



The Prince's
Responsible
Business Network

Toolkit

FIVE KEYS TO INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT

April 2023

Opening Doors through Partnerships



TOOLKIT

OPENING DOORS: CREATE PARTNERSHIPS THAT CONNECT UNTAPPED TALENT TO JOBS

Business in the Community's (BITC) Opening Doors campaign supports businesses to take action across five keys to inclusive recruitment. This toolkit contains advice and examples to help your business with the first key: **create partnerships that connect untapped talent to your jobs.**

WHY INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT

MATTERS

Many businesses in the UK are struggling to recruit, with 57% of employers reporting hard-to-fill vacancies at the start of 2023.¹ This is being driven by historically low levels of unemployment – with an average ratio of one unemployed person to every vacancy - and high levels of economic inactivity (people of working age not looking for employment).²

At the same time, employers are increasingly prioritising diversity and inclusion which are key to being a responsible and successful business.³ And yet research suggests that businesses are overlooking – or even excluding - some jobseekers:

- 22% would close their doors to disabled people⁴

- 35% would close their doors to refugees⁵
- 35% would close their doors to education leavers⁶
- 58% would close their doors to homeless jobseekers⁷
- 55% would close their doors to people with criminal convictions⁸.

To fill vacancies and reach diverse talent, businesses need to adopt inclusive recruitment practices. BITC's Opening Doors campaign identifies five keys to inclusive recruitment, each underpinned by specific actions for businesses to take. Creating partnerships that connect untapped talent to your jobs is the first key to inclusive recruitment.



THE VALUE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Some individuals need tailored support to prepare them for employment and to become familiar with your business, sector and the types of roles available. If your business is serious about reaching a broader, more diverse talent pool you will need to establish partnerships with organisations that support disadvantaged jobseekers.

BUSINESS BENEFITS

Working in partnership enables your business to:

- **build your talent pipeline** by gaining access to jobseekers you would otherwise be unable to reach
- **increase your understanding of disadvantaged groups** to help make your recruitment more inclusive
- **break down bias** amongst your employees which may impact on hiring decisions or the culture of your workforce
- **provide volunteering opportunities for employees to develop skills, confidence and commitment to the business.**

Data from BITC's [Job Coaching programme](#) shows the benefits employees can gain through volunteering with employability initiatives. Of 103 coaches completing the programme:

- 91% improved their coaching skills
- 87% increased their knowledge of barriers to employment
- 84% improved their communication skills
- 75% had an improved sense of wellbeing
- 65% improved their problem solving
- 57% had an improved commitment to the company.

HOW TO CREATE HIGH IMPACT PARTNERSHIPS

1. Identify your target groups

It can be helpful to begin by focusing on a small number of target groups you want to bring into your business. Reviewing your recruitment process, HR, diversity and customer data, you can use diagnostic questions like:

- Are there any groups or characteristics that are underrepresented in our business?
- Are there any issues that particularly affect our communities and customers?
- What are the risks of overlooking certain groups, and the opportunities of increasing representation of these groups within our business?

More information on jobseekers that face a disadvantage in recruitment can be found in the appendix.

2. Define your ambition

Decide **how** you will support your target groups in consultation with your partners, who have the expertise and experience to guide you in what works. To help you focus your search for partners you should define the scale of your ambition. You will need to consider:

- the nature of your business, and whether you want to deliver employability activities in multiple locations
- which areas of the business may offer the best potential for the groups you support to progress into employment
- the demands of the business and the capacity of employees to be involved in any employability initiatives
- the level of resources you are able to invest in untapped talent.

GOOD FOR BUSINESS, GOOD FOR SOCIETY

Dainya was supported by Working Chance, a charity that partners with employers such as Thames Water to support women with criminal convictions into employment:

‘After talking with Working Chance, I felt more comfortable and able to express myself freely and speak about my situation and what I experienced and that made me even more confident when applying for jobs. Now if the question of disclosure comes up, I feel much more confident with saying what happened.’

Leigh Maxfield Employment and Skills Partner Thames Water explains the benefits of partnering with the charity:

‘The insight from Working Chance has been amazing. They really equip you to be able to go back to your business and say ‘I’ve got this amazing candidate you just can’t ignore, they have this brilliant skillset’. That overrides any conviction, making it more a case of ‘by the way they have a conviction’ rather than, ‘I’ve got this candidate with a conviction but they also have these skills’. The insights Working Chance share have really equipped me to support candidates like Dainya, and successfully help her in to work with us, which is amazing.’



USEFUL RESOURCES FOR FINDING A PARTNER

- [BITC's Opening Doors endorsers](#): A list of organisations that endorse BITC's Opening Doors campaign and how they can partner with employers.
- [Refugee Employment Network](#): A network of organisations supporting refugees into employment. The website has a directory that can be searched by location.
- [Criminal Justice Alliance](#): An alliance of organisations that support people with criminal convictions.
- [New Futures Network](#): A Government initiative that brokers relationships between prisons and employers.



Case study: JTI UK

Opening Doors employer JTI UK invests in long-term partnerships with charitable organisations which share the business' values – and these partnerships have helped to shape the business' approach to recruitment.

The business has identified key target groups that face disadvantage in recruitment, with a focus on veterans (as well as military spouses and partners) and adults with disabilities.

JTI UK has established its Inspiring and Hiring programme for veterans and military spouses, through which it has offered work placements and delivered career workshops in partnership with organisations including [Mission Motorsport](#) and [Recruit for Spouses](#). The learnings from these partnerships have enabled JTI UK to adopt more inclusive hiring practices for veterans, such as making job descriptions more accessible, and offering support on preparing for interviews for ex-military candidates who meet the essential criteria. As a result of these changes, JTI UK has been awarded the Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award for their support to the defence and armed forces community.

The business is also providing paid work placements to graduates with disabilities through a partnership with [Leonard Cheshire's Change 100 programme](#). The partnership matches diverse talent with progressive employers, providing candidates an opportunity to experience the working world whilst giving employers the opportunity to learn from the experiences of disabled adults. JTI UK hosted two placements in 2022; one Change 100 intern worked within the People & Culture Team supporting JTI UK's project to review its recruitment journey to ensure it is accessible for disabled jobseekers.

“Long-term partnerships are key for us to really make an impact in society, and they enable us to better understand the types of challenges some groups can face. Our recruitment has already become more inclusive as a result of these partnerships, and we have plans to take this further through our commitments as part of the Opening Doors campaign.”

Victoria Palmer-Keen, People & Culture Business Partner, JTI UK

3. Connect with partners

There are several methods you can use to identify partners:

- **Desk research.** Research national and local organisations supporting the target groups you wish to support. You may prefer to find a partner that works with multiple disadvantaged groups or you may choose to work with different partners for each of your target groups
- **Ask your people.** Consulting with your employees can be a good way to begin to raise awareness of your plans, and to identify potential partners, as your employees may know of, or be involved with, organisations that support disadvantaged groups
- **Use BITC's [Advisory Services](#).** BITC can support members to develop a strategy in inclusive recruitment, including establishing high-impact partnerships.
- **Explore BITC [employment programmes](#).** BITC has a range of pre-employment programmes for different groups that face disadvantages in recruitment.

Once you have identified potential partners, this will likely be followed by an initial exploratory conversation. Prepare for these conversations with a clear brief outlining:

- the background and nature of your business, its purpose and your responsible business strategy
- the target groups you want to support and how these fits into your inclusive recruitment ambitions
- the anticipated objectives for the partnership
- the timing and proposed lifespan of the partnership.

It is helpful to come up with an idea of the type of employability support your business can provide, while being open-minded to learn from partners

about what works best. Be upfront about your expectations and ambitions but be fair in valuing what the organisation brings to the table.

TYPES OF EMPLOYABILITY ACTIVITIES

- Work placements
- CV workshops
- Careers exploration activities
- Essential skills training
- Interview practice
- Employability training

4. Formalise the agreement and get started

Once you have decided you will work with a partner, you can formalise the agreement. This should include:

- setting out clear expectations about what each party will provide
- identifying who will be the key points of contact on each side
- a plan to test and scale. It can be helpful to start small to test your approach and the strength of the partnership, before scaling up your activity
- agreeing on timeframes and setting KPIs including the number of people supported and the percentage of people progressing to employment within your business and elsewhere
- regular review points.



5. Review and adjust

Through regular review points with partners, you can assess how effective your employability activities are and whether any changes need to be made. A key part of this is considering your business-as-usual recruitment process and whether there are any barriers the groups you are supporting would face. Your partners may be able to help you identify these barriers, and BITC can support you to take action through the Opening Doors campaign.

TOP TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS FROM COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Invest in culture-change across the organisation to help employees understand the challenges some groups can face and why your business is taking action
- Appoint a senior sponsor to help ensure investment for employability partnerships
- Ensure the partnership is not dependent on the enthusiasm of one individual (who may leave the business) but is embedded across the organisation
- Be transparent about internal processes, procedures and timeframes so partners know what pace to expect things to progress
- Consider what support is available once individuals progress into work, to enable them to sustain employment.

Case study: Pagegroup

Opening Doors employer PageGroup has established several partnerships to reach disadvantaged groups including refugees, people from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and people with disabilities or learning differences.

As a recruitment company, PageGroup has been able to build a talent pipeline for its own business by offering internships to people who face disadvantage in recruitment, in partnership with organisations including [10,000 black interns](#), [10,000 able interns](#) and [Ambitious about Autism](#).

PageGroup also partners with some of its clients to deliver skills and employability training – for example, its partnership with Salesforce to deliver skills and employability training to people from low-socioeconomic backgrounds in partnership with social mobility charity [Leadership Through Sports and Business](#).

Engaging its employees in partnerships has been key for PageGroup and the business is strategic in its approach. Through its partnership with [Refuaid](#), PageGroup employees provide mentoring to refugees that are seeking employment and the business makes sure to match the refugees' skills and career aspirations with a colleague that recruits in similar sectors. PageGroup has found that as its own employees better understand the barriers people from disadvantaged groups can face, this has two benefits: it breaks down bias in recruitment leading to a more diverse workforce, and it enables employees to become advocates for inclusive recruitment with clients:

‘As a business, we are advocating for our clients to adopt inclusive recruitment practices, so it is important for us to be practicing this in our own recruitment. Through our partnerships we have been better able to understand the recruitment barriers some job seekers can face, and have adapted our own practices and the advice we give to our clients.’

Sheri Hughes, UK & MEA DE&I Director at PageGroup

Case study: Thames Water

Opening Doors employer Thames Water set out an ambitious [skills strategy](#) in 2021, which included plans to grow the representation of priority target groups within the business. Amongst others, these include care leavers, young black men, prison leavers, refugees and survivors of domestic abuse.

Forming meaningful partnerships with organisations supporting these groups has been at the heart of Thames Water's strategy. To inspire untapped talent, the business runs its own employability programme and supports the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) Sector Based Work Academies; attends community recruitment events to explain the different opportunities available in the business; and advertises jobs with specialist recruitment portals and referral partners to reach disadvantaged groups, such as [Drive Forward Foundation](#), [Aspire Oxford](#), and [Working Chance](#).

But key to the success of its partnerships approach has been the ambitious targets Thames Water sets for the percentage of people that will progress to employment. To ensure more candidates progress into employment within Thames Water, the business has invested in its business-as-usual recruitment, including:

- training hiring managers
- enabling candidates facing barriers to identify these during recruitment to explore what additional support may be necessary
- removing the criminal conviction question from application forms
- tracking progress of candidates that have come through partner organisations to ensure the right support is provided and barriers removed where necessary
- reducing referencing from five years to three years
- promoting vacancies with community partners.

These efforts are paying off, with Thames Water already exceeding its year-end target of 120 hires from community partners by March 2023. This includes a female/male placement ratio of 46%:54%, five care leavers, nine prison leavers, 14 young black men, and two refugees.

'We have been working with community partners for some time but signing up to Opening Doors has helped us to focus our efforts on ensuring the people we support are able to gain employment at Thames Water. We see so much diverse talent through our partners, and we are working hard to ensure our recruitment practices are inclusive to ensure we don't miss out on these candidates.'

Rachael Parker, Employment and Skills Partner, Thames Water



Case study: Deloitte

Opening Doors employer Deloitte has partnered with BITC to run its Careers Conversations since 2019. Initially, the programme provided language support to refugees for whom English is not a first language, focusing on language skills, grammar, and syntax. Facilitators then developed the programme to focus on providing a more holistic understanding of UK business norms and employment culture.

Volunteers at Deloitte's Leeds office have supported 50 people through the programme. Working with BITC, and referral partner the World Jewish Relief Foundation, Deloitte employees now deliver a revised version of Careers Conversations. The current programme focuses on supporting clients' understanding of how UK firms recruit people.

Will Milner, Talent Advisor at Deloitte's Leeds office and a Careers Conversations volunteer said: 'When the chance to work on Career Conversations came up it seemed the perfect opportunity to use skills from my day job to help change the lives of refugees.'

The time that is given by Will and his colleagues contributes to Deloitte's 5 Million Futures initiative. This is the firm's social impact ambition to make a positive impact on the lives of 5 million people across North and South Europe by 2030, through supporting access to education and employment.

[Read more about Deloitte's partnership and BITC's Careers Conversations programme](#)

“THE HELP [I RECEIVED] WAS AMAZING, AND I WAS ABLE TO USE MY EXPERIENCES FROM MY PREVIOUS COUNTRY. STARTING NEW IN THE UK REMINDED ME OF WHAT I NEEDED TO SUCCEED. KNOWING WHAT TO SAY IN AN INTERVIEW WAS ALSO VALUABLE AND I USED THIS WHEN INTERVIEWING FOR MY PLACEMENT. NOW I'M CONFIDENT AND MY USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IS GETTING BETTER EVERY DAY. AFTER MY PLACEMENT I WAS OFFERED EMPLOYMENT. THE POSITION OFFERED WAS A SENIOR POSITION AS A DUTY MANAGER.”

BITC employment programme participant



HOW BITC CAN HELP

BITC can support your business to create partnerships that connect untapped talent to your jobs.

- [Sign up to Opening Doors](#) to join a community of businesses committing to inclusive recruitment
- [Access BITC's Advisory Services](#) for support to develop a partnership strategy or implement inclusive recruitment
- [Get involved in BITC's employment programmes](#), which include employability activities and work placements for groups such as refugees, over 50s and people experiencing homelessness.

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APPENDIX: WHAT DO WE MEAN BY GROUPS THAT FACE DISADVANTAGE IN RECRUITMENT?

Research shows that some jobseekers are less likely to be recruited than others. This can be due to bias in recruitment, or practices that deter some jobseekers from applying or make it more difficult for some jobseekers to succeed. The Opening Doors campaign focuses on the keys to achieving inclusive recruitment for everyone. However, your business may want to focus on targeting certain groups such as those listed below.

BLACK, ASIAN, MIXED RACE AND OTHER ETHNICALLY DIVERSE PEOPLE

Jobseekers from Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse backgrounds are all more likely to face unemployment than white jobseekers⁹:

- Jobseekers from Chinese backgrounds are almost four times more likely to be unemployed
- Jobseekers from Pakistani backgrounds are three times more likely to be unemployed
- Jobseekers from Black, African, Caribbean and Black British backgrounds are twice as likely to be unemployed

These disparities will also persist amongst jobseekers who may face other forms of disadvantage. For example, there is an over-representation of Black, Asian and other ethnically diverse people throughout all stages of the criminal justice system¹⁰.

Further guidance:

[Factsheet: Employment and Socio-Economic Factors by Ethnic Group](#)
[Race at Work 2021: The scorecard report](#)

PEOPLE WITH CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS

11.9 million people in the UK have a criminal record. 736,000 have an unspent conviction which will appear on a basic background check, while the rest are unspent and will appear on standard or enhanced checks.¹¹ Though attitudes have progressed in recent years – with 45% of employers now saying they would consider hiring someone with a conviction compared to just 25% in 2010 – 30% of employers still say they would automatically reject a candidate that declared a criminal conviction.

The majority of people with criminal convictions do not receive a prison sentence, but many of those that do are able to build skills in prison and can be employed on temporary license. This form of employment can ease the transition for someone as they leave prison if they are able to retain employment with the same business.

Further guidance:

[Ban the Box Employer's Guide](#)
[Reducing Reoffending through Employment Toolkit](#)

DISABLED AND NEURODIVERSE PEOPLE

One in five people of working age living in the UK are disabled,¹² yet 19% of employers state that they would be less likely to hire a disabled person.¹³ Disabled people are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled people, and 3 times as likely to be economically inactive.¹⁴ 15-20% of people are neurodiverse¹⁵ and yet 50% of managers admit they would be uncomfortable hiring a neurodivergent individual¹⁶.

Disabled and neurodiverse jobseekers can face a range of barriers to employment including employer perceptions, failure of employers to make reasonable adjustments, accessibility of recruitment processes, fear of discrimination and physical barriers.

Further guidance:

[Factsheet: Disability Inclusion in the Workplace](#)

[Factsheet: Supporting Neurodiversity at Work](#)

REFUGEES

There are an estimated 135,000 refugees living in the UK, and 130,000 people that have pending asylum cases.¹⁷ Refugees can face a range of barriers in recruitment, including language barriers, a lack of familiarity with UK workplaces and recruitment, and non-recognition of skills and qualifications. Despite often having high levels of qualifications and skills¹⁸, refugees are four times more likely to be unemployed than people born in the UK.¹⁹

Further guidance:

[Tapping Potential: Guidelines to help UK Businesses employ refugees](#)

OLDER PEOPLE (50+)

A third of the UK's workforce is over 50.²⁰ And yet, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that there is also a record number of over 50s out of work – which includes the unemployed as well as those economically inactive due to ill health, disability or retirement. Nearly three quarters (72%) of those in their 50s who left the labour market during the pandemic would consider returning.²¹

Older people represent a huge talent pool for employers, but age bias in recruitment can exclude them. In a study by Anglia Ruskin University, younger applicants were found to be up to four and a half times more likely than older applicants to be invited for interview.²²

Further guidance:

[Becoming an Age-friendly Employer toolkit](#)

PEOPLE FROM LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS

Young people from working backgrounds are more likely to be unemployed, or economically inactive – with 52% of young people from workless households in employment compared with 74% of those whose parents had a profession.²³ Recent research has also found that 50% of jobseekers from lower-socio economic backgrounds feel they are missing out on employment opportunities because the recruitment process is unfair to them.²⁴

Further guidance:

[Toolkit: Social Mobility: Delivering Change Through Essential Skills](#)

YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people entering the world of work often report a lack of work experience as being the biggest barrier to gaining employment. Only 36% of young people have access to work experience, yet more than a third (35%) of entry level jobs require it.²⁵ An overly demanding job description can also create a barrier for young people: 19.7% said they chose not to apply for jobs because the person's specification had too many requirements.²⁶

Further guidance:

[Job descriptions and jargon: Youth Employment UK toolkit](#)

[Factsheet: Improving employment outcomes for young black men](#)

ENDNOTES

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