

Sodexo pledges £100k of apprenticeship levy in support of training ex-offenders this year

2 years ago



Sodexo has announced that it has pledged £100,000 of its annual apprenticeship levy in support of training ex-offenders this year.

Funds will be made available to any small or medium sized employers (SMEs) or not for profit organisations, seeking to recruit an ex-offender into an apprenticeship position.

The announcement follows [recent research commissioned by Sodexo](#) which revealed that the apprenticeship levy gifting scheme could incentivise more UK businesses to offer employment opportunities to ex-offenders.

The research, which was released to mark the launch of Sodexo's [Starting Fresh](#) campaign, found that one in five (21%) of UK businesses would be more likely to hire an ex-offender if they could receive apprenticeship levy gifting funds to cover training costs associated with putting them through an apprenticeship scheme.

The study also discovered that businesses in the hairdressing and beauty sector were most interested in receiving these funds to hire ex-offenders (24%), followed by architecture, engineering, and building (23%), finance (22%), and IT and Telecoms (21%). This figure soared to 43%, however, amongst HR professionals who responded to the survey – perhaps reflecting their greater experience of apprenticeships and the apprenticeship levy scheme.

In terms of UK regions, businesses in Wales (27%) and Yorkshire and the Humber and the North East (both

24%) showed the most interest, respectively.

Sodexo, which runs seven UK prisons on behalf of the Ministry of Justice and Scottish Prison Service, launched [Starting Fresh](#) to encourage and provide guidance to businesses on proactively hiring ex-offenders.

As part of the campaign, Sodexo has created an online hub with resources for employers seeking to unlock the talent available from this under-utilised community of individuals with criminal backgrounds to help fill skills gaps and to provide them with the opportunity to find employment. One such option that Sodexo is able to offer to employers interested in proactively recruiting ex-offenders is to hold a recruitment day in a prison.

Since 2019 Sodexo has gifted a portion of the apprenticeship levy it pays and in February this year passed the £2 million milestone. Sodexo's approach when selecting an organisation is to 'gift with purpose' to those that share its social value ethos in areas such as health and safety and ensuring their workforce is diverse and inclusive.

Large businesses, such as Sodexo, that pay the apprenticeship levy can choose to transfer up to 25% of their levy funds each year to other organisations to pay for their apprenticeship training and assessment.

Head of apprenticeships Sue Davison said: "When we initially polled businesses on their attitudes towards recruiting ex-offenders, we included the question about apprenticeship levy gifting as we were genuinely interested to see if this could be an influencing factor. Given the results of the survey, we decided to take employers at their word and provide a proportion of our levy gifting fund specifically to those who would offer apprenticeships to ex-offenders. We can also, of course, provide support via our prisons and partners in helping connect employers with this pool of talent. We look forward to hearing from any SMEs or not for profits who are interested in helping individuals rebuild their lives in this way."

Organisations which have already benefited from Sodexo's apprenticeship levy gifting have included a range of small companies and not-for-profit organisations across the UK including London Ambulance Service, Aspire Training Solutions (UK) Ltd, McGinley and a number of community organisations and sports clubs in Salford, Worcester and Bath. Businesses interested in applying for the apprentice levy gifting can contact Sodexo by email at startingfresh.js.uk@sodexo.com