

**MDA No.: 1758**

## **Title: *Employment in London After Prison Report***

### **1. Executive Summary**

1.1 At the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee meeting on 2 September 2025 the Committee resolved that:

*Authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.*

1.2 Following consultation with party Group Lead Members, the Chair of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee agreed the Committee's report, *Employment in London after Prison*, as attached at **Appendix 1**.

### **2. Decision**

2.1 **That the Chair, following consultation with the party Group Lead Members, agrees the *Employment in London after Prison* report, as attached at Appendix 1.**

#### **Assembly Member**

I confirm that I do not have any disclosable pecuniary interests in the proposed decision and take the decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct for elected Members of the Authority.

The above request has my approval.

**Signature:**



**Printed Name:** Hina Bokhari OBE AM, Chair of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee

**Date:** 8 January 2026

### **3. Decision by an Assembly Member under Delegated Authority**

#### **Background and proposed next steps:**

- 3.1 The terms of reference for this investigation were agreed by the Chair, in consultation with relevant party Lead Group Members and Deputy Chair, on 29 May 2025 under the standing authority granted to Chairs of Committees and Sub-Committees. Officers confirm that the report falls within these terms of reference.
- 3.2 The exercise of delegated authority approving the *Employment in London after Prison* report will be formally noted at the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee's next appropriate meeting.

#### **Confirmation that appropriate delegated authority exists for this decision:**

Signature (Committee Services): *Sal Fazal*

Printed Name: Saleha Fazal

Date: 7 January 2026

#### **Financial Implications: NOT REQUIRED**

Note: Finance comments and signature are required only where there are financial implications arising or the potential for financial implications.

Signature (Finance): Not Required

Printed Name:

Date:

#### **Legal Implications:**

The Chair of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee has the power to make the decision set out in this report.

Signature (Legal): 

Printed Name: Rory McKenna, Monitoring Officer

Date: 8 January 2026

Email: [rory.mckenna@london.gov.uk](mailto:rory.mckenna@london.gov.uk)

#### **Supporting Detail / List of Consultees:**

- Alessandro Georgiou AM,
- Alex Wilson AM,
- Zack Polanski AM, and
- Anne Clarke AM.

#### **4. Public Access to Information**

- 4.1 Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the FoIA, or the EIR and will be made available on the GLA Website, usually within one working day of approval.
- 4.2 If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary.
- 4.3 **Note:** this form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

##### **Part 1 - Deferral:**

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

If yes, until what date:

##### **Part 2 – Sensitive Information:**

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA or EIR should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form? NO

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#### **Lead Officer / Author**

Signature: *Tim Gallagher*

Printed Name: Tim Gallagher

Job Title: Senior Policy Adviser

Date: 7 January 2026

#### **Countersigned by Executive Director:**

Signature: *Helen Ewen*

Printed Name: Helen Ewen, Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat

Date: 7 January 2026

# Employment in London after prison

Economy, Culture and Skills Committee

January 2026



**LONDON ASSEMBLY**

## Economy, Culture and Skills Committee



Hina Bokhari OBE AM  
Chair  
Liberal Democrats



Anne Clarke AM  
Deputy Chair  
Labour



Marina Ahmad AM  
Labour



Unmesh Desai AM  
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Neil Garratt AM  
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Alessandro Georgiou AM  
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Krupesh Hirani AM  
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Zack Polanski AM  
Green



Alex Wilson AM  
Reform UK

The Economy, Culture and Skills Committee examines and reports on matters relating to economic development, culture, skills, sport and tourism in London, and leads on scrutiny of any actions or decisions taken by the Mayor in these areas.

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## Foreword



**Hina Bokhari OBE AM**  
**Chair of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee**

Giving people a second chance is not only the most caring way to act but the most economically beneficial way to act too.

People who have been in prison can often be stereotyped or misjudged by mistakes or poor decisions they have made in the past. They can often be written off and, without any support, will have no choice but to reoffend and allow the cycle of prison life to continue. Reoffending rates increasing is bad for society but bad for the economy too. Our report shows that this is a wasted opportunity when people who have been in prison may often have untapped invaluable skills and talents. We have heard of businesses witnessing how their decisions to employ prison leavers have not only changed lives but improved their businesses. Giving prison leavers an opportunity to train and work is not just the moral thing to do but the logical thing to do – we just need to ensure we have the right conditions to make this approach work.

The reasons why someone is in prison are complex and can vary from person to person, but those who spend time in prison have often dealt with a number of particularly challenging circumstances prior to and up to their arrest, such as substance abuse, poor employment prospects, mental ill health or family breakdown. Spending time in prison can exacerbate many of these problems. These are hardly ideal conditions for someone to turn their life around.

The Economy, Culture and Skills Committee set out to investigate how Londoners who have been to prison are currently being supported to re-enter society, with a particular focus on accessing employment. We heard evidence from a wide range of stakeholders, including leading employers, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime and a number of third sector organisations doing vital work in London to help people get back on their feet. We also spoke to people who have themselves been to prison during our site visit to the Dusty Knuckle, a bakery in Dalston that actively recruits and supports Londoners who have been to prison.

We heard clear and compelling evidence that, in many instances, the current system of support provision is not effectively addressing people's multiple needs and, in not doing so, is failing to support them into stable employment after prison. Education and training in prisons are not funded appropriately and are typically not reflective of the needs of London's employers, leaving many people without the right skills to succeed in our city's competitive labour market. After prison, people face a disjointed and severely underfunded support system that is unable

to meet their multiple needs. Charities are doing important work in this space, but these organisations have limited funding and are unable to provide the support that every Londoner who is released from prison should receive.

The recommendations in this report seek to address these issues. It is clear that central government funding for prison education and the probation service must be increased. In addition to this, there is significant scope for the Mayor to take a more active role in this space. For example, we would like to see the quality of education in prisons improved and more closely aligned with the needs of London's employers. This is in line with the ambitions set out in the Mayor's Inclusive Talent Strategy and should form part of it. We would like to see the Mayor use his convening powers to improve coordination between the various stakeholders supporting the resettlement of people leaving prison in London. We also want the Mayor to model best practices to businesses in London by setting up a programme to employ prison leavers and lead in breaking the stigma of prison leavers employees – this would be an important step towards maximising the skills of all Londoners.

Our report is clear that supporting those who have spent time in prison into employment not only helps a group of Londoners that have traditionally been marginalised in the labour market but also delivers concrete benefits for all Londoners and our city's wider economy. It makes everyone safer by reducing reoffending whilst also providing London's employers with a skilled pool of labour to help it thrive in the future. Not addressing this issue presents a missed opportunity to make London a more compassionate, safer and more dynamic city.

## Executive Summary

Fewer than one in three Londoners leaving prison are in employment six months after release. This is lower than all other regions in England and Wales, other than the Midlands and the North East.<sup>1</sup> Being in work enhances reintegration after prison, and enables people to put their skills to use in London's economy. With a lack of support both within prison and on release, combined with the stigma that those leaving prison can face, there is a pressing need for this issue to be addressed by the Mayor and other public authorities.

The Economy, Culture and Skills Committee set out to investigate the employment prospects for people leaving prison in London and how these can be improved. We identified that there is a wide range of organisations carrying out invaluable work in London, helping people to turn their lives around and gain sustained employment. This is welcome and laudable, but we want to see more strategic, joined-up provision for Londoners, which supports them to gain the skills they need and links them to opportunities in the London labour market:

- The provision of education in prisons needs to be more closely aligned with the requirements of London's employers. We recommend the Mayor identify the skills gaps in London's labour market and convene London's prisons to ensure the training and education available to prisoners more closely reflects what employers are looking for.
- There should be strong coordination between the various stakeholders supporting the resettlement and rehabilitation of people leaving prison in London. London's prisons, local authorities, the Probation Service and the voluntary sector must work together more closely to reduce duplication and also to prevent people falling through the cracks. MOPAC and the Violence Reduction Unit could help address this, by setting up a forum for these organisations to come together, coordinate their support offer and improve communication.
- Employers looking to take the first step to recruit people with experience of the criminal justice system require support. This support can be provided by partners from the voluntary sector, which have experience partnering with businesses to help them with recruitment and on-the-job support. The Mayor is uniquely placed to connect employers and voluntary sector organisations and he should set up a portal for employers, enabling them to find a voluntary sector partner to support them. He should also draw on the expertise of organisations in the voluntary sector to develop guidance for employers of prison leavers.

The system has been underfunded by governments for many years, which reduces the amount and quality of support available. This should be addressed:

- More funding overall is needed for prison education, which we call on the Government to provide. The Adult Skills Fund, which is controlled by the Mayor, cannot be used for

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Justice, [Offender Employment Outcomes – Statistical Summary](#), 17 February 2025

prison education at present. But the Mayor potentially has an opportunity to innovate in this area, with plans for an integrated funding settlement for the GLA from 2026-27, and we recommend that he explores options to use this to boost employment among prison leavers.

- The probation service is underfunded, impacting the effectiveness of probation staff to support people into employment after prison. The Government has set out plans to increase funding, but it must make sure this is sufficient to ensure probation staff have manageable workloads and the resources to provide rehabilitative support.
- The discharge grant for people leaving prison should reflect the significantly elevated cost of living in London. We recommend the Government introduces a London weighting for the discharge grant as soon as possible, and urge the Mayor to support this proposal.

There are other measures the Committee has identified as being beneficial in helping people leaving prison to find secure employment:

- People in prison in London currently do not benefit from Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL). This needs to change in order to help support people making a future transition to employment after prison. The Mayor should work alongside prison governors to re-establish access to ROTL across at least two London prisons.
- Greater Manchester has devolved funding for commissioning probation services, which is a promising approach that could be beneficial for London. We ask the Mayor to engage with colleagues in Greater Manchester to learn about the outcomes of these arrangements, to inform potential future requests for devolution.

The challenge of improving employment outcomes for people leaving prison is highly complex and requires long-term change. Based on the commitment and innovation the Committee has seen during our investigation, from Londoners who have left prison and those who work with them, we are confident that this is possible. However, we need more support and more joined-up thinking from the GLA Group and the Government in order to achieve improvements. We hope decision-makers will implement the recommendations we make in this report as important steps towards this goal.

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

Additional funding is required to improve education and training for people in prison to help them prepare for future employment opportunities. To achieve this:

- a) The Government should commit to a long-term increase in funding for prison education. We ask that the Ministry of Justice respond to the Committee setting out any plans it has for this by the end of 2025-26.
- b) As part of discussions with the Government on the Integrated Settlement for the GLA in 2026-27, the Mayor should seek the Government's agreement that adult skills funding can be used to increase skills among people in prison and, should this be the case, consider allocating funds for this purpose. Plans should be set out in the final draft of the budget considered in February 2026.

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### Recommendation 2

The GLA should ensure that Heads of Education at London's prisons are included in the new Sector Talent Boards and hubs, to ensure alignment between the needs of London's employers and education within prisons. We ask that the GLA write to the Committee with an update by the end of 2025/26.

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### Recommendation 3

The Mayor should convene London's prison governors to discuss the potential and challenges of the use of Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) in London prisons, with the aim of re-establishing access to ROTL in at least two London prisons by the end of 2027.

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### Recommendation 4

By the end of 2026-27, the Government should review the impact of the funding increase for the Probation Service set out in the 2025 Spending Review. It should assess whether the funding increase has enabled the service to address staff shortages and excess workloads, so that it is able to provide further rehabilitative support and help people leaving prison to secure employment. Further funding increases should be introduced if the review indicates this is not the case.

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### Recommendation 5

MOPAC should hold at least one meeting with the Probation Service in London as soon as possible and assign a liaison to regularly update the Probation Service on initiatives commissioned by MOPAC. MOPAC should confirm to the Committee by the end of 2025-26 that these arrangements are in place.

## **Recommendation 6**

The Government should introduce a London weighting for the discharge grant as soon as possible to reflect the higher cost of living in London. The Mayor should lobby the Government to do this. We ask that the Ministry of Justice responds to this report confirming plans to introduce a London weighting by the end of 2025-26.

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## **Recommendation 7**

The Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) should produce an estimate of the cost of providing every Londoner under 30 who has been to prison with access to a mentor. We ask that the VRU write to the Committee with an estimate by the end of 2025-26.

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## **Recommendation 8**

MOPAC and the Violence Reduction Unit should set up a working group between London prisons, local authorities, probation services and the voluntary sector within the next 12 months. This group should meet at least once a quarter to encourage better joined up working to provide holistic resettlement support with a focus on accessing and sustaining employment.

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## **Recommendation 9**

MOPAC should engage with counterparts at the Greater Manchester Combined Authority to further understand the devolved arrangements in Greater Manchester for commissioning probation services. MOPAC and the Mayor should examine whether this can deliver benefits and help Londoners leaving prison to gain secure employment. If this is the case, it should inform the Mayor's future priorities for requesting devolved powers from the Government. We ask that MOPAC updates the Committee by the end of 2025-26 on the results so far of this engagement.

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## **Recommendation 10**

The Mayor should convene leading organisations within the voluntary sector and members of the London Employment Council for prison leavers within the next 12 months to develop training and guidance for employers that want to employ people leaving prison. The Mayor should promote this to employers and set up an online portal to connect them to voluntary sector partners.

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## **Recommendation 11**

The GLA should launch a small-scale scheme to attract and recruit people who have been to prison within the next 12 months. To do this, the GLA should partner with voluntary sector organisations working in this field to provide holistic support during the first year of employment. The GLA should evaluate the successes and key learnings of this programme after one year.

## Introduction

Spending time in prison significantly disrupts a person's life and, for many people, getting back on their feet after release is fraught with difficulties. Support varies in quality, but many people who spend time in prison receive minimal support from authorities as they try to navigate their new life after release and struggle to reintegrate into society.

The Economy, Culture and Skills Committee set out to investigate the employment prospects for people leaving prison in London. We met with a range of experts and stakeholders, and invited written submissions. We heard compelling evidence from businesses and third sector organisations about the challenges faced by people with experience of the criminal justice system (CJS). We also heard that many of these challenges can be overcome. There is a wide range of organisations carrying out invaluable work in London, helping people who have been to prison to turn their lives around.

As part of our investigation, we visited and held a roundtable discussion at Dusty Knuckle, a thriving bakery and café in Dalston, which employs and supports people right after their release from prison. This allowed us to hear directly from people who have been to prison, and gave people with lived experience the opportunity to tell us what they think works and what they think needs to change.

This report aims to shed some light on why people who have been to prison find it so difficult to access and sustain employment in London, by identifying barriers to finding employment and the gaps in support that currently exist. It also outlines what can be done to improve this situation by making recommendations to the Mayor and Government, and showcases some of the important work of organisations in London which are already successfully working to make a difference.

It is important we get this right. It is an issue that affects all Londoners and the safety of the city we live in: the link between inadequate resettlement support and increased rates of reoffending is well-understood.<sup>2</sup> Not only does poor resettlement support make London a more dangerous place to live in, it also makes it less prosperous and less dynamic. Like everyone, people released from prison have ambitions and potential. However, without the right support, this goes to waste. Given many of London's businesses are currently facing skills shortages,<sup>3</sup> this is something our city can ill afford. It is therefore imperative we see a significant improvement in the support for people released from prison to help them resettle and secure employment.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example: National Audit Office, [Improving resettlement support for prison leavers to reduce reoffending](#), 12 May 2023

<sup>3</sup> London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, [London's business leaders say workforce skills gaps are stunting economic growth](#), 23 September 2022

## Background: working after prison

During this investigation, we considered the challenges faced by individuals leaving prison, and the available data on employment outcomes.

Whilst every person leaving prison faces a different set of challenges, depending on their individual circumstances, a crucial part of rebuilding one's life after prison is finding employment. Income from employment provides people with capability and choice over essentials such as housing, food and family. But the guests that shared evidence at our meetings told us that getting a job can also be a powerful way to regain a sense of stability in one's life after a period of disruption and uncertainty. Darren Burns, Director of Diversity and Inclusion at the Timpson Group told us:

*"It is not just the case of, when you get released, you can dust yourself off and move off. People will often need time to process what they have been through. They need to recognise that they have lost their job, often their partner, their home, access to their children. They have lost the self-esteem. They have lost their standing in the community and their reputation. Employment is that golden opportunity that allows them to get all that back and, again, will ultimately help them to desist from committing more crime in the future."*<sup>4</sup>

### A note on terminology

Official statistics use the terms "offender" or "ex-offender" to refer to people with convictions who have spent time in custody.<sup>5</sup> In recent years, there has been a shift away from this terminology towards descriptors that centre on the person, rather than the offence, to avoid conflating the person with the act.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, this report will primarily use terms such as "people leaving prison", "people who have been to prison" or "people who have served a custodial sentence". It will only use the terms "offender" or "ex-offender" when referring to official statistics and research which also uses these terms.

The majority of people recently released from prison struggle to find employment in London. Official statistics show that in the 12 months ending in March 2024, 17.1 per cent of ex-offenders in London were employed six weeks after release from custody.<sup>7</sup> This rises to 27.9 per

<sup>4</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (p.14)

<sup>5</sup> See for example: Ministry of Justice, [Offender Employment Outcomes – Statistical Summary](#), 17 February 2025

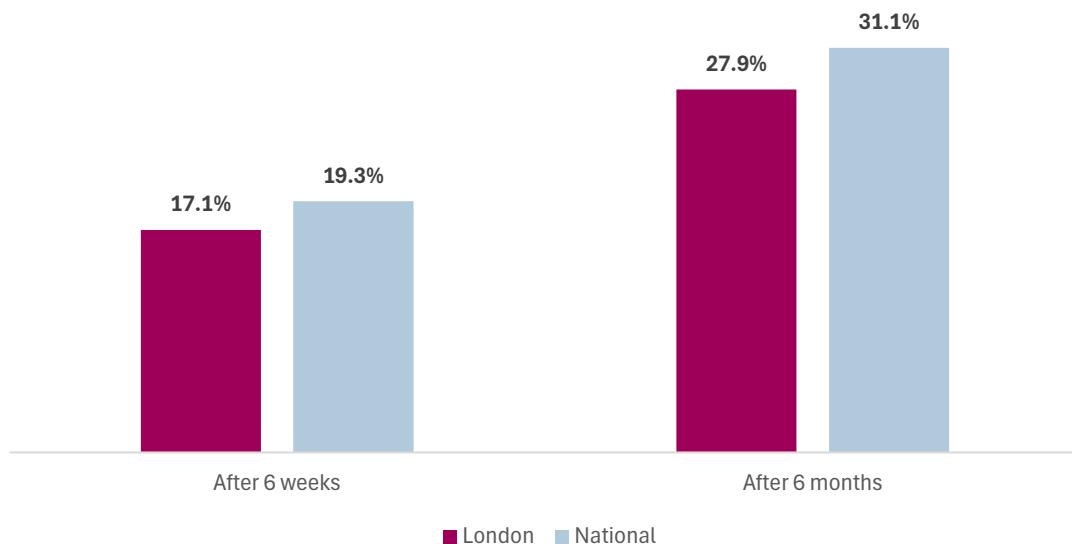
<sup>6</sup> Nottingham Trent University, [Recommended Terminology Concerning People with a Criminal Conviction](#), 20 July 2021

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Justice, [Offender Employment Outcomes – Statistical Summary](#), 17 February 2025

cent after six months, which is still fewer than one in three.<sup>8</sup> This is slightly lower than the national average: across England and Wales, 19.3 per cent of ex-offenders were employed after six weeks, rising to 31.1 per cent after six months.<sup>9</sup> Urgent action is therefore needed in London to address this.

**Figure 1: Employment rates of ex-offenders in London and nationally (England and Wales combined)**

Fewer than one in three people in London are employed six months after leaving prison



Charts produced by the London Assembly.

Data: Ministry of Justice, [Offender Employment Outcomes](#), data relates to the year ending 31 March 2024

## What is making it difficult for people to find work after prison?

In many cases, the odds are stacked against people with a conviction even before they leave prison. Jon Collins, Chief Executive of the Prisoners' Education Trust (PET) told us that people in prison are likely to struggle with literacy and numeracy, and that many of them have little or no formal qualifications that could be useful to them after release.<sup>10</sup> Matt Randle, Director of Justice at Catch22, told us that this situation changes little after release as the training and education provided in prisons is not always of a high standard and is unaligned with London's labour market needs.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Justice, [Offender Employment Outcomes – Statistical Summary](#), 17 February 2025

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Justice, [Offender Employment Outcomes – Statistical Summary](#), 17 February 2025

<sup>10</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 1\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.1)

<sup>11</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (pp.1-2)

Londoners who are in prison do not always spend their sentence in a London prison. Instead, Jon Collins told us, people often spend varying amounts of time in different prisons around the country before resettling in London, which makes it difficult to build up links with employers.<sup>12</sup>

After release, prisoners face a range of challenges and often receive little support to tackle them. In its submission to our call for evidence, Catch22 stated that there was a “support cliff” after custody as people no longer have access to the support they received in prison.<sup>13</sup> Housing insecurity and high levels of rent in London were widely cited as some of the most significant obstacles to securing employment by voluntary sector organisations working with people who have been to prison.<sup>14</sup> The charity Switchback stated that many people leaving prison end up homeless or in unstable temporary accommodation, making it nearly impossible to look for work.<sup>15</sup> Poor health, particularly mental health, was also identified as a significant barrier by several of our guests.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, we heard that people who have been to prison continue to face prejudice and stigma from employers. Darren Burns told us that many potential employers have misconceptions about people who have been to prison, which are often exaggerated and do not reflect their skills and aptitude.<sup>17</sup>

The issues set out above will be explored in more detail in the following chapters.

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<sup>12</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 1\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.2)

<sup>13</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Switchback. Published alongside report. (p.9)

<sup>14</sup> See for example written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Switchback, Catch22 and Clinks. Published alongside report.

<sup>15</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Switchback. Published alongside report.

<sup>16</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (pp.2,9)

<sup>17</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.16)

## Education and training in London's prisons

Our investigation primarily focused on people leaving prison and the hurdles they encounter upon release when entering the labour market. However, spending time – sometimes years – in prison can have significant impact on a person's life. We therefore also considered the impact of what happens inside the prison gates, and how it affects a person's prospects of employment later on.

### People in prison are more likely to lack basic skills and qualifications

We heard that people in prison typically have lower levels of education, compared to the wider population. Jon Collins told the Committee that literacy and numeracy are likely to be low among prisoners. People who arrive in prison can complete an initial assessment to assess their levels of numeracy and literacy. Results show that most prisoners can be expected to have levels of literacy and numeracy of someone leaving primary school.<sup>18</sup> Data from Ofsted suggests that people in prison are also more likely to have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), as well as mental health problems, presenting further barriers to engaging with education and training in prison.<sup>19</sup>

The Prisoners' Education Trust highlighted that prisoners are likely to have little or no relevant qualifications.<sup>20</sup> According to survey data from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), just under half of prisoners (47 per cent) enter prison with no prior qualifications.<sup>21</sup>

The data also shows that many people in prison have little prior work experience: approximately two-thirds of prisoners are unemployed when they enter custody and one-in-ten prisoners has never had a job.<sup>22</sup>

Much of the evidence we received therefore pointed to the importance of prisons as places where people are given the opportunity to improve their skills and obtain relevant qualifications to support their transition into the community after release. However, we heard convincing evidence that prisons are currently not as effective as they could be in equipping people with the skills they need to succeed in securing employment.

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Justice, [Prison Education and Accredited Programme Statistics 2023 to 2024](#), 20 September 2024

<sup>19</sup> Ofsted, [Ofsted and HMI Prisons say it is time to give prison education 'the attention it deserves'](#), 10 September 2021

<sup>20</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by the Prisoners' Education Trust. Published alongside report.

<sup>21</sup> House of Common Education Committee, [Prisoner Learning Alliance \(PLA\) submission to Education Committee Inquiry on Adult Skills and Lifelong Learning](#), July 2020

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Justice, [The impact of experience in prison on the employment status of longer-sentenced prisoners after release](#), 2014 (pp.1,34)

## Accessing learning in prison

Accessing education and training in prisons is typically difficult for prisoners, with staffing shortages, overcrowding and underfunding of courses all playing a part. We heard from Jon Collins that a lack of staff in prisons means that prisoners often spend long periods of time in their cells, as opposed to being in education or training.<sup>23</sup> Clinks told us that there was a lack of staff to adequately run sessions, and also that there are not enough officers to safely escort people to training sessions.<sup>24</sup> Data from the Prison Reform Trust shows that 70 per cent of prison educators reported that a lack of non-teaching staff had negatively impacted their teaching.<sup>25</sup>

Clinks told us that general staffing shortages are exacerbated by concerns that existing staff are not adequately trained to support individuals with complex needs and neurodivergence.<sup>26</sup> This issue was highlighted in 2022 by the House of Commons Education Committee, which found that several prisons are failing to meet the needs of learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), with only one in four prisons in England and Wales having a SEND Co-ordinator (SENDCo) to identify special needs and support learning.<sup>27 28</sup> We heard no evidence suggesting that this situation has improved in a significant way since then.

We heard that overcrowding is another factor making it difficult for people in prison to access education and training, particularly in London. Jon Collins stated that there are London prisons “where there is only roughly half the amount of capacity in terms of things people can do as there is people in the prison.”<sup>29</sup> A recent inspection of HMP Pentonville found that for a population of over 1,200, there were fewer than 600 activity spaces, where prisoners can work or learn.<sup>30</sup> Whilst the report notes that this might be enough for most prisoners to work part-time, it adds that this was further undermined by an “ineffective allocations system”, leaving many places unfilled.<sup>31</sup>

Jon Collins stressed that people in prisons generally want to learn but there is currently more demand than can be met. He largely attributed this to underfunding, telling the Committee that:

*“prison education and training are significantly underfunded. More resources would enable prison education departments to do more, particularly when you bear in mind that they are dealing with people who may have had a very negative experience of*

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<sup>23</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 1\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.8)

<sup>24</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Clinks. Published alongside report.

<sup>25</sup> Prison Reform Trust, [Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile](#), Winter 2022

<sup>26</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Clinks. Published alongside report.

<sup>27</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Not just another brick in the wall: why prisoners need an education to climb the ladder of opportunity](#), 11 May 2022

<sup>28</sup> This applies to public prisons only

<sup>29</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 1\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.9)

<sup>30</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons, [Urgent Notification: HMP Pentonville](#), 16 July 2025 (p.2)

<sup>31</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons, [Urgent Notification: HMP Pentonville](#), 16 July 2025 (p.2)

*education in the past, and may have high levels of educational need and high levels of learning difficulties and disabilities.*<sup>32</sup>

All this, we were told, ultimately manifests in declining participation rates for prison education. In its submission to our call for evidence, PET informed us that, of the five prisons that had education attendance rates of less than 50 per cent in 2023/24, three were in London (HMP/YOI Feltham B, HMP Wandsworth and HMP Wormwood Scrubs). Three more London prisons had attendance rates of less than 60 per cent (HMPs Belmarsh, Pentonville and Thameside) - significantly below the England average of 72 per cent.<sup>33</sup>

## The potential of the Adult Skills Fund in London

The GLA plays a significant role in funding skills training for Londoners through its Adult Skills Fund (ASF), funding that has been delegated to the Mayor from the Government. The ASF funds education and training for adults aged 19 and above, including English, maths and digital skills.<sup>34</sup> In its letter to the Committee as part of this investigation, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) told us that the ASF cannot be used to support activity in prisons as prison education is financed through the MoJ, which means that prison-based learning is explicitly excluded from the ASF.<sup>35</sup>

However, we note that the GLA is now set to receive a new form of this funding via the new integrated funding settlement from 2026-27. The Mayor's 2026-27 budget guidance in July states that the Government's recent Spending Review:

*"confirmed that the GLA will receive an integrated funding settlement from 2026-27, combining a number of existing grants into 'a single flexible pot to invest in growth and public services'. The government will set out the final scope and quantum of the settlement in due course."*<sup>36</sup>

Although arrangements for London are yet to be confirmed, it is expected that the Integrated Settlement will include funding for adult skills.<sup>37</sup> The GLA will still be required to meet its statutory obligations for use of the ASF, and agree a new outcomes framework with the Government, but the Mayor may have more flexibility to use funds in different ways. We urge him to consider prison education in his plans.

Many people leaving prison already have the skills to enter the workforce, and just need some additional support to help them find a job. These forms of support will be explored later in this

<sup>32</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 1\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.4)

<sup>33</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by the Prisoners' Education Trust. Published alongside report (p.32)

<sup>34</sup> London Assembly Research Unit, [The Adult Skills Fund in London](#), September 2024

<sup>35</sup> Mayor's Office for policing and Crime, Written response: London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee - Employment after Prison in London (received via e-mail on 23 September 2025)

<sup>36</sup> Mayor of London, [The Mayor's budget Guidance 2026-27](#), July 20025

<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. [Integrated Settlement: policy document](#), June 2025

report. But others would benefit from further training and education in prison, to put them in the best possible position to find work after release.

The Committee therefore believes it is imperative for the Government to ensure that prison education in London receives adequate funding. While an overall increase in funding from the Government is still necessary, the Integrated Settlement may provide an opportunity to use existing funds more effectively. Options for this should be explored by both the Mayor and the Government.

## Recommendation 1

**Additional funding is required to improve education and training for people in prison to help them prepare for future employment opportunities. To achieve this:**

- a) The Government should commit to a long-term increase in funding for prison education. We ask that the Ministry of Justice respond to the Committee setting out any plans it has for this by the end of 2025-26.**
- b) As part of discussions with the Government on the Integrated Settlement for the GLA in 2026-27, the Mayor should seek the Government's agreement that adult skills funding can be used to increase skills among people in prison and, should this be the case, consider allocating funds for this purpose. Plans should be set out in the final draft of the budget considered in February 2026.**

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## Preparing prisoners for London's labour market

Prisoners do not typically leave prison ready to enter London's labour market. This is not a new observation; Dame Sally Coates made the same point in 2016 in a review of the prison system.<sup>38</sup> The evidence we received suggests that whilst there has been some improvement in London prisons since then, the overall situation is largely unchanged.

Penny Parker, Chief Executive of StandOut, told us that steps in the right direction have been taken by the Government by requiring prisons to appoint Heads of Education, Skills and Work to coordinate the education and training offer across prisons. However, she also stressed that people working in prisons "do not have an eye to what happens through the gate, and they do not have that reach out into the community".<sup>39</sup>

The previous Government set up the New Futures Network (NFN) in 2018, a programme covering all of England and Wales with the goal of linking training provision to employer needs.<sup>40</sup> The NFN runs workshops with local businesses in prisons and employers can set up their own training and production facilities across the prison estate.<sup>41</sup> As part of the NFN,

<sup>38</sup> Ministry of Justice, [Unlocking Potential](#), May 2016

<sup>39</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.3)

<sup>40</sup> New Futures Network, [How we work](#) [accessed 6 October 2025]

<sup>41</sup> New Futures Network, [How we work](#) [accessed 6 October 2025]

individuals can access a dedicated advisor who is responsible for identifying work-ready candidates, prioritising actions and services needed to ensure prisoners are work-ready, and matching candidates to vacancies supplied by NFN and other employment stakeholders.<sup>42</sup> However, their remit does not extend beyond the prison gates.<sup>43</sup>

### How prisons commission training and education

Contracts for delivering courses are awarded by the MoJ to independent providers on a regional basis. The Government has committed to making changes to the current commissioning system with the aim of placing greater focus on work-based training, employability and vocational qualifications. New contracts are expected to commence from Autumn 2025.<sup>44</sup> In addition to this, prison governors can fill gaps in provision by contracting with individual providers via a mechanism called the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). This is intended to provide a greater degree of flexibility and allow for the procurement of more niche or specialist qualifications.<sup>45</sup>

Matt Randle from Catch22 highlighted that despite these positive initiatives, there was still a disconnect between prisons and the community, stating provision in prisons was not always aligned with London's labour market needs.<sup>46</sup> This was echoed by Jon Collins, who stated that there was an opportunity to better align skills provision in prison with labour market needs. He told the Committee that:

*"Thinking about how good quality labour market information that is time-specific and London-specific can be provided to those educational leaders in prisons and to Employment Advisory Boards could really help to ensure that people leaving prison and the skills they are being given align with where skills gaps are in London."*<sup>47</sup>

In its submission to our call for evidence, Breakthrough Social Enterprise stated that prisons were under "immense budgetary pressure", reducing the provision of education and training to basic literacy or vocational training with little connection to London's labour market.<sup>48</sup> In its submission, Working Chance stated that most programmes available in prisons are capped at Level 2 NVQs, whereas employers typically seek qualifications at Level 3 NVQs or above.<sup>49</sup> In this context, it is sobering to observe that there has been a 90 per cent reduction in prisoners studying Level 3 courses or above since 2010.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>42</sup> New Futures Network, [A Day in the Life of a Prison Employment Lead](#)

<sup>43</sup> The Centre for Social Justice, [Unlocking Aspiration](#), May 2023

<sup>44</sup> Ministry of Justice, [Prisoner Education Services Panel Core Education](#), 26 September 2024

<sup>45</sup> Clinks, [A brief guide to the Dynamic Purchasing System \(DPS\)](#), September 2022

<sup>46</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.4)

<sup>47</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 1\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.15)

<sup>48</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Breakthrough Social Enterprise. Published alongside report. (p.3)

<sup>49</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Working Chance. Published alongside report.

<sup>50</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Not just another brick in the wall: why prisoners need an education to climb the ladder of opportunity](#), 11 May 2022

We also heard strong criticism that the training and education offered in prisons is not sufficiently aspirational. Penny Parker told us that conversations around careers after prisons were typically restricted to a few sectors, such as rail track or construction.<sup>51</sup> This was also emphasised by Sian Williams, Chief Executive of Switchback, who stressed the importance of taking prisoners' aspirations seriously, telling the Committee that: "if you do not give them something that they can see themselves in, then easier money in the streets is a very tempting alternative".<sup>52</sup>

Prisoners from London do not always spend their entire sentence in a London prison. Catch22 told us that around 40 per cent of prisoners returning from London are released from prisons outside the capital, often rural category C prisons, which do not offer training relevant to London-specific labour market needs.<sup>53</sup>

This was also highlighted by Matt Randle during our meeting when he told us that commissioning for training and education can be improved by aligning it more closely with London's labour market needs, as opposed to just increasing funding. He told the Committee that: "sometimes we are very quick to say it is a lack of funding that is in the system, but it is a lack of joined-up funding, and it is a lack of intelligent commissioning that exists."<sup>54</sup>

It should be a priority that training and education in prisons is aligned with labour market needs to enable employers to tap into this large pool of talent. Research by the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry from 2022 found that more than two in three businesses in London report skills shortages, concentrated in fields like advanced digital skills and sales.<sup>55</sup> Ensuring better alignment between training and the labour market would be an important step to addressing the skills gap whilst also helping people leaving to re-enter society, begin work more quickly and reduce reoffending.

## The GLA's new Inclusive Talent Strategy

In its letter to the Committee as part of this investigation, MOPAC told us that the London Growth Plan sets out London's labour market needs and that it is "*working to understand any further skill gaps specific to people leaving prison, as we know many will leave without their Maths and English GCSEs which is a barrier to many careers*".<sup>56</sup> The letter referenced the GLA's

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<sup>51</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.3)

<sup>52</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.5)

<sup>53</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Catch22. Published alongside report.

<sup>54</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.4)

<sup>55</sup> London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, [London's business leaders say workforce skills gaps are stunting economic growth](#), 23 September 2022

<sup>56</sup> Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, Written response: London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee - Employment after Prison in London (received via e-mail on 23 September 2025)

Inclusive Talent Strategy (which was in development when the letter was sent) and notes that this would set out how employment, skills and careers services in London can be linked.<sup>57</sup> The Inclusive Talent Strategy was jointly published by the GLA and London Councils on 23 October 2025. One of its stated ambitions is to make London's skills and employment system more responsive to the needs of employers, enabling them to influence the provision of training and education. To achieve this, the GLA will set up 'Sector Talent Boards', which will be led by employers representing five sectors of London's economy.<sup>58</sup> Each Board will aim to identify skills gaps in its respective sector and seek to address them by shaping adult skills commissioning. The Boards will be complemented by six 'pan-London sector hubs' and four 'sub-regional hubs', which connect employers with further education and higher education providers.<sup>59</sup> The Strategy states that by 2029, the GLA and London Councils will "use Sector Talent Boards and their hubs to respond to employer skills needs".<sup>60</sup>

This is a welcome step in the right direction, as it seeks to make training and education provision more responsive to labour market needs. Although the strategy states that the GLA "will work with all types of skills providers", it does not explicitly mention education and training provision in prisons.<sup>61</sup> We believe this new strategy is a timely opportunity to align education in prisons with labour market needs by including heads of prison education in these initiatives to help them inform their commissioning.

## Recommendation 2

**The GLA should ensure that Heads of Education at London's prisons are included in the new Sector Talent Boards and hubs, to ensure alignment between the needs of London's employers and education within prisons. We ask that the GLA write to the Committee with an update by the end of 2025/26.**

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The provision of training and education has traditionally received a stronger focus in category D prisons, or "open prisons", with many of them offering release on temporary licence (ROTL), whereby a prisoner is released for a limited time period during the day to work in the community.<sup>62</sup> We heard that London prisons are currently not utilising ROTL.<sup>63</sup> It should be noted that this is in part due to London having no category D prisons and instead having more category A and B prisons. Prisons within these categories require higher levels of security, precluding the use ROTL. However, there are multiple category C prisons located within London which could offer ROTL. The employers we heard from were unanimous that ROTL was an effective tool for preparing prisoners for the labour market.<sup>64</sup>

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*"Anybody who goes out on ROTL is essentially up to speed with the pace of life, the sights, the sounds, the noises. They have a much higher chance of staying out of prison when they eventually get released."*<sup>65</sup>

**Darren Burns, Director of Diversity and Inclusion  
The Timpson Group**

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Lynne Kennedy, Social Mobility Manager at Greene King, praised ROTL as a great way to transition into employment as it allows prisoners to get to grips with working in the community whilst technically still serving a sentence.<sup>66</sup> Employers told us their experience with ROTL had been overwhelmingly positive, with Jessica Mellor-Clark, Head of BeOnsite at Lendlease, stating it was “the best and smoothest pathway into employment”.<sup>67</sup> However, despite such positive evidence, no London prison currently offers ROTL to its population. Whether to introduce ROTL or not is ultimately a decision made by each individual prison. The absence of ROTL in London’s prisons represents a missed opportunity as it would enable prisoners to gain relevant work experience before being released and help facilitate their entry into the labour market.

## Recommendation 3

**The Mayor should convene London’s prison governors to discuss the potential and challenges of the use of Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) in London prisons, with the aim of re-establishing access to ROTL in at least two London prisons by the end of 2027.**

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### Accessing learning before trial

In the context of growing court backlogs, an increasing number of prisoners are spending long periods of time on remand, prior to their court date, unsure when or if they are going to be sentenced.<sup>68</sup> Jon Collins told us that this time could be used more constructively if prisoners had access to digital devices with educational material.<sup>69</sup>

Whilst inadequate digital access affects all prisoners, Jon Collins told the Committee that this was a particularly acute issue for people being held on remand, as they are not able to take part

<sup>57</sup> Mayor's Office for policing and Crime, Written response: London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee - Employment after Prison in London (received via e-mail on 23 September 2025)

<sup>58</sup> The sectors are life sciences, the creative industries, construction, hospitality, and health and social care.

<sup>59</sup> Mayor of London and London Councils, [London Inclusive Talent Strategy](#), 23 October 2025

<sup>60</sup> Mayor of London and London Councils, [London Inclusive Talent Strategy](#), 23 October 2025 (p.27)

<sup>61</sup> Mayor of London and London Councils, [London Inclusive Talent Strategy](#), 23 October 2025 (p.25)

<sup>62</sup> UK Government, [Prisoners start as apprentices at big name employers](#), 4 October 2022

<sup>63</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (p.5)

<sup>64</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (pp.5-8)

<sup>65</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (p.7)

<sup>66</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (p.7)

<sup>67</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (p.5)

<sup>68</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 1\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.3)

<sup>69</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 1\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.13)

in the prison's learning and training activities, unlike those who have been convicted.<sup>70</sup> He told the Committee that prisoners can currently access in-prison secure laptops via the Government's Launchpad programme and Coracle Inside, a virtual learning company. However, he stated that these programmes did not cover the entirety of the prison population and that there were logistical challenges with ensuring the device with the right courses is available at the right time.<sup>71</sup> He told the Committee that:

*"while there has been some progress made in recent years to broaden access to digital devices - laptops or tablets - and the internet, the reality for the vast majority of people in prison is that they do not routinely get to access a computer or access the internet"<sup>72</sup>*

We heard similar evidence about limited access to digital devices across prisons from other guests and written submissions, such as Breakthrough Social Enterprise.<sup>73</sup>

This represents another missed opportunity. As court backlogs grow and more prisoners are likely to spend large parts of their sentences on remand, it is even more important that this group is provided with access to training while they await a resolution to their cases. This does not mean that people should be able to access the internet in their cells unrestricted and whenever they want. However, a lack of devices and logistical challenges should not be factors preventing people in prison from accessing course content delivered digitally. We cannot expect people leaving prison to re-enter the labour market upon release if they have not been given the opportunity to learn and obtain relevant skills whilst in custody.

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<sup>70</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 1\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.13)

<sup>71</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 1\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.14)

<sup>72</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 1\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.12)

<sup>73</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Breakthrough Social Enterprise. Published alongside report. (p.3)

## Statutory support after release

Being in prison means having one's freedom severely restricted and being confined to a small cell for large parts of the day. But it also means having a predictable routine and access to some support for meeting one's basic needs. Being released from prison can feel like a shock, as much of this certainty, predictability and support suddenly falls away. Breakthrough Social Enterprise told us that many of the people it works with in London describe the first 30 days after release as more stressful than their entire sentence.<sup>74</sup> In its submission, Catch22 referred to the situation facing people after release as the "support cliff".<sup>75</sup> The evidence we received overwhelmingly suggests that there is a lack of support after release from statutory services, which represents a major obstacle to securing employment later on.

### The support cliff

Typically, when someone leaves prison, they are still on probation, which means they continue to be supervised by His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). In 2018, the Government introduced the Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) model to coordinate an individual's journey through custody and into the community. This was intended to place greater emphasis on successful rehabilitation.<sup>76</sup> Under the OMiC model, a Community Offender Manager (COM) is responsible for helping an individual transition into the community. This is typically a Probation Officer.<sup>77</sup>

A person in prison who is nearing their release date should meet with their COM for the first time seven or eight months before release. The COM is tasked with preparing the individual for release, which includes identifying needs, such as accommodation, financial matters and substance misuse. They are expected to work with the individual once they have been released and can make referrals to address specific issues, such as employment support and the provision of training or education.<sup>78</sup>

We heard from a number of sources that the Probation Service is not carrying out its role of supporting people after release in an effective way. Sian Williams told us that there is only limited communication between prisons and the Probation Service, a state of affairs which was heavily criticised by the Prison Reform Trust in 2018.<sup>79 80</sup> For example, Sian Williams told the Committee that limited communication between prisons and the Probation Service frequently

<sup>74</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Breakthrough Social Enterprise. Published alongside report.

<sup>75</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Catch22. Published alongside report. (p.9)

<sup>76</sup> HM Prisons & Probation Service, [HMPPS Offender Management in Custody Model](#), Spring 2019

<sup>77</sup> HM Prisons & Probation Service, [HMPPS Offender Management in Custody Model](#), Spring 2019

<sup>78</sup> HM Prisons & Probation Service, [HMPPS Offender Management in Custody Model](#), Spring 2019

<sup>79</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.4)

<sup>80</sup> Prison Reform Trust, [Offender Management in Custody \(OMiC\)](#), 30 October 2018

leads to people leaving prison without a bank account. She stated that while prisons support people to open a bank account, they do so only six weeks before release, which is not enough time for banks to complete fraud checks. The result of this, she said, is that prisoners are unable to use their bank accounts by the time they are released and report to the Probation Service.<sup>81</sup> Sian Williams noted that not having a bank account can make it even more difficult to find employment as public transport in London is cashless and employers usually need bank details to pay an employee.<sup>82</sup>

In its submission, StandOut noted that people released from prison also typically do not receive the help they need to obtain essential documents, such as a form of ID.<sup>83</sup> Lynne Kennedy told us that not having a bank account or some form of ID presents a serious difficulty for employers looking to recruit people released from prison. She told the Committee that:

*“Sometimes, it is something as simple as the candidate is keen to come to us and we are keen to employ and then we go, ‘Right, can we have your right-to-work documents?’ ‘I have not got them.’ Then, when they have left custody, nobody is there to help. Nobody is there to support them. Literally, they go on this whirlwind of, ‘Which door do I knock on to get that support?’ Then they flounder. Time is ticking by. The general manager is holding the job open as long as they possibly can. The candidates do not know what they do not know. They are getting frustrated, and they just go, ‘It is too difficult. It is too hard’, and walk away. The volume of candidates I have lost because of something as simple as that.”<sup>84</sup>*

Breakthrough Social Enterprise told us that understaffing was an issue and that this meant that “employment support is often reduced to box-ticking rather than genuine preparation or mentoring”.<sup>85</sup> Switchback cited the National Association of Probation Officers, which this year warned of Prison Officers being at risk of burnout due to “relentlessly high workloads”.<sup>86 87</sup>

This means that people leaving prison miss out on opportunities available. In its submission, StandOut stated that based on experience of the people it has worked with, initiatives by the Probation Service to help people into work are often 10-minute-long appointments “that are not sufficient to support people to resolve some of the challenges they face”.<sup>88</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>81</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.4)

<sup>82</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.4)

<sup>83</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by StandOut. Published alongside report. (p.9)

<sup>84</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (p.12)

<sup>85</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Breakthrough Social Enterprise. Published alongside report. (p.3)

<sup>86</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Switchback. Published alongside report. (p.3)

<sup>87</sup> BBC, [Probation: 'Too few staff, with too little experience, managing too many offenders'](#), 11 January 2025

<sup>88</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by StandOut. Published alongside report. (p.45)

Catch22 told us that probation and frontline workers are not always aware of the employment and education opportunities available to people leaving prison.<sup>89</sup>

The evidence we received was also overwhelmingly critical of the support provided within Job Centres to prison leavers. Breakthrough Social Enterprise told us that job coaches have little understanding of the circumstances of people who have been to prison and typically offer a narrow set of roles within a limited number of sectors.<sup>90</sup> Clinks said that work coaches in Job Centres often lack knowledge of criminal records, including the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act and the concept of spent convictions, which results in poor guidance for service users.<sup>91</sup> This was echoed by Working Chance, which also stressed that Job Centres were frequently understaffed, meaning meetings are typically short with little continuity between coaches.<sup>92</sup>

London's labour market is notoriously competitive. People who have been to prison face additional hurdles to securing employment and need all the help they can get. It is clear that probation services are not going to be able to do their job effectively if they are under-resourced and officers are not trained to acknowledge and meet the needs of people who have been to prison.

The Government has recognised these challenges. The Independent Sentencing Review it commissioned, which reported in May 2025, made a recommendation for the Government to, "Increase investment in the Probation Service to support capacity and resilience."<sup>93</sup> In the June 2025 Spending Review, the Government stated that it would increase spending on probation:

*"To support the justice system and keep the country safe, this SR provides £7 billion from 2024-25 to 2029-30 to build 14,000 new prison places, alongside up to £700 million per year by 2028-29, compared with 2025-26, to transform the probation system. The government is therefore providing the funding necessary to deliver transformative reforms to sentencing, based on the recommendations set out in the recent Sentencing Review."<sup>94</sup>*

It is clear to the Committee that the probation system in London is in need of additional funding, which would ultimately enable services to better support people leaving prison to access employment. We do not know at this stage how far the Government's pledged increase in spending will address the issues with probation in London. We call on the Government to monitor this closely and provide more support if this is needed.

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<sup>89</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Catch22. Published alongside report.

<sup>90</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Breakthrough Social Enterprise. Published alongside report.

<sup>91</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Clinks. Published alongside report.

<sup>92</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Working Chance. Published alongside report.

<sup>93</sup> Ministry of Justice, [Independent Sentencing Review: final report](#), May 2025

<sup>94</sup> HM Treasury, [Spending Review 2025](#), June 2025

## Recommendation 4

**By the end of 2026-27, the Government should review the impact of the funding increase for the Probation Service set out in the 2025 Spending Review. It should assess whether the funding increase has enabled the service to address staff shortages and excess workloads, so that it is able to provide further rehabilitative support and help people leaving prison to secure employment. Further funding increases should be introduced if the review indicates this is not the case.**

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## Recommendation 5

**MOPAC should hold at least one meeting with the Probation Service in London as soon as possible and assign a liaison to regularly update the Probation Service on initiatives commissioned by MOPAC. MOPAC should confirm to the Committee by the end of 2025-26 that these arrangements are in place.**

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## Accessing benefits and financial support after release

Upon release, people leaving prison are entitled to some immediate financial support in the form of a one-off payment, called a 'discharge grant'. The current value of this is £86, and since 2021 it has increased in line with inflation.<sup>95</sup> However, Sian Williams and Penny Parker both voiced strong criticism of this amount, stating that this is too low and fails to take into account the significantly elevated cost of living in London, compared to the rest of the country.<sup>96</sup>

This is all the more worrying given our evidence that people who are released from prison face significant hurdles and long wait times in accessing benefits. StandOut told us that Probation Officers frequently lack knowledge with regards to what benefits someone who has been to prison is entitled to and are thus unable to provide useful guidance.<sup>97</sup> Working Chance stated that coaches in Job Centres often have little understanding of the circumstances of someone on probation and are quick to impose sanctions when they believe a person is in breach of their jobseekers' agreement. Working Chance cites one case where a job seeker who had recently left prison had been sanctioned because they could not attend a job interview, which constituted a breach of their agreement. However, the decision did not take into account that this interview took place in an area the job seeker was unable to travel to due to a restraining order.<sup>98</sup>

We heard from Sian Williams that this is further exacerbated by a rule determined by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) that prevents people in prison from applying for

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<sup>95</sup> Switchback, [Discharge grant to increase for the first time in 25 years](#), 21 May 2021

<sup>96</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (pp.8,23)

<sup>97</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by StandOut. Published alongside report.

<sup>98</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Working Chance. Published alongside report.

benefits while still in custody. She stated that this meant people were unable to access support for several weeks, with the current wait time for Universal Credit in London being six weeks.<sup>99</sup> The result of this, she said, was that “people are not able to pay for basic needs”.<sup>100</sup>

It is widely acknowledged that Londoners face significantly higher costs of living compared to other parts of the country.<sup>101</sup> This is even more acute for people leaving prison, who, in many cases, will have no stable source of income after release. Living and looking for work in London is expensive, much more so than in the rest of the country. Given long waiting times for Universal Credit, the discharge grant becomes an important means of support to help people pay for the essentials. The Government has taken a step in the right direction by ensuring it rises with inflation. However, more needs to be done to ensure the discharge grant in London reflects the higher cost of living people for living in the capital.

## Recommendation 6

**The Government should introduce a London weighting for the discharge grant as soon as possible to reflect the higher cost of living in London. The Mayor should lobby the Government to do this. We ask that the Ministry of Justice responds to this report confirming plans to introduce a London weighting by the end of 2025-26.**

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<sup>99</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.8)

<sup>100</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.9)

<sup>101</sup> Trust for London, [A Minimum Income Standard for London 2019](#), April 2020

## Supporting people leaving prison to find work

Finding a job in London's competitive labour market is never easy. But it is even more difficult if someone struggles with poor health, lacks confidence and does not have access to safe and secure accommodation. This also makes it substantially more difficult to remain employed, once employment has been secured. Yet this is the situation many people face after leaving prison.

Not all of these issues affect every person in the same way: depending on individual circumstance, some of these might loom larger for some than they do for others. However, our evidence suggests that a combination of these three factors frequently plays a role in preventing those who have been to prison from joining London's labour market and remain employed without reoffending.

### **The main factors preventing people who have been to prison from finding and sustaining work**

#### **Housing instability**

Multiple submissions to our call for evidence identified housing as a key barrier for people leaving prison to finding and sustaining work, with Switchback naming it as the most significant barrier.<sup>102</sup> This was also identified in the London Assembly Housing Committee's report on housing needs for women leaving prison, published in May 2025, which highlighted the severe shortage of social housing in London and a lack of coordination between prisons, probation and London boroughs.<sup>103</sup>

The Government launched the Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3) in 2021, which provides up to 12 weeks' short-term temporary accommodation on release for those leaving prison at risk of homelessness.<sup>104</sup> Switchback told us that it welcomed the introduction of CAS3 but said that challenges persist for the people it supports. It stated that there is a lack of support for people to move onto more stable accommodation after the 12 weeks are up and states that "we have seen many people leave CAS3 accommodation homeless".<sup>105</sup> This was also noted by the Housing Committee's report, which found that many women were effectively released into homelessness from temporary accommodation.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Switchback. Published alongside report.

<sup>103</sup> London Assembly Housing Committee, [Breaking the Cycle: Housing Needs for Women Leaving Prison in London](#), May 2025

<sup>104</sup> Ministry of Justice, [Annex 1 – Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 – Summary](#), 31 July 2025

<sup>105</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Switchback. Published alongside report. (p.50)

<sup>106</sup> London Assembly Housing Committee, [Breaking the Cycle: Housing Needs for Women Leaving Prison in London](#), May 2025

StandOut told us that homelessness was a significant challenge for a number of participants it worked with directly.<sup>107</sup> In line with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, HMPPS has a duty to refer people who are being released into the community and are at risk of becoming homeless to their local authority.<sup>108</sup> Local authorities must take “reasonable steps” to help an individual secure accommodation.<sup>109</sup> However, Switchback said that people who have been to prison do not typically qualify for ‘priority need’ support and thus have to rely on renting in the private market. This can be expensive and particularly difficult for people leaving prisons to access, as we heard that landlords are often unwilling to accept renters with convictions.<sup>110</sup>

Even when landlords are willing to let to someone with a conviction, renting in London is often unaffordable for people just released from prison. This is particularly acute in London, with data showing that Londoners saw their rents rise by 11.5 per cent in 2024, the largest increase in the country.<sup>111</sup> Darren Burns told the Committee that high rents and utility bills can be “a real issue” for new starters at Timpson.<sup>112</sup>

As part of its Accommodation for Ex-Offenders (AFEO) scheme, the Government provided over £51 million to 29 London local authorities between July 2021 and March 2025 to support people who were released from prison and at risk of rough sleeping by helping them secure tenancies in the private rented sector.<sup>113</sup> Switchback told us that AFEO had “very little benefit for our cohort”, which it believes is due to many schemes being dependent on people’s Housing Benefit entitlement. Switchback also said that it can be less lucrative for housing providers to work with people under 35 as this group receives a lower rate of housing benefit.<sup>114</sup>

### Substance abuse and poor health

Poor health, in particular addiction and mental health, were identified by multiple guests as significant barriers to finding and sustaining employment.<sup>115</sup> Data consistently shows that people in prison are more likely to struggle with poor health, particularly mental health and substance abuse.<sup>116</sup>

In situations where individuals start treatment in prison, it is unlikely they are going to be able to continue seamlessly after release. Both Matt Randle and Sian Williams highlighted the long waiting times to access mental health treatment in London, with Sian Williams stating waiting

<sup>107</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by StandOut. Published alongside report.

<sup>108</sup> Ministry of Justice, [Homelessness Reduction Act: Duty to refer policy framework](#), 9 April 2021

<sup>109</sup> Shelter, [Local authority duty to prevent homelessness](#)

<sup>110</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Switchback. Published alongside report.

<sup>111</sup> Office for National Statistics, [Private rent and house prices, UK: January 2025](#)

<sup>112</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (p.10)

<sup>113</sup> Department for Levelling Up, [Housing and Communities, Accommodation for Ex-Offenders scheme local authority funding between July 2021 and March 2025](#), 22 March 2023

<sup>114</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Switchback. Published alongside report. (p.50)

<sup>115</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (pp.1,2,9)

<sup>116</sup> Nacro, [Mental Health in Prison](#), March 2024

lists were “horrifically long”.<sup>117</sup> Matt Randle told us that waiting times for mental health support is “measured in months and years, not days”.<sup>118</sup> This issue is particularly severe in London. The capital has the lowest rate of successful ‘treatment transfers’ of any region in the country: the proportion of adults released from prison and successfully starting community treatment within three weeks in London is 41 per cent in 2023/24, compared to 53 per cent nationally.<sup>119</sup>

We heard that poor health, addiction and unstable housing all interact when someone leaves prison, making it difficult to focus on finding employment.<sup>120</sup> In its submission, Working Chance noted that housing instability negatively affects people’s mental health and leads to a general sense of instability.<sup>121</sup> Sian Williams noted that this also makes reoffending more likely, telling the Committee that:

*“When sleeping on the streets without support, without mental health medication, it is much safer for people to get back into the group that they were in before, to carry on the activity they were carrying out before, and also, if they were using drugs to take away some of that fear, to take away some of that awareness of what their life is really experiencing, then that is going to happen.”<sup>122</sup>*

Catch22 shared its own evidence showing that people being recalled to prison was frequently caused by resettlement challenges and substance abuse.<sup>123</sup>

### **Lack of confidence and workplace experience**

In addition to housing and health, we heard convincing evidence suggesting that people leaving prison typically lack self-confidence and experience in the workplace, and that this acts as an additional barrier to finding and sustaining employment. Darren Burns told the Committee that people leaving prison often have to contend with the loss of their self-esteem and damage to their reputation.<sup>124</sup>

Several submissions to our call for evidence noted that a lack of self-belief was holding back many people.<sup>125</sup> StandOut stated that candidates with low self-esteem frequently believed

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<sup>117</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (pp.9, 11)

<sup>118</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.9)

<sup>119</sup> Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, [Alcohol and drug treatment in secure settings 2023 to 2024: report](#), 30 January 2025

<sup>120</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.10)

<sup>121</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Working Chance. Published alongside report.

<sup>122</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.12)

<sup>123</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Catch22. Published alongside report.

<sup>124</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (p.14)

<sup>125</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Clinks, StandOut and Working Chance. Published alongside report.

certain career paths were closed off and unavailable to someone who has been to prison.<sup>126</sup> Working Chance pointed out in its submission that this can negatively affect candidates' performance during job interviews. It also noted that this particularly affects women as low confidence and self-belief can "*manifest into feelings of shame, internalised stigma, and fear of judgement from employers, especially given the societal tendency to view women – particularly mothers – with convictions as morally unacceptable.*"<sup>127</sup>

This is further compounded by a general lack of experience in the workplace among many people who have been to prison. Switchback told us that one third of its trainees have no work experience at all. Its submission stated that adjusting to workplace norms, unspoken rules and etiquette can take time and that this can make it challenging for employees to achieve the level of consistent performance expected by most employers. It explained that this can then lead to disappointment and a loss of confidence for both the employee and employer.<sup>128</sup>

Sian Williams noted that this particularly affects young men who in many cases grew up on council estates in London and have had less exposure to professional environments through their school years. She told us that:

*"when they leave prison, and we try to support them into work, they have never seen a workplace, they have no idea what to wear, how to speak or how to turn up, and it is very challenging. Sometimes, it can lead to people just dropping out completely. Sometimes, it leads to people being persistently late."*<sup>129</sup>

Supporting people who have been to prison into employment cannot be viewed as an isolated issue. People leaving prison face a number of significant challenges. These often interact and can make it nearly impossible to find and sustain employment. It is clear that the issues outlined above have to be addressed first, alongside more targeted employment support. This was summed up by StandOut, which stated that given the severity of the challenges faced by those who leave prison, finding employment is often simply not the first priority.<sup>130</sup>

Throughout our investigation, we heard from organisations that support people leaving prison and from people who have been to prison themselves. We received strong evidence about how to best address the multiple issues described in this section, address the significant gaps in support that currently exist and facilitate a successful transition between prison and work. This will be covered below.

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<sup>126</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by StandOut. Published alongside report.

<sup>127</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Working Chance. Published alongside report. (p.65)

<sup>128</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Switchback. Published alongside report.

<sup>129</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.20)

<sup>130</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by StandOut. Published alongside report.

## How to support people who have spent time in prison

Given its size, London has more charities than any other city in the UK working to support people in different ways after their release from prison. The third sector plays a crucial role in London, supporting people and ensuring their multiple needs are addressed after their release from prison. As highlighted above, given the persistent gaps in statutory support for people leaving prison, we heard that these organisations have become increasingly important. Sian Williams told us that charities like Switchback “step in where the state rolls back”.<sup>131</sup>

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*“We are the glue that holds together a system that is under enormous stress.”*

**Penny Parker**  
**Chief Executive Officer, StandOut**

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We heard it is not as simple as charities substituting for state provision. Matt Randle told us that people leaving prison often have a sense of mistrust with regard to state services and often do not engage. In contrast, he said, organisations from the third sector are not associated with the same negative connotations and can thus better reach people who have been to prison, encouraging them to engage with services and support available.<sup>132</sup> This was also raised by Sian Williams, who noted that distrust toward the state can be more prevalent among people from minority ethnic backgrounds. She told us that eight out of ten people who Switchback works with are from ethnic minority backgrounds and that they are typically more likely to struggle with authority and low levels of trust in the state due to past life experiences, which can make probation and accessing government services more challenging.<sup>133</sup>

Charities told us they add value by providing long-term support and addressing the various needs of people leaving prison, rather than simply helping them find a job as quickly as possible. StandOut stated that the people it works with need on average three months before they can consider employment, given how traumatic prison can be.<sup>134</sup> This was echoed by Sian Williams, who told the Committee that being in full-time work within a few weeks after leaving prison was not realistic for many people, particularly those with experience of significant adverse childhood experiences or trauma.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.11)

<sup>132</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (pp.13-14)

<sup>133</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.21)

<sup>134</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by StandOut. Published alongside report.

<sup>135</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.15)

## The partnership between Switchback and the Dusty Knuckle

The Dusty Knuckle Bakery and café in Dalston has been partnering with the charity Switchback since 2019 to support young men who have been to prison to learn how to sustain work in a supportive environment. Switchback provides its trainees with the opportunity to begin work at the Dusty Knuckle right after their release, where they will continue to receive support from a mentor.

The Dusty Knuckle uses its busy operations to help young people who are yet to find their career path adjust to work through on-the-job training and mentorship. Trainees are assessed on which sections of the business best align with their goals, skills, innate qualities, and experiences, rather than expecting them to conform to any vacancies the business may have. The induction at Dusty Knuckle is an incremental process intended to build a trusting, honest relationship. Trainees start on shorter shifts that gradually extend as they get used to work. This phased approach is intended to avoid overwhelming trainees, at an especially stressful and disorienting time.

The program is led by trauma-informed practice from the outset, with trainees working alongside chefs, bakers, and baristas from day one, who all receive in-house training to provide blame-free, detailed, and high-quality instruction on the shop floor.<sup>136</sup>

The Dusty Knuckle and Switchback invited the Committee to visit them in Dalston to get a first-hand insight into the operation of the bakery and speak to staff and former trainees who have been to prison. We heard about the importance of creating a supportive environment and the role of mentoring in helping trainees gradually build up their skills and confidence before they join the team on a full-time basis. We were deeply struck by the accounts of some of trainees who shared with us their own stories of how the opportunity to begin working immediately after prison alongside consistent support from mentors enabled them to turn their lives around.

Several organisations highlighted the importance of mentoring and relational support, which begins in prison and continues through the prison gate.<sup>137</sup> The importance of mentoring and relationship-building was also repeatedly raised during our site visit to the Dusty Knuckle Bakery. During our roundtable session, one former trainee at the Dusty Knuckle told us that the persistence of a mentor who came to see them regularly whilst they were still in prison was one of the key reasons they decided to join the training programme.<sup>138</sup> Penny Parker stated that mentoring was important as it provides a person with someone to hold them to account whilst also motivating them to achieve. She told the Committee that:

<sup>136</sup> Information provided to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Switchback on 12 March 2025

<sup>137</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by StandOut, Switchback and Working Chance. Published alongside report.

<sup>138</sup> Evidence heard as part of a roundtable discussion held by the London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee on 17 September 2025

*"It is about holding you to account and encouraging you through a set of coaching questions and that coaching relationship to be thinking about what it is you want to achieve because that is where success will come from. Success comes from opening up for people the possibilities and the self-belief that there is something out there that is worth them working at."*<sup>139</sup>

While mentoring was praised as a highly effective tool for supporting people leaving prison into employment, during our roundtable discussion at the Dusty Knuckle participants also stressed that it should be embedded in a wider 'wraparound' support network.<sup>140</sup> The importance of this was further illustrated by StandOut, which stated in its submission that mentoring and coaching can be particularly effective if combined with practical support, such as confidence-building and preparation for the job market while in prison, which is then followed by additional practical support around securing housing, benefits, health, as well as making connections with employers.<sup>141</sup> StandOut credits this approach with programme participants achieving significantly better outcomes than those without this support, including 48 per cent of those eligible to work finding employment within six months after release.<sup>142</sup>

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*"If you are layering people entering the workforce at the same time as reintegrating into society, managing housing, managing a budget and managing their own emotions, it can become incredibly overwhelming."*<sup>143</sup>

**Jessica Mellor-Clark**  
**Head of BeOnsite, Lendlease**

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Switchback cited this lack of 'wraparound' support as one of the key pieces missing from Government initiatives such as the New Futures Network (NFN). The submission praises the NFN for addressing negative stigma and connecting people to employers but highlights that many people require additional support as they are trying to overcome barriers related to housing insecurity, financial instability, mental ill health and a lack of workplace experience.<sup>144</sup>

While it is no silver bullet, the evidence we received highlights the invaluable contribution of mentoring in supporting people after their release from prison. London has a rich ecosystem of third sector organisations providing mentoring alongside more practical support to people leaving prison. Penny Parker told us that smaller organisations like StandOut often have to

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<sup>139</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.15)

<sup>140</sup> Evidence heard as part of a roundtable discussion held by the London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee on 17 September 2025

<sup>141</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by StandOut. Published alongside report.

<sup>142</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by StandOut. Published alongside report. (p.45)

<sup>143</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (p.5)

<sup>144</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Switchback. Published alongside report.

work “incredibly hard” for funding, relying exclusively on charitable funds.<sup>145</sup> The Mayor, as part of his New Deal for Young People and his commitment to tackle the underlying causes of crime, has invested £34 million to fund third sector organisations to provide mentoring for persons under 25. Since the start of the programme in February 2022, more than 100,000 young Londoners have been able to benefit from this.<sup>146</sup> <sup>147</sup> We believe that the Mayor should consider expanding this commitment to ensure every young Londoner who has been to prison has access to a mentor. Given the unique challenges faced by young people leaving prison, we believe this could be extended to people under the age of 30.

## Recommendation 7

**The Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) should produce an estimate of the cost of providing every Londoner under 30 who has been to prison with access to a mentor. We ask that the VRU write to the Committee with an estimate by the end of 2025-26.**

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### The importance of joined-up support provision

We heard that charities have varying budgets and are not always able to do this work by themselves, and that successful models bring together different partners to form a comprehensive support system.<sup>148</sup> <sup>149</sup> Catch22 praised the Youth 2 Adult Hub in Newham, a collaboration between MOPAC, the MoJ and London Probation, for bringing together different services, reducing duplication and addressing housing and health needs alongside employment. The Youth 2 Adult Hub is a £3 million pilot programme that was launched in 2021 to support young adults in the criminal justice system<sup>150</sup> by addressing the multiple disadvantages faced by many young offenders growing up.<sup>151</sup> One of the programme’s key features is combining specialist services, including drug and mental health support, under one roof.<sup>152</sup>

In its letter to the committee, MOPAC told us that the Hub does not have a specific education, training and employment (ETE) service anymore, following commissioning changes by HMPPS. MOPAC stated that the support is provided to young adults on probation to “help them lead pro-social lives”, which includes “communication and therapeutic support”, as well as mentoring, currently provided by Catch22. The provision of mentoring also focuses on improving work readiness and signposting to job opportunities, working alongside Our Newham Work, an employment portal run by the borough. The mentoring service manages the Youth 2 Adult Service User Fund, which provides small pots of funding that can be used to support ETE

<sup>145</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.13)

<sup>146</sup> Mayor of London, [Mayor delivers record mentoring investment for 100,000 young people most in need of support in London](#), 14 January 2025

<sup>147</sup> Mayor of London, [Mayor announces plans to provide mentor for every young Londoner](#), 9 February 2022

<sup>148</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Clinks. Published alongside report.

<sup>149</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (pp.12-13)

<sup>150</sup> The hub supports 18-25-year-olds on probation and 17-year-olds transitioning to adult probation

<sup>151</sup> Newham Families, [Youth 2 Adult Hub](#), 5 February 2024

<sup>152</sup> Mayor of London, [£3 million pilot to reduce reoffending by young adults](#), 5 March 2021

courses for young adults.<sup>153</sup> Catch 22 praised the Hub's mentorship model, whereby mentors work closely with mentees, taking an active role rather than just signposting them to support.<sup>154</sup> MOPAC stated that the Hub also works closely with Our Newham Work, the employment support service run by the local authority, to connect participants with opportunities.<sup>155</sup>

The Hub supports both young men and young women, with the latter accessing Hub support at the local women's centre to ensure a trauma-informed and safe environment. The overwhelming majority (93 per cent) of young adults accessing the Hub are male and 73 per cent of the young adults accessing the Hub are from Black, Asian and Mixed backgrounds.<sup>156</sup> A 2024 external evaluation report found high levels of satisfaction with the service among ex-offenders, as well as staff.<sup>157</sup> In its letter, MOPAC told us it is undertaking further impact analysis which will be published in the following months.<sup>158</sup>

Despite this positive example, we also heard evidence that the support system in London has traditionally been disjointed. Breakthrough Social Enterprise told us that there was "dangerous lack of joined-up provision between custody, probation, Job Centres and community support", whereby many organisations operate in silos, leading to duplication, delays and people falling through the cracks.<sup>159</sup> This was also raised by Switchback's submission, which stated that existing initiatives were "highly disconnected" as they are being delivered by different parts of the state without sufficient integration.<sup>160</sup>

Similarly, Clinks stated there was a lack of coordination between the voluntary sector and staff in prison responsible for employment support. It said that this leads to communications gaps, as well as unrealistic expectations as prison staff frequently expect people to be employed right after release.<sup>161</sup> Switchback referred to 'The Good Prison Project', a pilot which ran in 2016/2017 and aimed to enhance voluntary sector coordination in prisons through the creation of a voluntary sector coordination role, which supported the mapping of services, identifying gaps and ensuring staff were well informed about the prison regime and population. Out of the eight prisons in London, this role currently exists within one prison, HMP/YOI Isis in Thamesmead.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Mayor's Office for policing and Crime, Written response: London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee - Employment after Prison in London (received via e-mail on 23 September 2025)

<sup>154</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Catch22. Published alongside report.

<sup>155</sup> Mayor's Office for policing and Crime, Written response: London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee - Employment after Prison in London (received via e-mail on 23 September 2025)

<sup>156</sup> Newham Families, [Youth 2 Adult Hub \[accessed 6 October 2025\]](#)

<sup>157</sup> Ministry of Justice, [Process Evaluation of the Newham Y2A Hub](#), [accessed 6 October 2025]

<sup>158</sup> Mayor's Office for policing and Crime, Written response: London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee - Employment after Prison in London (received via e-mail on 23 September 2025)

<sup>159</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Breakthrough Social Enterprise. Published alongside report. (p.4)

<sup>160</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Breakthrough Social Enterprise. Published alongside report. (p.54)

<sup>161</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Clinks. Published alongside report. (p.4)

<sup>162</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Clinks. Published alongside report.

## The role of the Mayor and MOPAC

There was a strong sense among guests and contributors to our call for evidence that the Mayor should assume a much more active role in the coordination of support available across London, ensuring commissioned provision is joined-up and meets the multiple needs of people who have been to prison.<sup>163 164</sup> As part of his Police and Crime Plan, the Mayor has made a commitment to reduce reoffending.<sup>165</sup> In its letter to the Committee, MOPAC stressed that it had no formal role in commissioning services specifically targeted at education, training and employment, and that its main role was to convene partners to identify and address gaps in provision to reduce reoffending. However, it added that some services commissioned by MOPAC provide wraparound support, which includes education, training and employment. For example, the London Women in the Criminal Justice System service supports women in several areas, including education, training and employment.<sup>166</sup>

Whilst we understand that MOPAC has no formal commissioning role, the Committee believes there is more the Mayor and MOPAC can do to support people leaving prison into employment in London. Stakeholders contributing to our investigation were overwhelmingly positive about the work of the Youth 2 Adult Hub and its role in providing 'wraparound' support.<sup>167</sup> This demonstrates the positive impact of the GLA's work, and the potential for it to do more.

We would like to see the Mayor work more closely with London's prisons, as well as its voluntary sector organisations, which are providing such crucial support to people who have been to prison. The Mayor has used his convening powers to coordinate the actions of public sector stakeholders working in this space before. In 2017, he established the Reducing Reoffending Board, bringing together attendees from a wide range of organisations, including MOPAC, the Violence Reduction Unit, the British Transport Police, the Metropolitan Police Service, HMPPS, the DWP, London boroughs, the MoJ and the Youth Justice Board.<sup>168</sup> We ask that the Mayor use his convening powers to encourage coordinated and joined-up working among stakeholders by setting up a working group which includes public sector stakeholders, such as boroughs and probation services, as well as representatives from the third sector.

## Recommendation 8

**MOPAC and the Violence Reduction Unit should set up a working group between London prisons, local authorities, probation services and the voluntary sector within the next 12 months. This group should meet at least once a quarter to encourage better joined up working to provide holistic resettlement support with a focus on accessing and sustaining employment.**

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<sup>163</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (pp.22-23)

<sup>164</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Clinks and Switchback. Published alongside report.

<sup>165</sup> Mayor of London, [A Safer London for Everyone](#), 28 March 2025

<sup>166</sup> Mayor's Office for policing and Crime, Written response: London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee - Employment after Prison in London (received via e-mail on 23 September 2025)

<sup>167</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Catch 22 and Clinks. Published alongside report.

<sup>168</sup> Mayor of London, [Reducing Reoffending Board \[accessed 6 October 2025\]](#)

Additionally, a future devolution settlement could offer opportunities for the Mayor to join up and improve support provision across London more directly. For example, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) has been pursuing a more integrated approach, using funding devolved to GMCA from the MoJ.<sup>169</sup> Switchback praised the GMCA for agreeing additional powers with the Government and taking a wider role in commissioning probation services to prevent people becoming homeless after prison. It said that this commissioning model enabled the GMCA to commission the Government's Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3) alongside more integrated support, with the goal of ensuring that people find stable housing after their stay in temporary accommodation.<sup>170</sup> In practice, this is made possible by a range of delivery partnerships between prisons, housing specialists based in prisons, local housing authorities, accommodation providers and support providers.

We believe this is an area where the Mayor could play a more central role, in line with the commitments in the Mayor's Police and Crime Plan to reduce reoffending. The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill does not seek to devolve powers in this area yet, but it would grant the Mayor a right to request further powers once it passes into law. If the model in Greater Manchester is considered successful and applicable in London, he could use this to request additional powers to commission probation services to provide people leaving prison in London with support that addresses their multiple, including stable housing and employment.

## Recommendation 9

**MOPAC should engage with counterparts at the Greater Manchester Combined Authority to further understand the devolved arrangements in Greater Manchester for commissioning probation services. MOPAC and the Mayor should examine whether this can deliver benefits and help Londoners leaving prison to gain secure employment. If this is the case, it should inform the Mayor's future priorities for requesting devolved powers from the Government. We ask that MOPAC updates the Committee by the end of 2025-26 on the results so far of this engagement.**

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<sup>169</sup> Greater Manchester Combined Authority, [Community Accommodation Service \(Tier 3\) Budget](#), May 2025

<sup>170</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Clinks and Switchback. Published alongside report.

## The role of employers

### Disclosing convictions to potential employers

People who have served a prison sentence may be required to disclose their conviction as part of the recruitment process, which can make it difficult to find employment. A 2021 survey found that around half of employers would not hire someone with a criminal record.<sup>171</sup>

Upon release from prison, individuals have the right to work and, provided they secure employment, will have the same rights as any other employee.<sup>172</sup> Employers cannot ordinarily reject a person for a job because they have what is considered a 'spent' conviction.<sup>173</sup> However, if the individual's conviction is still considered 'unspent', employers can lawfully refuse to employ them on this basis.<sup>174</sup>

Under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (ROA), eligible convictions or cautions become 'spent' after a specified amount of time, known as the rehabilitation period.<sup>175</sup> An unspent conviction is a criminal conviction that is still in the bounds of the rehabilitation period. The rehabilitation period depends on the sentence given and the age of the individual on the date they are convicted.

Employers typically check a candidate's criminal record by conducting a Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) check. There are three levels of DBS checks: Basic, Standard and Enhanced. The type of DBS check conducted depends on the role being recruited for.<sup>176</sup> Spent convictions are not disclosed on basic disclosures. However, they are disclosed on higher level disclosures (i.e. Standard and Enhanced DBS checks).<sup>177</sup>

### Overcoming stigma and misconceptions

Employers have traditionally been reluctant to employ people who have spent time in prison. Our guests attributed this largely to negative stigma associated with prison. Sian Williams told the Committee that "for some reason, this country still wants to hold on to the idea that some people are good and some people are bad".<sup>178</sup>

It is important to note that this does not affect all people in the same way. For example, a 2019 survey of people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds by Unlock found that over

<sup>171</sup> Working chance, [Worst-case scenario](#), July 2021

<sup>172</sup> Ministry of Justice, [Employing prisoners and ex-offenders](#), 8 March 2023

<sup>173</sup> UK Government, [Check if you need to tell someone about your criminal record](#) [accessed 6 October 2025]

<sup>174</sup> Unlock, [Spent and unspent convictions and employment law](#) [accessed 6 October 2025]

<sup>175</sup> Disclosure and Barring Service, [Rehabilitation Periods](#), 28 May 2019

<sup>176</sup> Disclosure & Barring Service, [About us](#) [accessed 6 October 2025]

<sup>177</sup> Ministry of Justice, [Disclosing your criminal record](#), 3 March 2025

<sup>178</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.11)

three quarters (78 per cent) felt their ethnicity made it harder for them to overcome the problems they faced as a result of having a criminal record. Nearly eight in 10 (79 per cent) said they experienced problems finding employment.<sup>179</sup> Similarly, 2021 research by Working Chance found that women from minority ethnic groups are more likely to experience long-term unemployment if they have a criminal record and that they are more likely to be ruled out when applying for jobs or experience a lack of career progression once in work, compared to white women with a criminal record.<sup>180</sup>

Employers with experience of recruiting people from prison in London have told us that although negative stereotypes exist, these are not based on facts or actual experience. Darren Burns told us that people who have been to prison have shown to be hard-working and bring with them a personal resilience.<sup>181</sup> This was also emphasised by Jessica Mellor-Clark, who told the Committee that:

*"The conviction is the tip of the iceberg. It is the visible thing. What you have to do is look below what is a huge iceberg because it shows people have hidden depths. They are resilient. They are determined. People want a chance and, if you give people a chance, nine times out of ten, 99 times out of 100, they are going to repay you."*<sup>182</sup>

We heard that in order to overcome stigma and misconceptions, it was important to make the 'business case' for employing people who have been to prison. Sian Williams told the Committee that "if we just go in naively and say 'It is a good thing to do', we will not get very far".<sup>183</sup> Instead, she stressed, it was important to highlight the positive impact on the business, such as addressing skills gaps or reputational benefits.<sup>184</sup> The importance of making the business case was also stressed by Matt Randle, who highlighted that making the business case was important to ensuring employers continue to hire prison leavers even when the economic situation worsens.<sup>185</sup>

Businesses we spoke to told us that their decisions to employ people leaving prison was largely based on commercial need. Darren Burns from the Timpson Group and Lynne Kennedy from Greene King told us they began hiring people from prison due to skills shortages in their respective businesses which emerged after Brexit.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Unlock, [Double discrimination?](#), July 2019

<sup>180</sup> Working chance, [Worst-case scenario](#), July 2021

<sup>181</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (p.4)

<sup>182</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (p.3)

<sup>183</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.18)

<sup>184</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.18)

<sup>185</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.19)

<sup>186</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (pp.3,9)

However, multiple guests told us that employers on the whole remain unaware of the many positives associated with hiring people who have spent time in prison.<sup>187</sup> Tehmina Khan, Business Manager, Ringway Hounslow Highways stressed that it was important to educate employers about the advantages associated with recruiting people who have been to prison. She stressed that “part of that education should be communicating some of the successes so that people know that there is success when you do something like this.”<sup>188</sup>

It is true that negative stigma still looms large and businesses remain reluctant to employ people who have spent time in prison. However, we believe it is time for this to change. Our evidence suggests that the experience of employers who have taken concrete steps to attract and recruit people from prison has been overwhelmingly positive. Negative misconceptions can be overcome by highlighting to employers the many benefits associated with tapping into this talent pool. As a large employer, the Mayor and the GLA can play an active part in leading this work. This will be covered in more detail below.

## **The Employers’ Forum for Reducing Reoffending and Regional Employment Councils**

Despite widespread negative stigma, some employers have taken steps to actively recruit people leaving prison with support from the Government. The Government established the Employers’ Forum for Reducing Reoffending (EFFRR) in 2010. Chaired by Greggs’ Chief Executive Officer, the EFFRR comprises local and national employers that provide training and employment opportunities to people leaving prison. Members include, Timpson, M&S, Greene King and Ringway. The EFFRR’s objective is to “encourage more businesses to consider adapting their recruitment practises to support more returning citizens into employment, therefore reducing the impact of re-offending on our communities.”<sup>189</sup>

In addition to this, the Government launched a series of Regional Employment Councils in January 2025.<sup>190</sup> Employment Councils will be comprised of employers who provide support to frontline probation staff. They will seek to provide them with a greater understanding of the local labour market and help build better relationships with suitable employers.<sup>191</sup> Each council will also have a representative from DWP to help improve links with local Job Centres. There will be 11 councils covering England and Wales. One council will cover all of London.<sup>192</sup>

## **Supporting people who have been to prison in the workplace**

Although our guests were positive about recruiting people out of prison, they also urged caution, stressing that employees who have previously been to prison require additional

<sup>187</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (pp.1,2,4)

<sup>188</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (p.1)

<sup>189</sup> Ingeus, [EFFRR \[accessed 6 October 2025\]](#)

<sup>190</sup> UK Government, [Top bosses join forces to get thousands of offenders into work](#), 10 January 2025

<sup>191</sup> UK Government, [Top bosses join forces to get thousands of offenders into work](#), 10 January 2025

<sup>192</sup> UK Government, [Top bosses join forces to get thousands of offenders into work](#), 10 January 2025

support. Tehmina Khan told us that employers often do not understand that people who have been to prison have different needs and that they require a higher degree of flexibility on the part of the employer.<sup>193</sup> She told the Committee that:

*"We cannot expect people to turn up at 9 o'clock and clock in until 5 o'clock. They have restrictions they might have to be back at a certain time. They will not have accommodation sorted out. The benefits will not be sorted out. They will not know where they are going to be or how they have to travel. If they do not have access to those benefits when they come out then it will be a problem for them to turn up."*<sup>194</sup>

Employers emphasised that once someone is employed, many people continue to require support addressing their multiple needs, including housing, finances and mental health. There is no 'one size fits all' approach and the businesses we heard from take different approaches to providing support. Jessica Mellor-Clark told the Committee that BeOnsite often directly provides support for employees in London, such as with finding accommodation and preventing them from becoming homeless. She told the Committee that "there have been numerous occasions where the phone has rung at midnight and someone has said, 'I am now street homeless. How can you help me?' We do it."<sup>195</sup>

Lynne Kennedy told us that, rather than providing direct support, Greene King partners with third sector organisations active in London, such as Only A Pavement Away, to ensure employees receive additional support. She told the Committee that:

*"The charities that we work with, they provide that network. There is the emotional support that they can provide, mentoring, counselling, guidance around that side. There is financial support they can have, and even just sometimes just somebody to speak to when they have had a really bad day, that whole go-to point."*<sup>196</sup>

During our roundtable, participants noted that the Dusty Knuckle was effective in supporting its trainees because it views itself as a 'transition space', where trainees gradually establish a routine in a non-judgemental environment whilst receiving additional support and being supported by a mentor from Switchback.<sup>197</sup>

Our guests acknowledged that providing this support can place a significant burden on employers. During our roundtable, we heard that employers often have no experience recruiting people from prison and cannot be expected to go from 'zero to one hundred'.<sup>198</sup> The employers

<sup>193</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (p.9)

<sup>194</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (pp.9-10)

<sup>195</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (p.11)

<sup>196</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (p.15)

<sup>197</sup> Evidence heard as part of a roundtable discussion held by the London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee on 17 September 2025

<sup>198</sup> Evidence heard as part of a roundtable discussion held by the London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee on 17 September 2025

we spoke to pointed to the importance of 'not going it alone' and partnering with established third sector organisations to provide additional support.<sup>199</sup> Penny Parker emphasised starting small and ensuring the right support is in place before expanding recruitment.<sup>200</sup> She told the committee that "what we should be saying to London businesses and London employers is, 'Start with one. Start with one person, do one recruitment really well'".<sup>201</sup>

Sian Williams noted that that there was an opportunity for the Mayor to take an active role in this space, telling us that "what we would love to see is London investing in employers to help them understand the needs of people leaving prison, entering the workplace, and to have a support function".<sup>202</sup> London's third sector organisations have a wealth of expertise and a proven track record of supporting employers. We believe the Mayor can make an invaluable contribution by leveraging this to create guidance for employers on recruiting and supporting people who have been to prison. The Mayor should also act as a conduit, connecting employers which are interested in this to the relevant organisations.

Finally, the employers we spoke to told us that the GLA should lead by example.<sup>203</sup> Penny Parker stressed the importance of modelling positive behaviour as a large employer as a way of encouraging other employers in London to change their practices.<sup>204</sup> We agree with this and believe the GLA should actively recruit who have been to prison. As stated above, as an employer with little experience in this field, the GLA should not seek to do this on its own. Instead, it should draw on the expertise and support of London's third sector organisations.

## Recommendation 10

**The Mayor should convene leading organisations within the voluntary sector and members of the London Employment Council for prison leavers within the next 12 months to develop training and guidance for employers that want to employ people leaving prison. The Mayor should promote this to employers and set up an online portal to connect them to voluntary sector partners.**

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## Recommendation 11

**The GLA should launch a small-scale scheme to attract and recruit people who have been to prison within the next 12 months. To do this, the GLA should partner with voluntary sector organisations working in this field to provide holistic support during the first year of employment. The GLA should evaluate the successes and key learnings of this programme after one year.**

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<sup>199</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (pp.16-17)

<sup>200</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.19)

<sup>201</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.19)

<sup>202</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.24)

<sup>203</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Employment in London After Prison - Part 2](#), 2 September 2025 (pp.17-18)

<sup>204</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 3 - Employment in London After Prison \(Panel 2\)](#), 16 July 2025 (p.22)

## Committee Activity

The Committee held two formal meetings on the topic of employment after prison in London. The Committee's first meeting took place on 16 July 2025 and explored the provision of education and training in prison, as well as the role of the voluntary sector in supporting prison leavers into employment. One of the meeting's main purposes was to gain a better understanding of the barriers faced by people with experience of the criminal justice system looking to enter or re-enter the labour market. The meeting was attended by the following guests:

- **Jon Collins**, Chief Executive, Prisoners' Education Trust (PET)
- **Penny Parker**, Chief Executive Officer, StandOut
- **Matt Randle**, Director of Justice, Catch22
- **Sian Williams**, Chief Executive Officer, Switchback

The Committee's second meeting took place on 2 September 2025. This meeting involved a session with select employers which are actively recruiting prison leavers. The session was attended by the following employers:

- **Darren Burns**, Director of Diversity and Inclusion, The Timpson Group
- **Lynne Kennedy**, Social Mobility Manager, Greene King
- **Tehmina Khan**, Business Manager, Ringway Hounslow Highways
- **Jessica Mellor-Clark**, Head of BeOnsite – Leandlease

### Site visit

The Committee attended a site visit at the Dusty Knuckle Bakery on 17 September 2025, organised in partnership with Switchback. This involved a roundtable discussion with staff from Switchback and the Dusty Knuckle, including two former trainees with experience of the criminal justice system.

### Call for evidence

The Committee also launched a call for evidence which ran 17 June and 25 July 2025 and received Seven responses from the following organisations:

- Breakthrough Social Enterprise
- Catch22
- Clinks
- Prisoners' Education Trust (PET)
- StandOut
- Switchback
- Working Chance

The Committee also received additional written evidence from the Mayor's Office for Police and Crime (MOPAC).

## Other formats and languages

If you, or someone you know needs this report in large print or braille, or a copy of the summary and main findings in another language, then please call us on: 020 7983 4100 or email [assembly.translations@london.gov.uk](mailto:assembly.translations@london.gov.uk)

### Chinese

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### Vietnamese

Nếu ông (bà) muốn nội dung văn bản này được dịch sang  
tiếng Việt, xin vui lòng liên hệ với chúng tôi bằng điện  
thoại, thư hoặc thư điện tử theo địa chỉ ở trên.

### Greek

*Εάν επιθυμείτε περίληψη αυτού του κειμένου στην γλώσσα σας, παρακαλώ καλέστε τον αριθμό ή επικοινωνήστε μαζί μας στην ανωτέρω ταχυδρομική ή την ηλεκτρονική διεύθυνση.*

### Turkish

Bu belgenin kendi dilinize çevrilmiş bir özetini okumak isterseniz, lütfen yukarıdaki telefon numarasını arayın, veya posta ya da e-posta adresi aracılığıyla bizimle temasla geçin.

### Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦਾ ਸੰਘੇਪ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ ਉਪਰ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਡਾਕ ਜਾਂ ਈਮੇਲ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

### Hindi

यदि आपको इस दस्तावेज का सारांश अपनी भाषा में  
चाहिए तो उपर दिये हुए नंबर पर फोन करें या उपर दिये  
गये डाक पते या ई मेल पते पर हम से संपर्क करें।

### Bengali

আপনি যদি এই দলিলের একটা সারাংশ নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান,  
তাহলে দয়া করে ফোন করবেন অথবা উল্লেখিত ডাক ঠিকানায় বা  
ই-মেইল ঠিকানায় আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করবেন।

### Urdu

اگر آپ کو اس دستاویز کا خلاصہ اپنی زبان میں  
درکار ہو تو، براہ کرم نمبر پر فون کریں  
یا مذکورہ بالا ڈاک کے پتے یا ای میل  
پتے پر ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

### Arabic

الحصول على ملخص لهذا المستند بلغتك،  
فرجاء الاتصال برقم الهاتف أو الاتصال على  
العنوان البريدي العادي أو عنوان البريد  
الإلكتروني أعلاه.

### Gujarati

જો તમારે આ દસ્તાવેજનો સાર તમારી ભાષામાં  
જોઈતો હોય તો ઉપર આપેલ નંબર પર ફોન કરો  
અથવા ઉપર આપેલ ટ્યાલ અથવા ઈ-મેઈલ સરનામાં  
પર અમારો સંપર્ક કરો।

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