**Study finds criminal record tick box failing employers and job applicants**

* *Criminal record declarations “clumsy tool” to predict reoffending but puts off applicants*
* *Some recruits with no record may pose greater risk of offending, study finds*
* *Business in the Community and Virgin Trains asking employers to Ban the Box*

Criminal record declarations often do little to accurately predict the risk of re-offending among potential recruits, new research has found.

But asking people to declare convictions upfront may put people off applying for jobs whilst offering employers a false sense of security.

The findings have been backed by Virgin Trains and Business in the Community who are calling on employers to “ban the box”, dropping criminal record declarations from job application forms and instead find more supportive ways to discuss potential recruits’ criminal backgrounds.

The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice paper highlighted that, in some cases, people who had never been convicted of a crime might pose a greater risk than those with a criminal record.

On average, the time between someone committing a crime and being at no more risk of re-offending than someone who had not committed a crime was between seven and 10 years, the study by criminology expert and Associate Director of SCCJ Dr Beth Weaver concluded.

However, this varied, based on age, gender and type of crime. While some offending backgrounds would make potential employees unsuitable for certain roles, there was evidence that many candidates are either put off or dismissed out of hand by employers on declaration of a criminal record, despite there being little evidence that this would present a significant risk of re-offending.

“Around one in six people in the UK have a criminal record, so this issue affects a large number of people. Giving people a chance to work can improve outcomes for people and contribute to a safer and more just society. Asking people to disclose their convictions at the job application stage legitimises employer discrimination, as most employers don’t know how to make sense of the information provided and undermines the purposes of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act,” said Dr Weaver, a senior lecturer at Strathclyde University.

Business in the Community, the organisation behind the Ban the Box campaign in the UK, said in response to the research that asking people to declare convictions upfront is likely to put off talented candidates and, in some cases, drive people back to crime.

Jessica Rose, Campaign Manager at Business in the Community, said: "The research shows that including an upfront declaration on application forms can be a crude tool for assessing a candidate’s risk to a business. There is also strong evidence suggesting that people can permanently move away from crime and that employment plays an important part in this. We understand that employers need to manage risk in recruitment but asking everyone who applies for a role about criminal convictions at the start of the process tells people who are trying to move on with their lives that they won’t be given a fair chance. We urge all employers to remove the tick box and carefully consider whether, when and how they need to ask about criminal convictions and what they will do with that information once they have it.”

Virgin Trains has been proactively recruiting people with convictions for five years and has banned the criminal record declaration form on job application forms. Kathryn Wildman, Virgin’s Talent Acquisition Manager, said learning about people’s criminal history was an important part of the recruitment process. She said: “We’ve banned the box, but that doesn’t mean we don’t ask job applicants about their past offending. Rather than ask people to tick a box on application, we’ll have a conversation at interview stage in which we talk about their offences and where they are on the rehabilitation journey. That may still result in a no from us, but it gives that person the opportunity to discuss their past and what they’ve got to offer in a supportive environment rather than just being dismissed out of hand. And our experience is that we’ve identified some fantastic people with convictions who have gone on to perform really well for us and helped our business grow.”

Using criminal record checks has become increasingly common in the United States of America and United Kingdom but is less widespread in Europe, where alternative methods are practiced to assess risk, the research found.

Ends

Notes to editors

Time for Policy Redemption : A Review of the Evidence on the Disclosure of Criminal Records can be downloaded here: <https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/64981/>

The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research is a collaboration between Strathclyde, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Stirling universities.

For interviews or further information, please contact Damien Henderson: 07739 479 492; damien.henderson@virgintrains.co.uk

**About Ban the Box**

Business in the Community’s Ban the Box campaign calls on UK employers to remove the tick box and ask about criminal convictions later in the recruitment process – putting an end to the unfair discrimination of ex-offenders. To date, more than 115 employers with a combined workforce of more than 825,000 have signed up to the campaign, including the entire Civil Service. The Ministry of Justice wants to see all Ban the Box and the employment of ex-offenders in the public and private sectors.

Ban the Box calls for employers to:

* Remove the tick box asking about unspent criminal convictions from job application forms
* Publicly commit to considering applicants’ skills, experience and ability to do the job before asking about criminal convictions

It is not calling for any changes to the checks and processes that are legally required when recruiting for “regulated” roles as defined by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), such as jobs with children or vulnerable adults. For a full list of Ban the Box employers, see: [www.bitc.org.uk/banthebox](http://www.bitc.org.uk/banthebox)

About Business in the Community

Business in the Community, part of the Prince’s Responsible Business Network, is a business-led membership organisation made up of progressive businesses of all sizes who understand that the prosperity of business and society are mutually dependent. We exist to build healthy communities with successful businesses at their heart.

We use our Responsible Business Map to guide members on a journey of continuous improvement, working across the whole responsible business agenda. From community engagement to employment, diversity and the circular economy, we offer expert advice and specialist resources, driving best practice by convening, sharing learning and recognising great performance across our influential network of over 700 members, including over half the FTSE 100. [www.bitc.org.uk](http://www.bitc.org.uk)

**About Virgin Trains**

Stagecoach and Virgin are working in partnership to operate the West Coast inter-city route under the Virgin Trains brand, revolutionising travel on one of the UK’s key rail arteries.

The network connects some of the nation’s most iconic destinations including Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and London.

Virgin Trains is committed to delivering a high speed, high frequency service, offering shorter journey times, more comfortable travel and excellent customer service. Customers consistently rate Virgin Trains ahead of other long-distance rail franchise operators in the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) commissioned by industry watchdog, Transport Focus.

Virgin Trains has a proud record of challenging the status quo - from introducing tilting Pendolino trains, to a pioneering automated delay repay scheme, introducing the industry-leading onboard entertainment streaming service, BEAM, and becoming the first franchised rail operator to offer m-Tickets for all ticket types.

Virgin Trains operated the East Coast route between March 1, 2015 and June 24, 2018. In that time, we invested £75m to create a more personalised travel experience, including over £40m in the existing fleet. Customers have benefitted from 48 additional services between Edinburgh and London every week, and an extra 22 Saturday services between Leeds and London – a total of 1.74 million additional seats since May 2015.

Working together, the partnership railway of the public and private sectors has published a long-term plan, called *In Partnership for Britain’s Prosperity,* to change and improve Britain’s railway. The plan will secure almost £85bn of additional economic benefits to the country whilst enabling further investment and improvement, and contains four commitments which will see rail companies: strengthen our economic contribution to the country; improve customers’ satisfaction; boost the communities we serve; and, create more and better jobs in rail. For more information go to [Britain Runs on Rail](http://www.britainrunsonrail.co.uk/?gclid=CjwKCAiAr_TQBRB5EiwAC_QCq9OA-y_Al1Voo4ZvYjMvSBs86kuvjZLD8MfFvnOUU9UeVZ1T5CObLRoCasIQAvD_BwE).

Visit the Virgin Trains Media Room - [virgintrains.co.uk/about/media-room](http://mediaroom.virgintrains.co.uk/) - for the latest news, images and videos. Subscribe [here](http://www.mynewsdesk.com/follow/47939) for regular news from Virgin Trains.

Press Office: 0845 000 3333.