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Employee Voice & Collective Representation - resource pack

Resource pack

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In this page

How to ensure your employees' voice is heard

What can I do as an employer to ensure my employees' voices are heard?

Toolkit - Employee Voice

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How to ensure your employees' voice is heard



Employee Voice is a key part of Fair Work. The benefits of engaging worker voice include:

- Easier and more successful negotiations
- Early identification and resolution of issues
- Increased employee engagement and satisfaction
- Improved health and safety
- Support for training and development

A business shows it values employee voice and collective representation by allowing Trade Unions, recognizing them, and following collective agreements. Any business, no matter its size, sector, or location, can benefit from working with a trade union.

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Here are just some of the ways in which having a clear and effective Employee Voice policy can benefit your business:

- Employee Voice is a key enabler of employee engagement. A workforce that is engaged and feels listened to can enhance staff productivity, commitment, retention and effectiveness. In a survey of over 23,000 business units, those with higher employee engagement scores were 18% more productive and absenteeism was 81% lower than those with lower rates of engagement.
- Making sure your workers are heard and represented in business decisions can also help the management team to capture ideas, creativity and innovation. Often your employees are the ones who know your business, suppliers and customers best so it pays to listen to their suggestions and feedback.
- Having a functioning Employee Voice system in which both workforce and management are invested helps to build a positive social partnership between the two and can strengthen mutual trust. This can then help you to resolve any issues in a professional and amicable manner, rather than leading to potential disputes.

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- Employee Voice also plays an important role in creating inclusive working environments. An effective system will ensure the views of under-represented people, such as those with protected characteristics, are also heard.
- An engaged workforce with a meaningful voice will support an organisation that is undergoing periods of turbulence, either as a result of internal change programmes or external pressures. Having a disengaged workforce that lacks a proper mechanism for meaningful dialogue, however, can exacerbate those pressures as they look for means to vent the frustrations that they have no legitimate means to express.
- And finally, the consequences of not listening to employees where there has been an issue within the organisation can be catastrophic for those concerned, forcing down share price and reduce public confidence in the business.

What can I do as an employer to ensure my employees' voices are heard?

Now you understand what Employee Voice is, and know both its benefits and the risks of not implementing it in your organisation. So, what steps can you take to make it a reality?

Here are some practical steps to consider:

Allow access to Trade Unions

Allowing access to trade unions and adhering to collective agreements where these apply is the best way to demonstrate that you understand the importance of, and are committed to listening to, employee voice.

Currently 31.4% of Welsh employees are currently in a Union, a higher percentage than all regions in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Trade unions can support you in delivering your fair work commitments.

Introduce a variety of formal, informal, individual and collective arrangements

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Make it as easy as possible for workers to have their say by opening up both individual and collective channels. Give them the option of either speaking directly to management or indirectly through employee representatives and trade unions, both formally, through consultation groups and surveys, and informally via team meetings, staff forums and employee communication channels. Having one single initiative in place will not be enough to ensure employees feel heard. A multi-channel approach to Employee Voice is always best.

Run regular employee surveys

Almost all major employers these days use some form of staff survey to solicit feedback and gather the workforce's thoughts and ideas about the company. Be careful, however, as while these are one of the most common forms of Employee Voice, they can also be one of the least meaningful, offering a sterilised, one-way, one-off form of consultation where answers are only sought on the questions management want answered.

Help to make sure the Employee Voice is informed

Employee Voice requires a two way dialogue, not just a complaints system or a suggestion scheme. By regularly cascading information from the top down to the workforce, you can make sure their opinions are informed and worth listening to.

Take care to cover meaningful issues about business performance, strategy, change management and workplace culture, and not just suggestions about the coffee machine or toilets!

Ensure the Employee Voice is representative of your workforce

Make sure the voice of all employees is heard, not just the 30% who are really positive or the 30% who complain about everything, but also the 40% in the middle who are usually content enough to just get on with the job, might not be the loudest in speaking out, but still have valuable contributions to make. This is particularly

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important for under-represented groups with protected characteristics whose voices are often not heard.

Equip your employee representatives with the skills they need

Your elected employee representatives will need support and training if they are to fulfil their role effectively. Where trade union membership exists, this is something that they can offer but otherwise, as the employer, you should take the initiative to provide.

Act on feedback!

The final - and perhaps most important - tip is always to respond to and act on the suggestions you receive. Organisations that adopt a voice structure simply to ‘tick a box’ in the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or improve their public reputation, but then don’t listen to the views their employees express through it, are setting themselves up to fail. If you ask for your employees’ views and then simply lock the results in a drawer, it will do more harm than good, breeding cynicism and distrust.

Instead, regularly report back on progress and keep giving your workforce real examples of instances where you’ve made changes based on their feedback. This is the most effective way to build their trust and engagement and will pay dividends in the long term.

Toolkit - Employee Voice

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We've prepared these handy resource packs – one for each Fair Work principle – to help you on the path to becoming a Fair Work employer.

Another way to deliver fair work is to ensure employee voice is always listened to. There's a wealth of online tools and resources to help you implement this principle across your organisation but knowing how to navigate your way through all the information can be a challenge, so we've compiled some of the most useful ones here:

Wales TUC

Wales TUC has a wealth of information to help you deliver fair work and understand the benefits of collective bargaining.

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Ethical employment in supply chains: code of practice, guidance and training | GOV.WALES

Another way to show your commitment to implementing an effective Employee Voice system is to sign the Welsh Government **Ethical Employment in Supply Chains Code of Practice**.

This is a great resource for businesses looking to introduce a number of Fair Work principles as it has practical steps on ethical employment, whistleblowing and freedom to join Trade Unions as well as modern slavery, ethical supply chains, false employment and Living Wage.

What is Employee Voice? | Involvement & Participation Association

The Involvement & Participation Association (IPA) has published a breakdown of the benefits and different forms of Employee Voice, containing some **useful tips for businesses to follow**.

Employee Voice | Factsheets | CIPD

This factsheet examines the changing nature of voice and influence in the employment relationship, as well as suggesting mechanisms for participation. It covers topics such as whistleblowing and gives practical **advice on how employers can create a safe environment** where individuals feel able to speak up.

Social partnership and public procurement (Wales) bill

In Wales, there have been significant developments in efforts to increase Employee Voice and collective representation, particularly through social partnership. The **Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill** would develop this further and so is worth a read for any employers keen to find out more.

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