

# Strengthening your workforce with talent from disadvantaged groups



HM Government

In partnership with

**BUSINESS  
IN THE  
COMMUNITY**

**see**

**potential**

## A simple step-by-step guide to open recruitment

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This guide has been written by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and produced in partnership with Business in the Community (BITC). Business in the Community is part of the Prince's Responsible Business Network. It's a business-led, issue focused charity with more than 30 years' experience of mobilising business. BITC engages thousands of businesses through our programmes driven by a core membership of over 800 organisations, from small enterprises to global corporations. BITC's members work together to tackle a wide range of issues that are essential to building a fairer society and a more sustainable future.

# A guide to open recruitment

This guide will support you in reviewing your recruitment practices to make sure they're open and fair for all candidates, including those from disadvantaged groups – helping you reach the widest possible pool of talent. These include the long-term unemployed, ex-offenders, care leavers, recovering addicts, homeless people, single parents and military veterans.

The pages that follow offer expert advice on tried-and-tested ways of reviewing staffing practices and a step-by-step guide for how to introduce open recruitment to your workplace. It's designed to help you fill skills shortages and boost productivity, by tapping into a reservoir of new talent.

## The view from business...



“ People from disadvantaged groups are a prudent investment. They're hard-working and passionate about business. ”

**Deborah Meaden**  
Entrepreneur



“ I believe in giving everyone a chance in life. Recruitment should be about talent – not background. ”

**Sir Richard Branson**  
Virgin Founder



“ Recognising talent in candidates that have previously been overlooked is crucial in keeping Britain's economy competitive. ”

**Paul Drechsler CBE**  
President, CBI



# What is open recruitment?

Open recruitment means removing unfair and unnecessary barriers to appointing talented staff from disadvantaged groups - who could be contributing to your organisation. It's about opening doors and welcoming people who have been long-term unemployed, are ex-offenders, care leavers, recovering addicts, homeless people, single parents or military veterans to job interviews – and ultimately to your workforce.

Evidence from business suggests that people from disadvantaged groups can become some of your best employees. These are people who will have overcome their own personal challenges, so can bring fresh ideas and solutions to problems. Businesses report that employees from these groups go the extra mile to secure results, stay with their employer for longer, have a strong commitment to their organisation and lower rates of absenteeism.

Having an open recruitment policy covers everything from the job advert you publish and questions you ask (or don't ask), through to the people you invite to interview. It includes the way you ask about criminal convictions and peoples' addresses, and set out the working hours of the job.

It could also mean offering training programmes such as apprenticeships, internships and work placements to those furthest from the labour market, whose skills might otherwise be overlooked.

## The view from business...

“ We value the fresh perspectives, creative ideas and connections that flow from bringing together people from different backgrounds. ”

**Edward Brahman**  
Senior Partner,  
Freshfields Solicitors

“ We want a committed team, with passion and the right knowledge. We've found ex-offenders deliver for Halfords. ”

**Jill McDonald**  
CEO, Halfords

“ Recruiting people like care leavers and homeless people is essential. They provide new solutions and customer insight. ”

**Mike Cherry**  
Chairman, FSB

# Why open recruitment matters

Employers who hire candidates from disadvantaged groups report a wide variety of business and societal benefits in becoming more inclusive. More open recruitment can help businesses:



**Resolve skills shortages**



**Be cost-effective**



**Increase staff retention**



**Reduce staff absence**



**Improve client relationships**



**Up-skill existing workforce and boost morale**



**Demonstrate a social conscience**



**Boost corporate reputation**

You can read more about the advantages of becoming an open recruiter in the [See Potential Employer Information Pack](#).

**90%**

of inclusive employers say it's been advantageous recruiting disadvantaged groups

Source: Business in the Community, 'Business Benefits of Work Inclusion' (2015)



# Top tips and organisations that can help you

If you would like to review your recruitment practices to ensure they are open and fair, and further tap into the talents of people from disadvantaged groups, then there are a number of top tips and helpful and impartial organisations that can guide you.

These experts can advise you on what steps to take, connect you with potential candidates, and help you to introduce tailored schemes. Get in touch and they will be there for you every step of the way.



**Business in the Community** offers programmes and support for employers to become more inclusive and benefit from access to a wider talent pool  
[www.bitc.org.uk/employment](http://www.bitc.org.uk/employment)



**Jobcentre Plus** has a range of recruitment services that can help you. They offer recruitment advice, including specialist support for businesses in setting up work trials to give you the opportunity to try out potential recruits.  
[www.gov.uk/jobcentre-plus-help-for-recruiters](http://www.gov.uk/jobcentre-plus-help-for-recruiters)

## Ex-offenders

### TOP TIPS

When it comes to the way you deal with recruitment and criminal records:

1. Firstly, some employers worry that the public may not respond well to them hiring people who have broken the law in the past, but evidence actually shows that the public warm to the idea of employers being socially responsible. Don't forget that there are more than 10 million people in the UK with a criminal record so this isn't a niche issue. It's also a myth that your business' insurance will automatically prevent you from employing ex-offenders.
2. When it comes to the recruitment process, consider whether you need to ask candidates about criminal records. In most cases, there's no legal obligation on you to enquire, unless you're recruiting for a role which requires you to do a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

More than **3 in 4**

companies have actively become more inclusive workplaces in the last five years

## TOP TIPS

3. Have a clear and accessible policy which is linked to your online vacancies, setting out how you deal with applicants who have a criminal record. In order to manage applicant's expectations, it should make it clear whether you will ask about it and, if so, when and how this will happen for each role.
4. 'Ban the Box': only ask for information on criminal convictions once a candidate has been shortlisted or a conditional offer is made. This helps you to focus on the candidate's skills and experience.
5. Be fair and consider the context. Written information about a conviction, whether official or provided by an individual, can be difficult to put into context. So if you do have concerns and feel you might have to refuse an individual because of their criminal record, give them an opportunity to explain the surrounding circumstances in person.
6. If you do ask about convictions, make sure you're asking the right question. For most jobs, you're not allowed to consider convictions that are 'spent' under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (ROA). You would also be acting unlawfully if you were to carry out a criminal record check at a level inappropriate to the role. Employers who do this could be charged for unlawfully processing data of a sensitive nature.
7. Make sure you also make a written record of verbal disclosures of criminal convictions to avoid unfair dismissals caused by misunderstandings surrounding non-disclosure.



Business in the Community's Ban the Box campaign guides employers on when and how to ask about criminal convictions. [www.bitc.org.uk/banthebox](http://www.bitc.org.uk/banthebox)



Nacro provides free expert advice to help employers considering recruiting someone with a criminal record. [www.nacro.org.uk](http://www.nacro.org.uk)



The St Giles Trust has a dedicated employment service, helping place ex-offenders into a variety of employment fields. [www.stgilestrust.org.uk](http://www.stgilestrust.org.uk)



Blue Sky helps companies fill vacancies with committed workers, whilst also reducing re-offending. [www.blueskydevelopment.co.uk](http://www.blueskydevelopment.co.uk)



Working Chance is an award-winning recruitment consultancy, placing women with criminal convictions into mainstream quality jobs. [www.workingchance.org](http://www.workingchance.org)



Unlock supports employers in the fair treatment of people with criminal records. [www.unlock.org.uk](http://www.unlock.org.uk)

More than **10 million**

people have a criminal conviction – that's one in five of the adult population

# Care leavers

## TOP TIPS

When it comes to recruiting care leavers:

1. Some apprenticeships require minimum education and experience requirements, which can sometimes unfairly filter-out care leavers, who will have had fewer opportunities. Consider offering short-term traineeships as a way of sampling their talents and helping them acquire experience in the field.
2. Make the application process as accessible as possible. That includes making sure your application forms are in plain English. Some care leavers may struggle with the application process, having received little or no career support from their families. Lots of employers are using creative application procedures outside of the workplace, assessing personal aptitude and capacity to develop in a particular industry rather than more formal processes.
3. Consider offering greater discretion on leave entitlement for care leavers to attend any necessary appointments with organisations that help them get on their feet. Local authorities offer care leavers support up to the age of 21 (24 if still in education). As a lot of care leavers will be younger people, offer a buddying scheme to help them grow in their roles.



**The Prince's Trust** works with young people who need practical, financial and emotional support and places them with employers looking for fresh talent.

[www.princes-trust.org.uk](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk)



**The School of Hard Knocks** is a sports charity that prepares people from disadvantaged groups, including those who grew up in care, to become work-ready, matching candidates and employers. [www.schoolofhardknocks.org.uk](http://www.schoolofhardknocks.org.uk)



**Street League** provides work-ready, enthusiastic young people for employment.

[www.streetleague.co.uk](http://www.streetleague.co.uk)



**Catch 22** supports those who have grown up in care begin their career journey by helping employers across all industries fill roles. [www.catch-22.org.uk](http://www.catch-22.org.uk)



**Barnardo's** provide employment, training and skills services for young people, to equip them to find work and pursue a career. [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)



**Become** offers affordable training and consultancy to organisations that hire those who have grown up in care. [www.becomecharity.org.uk](http://www.becomecharity.org.uk)

More than **8 in 10** employers have no worries about care leavers skills and reliability



# Recovering addicts

## TOP TIPS

When it comes to recruiting recovering addicts:

1. Promote a culture of understanding about addiction in your workplace. It's important to appreciate that addiction is not a life-style choice and can happen for a variety of reasons. Remember recovering addicts have decided that they want to put their addiction behind them - and contribute positively to your business.
2. Introduce a regular work pattern for recovering addicts where possible, to help employees to maintain their routine, which is important for them.
3. Experience shows that the chances of well-established recovering addicts relapsing are very low. However, having a clear drugs and alcohol policy in place will ensure all employees know what is expected of them in the workplace.

*Collective Voice*

**The Collective Voice** is a group of nine voluntary sector organisations who have come together to ensure that the voices of the drug and alcohol treatment sector and those who use our services are represented. [www.collectivevoice.org.uk](http://www.collectivevoice.org.uk)



**Action on Addiction** provides support, advice and life skills for people recovering from drug and alcohol addiction. [www.actiononaddiction.org.uk](http://www.actiononaddiction.org.uk)

# Homeless people

## TOP TIPS

When it comes to recruiting homeless people:

1. Remember that homeless people will come from a variety of professional backgrounds. Lots of homeless people will have previously been in highly skilled jobs.
2. Don't sift out candidates just because they have gaps in their work histories. Gaps on CVs can be for a variety of reasons, including periods of homelessness.
3. Train line managers to understand the impact of homelessness. It can affect candidates' self-esteem. Understanding that and having strong support networks in place can help candidates with histories of homelessness give you their best as employees.
4. Offer secure contracts wherever possible. Homelessness is characterised by instability, so it's important for those who are rebuilding their lives to have enough security so they can plan for the future - and thrive at work.

**Crisis**

**Crisis** supports homeless people into meaningful, sustainable employment, by building partnerships with organisations and through its recruitment service. [www.crisis.org.uk](http://www.crisis.org.uk)

Over **95%**

of recovering addicts hold down a job and have good attendance records

# Single parents

## TOP TIPS

When it comes to recruiting single parents:

1. Broaden your appeal as an employer by advertising jobs on a compressed hours or job share basis. Promote the fact you offer flexible working practices in your job adverts.
2. All employees have the legal right to request flexible working. Although employers aren't legally obliged to offer this to employees that have been working with them for less than 26 weeks, it's good practice to be as flexible as you can and consider what you can do to help employees who are single parents.
3. Going back to work after time out to look after children isn't always easy. Consider introducing a family-friendly induction period. So, perhaps start with reduced working hours of between 09:30 and 15:00, to help them settle into the workplace, build their confidence and support them in realising they can manage work and looking after a family on their own. After an initial induction period, gradually introduce the shift pattern to help parents adjust.
4. It would help your single parent colleagues to let them know of Ofsted-registered local childcare providers, which offer Tax-Free Childcare and the new 30 hours free childcare for 3-4 year olds.
5. A buddy scheme during the first few months, ideally with another parent, can also prove effective in supporting single parent colleagues to settle in.



**Gingerbread** is England and Wales' leading single parent charity and can help match employers with skilled and passionate workers. [www.gingerbread.org.uk](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk)

# Military veterans

## TOP TIPS

When it comes to recruiting military veterans:

1. Ex-military personnel have a unique set of skills and abilities, such as leadership, resilience and discipline – all of which are transferable to the civilian workplace. However veterans can sometimes struggle in the initial recruitment stages to translate their skills and experience in a way that resonates with employers. Work with military organisations to identify talented veterans or hire someone with military experience to help you become better at spotting talent.
2. It's difficult for some veterans to know where to start their job search. Try to make your business known by attending job fairs and advertise your vacancies through the Career Transition Partnership and other military charities.

**97%** of homeless people want to work

Source: Off the Streets and into Work/Crisis, 'No Home, No Job' (2005)

## TOP TIPS

3. Military culture can affect how veterans approach job interviews. They are trained to emphasize their teams and not take credit for their achievements. Try to help them 'sell themselves' during the interview process.
4. The majority of military veterans have not engaged in combat and will not have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Nevertheless, experience shows that people with PTSD can perform well in jobs with the right help and support.
5. Adjusting from the military to the business world can be a challenging process for some veterans. Offering a buddying or mentoring scheme can help them feel welcome and settle into the business quicker. Veterans can also benefit from a community of fellow veterans so consider setting up an internal military network at your company.



**The Career Transition Partnership (CTP)** is a partnership between the Ministry of Defence and recruitment specialist, Right Management. The CTP is the official provider of Armed Forces resettlement, offering resettlement support, career transition advice and training opportunities. [www.ctp.org.uk](http://www.ctp.org.uk)



**The Forces Employment Charity** offers companies a no-cost, high-quality recruitment service through which they can access motivated, highly qualified Service leavers and ex-Forces. They work with employers of all sizes across all sectors. [www.rfea.org.uk](http://www.rfea.org.uk)



**Veterans Employment Transition Support** is a social enterprise that brings together charities, businesses and the MOD to improve employment outcomes for veterans, employers and the UK economy. [www.veteranemployment.co.uk](http://www.veteranemployment.co.uk)

Nearly **2 thirds**

of small business owners think military veterans bring valuable skills and knowledge to business



# Three simple steps to open recruitment

## 1 Making the decision to change

The first step is to focus on the business case for developing a more open recruitment policy, and making a collective decision – as an employer – to tap into the widest possible talent pool.

### Assess your existing recruitment policy

Start by considering whether your recruitment policy does enough to encourage disadvantaged groups to apply for roles at your organisation. And consider whether your practices unfairly filter out talented candidates because of their circumstances. Do you ask about criminal convictions at the start of the selection process? Do you address blind applications? Or do you do enough to tell candidates that you welcome flexible working patterns to fit around caring responsibilities?

### Identify your business objectives

Consider what it is you're seeking to achieve by changing your recruitment policy. Perhaps you're trying to fill entry level jobs; create a new set of skills for the organisation; improve existing staff's skills; improve productivity; change the corporate culture of the organisation; or improve its reputation. National Grid, for example, has an apprenticeship scheme for ex-offenders to boost their organisation's engineering capabilities. Whatever it might be, identifying your key objectives before you begin will help you shape your activity, assess its success, and get the best for your business.

### Making inclusiveness work for you

Once you've set your objectives, agree a scope of activity that works for your organisation. An accessible recruitment process is the first step, but you'll also need to think about establishing partnerships with other organisations to reach out to your target groups.

**92%**

of inclusive employers say it's enhanced their reputation – often helping them win new contracts

Source: Business in the Community, 'Business Benefits of Work Inclusion' (2015)

Think about offering work placements, apprenticeships or internships for candidates from disadvantaged groups. Work trials are a good way to help you tap into a broader talent base and often prove to be a better selection process than interviews, allowing you to see how people really perform on the job.

### **Gain internal buy-in from senior managers**

Strong senior commitment to the issue, backed by your HR Director, is key to the success of any recruitment changes or programmes you create at your organisation. If that's tricky, then first-hand insight will improve their ability to connect with the participants and objectives. One way senior leaders can gain insight is through participating in BITC's 'Seeing is Believing' programme, designed to inform and inspire business leaders about ways their businesses can benefit from becoming more socially aware. Many companies, including Land Securities, for instance, have found that pride in working for an employer is far higher amongst staff at organisations that have a social conscience.

### **Select your target group(s)**

To identify appropriate target disadvantaged groups, consider your business and community needs. Perhaps your local area has a high degree of homelessness, or your organisation wishes to help recovering addicts turn their lives around. Tesco, for instance, filled half its new roles in its regeneration stores with staff who had been long-term unemployed.

### **Agree your success measures**

This is about establishing early on what your goals are and your indicators for success. Perhaps it's enhancing skills, filling vacancies or improving staff retention. By tracking the numbers of people you're taking on and how they're performing, you will be able to build a picture of the impact of your activity.

**2 thirds**

of employers that have become more inclusive say it's boosted the skills levels of existing employees

## 2

# Reviewing your recruitment practices and making the change

Once you've committed to open recruitment and secured internal buy-in from senior management, it's time to review your recruitment practices.

### Select partner organisations

There are a range of specialist organisations that can help you gain a better understanding of the needs and challenges of those you're trying to reach with your new recruitment policy. They will be able to advise you on your approach and provide a ready pipeline of candidates for you to explore taking on. DJ Rees, a small decorating company in South Wales, called on RFEA - The Forces Employment Charity, for instance, to help them recruit more ex-service personnel. A list of organisations that can help you is on pages 6 - 11.

### Review your recruitment exercise

Partner organisations can help you ensure you're offering disadvantaged groups a fair chance to compete for vacancies. Things to consider are where and with whom do you advertise; the ways people can apply; the style of your job adverts and job descriptions; and whether you state that posts are available on a flexible-working or job-share basis to appeal to single parents.

Growing numbers of companies are using the BITC's 'Ban the Box' initiative – removing the criminal record tick-box from application forms and asking about criminal convictions later in the recruitment process. Making it policy to discuss in person any possible previous convictions with successful candidates, for instance, enables employers to decide whether an offence is really relevant to the post.

### Set up a mentoring programme

A mentoring or buddy programme can help disadvantaged recruits settle into your organisation and help you get the most from them. Engaging existing employees to help deliver this can help enhance their own skills. Companies like M&S and Royal Mail have used this approach with new recruits who are single parents and long-term unemployed to develop existing staff, particularly non-managers.

### Consider appointing a project leader

You may decide that setting up a designated project manager with responsibility for reviewing and changing your recruitment practices, will help. They can also take a lead on making sure that any changes made centrally are being implemented throughout branches and regional operations and that local staff have the information and support that they need.

92%

of future business leaders say responsible business is important to them as potential investors

## 3 Evaluating outcomes and sharing best practice

Once you've started implementing an open recruitment policy and made strides towards appointing more candidates from disadvantaged groups, you could set a time frame for evaluating how it's working. And make sure you don't miss an opportunity to tell people about what you're doing.

### **Measuring business and social benefit**

You may decide to follow a formal 3-stage evaluation process for your new recruitment practices. This could comprise monitoring information collected about recruits to track progress against targets; sharing your achievements and challenges each year with internal and external stakeholders; and reviewing it to consider where improvements can be made to meet your business objectives.

### **Update your communications strategy**

It's important to review your communications plan and publicise your open recruitment practice both inside and outside your organisation. Training for staff is an important step. But so too is updating your job adverts, the literature on your website and intranet, newsletters, communications with your supply chain and your approach to public relations. Pret a Manger, for instance, have placed their apprenticeship scheme for homeless people at the heart of their media strategy. This will help encourage best practice and give candidates who have faced barriers confidence that their applications will be taken seriously.

### **Share best practice with your industry**

Each employer will shape activity to suit their own business needs. Sharing your experiences of what's worked with other businesses in your sector, and within your professional networks, can help other organisations follow your lead.

Over **2 thirds** of employers struggling to fill vacancies due to skills shortages report experiencing a direct financial impact