Employing prisoners and ex-offenders
See what’s on the inside

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Introduction

Over half of employers struggle to fill vacancies due to skills shortages, according to The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Thinking outside the box about recruitment and exploring new talent pools can help overcome such challenges.

See what’s on the inside

Join over 300 leading businesses who benefit by hiring skilled people from prisons.

Prisoners gain a wide breadth of skills and qualifications from workshops in prison. Many workshops are run by external businesses, tailored to their company’s needs; making ideal job-ready candidates on release.

The New Futures Network (NFN) is a specialist part of the prison service that brokers partnerships between prisons and employers. It will help you to identify the best option for your organisation and find out more from other businesses.

There are a range of ways to get involved:

Employing serving prisoners

Employers can set up training and production facilities within prisons, getting a dedicated space and workforce from within the prison estate.

Release on temporary licence (ROTL)

Release on temporary licence, or ROTL, is a scheme which allows risk-assessed prisoners, towards the end of their sentence, to work or volunteer while on day release from prison. It allows you to offer work experience to a serving prisoner while you assess if they are right for your business.

Employment on release

Upon release, prisoners are available to work and have full employee rights. NFN can help you arrange interviews with ex-offenders before they are released, so you can choose the best person for your business.
Reasons to work with prisoners and ex-offenders

Working with prisoners and ex-offenders has a whole range of benefits, including:

Resolving skills shortages
Over half of organisations in England and Wales, say they have struggled to fill a position due to skills shortages in the past year. Working with prisons to offer employment opportunities makes good business sense, as well as helping prisoners and ex-offenders get their lives back on track.

Reducing recruitment costs
The CIPD has calculated that filling the average non-managerial vacancy costs around £2,000. Work inclusion initiatives, such as opening recruitment up to ex-offenders, can help reduce those overheads, saving organisations substantial sums.

Increasing staff retention
81% of businesses that employ ex-offenders say they have helped their business. Evidence from employers such as Marks & Spencer shows that the higher value placed on having a job, with the desire to stay out of prison, often means ex-offenders have higher levels of loyalty and retention, which keeps institutional knowledge within your business.

Reducing staff absence
The biggest concern of employers around hiring ex-offenders is a worry that they may not be honest and trustworthy. However, over half of employers of ex-offenders would positively rate their attendance at work, being motivated and reliable.

Making a difference
Over two fifths of employers say hiring ex-offenders has helped their company become socially responsible. Actively hiring former prisoners is proven to reduce reoffending. Most offenders want the opportunity to turn their backs on crime and having a job helps them get their lives back on track.
92% of inclusive employers say it’s enhanced their reputation – often helping them win new contracts.

3 out of 4 people would be comfortable buying from a business that employs ex-offenders.

79% of people think that businesses employing ex-offenders are making a positive contribution to society.

Two thirds of companies that employ ex-offenders would recommend others do the same.

Only 17% of ex-offenders manage to get a job within a year of release.

Ex-offenders who get a job after prison are up to 9 percentage points less likely to reoffend.

Offenders have relevant work experience; more than 11,000 serving prisoners are employed today, by over 300 businesses or government departments.
Hear from businesses already working with prisoners and ex-offenders

Do ex-offenders have any qualifications or the skills needed to work?

“The guys on-site, they are just like everybody else that we come across as an employer. We find they come with a variety of skills and we ensure they are then given the correct training so they can go to work and join in with the team.”

Claire Coombs, Development Manager, Keltbray

Will they turn up for work if I take a chance on them?

“We have found that the level of retention of our graduates from the [prison] academy is higher than the level of retention of our normal employed sales floor workers.”

Andy McBride, Head of Resourcing and People Shared Services, Halfords

Can I really rely on offenders to be part of my workforce?

“Pret has been working with both Working Chance and Novus for several years to take ex-offenders on to our Rising Stars Programme. We see this as an excellent talent pool with many Rising Stars enjoying a great career within Pret.”

Nicki Fisher, Head of the Pret Foundation Trust, Pret A Manger

Why should businesses employ ex-offenders?

“We’ve started working with ex-offenders and people coming towards the end of their sentence because it allows us to secure a pipeline of talent coming into our business, at the same time as helping people start again as they leave prison. In the hospitality industry there is a nationwide shortage of kitchen staff – kitchen managers and chefs particularly – that we at Greene King are not immune to.”

Greg Sage, Spokesperson, Greene King

Watch video testimonials from businesses on our website.

Ex-offender Leigh

“I was on the Halfords academy at HMP Drakehall and learnt how to repair a bike, give great customer service. I also learnt planning and resourcing skills ordering bike parts. I now work at Halfords as part of their customer and bike repair team.”

Leigh, Former prisoner, now Halfords colleague

Ex-offender Tyler

“In prison I got my level 2 catering course in HMP Glen Parva, I learnt to cook and run a kitchen. I’m now a chef in a busy pub kitchen working for Greene King.”

Tyler, Former prisoner, now Greene King employee
Getting started – how to work with prisoners and ex-offenders

Employing serving prisoners

Is your business looking for a space and workforce to make a product, or deliver a service?

We can help you by providing these to meet your business needs. More than 11,000 prisoners are employed in prisons today, by over 300 businesses or government departments.

Find out more about how businesses are already working in this way:

Redemption Roasters produces high-end coffee beans and trains prisoners in barista skills at HMP YOI Aylesbury.

Redemption Roasters decided to run part of their coffee business in a prison after speaking to HMP YOI Aylesbury about supplying barista training to prisoners. They’re now the world’s first organisation to roast coffee in a prison, employing the prisoners as their production team.

The prison provided them with the use of a workshop, as well as a prison instructor to help oversee work. They supported Redemption Roasters to recruit motivated, high-potential prisoners. 100% of Redemption Roasters’ coffee is now roasted and packed at the prison. It is then shipped to Dorset to be sold in their London café and distributed to buyers in the UK and Germany.

The prisoners get a high level of training in roasting, barista skills and customer service, which makes them ideal employees for the business on the outside. Redemption Roasters has already hired two men from the roastery to work in their London coffee shop.

Max Dubiel, Founder of Redemption Roasters, said:

“Setting up the roastery was actually not as complicated as we thought. We have had so much support from HMP Aylesbury itself and from the Ministry of Justice that we managed to get it on the road pretty quickly.”

Coffee roastery at HMP YOI Aylesbury
Release on temporary licence (ROTL)

Are you interested in employing ex-offenders, but concerned that they might not be the right fit for your business?

We can help by enabling prisoners to join your business as employees on day release, also known as ROTL. You can build up experience using ROTL to show your other employees, or board-members that working with prisoners makes business sense.

ROTL enables serving prisoners, who are coming to the end of their sentence, to leave prison every day to work in the community. This offers you the opportunity to ‘try before you buy’ and allows them to gain work experience and save money before being permanently released, helping them make a smoother transition back into the community.

Find out more about how businesses are already working in this way:

Timpson, the British retailer, recruit 10% of their workforce from prison, including offenders on ROTL.

Timpson has a long history of working with the prison service to employ ex-offenders, which started when James Timpson toured a local prison and spotted a prisoner with potential. As well as running training academies in prisons around the country, Timpson also hire prisoners on ROTL to work in their high street stores.

All prisoners who are eligible for ROTL are very carefully risk-assessed.

James Timpson, Chief Executive of Timpson, said:

“When I first started employing people from prison my biggest concern was what people would think – and that’s not just colleagues I work with, but also our customers. Far more people come to our shops because of what we do and see it as a really positive thing.”
Employment on release

Are you looking for a new pool of skilled, enthusiastic people to work for your business?

The New Futures Network (NFN) can arrange for you to meet with prisoners before their release, so you can find out first hand about the skills they have mastered and qualifications gained – be they excellent customer service skills, first-class business planning or a solid foundation in something industry specific, like brick laying.

NFN will share information about the training and workshop performance each candidate has built up during their rehabilitation, so you know you are employing the right person for your business.

Find out more about how businesses are already working in this way:

Bernard Matthews visits HMP Norwich as part of their regular recruitment cycle, to assess candidates from the prison and offer contracts to start upon release.

Bernard Matthews works with HMP Norwich to fill vacancies at their turkey processing plant in Norfolk. Due to the organisation’s rural location and a significant labour shortage in the area Bernard Matthews frequently need to run recruitment. They find it useful to tap into the keen talent pool from the prison.

The prison’s reducing reoffending team help Vicki, HR manager at Bernard Matthews, employ the right people by providing a ‘passport to work’ document, which outlines each candidate’s offences and behavioural record from the training or education workshops they’ve done while in prison.

The Job Centre Plus, housed within the prison, also supports by shortlisting potential candidates based on Vicki’s guidelines. Once an offer is made, the job centre team also ensure men have the documents they need for Bernard Matthews’ onboarding processes.

Andrew Sherwood, HR Director at Bernard Matthews, said:

“I would recommend working with ex-offenders. Our experience has been that the people who come to work with us have been loyal and hard-working. Many of them have moved on to become machine minders or forklift drivers. It’s a fantastic opportunity for them and it’s great for us as well.”
Recruitment practices can exclude ex-offenders from employment opportunities.

To be fairer, businesses can review their recruitment policies and practices, which will open up opportunities for ex-offenders.

If there are some offences that may be unacceptable for your organisation, NFN can help you filter by offence, so you do not have to have a blanket ban.

Consider what documentation will be required by the HR department before appointment; some forms of ID, such as proof of address, may be very difficult for prisoners to obtain and if possible this should be taken out of the process.

Consider adopting Ban the Box, a Business in the Community campaign that calls on UK employers to give ex-offenders a fair chance to compete for jobs. Companies that sign up commit to removing any tick box from job application forms that asks about criminal convictions and, if necessary, moving this question to later in the recruitment process so they fairly consider applicants' skills, experience and ability to do the job.

Get more tips and advice on inclusive recruitment from social justice charities Nacro or Unlock.

Read more about Ban the Box from Business in the Community: www.bitc.org.uk/banthebox
Next steps

Find out more at **offenderemployment.campaign.gov.uk**

Go to our website and register your interest on our employer form.

Once you’ve completed the online form a member of the New Futures Network will be in touch with you within a week to discuss your needs.

Prisoners working at construction workshop at HMP Brixton