



changing lives  
reducing crime

## Finding a job

Information for people working with prisoners

### Contents

Help in prison [page 2](#)

Help on release [page 2](#)

The New Deal [page 3](#)

Education and training [page 5](#)

Other options [page 6](#)

Seeking advice [page 7](#)

### 2003

**This guide is for people working with prisoners. Prisoners seeking detailed information about finding a job may be interested in reading it too. Other prisoners may prefer Nacro's less detailed *Sorting yourself out guide to finding a job* (see [page 8](#)).**

The guide does not address the issue of disclosing criminal records or the *Rehabilitation of Offenders Act*. These issues are covered in separate guides (see [page 8](#)). People serving prison sentences will not in any case benefit from the provisions of the *Rehabilitation of Offenders Act* for several years after release, if they benefit at all.



## Help in prison

Given the problems they face, prisoners intent on finding employment on release should take advantage of the help available in prison. All prisons provide some education, training and employment opportunities. Every prison has prison officers who have been on employment courses run by Nacro's Prisons Link Unit. These officers should be able to give advice about finding a job.

Prison education departments can advise prisoners about education and training courses, including correspondence courses. Some prisoners might be eligible for release on temporary licence to attend education, training, work experience or community service projects outside prison.

The prison library may have – or may be able to order – books on job hunting, applying for work, preparing for job interviews, setting up businesses, etc.

Most prisons run courses which give advice on employment. Some have job clubs and resettlement centres which can also help with employment. Outside agencies may come into the prison to run courses and advice surgeries.

Nacro's Resettlement *Plus* Helpline (see page 8) will have details of local employment and training services, as well as information about local jobcentres.

Jobcentre staff visit many prisons, advising prisoners about employment and training options as well as their entitlement to benefits on release. Jobcentre staff are also involved in a range of other initiatives within prisons. For instance, a number of prisons are piloting the jobcentres' touch-screen Jobspoint database, giving prisoners direct access to information about job vacancies throughout the country.

Another jobcentre database, the Worktrain website ([www.worktrain.gov.uk](http://www.worktrain.gov.uk)), is being made available in a few prisons. This gives prisoners access to general information about jobs, training places, benefits, childcare and volunteering opportunities throughout the country.

Under the Freshstart initiative, most prisons will be able to arrange New Jobseeker Interviews with local jobcentre staff in advance

of release. This will speed up benefit claims and access to the Government's New Deal programme (see page 3). Prisoners in establishments which are unable to make such appointments should be encouraged to make the appointments themselves, preferably for the day they are released. At the same time, they can ask for a jobseeker's allowance claim form, which they can complete before the interview.

Jobcentres have available a range of information and advice booklets about various New Deal programmes and the benefits prisoners may be entitled to. If these are not available within the prison, prisoners should be encouraged to contact their local jobcentres to obtain these.

## Help on release

### Claiming benefits

Prisoners who need to claim benefits should make a claim as soon as possible on release. If they are not in paid work, or will be working for less than 16 hours a week, they should make a claim for income-based jobseeker's allowance at their local jobcentre. Those prisoners unable to work because of sickness should claim income support.

Unless they are unable to work because of illness or because they are a single parent, people are expected to be available for and actively seeking work in order to claim benefits. If they have not already done so, they will need to make an appointment to see a personal adviser at their local jobcentre as soon as possible. The adviser will discuss the employment and training options that are available locally and will help them draw up a plan for getting back to work.

In addition, claimants will be subject to review every quarter and a Restart interview every six months during which they will be given information about training schemes and other initiatives to help them back into work.

These initiatives include programme centres, a form of jobclub for people who have been unemployed for three months or more, and work trials, placements with employers of between one day and three weeks. Some areas of the country have been designated

Employment Zones, and have been given additional funding to get people back to work. Some areas have Action Teams, which provide extra help for getting people into work.

### Looking for work

Jobcentres have details of job vacancies around the country on their touch-screen Jobspoint databases. Some jobcentres still have vacancy boards with details of local full-time, part-time and temporary jobs. It is worth checking for vacancies on a regular basis. Jobseekers can also contact Jobseekers Direct on 0845 6064 234, which can provide information on all jobcentre vacancies and send out application forms and arrange interviews in some cases.

Jobseekers should also consider contacting local employment agencies. Temporary or casual employment is often easier to find than full-time permanent work. It can be a good stepping stone to better or more permanent work because it provides recent work experience to add to a CV. It is also a good source of people to supply references when applying for other jobs.

Many jobs are found through word of mouth – jobseekers should ask friends and relatives to let them know if they hear of any vacancies or can suggest any employers to contact.

In some areas there are specific job advisory services, details of which may be found in local libraries and Citizen's Advice Bureaux. Nacro's Resettlement *Plus* Helpline may also have details of some of these (see page 8).

They should also consider contacting local employers directly, and finding out how they fill their vacancies. Not all will advertise in jobcentres or the newspapers. A few may have notice boards listing vacancies. Some advertise vacancies on their websites, which jobseekers may be able to access via the jobcentre. Some employers might be willing to keep a person's details on file if they call in, write or phone. Jobseekers could consider contacting their previous employers to see if they have any jobs going.

### Applying for work

If jobseekers contact employers directly in this way, they must make sure that they are well

prepared. If possible, they should find out as much as they can about the employers and what skills they will be looking for. They should prepare a CV or at least think through carefully how they will convince the employer that they have the relevant skills and experience.

When applying for work, jobseekers need to show that they have the skills to do the job. Relevant qualifications or experience will improve their chances. For employers, general skills such as communication, flexibility, motivation, reliability, willingness to learn and get on with other people and – where relevant – customer relation skills can be as important as specific job skills.

Jobseekers who have to disclose a criminal record will also have to reassure employers that their offending is in the past.<sup>1</sup> In practice, for anyone in prison or recently out of prison, this is very difficult and for some the best way back into employment will be via the education and training, voluntary or self-employment route (see page 6).

However jobseekers can significantly improve their chances of securing employment if they go about disclosing records in the right way. Information about this is contained in Nacro's Resettlement practitioner guide to *Applying for work (with a criminal record)* – page 8. Nacro also produces a *Sorting yourself out* version of this guide for prisoners and ex-offenders (see page 8).

## The New Deal

For many people coming out of prison aged 18 and over, the best way back into employment will be through the Government's New Deal programme. The New Deal is for people who have been claiming jobseeker's allowance for six months or more, in the case of 18-24 year olds, and one year or more for older people. People who are aged 18-24 who have been in prison for all or part of the previous six months will be able to join immediately on release. Information about the New Deal is available from jobcentres.

<sup>1</sup> Except those people who are banned from working with children and young people by virtue of having received a disqualification order or being placed on a list of people deemed unsuitable to work with such people, ex-offenders do not have to disclose criminal records if they are not asked about them.

## 18-24 year olds

Under the New Deal, 18-24 year olds will be given up to four months of concentrated advice and help from a New Deal personal adviser – someone from the local jobcentre or a partner organisation. This four-month period is known as the Gateway. The personal adviser will work with them to identify additional practical help they need to find work. This could include confidence building or job search skills. It could include a short training course.

During the Gateway period, the jobseeker will agree with the personal adviser what they should do to try to secure employment. This could be a subsidised job, help with setting up their own business, a placement with a voluntary organisation or environmental group, or full-time education and training.

- **Subsidised job:** this could be full- or part-time. The employer will be paid a subsidy for six months and money for training, either in-house or elsewhere. Most jobs should become permanent, subject to satisfactory performance. Some will be for six months only.
- **Self-employment:** people who take up this option will be given help and advice to set up and establish their businesses while drawing benefits for up to six months. They may also be eligible for a grant of up to £400 and support from a business adviser for up to two-and-a-half years.
- **Voluntary or environmental work:** these two options last for six months. Participants are guaranteed at least the same amount as their benefits plus an extra £400. At the end of the period, participants will have a certificate to show what they have achieved, plus a reference to take to potential employers.
- **Education and training:** under this option, participants will get up to one year's training which leads to an approved qualification. Participants will receive the same amount as their benefits. They may also be entitled to an extra sum above this amount. Course materials will be provided free of charge.

## 25+ year olds

The rules for those aged 25 plus are slightly different. Jobseekers have to have been claiming jobseeker's allowance for 18 months

or more out of the last 21 months to be eligible for the New Deal. People coming out of prison having served a custodial sentence should be able to join on release.

As for 18-24 year olds, there is an initial four-month Gateway period where participants and their personal advisers will work together to find a job and identify any additional help that is needed. The adviser will aim to find an employer who will provide subsidised employment for six months in the hope that the employment will continue after this period.

If jobseekers are unable to secure employment during this period, there will follow an 'intensive activity period' where jobseekers will be given additional help. This might include help with motivation and key skills. It might include practical help with looking for a job and writing letters of application or practice for job interviews. It might include work experience with an employer or with a voluntary or community organisation, job-focused training or help and advice with self-employment if that is an option.

This period will usually last for between three and six months. During this period, participants will receive an allowance equivalent to their benefit entitlement plus an additional weekly premium, unless they take up what is known as an 'education and training opportunity', in which case there will be no additional premium, or self-employment.

There is extra financial help available for those who are aged 50 or over.

## 50+ year olds

The rules for those aged 50+ are different again. Jobseekers will not risk losing any benefits if they decide not to take up New Deal. New Deal is also intended to help those people who have a low-paid job lined up or have just started low-paid work and qualify for a Training Grant or Employment Credit.

Participants on the New Deal programme can claim a Training Grant of up to £1,500 for in-work training. To qualify for the grant, participants must take a job which is expected to last for at least five weeks and pays the national minimum wage. The participant's total personal income must not exceed £15,000 a year.

Participants can also get in-work financial support, as Employment Credit, paid as part of Working Tax Credit.

## Education and training

Jobseekers can develop their skills, obtain a recognised qualification and improve their chances of finding work by taking an education or training course, perhaps via the New Deal route. Participants can undertake training in a wide range of subjects, from traditional trades such as painting and decorating, through to computing, environmental skills, business studies, media work – or just about anything you can think of.

Before they look for training, jobseekers should consider finding out what skills employers in their area are looking for and what training would help them get those skills. Jobseekers should also consider getting training in the non-vocational skills that employers want, such as communication skills or customer relations.

People can find out what is available in their local areas by asking at their jobcentre. In addition, they can contact Learndirect, a free helpline for adults with learning and career enquiries. Learndirect can help people find out about learning opportunities, local careers advice, paying for learning, where to get childcare while they learn, and organisations that can help. The freephone number is 0800 100 900.

Nacro's Resettlement *Plus* Helpline (see page 8) can also provide details about a wide range of local education and training schemes. The main programmes are set out below.

### Training

Work-based Training for Young People is for all 16 and 17 year olds. If they are not in full-time education or employment, young people should be guaranteed an offer of a training place. It can be a course with a training provider like Nacro or it could be based with a local employer. The training, which can be for up to two years (longer in some instances), should lead to a nationally recognised qualification. Trainees will receive a weekly training allowance of £40. This will be higher in some areas.

In some areas and occupations, a Modern Apprenticeship might be available. This usually leads to a higher level vocational qualification. Jobcentres, Connexions and careers offices (see

page 7) should have further information.

Work-based Learning for Adults is for people aged 25-63 who have been unemployed for six months or more. Time in prison counts as a period of unemployment for this purpose. It includes a work placement with an employer. Participants receive their benefits plus £10 a week and expenses.

People who have difficulties with reading, writing or arithmetic might benefit from a basic skills training course. If English is not their first language, training in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is also available. These courses can be undertaken on their own or included as part of a youth training or work-based training course.

Anyone needing help with basic skills can call the Basic Skills Agency on freephone 0800 700 987 for details of local basic skills training providers. Those who have trouble reading and writing may have dyslexia. They can get advice about this from The Dyslexia Institute at Park House, Wick Road, Egham, Surrey TW20 0HH (tel 01784 222300).

### Education

People might want to consider a full- or part-time education course. Even if they do not have the appropriate qualifications, they might get in without them through an access course, or as a 'mature student' if they are aged 25 or over. Many colleges and training organisations run special access courses, or set aside places on courses for people without the qualifications they usually require. To find out what is available, they can make enquiries at their local library, contact their local education authority or phone Learndirect.

Some colleges will not accept people who have just left prison – they require a 'period of stability' in the community for as much as six months before they will consider applications. If their application is refused for this reason, they could ask their probation officer, if they have one, to support them in asking the college to reconsider.

If they get a place on a college course, they will need to sort out funding. It is no longer possible to get an award to cover tuition fees, but it may be possible to obtain a loan or grant

for day-to-day living expenses. They should contact the grants department of their local education authority for details. A free leaflet – Student Grants and Loans (ref HE052) – is available from the Department for Education and Skills, Publications Centre, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annersley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ (tel 0845 602 2260).

Grants and loans are unlikely to cover all their expenses, so they may have to support themselves or apply to charities for the extra money. Nacro, for instance, can give very small, one-off grants to ex-offenders towards training or education. People should contact Nacro's Welfare Administrator on 020 7840 6494 or write to Nacro's Clapham Road office (see page 8) for an application form.

People can find further information about loans and grants in *The Directory of Social Change's Educational Grants Directory*, which may be available at their local library or careers office.

Alternatively, people could consider taking out a Career Development Loan – a deferred bank loan of between £300 and £8,000 designed to enable individuals to pay for vocational education or training. The government pays the interest on the loan while the individuals study. They should ask at the jobcentre for more details about this.

People will not be able to claim benefits if they are studying full-time (over 16 hours per week). They may however be able to claim some benefits if they are studying part-time. If they are already claiming benefits and want to take a further education course, they should ask for advice at the jobcentre, Connexions or careers service office. There is of course the education and training option under the New Deal programme for those aged 19 and over.

## Other options

### Voluntary work

Voluntary work is a good way to get work experience and references. As well as being interesting and rewarding in itself, it often provides the opportunity to develop new skills or find out about new or different areas of work.

If people are claiming jobseeker's allowance,

there is no limit as to the number of hours a week they can volunteer when claiming, provided they can meet the rules for actively seeking work. This means that a volunteer must be willing and able to attend a job interview, or start a job, at 48 hours' notice.

There is no limit to the number of hours for which someone on incapacity benefit can volunteer, but they should tell their local Jobcentre Plus or social security office before they start voluntary work and receive confirmation that they will be allowed to do the work.

People can find out about volunteer opportunities through their local paper and local volunteer centre. They can find out where their nearest volunteer centre is by looking in the phone book or phoning Volunteer Development England on 0121 633 4555. *The Guardian* on Wednesdays also has details of voluntary opportunities. Voluntary work for 18-24 year olds can also be pursued as an option under the New Deal programme.

### Self-employment

Many ex-offenders take up self-employment because it is a way of getting back to work without having to disclose their criminal records, but it is also a very tough option.

Jobcentres can advise people wanting to set up their own business or put them in contact with local agencies which can help. Business start-up grants of between £20 and £90 a week for between 26 and 66 weeks may be available.

If people are eligible for help under the New Deal programme, they should take advantage of this and seek assistance from their local jobcentre. The local jobcentre will be able to put them in touch with local agencies offering business support. Further information about self-employment and the New Deal is to be found in the booklet *Starting Your Own Business (NDL 17)*, available from jobcentres.

BEAT (Business, Enterprise, Advice and Training) helps prisoners in a number of establishments to draw up business plans and then provide advice and ongoing mentoring

support during the first two years of business. It is at Southbank House, Black Prince Road, London SE1 7SJ (tel 020 7793 4294/4296, fax 020 7463 2259).

The Prince's Trust helps young people aged between 18-30 to set up in business. Loans and bursaries are available as well as on-going business support provided by a business mentor, and marketing opportunities. The Trust's ACORN Project works specifically with offenders and ex-offenders. ACORN staff liaise closely with the probation service and other key agencies to work with people, on a one-to-one basis or in groups, to prepare for employment. For details about the ACORN project, contact The Prince's Trust, 18 Park Square East, London NW1 4LH (tel 01623 812810 – Thurs-Fri).

The organisation LiveWIRE offers young people aged between 16 and 30 advice, support and assistance in setting up a business through its network of local offices. For information about the local Shell LiveWIRE office, call 0845 757 3252 or write to LiveWIRE, Freepost NT805, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 3SG.

The charity Fairbridge runs 12-week Learn to Earn courses for young people up to the age of 25. The course allows participants to experiment with setting up their own business. The aim is to increase their general employability, although some people do continue with running their own business. Fairbridge is at 207 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8XD (tel 020 7928 1704, fax 020 7928 6016).

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) produces a number of information and advice leaflets on various aspects of setting up in business, including the booklet *A Guide to Help for Small Business*, which contains contact details of local sources of further advice and assistance, and is available free of charge. A copy of this booklet and a list of other DTI publications is available from DTI Small Firms Publications, Admail 528, London SW1W 8YT.

## Seeking advice

### Organisations

- **Jobcentres** are the first places to go for information and advice on employment and training opportunities. They will also have information about the New Deal, or you can call 0845 606 2626 for written information. There is also a website at [www.newdeal.gov.uk](http://www.newdeal.gov.uk). Jobcentres are listed in the phone book.
- **Careers services** may be able to offer guidance on career, education and employment in local areas. Careers services work with adults – they are no longer just for young people. To find out if they can help – and to make an appointment with a guidance worker if they can – people should contact the careers service in the area they plan to live on release. It will be listed in the phone book.
- The **Connexions** service has been set up by the government to provide support and guidance for young people aged between 13 and 19. Local services will be listed in the phone book.
- The **Apex Trust** provides an employment advice service for ex-offenders and runs training schemes in some parts of the country. For details, contact Apex Trust, St Alphege House, Wingate Annexe, 2 Fore Street, London EC2Y 5DA (tel 020 7638 5931, fax 020 7638 5977).
- **Nacro** provides employment training and advice projects in some towns and cities around the country. Contact Nacro's Services Information Unit at 169 Clapham Road, London SW9 0PU (tel 020 7840 6458 fax 020 7735 4666).
- The **New Bridge** also provides an employment advice service for prisoners and ex-offenders. It is at 27a Medway Street, London SW1P 2BD (tel 020 7976 0779, fax 020 7976 0767).
- **SOVA** provides an employment advice and mentoring service for prisoners and ex-offenders. It is at Chichester House, 37 Brixton Road, London SW9 6DZ (tel 020 7793 0404).
- Nacro's **Resettlement Plus Helpline** (see page 8) gives general information and advice about finding work, including details of training and employment services in most local areas. As well as phone enquiries, helpline staff deal with letters from prisoners.

## Publications

In addition to this guide, Nacro also publishes a number of other practitioner guides, single copies of which are free, multiple copies 75p each. For those people working with prisoners, these are:

- *Finding a home* – detailed information and advice on how to find somewhere to live
- *Benefits and debt* – detailed information and advice about benefits and debt.

For those people working with prisoners and ex-offenders:

- *Applying for work (with a criminal record)* – detailed information and advice on how to apply for work generally and how to disclose a criminal record specifically
- *Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974* – detailed information and advice on the Act and wiping criminal records.

In addition, the helpline publishes the following *Sorting yourself out* guides, single copies of which are free (multiple copies cost 50p each). For prisoners:

- *Just Imprisoned?* – information and advice on matters to be addressed on arrival in prison
- *Keeping your home* – information and advice on getting housing costs paid
- *Finding a job* – information and advice on how to get work
- *Benefits and debt* – information and advice on benefits and debt.

For prisoners and ex-offenders:

- *Applying for work (with a criminal record)* – information and advice on how to apply for work generally and how to disclose a criminal record specifically
- *Simple guide to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974* – basic information on the Act.

The helpline also publishes a booklet, *Outside help*, for the families and friends of people in prison (single copies free).

To order, contact Nacro publications (see right).

## Nacro Resettlement Service

This information has been produced by Nacro's Resettlement *Plus* Helpline, part of Nacro's Resettlement Service, which provides information and advice for prisoners, ex-offenders and people involved or working with them. If you want to find out more about how Nacro's Resettlement Service can help you, contact **Nacro's Resettlement *Plus* Helpline**, 169 Clapham Road, London SW9 0PU. Tel **020 7840 6464**.

Further copies of this guide are available from **Nacro Publications** on 020 7840 6427, fax 020 7840 6444.

Single copies are free; multiple copies, 75p each.

For details about all Nacro's advice material, check on our website at [www.nacro.org.uk/publications/adviceleaflets.htm](http://www.nacro.org.uk/publications/adviceleaflets.htm)

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