**Press Release**

**Virgin Trains gets prisoners job-ready with innovative training programme**

* *Three-week employability course launches at women’s prison HMP Styal.*
* *Course will be rolled out to other prisons over next year*
* *Train operator builds on more than five years of recruiting people with convictions*

Virgin Trains has launched the first in-prison employability training programme aimed at building the workplace skills prisoners need to make them job-ready on the day of release.

The three-week employment and business course has been piloted at HMP Styal, a women’s prison near Manchester, in partnership with prison education and training provider Novus.

It is due to be rolled out at other prison on Virgin’s west coast route over the next year.

The course will utilise Virgin Trains’ experience in delivering excellent customer experience as well as working with people with convictions. It comes two years after the operator made in-prison recruitment fairs a part of its regular recruitment process and removed the criminal record declaration box from its recruitment forms.

The pilot is believed to be the only privately-run training course which focusses on “soft skills” such as building confidence, time-keeping and managing workplace relationships, which are highly valued by employers. It also complements the skills training programmes developed in prisons by other employers such as Timpson and Halfords.

Virgin Trains has been proactively recruiting those with convictions for five years and currently employs more than 30 people who were recruited directly from prison.

The aim of the training course is to level the playing field for people with convictions and equip them with the skills they need to get back into the workforce on release. The course covers topics such as team-building, Virgin’s values, customer service and problem-solving common workplace issues.

The training is aimed at providing skills that will be useful for a broad range of employers. At the end of the programme, trainees are guaranteed an interview with Virgin Trains as well as being taken through a mock interview in preparation for the real thing.

Three courses involving around 80 hours of training and homework have been piloted at HMP Styal this year, with the latest group of trainees graduating on October 5 in specially-made Virgin Trains graduation gowns. Of the 16 trainees on the first two courses, nearly half have been offered permanent positions.

Virgin Trains is now planning a further recruitment events at HMP Styal and is discussing rolling out the programme with prisons in other areas of the country.

Kathryn Wildman, Talent Acquisition Manager for Virgin Trains, said: “I’m so proud to be launching this prison training programme here today to spread opportunity and demonstrate our commitment to recruiting and training former offenders. We know that hiring from prisons has meant that we’ve benefitted from access to great talent and we’re keen to see more businesses do the same. At Virgin Trains we want to hire the best talent no matter what their background and we hope that this course will help people with convictions find jobs and give a bright future for them as employees.”

Prisons Minister Rory Stewart said: “I’m delighted to see the launch of this programme as I believe passionately that through work, people can turn their backs on crime and start a new chapter in their lives. The recent launch of our employment and education strategy shows our commitment to getting offenders into work, and I want to see more employers really stepping up and looking past an offender’s conviction to their future potential. I believe that by supporting positive projects like this, we will help to make prisons places of hope and aspiration that propel offenders into employment, and ultimately help to reduce reoffending.”

Barbara McDonough, Chief Operating Officer for Novus said: “We are delighted to be working with Virgin Trains in supporting the women here at HMP Styal to build on the skills they need to find work on release. We know the value of employment in reducing re-offending. By creating more opportunities for the women to find work, we can help them to build their self-esteem and raise their aspirations, helping on the path to a crime-free future.”

Businesses who want to unlock opportunity can register their interest in employing prisoners and ex-offenders at [offenderemployment.campaign.gov.uk](https://offenderemployment.campaign.gov.uk/).

**Notes to Editors:**

**About Virgin Trains**

Stagecoach and Virgin are working in partnership to operate the West Coast inter-city route under the Virgin Trains brand, revolutionising travel on one of the UK’s key rail arteries.

The network connects some of the nation’s most iconic destinations including Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and London.

Virgin Trains is committed to delivering a high speed, high frequency service, offering shorter journey times, more comfortable travel and excellent customer service. Customers consistently rate Virgin Trains ahead of other long-distance rail franchise operators in the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) commissioned by industry watchdog, Transport Focus.

Virgin Trains has a proud record of challenging the status quo - from introducing tilting Pendolino trains, to a pioneering automated delay repay scheme, introducing the industry-leading onboard entertainment streaming service, BEAM, and becoming the first franchised rail operator to offer m-Tickets for all ticket types.

Virgin Trains operated the East Coast route between March 1, 2015 and June 24, 2018. In that time, we invested £75m to create a more personalised travel experience, including over £40m in the existing fleet. Customers have benefitted from 48 additional services between Edinburgh and London every week, and an extra 22 Saturday services between Leeds and London – a total of 1.74 million additional seats since May 2015.

Working together, the partnership railway of the public and private sectors has published a long-term plan, called *In Partnership for Britain’s Prosperity,* to change and improve Britain’s railway. The plan will secure almost £85bn of additional economic benefits to the country whilst enabling further investment and improvement, and contains four commitments which will see rail companies: strengthen our economic contribution to the country; improve customers’ satisfaction; boost the communities we serve; and, create more and better jobs in rail. For more information go to [Britain Runs on Rail](http://www.britainrunsonrail.co.uk/?gclid=CjwKCAiAr_TQBRB5EiwAC_QCq9OA-y_Al1Voo4ZvYjMvSBs86kuvjZLD8MfFvnOUU9UeVZ1T5CObLRoCasIQAvD_BwE).

Visit the Virgin Trains Media Room - [virgintrains.co.uk/about/media-room](http://mediaroom.virgintrains.co.uk/) - for the latest news, images and videos. Subscribe [here](http://www.mynewsdesk.com/follow/47939) for regular news from Virgin Trains.

Press Office: 0845 000 3333.

**About Novus**

Novus delivers education, training and employment opportunities to 66,000 adults and young people in 60 prisons across the UK. With over 20 years’ experience in offender learning, Novus have built a reputation as an innovator in rehabilitation and working towards reducing re-offending by transforming people's lives through learning and skills.

[www.novus.ac.uk](http://www.novus.ac.uk)