

Purpose Coalition and Sodexo host Breaking Down Barriers reception at Labour Party Conference

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In a powerful display of collaboration between government and business, the Purpose Coalition and [Sodexo](#) UK & Ireland hosted Baroness Jacqui Smith, Minister of State for Skills, and Lord James Timpson OBE, Minister of State for Prisons, Parole, and Probation, at the Breaking Down Barriers reception during the Labour Party Conference.

The event, which also featured Rt Hon Justine Greening, Chair of the Purpose Coalition, Sean Haley, CEO of Sodexo UK & Ireland; and former England Rugby Union player Matt Dawson, who has been brand ambassador for Sodexo for 15 years, headlined a crucial discussion on skills development, prison reform, and breaking down barriers to opportunity at the 2024 Labour Party Conference.

Held in the Sodexo Live! Lounge at ACC Liverpool, the reception shone a spotlight on how employers, government, and purpose-led organisations can collaborate to dismantle the obstacles faced by disadvantaged communities across the UK. Central to this discussion was Sodexo's [Starting Fresh](#) programme, which equips prison leavers with the skills and employment opportunities essential for successful reintegration into society and provides proactive steps for more businesses to recruit candidates directly from prisons.

The speakers engaged in a dynamic conversation about the transformative potential of collaborative efforts between government and industry, particularly in addressing social mobility and reducing reoffending. Sean Haley highlighted how Sodexo UK & Ireland is leading the charge, not only through its commitment to inclusive hiring but also by equipping prison leavers with critical skills and sustainable

employment options.

Baroness Smith highlighted the government's role in advancing skills and training initiatives, while Lord Timpson provided insights into reforming the prison system to promote rehabilitation and employment, key pillars of his work in reducing reoffending.

During the event, Sean Haley was honoured by the Purpose Coalition, being featured in the Purpose Power List for his outstanding leadership in advancing the social value agenda.

Justine Greening, Chair of the Purpose Coalition, said: "This event highlights the power of partnerships between government and purpose-led businesses like Sodexo to create real change for the better. By working together, we can break down the barriers holding people back and help them connect up to opportunities.

"Sodexo's Starting Fresh programme is a perfect example of how businesses can take a lead in providing skills and opportunities that not only transform individual lives but also strengthen communities. It's this kind of crucial collaboration that will help us build a more inclusive and fairer society for everyone."

Sean Haley, CEO, Sodexo UK & Ireland, added: "We are proud to have once again co-hosted this event alongside the Purpose Coalition, Rt Hon Justine Greening, and Nick Forbes CBE, and we extend our thanks to our special guests, Baroness Jacqui Smith, Minister of State for Skills and Lord James Timpson OBE, Minister of State for Prisons, Parole and Probation, for joining us.

"The evening was a powerful reminder of the crucial role businesses must play in driving social mobility and breaking down barriers to employment opportunities. At Sodexo, we remain deeply committed to this mission. Through initiatives like our Starting Fresh programme, which supports prison leavers into sustainable employment, and our ongoing work to empower veterans and apprentices, we are actively creating pathways for positive change. By working together through radical collaboration, we can make a lasting impact in the communities where we live and work and ensure no one is left behind."