

Press release: Drive to employ ex-offenders attracts over 120 businesses

- newly-registered businesses could join more than 300 already working in prisons
- new £250,000 construction academy to provide qualifications to prisoners
- focus on rehabilitation through work to cut £15 billion cost of reoffending

The businesses have come forward in the 6 months since the launch of the [Education and Employment Strategy](#), which set out a series of measures to boost prisoners' skills while in custody and improve their chances of securing work on release.

Reoffending costs the taxpayer £15 billion each year and evidence shows that ex-offenders in employment are up to 9 percentage points less likely to commit further crime.

A major focus of the strategy is to encourage a culture change within companies so that they see beyond an offender's conviction to their potential as an employee.

The interested businesses span a range of sectors, including construction and retail, and they could join employers such as Virgin Trains, DHL and Recycling Lives which are among more than 300 around the UK already seeing the benefits of employing those with a criminal record.

Having registered their interest, the businesses will now work with the Ministry of Justice to explore how to take forward their relationship with prisons.

Justice Secretary David Gauke said:

I passionately believe that building up offenders' skills and helping them into work encourages offenders turn their backs on crime, benefitting them and society as a whole.

I am delighted that so many businesses are recognising the value of giving ex-offenders a second chance and a job – their interest sends a clear message to offenders that if they work hard and behave well in prison then real opportunities await them.

I would encourage more businesses to consider getting involved in our New Futures Network and help ex-offenders into work.

Andy Milner, CEO of Amey, said:

At Amey, we believe in hiring the best people for the job, no matter what their background or history. For us, hiring ex-offenders is not only the right thing to do but it also makes good business sense.

There is a growing skills gap within our industry and within our prison population there is a pool of highly motivated people learning new skills such as engineering, carpentry and plumbing who just need someone to believe in them to help change their lives.

The 'Passport into Employment' programme we have in place as part of our prisons maintenance contract together with our waste recycling partnership with Recycling Lives is helping to support men and women to transform their lives and demonstrates our commitment to rehabilitating ex-offenders.

Other achievements since the strategy was launched include:

- Prisons in Yorkshire have secured a £250,000 investment to start a construction academy at HMP Leeds – to equip offenders with valuable skills ahead of release.
- A new body, the New Futures Network, has been established to build partnerships between prisons and employers – filling skills gaps in companies by providing job opportunities for men and women on release from custody.
- More than 160 education providers have signed up to deliver education in prisons, after a new system was put in place. Governors will be running competitions to bring in these new providers from April.

The new construction academy in Yorkshire will offer fully accredited qualifications to prisoners and will be funded by a £250,000 grant.

Offenders who graduate from the academy will help plug the skills gap in the sector – 44% of small and medium house-building businesses claim the shortage of skilled workers is reducing their ability to construct more homes.

The innovative new academy, based at HMP Leeds, is due to open in February 2019 and will benefit 168 participants across 7 prisons in the region each year.

Since the launch of the Education and Employment Strategy in May, a new body, the New Futures Network, has been established to work with employers to generate training and job opportunities.

It has already begun work in 3 areas – Yorkshire, Tees and Wear and Wales – and will be rolled out across England and Wales in 2019.

The Network, launched in October this year, will follow up with the 120-plus businesses and broker partnerships to create more prison workshops, paid placements for serving prisoners and jobs on release.

In November a new system was put in place providing governors with access to

education providers from across the country. This has already attracted more than 160 education bodies, businesses and charities, providing courses ranging from construction to life skills and money management.

Notes to editors

- The project to establish the new construction academy will be delivered in partnership with the charity Bounce Back, which already works with HMP Brixton to train prisoners for construction.
- The academy is due to open in February 2019, with prisoners working to get the building itself ready prior to that.
- All skills training will be structured to take into account the average length of stay, average length of sentence, the need for continuity of learning, teaching of soft skills and tailoring the experience to the meet the needs of industry to ensure the best possible opportunity of employment outcomes post release.
- The launch of the Prison Education Dynamic Purchasing System has given governors direct access to a wide variety of educational providers, charities and businesses, to commission services for their prisons. So far more than 160 have signed up. They will be able to begin delivering courses from next April.