

Providing a second chance

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Insight from Kelly Dolphin, chief people & culture officer, [SBFM](#)

There exists a powerful yet often overlooked opportunity for companies to address labour shortages and contribute to social good: hiring ex-offenders and care leavers. Just as recently as April 24th 2024, KPMG UK has emerged as the first white-collar business to take on ex-offenders after joining a new scheme led by the Ministry of Justice. Businesses are starting to see beyond the surface and recognise the value these individuals bring.

We must take into account an ex-offender's prison experience and the impact this has on re-offending. Historically, little effort would be made with troublesome prisoners while inside to help them improve their chances of leading fulfilling lives upon release.

Thanks to various initiatives, this is changing.

[New statistics](#) show rapid progress has been made to boost employment for prison leavers, with the number of ex-offenders who have been successfully steered into jobs within six months of release more than doubling, from 14% to 30% since April 2021.

However, the recent fiscal Budget – the last before a General Election – was an opportunity for the chancellor to introduce tax credits or deductions for these businesses that hire ex-offenders or care leavers. This could have involved providing tax breaks for each individual hired from these groups, which would help to offset the costs associated with training and integration into the workforce. These incentives not only alleviate financial burdens for employers but also serve as a powerful signal of societal support for the reintegration and rehabilitation of repeat offenders. The government could also offer subsidies or grants to businesses that employ ex-offenders, helping to cover a portion of their wages during their

probation period.

Subsidised wages could incentivise businesses to hire from these underrepresented groups. By offsetting a portion of the costs associated with employing individuals who may require additional support or training, subsidies enable businesses to bridge the gap between potential and performance. This not only enhances the economic viability of hiring ex-offenders and care leavers but also fosters a sense of social responsibility and inclusivity within the organisation.

It is crucial to remember that the benefits of hiring ex-offenders and care leavers extend far beyond financial incentives. Embracing diversity and inclusion in the workforce is more than just a moral imperative. Individuals who have overcome adversity often possess resilience, determination, and a unique perspective that can enrich an organisational culture and drive innovation. By harnessing the untapped potential of these individuals, businesses can gain a competitive edge in an increasingly dynamic and ever-evolving market.

Furthermore, initiatives such as training and support programmes play a part in facilitating successful integration into the workforce. Investing in vocational training, mentorship schemes, and ongoing support not only equips ex-offenders and care leavers with the skills necessary for employment but also empowers them to fulfill their potential and contribute meaningfully to society. By providing a supportive environment that fosters personal and professional growth, businesses can break the cycle and create pathways to long-term success for ex-offenders.

Businesses must recognise the broader social impact of their hiring practices. By offering a lifeline to individuals who may otherwise face systemic barriers to employment, businesses have the opportunity to transform lives and strengthen communities. Giving ex-offenders and care leavers a second chance isn't just about altruism; it's about recognising the inherent dignity and worth of every individual and embracing the potential for positive change.

Collectively, we must believe in the power of compassion, empathy, and social responsibility. Let's not underestimate the transformative potential of giving ex-offenders and care leavers a second chance. Businesses should seize this opportunity to unlock the potential of every individual, to break down barriers, and to build a brighter future. The scenario is a win-win for everyone.

Working with local communities, it is possible to create a shared experience between skilled employers seeking to fill labour gaps, and reformed individuals seeking either to apply their trade experience or be upskilled into these positions. By displaying trust, confidence, and some faith, we have seen first-hand how it can change lives. It is time for the collective industry to extend a hand and offer the security and stability that prison leavers and care leavers so often need. Together, we are at a point of being able to both make positive societal and economic change and to take a step towards plugging labour gaps in the process.