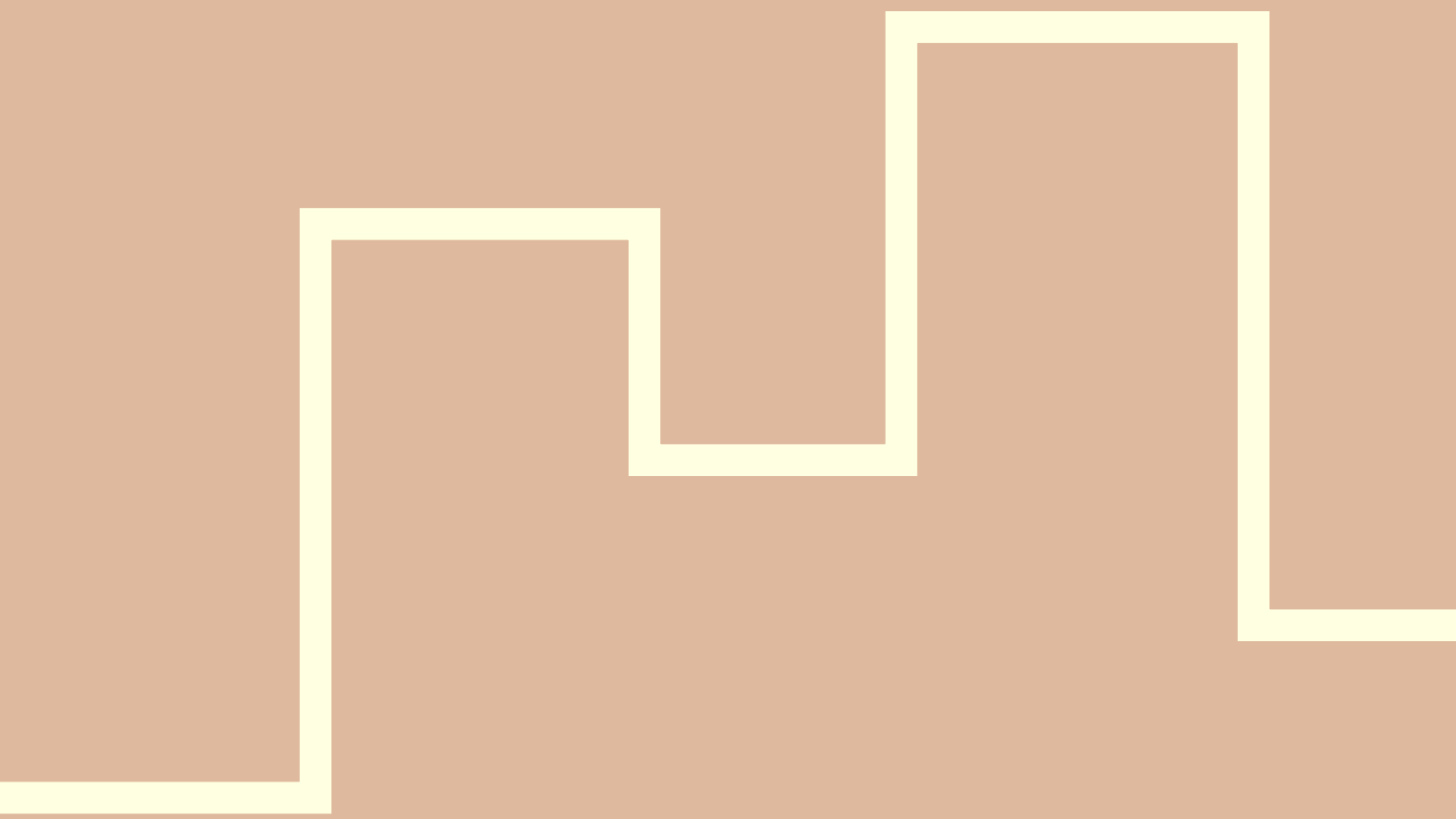


New Employment Opportunities Network (NEON)

Working together to end
homelessness through employment



homewards
northern ireland

About Homewards

Homewards is a five-year, locally-led programme from The Royal Foundation, launched by Prince William, that aims to demonstrate that it is possible to end homelessness — making it rare, brief, and unrepeated.

We're working in six locations across the UK to test new approaches and drive change, focusing on strategic action and early intervention. A key part of this is addressing the link between homelessness and employment.

Why Employment Matters

Stable work is one of the most powerful ways to prevent and reduce homelessness. It provides income, structure, connection, and confidence - the foundations for long-term stability.

But too often, people at risk of or experiencing homelessness face invisible barriers that stop them from getting through the door. NEON exists to remove those barriers, led by the private sector, and with support from The Royal Foundation and Homewards' local teams and coalitions.

What is NEON?

NEON (New Employment Opportunity Network) is a private-sector led partnership that brings together businesses, public services and voluntary organisations to create and strengthen pathways into employment.

Led locally by an influential business leader, and supported nationally by Homewards, NEON is designed to:

- Tackle local skills shortages
- Support people into meaningful, sustainable work
- Prevent homelessness before it happens

Together, we want to build:

- A lasting, business-led employment group in each Homewards location
- Permanent, supportive jobs for people who are ready to work
- A new standard for inclusive, flexible recruitment
- Benefits to the wider economy and society, through reduced homelessness, stronger communities, and inclusive growth

This isn't about charity — it's about unlocking potential and doing business differently, for the better.

The benefits for your business

Bringing people from diverse and under-represented backgrounds - including those with experience of homelessness - into your workforce can deliver clear, measurable business value.

It makes businesses smarter, more innovative, more profitable, and more resilient while transforming the lives of individuals and strengthening communities. It's not just a "nice to have" - it's a competitive advantage.

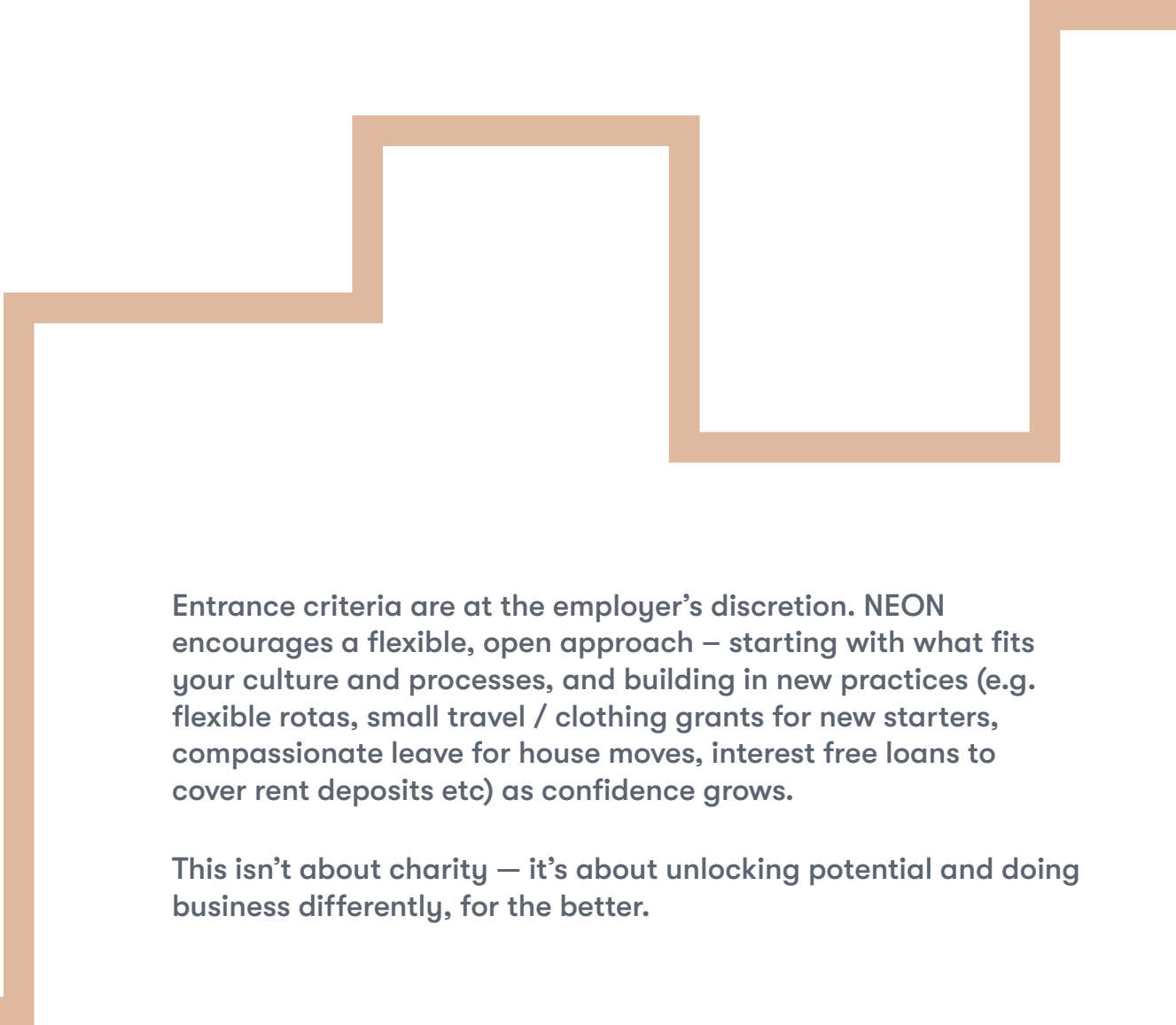
- 1. Solve Labour Shortages with a Bigger, Better Talent Pipeline**
Access overlooked talent pools - including people with lived experience of homelessness - to fill vacancies faster and recruit highly motivated people who are committed to long-term work.
- 2. Boost Retention and Reduce Costly Turnover**
Inclusive workplaces retain people for longer. When employees feel valued, they not only stay but also perform better, and reduce the continual cost of rehiring and retraining.
- 3. Make Smarter Decisions with Broader Thinking**
Teams with diverse perspectives challenge assumptions, spot risks earlier, and generate more creative and commercially sound solutions - leading to stronger performance.
- 4. Understand and Serve Your Customers Better**
A workforce that mirrors your customer base delivers better insights, better products, and better service - directly supporting revenue and customer loyalty.
- 5. Strengthen Your Employer Brand and Attract Top Talent**
Today's high-performing candidates actively seek employers who value fairness, inclusion, and community impact. Inclusive hiring gives your business a competitive edge in the talent market.

Who are we looking for?

We're looking for employers who are ready to:

- Offer permanent job opportunities (full or part time) ideally with mentoring / support; and flexibility
- Open doors through your networks, to grow the network
- Adapt hiring processes if appropriate

Helpful steps towards this include apprenticeships; paid placements and work experience; and traineeships and job trials. For maximum success, these should be suitable, supportive and linked to a route into sustained employment.



Entrance criteria are at the employer's discretion. NEON encourages a flexible, open approach – starting with what fits your culture and processes, and building in new practices (e.g. flexible rotas, small travel / clothing grants for new starters, compassionate leave for house moves, interest free loans to cover rent deposits etc) as confidence grows.

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What do we want to achieve?

We'd like to see more people at risk of homelessness being supported to both get a job and to keep their job.

- In year 1, we would like 10 pioneering employers to be actively hiring people at risk of homelessness from our cohort of focus.
- Once hired, with support from our partners, we would like to see 60% of new recruits still in work 12 months later.
- Progress against this target will be tracked through support from the Department for Communities and The Royal Foundation.

We'll keep measurement light-touch and meaningful, sharing regular insights.



How to get involved

A typical NEON journey might look like this:

1. Introductory conversation with Homewards/NEON team; Agreement on type of opportunities you can offer; support and onboarding plan.
2. Match with trusted agency partners who can refer candidates and train / support existing teams (eg in trauma-informed approach).
3. Candidate begins a short placement or trial shift(s), leading to a permanent role. The process will depend on the employer's usual hiring / onboarding approach, and their culture. This works best with a dedicated mentor, either from within the employer or from a third party. Homewards can help with the latter.
4. Regular support with measurement and feedback

Everything is flexible – the aim is to make it work for you and your team. You'll receive support every step of the way, both as an employer and for potential candidates.

Even if you're not ready to hire just yet, there are other valuable ways to engage:

- Host a workplace visit or open day
- Provide mentoring or coaching
- Offer volunteering or training opportunities
- Speak at a local NEON event

These activities can help build understanding and confidence across the sectors and connect people to the world of work.

To express interest or find out more about the support available and partners we work with, contact the Homewards team at homewards@royalfoundation.com

To view and download the full version of this toolkit, please scan the QR code below.



“The passion and energy for work that comes from people who are given an opportunity to turn their lives around is clear for all to see. Our Fresh Start programme energises all of us and provides a real sense of purpose and pride in what we do. As we support each other, we impact our communities, and that’s something we can all be incredibly proud of. There’s no doubt that Greggs’ culture and performance benefit by us working together to support our local communities through programmes like Fresh Start.”

Roisin Currie, CEO, Greggs.

“Hiring individuals who have experienced homelessness offers compelling benefits not only to society, but also to employers themselves. Employment can change people’s lives... we discover gifts they didn’t know they had. They grow in confidence... and in return, COOK gets brilliant and committed colleagues”

Rosie Brown, Co-CEO, COOK.

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