this was a source of continual stress that made it harder, not easier, to focus on building a stable life.

I'm still on a 7 till 9 curfew, after eight weeks of being in the community now, where I haven't been a minute late for anything. I've abided by all the rules. It's just getting a bit frustrating, because I'm trying to get my life back.

Participant E

The system, in their experience, was calibrated to detect failure but not to recognise success. Perfect compliance, week after week, produced no change in the conditions of their license. Several participants noted that the emotional effort of constantly proving compliance, while managing practical barriers and limited support created a continual sense of battling the system rather than being helped by it.

THE STRUCTURAL EXCLUSION OF THE THIRD SECTOR FROM MAPPA

All 15 organisations at the dedicated third-sector engagement day reported experiencing the same information gaps as the clients they support. They receive prison leavers with incomplete documentation, no formal link to MAPPA processes and no clear information about risk levels, license conditions or specific support needs. They are expected to provide intensive, effective support without the contextual information that would make it effective.

At times Third-sector organisations only discover they are working with a MAPPA-managed individual when something goes wrong: a missed appointment triggers a recall, or a housing incident leads to police involvement. Only then does importance of the missing information about license conditions and MAPPA status appear to become relevant — but it arrives too late to prevent the crisis.

We do exceptional work with ex-offenders and have proven success in reducing reoffending, yet we are not part of the reporting bodies at MAPPA meetings.

Third-sector engagement day participant



Figure 6 Prison Healthcare

A STRUCTURAL PARADOX

MAPPA is designed to manage risk but by excluding the organisations most capable of reducing that risk from the information they require results in the current arrangements increasing it. Senior professionals including former Chief Constable Winton Keenen and former Chief Inspector Deborah Alderson — confirmed that the barriers to third-sector involvement are cultural and procedural, not statutory. The 'wobble room' already exists within the framework. What is missing is the willingness to use it.

PILLAR 2: THREE PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS, READY NOW

CO-DESIGNED WITH STAKEHOLDERS, GROUNDED IN PROVEN PRACTICE

None of the three tools developed during this project are original ideas. They restore and adapt practices that demonstrably worked before the 2014 Transforming Rehabilitation reforms, and that continue to work in Scandinavian systems. They are also directly informed by international best practice: the Norwegian import model, Swedish continuous probation contact and Danish employment broker approaches all informed the design process, and the detailed evidence base is set out in Appendix C. What is new is the scope and design, shaped directly by what 18 participants consistently told us was missing when they walked out of the prison gate.

TOOL 1: THE PRISONER PASSPORT

A simple physical format was chosen deliberately. HMP Durham staff confirmed that many people leave without a working mobile phone, meaning digital solutions are not adequate for the immediate release period. What people need, in the words of one staff member, is 'something physical, like maps', a document they can hold, refer to and hand across a desk. Something that demonstrates clearly, that they are prepared and that someone has taken their resettlement seriously.

The Prisoner Passport, titled "Change of Plan," is a practical A4 workbook designed to travel with a person from custody into the community. The workbook is part reference guide, part planner, and part personal record, structured so that the individual fills it in themselves, with support from staff, before they leave. It covers:

- A release to-do list and appointment planner bringing every post-release meeting into a single page
- Probation officer details alongside a directory of every North East probation office
- Housing arrangements for night one, with contacts for council housing and homelessness teams across the region and national services including Shelter, Crisis, and Changing Lives
- A detailed healthcare section including step-by-step GP registration guidance, an explicit statement that no ID or proof of address is required, a table explaining which NHS service to use for which need, emergency dental contacts, sexual health services, and a quick-reference box of key numbers
- An identification guide setting out options from CitizenCard (£18) to provisional driving licence (£34) to passport (£88.50), with step-by-step instructions for each
- A money and bank accounts section identifying specific providers that accept people with no fixed address or limited ID, including HSBC's No Fixed Abode scheme, app-based accounts, and the North East Credit Union
- Employment history, training and qualifications, volunteering experience, and a skills self-assessment, functioning as a portable CV that can be taken directly to an employer or Jobcentre adviser

- A volunteering section that specifically names prison-based roles such as Samaritans Listener, Shannon Trust Mentor, and Violence Reduction Peer Mentor, and explains how to present them as transferable skills
- A disclosure statement section with structured guidance on when disclosure is legally required, how to build a statement using the three-part model recommended by Nacro and Unlock, and practical advice on delivering it face to face
- A curated list of employers known to recruit people with convictions, including Timpsons, DHL, Greggs, Co-op, and Halfords, alongside specialist recruitment charities
- Recovery support services across the North East with phone numbers and addresses
- Free debt advice services and guidance on the most common types of debt people face after release
- A support network page, a goals section, and contact details for key charities and support organisations across the region

The design principle throughout is that no single section is sufficient on its own. What makes the passport effective is the combination: practical information, personal records, and forward planning in a single document that the individual owns and controls. Everything in it was identified by participants as something they either did not have on release or had to spend weeks piecing together from scratch.

USING THE PASSPORT

The proposed usage process begins twelve weeks before release, with a joint review of DPS and ETP records by the prison employment lead and, where an Information Bridge Worker is in place, by the third-sector worker already known to the individual. At eight weeks pre-release, the individual contributes their own input on disclosure preferences, key contacts, and specific support needs. On release day, the completed passport leaves the prison in the possession of its owner.

That is the ideal. The passport was designed, however, for the reality that this process frequently does not happen. Short sentences, unplanned releases, staffing shortages, and the sheer volume of people moving through local prisons, mean that individuals can leave custody with little or no structured pre-release preparation. The workbook accounts for this. It's plain language, step-by-step instructions, and pre-populated reference information mean that a person can pick it up on the day of release, or even after release, and begin filling it in without professional support. If the 12-week process happens, the passport is significantly richer. If it does not, the passport still functions.

The passport was also designed to be organisation neutral. It is not tied to the Oswin Project, to any single referral pathway, or to any third sector provider. Any professional or volunteer supporting a prison leaver can use it as a starting point: a way of understanding what someone already has in place, identifying what is missing, and building a relationship around practical next steps rather than starting from a blank page. The aim was to create something that belongs to the individual, not to the service.

CENTRAL FINDING

14 of 18 participants left prison without complete, usable records. The Prisoner Passport directly addresses this. No new systems are required, only coordination, printing resource and a commitment to handing the document to every person on release day.

TOOL 2: THE INFORMATION BRIDGE WORKER MODEL

The Passport works best when it is produced with someone, not for them. That is the role of the Information Bridge Worker. To be most effective this role should be undertaken by the third sector: a lived-experience worker embedded in the prison's reception and release hub, who builds a relationship with the individual in the weeks before release, helps complete the Passport, provides disclosure coaching and makes a warm personal introduction to community services on release day.

The Bridge Worker model is envisaged as a third-sector role, commissioned and managed by organisations such as the Oswin Project with the relational infrastructure, lived-experience workforce and existing prison relationships required to make it effective. It is a restoration of something that existed before 2014, when embedded probation officers performed a similar function. The key difference is that Bridge Workers bring lived experience of the criminal justice system, creating a specific kind of trust and credibility that statutory workers, however skilled and well-intentioned, cannot always replicate. A Bridge Worker who has been through the gate themselves understands, in a way that cannot be taught from an instruction manual, what the person in front of them is facing.

- Relational continuity: Bridge Workers begin building a relationship inside the prison, in the weeks before release, then accompany the individual into the community, attending appointments, helping them present their disclosure letter to an employer, ensuring the Passport contact sheet is used rather than filed away.
- MAPPA integration: For individuals under MAPPA supervision, Bridge Workers would participate in pre-release planning meetings under formal observer status, ensuring the individual's support needs are represented alongside their risk profile, and receiving, in return, the licence condition information necessary to provide safe, effective post-release support.
- The 'Inside Job' variant: training and employing people nearing release to help produce Passports for others creating employment pathways, building administrative and organisational skills that transfer directly to the labour market. This would reduce the unit cost of Passport production and generate a self-sustaining community of practice in the prison. This initiative deserves serious development.

I think it's the support now. I'm getting a lot of support off Junction 42.

Participant A — citing third-sector relational support as the most significant factor in their stability, above probation contact, GP support and housing

Seventeen of the eighteen people we interviewed credited third-sector relational support as a key protective factor in their resettlement. The consistency of this finding across very different individuals, in very different circumstances, with very different conviction histories, is striking. People used diverse words and described different organisations, but the underlying experience were the same: a flexible, persistent, non-judgemental humane presence that statutory services, however well-intentioned, could not consistently provide.

TOOL 3: THE EMPLOYER CONFIDENCE HANDBOOK

Employer reluctance to hire people with convictions is one of the most significant — and, crucially, one of the most tractable barriers to economic inactivity among prison leavers. It is manageable because, as our research shows, the reluctance is not rooted in prejudice. It is rooted in uncertainty and the absence of practical support. We held an employers workshop with participants from large and small employers, social care, housing associations and customer service sectors, using realistic fictional scenarios and a RAG (Red Amber Green) coding approach to capture actual decision-making rather than abstract attitudes.

What employers think

The headline finding was striking. When asked 'How risky is it for you to hire an ex-offender?', the mean response across all participants was exactly 3.0 out of 5. No participant scored 1 or 5. The distribution clustered around the middle — employers acknowledging real uncertainty while remaining open. The word-cloud exercise told a similar story: dominant descriptors were 'Trusting', 'Opportunity' and 'Second chances'. Risk-aware language was present but almost always qualified by positive sentiment.

WHAT EMPLOYERS TOLD US

The mean risk score was 3.0 out of 5. The most common descriptors were 'Trusting', 'Opportunity' and 'Second chances'. Employers are not hostile. They are uncertain and under-supported.

What moves employers from amber to green

Two factors consistently moved employers from hesitation to willingness. First, clear rehabilitation evidence: time elapsed since the offence, demonstrated behaviour change, completed programmes and strong references. Second, third-sector support: the availability of a named contact who could answer questions, provide disclosure coaching and be a first call if concerns arose. Employers were consistently explicit that they did not want to manage licence conditions or become amateur risk assessors. They wanted a partner who would carry that responsibility beside them.

A case study exercise reinforced this. Employers were presented with three fictional individuals, each with a different offence history, set of circumstances, and level of support in place, and asked to discuss whether they would consider hiring them and what would need to be true for them to say yes. The conversations were striking for how quickly they moved past the nature of the offence and toward practical questions: how long ago did it happen, what has changed since, who is supporting this person, and what do I need to know versus what I do not need to know. The exercise demonstrated that most employers are not categorically opposed to hiring people with convictions. What stops them is uncertainty, and what resolves that uncertainty is not more information about the offence but more confidence in the support structure around the individual.

This shows I don't need the full offence history. Just the bits that affect the job. That makes it much more manageable.

Employer workshop participant, during the probation role-play exercise

I trust him. She thinks he's marvellous.

Mark Bridgeman, North East employer, describing a permanent hire from The Oswin Project who now works full-time on his estate and cares for his elderly mother half a day a week – he has befriended her and maintains her house and garden rather than caring for her – that has very different connotations

THE CO-PRODUCED HANDBOOK

The Employer Confidence Handbook, titled "No, They Won't Nick the Stationery: 10 Things to Think About When Hiring People with Convictions," was not written in advance. It was built through the workshop exercises and group conversations about what information and support would make a difference to hiring decisions. Written specifically for small businesses without HR departments or in-house legal teams, it covers:

- The scale of criminal records in context: one in four working-age adults have some form of record, and more than half of all convictions are for summary motoring offences
- The commercial case for hiring, including evidence on retention, performance, and public attitudes
- The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act in plain language: what "spent" and "unspent" mean, how long rehabilitation periods last, and which convictions can never become spent
- The four levels of DBS check, when each is required, and the fact that requesting a higher-level check than the role is eligible for is a criminal offence
- How to restructure an application process so that conviction questions come after interview rather than on page one
- A practical framework for handling disclosure: what to ask, what not to ask, how to respond to over-disclosure, and how to keep the conversation professional
- Risk assessment reframed as structured common sense, built around a single question: is this specific conviction relevant to this specific role?
- Employers' obligations under UK GDPR when processing criminal offence data, including storage, access, retention, and what to do if a colleague's conviction becomes known in the workplace
- Onboarding guidance covering licence conditions, tagging curfews, and accepting character references from probation officers or support workers where traditional references are unavailable
- A directory of organisations providing free employer support, including the New Futures Network, Nacro, Offploy, and Unlock
- Ready-to-use templates: a recruitment policy, a data handling policy, a blank risk assessment form, two worked examples showing how the form is completed in practice, and a manager's checklist covering every stage from pre-interview to post-hire



Figure 7 Inside & Out Team The Oswin Project

TWO PAGE LEAFLET

Alongside the handbook, a two-page quick guide titled "Hard-Working. Loyal. Hired." was produced as a standalone leaflet for employers who want the essentials without reading a full document. It covers:

- Key statistics on the scale of criminal records in the UK workforce and employer experience of hiring people with convictions
- The business case in four panels: lower recruitment costs, access to untapped talent, loyalty evidenced by employers including Timpson, Greene King, and Halfords, and available tax incentives
- A plain-language summary of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act and what "spent" means in practice
- Five practical steps for getting started: reviewing application forms, training hiring managers, conducting individual risk assessments, partnering with specialist organisations, and considering a ROTL (Release on Temporary Licence) placement
- A jargon buster defining the key terms employers are most likely to encounter
- Contact details for the New Futures Network, Nacro, The Oswin Project, and Unlock
- The leaflet was designed to be left with employers after the confidence day or handed out at networking events, giving them enough to act on without requiring them to commit to the full handbook first.



Figure 8 Third Sector Day March 2026

THE THIRD SECTOR DAY

A dedicated engagement day brought together voluntary and community organisations from across the North East. The structure mirrored the employer confidence day: facilitated group discussions exploring the organisations' experience of supporting prison leavers, the barriers they encounter, and what would need to change for them to do that work more effectively.

The central finding was a unanimous frustration with the exclusion of third-sector organisations from MAPPA processes. Every organisation at the event raised this without prompting. Voluntary organisations are routinely expected to provide intensive, relational support to people subject to MAPPA, but they have no formal role in the framework that governs those individuals' lives. They receive referrals without knowing the risk management plan. They cannot contribute what they know about someone's progress to the people making decisions about them. They may be unaware that a job they have found for someone falls within an exclusion zone, or that a session they have arranged conflicts with a supervision appointment. One participant put it directly:

"We do exceptional work with ex-offenders and have proven success in reducing reoffending, yet we are not part of the reporting bodies at MAPPA meetings."

This exclusion does not only frustrate the organisations involved. It actively weakens risk management. The relational trust that third-sector workers build with MAPPA-managed individuals is exactly the kind of intelligence that statutory agencies need but cannot generate through compliance-based supervision alone. It is currently being wasted. Several organisations described running parallel processes to statutory services, duplicating assessments and gathering information that had already been collected elsewhere but was not shared.

The discussions confirmed the case for the Information Bridge Worker role, which would provide a formal mechanism for voluntary organisations to contribute to MAPPAs processes with appropriate vetting and information-sharing agreements.

THE THIRD SECTOR GUIDE

A nine-page guide titled "Bridging the Data Divide: What We Found, What MAPPAs Are, and Why It Matters to Your Work" was produced as a companion document for voluntary organisations unfamiliar with MAPPAs or new to working with prison leavers, it covers:

- The data divide: what it is, where it comes from, and why the 2014 Transforming Rehabilitation reforms made it worse
- What MAPPAs are: the three levels, the three categories of offender, and what supervision means in practice for someone subject to it
- What MAPPAs mean for third-sector organisations: the constraints that people may be living under, why they may not be able to tell you about them, and the information vacuum that voluntary organisations currently operate in
- What senior MAPPAs professionals told us about the system's structural problems, including capacity pressures, personality-driven inconsistencies, and the risk-averse culture that prioritises institutional protection over rehabilitation
- What people living under MAPPAs supervision described: the weight of compliance, the frustration of restrictions that do not reflect progress, and the role that third-sector support plays in filling the gap that statutory supervision cannot
- What employers told us: that reluctance is real but not fixed, and that structured disclosure support and an ongoing third-sector contact are the two things most likely to move an employer from hesitation to yes

PILLAR 3: AN OVERWHELMING INVESTMENT CASE

THE FINANCIAL ARGUMENT AND THE NORTH EAST'S STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

The financial case for a funded second phase rests on the Oswin Project's own track record, ninety-six per cent non-reoffending in the first year for low to high-risk service users, against a regional average of around 50 per cent and on the well-established societal cost of each person who does reoffend. That cost is not a one-off: each recall, each reoffence, each prosecution draws on police, court, prison and community service budgets year after year, for as long as the cycle continues.

The return on a £200,000 investment



Using the Oswin Project's non-reoffending rate as the benchmark, or even a conservative seventy per cent, across sixty to eighty high-risk individuals, the projected public saving exceeds £2 million in the first year alone. The net return, after the full cost of the investment, remains strongly positive even with pessimistic assumptions. The risk of not investing is equally measurable: each person who reoffends costs the public £37,000 to £50,000, not once, but repeatedly, year after year, as long as the cycle continues.

These figures draw on the Gauke Independent Sentencing Review's (2025) economic analysis, which explicitly identifies the failure of current resettlement arrangements as a driver of reoffending and of the substantial human and economic costs that flow from it. They are not speculative projections. They are grounded in the Oswin Project's sustained track record over more than a 12 years of operation.

Why The Oswin Project is uniquely placed to lead this

The Oswin Project brings a combination of assets that no statutory or academic partner could replicate. Seventy per cent of its staff have lived experience of the criminal justice system, not as a diversity credential, but as the operational foundation of its effectiveness. That track record is unusual and significant.

- The Oswin Project already operates inside HMP Northumberland through a range of enterprises, a cafe, a gardens programme and a bike repair workshop providing real work experience, real responsibility and a real employment record that individuals can point to/talk about/show when they sit across from a potential employer after release.
- Existing relationships with HMP Northumberland, probation services, police and MAPPA leads gave the research team access and credibility that an academic or statutory team could not replicate.

- The first phase of this project built the multi-stakeholder network spanning fifteen third-sector organisations, employers, probation, police, HMPPS and two senior MAPPA professionals — that is essential for the second phase. That network cannot be bought. It was/has to be earned.
- The ethics protocols, data infrastructure and methodological approach developed the first phase are ready to deploy immediately. There is no setup cost for a second phase, only the cost of delivery.

The North East's strategic positioning

The North East has specific advantages that make it the right place to test and develop this model at scale. NECA's devolution settlement creates both the political will and the convening power to bring statutory agencies, employers and the third sector around a shared agenda in a way that is harder to achieve at national level. MAPPA caseloads in the region are among the highest per capita in the country, creating added pressure on statutory services and particular need for the third-sector capacity this project aims to build. Post-industrial economic decline has left large parts of the region with limited employment opportunities, principally in sectors accessible to people with criminal convictions — making the employer confidence work especially valuable in this area.

The Gauke Review calls for exactly the rehabilitation-focused, through-the-gate investment that this project has been developing. The DWP Trailblazer programme exists to test and scale what works. The evidence from this project, from the Scandinavian models and from pre-2014 probation practice, converges on the same set of answers. Year Two is how the North East turns that convergence into lasting change.



Figure 9 HMP Holme House

RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate Actions — 2026

1. Deploy a standard Prisoner Passport at HMP Northumberland, HMP Durham, and HMP Deerbolt

- Three prisons, three distinct populations: Durham is high-turnover remand; Northumberland is a Category C training prison; Deerbolt is a newly recategorised Category C.
- No new systems required: the passport uses information already held in DPS, ETP records, and prison healthcare systems.
- What is needed: coordination, printing resource, staff time to support completion before release, and a commitment to handing the document over on release day.
- Template to be finalised in consultation with staff at all three prisons and people with lived experience of the release process, ready for deployment before end of 2026.

2. Pilot four Information Bridge Workers embedded in HMP Northumberland

- The Oswin Project to lead, supported by NECA and HMPPS.
- Independent evaluation built in from the outset.
- Pilot should run for 12 months with a minimum cohort of 30 high-risk individuals, including a meaningful proportion of MAPPA-managed individuals.
- Training and employing people nearing release to help produce Passports for others — should be developed combined with the staffed model.

3. Distribute the Employer Confidence Handbook across all North East probation areas and employer networks

- The Handbook is ready to use now. It requires no further development and no additional funding.
- Statutory and Third Sector bodies could incorporate it into standard employer engagement work.
- NECA should promote it through its business networks, supply chain programmes and major employer contacts.

4. Develop a MAPPA information pathway for vetted third-sector partners on a case-by-case basis

- No new legislation is required. Senior MAPPA professionals have confirmed the 'wobble room' exists within the existing framework.
- Police and probation leads to identify a small number of appropriate cases and pilot.
- Independent evaluation of the pilot should inform a decision on formalising the approach through a Memoranda of Understanding.

YEAR TWO INVESTMENT 2026 – 2027

1. Scale to 60–80 high-risk leavers, including a substantially higher proportion of MAPPA-managed individuals

- Four Bridge Worker posts at approximately £50,000 per post including on-costs = £200,000 total investment.
- Projected saving: £2.1m–£2.9m in the first year. The return on investment is not marginal it is overwhelming.
- Independent evaluation tracking reoffending rates, employment outcomes, housing stability and public service demand over 12 months.

2. Formalise third-sector contributor status in MAPPA

- GDPR-compliant Memoranda of Understanding between NECA, Northumbria Police, probation services, HMPPS and vetted third-sector organisations.
- The Alderson MATAAC model provides an existing and tested template for the governance framework required.
- Roles, responsibilities, information access and accountability structures to be clearly defined before formalisation.

3. Develop the 'Inside Job' model within HMP Northumberland

- Train and employ people nearing release to help produce Passports for others.
- Creates an employment pathway and builds administrative skills that transfer directly to the labour market.
- Reduces unit cost of Passport production and generates a self-sustaining community training in the prison.

LONGER-TERM POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop differentiated inspection frameworks for remand prisons

- HMIP and Ofsted currently apply the same performance standards to HMP Durham as to longer-stay training prisons — creating impossible expectations and diverting resources from the rapid, relationship-led support remand populations need.
- Separate standards should incentivise outcomes remand facilities can realistically achieve timely Passport completion, supportive handovers, healthcare continuity at point of release.

2. Reinstate embedded pre-release planning

- Return to the pre-2014 practice of placing community probation officers and third-sector workers inside prisons 12 weeks before release.
- Begin at HMP Northumberland where the Oswin Project already has an established presence.
- 2014 practice was not abandoned because it stopped working. It was abandoned as a collateral consequence of structural reform. The evidence for its effectiveness is clear.

3. Fund Scandinavian-style import teams entering prisons 12–16 weeks pre-release

- Community health, employment and housing providers to co-produce resettlement documentation and begin building community relationships before release.
- Follows the Norwegian model, which achieves recidivism rates of 20–25% compared to England's typical rate of over 50%.
- The principle is not culturally specific to Norway. It is a practical, evidence-based investment in early relational continuity.

CONCLUSION

THE BOTTOM LINE

Employment is the strongest single protective factor against reoffending. Only 17 per cent of people leaving prison find work within six weeks. The data evidence is a primary reason why action is imperative. The solutions are known, practical and costed. The evidence base is robust, the stakeholder consensus is clear. The case for acting is overwhelming.

This three-month test-and-learn project has moved from mapping a problem to co-designing solutions, using evidence from five distinct stakeholder groups across three research strands, producing three practical tools. This has resulted in a clear consensus among statutory and third-sector partners on what must happen. That is a significant achievement over three months. It should herald a new beginning.

None of the three tools developed in first phase has been piloted. None has been independently evaluated. The Prisoner Passport, the Bridge Worker model and the Employer Confidence Handbook are all proposals grounded in strong evidence and ready for implementation. But the evidence that will drive national policy change is the rigorously evaluated outcome data that DWP, HMPPS and NECA need to make a compelling case for wider investment, that can only come from a funded second phase in which these tools are deployed and tested.

The solution is not a new system. It is better coordination of existing ones, anchored in trusted relationships. The Oswin Project's track record, and the breadth of stakeholder support gathered during this project, positions the North East to lead a national conversation on what effective, evidence-based resettlement looks like in practice. This work directly supports the Gauke Independent Sentencing Review's emphasis on rehabilitation-focused sentencing and aligns with NECA's devolution priorities around economic inclusion and upstream prevention. The evidence is sufficient. The tools are ready. The investment case is compelling. The question is whether the North East will have the perspicacity and courage to act on it.

The evidence is sufficient. The tools are ready. The investment case is compelling. The question is whether the North East will have the perspicacity and courage to act on it.

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

ABOUT THE OSWIN PROJECT

The Oswin Project is a North East charity that supports people leaving prison to rebuild their lives through training, employment and most crucial mentoring which supports integration back into the community. Seventy per cent of its staff have lived experience of the criminal justice system. That is not incidental to its effectiveness, it is central to it.

The Project operates inside HMP Northumberland and in the community through a range of enterprises including a cafe, a gardens programme and a bike repair workshop. These are not token activities: they provide real work experience, real responsibility and a real employment record that individuals can talk about when they are interviewed by potential employers on release.

In the first year following release, 96 per cent of people the Oswin Project supports do not reoffend. The reoffending rate in the region can be as high as 50 per cent. That gap, sustained consistently over time, represents an estimated saving of on average £50,000 per person per year in avoided reoffending costs, fewer victims, lower demand on courts, police and prisons, and more people contributing to their communities and to the North East economy.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This was a test-and-learn research project, which means the team was not implementing interventions and measuring long-term outcomes, but mapping the problem, testing ideas with stakeholders, and producing practical tools and recommendations grounded in evidence. The three-month timeline was tight but deliberate: the DWP programme required rapid, action-oriented learning rather than extended observation.

A multi-method qualitative approach was used, combining semi-structured interviews, participatory workshops and facilitated group discussions. The analytical framework was reflexive thematic analysis — a systematic process of coding transcripts and workshop materials, then building and refining themes through iterative team discussion. This approach treats the researcher's position and perspective as something to be acknowledged and used, rather than managed away.

The research team were not neutral observers. They are practitioners embedded in the system they were studying. That gave them insight; it also required intellectual honesty about assumptions and a willingness to let the data challenge them. The research was conducted in accordance with an ethics protocol developed in consultation with Northumbria University, mirroring the procedures approved for the lead researcher's MSc Psychology thesis.

THE FULL DATASET

Group	Detail
Prison leavers	18 in-depth interviews, including five detailed follow-up interviews (Participants A–E) with individuals under MAPPA supervision, conducted several weeks after initial contact
Employers	Two full-day confidence workshops with 24 participants from social care, housing associations and customer service sectors, using realistic fictional scenarios and RAG coding
Third-sector organisations	One dedicated engagement day with 15 voluntary and community organisations representing housing, employment, mental health, substance misuse and family support
HMP Durham staff	Interviews with the Head of Education, Skills and Work and the Prison Employment Lead
Senior MAPPA professionals	In-depth discussions with Deborah Alderson (retired Chief Inspector, Northumbria Police, co-developer of MATAC) and Winton Keenen (retired Chief Constable, Northumbria Police, Oswin Project trustee)

ETHICAL FRAMEWORK AND PARTICIPANT ANONYMITY

All participants gave informed consent. Anonymity was maintained throughout people with lived experience who participated in detailed interviews are referred to as Participant A to E. Others are identified by role or, where they gave explicit consent to be named, by name.

The research maintained a trauma-informed approach throughout all interviews and workshops. Participant information sheets, consent forms, debrief materials and data storage schedules are held securely and available on request to NECA and DWP.

WHAT THIS PROJECT DID AND DID NOT DO

It is important to be explicit about scope. This project developed three practical tools — the Prisoner Passport, the Bridge Worker model and the Employer Confidence Handbook — to the co-design and consultation stage. None were implemented or piloted during the three-month phase. They are proposals grounded in extensive stakeholder consultation and ready for development and formal evaluation in a funded second phase. The evidence base this report presents is the foundation on which that evaluation should be built, not a substitute for it.

APPENDIX B: TRANSFORMING REHABILITATION AND THE ROOTS OF THE DATA DIVIDE

WHAT EXISTED BEFORE 2014

To understand the data divide, it helps to understand where it came from. Before 2014, England and Wales had 35 public probation trusts that received consistently strong inspection ratings. They delivered what practitioners still describe as 'end-to-end' offender management: probation officers embedded in prisons weeks before release, physical resettlement documents handed over on the day, and joint planning meetings that brought prison, health, housing and community services into the same room.

Physical 'resettlement wallets' contained verified qualifications, medication summaries, GP registration forms and disclosure letters. Multi-agency pre-release MAPPA meetings, typically held four to six weeks before release, achieved recall rates below 10 per cent in well-coordinated cases. The infrastructure was not perfect, but it was relational and it was largely effective.

WHAT THE 2014 REFORMS CHANGED

The Transforming Rehabilitation reforms of 2014 broke that model apart. The 35 trusts were replaced by a single National Probation Service for high-risk cases and 21 privately-run Community Rehabilitation Companies for lower-risk cases. A statutory 'Through the Gate' service was introduced to manage resettlement in the final 12 weeks of custody. The theory was that competition and specialisation would improve efficiency. The reality, as documented by repeated inspection findings, was a systematic loss of the relational infrastructure that made resettlement work.

What was lost	Consequence
Embedded probation officers in prisons pre-release	Cold handovers became standard; community services met people as strangers
Physical resettlement wallets	Documentation gaps became structural rather than exceptional
Pre-release multi-agency planning meetings	MAPPA and community services lost early sight of release dates and support needs
Continuous probation officer relationships	Through the Gate staff rotated — officers had no prior knowledge of the individual
End-to-end offender management	The person was handed between separate systems with no shared accountability for outcomes

WHAT THE INSPECTORATE FOUND

HM Inspectorate of Probation found, repeatedly, that Through the Gate services 'made little or no difference' to resettlement outcomes. Physical release packs largely disappeared. Pre-release planning meetings became inconsistent. Recall rates rose to between 16 and 26 per cent. By 2021, only 40 per cent of Through the Gate plans adequately addressed the three most basic resettlement needs together: accommodation, finance and employment.

Health continuity suffered significantly: the seven-to-fourteen-day medication gap re-emerged, and only 30 per cent of prisoners with identified mental health or substance misuse needs had those needs effectively flagged and transferred to community services.

THE 2021 REUNIFICATION AND WHAT IT DID NOT RESTORE

The reunification of probation in 2021 reversed some of the structural damage: Community Rehabilitation Companies were abolished, and probation was returned to public control. But the relational infrastructure the trusted connections between prison and community that had taken years to build — could not simply be switched back on. The practitioners who had built those relationships had moved on. The institutional memory had dissipated. The data divide this project set out to address is, in large part, a consequence of those ten years of fragmentation.

This matters because the solutions proposed in this report are not novel. They are restorations of things that worked, adapted for the current context. The Prisoner Passport, the Bridge Worker model and the embedded pre-release planning approach all have direct precedents in the pre-2014 probation system. The evidence for their effectiveness was accumulated over decades. It did not disappear when the system changed — it simply stopped being used.

APPENDIX C: INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

WHAT SCANDINAVIAN SYSTEMS DO DIFFERENTLY — AND WHY IT MATTERS

The international picture is instructive and, for those who care about evidence-based policy, should be uncomfortable reading. Scandinavian countries achieve recidivism rates of between 20 and 25 per cent within two years of release, compared to the UK's typical rate of over 50 per cent within one year. The difference is not primarily digital, cultural or the result of less serious offending populations. It is relational and practical.



NORWAY: THE IMPORT MODEL

Norway's Correctional Service operates what it calls an 'import model'. Rather than trying to create in-prison versions of community services, it brings community NAV (Jobcentre) advisers, health workers and housing officers into prisons 12 to 16 weeks before release. These workers begin building relationships with the individual, co-produce a physical resettlement folder that is handed over on release day, and are already known to the person when they walk out.

The Norwegian import model produces three outcomes that the UK system consistently fails to achieve: early relational continuity between prison and community; accessible physical documentation that the individual owns and controls; and community providers who are known to the person before they leave, rather than being strangers they encounter in crisis.

- Community NAV advisers enter the prison from 12 weeks pre-release and begin building an employment plan with the individual, integrated with their resettlement folder.
- Health workers ensure medication continuity is planned from within the prison — prescriptions are transferred to community pharmacies before release, not after.
- Housing officers attend pre-release planning meetings so that stable housing is in place — or as close to in place as possible — on release day, not weeks later.
- The resettlement folder, co-produced with the individual, contains verified employment history, health information, benefit entitlements and appointment schedules.

SWEDEN: CONTINUOUS PROBATION CONTACT

Sweden's approach is built around embedded probation officers who maintain continuous contact from sentencing through to community supervision. Rather than handing individuals between different staff at different stages, the same officer follows the case from beginning to end. This continuity of relationship, supported by paper-based planning tools designed to survive the transition from prison to community, is credited with producing Sweden's comparatively low recidivism rates.

The Bridge Worker model proposed in this project incorporates a similar principle of relational continuity: the same individual builds the relationship inside the prison, supports the Prisoner Passport process, is part of the handover on release day and accompanies the person into community services. The worker is not a new face at the gate. They are someone already known and trusted.

DENMARK: TRANSITION PLANS AND EMPLOYMENT BROKERS

Denmark uses 'transition plans' co-produced with community providers, which include verified skills certificates and dedicated employment brokers who work with both the individual and prospective employers. The employer engagement approach developed during this project — including the Employer Confidence Handbook and the disclosure coaching role of Bridge Workers — directly parallels the Danish employment broker model.

What Danish employment brokers provide is exactly what North East employers told our workshops they needed: a named contact who can answer questions, provide context on the individual's rehabilitation journey, and be a first call if concerns arise. The difference is that in Denmark this is a funded, embedded role. In the North East, it currently falls informally, inconsistently and inadequately on overstretched probation officers.

WHAT THESE SYSTEMS SHARE — AND WHAT THE NORTH EAST CAN LEARN

Shared feature	North East equivalent
Early relational investment — community workers entering prisons 12–16 weeks pre-release	Bridge Workers embedded in HMP Northumberland, beginning relationships in the weeks before release
Physical accessible documentation co-produced with the individual	The Prisoner Passport, designed to be held, carried and presented by the individual at the 12 week pre release point.
Community providers known to the person before they leave	Bridge Workers involved in handovers, accompanying individuals to appointments and ensuring the transition is supported
Integrated employer engagement with dedicated brokers	The Employer Confidence Handbook and Bridge Workers providing disclosure coaching and employer liaison, which could also include a pre-disclosure conversation with employers.
Continuous, unbroken relational contact from custody through community	The Oswin Project's 96% non-reoffending model, which maintains relationships through the periods most likely to trigger recall

Norway is not England. But the principles are not culturally specific. They are practical investments in early relational continuity that produce measurable, sustained reductions in reoffending wherever they have been properly funded and implemented. The evidence base is already built. The question is whether England is ready to learn from it.

APPENDIX D: THE NORTH EAST AND NECA CONTEXT

THE REGIONAL PICTURE

The North East has a proud industrial heritage and a strong sense of community, but it also carries some of the most persistent structural disadvantages in England. Unemployment and economic inactivity rates have consistently exceeded the national average for decades. The communities to which most prison leavers return — in the post-industrial heartlands of County Durham, Wearside and the former mining villages of Northumberland — are often those with the fewest employment opportunities and the thinnest public service infrastructure. When someone leaves prison without a job, without stable housing and without a functioning support network, the chances of recall are high. The costs — to that individual, to their family and to the public — are enormous. Rural-urban transport barriers mean that even where employment exists, reaching it can be practically impossible without support. MAPPA caseloads in Northumberland are among the highest per capita in the country, creating particular pressure on statutory services.

NECA'S DEVOLUTION OPPORTUNITY

The North East Combined Authority's devolution settlement creates an important opportunity. NECA has the convening power to bring statutory agencies, employers and the third sector around a shared agenda in a way that is hard to achieve at national level. The work described in this report is designed to support that agenda, generating the evidence that NECA needs to make a compelling case for continued and expanded investment.

The DWP Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programme (2024–2026) is a national test-and-learn initiative. In the North East, Priority 3.4 focuses on ex-offenders, a group disproportionately affected by barriers to employment, housing, health continuity and information transfer that drive both economic inactivity and reoffending cycles.

THE GAUKE REVIEW AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NORTH EAST

The Gauke Independent Sentencing Review, published in 2025, calls for a renewed emphasis on rehabilitation-focused sentencing and significantly improved through-the-gate support. It explicitly identifies the failure of current resettlement arrangements as a driver of reoffending and of the human and economic costs that come from it. The Review highlights the substantial economic cost of reoffending — estimated at £37,000 to £50,000 per person per year — and points to the potential for well-designed, relational support models to deliver significant public savings.

In the North East, these national challenges are amplified by local conditions. The work described in this report is designed to position the region not as one that has a problem, but as one that has a solution — to demonstrate, with evidence, what effective evidence-based resettlement looks like in practice and to lead the national conversation that will follow.

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES FROM THE RESEARCH

Four themes emerged consistently across every strand of the research. They are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, and they point in the same direction: toward a model of resettlement support that is relational rather than bureaucratic, third-sector-led rather than statutory-dominated, and grounded in proven practices.

Theme 1: The data divide is relational, not technical

The most important finding of this project is that the primary barrier to continuity of employment, health and skills information is not technology. It is trust. Information exists in the DPS and ETP systems. Digital records are maintained and updated. The problem is that no trusted human connection exists to translate that information into something usable on release, and no mechanism exists to make it accessible once the prison gate closes. Digital solutions alone will not close the data divide. A digital Prisoner Passport would be a useful long-term development, but it would address only the technical dimension of a problem that is fundamentally human. The Bridge Worker, the pre-release relationship, the warm handover, the familiar face at the probation appointment: these are not supplementary to the solution. They are the solution.

Theme 2: Lived-experience networks provide protective scaffolding statutory services cannot replicate at scale

Seventeen of eighteen people interviewed credited third-sector relational support as the key protective factor in their resettlement. The consistency of this finding — across very different individuals, circumstances and conviction histories — is striking. The Oswin Project's 96 per cent non-reoffending rate is not accidental. It is the outcome of a deliberate model in which lived-experience workers build genuine, sustained relationships with the highest-risk individuals and maintain those relationships through the periods most likely to trigger recall.

Theme 3: Third-sector organisations are uniquely positioned to support MAPPA-managed individuals

The third sector is currently excluded from MAPPA processes despite reducing reoffending among the population MAPPA is designed to manage. This is not a minor operational gap. It is a systemic contradiction at the heart of the current approach to risk management for the highest-risk individuals leaving custody. Third-sector organisations bring relational trust, flexibility to provide support outside office hours, and the lived-experience credibility to sustain engagement when formal options are exhausted.

Theme 4: Proven pre-2014 and Scandinavian practices remain viable and cost-effective

Much of what this project recommends is not new. Embedded pre-release planning, physical resettlement documentation, warm handovers from custody to community, and community providers entering prisons before release to build relationships: all of these existed in England and Wales before 2014. They were abandoned due to structural reform, not because they stopped working. The Scandinavian evidence shows that these approaches, implemented at scale and with sustained investment, produce dramatically better outcomes than the fragmented model that replaced them.

APPENDIX E: WHAT IS MAPPA?

UNDERSTANDING MAPPA

Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) are the statutory framework through which police, probation, and prison services work together to manage the risk posed by certain offenders living in the community. MAPPA is not a single organisation or programme. It is a set of legal arrangements, established under the Criminal Justice Act 2003, that sit across three statutory agencies known collectively as the Responsible Authority.

MAPPA applies to three categories of people. Category 1 covers registered sexual offenders. Category 2 covers violent offenders who have received a custodial sentence of twelve months or more. Category 3 covers other individuals who are assessed as posing a risk of serious harm to the public, regardless of their offence type. People can move between categories as circumstances change.

Within these categories, individuals are managed at one of three levels, determined not by offence type but by the degree of multi-agency coordination their case requires. At Level 1, which accounts for the large majority of cases, management sits primarily with a single agency, usually probation, under standard licence conditions. Level 2 involves active multi-agency management through regular panel meetings, used where the risk posed by an individual requires a coordinated plan across more than one agency. Level 3 is reserved for the most complex cases, bringing together senior representatives from multiple agencies to oversee intensive risk management. Practitioners also described an informal Level 4, used for exceptional situations such as counter-terrorism or foreign national offenders, which does not appear in the published framework but operates in practice.

For people subject to MAPPA, the framework shapes nearly every aspect of life after release. Management plans can include curfews, exclusion zones, restrictions on contact with named individuals, electronic monitoring, and conditions governing where someone may live and work. Breaching any condition can result in recall to prison. The practical effect is that someone leaving custody under MAPPA does not simply re-enter the community. They re-enter it within a tightly defined set of boundaries that are managed, monitored, and enforced by the statutory agencies responsible for their supervision.

WHY MAPPA MATTERS TO THIS PROJECT

This project gave particular attention to people managed under MAPPA for two reasons.

First, the information-sharing challenges that affect all prison leavers are significantly more acute for this group. MAPPA-managed individuals interact with more agencies, are subject to more conditions, and face more restrictions on employment and daily life. When information about their qualifications, health needs, or employment history fails to transfer from prison to community, the consequences are more immediate and more severe. A missed appointment, an unapproved workplace, or a misunderstood condition can result in recall, regardless of the person's own compliance or progress.

Second, the systems that manage risk for this group are well-established and broadly functional. ViSOR tracks intelligence on high-risk individuals across police forces. NDelius records licence conditions and supervision activity across probation. OASys provides structured risk assessments that follow an individual from custody into

community. MAPPAs themselves bring agencies together through structured, minuted meetings with clear protocols. For the purposes of public protection, these systems work. The gap is not in risk management. It is in everything else: the employment records, health information, training certificates, and appointment details that determine whether someone can actually rebuild a stable life under supervision. The data divide identified across this project is sharpest where the stakes are highest.

Third-sector organisations, including those providing employment support, housing, and mentoring, currently have no formal role within MAPPAs. They may be providing intensive daily support to someone subject to a complex management plan, but they are not told what that plan contains, cannot contribute what they know about the person's progress, and may not understand why a placement or opportunity has been blocked. This creates a gap that serves nobody well, including the statutory agencies trying to manage risk.

APPENDIX F: EMPLOYERS HANDBOOK

No, They Wont Nick The Stationery...

10 Things To Think About When
Hiring People With Convictions

Table Of Contents

Introduction	3
Why You're Already Working With People Who Have Convictions	4
The Genuine Commercial Case	6
The Law in Plain English	8
Understanding Criminal Record Checks	10
How to Fix Your Application Process	12
Handling Disclosure With Confidence	14
A Common-Sense Approach to Risk Assessment	16
Managing Confidentiality, Data, and Staff Concerns	18
Setting People Up to Succeed	20
Who can Help	22
The Paperwork: Example Policies and Templates	26

Introduction



When most small business owners hear the phrase “hiring people with criminal convictions,” their first thought is usually risk related. The till. The customers. The feeling that it’s all going to be time consuming and complicated rather than worthwhile.

This guide is designed to show you that it doesn’t have to be. The legal framework is manageable. The steps are simpler than you think. And the benefits - for your business, your team, and the individual with a conviction getting a second chance - are well evidenced.

Around one in four people of working age in England and Wales have some form of criminal record. Crucially, only 6-8% of those sentenced actually go to prison. In 2022, more than half of all criminal convictions were for summary motoring offences - things like speeding and driving without insurance. An “ex-offender” does not always mean an “ex-prisoner.”

Yet when it comes to finding work, a criminal record haunts individuals. Research consistently shows that the single biggest factor in whether someone reoffends is whether they can find employment. When employers open the door, they give people stability, purpose, and a reason to stay on track. When the door stays closed, the opposite tends to happen.

This guide is **not** a moral lecture. It’s a hands-on handbook for small business owners who want to know: How does this actually work? What does the law say? What should I ask, and what should I avoid? How do I keep my business safe while giving someone a genuine chance?

We have written this specifically for small businesses because you are the ones who have the most to gain and the least time to wade through dense HR guidance. You don’t have a legal department. You have got a business to run and you **need answers** that are clear and honest.

So here are 10 things to think about, plus a section of ready-made templates and example policies you can adapt. No jargon without explanation. No sermons. Just the information you need.

Why Are You Working With People Who Have Convictions



Over 12 million people in England and Wales have a criminal record - roughly **1 in 4** working-age adults

- ★ Most convictions are for minor offences, not serious violent crime
- ★ There is no general legal or insurance barrier to employing someone with a conviction
- ★ You almost certainly already employ someone with a record and don't know it

There are over 12 million people recorded as having a criminal record on the Police National Computer. That is roughly one in four of all working-age adults. If you employ more than three or four people, there is a reasonable chance that at least one of them has some form of record.

It might be a caution from fifteen years ago, a fine for something minor, or a conviction from a period of their life they would rather forget. Most of the time, you will never know about it, and that is exactly how the law is designed to work.

The phrase "people with convictions" conjures up a very specific image, and it is almost always wrong. The overwhelming majority of criminal records relate to offences that are far less dramatic than the evening news might suggest - minor theft, criminal damage, drug possession, or driving offences. Many are one-off incidents from someone's youth that bear no resemblance to who they are today.



In 2022 57% of all criminal convictions in England and Wales were for summary motoring offences.

An estimated 1 in 3 Department for Work and Pensions customers has a criminal record. Having a conviction is far more common than most people realise.

There is also a common misconception that you are somehow not allowed to employ someone with a criminal record, or that it creates an insurance problem. **This is not true.** For the vast majority of roles, there is **no legal barrier whatsoever.** On the insurance front, spent convictions should not be considered. If your broker or insurer suggests otherwise, you should push back, and it may be worth reviewing your cover at renewal to ensure it does not contain unnecessary exclusions.

A NOTE ON INSURANCE

Review your existing insurance policies for any clauses relating to criminal convictions. Spent convictions should not be considered for insurance purposes. Employers' Liability insurance sometimes requires that directors or trustees do not have unspent convictions, but this can often be addressed with a simple policy endorsement at renewal. If your insurer is resistant, speak to other employers in your sector who have experience of this.

“People with convictions” are not a separate category. They are already part of your workforce, your customer base, and your community. The question is not really whether to work with them - it’s whether to do so knowingly, fairly, and with your eyes open.



The Genuine Commercial Case



This is not about doing someone a favour. Hiring people with convictions can tangibly **strengthen your business**. Here is the evidence.

① They Stay Longer

Staff turnover is one of the biggest costs for small businesses. Research shows that employees with convictions tend to stay in their jobs longer than average - **75% retention after 12 months** is the figure consistently cited across employer surveys. They place a higher value on having a job because they know how hard it was to get one. That translates into loyalty and lower turnover.

② They Perform Well

Over 86% of employers who have knowingly hired someone with a conviction rate them as good at their job. **Over 80% have positively rated their reliability, motivation, attendance, and performance.** These are not people who coast.

③ You are Fishing in a Bigger Pond

42% of employers currently have hard-to-fill vacancies. If your industry has skills shortages, opening your recruitment to people with convictions gives you access to a talent pool that most of your competitors are ignoring. Many prisons run training programmes that produce people with recognised, industry-relevant qualifications in areas like catering, construction, and warehousing.

④ It Reduces Your Recruitment Costs

The average cost of filling a non-management vacancy is around £2,000. Working with organisations like the New Futures Network or local probation services can put you in touch with candidates who are ready to work, often at no cost to you.

⑤ Your Customers Support It

Three out of four members of the public say they would be comfortable buying from a business that employs people with convictions. 81% think that businesses doing so are making a positive contribution to society. Over 92% of employers who have embraced diverse recruitment say it has enhanced their reputation.

Real-World Example




Greene King runs a 'Releasing Potential' programme that actively recruits from prisons into hospitality roles. Halfords reported that retention among graduates from their prison academy was higher than among standard shop floor recruits. These are not charitable exercises - they are commercially driven recruitment strategies.



The Law In Plain English



The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 allows most convictions to become 'spent' after a set period

-  Once spent, a conviction **does not** need to be disclosed and must be treated as if it never happened
-  For most small business roles, you can **only ask about unspent convictions**
-  Some roles are exempt, particularly those involving children or vulnerable adults

The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (ROA)

The ROA is built on the principle that people who have served their sentence deserve the chance to move on. After a set period - the "rehabilitation period" - most convictions become "spent."

Jargon Buster

"Spent Conviction"

A conviction that has passed its rehabilitation period. Once spent, the person is legally treated as though it never happened. They do not need to disclose it to most employers, and it is unlawful to refuse employment or dismiss someone because of a spent conviction.

The length of the rehabilitation period depends on the sentence given, not the offence itself. A custodial sentence of one year or less becomes spent 12 months after the sentence - including any licence period - is completed. A sentence of over one year and up to four years becomes spent four years after completion. A sentence of more than four years (where it is not a Schedule 18 offence - see below) becomes spent seven years after completion. Fines become spent 12 months from the date of conviction. Simple cautions are spent immediately; conditional cautions are spent after three months. Community and rehabilitation orders become spent at the end date specified by the order, or two years from the date of conviction if no end date was given.

Some sentences can never become spent. These include life sentences, Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences, and sentences of over four years for offences listed in Schedule 18 of the Sentencing Act 2020 - which covers serious violent, sexual, and terrorist offences. If you are unsure whether a particular conviction is spent, Unlock's free online Disclosure Calculator at disclosurecalculator.org.uk can work it out for you.

What This Means for You

For the majority of roles in a small business - shop assistants, warehouse staff, office workers, tradespeople - you can only ask about unspent convictions. If someone's conviction is spent, they have no obligation to tell you, even if you ask directly.

They have not lied. The law specifically gives them that right.

Jargon Buster

"Unspent Conviction"

A conviction still within its rehabilitation period. An employer can ask about unspent convictions, and the person is legally required to disclose them if asked. However, an unspent conviction does not automatically disqualify someone from a job.

The Exceptions

Some roles are exempt from the ROA, meaning you can ask about spent convictions too. These are typically roles involving regulated work with children or vulnerable adults, roles in healthcare, law enforcement, and certain financial or legal positions. If your business does not involve these kinds of roles, the standard rules apply.

Data Protection and Criminal Record Information

Under UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018, information about criminal convictions is classified as particularly sensitive data. The law requires a higher standard of care when you collect, store, and share this information. You should only process it when there is a clear and lawful reason to do so, restrict access to those who need it for the recruitment decision, and delete it when it is no longer required.

The Information Commissioner's Office makes clear that even the absence of a conviction (for example, a clear DBS check) is still criminal offence data and must be handled accordingly. If you hold this type of data, you should have a simple policy document setting out why you hold it, who can access it, and when it will be deleted. Section 11 of this guide includes an example policy you can adapt.

Key Takeaway

For most small business roles, you can only ask about unspent convictions. Getting this wrong does not just disadvantage the candidate - it could put you on the wrong side of the law. If in doubt, contact Nacro's free Employer Advice Service.

Understanding Criminal Record Charges



- ★ DBS checks come in four levels - the type of role determines which check you can request
- ★ For most small business roles, you do not need a DBS check at all
- ★ It is a criminal offence to request a higher-level check than the role is eligible for
- ★ A DBS check is information to support a decision, not a pass or fail

Basic Check

Shows only unspent convictions. Available for any role. This is the most common type for small businesses.

Standard Check

Shows both spent and unspent convictions, plus cautions. Only available for specific roles listed in the ROA Exceptions Order.

Enhanced Check

Includes everything on a standard check, plus any additional information the police consider relevant. Used for roles involving regular contact with children or vulnerable adults.

Enhanced with Barred Lists

Includes everything on a standard check, plus any additional information the police consider relevant. Used for roles involving regular contact with children or vulnerable adults.

How to Fix Your Application Process



- ★ Remove conviction-related questions from initial application forms ('Ban the Box')
- ★ Assess candidates on skills and experience first, and deal with convictions later
- ★ Use positive, welcoming language in job adverts
- ★ State clearly if a DBS check is required for the role

If your application form asks "Do you have any criminal convictions?" on page one, you are almost certainly losing good candidates before you have had a chance to assess them.

Jargon Buster

"Ban The Box"

A campaign led by Business in the Community that encourages employers to remove tick-box questions about criminal records from initial application forms. The principle is straightforward: assess candidates on their skills and experience first, then deal with conviction information later, when you have better context for a fair decision.

Research shows that 75% of employers admit they would use a criminal record disclosure to favour another candidate, even before considering relevance. When someone with a conviction sees that tick box at the start of an application, many will not bother completing it. They assume - often correctly - that ticking "yes" means their application goes straight in the bin.

What to Do Instead ✓

- Remove any conviction-related questions from your initial application form.
- Assess candidates on skills, experience, and suitability during shortlisting.
- If you need to ask about convictions, do so after interview - ideally at the conditional offer stage.
- Make sure you are asking the right question for the role. For most roles: "Do you have any unspent convictions?"
- Keep conviction information separate from the rest of the application.

Your Job Adverts Matter Too

If you want to attract candidates with convictions, say so.

A positive statement such as

“We welcome applications from people with lived experience of the criminal justice system”

is far more effective than the vague

“Having a criminal conviction will not necessarily be a bar to employment.”

Include a link to your policy or a brief summary. If a DBS check is required, state this upfront.

Quick Win

If you do nothing else after reading this guide, remove the criminal record tick box from your application form. It costs nothing, takes five minutes, and immediately opens your recruitment to candidates you would otherwise never see.

Handling Disclosure with Confidence



- ★ Stay calm and professional when someone discloses a conviction
- ★ Focus on context and circumstances, not the details of the offence
- ★ Ask “What happened?” rather than “What did you do?”
- ★ Keep all disclosure information strictly confidential
- ★ You are not the court - your job is to assess relevance to the role

At some point during your recruitment process, a candidate may disclose a criminal conviction. This might happen on a form, during an interview, or in conversation. Some candidates will bring a prepared letter of disclosure to the interview, setting out their convictions and the circumstances in their own words. If someone hands you a letter like this, read it carefully and use it as the starting point for a supportive conversation rather than an interrogation.

How you handle that moment matters greatly - both for the candidate and for your business.

Stay Calm and Professional

For the person disclosing, this is likely one of the most stressful parts of the process. Many have experienced being immediately written off the moment they mention their record. A calm, measured response sets the tone for a fair assessment.

You do not need to conduct an interrogation. The goal is to understand the context, not to extract every detail. Effective questions focus on understanding:

What to Ask

- What were the circumstances at the time? (Rather than “What did you do?” - this approach, used by employers like Greene King, encourages a fuller picture.)
- How long ago did it happen, and how old were you?
- Have your circumstances changed since then?
- Is there anything you are doing now that reflects that change?

What Not to Ask

- Do not ask for more detail than you need
- Do not ask about convictions that are spent (unless the role is exempt).
- Do not ask about arrests, allegations, or charges that did not result in a conviction
- Be aware of “over-disclosure” - if a candidate tells you about a spent conviction or a conviction you have no right to know about, you should not take it into account. If this happens, gently explain that they were not required to share that information and that it will not influence your decision

Your role is not to re-try the case. It is to determine whether the conviction is relevant to the job and whether the person can perform it safely and effectively. Focus on the questions above and let the answers guide your assessment.

Confidentiality

Any information shared about a conviction must be kept confidential under data protection law. Share it only with people who need to know for the recruitment decision. Do not leave paperwork in shared spaces. Delete or securely destroy the information when it is no longer needed. The candidate should be told exactly who in the organisation has seen their disclosure.

Remember

The person does not have to tell their future colleagues about their conviction. That is their choice. If you hire them, reassure them that their disclosure will remain confidential and that they decide who else, if anyone, to tell.

A Common Sense Approach to Risk-Assessment



- ★ Risk assessment is structured common sense, not a bureaucratic process
- ★ The key question: is this conviction relevant to this specific role?
- ★ Consider the nature, seriousness, age, and pattern of offending
- ★ Think practically about what the role actually involves day to day
- ★ Think practically about what the role actually involves day to day

When someone discloses a conviction, or a DBS check reveals one, you need to decide: Does this matter for this specific role? This does not require a committee or a lawyer. It requires structured common sense.

The Key Questions

What was the offence? You need a general understanding of what happened, but not every detail.

How relevant is it to the job? A fraud conviction is clearly relevant for a bookkeeper. It is far less relevant for a gardener. A driving offence matters for a delivery driver but not for a kitchen porter.

How serious was it? There is a significant difference between a minor public order offence and a serious assault.

How long ago was it? An offence from 20 years ago tells you far less about someone than one from 6 months ago.

Was there a pattern? A single offence is very different from a string of similar offences.

Have circumstances changed? Has the person moved on? Is there evidence of change - a probation officer's reference, completion of a programme, stable housing?

Could the role create opportunities to reoffend? Think practically about day-to-day duties. If someone has a conviction for theft and the role involves handling cash unsupervised, that requires careful consideration. If the role has no connection to the offence, the risk is minimal.

Jargon Buster

“DBS Check”

DBS stands for the Disclosure and Barring Service. A DBS check is a background check that reveals information about a person’s criminal record. The level of detail depends on the type of check and the nature of the role. It is not a pass or fail - it provides information to support a recruitment decision.

When Do You Actually Need a Check?

For most small business roles, you do not need a DBS check at all. If the role does not involve working with children or vulnerable adults, or fall into a specific exempt category, requesting a standard or enhanced check would be unlawful. Every role should be assessed individually before you advertise it, so you know which level of check (if any) is required. The UK Government website has a tool to help you determine the correct check for each role.

You can always request a basic DBS check for any role. But remember: it will only show unspent convictions, which the person is already legally required to disclose if asked.

Jargon Buster

“Regulated Activity”

A legal term for work involving close, unsupervised contact with children or vulnerable adults - for example, nursery workers, care home staff, or certain teaching positions. It is a criminal offence for someone on the barred list to apply for such a role, and a criminal offence for you to employ them in one.

Important!

A DBS check is not a pass or fail. A record on a check does not automatically make someone unsuitable. Your job is to assess whether the specific conviction is relevant to the specific role. For instance, an unspent conviction for a minor public order offence from three years ago has no bearing on someone’s ability to work in your warehouse.

Record Your Decision

Write down your reasoning - even just a few sentences. Note what you considered, what the candidate said, and why you decided to offer or not offer the role. This protects you if the decision is ever questioned and demonstrates that you acted fairly. Section 11 of this guide includes an example risk assessment form.

If You Decide Not to Hire

If you cannot offer someone a role because of their conviction, explain why. Give them honest, useful feedback so they can address it in future applications. Many people with convictions are used to applying for dozens of jobs and hearing nothing back. Even when the answer is no, a phone call with clear reasons will be appreciated. You must not retain details of their conviction after the process is complete.



Managing Confidentiality, Data, and Staff Concerns



- ★ An employee's conviction is private - you cannot share it without their consent
- ★ Criminal record data has enhanced legal protections under GDPR
- ★ Communicate your general approach to staff without referencing individuals
- ★ Have a plan for handling accidental disclosure of a colleague's conviction
- ★ Store conviction data securely, separately from routine HR files, and delete it when no longer needed

Confidentiality and Data Handling

A new employee's conviction is their private information. Under data protection law, you cannot share it with colleagues without their explicit consent. In most cases, nobody else in the business needs to know.

Criminal record information - including DBS certificates, disclosure statements, and your own notes from risk assessments - must be stored securely and separately from routine HR files. Access should be limited to a very small number of named individuals. Disclosure information from unsuccessful applicants should be destroyed promptly after the recruitment process concludes. For successful applicants, review periodically whether you still need to hold it - particularly when a conviction becomes spent, at which point you have no right to retain the information unless the role is a regulated one.

Jargon Buster

"Criminal Offence Data"

Under UK GDPR, information about criminal convictions and offences is given enhanced legal protection. This includes not just details of convictions, but also allegations, cautions, and even the fact that someone has no convictions (for example, a clear DBS check). You must have a lawful basis for holding it, store it securely, minimise who can access it, and delete it when it is no longer needed.

Communicating Your Approach to Staff

Rather than telling your team about any individual, communicate your general approach. You might mention that your business recruits based on skills and attitude, that you believe in giving people a fair chance, and that you do not discriminate unfairly on the basis of criminal records. This sets expectations and signals to any existing employees with undisclosed convictions that they work somewhere that does not judge them for their past.

If a Colleague's Conviction Becomes Known

Despite best efforts, there may be rare situations where a colleague's conviction becomes known to others in the workplace. If this happens, you should take it seriously. Interview the individual privately - off-site if possible - to understand how the information came out and to assess any impact on their wellbeing. Consider steps such as adjusting shift patterns if needed. If the disclosure was deliberate, this is a data protection breach and should be treated as a disciplinary matter. If the employee has been open and honest with you, standing by them sends a powerful message about your values.

Addressing Staff Concerns

If a colleague raises concerns, take them seriously but respond with facts. The common misconceptions - that people with convictions are untrustworthy, that the business is taking on legal risk, or that customers will react badly - are not supported by evidence. Three out of four members of the public would be comfortable buying from a business that employs people with convictions. The evidence consistently shows these employees to be motivated, loyal, and determined.

Setting People Up to Succeed



- ★ For most people, onboarding should be the same as for any other employee
- ★ Recent prison leavers may need some extra flexibility in the early weeks
- ★ Consider providing a mentor or named point of contact
- ★ Be aware of licence conditions, probation appointments, or tagging requirements
- ★ Ask, don't assume - engage with the individual about what support they need

For most people with convictions, the onboarding process does not need to be any different from any other new starter. The same induction, the same expectations, the same standards. Making someone feel singled out can be just as harmful as discrimination.

That said, if you are hiring someone who has recently left prison or has been out of work for a long time, there are a few things worth thinking about.

Jargon Buster

“ROTL (Release on Temporary Licence)”

This means someone is still technically serving their sentence in prison but has been approved to leave during the day for work or training. They will need to return to the prison each evening and will have specific conditions. The New Futures Network can help you understand how this works in practice.



Reminder

Make sure the new starter knows they do not have to tell colleagues about their conviction. That is their personal information and their choice. Removing that pressure helps them settle in and focus on the job.

Support that makes a Difference

Provide a mentor or named contact - someone the new starter can approach with questions without feeling awkward

1

2

Be aware that recent prison leavers may face practical challenges: housing, bank accounts, identification documents. A little flexibility goes a long way

Accept character references from probation officers, prison staff, or charity workers if traditional employment references are not available.

3

3

If performance is uneven in the early weeks, consider flexibility with probation periods rather than making a snap decision

If someone has external supervision requirements - meetings with a probation officer, reporting to a supervising police officer, or electronic tag restrictions - discuss what adjustments may be needed to working hours. A conversation with probation may be required to align tag curfew times with shift patterns.

4

Don't Make Assumptions

The most important thing is to ask, not assume. Do not assume someone needs extra help. Do not assume they will struggle. Many people with convictions will start strongly and never look back. Others may need support. The best approach is an open conversation. After the first few months, ask how the induction went and whether there is anything you could improve. Their perspective can help you refine your approach for future hires.

Who Can Help



- ★ Several organisations provide free, specialist support to employers
- ★ New Futures Network links employers with prisons
- ★ Nacro offers a free Employer Advice Service on legal and practical questions
- ★ Offploy provides employer toolkits, training, and consultancy
- ★ You do not need to work this out on your own
- ★ Unlock offers a helpline and free Disclosure Calculator for working out when convictions are spent

There are organisations whose entire purpose is to help employers navigate this, and most offer their support free of charge.

New Futures Network (NFN)	Part of HM Prison and Probation Service, NFN has Employment Brokers in prisons across England and Wales who can match you with candidates, help you understand prison recruitment, and support you through the process.
Nacro	One of the leading criminal justice charities. Their free Employer Advice Service covers everything from DBS checks to risk assessments to legal questions. If you are unsure about anything in this guide, Nacro should be your first call.
Offploy	A social enterprise run largely by people with lived experience of the justice system. Offploy provides employer toolkits, training, consultancy, and an 'Employing With Conviction' guide covering culture, policy, risk management, and impact measurement. They offer free 30-minute calls to help employers get started.
The Oswin Project	Based in Northumberland, The Oswin Project has been supporting people with criminal records into employment, training, and mentoring since 2014. What makes them distinctive is that they run their own social enterprises - including a training café and bakery inside HMP Northumberland, a landscaping and property maintenance service, a bike repair workshop, and a farm shop - all staffed by serving prisoners and prison leavers. 70% of their own staff have lived experience of the justice system. They also match employers with motivated, work-ready candidates, providing ongoing mentoring and support throughout the employment process to ensure it works for both sides. Their reoffending rate for people they work with is under 5%, compared to a national average of around 29%. If you are in the North East, they are an excellent first point of contact.
CIPD Trust	Linked to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the CIPD Trust provides guidance on recruiting, employing, and retaining people with convictions, including mentoring advice and employer case studies.

Other Helpful Organisations

Unlock - an independent national charity for people with criminal records. They run a peer-led helpline, an information hub, and a free online Disclosure Calculator (disclosurecalculator.org.uk) that works out when convictions become spent. Their employer-facing site, Recruit!, helps businesses deal with criminal records fairly

Business in the Community - runs the Ban the Box campaign and provides employer resources.

Working Chance - helps women with convictions find employment and build careers.

St Giles Trust - supports prison leavers with employment, housing, and everyday needs.

Only a Pavement Away - a hospitality sector charity helping prison leavers into pub, hotel, and restaurant roles.

Prison Reform Trust - provides research and information on the criminal justice system.

Every Question Has Been Asked Before

These organisations exist because they want employers to succeed at this. There is no question too basic or too niche. If something in this guide has raised a query, pick up the phone.

Useful Contacts

New Futures Network	newfuturesnetwork.gov.uk
Nacro Employer Advice Service	nacro.org.uk
Offploy	offploy.org
The Oswin Project	oswinproject.org.uk
CIPD Trust	cipdtrust.org
Unlock	unlock.org.uk
Disclosure Calculator	disclosurecalculator.org.uk
Ban the Box	bitc.org.uk
Working Chance	workingchance.org
Disclosure and Barring Service	gov.uk/dbs
Information Commissioner's Office	ico.org.uk
Prison Reform Trust	prisonreformtrust.org.uk

A Final Thought

£18bn

Reoffending Costs the UK economy up to £18bn a year

Employment is the single most effective way to reduce it. When someone gets a job, they get stability, purpose, and a reason to stay out of trouble.

As a small business owner, you are not expected to solve this problem on your own. But by being open to hiring people with convictions - by removing unnecessary barriers, asking the right questions, and assessing people on who they are now rather than who they were - you can make a real difference

To your business, to your community, and to the individuals who need someone to give them a fair chance.



The Paperwork: Example Policies and Templates

- ★ Example policy on recruiting people with criminal convictions
- ★ Example criminal record data handling policy
- ★ Blank risk assessment form
- ★ Worked example: a completed risk assessment showing how to use the form
- ★ Manager's checklist for when a candidate declares a conviction
- ★ All templates can be adapted to your organisation's needs

The following templates are designed to be adapted for your own business. They are starting points, not finished articles. Tailor the wording to reflect your organisation, your industry, and the roles you recruit for. Avoid using template policies without making them your own - a policy that clearly reflects your business will be far more credible and effective than a generic cut-and-paste document.

Template 1: Policy on Recruiting People with Criminal Convictions

Organisation: [Company Name]

[Company Name] is committed to fair and inclusive recruitment. We welcome applications from all candidates, including those with criminal convictions, and we assess every applicant on their skills, qualifications, and suitability for the role.

We comply fully with the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, the DBS Code of Practice, and all relevant data protection legislation.

Our commitments:

- We will not ask about criminal convictions on our initial application forms.
- We will only ask about convictions that we are legally entitled to know about, at an appropriate stage of the recruitment process.
- We will only request DBS checks where the role is eligible for one, and at the correct level for the position.
- We will not discriminate unfairly against any candidate on the basis of a criminal record.
- We will treat all disclosure information as confidential, sharing it only with those who need it for the recruitment decision.
- We will assess each case individually, taking into account the nature of the offence, its relevance to the role, the time elapsed, and any evidence of change.
- We will discuss any concerns arising from a disclosure with the candidate before making a final decision.
- Where we are unable to offer a role due to a conviction, we will provide constructive feedback.
- We will support employees who have disclosed convictions, including maintaining confidentiality. If an employee has been open and honest with us, we will stand by them in the event of any internal or external attention regarding their past.

All staff involved in recruitment will receive appropriate training on this policy and the relevant legislation.

This policy will be reviewed annually.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name and Role:

Template 2: Criminal Record Data Handling Policy

Criminal Record Data Handling Policy

Purpose: This policy sets out how [Company Name] handles personal data relating to criminal convictions and offences, in compliance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Scope: This policy covers all criminal offence data collected during recruitment, including DBS certificates, disclosure statements, risk assessment notes, and any related correspondence.

Collection: We only collect criminal offence data where there is a lawful and genuine reason to do so, and only at the appropriate stage of the recruitment process.

Storage: All criminal offence data is stored securely, separately from routine HR files. Access is restricted to [named role(s), e.g. 'HR Manager and Managing Director'].

Retention:

- Disclosure data from unsuccessful applicants will be securely destroyed within [e.g. 6 months] of the conclusion of the recruitment process.
- Disclosure data from successful applicants will be reviewed periodically. It will be securely destroyed or returned to the employee when the conviction becomes spent, unless the role is a regulated position requiring ongoing checks.
- DBS certificates will not be retained for longer than six months unless there is a specific and documented reason for doing so.

Sharing: Criminal offence data will not be disclosed to anyone who does not have a genuine need to know. Employees will be informed of exactly who within the organisation has access to their information.

Destruction: Data will be destroyed using a cross-cut shredder (paper) or permanent deletion (electronic). No copies will be retained.

Review: This policy will be reviewed annually.

Schedule 1 Condition relied upon: [e.g. Condition 1 - Employment]

Lawful Basis under Article 6: [e.g. Legitimate Interests / Legal Obligation]

Template 3: Criminal Record Risk Assessment Form

Criminal Record Risk Assessment Form

Candidate Name: _____ Date: _____

Position Applied For: _____

Assessor(s): _____

SECTION A: Offence Details

Nature of offence(s): _____

Date(s) of offence(s): _____

Sentence received: _____

Is the conviction spent or unspent? _____

SECTION B: Assessment Questions

1. How relevant is this offence to the role applied for?

[Not relevant / Somewhat relevant / Directly relevant]

Notes: _____

2. How serious was the offence?

[Minor / Moderate / Serious]

Notes: _____

3. How long ago did the offence occur? _____

4. Was this a single incident or part of a pattern? _____

5. What were the circumstances at the time? _____

6. Have the candidate's circumstances changed since? _____

7. Does the role present realistic opportunities to reoffend?

[Yes / No] If yes, explain: _____

8. Does the role involve:

- Unsupervised contact with vulnerable people? [Yes/No]
- Direct responsibility for finance or valuables? [Yes/No]
- Direct contact with the public? [Yes/No]
- A significant level of trust? [Yes/No]

SECTION C: Decision

Risk level: [Low / Medium / High]

Decision: [Offer role / Offer role with safeguards / Do not offer role]

If safeguards, specify: _____

If not offering, reason: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Worked Example: A Completed Risk Assessment

The following is a fictional example showing how the risk assessment form above might be completed in practice. It illustrates the kind of reasoning and level of detail that is appropriate.

Candidate Details	
Candidate Name	Mark Taylor
Date	Mar 14, 2026
Position Applied For	Warehouse Operative
Assessor(s)	Sarah Jenkins (Owner) and Tom Pearce (Warehouse Manager)
Offence Details	
Nature of offence(s)	Possession of Class B drugs (cannabis)
Date(s) of offence(s)	Jun 2018
Sentence received	Community order (12 months) with unpaid work requirement
Spent or unspent?	Spent (rehabilitation period ended July 2020)
Note	This conviction is spent. The candidate disclosed it voluntarily. As a spent conviction, it cannot be taken into account for this role. This assessment is
Assessment	
Relevance to role	Not relevant. The role involves picking and packing. There is no connection between a drug possession offence and the duties of the role.
Seriousness	Minor. Possession for personal use, not supply. Community order rather than custody.
How long ago?	Almost 8 years ago.
Single incident or pattern?	Single incident. No other convictions disclosed or revealed.
Circumstances at the time	The candidate was going through a difficult period after a family bereavement and was using cannabis to cope. He has since received support and has not used drugs since.
Have circumstances changed?	Yes. Community order completed. Stable accommodation for five years. Two temporary warehouse roles since 2020 with positive references from both.
Does the role present opportunities to reoffend?	No.
Unsupervised contact with vulnerable people?	No

Responsibility for finance or valuables?	No
Direct contact with the public?	No
Significant level of trust?	No more than any standard employee
Decision	
Risk level	Low
Decision	Offer role
Safeguards required	None beyond standard onboarding.
Reasoning	The conviction is spent and not relevant to the role. The candidate performed well at interview, has relevant experience, and provided strong references.
Signed	S. Jenkins - 14 March 2026

Note how this example keeps the reasoning brief but clear. It addresses each question, explains why the conviction is not relevant, and records the decision with a short justification. If this decision were ever questioned, the form demonstrates that the employer considered the matter fairly and reached a reasonable conclusion.

Worked Example 2: A More Complex Case

Not every assessment will be as clear-cut. Here is a second example involving a conviction that is more closely connected to the role.

Candidate Details	
Candidate Name	Lisa Morgan
Date	Mar 14, 2026
Position Applied For	Accounts Assistant
Assessor(s)	Sarah Jenkins (Owner) and David Hall (Finance Manager)
Offence Details	
Nature of offence(s)	Fraud by false representation (inflated expense claims at previous employer)
Date(s) of offence(s)	Mar 2021
Sentence received	8 months' imprisonment, suspended for 18 months
Spent or unspent?	Unspent (rehabilitation period: sentence length plus 4 years = estimated spent date late 2026)
Assessment	
Relevance to role	Directly relevant. The role involves processing invoices, handling petty cash, and preparing expense claims. The offence relates directly to financial dishonesty in a workplace.
Seriousness	Moderate. Suspended prison sentence indicates the court considered it serious enough to warrant custody but that there were mitigating factors.
How long ago?	Approximately 5 years ago.
Single incident or pattern?	The candidate described it as occurring over approximately four months. No other convictions.
Circumstances at the time	The candidate was in significant personal debt following a relationship breakdown and began inflating expense claims. She was caught, immediately admitted responsibility, and cooperated fully with the investigation.
Have circumstances changed?	Yes. Suspended sentence completed. Amount repaid in full through court order. Completed a financial management course. Has since worked in a retail role (not involving finance) with a positive reference.
Does the role present opportunities to reoffend?	Yes. The role involves direct access to financial systems and petty cash.

Unsupervised contact with vulnerable people?	No
Responsibility for finance or valuables?	Yes
Direct contact with the public?	Limited
Significant level of trust?	Yes - access to company accounts
Decision	
Risk level	Medium
Decision	Offer role with safeguards
Safeguards	(1) All expense claims and petty cash reconciliations to be counter-signed by the Finance Manager for the first 12 months. (2) No sole signatory authority on company bank account. (3) Six-month probation review to include specific discussion of the arrangement. (4) Candidate has been informed of and agreed to these measures.
Reasoning	The candidate was the strongest at interview and has clearly taken steps to address the circumstances that led to the offence. The conviction is directly relevant, but the safeguards above reduce the residual risk to an acceptable level. The candidate was open about her record and the measures have been agreed collaboratively.
Signed	S. Jenkins - 14 March 2026

This second example shows a more nuanced assessment. The conviction is directly relevant, but the employer has not simply said no. Instead, they have identified sensible safeguards that manage the risk while still giving the candidate a fair opportunity. This is the kind of proportionate, common-sense approach that the law and good practice both encourage.

Template 4: Manager's Checklist - When a Candidate Declares a Conviction

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- Review your company's policy on recruiting people with convictions
- Review the job description and any role risk assessment
- Determine whether the type of conviction declared could affect the candidate's ability to perform the role

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Conduct the interview fairly - focus on qualifications, skills, and experience
- Do not ask illegal or inappropriate questions about criminal history
- If the candidate discloses voluntarily, respond calmly and professionally
- Reassure them of confidentiality and explain your fair evaluation process
- Ask about circumstances and context, not the details of the offence

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Assess qualifications and performance against the role requirements and any risk assessment
- Evaluate whether the conviction has a direct and adverse impact on their ability to do the job safely
- If unsure, consult HR or seek advice from Nacro's Employer Advice Service

OFFER AND ONBOARDING

- Base your decision on qualifications, abilities, and relevance of the conviction
- Issue a standard offer letter with position, start date, and salary details
- During induction, emphasise your commitment to equal opportunity and inclusion

POST-HIRE

- Offer the same support and development opportunities as for all employees
- Discuss any external supervision requirements (probation, tag curfews) and agree any adjustments needed
- Monitor performance through normal channels and provide constructive feedback
- Maintain confidentiality at all times
- Stay informed about relevant legislation to ensure ongoing compliance



Oswin
Project

APPENDIX G: EMPLOYERS LEAFLET

HARD-WORKING. LOYAL. HIRED.



The employer's quick guide to hiring people with convictions

Around 11 million people in the UK have a criminal record. Many are skilled, motivated, and desperate to prove themselves.

Overlooking them isn't just unfair – it's bad for business.



75%

of employers who hire people with convictions say they would do it again.



1 IN 3

working-age adults in the UK has a criminal record.



50%

lower staff turnover is reported by some inclusive employers.

Why it makes business sense



Lower recruitment costs – High staff turnover is expensive. Candidates with convictions are often highly motivated to hold down work. They tend to stay.



Access untapped talent – A tight labour market means you can't afford to rule people out. Many candidates have trade skills, management experience, and professional qualifications.



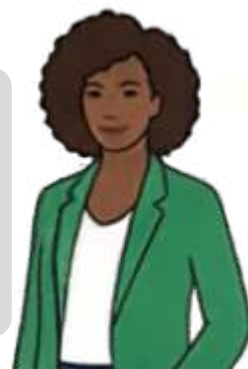
Loyalty that pays off – Timpson, Greene King, and Halfords all report that employees hired through prison programmes are among their most reliable staff.



Tax incentives Some employers may be eligible for financial support when hiring people leaving custody. Ask your local Jobcentre Plus about available schemes.

What the law says

The Rehabilitation of offenders Act 1974 means many convictions become "spent" after a set period. Candidates don't have to declare them, and you can't ask. Most jobs don't require a DBS check – and for those that do, different rules apply.



Turn over to find out how to get started.

GETTING STARTED

Five practical steps for inclusive hiring



1. Review your application form

Remove blanket tick-box questions about convictions. Ask only what's relevant to the role. A conviction from 15 years ago is probably not relevant to a warehouse job today.



3. Do an individual risk assessment

If a candidate discloses a conviction, assess the specific risk for that specific role. Consider: how long ago, what were the circumstances, and what has changed since?



5. Consider a ROTL placement first

Release on Temporary Licence lets people open prisons work for employers before release. It's a low-risk way to try before you hire – many become permanent employees.

"But what if it goes wrong?" Most employers never have an issue. And if you do need to manage a problem, the same employment law that applies to everyone else applies here too. You are not taking on extra legal risk simply by hiring someone with a conviction.



2. Train your hiring managers

Make sure whoever interviews candidates understands what they can and can't ask, and what "spent" means under the Rehabilitation of offenders Act.



4. Partner with specialist organisations

The New Futures Network connects employers directly with prisons. The Oswin Project, Nacro and the Prison Reform Trust offer free advice and can help you recruit effectively and safely.

Useful contacts

New Futures Network

newfuturesnetwork.gov.uk – connects employers with prisons across England and Wales

Nacro

nacro.org.uk – free advice on employing people with criminal records

The Oswin Project

oswinproject.org.uk - works with people inside prison and on release, offering employment and volunteering, also supports employers.

Unlock

unlock.org.uk – charity supporting people with convictions into work

Jargon buster

Spent conviction – one that no longer needs to be declared after a rehabilitation period under the Rehabilitation of offenders Act 1974.

DBS check – a Disclosure and Barring Service check, only required for specific roles such as working with children or vulnerable adults.

ROTL – Release on Temporary Licence, which allows prisoners in open conditions to work outside before release.

New Futures Network – the Ministry of Justice programme linking employers directly with prisons.

APPENDIX H: PRISONER PASSPORT

Change Of Plan

A Practical Workbook for Starting Over

**“You can't go
back and change
the beginning,
but you can start
where you are
and change the
ending.”**

C.S Lewis

This book is yours.

Use it to

- Plan your release
- Keep track of appointments
- Write down important contacts
- And think about your future

No one can make you share anything

You write in it.

If This Book is Lost – Please Return It To:

Full Name	
Phone Number	
Release Address	
Key Contacts	

Thank you for returning this book. It may contain important personal information.

Contents

My Release To-Do List	5
Probation Appointments & Offices	7
Housing	9
Appointment Planner	11
Healthcare	12
My Support Network	17
Getting ID	19
Money & Bank Accounts	21
My Employment History	23
Training & Qualifications	25
Volunteering Experience	26
Hobbies & Interests	28
My Skills	29
My Goals	31
My Disclosure Statement	33
Employers Who Welcome Ex-Offenders	35
Hobbies & Things To Do	37
Recovery Support	39
Charities & Support Organisations	41
Dealing With Debt	43

My Release To-Do List

Use this page to plan what you need to sort out before and after release

Think about these areas when making your list:

- 1. Probation** – Do you know your first appointment date and time?
- 2. Housing** – Do you know where you are sleeping on night one?
- 3. Benefits** – Universal Credit can take 5 weeks. Start it as early as you can.
- 4. Healthcare** – Do you need a GP, prescription, or dentist?
- 5. Relationships** – Who do you want to contact? Who do you want to stay away from?

#	What I need to do?	Done?
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

7		
8		
9		

Probation

Keep this information somewhere safe – missing appointments can have serious consequences

My Probation Officer

Name of Probation Officer	
Phone Number	
Email Address	
Office Address	
Date & Time of First Appointment	

Questions I have for my first meeting...

North East Probation Offices

Use the table below to find your nearest office. All offices share the same contact number 0191 933 3780.

Area	Address
Newcastle	Victoria House, Hampshire Court, Newcastle Business Park, NE4 7YJ
Gateshead	Warwick Street, Gateshead, NE8 1PZ
South Shields	Probation Office, Secretan Way, South Shields, NE33 1HG
Durham	Framwell House, Framwellgate, Durham, DH1 5SU
Darlington	9 Corporation Road, Darlington, DL3 6TH
Middlesbrough	160 Albert Road, Middlesbrough, TS1 2PZ
Northumberland (Ashington)	South View, Ashington, NE63 0RY
Northumberland (Blyth)	Unit 36, Bridge Street, Blyth, NE24 2AG
Sunderland	Stoney Ln, Southwick, Sunderland SR5 2JB

Important: Always attend probation appointments on time. If you are going to be late or cannot make it, call your probation officer as soon as possible. Missing appointments without a good reason could mean you are recalled to prison.

Housing

Knowing where you are going to live is one of the most important parts of your release plan

My Housing Arrangements

Where am I living on release?	
Address	
Landlord / Housing Provider Name	
Landlord / Housing Phone Number	

Contacts for housing...

Council Housing & Homelessness Teams

If you have nowhere to go on release, contact the council in the area you want to live. Tell them your release date as early as possible.

Council	Housing / Homelessness Team	Phone
Newcastle City Council	Housing Solutions, Civic Centre, Barras Bridge, Newcastle, NE1 8QH	0191 277 7427
Gateshead Council	Housing Advice Team, Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead, NE8 1HH	0191 433 3000
Durham County Council	Homeless Prevention, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UQ	03000 268 000
Darlington Borough Council	Housing Advice, Town Hall, Feethams, Darlington, DL1 5QT	01325 406 333
Middlesbrough Council	Housing Options Team, PO Box 506, Middlesbrough, TS1 2QZ	01642 729 429
Northumberland County Council	Housing Options, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF	0345 600 6400

Other housing help:

Shelter – free housing advice: 0808 800 4444 (freephone) – shelter.org.uk

Crisis – homelessness charity: 0300 636 1967 – crisis.org.uk

Changing Lives – NE homelessness support: 0191 273 5832

Appointment Planner

Write down all your appointments here so everything is in one place

Use this page to keep track of any meetings you have lined up. Fill in who you are meeting, where, when, and what it is for.

Who / Organisation	Address / Where	Date & Time	Purpose

TIP: Take this book to every appointment. Ask for a receipt or letter confirming you attended. If you need to travel, check your local bus or train times at Traveline: 0871 200 2233 or traveline.info

Healthcare

Looking after your health is just as important as everything else

TIP: If you're not sure whether you need a walk-in centre, A&E, or a GP call NHS 111 first. They can advise you and can often book you a timed appointment.

My GP Details

GP Practice Name	
Address	
Phone Number	
Date of Registration	
Any regular medication I need	

How to Register with a GP

Registering with a GP should be one of the first things you do after release. Your GP is your main point of contact for ongoing health needs, prescriptions, mental health support, and referrals to other services.

IMPORTANT: You do NOT need ID, proof of address, or an NHS number to register with a GP. This is stated in official NHS guidelines. If a surgery tries to turn you away for not having these, they are not following the rules. You have the right to register. If you have no fixed address, you can use a temporary address – such as a hostel, a friend's address, or even the GP surgery's own address.

Step - By - Step

Registering with a GP

1

Find a GP surgery near where you're living. Search at nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-gp or call NHS 111. Your probation officer or support worker may also be able to suggest one.

3

Give your basic details. Name, date of birth, and an address. Your NHS number helps but isn't essential.

5

Ask about a new patient health check. Most surgeries offer one when you first register.

2

Go to the surgery or register online. Many GP surgeries now allow online registration through the NHS "Register with a GP surgery" service. You can also walk in and ask to register in person.

4

Mention your medication. If you were given medication on release (up to 28 days' supply), tell the surgery straight away so they can arrange your next prescription.

Knowing Where to Go

The NHS has different services for different needs. Knowing which one to use means you get the right help faster.

Service	When to Use	What to Know
Pharmacy	Minor ailments: coughs, colds, skin rashes, aches, stomach upsets	No appointment needed. Ask about the Pharmacy First service – pharmacists can now treat some conditions and give prescription medicines without a GP appointment.
NHS 111	You need medical help but it's not life-threatening. Not sure where to go.	Available 24/7 by phone (111) or online at 111.nhs.uk . They can book you a UTC appointment directly.
GP Surgery	Ongoing health issues, repeat prescriptions, mental health support, referrals to hospital	Book by phone or online. Your registered GP holds your medical records and coordinates your care.
Urgent Treatment Centre / Walk-In Centre	Injuries or illnesses that need same-day attention but aren't emergencies: sprains, minor burns, infections, cuts needing stitches	No appointment needed. No registration needed. Open 7 days a week.
A&E (999)	Life-threatening emergencies: chest pain, severe bleeding, stroke symptoms, serious accidents	Call 999 or go directly. For emergencies only.

How to Use a Walk-In Centre or Urgent Treatment Centre

Walk-in centres and Urgent Treatment Centres (UTCs) are NHS services where you can get help for illnesses and injuries that need same-day attention but aren't serious enough for A&E.

KEY FACTS ABOUT WALK-IN CENTRES / UTCs

- ✓ No appointment needed – you can just turn up.
- ✓ No registration needed – you don't need to be registered with a GP.
- ✓ No ID needed – anyone can walk in.
- ✓ Free – it's an NHS service.
- ✓ Open 7 days a week – including weekends and bank holidays.

They are **not designed for** long-term conditions, repeat prescriptions, or life-threatening emergencies. For emergencies, always call 999.

Emergency Dental Care

If you are in pain and cannot get a dentist appointment, call 111 and ask for emergency dental services.

Newcastle Dental Hospital Richardson Road, Newcastle NE2 4AZ | 0191 282 4240

South Tees Dental Helpline James Cook University Hospital, Middlesbrough | 01642 850 850

Durham / all areas Call NHS 111 to find your nearest emergency dentist

Sexual Health Services

All sexual health services are free, confidential, and non-judgmental.

Newcastle: Newcastle Sexual Health, Royal Victoria Infirmary, NE1 4LP | 0191 282 0899

Gateshead: Gateshead Sexual Health, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, NE9 6SX | 0191 445 2455

Durham / Darlington: County Durham & Darlington Sexual Health, Darlington Memorial Hospital | 0300 555 0103

Middlesbrough / Teesside: Tees Sexual Health Service, Gresham House, TS1 2QL | 01642 303 780

Quick Reference – Key Numbers

NHS 111 – Non-emergency medical advice, 24 hours (phone 111 or 111.nhs.uk)

999 – Life-threatening emergencies only

Samaritans – 116 123 (free, 24 hours, every day)

SHOUT Crisis Text Line – Text SHOUT to 85258

Find a GP – nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-gp

Find a Dentist – nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist

Thoughts on My Support Network

Write here about your support – who you can call, who to avoid, who you want to rebuild relationships with

Getting ID

Having ID is essential for everyday life – you’ll need it to open a bank account, start a job, claim benefits, rent a home, and much more.

Many people leave prison without any valid photo ID, so sorting this out early should be a priority.

What Counts as Valid ID?

The most widely recognised forms are a passport, a driving licence (full or provisional), and a PASS hologram card such as a CitizenCard.

WATCH OUT: A National Insurance letter is NOT accepted as valid ID by most organisations.

A Universal Credit statement is accepted by many organisations as proof of identity and address. Keep a recent copy to hand.

Your Options

Type of ID	Cost	How to Get It	Good to Know
CitizenCard (PASS hologram)	£18 std / £35 urgent	Apply at citizencard.com . Need a photo + passport/licence OR a referee (support worker, doctor, etc).	Endorsed by Home Office & Police. Takes ~21 days (std). Valid 3 years.
Post Office PASS Card	£15	Apply at postoffice.co.uk/identity/pass-card . Same process as CitizenCard and is issued by them.	Slightly cheaper. Same PASS recognition.
Provisional Driving Licence	£34 online / £43 post	Apply at gov.uk/apply-first-provisional-driving-licence or D1 form from Post Office. Need passport or birth cert + NI number.	Very widely accepted. Valid 10 years. You don't have to learn to drive.
Passport	From £88.50	Apply at gov.uk/apply-renew-passport . Need birth cert, digital photo, identity confirmer.	Strongest ID but most expensive. Takes several weeks.
Birth Certificate (replacement)	£11	Order at gov.uk/order-copy-birth-death-marriage-certificate .	Not photo ID on its own, but useful supporting document.

TIPS:

Start with what you can get now. A CitizenCard is usually quickest if you have no passport.

Ask for help with costs. Some charities and councils can help cover ID costs.

Get a replacement birth certificate (£11) – makes applying for a provisional licence much easier.

Keep your ID safe. Replacing lost documents costs money. Keep a photo on your phone as backup.

Money & Bank Accounts

Sorting out your finances is an important early step after release

Having a bank account makes everything easier – for Universal Credit, wages, and daily life. If you do not have ID, there are still options. Ask your probation officer or key worker for help.

My Bank / Finance Details

Bank Name	
Branch / Address	
Appointment Date & Time	
ID I have available	

Bank Accounts for People With No Fixed Address or Limited ID

HSBC Basic Account – HSBC offers a basic account ('No Fixed Abode' scheme). You can use your licence as proof of ID. Ask at any HSBC branch.

Monzo or Starling (app-based) – Free account with a Mastercard. If you have photo ID (passport or driving licence), you can apply via the app.

NE Credit Union – Local not-for-profit financial co-op. Savings accounts and small loans. Call: 0191 273 8811

Post Office Card Account – Can sometimes help people receive benefits payments without a full bank account. Ask your JobCentre.

Universal Credit – You can start your claim up to 28 days before release. There is a 5-week wait before your first payment – start as soon as possible. Call the UC helpline: 0800 328 5644 (freephone) or visit your local JobCentre Plus.

Other Work Experience / Informal Work

e.g. helping family business, cash in hand work, prison work placements, community payback

Volunteering Experience

Voluntary work is valued by employers and can be a good starting point for a CV

Volunteering inside prison counts. Roles like Listener, Shannon Trust Mentor, Violence Reduction peer worker all show responsibility and commitment. These are real skills that employers respect.

My Volunteering / Peer Support Roles

Role / Organisation	Dates	What I Did / Skills I Gained

Examples of Prison-Based Volunteering Roles

Samaritans Listener – Trained volunteer providing confidential emotional support. Shows empathy, trust, communication.

Shannon Trust Reading Mentor – Helps others learn to read. Shows patience, teaching ability, commitment.

Violence Reduction Peer Mentor – Works to reduce conflict. Shows leadership and conflict resolution.

Gym / Healthcare Orderly – Managing equipment and supporting others. Shows reliability.

Wing/Landing Cleaner – Maintaining the living environment. Shows work ethic and dependability.

Hobbies & Interests

What do you enjoy? What would you like to try?

Knowing what you enjoy doing can help you stay busy, meet new people, and feel better about yourself.

Things I Enjoy or Am Interested In

Write here...

Things I Would Like to Try or Learn

Write here...

Sport or Physical Activity I Like or Want to Try

Write here...

My Skills

Everyone has skills – this page is to help you see yours

Think about what you are good at, what others have told you you're good at, and skills you've picked up over the years.

Practical / Hands-On Skills

e.g. driving, construction, cooking, mechanics, decorating, gardening

Write your skills here...

People / Communication Skills

e.g. team working, customer service, managing conflict, negotiating

Write your skills here...

Organisation / Problem Solving Skills

e.g. planning, time keeping, managing money, using computers

Write your skills here...

Other Skills

Languages, creative skills, caring for others, leadership

Write your skills here...

My Goals

What does the future look like for you?

Setting goals can give you a reason to get up in the morning. They do not have to be big. Small goals matter just as much.

My Goals for the Next 3 Months

What do I want to have achieved?

My Long-Term Goals

What does my future look like?

My Disclosure Statement

When you apply for a job, you may need to tell the employer about your criminal record. A disclosure statement is a short, written summary that explains your convictions clearly and honestly.

Do I Have to Disclose?

Spent convictions: For most jobs, once your conviction is spent you do not have to disclose it. You can legally answer “No” to questions about criminal convictions.

Unspent convictions: If your conviction is still unspent and an employer asks, you must tell the truth.

Exception roles: Some jobs (working with children/vulnerable adults, healthcare, police, security) require a DBS check that can show both spent and unspent convictions.

CHECK YOUR RECORD: Use Unlock’s Disclosure Calculator at disclosurecalculator.org.uk or Offploy’s disclosure toolkit at www.disclosuretoolkit.org

What to Include in Your Disclosure Statement

Structure it in three parts (recommended by Nacro and Unlock):

1. **Start with something positive.** Why you’re applying, what skills and experience you bring.
2. **Explain your conviction(s).** Be honest and factual. What happened, when, and what has changed since.
3. **End on a strong, positive note.** What you’ve learned, how circumstances have changed, and people who can vouch for you.

*Since October 2023, some sentences over 4 years can become spent if the offence is not a serious sexual, violent, or terrorist offence.

Things That Reassure Employers

- **How long ago the offence happened** – the further in the past, the more reassuring.
- **Whether it was a one-off** – if multiple offences, group them (e.g. “between 2018 and 2020, three theft-related offences”).
- **Whether the offence is relevant to the job** – many offences have no connection to the work.
- **What has changed in your life** – stable housing, completed programmes, family commitments, recovery.
- **The sentence you received** – can put the offence in perspective.

When and How to Disclose

- Face-to-face tends to work best. Don’t lead with your conviction – talk about what you can offer first.
- Take your statement with you. It keeps you on track and shows you’ve prepared. Don’t let it take over. Keep your disclosure brief and factual, then move back to the positives.

PRACTICAL TIPS:

Practise saying it out loud with a support worker, friend, or family member.

Tailor it each time – adjust for how relevant your conviction is to each role.

Remember: you’re not alone. Nearly 1 in 4 working-age adults in the UK have a conviction.

Get help: Nacro (0300 123 1999) and Unlock (unlock.org.uk) offer free, confidential advice.

Employers Who Welcome Ex-Offenders

You deserve a fair chance – these employers agree

“Ban the Box” means an employer has removed the criminal convictions question from their initial application. They consider your skills first, not your record.

Key Employers to Know About

Timpsons

Key cutting, shoe repair. Strong policy of hiring ex-offenders. timpson.co.uk

DHL

Logistics and delivery. Actively recruit people with convictions. dhl.com/careers

Greggs

Newcastle-born bakery chain. Support ex-offenders. greggs.co.uk/jobs

Co-op

Ban the Box employer. Retail and logistics. jobs.coop.co.uk

Halfords

Automotive and cycling retail. Fair chance hiring. halfordscareers.com

Virgin Media O2

Telecoms. Ban the Box signatory. jobs.virginmediao2.co.uk

Boots

Pharmacy and health retail. Ban the Box employer. boots.jobs

Mitie

Facilities management. Actively recruits ex-offenders. mitie.com/careers

Ex Offender Support Charities

Nacro – Charity that helps ex-offenders find work. CV help, interview practice. nacro.org.uk

Working Chance – Recruitment charity for people with convictions. workingchance.org

Oswin Project – Employment and training charity for people with convictions. oswinproject.org.uk

Recruitment Junction – specialist employment agency for people with convictions. therecruitmentjunction.com

Ban the Box UK: A national campaign listing hundreds of employers who have pledged fair hiring. Check: bitc.org.uk/ban-the-box

Hobbies & Things To Do

Filling your time helps you stay out of trouble and feel better about yourself

Sport & Fitness

- Most leisure centres offer discounted memberships for people on Universal Credit.
- Parkrun.org.uk – Free 5km runs every Saturday morning. No sign-up needed.
- Local football clubs, amateur boxing clubs, basketball – most welcome new members.
- Swimming pools at most local leisure centres for low-cost exercise.

Creative & Social Activities

- Libraries – free to join. Internet, books, and free events.
- Art classes at local colleges – many free or low-cost for people on benefits.
- Community gardening projects – check your council website.

Learning & Development

- Adult education colleges (Newcastle College, Middlesbrough College) – free/subsidised courses on benefits.
- Open University (open.ac.uk) – flexible degree-level learning from home.
- Free Code Camp (freecodecamp.org) – free coding and tech skills.
- Coursera / FutureLearn – free and low-cost online courses.

Meeting New People

- Volunteering is one of the best ways to meet people and get into a routine.
- AA and NA meetings happen in almost every town – see Recovery Support page.
- Churches and community centres run free social groups and coffee mornings.
- Meetup.com – lists free/low-cost social events by interest in your area.

Boredom is one of the biggest risks after release. Having a structure to your day – even informal – can make a huge difference to how you feel and the choices you make.

Recovery Support

Help is out there if you are struggling with alcohol or drugs

Recovery is different for everyone. Whatever your situation, there are people who can help without judging you.

Recovery Services in the North East

Organisation	Area	What They Do	Phone	Website
Change Grow Live (CGL)	Newcastle & Gateshead	Drug and alcohol support. Walk-in and appointments.	0191 278 8000	changegrowlive.org
Change Grow Live (CGL)	Darlington	Drug and alcohol support	01325 366 890	changegrowlive.org
We Are With You	Teesside / Middlesbrough	Support with alcohol, drugs, and mental health.	01642 232 834	wearewithyou.org.uk
Northumberland Recovery Partnership	Northumberland	Drug and alcohol support across Northumberland.	01670 798 280	cntw.nhs.uk
Foundations	County Durham	Drug and alcohol support across Durham.	0300 123 0370	foundationsgp.co.uk
Turning Point	Various NE	Substance use, mental health, employment.	Search local	turning-point.co.uk

Self-Help Groups

- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) – Free meetings across the NE. Call: 0800 9177 650 | aa.org.uk
- Narcotics Anonymous (NA) – Free meetings across the NE. Call: 0300 999 1212 | ukna.org
- SMART Recovery – Meetings and online support. Call: 0330 053 6022 | smartrecovery.org.uk
- Cocaine Anonymous (CA) – Free support groups. Call: 0800 612 0225 | cauk.org.uk

You do not need to be referred to most recovery services – you can self-refer. Walk in or call directly.

Charities & Support Organisations

You are not on your own – these organisations are here to help

The Oswin Project | Newcastle upon Tyne

Support for people with convictions in the NE: housing help, employment support, benefits advice, and mentoring.

Tel: Contact via website | oswinproject.co.uk

Changing Lives | Newcastle & across NE

Support for people affected by homelessness, substance misuse, domestic abuse.

Tel: 0191 273 5832 | changing-lives.org.uk

Nacro | National (NE services available)

Criminal justice charity. Housing, employment support, and advice for people with convictions.

Tel: 0300 123 1999 | nacro.org.uk

Citizens Advice | All areas

Free, independent advice on benefits, debt, housing, employment and legal rights.

Tel: 0800 144 8848 | citizensadvice.org.uk

Shelter | National (NE offices)

Housing and homelessness advice, advocacy and legal support.

Tel: 0808 800 4444 | shelter.org.uk

Mind | NE (local branches)

Mental health support and information. Local branches across NE offer drop-ins.

Tel: 0300 123 3393 | mind.org.uk

The Samaritans | National

24/7 confidential listening service for anyone in emotional distress.

Tel: 116 123 (freephone) | samaritans.org

Prison Advice & Care Trust (Pact) | National

Support for prisoners, ex-prisoners, and families. Resettlement work.

Tel: 020 7735 9535 | prisonadvice.org.uk

Dealing With Debt

Debt can feel overwhelming – but there is always a way forward

Do not ignore debt. The longer you leave it, the worse it usually gets. Most debt can be managed or reduced with the right help. Never pay a company to help you with debt – there is free help available.

Free Debt Advice Services

StepChange Debt Charity – UK's largest free debt advice charity. Tel: 0800 138 1111 | stepchange.org

Citizens Advice – Free advice on all types of debt. Tel: 0800 144 8848 | citizensadvice.org.uk

National Debtline – Free, confidential debt advice. Tel: 0808 808 4000 | nationaldebtline.org

PayPlan – Free debt management plans. Tel: 0800 280 2816 | payplan.com

MoneyHelper – Government-backed free guidance. Tel: 0800 138 7777 | moneyhelper.org.uk

Common Types of Debt After Release



Council Tax

Contact your council immediately. You may qualify for a reduction.



Court Fines

Contact the fines team at the court. Payment plans usually available.



TV License

Contact TV Licensing. They can set up a payment plan.



Benefit Overpayments

Can often be repaid at a very low rate. Contact the DWP.



Rent arrears

Contact your landlord or council housing team immediately.



Gas / Electric / Water bills

Contact the supplier. Most have hardship schemes.

Bailiffs have strict rules. They cannot force their way into your home on a first visit. If bailiffs contact you, get advice immediately from Citizens Advice or StepChange.

The North East Credit Union can sometimes offer small, affordable loans to help avoid payday lenders. Call: 0191 273 8811

**“A step
backward, after
making a wrong
turn, is a step in
the right
direction.”**

Kurt Vonnegut



Oswin Project

This book was created by the Oswin Project and the Safe & Resilient Communities team at Northumberland County Council, as part of a project for the North East Combined Authority and Department of Work and Pensions Economic Trailblazers. Our very grateful thanks to everyone who contributed.

APPENDIX I: SUMMERY OF RESEARCH FOR THIRD SECTOR PARTNERS

Bridging the Data Divide

What we found, what MAPPA is, and why it matters to your work

A guide for third-sector organisations in the North East

The Oswin Project | March 2026

This guide summarises the findings of a three-month research project led by The Oswin Project as part of the North East Combined Authority's DWP Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programme. If you work with people who have left prison, or are thinking about it, this is written for you.

It covers what we found, what MAPPA is and why it matters to voluntary organisations, and what we think needs to change. We have kept the language as plain as possible and cut out most of the academic framing. If you want the full report, that exists too.

About The Oswin Project

The Oswin Project is a prisoner rehabilitation charity based in the North East. We work inside and outside HMP Northumberland through social enterprises including cafes, gardens, and bike shops. 70% of our staff have lived experience of the criminal justice system.

1. The Problem We Were Trying to Understand

When someone leaves prison, they should be walking out with everything they need to rebuild their life: proof of the qualifications they earned inside, a summary of their health needs, their medication, details of who their probation officer is, and a clear picture of what support is waiting for them in the community.

In practice, most of that information either does not travel with the person or arrives in a format that is impossible to use. Health records do not follow people to their new GP. Qualifications sit in a digital system that switches off the moment someone leaves the prison gate. The physical folder that is supposed to carry certificates is often incomplete and underfunded.

We call this the data divide. And it has a direct impact on whether people manage to stay out of prison, find work, and become part of their community again.

The numbers behind it are stark. Only 17% of people leaving prison find work within a year. The annual cost of someone reoffending is estimated at between £37,000 and £50,000 to the public purse. These are not inevitable figures. They are the result of a system that regularly fails at the handover point.

What changed in 2014

Before 2014, probation trusts ran embedded pre-release planning. Probation officers worked inside prisons in the final weeks before someone was released, building relationships and making sure the handover into the community was managed properly. Physical resettlement packs were standard. That system was broken up by the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms. Most of what made it work disappeared. The data divide we see today is largely a direct consequence.

2. What We Did

Over three months, we spoke to a wide range of people and organisations to understand where the system was failing and what practical solutions might look like. This was a research and co-design project, not a programme delivery. Nothing we developed was implemented or tested in practice during this phase. What we produced were tools and proposals ready to be taken forward with proper funding.

We gathered evidence from:

- 18 people who had recently left prison, including five in-depth follow-up interviews with people under MAPPA supervision
- 24 employers across two confidence workshops, from sectors including social care, housing, and customer service
- 15 third-sector organisations at a dedicated engagement day
- Staff at HMP Durham, including the Head of Education and the Prison Employment Lead
- Two senior retired MAPPA professionals, Deborah Alderson (former Chief Inspector, Northumbria Police) and Winton Keenen (former Chief Constable, Northumbria Police)

We analysed everything together to find the patterns that appeared across all sources, not just the most interesting individual stories.

3. What Is MAPPA and Why Does It Matter to You?

MAPPA stands for Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements. If you work with people leaving prison, especially those who have served sentences for serious or violent offences, some of the people you support will be subject to MAPPA. It is worth understanding what that means.

The basics

MAPPA is a legal framework that brings together police, probation, and prison services to manage the risk posed by certain offenders in the community. It is not a single organisation. It is a set of arrangements that sits across those three statutory agencies.

There are three levels:

- Level 1: Standard licence management, handled mainly by probation with occasional police involvement. This covers the majority of MAPPA cases.
- Level 2: Active multi-agency management, where a regular panel of agencies meets to coordinate the risk management plan. Used for higher-risk individuals where one agency alone is not enough.
- Level 3: The highest level, involving senior representatives from multiple agencies for the most complex cases. This is used rarely but for the most serious situations.

There is also an informal Level 4, used for exceptional cases such as counter-terrorism or foreign national offenders, which is not publicly documented but acknowledged by practitioners.

Who is included

MAPPA applies to three categories of offenders. Category 1 covers registered sex offenders. Category 2 covers violent offenders sentenced to 12 months or more in custody. Category 3 covers other offenders who are assessed as posing a risk of serious harm. People can move between categories and levels as their risk assessment changes.

What it means in practice

For someone subject to MAPPA, almost every aspect of their daily life is shaped by their management plan. This can include curfews, exclusion zones, restrictions on who they can contact, requirements to attend appointments, electronic monitoring, and conditions on where they can live and work. Breaching any of these conditions can result in recall to prison.

From the perspective of a third-sector organisation, this matters for several reasons. The person you are supporting may have constraints you are not aware of. They may not be able to take a job you have found them because the workplace is in an exclusion zone. They may not be able to attend a session you have arranged because it conflicts with a supervision appointment. And they may not be able to tell you why, because some conditions are confidential.

The information problem for third-sector organisations

Right now, third-sector organisations have no formal role in MAPPA. You may be providing intensive support to someone who is subject to a complex risk management plan, but you will not be told what that plan contains. You cannot contribute what you know about the person's progress or needs to the people making decisions about them. This creates a gap that serves nobody well, including the statutory agencies trying to manage risk.

4. The Real Challenges of MAPPA: What We Heard

Our conversations with senior MAPPA professionals and with people actually living under MAPPA supervision gave us a much more nuanced picture than the official framework suggests. The system is well-intentioned and, in the right circumstances, effective. But it also has some deep structural problems that third-sector organisations need to understand.

From those managing MAPPA

Winton Keenen, former Chief Constable of Northumbria Police, described the system bluntly as:

"Demand-rich and capacity-poor." Winton Keenen, retired Chief Constable, Northumbria Police

Police tend to lead MAPPA meetings because of their task-oriented culture, but that can create an imbalance in how cases are approached. Risk management and enforcement can crowd out rehabilitation and resettlement. Higher-level cases consume so much resource that medium-risk individuals receive inconsistent attention depending on who happens to be chairing meetings that week.

Keenen also identified what he called personality-driven inconsistencies. How MAPPA is applied in practice depends heavily on the values and approach of the individuals involved. The statutory framework gives agencies considerable discretion. That discretion can be used progressively or defensively.

Deborah Alderson, who developed the MATAC model (which focuses on perpetrators rather than victims alone and has achieved a 65 to 72% reduction in reoffending since 2014), identified cultural resistance as a major barrier. When she first proposed focusing resource on perpetrators, the response was:

"Why do I want to spend time talking about perpetrators? I'm here to support victims." Initial reaction from colleagues to the MATAC model

That culture, she argued, has not fully shifted. Risk aversion within MAPPA is partly about genuine public protection, but it is also partly about agencies protecting themselves from scrutiny if something goes wrong. Bureaucracy, as Keenen put it, functions as both shield and sword.

Both professionals were also clear that this does not have to be how it works. There is genuine space within the existing rules for a more collaborative, rehabilitation-focused approach. The question is whether those running MAPPA choose to use it.

From people living under MAPPA supervision

The five detailed interviews with MAPPA-supervised individuals were some of the most important conversations of the entire project. They described an experience of supervision that was simultaneously protective and exhausting, structured and dehumanising, necessary and insufficient.

Participant E had been out of prison for eight weeks when we spoke to him. He had not missed a single appointment, had complied with every condition, and was living by the rules of his hostel. He was still on a 7pm to 9pm curfew:

"It's just getting a bit frustrating now, because I'm trying to get my life back. It is a battle. It's a battle with everyone and everything." Participant E

Participant D had been released and placed in a MAPPA category that he felt did not accurately reflect his risk. He was being managed alongside people he considered much higher risk, with the same procedures applied regardless. His response to being told he was a high risk to the public but was being released anyway:

"I know you're talking bollocks." Participant D

This is not someone rejecting the idea of supervision. It is someone telling the system that it does not make sense to him and that the lack of coherent explanation makes it harder, not easier, to engage with it.

Participant A had a genuinely positive relationship with his probation officer and valued the structure that supervision provided. But the electronic monitoring tag created daily practical difficulties and felt like a constant announcement of his status. The technology was experienced as surveillance rather than support.

Across all five accounts, the pattern was the same. Supervision was tolerated, sometimes valued, but rarely experienced as something that helped people move forward. What made the difference in those cases where people were managing well was not the statutory framework. It was the third-sector support sitting alongside it.

"I think it's the support now. Support off Junction 42." Participant A

Boredom and isolation emerged repeatedly as the most significant day-to-day risk factors. These are not small concerns. They are documented triggers for the kind of decisions that lead to recall. Participant C described locking himself away in his flat, having nothing to do, and recognising in himself that boredom was becoming dangerous:

"Boredom, I think, is a bit of a trigger." Participant C

These accounts matter for third-sector organisations because they describe exactly the gap that voluntary organisations are well placed to fill: the consistent, trusted, flexible human presence that statutory supervision cannot provide at the required intensity.

The exclusion of the third sector from MAPPA meetings

Every single organisation at the third-sector engagement day raised this. You are expected to support people who are subject to MAPPA, but you have no formal role in the process that governs their lives. You receive referrals without knowing the risk management plan. You cannot contribute what you know about someone's progress to the people making decisions about them.

One participant put it directly:

"We do exceptional work with ex-offenders and have proven success in reducing reoffending, yet we are not part of the reporting bodies at MAPPA meetings."

This is not just frustrating for the organisations involved. It actively makes risk management worse. The relational trust that third-sector workers build with MAPPA-managed individuals is exactly the kind of intelligence that statutory agencies need but cannot generate themselves. It is currently being wasted.

Both Alderson and Keenen supported the principle of formal third-sector involvement in MAPPA Level 2 and Level 3 meetings, with appropriate vetting and information-sharing agreements. Keenen specifically proposed the idea of third-sector Information Bridge Workers who could contribute relational insight to meetings without taking on statutory responsibilities.

5. What People Leaving Prison Told Us

Across all 18 interviews, the first weeks after release were described as overwhelming. The word that came up most often, from people across very different situations, was cliff-edge.

Housing was the single biggest practical problem, raised by 15 of 18 people. Not having a stable address makes almost everything else impossible: registering with a GP, claiming benefits, taking a job, complying with licence conditions. Participant B had done everything

right. He had sorted his bank account and his ID while still inside. But months after release, housing was still unresolved:

"The only thing that I haven't got is my housing. That's it. That's no change."
Participant B

Documentation gaps affected 14 of 18 people. Even when qualifications had been earned, certificates were missing, incomplete, or in a format that employers did not recognise. Health records did not follow people to their community GP. People were repeating their story to every new agency they encountered, which was exhausting and often counterproductive.

What made the difference, in almost every account where things were going reasonably well, was third-sector support. Not statutory supervision, not digital systems, not better paperwork. A real person, available on a human timescale, who could help navigate a system that otherwise felt designed to exclude.

6. What Employers Told Us

The employer findings are relevant to third-sector organisations for a specific reason: if you are helping someone into work, you need to understand what employers are actually thinking, rather than assuming the worst.

The headline finding was that employers are more open than most people assume. The average risk score across two workshops with 24 employers was 3 out of 5. The most common words they used to describe their attitude were Trusting, Opportunity, and Second chances. This is not a hostile audience.

What employers needed in order to move from maybe to yes was practical: a clear disclosure process, confirmation that a third-sector organisation was available to support the person and answer questions, and reassurance that they were not taking on the probation officer's job. One employer summarised it well:

"The disclosure coaching bit is what would actually move me from maybe to yes. I don't want to do this alone."

That is a significant opening for third-sector organisations. Employers are not asking for guarantees. They are asking not to be left alone with a situation they do not know how to manage.

7. The Tools We Co-Designed

Three practical tools came out of the project. None of them require a new system to be built. All of them are ready to be taken forward.

The Prisoner Passport

A physical folder, co-designed with HMP Durham staff, that brings together everything a person needs on release day in one place they can carry with them. Proposed contents include verified certificates, a health summary, a medication list, appointment cards for the first three post-release appointments, a simple local map with key locations marked, a disclosure letter template the person helped write while still inside, and a contact sheet showing who is supporting them.

The format is deliberately paper-based. Many people leaving prison do not have a working phone or reliable internet access in the first days. The passport is designed to be immediately usable, not dependent on digital access.

The Employer Confidence Handbook

A set of practical one-page guides co-produced by employers during the workshops. It covers when and how to ask about criminal history, how to handle that information in line with data protection law, how to assess risk in a structured way, and where to get support. It is designed to sit in an HR file and be picked up on the day an application comes in from someone with a criminal record.

The Information Bridge Worker

A proposed staffing model in which a lived-experience worker is embedded at the prison reception and release hub, working alongside prison staff in the weeks before release to complete the passport, support disclosure planning, and make warm introductions to community services. After release, the Bridge Worker remains a point of contact for both the individual and for employers or housing providers who have questions.

For MAPPA-managed individuals, the Bridge Worker would also have a formal role as an observer or contributor in MAPPA Level 2 and Level 3 meetings, providing the relational intelligence that statutory agencies currently cannot access.

8. What This Means for Your Organisation

If you work with people leaving prison, this research confirms what most of you already know from experience: the statutory system provides structure and public protection, but it cannot deliver the relational support that people actually need to stay out of prison and build a life. That is not a criticism. It is a description of what statutory services are designed to do. The gap is real, and third-sector organisations are the ones filling it.

What this project adds to that picture is a clearer understanding of where the gaps are largest, what makes them worse, and what practical tools could help close them. It also makes a specific argument that third-sector organisations should be formally included in MAPPA processes, not because that is administratively convenient, but because the evidence shows it would produce better outcomes for everyone, including better public protection.

Specifically, the findings suggest three things for organisations in this space:

- If you are supporting someone under MAPPA supervision, you are working in an information vacuum. Advocating for formal inclusion in MAPPA processes is not an overreach. It is a reasonable ask, backed by evidence and supported by senior figures within the statutory system.
- Employer reluctance is real but it is not fixed. Structured disclosure support and the offer of an ongoing third-sector contact are the two things most likely to move an employer from no to yes. If your organisation is not yet offering that as part of your employment support work, the Employer Confidence Handbook gives you a practical starting point.
- The Prisoner Passport concept is simple enough to be adopted locally without waiting for a national policy change. If your organisation has relationships with a local prison, the co-design work done in this project gives you a template to work from.

A Final Word

The data divide is not inevitable. It is the result of policy decisions made over the past decade that broke up a system that, for all its imperfections, was built around the idea of continuity. Rebuilding that continuity does not require a technological revolution or a complete redesign of the criminal justice system. It requires practical tools, trusted relationships, and a willingness to include the organisations that are already doing the most effective work.

Third-sector organisations in the North East are not peripheral players in resettlement. They are central to it. This project makes the case for recognising that formally, funding it properly, and giving it the structural role it has earned.

Want to know more?

This guide is a summary. The full report contains detailed findings from every strand of the research, including full thematic analysis, employer archetypes, MAPPA professional discussions, and the complete Prisoner Passport co-design process. Contact The Oswin Project for a copy or to discuss how your organisation can get involved in the next phase of this work.

