



The Prince's  
Responsible  
Business Network



Toolkit

# REDUCING REOFFENDING THROUGH EMPLOYMENT

Ban the Box





# TOOLKIT

## REDUCING REOFFENDING THROUGH EMPLOYMENT

### Foreword

When we published the original version of this Guide in 2015, there were only 55 employers signed up to our Ban the Box campaign. Six years later, we have celebrated reaching the milestone of one million roles being opened up to people with convictions, a very real demonstration of how employer perceptions have started to shift in the right direction. Although Ban the Box remains one of Business in the Community's (BITC's) flagship campaigns – and we continue to encourage as many businesses as possible to sign up – it is by no means the entire solution. Many of the 750,000 people in England with unspent convictions, and the 60,000 people released from prison every year, face barriers to employment that cannot be solved just by banning the box.

We applaud all those employers who are already supporting people with convictions to find meaningful and sustainable work through initiatives such as employability workshops, work experience opportunities, job matching schemes and prison partnerships. We hope that by showcasing real-life, tried and tested programmes, which are having demonstrable benefits for businesses as well as for the people they're intended to help, more employers will have the confidence to go beyond Ban the Box.

Nicola Inge, Employment and Skills Director,  
Business in the Community

I'm a firm believer that each and every business has the capacity to be a force for good, for our employees and for the communities we serve. I'm proud to work for a company that shares that view. At Boots, we believe that our strength lies in our people, and that we are strongest when we recruit from broad and diverse talent pools. Opening our recruitment processes up to people who have experienced the criminal justice system benefits Boots as a business as well as the individuals themselves and the communities of which they are a part. In 2013, Boots became one of the first businesses to sign up to Ban the Box, and we continue to be great advocates of the campaign. However, becoming a Ban the Box employer is just one step towards meeting your corporate social responsibilities in this space – there are many more ways that employers can and should engage with people with convictions.

At Boots, the robust relationships that we've built with prisons help us to meet a commercial need over our busiest trading periods while providing essential work experience – it's a win-win. Boots is delighted to support Business in the Community's guide to Reducing Reoffending Through Employment; we hope it will give many organisations the confidence they need to really



make a difference to the lives of people with convictions, their families, and their communities for years to come.

Richard Ellis, Vice President, Corporate Social Responsibility, Boots

## Introduction

It is not uncommon to come up against resistance when talking about employing people with criminal convictions. *Will they pose a risk to my business? To my staff? To my customers?* But much of this reticence stems from a lack of understanding about what we really mean by a conviction and, crucially, how widespread convictions are:

- There are 11.8 million people in England and Wales with a criminal conviction<sup>i</sup> – that is equivalent to one in five adults<sup>ii</sup>.
- 76% of all sentences handed down by courts are fines<sup>iii</sup>. Most people with a criminal record have not been to prison.
- The majority (63%) of people who are sent to prison have committed a non-violent offence, and 44% are sentenced to serve six months or less<sup>iv</sup>.

Improving employability outcomes for people with convictions has significant benefits for individuals, businesses and communities alike. The aims of this toolkit are:

- to improve businesses' appreciation of the social and business case for engaging with people with convictions;
- to inspire businesses to take action themselves by providing real-life examples of the different ways that employers are already successfully interacting with this cohort; and

## BITC MEMBERS REFERENCED IN THIS TOOLKIT

- Boots
- Capita
- Co-op
- Greggs
- Kier
- Recycling Lives
- Ricoh UK
- RMF Group

- to help businesses who want to get involved but aren't quite sure where to start.

## The social case

Reoffending costs taxpayers, businesses, and communities £18.1 billion each year<sup>v</sup>. However, employment is one of the most effective ways to reduce rates of reoffending: when those with criminal convictions are in paid work, they are 39% less likely to re-offend<sup>vi</sup>.

However, unfortunately, people with convictions are less likely to be employed than those without:

- One-third of people claiming Jobseekers' Allowance had received a criminal conviction in the previous 10 years<sup>vii</sup>.
- 75% of the general population are employed<sup>viii</sup>, compared to just 17% of prison leavers one year after leaving prison<sup>ix</sup>.

If businesses can help ex-offenders to secure good paid work it will substantially reduce reoffending, lowering the number of future victims of crime and easing the financial burden on society. It will also contribute to greater community cohesion and wider social impact, as the ripple effect of a positive job outcome for a prison leaver is felt by families and communities.

**“THERE ARE FEW BETTER WAYS TO REDUCE REOFFENDING THAN GETTING FORMER OFFENDERS INTO WORK AND THE GOVERNMENT HAS**

BEEN LEADING BY EXAMPLE BY ON THIS. IN THE CIVIL SERVICE, WE HAVE BANNED THE BOX FROM ALL BUT THE MOST SENSITIVE ROLES AND I'D URGE ALL EMPLOYERS TO FOLLOW SUIT. YOU WILL BE HELPING SHAPE A NATION WITH LESS CRIME AND FEWER VICTIMS WHILE GIVING THESE MEN AND WOMEN A SECOND CHANCE." <sup>x</sup>

Lucy Frazer, Minister of State for Prisons and Probation

### The business case

Employing people with convictions is not just the 'right' thing to do from a social perspective, it can also bring significant benefits to your business:

- Address skill shortages: one-third of organisations say that they are unable to address skill gaps<sup>xi</sup>, which affects productivity and performance. By tapping into the talent pool of ex-offenders, employers can resolve skill shortages.
- Gain commercial advantage: since January 2021, social value has been explicitly evaluated in all central Government procurement, rather than just 'considered' as was previously the case. As a result, organisations seeking to secure public sector contracts must be able to demonstrate social value; actively employing people with convictions is a powerful way to do this.
- Address a commercial need: some organisations report that they are able to meet increased temporary flexes in demand by offering Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) placements to individuals who are nearing the end of their sentence.
- Diversify their workforces: some groups are over-represented in the criminal justice system: people from a Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic background make up 16% of the general population but 21% of people convicted<sup>xii</sup>, and less than 1% of under 18s enter local authority care each year, yet care leavers are estimated to represent between 24% and 27% of the adult prison population<sup>xiii</sup>. By working with people with experience of the criminal justice system, you're widening your talent pool and helping to reap the benefits that a diverse workforce brings.
- Reduce staff absence: over 80% of employers of ex-offenders positively rate their reliability, motivation, attendance, and performance<sup>xiv</sup>.
- Improve staff retention: organisations that actively employ people with criminal convictions report higher retention rates, reliability, and productivity among that cohort.
- Improve customer reputation: 81% of people think that businesses employing ex-offenders make a positive contribution to society<sup>xv</sup>.

### How can your business support people with criminal convictions?

There are a wide range of interventions that businesses can get involved in to improve employability outcomes for people with convictions.

The main section of this toolkit is dedicated to highlighting some of the excellent examples that are already underway. Many of them are aimed at serving inmates or prison leavers, but most can be adapted to help the broader cohort of people with convictions.

## Employability workshops

Employability workshops provide training, mentoring, advice, and guidance to help participants apply for jobs. They can focus on any skills that your target cohort will derive most benefit from, although many look to cover core skills such as CV writing and interview practice. They serve to boost participants' confidence, help to prepare them for their job search, and give tips on how to best demonstrate their potential.

### CASE STUDY: RICOH UK

Ricoh UK signed up to the Ban the Box campaign in 2014, and since then it has continued to be a strong business champion for people with criminal convictions. Ricoh has developed relationships with several prisons to offer employability workshops and Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) work placements to prisoners. Its employability workshops prepare serving prisoners with the skills and confidence they need to find employment upon release and help them turn the fact that they have a criminal conviction into something positive. In 2019, Ricoh supported 165 inmates through its workshops and feedback from both participants and volunteers was extremely positive.

## Vocational training

Delivered in the same way and to the same audiences as employability workshops, vocational training workshops address specific skill shortages rather than more general employability skills. As such, they create a direct line of recruitment for businesses that may be struggling to recruit for certain roles.

**"PEOPLE WHO ATTEND VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN PRISON ARE MORE LIKELY TO SECURE EMPLOYMENT SHORTLY AFTER RELEASE."** <sup>xvi</sup>

Ministry of Justice

## Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL)

Under this initiative, serving prisoners are invited to participate in activities outside of the prison, including paid and unpaid work, training, or education. Organisations with ROTL schemes report very high levels of satisfaction, and for many, they are a rewarding way of meeting fluctuating business demands whilst equipping people with convictions with the skills and experience they need to find work upon their release.

**"PEOPLE WHO ARE GIVEN ROTL HAVE LOWER RATES OF REOFFENDING. THE MORE THAT ROTL IS USED, THE GREATER THE IMPACT ON REDUCING REOFFENDING AND THE FEWER THE NUMBER OF OFFENCES PEOPLE COMMIT."** <sup>xvii</sup>

Ministry of Justice

### CASE STUDY: BOOTS

Boots, an early supporter of Ban the Box, has long been an advocate of helping people with convictions. Involved in a range of different initiatives to improve employability outcomes for this cohort, one of its most successful programmes is its involvement in ROTL schemes.

Every year, Boots offers 8-week paid placements to 30 inmates from HMP Sudbury to help out in the distribution centre over the busy Christmas period. It's a great example of helping Boots to respond to commercial pressures whilst also having a positive impact on the work readiness of prisoners.

Ian's story

Ian went to prison determined to make a life for himself when he was released. Towards the end of his sentence, he was transferred to HMP Sudbury, a rehabilitation and resettlement prison where he was given the opportunity to gain work experience.

*"I didn't know what I was going to do. I had no home to go to, no savings, nothing."*

Boots had been working with HMP Sudbury for four years and, along with agency partners Gi Group and AM2PM, regularly visited the prison to present the opportunities available for prisoners to work within a Boots' warehouse. Keen to apply, Ian had to complete a month's mandatory voluntary work before putting himself forward for a role working at the warehouse on a temporary license.

*"Every day, I'd be taken to the warehouse and taken back to the prison at the end of my shift. By the end of my sentence, I'd already gained a huge range of experience working across the different areas of the warehouse – learning how to operate a forklift truck, working on the floor checking the stock, and the behind-the-scenes clerical work."*

To read the full case study, please click [here](#).

### Work placements

Paid or unpaid work placements give people who have experienced the criminal justice system – and particularly those who've been away from paid employment for a long time – the opportunity to experience the world of work, develop their confidence and demonstrate their potential.

BITC's [Quality Work Placements in the New Normal](#) toolkit sets out ways of ensuring that

employers offer an accessible, inclusive, and quality experience for participants.

### Workplace insight days

If your business has limited capacity to deliver employability workshops and work placements, workplace insight days are a less resource-intensive way of engaging with people with convictions. They offer those with convictions the opportunity to visit the company, learn about the business and its culture, see the different roles available, and talk informally to people already working there.

### Ban the Box

Ban the Box is one of BITC's longest running and most successful campaigns. It calls on businesses to look at a person's skills and abilities first, rather than using the criminal record tick box on an application form as a filtering mechanism during recruitment. Being a Ban the Box employer doesn't mean that you can't ever ask an applicant to disclose any unspent convictions, but rather that you adopt a risk-based approach to how and when you ask about them, and how you assess them. BITC can support you to review your recruitment processes, remove the criminal record tick box and become a more inclusive employer.

To discuss how you can become a Ban the Box employer, get in touch with [banthebox@bitc.org.uk](mailto:banthebox@bitc.org.uk) or sign up via our [website](#).

### CASE STUDY: CO-OP

In August 2020, the Co-op formally signed up to Ban the Box, a campaign through which BITC calls on UK employers to give people with criminal convictions a fair chance to compete for jobs. To

do this, organisations remove the tick box from application forms and instead ask about criminal convictions later in the recruitment process.

The Co-op had adopted the principles of Ban the Box for around five years, but taking the step to publicly declare its commitments in this space, alongside 150 other employers, is a further way of ensuring that all its members, and their communities, have fair access to employment. The Co-op's commitment has helped to expand the reach of Ban the Box, which has now reached the encouraging milestone of over 1 million jobs, which no longer ask for details of criminal convictions upfront.

The Co-op recognises that by removing barriers to entry and providing greater access to employment for people with a history of criminal convictions, it can increase the likelihood of sustained rehabilitation, help to reduce reoffending and crime, and increase the economic wellbeing of the local communities it serves. This is all part of Co-op's vision, to support safer and stronger communities for colleagues, customers, and members.

*"Through initiatives like Ban the Box, we are able to help promote a fairer future for every person, no matter their background or experiences."*

Danny Matthews, Apprenticeships & Community Resourcing

### Actively recruit people with convictions

Many people with convictions have the right talent and motivation to be valuable employees but need the opportunity to overcome the barrier of their criminal records. By offering employment opportunities in-house, you can significantly reduce the likelihood of reoffending amongst participants whilst opening up a pipeline of motivated and skilled employees.

Some organisations actively recruit prison leavers to help them fill vacancies in industries that are suffering from a skill shortage. This can be done by creating partnerships to access work-ready candidates for jobs – to pursue this, you should get in touch with your local prison and ask to speak to the Resettlement team who will be able to advise further.

### CASE STUDY: RMF GROUP

RMF's Fresh Start programme is a leading socially inclusive labour supplier in the construction and rail industries. It began as an innovative solution to reduce the industry-wide skills shortage by targeting its training at groups who traditionally face barriers to employment, including people with experience of the criminal justice system. Through its Training Academy, it provides nationally recognised training qualifications, aligning courses with its clients' specific workforce needs. To date, it has placed over 1,000 people with convictions into paid employment.

*"At RMF, we train for specific roles, and we think the reason we're so successful is because we are providing a solution to an industry problem - skill shortages. By being able to be clear about the roles we have available and tailoring the training accordingly, we are able to successfully equip prison leavers with the skills and qualifications they need, to thrive in an industry in demand."*

Dara McCarthy, Operations Director

### CASE STUDY: KIER

Through its Making Ground initiative, Kier works in partnership to offer placements to Release On Temporary License (ROTL) participants, where 93 inmates have been through the scheme, and 53 have secured paid work as a result of it. Kier partners with multiple organisations to make sure

that they cover everything participants need, from soft skills to vocational training, to increase the chances of prison leavers succeeding and securing employment upon release. Following its success, Kier is currently refreshing the scheme to offer a wider range of opportunities.

*"I had no idea what to expect as I hadn't been to any interviews for years. It was refreshing to know that Kier wasn't interested in our qualifications, only our personalities and how we work together. After a few days I was offered an operative position, I accepted and was over the moon. A few days after that I was asked back for a further interview and was then offered a position as apprentice technician."*

Kier 'Making Ground' participant

### CASE STUDY: GREGGS

Greggs' Fresh Start programme, which started in 2012, offers support to people from disadvantaged groups who find gaining employment through conventional routes more difficult. Connected to over 20 prisons across the country, Greggs offers training sessions and work experience to those who are nearing the end of their sentence through the ROTL scheme. Once participants successfully complete the 2-4-week placement, Greggs maintains contact with participants with a view to helping them find permanent employment within the company.

Through its foundation fund, Greggs also provides monetary support to prison leavers to help them buy the things they need to get themselves ready for employment, such as clothes.

### Utilise your supply chain

Even if you cannot offer direct employment to people with particular types of convictions, you

can still support them to gain employment through your supplier network. You can promote and share vacancies with them and support them with any application process.

### CASE STUDY: RICOH UK

When direct employment is not an option, Ricoh uses its network and supply chain to support its employability workshop participants in finding employment.

*"At Ricoh, we acknowledge that offering permanent employment is not always possible, but that doesn't stop us from going the extra mile and using our network to support these individuals. At the end of each workshop, we share contact details with the participants so that we can stay in touch and support them in their job search after they have left prison."*

James Knox, ESG Manager

### Mentoring and coaching

Mentoring or coaching can have a significant impact on whether a person with a criminal conviction is able to succeed in employment. Mentoring can help to prepare an individual for the work environment; it also provides employers with an opportunity to upskill their current workforce, improve wellbeing, invest in their communities, and diversify their workforce.

BITC's Skills Exchange coaching programme provides jobseekers (who have experienced complex or multiple barriers to employment and who are now ready for work) with a business coach, who will equip them with:

- essential, transferable, and digital skills;
- improved chances of a successful job outcome – by increasing knowledge of the job market and building core employability skills; and



- enhanced wellbeing and resilience – helping them to stay positive and connected to the world of work.

## How to make changes to your business

Improving employability outcomes for people with convictions should be hugely rewarding for your business, but it does take careful planning and commitment from across your organisation. This section provides some tips on how to ensure delivery matches intention.

### Secure internal buy-in

The key to success is securing internal buy-in, particularly from senior leaders. In our experience, one of the most effective ways to do this is by getting members of your senior team to engage directly with the cohort of people you are trying to help, for example, through a 'Seeing is Believing' visit.

### CASE STUDY – BOOTS

In 2011, Marco Pagni, then Chief Legal Counsel & Chief Administrative Officer at Walgreens Boots Alliance UK (Boots), led a group of business leaders on a BITC 'Seeing is Believing' visit to HMP High Down in Surrey. The experience was a transformational one for both Marco and the business delegates and sparked a passion within Marco to explore how Boots could leverage its own employment potential and that of its suppliers to break down barriers to work for ex-offenders.

Following the visit, Marco engaged with Boots directors from HR and Procurement in the UK, inviting them to attend prison visits to explore how they could support an active approach to employing ex-offenders within the business.

### Stakeholder communication

Be open and transparent about your approach to employing people with convictions and ensure that you have comprehensive internal and external communication strategies. If you are unsure about how to address this, particularly with external media, BITC can connect you to other member companies who can share their experiences and approach.

### Form strategic partnerships

There are many organisations that will act as brokers between people with convictions and employers to offer employability support and training. A list of support services that businesses may wish to partner with is provided at the end of this toolkit. To build successful partnerships to support people with criminal convictions, your company should:

- Welcome potential partners into your business so that they can understand your culture, style of working and business need. They will then be better positioned to help you.
- Think about the opportunities you have available and the kinds of candidates or volunteering opportunities you're looking for.
- Be clear about the level of engagement and support you're likely to need and spend time with your potential partner to work out whether they can provide it.
- Recognise that you need positive and committed HR and line management support in your business to give your partnership the best chance of working.

### Create an inclusive culture

Engage employees at all levels of the business in delivering training, buddying people on work

placements, getting involved with mock interviews or CV and employability workshops. In doing so, you are not only developing their skills but also creating an inclusive culture as it will help to improve perceptions about people with convictions.

## CASE STUDY: RICOH

James Knox, ESG Manager at Ricoh says that the key to creating an inclusive environment for people with convictions is exposure. *"There is a cultural change that needs to happen. Far too often people are surprised when they learn that someone here has a conviction, because their previous perceptions of ex-offenders are entirely negative."*

These perceptions have changed as more employees – including senior leaders – have volunteered to support with the employability workshops which Ricoh continue to run. As well as being exposed to people with convictions whilst volunteering, Ricoh has helped to improve perceptions by actually employing ex-offenders.

[Join a network, for example BITC's Untapped Talent Taskforce](#)

Supporting people with criminal convictions can bring enormous benefits to organisations, but it may not always be a straightforward journey. Many organisations will face hurdles along the way, which is why it is important to leverage shared learning among organisations. However advanced or embedded your activity is in this area, you can learn from and share with others how you have overcome challenges and achieved success.

## Conclusion

In this toolkit, we have identified a number of different interventions that your business may

wish to consider in order to make a significant impact and improve the lives of people with criminal convictions. Though the criminal justice system is complex, there are plenty of sources of support available to help businesses to succeed on this journey.

Every employer, regardless of its size and sector, can be part of the solution to reducing reoffending in the UK, and benefit from a diverse and talented workforce.

## WHERE TO GO FOR MORE SUPPORT

### [Business in the Community](#)

Our advisory team can support you to review your recruitment practices to become a Ban the Box employer and improve your approach to inclusion.

Through our Skills Exchange programme, your employees can get involved in coaching jobseekers facing barriers to work, including people with criminal convictions.

By joining our Untapped Talent Taskforce, you can connect with and learn from other businesses who have experience in this space. Contact your BITC Relationship Manager or contact [us](#) for more information.

### [Specialised advice and training to improve recruitment processes](#)

[Nacro](#) supports people to overcome barriers presented by their criminal records and to move on from previous mistakes, as well as providing training to employers to improve their recruitment processes.

[Unlock](#) is a charity that provides a voice and support for those who are facing stigma and obstacles because of their criminal record, often long after they have served their sentence.

Through its 'Fair Chance' project, Unlock supports employers to make changes to their recruitment processes and identify candidates with criminal convictions.

### Support to set up prison partnerships

New Futures Network 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.

### Support to deliver interventions

Bounce Back is a training charity and painting and decorating Social Enterprise working inside and outside prison to train people from custody into employment to either become professional decorators for our own business or skilled construction workers for the building industry.

Breakthrough is a social enterprise that selects exceptional prison leavers and provides them with expert training, to bring diverse, inspiring talent to businesses through its fully supported apprenticeships. It transforms lives and communities through the impact it has on the individuals and businesses it works with and through reducing reoffending. Breakthrough runs two main programmes - a pre-apprenticeship course in prison and technology apprenticeships upon release.

Catch22 builds high-quality relationships alongside case management in prisons, and rehabilitation work to provide the long-term support needed for positive outcomes and to reduce reoffending.

Recycling Lives offender rehabilitation programmes are creating opportunities for ex-offenders to develop skills ahead of release and supporting them to find work and housing on release.

RMF – Fresh Start is a subsidiary of the RMF Group and has been assisting the most disadvantaged candidates through expert training and employment since 2014; it has been integral in assisting over 250 ex-offender candidates into employment during this time.

StandOut believes that with relational support, people leaving prisons can unlock their potential and turn their lives around. StandOut recognises that experience of prison, even a short sentence, can have a negative impact on confidence and self-esteem. StandOut has therefore developed an innovative approach to supporting people, which begins in prison and continues to support them after release for as long as needed.

Switchback enables young prison-leavers to build a stable, rewarding life through intensive 1-2-1 support and real-work training. Switchback's model is centred on a meaningful relationship between mentor and trainee, beginning in prison and lasting as long as it takes.

Working Chance helps women with convictions to develop the confidence, skills, and self-belief they need to overcome any barriers to their employment, find jobs and build careers.

### Help to identify candidates with criminal convictions

The Exceptionals help businesses employ ex-offenders by connecting them with relevant organisations who provide training, recruitment and ongoing support.

Offploy is a social enterprise formed by ex-prisoners to help those with convictions secure employment and can support your business to find candidates.

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Talk to one of our expert team today to learn how membership of BITC can help you take your responsible business journey further and drive lasting global change.

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