

A blurred, blue-tinted photograph of a crowd of people walking, likely in a public space or transit area. The image is out of focus, creating a sense of movement and a busy environment.

Employers' perception of best practice in prison education

Research report



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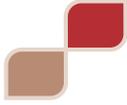
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Foreword

Over the past 20 years the prison population has doubled and the Ministry of Justice expects it to continue to rise. Moreover, most of those who leave prison return within a year. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the prevention of reoffending is a major concern of the prison and probation services and other agencies. CfBT is not alone in being keenly aware of the positive effect of employment on reducing reoffending, particularly among young men. However, 2.7 million people are currently unemployed, including around 25 per cent of young men, and while competition for jobs is tough for all, it is especially so for ex-offenders.

This report points to some stark realities. For example, around 30 per cent of employers would never countenance employing an ex-offender irrespective of their skills and work ethic. Far more positive, however, is the finding that many employers, including most large corporations, think they have a responsibility to help rehabilitate ex-offenders into society. They recognise that employment is a key to this. Nevertheless, most employers associate ex-offenders with a lack of work-related skills, and for that reason are reluctant to consider recruiting them.

Nearly all employers want candidates with the key employability skills of literacy and numeracy. They also seek candidates with the so-called 'soft skills', including positive attitudes to work and the ability to work well with others. CfBT provides education in some young offender institutions, perhaps the most challenging educational environment in the prison estate. Like most education providers, CfBT recognises the importance in the curriculum of these distinct but closely-related sets of skills, along with craft and trade skills such as building, painting and decorating to help young people access apprenticeships on release.

Employers are often uncertain about how well prison education and training equip prisoners with the skills that they need for employment. Many employers would be more inclined to help if they knew that ex-offenders had the requisite skills and attributes. We hope that this report provides a timely, up-to-date and clear picture for employers considering employing people who have served a prison sentence.

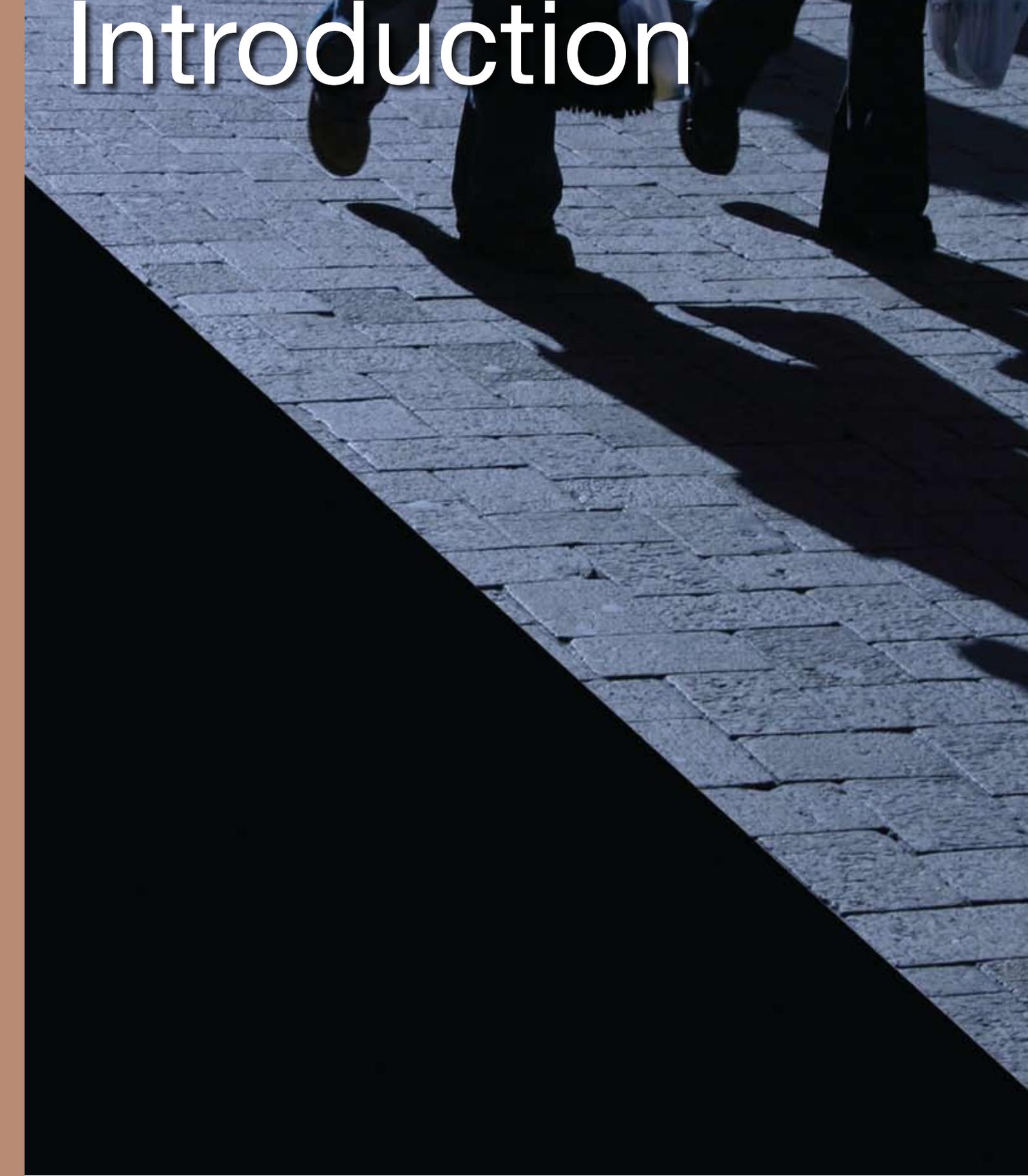


Sir Jim Rose, CBE

Chairman of the Education Committee, CfBT Education Trust



Introduction





1. Introduction

Background

The aim of this research report is to understand how employers perceive ex-offenders leaving prison, and what can be done to promote employment among this group. In addition to understanding the impact qualifications and training may have on employment prospects, the research explores how employers rate the usefulness of prison education and where these perceptions stem from.

The report is broken down into broad themes which are explored in turn within the report:

- The general approach employers take to hiring new candidates and what policy may exist on ex-offenders within their organisation;
- Employers' direct experience of employing ex-offenders (among those employers that have done so);
- Attitude toward employing ex-offenders in the future among all employers;
- Barriers that exist in employing ex-offenders and factors which may help to further promote their employment.

The report principally compares the responses from employers who have hired ex-offenders with those from employers who have never done so. Where patterns emerge the findings are further analysed by, among other factors, sector, industry, and size of organisation.

All comparisons reported are statistically significant, unless otherwise stated.



Method

The research was carried out online among n=1051 employers in England. Fieldwork was undertaken between 2nd and 13th September 2011 through the YouGov panel. Data is weighted by sector, industry and size of organisation in order to be representative of businesses in England.

Small organisations with up to five employees were screened out of the survey.

Employers were defined as people working at senior manager and above, with some responsibility for recruitment.



Within the sample, 69 per cent had never employed an ex-offender, leaving 31 per cent who had. A full sample breakdown can be seen below:

Sample breakdown			
		Unweighted	Weighted
Sector	Private	n = 694	n = 653
	Public	n = 225	n = 326
	Voluntary	n = 132	n = 73
Industry	Manufacturing	n = 161	n = 189
	Education	n = 55	n = 26
	Healthcare	n = 96	n = 82
	Voluntary	n = 116	n = 63
	Private sector services	n = 538	n = 543
	Public admin and defence	n = 85	n = 147
Size of organisation	Small (6 – 49 employees)	n = 408	n = 305
	Medium (50 – 249 employees)	n = 220	n = 126
	Large (250+ employees)	n = 423	n = 620
Region	North	n = 215	n = 204
	Midlands	n = 115	n = 168
	East	n = 144	n = 139
	London	n = 214	n = 225
	South	n = 323	n = 314

Where applicable, quotes are used to illustrate the findings from the quantitative data. Ten in-depth telephone interviews were carried out between 15th and 22nd September 2011 with respondents to the quantitative survey.

Key findings

A low-angle, blue-tinted photograph showing the lower legs and feet of several people walking on a brick-paved path. The image is blurred to convey motion. In the center of the path, there is a circular manhole cover. The overall mood is professional and dynamic.



2. Key findings

Employers who commonly recruit ex-offenders are working in the voluntary sector, and to a lesser extent the public sector. Furthermore, employers tend to be from larger organisations, both in terms of the overall size of the organisation and the number of employees working on site.

On the whole, employers are positive about their experience of recruiting ex-offenders. A small proportion regard their experience as a negative one, with the remainder neither particularly positive nor negative about it. Reasons for having employed an ex-offender commonly relate to their skills and attributes, although a sense of social responsibility is evident, as in 'giving a second chance'. Large organisations also tend to mention the positive impact of hiring ex-offenders on their corporate social responsibility. Half of employers did not receive any support when hiring an ex-offender. Of those that did receive support, this is most likely to have come internally from their own organisation.

Different aspects of the crime, such as the type and number of convictions, are what employers most commonly take into account when considering an application from an ex-offender. A high proportion of employers also review the applicant's work experience, skills and qualifications. Other than having a criminal record, barriers to employment that employers highlight are a lack of work experience and skills. Indeed, work experience trials and voluntary work experience are common factors which would give employers more confidence in employing ex-offenders.

Over half of all employers agree they have a role to play in reintegrating ex-offenders, although there is a discrepancy in that three in ten also think employing an ex-offender is more hassle than it is worth. A third of employers agree prison education helps to make ex-offenders more employable. However, the notable proportion who neither agree nor disagree that prison education helps to make ex-offenders more employable, or answer 'don't know' indicates there is a relatively low understanding of what prison education provides. This is further illustrated by the low proportion of employers who have confidence in prison education to prepare ex-offenders for the world of work.



General approach to **hiring**



3. General approach to hiring

Employers were first asked about their general approach to hiring, without being prompted to think about ex-offenders. The aim of this is to provide an understanding of the context in which employers hire people. The section explores what factors influence an employer's hiring decision, the skills and attributes that employers are currently most looking for, and what policy their organisation may have on employing ex-offenders.

Factors that influence an employer's decision to hire

Employers were asked to what extent factors such as qualifications and experience influence their decision to hire someone. Relevant experience is most notably highlighted, with 78 per cent of all employers saying this influenced their decision 'a lot' (and 20 per cent a little). This is further highlighted by employers in the case studies:

'The first thing when looking at an application form would be any previous experience that would give them an edge.' Manager, Waste management

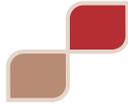
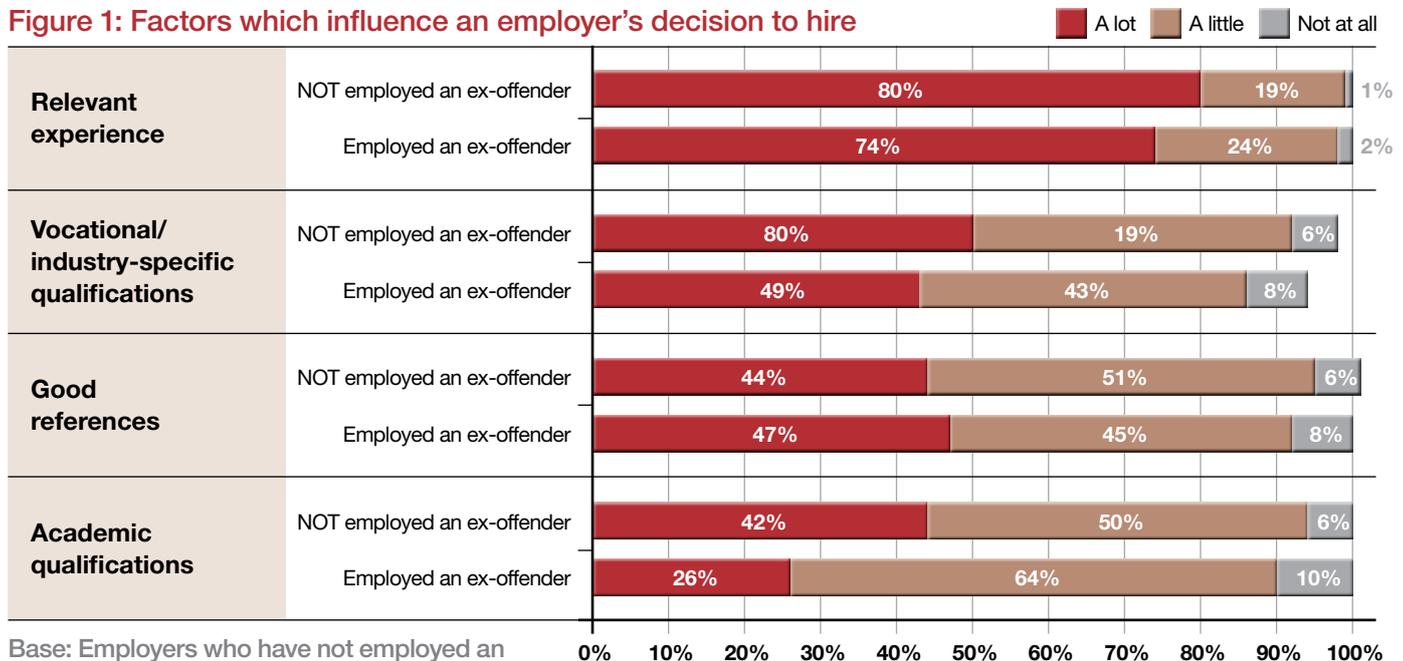
'So, for example, we might see ten CVs with people that have got their MCM, their Microsoft certifications and we might go, Well this guy who is an ex-offender has got his MCM but he's got no practical experience, 'cause he was able to sit it while inside. At that point the person becomes uncompetitive because you might have someone who does have their qualification and has three years' experience.' Risk and Controls Manager, Food manufacturing

Employers were generally positive in the case studies about the possibility of achieving work experience through trials set up for ex-offenders.

'I think experience in industry through work experience trials is equally valid to experience gained in a non-prison context.' IT Service Director, Financial services

'Work experience in prison shows willing, they have thought about what they want to do once they are released from prison. It makes you think that when they have committed to undertaking a work placement they are more likely in the future to be committed to you and your organisation.' Office Manager / Policy Officer, small charity

There is a general agreement about the importance of these factors among employers who have employed ex-offenders and those who have not, with one exception. That is, employers who have not employed ex-offenders are significantly more likely to think academic qualifications influence their decision 'a lot' (42 per cent compared with 26 per cent of employers who have employed an ex-offender). However this distinction is lost when analysing whether academic qualifications have any influence. A similar proportion of employers who have not employed ex-offenders (92 per cent), to those who have (90 per cent) then agree academic qualifications influence their decision either 'a lot' or 'a little'.


Figure 1: Factors which influence an employer's decision to hire


Base: Employers who have not employed an ex-offender n=727, employers who have employed an ex-offender n=324

The industries which are particularly influenced by academic qualifications are education (99 per cent) and healthcare (97 per cent). This compares with 88 per cent working in manufacturing, likewise 88 per cent in the voluntary sector.

Skills that candidates most need to demonstrate

Personal skills such as 'a positive attitude' (44 per cent), communication skills (37 per cent), and reliability (34 per cent) are highlighted as the type of skills or attributes applicants most need to demonstrate to prospective employers. Indeed, a positive attitude is deemed as important as having the technical skills to do the job (44 per cent compared with 43 per cent).

'Factors that would influence my decision to employ are attitude top and bottom, that's true of anybody I employ, it's their attitude and their approach to work.' Director in a small charity

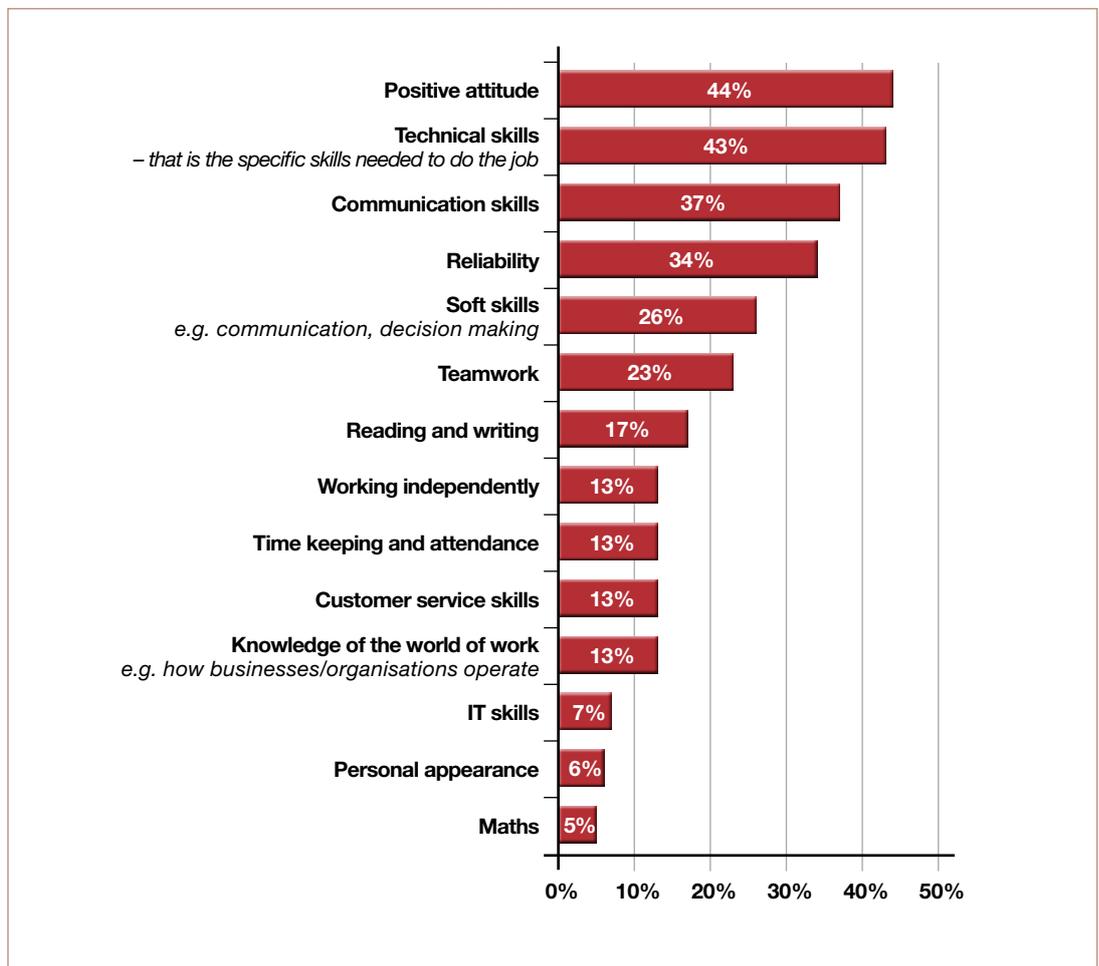
'And I think it's more about what attitude they've got, how keen they are to work for the organisation in the role. How committed they are? Are they going to turn up? Are they going to be on time? Are they going to be off sick? Are they going to reoffend?'

Senior Manager for a large bank

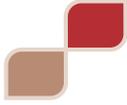
There are few statistically significant differences between employers who have and those who have not employed ex-offenders. It is regarding technical skills where there is some difference of opinion, with employers who have not employed ex-offenders rating technical skills as more important compared with employers who have employed them (48 per cent and 31 per cent respectively). Nonetheless it is important to note that technical skills remain the fourth most mentioned factor among employers of ex-offenders (after a positive attitude, reliability and communication skills).

Significantly more employers of ex-offenders rate 'time keeping and attendance' as an important attribute (17 per cent compared with 11 per cent of non-employers).

Figure 2: Skills/attributes potential applicants most need to demonstrate



Base: All employers n=1051



Technical skills remain important for employers in both the public (47 per cent) and private (42 per cent) sectors, significantly more so than for employers working in the voluntary sector (33 per cent). Furthermore, maths skills are significantly more important for private sector employers (7 per cent) than for public sector employers (3 per cent).

Soft skills are particularly valued by employers working in the public sector (32 per cent compared with 23 per cent working in the private sector). This is further emphasised by the importance of 'teamwork' skills mentioned by employers in the public sector (30 per cent compared with 20 per cent in the private sector).

The importance of soft skills such as communication and decision making are particularly important for large organisations (mentioned by 31 per cent of employers in large organisations compared with 20 per cent in small organisations). This is further illustrated by the importance of 'teamwork' skills which increase in line with the number of employees on site of the organisation (from 18 per cent among small organisations to 26 per cent in larger ones). This is consistent based on the size of the organisation as a whole, or the number of employees on site.

Again it is in the education and healthcare industries in which technical skills are regarded as particularly important (58 per cent and 48 per cent respectively), although employers working in manufacturing industry also highlight the importance of technical skills (48 per cent) among potential applicants.

Policy on ex-offenders

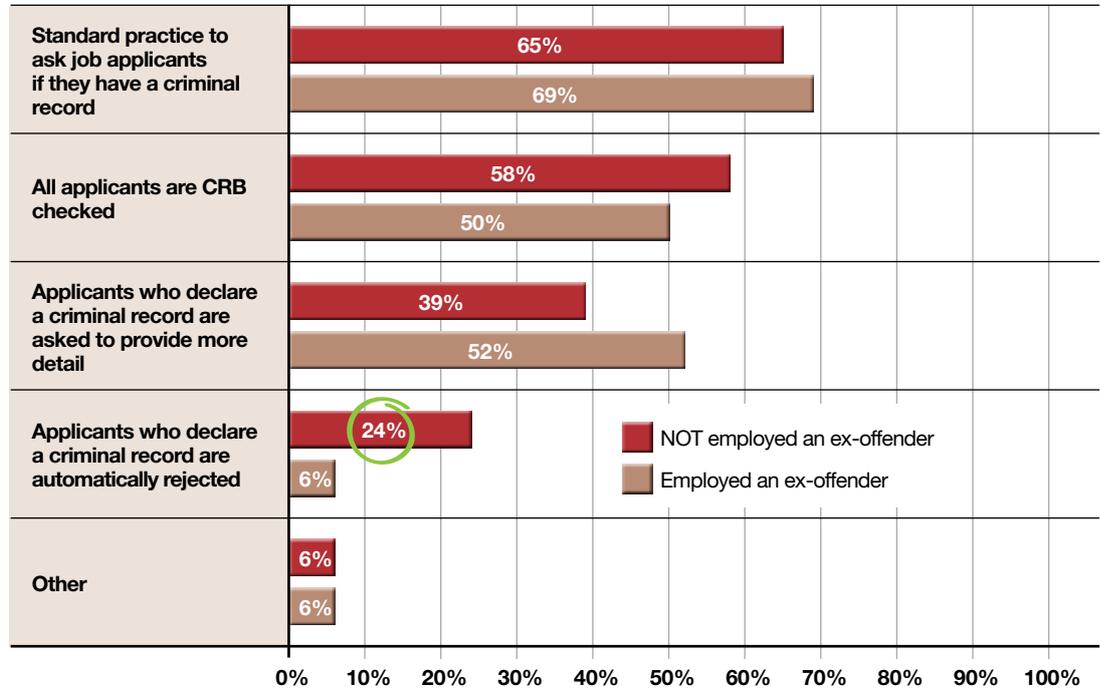
Around three in ten employers are aware that their organisation has a policy about the employment of ex-offenders. Of these, 73 per cent are familiar with the policy.

At least three in five employers who are aware of their organisation's policy on employing ex-offenders say it is standard practice to ask the job applicant if they have a criminal record and around half have all applicants CRB checked.

However, it is when applicants have a criminal record that employers who have and have not employed ex-offenders take a different stance. Employers who have not employed an ex-offender previously are less likely to ask for more detail (39 per cent), and significantly more likely to automatically reject the applicant (24 per cent compared with 6 per cent who have employed an ex-offender).



Figure 3: Organisational policy towards employment of ex-offenders

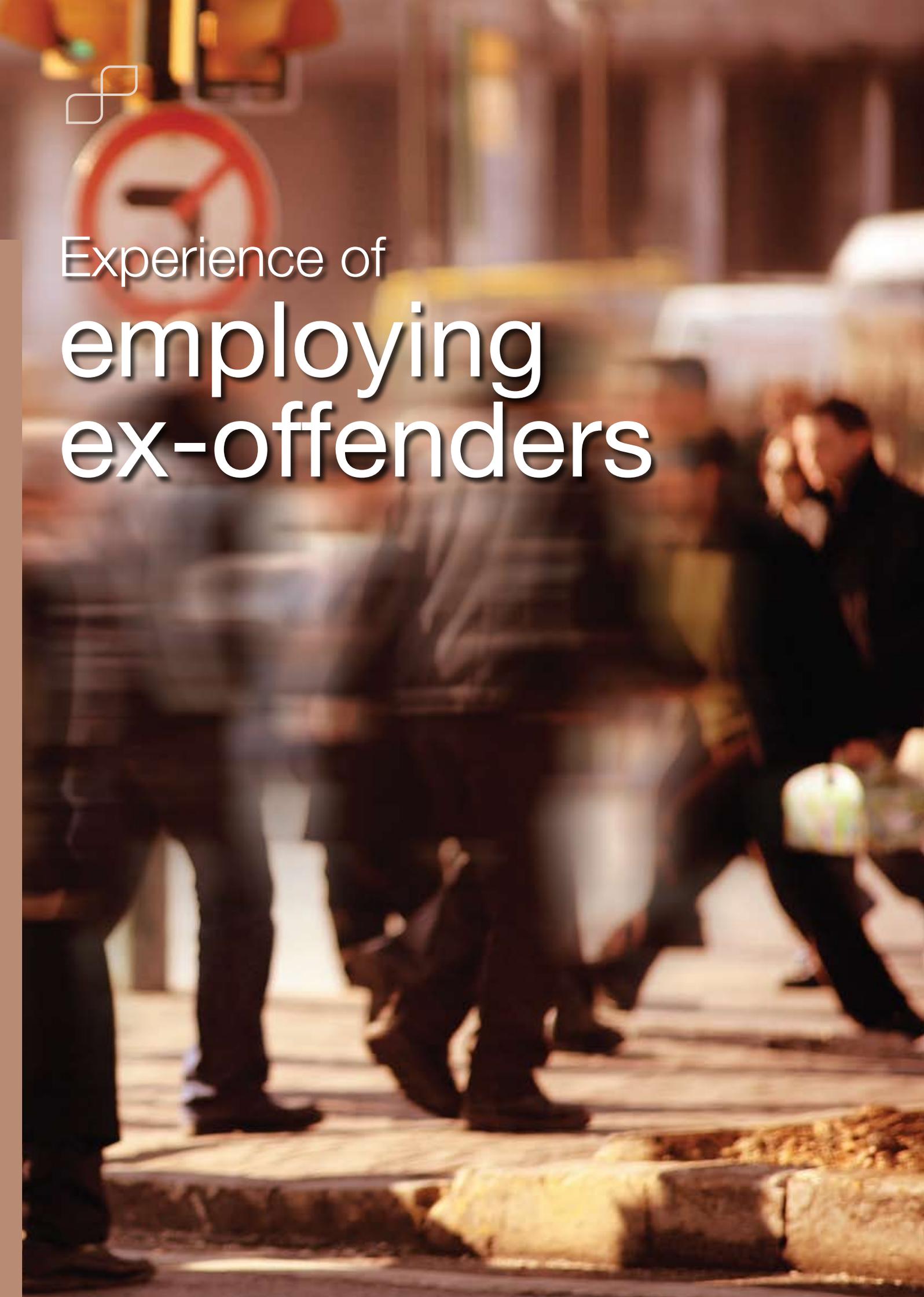


Base: Employers who have not employed an ex-offender and aware of their policy n=103, employers who have employed an ex-offender and aware of their policy n=117

Circled figures show a statistically significant difference.



Experience of
**employing
ex-offenders**





4. Experience of employing ex-offenders

This section of the report analyses the characteristics of employers who are likely to have employed ex-offenders in the past, and who say they are open to doing so in the future. The section then evaluates these employers' experiences, and determines the factors which encouraged them to hire an ex-offender, and what if any support was available to them.

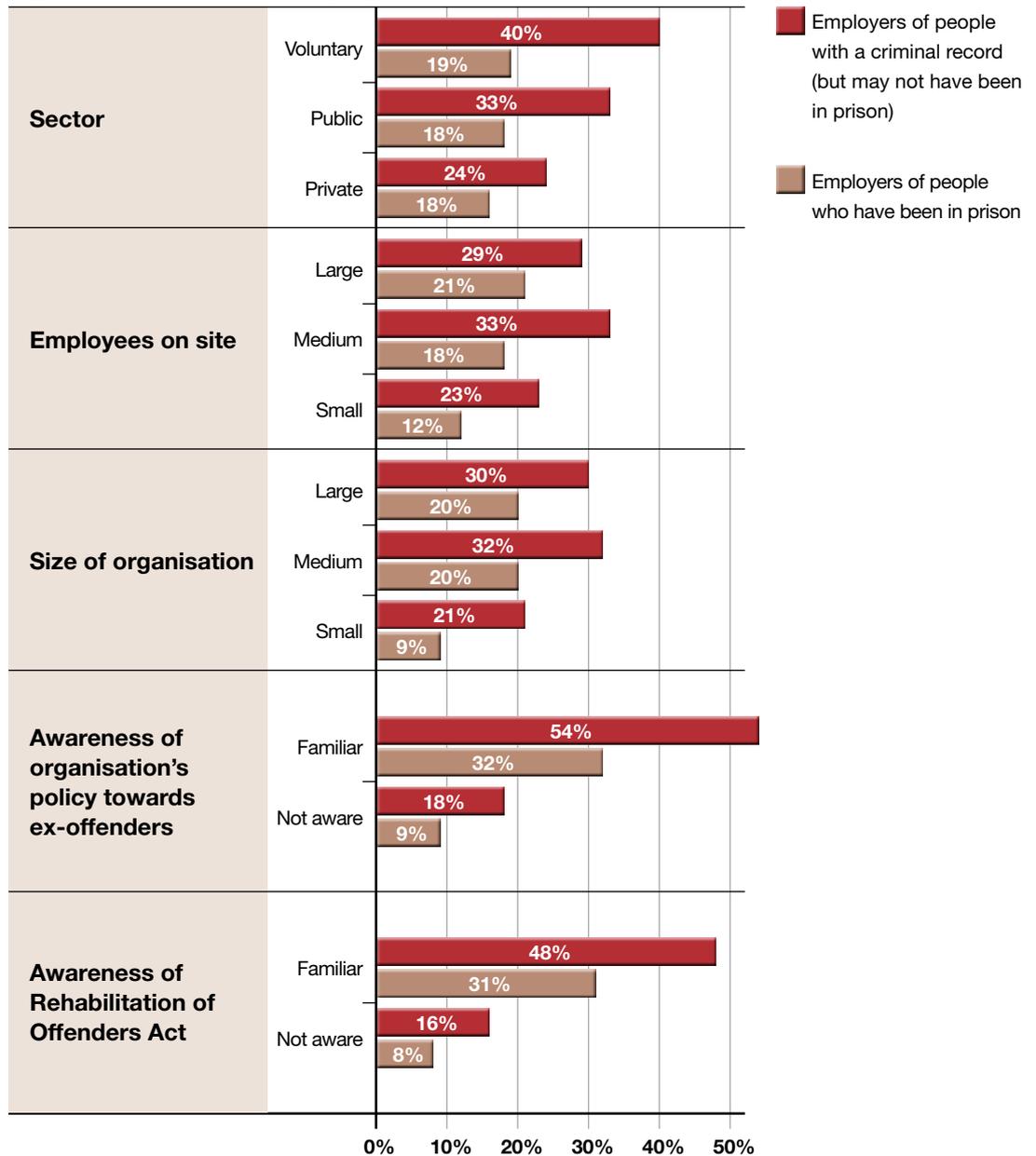
Who currently employs ex-offenders?

Overall, 31 per cent of employers surveyed have employed an ex-offender in a permanent post or on a contract basis. An ex-offender is defined here as either someone with a criminal record (but may not have been to prison) or a person who has been in prison.

The likelihood to employ an ex-offender is higher in the voluntary sector and significantly lower in the private sector. The size of the organisation (both overall and on site) is another indicator of the likelihood to employ an ex-offender, with medium and large organisations more likely to do so. Furthermore the more familiar employers are with both their organisation's policy toward employing ex-offenders, and of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, the more likely they are to have employed ex-offenders in the past.

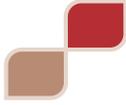
These differences are illustrated in the chart that follows (Figure 4). All differences are statistically significant, other than when analysing the likelihood to have employed people who have been in prison by sector. However, the pattern remains the same, in that smaller organisations are less likely to have employed from this group and larger organisations more likely.

Figure 4: Likelihood to employ ex-offenders



Base: Employers who have employed people with a criminal record (but may not have been in prison) n=292, Employers who have employed people who have been in prison n=176

Among employers who have recruited ex-offenders, 46 per cent did so over two years ago, 36 per cent within the last two years (14 per cent of whom did so in the last six months, with the remainder answering 'don't know'). This would indicate that the likelihood to employ ex-offenders has declined more recently. This could be an indication of fewer vacancies and less intention to hire, regardless of the applicant's background.



Who is likely to employ ex-offenders in the future?

Employers who would consider recruiting ex-offenders in the future are similar to the type of employers who have done so in the past. For example, 59 per cent of employers working in the voluntary sector say they would employ an ex-offender in the future, as do 43 per cent working in the public sector, declining to 34 per cent working in the private sector. Likewise large organisations are significantly more likely to say they will recruit ex-offenders (41 per cent compared with 33 per cent of small organisations).

Overall experience

Employers are more likely to rate their experience of employing ex-offenders as positive rather than negative (58 per cent rated their experience between 5 and 7 where 7 is excellent and 1 is very poor, whereas 17 per cent rated this between 1 and 3, with 26 per cent in the middle). Employers were asked to think about the people themselves, rather than the process or support they may have received.

On average, employers gave a score of 4.61. This (mean) average is higher among employers working in the voluntary sector (5.33) – although this is not a statistically significant difference. Even so, employers in the voluntary sector are significantly more likely to rate their experience as positive (83 per cent answering 5–7 on the scale, compared with 55 per cent in both the public and private sectors).

'Ex-offenders are fairly well motivated and dependable, which was something I was worried about when I first started employing them, you know with them being ex-offenders. Got to give someone a chance and I was pleasantly surprised.'

Manager, Waste management

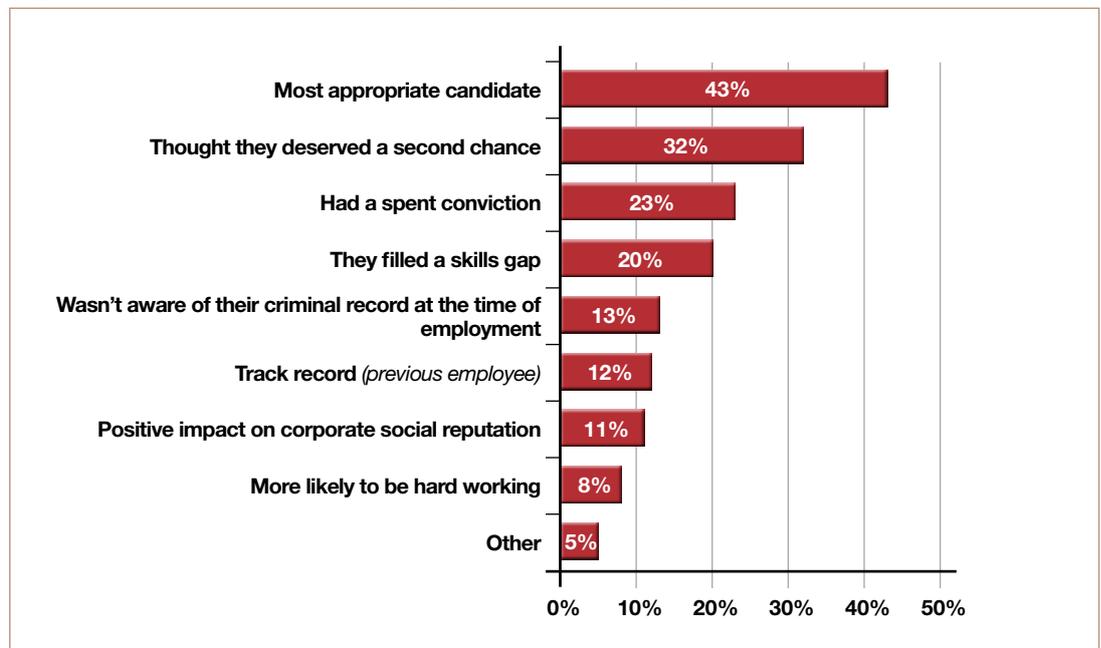
Reasons to employ

The reasons employers give for having hired an ex-offender in the past commonly relate to their skills and attributes ('most appropriate candidate' 43 per cent; 'they filled a skills gap' 20 per cent; 'more likely to be hard working' 8 per cent). There is also a sense of social responsibility, with nearly a third (32 per cent) answering that the applicant deserved a second chance.

Larger organisations are more likely to mention the positive impact hiring ex-offenders have on their corporate social reputation (14 per cent compared with 7 per cent of medium-sized organisations and just 3 per cent of small organisations).

'By employing an ex-offender you are helping a person in need to turn away from crime and better themselves. And you are doing a good job for yourself as well, getting good PR out of it and I think it will only enhance the reputation of your firm.' Recruitment Director, Transportation

Figure 5: Reasons to have employed ex-offender(s)



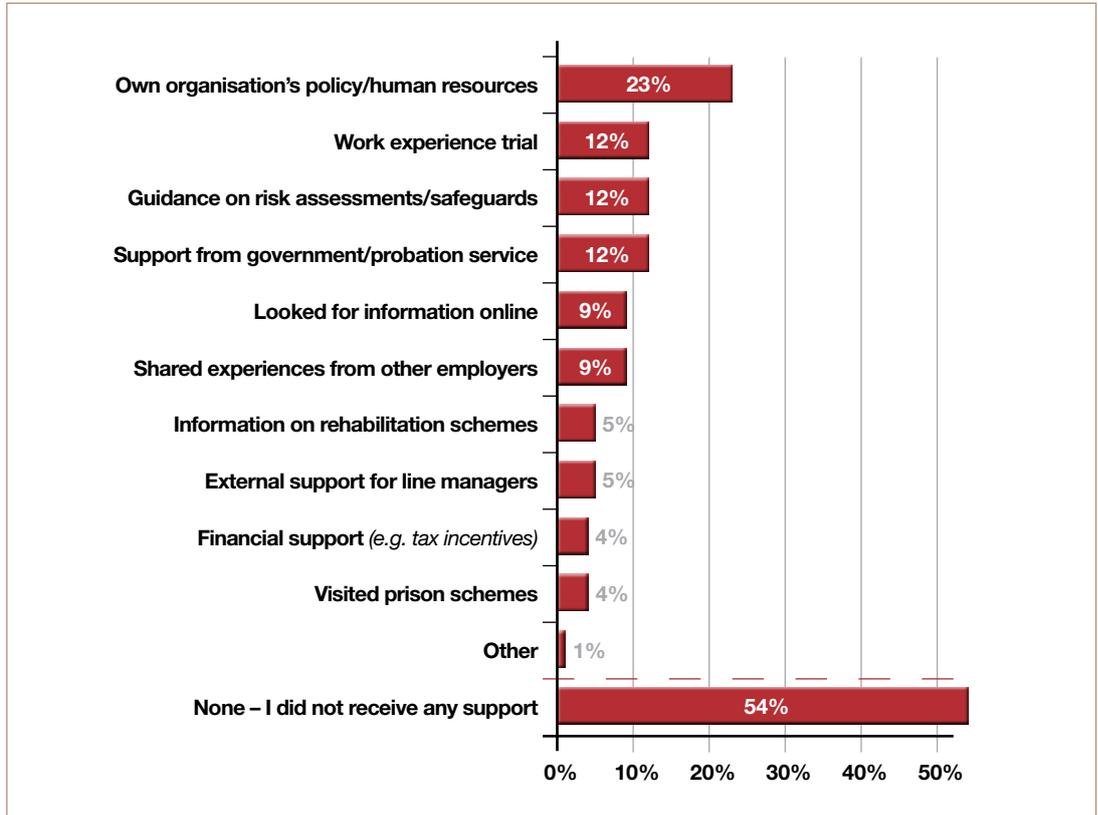
Base: Employers who have employed an ex-offender n=324

Support received

Over half of employers who have recruited ex-offenders did not receive any support when doing so (54 per cent). This is significantly more likely to be the case in small organisations (73 per cent) than in large organisations (47 per cent).

Among those that did receive support or information, the majority of this came from within their own organisation (23 per cent). As might be expected, the likelihood to rely on their own organisation's policy or human resources is higher in large organisations (27 per cent compared with 14 per cent in small organisations). However, and perhaps as a reflection of the likelihood to employ ex-offenders, large organisations are also the most likely to have sought support from the government or the probation service (15 per cent compared with just 5 per cent in small organisations). Overall, however, employers are almost twice as likely to seek support from their own organisation (23 per cent) than from the government or probation service (12 per cent).

Figure 6: Support or information received when employing ex-offenders



Base: Employers who have employed an ex-offender n=324



Experience and perception of
**employing
ex-offenders**
(all employers)



5. Experience and perception of employing ex-offenders (all employers)

This section is based on all employers, including those who have not employed ex-offenders in the past. The distinction between employers who have employed ex-offenders, and those who have not, whose opinions are therefore based more on perception rather than experience, is important. The general attitude of employers toward employing ex-offenders is explored, in addition to the factors they would consider when receiving an application from an ex-offender. The section then investigates how prepared employers think ex-offenders are for work and how confident they feel in hiring ex-offenders into different types of roles.

General attitude towards the employment of ex-offenders

Over half of employers indicate some sense of responsibility, agreeing that 'employers have a role to play in reintegrating ex-offenders' (6 per cent strongly and 48 per cent to some extent). Although the likelihood to agree with this statement is significantly lower among employers who have not previously employed ex-offenders (48 per cent) it is notable that almost half remain positive about this statement.

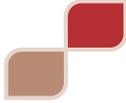
'Hiring ex-offenders is definitely something I would want to look into and encourage any employer to look into because I think culturally and socially it is the right thing to do.' Senior Manager, Banking

Those who agree that employers have a role to play in reintegrating ex-offenders are more likely to be working in the public (60 per cent) and voluntary sectors (66 per cent), rather than the private sector (49 per cent agree). Furthermore, large organisations are significantly more likely to agree (57 per cent) than small organisations (48 per cent).

The second statement employers are most likely to agree with is that 'prison education helps to make ex-offenders more employable' (3 per cent agree strongly and 30 per cent to some extent). Indeed more employers agree with this statement than disagree with it, or have no opinion. There is a consistent level of agreement with this statement across all industries and sectors, although organisations with a large number of employees on site stand out as more positive; 41 per cent agree that prison education helps to make ex-offenders more employable compared with 29 per cent with a small number of employees on site. Below are some examples of the positive impressions employers gave about prison education from the case studies.

'I think prison education is very valuable because those that want to make a change, it gives them a leg up and a start that can help set them apart. It's about giving them a chance to change if they want to make it and I think it's extremely valuable.' Manager, Waste management

'Prison education gives you knowledge and power to get you up and running – once you get released you can go out in the real world and get a job. It gives the person confidence to look forward to life outside.' Recruitment Director, Transportation



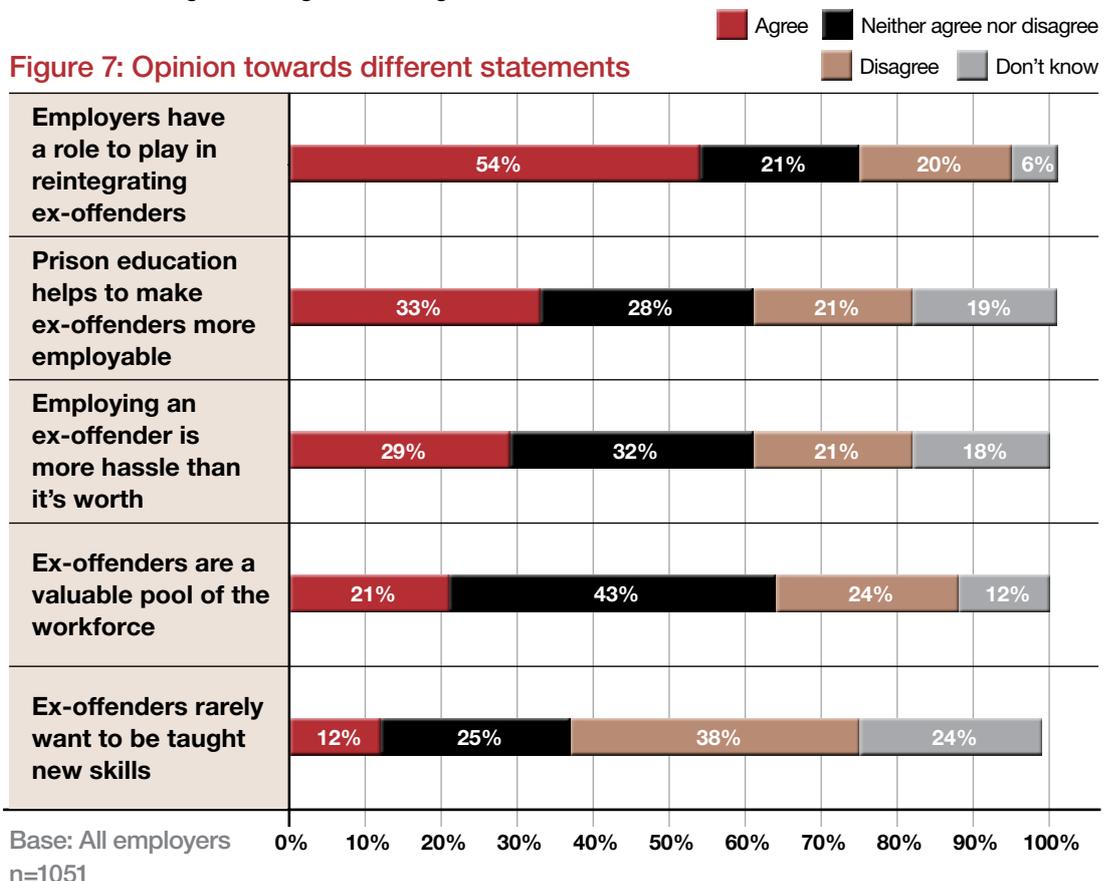
Even so, a sizeable proportion of employers agree that employing an ex-offender is more hassle than it's worth (7 per cent strongly agree and 22 per cent to some extent). More employers agree with this statement than disagree, although slightly more 'neither agree nor disagree' (32 per cent), indicating there is some uncertainty.

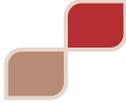
The employers who are likely to agree that employing an ex-offender is more hassle than it's worth are those who also tend to disagree prison education helps to make ex-offenders more employable and employers have a role to play in reintegrating ex-offenders – that is employers working in the private sector (35 per cent), and small organisations (31 per cent, although this is not statistically significantly different from larger organisations).

Around one in five (21 per cent) of employers agree that ex-offenders are a valuable pool of the workforce, although a similar proportion (24 per cent) disagree with this. There is a large proportion of employers who answer 'neither agree nor disagree', or do not know, indicating a lack of awareness or confidence in what ex-offenders have to offer the workplace.

Again, it is private sector employers who are most likely to disagree that ex-offenders are a valuable pool of the workforce (28 per cent compared with 19 per cent in the public and 14 per cent in the voluntary sectors).

More positively, more employers disagree that ex-offenders rarely want to be taught new skills (38 per cent compared with 12 per cent who agree), although there remains a notable proportion who are unsure, answering 'neither agree nor disagree', or do not know.





Factors that employers would take into consideration

The type of crime is a fundamental factor to employers considering a job application from an ex-offender (73 per cent). The circumstances in which the crime took place (58 per cent), the number of convictions (50 per cent) and when the conviction took place (46 per cent) are other important factors which the employer would take into consideration. Indeed, 84 per cent of employers would consider some aspect of the crime that the ex-offender was involved in.

'The type of crime is important, especially if there are issues around theft and burglary or issues around rape. It's those trusting crimes that I think we are probably most wary of. Particularly with the kind of client groups we have to work with. Just working in a general office environment, if someone has a conviction for theft, it does make you a bit more wary about employing someone like that.' Office Manager/ Policy Officer working in a small charity

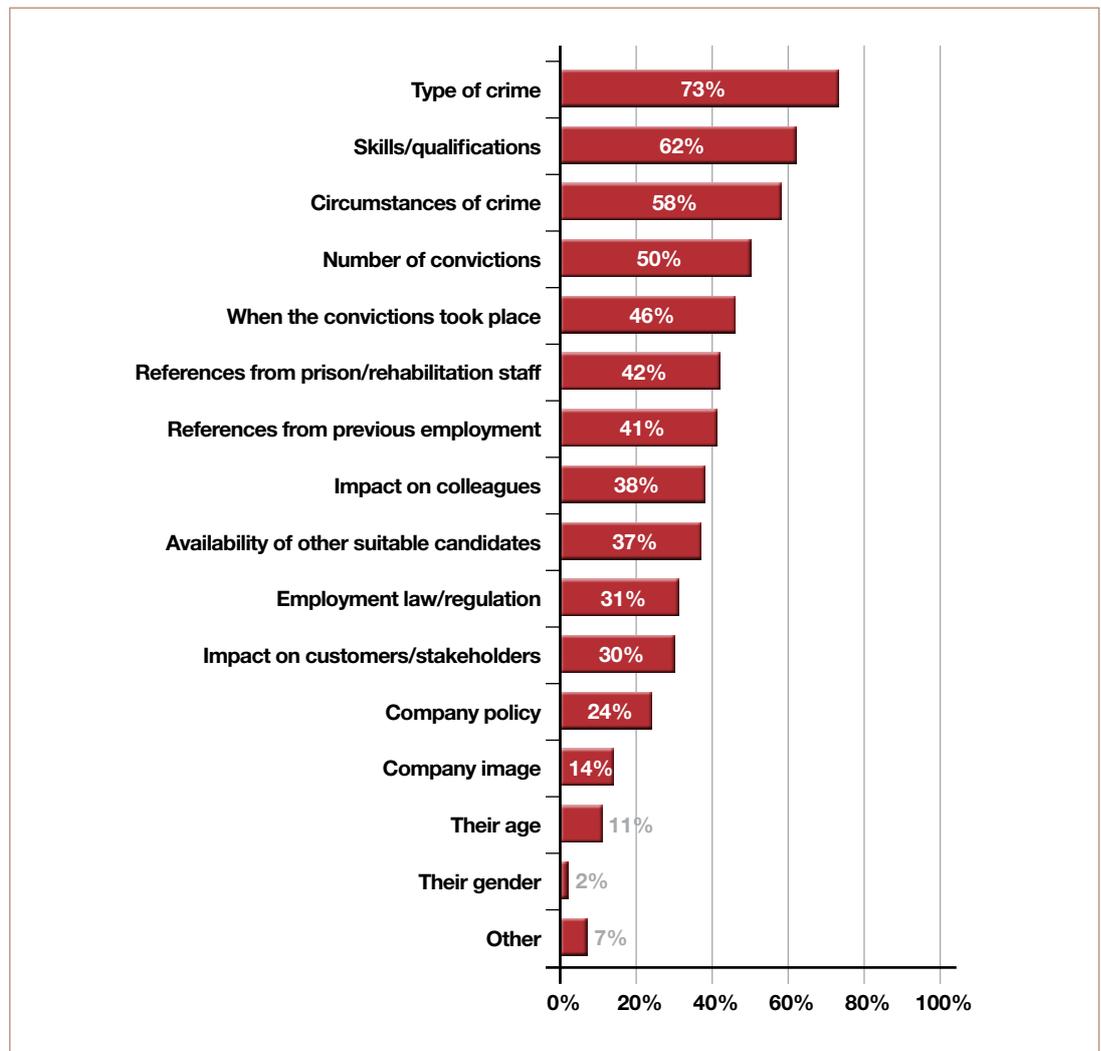
This is not to say that employers would ignore the applicant's educational background or work experience, with four out of five (80 per cent) employers taking some aspect of this into consideration. Skills and/or qualifications are the most common aspect of an applicant's experience that employers would consider (62 per cent). References, whether from prison/rehabilitation staff, or from previous employers are also mentioned by around two in five employers (42 per cent and 41 per cent respectively).

'There was a chap who had a personal reference from a prison guard. He was in charge of him at the time, same as a boss. So I didn't view the reference any different.' Manager, Waste management

References were highlighted as an important aspect in employers' decision-making process earlier, where 93 per cent said good references influence the decision to hire someone. Furthermore, poor references are mentioned later on by 16 per cent of employers as a barrier for ex-offenders in finding a job.

References from previous employers are equally important for both those who have previously hired ex-offenders (42 per cent) and those who have not (41 per cent). However, employers who have not previously hired ex-offenders are significantly more likely to consider references from prison/rehabilitation staff (45 per cent compared with 35 per cent among employers of ex-offenders).

Figure 8: Information/factors employers are likely to consider when receiving an application for work from an ex-offender



Base: All employers n=1051

There are no other significant differences between the responses from employers who have previously hired ex-offenders and those who have not, other than regarding age. Employers who have previously hired ex-offenders are significantly more likely to consider age as a factor in a job application from an ex-offender (17 per cent compared with 9 per cent of employers who have not previously employed ex-offenders).

Perhaps as would be expected, employers who are familiar with their organisation's policy on employing ex-offenders are more likely to take 'employment law/regulation' into consideration (39 per cent compared with 31 per cent of employers who are not aware of their organisation's policy, and 20 per cent whose organisation does not have a policy). However, awareness or familiarity with the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act does not have the same influence. Thirty-four per cent of employers who are familiar with the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act take into account employment law/regulation, more than those who are not aware of the Act (25 per cent), although not significantly so.



Preparedness of ex-offenders for work

Employers of ex-offenders are significantly more likely to agree that ex-offenders are well prepared for work in all the skills and attributes asked about. So, for example, over a third of employers who have employed ex-offenders think they are well prepared for work regarding their IT skills (35 per cent) and reading and writing (34 per cent), whereas half that proportion of employers who have not employed an ex-offender before think so (15 per cent regarding IT skills and reading and writing).

However all agree ex-offenders are more likely to be poorly prepared for work than well prepared. The skills and attributes employers think ex-offenders are least well prepared in are in their 'knowledge of the world of work' (51 per cent overall) and soft skills (48 per cent overall).

The high proportion of employers who have not employed an ex-offender answering 'don't know' is as high as half regarding some skills and attributes. This illustrates their lack of knowledge in what ex-offenders may be able to offer the workplace.

That just one in ten employers think the soft skills ex-offenders possess make them well prepared for work clashes with the high proportion of employers who highlight 'soft skills' as an area job applicants most need to demonstrate (see figure 2). Technical skills are also highlighted by employers as an attribute applicants need to demonstrate – although just 15 per cent say ex-offenders are well prepared for work in this area. This skills gap, whether or not a true perception, is an important barrier to employing ex-offenders.

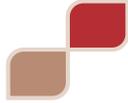
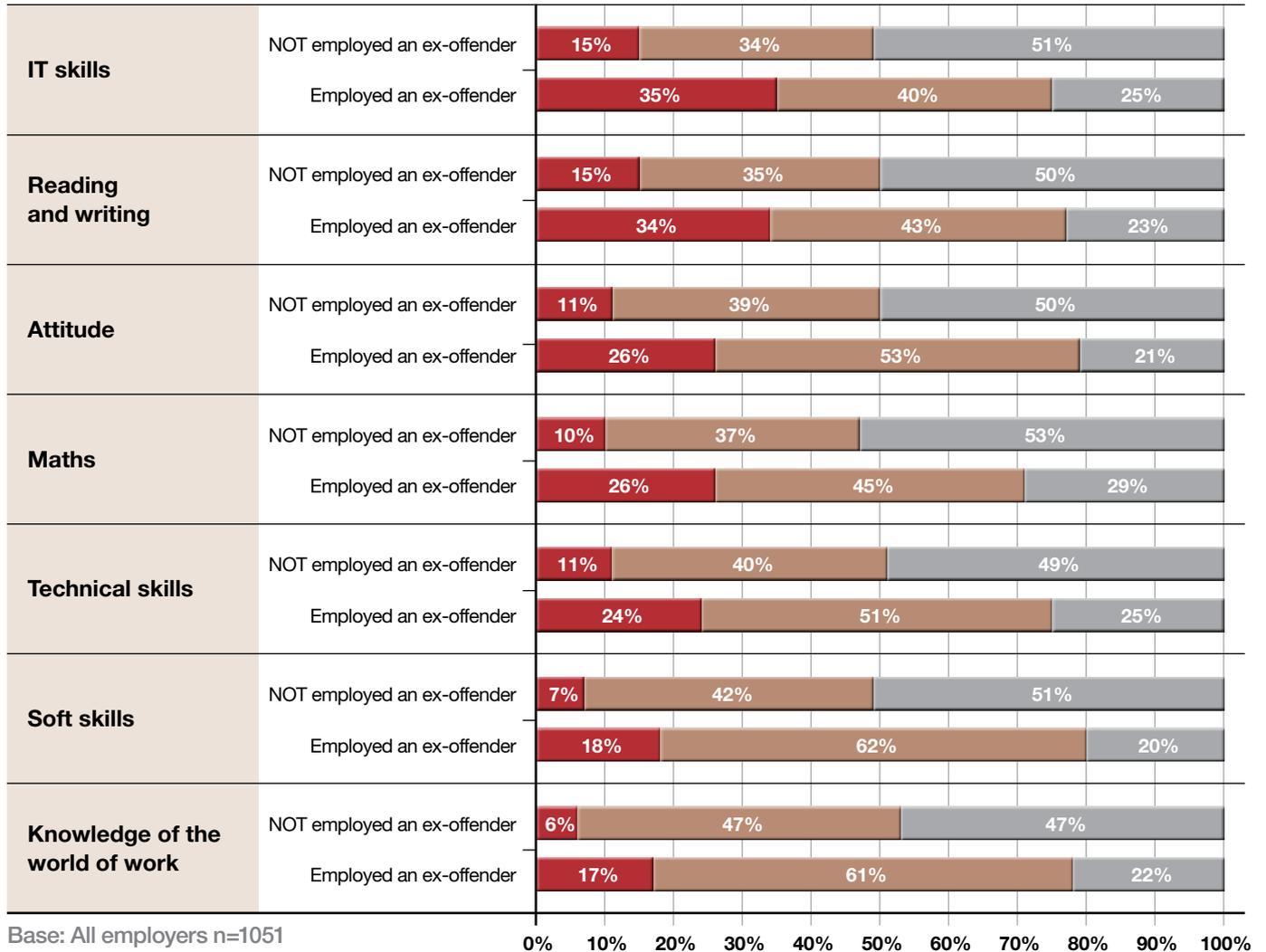
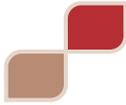


Figure 9: Preparedness of ex-offenders for work

Well prepared Poorly prepared Don't know





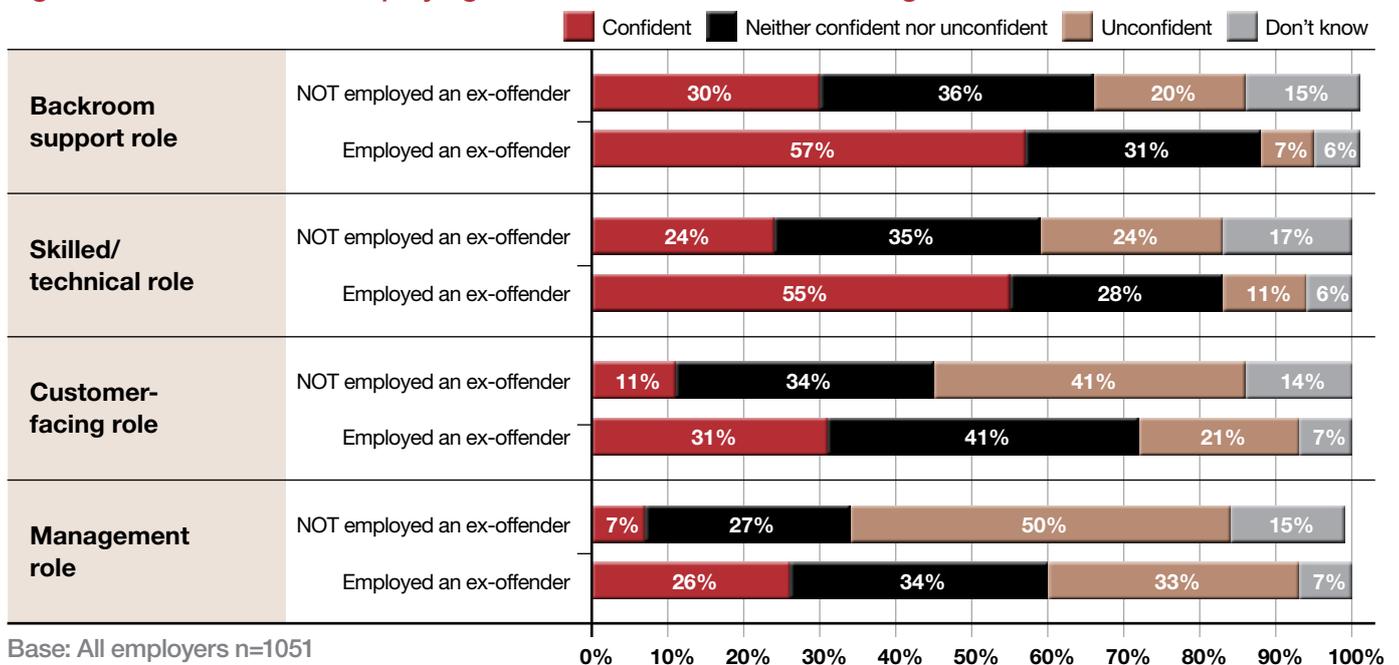
Confidence in employing ex-offenders into different roles

Employers who have employed ex-offenders in the past are significantly more likely to feel confident in employing an ex-offender into each of the roles asked about. This is when compared with employers who have not employed ex-offenders, and they are most likely to feel confident in employing ex-offenders into back office roles. A quarter (24 per cent) of these employers are confident in employing an ex-offender into a skilled/technical role, one in ten into a customer-facing role (11 per cent) and 7 per cent into a management role; whereas over half of employers who have employed an ex-offender are confident in employing them again into backroom support roles (57 per cent) or skilled/technical roles (55 per cent).

It is in backroom support roles, skilled/technical and customer-facing roles that employers who have not previously employed an ex-offender are more likely to be uncertain, rather than unconfident in employing an ex-offender (most commonly answering 'neither confident nor unconfident' or 'don't know'); whereas such employers are more likely to feel unconfident about employing ex-offenders into management roles than they are to feel confident or uncertain.

The more exposure to ex-offenders employers have had, the more confident they are about employing ex-offenders. Employers who have recruited more than one ex-offender are more likely to feel confident about employing them into management, backroom and customer-facing roles when compared with employers who have ever just recruited one ex-offender.

Figure 10: Confidence in employing an ex-offender into the following roles



Employers working in the private sector and in small organisations are the least likely to feel confident about employing ex-offenders in any of the roles illustrated in the chart above.



Promoting employment of ex-offenders





6. Promoting employment of ex-offenders

This final section of the report aims to explore factors that would encourage the employment of ex-offenders. Employers were first asked what barriers to employment may exist for ex-offenders and what may promote their employment. They were then asked what barriers may exist from their own perspective of an employer, and what would help them to feel more confident in employing ex-offenders. Finally the report summarises employers' perception of prison education.

Barriers that exist for ex-offenders

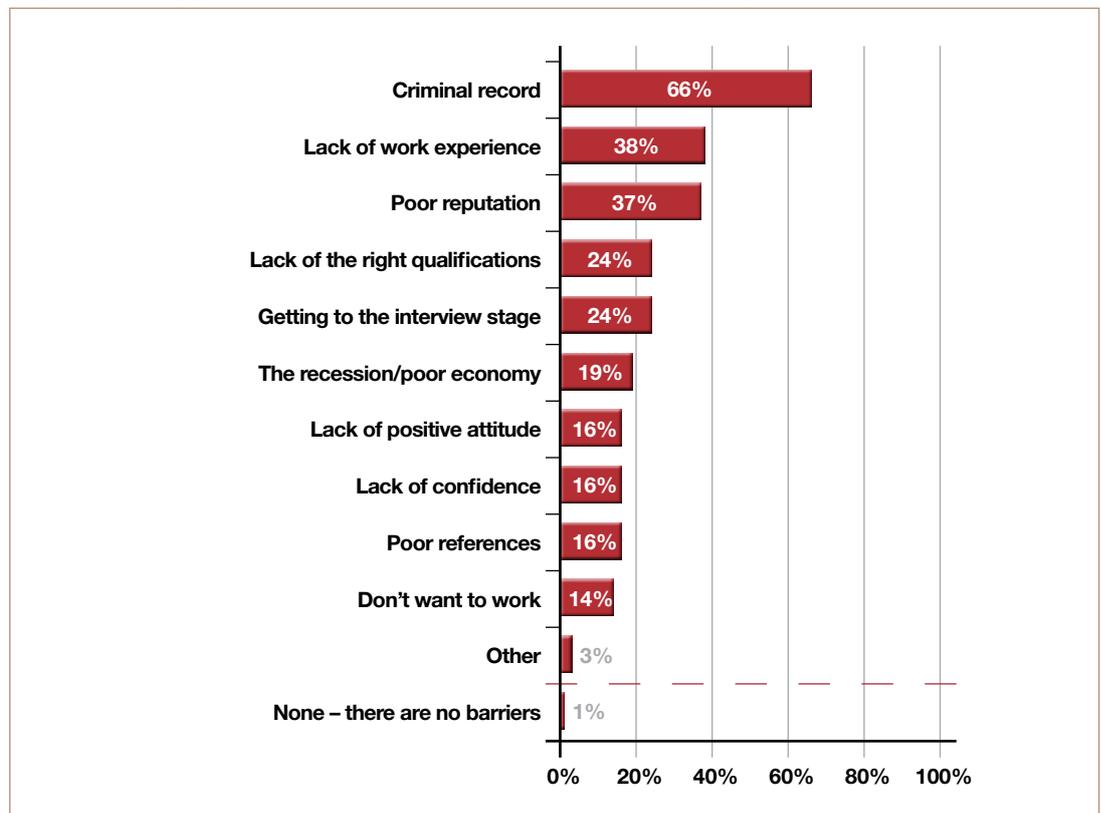
Two thirds (66 per cent) of employers believe a criminal record is the biggest barrier to ex-offenders finding a job, although there is a significant distinction between employers who have employed ex-offenders in the past and those who have not, with 58 per cent of ex-offender employers saying a criminal record is a barrier, jumping to 70 per cent among employers with no experience of employing ex-offenders. Perhaps as a consequence of having a criminal record, 'poor reputation' is also mentioned by over a third of employers (37 per cent), and equally by employers with and without experience of employing ex-offenders.

Otherwise employers tend to agree on the barriers to employing ex-offenders. This is true of all factors, other than 'lack of confidence' which is mentioned by significantly more employers who have employed ex-offenders (20 per cent) than employers who have not (13 per cent).

'Most of the offenders we work with in terms of employment have a huge confidence issue. So it's one thing to have the qualification, another thing to have the confidence that someone's actually going to entertain my application. Are they going to look at me and treat me as an individual rather than as an offender?' Director, small charity

In addition to the impact of having a criminal record, and perhaps a poor reputation, it is a 'lack of work experience' (38 per cent) and lack of hard and soft skills that are mentioned as barriers to employment, such as 'lack of the right qualifications' (24 per cent), 'lack of a positive attitude' (16 per cent), and 'lack of confidence' (16 per cent).

Figure 11: Biggest barriers for ex-offenders in finding a job



Base: All employers n=1051

The most commonly mentioned barriers among private sector employers and those from small organisations, who have consistently shown the least positive outlook on employing ex-offenders, remain the same as those mentioned overall. In addition, however, these employers are significantly more likely to mention ex-offenders 'don't want to work' (17 per cent in the private sector compared with 9 per cent in the public sector and 6 per cent in the voluntary sector, likewise, 20 per cent of small organisations compared with 15 per cent of medium-sized and 11 per cent of large organisations).

Factors to help ex-offenders

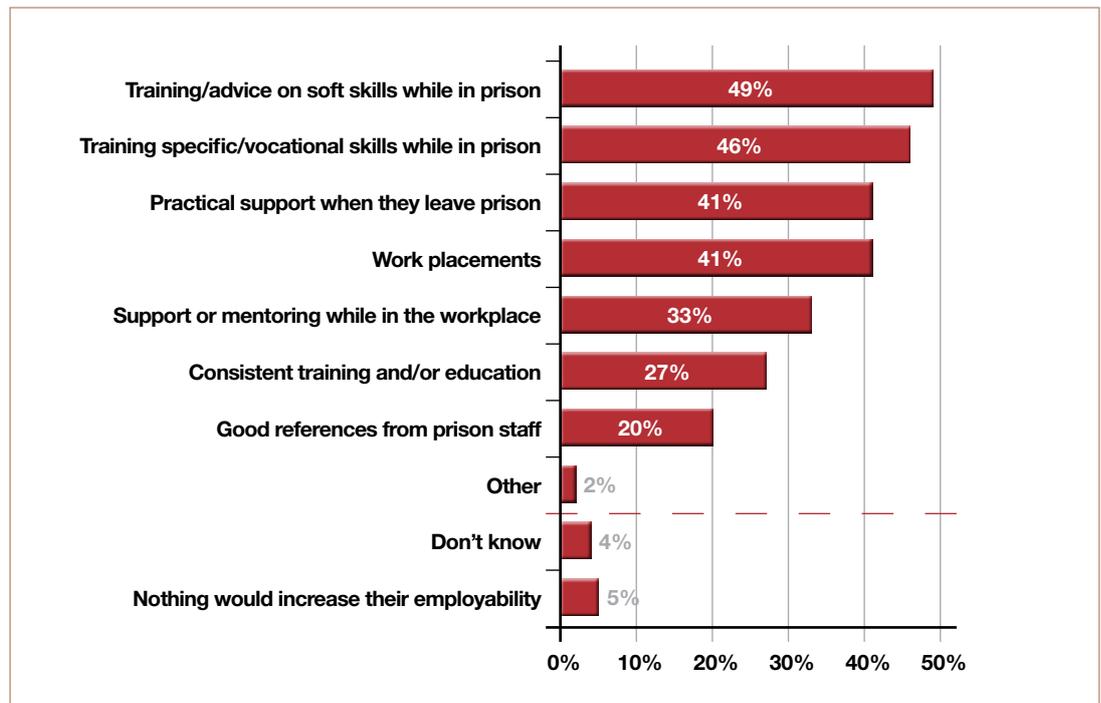
Improving hard and soft skills is the area which employers think would most help ex-offenders get a job once they leave prison. Nearly half (49 per cent) mention soft skills such as communication, appearance, attitude and time-keeping. Likewise 46 per cent mention hard skills, that is specific vocational skills.

'They need to learn some of those softer skills... in terms of dealing with other people, communication. Because if someone falls down in terms of coming through the door trying to get a job here it's their communication skills – to communicate their attitude, their approach, what's changed, how they're dealing with things, that's key.' Director, small charity

'We were shown the training facilities and schemes which have been run by the prison. It gave us confidence that someone who we are going to employ will have some basic skills from these schemes. One of the schemes they were running was basic repair. So a couple of guys we already recruited from there, they already had some basic skills on basic repair. So when we took them to our workshops they already had some background knowledge to get started. So it takes less time getting them up and running.' Recruitment Director, Transportation

Employers generally agree on the factors which would help ex-offenders get a job. However, those who have not employed ex-offenders in the past are significantly more likely to answer that nothing would increase an ex-offender's employability (6 per cent compared with 2 per cent of employers with experience of employing ex-offenders).

Figure 12: Factors that would help ex-offenders get a job once they leave prison



Base: All employers n=1051



Barriers that exist for employers

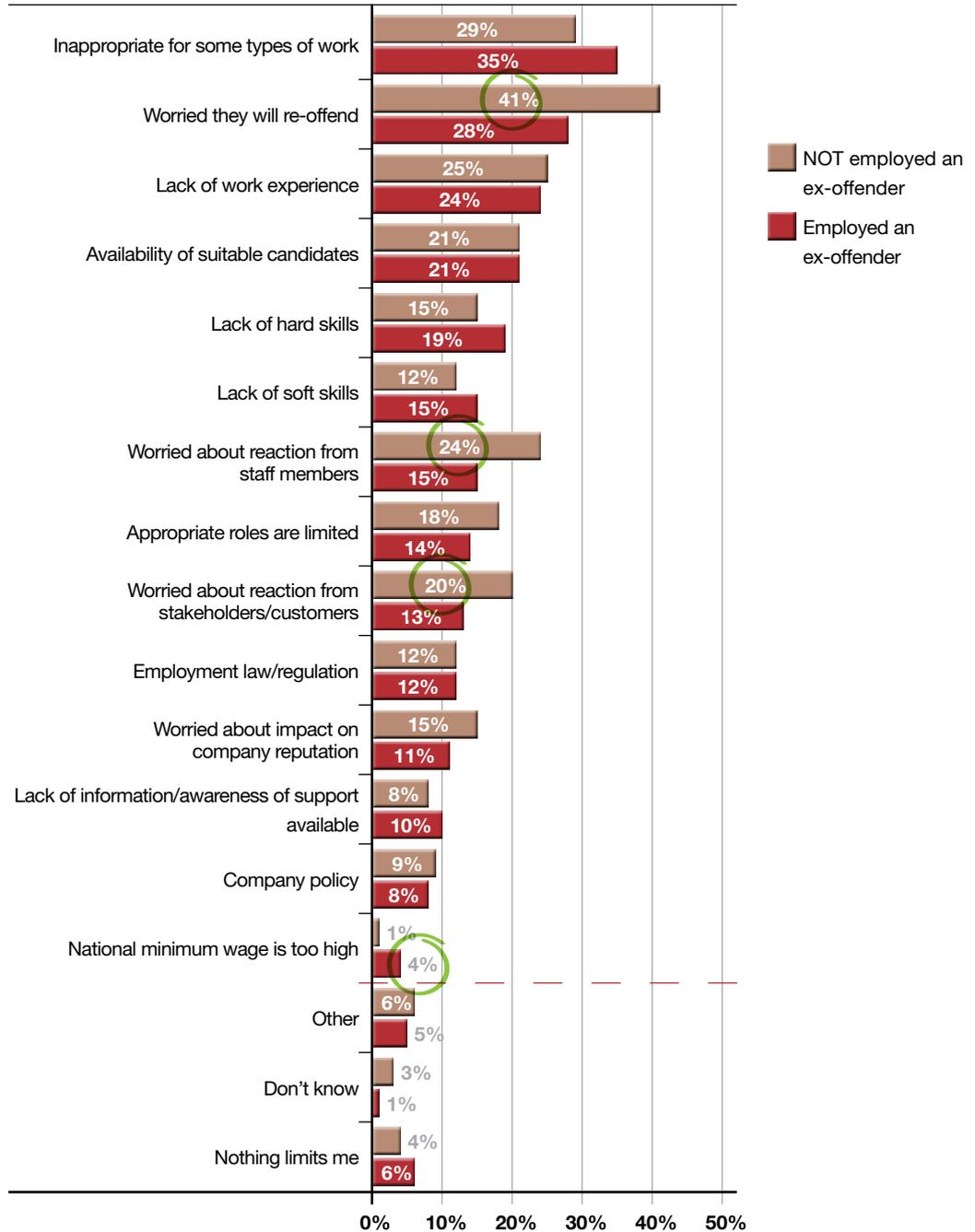
Employers commonly mention possession of a criminal record as a barrier to employment, whereas it is the concern that an ex-offender may reoffend, and that they may be inappropriate for some types of work, that most commonly acts as a barrier from the employer's perspective. The concern that they may reoffend is significantly higher among employers who have no experience of employing ex-offenders (41 per cent compared with 28 per cent of employers who do have experience). This concern is also higher among employers working in the private sector, and in small organisations (44 per cent in the private sector, 46 per cent working in small organisations).

Other factors that are mentioned as barriers for ex-offenders are also mentioned here as barriers that employers experience in hiring ex-offenders. These include a lack of work experience (25 per cent overall), 'availability of suitable candidates' (21 per cent overall) and lack of hard and soft skills (16 per cent and 13 per cent respectively).

The fourth most commonly mentioned barrier among employers who have not previously employed ex-offenders is that they are 'worried about the reaction from other staff members' (24 per cent), significantly higher than the proportion of ex-offender employers who mention this (15 per cent). This is also a common concern among employers working in the private sector, and in small organisations (27 per cent in the private sector are worried about the reaction from other staff members, 29 per cent working in small organisations).

Likewise, significantly more employers who have not employed ex-offenders before are worried about the reaction from stakeholders or customers (20 per cent).

Figure 13: Factors that would most limit employers from employing an ex-offender



Base: Employers who have NOT employed an ex-offender n=727, employers who have employed an ex-offender n=324

Circled figures show a statistically significant difference.



Factors that would make employers more confident

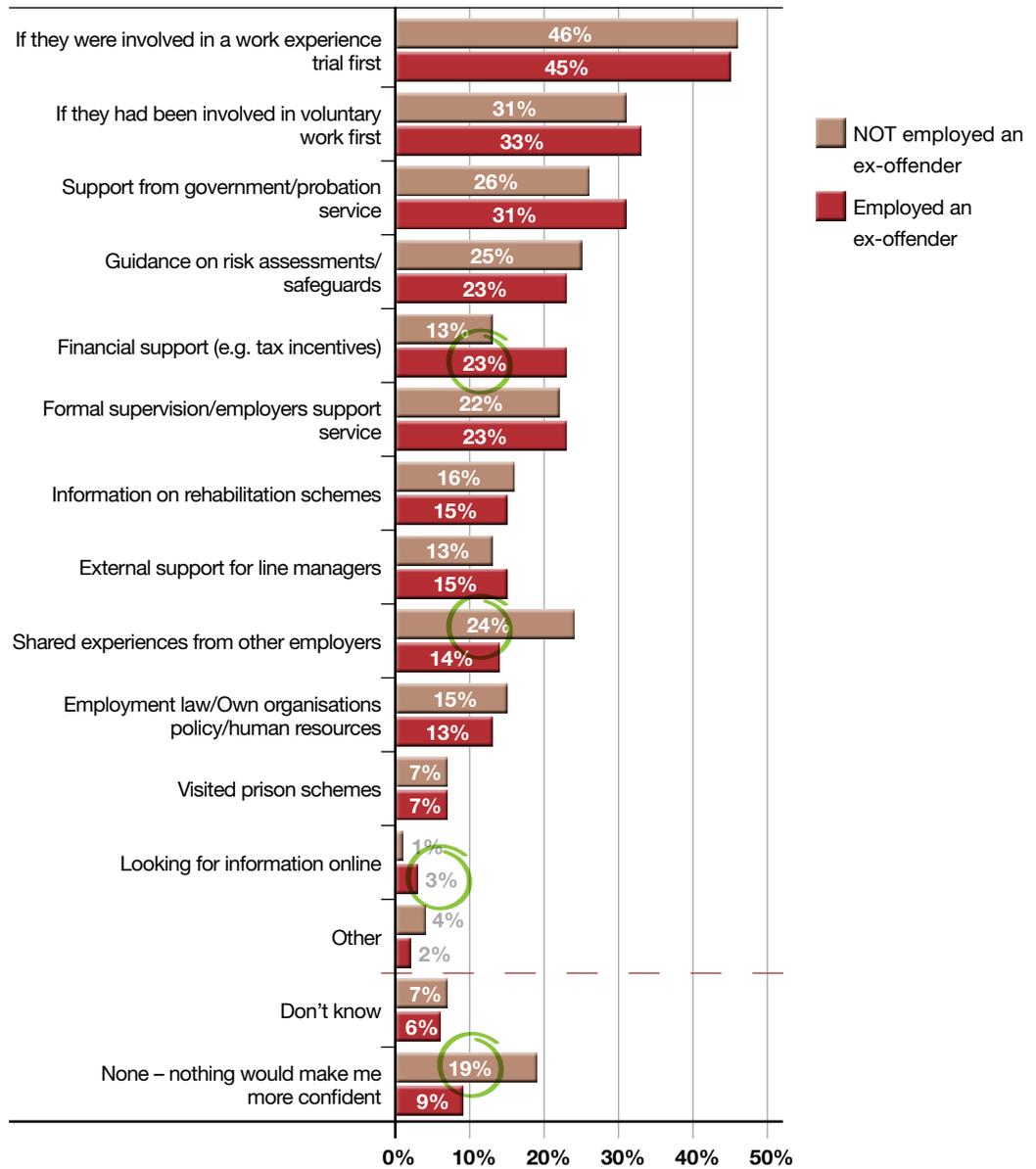
Employers agree that work experience would make them more confident in employing an ex-offender, whether that be through a work experience trial (46 per cent overall) or through voluntary work (32 per cent overall). Furthermore, 'support from the government/probation service' and 'guidance on risk assessments/safeguards' are mentioned similarly by employers with and without experience of employing ex-offenders (27 per cent and 24 per cent respectively).

There are then some striking differences between employers who have employed ex-offenders in the past and those who have not. Employers who do not have experience of employing ex-offenders are significantly more likely to mention that 'shared experiences from other employers' (24 per cent) would make them more confident to employ ex-offenders.

'I would like to see case studies from industries like us. It would give other firms a good understanding... and more confidence as well.' Recruitment Director, Transportation

While for employers who have employed ex-offenders in the past it is financial support that they are interested in (23 per cent compared with just 13 per cent of employers with no experience of employing ex-offenders), financial support is also an important factor for employers working in small organisations, mentioned by around one in five (21 per cent compared with 13 per cent in large organisations).

Figure 14: Factors that would make employers more confident in employing an ex-offender



Base: Employers who have NOT employed an ex-offender n=727, employers who have employed an ex-offender n=324

Circled figures show a statistically significant difference.

Confidence in prison education

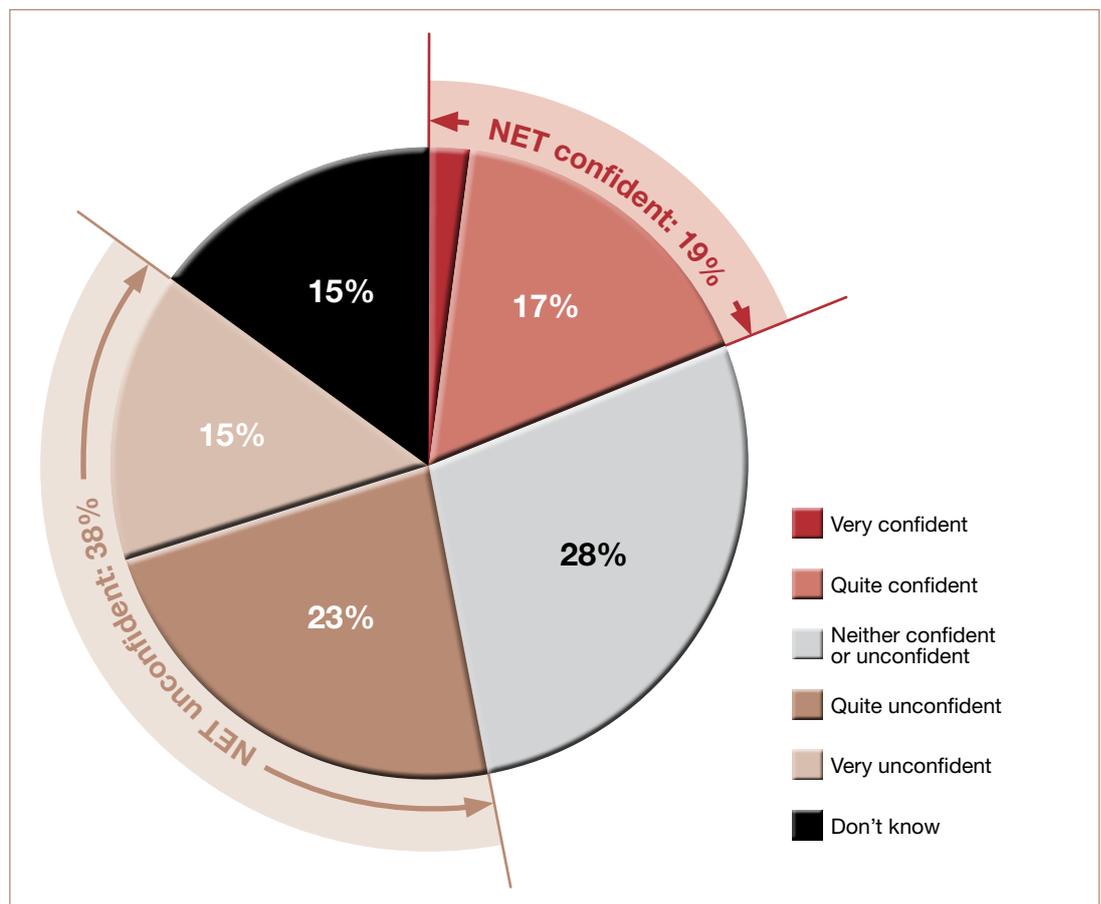
Double the number of employers who are confident in prison education are not confident that it can help prepare ex-offenders for the world of work (19 per cent confident, 38 per cent unconfident).

Employers who have employed ex-offenders in the past are equally split in their perception of prison education: 31 per cent are confident in its ability to prepare ex-offenders, and likewise 31 per cent are not confident in it (leaving 38 per cent answering 'neither' or 'don't know').

The more experienced employers are in employing ex-offenders, the more likely they are to feel confident in prison education. That is, 40 per cent of employers who have employed two or more ex-offenders have confidence in prison education, compared with 21 per cent who have employed just one ex-offender.

Among employers who have not employed ex-offenders just above one in ten (13 per cent) are confident in prison education. This leaves the majority who are not confident in it (41 per cent). These employers are also significantly more likely to 'not know' (17 per cent compared with 9 per cent among employers of ex-offenders), with the remainder answering 'neither confident nor unconfident'.

Figure 15: Confidence that prison education and training can prepare ex-offenders for the world of work



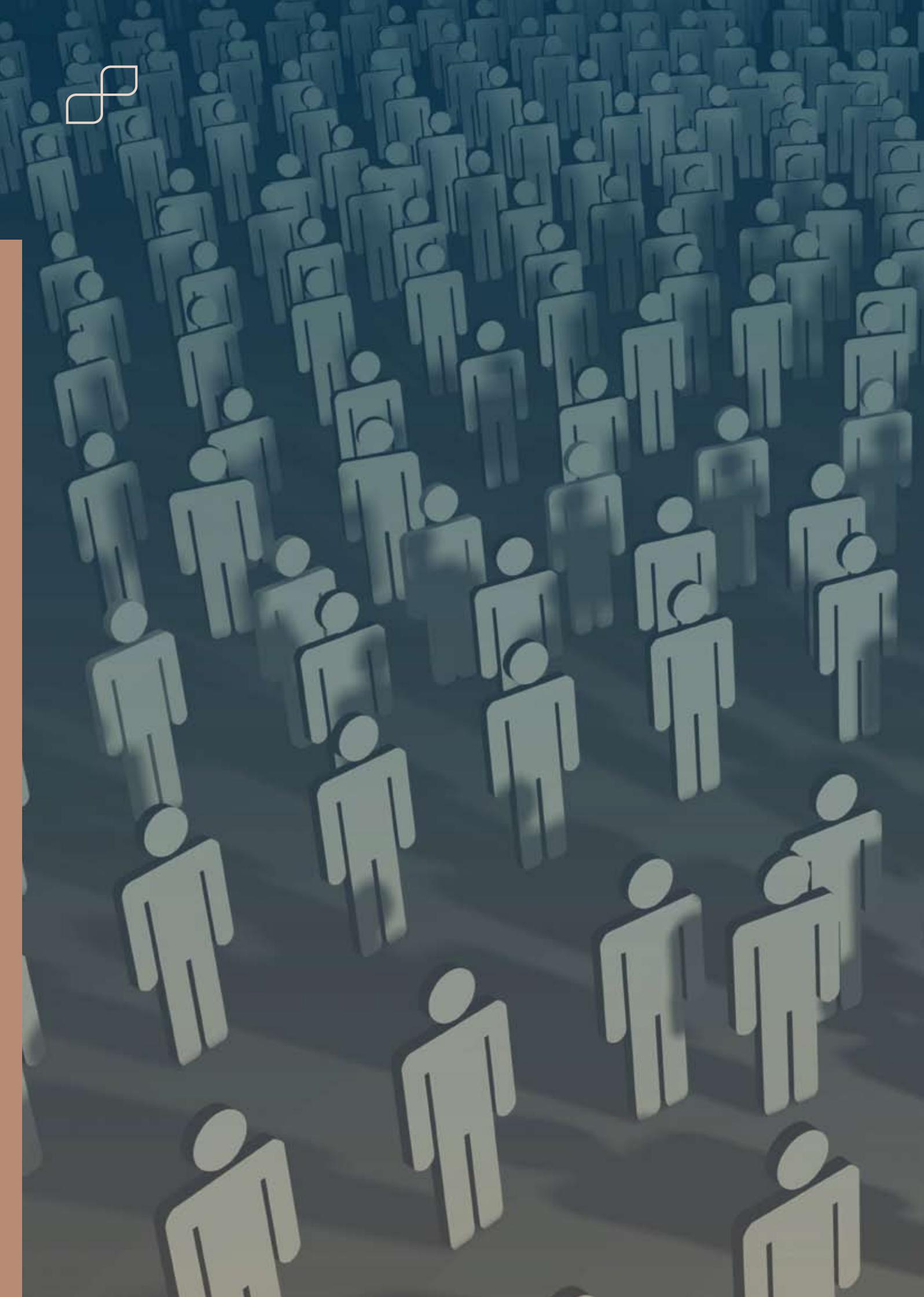
Base: All employers n=1051

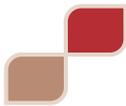


The concerns relating to prison education emphasised by employers in the case studies are that it has a limited scope, whilst trying to reach a broad range of demographics and skills; that prison education is based on 'funding and behaviour and not on need'.

Employers were also concerned that there is a lack of vocational skills being taught in prison education, and a concern that the skills taught are relatively basic and not necessarily those that are currently required in the workplace.

'Because it's (prison education) in the public sector it's potentially stagnated and... I wouldn't be confident it has moved with the times and the focus is actually now on what the employment arena is looking for.' Senior Manager, Banking



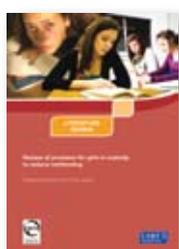


About CfBT's Evidence for Education programme

Through the Evidence for Education programme, CfBT Education Trust is proud to reinvest its surpluses in research and development both in the UK and overseas.

Our aim is to provide direct impact on beneficiaries, via educational practitioners and policy makers. We provide a range of publications from practice-based intervention studies to policy-forming perspective papers, literature reviews and guidance materials.

In addition to this publication the following CfBT research publications may also be of interest:



Review of provision for girls in custody to reduce reoffending

This research, carried out by Nacro youth crime section, reviews the current provision for girls in custody and raises serious concerns about the treatment of girls in the youth justice system.



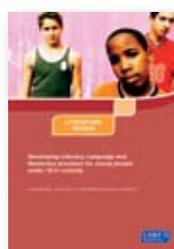
Adult basic skills

This book looks at how adults' basic skills can be improved through family, work-based and flexible learning. It also looks at two specific components within basic skills: financial capability and employability skills, and how the teaching and learning of these specific components can be improved. The impacts of developing basic skills are considered for individuals and employers as well as for society as a whole.



An Inclusive Approach to Teaching and Learning in Secure Settings – a Toolkit for Teachers and Managers

This toolkit offers guidance to practitioners and managers working with young people in a secure environment. It is designed not simply to be read, but to be used – to support, develop and inspire good practice. The focus is on literacy and numeracy, and what works best in teaching and learning.



Developing Literacy, Language and Numeracy provision for young people under 18 in custody

This literature review forms part of a wider research project about developing education and training for young people learning in the juvenile secure estate. The review aimed to explore three areas of literature: what we know about best teaching and learning practice; what works with this group of young learners; and literature examining the perspectives of key stakeholders, primarily young people.



Achieving successful outcomes through Alternative Education Provision: an international literature review

This literature review aimed to help improve understanding of how to measure the effectiveness of Alternative Education Provision (AEP); bring together evidence of effective approaches to AEP; and identify promising practice and lessons that might be transferable from AEP to mainstream provision.



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