

# **New Deal Intelligence Report Article**

## **Welfare to Work for Prisoners and Ex-Offenders**

**SCOTLAND**

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**Analytical Services Division**

**Scottish Executive**



# WELFARE TO WORK FOR PRISONERS AND EX-OFFENDERS

## Main Findings

- The prison population has increased fairly dramatically between 2001 and 2003 and now stands at an average daily prison population of 6,523. Over 99% of these prisoners are of working age
- 58% of adult offenders and 53% of young offenders are sentenced to less than 6 months. Also 93% of adult prisoners are sentenced to less than 4 years
- The average cost of keeping an offender in custody is £29,839 per year
- It is estimated that around 60% of offenders released from prisons were reconvicted of another offence within two years
- Only 28% of ex-offenders on New Deal go into unsubsidised employment compared to 39% for other participants. Of those who go into employment only 61% of ex-offenders obtain sustained employment compared to 76% of other participants
- 80% of prisoners claim benefit on release
- Research shows that employment can reduce the risk of re-offending between one-third and a half
- Research has also shown that those who do not take part in education and training while in prison are 3 times more likely to be reconvicted

## 1 Introduction

An increasingly important part of the welfare to work policy area is dealing with social exclusion of certain disadvantaged groups. One of these groups is prisoners and ex-offenders. Increasing employability amongst prisoners and hence increasing employment opportunities for ex-offenders is becoming more important. Research indicates that this will help to prevent re-offending and help people to work themselves out of poverty. This article will look at the scale of the client group and the link between employment and reducing re-offending as well as looking at the types of schemes which are being used to try help prisoners into employment once they leave prison.

## 2 Background

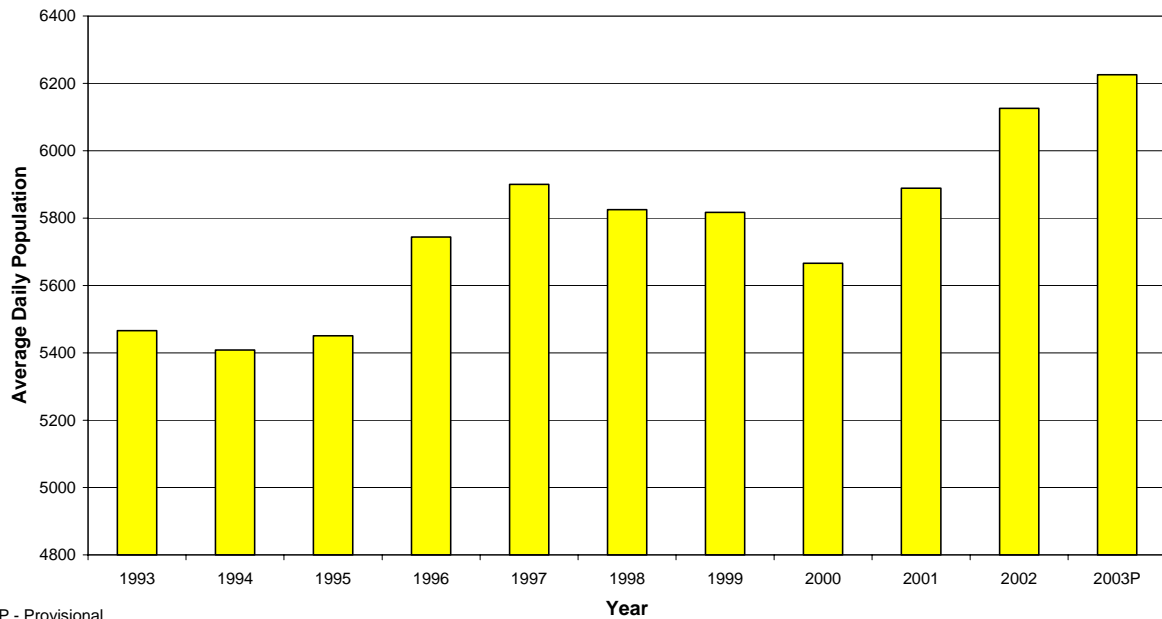
Provisional figures for 2003<sup>1</sup> show that the average daily prison population in Scotland has hit an all time high at 6,523. Chart 1a shows the average daily prison

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Prisons Service, provisional figures

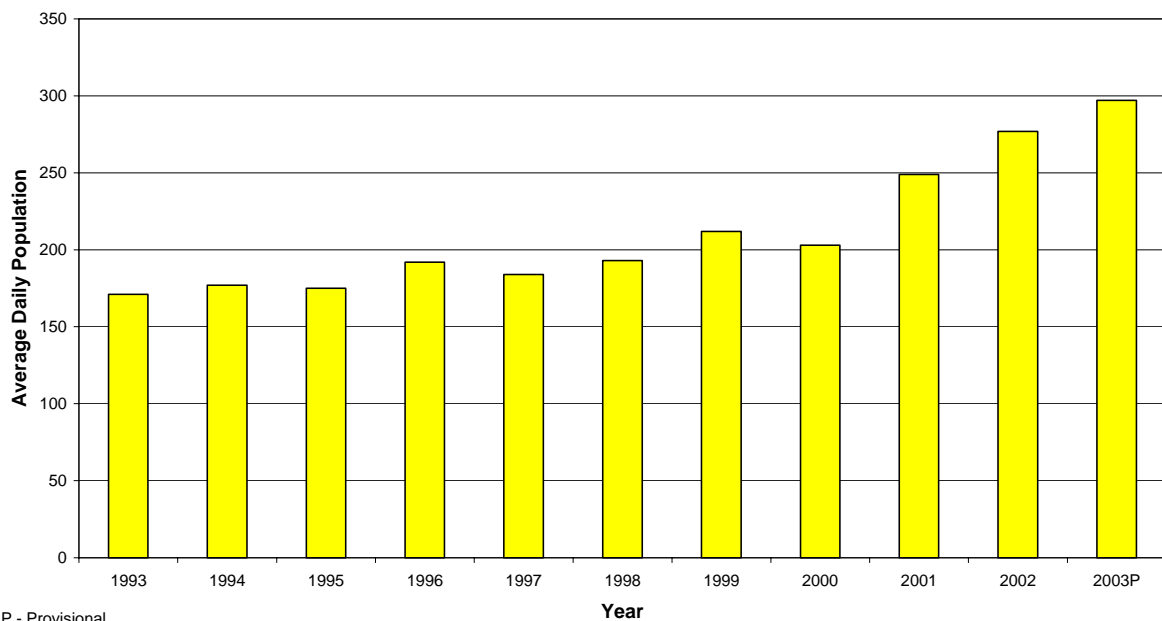
population for males in Scotland from 1993 to 2003. The chart shows that there was a rise in the prison population in the mid 1990s and then it stabilised for a few years. 2001 saw a fairly large increase in the average prison population and this increase continued in 2002 and 2003. This increase in the male prison population over 2001-2003 is mirrored in the female average prison population. In fact there was a 7% rise in the average daily prison population for females between 2002 and the provisional 2003 figures

**Chart 1a Average Daily Prison Population, Males, Scotland 1993-2003**



P - Provisional

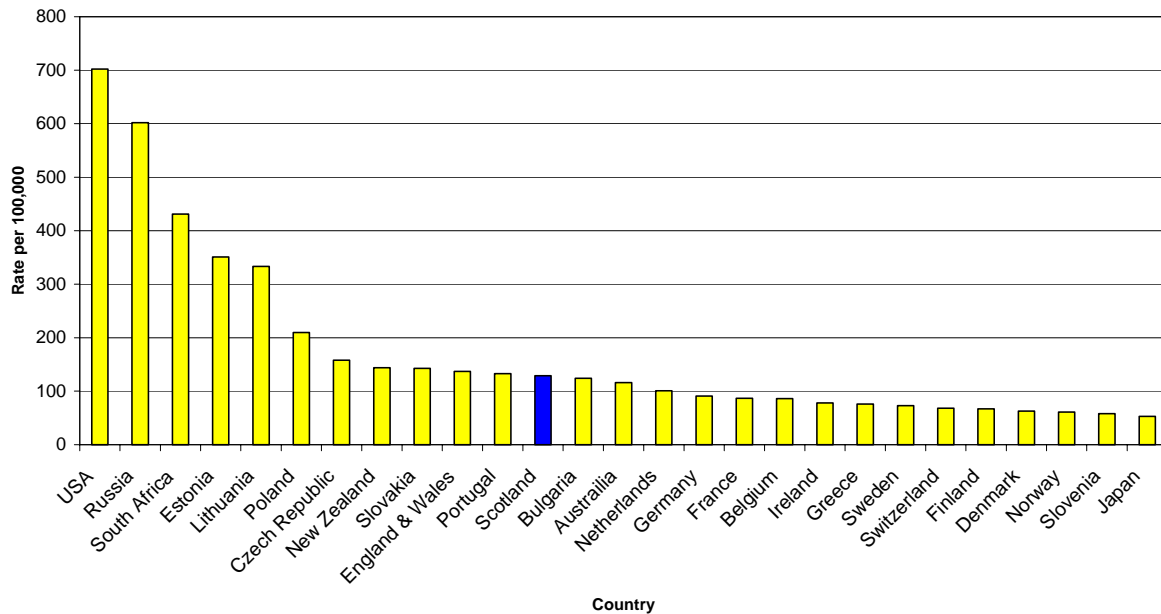
**Chart 1b Average Daily Prison Population, Females, Scotland 1993-2003**



P - Provisional

Scotland has a slightly lower average prison population than England and Wales at 129<sup>2</sup> per 100,000 population compared to 137 per 100,000 population for England and Wales. Chart 2 below shows that Scotland has a fairly average prison population compared to other countries across the world, however Scotland does have one of the highest rates in Europe.

**Chart 2 Prison Population as a rate per 100,000 Population, 2002**



The USA has a very high prison population with 702 per 100,000 population and Russia is not far behind at 602 per 100,000 population. Japan and Slovenia have very low prison populations with just over 50 prisoners per 100,000 population each.

As at 30 June 2002 49%<sup>2</sup> of prisoners in Scottish prisons were aged between 25 and 39 years old. Also 15%<sup>2</sup> of all prisoners in custody were 20 years old or younger. In fact over 99%<sup>2</sup> of prisoners are of working age.

Of those offenders sent to custody 58%<sup>3</sup> of adult offenders and 53%<sup>3</sup> of young offenders are sentenced to less than 6 months. 93%<sup>3</sup> of adult offenders in 2002 had sentences of less than 4 years (less than four years is considered a short term sentence).

Around 13,500 children are affected every year by the imprisonment of a parent<sup>3</sup>. Another important point to note is that it costs an average £29,839<sup>3</sup> per year to keep an offender in custody. This substantial cost is reflected in the Scottish Prisons Service (SPS) budget which increased by over £100 million between 1991/92 and 2002/03<sup>3</sup>. The cost to the state for ex-offenders can also be high as research shows around 80% of prisoners claim benefit on release<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Prison Statistics Scotland, 2002, Scottish Executive Justice Department

<sup>3</sup> Reduce, Rehabilitate, Reform: A consultation on Reducing Re-offending in Scotland

<sup>4</sup> Reducing Re-offending by ex-prisoners, Social Exclusion Unit

### 3 Employment and Re-offending

It is widely accepted that ex-offenders are less likely to re-offend if they are in employment. Research shows that employment reduces the risk of re-offending by between a third and a half<sup>5</sup>. The risk of re-offending is highlighted in the following facts<sup>6</sup> – For 1999 within 2 years:

- 60% of offenders released from prisons were reconvicted of another offence
- 58% of offenders who received a probationary order were reconvicted
- 42% of offenders who began a community sentence were reconvicted of further offences
- 40% of offenders who received fines were reconvicted of further offences
- 53% of offenders under the age of 21 were reconvicted

In 2002 more than half of the convictions were given to offenders who had previous convictions. It is estimated that the cost of recorded crime committed by ex-offenders in the UK is £10.8 billion per year<sup>5</sup> (this figure includes costs incurred in anticipation of crime, costs as a consequence of crime and the costs of the criminal justice system). This figure could be reduced by increasing the employment levels for ex-offenders.

Research suggests<sup>7</sup> factors which may act as a barrier to employment for offenders include:

- Employer attitudes
- Criminal records and offenders' concerns about disclosing their records
- Low self-esteem, confidence and motivation
- Behavioural problems
- Poor Health
- Lack of qualifications, including poor basic skills
- Lack of recent work experience
- Lack informal contacts for jobs
- Poverty and debt
- Insecure Housing

Perhaps one of the biggest problems to tackle amongst these is the lack of qualifications as only half of prisoners have the reading skills, one fifth the writing skills and less than one third the numeracy skills necessary for 96% of all jobs<sup>6</sup>. This is further illustrated by looking at the current qualifications of ex-offenders on New Deal compared to all other participants on New Deal. Chart 3 shows that ex-offenders on New Deal tend to have lower qualifications than other participants on New Deal. In fact of those ex-offenders on New Deal for Young People almost 50% have either no qualifications or foundation qualifications.

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<sup>5</sup> Reducing Re-offending by ex-prisoners, Social Exclusion Unit

<sup>6</sup> Reduce, Rehabilitate, Reform: A Consultation on Reducing Re-offending in Scotland

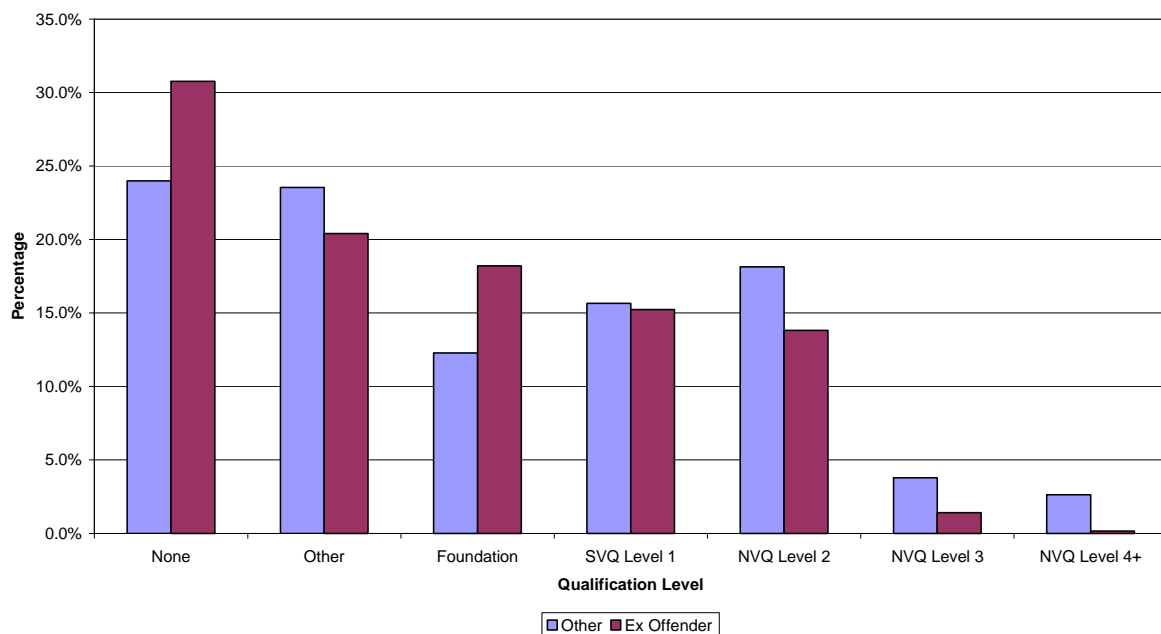
<sup>7</sup> Building Bridges to Employment for Prisoners, 2001

To help combat this problem the Scottish Executive Lifelong Learning Strategy says it will

*“provide a framework for prisoners to develop skills and lead more productive lifestyles independent of crime post-release in our Learning, Skills and Employability strategy for the Scottish Prisons Service”*

The Scottish Prison Service Learning, Skills and employability strategy was launched in November 2003 by the Deputy Justice Minister Mr Hugh Henry MSP.

**Chart 3 Current Qualifications of New Deal Participants of NDYP**



Section 2 showed that 93% of adult prisoners are sentenced to less than 4 years and that 58% were sentenced to less than 6 months. Recent Research has shown that this can be a problem when trying to provide educational support within prisons as prisoners on short sentences do not either see the point or do not have time to take part in educational classes. This research suggests that those who do not take part in education and training while in prison are 3 times more likely to be reconvicted<sup>8</sup>.

Employer attitudes and concern over criminal records are mentioned in the list of barriers to employment above. It is estimated that around one-third of men and one-fifth of women have a job when they enter custody<sup>8</sup>. There is, however, no procedure for notifying employers about the situation of the employee and hence being able to keep some positive links for the employee, where possible<sup>8</sup>. The Scottish Prison Service takes steps where possible to help prisoners maintain links with existing employers through the process of early assessment and planning. Maintaining links for prisoners serving short sentences will assist the individual to

<sup>8</sup> Reducing Re-offending by ex-prisoners, Social Exclusion Unit

return to work after their sentence, which in turn could help reduce the risk of re-offending

Another barrier to employment mentioned earlier is poverty and debt. Studies estimate that around 50% of prisoners have had previous debt problems<sup>8</sup> and that one-third of prisoners' debts get worse while in prison<sup>8</sup>. Also, as noted earlier, around 80% of prisoners claim benefit on release<sup>8</sup>. One suggested way of tackling problems of debt for prisoners is to set up a savings and payment scheme while they are in prison. This means that prison wages can be used to reduce debt.

## **4 Employability Support in Scottish Prisons**

The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) Framework Document<sup>9</sup> states that one of its four main aims is *"to prepare prisoners with a range of opportunities to exercise personal responsibility and to prepare for release"*. The SPS works closely with its partners to try and meet this aim. A key partner in achieving these objectives is Jobcentre Plus.

When a prisoner enters prison they are referred to a LINKS Centre where they will be able to talk with advisers from various organisations. Some examples include Jobcentre Plus and Careers Scotland, who will be able to help them to sort out elements of their life outside prison as well as help them in prison. Also in the LINKS Centre is the Employment and Benefit Surgeries run by Jobcentre Plus established in April 2003. At these surgeries prisoners have the opportunity to discuss issues around benefits which will ensure their claims are closed on admission to prison.

When the prisoner is nearing the end of their sentence they will be able to attend the Employment and Benefit Surgery again. This gives the prisoner the opportunity to arrange for appropriate payments of Job-seekers Allowance, Incapacity Benefit or Income Support to be set up for them when exiting prison. The prisoner will also be able to discuss job opportunities with the adviser, as well as being able to look at current vacancies which may be of interest. The adviser will also be able to inform the prisoners of welfare to work initiatives such as New Deal which prisoners are eligible for early entry.

The SPS also work closely with a number of non governmental and voluntary organisations to facilitate the inclusion needs of prisoners leaving custody. The Scottish Prison Service has made significant strides to address prisoner employability needs. A previous scheme was the Welfare to Work pathways project in Barlinnie Prison in 1998-2000. This scheme provided a programme of training and employment advice as well as preparing prisoners for early entry into New Deal Gateway on release. Participants on the Barlinnie scheme were more likely to join New Deal with around a quarter on the pilot joining New Deal on release compared to around 10% not on the pilot.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.sps.gov.uk/keydocs/framework/default.asp>

## **4.1 Employer Engagement**

Currently the SPS is working with employers to try and provide prisoners with training opportunities that will lead to employment opportunities on release. This entails prisoners taking part in a range of training programmes which will give them skills for a specific employment sector. The employer will advise on the design and skills required in the training. If prisoners are successful in completing the training, the employer will provide prisoners with a job on release.

In HMP Barlinnie the SPS is piloting a construction training scheme for prisoners close to release. Prisoners are given six months training in the construction skills which meet Construction Industry Training Board standards. Participants are trained to SVQ level 2 to qualify as a general construction operative. On site training is provided on release and once they have attained SVQ level 2 they will be guaranteed employment for one year subject to meeting the employers code of conduct etc.

To date two prisoners have successfully completed the pilot scheme and entered employment in the construction industry.

Work alone will not stop re-offending and many prisoners leaving custody find it difficult to find accommodation. Negotiations with social housing providers are ongoing to ensure that ex-offenders are given housing to meet their basic needs immediately after release. Although this scheme is in its pilot phase initial outcomes are encouraging. This type of scheme obviously relies very heavily on employer participation and efforts are being made to widen the base of employers who can make a very positive contribution to the scheme. Clearly some prisoners are better placed to benefit from the opportunities such as that offered by the Barlinnie scheme. In time and through ongoing evaluation the programme will be adjusted and developed to ensure its continuity.

## **4.2 Scottish Executive Welfare to Work Advisory Task Force**

John Milligan, Chairman of the Scottish Welfare to Work Advisory Task Force (SATF) visited HMP Barlinnie and the Construction project in December 2003. He was so impressed by the response of both the Prison Officers and the prisoners to the project that he agreed with the Deputy Minister ELLD that this would be an area where the Task Force would begin to involve employers.

At the Task Force's Awayday a sub-group was set up to look at ways of engaging employers in demand-led projects with the SPS. This group will attempt to engage employers to support schemes like the construction training scheme at HMP Barlinnie. Ronnie Bartlett, Director of Albert Bartlett & Sons and a member of the SATF, has agreed to chair the sub-group, and visited HMP Polmont Young Offenders Institute in March 2004.

An employer engagement event has been organised for the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2004, to be held in Barlinnie Prison. Ronnie Bartlett has issued invitations to selected employers in the Construction Industry who will be invited to give their views on ways the industry can become involved in this initiative. A presentation of the Barlinnie

Construction Project, which is nearing completion, will be given as well as a tour of the prison's training facilities.

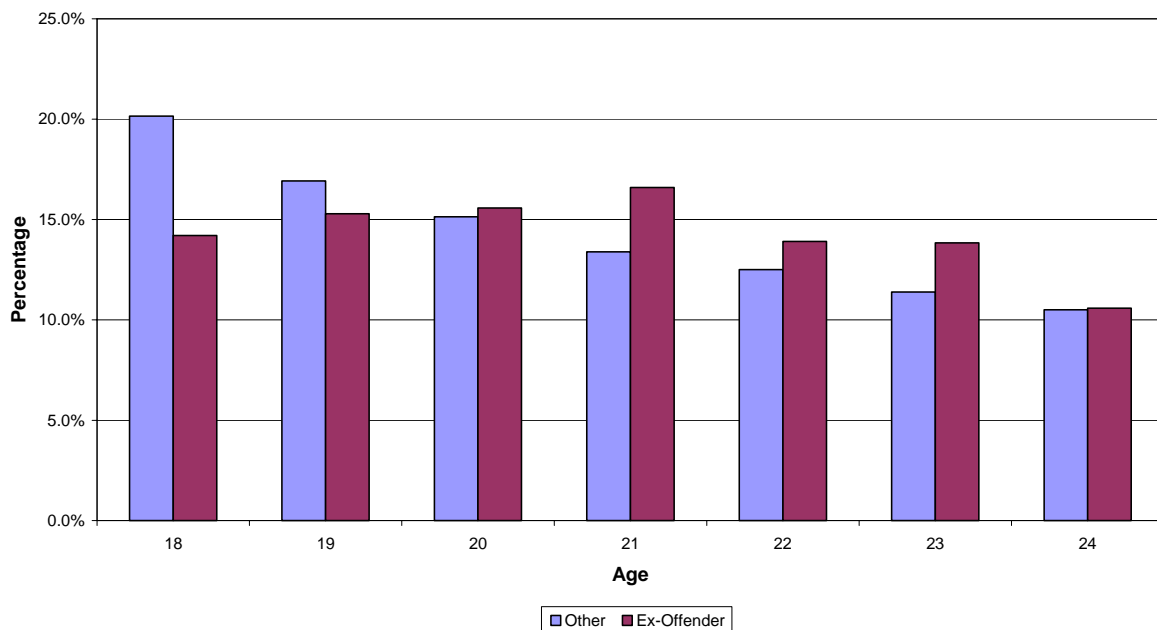
The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Lewis Macdonald, has sent a letter of support to each employer to urge their attendance at the event.

## 5 Ex-Offenders on New Deal

As mentioned previously, ex-offenders are eligible for early entry into New Deal Schemes. The New Deal database has a variable which can identify whether a person has obtained early entry into New Deal. This database can therefore be used to analyse the characteristics of ex-offenders on New Deal compared to other participants on New Deal. It should be noted, however, that there is no requirement for an ex-prisoner to take early entry onto New Deal. This means that there may be ex-offenders who have joined New Deal through the usual routes, i.e. long term unemployment, who will not be included in the ex-offender category. Unfortunately due to some data coding issues only the data from the New Deal for Young People is suitable for this type of analysis

Chart 4 shows the age breakdown of the people who joined New Deal for Young People by whether they are an ex-offender or not. The chart shows that ex-offenders tend to join New Deal at a slightly older age. This may be caused by a lack of awareness of the benefits of being on New Deal prior to imprisonment. It may also be that they were never engaged with the benefits system previously so never became eligible for New Deal until they were ex-offenders.

**Chart 4 Age at the Time of Entering New Deal**



A higher proportion of ex-offenders take up an option when on New Deal with 48% of ex-offenders on New Deal having done at least one option compared to 40% of other participants. Table 1 below shows that, of those who do go onto options. The table

shows that there are differences in the proportions of ex-offenders and other participants who go onto each option. Perhaps most importantly there is a slightly lower proportion who go onto the employment option amongst ex-offenders. This is the option which a participant is most likely to gain sustained, unsubsidised employment from.

**Table 1 Options Taken During NDYP**

	Employment Option	FT Education/ Training	Voluntary Sector	Environmental Task Force
Ex-offender	20%	32%	20%	28%
Other ND Participant	15%	35%	15%	35%

Chart 5, below, shows the breakdown of the destinations on leaving New Deal for ex-offenders compare to other participants. The chart appears to show that ex-offenders are considerably less likely to go onto unsubsidised employment (28% for ex-offenders compared to 39% for other participants). Figures from the database also show that ex-offenders are less like likely to go into sustained employment (61% of ex-offenders compared to 76% of other participants). However, there is a considerably higher proportion of unknown destinations for ex-offenders compared to other participants (51% compared to 37%) so any conclusions drawn must be treated with some caution.

**Chart 5 Destination of Those Leaving New Deal**

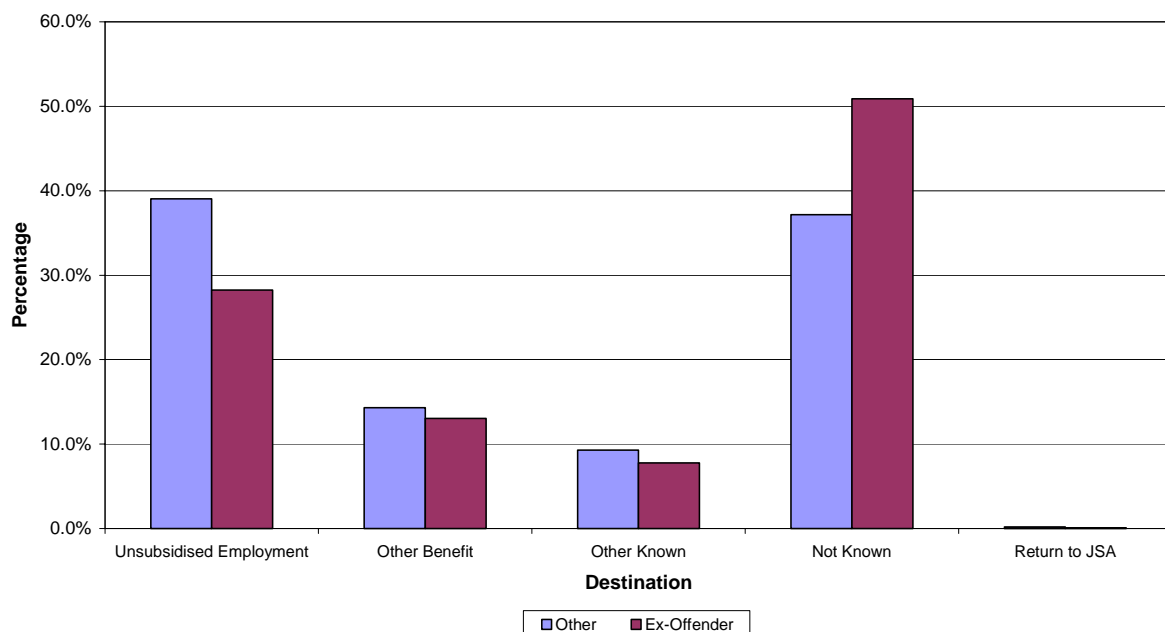
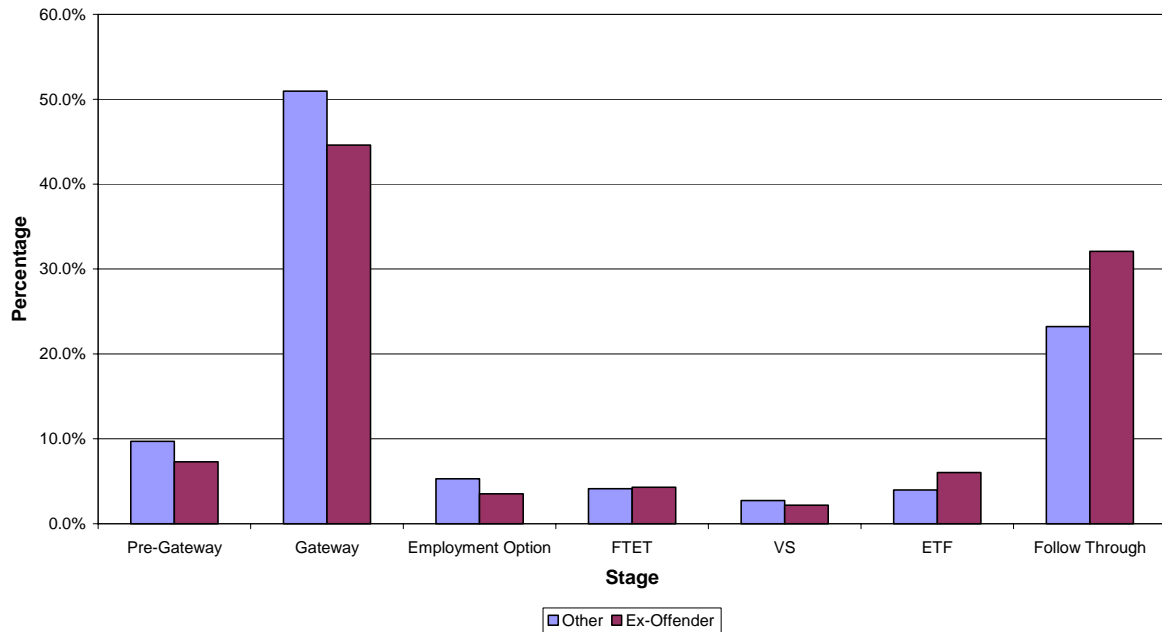


Chart 6 shows the breakdown of which stage people left New Deal. It appears that ex-offenders are more likely to stay on New Deal longer as 32% of ex-offenders left after follow-through compared to just 23% of other participants. A similar proportion of each group left from options.

**Chart 6 Stage at Leaving New Deal**



**Chart 7 Number of Spells on New Deal**

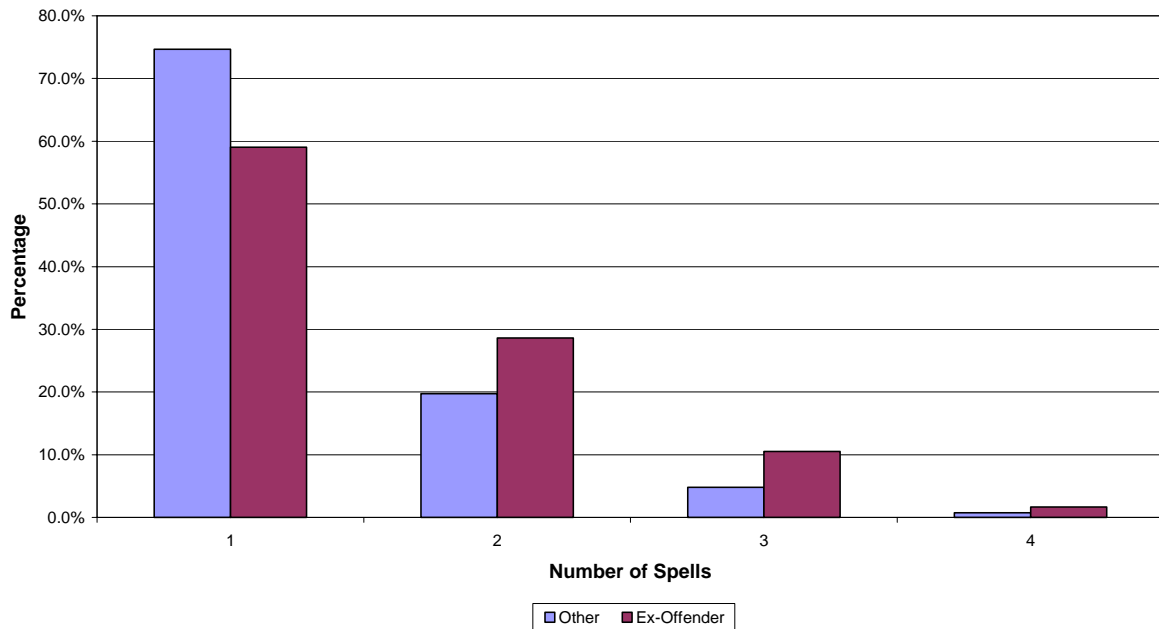


Chart 7 shows the proportion of each group by the number of spells on New Deal for Young People. The chart clearly shows that a higher proportion of ex-offenders have had more than one spell on New Deal compared to other New Deal participants. A possible reason for this may be that ex-offenders are not gaining employment and therefore are recycling through the system. This may be caused by the employer attitudes to ex-offenders. This highlights that it is not only important to

engage employers with work in prisons but also on the importance of work for ex-offenders.

## **6 Discussion**

Various points throughout this article have highlighted the importance of tackling employability and employment amongst ex-offenders. The figures have also shown that this is an extremely difficult area to address. Possibly one of the most important points which seem to emerge is the importance of trying to engage prisoners in education and training and considering post release employment while in prison, even for those prisoners who have very short sentences. Direct employer engagement is also critical to help prisoners develop motivation and skills to go straight to work on release.

It is also worth noting the good work which is being done by the SPS, along with it's partner organisations. An important factor in helping these organisations to help prisoners and ex-offenders is strong employer engagement in specific schemes and policy initiatives. The work of the Scottish Welfare to Work Advisory Task Force sub group could provide valuable lessons on how schemes can be mainstreamed and possibly rolled out to other prisons and using other sectors.