

## Almost two-thirds of employers set to hire ex-offenders in 2023

2 years ago



New research reveals how recruitment challenges are encouraging employers to consider ex-offenders.

The findings mark the launch of Sodexo's Starting Fresh campaign, which will encourage, and provide guidance to businesses on proactively hiring ex-offenders.

- 43% of UK businesses say they are struggling to fill in excess of 10 job vacancies in their organisation, 16% of hospitality businesses are struggling to fill as many as 31-40 positions
- Despite this, almost one in three (30%) of British business leaders say they do not believe they currently employ any ex-offenders
- More positively though, nearly two-thirds (61%[\[1\]](#)) say they anticipate hiring ex-offenders in the year ahead, although almost one in five (17%) say they will only look to employ someone from the ex-offender community if the position has been open for longer than six months
- Businesses suggest there should be a government scheme to incentivise employment

One in three (30%) UK businesses in the private sector do not currently employ any ex-offenders, despite the majority (62%) saying they are struggling to fill positions. 43% report finding it difficult to fill in excess of ten current vacancies.

This is according to a new study commissioned by Sodexo, the food services and facilities management business which runs six UK prisons on behalf of the Ministry of Justice and Scottish Prison Service. The study sought to understand the extent to which prison-leavers and ex-offenders who have not served custodial sentences have the same employment opportunities as other job seekers.

Launching the campaign today, the organisation is collaborating with partners including [New Futures](#)

[Network](#), [The Oswin Project](#), [Clean Sheet](#) and [Novus Works](#) to help remove the perceived barriers associated with the employment of ex-offenders, which hold back the reintegration of people into communities.

The company, which is also a [Ban the Box](#) employer, commissioned research of 1,000 owners and senior leaders with hiring responsibilities across British businesses, finding nearly two thirds (61%) will be hiring ex-offenders in 2023, while 21%<sup>[2]</sup> say they will not.

When asked about their greatest concerns, one quarter (25%) agreed they were worried employees would re-offend, and the same proportion agreed they feared for the safety of the rest of their workforce (25%). More than one in five (23%) agreed that they would not trust them to behave appropriately at work.

More positively, as the UK grapples with a talent shortage, many businesses this year said they are investing in training for their HR teams to ensure ex-offenders are supported in the company (40%). Almost half (46%) said that supporting their wider community was important during this time, and one of the reasons why they'd be hiring people with criminal records.

The research found a cross sample of industry leaders believed ex-offenders could help to fill shortages in specific areas such as food pickers and delivery drivers in farming (62%), and talent shortages in hospitality (57%).

#### Support on further progress

When respondents were asked what might encourage them to hire ex-offenders, 22% suggested there should be a government initiative which incentivises businesses. A fifth (20%) suggested an initiative giving businesses a target for hiring ex-offenders, and 20% said a need to fill crucial skills gaps would force them to look at individuals with criminal records.

According to the UK government, though the proportion of prison-leavers who were employed at six months from their release rose by almost two thirds between April 2021 and March 2022 to 23%<sup>[3]</sup>, this must improve.

Justice Operations director Tony Simpson, Justice Operations Director at Sodexo UK & Ireland said: "While not all ex-offenders are prison-leavers, an important aspect of this campaign is to help employers understand the quality of learning which takes place in prison. Nearly 50,000 people leave prison every year, many emerging with formal qualifications they didn't have before.

"Prisoners at the sites we manage are prepared to be job-ready for the opportunities in the outside world, whether that be in IT support, cleaning, catering, hospitality or hairdressing and beauty. It can be a win-win situation because there is a huge skills shortage in many UK sectors, and we believe ex-offenders could absolutely help to plug some of these gaps, while providing a more stable and secure income, and a better future, for the individual. It's positive to see the majority of businesses suggesting that they will employ from this largely untapped talent pool in 2023.

"Starting Fresh is not just about helping employers understand the valued contribution ex-offenders can make to their business, but to also encourage them to proactively engage with our prisons and our partners to start the hiring process with prison-leavers. We have more to do, and we want to start new conversations about how we share our experience and learn from others as part of this campaign."

[1] A combination of “Yes – we will be actively hiring ex-offenders”, “Yes – this is something we are interested in but we don’t know where to look” and “Yes – we have positions open, we’re not looking particularly at ex-offenders but wouldn’t rule them out”

[2] A combination of “No – definitely not – due to the nature of our business we are not able to consider this, please specify nature of your business”, “No – we are not comfortable hiring people who have committed a crime” and “No – but only because we never have so haven’t considered it as an option”

[3]  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1087060/20220630\\_Employment\\_Ad-Hoc\\_publication\\_Bulletinv1.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1087060/20220630_Employment_Ad-Hoc_publication_Bulletinv1.pdf)