

path2work

The Regional Employment Pathfinder programme – path2work – is a collaborative project between the National Probation Service (NPS), the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), and an alliance of Serco, Turning Point and Rainer as service provider. Its main aim is to help ex-offenders find appropriate and sustained work.

Formed in November 2004, NOMS is part of the Ministry of Justice. Working with Her Majesty's Prison Service and the NPS, it aims to bridge the gap between custody and community and to reduce re-offending by 10% by 2010.

Regional and Local Commissioning

Commissioning is a central part of NOMS strategy and involves selecting the best service providers from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. NOMS also co-ordinates the providers' services and manages their performance through service level agreements and targets. NOMS has devolved responsibility for reducing re-offending to Regional Offender Managers in nine regional offices in England and one in Wales.

From its Peterborough base, NOMS East of England is responsible for developing contestability (competition between service providers), commissioning services, maximising performance, accountability and value for money, and reducing re-offending in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.

About path2work

path2work aims to reduce re-offending by preparing ex-offenders for work and placing them in suitable employment.

The scheme has strategic regional links with the Learning and Skills Council and Jobcentre Plus.

path2work operates in Luton, Bury St Edmunds and Southend-on-Sea, these locations being chosen to deliver results and find out what works in urban, rural and seaside/urban environments.

After considering six high-quality bids, NOMS East of England chose Serco Civil Government to manage path2work, which is delivered in partnership with Turning Point and Rainer.

"Although there are various Pathfinder schemes focused on offender employment elsewhere in the country, path2work is regionally focused and locally delivered," says NOMS East of England Deputy Regional Offender Manager, Matthew Kelly. "It also has private-sector involvement – which is still rare but something we think will become increasingly important – and has more emphasis on the employer side than usual."

path2work implementation began in November 2006 and it accepted its first referrals from NPS offender managers in January 2007.

The project is managed by a project board with representation at chief officer level from four of the region's local probation areas. A recently established steering group chaired by the Chief Officer of Bedfordshire, Linda Hennigan, has enhanced links between the project and the NPS and has driven forward the performance agenda. "Success would not have been possible without the buy-in and expertise of the local probation areas," says Linda Hennigan, who is also the project's Senior Responsible Owner.

Alliance partners

The Alliance of Serco, Turning Point and Rainer was formed to respond to new opportunities in offender management, in community interventions and also in custody. It has a memorandum of understanding, short- and long-term strategies and objectives, an exclusivity agreement and shared decision-making. Lead partners vary according to the needs of the contract.

"Together we offer a choice of provider, innovation, a wide range of services, higher standards and contractual rigour," says Serco Project Director Heidi Watson.

With path2work, Serco provides the contract management and employment advisers, whose role is to help offenders find and keep work. Turning Point and Rainer provide case management expertise, assessing individuals' needs and helping them to prepare for work.

Serco is a leading service company, employing over 46,000 people in 30 countries. Public-sector organisations account for 90% of its business. In offender management, Serco cares for offenders on their journey through the criminal justice system – from taking them to court and detaining them in custody to providing them with the support and skills to live a stable, healthy, law-abiding life after the end of their sentences and monitoring them in the community. In Britain, Serco manages four prisons for NOMS and the Scottish Prison Service. It also runs a Young Offenders Institution and a Secure Training Centre for the Youth Justice Board of England and Wales.

Serco has significant experience in designing and implementing new services, integrating different services and improving the performance of existing services. It is experienced in contract management and delivery against robust performance requirements.

Turning Point is the UK's leading independent social care organisation. Founded in 1964, this highly regarded organisation provides services for people with learning disabilities and those affected by drug and alcohol misuse, mental health problems and other issues. In 2006 it provided services in 200 locations and worked with around 130,000 people.

Turning Point is the UK's largest provider of progress2work services. This is a Jobcentre Plus initiative that aims to help people such as past drug users, ex-offenders and the homeless to gain access to vocational training and employment. Turning Point also runs other employment and education support projects and has significant experience working with prolific priority offenders.

Rainer was formed over 200 years ago and is regarded as the forerunner to the probation system. It aims to help 'under-supported' and vulnerable young people to reach their full potential. In 2006 its 600 staff and 530 local volunteers provided education, training, advice and other support to over 18,000 people in the education, social care, housing and justice systems.

Although independent, Rainer works with partners such as the NPS, Jobcentre Plus and Further Education establishments. It runs 55 contracts around the UK, including employment programmes such as E2E on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council, progress2work and prep2work.

path2work support

path2work staff provide personal support to motivate and help offenders to gain sustainable employment. Staff also work with employers to ensure they feel confident in offering training and employment to offenders. Services include:

- vocational training, arranging bank accounts, in-work benefit calculation, confidence building, interview skills and other employment preparation activities
- employment and training advice, job search, job matching and other employment brokerage activities
- in-employment support

Outcomes

NOMS East of England has agreed a path2work target of placing 460 offenders into enduring employment for each full year.

In its first five months, path2work arranged 97 interviews for ex-offenders, leading to 33 jobs. "Given that we are experiencing a much higher volume of hardest-to-help clients than anticipated and that we expected a 20-week journey from start to job outcome, we're pleased with progress to date," says Heidi Watson. "We're passionate about helping this client group and are working with NOMS and our Alliance partners to boost referrals and help more ex-offenders into employment."

Key outcomes are:

- the number of low-, medium- and high-support offenders who fail to secure any employment after six months beyond the planned ending of their involvement in path2work
 - the number of offenders in each support category who are continually employed for four weeks, eight weeks and 12 weeks
 - employer feedback on path2work and the quality of employees placed
 - offender manager feedback
 - offender feedback
 - the number of path2work offenders who do not re-offend during the scheme, the number who do not re-offend within six months of completion and the number who do not re-offend within a year
- "path2work will enable us to learn lessons and apply them across the region," says Matthew Kelly. "East of England has recently been selected as one of two 'test bed' regions for Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment, further raising this region's profile and increasing momentum. We now want to take this up a level by doing more to bring employers into the heart of our activities."

"path2work is a pilot and we're already learning a huge amount about how to set up projects involving these kinds of partnerships and how to make them work so they provide real employment opportunities for offenders and so reduce the likelihood of re-offending," says Linda Hennigan.

Executive summary

Operating locally in Luton, Bury St Edmunds and Southend-on-Sea, path2work is a regional collaborative project between the NPS, NOMS, and an alliance of Serco, Turning Point and Rainer as service provider. Its main aim is to help ex-offenders find appropriate and sustained work.

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