

Reforms: time well spent

Recent changes to the 1974 Rehabilitation of Offenders Act will reduce the prejudice ex-offenders face when applying for jobs but they “do not go far enough”, warns Christopher Stacey, director of services at Unlock, a national charity for people with convictions.

The changes reduce the period in which people with a conviction have to declare it to a prospective employer.

They are intended to make it easier for ex-prisoners to gain employment and therefore complete their rehabilitation into society.

Rehabilitation

Some people who committed a single crime in their teens have found that they have to continue disclosing it until their thirties or forties, making it difficult for them to get a job.

“The reforms will make a huge difference to thousands of people,” said Stacey. “For many people the changes mean that the length of time that they will need to disclose their conviction will be reduced.

“For example, more than 800,000 people a year receive

a fine at court, and the rehabilitation period for this will reduce from five years to one.”

Exempted sectors

Nevertheless, he added, because of the way that the government has responded to concerns raised by the insurance industry, many people with minor motoring offences will still find themselves having to disclose



Stacey: reforms will make a difference for thousands of people

a conviction to employers for five years, which is now longer than somebody who receives an eight-month prison sentence.

When applying for jobs in certain exempted sectors, such as working with children or vulnerable adults, and healthcare, people may have to disclose spent convictions as well as unspent ones.

‘Relevant convictions’

As part of this process, employers in these sectors can ask for enhanced criminal record checks. But figures released to the charity from the Disclosing and Barring service showed that between March 2012 and February 2014, the DBS refused 1,385 applications from employers who were looking to carry out a level of criminal record check that they were not entitled to.

Stacey said: “We want to see the government review this exceptions list and look more closely at what is disclosed on these checks, so that only relevant spent convictions are disclosed.”

KELLY MATTISON

that: “US seed companies that for a decade have been struggling to break the deadlock over authorisation for the cultivation of their [GM] seeds now will be presented with the ultimate opportunity to change the entire process to suit their needs.”

The European Commission has said that the trade deal will not threaten European rules on food and environmental safety. But CEO analysis of the deal says it is likely to do exactly that. According to the analysis, under TTIP’s “mutual recognition” tool US farmers would be able to export products to Europe that didn’t meet EU food standards. However, CEO said European

farmers would still have to meet those standards, leading to unfair competition.

“In the EU, farming will become increasingly intensified and many farmers will go out of business,” Holland said. “Consumers will be faced with imported products that do not meet EU standards, and in the long run, with lower standards.”

Public awareness

The talks on TTIP are being held behind closed doors, and draft negotiation texts are being kept out of the public eye. Despite this, public awareness of the deal is growing quickly.

On 12 July thousands of protesters took to the streets of cities around the UK to

demand an end to talks on TTIP, supported by groups including the World Development Movement, Unison and Friends of the Earth.

“This deal would hand multinational companies unprecedented powers over life in this country,” said Nick Dearden, director of the World Development Movement. “David Cameron waxes lyrical about national sovereignty, but in pushing for this deal he is wilfully handing sovereignty to big business.

“The deal is not really about trade – it’s about entrenching the position of the one per cent. It should be abandoned.”

CLARE SPEAK



NEWS IN BRIEF

TUBE FOR THE NORTH

A tube system connecting major northern cities could help the nation’s economy, a new report suggests. The City Growth Commission, set up to explore how cities outside London could grow, says the UK is losing billions of pounds every year due to overly centralised decision-making. It noted the importance of the HS2 scheme but stressed the need for better connections between northern cities.

SCHOOL OF THE YEAR

An inner city school in Moss Side, Manchester has been named primary of the year at a national teaching awards ceremony. St Mary’s CofE Primary, in which English is a second language for 80 per cent of children and the same amount are entitled to free school meals, is in the top two per cent in the country for pupils’ progress in reading and in the top seven per cent for maths.

HULL WRITING COMP

Leading Hull author Val Wood is launching a creative writing competition with publication and cash prizes. Wood has written 21 historical and romantic novels based in Hull and wants to encourage others to do the same through Hull Is Where the Heart Is. Entrants can hear how they can bring their ideas to life at the official launch at Hull Central Library, 26 July, 2pm, or see valeriewood.co.uk for more details of the competition.

B&B BAN

A group of MPs are calling for a ban on care leavers being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation in a new report. The Commons Education Select Committee wants young adults leaving foster homes to be provided with regulated accommodation and say B&Bs can be threatening and frightening. The Department for Education said it will take tough action where it found B&Bs being used.

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