



Cabinet Office

Supporting Ex-Offenders on their Path to Employment

Call for Evidence Summary of Responses

June 2019

Cabinet Office

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Executive Summary

A government Call for Evidence on supporting people with convictions on their path to employment, was issued by the Cabinet Office and Ministry of Justice (MoJ) in early July 2018; it ran until the 31st of August 2018. The aim of the consultation was to gather evidence, insights and intelligence from public, private and voluntary sector employers, organisations and professionals who support, or have an interest in supporting, people with convictions to gain sustainable employment.

The call for evidence comprised 15 research questions which can be summarised into three main themes:

1. **Inclusive Recruitment Practices:** What are employers doing, if anything, to create fair opportunities for people with criminal records to compete for jobs within their organisations in the UK? What information or support would help employers to make the decision to remove the criminal conviction declaration tick-box from their job application forms?
2. **Employability Initiatives:** Aside from inclusive recruitment practices, what types of initiatives and support are being offered by employers, organisations and charities to help improve the employability of people with convictions and/or reduce the stigma associated with recruiting them?
3. **Evidence and Impact:** What impact have these recruitment practices and employability initiatives had on businesses and ex-offenders, and what level of research exists to substantiate these findings?

The response to the Call for Evidence has contributed to improving our understanding of inclusive recruitment practices and employability initiatives being undertaken by employers that support people with convictions, as well as what helps them to improve employability skills and address attitudinal barriers among employers in relation to this topic. The consultation has also provided different types of evidence in relation to our main themes of interest.

Our analysis of the Call for Evidence responses is divided into three main parts, as per the three main research themes: recruitment practices, employability initiatives, and evidence of impact. The first section summarises the processes followed by organisations, while the last two set out the impact of their activities.

In total 76 organisations from the voluntary (46%), private (32%), and public (14%) sectors responded to the Call for Evidence. Overall, 73% of the organisations that responded do hire people with a criminal conviction, either directly or through intermediary companies, suppliers or contractors. Over half (56%) of them ask about convictions in a later stage of the recruitment process (i.e. during interview, at the offer stage, etc.) – in line with good practice.

The majority of the organisations providing evidence not only hire people with convictions themselves, but also actively help and support people with criminal records

to find employment, via a wide range of initiatives (e.g. employment preparation, mentoring, training, etc.). Most of the organisations stated that their activities have a positive impact on the people they work with, people with convictions in general, and also on the local community and wider society. However, this was seldom backed by hard evidence, indicating that much more work needs to be done around evaluating these initiatives.

Overall, the Call for Evidence has provided very useful insights for the Civil Service and organisations in general on how to engage in activities that support people with a conviction in finding employment. Furthermore, the Call for Evidence has helped to identify barriers and challenges, both within and outside organisations, when employing people with convictions, and highlights the need for a communication strategy on the benefits of this practice.

Introduction

In 2017, the Civil Service reaffirmed its ambition to become the most inclusive employer in the UK by 2020 through the publication of our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy¹. More recently, in 2018, the Ministry of Justice published their Education and Employment Strategy to create a system where each person with a criminal record is set on a path to employment from the outset.²

With a similar goal, in 2018 the Civil Service also launched a pilot scheme called 'Going Forward into Employment' (GFIE). Under the GFIE pilot programme, which is still ongoing at the time of publishing this report, people with criminal records have been matched to fixed-term office-based and field-based jobs in participating government departments, via a two-year recruitment exception route. Prison and probation staff have been responsible for selecting people with convictions who are considered to be ready and willing to rehabilitate. The GFIE project team matches these potential candidates to vacancies in the participating government departments. A thorough risk assessment is carried out by the prison governors for each candidate against specific posts, and summaries of these are shared with departments once the candidate is matched to a role. The suitable candidates are usually then invited to interview for the roles. Full training, development and support is provided to all candidates and their managers to ensure that responsibilities and services to the public are effectively delivered.

The GFIE pilot scheme has three main aims:

1. To contribute to making the Civil Service the most inclusive employer in the UK by 2020;
2. To support people with criminal convictions in reducing reoffending by offering employment;
3. To reduce the social stigma around the employment of people with convictions and act as a role model to other employers.

The scheme is managed by the Cabinet Office, and other government departments and agencies have been supporting the management of the pilot initiative, including Ministry of Justice (MoJ), and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

The pilot started on a small scale in the North West of England in early 2018. Cabinet Office worked with local prisons to identify people who were due to leave custody, and who would be suitable to put forward for Civil Service jobs. Following the pilot, the Civil Service aims to roll the scheme out gradually across other regions, such as the South East – starting relatively small and building up in the same manner as the government apprenticeship scheme.

This Call for Evidence that was published in early July 2018 is part of our wider evaluation plan of the GFIE scheme, with the aim of understanding the inclusive

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-brilliant-civil-service-becoming-the-uks-most-inclusive-employer>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-and-employment-strategy-2018>

recruitment practices and employability initiatives for people with convictions that exist outside of the Civil Service, and the extent to which they have been evaluated.

Structure of the Call for Evidence

➤ Questions

The Call for Evidence was structured into three main sections to assess 1. *Inclusive Recruitment Practices*; 2. *Employability Initiatives*; 3. *Evidence and Impact*. Table 1 below summarises the main questions asked for each of these sections, while the full publication can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/supporting-ex-offenders-on-their-path-to-employment-a-government-call-for-evidence>.

Table 1. Call for Evidence questions.

Sections	Questions
Inclusive Recruitment Practices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have you heard of the Ban the Box Campaign? 2. Do you, or any of the companies, suppliers, or contractors you use, hire people with a criminal record? <p><u>If you do hire people with a criminal record:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. To what extent would you say the hiring of ex-offenders is an intentional or inadvertent recruitment practice at your organisation? 4. At what stage in the recruitment process, if at all, do you ask about criminal convictions? Please list each stage. 5. Are there any types of convictions that would prevent someone taking up specific roles in your organisation? Please list the roles and related offences. 6. What are the types of roles people with a criminal conviction can apply for in your organisation? Please give details. 7. What attitudinal or practical barriers, if any, has your organisation faced in recruiting people with criminal convictions? 8. What has been your overall experience of hiring people with criminal convictions? <p><u>If you do NOT hire people with a criminal record:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. If your organisation does not hire people with a criminal record, to what extent is this an active policy?
Employability initiatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Does your organisation act to help ex-offenders on their path to employment and if so, how? Please be as specific as possible. 11. Are there any specific “types” of ex-offenders you support and any you would not work with? Please provide details. 12. How do you identify or target the ex-offenders you support? Please provide details. 13. Why did your organisation decide to offer this support to ex-offenders (whether working directly with them/supporting other organisations to do so/ or running campaigns)?
Evidence and Impact	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. What impacts do you think your recruitment practices and/or employability initiatives have had? Do you have any research or evidence to support these findings? 15. Does your organisation keep a record of the number of employees it has recruited with a criminal record? If so, how do you record this?

➤ Audience

Anyone could respond to this Call for Evidence. However, we were particularly interested in receiving responses from public, private and voluntary sector employers, organisations and professionals who:

- proactively hire people with a criminal conviction and/or offer fair opportunities for people with a criminal conviction to apply for vacancies;
- impose restrictions and/or bans on the hiring of people with convictions for some or all jobs depending on the offence(s) committed;
- work directly with people with criminal records to improve their employability for example, through the provision of skills training, outreach, mentoring, work placements, etc.;
- work with or advise other organisations on creating fair recruitment practices and supporting people with convictions in the labour market;
- campaign to reduce the stigma associated with having, or hiring someone with a criminal conviction.

The definition of a person with a criminal conviction adopted for the purpose of this Call for Evidence is as follows:

‘A person admitting or being found guilty of a criminal offence, who has been given some form of disposal under the criminal justice system.

Disposals include, but are not limited to: a discharge, fine, community sentence, custodial sentence (including mandatory and discretionary sentences, suspended sentences, and extended sentences, whether served in prison or detention), an ancillary order (e.g. compensation order), cautions, reprimands and warnings.’

High Level Summary of Responses to Call for Evidence

➤ Respondents

In total 76 organisations responded to the Call for Evidence. Almost half of the organisations were from the voluntary sector (46%), a third from the private sector (32%), and 14% of them were part of the public sector. Figure 1 below shows a breakdown of the sectors of the responding organisations.

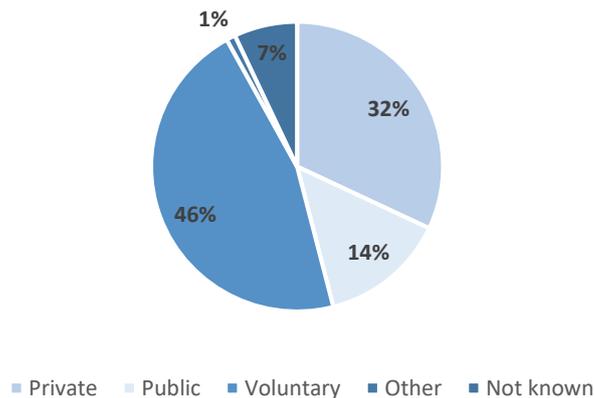


Figure 1. Sectors of responding organisations.

Out of these 76 organisations, 22% can be considered small organisations, with between 1 and 20 employees, another 21% could be considered medium, with between 20 and 100 employees, and the remaining 37% large, with more than 100 employees. For the remaining 20% this information is not available.

The findings reported in the following sections are based on analysis of all the submissions received (76 in total). A full list of the organisations that responded to the Call for Evidence is included in Appendix A.

➤ Section 1: Inclusive Recruitment Practices

The first part of the Call for Evidence focussed on the recruitment practices adopted by organisations that employ people with criminal records. This information is useful for understanding the processes followed outside the Civil Service, and the most common recruitment steps.

The Call for Evidence asked whether responding organisations themselves, or the companies, suppliers, or contractors they used, hire people with criminal records. Over half, 51 of the 76 organisations, confirmed that they do hire people with convictions (the remaining organisations skipped the question), of which 73% do so directly, and 27% indirectly via companies, suppliers, or contractors. For 11 organisations these two practices overlap. A breakdown by sector of responding organisations who hire directly people with criminal records is shown in Figure 2 below. The Call for Evidence suggests that the voluntary sector, among the respondents, leads in this area, emphasising the importance of schemes like Going Forward into Employment to boost good practice in the public sector. For more than half of the organisations that directly hire people with convictions (53%), their customers, suppliers, and other employers, are aware of this practice.

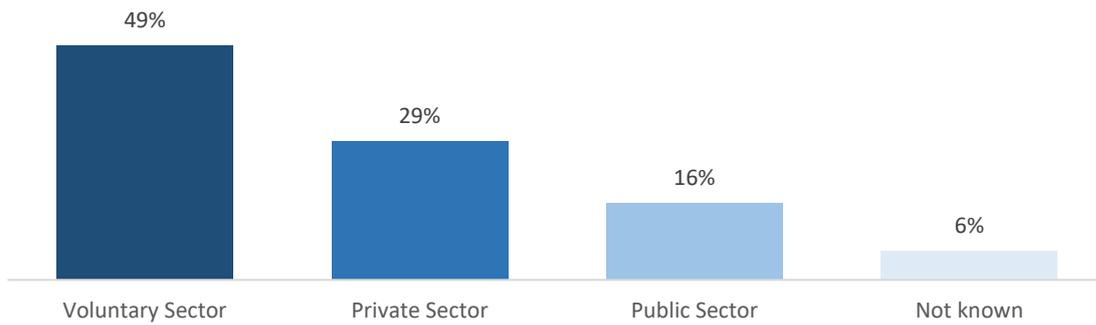


Figure 2. Breakdown by sector of organisations that employ people with convictions from responses to our Call for Evidence.

To gain additional information on the organisations’ recruitment practices, respondents indicated whether they were aware of the “Ban the Box” campaign. Out of 65 organisations that replied to the question, 83% confirmed to know about this initiative, while 17% had never heard of it.

On the same topic, we assessed at what stage in their recruitment processes, organisations asked about criminal conviction history. Out of the 54 responses to this question, the findings suggest that this type of information was collected mainly at the initial stage of recruitment (38%), or at the job offer stage (33%). Further details presented in the charts below indicate that the voluntary sector tends to ask the question about conviction at a later stage compared to the private and public sectors.

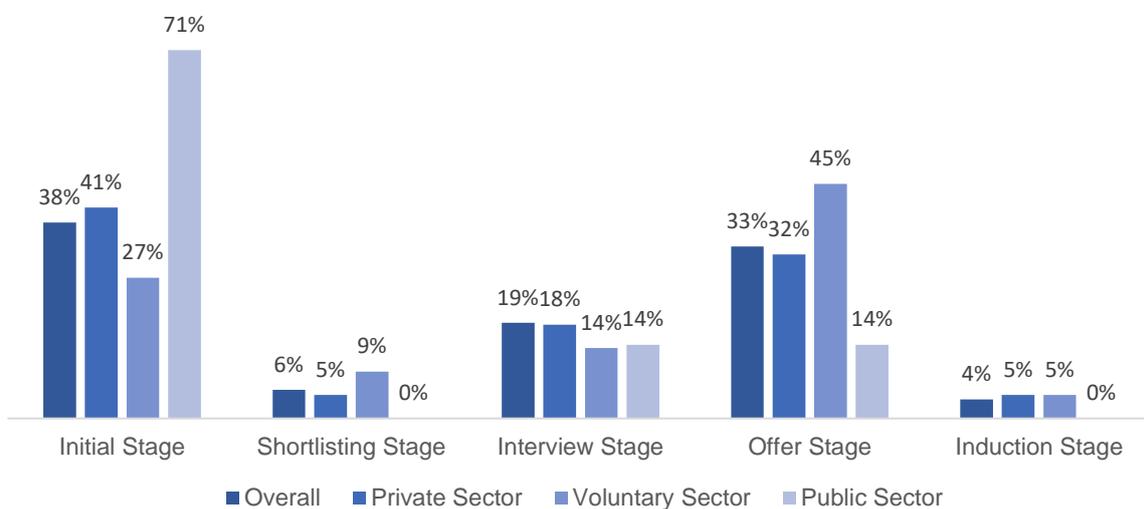


Figure 3. Assessment of criminal conviction at the different recruitment stages.

In relation to the security clearance level needed for the role, out of the 76 organisations, only 64% responded. Of these, the large majority need to conduct a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, or an enhanced DBS. A few others indicated they required a full security clearance, vetting checks, or Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check.

Furthermore, 86% of the 51 organisations that hire people with convictions directly or indirectly, indicated that this is an intentional practice. This intentional practice involves both active engagement in providing support, but also having proactive HR practices. Active engagement approaches are illustrated in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Type of active engagement.

Two thirds of the organisations that hire people with criminal records, indicated they have pro-active HR practices in this area including:

- Following and complying with employment and equal opportunities legislation, e.g. the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act;
- Implementing “Ban the Box” and other active HR policies on recruiting people with convictions.

Describing other aspects of their recruitment practices, 32 organisations (42%) mentioned that they require some minimum criteria to hire someone with convictions. Examples of these are:

- qualifications (41%),
- work experience (22%),
- general ability to satisfy the role requirements (22%),
- key skills (11%),
- education (6%),
- not specified (3%).

38 out of 76 organisations indicated the type of roles offered in their organisations to people with criminal convictions, for a total of 62 different jobs. The majority of roles that tend to be offered are customer service roles, but it is interesting that a significant proportion of those mentioned involved management responsibilities. Additional details are presented in Figure 5.

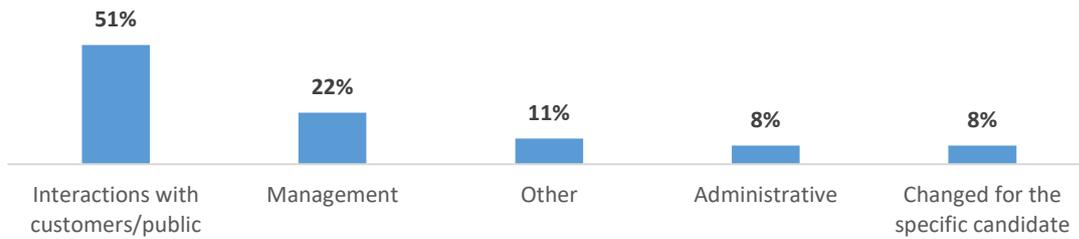


Figure 5. Types of role offered.

Organisations submitting evidence also highlighted some of the barriers to hiring people with convictions. The main barriers were either attitudinal, practical, or reputational. Examples of attitudinal barriers:

- Personal attitudes of people with criminal convictions: how they feel about their circumstances, affecting their willingness to apply;
- Staff resistance: attitudes of other staff regarding their employer hiring or working with people with criminal convictions;
- Employer resistance: negative attitudes of other employers regarding working with organisations that employ people with criminal convictions;
- Societal attitudes: relating to negative perceptions held by society regarding people with criminal convictions.

Further practical challenges relate to personal issues affecting people with criminal convictions that may be ongoing, and therefore require appropriate support and resources; this can hinder the transition into employment and also affect the stability of employment.

Overall, around 84% of the 57 organisations that evaluated their experience of hiring people with convictions, rated this as positive. Table 2 presents some main emerging themes with examples of positive comments.

Table 2. Main themes associated with the positive experience of hiring people with convictions.

Theme	Example Anonymous positive quote
Personal qualities of employees with criminal convictions	<i>“These staff tend to work extremely well, are productive and eager to learn. They are committed, have a good understanding and knowledge of themselves making for a supportive team member”.</i>
Specific experiences of people with convictions as an asset	<i>“Working with people from different backgrounds and with different experiences adds to the diversity of the team and people with lived experience of the criminal justice system can offer valuable insights that help us offer a more effective service”.</i>
Impact on organisation service delivery and external stakeholders	<i>“Members of a number of business networks and our members within those groups continually commission work from us and recommend the services to friends and other business”.</i>

➤ Section 2: Employability Initiatives

A second theme of the Call for Evidence was around the employability initiatives undertaken by the responding organisations to help people with convictions to find employment. Most of the sample of organisations, 71%, indicated that they actively support people in securing a job – these were mainly charities (63%), or private sector organisations (20%). The types of support activities are shown in Figure 6.

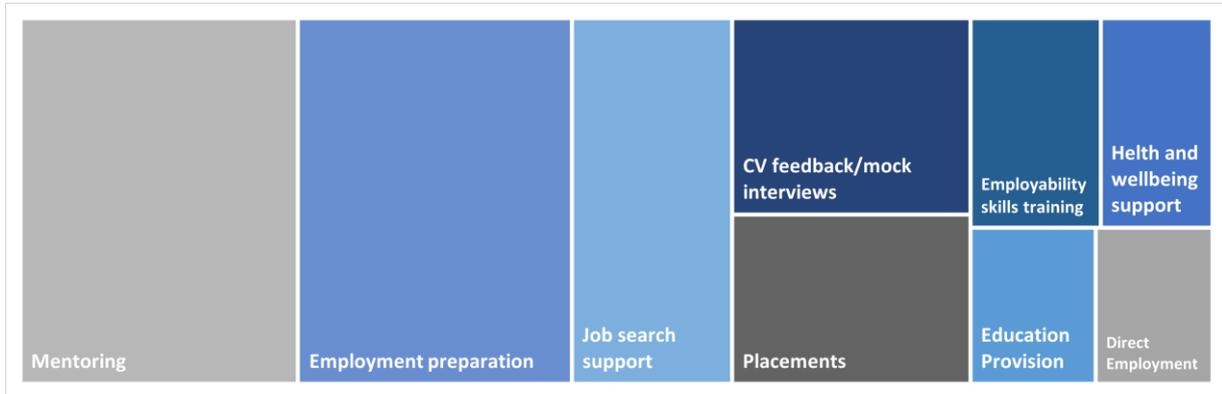


Figure 6. Activities to support people with criminal records in finding employment.

The two most common activities were: employment preparation and mentoring. Employment preparation activities focus on supporting people with criminal records to be ready for employment and provide targeted support to help them in gaining employment. Key activities include:

- support around disclosing offences and understanding career aspirations;
- employability programmes: providing training, education support and employment opportunities;
- work readiness preparation: provision of training on workplace environments;
- integrated rehabilitation support for prisoners to support pathways into employment, including important practical help obtaining housing;
- other practical support: help obtaining relevant work identity documents.

Mentoring was also a common theme emerging from the evidence review and examples of quotes are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Mentoring activities.

Mentoring themes	Example Anonymous Quotes
Personal development: confidence/ self-esteem/developing social networks	<i>"...employment programme coupled with wrap-around support, confidence building and personal development".</i>
Provision of ongoing support once in employment	<i>"Much encouragement - ongoing - including post-employment support".</i>
Mentoring support to overcome barriers and deal with complex needs	<i>"Work directly with young people who have complex needs in prison to help improve their emotional well-being".</i>
Importance of one to one mentoring	<i>"Support is tailored to the individual and on a one-to-one basis".</i>

Most of the organisations that responded to the Call for Evidence reported working in partnership with other companies via networking groups, in which they share learning and good practices. They also share referral partners, such as prisons, probation service, job centres, etc., to develop referral routes for prisoners and signposting them to other agencies and organisations upon release. These organisations are active promoters and advocates of the employment of people with convictions.

An interesting point that emerged from this section of the Call for Evidence relates to the reasons why these organisations believe it is important to support people with criminal records in finding employment. In detail, almost half of our sample, 45% of organisations, explained their reasons, including:

- to make a positive change in people's lives (24%);
- it is beneficial for the business (24%);
- it is the mission of the organisation (21%);
- to fulfil a need for resources in the sector (18%);
- it is beneficial for society (less than 10%);
- to ensure fair treatment to those with criminal records (less than 10%);
- to follow others' example (less than 10%).

➤ Section 3: Evidence and Impact

The third section of the Call for Evidence asked for any evidence of impact. The large majority of the organisations participating in the Call for Evidence reported that they believe their activities have a positive impact. This positive impact is mainly due to the employability initiatives (61%) that are carried out, as well as the support provided by staff and volunteers within the organisation. The main beneficiary mentioned was the target of the intervention, i.e. people with criminal convictions that work with the organisations (39%). However, benefits to the local community (10%) and wider society (13%) were also reported. Table 4 highlights the groups mentioned, the positive impact organisations responding to the Call for Evidence believe these groups receive, and anonymous examples of quotes. Organisations also highlighted that there may well be negative impacts and costs especially in cases where the employment does not work out, although none of these have been found in our assessment to date.

Table 4. Examples of Positive Impact mentioned in Call for Evidence.

Group impacted	Type of positive outcome	Example Anonymous Quotes
People with criminal convictions who have been employed	Gaining employment Personal development and springboard for other opportunities	<i>"Over the course of the pilot we worked with 34 participants, successfully supporting 12 into employment upon release".</i> <i>"...analysis of the benefits of attending courses, the highest gains were seen in skills, knowledge and confidence, progression to further learning and social interaction".</i>
People with criminal convictions in general	Positive role model for other people with criminal convictions Changing attitudes	<i>"in my previous jobs the employers saw me as an asset because of my lived experience and I was able to draw from that so that I could support the young people I worked with to help them have better outcomes".</i> <i>"...advocate for people with lived experience".</i>
Society	Reducing reoffending and positive societal impact	<i>"The re-offending rate is vastly reduced as are the frequent visits to GP's and hospitals".</i> <i>"...improvements in health, well-being, cognitive ability, social and family life are immeasurably improved along with confidence and self-respect".</i>
Local community	Positive impact on family and local communities	<i>"...impact their families and the communities in which they live".</i> <i>"...difference to local communities".</i>

Organisations were also asked whether they had any evidence to support the impact they reported. The types of evidence available vary: the majority reported having anecdotal evidence (22%), or case study testimonials (21%), while more than one third of the sample reported having more robust evidence such as administrative data (26%) or statistical evidence (9%). This evidence feels like a good starting point but more research is needed to understand the impact of these organisations' activities particularly on people with criminal records and the wider societal benefits.

Conclusion and next steps

The Call for Evidence has elicited a significant body of information that provided Cabinet Office with a snapshot of the current practices and initiatives across different sectors to support people with convictions in finding employment. Overall the evidence that emerged from the analysis of responses are positive. The results highlight how having specific recruitment practices and employability initiatives that reduce the barriers to employment for people with criminal records could have positive impact on the individuals involved, the organisations they are part of, and wider society as a whole in the long term.

Key messages from the analysis of the Call for Evidence include:

- a. There are some indications (from the respondents to this Call for Evidence) that variations exist across the different sectors in relation to employing people with criminal records and at which stage of the recruitment this information is taken into account. Asking about criminal records should not constitute a barrier or a filtering criteria for offering employment;
- b. Organisations that employ people with convictions across different roles - and responsibilities - reported having positive experiences, and affirmed that this part of the workforce constitutes an important asset thanks to their skills, commitment and experiences;
- c. Attitudinal barriers across stakeholders, including customers, colleagues, and even people with criminal records themselves, are reported to be the main challenges to offering employment to someone with a conviction; consequentially cultural change is likely needed;
- d. It is important to have activities that support and prepare people with convictions to be in the job market; examples are CV surgeries, mock interviews, mentoring schemes;
- e. There is the need to produce and collect more robust evidence – in addition to case studies – that prove the positive impact of hiring people with convictions.

The value of this Call for Evidence does not merely derive from the immediate actions taken as a result of it, but from inspiring further Civil Service and Government reforms in this field. The Civil Service looks forward to working with its stakeholders to be more inclusive, and promoting a culture that supports people with convictions on their path to employment.

Annex A: Respondents

- Accord Housing Association
- ANA Treatment Centres
- Antz
- Arts Council England
- Aspire Oxford
- Back on Track Manchester
- Big Society Capital
- Bright Ideas Trust
- BTEG
- Business in the Community
- Capital Tutorials
- Career Connect (inc. Achieve NW)
- Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
- Clean Sheet
- Clinks and the National criminal Justice Arts Alliance (NCJAA)
- Community Justice Scotland
- Crisis
- Croner Ltd
- Croner-i Ltd
- De Profundis Ltd
- Derby College
- Derventio Housing Trust
- Dominic Headley & Associates Ltd
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Empower Employability Mentoring Programme CIC
- Enterprise Inspiration
- Fresh Start 4U project, City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council
- Fusion21 Ltd
- Greggs
- Halfords Ltd
- Homeless Link
- HR-inform
- Karen Evans
- Khulisa
- LTE Group, Further Education Corporation (FEC) (trading as Novus)
- MAXIMUS UK
- Nacro
- n-ergy group ltd
- "N"gage Training Scheme
- NHS Employers (part of the NHS Confederation)
- North West Anglia NHS foundation Trust
- Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS FT
- Offpoy Community Interest Company (CIC)
- Only A Pavement Away
- Open University
- Peabody
- Pecan
- Peninsula Business Services
- Positive Changes (Scotland) CIC
- The Prince's Trust
- Recovery Connections
- Renfrewshire Council (Invest in Renfrewshire)
- Ricoh UK
- Sara Putt Associates
- Seetec
- Shaw Trust
- Society of St James
- St Giles Trust
- Synergy Theatre Project
- Tempus Novo
- THE GROWTH COMPANY
- The Poppy Factory
- The Prison Reform Trust
- The Skill Mill
- The Wallich
- Thirteen Housing Group
- University of Nottingham
- Unlock
- UnLtd
- User Voice
- Wates Construction Limited
- West Yorkshire Police
- Working Chance
- Women in Prison
- Movement to Work
- Recycling Lives