



## Ex-offenders are often met with negative preconceptions but the reality for many is a fierce appetite to work and an intense loyalty to their employers

Punctual, reliable, hard working and eager to learn. These are the words used by one employer to describe the ex-offenders his company has employed.

Stephen Simpson, Director at specialist reinforced concrete contractors Cidon Construction, hired the company's first ex-offender in December 2018 and has since employed another 20 through the New Futures Network (NFN) – a

specialist part of the prison service that brokers partnerships between prisons and employers.

"We were looking for a labour source to train up," Simpson says. "We had tried young people (16-20 year olds), but the retention rate was poor. After learning more about ex-offenders and re-offending rates, it seemed the right thing to do – giving the guys a second chance, helping to reduce re-offending

rates, bringing savings to the taxpayer and benefiting the communities in which we work."

Simpson has employed a combination of ex-offenders – hired on full time contracts – and those on ROTL, which stands for Release On Temporary Licence (see the 'What is ROTL?' boxout for more).

Emma Wagstaff, National Sector Development Manager at NFN, says

### What is ROTL?

**Certain prisoners are eligible for Release On Temporary Licence (ROTL), which allows them to gain employment while on a probationary release from prison. The process takes about 8-10 weeks and starts with the employer advertising a role in a particular prison.**

- The employer stipulates the skills and attributes they are looking for and any offences they will not consider;
- Men/women in the prison who are eligible for ROTL are able to apply;
- Suitable candidates are put forward to the employer;
- Candidates selected for an interview provide a disclosure letter;
- The employer interviews the candidates and decides who is successful;
- Probation officers conduct a full risk assessment, covering victim's issues and an assessment of the workplace itself;
- Police checks are made on the employer;
- The prison's ROTL board makes the final decision based on risks of harm, re-offending, non-compliance and public acceptability;
- The prisoner is formally offered the opportunity;
- The employer signs a memorandum of agreement with the prison; and
- The ROTL placement starts, with regular workplace checks undertaken by prison officers.

that despite certain preconceptions of ex-offenders, such as untrustworthiness, "over 80% of employers have positively rated the reliability, motivation, attendance and performance of prison leavers within their workforce".

The most common concerns from employers include staff perceptions, the opinion of supply chain partners and how the customer base could be affected. Some practical tips from the NFN on managing employees' concerns include:

- Reassure concerned staff by informing them that only the lowest-risk prisoners



Hiring prison leavers benefits society

### Benefits to employers of hiring ex-offenders through NFN

**The NFN operates on a no fee recruitment broker service. It vets suitable candidates and offers support during the recruitment process. Benefits of tapping into this labour market include:**

- **Reduced turnover** – evidence shows that employees recruited from disadvantaged groups have lower turnover rates than the wider workforce;
- **Suitably skilled workers** – prison leavers arrive job-ready;
- **Hire candidates with great attributes** – this cohort is loyal, motivated and hard-working;
- **You will make a difference in a person's life** – give someone a chance to use their skills and provide for themselves and their family; and
- **Positively affect local communities** – build an inclusive workforce.

are released for work and they have all been thoroughly risk assessed by experienced operational staff;

- Remind resistant employees that anyone can make a mistake in life and many prisoners regret their offences and want to regain their lives; and
- Encourage employees to be open-minded as an inclusive workforce is a worthy goal for us all.

"Where there are any misgivings, we would advise employers to talk to the NFN team openly about these," Wagstaff urges.

"Visiting a prison is a great opportunity to see the types of work being delivered within workshops and meet individuals to talk to them about the work they are undertaking and the skills they are gaining that will enable them to be an asset to your workforce."

Positively, the training programmes run in prisons cater to a variety of construction trades and skills so Wagstaff says prison leavers are "ideal job-ready candidates". Additionally, the sheer diversity of backgrounds of the prisoners and ex-offenders is a potential positive for employers. The NFN says many candidates have a long history of employment in a variety of professions and many have also attained high-level academic qualifications such as postgraduate degrees.

Nevertheless, the focus of the NFN is to train and identify candidates to best suit a particular business' needs. Many firms, operating in various sectors, have employed ex-offenders. Big names include Balfour Beatty, Wates, Timpson, Virgin, M&S and Halfords.

"Not only does hiring prison leavers improve the diversity of workforces,



Prison leavers have job-ready skills

### Dealing with the ex-offender's past – best practices

- Candidates will disclose details of their past with the employer at the beginning of the recruitment process and sometimes via a disclosure letter;
- The individual's line manager should be aware of the employee's circumstance but the employer should limit the number of colleagues who are informed; and
- Discuss with your new hire whether they want to talk about their past with their colleagues and, if so, how they'd like to approach and manage the conversation.

it is a factor in helping businesses to become more socially responsible – being in employment is proven to reduce re-offending, therefore benefiting communities," Wagstaff explains. "Most prison leavers want the opportunity to turn their backs on crime and having a job helps them get their lives back on track."

Simpson advises fellow employers that are interested in hiring ex-offenders to "go in with your eyes wide open... Speak to companies such as ours and find out the best routes, the support required and what to expect. These guys will make a positive contribution, of that I have no doubt".

### Impressive stats

**92%**

of inclusive employers say hiring prison leavers has enhanced their reputation and helped to win new contracts.

**80%**

of the public positively regard businesses that hire ex-offenders.

**75%**

of the general public would be comfortable being a customer of a company that employs ex-offenders.