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Applying for work (with a criminal record)

Information for people working with prisoners
and ex-offenders



In the past many people with criminal records have gained employment by not disclosing them. They have not been found out because most employers have not asked about their records or had access to them. The people concerned have been successfully employed; they have had no ulterior motive in seeking employment and have been satisfactory employees. With the introduction of the Disclosure Service (see Part 1) more and more employers will insist on seeing records – Disclosures – as conditions of offers of employment. This will make it more difficult for ex-offenders to secure employment. Part 2 sets out how people can reduce these difficulties by disclosing their convictions in the right way, while Part 3 discusses when to disclose.

Many people apply for jobs in the wrong way. It follows that those who apply for jobs in the right way stand a better chance of getting a job than other applicants, regardless of their record. Part 4 of this guide gives some brief advice about this.

The guide is intended to help people advising ex-offenders – or ex-offenders themselves who want detailed information – on how to complete application forms or to apply in writing for jobs, perhaps by submitting CVs. However, many employers, including most small businesses, recruit on the basis of personal interview only or word of mouth. Such employers may be more willing to judge individuals on their ability to fill their vacancy and may continue not to ask about records at all. Nevertheless, where questions are asked, the principles which underpin this guidance are applicable.

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Part 1 The system of Disclosure

This guide assumes the people you are dealing with have to disclose a criminal record, either because they have convictions which are not 'spent' under the *Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974* (ROA) or they are applying for work 'excepted' from it. A brief guide to the ROA is given in appendix A. If you need further information about it, contact Nacro's Resettlement *Plus* Helpline (page 12).

If convictions are not spent, they may show up at a future date on a Basic Disclosure (see below). If someone is applying for work excepted from the ROA (see appendix B), any

conviction, whether spent or unspent, along with cautions, reprimands and final warnings may show up on a Standard or Enhanced Disclosure.

The word 'may' is stressed. Disclosures are made against the Phoenix application on the Police National Computer (PNC). This is made up of all recordable offences – broadly more serious offences. If people have a non-recordable offence, there may not be a record on the PNC.

Also, under weeding guidelines produced by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), some records on the PNC will be wiped after 10 or 20 years, depending on how serious they are (see 'Wiping records' box opposite).

Disclosures and ROA exceptions

Standard and Enhanced Disclosure checks were introduced in March 2002. Basic Disclosures will follow at some point in the future. For up-to-date information on the introduction of Basic Disclosures, please contact Nacro's Resettlement *Plus* Helpline (page 12). If and when they are introduced, Basic Disclosures will probably only be issued to individuals although many employers will insist on seeing them as a condition of an offer of employment. Standard Disclosures, which show spent and unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands and final warnings, cover positions excepted from the ROA. Broadly, these are:

- those whose duties involve working with children and vulnerable adults
- certain professions in areas such as health, pharmacy, and the law
- senior managers in banking and financial services.

Enhanced Disclosures cover positions involving regularly caring for, training, supervising or being in sole charge of children or vulnerable adults. An Enhanced Disclosure shows the same details as a Standard Disclosure. Occasionally they may also show non-conviction information from local police records which the police think is relevant.

People applying to work in any area excepted from the ROA will normally be expected to disclose all convictions, cautions, reprimands and final warnings, and these penalties will usually show up on the Disclosures (but see 'Wiping records' opposite).

Before anyone begins a long period of study in

order to gain entry into an excepted profession, people should consider seeking advice from their college (if they are in one) or the relevant professional body. They may also find the directory, *I Can't Do That Can I?*, useful. This is a guide to occupations and the relevance of criminal convictions and can be found on www.connexions.gov.uk/partnerships/lcantdothatcanl/cover.htm

Though professional bodies will consider applicants on their merits, those people who have been convicted of a serious offence, several offences or a relevant offence may in practice find that they have little chance of entering their preferred field.

For instance, anyone found guilty of dishonesty or fraud may well be refused entry into the accountancy profession. People with convictions for serious violent, sexual or drug offences are unlikely to be employed with children or vulnerable adults.

If the applicant is accepted as a member of a professional body, a criminal record may not be a major handicap to future employment within the profession. Employers may well take the view that, if their professional body has accepted them, they are acceptable to the employer too.

People wanting to do a B.Ed or a postgraduate certificate in education can write to the Teachers Branch of the Department for Education and Skills in order to seek clearance to enter the profession. If clearance is given, they will receive a letter from the Secretary of State confirming this. The letter can then be shown to prospective education employers in support of job applications.

Keeping records

As of 31 March 2006, the ACPO guidelines on keeping records no longer apply.

Please contact Nacro's Resettlement *Plus* Helpline on 020 7840 6464 for advice about the new guidelines.

Part 2 How to disclose

Often disclosure will result in rejection. In some instances, however, employers will still consider someone if they do not think the conviction is relevant. If a person is not offered a job, it might be because they do not have exactly the right skills or experience or another candidate may simply have been better qualified.

People will improve their employment prospects by going about disclosure in the right way. They need to reassure employers that they are not a risk, and that their offending is in the past. Therefore, if the conviction is old, they can point this out. If the conviction is more recent but the offence was much older, they can point this out too.

If they were convicted when they were young, perhaps as a teenager, and they have matured and taken on family, mortgage and other responsibilities since then which mean that they have too much to lose by getting into trouble, they can point this out also.

If the convictions are not relevant to the job, they should say so. If they took responsibility for the offence – if for instance they owned up to it immediately or pleaded guilty – then they should say so. If they committed the offence because they were having particular problems at the time and these have been resolved, they should explain this.

If the offence sounds more serious than it is, they should explain this too. All offence categories cover a wide range of behaviours from the minor to the very serious. A sexual offence, for instance, covers everything from consensual homosexual acts and young men having sex with their under-aged girlfriends to indecent assault and rape. Burglary covers everything from taking goods from shop storerooms to entering the homes of old people, leaving them in fear.

If the context behind the behaviour would help to minimise the seriousness of the offence, they should highlight this. The context will vary from the mitigating to the sorely aggravating. For instance, a person in fear who in defence assaults someone who is threatening them is not as culpable as an individual who causes serious injury with intent.

However, they must be careful that mitigation of this sort does not sound like an excuse. An employer will not want to know. They should try and put themselves in the employer's position and ask

themselves how this mitigation would sound to themselves coming from a stranger.

If they have more than one conviction, they can give details in a way that will not put the employer off straightaway. For example, if any or all of the convictions can be grouped together, they can say 'I have x convictions for (offences) between (dates). For my last offence I was sentenced to ...' If they have a long criminal record and/or recent convictions, they will need to reinforce their application with an especially strong positive statement about their intentions and attitudes now.

In making a positive statement about themselves and their attitude now, if it is true, they can say that they regret committing the offence, are determined not to re-offend, are keen to work, and are confident they can prove themselves to be a reliable and hardworking employee.

However, they must not allow the issue of disclosure to dominate any application or interview. Their priority must be to put across the message that they are applying for the job because they can do it and that they meet all the requirements for the post as set out in the person specification of the job description (if there is one).

Whatever statement they make, they should discuss it with an objective third party, such as yourself or a probation officer, in order to get feedback on the impression they create by what they say. Prospective employers might themselves be more reassured about someone if such a third party, who knows about their record and character, were to make contact. Of course, disclosure through a third party will only work if this party can be positive about the applicant.

Making the best case

Whatever statement is made, it has to be truthful and come across that way. One way to draft a statement is for you to jot down a person's oral answers to the questions set out below and then build a statement based on what they have said.

People are often more articulate when asked to talk about matters than they are when trying to put their thoughts on paper. Using your notes, you can normally create a positive and truthful statement about a person's attitude to their offences and to work.

The key questions are as follows. Ask supplementary open questions where further details and clarification is necessary.

- Why are you applying for this job?
- What makes you think you can do it?
- Can you tell me about your offence(s)?
- Why did you commit it (them)?
- How did you feel at the time?

- How do you feel now?
- How can I be sure you are no longer a risk?
- How is your life different now?

Having completed this exercise, you should draft a letter based on some of the answers to these questions. This will stand the person in good stead should they then get an interview.

The letter itself should be short (one side A4), otherwise too much emphasis will be placed on the record rather than the person's ability to do the job. The letter should make the point that they are applying for a particular post because they think that they have the necessary skills and/or experience. They should then briefly discuss the record before finishing on a positive note.

A number of sample letters are set out in appendix C. Obviously the person's own letter has to put across their circumstances and attitudes in their own 'voice' if it is to work for them.

Part 3 When to disclose

People may be asked about their record or may choose to disclose it at application stage, after shortlisting, at interview or job offer stage, or when they are in post.

At application stage

If an employer is going to ask about records, it is likely to be at application stage. Where an application form asks, it might be best for the applicant to put 'see covering letter' and in the letter (see appendix C), give a short account of the offence and their attitude to it.

Alternatively, they can say that they are prepared to discuss this at the interview.

The issue of records may be raised indirectly in other sections of the application form. The applicant does not need to refer directly to a record in these sections. If the form asks for 'reasons for leaving job', they can either leave the space blank or put 'see covering letter', 'change of circumstances' or 'personal circumstances' if the reasons are connected with the conviction.

If they have served a prison sentence which has left a gap in their employment history, they can write on the form: 'not in employment' or 'unavailable for work due to personal circumstances', and give details in the covering letter or at interview. This leaves the form free for them to present themselves positively.

Most employers who recruit from written applications will provide their own form and job description. Some employers will recruit on the basis of a CV alone. Applicants are not expected to disclose convictions on a CV but they must be prepared to deal with the issue, should the subject of records be raised at interview. For more information about CVs, see appendix D.

After shortlisting

A few employers will seek disclosure only after shortlisting, having warned applicants that this will happen if they are shortlisted. Such employers are likely to have policies aimed at ensuring that ex-offenders do not face undue discrimination. Nevertheless, having disclosed a conviction on the shortlisting form, applicants need to be prepared to discuss it at interview.

At interview

The advantage of disclosure at interview is that the employer has the opportunity to see the person behind the conviction, but it takes a lot of confidence to disclose at this stage.

Disclosure can also be difficult because even experienced interviewers can be thrown by the unexpected and will often get out of it with 'Thank you for being honest with me – I will let you know'.

For this reason, applicants might find it useful to let interviewers know beforehand that they have something of a personal nature to discuss, so that the interviewers are prepared for something slightly out of the ordinary (even if they do not know exactly what it is).

Applicants need to decide beforehand at which point during the interview they will disclose – which might be when the discussion about their employment history reaches the point when the offence occurred – or towards the end of the interview when hopefully they have already made a positive impression.

At the job offer stage

The employer might, simply as a formality, ask about criminal records or unexpectedly require the applicant to disclose any convictions at the job offer stage and be taken aback if the applicant declares a conviction. Therefore, applicants should be prepared to deal with such questions to reduce the risk of a job offer being withdrawn.

When employed

After having started a job, circumstances may arise where the employer might ask the new recruit whether they have a criminal record or the person might feel that they should disclose one.

Disclosure at this stage could cause problems because it is hard to know how an employer will react. The employer may, for example, feel that they have been deceived and look for a way to dismiss them. Early on in employment this is easier as under UK law employees are unable to claim unfair dismissal until they have been employed for a year or more.

Part 4 Making a strong application

There are plenty of practical guides around on applying for jobs, completing CVs etc, and you may have access to some of these. These guides stress the importance of analysing one's skills and abilities, being organised, setting aside time each day or every other day to find work etc. The following notes are intended to supplement, not replace, these guides:

- **Spend a lot of time applying for a few jobs rather than a little time applying for lots.** For many jobs, employers tend to get far too many applications – a hundred or more in some instances. Inevitably their initial efforts go into weeding out as many applications as possible to reduce their shortlist to a manageable level. Those applications which will be weeded out first include those that have been filled in with haste, that perhaps have been scruffily hand-written (when they could have been typed), or have not been completed in the way the employer has asked (eg, addressing the person specification point by point). In many instances, an applicant who completes one hundred job application forms in haste may not receive a single interview. However, an applicant who completes 10 forms very carefully during the same period may expect to be interviewed for one or several of the jobs they have applied for.
- **Concentrate on applying for jobs that they are most likely to get.** It follows from the first point that if the applicant concentrates on applying for a few jobs rather than many, then it is best to focus on those that they are most likely to get, those for which they have the right skills, qualifications and experience. In general, you may expect most employers to identify quickly those applicants who do not have the qualities they are looking for, usually at initial application stage.
- **Make every word count.** When focusing on the job they can do, applicants should not simply complete the application form in one go. Rather, on a copy of the form or on spare paper, they should draft what they want to say, amend it, redraft it and amend it however many times it takes until they get it right. Every word in the application should count (but see the point below). If a word does not work in the applicant's favour, then they should leave it out. Then, perhaps after working on the application on and off for several days, they should complete the original application form and post it. If a deadline for a vacancy is not for a fortnight or so, applicants should use that period to the full to reflect on their draft application rather than get the form in the post as soon as possible.
- **Demonstrate that they can do the job.** In making words count, applicants need to give examples to show that they can do the job on offer. Too often applicants say that they are excellent at this or that but provide no proof. This will not impress most employers.
- **Presentation, presentation, presentation!** Unless employers are seeking a hand-written application, applications should always be typed. Even where employers provide application forms which cannot be completed in type, it is best to complete as much of them as possible by clipping type-written sheets to them. All application forms and covering letters must be in good English, free from spelling and punctuation errors. Information must be clearly and attractively laid out. Typed applications should not be in all capital letters.
- **Give employers what they want.** If the employer asks enquirers to complete an application form, they should not send them a CV instead. If the employer provides a person specification, which lists the essential requirements and competences for a particular post, applicants should address that specification point by point. The employer wants to know how and why applicants consider themselves suitable for the vacancy. They will not be interested in generalisations or the applicants' agendas. Applicants should give employers what they want and give them no reason to reject them at the initial sift.
- **Pay attention to detail.** Many applications have failed because applicants have misspelt the name of the employer or the organisation, or incorrectly addressed the envelope. Elementary mistakes such as these undermine any confidence an employer may have in an applicant, especially where the person is applying for

employment where accuracy, organisation and attention to detail are of the essence.

- **Work with others.** When drafting applications and preparing for interviews, applicants should work with others to see whether what they plan to say to an employer is what the employer is looking for. There is usually something to be gained by discussing drafts and forthcoming interviews with third parties, especially those people who can be objective.
- **Get out and about.** Many jobs are not advertised and recruitment takes place informally rather than through the completion of an application form. The more effort people put into maintaining contact with friends, relatives and former colleagues, the more likely they are to secure employment. Training and voluntary work can be a useful route into work.
- **Prepare properly for any interview.** If the applicant gets an interview, their chances of getting the job will significantly increase. They can increase them further by preparing properly. Applicants should make sure that they know where the interview will take place and that they can get there in good time. They should think about the questions that might be asked and put themselves in a frame of mind to answer them clearly and confidently. If they have a job description, the questions may be based on the person specification or they may be more general, such as 'Why do you want this job?', 'Why did you leave your last job?' or 'Tell me more about yourself'. Interviewees should dress smartly. Through proper preparation, applicants should be able to go into the interview with confidence, which is important as first impressions count.
- **Know the organisation.** They can further improve their chances by learning more about the employer, finding out what they do, what they believe in, and so on, and then using this knowledge in the interview. If the employer is a large firm, a statutory body or charity/voluntary organisation, they may well have an annual report and brochures they can send them. Applicants can phone up and request these – or check if the prospective employer has a website.

Part 5 Still can't get a job?

If despite this guidance, people find over time that they cannot secure employment, then they should consider further measures to improve their prospects. It may be that they are not getting interviews because their record is so serious that, no matter what assurance they provide, the employer cannot get beyond it. This is especially likely to be the case if the person has been convicted of a sexual offence. Most employers will not knowingly employ a sexual offender: nine out of ten employers will reject them outright.

It may however be a combination of a criminal record and other factors such as a long bout of unemployment, lack of confidence or skills, homelessness or chaotic lifestyle, that will prevent some ex-offenders from securing employment. If this is the case, people should consider training or voluntary work. As well as boosting their self-confidence and self-esteem, training or voluntary work will take off some of the pressure to find paid employment.

If ex-offenders were to get on to a good training scheme they might find that, in addition to learning new skills, they will be working with staff who might be able to advocate on their behalf and/or secure a placement with an employer. This will in some instances lead to permanent employment. Once they have that first job, it will be easier to secure subsequent jobs, assuming that they prove to be good, reliable employees.

They may be able to join a training scheme under the Government's New Deal programme, which is administered by local jobcentres. They should make enquiries at their local jobcentre.

Voluntary work can often enable people to improve their skills, provides a reference post conviction and, most importantly, gets them out and about, enabling them to make contact with others who might be able to recommend them for a job. Around four out of ten people find work through personal contacts. The importance of personal contacts and social networks therefore should not be underestimated, especially when employers' attitudes to ex-offenders are taken into account.

People can find out about local volunteering opportunities through their local volunteer office, adverts in local papers and in *The Guardian* on Wednesdays. They may also be able to undertake volunteer work under the New Deal programme.

Appendix A *The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974*

The *Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974* enables criminal convictions to become 'spent' or forgotten after a 'rehabilitation period'. After this period, with certain exceptions (see appendix B), a person with a conviction is not legally obliged to mention it when applying for a job. The Act is more likely to help people with few and/or minor convictions because further convictions usually extend rehabilitation periods. People with many convictions, especially serious convictions, may not benefit from the Act unless the convictions are very old.

Rehabilitation periods

The length of the rehabilitation period depends on the sentence given – not the offence committed. For a custodial sentence, the rehabilitation period is decided by the original sentence, not the time served. Custodial sentences of more than two-and-a-half years can currently never become spent.

The Government announced in April 2003 its intention to radically revise the Act. When it is eventually introduced (possibly not before 2004), new legislation will result in a simplification of the Act, shorter time periods for convictions to become spent and the abolition of the two-and-a-half year tariff.

The following sentences become spent after fixed rehabilitation periods from the date of conviction:

Sentence	Rehabilitation period People aged under 18 when convicted	Rehabilitation period People aged 18 or over when convicted
Prison sentences ¹ of 6 months or less	3½ years	7 years
Prison sentences ¹ of more than 6 months to 2½ years	5 years	10 years
Borstal (abolished in 1983)	7 years	7 years
Detention centres (abolished in 1988)	3 years	3 years
Fines ² , compensation, probation ³ , community service ⁴ , combination ⁵ , action plan, curfew, drug treatment and testing, and reparation orders	2½ years	5 years
Absolute discharge	6 months	6 months

¹ Including suspended sentences, youth custody (abolished in 1988) and detention in a young offender institution (abolished for under 18 year olds in 2000 and for those aged 18-20 in 2001).
² Even if subsequently imprisoned for fine default.
³ For people convicted on or after 3 February 1995. These orders are now called community rehabilitation orders.
⁴ These orders are now called community punishment orders.
⁵ These orders are now called community punishment and rehabilitation orders.

The *Crime and Disorder Act 1998* introduced a new custodial sentence for young people with different rehabilitation periods:

Sentence	Rehabilitation period Young people aged 12-14 when convicted	Rehabilitation period Young people aged 15-17 when convicted
Detention and training order of 6 months or less	1 year after the order expires	3½ years
Detention and training order of more than 6 months	1 year after the order expires	5 years

With some sentences the rehabilitation period varies:

Sentence	Rehabilitation period
Probation ¹ , supervision, care order ² , conditional discharge and bindover	1 year or until the order expires (whichever is longer)
Secure training (abolished 2000) and attendance centre orders	1 year after the order expires
Hospital order (with or without a restriction order)	5 years or 2 years after the order expires (whichever is longer)

¹ Only for people convicted before 3 February 1995, otherwise see above.
² Care orders in criminal proceedings were abolished by the *Children Act 1989* and effectively replaced with a supervision order with residence requirements.

Cautions and reprimands

Although the rehabilitation periods for cautions, reprimands and final warnings have been unclear up until now, they will become spent the moment they are administered under the Government's proposals for changes to the ROA.

Disqualifications

The rehabilitation period for a disqualification is the length of the disqualification. If a person is disqualified at the same time as receiving another penalty, such as a fine, the longer rehabilitation period applies. For example, if a motorist is banned from driving for two years and fined – which takes five years to become spent – the rehabilitation period would be five years, not two years.

Endorsements

An endorsement cannot affect the rehabilitation period of a motoring conviction. For example, if a motorist is fined and has their licence endorsed, the rehabilitation period would be five years (the length applying to the fine) rather than 11 years (the length of time before a driver convicted of drink-driving is entitled to a clean driving licence).

Further convictions

If a rehabilitation period is still running and the offender commits a 'summary' offence, a minor offence that can only be tried in a magistrates' court, the minor offence will not affect the rehabilitation period for the other offence; each offence will expire separately. For example, if someone received a two-year probation order and was fined for a minor offence one year later, the probation order would become spent before the fine. Therefore once the probation order is spent, only the fine would need to be disclosed until it became spent.

However, if the further offence is a serious one that could be tried in a crown court, then neither conviction (even if the first one is for a minor offence) will become spent until both rehabilitation periods are over. For example, if someone received a two-year probation order, then one year later was fined for a serious offence, both convictions would have to be disclosed until the fine became spent.

If the future conviction leads to a prison sentence of more than two-and-a-half years, neither conviction will ever become spent. However, if the first conviction leads to a prison sentence of more than two-and-a-half years, later convictions with fixed rehabilitation periods will become spent separately. For example, if someone received a three-year sentence and later received a fine, the conviction for the prison sentence will always have to be disclosed, but the fine would only have to be disclosed for five years.

Concurrent and consecutive sentences

If an offender receives two or more prison sentences in the course of the same proceedings, the rehabilitation period will depend on whether they are to run concurrently or consecutively. For example, two six-month terms ordered to run consecutively are treated as a single term of 12 months, giving a rehabilitation period of 10 years. But two such sentences ordered to take effect concurrently are treated as one sentence of six months, giving a rehabilitation period of seven years.

For further information about the *Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974*, contact Nacro's Resettlement Plus Helpline (page 12).

Appendix B

The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (as amended)

These are some of the key professions, offices, employments and occupations exempt from the *Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975*, as amended:

Professions

Actuary
Barrister (in England and Wales), advocate (in Scotland), solicitor
Chartered accountant, certified accountant
Chartered psychologist
Dentist, dental hygienist, dental auxiliary
Legal executive
Medical practitioner
Nurse, midwife
Ophthalmic optician, dispensing optician
Pharmaceutical chemist
Registered chiropractor
Registered osteopath
Registered teacher (in Scotland)
Veterinary surgeon

Offices and employments

Care services to vulnerable adults
Health service appointments
Judicial appointments
Justices' chief executives, justices' clerks and their assistants
Police constables
Prison staff
Probation officers
Traffic wardens
Work with under 18 year olds

Regulated occupations

Taxi driver

Appendix C

Sample covering letters

Letter A

The best approach to disclosure is for people to make a positive statement about themselves, one that is true. They should disclose that they have a conviction, providing whatever reassurance they can. They should then re-emphasise their positive features, whether it be (as in this instance) their reliability as demonstrated by their work record, or their ability to do the job (eg, their skills and experience). Most people will have something to offer employers, even if it is only general or personal skills, such as having a helpful and tactful manner, being able to relate well to customers, being flexible, thorough, accurate, committed, hard working or conscientious.

Dear Mr Holroyd

Caretaker vacancy

I am applying for the post of caretaker. I believe I have all the skills you are looking for. I have worked in the all areas listed in the job description and have more than two years' supervisory experience. I will make a good, conscientious employee and I am sure that my former employer will testify to this. I was always at the premises before 9 o'clock and was never late. In my two years with the company I only lost two days through sickness.

I have, however, convictions for theft which are now more than five years old and arose from financial hardship at the time which no longer applies. The convictions are 'spent' under the *Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974*, although I am aware that I have to disclose them for this job. Since this troubled period in my life, I have turned things around. I met my partner soon after my last conviction and settled down. We now have two children. I have been in more or less regular employment since the conviction. As my application makes clear, I have a good work track record and hope you will judge me on this rather than my past, of which I am not proud. I am of course prepared to discuss this at interview.

Yours

Letter B

Those people convicted of employment-related offences face the problem that employers are going to find it hard to trust them. Those problems will be compounded where people have been sent to prison, which carries with it its own particular stigma. If they provide some reassurance either directly or, in this example, indirectly (the individual refers to the positions of responsibility s/he held both inside and outside prison), then they will improve their employment prospects.

Dear Ms Virgo

Administrative assistant post

I have submitted my application for this post on the basis of my varied skills and experience. As you will see, I have several years' office experience and am familiar with a range of software packages including Word, Access and Excel. I have good keyboard skills, strong communication skills, solid organisational abilities and an eye for detail.

I have, however, two convictions. The first was for drink-driving and I was given a one-year ban, which has now expired. The second, in March 2001, was for theft. While working in an accounts office I got into debt and took money and thus abused a position of trust. I did in fact return the money, although I accept that what I did was wrong. On pleading guilty and being given a one-year sentence, I resolved to make constructive use of my time in prison, where I was trusted with several positions of responsibility, both inside and outside the establishment.

I want to make it clear that there will be no repeat offending. I have family responsibilities which mean that I can ill afford to get into trouble again, were I that way inclined. Prior to my conviction, I had a reputation for hard work and reliability. I am keen to re-establish that reputation and therefore would be grateful if you would at least grant me an interview, so that you might be in a better position to judge my true character. As my application makes clear I have a lot to offer, much more I suspect than the average applicant. I would not let you down.

Yours

Letter C

Anyone seeking work with children or vulnerable adults faces particular difficulties because of employers' concerns about risks. However, there are things that one can say, if true, that will provide reassurance. In this instance, the applicant has been able to provide reassurance that his offences, which include arson, drugs and possession of an offensive weapon, are not quite so bad as they seem. Without making excuses, the applicant has drawn attention to his youth at the time of the offences and his difficult social circumstances. The applicant has chosen to focus on his convictions rather than ability to do the job on offer. This ordinarily is a dangerous course of action but what comes across is a frank, reassuring account of his troubled past.

Dear Mr Williamson

Application for post of care assistant

As you see, I have submitted an application for the post of care assistant. I am applying for this position because I like working with old people and think I am good at what I do. I used to work in an office but deliberately chose this work because I find it satisfying. I get on well with people and can be relied upon.

However, I have a number of convictions, all of which are ordinarily spent, but not for this sort of work. As a 13-year old I lit a campfire in a shed which got out of hand. We burnt the shed down. No one was hurt, but I received a conviction. As an 18-year old I was convicted of possession of a small amount of cannabis and fined. I do not smoke at all these days, or drink.

As a 19-year old with no money I was convicted twice for fare evasion. I was head over heels in love, my girlfriend lived the other side of town and the train was the only way I could see her. And finally, as a 20-year old, I was convicted of possession of a Swiss army knife, which was found on me during a routine stop and search. I was not intending to use it. I am not that sort of man, and was not that sort of man even then.

After this last offence, I got my act together. I finally found some stability in my life. I managed to find somewhere to live, secure employment and settle down. I now have a family. I have come a long way since the offences, but I understand that they will be of some concern to you.

However, I can reassure you that I have learned from past mistakes and hope you will see that I am not the foolish young man I was and will judge me on my ability to do this job.

Yours

Appendix D Sample CV (with covering letter)

There is a tendency among those running job search courses to place much emphasis on preparing CVs, even though many participants will be applying for work where CVs are not required. Nevertheless, some employers do require them and compiling one can be a useful exercise for determining skills, qualifications and experience. A CV is also needed if they are going to submit speculative job applications to local employers, although arguably it is more productive to concentrate on obtaining application forms and applying for advertised jobs.

Below is an example of CV for someone who is currently on day-release from prison, which is why there is both a gap in his (paid) employment history and a change in career direction. He has left his prison address off the CV but has explained his circumstances in the covering letter which follows.

The author has also chosen to make a personal statement about himself immediately after disclosing his personal details. Others will want to put this information at the end of the CV.

Curriculum vitae

Peter Smith

3 Pode Hole Road, Spaldon, Lincs

I am a confident, mature and hardworking person who is ambitious, reliable and able to work on my own initiative or as part of a team. I get on well with people of all ages and backgrounds, am self-motivated and willing to undertake any training required by the company.

Education and qualifications

September 2002 to date: Fenland College (Wasbeck)

City & Guilds Level III Certificate in Information Technology (due to be completed in July 2003)

October 2001 to September 2002: National Extension College (Cambridge), Distance Learning Certificate in Marketing (due to be completed in June 2003)

September 1998 to June 2001: Sowtree Community College (Paulbrough), BTEC National Diploma in Business and Finance (passed with merits and distinction); GCSE History (B); GCSE Maths (B); GCSE English (B)

Other qualifications: Windows 95/98 environment, Excel spreadsheet, Microsoft Word.

Relevant work experience

June 2002 to date: Horsebite Day Centre (Spaldon)

Volunteer working with adults with learning difficulties, assisting with day outings for horse-riding, sailing and bowling. I also organise various sporting activities and competitions.

Summer 2000: Trinity Technical Services (Creeklund)

General administration. I performed a range of tasks from general office work to banking cheques, dealing with customers and advertisers on the telephone, and organising the typists and telephonists for the day. I was in charge of petty cash, faxing orders and verifying the order books.

Summer 1999: Tulip IT Services (Spaldon)

Assistant's position. Gained valuable experience in office-related work. Main duties included dealing with customers, answering the telephone, entering and retrieving information on the computer, distributing promotional material and general office work.

1997 to 1998: Wragg's Data Solutions (Spaldon)

Assistant. Duties included dealing with customer requests and needs.

Professional membership

Student membership: Chartered Institute of Marketing. Currently studying for the Certificate in Marketing.

Interests and hobbies

I enjoy listening to music, reading, swimming, socialising and meeting new people. I am also keen on studying to further my career. On completion of my present studies, I plan to continue studying marketing (distance learning) in my own time. My aim is to complete the postgraduate diploma to become a full member of the Chartered Institute of Marketing.

Further information

I have my own car and a full driving licence.

Referees

Available on request

Covering letter

It is clear from this covering letter that Mr Smith has made enquiries as to whom he should address his letter. This is more likely to result in a response from the organisation.

Dear Ms Dexter

Vacancies in administration

I should like to apply for any administrative positions that may be available within your organisation and have pleasure in enclosing a copy of my CV.

I have worked in the IT services field, where I have gained valuable experience in office administration, customer relations and maintaining a customer database. I am currently a volunteer worker at a day centre, working with adults with learning difficulties.

At present, I am serving a prison sentence and am due to be released in September 2003. I would like to say that I made a mistake from which I have learned a valuable lesson. During my sentence I have used my time positively and constructively and this is reflected in my ongoing studies and the fact that I am allowed outside the establishment to seek employment.

I am attending Fenland College one day a week to obtain a City and Guilds Level III Certificate in Information Technology. I am also studying for a Certificate in Marketing. Both are due to finish in June/July 2003.

Although I currently attend college on Mondays I could change to evening study if I was offered full-time employment. I am available to commence full-time employment from April 2003 under the prison's day release scheme.

I would be delighted to be given an opportunity to meet you to discuss my application further.

Yours sincerely

Peter Smith

Nacro Resettlement Service

This information has been produced by Nacro's Resettlement *Plus* Helpline, part of Nacro's Resettlement Service, which provides information and advice for prisoners, ex-offenders and people involved or working with them. If you want to find out more about how Nacro's Resettlement Service can help you contact **Nacro's Resettlement *Plus* Helpline**, 169 Clapham Road, London SW9 0PU. Telephone **020 7840 6464**.

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