

Government advisory board invitation to assist with ex-offender rehabilitation

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Ireland-based service provider SBFM has been invited onto the government's Employment Advisory Board (EAB) as part of a programme that links prison leavers with local employers who can offer their expertise on skills, qualifications and training.

Owner and founder Colin Shute will chair the board, which will also see people and social impact director Kelly Dolphin included.

Between April 2020 and March 2021, 38% of adults released from prison reoffended in the 12 months following their release. According to the Ministry of Justice's *Prisons Strategy White Paper* in 2022, reoffending is costing society over £18bn a year. One of the key drivers of the EAB is to reduce these numbers and integrate offenders into meaningful careers.

Mr Shute said: "Too often prison leavers are released with nowhere to go, and in many cases become homeless. That must change. They need security and stability in order to rehabilitate, and the EABs provide just that. Enabling the reintegration of ex-offenders into the labour market holds immense advantages for UK businesses, while also serving as a crucial lifeline for these individuals who are in search of employment opportunities. Although we are still in the early stages of this rehabilitation journey, we are already witnessing tangible positive societal and business impacts emerging from this approach."

EABs were the brainchild of Timpson Group chief executive James Timpson OBE and were successfully implemented and expanded with the support of the Timpson Foundation.

They are supported by prison employment personnel and provide a focus on creating a long-term positive culture of employment, ensuring prisoners are 'job ready' on release, and linking prison leavers with

sustainable employment opportunities and the wider labour market.

Following the successful trial of EABs in what was called 'accelerator prisons' in 2021, the Ministry of Justice's Prison Strategy White Paper, released in early December 2021, made a commitment to implementing EABs across all resettlement prisons, officially launching in spring 2022.

The company's representatives attend quarterly meetings with the prison governor, the head of reducing reoffending, the prison employment lead, training providers, and New Futures Network, which also aims to broker partnerships between prisons and employers. In total, the company works closely with 10% of UK prisons, including Feltham Young Offenders Institution, a prison for male juveniles and a young offenders institution. The company also hosts 'careers talks' in the prisons to share expertise and help build trust with inmates.

Ms Dolphin said: "Many people leave prison and re-enter communities alone. That can be a very lonely and confusing existence. This isn't about simply filling vacancies. It's about creating a strategy for inmates to help forge a career and a new life. This scenario presents a genuine win-win outcome as it addresses deficiencies in skill supply across multiple sectors, simultaneously fostering a more secure future for individuals and reducing the likelihood of them engaging in criminal activities."