

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.

[Joint statement from the International Coordination and Response Group for the victims of Flight PS752](#)

News story

Canada, Sweden, Ukraine and the United Kingdom, have issued a joint statement to mark 1000 days since Iranian forces shot down Flight PS752, killing 176 civilians



The International Coordination and Response Group for the victims of Flight PS752 today issued the following joint statement:

October 4, 2022, marks 1,000 days since the unlawful downing of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 (PS752) by Iran that resulted in the deaths of 176 innocent civilians.

We, Ministers representing Canada, Sweden, Ukraine and the United Kingdom, stand with the grieving families on this solemn occasion and honour the memories of the victims killed on board Flight PS752. We renew our demand that Iran fulfills its international legal obligations and ensures transparency and justice for its actions.

As we continue to advance our efforts to hold Iran accountable in accordance with international law, the Coordination Group is thankful for the contribution of four highly recognized legal experts: Professor Payam Akhavan, Professor Harold Hongju Koh, Ms. Jessica Wells and Sir Michael Wood.

They have brought their extensive expertise to our legal teams, who continue their diligent work in response to Iran's unlawful and egregious downing of Flight PS752.

We continue to stand in solidarity with the families and loved ones of the victims of the downing of Flight PS752.

Published 4 October 2022

Statement to the 101st Session of the Executive Council of the OPCW

Mr Chair, Director-General, Colleagues,

The Executive Council of the OPCW was created in order to promote the effective implementation of, and compliance with, the Chemical Weapons Convention. The United Kingdom takes that responsibility seriously.

As Council members we are obliged to ensure that the Organisation has an adequate budget. We are mindful that the world faces economic headwinds following the global pandemic and Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. Many national budgets are under pressure. Looking ahead the OPCW must continue to exercise budgetary restraint. That said, the United Kingdom supports the proposed budget revision for 2023. It puts to good use the 2020 cash surplus,

which arose primarily due to late contributions from States Parties. We urge all OPCW members to pay their Assessed Contributions on time and in full.

We must continue to respond to evolving circumstances. It is high time for the Council to move forward with sensible measures, such as those proposed on business continuity and appointing the External Auditor.

In a similar vein, the Review Conference process enables us to take stock of implementation of the Convention. We welcome the constructive discussions in the Open-Ended Working Group and look forward to the next six months to come.

Like other states, we are planning to provide national papers and look forward to further discussions on practical proposals to strengthen implementation of the Convention. Hearing from industry and civil society will be of great value, particularly in relation to future activities at the Centre for Chemistry and Technology. We also have much to learn from others about enhancing diversity and gender equality. Mainstreaming gender considerations is key to delivering successfully. A diverse Technical Secretariat that represents the world it serves and attracts the best talent from all backgrounds is a stronger Secretariat.

Mr Chair, the central responsibility we share on this Council is to challenge all uses of chemical weapons. If we do not respond we are not promoting compliance with the Convention. The Syrian regime has been found responsible for eight uses of chemical weapons and the Council acted. It is very straightforward. Syria has used chemical weapons before and still refuses to acknowledge this fact.

We remain concerned about the future too. Syria's declaration of its chemical weapons programme is incomplete. It is obstructing the Technical Secretariat in its efforts to deliver on the instructions of OPCW States Parties. If Syria had nothing to hide they would not behave in this way. We cannot and will not ignore this. The Syrian chemical weapons programme should remain a top priority for this Council until it comes into compliance with its legal obligations.

A member of this Council, the Russian Federation, used chemical weapons on the streets of my own country, and then again on Russian territory. Russia must account for the poisoning of Alexey Navalny in 2020 and answer the questions posted by 45 States Parties under Article IX of the Convention.

Russia must stop spreading disinformation about this Organisation and making baseless allegations against other States Parties. We continue to watch very closely for any signs of chemical weapons use by Russia during its ongoing brutal war in Ukraine. Any use would have grave consequences.

Thank you Mr Chair.

Call for Bids: Australia Network's UK Trade Partnerships Fund Supply Chains Project



Building on the closer economic ties enabled by the UK-Australia Free Trade Agreement (FTA), the UK in Australia network is issuing a call for bids for planning and executing a project to increase supply chain resilience collaboration between the UK and Australia, and potentially third countries, as well as businesses in critical sectors.

Background

Following the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing supply chain shortages, countries and businesses are increasingly aware of the risks posed to critical supply chains by external events, be they natural disasters, geopolitical events, or other disruptions.

The UK-Australia FTA was signed in December 2021 and will be critical to strengthening the UK-Australia bilateral relationship. In the [Innovation Chapter](#), both countries commit to engage on “value chain matters, including supply chain resilience”. Both the UK and Australia have dedicated teams looking at supply chain vulnerabilities, and are engaged in a joint supply chain resilience capability-building [initiative](#) to engage interested third countries to develop and improve public sector approaches to managing critical supply chain risks.

Scope of Work

Building on this joint initiative, we are looking to fund a project that will demonstrate how the UK, in collaboration with industry and other governments and organisations in the Indo-Pacific, can improve the resilience of supply chains in critical sectors (which could include but is not limited to semiconductors, telecoms, critical minerals in line with the recently-[published](#) Critical Minerals Strategy, medical goods or food commodities).

Examples of potential projects

- Work to identify alternative sources of supply for critical goods, and create a shared list of producers to improve business awareness of diversification options, taking advantage of FTA tariff reductions for goods from the UK where possible.
- Proposals for potential alternative sources of supply for critical goods or their precursors in third countries, and workshops to engage key stakeholders across government and industry on how we might incentivise these sources of supply.
- Survey of businesses in critical sectors on key perceived supply chain risks, mitigations they are currently taking, and what role they want to see for government in mitigating these risks.
- Organisation of a stress test exercise on a critical supply chain. This could simulate a series of potential external shocks to the supply chain, and convene key government, industry and academic stakeholders to chart likely impacts and responses. It should result in a series of policy proposals for how UK and Australian government and industry can work to make that supply chain more resilient. The findings could then be presented as part of an additional series of events.

Timelines

No.	Deliverable	Anticipated activities (not limited to)	Milestone date
1	Accountable Grant signed with chosen bidder and start the implementation	Proposed work plan for the whole programme	Last week of October 2022
2	Programme design report	Detailed list of finalised activities for the programme	2nd week November 2022
3	Delivery of activity	Finalise activity events, dates, locations	November 2022 onwards
4	Final report of delivery activity and findings	Summarise delivery activity and outcomes and delivery of findings to UK Government	April 2022

Selection Criteria

Bids will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Project design: Feasibility of activities and outputs including the capacity of implementing organisation to deliver outcomes.
- Impact: Supporting identifiable, meaningful activities to enhance impact of the project.
- Scalability: The potential for the project to act as a building block for subsequent FTA implementation activity.
- Viability and risks: Clear engagement/buy-in of key stakeholders. Robust analysis of key risks and a plan of action to manage and mitigate those risks.
- Value for money: Comparable and reasonable costs against the scale of

achievable outcomes.

We draw your attention to the below key points:

- Proposals should be between £12,000 – £25,000 (\$20,000 – \$42,000 AUD).
- All funding must be activity-based (i.e. not for general support staff costs (admin, finance support), office rental etc.).
- We welcome joint bids by more than one implementing organisation where these will result in a more interdisciplinary approach to the project.

Process

1. Project proposals must be received by 23:59 (GMT) on Monday 17th October 2022. Late proposals will not be considered.
2. Proposals must be submitted using the attached forms only.
3. Proposals must be submitted to: australia.ProgrammeFunding@fcdo.gov.uk

Attachments

[Activity Based Budget Template](#) (ODS, 9.84 KB)

[Project Proposal Form up to £10k](#) (ODT, 54 KB)

[Project Proposal Form above £10k](#) (ODT, 61.3 KB)

Published 4 October 2022

Last updated 7 October 2022 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 7 October 2022

Food commodities added to the Scope of Work.

2. 4 October 2022

First published.

[Water companies face new penalties up to £250million](#)

The Environment Secretary has today (3 October) announced that he will bring forward proposals to raise the civil penalty for water companies who pollute the environment by 1,000-fold – from £250,000 to up to £250 million.

The move comes as part of the government's ongoing action to push for water companies to invest more in infrastructure that will minimise pollution incidents and secure our water supply for future generations. Last year there

were 62 serious pollution incidents by water companies – up from 44 in 2020.

At present, if water companies fail to uphold the law or cause environmental harm, the Environment Agency (EA) can pursue both criminal and civil prosecutions as part of their enforcement regime.

Whilst fines handed out by the courts through criminal prosecutions are unlimited, these can be a lengthy and costly process. Using civil sanctions – Variable Monetary Penalties (VMPs) – which can be imposed directly by the EA rather than the courts can offer a quicker method of enforcement.

VMPs can be issued for more serious offences, including when there is evidence of negligence or mismanagement or when there is an environmental impact.

However, the current limit for VMPs handed out by the EA for individual breaches of the rules is £250,000. Increasing the cap for fines up to £250 million will simplify and speed up the process of enforcement by allowing the EA to directly hand out penalties to water companies.

Last month the Environment Secretary asked water companies to write to him, setting out their plans for improving environmental performance and infrastructure. Responses have been received from all water companies and are currently being scrutinised as part of the ongoing work by the government, the Environment Agency and the regulator Ofwat to drive up water companies' performance and increase accountability. We are clear that water companies should urgently look at opportunities to accelerate infrastructure delivery.

Environment Secretary Ranil Jayawardena said:

I have been clear that if water companies don't do what is expected, there will be consequences. Bigger financial penalties will act as a greater deterrent and push water companies to do more, and faster, when it comes to investing in infrastructure and improving the quality of our water.

This 1,000-fold increase sends a clear signal that we want clean rivers and coastlines, and that the duty falls to the water companies to deliver – the polluter must pay.

Environment Agency Chief Executive Sir James Bevan said:

Since 2015 the Environment Agency's criminal prosecutions against water companies have secured fines of over £138 million – with a record £90 million fine handed out to Southern Water for corporate environmental crime.

However, criminal prosecutions can be lengthy and costly, so we welcome today's proposals which will make it easier for us to hold water companies to account for environmental crimes.

We will now work closely with government to put this plan into action.

Today's proposal will be subject to consultation.

It builds on the [Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan](#), published at the end of August, which brought in the strictest targets on sewage pollution and requires water companies to deliver their largest ever infrastructure investment – £56 billion capital investment over 25 years.