



## **JOBTRACK**

### **An evaluation of NIACRO's Jobtrack programme 2004 – 2006**

**Commissioned for NIACRO by PROTEUS Training  
Ltd**

March 2006  
NIACRO  
Amelia House  
4 Amelia Street  
Belfast BT2 7GS  
Tel: 028 9032 0157  
Web: [www.niacro.co.uk](http://www.niacro.co.uk)

## Table of Contents

Introduction and Methodology	3
Strategic Context	5
Background to Jobtrack	22
The Jobtrack Clients	30
Jobtrack Performance	37
Operation of Jobtrack	45
Client Feedback	54
Conclusions and Recommendations	59

## **Introduction and Methodology**

This paper presents an outline evaluation of the Jobtrack programme, run by a partnership between NIACRO and the Probation Board. The programme aims to take offenders who received non-custodial orders and who are unemployed through a process of assessing their employability requirements and delivering a customised programme of support and training. The programme's key goal was to move a proportion of such offenders into employment. In addition, much of the research into re-offending patterns pointed to an inverse relationship between achieving employment and offending behaviour. Thus, the programme was designed not only to deal with a 'hard to reach' and 'hard to place' group and to improve their labour market prospects but also, as a consequence, to make a contribution to reducing re-offending. Assessing the latter is beyond the scope of this exercise, which concentrates entirely on the former.

The evaluation concentrates on three aspects of programme performance:

- Purpose – was it designed in the light of the best evidence available both in terms of relevant research material and the policy environment?
- Process – as Jobtrack was delivered, how did its clients perceive it and were they satisfied with the service received? – at another level, how did the partnership between the two organisations progress and did each believe that the partnership was a useful way of delivering their respective missions?
- Outcomes – evaluating outcomes poses special difficulties since these may only occur long after the intervention and it is difficult to attribute them as an effect of the specific intervention. Even where outcomes can be identified, there is a further problem of assessing whether they were proportionate to the investment made in the programme. In short, was it cost effective? This is a particular problem with the Jobtrack client group, for which there are no benchmark data, i.e. what outcomes can be expected given the specific characteristics of this client group? In order to address some of these issues, the details of the client group will be spelt out and compared, where possible, with other 'difficult to place groups'

based on the evaluation of other kinds of employability projects. The Jobtrack outcomes will be considered within that framework.

The following methods were used to capture relevant data:

- Desk research on the background to the programme, including reference to the evaluation of other employability programmes;
- Interviews with staff in NIACRO and the Probation Board;
- Focus groups with three sets of Jobtrack clients;
- Analysis of the NIACRO database;
- Analysis of Jobtrack Annual Reports for 2003/04 and 2004/05

## Strategic Context

Research carried out by the UK Government's Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), has demonstrated that a majority of ex-prisoners are likely to commit another crime:

- *Of those prisoners released in 1997, 58% were convicted of another crime within two years. 36% were back inside on another prison sentence. 18 to 20 year old male prisoners were reconvicted at a rate of 72% over the same period; 47% received another prison sentence.*
- *Of those reconvicted in the two years following release, each will actually have received three further convictions on average. For each reconviction, it is estimated that five recorded offences are committed. At a conservative estimate, released prisoners are responsible for at least 1 million crimes per year – 18% of recorded, notifiable crimes. And this takes no account of the amount of unrecorded crimes that ex-prisoners, reconvicted or otherwise, will have committed.<sup>1</sup>*

The problem of re-offending is also significant in Northern Ireland. While the reconviction rates in Northern Ireland are only slightly lower for adults (45% in 2001 within two years), the figure for young offenders (72% of 17 to 19 year olds within two years) underlines the deeply rooted nature of the problem of recidivism in Northern Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

Re-offending by ex-prisoners carries both social and financial costs. The impact upon victims and their families is often felt in the most disadvantaged communities. The families of the reconvicted offenders have to shoulder a financial and emotional burden. The SEU estimates the cost to the criminal justice system in terms of dealing with the consequences of crime at £11 billion per year. Such a figure again underestimates the true financial cost since it refers only to the criminal justice system and only to recorded crimes. (McEvoy, 2005)

---

<sup>1</sup> Social Exclusion Unit (2002)

<sup>2</sup> Adult Reconviction in Northern Ireland (2001) Northern Ireland Office

In terms of over all crime levels in Northern Ireland, a recent survey carried out to assess attitudes to crime in Northern Ireland revealed that the majority of respondents felt that incidents of crime had increased.<sup>3</sup>

- *52% of respondents felt that crime had increased in their local areas in the previous two years;*
- *In terms of crime rate in Northern Ireland as a whole, 80% of respondents felt that there was 'a little' or 'a lot more crime' than in the previous two years.*

These statistics clearly demonstrate the need for intervention, both at a strategic and an operational level.

### **Rehabilitation Theories**

Research has concluded that the level of re-offending by ex-prisoners is significantly high, with 45% of adult ex-prisoners and 72% of young offenders in Northern Ireland being convicted of another offence within two years.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore not surprising that re-offending has been the subject of a significant amount of policy and literary debate.

A full literature review was outside the scope of the evaluation team, but had previously been undertaken by an academic with considerable expertise in the field. As such, reference here is made to the research carried out by Professor Kieran McEvoy in his report 'Enhancing Employability in Prison and Beyond: a Literature Review.'<sup>5</sup> Many of the most significant arguments in the review are reiterated below.

In his review, McEvoy outlines recent attempts to reduce levels of criminal recidivism such as the current British government's commitment to 'joint up' thinking within and beyond government departments (Prime Minister Strategy Unit 2000). The review goes

---

<sup>3</sup> Perceptions of and Concerns About Crime in Northern Ireland – Findings from the 2003/04 Northern Ireland Crime Survey.

<sup>4</sup> Adult Reconviction in Northern Ireland (2001) Northern Ireland Office

<sup>5</sup> Enhancing Employability in Prison and Beyond : A Literature Review (2005) McEvoy

on to outline the relationship between employment-based interventions and the level of re-offending by ex-prisoners.

### **Employment and Re-offending**

The UK Government Social Exclusion Unit<sup>6</sup> identified nine key factors which need to be addressed to reduce re-offending:

- |                             |                                       |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| -Education                  | -Employment                           |
| -Drugs and alcohol misuse   | -Mental and physical health           |
| -Attitudes and self control | -Institutionalisation and life skills |
| -Housing                    | -Financial support and debt           |
| -Family                     |                                       |

Of these nine factors, the research carried out by the Social Exclusion Unit has pointed out the particular significance of employment, as it reduces the risk of re-offending by between a third and a half. In spite of this, two-thirds of prisoners enter custody having spent much of their life outside stable employment, and three-quarters of prisoners say that they do not have paid employment to go to on release.<sup>7</sup>

McEvoy outlines the arguments which contribute to providing an explanation for these statistics. A number of studies have contended that for offenders who succeed in moving out of a criminal lifestyle, employment plays a central role. For example, Mischkowitz (1994) reported that *'erratic work patterns were substituted by more stable and reliable behaviour'* amongst his sample of non-offending ex-offenders. Sampson and Laub (1993) describe their success stories as having *'... good work habits and were frequently described as hard workers.'* Similarly, Horney et al found that starting work was related to reductions in offending, whilst ceasing to work was associated with the re-initiation of offending (1995). Like Ouimet and Le Blanc (1996) and Cusson and Pineseault (1986), Uggen (2000) also found that those aged twenty seven and over were more likely to

---

<sup>6</sup> Social Exclusion Unit, (2002)

<sup>7</sup> Social Exclusion Unit, (2002)

desist from offending when provided with employment opportunities than those who were not offered such opportunities.

In his 1998 study<sup>8</sup>, Andrew Bridges analysed the effectiveness of probation services at increasing the employability of offenders as a direct contribution to crime prevention. Bridges examined the employment-related interventions attempted by eleven area probation services, and the employment related outcomes recorded as achieved. The study found that with offenders who were unemployed on commencement, those who had an employment intervention gained a job before their supervision ended at twice the rate of those who did not have an employment intervention during their supervision.

McEvoy and Bridges both cite Farrington et al's 1986 analysis of the self-reported job history and official criminal records of 411 young males. They found that the rate of offending during periods of unemployment was significantly higher than during periods of employment. Nagin and Waldfogel (1995) subsequently re-examined the data from Farrington et al's study to model the link between convictions and job opportunities. The results of this exercise confirmed the earlier results indicating that early criminal convictions can deny young offenders job opportunities throughout their lives by precluding entry into apprenticeships and training opportunities. Thus, they argued, young offenders' long-term career advancement becomes limited which in turn puts a ceiling on their potential earnings and perpetuates the crime/social exclusion cycle.

The corollary of this research appears to be that getting offenders into meaningful employment reduces their likelihood of offending.

### **Barriers to employment**

Having highlighted the relationship between employment and re-offending, McEvoy goes on to point out the main barriers which ex-offenders face in gaining meaningful

---

<sup>8</sup> Increasing the Employability of Offenders: An Inquiry into Probation Service Effectiveness (1998) Bridges



employment. These are presented under three headings: Social Exclusion; Attitude of Employers; and Lack of Legislative Protection from Discrimination.

### *Social Exclusion*

It has been argued that the high levels of unemployment amongst ex-offenders may be due to wider factors aside from their criminal convictions, such as low educational qualifications, health problems, lack of practical experience in employment or lack of motivation. Based on the findings of a 1990 Prison Service survey, McEvoy identifies the following characteristics of the ex-offender population:

- lower socio-economic groups are over represented
- around 25% have been in care (compared to 2% in the general population),
- high levels of drug and alcohol abuse,
- high levels of illiteracy and lack of basic skills
- a high proportion (e.g. two thirds of young prisoners) are unemployed prior to imprisonment
- approximately 40% left school before the age of 16 (compared to 11 % of the general male population).

These characteristics can have a negative impact on the employability of ex-offenders, as they conflict with the attributes which employers seek on the demand side of the labour market. As such, McCall (1998) argues that policy must take account of these multiple problems faced by offenders which cannot be solved by assistance with employment alone.

### *Attitudes of Employers*

The attitudes of potential employers towards ex-offenders has been highlighted as a further barrier for ex-offenders seeking employment. Although McEvoy points out the limitations in the research available on this subject due to a large number of inconsistencies, there are a number of pertinent points which are worthy of note. The most consistent conclusions are that, in terms of ex-offenders, employers are most

concerned with the type of offence the person has committed and the relationship between the offence and the post applied for.

In addition, McEvoy outlines the findings of specific pieces of research. For example, a 1991 survey of 2,300 employers concluded that what most employers are looking for is someone with basic skills, which include honesty, reliability and motivation, and who are willing and capable of being trained in the company's specific processes. As such, these workforce skills may not be the characteristics which employers would automatically associate with their idea of a 'typical' ex-offender. Therefore, the report concludes that there is great reluctance amongst employers to consider recruiting people who they know to have a criminal record.

However, the research summarised by McEvoy does highlight the following more positive points in relation to employers' attitudes:

- Larger companies are the most likely to consider employing offenders and ex-offenders in the future;
- Employers had a preference for people with the 'necessary basic skills', including good motivation, reliability, trustworthiness, literacy and numeracy and the ability to work in a team;
- Employers have pointed out the importance of a 'positive attitude' in an offender or ex-offender, including motivation to change past behaviour.

#### *Lack of Legislative Protection from Discrimination*

McEvoy outlines two models for dealing with criminal records through legislation, firstly the Human Rights Anti-Discriminatory Model and secondly the Spent Convictions Model.

The 'Anti-Discrimination Model' prevents discrimination on the grounds of a criminal record in relation to a range of social and civil activities including employment. There are international human rights standards and there is some case law to suggest that discrimination against persons on the grounds of an irrelevant criminal record may be

unlawful. For example, the European Court of Human Rights has interpreted non-discrimination on the grounds of ‘other status’ to include non-discrimination on the basis of criminal record.

Similar provisions have been included in the Draft Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland prepared by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and suggested for inclusion by the Equality Commission in the Single Equality Act. However, neither of these pieces of legislation have yet been enacted.

The ‘Spent Convictions Model’ is exemplified by the UK’s Rehabilitation of Offender Act 1974 (Order 1978 in Northern Ireland). This legislation has been widely criticised as not providing adequate protection against discrimination for ex-offenders, and proposals have been put forward to review and amend it. The impact of this legislation is discussed in more detail later in this report.

McEvoy suggests that the ideal model for protecting ex-offenders from unreasonable discrimination, and thereby improving employability, is to use the human rights framework as a base. In the Northern Ireland context, this means supplementing the Rehabilitation of Offenders legislation with the Single Equality Bill and the Northern Ireland Bill of Rights, so as to ensure that ex-offenders as a group are not unreasonably excluded from employment.

### **Employment and Social Capital**

One of the arguments outlined in the literature review is the relationship between re-offending and social capital. McEvoy describes social capital as ‘those factors and relationships which can mitigate against offending behaviour.’ In other words, the connection between a person and their families, communities, or employers and co-workers can be seen as a resource in seeking to reduce re-offending. A central aspect of this notion is employment, as it can be crucial to the development of mature relationships which produce social capital.

Employment has been viewed as a key element in the process of social capital by Farrell (2004), whose argument is outlined by McEvoy as follows (p26):

*Paid employment has the potential to achieve all of the following: a reduction in 'unstructured' time and an increase in 'structured' time; an income, which enables 'home-leaving' and the establishment of 'significant' relationships; a 'legitimate' identity; an increase in self-esteem; use of an individual's energies; financial security; daily interaction with non-offenders; for men in particular, a reduction in the time spent in single sex, peer-aged groups; the means by which an individual may meet their future partner; and ambition and goals, such as promotion at work.*

As such, initiatives which have been established to assist offenders to reintegrate back into local communities often have well developed mentoring, circles of support or other peer focused schemes which are designed to assist in developing supportive relationships with ex-offenders families, communities and employers. McEvoy summarises this point by stating that in order to assist ex-offenders in desisting from crime, a focus upon networks of social capital is key.

### **Employment as an Outcome**

Bridges (1998) outlines a distinction between 'employment interventions' (EIs) and 'employment outcomes' (EOs) as measures of success. In his analysis of the effectiveness of probation services, he identified what might count as an intervention and what could be classed as an outcome. His explanation on this offers a useful context in which to evaluate the performance of Jobtrack.

Bridges takes the view that assessment of individual offenders and referrals to training courses should be seen as employment interventions, work undertaken by a worker or agency with the intention of increasing the employability of an offender. He points out that EIs traditionally focus on guidance and training, but can be made more effective if

there has been a careful assessment of the offender to ensure that he or she has been entered for the most appropriate training provision.

An outcome must show a '*demonstrable increase in the offender's employability*'. Bridges gives the example of an offender having experienced an EI such as an assessment or training course. In this case, it will be necessary to assess whether or not there has been an identifiable benefit gained which had increased the person's employment prospects to some extent. Any qualifications gained from a training course could count as an EO, as could the production of a CV, attendance at a job interview, or evidence of a new constructive use of leisure.

Bridges summarises the point by stating that in a training programme, referral to and attendance at the training programme would be interventions, but the qualification and interview gained at the end would both be outcomes. This classification of 'interventions' and 'outcomes' is important to bear in mind when assessing the performance of Jobtrack.

### **Legislative Framework**

One of the aims of Jobtrack is to help raise awareness with employers and policy makers with respect to changes to legislation and how these may affect and influence practice in respect of recruitment and selection procedures. Examples of this legislation include the following:

#### **The Rehabilitation of Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1978:**

The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 was given its Northern Ireland equivalent in the form of the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1978. The Order came into effect in Northern Ireland in July 1979, and allows certain convicted persons who have not been subsequently reconvicted to be considered as rehabilitated persons and their convictions treated as 'spent'. The legislation introduced new concepts of 'spent convictions' and 'rehabilitated persons.' A rehabilitation period, varying from six months

to ten years from the date of conviction, is set according to the sentence passed by the court. It is worth noting, however, that sentences of over thirty months (two and a half years) are never considered 'spent', which reflects the extent of the barriers experienced by those with lengthy sentences.

Under the terms of the legislation, during the rehabilitation period a person must disclose their previous convictions when asked to do so by an employer. However, provided that they are not reconvicted during the rehabilitation period, the conviction becomes 'spent.' In practical terms this means that the rehabilitated person is no longer required to disclose the spent conviction. If anyone chooses to do so, an employer may not use a spent conviction as a reason to reject a job application or as grounds for dismissal.

A number of exceptions to these rules have been made by the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Exceptions) Order 1979 (amended in 1987, 2001 and 2003) some of which are designed to ensure the protection of certain vulnerable groups of the public in particular circumstances. These exceptions include work with children, work with vulnerable adults and employment involving the administration of justice, national security and financial services.

A review<sup>9</sup> has taken place of the UK Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. The *Breaking the Circle* review points out the problem, or 'circle', of re-offending:

- Over a quarter of the working age population has a previous conviction
- The annual cost of crime is £60 billion
- Employment can reduce re-offending by between a third and a half
- But a criminal record can seriously diminish employment opportunities

The ROA review acknowledges that the scheme is no longer wholly effective, as it is not achieving the right balance between resettlement and protection. The ROA review has

---

<sup>9</sup> *Breaking the Circle – A Report of the Review of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974*, (July 2002) Home Office

looked at ways to ensure that the burden of the requirement to disclose a previous conviction is minimised for ex-offenders who simply want the chance of lawful employment, while maintaining a requirement to disclose where there may be a particular risk of harm. The review has focused specifically on the requirements for disclosure to employers.

The UK government has indicated that a draft Bill to enact the changes recommended in the review will be placed before parliament ‘as soon as practicable’.

In the summer of 2003, the Northern Ireland Office carried out a consultation process on the review of the Northern Ireland Rehabilitation Order proposing to adopt the changes proposed in the ‘Breaking the Circle’ publication. This review made a range of suggestions which would bring the current legislation in line with the specific requirements of the Northern Ireland criminal justice system. NIACRO established a consultative working group to examine the review of the legislation, and provided a detailed response on the issues raised. NIACRO continues to make policy comments when appropriate with regards to this legislation on an ongoing basis.

NIACRO has made the point that any reform of the legislation should ensure that it is relevant to the Northern Ireland jurisdiction. The main concern with the current legislation is:

*A poorly framed rehabilitation legislation that is not uniquely relevant to the region could actually increase barriers rather than decrease them...*

*Any new legislation must strike a balance between rehabilitation, which most desire, and risk management which is a pre-requisite. Historically rehabilitation legislation has focussed on risk management. The consequent rehabilitative effect has been questionable.<sup>10</sup>*

NIACRO also points out that the weakness of the Rehabilitation of Offenders legislation is that it does not promote equality of opportunity or safeguard against discriminatory

---

<sup>10</sup> Draft Response to the Reform of the Law on Rehabilitation of Offenders, NIACRO

practice. NIACRO recognises that people with convictions regularly experience difficulties obtaining insurance, licences such as PSVs, bank loans and mortgages, and can face discriminatory practice accessing employment and training opportunities. Any reform of the Rehabilitation of Offenders legislation should therefore promote equality of opportunity for individuals with a criminal conviction.

NIACRO has also pointed out the particular difficulties which people with convictions face in Northern Ireland. NIACRO estimates that there are approximately 25,000 people who received lengthy sentences of over two and a half years as a result of the conflict. Under the current legislation, these convictions cannot be treated as ‘spent’ so this group of ex-offenders are therefore more likely to face difficulties accessing employment opportunities. NIACRO has also stated that the review of the Rehabilitation of Offenders legislation needs to take account of life sentences and therefore acknowledge the unique offender population in Northern Ireland and the additional barriers which they face.

NIACRO has also provided detailed comments on the recruitment and security vetting procedures carried out within the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). NIACRO’s main concern lies in the use of a Risk Assessment Model by the NICS, which can be used to assess “character” rather than assessing the relevance of the conviction to the duties of the job. NIACRO feel that this model operates a practice of exclusion rather than inclusion and is therefore fundamentally flawed.

### **Single Equality Bill**

The Northern Ireland Executive’s first Programme for Government commits Ministers to bringing forward a Single Equality Bill, which will bring together and harmonise as far as is practicable all existing anti-discrimination legislation in Northern Ireland and extend the legislation to incorporate new developments in Great Britain and Europe.



In June 2004, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) issued a consultation document on a Single Equality Bill for Northern Ireland. This document defined the aim of the Bill as follows:

*To harmonise as far as practicable the provisions across all the grounds for which protection against anti-discrimination is afforded and to extend protection where appropriate.*<sup>11</sup>

NIACRO has provided a response to issues raised in the consultation paper. NIACRO provided comments on the inconsistencies in protection for people with past convictions with regard to the Rehabilitation of Offenders legislation. In its response, NIACRO took the opportunity to *draw attention to the need for stronger protection for this proportion of the population through stronger anti-discrimination legislation and to take account of equality of opportunity that no other piece of legislation currently promotes for individuals with past convictions wishing to access employment, goods, facilities and services.*<sup>12</sup>

The following points were included in NIACRO's response:

- Within the context of human rights, it is a basic human right to work, therefore this should be promoted within the legislation with employers being responsible for advocating a transparent and pro-active approach to considering individuals with convictions;
- The Single Equality Bill needs to clearly spell out that inequitable treatment and unjustifiable discrimination on the grounds of past convictions is unlawful;
- The Single Equality Bill needs to take account of the size and level of discrimination and the significant impact that it has on communities in Northern Ireland and recognise that this merits acknowledgement of people with past convictions as a tenth group;

---

<sup>11</sup> A Single Equality Bill for Northern Ireland (June 2004), OFMDFM

<sup>12</sup> NIACRO's Response to the OFMDFM Consultation on: "A Single Equality Bill for Northern Ireland."

- The Rehabilitation legislation does not provide the guidance and safeguards needed in how information is to be used and in NIACRO's experience, information received about past convictions is used to discriminate unfairly;
- Discrimination is an every day problem for people with past convictions and unless the Bill provides a context in which these issues can be addressed there is no opportunity for people to challenge these discriminatory practices and decisions;
- NIACRO would like the Single Equality Bill to address all forms of discrimination defined to protect people with past convictions;
- If we are to address long term unemployment we need to monitor access to employment. As a society we need to ensure that people are considered in terms of skill and experience and that a conviction alone should not be a barrier or reason to exclude people with past convictions. The Bill needs to take account of this and clearly address the need to protect this proportion of the population when accessing employment opportunities.

### **Police Act 1997**

The implementation of Part 5 of the Police Act 1997 has been the subject of consultation and debate in Northern Ireland. This piece of legislation creates a statutory framework for the disclosure of criminal and police records, including non-conviction information in certain circumstances. Under Part 5, there are three levels of check, Basic, Standard and Enhanced, which provide varying degrees of access to a person's Criminal and Police record. The Enhanced Category provides employers with access to an individual's full criminal record and any other relevant information held on them in police files.

It has been suggested that the system proposed under Part 5 needs to adequately ensure that there is protection from discrimination on grounds of having a criminal record. In a recent Northern Ireland Office report, it was noted that monitoring of the checking

system must be an important consideration.<sup>13</sup> In this report, it was noted that there may be a great deal of discrimination against those with convictions. As such, monitoring of the procedures should include consideration of whether decisions not to employ someone have been made appropriately, whether the ‘enhanced’ level check was ordered appropriately and how well systems protect the rights of ex-offenders.

NIACRO provided a detailed response to the Northern Ireland Office’s consultation paper on proposals to reform the criminal disclosure service through the enactment of Part 5<sup>14</sup>. NIACRO points out that the main deficiency in the present system is the lack of a legislative basis for the disclosure of criminal or police records. It states that unless there is some firm legislative mechanism put in place to guide employers to make more informed recruitment choices, there is a fear that increased inequality of opportunity will take place.

NIACRO points out that the Part 5 of the Police Act fails to take into account the unique characteristics of the offender population in Northern Ireland. It points out that, during the period of the conflict, there were a number of people prosecuted for offences associated with Northern Ireland situation, who would have been convicted as juveniles and not re-offended since. People in this group may be discouraged from applying for posts which are subject to security vetting. In relation to obtaining PSV licences, for example, any convictions for serious offences will lead to automatic disqualification. Part 5 therefore needs to take account of a unique offender profile and security vetting requirements within Northern Ireland to safeguard against further unnecessary discrimination.

Furthermore, there are a number of employers who are ‘excepted’ from rehabilitation legislation, who have regarded a previous conviction as automatic grounds for disqualification, regardless of its relevance. This includes people wishing to work in

---

<sup>13</sup> Reforming Employment Checking in Northern Ireland: Report of an Interactive Consultation Event (December 2004) Northern Ireland Office

<sup>14</sup> The NIO Consultation Paper on Safer Recruitment in Northern Ireland: NIACRO’s Response, May 2005

childcare, the Health and Social Services Board, financial services and a wide range of private sector positions. NIACRO feels that legislation should take the opportunity to require employers, professional organisations and licensing bodies to demonstrate why someone with a conviction is considered unsuitable for a particular post or service and to make this known to the applicant.

NIACRO goes on to express concern about the use of Basic Disclosure information by employers in the absence of any regulated control and monitoring tools. It states that employers wishing to access Basic Disclosure information should be subject to the same registration and regulatory requirements as those organisations accessing Standard and Enhanced Disclosures.

Over all, NIACRO supports efforts to ensure that Part 5 of the Police Act puts an onus on employers to follow good employment practices when considering the contents of disclosures.

### **Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (Northern Ireland) Order 2003**

The Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 (POCVA) commenced on 1st April 2005, and provides for the maintenance of two lists, namely the Disqualification from Working with Children (DWC (NI)) List and the Disqualification from Working with Vulnerable Adults (DWVA (NI)) List.

In addition, POCVA provides a legislative basis for pre-employment checks against these lists. As such, POCVA provides a legislative basis for referral to the DHSSPS of those workers, either paid or unpaid, in care positions who are unsuitable to work with children and vulnerable adults and for screening prospective employees to care positions

In its Guide to POCVA, the DHSSPS also states that careful account has been taken of the rights of the individual and the need for protection from malicious or unsubstantiated referrals. It is therefore important to ensure that, in making decisions based on the

POCVA legislation, individuals with a criminal record are afforded sufficient protection from undue discrimination.

### **Northern Ireland Act 1998**

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act requires all public authorities in carrying out their functions, powers and duties in Northern Ireland to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity amongst the following nine groups:

- Between people of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- Between men and women generally;
- Between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- Between persons with dependants and persons without.

NIACRO argues that people with criminal convictions are represented within this group, in that:

- Discrimination because of previous involvement with a paramilitary organisation could be interpreted as discrimination on the grounds of political opinion;
- As the ex-offender population is predominantly male, discrimination to this group could be interpreted as discrimination on the grounds of gender;
- As 40% of convictions relate to people under 25 years of age, discrimination to this group can be interpreted as discrimination on the grounds of age;
- Families and dependants of people with a conviction are likely to experience an adverse impact in relation to equality of opportunity, as they may be denied criminal injury compensation, insurance or employment. This could be interpreted as discrimination on the grounds of having dependants.<sup>15</sup>

NIACRO has represented these issues to all of the public authorities to whom it responds.

---

<sup>15</sup> 'To Develop and Test Models that Engage Employers in the Recruitment of Individuals with a Criminal Record' – A Report from PPS Northern Ireland and OIS Greece.

## **Background to Jobtrack**

### **Northern Ireland Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity**

Jobtrack receives funding under the Northern Ireland Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity (BSP). BSP aims to address the wider developmental issues facing Northern Ireland. It has the following five priorities:

1. Economic Growth and Competitiveness
2. Employment
3. Urban and Social Revitalisation
4. Agriculture, Rural Development, Forestry and Fisheries
5. Environment

Priority 2 acts as the umbrella for all actions funded from the European Structural Funds and addresses specific labour market needs of those in education who are about to enter the labour market, those who are unemployed and those who are in employment. It aims to address a number of identified labour market weaknesses.

Jobtrack has received funding under Measure 2.3 – Promoting a Labour Market Open to All. The aim of this measure is stated as follows:

*To promote a labour market open to all through the development of innovative ways of overcoming disadvantage and exclusion.*

The target group for this measure is people in disadvantaged groups and communities, who are at risk of social exclusion through an inability to compete equally in the labour market.

Jobtrack aims to target ex-offenders as one of these socially excluded groups. This group encompasses many who are at the margins of society, including people who have low essential skills. These include single parents, people who are poorly motivated and lack

self-esteem and people who abuse alcohol, drugs and other substances. Jobtrack operates on the recognition that these and other associated groups have fundamental educational and training deficits which impeded their ability to secure and retain employment.

### **Purpose of Jobtrack**

Jobtrack operates on the assumption that there exists a correlation between unemployment and offending behaviour. As such, efforts to improve or enhance a person's ability to secure employment can contribute to a reduction in the likelihood of re-offending.

The programme takes into account specific research carried out by Andrew Bridges<sup>16</sup> in to the effectiveness of probation services. Bridges discovered that, even with the least motivated offenders who were unemployed at the start of their probation supervision, those who experienced any form of employment intervention gained a job at twice the rate of those who did not.

Jobtrack therefore aims to provide a programme which enhances the employability of offenders through the provision of an individually tailored, dedicated service. The service provided by Jobtrack extends beyond immediate employment issues to address the entire needs of a person so as to make them more employable.

The group which Jobtrack targets are extremely difficult to reach, as they are long term unemployed ex-offenders who have been given community based sentences. Jobtrack provides a staged provision made up of the following programme elements:

#### *Assessment*

- Training and employment assessment
- Employment focussed motivational self assessing method
- CCEA essential skills assessment tool

---

<sup>16</sup> Increasing the Employability of Offenders: An Inquiry into Probation

- Benefit assessment
- Other assessment tools are used when appropriate

### *Job Preparation*

- Essential skills training
- Vocationally relevant training
- Work sampling
- Supported job search
- Disclosure advice
- Benefits advice
- IT training
- Information, advice and guidance
- Personal development

### *Signposting/Brokerage*

- Service within and beyond NIACRO
- Work placement
- Further education/training
- Part time and full time employment

Jobtrack provides this Assessment and Job Preparation service for the least motivated and/or qualified 25% of the offender population who are in contact with PBNI in the community. It also provides these services for a number of referrals from other sources, including self referrals and referrals from the community. Jobtrack is now also working closely with the Reachout programme, so as to align the support services provided to offenders post release. As such, the programme deals with a number of serious offenders.

Jobtrack recognises that the ex-offender group faces significant legislative barriers due to a number of statutory provisions, including the Rehabilitation of Offenders (NI) Order



1978 (and Rehabilitation of Offenders (Exceptions) Order 1979), which NIACRO feels fail to protect against discrimination on the grounds of having a criminal record. Ex-offenders also face attitudinal barriers in terms of prejudice, mistrust and fear due to the fact that they have a criminal record. Furthermore, they are faced with structural barriers in relation to recruitment practices which do not protect against discrimination, including the recruitment and security vetting procedures adopted by the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Jobtrack aims to address these legislative, attitudinal and structural barriers which ex-offenders face when seeking employment.

### **Influencing Employers**

As well as enhancing the participants' employability, Jobtrack also aims to engage with employers to influence their recruiting practices with the aim of reducing barriers faced by the beneficiary group.

In its commitment to enhancing employment and training opportunities for offenders, NIACRO offers support to employers to address structural, legislative and attitudinal barriers faced by the client group. As such, NIACRO's Employer Equity Work focuses on targeting recruitment and selection processes and has sought to change the systems that take account of the needs of employers and prospective employees with a criminal record. In addition, NIACRO is keen to promote equality of opportunity through its responses to Section 75 Consultations.

NIACRO's Employment Advice Line serves to provide advice to employers, individuals and other interested parties on employment issues relating to people who have criminal convictions. Callers are advised on the requirements of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Legislation and other associated legislation. Advice is delivered by the organisation's Employment Liaison Officer who provides an impartial and confidential service to all callers. The service is offered free of charge and callers can access the service either by telephone or by arranging to see the Employment Liaison Officer in person.

Employer Support is a key service aimed at:

- Advising employers of their legal responsibilities relating to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Legislation;
- The promotion of Good Practice guidelines to employers when considering recruitment and selection procedures for potential employees and / or volunteers. Employers are encouraged to consider:
  - Facilitating Disclosure of Convictions
  - Including a statement of non-discrimination and adapting Equal Opportunities Policies
  - Handling information
  - Assessing relevance of convictions
- Inviting employers and other organisations to attend training workshops delivered by NIACRO on the “Fair Recruitment of People with Criminal Convictions”. Training is based on the NIACRO publication: “Working with Conviction - A Guide for Employers.” Alternatively, training is available to employer organisations on site where there are large numbers of staff wishing to participate in training workshops. Employers are invited to apply for NIACRO’s Employer Equity Award, a charter mark, to recognise and endorse an organisation’s commitment to fair recruitment and selection of people with criminal convictions. It has also produced two information DVD’s to assist employers and clients with the issues around the disclosure of conviction information.

### **Strategic Fit with Other Organisations**

Jobtrack fits with the strategic objectives of both the Probation Board and the Department for Employment and Learning.

### **Probation Board for Northern Ireland**

In its Corporate Plan 2005-2008 and Business Plan 2005-2006, PBNI takes in to account the Government's aim to 'Reduce Reconviction Rates in Northern Ireland.' In response to widespread public consultation, PBNI set out its strategic objectives and priorities, including the following areas:

#### *Public Protection*

Strategic Objective: 'The Probation Board for Northern Ireland will assess and then contribute to the management of the risk posed by offenders in the Community so as to protect the public from harm, reduce re-offending, encourage partnerships and secure community confidence.'

#### *Social Inclusion*

Strategic Objective: 'The Probation Board for Northern Ireland will promote Social Inclusion in its policies and practices.'

#### Priorities:

- Improve the essential skills level of offenders under supervision.
- Increase access to education, training and employment for offenders under supervision.

#### Key Performance Measures:

- Number of offenders under statutory supervision referred to the Equal Programme to improve essential skills and employability.
- 80% of the Community Development Budget will be targeted at organisations who work with adjudicated offenders under community supervision.

Jobtrack can be seen to fit under both the wide objective of reducing reconviction rates in Northern Ireland, and PBNI's specific objectives of Public Protection and Social Inclusion. By aiming to enhance the employability of ex-offenders, Jobtrack seeks to reduce the likelihood of re-offending by its client group. In doing so, it can reduce the risk posed by offenders in the community and enhance public protection. Furthermore, by providing access to education, training and employment for ex-offenders, the programme can help to meet the objective of promoting social inclusion.

### **Department for Employment and Learning**

In its Corporate Plan 2005-2008, the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) outlines its strategic priorities over three years. It outlines the main purpose of the Department, which is to:

*Improve access to skills and employment through education and training and to promote learning for social and personal development.*

The plan goes on to point out the importance of addressing the legacy of the Troubles and ensuring that all sections of society become engaged, and have opportunities to share in the benefits of prosperity and growth.

Under its strategy for improving skills, DEL outlines the following areas for priority action:

- improve the assessment of skill needs, existing and potential, and improve the flow of labour market information;
- improve the relevance, coherence, response and quality of current education and training provision;
- promote the acquisition of skills;
- improve access to skills for sustainable employment; and
- make the supporting education and training infrastructure easier to navigate.

In line with these priorities, Jobtrack seeks to improve the skills which exist in the ex-offender population, with a view to enhancing their employability and improving the likelihood of achieving employment.

DEL also states its commitment to *‘providing individuals with assistance to address their personal barriers to employment, including developing more targeted provision for individuals, promoting education and training to increase skills, and providing individuals with access to information, advice and guidance.’*

It states that a particular focus will be to *‘help as many working age people as possible, including those who are furthest away from the labour market, to achieve at a qualification that will enable them to secure sustainable employment.’*

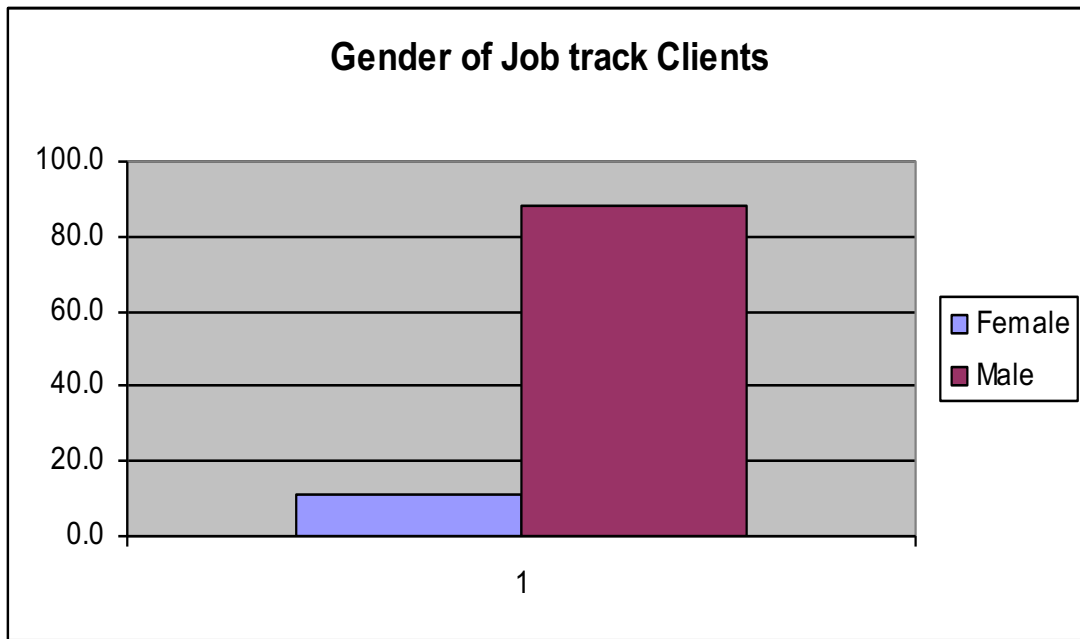
Jobtrack fits with this aim, as it targets ex-offenders that are long term unemployed and therefore far away from the labour market, to help them to achieve qualifications and enhance their future employability.

## **The Jobtrack Clients**

The profile of Jobtrack Clients is presented so as provide an understanding of the barriers to employment they face. These are not a typical group of even the long-term unemployed and this should be acknowledged in assessing how many achieved positive outcomes.

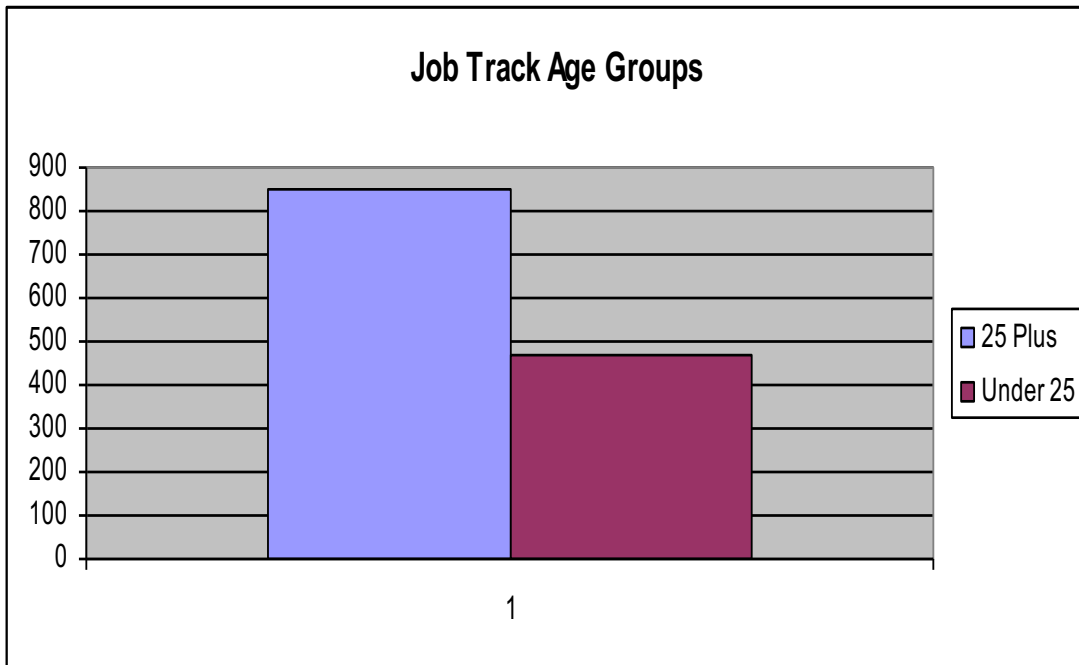
NIACRO made available its database on Jobtrack clients. The database contained information on just over 1,300 clients drawn from two years of the programme. As with the total population of offenders, Jobtrack clients were overwhelmingly male.

**Figure 1**



Because Jobtrack is supported under ESF regulations, the key age groups are the under, and over, 25 years respectively. The distribution of Jobtrack between these two groups was as follows:

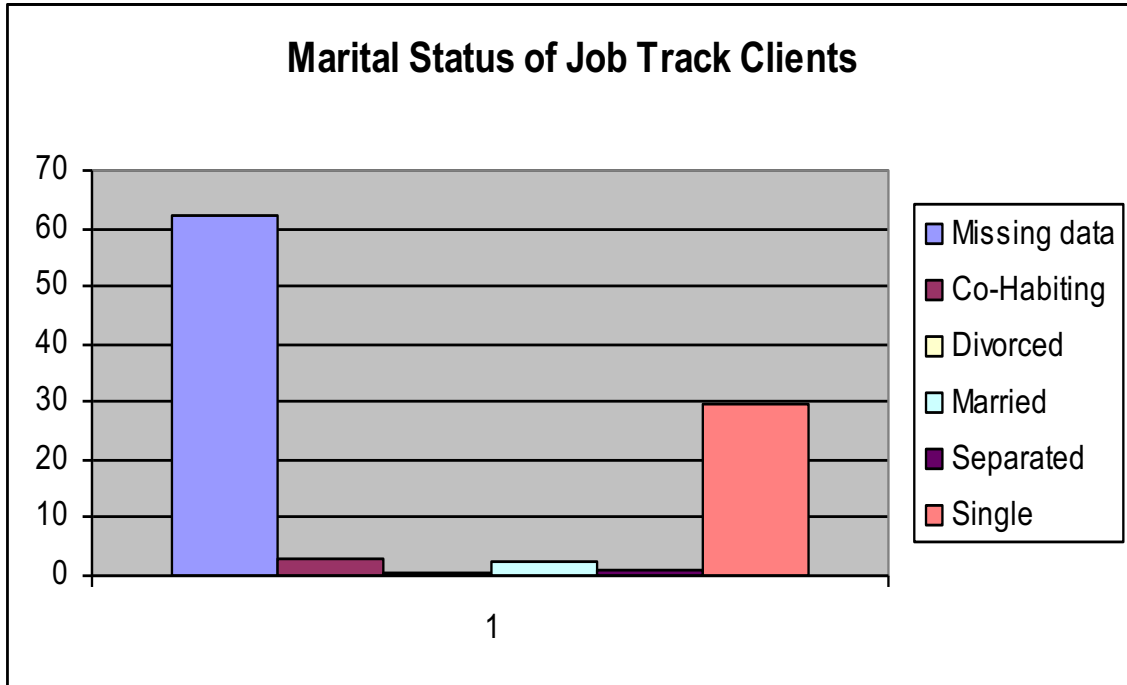
**Figure 2**



Just over 800 clients (about two thirds of the total) were in the older age group. Both gender and age have implications for the central issue of employability. In general, older men tend to be concentrated amongst the long-term unemployed and they also form a significant proportion of the economically inactive. When considering the barriers to employment already faced by the offender population, the fact that Jobtrack recruits predominantly amongst the older age groups should also be seen as a relevant factor.

In the debate about re-offending, the relationships sustained by the offender are seen as an important factor in influencing behaviour. For that reason, a key variable on the NIACRO database is the marital status of the Jobtrack client

**Figure 3**



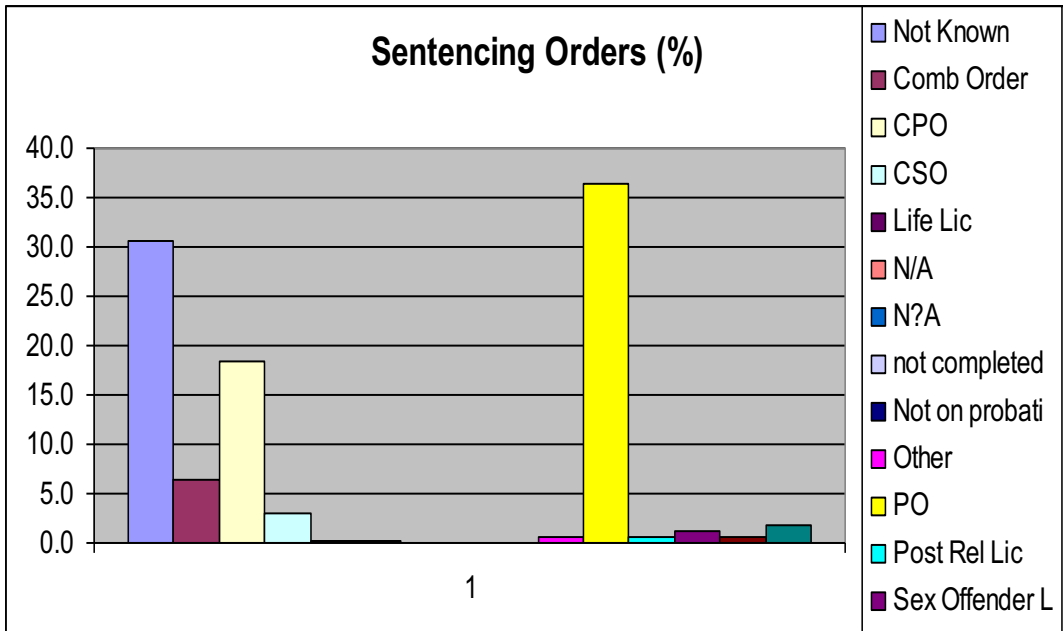
The data on marital status were missing for a very large number of cases, although this has to be considered in the context of the difficulties encountered with the original database and complexity of the recording requirements. Almost another 30 per cent were recorded as single, with very small percentages recorded as either cohabiting or married.

Jobtrack clients, referred by the Probation Board, are defined as being under a non custodial order and being unemployed. While these constitute the bulk of clients, a small number are referred from other sources, e.g. community-based organisations. For that reason, the figure on client employment status contains a small number who are not categorised as unemployed.

Although, many Jobtrack clients were under Probation Orders, some were under Custody Probation Orders, i.e. the sentence involved both an element of custody and probation. This can be seen in Figure 4

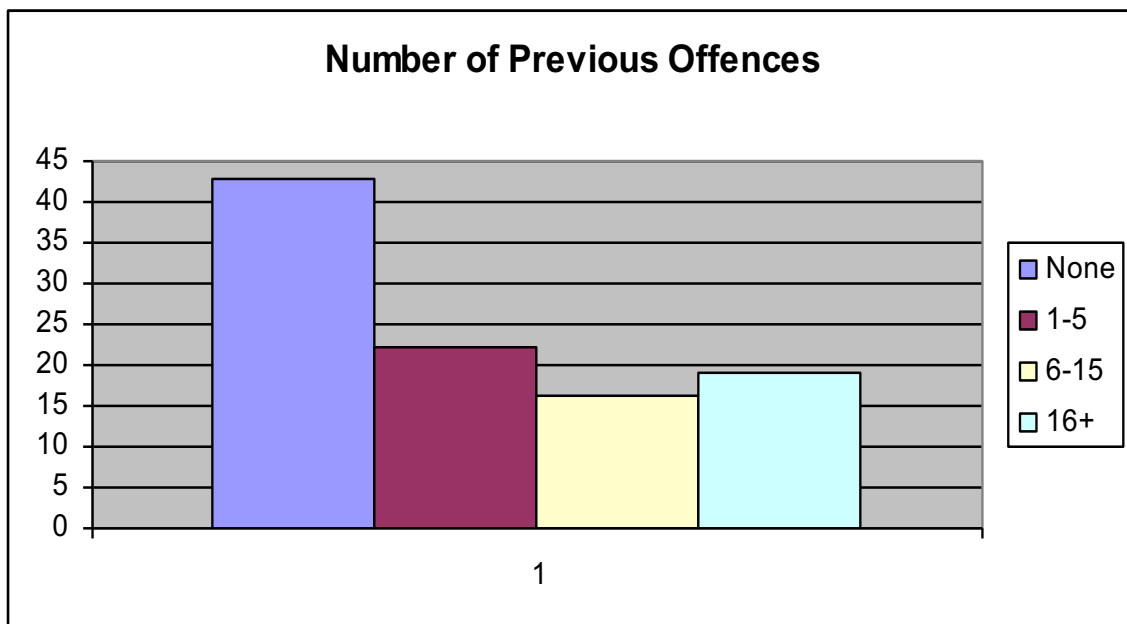


**Figure 4**



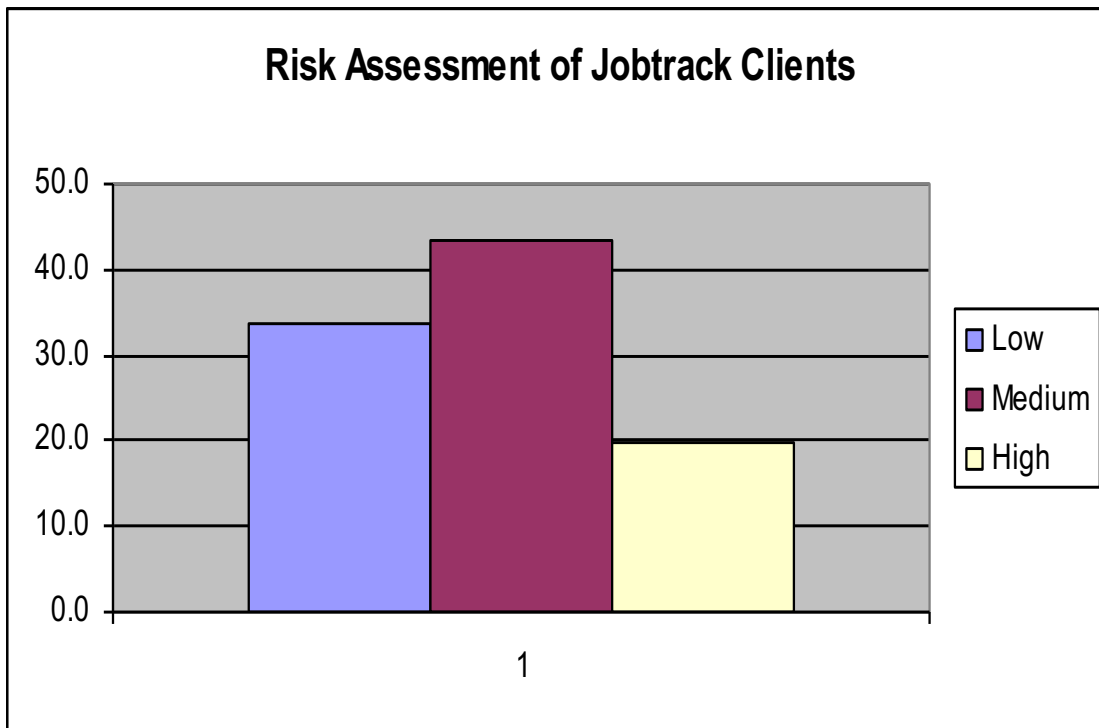
No order was recorded for about 30 percent of all clients. If these are discounted, then almost three quarters of clients were on POs or CPOs. Interestingly, for over 40 per cent of those on Jobtrack, the order referred to a first offence (no previous convictions). Almost one in five were recorded as having more than 15 previous offences.

**Figure 5**



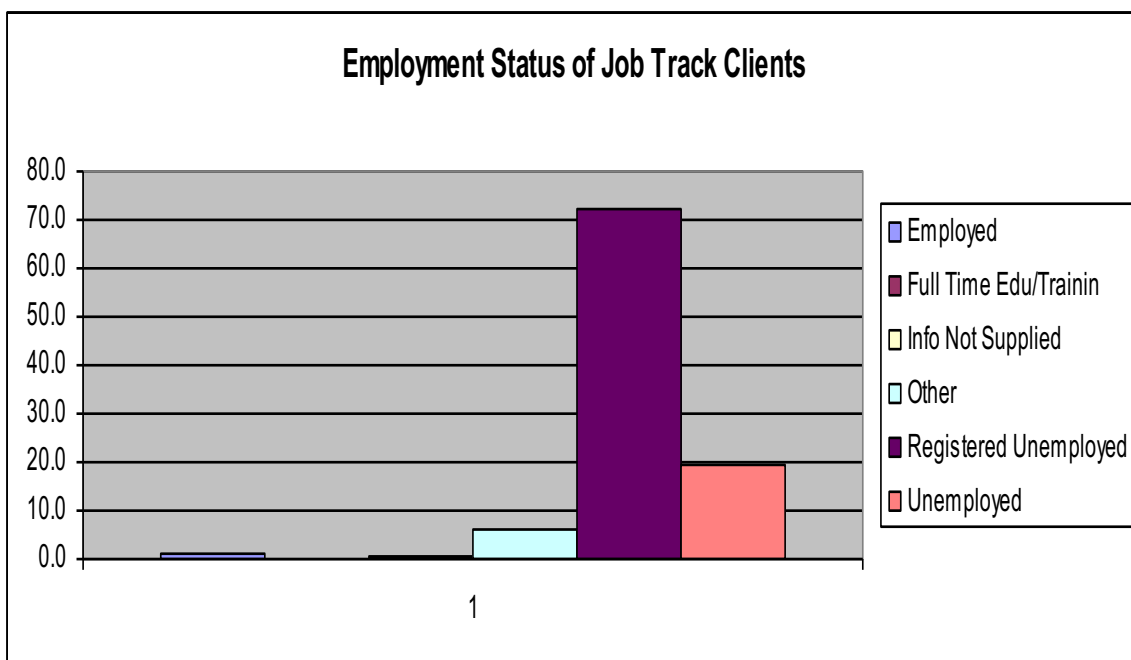
The distribution of risk assessment among the client group was as follows:

**Figure 6**



The largest single group were in the medium risk category with a further one in five in the high risk category.

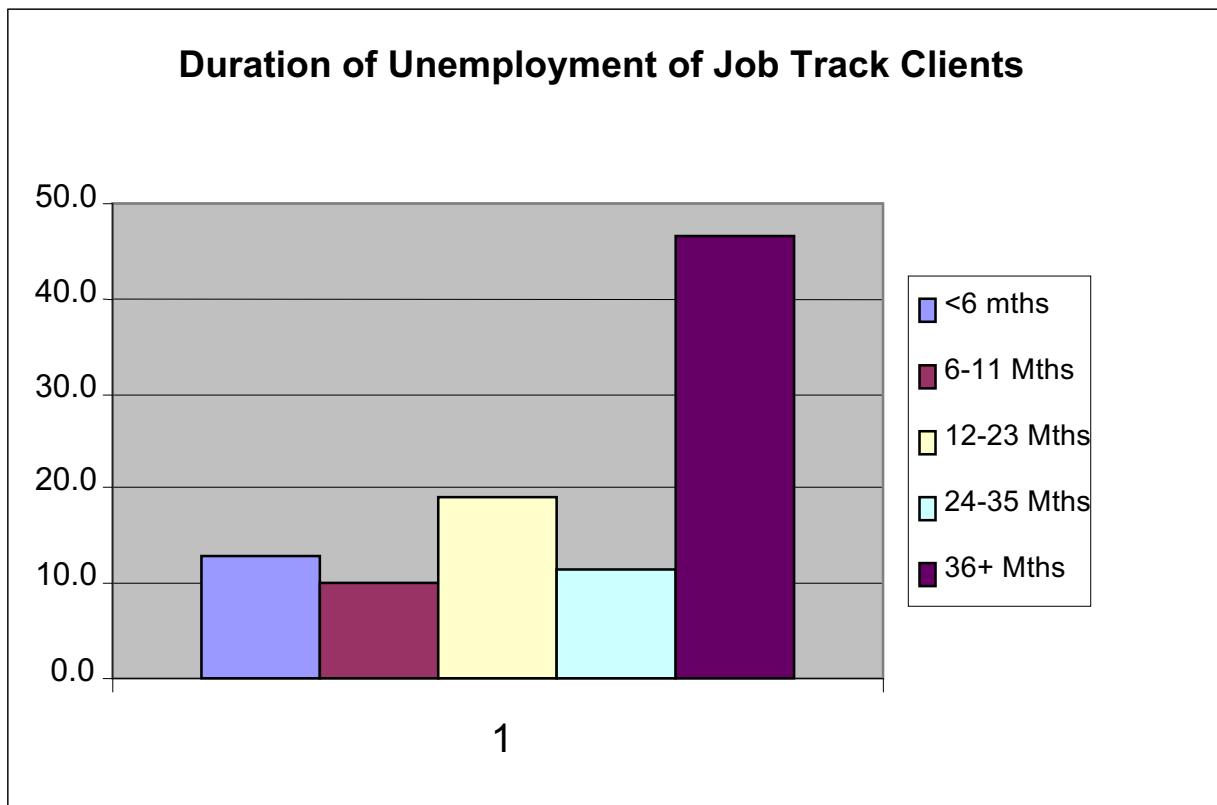
**Figure 7**



Over 70 per cent of clients were registered unemployed. Another 20 per cent were unemployed without being on the register (i.e. economically inactive). Less than four per cent were either in employment or full-time education/training.

In making the transition to employment, the duration of unemployment is crucial. Studies of employment/unemployment flows suggest that those most likely to take up work are the short-term unemployed (more than 60 per cent). The rate of gaining employment steadily falls as the duration of unemployment lengthens until only about four per cent of the very long-term unemployed (2 years plus) leave the register to find jobs. Indeed, high percentages of those who leave for other reasons (i.e. training) will have returned to the register within a year. Between October 04 and September 05, less than one in five of the long-term unemployed (one year Plus) and about one in fifteen of those five years or more unemployed left the register for employment (DETI November 2005).

**Figure 8**



The Jobtrack client group was disproportionately concentrated in the long-term unemployment categories – almost 80 per cent were long-term unemployed – more than 50 per cent were in the very long-term category (two years plus) and 46 per cent had been out of work for three years or more.

In summary, this group of clients faced many barriers to employment. They were concentrated in older rather than younger age groups. Those, for whom data were available, were disproportionately single or separated and they were heavily concentrated in the very long-term unemployed. There was no detailed information on educational background or qualifications, although it may be guessed that both were low. Finally, the majority of clients were either medium or high risk. These are all supply-side characteristics. On the demand side, there is a proven tendency for employers to be worried about taking on members of this client group and there are certain jobs that they could not be expected to get, e.g. for some offenders working with children, for others working with money. Moving such individuals towards positive employability outcomes is a substantial task.

## Jobtrack Performance

The performance of Jobtrack needs to be put in a context. In part, that context consists of what is known about offenders, in part it about employability programmes, particularly for ‘hard to reach’ groups.

A report by the Social Exclusion Unit (2002) compared the education and employment characteristics of prisoners with that of the general population. Although Jobtrack deals mainly with non-custodial sentences, some of those who have been to prison do go through the programme because of Custody Probation Orders. The Social Exclusion Unit (p.19) made the following comparison:

Characteristic	General population	Prisoners
<b>Regularly truanted from school</b>	<b>3%</b> <sup>33</sup>	<b>30%</b> <sup>34</sup>
<b>Excluded from school</b>	<b>2%</b> <sup>35</sup>	<b>49%</b> of male and <b>33%</b> of female sentenced prisoners excluded from school <sup>36</sup>
<b>Left school at 16 or younger</b>	<b>32%</b> <sup>37</sup>	<b>89%</b> of men and <b>84%</b> of women <sup>38</sup>
<b>Attended a special school</b>	<b>1%</b> <sup>39</sup>	<b>23%</b> of male and <b>11%</b> of female sentenced prisoners <sup>40</sup>
<b>Have no qualifications</b>	<b>15%</b> <sup>41</sup>	<b>52%</b> men and <b>71%</b> women <sup>42</sup>
<b>Numeracy at or below Level 1</b> (the level expected of an 11-year-old)	<b>23%</b> <sup>43</sup>	<b>65%</b> <sup>44</sup>
<b>Reading ability at or below Level 1</b>	<b>21–23%</b> <sup>45</sup>	<b>48%</b> <sup>46</sup>
<b>Writing ability at or below Level 1</b>	No direct comparison	<b>82%</b> <sup>47</sup>

Thus prisoners are more twice as likely to have left school at 16 or younger, more than three times more likely to have no qualifications and more than twice as likely to have literacy or numeracy problems.

The employment record is no better:

Characteristic	General population	Prisoners
Unemployed	5% <sup>48</sup>	67% in the four weeks before imprisonment <sup>49</sup>

On this statistic prisoners have an unemployment risk more than 13 times higher than the general population. On education and training the report comments (P.43)

*Many prisoners enter custody with a history of educational under-achievement and poor skills. Until recently, education and training has been seen in many prisons as a means of keeping prisoners occupied, rather than providing them with the necessary skills for employment. As a result, the skills and commitment of prison-based education and training staff and the potential of prisoners has frequently gone untapped. Despite recent improvements, prisoners do not gain as much as they should from education and training while in prison.*

The characteristics of the Jobtrack client group substantially resemble those of prisoners described in the Social Exclusion Unit report. If there are clear imperatives to invest in education and training for prisoners, these exist also for those on non-custodial sentences. Arguably, the need is greater. Non-custodial sentencing is an attempt to divert individuals from prison and reduce their potential for re-offending. It should thus be seen as a period of investment in the individual to directly address the risk factors associated with engaging in crime and working on employability should be seen as a central component of that process.

A more recent report from the Social Exclusion Unit (November, 2005) on ‘Young Adults with Complex Needs’ makes the following point about education and training (P.10):

*Decisions made during the transition – in areas like education and employment – are critical. They are some of the most important and far-reaching decisions taken at any time of life. But disadvantaged young adults can often be least equipped with the skills they need to make the choices that influence their futures.*

*For some disengaged young adults, the support needed to help them get a job, or to consider re-engaging with education, may take substantial time and effort. In these cases it will be essential to measure the progress, or ‘**distance travelled**’, on the road to employment or education.*

Again, this refers to a different client group than Jobtrack clients, but again there are remarkable similarities. Two points stand out: the requirement to equip individuals with

complex needs with a range of skills that can enable sensible choice and second the importance of capturing all forms of progress rather than just the acquisition of a job. With Jobtrack, it is important to think of a continuum of outcomes each of which could represent a step forward for the individual – perhaps the completion of the employability assessment should be the starting point of the continuum.

The range of interventions recorded on the NIACRO database was as follows:

**Figure 9 Jobtrack Interventions**

INTERV				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	642	15.0	15.0	15.0
Assessment Completed	873	20.4	20.4	35.4
Attended External Me	76	1.8	1.8	37.2
Attended External Tr	432	10.1	10.1	47.3
Attending Essential	134	3.1	3.1	50.4
Attending IT Trainin	405	9.5	9.5	59.9
Benefits Advice	192	4.5	4.5	64.4
Did Not Attend Meeti	26	.6	.6	65.0
didn't attend	8	.2	.2	65.2
DIDN'T ATTEND	1	.0	.0	65.2
didn't attend	1	.0	.0	65.2
DIDN'T ATTEND ASS	2	.0	.0	65.2
DIDN'T ATTEND ASSESS	1	.0	.0	65.3
Info and Guidance	667	15.6	15.6	80.9
Job Search Activitie	237	5.5	5.5	86.4
non-attendance	7	.2	.2	86.6
Non-attendance	6	.1	.1	86.7
On Work Placement	71	1.7	1.7	88.4
Other	54	1.3	1.3	89.6
Personal Development	303	7.1	7.1	96.7
Working On CV	75	1.8	1.8	98.5
Working On D/Stateme	66	1.5	1.5	100.0
Total	4279	100.0	100.0	

There were some missing data and there were over 50 instances of non attendance, but Figure 9 records over 3,500 interventions that might be organised into the following typology:

<b>Jobtrack Outputs</b>
Client Assessment (a statement of employability needs and a contract with the individual)
Benefits Advice Given (maximise income)
Completion of CV, Declaration, Personal Development etc. (preparation for job search)
Attended Training ( Enhances Individual Employability)
Attended Job Placement (obtains work experience)
<b>Anticipated Outcomes</b>
Further training or education – part-time or full-time employment.

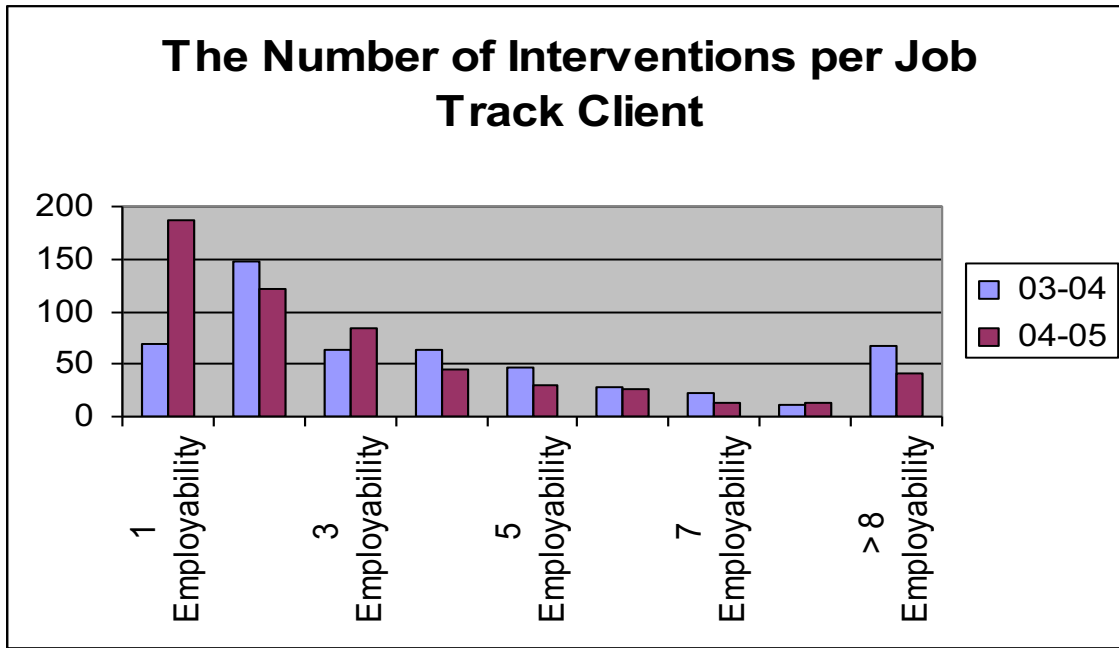
It should be noted that the number of interventions (and therefore outputs) is greater than the number of clients, indicating that clients received more than one intervention. It should be noted that interventions are progressive and cumulative. Moreover, the emphasis on client assessment/benefits advice/preparation for job search underlines the need to start with these clients at a point that is more basic than suggested by New Deal. These are difficult, hard to reach clients. A substantial amount of investment needs to be undertaken before they are ready to engage with the labour market in any formal sense. This further underlines the need for specialist agencies with specific client expertise to operation in co-operation with statutory agencies in delivering customised programmes for this group.

It also represents a process of employability enhancement that each client needs to undergo. Early stages of the process can be legitimately regarded as outcomes, although they are depicted here as outputs. Nevertheless, projects like Jobtrack are funded under EU employability programmes and thus are required to measure their impact in terms of successful labour market engagement.

The distribution of interventions by the number received by clients is given next.



Figure 10

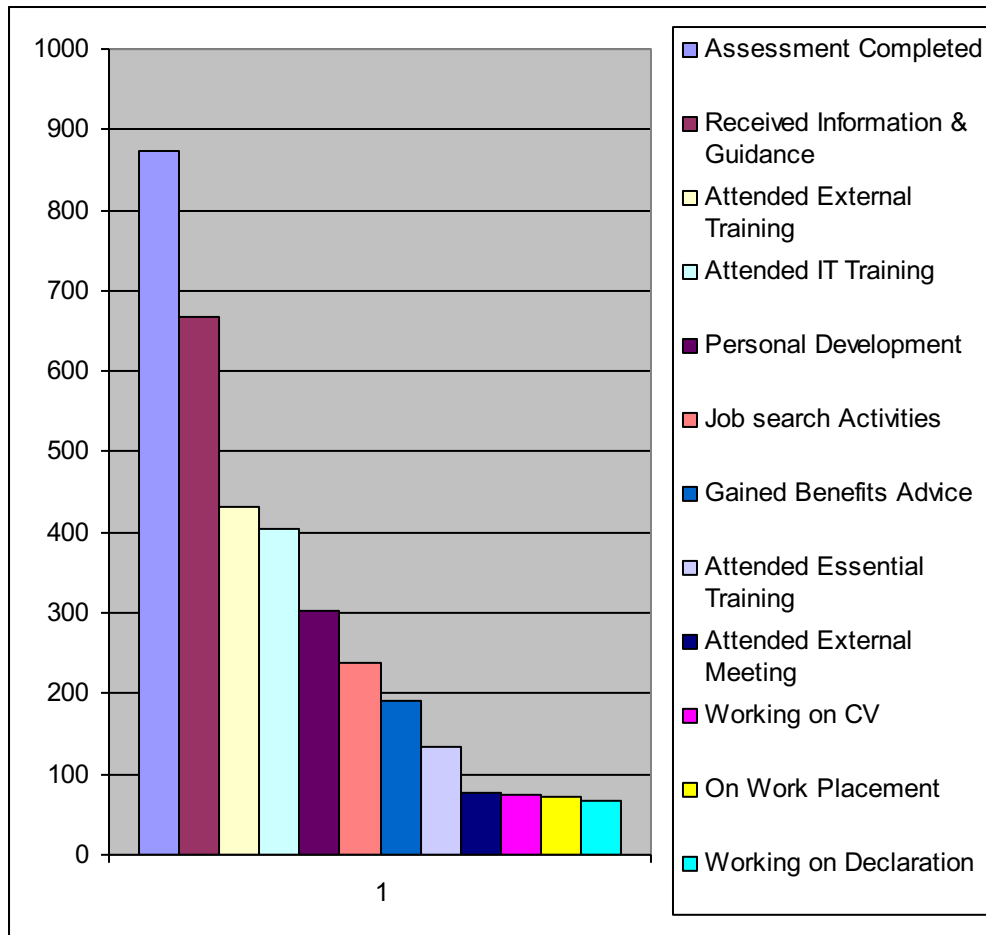


N=1078

It is impossible to measure a trend from two years (only two annual reports, from which the data were taken, were available). However, the suggestion here is that the number of multiple interventions declined between 2003/04 and 2005/05.

The distribution of these interventions by type (excluding non-attendance etc.) was as follows:

**Figure 11**



N = 3531

The above distribution emphasises the high number of clients who were assessed, received advice and guidance and undertook some form of training. Thereafter, the numbers considerably fall. There is thus a substantial amount of work being done that does not translate into what might be called conventional employability outcomes. However, as the comparative material presented earlier demonstrates, there are key groups for whom employability strategies do not necessarily translate into easily quantifiable outcomes. As the recent report from the Social Exclusion Unit argues, these require a different conceptualisation of what is regarded as progress.

One approach is to work with a base number that is more ‘realistic’ than the 1300 clients that went through the programme at some level, as is done for the next table

Outcome	Frequency	Percent
Breached/Custody	30	3.0
Employment	109	11.0
Full Time Training	46	4.7
Long Term Work Placement	6	.6
not entered	1	.1
Unemployed	797	80.6
Total	989	100.0

Certainly, just over 80 per cent of clients remain unemployed after Jobtrack. However, the combination of positive outcomes (employment + full-time training + long-term work placement) amounts to 16.3 per cent. How does this result compare with the outcomes of mainstream employability programmes?

Year	Total Leavers	Unsubsidised Employment	%	Return to Benefits	%	Other & Not Known	%
1998	89	18	20.2%	30	33.7%	41	46.1%
1999	11218	2689	24.0%	1105	9.9%	7424	66.2%
2000	14618	3050	20.9%	6230	42.6%	5338	36.5%
2001	7772	1563	20.1%	3887	50.0%	2322	29.9%
2002	10252	1738	17.0%	5686	55.5%	2828	27.6%
2003	48503	9722	20.0%	19478	40.2%	19253	39.7%

The above table, derived from Evaluation Report No. 9 for the 25+ New Deal group indicates that entry to unsubsidised employment fluctuated around 20 per cent of clients of the Programme. Those returning to benefits (with the exception of 1999 where two thirds of client destinations were registered as 'other' or 'not known') exceeded 40 percent. It should be noted that New Deal works with a client group with considerably fewer difficulties than most Jobtrack clients.

The other major mainstream programme was reviewed by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, which commented (p.8):

*Our overall impression is that Jobskills is one of the worst-run programmes that this Committee has examined in recent years. We noted a quite astonishing catalogue of failures and control weaknesses, all of which pointed to a disturbing level of complacency within the Department... and it appeared that... targets have been altered to avoid reporting poor performance (p.11).*

This creates an important context for the understanding of the Jobtrack performance. Recognising the difficulties in working with the group, the employability outcomes are comparable with mainstream programmes. Arguably, the Public Accounts Committee is insufficiently sensitive to some of the difficulties in moving people into employment in Northern Ireland. As the profile of Jobtrack clients demonstrates, on measure this would be a 'hard-to-place' group. In addition, there are problems on the demand side – jobs from which such individuals are excluded because of conviction records, employer prejudice etc. In comparison with mainstream programmes, it would appear that Jobtrack's performance has been more than respectable.

## **Operation of Jobtrack**

### ***1) NIACRO/PBNI Management***

In order to gain an insight in to the operation of Jobtrack from the delivery partnership's point of view, interviews were carried out with representatives at a management level from both NIACRO and PBNI. The outcome of these interviews is outlined below, under the following basic headings:

- Why did your organisation become involved in Jobtrack?
- What did your organisation expect to achieve from participation in Jobtrack?
- How well has the programme performed in terms of employability? Has this been appropriate in proportion to the resources used?
- Are there any changes to the programme which you would implement in hindsight?

### **Reason for Involvement and Expectations from Jobtrack:**

Both organisations gave similar reasons for their involvement in Jobtrack. Employability was seen as the focus of the programme, which tied in with the objectives of both organisations. NIACRO had a history of delivering employment based initiatives since its formation, including ACE which delivered workshops with an employment theme. The aims of Jobtrack therefore linked with NIACRO's over all aims in relation to employability.

PBNI also became involved in the programme due to its relevance in terms of employability. By participating in Jobtrack, PBNI aimed to address the issue of employability in the work plan of the offender, which would be broken down in to realistic steps. The PBNI representative stated that the programme was of particular importance as it highlighted the relevance of employability as a major contributing factor to the prevention of re-offending.

In addition to employability, both organisations stated that they became involved in Jobtrack due to the common goal of crime reduction. Both organisations have the reduction in crime as one of their objectives, and Jobtrack fitted this as it had the goal of crime reduction through training.

Both organisations therefore stated that their expectations in relation to Jobtrack were linked to employability and crime reduction. It was pointed out that in terms of Building Sustainable Prosperity requirements, the focus of the programme was on employability rather than employment. As such, clients would not necessarily have to be in a job in order for the programme to be viewed as a success.

PBNI in particular expected Jobtrack to allow probation officers to consider employability within the work plan of offenders. Jobtrack provided the opportunity for a specific, tailored, individual plan for offenders.

### **Performance of the Programme:**

The following issues were raised in relation to programme performance:

- *Employment*

One of the main difficulties has been getting Jobtrack and the outcome of employment to converge. Although the focus of the programme is on employability, it was stated that there may need to be drive towards achieving employment as an end result. Without job creation, Jobtrack may be viewed as another generic training programme, of which there is already arguably an over use. As such, it was felt that harder targets which are more explicit in terms of employment may be a positive move for Jobtrack.

It is recognised, however, that the priority of the programme was not to create employment, but rather to enhance the employability of participants. Although NIACRO recognises that job creation should be viewed as an ultimate outcome for Jobtrack's client population, it was never the sole determinant for success of the programme.

- *Work with Employers*

Another point was also linked to employment for Jobtrack participants. It was stated that trying to get the clients which Jobtrack deals with in to meaningful employment is difficult, due to the legislative, attitudinal and structural barriers faced by ex-offenders. In particular, there can be difficulties linking medium/high risk offenders with employers.

However, it was pointed out that NIACRO is taken positive steps to address this problem. NIACRO has now developed a strategy of influencing employers, so that the demand side of employment meets the supply of individuals exiting from the programme. As well as enhancing the employability of participants, Jobtrack seeks to engage with employers to influence their recruiting practices with the aim of reducing barriers faced by the client group. Positive developments which have been made include the provision of a help line for both beneficiaries and employers for issues such as disclosure of criminal records. NIACRO staff also work to raise awareness with employers in relation to changes in legislation and how they might affect and influence practice in respect of recruitment and selection procedures.

- *Concentration of clients at assessment stage*

A further issue was raised in relation to the progression of Jobtrack clients through the various stages of the programme. The NIACRO representative expressed concern that there was a concentration of clients being seen at the initial assessment stage and then not moving any further. This resulted in a very low number of clients proceeding to the final stages of the programme.

This problem has been attributed to the fact that PBNI and NIACRO had different priorities in terms of clients' progression. NIACRO felt that PBNI was more concerned with the initial stages of the programme, ie assessment, than with moving the clients on towards the end stages.

The representative from NIACRO pointed out the difficulty it faced in co-ordinating all its various functions under a common goal. However, this problem is in the process of being addressed, as there is a drive to ensure that staff are all working for the common goal of crime reduction.

- *Partnership*

NIACRO and PBNI representatives commented on the effectiveness of their partnership arrangement as joint delivery agents for the programme. From a positive point of view, it was felt that there was a good level of communication and sharing of information between the two organisations at a senior management level.

However, in NIACRO's opinion, the relationship may have been viewed as a more of a sub-contractual arrangement than a partnership. As such, it was felt that PBNI was contracting work to NIACRO rather than acting as a partner.

In addition, PBNI representatives had concern about the clarity of information being collated by NIACRO and felt that there needed to more consistency and clarity in terms of measuring outcomes.

Both partners therefore had a mix of positive and negatives viewpoints in relation to the effectiveness of the partnership relationship.



## **2) NIACRO/PBNI Staff**

Staff involved in the delivery of the programme were contacted in order to gather their views on its performance. Information was gathered through a focus group session with NIACRO staff, and e-mail responses collected from PBNI Area Managers. Although a focus group with PBNI staff was requested, due to time constraints this was not possible and e-mailed responses to a set of standard questions were accepted as an alternative. Responses from NIACRO and PBNI staff members are summarised below:

### **Expectations:**

Staff members from NIACRO and PBNI had varying expectations from the programme. From NIACRO's point of view, Jobtrack occurred at a time when there was a refocus within the organisation towards specifically working with offenders and ex-prisoners and dealing with ideas about re-offending. NIACRO focussed on the concept that by enhancing the employability of offenders you can reduce the likelihood of re-offending.

Staff from PBNI had a mixture of positive and negative expectations from the programme. While one representative admitted that he had limited expectations in terms of outcome from Jobtrack, others had more specific expectations in terms of the format of the programme, particularly in terms of clients receiving an employability assessment as early as possible on the programme. One staff member went further, stating that they expected employment to be the ultimate outcome of the programme.

### **Performance:**

Both NIACRO and PBNI staff members made comments on how successfully they viewed the performance of Jobtrack, including comments on the difficulties faced and the changes which they would make to improve the programme.

*Positive Comments:*

- It was felt that Jobtrack has provided a structured, tailored programme for a unique client group which existing training programmes had not catered for. In comparison to New Deal, it was felt that Jobtrack was more effective as it had developed a more specialised approach. One of the drawbacks of New Deal was that it may be viewed as unwilling to accept the difficult client group which Jobtrack deals with, as they are medium to high risk offenders who may have a conviction of over two and a half years. In addition, it was noted that there was a risk with New Deal that clients may drop out because of the availability of benefits. As such, Jobtrack provided a more personalised, tailored approach and used the expertise of delivery staff to provide a continuum of support for offenders post release.
- Jobtrack provided PBNI staff with a structured method of trying to address employability amongst their clients. The positive outcomes for the clients included the opportunity to engage in training and get a range of qualifications and help with their CVs. The level of training involved helped to enhance participants' long employment prospects, as well as increasing their self esteem and personal development.
- One opinion expressed by PBNI was: *Jobtrack is very effective programme that has helped a number of clients, some very high risk, into valid and achievable training programmes to significantly increase their employment prospects.*

*Difficulties:*

- There were difficulties with the client group itself, as they are offenders who are unemployed and are medium to high risk. The main difficulty expressed in relation to the client group was that many had a lack of motivation and did not wish to progress beyond the assessment stage. Some of the clients were serious offenders, and required a significant amount of support. This problem was aggravated by the fact that there was limited resources and capacity available to deal with such a large number of referrals.

- PBNI staff pointed out that the expectations among the client group often conflicted with the limited employment opportunities available. In addition, they pointed out that clients are often stuck in a ‘benefits trap’, as the level of minimum wage available through employment may be less than the level of benefits available, including Housing Benefit, Incapacity Benefit, and Disability Living Allowance.
- One of main difficulties, pointed out by NIACRO staff, was that the volume of referrals was too high for their resources to deal with. Although Jobtrack was intended to be targeted at a specific client group who were long term unemployed, there was large of volume of referrals from PBNI for clients who may have been at any stage of unemployment. There needed to be a more refined approach, in which referrals were focussed on those people who would be most likely to benefit from a programme with an employability focus.
- NIACRO staff expressed concern that there was a concentration of clients being seen at the assessment stage, rather than progressing on to the later stages of the programme. This was linked to a perception that PBNI did not fully appreciate the intensive support required to progress the individuals through the various stages of the programme.
- NIACRO staff also pointed out that it was difficult to assess the full impact of the programme on offenders’ employability, as they did not have the full data required. NIACRO viewed it as PBNI’s role to track the impact of the programme in the later stages of the clients’ progression, but this information was not always forthcoming.
- Jobtrack statistics suggest that there is a disparity between the number of client interventions made and the number of measurable outcomes from the programme. NIACRO staff pointed out that there is a substantial amount of work being done that does not translate into conventional project outcomes, such as ‘employment’, ‘work placements’ or ‘training.’ It is therefore important to recognise the ‘soft’ outcomes of

the programme so that they can be recognised as having a positive impact. Important 'soft' outcomes include 'distance travelled', completing CVs and attending interviews. It is important, therefore, to ensure that these factors are measurable and are recorded as positive outcomes of the programme.

### **Partnership:**

Delivery staff were asked to outline how effective they felt the partnership between NIACRO and PBNI had been. PBNI Area Managers stated that an effective working relationship had been developed between Probation and Jobtrack staff. It was felt that information had been shared as required, and that the relationship was *'professional, productive and friendly.'*

However, it was also felt that more effective communication is required between PBNI and NIACRO, and that more structure and collective thinking is needed.

NIACRO staff felt that the two organisations had different priorities. There was an impression from NIACRO that PBNI expectations in terms of programme outcomes were quite low. In particular, it was pointed out that PBNI's main interest was in getting clients on to an employment assessment. This created an influx of referrals for assessment, but a lack of recognition of the intensive support required to progress these individuals through the programme.

### **Changes:**

In terms of making improvements to the programme, it was noted that there should be a stronger link with the provision of essential skills, and more focus on the links with employers. It was noted, however, that NIACRO has made positive steps towards achieving these goals.

NIACRO has recently employed tutors to support Jobtrack staff on issues with literacy and numeracy, which they would not have had the capacity to deal with previously. This

will therefore provide the opportunity for greater integration between the programme components and essential skills training.

In terms of links with employers, NIACRO has taken positive steps to develop these relationships. Through the Employment Liaison Officer, NIACRO is now making a move to get employers to link up early, and also to maintain strong links with them throughout the programme.

## Client Feedback

Three focus groups sessions were held with Jobtrack participants in order to assess the effectiveness of the programme from their perspective. A summary of the responses from focus group discussions is presented below:

- **How were you contacted?**

The majority of participants from all the sessions stated that they had been referred on to Jobtrack through the probation service. Of those who had not been referred by PBNI, two stated that they had been referred by NIACRO and another two stated that they had referred themselves after the programme had been recommended to them by other participants.

- **What did you do while on Jobtrack?**

Participants had carried out a range of activities depending on their own particular level of involvement and the qualifications which they were working towards. The following activities were listed by focus group participants:

<b>Jobtrack Activities</b>
IT Courses
Community Arts Course
Driving Lessons
Forklift Driving Licence
Digger Licence
Construction Skills Register (CSR)
Duke of Edinburgh Course
First Aid Training
Work Experience
Cross-Community Programme

Participants stated that Jobtrack staff helped each of them to find a course and directed them towards the qualification which they wished to achieve. In addition, participants pointed out that they had received support and advice on a number of aspects related to

their personal lives. Through regular contact and one-to-one sessions with staff, participants received advice on a range of issues including access to benefits; finding accommodation; advice on employment prospects and access to counselling on alcohol and drug addiction.

- **What level of support did you receive?**

All participants were happy with the level of support which they had received. Positive aspects in relation to support provided included:

- Staff were available to contact at any time;
- Participants felt free to contact staff about any problem, or if they wanted someone to talk to;
- There was a good combination of support at NIACRO premises and external support (such as driving lessons);
- Staff directed them towards the most appropriate qualification for their needs;
- Course materials were made available, which they otherwise would not have been able to access.

The one negative comment made was by a participant in the Belfast focus group, who pointed out that support was not as readily available since NIACRO changed premises. He felt that the premises on the Ormeau Road were like a ‘drop in’ centre and you could come and go as often as you liked. He felt that the Amelia Street premises have higher security and you have to make an appointment to see staff.

- **Was the level of support useful to you?**

All of the participants in each of the focus group sessions stated that the level of support they had received through Jobtrack had been useful. In addition, the following points were made in relation to the level of support:

- One participant stated that what he has accomplished through Jobtrack is ‘amazing’ and that he has a great sense of achievement because of what he has done;

- Staff are very good listeners on a range of problems. They are honest and friendly and treat participants with respect. Participants were made to feel equal and were not treated like they have been in prison;
- The support provided by Jobtrack has helped to build their character. One participant stated that his confidence was destroyed after being in prison, but by being involved in Jobtrack, he has increased his self confidence and self esteem;
- Support from staff was more like a ‘friendship’ than a working relationship. The Jobtrack workers are always willing to listen and offer advice, so participants felt able to ‘open up’ and share any concerns or problems which they had;
- One participant described the support received through Jobtrack as ‘a lifeline.’ It has introduced him to other support agencies, such as Alcoholics Anonymous;
- The programme has helped to remove a lot of obstacles to achieving a qualification and finding a job. If an obstacle does crop up, participants feel that Jobtrack staff are there to help;
- At least three participants stated that if it had not been for the support provided by Jobtrack, they would have been back in prison. One stated that Jobtrack had been instrumental in saving his life.

- **What qualifications have you received as a result of Jobtrack?**

Focus group participants listed the following qualifications which they have either achieved or are working towards:



<b>Qualifications Achieved</b>
IT (ECDL, CLAIT, Diploma in Text Processing) Driving Licence Forklift Driving Licence Digger Driving Licence Construction Skills Register (CSR) OCD in Community Arts NVQ in Tiling Completed Foundation Year in Counselling Completed Foundation Year in Psychology - Accepted on to Degree Course Qualified as Tester Trainer (working with other Jobtrack clients) Duke of Edinburgh Award

### **What other benefits have you enjoyed?**

In addition to their qualifications, focus group participants listed the following additional benefits from the programme:

- Being able to stay off alcohol and drugs
- Improved speech, writing and communication skills
- Have been able to ‘re skill’ to suit future jobs
- Having more direction in terms of where they can go with their lives
- They have been given hope for the future
- Increased confidence, self esteem and motivation
- They have been able to trust people.
- They have changed their way of thinking – used to be very negative about themselves and their prospects but are now much more positive.
- They no longer want to re-offend because of the progress that they have made.
- They feel that they are able to find a job at the end of the process

Participants went as far as stating that had it not been for Jobtrack, they would be much worse off. The following statements were made:

- *‘I would be back in prison’*
- *‘I probably would have re-offended’*
- *‘I would have started drinking again’*
- *‘I would still be homeless’*

### **Do you feel that Jobtrack has improved your employment prospects?**

All participants felt that their employment prospects had been improved because of Jobtrack. Reasons given for this included the following:

- The modules completed and qualifications gained will help with finding a job;
- They have improved their writing skills and can complete application forms and compile CVs. This would not have been possible before Jobtrack;
- They feel more confident, and therefore more comfortable approaching employers and looking for a job;
- Before becoming involved in Jobtrack, they would not have considered applying for jobs as they would not have thought they would have been successful. Now they are much more confident about finding a job.

### **Additional Comments**

Focus group participants made the following general points in relation to their experience with Jobtrack:

*‘There are a lot of people in prison who do not want any help. A lot of people do not realise that help is there, and it is not a priority for people while they are in prison. These are the people who need to be contacted and helped to access support.’*

*‘A lot of people may not know what NIACRO is or what it means. More people need to be contacted and told what support is available to them.’*

*‘People coming out of prison now would not have the same opportunities that we had. The support we received when we were released from prison was extremely useful, but that there is less support available for people now.’*

All participants stated that they hope the programme continues and can have a positive impact on others.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The conclusions about Jobtrack already appear in the body of the evaluation. Here is a group with extreme difficulties and risks associated with labour market integration that also faces several kinds of problems on the demand side. The numbers that entered the programme were considerably greater than anticipated and, associated with that increase, the selection criteria considerably looser. In that context, the record of working with this group demonstrates a high level of staff commitment, reputable employability outcomes and considerable approval by clients. Both of the agencies concerned, the Probation Board and NIACRO are fully committed to this new way of delivering public services – a partnership between the statutory and voluntary offering specialised, customised programmes for clients that would remain largely untouched by mainstream interventions.

As with all innovative programmes, there is a substantial requirement to demonstrate success and, notwithstanding the demands of an increased client base, this has proved to be the case. There is, however, an argument for greater selection of clients and greater focus on those with greatest potential. This is not to suggest a process of ‘cherry-picking’, but rather a realistic assessment of what can be done with limited resources.

In that respect the evaluators would make four main recommendations:

- Working with a smaller client group (in the immediate future this could be achieved by carrying out assessments as specified in current Jobtrack contract) so that face-to-face work with individuals can be developed to maximum effect. This also suggests the need for clarity in selection criteria that should be made explicit in advance.
- A consistent focus on employability outcomes that should be defined and measured to include soft as well as hard employability outcomes;
- It is an imperative that both organisations focus on the development of a mainstreaming strategy. A key element of mainstreaming is the requirement for currently less engaged departments to contribute positively and constructively to a process that is ultimately concerned with reducing levels of crime

- Consistent attention to building and sustaining partnership as an innovative model for delivering services to offenders. This model, as recommended by the Treasury review of the role of voluntary organisations in the delivery of public services (2002), is generally regarded as the most effective for innovative services in specialist service areas. The Probation Board and NIACRO have the opportunity to pioneer a service that could prefigure the shape of public service delivery in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.