

Retail Sector Council

Retail - Employment Opportunities for Everyone

May 2024



Foreword



James Lowman, Chief Executive, Association of Convenience Stores

The Retail Sector Council is proud to launch this report into working with under-utilised parts of our workforce – individuals whose backgrounds and experiences might otherwise lead them to be overlooked by recruitment processes. What the case studies and information included in this guidance show us is that the richness of these experiences actively improves teams in stores, head offices, and other workplaces in retail businesses.



We should never be bashful about promoting what the retail industry offers as an employer. We are the largest private sector employer, champions of good working practices, offering two-sided flexibility. We offer training and progression – take a look around the boardrooms of the country's biggest retailers, and you will see people who started on the shop floor, often in the same business they are now running.

Working in retail is about even more than that, though. It's a business founded on mutual respect for colleagues and customers, welcoming everyone regardless of their background, wealth, or ethnicity, and accepting everyone's beliefs and preferences. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion transcend mere chapters in annual reports or annual board agenda items; they represent a deeply ingrained culture within every successful retail business.

This ethos is even stronger when businesses embrace people who have experienced less conventional upbringings and lives to that point, including ex-offenders rebuilding their lives after prison, veterans re-entering the civilian

workforce after performing their extraordinary service, individuals raised in foster care, and refugees. If retailers need another incentive to consider these often neglected groups, the challenges of finding good colleagues in an era of home working, tight labour markets and skills shortages should focus the mind.

This report does not aim to be comprehensive; it simply showcases some of the work retailers are doing to help people who need that support, and who in turn are helping their businesses to thrive. We also provide links to some organisations who can help retailers to find their next brilliant colleague, perhaps in a place they hadn't looked before.

Thank you to all the businesses and colleagues who have helped the sector make such a difference. My hope is that this report inspires more retailers to explore these opportunities, enables more people to find jobs and skills, but also enriches the lives of colleagues and customers, elevating our engagement with under-utilised groups to another level.

Key Data

The retail sector is the UK's largest private sector employer. With approximately 3.57 million individuals currently working in this sector, it accounts for up to 10% of all jobs in the UK¹. This immense workforce underscores the sector's pivotal role in the nation's economy, providing a wide array of job opportunities. Despite this, the industry faces a significant challenge with around 125,000 vacancies yet to be filled, highlighting an urgent need for innovative recruitment strategies.

In light of this, the beginning of 2023 saw 57% of employers within the retail sector reporting difficulties in filling vacancies², a clear indication that traditional recruitment pools are becoming increasingly insufficient to meet the sector's needs. As the retail landscape becomes more competitive, there is a pressing necessity for retailers to explore new avenues for talent acquisition. This presents a golden opportunity to tap into underutilised recruitment pools, such as care leavers, prison leavers, ex-armed forces personnel, and refugees, among others. By broadening their recruitment horizons, retailers not only address their immediate staffing needs but also contribute to a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

Key Stats:

Older people and Career Returners

- 37.5% of adults aged between 50 and 64 are long-term unemployed (12 months or more), compared to 21% of those aged 35 to 49³.
- 72% of over-50s in the UK desire flexible work arrangements to achieve a better work-life balance, with caregiving responsibilities and a desire for more personal time being significant factors⁴.
- 41% of those who have retired said they could be tempted back to work if the conditions were right⁵.
- 1.5m UK women and 0.2m men are not in paid employment as they are looking after their family and home⁶.

Refugees

- 51% of individuals granted asylum are employed, a rate significantly lower than the 88% for economic migrants⁷.
- Companies with ethnic and cultural diversity outperform their less diverse counterparts by 36% in profitability⁸.
- 35% of businesses do not know if it is legal to hire refugees⁹.

Prison leavers/Ex-offenders

- 12 million people in England and Wales have a criminal record¹⁰.
- Employed offenders are 29% less likely to re-offend, compared to a 59% re-offending rate among those who are unemployed¹¹.
- 86% of employers of ex-offenders rate them as good at their job¹².
- 45% of employers would not recruit someone with a conviction, compared to 25% in 2010¹³.

Disabled people

- 54% of people that report they are disabled and are of working age are in employment¹⁴.
- Companies that lead on key disability inclusion criteria saw 1.6 times more revenue, 2.6 times more net income and two times more economic profit than other companies surveyed¹⁵.

Care Leavers

- 38% of care leavers aged 19-21 years are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), compared to 13% of all 19- to 21-year-olds¹⁶.

Ex-armed forces

- Over 14,000 skilled and experienced individuals leave the Armed Forces ready to enter the civilian workforce¹⁷.
- 11% of ex-military personnel are reported to be economically inactive or unemployed¹⁸.

Retail Industry Case Studies

In the dynamic landscape of retail, a growing number of retailers are recognising the value of diversifying their workforce by tapping into overlooked recruitment pools. Through partnerships with various organisations and the establishment of their own innovative programs, these companies are not just filling vacancies; they're enriching their teams with unique perspectives and experiences that mirror the diversity of their customer base. These initiatives not only facilitate access to employment for those who might face barriers

to entry but also demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility and community engagement. From schemes aimed at supporting care leavers and ex-offenders to programs focused on integrating individuals who have taken career breaks, the success stories are both inspiring and transformative.

Here are 12 case studies showcasing the impactful efforts of retailers who are leading the way in creating more diverse and inclusive environments.



Bright Future Co-operative



For more information, contact info@brightfuture.coop



Bright Future Co-operative stands as a groundbreaking initiative aimed at providing survivors of modern slavery with more than just employment; it offers a fresh start and a chance to rebuild lives with dignity. The programme's core mission is to ensure survivors enjoy the freedom that comes with safe, secure employment, fostering a sense of community and restoring control over their own lives.

To date, Bright Future has united 36 organisations, including notable co-ops like Co-op Group, Mid-counties, East of England, and Heart of England, in its cause, successfully placing 86 survivors across the UK in meaningful employment. These placements offer more than a pay cheque; they provide a lifeline, enabling survivors to regain confidence and autonomy.

One inspiring success story is that of Aisha. Rescued from seven years of forced labour and abuse, Aisha's job as a Co-op customer assistant marked the beginning of her new life. This role not only gave her financial independence but also a welcoming community where she formed lasting friendships, significantly impacting her recovery and self-esteem.

The Co-operative was formed in July 2020, and is led by an entirely volunteer Board, with representatives from business, referral partners such as [Medaille](#) and [Causeway](#) – its service delivery partner. It stemmed from a 2017 Causeway initiative, in partnership with the Co-op Group, that was developed in response to the Modern Slavery Act of 2015, which both highlighted the issue as well as driving action. With a significant percentage of modern slavery victims forced into the retail & manufacturing sector, the 4 Co-op Societies alongside other leading employers such as Currys & Pilgrim's, are combatting this issue head-on.

As Bright Future Co-operative embarks on a new three-year strategy to expand its impact, it remains a beacon of hope, demonstrating the transformative power of employment and community support in changing lives.

Tesco

Tesco and Business in the Community: Empowering Ukranian Refugees through Employment Opportunities



In an exemplary demonstration of corporate social responsibility and inclusivity, Tesco, in partnership with [Business in the Community \(BitC\)](#), supported a strategic initiative aimed at dismantling barriers to employment for Ukrainian refugees.

A cornerstone of the initiative was a virtual behind-the-scenes session, intended to provide Ukrainian refugees with a two-hour comprehensive overview of Tesco's history, core purpose, and inclusive culture. This session not only showcased the diverse array of roles within Tesco's expansive operations but also emphasised the company's commitment to career progression and the attributes desired in potential candidates.

Recognising the significant challenge posed by language barriers, Tesco introduced a dedicated webpage and inbox in May 2022, specifically designed to support Ukrainian candidates. This resource has since become instrumental in aiding hundreds of refugees, assisting them in exploring employment opportunities and navigating the application process with greater ease.

The positive repercussions of the session were immediately evident, with Tesco receiving numerous inquiries about internships, apprenticeships, and vacancies across their stores. This surge in engagement is a testament to the initiative's success in not only highlighting Tesco's dedication to inclusivity but also in providing tangible employment avenues for those in dire need.

Key takeaways from the initiative include the pivotal role of informative sessions in bridging the informational divide, the effectiveness of targeted support systems in overcoming language obstacles, and the profound impact of collaborative efforts in promoting diversity and integration within the workforce.

As Tesco continues to receive applications through its dedicated support channels, the initiative stands as a beacon of hope and a model for corporate engagement with refugee communities.



For more information, please visit: [Supporting Refugees | Tesco Careers \(tesco-careers.com\)](#)

Superdrug and Savers

Empowering Care Leavers: Superdrug and Savers Partnership with the Care Leaver Covenant



In an effort to support young people transitioning from the care system, Superdrug and Savers have joined forces with the [Care Leaver Covenant \(CLC\)](#) to open up a wide range of job and apprenticeship opportunities across their UK stores. This collaboration not only aims to facilitate access to employment for care leavers but also ensures a supportive pathway into the retail industry, exemplifying a commitment to social responsibility and community support.

A feature of this partnership is the offer of a guaranteed interview with a store manager for care leavers, contingent on the availability of a vacancy in their preferred store. This initiative significantly reduces the barriers to employment that many care leavers face, providing a direct and supportive route into meaningful employment.

The Care Leaver Covenant website serves as a crucial resource, offering care leavers and their support workers detailed information on available job opportunities, alongside additional support services designed to kickstart careers in retail. Recognising the diverse challenges faced by care leavers, Superdrug and Savers eliminated the need for a CV and the requirement to apply online, addressing concerns around digital literacy and accessibility.

Further strengthening the initiative, both businesses actively engage with local councils and Covenant supporters, ensuring a cohesive approach to supporting young care leavers within their communities. This collaboration not only enhances the visibility of the opportunities available but also ensures a network of support that extends beyond the initial job application process.

Although preliminary self-ID data from late 2023 indicates that a minimum of 2% of the workforce in these businesses are care experienced, it is acknowledged that the actual figure is likely higher. This initiative not only aims to increase these numbers but also to highlight the potential and capabilities of care leavers, empowering them to build successful careers in the retail sector.



For more information, please contact Sue.Renny@uk.aswatson.com

Lincolnshire Co-op

Lincolnshire Co-op and The Prince's Trust: Transforming Young Lives through Get into Retail Programme



In a partnership with [The Prince's Trust](#), Lincolnshire Co-operative has made a lasting impact on the local community and the lives of nearly 300 young individuals through the "Get into Retail" programme. This initiative, running from 2015 until 2023, was designed to empower young people aged 16 to 30, enhancing their job prospects through comprehensive skill development.

The programme's structure focused on building confidence, teamwork, and volunteering, with a three-week placement at a Lincolnshire Co-op store. Over eight years, 288 participants seized the opportunity to reshape their futures, with an impressive 50% securing employment with Lincolnshire Co-op itself. The remainder found success with other local businesses, leveraging their newfound skills and confidence.

This success led to Lincolnshire Co-op becoming a silver patron and corporate partner of The Prince's Trust, a distinction unique to them in Lincolnshire.

Upon completion of their partnership, The Prince's Trust expressed their gratitude for the support received from Lincolnshire Co-op saying the work they enabled them to do has changed the lives of so many young people. Together we have been able to help young people upskill, re-skill and build the confidence they need to get back on track and into employment.

Tom Cullen, a former participant, was nominated for a Prince's Trust award, sharing his journey from struggling to find employment to progressing to become a store manager. His story exemplifies the profound influence of the Get into Retail programme, serving as an inspiration for future participants and a testament to the initiative's success.

The programme's legacy, marked by the celebration of Lincolnshire Co-op's silver patronage, continues to inspire other organisations to contribute to meaningful community development and workforce diversification.



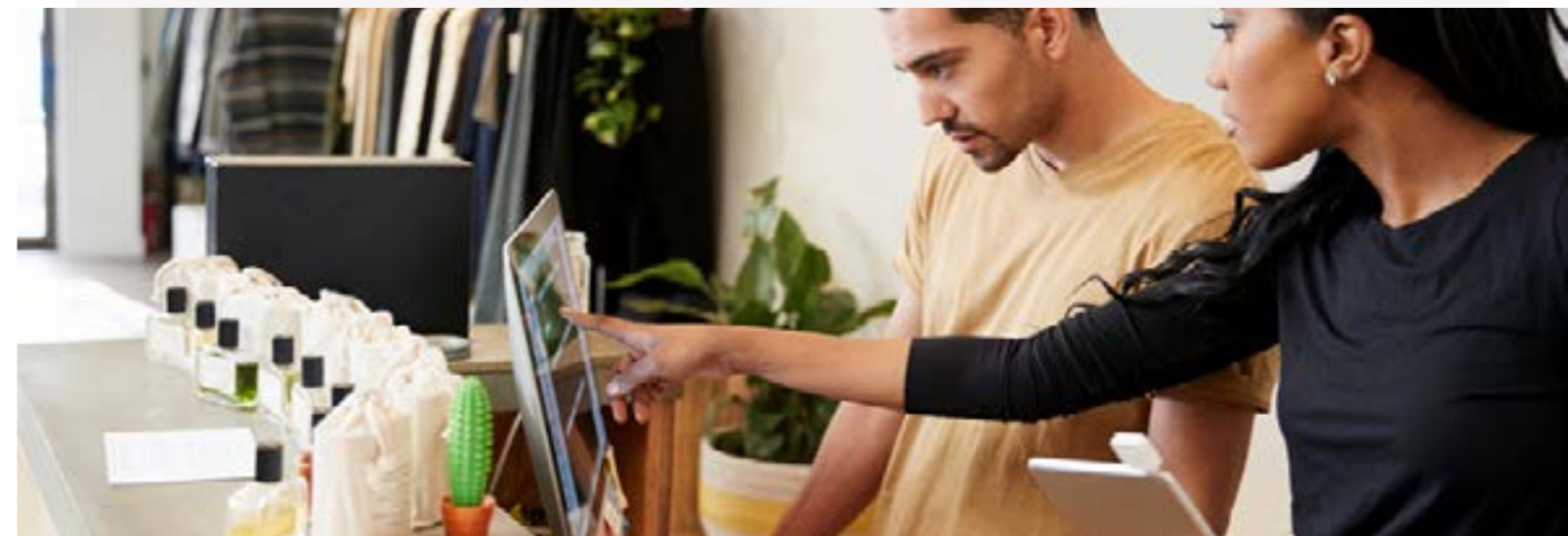
For more information, contact: engagement@lincolnshire.coop

John Lewis Partnership

John Lewis Partnership: Pioneering Support for Care Experienced Individuals



For more information, please visit [Building Happier Futures: Impact Report](#)



The John Lewis Partnership has an ambition to be the employer of choice for care experienced people through its [Building Happier Futures](#) employability programme.

The programme is live across John Lewis and Waitrose stores, Supply Chain and central offices. Collaborating with local authorities and charities such as the [Drive Forward Foundation](#), the organisation ensures that ideas of care experienced people informs its work so that lived experience is central to shaping the programme.

Work experience is at the centre of the offer and designed for participants to gain valuable experience to enhance CVs. Sharing interview questions in advance and guaranteeing interviews with familiar people met during work experience reduces anxiety and increases support.

Support mechanisms are robust. People managers and buddies complete care experience awareness training, there is dedicated wellbeing support from the internal Health and Wellbeing teams and dedicated mentors are offered to all new recruits.

Alongside employability which is at the heart of Building Happier Futures, the organisation has a broad focus. Their internal network brings together care experienced people and their allies and the research panel helps shape ideas for the future. The Fostering Network awarded the organisation a "[Fostering Friendly](#)" accreditation in 2023 due to their policy which offers additional paid leave to foster and kinship carers; something retailers can introduce to address the shortage of foster carers in the UK. The John Lewis Partnership is happy to collaborate with and learn from organisations of all sizes to ensure their work remains credible and sustainable.

Iceland

Iceland and New Futures Network: Pioneering Second Chances



For over 50 years, Iceland Foods Ltd, the UK's most successful frozen food company, have been proud to offer career opportunities to people from all walks of life. In 2022, they launched a "Second Chance" initiative to directly recruit prison leavers into their business.

Working with [New Futures Network](#), a specialist part of HM Prison and Probation Service, Paul Cowley MBE, Director of Rehabilitation at Iceland, regularly visits prisons to conduct interviews with individuals that are committed to securing a job on release. The potential candidates are supported by [Prison Employment Leads](#), who identify job opportunities for suitable prisoners across 93 prisons in England and Wales, resulting in a more positive experience of job searching.

Those successful in receiving job offers are supported by the Iceland HR team and third sector organisations to make the transition into roles in the community, such as Retail Assistants or Home Delivery Drivers. Through this initiative and investment, Iceland have recruited more than 130 individuals since 2022, and found the absence and turnover rates are lower than conventional recruitment methods.

This collaborative approach successfully breaks down many barriers to employment and challenges the stigma of employing people that have been through the justice system. By showcasing the untapped potential of people in custody, these initiatives support both men and women to obtain sustained employment on release, transform their lives and ultimately reduce reoffending.



For more information, please visit www.newfuturesnetwork.gov.uk

Midcounties Co-op

Empowering Youth through the Fairer Futures Programme: A Collaboration between The Midcounties Co-operative and Miss Macaroon



In April 2023, The Midcounties Co-operative and Miss Macaroon launched the Fairer Futures Programme in Walsall, a pioneering initiative aimed at tackling youth unemployment by providing opportunities for marginalised and overlooked individuals. The programme seeks to make a tangible difference by empowering young people to build fulfilling careers and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

The Fairer Futures Programme offers personalised support, including one-to-one mentoring, training, work experience, and in some cases, access to further education. It specifically targets young people facing significant barriers to long-term employment, such as social anxiety, disability, previous incarceration, childcare issues, or those who are neurodiverse, have mental health issues, or learning difficulties.

A key feature of the programme is its base at the Midcounties town centre store in Walsall, which has been specially redeveloped to include a training room and a quiet space for counselling and mindfulness, creating a supportive and welcoming environment for participants.

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This collaboration between The Midcounties Co-operative and the award-winning community enterprise Miss Macaroon has already seen remarkable success. In just 11 months, 23 young people aged 18-30 with complex needs have been supported, with 19 trainees securing employment either within the Midcounties family or in other local businesses. This success rate highlights the programme's impact on individuals' lives, their families, and the wider community.

Fully financed and co-managed by The Midcounties Co-operative, the Fairer Futures Programme stands as a testament to the power of partnership in creating meaningful social change. Through this initiative, The Midcounties Co-operative and Miss Macaroon are not only addressing youth unemployment but are also fostering an environment where young people can thrive.



For more information, contact programmemanager@missmacaroon.co.uk

M&S

Empowering Futures: The Marks & Start Scheme by M&S and The Prince's Trust



Marks & Spencer (M&S) employs 65,000 individuals, has long been dedicated to nurturing talent and investing in its people. Beyond fostering career development within retail, M&S has been pivotal in bridging the gap for those furthest from the workforce through its successful employability scheme, Marks & Start.

In partnership with The Prince's Trust, Marks & Start supports young individuals facing prejudices and barriers in their job hunts. M&S has been in partnership with The Prince's Trust for over 20 years and is now its largest private sector employability partner and has significantly contributed to supporting more than 11,000 young people on their paths to meaningful employment.

The cornerstone of this initiative is a comprehensive 4-week work placement programme, launched in its current format in 2013. Participants gain invaluable retail experience and skills through hands-on training alongside dedicated M&S buddies. The curriculum extends beyond practical retail knowledge, incorporating employability training and M&S's own learning modules to equip participants with essential skills and behaviours for future career success. Upon successful completion, a remarkable 81% (2023-24 average) of participants are offered a 16-hour fixed term contract to continue their journey with M&S.

M&S's leadership in fostering employability extends to being among the first to support the Government's Kickstart scheme, further solidifying its role as a catalyst for change in the community. The Marks & Start scheme not only reflects M&S's commitment to supporting those at a disadvantage but also highlights the transformative power of providing clear, accessible routes into work. Through this initiative, M&S is not just creating job opportunities; it's empowering individuals to start new chapters in their lives, contributing to a more inclusive and diverse workforce.



For more information, please visit <https://jobs.marksandspencer.com/marks-and-start>

The Very Group

The Very Group's Career Reinvention Programme with Career Returners: Bridging the Gap in Technology



In collaboration with [Career Returners](#) (previously Women Returners), The Very Group, created a new pathway for individuals looking to re-enter the technology sector after a career break. This career reinvention programme was specifically designed for those who have taken a hiatus from their professional life for two years or more, offering people the chance to dive back into a variety of technology roles with flexible hours and part-time options, all based in the North-West.

The initiative, which began in 2021 and had a second in-take in 2022, aimed to not only facilitate a seamless transition back into the workforce, but also to enrich its technology team with diverse talents and perspectives. The programme's recruitment process prioritised potential and values over just technical prowess in the latest technologies, seeking candidates with a passion for learning and previous experience in roles such as QA engineers, software engineers, data engineers, or data scientists.

Participants of this transformative programme enjoyed extensive technical training and support, benefiting from The Very Group's commitment to work-life balance through its hybrid working model. This model allows team members to blend remote work with collaboration at the company's Liverpool headquarters. Additional perks include a 30-day holiday allowance, matched pension contributions, and a 25% discount at [Very.co.uk](#).

This initiative underscores The Very Group's dedication to offering meaningful career opportunities and supporting the professional growth of individuals returning to the workforce. With tailored support and coaching workshops provided by Career Returners, the programme aimed to ease the transition back to work, ensuring a smooth and empowering experience for all successful candidates.



For more information, please contact dave.lafferty@theverygroup.com

Amazon

Amazon and Barnardo's The JOBS Project: Inspiring young people to unlock their full potential



For more information, please visit <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/the-jobs-project>



Amazon, in collaboration with [Barnardo's](#), launched 'The JOBS Project' to support young individuals aged 18-29 who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) and face various challenges. This initiative aims to develop their skills and confidence, guiding them toward meaningful career paths. By providing direct employment opportunities at Amazon Fulfilment Centres and support for apprenticeships or other employment avenues, The JOBS Project empowers participants to move forward regardless of their starting points.

Over a 10-week course, the project includes visits to Amazon sites to foster teamwork, confidence, and communication skills. An impactful example is a 29-year-old from Coventry who, before joining The JOBS Project, struggled with unstable employment and financial hardships. The project equipped him with the necessary skills and confidence, leading to a job aligned with his career goals.

Participants learn various key skills, including effective communication, time management, adaptability, leadership, and the importance of continuous learning and self-motivation. These skills not only enhance their professional capabilities but also build confidence in pursuing successful careers.

The program is highly recommended by its participants for its comprehensive approach to personal and professional development. It emphasises financial literacy, wellness, and efficient time management, contributing significantly to both professional and personal growth. We have a commitment to support over 500 people through the program by the end of 2025 and have supported 236 as of April 2024.

Central Co-op

Empowering futures: Alicia's journey with Central Co-op



Central Co-op is dedicated to nurturing the potential of young individuals through its work experience programs, providing invaluable opportunities for growth. In collaboration with long-standing partners like MINT (Supported Employment Provision) and City College Norwich, Central Co-op welcomes the next generation of professionals. Alicia's journey serves as a testament to this commitment, seamlessly integrating into Central Co-op through a structured work experience opportunity.

Alicia started work experience placement in January, delving into work within a nurturing environment. Given Alicia's diagnosis of PoTs (Postural Tachycardia Syndrome), the Central Co-op team at Brundall tailored her experience to her specific needs, gradually acclimating her to the potential impacts of work on her health over eight weeks.

Throughout this period, constant communication with Alicia and her job coach, Sarah, fostered a collaborative environment, focusing on Alicia's well-being and growth. As Alicia integrated into the team, she not only refined practical skills but also enriched the store with her unique perspectives and insights. Her openness about her condition facilitated greater awareness of PoTs among her colleagues, fostering a culture of understanding and support.

Recognising Alicia's impact, Central Co-op extended her placement at her job coach's request. By the end of her 12-week journey, Alicia demonstrated significant personal growth and a comprehensive understanding of operational tasks.

Transitioning to a permanent role in April marked a significant milestone, reflecting Central Co-op's pleasure in contributing to her journey and commitment to her ongoing success.

This experience underscores Central Co-op's dedication to empowering young individuals like Alicia and fostering inclusive workplaces.



For more information, please visit: <https://www.careers.coop/>

Boots

Boots: Championing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Through Collaborative Employment Initiatives



For more information, please visit <https://www.boots.jobs/>



Boots is committed to being a diverse, equitable, and inclusive employer. We attract and develop people from diverse backgrounds, enabling us to build teams who reflect the customers and communities we serve. We offer equal opportunities for recruitment and proactively support the health and wellbeing of all our team members.

Boots partners with charitable and community organisations to provide work experience and employment opportunities to diverse candidates including young people, ex-offenders, care leavers, armed forces and more.

Since 2019, Boots has worked with The Prince's Trust to engage young people to develop their skills and confidence, with over 500 young people supported via employability initiatives. In 2023, the Get Into program supported 76 young people with more than half progressing into paid work. Boots also partners with Nottinghamshire Care Leavers to provide workplace visits, work experience and employability opportunities to young people who have been in care.

Boots has a long-standing partnership with Sudbury Prison to provide work placements to serving prisoners in our Burton supply chain warehouse, and since 2013 we have supported the Ban the Box campaign by removing the criminal convictions 'tick box' from our recruitment process. Boots is also a signatory to the Armed Forces Covenant as part of our commitment to providing employment opportunities for veterans and reserves.

More than a quarter of Boots team members are aged over 50 and in 2023 we achieved Age Inclusive accreditation from 55/Redefined in recognition of our commitment to supporting the inclusivity of older people in the workforce.

Supporting Organisations

In addition to the case studies featured, we recognise the importance of highlighting the organisations that play a crucial role in facilitating these transformative opportunities.

The next two pages include some examples of organisations that have established strong partnerships with retail businesses to create and support projects aimed at offering meaningful employment opportunities to those from overlooked recruitment pools.

If you are a retailer looking to diversify your workforce and explore overlooked recruitment pools, you can learn more about the organisations listed by clicking on their logos.



Drive Forward Foundation is a registered charity enabling care-experienced young people in London to move into sustainable and fulfilling careers.



Find out about how your business can make a lasting impact at <https://driveforwardfoundation.org/businesses-employers> or email Anita Riberio: anita@driveforwardfoundation.org

“The retail sector offers a fantastic springboard for young people, especially those with resilience and adaptability honed through care experience. Drive Forward Foundation’s collaboration with John Lewis Partnership has shown the value of tailored support in helping care leavers kickstart their careers. 40% of care-experienced young people are not in employment, education, or training; a gap that the retail sector, with its diverse roles and opportunities, can bridge. Providing expert training and ongoing support to our partners, we encourage retailers to explore opportunities that foster young peoples’ skills and motivation, and unlock each individual’s potential.” - **Anton Babey, CEO of Drive Forward Foundation**

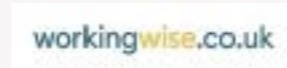


Causeway is a national charity that exists to create lasting change for marginalised and vulnerable people. This includes survivors of modern slavery and those caught in the cycle of crime and exploitation.

For more information, please visit <https://www.wearecauseway.org.uk>

“As an organisation that specialises in supporting victims of exploitation, human trafficking, and modern slavery, we often find that a major hurdle faced by survivors is finding suitable employment that allows them to support themselves financially, and by doing so remain resilient to re-trafficking. Enduring months or years of exploitation, threats, and abuse, understandably leaves people feeling anxious about new people and places, which makes hurdles such as job applications and interviews extremely challenging. In an effort to combat this, Causeway developed the Bright Future programme that helped survivors enter the workplace in a less stressful way, and which allowed them to feel supported and safe. The scheme proved extremely successful, and is now an independent cooperative that has helped place many vulnerable people into employment roles where they can thrive and contribute to society in a meaningful way. We hope Bright Future Cooperative can continue to grow, and that many more partners and organizations can get involved.” - **Helen Ball, CEO of Causeway**

workingwise.co.uk is a job and community site specially focused on older workers looking for flexibility and improved work-life balance, and the employers who recognise what they have to offer.



“A multi-generational workforce is good for everyone - employers and employees benefit from a diversity of experience, skills and perspectives. As a society, we have delayed addressing the issue of longevity and its implications for age diversity in the workforce, but it cannot be avoided and those who prepare now, who have the structures in place to support a multi-generational workforce, will benefit the most.” - **Gillian Nissim, Founder of workingwise.co.uk**



Working Chance helps women with convictions to develop the confidence, skills and self-belief they need to overcome any barriers to their employment, find jobs and build careers. For more information, please visit <https://workingchance.org/>

“It’s fantastic to see the retail sector being encouraged to open its doors to people who haven’t had a traditional career route and who may have had significant struggles in their lives. Recruiting from a range of pools makes sense - research shows that staff and customers value this inclusive approach and that organisations that recruit people from all sorts of different backgrounds with diverse life experiences often have better productivity and morale. We work specifically with women who have criminal records. These women need employers who are prepared to look beyond their pasts and appreciate what they have to offer, who can help them build careers where they can flourish and support their families, and make a fresh start.” - **Natasha Finlayson, Chief Executive at Working Chance**

Career Returners is a social business which works with employers and individuals to enable the return to work of experienced professionals after multi-year career breaks, for childcare, eldercare, relocation, health or other reasons. See careerreturners.com for more details.



“Our Career Returners Indicator 2024 found that 92% of experienced professionals are finding it challenging to return to work, 64% extremely challenging. Returners face widespread recruitment bias against a CV gap and a pervasive loss of self-confidence. Retailers like The Very Group and Next who access and support this talent pool benefit from a wealth of skills and experience that returners bring from before and during their career breaks, together with maturity, commitment, a high degree of motivation and a fresh perspective.” - **Julianne Miles MBE, CEO Career Returners**



The Care Leaver Covenant is delivered by Spectra - a multi-disciplinary social impact company - for the Department for Education. You can connect here: <https://mycovenant.org.uk/support-the-covenant/companies-charities/>

“The Care Leaver Covenant works with more than 500 organisations across the country, including Savers and Superdrug, to connect care leavers with exclusive opportunities in education, work, wellbeing, money and their home life. Around 10,000 young people leave the care system every year. With rich life experiences and high levels of resilience, care leavers make for valuable members of any team. With access to 5,500 care leavers, the Care Leaver Covenant provides a gateway for retailers to tap into this underutilised talent pool.” - **Gareth Evans, Director of Operations, Care Leaver Covenant at Spectra**



The Refugee Council is a leading charity working with refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK, including separated children. Founded in 1951 following the creation of the UN Refugee Convention, we exist to support and empower people who have fled conflict, discrimination and persecution to rebuild their lives here in the UK. We work directly with thousands of refugees each year, supporting them from the moment they arrive in the UK. We provide crisis advice and practical support, help them to integrate into their new communities and offer mental health counselling to support them come to terms with the trauma so many have experienced. We also speak up for refugees using our direct work as an evidence base and ensure refugees have a stronger and more influential voice in decisions that will affect them. For more information, please visit www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

“Most refugees were working before they arrived in the UK, and they all have a range of valuable skills and experience that can benefit any workplace. Anyone can become a refugee, which is why refugees have backgrounds in a wide variety of roles, from skilled trades to creative professions. We know from our work with refugees that they are highly motivated to find employment in the UK and to make a positive contribution at work, and we encourage employers to consider recruiting refugees into their workforce.” - **Jane Aldous, Head of Partnerships at the Refugee Council**

New Futures Network is the specialist part of His Majesty’s Prison and Probation service that brokers partnerships between prisons and employers. For more information, please visit newfuturesnetwork.gov.uk



“It is our mission to support more prison leavers to take up careers in sectors such as retail, where there are opportunities for people with diverse backgrounds to thrive. Partnerships like the one we have with Iceland are a fantastic example of great joint working, and where businesses can benefit by hiring talented people to join their national workforce.” - **Duncan O’Leary, CEO, New Futures Network**



Opening Doors is BITC flagship inclusive recruitment campaign, which calls on employers to change how they recruit to help make 2 million jobs more inclusive by 2025. For more information about the Opening Doors Campaign, please visit <https://www.bitc.org.uk/openingdoors/>

“Business in the Community supports businesses to open their doors to diverse talent. We believe this is not just the right thing to do; it also brings business benefits such as increased productivity, employer attractiveness, and employee retention. Through our Opening Doors campaign, we work with businesses across the UK to support them in embracing and embedding inclusive recruitment practices into their organisations, making all stages of the recruitment process inclusive and accessible, from using clear and inclusive language in job advertisements to prioritising essential skills over formal experience when assessing someone’s suitability for a role.” - **Ola Kolade, Employment and Skills Director, Business in the Community**

The Prince’s Trust helps people aged 11 to 30 to build confidence, get a job or launch a business. For more information, visit <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/>



“The Prince’s Trust believes that securing work enables young people to live more stable and fulfilling lives. We know from experience that an entry level job in retail can lead to so many varied careers. We work with leading retailers such as M&S, TK Maxx and Homesense, and the Co-Op to help young people secure that crucial first step on the ladder. As careers are built, lives are transformed. A win-win for young people and business alike.” - **Jonathan Townsend, UK Chief Executive, The Prince’s Trust**



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This report represents an initial step, and these themes will be further explored by the RSC Delivery Group. We welcome your insights and suggestions on areas to consider for future development'

If you would like to add a case study to the report please contact ACS Public Affairs Manager, Jordan Newfield: Jordan.Newfield@acs.org.uk

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