

Press release: Coding to be taught in prison to help offenders return to the world of work

- New funding for pilot scheme to help carefully vetted prisoners learn digital skills
- Plans are part of a £1.2 million package to help underrepresented groups get jobs
- Three new Local Digital Skills Partnerships will help people get the skills they need to thrive in the digital economy

Prisoners will be taught coding to prepare them for work as part of plans to help marginalised groups become skilled in tech.

CODE 4000, an organisation that works with carefully vetted offenders and has led a successful trial at HMP Humber, has been given new funding by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to expand its scheme to HMP Holme House and reach more than a thousand more offenders.

The £100,000 award will also fund a new employment hub in Sheffield, providing support, mentoring and training for graduates once they have left prison, as the organisation looks to achieve its aim of developing a network of coding workshops in UK prisons.

The programme is modelled on the Last Mile project in the San Quentin prison in California which has helped almost 500 offenders with a zero per cent reoffending rate of participants. The national average reoffending rate in the US is 55 per cent.

To tackle reoffending – which costs society around £15 billion a year – the Government has launched the Education and Employment Strategy which aims to create a system where each prisoner is set on a path to employment from the outset.

Minister for Digital, Margot James said:

The Government is committed to stopping the cycle of reoffending and a valuable asset to prevent recidivism is employment.

Equipping offenders with coding skills will help them into life-changing work and give them a path to a hugely rewarding career.

We have a world-leading digital economy and this new funding will help keep people out of prison so they can give back to their local communities as well as be a boost for our tech businesses.

Prisons Minister Rory Stewart said:

I want to see more offenders learning the kind of workplace skills which can set them on a path to a better future, which is precisely why we launched our Education & Employment Strategy last year.

Code 4000 is an excellent example of what can be achieved through education and training in prison. It not only helps offenders turn their lives around but also benefits society by reducing the chances of their reoffending, and I am delighted to see it receive this further funding.

Neil Barnby, Workshop Instructor, HMP Humber, CODE 4000 said:

Code4000 workshops are reducing re-offending at a measurable rate, because we keep in touch with our graduates. We are constantly seeing success after success. When I started teaching in prisons I thought that if I could change just one life, turn one person away from crime then I have achieved something truly marvellous.

I look back on the years that I have been teaching coding in prisons and can see all the lives I have had a part in changing for the better. Not just the ex-offenders but their families and, more importantly their children. It is an enormous sense of achievement and with this funding I look forward to changing even more lives.

Digital Skills Innovation Fund

More than £1 million will be used to fund regional and local initiatives to help people from underrepresented groups gain the skills they need for digital roles.

Programmes being funded include those targeted at helping women from disadvantaged backgrounds, people with autism and people living in lower socioeconomic areas. The aim is to help people get the skills to succeed in roles such as data analysts, programmers, software developers and digital marketers.

The funding will see new training courses, workshops and seminars led by tech experts alongside a mentoring scheme tailored to businesses.

Research reveals only 19 percent of women make up the tech workforce and are underrepresented in the uptake of digital qualifications. While unemployed adults are five per cent more likely to lack the basic digital skills than the national average.

The following Local Enterprise Partnerships will receive a share of the money to invest in their local communities:

West of England Combined Authority

Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire (D2N2) LEP working with Sheffield City Region and supported by Leicestershire LEP and Greater Lincolnshire LEP

The following Local Enterprise Partnerships will receive a share of the money to invest in their local communities:

Lancashire LEP

Heart of the South West LEP

More regions to launch Digital Skills Partnerships

Local Digital Skills Partnerships (Local DSPs) bring together regional businesses, charities, local authorities and academics to increase the digital skills of individuals and organisations in their region. Three launched last year in Lancashire, Heart of the South West and West Midlands Combined Authority.

Three more Local Digital Skills Partnerships will be set up in the South East; Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly; and Cheshire and Warrington. This takes the number of people with access to the programme to more than 10 million, boosting digital and technical skills, job opportunities and productivity across the regions.

More than 2.5 million free training opportunities, in areas such as basic online skills, cybersecurity and coding, have already been delivered through the Digital Skills Partnership.

ENDS

Notes to editors and further info:

Contact the DCMS Press Office on 0207 211 2210.

CODE 4000

Offenders take part in a four-stage programme from initial training to developing the technical skills to qualify as full-time developer and find employment on release. The courses are led by volunteers and industry experts.

Stage 1: is a training phase, and begins with teaching the basics of HTML, CSS, and Javascript, before moving on to more advanced concepts such as Git, TDD, MVC, databases and full stack development.

Stage 2: allows successful graduates of Stage 1 to then work on real-world projects for external clients, which will also provide a modest income to the project.

Stage 3: will then see them working for clients in the real world on temporary day release.

Stage 4: aims to help them find full time employment as developers.

This employment hub in Sheffield will help them into work, stay in work and out of prison, and give back to their communities.

Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund – further quotes and info

Mike Blackburn, Lancashire LEP Board Director and Chair of the Lancashire Digital Skills Partnership, said:

We're delighted to have been awarded this funding which will enable us to deliver more accessible digital skills training to residents who are currently underrepresented in the local workforce.

The investment will also complement other programmes which focus on driving the region's digital economy as well as contributing to our wider inclusive growth strategy.

Lindsay Wetton, Senior Programme Manager, D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership said:

D2N2 are thrilled to be leading this exciting innovative digital skills project across the area in collaboration with Sheffield city region.

The focus is to support women and people with Autism, into digital skilled jobs through workshops, work experience and jobs.

West of England Mayor, Tim Bowles, said:

This is fantastic news and supports one of my key ambitions of improving job opportunities across the region. I want to ensure that everyone, regardless of background or personal circumstances, can access support to develop workplace skills so that they can fulfil their potential.

Digital and tech is an important part of the West of England's economy, and businesses have a particular need for skilled employees now, and this demand is expected to grow in the future.

Women are currently under-represented in digital roles and this new project will seek to tackle this by engaging with a wide group of women in communities, with the aim of moving us towards more representative and inclusive employment in digital roles across the region. This could include roles in virtual reality, VFX design or software development.

Digital Skills Partnership – further quotes and info

Clare Harris, Senior Skills Officer for Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP said:

We are delighted to have secured £75,000 of Digital Skills Partnership funding. As one of the best connected regional economies in Europe with a thriving tech sectors, it is important that people have the skills and confidence to take full advantage of our distinctive digital assets.

The project can make a tangible difference to residents, organisation and the economy of our area, helping to access and embrace the digital world and the opportunities that it brings.

By investing in the region, working with government and our partners, we can radically increase our contribution to the UK economy, while pioneering new systems, technologies and skills ways of working.

Philip Cox, Chief Executive of Cheshire and Warrington LEP said:

We are very excited to be a part of this initiative and to have a Local Digital Skills Partnership for Cheshire and Warrington. Being recognised by DCMS as one of the LEPs to deliver this project, shows the great potential Cheshire and Warrington has to increase our digitally-focused economy and increase productivity. Having the right digital skills offers fantastic opportunities for schoolchildren and adults when choosing a role.

Cheshire and Warrington LEP are keen to build upon our already dynamic economy by embracing and encouraging the skills our businesses need now and in the future. The Local Digital Skills Partnership will enable us to continue supporting the growth of our priority sectors as we move towards delivery of our Local Industrial Strategy.

More information on these three new Digital Skills Partnerships can be found [here](#).