

**IMPROVING OFFENDER EMPLOYMENT SERVICES:
A JOINT STRATEGIC REVIEW**

FINAL REPORT – MARCH 2010

**DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS (DWP)
MINISTRY OF JUSTICE (MOJ)**



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1 SUMMARY

1.1 Context

In recent years around 250,000¹ people have entered the criminal justice system on an annual basis to carry out a custodial sentence or a period of Probation Service supervision in England and Wales. Many of these individuals have not had a job and have needed help and support to get one, with the level of support needed depending on the number and extent of their barriers to employment.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Ministry of Justice (MOJ) provide a range of support through their delivery organisations (primarily Jobcentre Plus and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) as well as with other partners such as the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)², to help reduce re-offending and develop offender employability; engage employers to train and recruit them, and to match people to vacancies. But we know that more could be done across both organisations to ensure that offenders receive the right support at the right time.

This report sets out the results of a strategic review of offender employment commissioned by the Departments' Permanent Secretaries and feeds directly into work under PSA 16 and PSA 23. It makes recommendations covering a wide-range of interventions delivered by DWP / MOJ and focuses throughout on improving partnership working as a means to improve outcomes.

Strong partnership working is key to improving offender employment outcomes. Many of the recommendations focus on the need to:

- encourage more communication and joined-up working at a local-level between prisons, probation and Jobcentre Plus;
- articulate that joined-up service with other partners' activities;
- provide clarity around roles and responsibilities to make sure the offender receives appropriate targeted interventions and to ensure the correct sequencing of provision; and
- make sure the offer from both agencies is clear to the offender.

Increasing offender employment rates is critical to our strategy to increase social inclusion and reduce re-offending. Offenders who are in work and have stable accommodation are much less likely to reoffend³.

¹ Data from Offender Management Caseload Statistics 2007 (published in October 2008) of prison and probation inflows for 2007.

² The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) from 1st April 2010.

³ Odds of reoffending were increased by 43% if prisoners reported both employment and accommodation problems on release (Resettlement Survey Reconviction Analysis, 2008)

The current economic climate adds to the significant challenge of getting offenders into employment. The barriers many offenders face are the same as other socially excluded groups, and often include poor skills, poor or non-existent employment history, poor health including mental health, and substance misuse. Significant numbers of offenders are also known to have issues relating to housing. However offenders also face an additional barrier related to their conviction - which can act as a deterrent to employers. The measures outlined in this paper will ensure a more efficient use of our existing resources to help to increase offenders employment prospects now and in the future.

1.2 Terms of reference of the review

The agreed aim of the review is to “improve offender employment support by conducting a strategic review of current services offered by DWP and MOJ and implementing improvements to make services more coherent and effective without increasing existing resources”.

NOMS, Jobcentre Plus, and the LSC provide interventions to offenders to develop their employability and help them find work. This review focuses on what NOMS and Jobcentre Plus could do to make better use of existing resources and strengthen partnerships to improve the offender employment journey and sustainable job outcomes.

1.3 Objectives

The findings and recommendations have been established with the following objectives in mind, to:

- **facilitate improvements to partnership working** to ensure that services delivered to offenders by Jobcentre Plus and NOMS are joined-up to achieve the best possible outcomes for individuals, that these services are articulated with other partners' services and that services are delivered by the most appropriate agency at the right time;
- **increase the effectiveness of employment related services** in custody and the community by developing a delivery framework that sets out more clearly the roles and responsibilities of both organisations;
- **join up employer engagement** activity between NOMS and Jobcentre Plus;
- **facilitate joint data sharing** between MOJ / NOMS and DWP /Jobcentre Plus at a local, regional and national level; and
- **explore the feasibility of a future shared target** to drive performance across agencies.

1.4 Approach

We recognise that there is a lot of good work going on across both organisations to rehabilitate and resettle offenders. However, we also know that there is more we can do to build on this and improve the way we deliver our services, particularly in joining up delivery and working more closely together.

The review recommendations are based on evidence gathered in a number of ways, such as:

- a survey of frontline staff across Jobcentre Plus and NOMS (prisons and probation), which achieved a 74% response rate;
- eight regional conferences⁴ to validate the results from the survey and provide an opportunity for staff to engage with emerging recommendations and share good practice and highlight areas for improvement; and
- evaluation findings from recent pilots such as the Next Steps Test Beds, Exit to Work Job Developers, and Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE)⁵.

1.5 Recommendations

Short term

- i. **Implement a framework for joint working and data sharing (by March 2010).**

This recommendation addresses the need to improve communication and promote joined-up working at a local level between prisons, probation and Jobcentre Plus and to provide clarity around roles and responsibilities. The review found no evidence of a need to transfer responsibilities (and the associated resources) from one agency to another. However, it did find that, in some areas, **a lack of partnership working has led to missed opportunities to target timely and effective interventions at offenders and avoid duplication of interventions.**

The following changes will facilitate delivery:

⁴ Conferences were held in London, South East, South West, North East, North West, East of England, West Midlands. A further event is also planned in Cardiff on 26 November 2009.

⁵ Conclusions used from the Institute for Employment Studies “Joint Pilots Baseline Report”.

- a. **those responsible for commissioning offender provision in NOMS, DWP, and the LSC working at national and regional levels will identify opportunities to better co-ordinate or jointly commission provision for offenders in custody and the community - including joint service design and specification where appropriate. (A structure to be in place by April 2010 in line with the introduction of the new Skills Funding Agency);**
 - b. **partnership teams will be formed by better integrating (and co-locating) Jobcentre Plus' Employment and Benefit Surgery staff with prison teams leading on skills, employment and resettlement (by April 2010);**
 - c. **an agreed single point of contact and designated officer within Jobcentre Plus and probation will work together on offender issues (by April 2010);**
 - d. **guidance to support frontline partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and NOMS will be developed - helping both to better understand the offender offer (by March 2010); and**
 - e. **a legally approved data sharing consent form for use between frontline probation and Jobcentre Plus staff will be drawn up (by March 2010).**
- ii. **Introduce a leaflet explaining the current Jobcentre Plus offer for offenders (by March 2010).**

Many offenders are reluctant to declare their offending background and therefore do not always access the correct provision via Jobcentre Plus. Prison and probation staff are also often unaware of what support is available via Jobcentre Plus, and the leaflet will address this (alongside gains made through improvements to partnership working). We are also examining placing guidance on the disclosure of convictions for customers accessing the Jobcentre Plus website.

- iii. **We propose to implement changes that we hope will free-up more time to enable Jobcentre Plus Employment and Benefit Surgery Advisers (EBSAs) to focus more on job search related activity, whilst also strengthening the important fraud and error prevention processes.**

This recommendation addresses the fact that a major element of the EBSA role is around facilitating claim closure on offender benefit claims when they start their sentence in custody and help them to claim benefits on release.

The benefit closure activity is important for the prevention of fraud and error, however we believe that the EBSA role can be re-designed to both strengthen the fraud and error related processes and at the same time deliver a more employment focused service to offenders leaving custody.

The following changes will facilitate delivery:

- a. **introduce a revised detailed job description outlining the requirements of the EBSA role (by April 2010);**
- b. **maintain EBSA current knowledge of Jobcentre Plus provision – through spending some time each week, based in their Jobcentre Plus office, including attendance at team / office update meetings. We also recommend rotation of the role (by April 2010);**
- c. **each prison will provide the EBSAs with an appropriate space to deliver face-to-face advice to prisoners (by April 2010);**
- d. **each prison will provide the EBSAs with broadband access to allow on-line access to the Jobcentre Plus network (including the Labour Market System) and a dedicated telephone line (by April 2010);**
- e. **Jobcentre Plus will provide the EBSAs with a single point of contact within the Benefit Delivery Centre to action benefit closure activity (by April 2010);**
- f. **NOMS will explore the feasibility of collecting National Insurance Numbers of offenders – to be used as an additional match criteria to make the Generalised Matching Service (GMS) scan more robust and reduce the manual work that the EBSAs currently are obliged to complete on benefit closures (by April 2010);**
- g. **where appropriate use offenders to provide more peer support to assist the EBSA in a wide range of ways that takes account of the skills and abilities of the prisoners who can fulfil this role (e.g. giving advice, signposting enquiries, or helping offenders complete forms). Prisoners should be accredited for their work by way of a formal qualification (by April 2010); and**

h. **MOJ/NOMS and DWP/Jobcentre Plus will examine how the national roll out of the virtual campus can be used to support communications with offenders – this includes important advice on the disclosure of offences (timescale subject to Ministerial approval).**

iv. **Jobcentre Plus and NOMS to join up employer engagement activity (by April 2010).**

This recommendation addresses the lack of a joined-up approach between NOMS and Jobcentre Plus on engaging employers to train and recruit offenders as one of several groups disadvantaged in the labour market.

The following changes will facilitate delivery:

- a. **in prisons, Jobcentre Plus and learning, skills and resettlement leads will work together to engage local employers to train and recruit offenders discharged into the local area. In the community Jobcentre Plus and Probation will co-ordinate in a similar way;**
- b. **at the regional level, NOMS Regional Offender Employment Co-ordinators will work with Jobcentre Plus employer engagement staff to analyse information about labour market skills shortages (both current and future) and the current employment strengths of the offenders that are working with NOMS to ensure a co-ordinated approach to employer engagement, and that information about national employers is fed to local NOMS and Jobcentre Plus staff; and**
- c. **at the national level, employer champions for offender training and recruitment who have signed up to the Reducing Re-offending Corporate Alliance should continue to support Jobcentre Plus efforts to engage with employers to take on offenders through Local Employment Partnerships.**

Medium term

v. **Implement a shared system of performance management (by April 2011).**

This recommendation addresses the need to introduce a system to measure our collective efforts. Work is already being undertaken across the three principle offender skills and employment departments (DWP, MoJ and BIS) to press forward this performance management and data exchange agenda.

To ensure that a robust measure is developed substantial work is needed to:

- define the measure;
- ensure that data to support it can be accurately captured;
- ensure that we can legally share the data to develop the target under data protection laws (as a minimum we are likely to need to share data on individuals between MOJ, DWP and HMRC); and
- ensure that the proposed measure is relevant to frontline delivery in NOMS and Jobcentre Plus.

The following will be a first step in facilitating delivery of this recommendation:

- a. **to establish a joint working group (MOJ / NOMS and DWP / Jobcentre Plus) to deliver a preliminary report with recommendations (by April 2010)**
- vi. **Introduce the provision for an advance of benefit to help resolve the ‘Prisoner Finance Gap’ (by October 2010).**

This recommendation addresses the fact offenders may have to wait a period of between 2 to 6 weeks after release from prison before the relevant income stream is made available to them (such as Jobseekers Allowance which is paid 2 weeks in arrears).

The Welfare Reform Act which received Royal Assent on 12th November made provision for an advance of benefit (a “Payment on Account”) to customers **if their benefit claim has:**

- **not been decided** (provided any delay is not caused by the customer having failed to produce evidence necessary to decide and pay the claim); or
- **been decided but payment of benefit cannot be made** because the customer has not yet reached their payday.

The Act provides for the recovery of Payments on Account by deductions from benefit over a period, and not immediately from the first payment of arrears of benefit so as to avoid re-imposing the original financial problem. Supporting regulations are currently being developed setting out the details of the scheme. It is expected that this provision will be introduced from October 2010.

Payments on Account will apply to offenders in the same way as to any other customers and should ensure the "prisoner finance gap" is substantially, if not completely, closed so long as they provide the necessary evidence at the time of their claim.

1.6 Outcomes for offenders

Implementing the recommendations in this paper will help the offender to:

- receive the right targeted provision at the right time from the appropriate agency;
- know where to go to get the appropriate advice and information; and
- have better more targeted employment opportunities through agencies working together to engage with employers and identify opportunities.

1.7 Measures of success

To check whether progress has been made in improving partnership working we will:

- **Conduct a follow up survey of frontline staff across Jobcentre Plus and NOMS in June 2010 and in April 2011 and hold conferences in October 2011 to validate responses.**

We will issue survey questions consistent with those used this year to check whether improvements have been made and to determine whether the interventions highlighted in this review have been successful. We will validate the results at regional conferences to be held in October 2011.

- **Evaluate the impact of these measures on the use of Jobcentre Plus offender markers.**

There is a function within the Labour Market System for an adviser to use a "disadvantage marker" for a DWP customer. This marker can be used to record drug, alcohol and offender status and is retained on the system for 12 months.

With improved partnership working and robust data sharing arrangements, we would expect to see an increase in the numbers of offender markers on the labour market system, with more offenders giving consent to sharing information and in turn receiving correctly targeted provision.

We would also like to use the marker system to identify the number of offenders engaging with the Jobcentre Plus programmes and use the information to analyse the effectiveness of our programmes for this cohort.

- **Monitor employment outcomes and introduce hot spot mapping**

We will use data from a range of sources to identify local areas that have not shown improvements as a result of the review. For example, we will use NOMS data on performance against employment Key Performance Targets (KPTs) for custody and community, along with Jobcentre Plus data on the use of the offender marker. The first sample will be analysed in June 2010 (in line with the first frontline staff survey) and then followed up by another in October 2010.

2 FRAMEWORK FOR JOINT WORKING

2.1 Background

A common theme identified in all of the feedback we have received, and underlying a number of our recommendations, is the need for strong partnership working between agencies. We have identified the need to:

- encourage more communication and joined-up working at a local-level between prisons, probation and Jobcentre Plus;
- articulate that joined-up service with other partners' activities; and
- provide clarity around roles and responsibilities to make sure the offender receives appropriate targeted interventions and to ensure the correct sequencing of provision.

2.2 What is the purpose of the framework

This framework sets out the key principles for the joint working between MOJ / NOMS (prisons and probation) and DWP / Jobcentre Plus to prepare for and to get offenders into employment. It provides a minimum standard required for each agency, at a national, regional and local level.

The framework supports the delivery of the government objectives that MOJ and DWP jointly support (with other government departments):

- **PSA16** – “Increase the proportion of socially excluded adults in settled accommodation and employment, education or training” which includes “offenders under probation supervision in employment”.
- **PSA 23** – making communities safer, especially priority action 4 – “Reduce re-offending through the improved management of offenders”.

To implement the framework we have recommended improvements in key areas to help improve the continuity of provision provided through a multi-agency approach and where appropriate we are providing additional tools and mechanisms to support this way of working.

The framework will be developed to include the emerging Skills Funding Agency arrangements (from April 2010) and will link closely with the Offender Skills and Employment accountabilities framework. It will also take account of the national roll out of Integrated Employment and Skills (IES).

The benefits of joint working include:

- an increased understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities and the "offer" to offenders, leading to more targeted and better sequenced interventions;
- an ability to develop the offender's employability in line with labour market demand, and to better match suitable offenders to vacancies offered; and
- a stronger package of support to employers to encourage them to train and recruit offenders.

2.3 Key roles and responsibilities

JOBCENTRE PLUS

Jobcentre Plus is part of the DWP and it aims to provide "work for those that can, and support for those that cannot" by:

- helping more people into paid work;
- helping employers fill their vacancies; and
- giving people of working age the help and support they are entitled to if they cannot work.

Jobcentre Plus will aim to provide their customers with accurate information to help them to:

- find a suitable job;
- find out which benefits they may be able to claim;
- find out what other support they may be able to get; and
- decide what their next steps should be.

Help for offenders in Prison

Provision of Employment and Benefit Surgery Advisers (EBSAs) to:

- close down benefit claims in liaison with Benefit Delivery Centres when an offender enters custody (either on remand or at the start of sentence);
- provide benefit advice prior to the offender leaving prison including help to claim from the social fund;
- book Freshstart appointments for new Jobseekers Allowance claims;
- work with resettlement teams and the Jobcentre Plus local office to deliver job searching and job clubs, and employer engagement and employment brokerage (providing links with local and national employers);
- help with job search activity;

- keep the resettlement teams informed about the Jobcentre Plus offer and providing advice to offenders on Jobcentre Plus services in the community;
- where appropriate use offender peer support to provide advice and complete claim forms (only where this can be accredited); and
- explain to offenders the range of help and support available to them from Jobcentre Plus, advising them of the benefits of declaring they are an offender (in terms of quick access to Jobcentre Plus' more intensive employment support).

Help for offenders in the Community

- conduct New Jobseekers interview for those leaving custody (Freshstart);
- provide a rapid re-claim process for benefit claims (a shorter simpler form to be used if a prisoner reclaims within 26 weeks of their last claim and circumstances have not changed);
- act as a contact point for liaison and the exchange of data with probation;
- identify the most appropriate provision dependant on need and based on the offender's journey to date, any learning that the offender has undertaken and other relevant supporting information (progress2work, flexible New Deal);
- work with NOMS and other partners to deliver job searching and job clubs, and employer engagement and employment brokerage (providing links with local and national employers); and
- where appropriate signpost intensive adviser support and the use of recruitment subsidies for employers.

National Offender Management Service (NOMS)

NOMS is an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice and is responsible for commissioning and delivering adult offender management services, in custody and in the community, in England and Wales. The twin aims of NOMS are to:

- protect the public; and
- reduce reoffending, contributing towards the overall objectives of the Ministry of Justice.

Responsibility for delivering a reduction in reoffending and the management of offenders is devolved to nine regional offices in England and one office in Wales. Each is responsible for commissioning services, developing a reducing reoffending delivery plan and coordinating partnerships in their area with a range of government departments and agencies, and with local government. These partnerships ensure that offenders' needs, which may be contributing to their risk of re-offending, such as health, drugs and alcohol, accommodation, finance, and skills and employment are met.

In custody

Delivery of Education, Training and Employment interventions is co-ordinated by an establishment Head of Learning, Skills and Employment function underpinned by close working between a number of activity areas across the prison, including with the Head of Reducing Re-offending and the Head of Industries. Together this provides a function that will:

- plan, coordinate and quality assure all learning, skills and employment services from reception to release, ensuring alignment with Offender Management arrangements;
- ensure offenders are screened, assessed, and referred to the appropriate intervention, including the LSC's Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) and non-OLASS provision, careers information and advice (CIAS) provision, work in prison through industries and employer-led workshops;
- work as an integrated team with Jobcentre Plus EBSAs and other partners, to deliver job searching job clubs, employer engagement and employment brokerage (providing links with local and national employers);
- support, motivate and encourage offenders to engage with DWP/Jobcentre Plus programmes; and
- provide advice and guidance on the effective disclosure of criminal convictions.

In the community

The ETE pathway is supported by established Education, Training and Employment (ETE) Teams in probation areas. They provide a function that will:

- effectively manage offender sentence plans to enable offenders to participate in provision and manage conflict of interests;
- ensure offenders are screened and referred to the appropriate assessment and intervention dependant on need and in consultation with partners;
- support, motivate and encourage offenders to engage with DWP/Jobcentre Plus programmes;
- support offenders in CV preparation, interview techniques, letter writing, communication and advice on financial management (where not provided through DWP enhanced support);
- act as a contact point for liaison and the exchange of data with DWP/Job centre Plus teams;
- work closely with Jobcentre Plus and other partners to deliver job searching, job clubs, employer engagement and employment brokerage (providing links with local and national employers);
- provide advice and guidance on becoming self employed; and
- provide advice and guidance on the effective disclosure of criminal convictions.

2.4 Implementing the framework

Data sharing

The provision of a nationally agreed data sharing form will be available for staff in NOMS and Jobcentre Plus, with supporting guidance. This should give staff more confidence in what they can and cannot share to help with frontline delivery. To assist with the data share and improve communications probation and Jobcentre Plus should have a named contact and a designated officer locally within each agency as a point of liaison.

Employer Engagement

We will better co-ordinate within each of the regions the employer engagement activity undertaken by NOMS and Jobcentre Plus. Jobcentre Plus will provide NOMS with information about current and future labour market vacancies / trends. This will inform the provision of skills and employability training for offenders and to match labour market demand to the supply of suitable offenders on a case-by case basis. We will implement a pilot with proposals to further strengthen this in the East of England with a view to rolling out the approach nationally.

Commissioning

NOMS and the Learning and Skills Council (the Skills Funding Agency from April 2010), will be commissioning much of their provision for offenders regionally. The majority of the DWP / Jobcentre Plus provision is commissioned nationally. To ensure offenders are targeted towards mainstream provision, those responsible for commissioning in NOMS, LSC and DWP / Jobcentre Plus should meet regularly and agree regionally what provision is provided through the mainstream – filling any gaps avoiding overlaps, and looking for opportunities to jointly commission where appropriate.

Understanding of each agencies offer

Staff in NOMS and Jobcentre Plus will have access to joint guidance articulating what each agency is responsible for to help ensure the offender is made aware of what is available to them at each stage of their employment journey. A leaflet will be made available by March 2010 for offenders to help them identify what is available from Jobcentre Plus and who to contact to obtain that help.

3 OFFENDER EMPLOYMENT JOURNEY

3.1 Three groups of offenders

It is useful to look at the issue of how best to increase the opportunities for the employment of offenders by looking at them in three groups:

- **offenders who receive a community order or suspended sentence, and who will remain in the community. All offenders serving community sentences for which probation have responsibility receive offender management support, although not all will be Jobcentre Plus customers.** 42% of individuals serving community sentences are employed at the end of their sentence. Here there is a higher chance that they will be able to keep their current job, if they have one, or will be available for work alongside probation supervision. A small number of unemployed offenders will not claim benefits and therefore not come in contact with Jobcentre advisers. The remainder of offenders in the community will require financial and employment support and this group therefore calls for joint work in the community between probation and Jobcentre Plus;
- **offenders who receive a short custodial sentence of less than 12 months, whose time in custody will generally be very short, on average only a few weeks. Prisoners sentenced to under 12 months in custody and remand prisoners do not in most cases currently receive offender manager support but the majority will need support from Jobcentre Plus.** Some may receive some interventions during their time in custody but the majority serve only a few weeks in prison and as a result are limited to interventions of short duration. Many will see a Jobcentre Plus adviser during this time to sort out their benefits and have a Freshstart appointment booked for them on release⁶. The challenge for this group is to enable speedy access to financial and employment advice and support following release; and
- **offenders who receive a custodial sentence of 12 months or more. Prisoners sentenced to longer than 12 months in custody are subject to offender management and will see a Jobcentre Plus adviser.** This group will generally serve at least 6 months in custody, providing time for an assessment, some skill acquisition, and time to plan release and follow-up in the community.

⁶ Remand prisoners do not tend to get interventions targeted at them since their time in custody is often spent preparing for court. Many of these prisoners will also be released immediately after sentencing, having served sufficient time on remand. This means that they will not have any pre-release contact with the Employment and Benefit Support Adviser or have a Freshstart appointment booked at their local Jobcentre.

These categories are consistent with the NOMS offender management model for each group. In addition, each category subdivides into offenders who:

- are unemployed and have some needs / barriers to work; and
- are unemployed and, because of a range of personal, mental health, social and other problems, have significant needs / barriers to work.

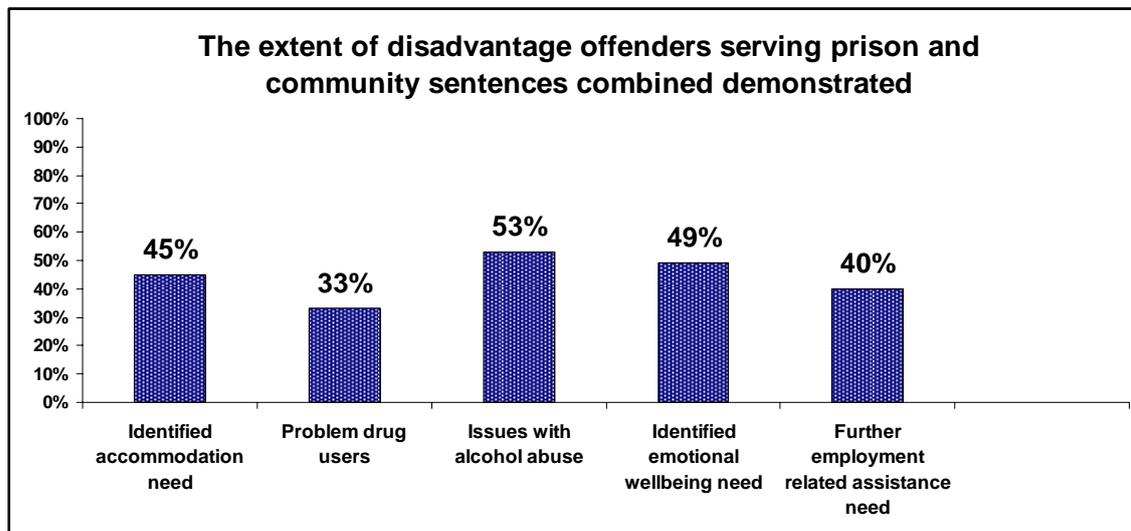
3.2 Analysis from NOMS data of offender needs

NOMS has data⁷ on 318, 590⁸ offenders, 288,003 in the community and 30,587 in custody. We looked at the assessments of their re-offending related needs over the 2008/09 period.

Across all offenders receiving prison or community sentences (assessed at the pre sentence stage) where information exists on NOMS systems:

- 35% were in employment; and
- 65% were unemployed.

The table below demonstrates that **many unemployed offenders have significant multiple barriers to employment** that require a multi agency approach in order to help them resettle and get into a position where they can find and retain work.



⁷ Data is from OASys assessments for the 2008/09 period. OASys is designed to be a risk management system. It identifies a need across the seven pathways to reducing re-offending which might be linked to the person's risk of re-offending. These needs may also therefore barriers to them finding and sustaining work. It is used to assess the needs of higher-risk offenders or those with certain offence types or sentence lengths and so is not representative of the entire population. However, from other sources we can deduce that offenders not included in the above sample such as those serving short custodial sentences and those on a stand alone unpaid work requirement demonstrate similar levels of unemployment and employability needs.

⁸ Figures include assessments carried out for individuals who did not subsequently receive a sentence that necessitated NOMS supervision.

3.3 Duplication of provision

We agreed at the interim review stage to explore whether employment services for offenders are being delivered by the most appropriate part of government and, if not, to investigate whether a transfer of responsibilities with the associated resources would be appropriate.

In order to do this we have mapped the customer journey, based on the three groups outlined in paragraph 3.1. We have also gathered evidence during the regional seminars. The DWP offer to those claiming benefit is set out in the third diagram below. Due to the NOMS commissioning model devolving responsibility for buying in employment-related services to the local-level, it has not been possible in the time available to map out all of the provision commissioned throughout the country. **But we have not found any evidence of any significant or systematic expenditure that would make the case for a transfer.**

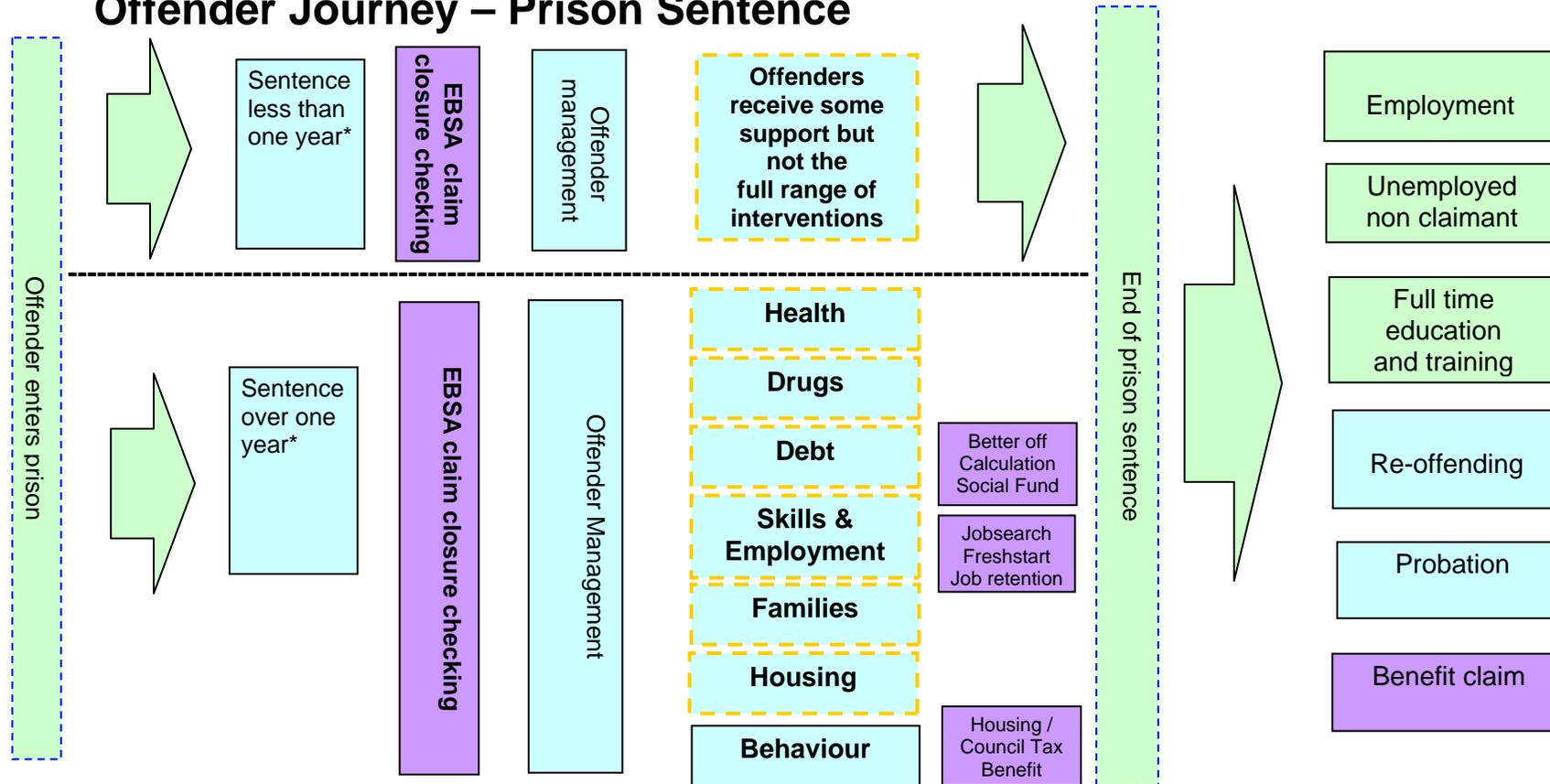
The customer journey map does emphasise that there are differing lead agencies dependant on the individuals needs and that where there is poor communication between agencies the offender's employment journey can prove to be very difficult. In some cases we found evidence of interventions being repeated by different agencies, and also evidence that some interventions were being offered by one agency because it did not know another agency could have offered the intervention. In some areas, a lack of partnership working has led to missed opportunities to target timely and effective interventions at offenders and to avoid duplication of interventions and gaps in delivery, in particular around job searching/job clubs and employer engagement and brokerage. Partnership working is vital to make a success of the latter where a lack of co-ordination often leads to a failure to match employer demand with the supply of suitable offenders.

However, we also found examples of good practice in partnership working. In such cases, where an offender is in the community and is a Jobcentre Plus customer, it is possible for Jobcentre Plus to identify their customer as an offender and to assess whether the individual is suitable and eligible for fast-tracking to enhanced support through one of DWP's contracted programmes or whether something more tailored for the offender's particular needs, provided or commissioned by NOMS would be better at that stage of their rehabilitation. One of this report's recommendations is that there is a more strategic approach to the commissioning of interventions and this is covered in more detail in 3.4.

The recommended framework for joint working and data sharing will strengthen these relationships. It should ensure that NOMS and Jobcentre Plus have a better understanding of what they each provide, and a single point of contact in probation and in Jobcentre Plus should increase both NOMS and Jobcentre Plus ability to target the most appropriate provision.

Restricted - Policy

Offender Journey – Prison Sentence

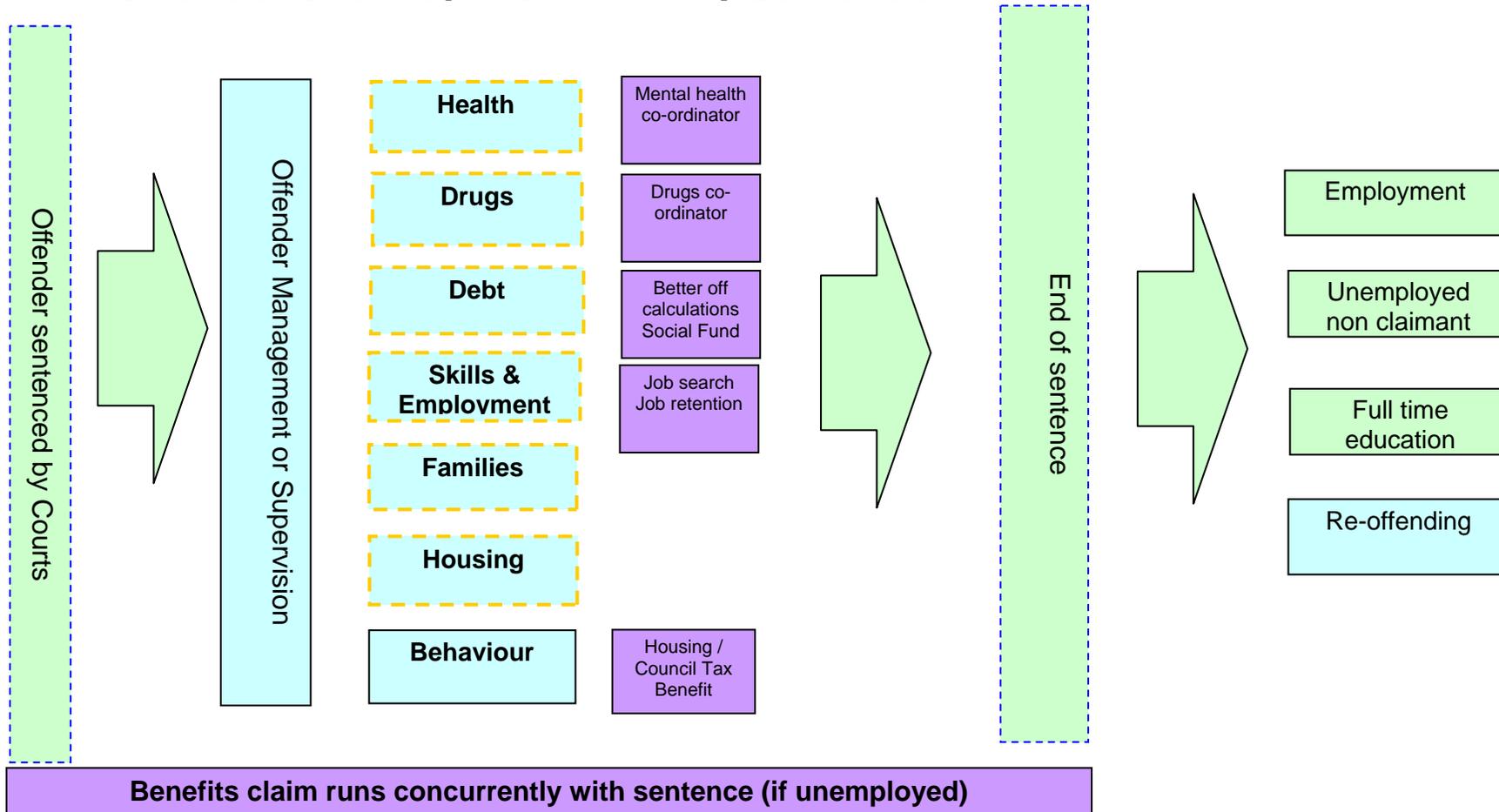


* Remand prisoners do not receive offender management support until they are sentenced. For sentenced prisoners of less than one year only 18-21 year olds receive offender management.

Interventions are coded by agency:

- = Jobcentre Plus
- = National Offender Management Service
- = interventions that are part of the reducing re-offending pathways but which are delivered partly or wholly by other government departments and /or partners

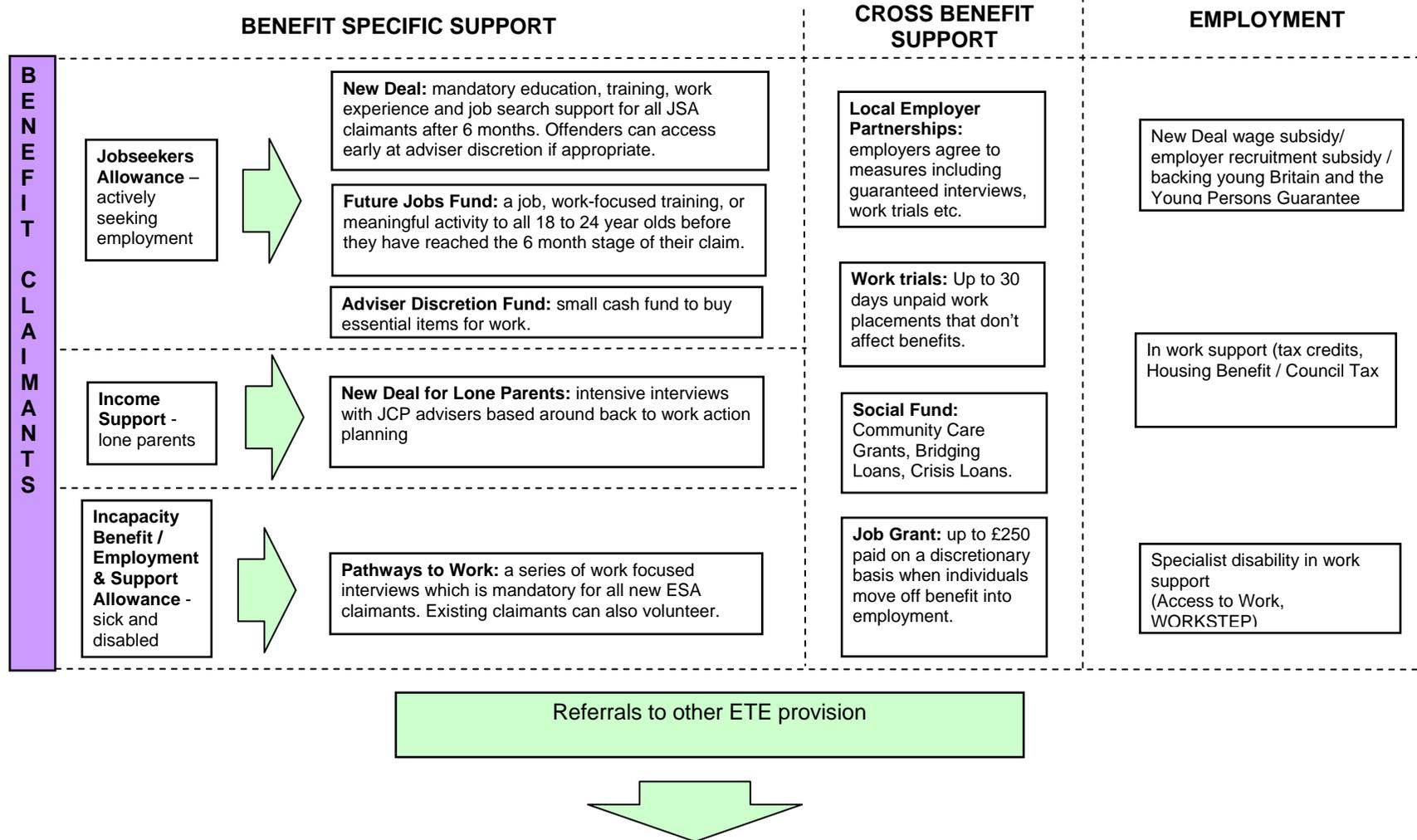
Offender Journey – Community Sentence



Interventions are coded by agency:

- = Jobcentre Plus
- = National Offender Management Service
- = interventions that are part of the reducing re-offending pathways but which are delivered partly or wholly by other government departments and /or partners

Offender Journey – The Jobcentre Plus Offer



3.4 More strategic commissioning of provision

One of the key areas for improvement and a theme running through many of the recommendations in this review is improved partnership working. At the regional seminars feedback received suggested that improvements could be made to the way offender provision is commissioned – in particular between DWP, NOMS and the LSC.

Much of the provision provided by DWP / Jobcentre Plus is commissioned nationally, meaning there could be overlaps with the provision commissioned regionally by the other agencies. To reduce duplication and to ensure that offenders are targeted towards mainstream provision, we recommend that those responsible for commissioning in DWP, NOMS and the LSC agree nationally and regionally what provision is needed – filling gaps avoiding overlaps and targeting mainstream provision to adopt a more flexible approach.

This approach fits with the model the LSC are recommending for the new Skills Funding Agency (SFA) which will replace the LSC from April 2010 and it also fits with the DOMS requirement to commission regionally. It would seem right that those with the expertise in offender provision should be able to influence where the need is within their particular region.

Good practice suggests that developing joint working should include:

- a need and demand analysis – including for offenders and for the broader employment market; and
- mapping current provision to identify possible gaps and duplication.

Recommendation:

- **those responsible for commissioning offender provision in NOMS, DWP and the LSC working at a national and regional levels will identify opportunities to better co-ordinate or jointly commission provision for offenders in custody and the community - including joint service design and specification where appropriate. (A structure to be in place by April 2010 in line with the introduction of the new Skills Funding Agency).**

3.5 Single Caseworkers to link to mainstream DWP programmes

NOMS gained co-financing status earlier this year and will use significant European Social Fund (ESF) funds to provide employment support for offenders in both custody and the community to help offenders access mainstream employment and training provision from December 2009 to December 2011.

In delivering this programme, NOMS will promote a joined up approach with partners and stakeholders. It will take particular care to link to the major DWP/BIS Integrated Employment and Skills programme, and to ensure data arrangements draw on and link to existing data sets, enabling data exchange and the availability of a coherent and complete set of skills and employment data for each client. Delivery will demonstrate linkages, progressions and added value to mainstream delivery, Jobcentre Plus, LSC and in-house, NOMS-led delivery for (ex) offenders.

The underpinning principle is to provide added value by filling gaps in existing services and supporting offenders to access mainstream employment and skills services that currently do not reach prisoners and offenders. The overarching aim is to provide greater cohesion between existing offender specific skills and employment services and the transition and access to mainstream employment and skills provision.

Case Managers based in prisons, probation teams and third sector offices will co-ordinate the various aspects of employment support for offenders ensuring, delivery into the mainstream with particular emphasis on “through the gate” activity and bridging the gap between custody and community. The Case Manager will link into existing NOMS and other offender support processes such as the Offender Management Plan and sentence planning, learning and skills provision, and the role of the Jobcentre Plus advisers. They will act as a ‘link worker’ between the provision provided in prisons or during community sentences, to ensure that employment plans are in place for the crucial transition period immediately up to and immediately following release, and that they are continued following release.

4 EMPLOYMENT AND BENEFIT SURGERY ADVISER (EBSA) FRAMEWORK

4.1 Employment and benefit surgery adviser role

The EBSAs work in partnership with NOMS in prison, reducing fraud and error in prisoner benefit claims when they start their sentence by closing down claims, and acting as an employment / benefit link for prisoners before they leave, through, for example, conducting job search and giving benefits advice. In many cases EBSAs also book Freshstart interviews to ensure prisoners get quick access to a Jobseekers interview on release. In addition they can help offenders claim the community care grant prior to release.

Taking account of the feedback received from the survey and the seminars, we would like to re-focus the EBSA role to undertake more employment focused activity. The recommendations in the following paragraphs will help achieve this aim.

4.2 Benefit closure activity

Overpayments of Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance amongst the offender client group are estimated to be £4m (estimates cover the period April 2007 to March 2008). To help detect fraud or potential overpayments a Generalised Matching Service (GMS) scan of benefit customers is matched against new prisoner intakes weekly.

In addition to this activity an important function of the current EBSA role is to undertake claim closure activity when an offender enters prison. EBSAs are able to pick up potential fraud more quickly and make some matches that GMS would miss by virtue of their case-by-case approach.

The combination of the scan and the EBSA interventions helps prevent fraud, however numbers of EBSAs are limited and they are not able to deal with every case. GMS, for example, will pick up some cases the EBSA might have missed or have dealt with due to backlogs caused by such things as uncovered annual leave or lockdowns. There is a clear rationale for having this two pronged approach, although it is difficult to quantify the benefits precisely.

We recognise that this function performed by the EBSAs is very important and we have therefore tried to identify ways of speeding up the claim closure activity and to also reduce the numbers of cases the offenders have to action through improvements to the data matching.

4.3 GMS matching service

A weekly scan of MOJ prisoner data is matched against DWP benefits. Where a positive match is found, scan results are forwarded to the relevant Benefit Delivery Centre for the claim to be closed as necessary.

The main issues with this approach are:

- The match criteria (name, sex, date of birth) often do not produce a good match, as they are not specific enough;
- In some cases, the prisoner will give false information wherever possible in an attempt to fraudulently continue to claim their benefit payments. Therefore details given by prisoners need to be verified and the offender positively identified.

We would like to improve the numbers of cases matched through the GMS service by adding an additional matching criterion to those used currently. If NOMS collected the National Insurance Number on reception, this would further strengthen the current match and in turn should result in more cases being matched using the GMS scan and fewer cases having to be picked up by the EBSAs, freeing up more time to focus on employment related activity.

Recommendations:

- **NOMS will explore the feasibility of collecting National Insurance Numbers of offenders – to be used as an additional match criteria to make the Generalised Matching Service (GMS) scan more robust and reduce the manual work that the EBSAs currently are obliged to complete on benefit closures (by April 2010).**

4.4 Interaction with Benefit Delivery Centres

On undertaking benefit closure activity the EBSAs have to liaise closely with the Benefit Delivery Centres (BDCs). The BDCs are responsible for undertaking benefit processing activity so are a key contact for the EBSA when resolving offender benefit issues and undertaking claim closure activity.

Many EBSAs reported difficulties in contacting the BDCs. Feedback suggested that they were having to contact the BDC via the external “0845” number so getting through was proving to be difficult.

In addition they suggested that they often had to wait for lengthy periods without resolution to benefit issues. This is further exacerbated by the fact that prisoners are often not from the region where the prison is located. Therefore EBSAs have to contact BDCs from outside of their own regions adding to the complexity of this issue.

Many felt that a named contact within the BDC who had an awareness of offender related issues would be very helpful in speeding up the process. In addition to have a dedicated contact number or e-mail route would also free up a significant amount of EBSA time.

Recommendation:

- **Jobcentre Plus will provide the EBSAs with a single point of contact within the Benefit Delivery Centre to action benefit closure activity (by April 2010).**

4.5 EBSA accommodation and access to IT

A review of the EBSA role in 2006 identified some tensions between delivering benefit and job search activity and the requirements of running a prison. This review has presented an opportunity to determine whether these tensions have been resolved.

EBSAs reported that they are still frustrated by a lack of supporting infrastructure, particularly their inability to effectively access the Jobcentre Plus intranet and Labour Market system (LMS) in some prisons because of the lack of broadband access. Given that LMS is their key tool for accessing vacancies and submitting individuals to jobs, this is a substantial barrier to advisers carrying out this part of their role effectively.

Some EBSAs reported that they did not have adequate accommodation to undertake discussions with offenders. The facility of a dedicated room to conduct benefit and employment advice with access to a telephone line would seem to be a basic requirement for the EBSAs to efficiently conduct their duties.

Recommendations:

- **each prison will provide the EBSAs with broadband access to allow on-line access to the Labour Market System and a dedicated telephone line (by April 2010); and**
- **each prison will provide the EBSAs with an appropriate space to provide face-to-face advice to prisoners (by April 2010).**

4.6 Roll-out of the Virtual Campus

Ministers are currently considering a national roll-out of the “virtual campus” which has been tested as a proof of concept in two regions. The virtual campus provides (carefully controlled) access to a wide range of web-based material, and it is possible that the virtual campus functionality will further support the work of EBSAs and support offenders in prison. This includes valuable help and advice for offenders including practical advice and guidance on the implications of having a criminal record and what their responsibilities are in relation to job search activity (types of employment and what should be declared to the employer).

Recommendation:

- **MOJ/NOMS and DWP/Jobcentre Plus will examine how the national roll out of the virtual campus can be used to support communications with offenders – this includes important advice on the disclosure of offences (timescale subject to Ministerial approval).**

4.7 Integration with resettlement teams

Resettlement teams in prisons, co-ordinated by the Heads of Reducing Re-offending (HORRS) cover a range of provision such as learning, skills and employment, accommodation, psychology and drugs support. They work with the Heads of Learning and Skills (HOLS) and CARRAT (Drug action workers). They all have a role to play in ensuring that individuals are prepared as far as possible for release back into the community, either at the end of sentence in the case of those serving less than twelve months, or for release on licence in the case of those who serve more than twelve months.

In response to the survey and during discussions at the seminars, many EBSAs felt that their skills were not being fully utilised by the resettlement teams. The perception from some NOMS staff was that the EBSA role was purely there to undertake benefit closure activity and there was no awareness of the other important employment related activity the EBSA could usefully provide. An example of this is on employer engagement. Many HOLs and HORRS reported that employer engagement activity was being undertaken in prisons however only a small number said they were working with Jobcentre Plus on this.

At HMP Peterborough, the country's only dual purpose-built prison for men and women, resettlement provision benefits from 'The Link', a one stop information and advice centre on both the male and female side of the establishment accommodating resettlement and partner agencies such as Jobcentre Plus, NACRO, Citizens Advice Bureau and Learn Direct to support offenders employment on release as well as information and advice on other areas such as alcohol, drugs, health and accommodation. The LINK is at the centre of the establishment's induction and pre-release programmes co-ordinating needs assessments and referrals to a range of provision.

Recommendations:

- **partnership teams will be formed by better integrating (and co-locating) Jobcentre Plus' Employment and Benefit Surgery staff with prison teams leading on skills, employment and resettlement (by April 2010).**

To facilitate this:

- **EBSAs will work with the resettlement team to provide advice to offenders on the Jobcentre Plus offer at appropriate events including reception and pre-release;**
- **EBSAs will be more involved in employment activities e.g. employer engagement activity; and**
- **EBSAs will provide regular updates of Jobcentre Plus provision at regular resettlement team meetings.**

4.8 Use of offender peer support

In some prisons the EBSAs have utilised the offenders themselves to provide advice, conduct simple administrative jobs, fetch prisoners for interview, and to help offenders complete forms. This has freed up valuable EBSA time to concentrate on employment related activity. It has also provided an opportunity for the offender to be engaged in an activity where they can be accredited by way of a formal qualification for their achievements.

We recognise that the duties of the peer support worker should take account of the individual's skills and abilities, and the length of their sentence, but we would suggest consideration should be given to utilising offenders to offer this support, given that EBSA's have reported that this can free up time for them to focus on other advisory related activities.

Recommendation:

- where appropriate using offenders to provide more peer support should to assist the EBSA in a wide range of ways that takes account of the skills and abilities of the prisoners who can fulfil this role (e.g. giving advice, signposting enquiries, or helping offenders complete forms). Prisoners should be accredited for their work by way of a formal qualification (by April 2010).

At HMP Lewes, a local prison in East Sussex, the induction and pre-release process benefits greatly from a team of offender peer advisers who have achieved NVQ level 3 in Advice and Guidance. After undergoing a rigorous selection process and then training by St Giles Trust the peer advisers support other offenders both at induction and pre-release with academic and work skill assessments and also careers advice and guidance.

Offenders participating in induction, report the positive impact of peer support, especially their assistance with on-line skill assessments. This is a very good example of how offenders working alongside other agencies (including Jobcentre Plus) can support the ETE pathway.

4.9 Maintaining contact with Jobcentre Plus

The EBSA role is a specialist role conducted often in isolation of other Jobcentre Plus staff. In the current environment where the Jobcentre Plus offer is constantly changing, we feel that it is vital that EBSAs maintain a close working link with their Jobcentre Plus office. This will help them to maintain a working relationship with colleagues; stay aware of any new or changing Jobcentre Plus programmes and services; maintain local knowledge of the jobs market in their area; raise awareness of offender issues with colleagues.

This will allow Jobcentre Plus to offer the best service possible to offenders. Wherever possible, EBSAs should consider spending some time each week, based in their Jobcentre Plus office, and should aim to attend any team/office meetings that might occur. We also think that rotating the role would be beneficial especially after some years. Rotating the EBSA role will in turn increase the number of individuals with offender expertise within the region. This will also provide additional flexibility during periods of leave and illness.

Recommendation:

- to maintain EBSA current knowledge of Jobcentre Plus provision - EBSAs should spend some time each week, based in their Jobcentre Plus office, including attendance at team / office update meetings. We also recommend rotation of the role (by April 2010).

4.10 Job description

To provide clarity for EBSAs about what should be delivered and the support they should expect in prison we would recommend the development of a new job description.

Recommendation:

- **introduce a revised job description outlining the requirements of the EBSA role (by April 2010).**

5 DATA SHARING – THROUGH THE GATE AND IN THE COMMUNITY

5.1 Background

When talking about data sharing we are referring to the sharing of information locally on a case-by-case basis between agencies for the purpose of case management. An example of this is the sharing of individual offender information between a probation officer and a Jobcentre Plus adviser.

We have found that the sharing of information between Jobcentre Plus and Probation is patchy, because the relationships and communication between the organisations are often poor. There is also evidence of a lack of clarity around what can be shared legally and the lack of understanding as to why each would find this information beneficial.

5.2 Research

In addition to the views expressed by EBSAs and prison and probation staff in the survey and at the seminars, we and the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) commissioned York University to undertake a specific piece of research focused on information sharing and the frontline delivery of settled housing and employment for offenders on Probation⁹. A summary of key issues highlighted by the research were:

- there is evidence of effective information sharing for the purposes of frontline service delivery of housing and employment services to ex-offenders in some areas. This is where joint working arrangements have been established and protocols or agreements are in place alongside the opportunity for service users to give 'free and informed consent' to having their personal details shared with others;
- information sharing between Probation and Jobcentre Plus is variable, working more effectively where Jobcentre Plus had specialist staff resources;
- the situation with the sharing of information by prisons is also variable with particular problems when a prisoner was discharged to an area a long distance from the prison. There is limited flow of outcome monitoring data from other agencies back to probation; and
- problems are often logistical rather than the result of the legislative framework and more likely to result from under-developed or inadequate joint working.

⁹ DWP Research Report no 610 "Delivering better housing and employment outcomes for offenders on probation" Nicholas Pleace and Jon Minton – York University.

5.3 Joint working arrangements

We have found that where the links between agencies is poor, there is a lack of understanding around what each agency can provide in terms of support for offenders and the benefits of communicating with each other are not clear. This in turn can lead to the offender receiving poorly targeted provision e.g. we found that some probation staff were unaware of the Jobcentre Plus offer and the different types of employment support an unemployed offender can access.

There were also examples where Jobcentre Plus had no clear understanding of the flexibility probation can apply to offender community sentences to ensure the offender is still available for employment.

Guidance highlighting the Jobcentre Plus offer and the prison and probation requirements would benefit both organisations and ultimately the offender journey, but this alone will not improve the joint working arrangements. We feel it is important for individuals in each agency locally to have an identified contact for offender specific related issues. This is not seen to be an additional resource requirement. More targeted support and improved communication could lead to efficiencies and an increase in target performance.

In addition to providing staff with information about the Jobcentre Plus offer, we identified that the offender would also benefit from having clear information about Jobcentre Plus. To address this need we have recommended the introduction of a Jobcentre Plus leaflet and poster, specifically aimed at offenders. The leaflet will be available to those remand prisoners who will not have had any pre release-contact with the EBSA or have a Freshstart appointment booked at their local Jobcentre.

The regional conferences held in September and October were a good opportunity for cross agency relationships to be formed and an opportunity to start discussions on improved partnership working. Many attendees welcomed this opportunity to network and share good practice. This is the first time in 6 years events of this kind have been held in some regions. We would recommend that momentum continues and that further conferences are held following up progress in October 2011.

Recommendations:

- **guidance to support frontline partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and NOMS will be developed - helping both to better understand the offender offer (by March 2010);**
- **an agreed single point of contact and designated officer within Jobcentre Plus and probation will work together on offender issues (by April 2010);**
- **introduce a leaflet explaining the current Jobcentre Plus offer for offenders (by March 2010); and**

- **follow up the regional conferences held in September / October with a conference in October 2011.**

5.4 Legally agreed data sharing agreement

It was clear from the feedback obtained from the workshops that many individuals felt uncomfortable sharing information, even when the offender had given consent to do so. There also appeared to be regional and local variations in the type of information being shared. Feedback from the survey and the seminars suggested a national legally agreed data sharing consent form with supporting guidance would be beneficial.

Recommendation:

- **a legally approved data sharing consent form for use between frontline probation and Jobcentre Plus staff will be drawn up (by March 2010).**

6 EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

6.1 Improving joint working

An area where duplication of activity between NOMS and Jobcentre Plus at local level is most prevalent is around employer engagement. A lack of co-ordination of this activity can lead to confusion among employers who may be targeted by several different agencies of government, and missed opportunities to offer support to employers to take on offenders via Jobcentre Plus initiatives for disadvantaged groups.

Offenders can be some of the most difficult people to place with employers. This can be for a variety of reasons including a lack of basic skills or motivation to work by offenders. But, for those who are willing and able to work the problem is often caused by employers having a lack of understanding of the risk posed by people with different types of convictions or, in the worst cases, a negative preconception about people with convictions as employees.

A survey carried out by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) in 2006¹⁰ showed that the UK organisations are four times more likely to report a positive experience when employing an (ex) offender than a negative one. In around four fifths of cases they say that (ex) offenders settle into work well with colleagues perform well and are reliable. In addition, three-quarters of employers surveyed indicated that they would consider employing (ex) offenders if they had the relevant skills that fit the needs of the organisation.

Engaging employers to engage with offenders where appropriate by offering training, work placements, and work trials is a good way of overcoming some of these barriers. Such initiatives not only develop the offender's employability, but also build a relationship with the employer which leads to permanent and sustained employment with that employer in the majority of cases. This is particularly true for young offenders who may have a poor or non-existent work history. NOMS has a programme of work to increase the range of constructive work available to offenders inside prison, and in turn their job opportunities on the outside. A recent example is the Timpson Academy at HMP Liverpool (with another due to open in December at HMP Wandsworth). These initiatives build on the opportunities available in prison via internal industries and services that employ substantial numbers of prisoners, which are increasingly run as much as possible on commercial business lines so they provide a real employability experience, the potential for qualifications, and a saving to the tax payer.

However, while prison and probation staff can often provide support to employers in the form of advice about managing risk relating to the type of conviction, they should not be doing so in isolation since Jobcentre Plus have long established initiatives in place aimed at incentivising and supporting employers to work with disadvantaged groups.

¹⁰ For more information on the survey see – <http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/dvsequ/exoffenders/empexoffdr.htm?IsSrchRes=1>

There are many advantages to NOMS and Jobcentre Plus working together to engage employers:

- Jobcentre Plus provide NOMS with information about current and future labour market vacancies in order to inform the provision of skills and employability training for offenders and to match labour market demand to the supply of suitable offenders on a case-by-case basis;
- NOMS can advise Jobcentre Plus on how to make the case to employers for taking on offenders;
- the combined support offered by Jobcentre Plus (through recruitment incentives and in some cases, ongoing account management) and NOMS (through advice on risk management relating to type of conviction) is a more attractive package to employers than each on its own;
- a more co-ordinated approach will avoid frustrating employers who may be approached by several different people representing the government; and
- the improved commissioning arrangements suggested earlier will be informed by, and better rooted in, employer need.

For this reason this review has concluded that improvements can be made at local, regional and national levels.

6.2 Local Employment Partnerships (LEPs)

Local Employment Partnerships (LEPs) are based on a simple deal with employers:

- the government gets jobseekers ready for work; and
- employers with vacancies agree to give them a fair shot at the jobs.

Jobcentre Plus broker LEP agreements with employers, reviewing their recruitment processes to make them more inclusive.

A LEP agreement can set in train a series of measures that can make it easier for customers furthest from the labour market to secure and retain employment. For example, a customer furthest from the labour market, such as an (ex) offender, can be a beneficiary of;

- tailored pre-employment training to give them the knowledge, skills and confidence to get a job, often with a guaranteed interview;

- a Work Trial that will provide skills, work experience and an opportunity to demonstrate ones capabilities to an employer; and /or;
- mentoring when in work to help an individual retain their new employment.

In return, Jobcentre Plus will ensure employers have the chance to recruit people they might not have considered, who are eager to work and have the core skills they need.

With the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills Jobcentre Plus are working to ensure that people not only find sustained employment but also have opportunities to develop their skills during employment. This benefits the customer and boosts employers' competitiveness.

6.3 Corporate Alliance

The Corporate Alliance is a banner for the Government's employer engagement activities for offenders. It includes partnerships with private, public and voluntary sector organisations on improving the skills and employment outcomes for offenders. It seeks to:

- i) encourage more employers to employ and support offenders during the process of finding and retaining employment;
- ii) support and disseminate good practice involving employers improving the skills and employment of offenders; and
- iii) use employers to 'market' the Corporate Alliance to other employers.

There are three levels of engagement that will enable employers to get involved with offenders in ways that best suits them. These are:

- level one – activities to support improvement in employability, focusing on donating materials that can be used to train offenders, and donating staff time for interview training, CV preparation, and for mentoring offenders;
- level two – activities in support of designing and delivering training programmes, including paid work placements; and
- level three – recruiting directly from prisons and probation.

Promotion of the Corporate Alliance at national and regional level has resulted in over 100 employers, who are already involved with offenders or planning to get involved, using their involvement to promote the case with other employers.

To ensure that developments to engage with employers are informed and steered by employers a reference group, chaired by a business leader and consisting of major as well as medium and small employers from the private, public and voluntary sectors has been established.

6.4 East of England pilot

As a development from the *Reducing Re-offending Through Skills and Employment: Next Steps* regional test bed activity, Jobcentre Plus Employer Engagement Division (EED) are working with colleagues in NOMS East of England and Jobcentre Plus regional colleagues, to support them deliver an initiative to help offenders move into employment with Jobcentre Plus national account employers.

Building upon the work of the Next Step Test-Beds in the region, the focus is to bridge the gap between prisons releasing offenders with marketable employment skills (such as catering and hospitality) with known employer vacancies in the same sector. The pilot is at the development stage but in bringing together the key NOMS and Jobcentre Plus people at regional and local level, is expected to be operational in the New Year. We envisage the key elements to be:

- identify national employers already signed up to this agenda and the Offender Employment and Skills Service (OESS) in NOMS will produce a business case for employing offenders which EED will use to promote this to other national employers on our portfolio;
- match appropriate prison skill supply with employer demand in the same employment sector supported by the Jobcentre Plus account manager network and a nominated person at the prison;
- share the employer information with colleagues in the East of England where there is potential for recruitment in this region. We will focus on catering and hospitality but with scope to extend to other sectors; and
- support the introduction of the new NOMS regional post, learning lessons from the pilot on how that post can operate to the best effect with the key stakeholders from Jobcentre Plus and other organisations.

6.5 Technical assistance fund posts

To facilitate the strategic link between NOMS and DWP / Jobcentre Plus including the co-ordination of employer engagement work across the regions, NOMS intends to fund nine regional posts via bid to the ESF under the NOMS co-financing programme. The roles will be a strategic driver in the regions to ensure relationships, partnerships, processes, referral routes and local procedures are in place to maximise the route from job readiness into mainstream employment support.

The NOMS roles will provide an additional resource to facilitate partnerships with Jobcentre Plus provision in each region, notably employer engagement work with the Jobcentre Plus account manager network but will also support the wider link between the CFO activities and mainstream Jobcentre Plus/DWP employment offer across each region. The co-ordinators will develop the employment relationship with the mainstream and ensure implementation and support with both prisons and probation areas. The NOMS roles will have a key strategic requirement to wire together employer engagement contacts at a national level through the Corporate Alliance and Local Employment Partnerships with work at a regional level and improving national data about employers working with prisons and probation.

Recommendations:

- **Jobcentre Plus and NOMS to join up employer engagement activity (by April 2010).**

This recommendation is addressing the lack of coherence and co-ordination that exists around engaging employers to train and recruit offenders as one of several groups disadvantaged in the labour market. To facilitate this:

- **In prisons, Jobcentre Plus and learning, Skills and resettlement leads will work together to engage local employers to train and recruit offenders discharged into the local area. In the community Jobcentre Plus and Probation will co-ordinate in a similar way;**
- **at the regional level, NOMS Regional Offender Employment Co-ordinators will work with Jobcentre Plus employer engagement staff to analyse information about labour market skills shortages (both current and future) and the current employment strengths of the offenders that are working with NOMS to ensure a co-ordinated approach to employer engagement, and that information about national employers is fed to local NOMS and Jobcentre Plus staff; and**

- **at the national level, employer champions for offender training and recruitment who have signed up to the Reducing Re-offending Corporate Alliance should continue to support Jobcentre Plus efforts to engage with employers to take on offenders through Local Employment Partnerships.**

7 DATA LINKING

7.1 Background

At the moment Departments engaged in programmes to improve employment outcomes for offenders do not have effective ways of evaluating the success. In addition monitoring progress against national performance indicators has also been difficult.

7.2 Progress to date and next steps

Since the commission of this review we have made progress on improving national data sharing. The following highlights progress to date and next steps:

- BIS are working with DWP and have completed the first in a series of data matches between LSC data and the Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study (WPLS). The Offender Markers contained in the data set will allow evaluation of the effect of learning interventions on offenders. Many lessons learned in this project have helped other projects move forward;
- SPCR Stage 1 is a Data Matching Project between Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) data and DWP benefit data. The legal gateways for this project have been re-examined to ensure the bases for the data sharing are sufficiently robust. Although slowing the project for a period of time, a firm footing has now been established. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Department's is now being drafted.
- SPCR Stage 2 will aim to build on stage one to possibly include HMRC employment data (subject to HMRC approval and agreement between departments); and
- MoJ are leading a wider data sharing project¹¹ on offenders to link MoJ administrative data to DWP benefit data and HMRC employment data. This work will provide an evidence base for future partnership work on targeting employment, skills and re-offending. Sharing key sources of personal data held by departments for research and analytical purposes is essential for work in this area to continue to move forward. The aim of the data share is to build on the current evidence base to help understand re-offending behaviour and have more robust evaluations of the interventions used.

¹¹ This work is part of the Data Improvement Project led by MOJ Chief Statistician. The project has been set up in order to build the evidence and analysis capability through better use of administrative data linked across different data sources (including sharing data with other government departments) and creating robust analytical IT to create an environment for efficient analysis.

- Chief statisticians in DWP and HMRC have agreed in principle to this data share, subject to legal and ethical requirements being met. A meeting between lawyers in DWP / HMRC and MOJ is due to take place at the end of November. Further details including timescales will be available after this meeting.
- Following this meeting an expert group will be set up with representatives from all departments. The remit will include prioritising the analysis on the shared data. This group will assist in the development of a new shared performance target.

8 IMPLEMENT A SHARED SYSTEM OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

8.1 Progress to date

Work is already being undertaken across the three principle offender skills and employment departments (DWP, MoJ and BIS) to press forward this performance management and data exchange agenda.

To ensure that a robust measure is developed substantial work is needed to:

- define the measure;
- ensure that data to support it can be accurately captured;
- ensure that we can legally share the data to develop the target under data protection laws (as a minimum we are likely to need to share data on individuals between MOJ, DWP and HMRC); and
- ensure that the proposed measure is relevant to frontline delivery in NOMS and Jobcentre Plus.

The following will be a first step in facilitating delivery of this recommendation.

Recommendation:

- **to establish a joint working group (MOJ / NOMS and DWP / Jobcentre Plus) to deliver a preliminary report with recommendations (by April 2010)**

9 PRISONER FINANCE GAP

9.1 Background

The prisoner finance gap is a period of between 2 to 6 weeks after the offender has been released where they may have to wait before the relevant income stream is made available to them (such as Jobseekers Allowance which is paid 2 weeks in arrears). This gap in funding can act as a major obstacle to the resettlement efforts of an offender and their successful integration back into the community.

9.2 North east research project

DWP and MOJ have commissioned a piece of research into the prisoner finance gap, to understand the nature of the gap and to establish what issues are involved in putting measures in place to address the problem.

One of the obstacles for offenders taking up employment has been the inability to obtain a bank account. MOJ have been progressing work on making bank accounts more widely available to offenders leaving prison. Improvements have already been made to simplify the issues offenders often face in providing ID to open bank accounts. The British Banking Association has agreed a simple process working in partnership with NOMS for obtaining ID. Guidance is due to be issued shortly on this new process.

To support the introduction of this process a grant to a third sector body has been agreed for a short-term project to support the establishment of working relationships between individual prisons and banks. It is hoped to have this project operational in early 2010.

9.3 Payment on account

The Welfare Reform Act which received Royal Assent on 12th November made provision for an advance of benefit (a "Payment on Account") to customers **if their benefit claim has:**

- **not been decided** (provided any delay is not caused by the customer having failed to produce evidence necessary to decide and pay the claim); or
- **been decided but payment of benefit cannot be made** because the customer has not yet reached their payday.

There will be two simple tests. The customer must be likely to be entitled to benefit and they must be in financial need. Both of these tests are judgements to be made by a decision maker receiving the information from the customer but guidance will be given to ensure we have a consistent approach. Access to a Payment on Account will be available to customers at any time from the point of claim for benefit until they have received their first full payment of benefit.

The Act provides for the recovery of Payments on Account by deductions from benefit over a period, and not immediately from the first payment of arrears of benefit so as to avoid re-imposing the original financial problem. Supporting regulations are currently being developed setting out the details of the scheme. It is expected that this provision will be introduced from October 2010.

Payments on Account will apply to offenders in the same way as to any other customers and should ensure the "prisoner finance gap" is substantially, if not completely, closed so long as they provide the necessary evidence at the time of their claim.

10 DWP AND MOJ RECRUITMENT OF (EX) OFFENDERS

10.1 DWP vacancies within the Department

DWP has recently reviewed its existing policy in terms of handling applications from (ex) offenders for jobs within the Department.

The policy guidance has been revised to ensure that DWP managers consider cases as sympathetically as possible, reflecting the difficulties that (ex) offenders have in securing employment. Of course all decisions on employing someone with convictions have to be taken in the context of the job(s) on offer and the relevant convictions.

When DWP human resource (HR) checks identify unspent criminal convictions the application is referred to the local manager who has the vacancy. They then make the decision on whether or not to employ, taking into account the relevant conviction and the nature of the job on offer. The Department believes that local managers, supported by HR Business Partners, are in the best position to make this considered judgement.

10.2 DWP vacancies with service providers

DWP are currently working on an initiative with PECAN, a charity who help mainly black (ex) offenders into work, The London Employer Accord and Telereal Trillium, who provide DWP Estates and facilities, to provide employment for (ex) offenders within London DWP offices. As well as cleaning, catering and Landscape maintenance jobs, Trillium feel that some (ex) offenders may be suitable for apprenticeship/skills training schemes.

The scheme has the support of DWP Estates and DWP Security. DWP and other stakeholders involved in the initiative will shortly be meeting with Telereal Trillium and their service partners to discuss the initial recruitment of a small number of (ex) offenders. We are confident that the recruitment process will be put in place from January 2010.

10.3 MOJ recruitment and work placements

MoJ has for some time been promoting recruitment practices that are open to people with convictions and that allows recruiters to base their decisions on sensible risk assessment, taking into account the relevance of a person's conviction for the post being offered and the environment in which they will be working. A positive policy statement setting out this recruitment practice is sent out to all job applicants.

In addition, the department is planning to take two serving offenders on work placements as part of their rehabilitation and CV development. Some NOMS regional offices have successfully done this and we are using the learning from their experience in offering placements at the headquarters in Petty France.

We are planning to offer paid placements for six months duration

10.4 MoJ supporting the wider civil service in offering placements

MoJ will use its own experience of running placements to develop guidance for other departments and agencies. The guidance will offer advice logistical and contractual options such as:

- whether placements should be offered on a paid or unpaid basis;
- the ideal duration of the placements;
- how to grade the positions e.g. create a work placement grade;
- whether to take someone from a community or custodial setting;
- the types of convictions that may be considered a barrier.

At the same time, it has been agreed that a steering group would be set up to oversee the running of these, and future, placements, comprising representatives from:

- offender employment policy teams in MoJ & NOMS;
- HR representatives from MoJ, NOMS, Cabinet Office, & DCSF;
- London Probation;
- open prisons in London and the South East.

The steering group will act as a central point for those offering work placements to approach in the first instance in order to identify someone suitable for the placements they are offering and to discuss their ongoing support needs. It is envisaged that departments who have successfully run placements will be able to choose between continuing to use the above steering group or to use existing relationships for further placements.