

## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

# Cross government support for arts and cultural sector initiative giving people with criminal records a second chance

The **National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance** is delighted that senior government ministers, along with **Arts Council England** and major arts and culture organisations, are set to lead the way in supporting people with criminal records gain skills and find employment.

The **Secretary of State for Justice, Rt. Hon. David Gauke MP** and the **Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, Rt. Hon. Jeremy Wright MP** met with leading experts to discuss the role of the arts and creative skills in criminal justice settings, and consider initiatives such as Ban the Box, a campaign led by Unlock that aims to break down barriers for people with convictions seeking work.

Key arts, culture and media organisations were enthusiastic and committed to adopting Ban the Box principles. Arts Council England has made a further commitment to funds for a possible place-based pilot programme, which seeks to build understanding of how the cultural sector can support the employability of offenders and ex-offenders.

David Gauke welcomed the forward-thinking approach of the arts and creative sector and has seen first-hand the impact arts can have on changing people's lives. He encouraged organisations to explore ROTL, work placements and training opportunities for people with criminal records. David Gauke, Secretary of State for Justice, said:

*"Helping offenders into employment is central to our drive to improve rehabilitation, reduce reoffending, and ultimately protect the public from crime."*

*"I am therefore grateful to the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance for its work encouraging employers to take on ex-offenders. We want more employers to look past a conviction and see the benefit for their business and for society."*

According to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport figures, creative industries were worth £101.5 billion to the UK economy in 2017 – more than the tourism and sports sectors combined. Despite compelling evidence that employment is a leading factor in reducing reoffending, research shows only 17% of ex-offenders are in PAYE work a year after coming out of prison and only half of employers say they would even consider employing an ex-offender.

The Ministry of Justice's Education and Employment strategy and its pioneering Unlock Opportunity campaign seeks to build bridges between employers and the criminal justice system. The creative sector recognises the potential talent pool within our criminal justice system and wants to do more to provide real second chances in this growing area of the economy.

The impact of this kind of initiative has huge potential. **Michael** (39, London), a former prisoner at HMP Brixton, has worked with Synergy Theatre Project (a company that supports people in prison and on release) to develop acting, facilitation and stage management skills.

Since Michael's release in 2016 Synergy Theatre Project has helped him to discover his passion and go on to achieve distinction in a stage management course. He will be stage managing Synergy Theatre Project's next show at Theatre 503 in February. Michael is about to undertake a work

placement at the National Theatre, London, and hopes this will lead to a future career in the industry. He says the arts helped turn his life around:

*“It was the only thing that helped me see I had a possible future outside crime, the arts enabled me see I had something to offer, something I was good at.”*

Jeremy Wright, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, said:

*“The arts can play an important role in reducing reoffending by helping people develop the skills they need to find employment and education upon release. We will continue to promote the use of arts and culture as a tool to assist with rehabilitation working with the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance.”*

Alison Frater, Chair of the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance, commented:

*“It is clear that more can be done to support people coming out of prison find meaningful work. Banning the Box is the first step towards this. The creative and cultural sectors are leading innovators - recognising that talent comes from all corners of society.*

*“We are delighted that the government departments have come together to discuss this important agenda and are excited about the potential to provide real opportunities for people in this dynamic sector.”*

Mags Patten, Executive Director, Communication and Public Policy, Arts Council England, added:

*“Creative talent can flourish anywhere, even in the most challenging of circumstances, and it can be transformative. We’ve seen first-hand how creativity has helped rehabilitate offenders, and how creative projects have brought people together for the first time, creating safe, strong, and bonded communities. We are proud to support Ban the Box, which will further break down barriers for people with convictions looking to develop their talent and skills within the creative industries.”*

**Ends**

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

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### **About the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance**

The NCJAA is a network promoting arts and culture in criminal justice settings as a springboard to positive change. The NCJAA is managed by Clinks, the national infrastructure charity supporting charities and social enterprises working in criminal justice in England and Wales. We have over 900 people in our network and our purpose is to promote effective practice; undertake and showcase specialist work and research; provide opportunities for skills, knowledge and network development; raise the profile of the sector; inform related policy; and build sector sustainability and resilience. The NCJAA is an Arts Council England Sector Support Organisation and also receives funding from the Ministry of Justice as part of the infrastructure grant awarded to Clinks.

**Website:** [www.artsincriminaljustice.org.uk](http://www.artsincriminaljustice.org.uk)

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### **About Clinks**

Clinks is the national charity for voluntary organisations in the criminal justice system in England and Wales. It supports, represents and advocates for the voluntary sector in criminal justice, enabling it to provide the best possible opportunities for individuals and their families.