



EMPLOYERS' GUIDE

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COMMITTED TO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT HOW TO ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE

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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS



When employers are interested in becoming more youth-friendly or attracting more young talent, one of the first questions they tend to ask is “how can we engage young people?” It is a fair question, but it is not always an easy one to answer.

Like everyone else on this planet, young people are individuals. This means that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to engaging them, and that you cannot view them as a collective or monolith. Young people can be reached in many different places and engaged in many different ways. Each demographic, situation, and individual under the umbrella of “young people” will require a slightly different approach.

A good rule of thumb in marketing and advertising is that a person needs just one exposure to your brand to become aware of your organisation, but multiple exposures to your brand before that passive awareness turns into action. The famous “rule of seven” states that a prospect needs to be exposed to a brand an average of seven times before they will become a customer. Have you ever made a purchase after seeing the same advertisement several times? If so, that is this principle in action.

In terms of youth engagement, an instance of exposure to your brand (also called a “touchpoint”) could be anything from seeing your content on social media to watching a careers video on your organisation’s website or even applying for an open opportunity.

Young people will most likely need to see, hear from, and engage with a brand multiple times before they apply for a job with that employer, and perhaps even before they consider that employer in their job search at all. Ensuring that your organisation’s brand gets in front of young people in the right places is essential to building engagement with the next generation of your workforce.

This guide provides tips, support, and ideas for activities to help your organisation meet the five core principles of good youth employment: Creating Opportunity, Recognising Talent, Fair Employment, Developing Young People, and Youth Voice.

WHAT IMPROVEMENTS CAN YOUR BUSINESS MAKE TO ATTRACT MORE YOUNG PEOPLE?

We are so glad you asked! Fortunately, there are numerous different options available to you. Just a few of them include:

Connect with local
education providers
and youth organisations

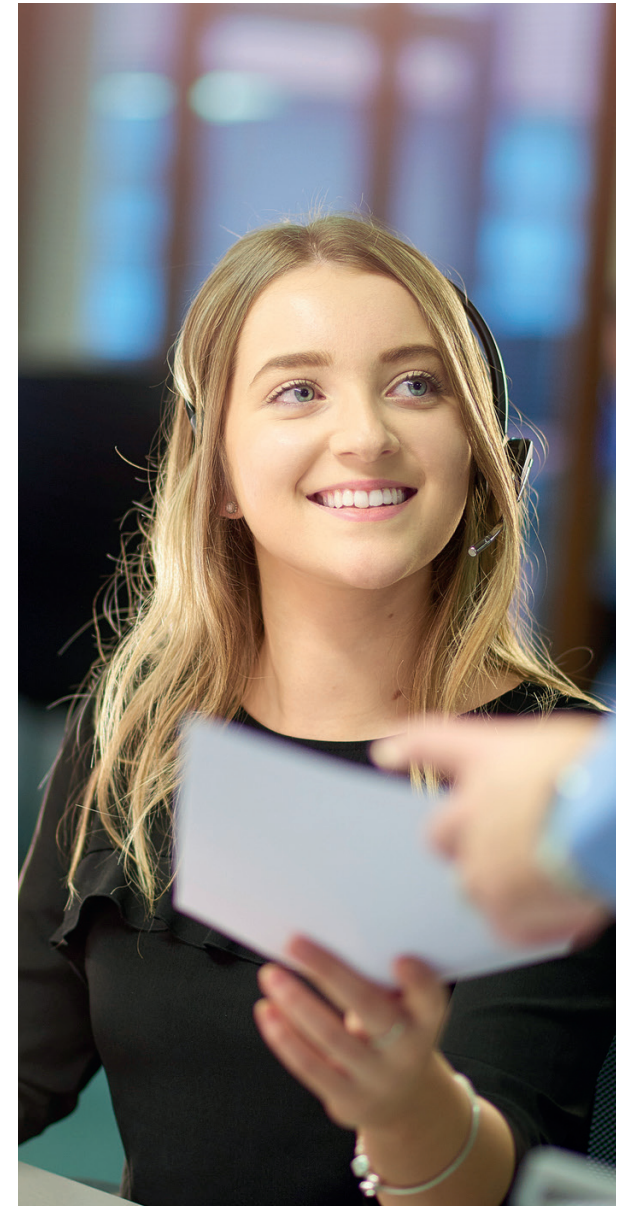
Build or expand
your online presence

Build equality,
diversity & inclusion into
everything you do

Offer taster days
and work experience

Speak to young people
in your community

Ensure that your offer
is truly competitive



SO HOW DOES THIS LOOK IN PRACTICE?

1. CONNECT WITH LOCAL EDUCATION PROVIDERS AND YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

Why should you do this?

It is vital to build support for young people into your business as early as possible. This is key to preparing them for the future and will allow them to see your organisation as an attractive option when they come to look for work.

You can use various touchpoints to build a relationship with the young people in your community and get your brand out there in the places where young people are.

Show them what is exciting, unique, and inclusive about your organisation and the opportunities it represents for them. Celebrate and demonstrate the pathways into your organisation—such as apprenticeships, paid traineeships or placements—and outline the skills that you look for when you recruit.

This gives you a real opportunity to reassure young people and help them to feel that they already possess the basic

skills they need to apply—skills that you can then build on through training and development.

There is evidence to say that when a young person has 4 or more experiences of the world of work they are more than 80% less likely to become NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) than those who do not have these experiences.

You could reach out to...

- > Schools
- > Colleges
- > Universities
- > Charities Working with Young People
- > Youth Networks
- > Job Centres
- > Youth Groups

WHAT YOUR BUSINESS COULD DO

Offer to present a talk about your career, business, or industry	Support career fairs by attending with stalls and activities	Conduct mock interviews with job applicants, students, and learners
Offer application tips such as CV writing, cover letter skills, or interview techniques	Present case studies showcasing your current young employees	Invite your current employees to become mentors for ambitious young people
Ask Careers Advisors/Leaders how you can support them and raise awareness of your organisation as an employer	Create teaching/outreach resources such as careers posters for schools and colleges, or flyers for careers fairs	Consider student group activities that might make your school engagement stand out from the crowd - such as a "Dragon's Den" style activity or a quiz
Invite schools or colleges to bring small groups of interested students to tour your premises and meet your team	Raise awareness of your business by becoming a sponsor for a group or activity (e.g. a youth sports club)	

THINGS TO BEAR IN MIND

It's important to not only make sure that young people know about you and your business, but to give something back to them. Helping in small or large ways with their career, skills, and professional development will ensure that young people understand where to find you, how to apply and how to succeed when the time comes to enter employment. Skills workshops such as CV writing, interview skills, or an introduction to cover letters are a great way to do this.

Once you have created and implemented your initial processes and structures for engaging with schools, colleges and other providers, you have done the heavy lifting. You can reap the benefits year after year, while gaining insights on improving your engagement over time, as long as you continue to put the time and effort in.

It is important to ensure, whenever you visit a college, school, or group, that you go into the setting prepared. This means having good "age and stage" relevant information as well as some next step suggestions for those young people interested in what they have heard.



Ensure that the opportunities you offer have good learning outcomes for young people, too. Each activity, session, or interaction should have a clear goal and metric for success in mind. If you can't immediately identify the purpose, it might be a sign that you should rethink the activity.

Remember that the key here is to be relatable and accessible. You want to help the young people imagine themselves working for your organisation in similar roles to you and your current employees. Show them that success is attainable, and they will always remember you as someone who helped them on their journey to employment.

2. OFFER TASTER DAYS AND WORK EXPERIENCE

Why should you do this?

In the 2022 [Youth Voice Census](#), the largest annual survey of young people in the UK, the statistics indicated that young people today lack confidence in their suitability and readiness for work. Work experience, insight days, and taster days can meaningfully reassure and inspire them to take the next step with you as a trusted employer.



Key Findings from the Census

Only **33.5%** of young people in education were confident that they had self-belief

51% of young people aged 19+ thought their mental health challenges were the biggest barrier to accessing work now or in the future

Only **34.4%** of those in education thought they understood the skills employers were looking for

Over half (**56%**) of those looking for work thought their biggest barrier to work was a lack of work experience

Some employers think that young people leaving education do not have sufficient skills and may discount them as prospective employees due to a relative lack of experience of the world of work. This problem has been worsened by the pandemic's impact on in-person education and work experience opportunities.

Many young people are now leaving school and university after an education filled with disruptions, social distancing rules, and lockdowns. They have not had the chance to explore the world of work that many of us benefited from when we were starting out. However, this is not a new problem, but an exacerbation of an existing one.

Young people have been struggling to find opportunities locally for a long time, and the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis simply hastened things along.

Opening up your business for a day, a week, or more to students and young people can provide them with great insight about the world of work.

Work experience is a great way to play a role in providing that all-important access, inspiration and opportunity.

Taster days and work experience placements are a safe space and offer a "try before you buy" introduction to your workplace and industry. They give you a chance to reassure and inspire young people, and to take away the fear of the unknown that so often accompanies entering the world of work for the first time. They will gain key employability skills, an invaluable insight into what it takes to land and excel in a job, and some experience they can later put on their CV.

Completing a placement or taster day can give young people a sense of confidence as well as positioning you, your company, and your team as a positive and supportive presence.

Your company will benefit, too!

Work experience students can bring fresh ideas and a new perspective to your company, perhaps allowing you to see aspects of your activities and processes in a whole new light.

You'll raise your organisation's reputation by doing something positive for youngsters in your local community, and provide opportunities for your employees to give back as supporters, guides, and mentors.

WHAT YOUR BUSINESS COULD DO

1 week work experience placements (or longer if possible)	Virtual work experience (see working examples from Haven , McDonald's and Surrey County Council)	Open days
Job shadowing opportunities	Taster Days or Insight Days	Skills development days
Q&A/"Ask Us Anything" sessions with your current employees	"Spotlight" sessions showcasing different jobs within your company	School holiday internships

THINGS TO BEAR IN MIND

Consider the type of experience you can provide to young people very carefully. Activities that include a site tour, meeting team members, and completing some work-based activities can be really beneficial for both students and employees. This sort of activity gives young people as full a picture as possible of your company and workplace.

Though we've found that in-person work experience is preferable in many circumstances, hybrid or online-only offerings are also important and can be just as beneficial. It takes a little knowledge and skill to conduct online work experience successfully, so have a look at some of our best-practice examples linked above to get you started. Flexibility is important to young people and, if you offer remote or hybrid working, virtual work experience is a great introduction to that.

You will need to build in plenty of time to organise and manage work experience, taster days, and other activities for young people. Get started far in advance of the dates you plan to hold the activity, and build in contingency time in case something goes wrong.



If your current employees are involved, they will need time away from their regular work tasks for this. Don't forget to plan for this—either bring in additional support, delegate some tasks elsewhere, or be clear about which less critical activities can be postponed.

3. BUILDING YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

Why should you do this?

The Youth Voice Census indicated that only 28.7% of young people aged 19+ felt that employers were supportive of hiring young people, and this perception can at least partially be attributed to a lack of messaging directly targeting them.

In order to reach and engage with young people, you need to be progressive, be forward-thinking, and go where they are—and this includes online spaces as well as those in the physical world. This means that you need to have a social media presence and a website that can be found through online search. These channels must fully reflect your brand and work culture, and showcase your support of young people in your organisation.

If you have no online presence, you will struggle to reach young people. It is that simple. A strong online presence, however, exposes them to your brand, opportunities,

and positive work culture regularly. (Remember: multiple touchpoints will be needed before a typical young person applies for a job with you!) It also gives you the edge over your competitors when young people search for opportunities, youth friendly employers, and advice on next steps as they move from school or college to work.

If you do have an online presence but it doesn't feature anything of interest to young people—such as a dedicated “early careers” area with messaging and visuals to capture a potential young candidate's attention and make them feel seen and valued—they are likely to feel disconnected from your employment offer, and potentially even excluded from it. The result? They simply won't apply.

Having an early careers website or a dedicated youth-facing [Employer Profile](#) on the Youth Employment UK website shows your desire to reach out to young people directly in a way that a generalised careers platform does not. A youth careers hub shows you understand, value, and actively seek to include young people in your organisation. It gives you the chance to showcase the benefits of working with your organisation and the breadth of your offer (e.g. apprenticeships, work placements, graduate roles, and so on), and to advertise the roles you want to fill.

WHAT YOUR BUSINESS COULD DO

Share plenty of informative content about what your business, its mission, and its values	Showcase your current employees through profiles, Q&As, case studies, and "A day in the life of..." content	Ensure that equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are front and centre in your messaging
Create interactive content, such as quizzes, to encourage young people to engage with you directly online	Include plenty of visual content such as photos, artwork, infographics, and so on	Keep an eye on hashtags, trends, and memes that you can take part in
Share quality resources for young people as well as for their parents and educators	Share CV, cover letter, and interview tips	Use accessible language free from jargon and "corporate speak"
Share tips, tricks, and insights – make sure they are relatable and actionable –for young people who want to work for your company or in your field	Don't forget about video and audio content, too. Short form videos (such as TikTok clips and Instagram reels) are very popular with young audiences	

THINGS TO BEAR IN MIND

Managing online platforms can be a full-time job in itself. You probably cannot do it all yourself or expect a current employee to add it to their already busy workload. If you are serious about going down this route (and you should be!), then you might want to consider hiring an employee to take charge of it. This person might be known as a Digital Marketing Executive, Social Media Manager, or something similar.

Digital marketing is an art. Pay close attention to what other organisations in your industry are doing. Do not copy them, but take inspiration and make a note of what works and what doesn't.

Your website and social media channels are no use if people cannot find them. This means you will need to put some effort into getting them in front of your target audience. On social media, follow plenty of relevant accounts and interact with their posts in a positive way. This will bring your content into the newsfeeds of people who might be interested in it. For your website, it could be worth investing in search engine optimisation (SEO) to ensure young people can find you

using Google. Don't forget about paid advertising, too—paid social media ads and Google pay-per-click (PPC) can be invaluable when you are building your audience.

Think carefully before you post. It is easy for online content to be misconstrued, and what you thought was a fun and humorous post could easily be read as offensive, insensitive, or exclusionary if you are not careful. Young people are highly attuned to issues of inclusion and social justice, and will not take kindly to businesses that do not seem to be living these values.

Finally, remember to be inclusive in your approach. For example, if you show pictures of young people on your online channels (which you should—stock images or photos of your own team members if they give you their permission can be great here) then make sure you are depicting a diversity of genders, races, and so on. If a young person does not see anyone who looks like them at your organisation, they will reasonably make the assumption it will not be welcoming to them. This will lead them to switch off.



4. SPEAK TO YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Why should you do this?

We've already talked about how important it is to engage young people through multiple touchpoints and channels, but this will not get you very far if you don't do it right!

Listening to youth voices is one of the core principles of the Good Youth Employment Charter. After all, the experts on engaging with young people are those young people themselves!

It is essential for businesses who want to cultivate meaningful engagement to talk to young people, rather than at young people. This means that you should go out into your community, find some youngsters to talk to, and really listen to what they have to say.

Listening to youth voices can help you with everything from creating reassuring and accessible job descriptions through to building your online presence in an effective way and creating the kinds of work experience offerings that young people really want.



WHAT YOUR BUSINESS COULD DO

Speak to young people in a way that they understand	Use clear language throughout the engagement and recruitment process. No corporate jargon!	Hold focus groups to get feedback and listen to youth voices
Allow opportunities for feedback and specifically seek it out	Co-create opportunities with young people	Reward young people for giving you their time and expertise—providing food is always a winner! Gift vouchers or small prizes are also great.
Ensure that you seek out a diversity of youth voices. Speak to young people of different ages, races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and educational experiences.		Don't forget about online engagement events, too. You could hold focus groups via Zoom or create a survey where young people can share their views.

The [BITC toolkit](#) can help you make sure your job descriptions and adverts are comprehensive and use inclusive language. They also provide a fantastic [future proofing youth recruitment toolkit](#) to help you make jobs attractive and accessible to all young people.

THINGS TO BEAR IN MIND

It can be tempting to skip this step because it is a time-consuming process. However, without a robust understanding of what young people actually want and need, you cannot achieve any of the other goals we have set out in this guide. In fact, everything starts with listening to youth voices!

One of the biggest mistakes employers make is to base their interactions with young people on assumptions rather than on robust information. And these assumptions can be enormously off-base, especially if they are based on stereotypes or outdated information. Instead of believing you already know what today's young people want, ask them!

Listening to youth voices isn't a one-time thing, either. Needs and contexts can change rapidly in response to all sorts of situations—the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis are two recent examples—so it is important to keep your finger on the pulse of what young people's wants, feelings, and concerns are.



5. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Why should you do this?

When it comes to recognising and furthering talent, it's in an organisation's interest to increase engagement with and support a diversity of young people and to pay particular attention to those from disadvantaged or marginalised backgrounds.

These young people have tremendous potential and a desire to succeed in a work environment where they can feel included and belong, but they often lack the confidence due to negative past experiences.

According to new [research](#) from Stonewall, the UK's largest LGBTQ+ charity, a number of participants shared their experiences of feeling forced to leave jobs because of anti-LGBTQ+ bullying. Others put off applying for positions as they feared they would be discriminated against on the grounds of their sexuality or gender identity. Stonewall research revealed that almost one in five LGBTQ+ people (18%) looking for work have faced discrimination while trying to get a job.

The findings of the 2022 Youth Voice Census showed that

Young people with protected characteristics¹, as well as carers and care leavers, were **15% less likely** to be confident that there are quality jobs available to them.

Black, Black African, Black British, and Caribbean respondents were over **3 times more likely** to say they did not feel welcome in their secondary school than students of other backgrounds.

So how important is EDI to young people?

The answer is that it is extremely important! Young people are, in general, highly engaged with and aware of these issues, and motivated to see positive change.

When you consider the ways you want to engage with young people, diversity must be at the heart of everything you do. This will sometimes mean taking additional steps to ensure that disadvantaged and marginalised young people are included.

It is vital to deliver engagement opportunities that meet the needs of young people of diverse backgrounds, identities, and experiences. Whenever you plan an activity or initiative, you will need to recognise and overcome the barriers that those from disadvantaged or marginalised backgrounds will face.

If you have a genuine desire to be inclusive and to improve equality and diversity, you will need to bring diversity of thought and talent into your business.

Showing this is key. Make sure young people see others who look like them throughout your business, brand, and online presence. See the table below for some ideas on how to do that!



WHAT YOUR BUSINESS COULD DO

<p>Use inclusive language in all your communications (for example, using "they" as a gender-neutral pronoun instead of writing "he or she")</p>	<p>Providing support for barriers to engagement such as travel costs or childcare, or signposting young people to external resources for these things</p>	<p>Support young people with a lack of experience or qualifications by focusing on potential rather than prior experience</p>
<p>Ensure that your online and printed materials show a diverse community of employees and customers</p>	<p>Providing flexibility with working hours and location (flexitime and hybrid or remote working can make a huge difference to young people who are parents, carers, or disabled in particular)</p>	<p>Study unconscious bias, understand how it may unfairly exclude those with protected characteristics, and work on eliminating it within yourself and your organisation</p>
<p>Try an "interview guarantee" initiative: any applicant who identifies with a certain characteristic (e.g. disabled or a person of colour) and meets the basic essential requirements for a job is guaranteed an interview</p>	<p>Ensure that your physical premises – including locations for interviews, focus groups, work experience, and other activities – are physically accessible</p>	<p>Offer important materials in a variety of formats: printed, digital, audio, large print, Braille, etc.</p>

¹Age, sex, race (including skin colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin), religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, marital or civil partnership status, and disability are the protected characteristics under UK law.

THINGS TO BEAR IN MIND

Creating a culture that embraces and celebrates diversity is a process. It will likely never be entirely complete and will be something your business will always have to be aware of.

Perhaps the most important thing you can do when it comes to diversity is to be cognisant of your own experiences, limitations, and biases. We all have unconscious bias. It doesn't make you a bad person, it makes you a product of the unequal society in which we all live. Acknowledging and actively working against it is key. If you are a white person in the UK, for example, you will never entirely understand what it means to face racism. This gives you an opportunity to listen to other voices and to learn from those with lived experiences you do not share.

It is important to understand the concept of equality versus equity here. **Equality** means treating everyone the same. **Equity** means giving everyone the support and resources they need to thrive, which will look different for everyone.



When dealing with situations of inequality, treating everyone the same is unlikely to be enough and you may have to go a step further to provide resources, support, and opportunities for those who are marginalised.

For example, many organisations have focused on providing opportunities for disabled applicants and people of colour, who are often unfairly discriminated against in hiring. Male-dominated industries may organise networks and development opportunities specifically to further the careers of women, and corporate LGBTQ+ networks are increasingly common. This is the principle of equity in action!

6. ENSURE THAT YOUR OFFER IS TRULY COMPETITIVE

Why should you do this?

The [Health Foundation's 2023 "Bridging the Gap" study](#) found that there is a discrepancy between employers' and young people's perceptions of what makes "good work."

Employers viewed the most important aspects of employment as: an enjoyable work environment (43%), an interesting and fulfilling job (42%), and opportunities to progress (41%). Young people, however, expressed that they want rates of pay above industry standards, as well as stability and security in their jobs.

In the same study, employers suggested that progression and development opportunities, financial incentives, good management, and flexibility were key factors that influence retention of young employees.

Young people have a choice in where to apply for jobs, and they are becoming increasingly savvy in their job searches. This means that if you want to attract and retain them, you need to ensure that you are creating an offer that truly appeals to them.



WHAT YOUR BUSINESS COULD DO

Offer pay rates at least in line with, and preferably above, industry standards

Create a culture of career advancement, development opportunities, and promotions from within

Consider flexible working arrangements such as flexitime and hybrid or remote work

Offer competitive benefits: a generous paid time off allowance, a competitive pension plan, and health insurance are just some options to consider

Ask current and prospective young employees for their input: what would most attract them to a role?



THINGS TO BEAR IN MIND

This is another area where it is vital to talk to your employees and to the young people you are hoping to attract and retain. It is easy to make assumptions about what young people value in the workplace, and it is easy to be wrong.

It is possible you may not be able to offer your employees every perk or benefit they would like. However, most people will be willing to compromise if other appealing incentives are offered. For example, perhaps you cannot increase the salary for a role, but would be willing to offer more paid time off. Or perhaps your PTO allowance is fixed, but you could give your employees more freedom by allowing them to work flexibly?

What makes the most sense will be different for every workplace and employee. The most important thing is to listen and offer what you can. Retaining the best young talent is worth it and will more than pay off in the long run!

RESOURCES USED IN THIS ARTICLE

- > [Opening Doors Toolkit for Employers](#)
BITC
- > [Future Proofing Youth Recruitment: Best Practise Toolkit for Employers](#)
BITC
- > [Young Talent & Early Recruitment Services](#)
Youth Employment UK
- > [The Good Youth Employment Charter](#)
Youth Employment UK

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CONTACT

Contact us to speak with an adviser about how your business can support young people into work.

Call Business Wales on **03000 6 03000** or visit

[Recruitment Support | Business Wales Skills Gateway \(gov.wales\)](#)
for further information, free advice and support.

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