

**REIMAGINE**  
CHALLENGE



Cabinet Office



# Reimagine Challenge: **Criminal Justice**



# Reimagine Reducing Reoffending

Responsible department:

**Ministry of Justice**

Departmental challenge:

**Over time, the prison population in Britain has risen sharply. How can we reimagine the criminal justice process to reduce reoffending, taking the pressure off society and our prisons? How can more employers be encouraged to take on more people leaving the prison system, and how can ex-offenders be supported to find employment upon leaving the prison system?**



## Introduction

**For the last two years, KPMG has worked with Whitehall departments to address some of the biggest policy challenges facing the government – building joint teams to investigate social or economic issues and devise workable solutions.**

Under the Reimagine Challenge programme, KPMG specialists and staff from across the civil service work together over a period of months to research specific policy areas. With the guidance of senior departmental leaders and the support of KPMG’s data, design and digital teams, they develop evidence-based, pilot-ready proposals for tackling departments’ public policy goals.

I’ve always been hugely impressed by the quality of the ideas, and am delighted to join this year’s judging panel as KPMG’s representative – replacing Kru Desai. The panel also includes Permanent Secretaries and Director-Generals, and is chaired by Civil Service Chief Executive John Manzoni. And whilst the winning teams receive active Cabinet Office backing to turn their plans into reality, all of them also end up strengthening the wider operation of government – building connections, developing skills, improving understanding, and feeding into departmental policy-making.

As we launch the 2018 Reimagine Challenge, we’re publishing the 2017 teams’ final submissions. In many cases, civil servants continue to develop these ideas inside government – so if you see something that chimes with your own goals or requirements, then drop me a line and we’ll put you in touch with the team.

The Reimagine Challenge exists to help solve complex, far-reaching public policy challenges by bringing people together across sectoral, policy and professional lines. **Why not join the conversation?**

**Nicholas Fox**  
Head of Government

## So what’s the idea?

Employed ex-offenders are far less likely to reoffend. Employers find it ever harder to recruit. These groups struggle to connect – so we have built a bridge called **NetWork** to help ex-offenders change their lives and secure meaningful employment, and help employers find potential new employees.

Government research indicates that 44.1% of those released from prison over the year to June 2015 reoffended within 12 months, at a cost of £9.5-13bn to the economy. Research shows that prisoners with shorter sentences in employment post-release are 9.4% less likely to reoffend than their unemployed counterparts. In a survey of 1,435 prisoners, 68% said employment is the most important factor preventing reoffending.

Finding work is hard if you’re entering the job market with a criminal record and potentially little experience, qualifications or references. Therefore, only 25% of those leaving prison have a job to go to, and one year on just 17% of offenders are in employment.

We know employers are open to hiring ex-offenders and that there are a number of incentives to do so with low unemployment rates and specific labour market shortages putting pressure on business. This challenge will only be exacerbated after Brexit with reliance on EU workforce disproportionately affecting certain industries, e.g. food manufacturing (30%), construction (8%), chefs (5%), house-keeping (37%) and agriculture (65%).

Our solution, **NetWork**, involves an innovative digital marketplace approach where employers can connect with ex-offenders with particular skills, interests and attributes. Ex-offenders can gain access to real and sustainable employment opportunities. Unlike a traditional jobs board, **NetWork** takes a broader approach in that it will serve as a centralised platform to help both employers and ex-offenders navigate employment opportunities and create a community of good practice and act as a knowledge hub to support both groups.

**NetWork** would be accessible to the prison and probation services as well as the 1,800+ charities working in the criminal justice field, which struggle with a lack of information and disparate connections around employment support. It would

also be accessible to those with a criminal record who are preparing to leave, or have already left, the prison system. Fundamentally, the platform catalyses – rather than duplicates – these efforts creating a multiplier effect, offering economies of scale to support these organisations with efficiencies.

**NetWork** can provide high quality data, not currently collected, on information such as skills and experience of ex-offenders, job connection and retention rates with employers, and employers who are both open to employing people with a criminal record and do so in practice. This information is crucial for prison governors to understand their local labour markets and tailor their education and training options and services accordingly. As the data improves, so will prison services, improving the employment opportunities of workers to their locality.

### Who did you consult, and what did they tell you?

We've consulted offenders, NGOs, former and current prison governors, offender training providers, digital, criminal justice and labour market specialists from the MoJ, DWP, and social enterprise companies.

**NetWork** is fundamentally a system for connecting offenders and employers – and their feedback has shaped it. Offenders in HMPs Forest Bank and Wandsworth stressed the importance and need to find work quickly after release. Employers explained that labour markets are tight – and getting tighter. They asked for quicker, cheaper ways to recruit, and more accessible guidance on how to go about employing ex-offenders.

Prison governors told us that resources are scarce, and welcomed the concept's integration with the offender management model. They also asked us to ensure that the system can work on and off-line depending on the technology available in each prison.

At a round table convened with NGOs, the messages were that rehabilitation charities struggle to connect with offenders and employers, and operate in a fragmented landscape.

**NetWork** will amplify, rather than duplicate, their efforts.

**NetWork** is aligned to current policy including governor autonomy and the new offender management model. Apprenticeships and the development of the New Futures Network provides another opportunity to support and champion connectivity between employers and offenders with **NetWork** acting as the hub for such interactions.

### What are the key obstacles, and how would you address them?

One of the biggest challenges is the perceived stigma of employers. Research by Holzer et al suggests that stigma varies between sectors, and can be reduced by better information. Employers are not a homogenous group; many desperately need staff but don't engage this latent labour market due to its complexity, rather than any fundamental stigma. **NetWork** seeks to initially unite the 'willing and able' on both sides – as it develops and succeeds, the resulting benefits can be used to widen the circle of use and create a virtuous circle that works to change the public perception of ex-offenders' worth to society.

**NetWork** is best described as an online platform. However, given the timescales involved in the rollout of digital prisons, **NetWork** will be accessible offline by ex-offenders, using tablets which can be connected to the internet later or paper forms, with prison, probation, and/or third sector staff inputting the data into the system afterwards through the new offender management model.

### What evidence do you have that this proposal is efficient and scalable?

We have identified a potential digital partner in Get My First Job: a social enterprise company with approval as a government supplier with a tried and tested online system that has succeeded in targeting unemployed youth and has the capabilities to be adapted to the ex-offender context. Get My First Job also has an established client list of employers. Adapting their systems in a constructive partnership is estimated to cost c.£75k with an annual £1.5k maintenance charge. **NetWork** will also harness network effects – the more offenders and employers that use it, the greater the incentives and opportunities for others to use it. There are also impressive returns to scale as the marginal cost of adding new users is negligible.

The benefits and impacts of our solution will be tangible and measurable. In 2014/15 the total reported number of offenders in the UK stood at 118,038 offenders. The cost of re-offending to the UK economy is £13 billion, this comes to £110,134 per person. If **NetWork** manages to get just 2% of this population into work we would be helping 2,361 people secure jobs. We estimate this would lead to a cost saving of over £250 million.

Communications and support staffing costs will also need consideration – but the potential benefits of the tool and its scalability are vast. Reoffending causes economic and social damage, and places additional burdens on services across communities; but if ex-offenders can find employment, they become a net contributor to society and public finances. With employed ex-offenders 25% less likely to be re-convicted, the programme will break even if it creates a marginal improvement in employment rates. Furthermore, the improved data will inform expenditure by prison governors on training and education to achieve greater value for money. **NetWork** provides effective tools to support and enable those staff already working in this area more efficiently.

In terms of rollout, we have a pilot ready to go in Manchester with willing partners such as HMP Forest Bank, local employers, and NGOs to test the solution, and a technology supplier able to create a minimum viable product for **NetWork**. Subsequent rollout will progress through new geographical areas, types of offender and labour markets, and is scalable to incorporate community-based groups. The system is equally able to cater for non-custodial offenders or provide the conditional element to early release; or non-custodial sentences.

**Our solution is ready to go and will provide a lasting benefit to society – creating growth, changing lives, improving information flows – demonstrating the net worth of NetWork.**

# Team members



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