

# URBAN FOUNDRY

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**As a creative regeneration agency forging great ideas to change the world for the better, Urban Foundry aims to improve people's lives, make great places and build businesses with purpose.**

Founder and managing director, Dr. Ben Reynolds, has over 20 years of experience in regeneration. His central approach to the company, using creative thinking combined with a strong entrepreneurial and theoretical understanding to solve a range of problems, is what makes projects last and allows them to make a true difference.

## FAIR REWARD

Urban Foundry have long been advocates of paying their employees the Real Living Wage. It has always been a fundamental principle of theirs that people should be paid fairly. Having secured the official accreditation in 2018, they aim to encourage other small companies to follow suit and join the Real Living Wage movement.

Ben says that the Real Living Wage is "in our DNA" as a company. He adds: "I've always had the mindset where if you're doing well in business, then some of it might be down to your own ingenuity, but almost certainly a lot of it is down to the people who work for you, and they should be fairly

remunerated. I'm also on various funding panels and partnerships and I've been pushing to have this as a pass/fail criteria for being awarded public funds – I'm really pleased to see that this is now appearing on application forms."

The company also paid cost of living bonuses to all staff to help with the sudden rise in living expenses in the latter half of 2022. All salaries keep pace with inflation, not just those on the Real Living Wage, which in 2022 meant a 10% pay increase for all staff. All employees are also provided a discount on food and drink from the [HQ Urban Kitchen café](#) that Urban Foundry set up.

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## CASE STUDY

### EMPLOYEE VOICE & COLLECTIVE REPRESENTATION

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Starting out small meant that the employee voice at Urban Foundry was strong and direct, allowing employees to directly converse daily with the Director. In general, as teams grow, this needs to take on a more formal structure, which is exactly what happened at Urban Foundry.

Now a team of 15, Urban Foundry are moving towards a more quantitative approach to recording the employee voice, though they are still small enough that qualitative chats are still impactful and valued. The Senior Managers of the company all have an 'open door' policy for employees to raise any issues at any time. Other changes being implemented include asking set questions about employee happiness and satisfaction within the workplace and monitoring that regularly. Urban Foundry has also started

making the first small steps towards exploring employee ownership, with the financial participation of the employees on the agenda for the coming year.



### OPPORTUNITY FOR ACCESS, GROWTH AND PROGRESSION

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Professional development is something that Urban Foundry take very seriously. Ben explains: *"We fully fund any training needed by our employees in order to be able to do the job, including any costs of getting there and back, subsistence and accommodation."*

Within Urban Foundry, this could include food hygiene qualifications for staff working at the Urban Kitchen, part of the Urban Foundry group of businesses, or more competency style training such as health and safety or manual handling to name just a few.

Urban Foundry also encourages volunteering as a way of nurturing growth within the team which Ben feels is invaluable. He explains: *"The experience of being able to work with people from different walks of life means that employees can approach their work and life in a way that allows them to grow and develop."*

## CASE STUDY

### SECURITY AND FLEXIBILITY

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Urban Foundry is a family-friendly employer, however, its flexible hours and hybrid working options are not just for people with dependents. All employees are able to work from home if their role allows, which has been a fairly easy transition with the office staff.

Ben says: *"We were on the verge of not needing offices anymore after COVID, but we concluded that we were all missing the social aspect of it. As a result of that feedback, we've retained an office and everyone takes responsibility for their own office hours."*

However, not all of the Urban Foundry businesses are able to use a hybrid model of working. Staff at HQ Urban Kitchen, such as kitchen staff or front of house staff, are not able to work from home. They are however afforded flexibility

wherever the role allows, such as flexibility in being able to swap working days and shifts as easily as possible.

Ben makes sure that all his employees feel like they have a good work-life balance and is extremely flexible with this approach. He explains: *"If some of my staff want to come in at 11 o'clock in the morning and work till seven o'clock at night then that's fine as long as the work gets done. Others, myself included, have got children, so staff might disappear at three o'clock to do the school run and then work from home for the rest of the day and that's completely fine. One member of staff wanted to work in term times only, and we've done that to help preserve work-life balance for them. For the café it's a bit trickier – you have to have staff when you're open to the public – but we still try to be as flexible as we can within that."*

### SAFE, HEALTHY AND INCLUSIVE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

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The Urban Foundry premises are disabled accessible and whenever a new employee is onboarded, the induction includes a risk assessment to identify conditions or limitations that might not be classically labelled. Ben explains: *"Mental health is not taken seriously enough in society generally, let alone in the workplace. So, a simple thing that we do is that frequently we will ask: 'What's your score out of 10 today?' – a ten means on top of the world, and zero would mean an immediate emergency intervention is needed. We all have our up and down days, so if the score is over five then we aren't too concerned, but if it's five or under then we always aim to have a chat straight away to find out what we can do to help."*

There are small but no less meaningful things the company does to create an inclusive environment, such as the company's personnel forms (completed at induction) asking for preferred gender pronouns. The company has also signed up to the Swansea Pride charter and has directly supported initiatives that promote the LGBTQ+ community.

## CASE STUDY

### LEGAL RIGHTS RESPECTED

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Hospitality is a notorious sector where a lot of staff can feel overworked and undervalued. At HQ Urban Kitchen, Ben and the team made a commitment to say that if you are contracted to a 40 hour week, it won't edge up to 60 hours, it will stay at 40.

Urban Kitchen have also committed to not doing split shifts, with all staff knowing the rota well in advance. This all helps with employees maintaining a healthy work-life balance and ultimately being happy, productive and successful at work. The company also has a policy that it will not impose zero hours contracts, though they are available if a prospective employee asks for this, for example, students who want to earn some extra money whilst they are studying but without having to commit to set hours so that they can retain flexibility.

### THE BENEFITS OF BEING A FAIR WORK EMPLOYER

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Urban Foundry has definitely found that there are upsides to being a Fair Work employer. Ben explains: *"It reduces your staff turnover, it makes it easier to recruit, people are happier in work, and a happier workforce is generally going to be a more effective workforce."*

However, he is keen to convey to other businesses and organisations that you should be a Fair Work employer whether it helps your bottom line or not. Ben adds: *"You have an ethical responsibility to be a good corporate citizen and as an employer, regardless of whether it actually benefits you as a business. So, yes, there are benefits, but that's not the reason we're doing it this way at Urban Foundry."*



### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

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In terms of the development of Fair Work at Urban Foundry, one area where there will be a review over the next year will be sick pay. At the moment, employees would find themselves on the statutory minimum, however, Ben would like the company to be a lot more generous with it and is in the process of reviewing how as a small company they can achieve that for the team.

Promoting active travel is also high on the to-do list for 2023. Bike racks are in around their premises and the company has plans to continue promoting active travel: *"We're actively looking at a project where we can install a shower as one of the biggest barriers to people cycling to and from work is you're either really sweaty or drenched to the bone when you get there. We also need to push for it to be safe to travel from A to B on the roads and that's*

*something that our day to day work has been pushing for."* This is to encourage people to cycle rather than drive as much as possible, with benefits being two-fold for employees' health and also the environmental impact – studies show it's also generally better for the local economy too.

In looking to the future, Urban Foundry has found its 'happy place' and after significant growth over the last few years, the aim now is to focus on the brand's development. He concludes: *"We have no desire to become a huge, sprawling company but we also don't want to go backwards; we may grow a little further and we have some new projects we want to do that need some more space, but we're about the right size now to enable us to do more things and we're looking forward to developing new work and projects within our community."*

### CONTACT

Contact us to speak 1-2-1 with a specialist adviser about how your business can realise its Fair Work ambitions and take steps towards becoming a more equal, diverse, and inclusive employer.

Call Business Wales on **03000 6 03000** or visit [Fair Work | Business Wales Skills Gateway \(gov.wales\)](https://www.gov.wales/skills-gateway) for further information, free advice and support.

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