

Press release: Offender rehabilitation drive boosted by new ROTL rules

- One year since prison Education and Employment Strategy, 230 additional businesses have joined the New Futures Network to hire ex-offenders
- 81% of firms say employing offenders has helped their business
- New rules to widen prisoner access to employment through widened use of release on temporary licence (ROTL)
- Evidence shows ex-prisoners in work less likely to reoffend – cutting the £15 billion cost to the economy

Also announced today is a change in rules to allow prison Governors greater autonomy to grant Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) to offenders following a rigorous risk assessment. This will allow them more opportunities to work and train with employers while serving their sentence and increase their chances of securing an immediate job on release.

Research shows time spent working in the community before release significantly reduces a prisoner's likelihood of reoffending – cutting the £15 billion cost to the taxpayer each year and helping to keep the public safer. Ex-offenders in employment are up to nine percentage points less likely to commit further crime.

The drive to reduce reoffending through rehabilitation has worked alongside investment of hundreds of millions of pounds since the beginning of 2018 to increase stability in prisons – with latest statistics showing an 11% fall in violence in the last quarter of 2018 compared to the previous quarter.

Earlier this month, the Justice Secretary announced a fundamental reform of the probation system to ensure that rehabilitation, support into work, treatment and housing is continued for ex-offenders when they leave prison.

The changes to probation will also ensure that community sentences focused on security and rehabilitation and will enable a move away from ineffective short prison sentences – after which two thirds of offenders go on to commit more crime – and allow more effective treatment for issues such as addiction and mental health problems.

As part of the wider drive to enhance rehabilitation, the Education and Employment Strategy, launched in May 2018, set out a series of measures to boost prisoners' skills while in custody and improve their chances of securing work on release. One year on from this:

- More than 230 businesses have registered to work with prisons and set offenders on a path to employment. This is further to the 300 businesses around the UK already seeing the benefits of employing ex-offenders.
- Prison Governors have been given greater autonomy to grant Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) to offenders following a thorough risk assessment.

- The New Futures Network was launched in October 2018 as a new specialist part of the Prison Service, to build partnerships between prisons and employers. This is designed to fill local skills gaps in companies by providing job opportunities for men and women on release from custody. The Network will have an employment broker in every geographical prison group by July 2019.
- A new £250,000 construction academy opened at HMP Leeds last week – to equip offenders in Yorkshire with valuable skills ahead of release.
- Jails now have access to the Prison Education Dynamic Purchasing System – giving Governors power to commission services from a wide variety of educational providers, charities and businesses. So far more than 230 suppliers have successfully been added to the system and 30 contracts have been awarded by Governors.
- Suppliers will aim to drive more offenders into the classroom with nearly 88% of prisoners achieving a recognised award from educational bodies in the 2017/18 academic year.

New polling from YouGov suggests that businesses are supportive of employing those with a criminal record:

- 81% of employers agree that employing ex-offenders has helped their business
- two thirds of companies that employ ex-offenders would recommend others do the same
- 79% of people think that businesses employing ex-offenders are making a positive contribution to society
- three out of four people would be comfortable buying from a business that employs ex-offenders

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Justice Secretary David Gauke said:

Broadening access to training and work opportunities is a vital part of our strategy to steer offenders away from a life of crime and ultimately keep the public safe.

Many organisations are recognising the value of giving offenders a second chance, and we have carefully listened to their feedback before making these changes.

I urge more businesses to join this movement and help ex-offenders turn their backs on crime for good.

As part of the Education and Employment Strategy, prison Governors now have greater flexibility to get prisoners from open and women's jails into the workplace.

Offenders will now be eligible for paid work immediately after they have passed a tough risk assessment. Getting offenders into work earlier will boost their prospects of securing immediate work on release.

Leading hospitality and hotel business Greene King has committed to employing 50 offenders by the end of 2019, working with prisons in the North West and London.

Explaining how employing offenders through ROTL can benefit their business, Greene King's Greg Sage, said:

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.