

Prisoners start as apprentices at big name employers

Prisoners in England have begun high-quality apprenticeships this week in a bid to cut crime following a change in the law.

For the first time ever, those behind bars will embark on dedicated on-the-job learning programmes that have a direct route into work with leading employers on release that will keep offenders on the straight and narrow.

Big employers have already pledged their commitment including Greene King, Timpson's and Kier, with a wide range of job roles available to offenders, including highway maintenance, hospitality and cheffing.

As announced in the [Prisons Strategy White Paper](#) last year, the Government is exploring all avenues to boost the employability of ex-offenders when they leave prison – a key contributor to cutting crime and making our streets safer.

Evidence has already shown the Government's efforts are working – in the last year, the employment rate of ex-prisoners in jobs six weeks and six months after release has increased by [35% and 24%](#), respectively.

Prisoner apprenticeships offer another avenue for offenders to boost their skills, education and training and ultimately gain employment once they leave the prison gates.

Skills Minister Andrea Jenkyns said:

This vital change to the law will not only help us to rehabilitate offenders, but it's also plugging the skills gap for the future.

Apprenticeships give employers dedicated new workers in sectors like construction and hospitality and it's great to have such high-profile companies sign up to help prisoners turn their life around through work and training.

Prisons Minister, Rob Butler MP, said:

Getting prison leavers into work is absolutely crucial – it provides them a second chance to lead a more positive life and cuts crime.

Apprenticeships are a direct route into gold-standard training in vital industries – encouraging ex-prisoners to stay on the straight and narrow while supporting businesses of all sizes and contributing to economic growth.

Most apprenticeships take place under an apprenticeship agreement which is classed as an employment contract in law. The Government has now changed the law so prisoners will be able to undertake apprenticeships without the need for such an agreement.

An apprentice starting work at Kier said:

This opportunity means a lot to me and I was over the moon when I found out I had been successful. It gives me the chance to prove to myself, my friends, family and the wider community that I am worthy and capable of being successful. I am appreciative to Kier and the team I have worked with during this process, it has been made clear to me that my convictions aren't a barrier to my success or progression.

I look forward to gaining as much experience as I can during my apprenticeship and in the future I would like to stay with Kier, work my way up and hopefully gain further qualifications.

Up to 300 prisoners, who are eligible for day release and nearing the end of their time in prison are expected to be recruited by 2025.

James Timpson, Chief Executive of the Timpson Group, said:

At the Timpson Group, we have a track record of championing ex-offenders and providing them with employment opportunities that enable them to break the cycle of reoffending, reintegrate into society and make positive contributions to the economy.

Key to this mission is ensuring that offenders have as many opportunities as possible to gain skills and training while completing their sentence. As such, we are delighted to be providing one of the first-ever work placements for the prisoner apprenticeship scheme at The Partridge pub, and are looking forward to working with Novus and Total People to ensure this opportunity can be offered to other prisoners who could benefit from an apprenticeship.

Nick Mackenzie, chief executive of Greene King, said:

We are proud to have now supported 135 prison leavers into employment through our Releasing Potential programme, but our ambition doesn't stop there. We have an important role to play in supporting social mobility and the change in law means those in prison can learn new skills to enable them to build a career once they leave prison, which is key to successful rehabilitation. We're really pleased that we'll now be able to offer our award-winning apprenticeship programme to prisoners and hope that more

people will be able to join us at Greene King upon release.

Helen Redfern, chief people officer at Kier, said:

At Kier, we're committed to having a more diverse workforce, with colleagues who have skills from a range of backgrounds; reflecting the wider community. This pioneering scheme allows us to diversify our workforce further, whilst benefitting prisoners who are nearing the end of their sentence, as well as reducing the likelihood of reoffending, benefitting communities across the country.

Being one of the first employers to take part in the scheme builds on the work we have already done through Making Ground, our prison engagement and employment programme, which is designed to support serving prisoners and prison leavers into sustainable employment in the construction industry.

Over the coming months, more and more employers covering all sectors of the economy will come on board to offer apprenticeship opportunities to prisoners, including Sheffield City Council, Co-op and Premier Foods.