



Supporting ex-offenders into the jobs market

The Department of Jobs and Small Business conducts the annual Survey of Employers' Recruitment Experiences which covers all 51 Employment Regions in Australia. More than 10,000 employers participate in the survey each year providing valuable information about their local jobs market. As part of this survey, a subset of employers were asked about their experiences hiring job seekers with a criminal record (ex-offenders) and offered suggestions for how they could improve their employment prospects.¹

Results from the survey showed that around 15 per cent of regional employers had hired an ex-offender.

Employer experiences with ex-offenders

Of the employers who had knowingly hired an ex-offender, 78 per cent reported positive outcomes, stating that the ex-offender had successfully integrated into the business because they were:

- Hardworking and a team player
- Liked by their colleagues and customers
- Appreciative of the opportunity
- Able to demonstrate they had the right skills for the job.

Of those employers who reported a negative experience, it was most commonly due to performance issues (29 per cent) which included absenteeism and bad behaviour. Employers also reported negative experiences due to the job seeker re-offending and substance abuse (23 per cent and 16 per cent respectively).

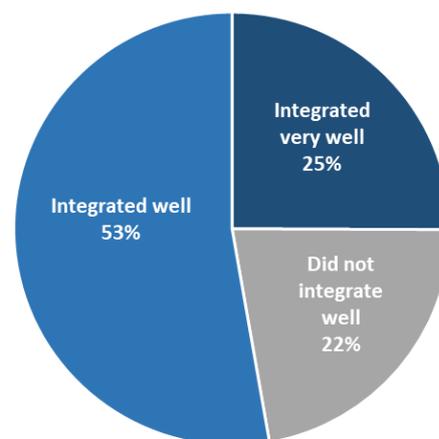
Ex-offenders need to be upfront

Employers commonly reported the need for ex-offenders to be honest about their criminal record, with many employers wanting to know about the conviction(s) as early as possible (either on the résumé or at the interview). There were a number of employers who said that if the applicant was upfront and honest about their criminal history when applying, depending on the nature of the offence and the nature of the job, they would 'give them a go'. Some employers working in industries that prohibit employment of a person with a criminal record reported terminating employment because the ex-offender did not disclose their criminal history which was subsequently identified in a police check.

"The main thing is they need to prove themselves and be upfront and honest about their situation. I think depending on the crime, people should be given a second chance." (Employer in NSW)

*"He was one of the best workers I have ever had. He admitted at the interview that he had just got out of jail and wanted to start an apprenticeship to turn his life around - and it did."
(Employer in NT)*

Figure 1. Ex-offender employment outcomes



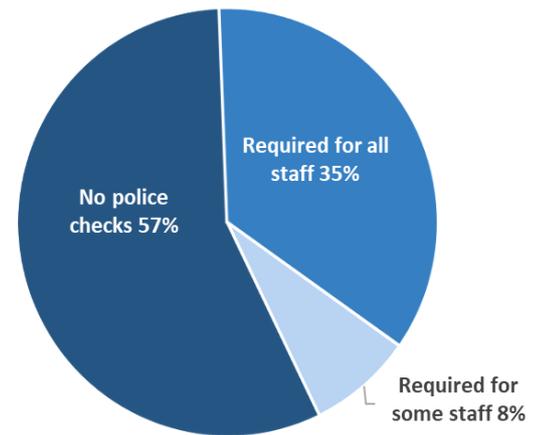
¹ The ex-offender questions were asked of more than 2,900 employers in 2017.

Employers requiring police checks

Some 57 per cent of surveyed employers did not require a police or criminal background check when recruiting new staff. These employers were most often in the Agriculture, Manufacturing, and the Retail and Wholesale Trade industries.

Of the surveyed employers who required a police check for some or all new staff, most were in industries where police checks are mandatory (such as Health Care and Education and Training) as the nature of their work involves working with children, the elderly or other vulnerable people.

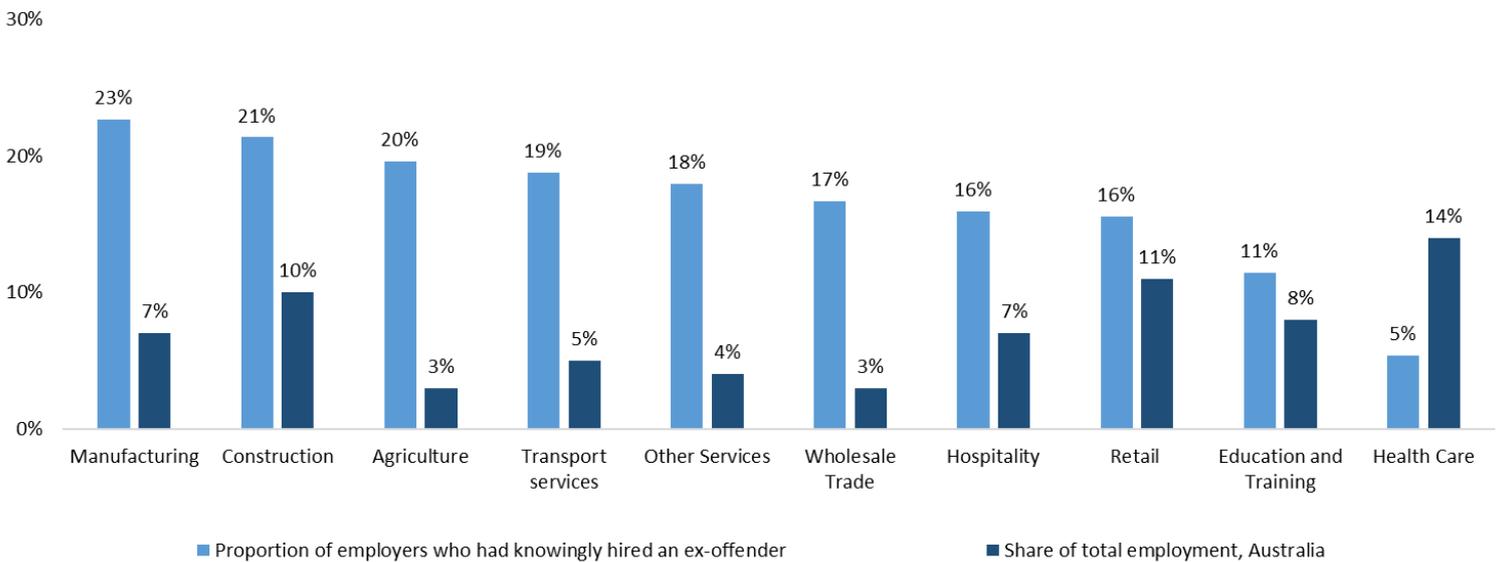
Figure 2. Employers who required a police check



Which employers are more likely to hire an ex-offender?²

Employers in producing industries (Agriculture, Construction and Manufacturing) were more likely to have hired an ex-offender. Almost one in four employers in Manufacturing had knowingly hired someone with a criminal record, followed by employers in Construction, Agriculture and Transport Services (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Employers who had knowingly hired an ex-offender and share of total employment, by industry



Source: ABS, Labour Force Survey, February 2018, Seasonally adjusted, Australia; Department of Employment, Survey of Employers' Recruitment Experiences, 2017

² The Other Services industry provides a range of services including car repair and maintenance (like spray painting) and other machinery repair services.

The Construction industry is likely to continue to provide employment opportunities for ex-offenders due to:

- Large projected employment growth
- Close to half (46 per cent) of employers not requiring police checks for their staff
- A willingness to hire ex-offenders.

Health Care is Australia’s largest employing industry and while it is projected to make the largest contribution to employment growth in the coming years, ex-offenders will find it more difficult to take advantage of these opportunities due to the significant number of employers requiring police checks. Of the surveyed employers in the Health Care industry:

- 82 per cent said they require police checks for all or some jobs; but
- 5 per cent had knowingly hired someone with a criminal record, most likely in roles like maintenance, trades and food preparation.

Retail is the second largest employing industry in Australia, and 73 per cent of employers in this industry said they do not require police checks for their staff. Accordingly, this industry is also likely to provide opportunities for ex-offenders.

How can ex-offenders improve their employment prospects?

When employers were asked what ex-offenders could do to improve their employment prospects, they suggested:

Education and training

Job seekers with a criminal record should focus on improving their education and training. With a changing labour market and many new jobs requiring a different and higher level skill set, education and training are more relevant than ever. In addition to having the skills required, employers said that undertaking relevant training would demonstrate a willingness to learn and a desire to work.

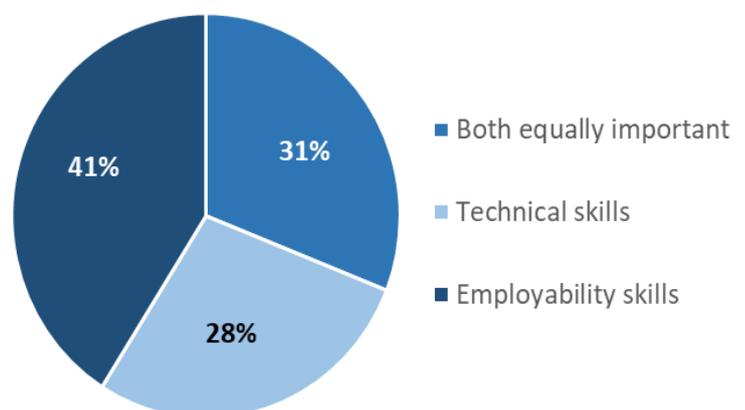
“Ex-offenders should try to get as many qualifications as possible to broaden their employment prospects.” (Employer in WA)

Employability skills

Sometimes called soft skills or people skills, these are the essential skills, personal qualities and values that are very important to employers. Most commonly, employers sought good communication and interpersonal skills, a strong work ethic, good presentation (at the interview and for work), a positive attitude, being upfront and honest and reliability.

Research by the Department shows that 72 per cent of employers place at least as much emphasis, if not more, on employability skills than they do on technical skills.

Figure 4. Employer ratings of technical and employability skills



In addition to obtaining experience and developing their employability skills, employers also suggested that volunteering or workplace trials were a great way for ex-offenders to demonstrate their skills, commitment and enthusiasm to a prospective employer.

Applying for jobs

Employers offered general job seeker advice such as:

- Selling their strengths in the résumé (particularly their willingness to work)
- Presenting well to a potential employer (first impressions count)
- Looking for jobs in industries where a criminal record may not prohibit them from employment.

Employers also suggested job seekers need to include character references and referees from previous employment to help improve their chances in the labour market.

Additional resources;

Labour Market Information Portal:

This website brings together data from a range of sources to help job seekers understand their local labour market. <http://lmip.gov.au/>

Posters for job seekers:

A range of posters to help job seekers to improve their chances of getting a job.

<http://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/GainInsights/EmployersRecruitmentInsights/LabourMarketPosters>

Australian jobs 2018:

An overview of the Australian labour market with occupation and industry profiles.

<https://docs.jobs.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/australianjobs2018.pdf>

Job Outlook:

Provides information on around 350 occupations including employment prospects and required training.

<http://joboutlook.gov.au/>

Job Jumpstart:

This site allows students, parents, teachers and job seekers to explore occupations, courses, and job search strategies. <https://jobjumpstart.jobs.gov.au/>