

Reed in Partnership

Employer attitudes to employing people with criminal convictions

September 2025

The partner of choice for transforming
people and their communities

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Contents

Executive summary	3
Introduction	4
01 Our findings	5
02 Our reflections	8
03 Call to action	9
04 Employer spotlights	10
Social Pantry	11
Redemption Roasters	12
XO Bikes	13
Homewood Solutions	14

Executive summary

Our survey of over 1,000 employers in the UK puts the spotlight on the prevailing attitudes to employing people with criminal convictions.

Our findings shine a light on the need for employers to take more proactive measures to see the benefits of inclusive recruitment.

The survey revealed that **one in five (20%)** employers surveyed in 2025 say that they will immediately reject a candidate if they disclose a criminal conviction, despite employers who have recruited people with criminal convictions reporting them having the same or higher levels

of commitment, resilience and trustworthiness as comparable staff with no conviction.

Employers should address these prevailing attitudes head on by assessing and reviewing their internal policies and procedures to actively recruit people with criminal convictions and create a positive and empowering workplace culture where inclusion isn't just welcomed, it's expected.



Introduction

In July 2025, Reed in Partnership surveyed 1,045 employers in the UK to gain an understanding of their attitudes and approach to employing people with criminal convictions.¹

This repeated a survey of 1,118 employers conducted by Reed in 2013. With widespread acknowledgment of the role played by employment in reducing reoffending and the positive impact this has on our communities, we wanted to see what had changed over this 12-year period.

We also connected with four employers who are part of our employer and training provider network. They each shared their approaches to recruitment, training and employment of people with criminal convictions.

We know the important role that employment has in reducing reoffending rates. Ministry of Justice (MoJ) statistics consistently highlight that people who are employed following release from custody have significantly lower reoffending rates to those who are unemployed.²

At Reed in Partnership, we deliver [Creating Future Opportunities](#) (CFO) Evolution in London. This programme, commissioned by CFO, part of HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), supports thousands of people each year who have left prison or are serving a community sentence and are navigating through their resettlement journey. This includes supporting participants with education, training and employment progression.

We are committed to supporting people with criminal convictions through both dedicated programmes and our broader employment support services. Reed in Partnership provides tailored employability pathways, skills development aligned with labour market needs and wraparound support that addresses wellbeing and social reintegration. Our national employer network of over 30,000 employers allows us to maximise the opportunities available to people we work with regardless of their background.

Employers across the UK have a key role to play in ending cycles of reoffending and creating safer communities by providing employment to people who have criminal convictions who have been released from custody. They can also benefit as a business from this inclusive approach.

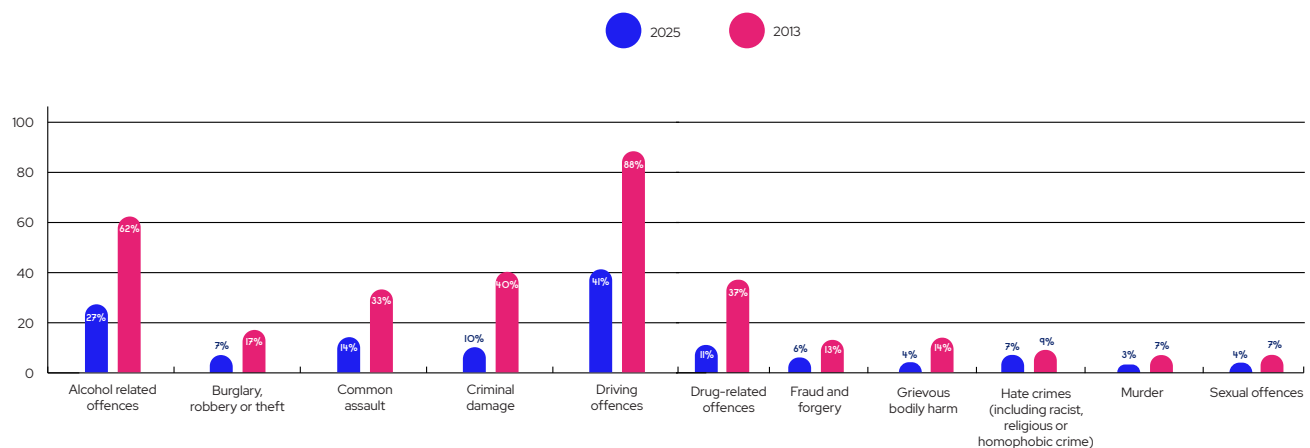
This report shares what we found, highlighting where there have been shifts in attitudes and providing practical actions and solutions that can be taken to improve the experience of employing people with criminal convictions for both employers and future employees.

01 Our findings

When considering recruiting staff with a criminal conviction, fewer employers in 2025 say they would consider doing this than in 2013, across all the offence types specified in the survey.

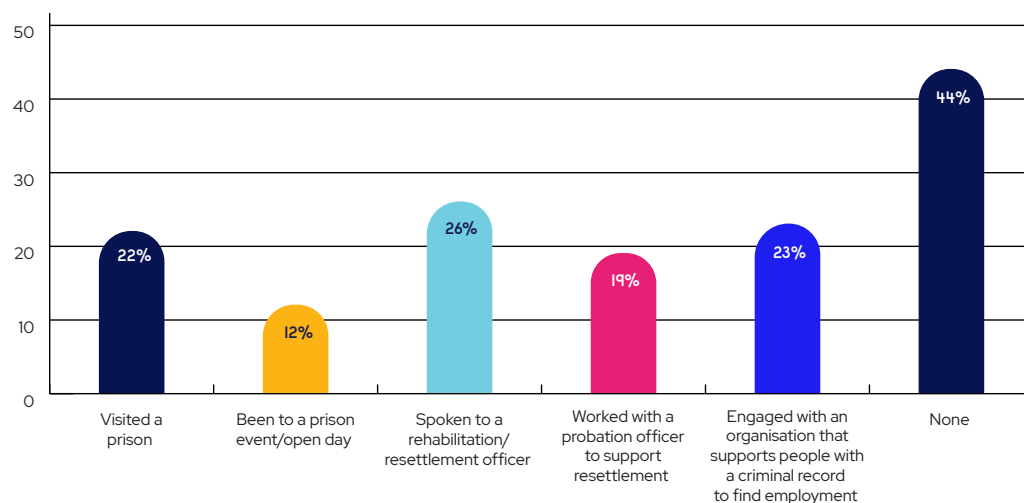
For example, alcohol related offences (27% in 2025 compared to 62% in 2013), driving offences (41% in 2025 compared 88% in 2013) and criminal damage (10% in 2025 compared to 40% in 2013).

01 Percentage of employers who would consider hiring someone with a conviction based on offence type



The majority (56%) of organisations have engaged with the prison, probation, resettlement or employment support services for people with criminal convictions.

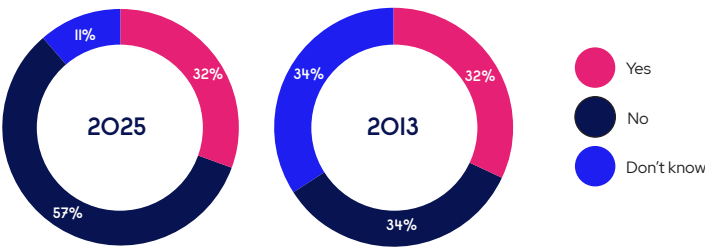
02 Percentage of employers who have had representatives do any of the following:



In terms of experience of hiring people with criminal convictions, 32% of employers said that they have recruited someone from this demographic in both of our 2025 and 2013 surveys. There was an increase in the number of respondents who said they have never recruited someone with a criminal conviction in our 2025 survey - up to 57% from 34% - because

the number of respondents who didn't know reduced from 34% to 11%. The reduction in employers who don't know whether they have ever recruited people with a criminal conviction may be explained by the increase in requirements for disclosure as part of recruitment screening processes, as evidenced in the data presented later in this report.

03 Have you or the organisation you work for ever recruited staff with a criminal conviction?

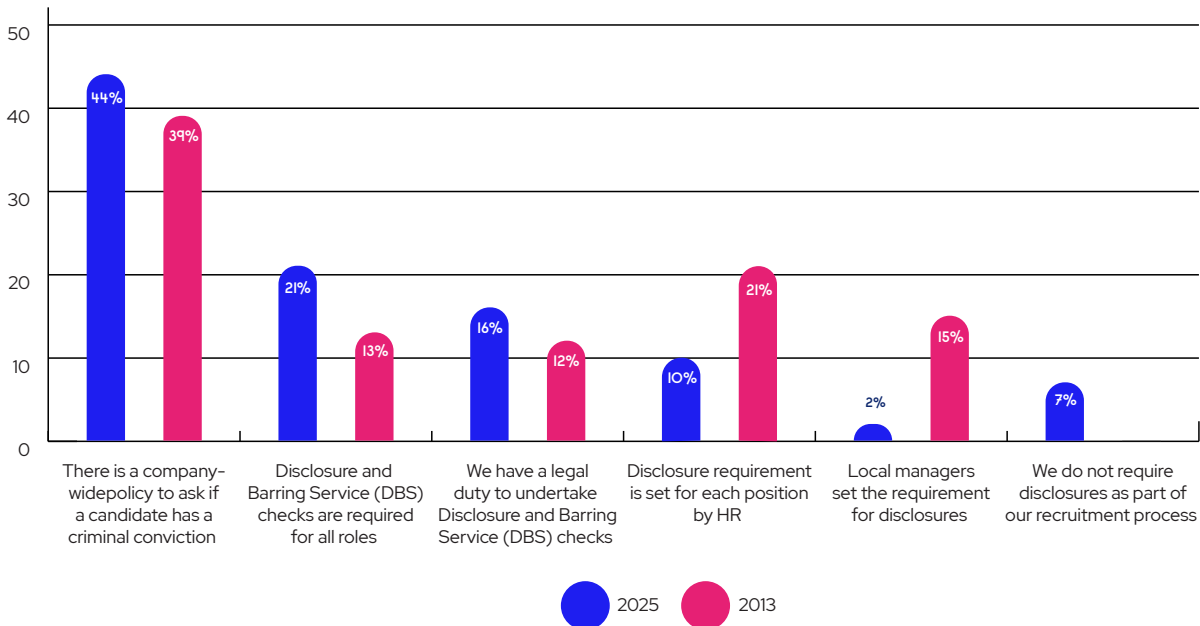


When asked about screening criteria, more employers have a company-wide policy to ask if a candidate has a criminal conviction in 2025 (44%) than in 2013 (38%).

There has also been an increase in employers who are undertaking Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for all roles (up from 13% in 2013 to 21% in

2025) as well as an increase in those who have a legal duty to undertake DBS checks (up from 12% in 2013 to 21% in 2025). There was a corresponding reduction in the number of organisations who set policies such as disclosure requirements for positions individually by HR or local managers, leaving only 7% of employers who do not require disclosures as part of their recruitment process in 2025.

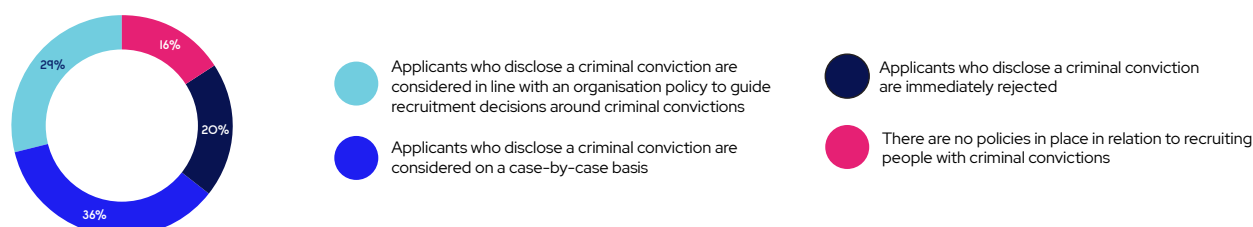
04 Which of the following applies to screening criteria when your organisation is recruiting?



One in five (20%) employers surveyed say that they will immediately reject a candidate if they disclose a criminal conviction in 2025. Of the remaining employers, 16% do not have policies in place in relation to recruiting people with criminal convictions,

29% have an organisation policy to guide recruitment decisions for those who disclose a criminal conviction and 36% of employers will consider an applicant on a case-by-case basis following disclosure.

05 What policies do you have in place at your organisation if it's identified that a candidate has a criminal conviction?



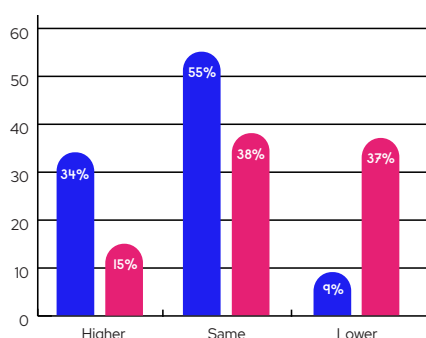
To capture employer attitudes, we asked them about their reflections on the commitment, trustworthiness, resilience of employees with criminal convictions, as well as their likelihood of straying with the organisation. We then compared employees who had experience of recruiting people with criminal convictions and those that were basing their reflections on expectations.

The majority of employers surveyed in 2025 who have employed people with criminal convictions rated staff with a criminal conviction as having the same or higher levels of commitment, resilience and trustworthiness as comparable staff with no conviction (89%, 86% and 73% respectively).

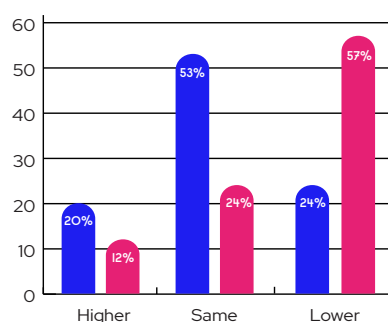
However, those employers that had no experience of recruiting people with criminal convictions had much lower expectations across the board.

For example, 37% of employers that had never employed someone with a conviction thought that staff with a criminal conviction would have lower commitment than staff without one, compared with just 9% of employers who did have experience of employing people with convictions. This highlights the positive experience of employing people with criminal convictions that organisations experience as well as reflecting negative attitudes of employers who have not had this experience.

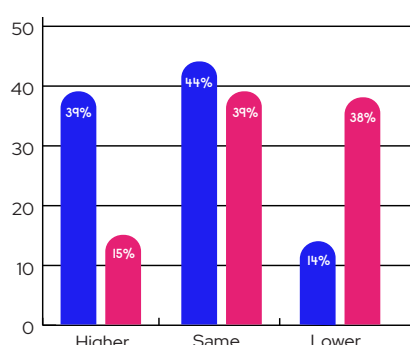
Commitment



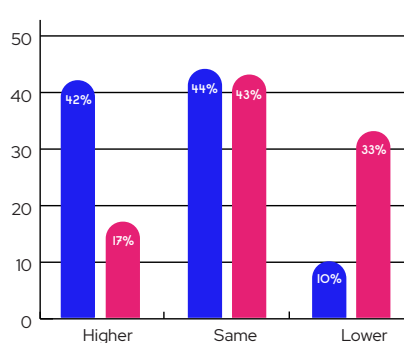
Trustworthiness



Likelihood to stay



Resilience



Based on expectations (Sample size: 706)

Based on experience (Sample size: 339)

O2 Our reflections

If reflective of UK employer practice more widely, these survey findings should be a big wake-up call for all employers who support inclusive recruitment.

If reflective of UK employer practice more widely, these survey findings should be a big wake-up call for all employers who support inclusive recruitment. They suggest that the UK has taken a step backwards in labour market treatment of people with criminal convictions in the UK, who make up one in four of the working-age population.³

This is a complex issue. Safeguarding concerns are rightly paramount, and there have been welcome improvements in employer practice in in this area over recent years. It is not surprising that we found a greater proportion of employers asking potential recruits about criminal records, for example, or requiring DBS checks. DBS checks should, however, not be used as a pass/fail mechanism. They should provide opportunity for employers to appropriately assess and manage any risk.

Our findings may mean that too many employers are missing out on the potential of people with a criminal conviction in their past. It is striking that in our survey, those employers with experience of employing people with convictions rated the commitment, resilience, trustworthiness and likelihood of staying with their organisation consistently more highly than those with no experience. This highlights the positive impact that recruitment of people with criminal convictions can have, not just in making our communities safer but in building a strong and sustainable workforce.

It is paramount to challenge negative attitudes towards people with criminal convictions as employees. We see in our survey the impact of these attitudes with less employers considering recruiting people based on their offence type in 2025 than 2013.



O3 Call to action

Employers who want to build inclusive, resilient workforces should take proactive steps to recruit people with criminal convictions.

Employers should address the prevailing attitudes outlined in this report head on; to achieve this, inclusive hiring needs to move from intention to action. By embedding inclusive practices into recruitment and workplace culture, employers can open doors to people looking to take positive steps for themselves and families.

Our evidence shows that this approach will not only contribute to organisations' social impact goals but will provide access to a wider talent pool in a tight

labour market and reduce recruitment costs because of improved staff retention. For example, Redemption Roasters saw 82% of their training programme participants stay in role as staff for 90 days - nearly double the industry average.

To better meet the needs of people with criminal convictions and provide them with the best possible outcomes, employers must take responsibility for their role in providing genuine employment opportunities.

To make meaningful progress employers should have:

- 1 A clear, honest, and consistently communicated policy on recruiting people with criminal convictions - one that signals commitment and builds trust.
- 2 Practical guidance and support for hiring managers, helping them assess risk fairly and apply the organisation's values in real-world decisions.
- 3 Ongoing support for both employer and employee, fostering a workplace culture where inclusion isn't just supported, it's expected at every level.

By embracing inclusive practice, employers don't just manage and mitigate risk, they offer second chances, reduce reoffending, employ trustworthy people and contribute to safer, more resilient communities. And they don't have to do it alone. There's a wealth of support available:

- [Reed Screening's Employ with Convictions guide](#), offers practical steps to get started.
- [CFO Evolution](#) provide tailored support for prison leavers and those serving community orders, including support around securing employment, training and education opportunities.
- [New Futures Network](#), part of HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), connects employers with prisons to help prison leavers find meaningful work.
- [Employment Advisory Boards](#) across England and Wales bring together businesses, HMPPS, and community organisations to support sustainable employment for people leaving prison.

O4 Employer spotlights

As part of our CFO Evolution programme delivery, we work with a variety of employers and training providers to support people we work with on their pathways into sustainable employment.

Four employers sat down with us to share their approaches and advice for other organisations looking to establish inclusive hiring practices for people with criminal convictions.

Social Pantry

Social Pantry are a catering company in London, committed to employing prison leavers. They have been actively working with partners since 2015 to contribute to prison reformation and crime prevention.

To recruit prison leavers, they work with partner organisations that support people with criminal convictions to find employment. This includes the CFO Evolution Programme and charities, as well as engaging with their regional MoJ Employment Council. Social Pantry will consider applicants from a range of referral partners as well as people with criminal convictions that approach them directly – striving for an ‘open-door’ policy to help people connect with opportunities. They offer work experience, trial shifts and employment to prison leavers and are able to streamline their recruitment process, such as simplifying or removing digital elements when needed.

To offer appropriate support to prison leavers, Social Pantry ask for disclosure of unspent convictions when they are considering offering employment, towards the end of the recruitment process. There is often no need to understand details of the offence. However, for some serious offences, risk management will be considered ahead of moving forward with an offer, to understand context and be transparent about whether this is an appropriate workplace for the person. It should be noted that they do not recruit people who have sexual offences or where the offence is related to gender-based violence and are open about this with applicants and partner organisations throughout the process.

Once employed, Social Pantry work with prison leavers to build up their experience, as well as offering mentoring and continue to signpost and engage with other support to aid with their move into stable employment. They see hospitality as an excellent opportunity for people to try working and there is lots of room to grow and develop.



Social Pantry highlighted that they have positive workplace culture because of this work, where it gives all staff opportunities for growth and development with mentoring opportunities and feeds into their collaborative and social approach across the whole organisation.

Social Pantry's biggest piece of advice is to build trust through honest and open dialogue with members of the team who have criminal convictions. In doing so, they can adapt and respond to their needs as well as be clear about expectations and the support that's available.



Redemption Roasters

Redemption Roasters are a social enterprise established to reduce reoffending through coffee. Their speciality coffee is roasted behind bars at HMP The Mount and they have twelve coffee shops across London. 34% of those employed in their shops are prison leavers.

To recruit prison leavers, they deliver training in-custody both via their roastery within HMP The Mount and through coffee training academies within HMP High Down, HMP Wandsworth, HMP Downview and HMP Wormwood Scrubs. Their support continues 'through the gate' with those who completed training in prison being supported into employment in their coffee shops. They also work with partner organisations to offer barista training in the community to recent prison leavers. Again, this training has direct routes into employment in their shops.

With a mission to reduce reoffending through training and employment at the heart of their organisation, Redemption Roasters are open to considering all offence types. Before starting in community training, participants will be risk assessed to assess their suitability for the training and eventual role this could lead to. This assessment includes practical elements such as any associated risk to themselves or others as well as more holistic consideration of if they are in the right place to take on this type of employment, given the nature of the work and where they are in their resettlement journey. Redemption Roasters told us

that most license conditions can be accommodated so long as there is open and transparent dialogue between themselves, the person involved and probation services.

Redemption Roasters provide a caseworker model for their prison leaver employees. This provides people with criminal convictions someone who is not in their direct line management to discuss their needs with. Case workers are there to support them to navigate challenges that could compromise their employment and positive progress. The content and frequency of these sessions is led by a participant's support needs.

Redemption Roasters' biggest piece of advice is to pilot offering paid opportunities such as work placements or working with partners such as themselves to offer further work opportunities to their training programme participants or employees. They have seen an incredible impact on retention of staff that have been through their training programme. In June 2025, 82% of their participants stayed in role for 90 days, compared to an industry average of 42%.



XO Bikes

XO Bikes is a sustainable business venture owned by charity Onwards & Upwards whose core purpose is to break the cycle of reoffending.

Founded in 2022, XO Bikes exclusively trains, mentors and hires prison leavers to become professional bike mechanics, refurbishing donated bikes to sell in their bike stores in London. The second venture, XO Barbers, coming later in 2025, will train ex-offenders in barbering and haircutting.

To recruit prison leavers, XO Bikes runs engagement sessions with prisoners on training and job opportunities while they are in custody. They also work with referral partners from across prison and probation services, such as the CFO Evolution Programme.

After receiving a referral form from one of their partners, the Programme Lead at XO Bikes meets with applicants for an informal and friendly initial conversation. It's difficult to know a person from a form, XO Bikes say, so the form is used only as a starting point to get to know the person better and explore together if this is the right opportunity for them.

Understanding an applicant's offence helps XO Bikes put support in place for their journey into employment. Applicants are considered on a case-by-case basis, considering any license conditions and risk assessment outcomes to manage organisational risks and foster a transparent and flexible working environment. The programme prioritises a candidate's prospects rather than their past. If they show a genuine desire to change and are committed to putting in the work, they are more than likely a good fit for the programme.

XO Bikes see their role as giving space for prison leavers to be honest about what they have done and take steps to move forward, build their confidence and develop key skills to prepare them for further training or employment. The training programme is intensive and hands-on, running for up to 16

weeks, four days a week, training prison leavers to become fully qualified bike mechanics. The programme includes sessions on work-readiness to give trainees the essential tools needed in any workplace, wellbeing support and weekly one-to-one check-ins for more personalised advice. This can be particularly helpful when prison leavers are navigating other resettlement priorities, such as housing, which may impact their ability to engage in training or subsequent work in a way they would like.

XO Bikes' biggest piece of advice is to understand the issues that prison leavers face to adapt regular recruitment and employment practices. Partnering with employers and training providers like XO Bikes can be a great way to open opportunities and contribute to someone else's change.



Homewood Solutions

Homewood Solutions specialises in supporting long-term unemployed people with a variety of different barriers to employment, including people with criminal convictions. They train and employ people to work on rail networks in safety and trade roles.

To recruit prison leavers, Homewood Group engage directly with prisoners while they are in custody to share the training and employment opportunities that they offer. They also work with referral partners such as the CFO Evolution Programme to engage with people who might be interested in training or working with them.

Taking an employment first approach, when they have vacancies to fill, they set up training programmes designed to give prison leavers all the training and certifications they need to start in the role. This gives those that start training with them guaranteed employment upon completion. As financial hardship can act as a significant barrier to entering and maintaining work, Homewood Group offer salary advances where prison leavers would not be able to work otherwise, to help break the cycle of reoffending.

To build an honest and supportive working culture, during the onboarding process Homewood Group ask for disclosure of criminal convictions. This is primarily to understand their present circumstances and how this may impact their experience at work.

Though they do not recruit people convicted of sexual offences, given the nature of work not being appropriate with associated license conditions.

When working with prison leavers, Homewood Group expect there to be a transition period as people take steps in their employment journey alongside their wider resettlement experience. All their supervisors have training specifically to support with managing workplace experiences that may arise and how best to facilitate a resolution, with particular emphasis on the challenges and experiences that prison leavers have. Alongside role specific training for employees, Homewood Group also provide work readiness coaching on a variety of topics from understanding a payslip to navigating conflict in the workplace.

Homewood Group's biggest piece of advice is to start with the job you have to offer and work backwards to build a platform for prison leavers to enter that role. This way you can clearly identify any training or qualifications that should be offered. It also means that when you are reaching out to prisoners the pathway to employment and workplace expectations are clear to all parties.



References

¹ This survey was conducted on behalf of Reed in Partnership by SurveyGoo, a UK market research consultancy.

Our sample of 1,045 employers included:

- 39% had 250 or fewer employees, 37% had 250-999 employees and 24% of organisations had 1,000 or more.
- By profession: Retail (5%), Public services and healthcare (14%), Financial Services (9%), Engineering, Manufacturing or energy (7%), Technology/IT (36%), Hospitality/leisure (4%), Transport/logistics/distribution (3%), Construction (4%), Other (17%)
- 12% of respondents were business owners, 26% of respondents were directors, 31% of respondents were HR managers, 4% of respondents were other decision makers, 25% of respondents were other managers, 2% of respondents were other.

Rounding means that responses do not add up to 100% in all cases.

² Ministry of Justice, Proven reoffending statistics: July to September 2023, July 2025.

³ Ministry of Justice, Estimate of number of individuals of working age (16-64 and 16+) with a nominal record on the Police National Computer, October 2024.

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