

EMPLOYERS' GUIDE

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COMMITTED TO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT HOW TO RETAIN YOUNG PEOPLE

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A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

Congratulations, you've successfully engaged young people and started recruiting some fantastic young talent for your organisation! That's worth celebrating and deserves a pat on the back.

However, your work isn't done yet. Now that you've got those amazing young people working for you, you'll need to put in the effort to keep them happy and engaged at work so that they want to stay with your company for the long haul. This is called employee retention.

In today's competitive job market, it is more important than ever for companies to hold onto their talented and motivated young employees.

In this guide, we'll cover the steps you can take to retain young employees and help them to grow, thrive, and develop within your business.

THE BENEFITS OF RETAINING YOUNG EMPLOYEES IN YOUR ORGANISATION

Before we go any further, let's look at why it is important to retain young employees and what it can do for your organisation.

Young people bring fresh ideas and a new energy to a company and can grow and develop along with your business. Therefore, it's crucial for employers to understand what young employees value in order to retain them. If you do not put this effort in, they will go elsewhere as soon as they have the opportunity.

Younger workers have their own set of expectations, experiences, values, and priorities. Though all young people are individuals with their own needs, there are some common themes. In general, young people value a positive workplace culture, opportunities for growth and development, a good work-life balance, and the opportunity to do meaningful work and make a difference.

By doing the work to retain your best young employees, your company can also benefit in numerous ways. Not only will



you build a talented, engaged, and productive workforce, but you'll also improve your company's reputation as a desirable place to work. This can help attract new talent, which is especially important in industries with high turnover rates or in growing businesses with increasing hiring needs.

Recruiting new employees is expensive, and retaining your existing talent is far more cost-effective. A low turnover rate also allows for a greater knowledge base to be built up and shared amongst your team, which improves productivity. If you serve customers in your business, employee retention can be a great thing for customer service as your employees get to know and build long-standing relationships with your customers.

WHAT CHANGES CAN YOUR BUSINESS MAKE TO RETAIN YOUNG EMPLOYEES?

If you're starting to think about employee retention, you might be wondering about the changes you can make to help achieve this goal. Read on to learn more about the best ways to do this, which include:

Provide quality jobs

Provide opportunity

Offer opportunities for progression

Support development from day one

Nurture a positive workplace culture



SO HOW DOES THIS LOOK IN PRACTICE?

1. PROVIDE QUALITY JOBS

One of the main reasons people stay in a job long-term is security. We all like to feel safe and stable in our lives, knowing where our next paycheque is coming from. This applies to employees across age groups and demographics, and is certainly something that young people look for when searching for jobs.

However, stability alone is not enough, and young people look for far more in their jobs. According to the [Youth Voice Census 2022](#), the biggest youth survey in the UK, young people want good rates of pay (only 56.3% of young employees felt they were fairly paid for their work), training and development opportunities (62.5% of respondents said this was an important factor when looking for a job,) and a strong culture of diversity and inclusion (45.1% said this was important.)

The data is clear: employers must do more to retain their young employees, and those young people will look elsewhere if their employers do not address these needs.

Retaining young employees ensures that your company continues to benefit from their talent, energy, and ideas. Young workers often have a strong desire to learn and grow, and if provided with opportunities they can grow *with* your company rather than *outgrowing* it.

[Creating opportunities](#) is one of the five central principles of good youth employment (as set out by Youth Employment UK in their [Good Youth Employment Charter](#)).

Your organisation should ensure that the jobs you offer pay a living wage (paying above the industry standard is a great way to attract the best talent), provide good benefits, offer opportunities for training and advancement, and recognise and attempt to overcome the barriers young people (and particularly those from marginalised backgrounds) face. [Listen to youth voices](#) and co-create opportunities with young people both inside and outside of your business.

In addition, strive to create a positive workplace culture that values diversity, allows everyone to make a positive difference, and ensures that employees can enjoy a good work/life balance.

WHAT YOUR BUSINESS COULD DO

Pay at least a living wage, and ideally above the industry standard

Offer good benefits—private health insurance, subsidised lunches, staff networks, flexible or hybrid working, and a generous holiday entitlement are all great options

Ensure that your young employees have job security—do not employ on fixed-term or short-term contracts if you can possibly avoid it

Prioritise professional development opportunities with training and advancement opportunities

Foster a culture of promoting from within so that young people can advance through your company

Ensure that you offer reasonable adjustments and accommodations to those who are marginalised or face additional barriers

Put diversity and inclusion at the heart of everything you do

Build a positive workplace culture that values wellbeing and work/life balance

Listen to youth voices and allow them to shape these opportunities

THINGS TO BEAR IN MIND

Workplace practices do not change overnight. This means that, if you have big changes to make, you will need to be patient and give it time. Habits and patterns can be deeply ingrained in an organisation, and changing it requires a significant amount of effort and commitment from everyone involved.

However, even if there is a lot of work to be done, you should start today. Even little changes can add up to a big difference over time. It can be difficult to break down old habits and beliefs, and to create a new way of doing things. People can be resistant to change, too, so you will need to get everyone's buy-in by explaining why you are striving to change the ways you do things and how the changes will benefit everyone.

Sometimes you may find that financial constraints mean that you cannot pay quite as generously as you would like to (though paying a living wage should be the absolute minimum standard.) However, this does not necessarily mean that you cannot provide quality jobs to attract and retain the best talent. You just need to get a little creative.



Think about the non-monetary benefits you might be able to provide to make your offer more enticing. For example, many employees value flexibility and freedom, and allowing them to flex their schedule or work from home a few times a week can be even more valuable than more money (they'll also save on commuting!) Subsidised private medical care and lunches can also be cost-effective but enticing benefits, if you have the infrastructure in place to offer these.

2. OFFER OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRESSION

Young employees typically have a strong desire to learn and grow in their careers and to feel like they are advancing in their roles. For this reason, providing opportunities for progression is essential to retaining your best people in the long run. These opportunities can keep employees motivated, leading to higher levels of job satisfaction and lower turnover rates.

Providing opportunities for progression also helps to build your talent pipeline. By investing in the development of your young employees, you will create a pool of skilled and motivated workers who are ready and willing to step into more senior roles when they become available. This helps your company to fill key positions quickly and efficiently but also provides a sense of security and stability for young employees, who can see a clear path to advancement.

During your recruitment process, and once a young employee is employed within your organisation, it is important to show them that they can work their way up



and grow in their role. Ideally, you should give them a clear picture of the possible career pathways and training opportunities that will support their goals and ambitions.

Schemes such as [apprenticeships](#), [traineeships](#), courses, and employer led training can be invaluable here. The [Business Wales Skills Gateway platform](#) contains a treasure trove of valuable information on providing apprenticeships.

In addition, make career development a part of your conversations with your employees from day one. Ask them where they see themselves in a few years and how they envision the journey to get there, and offer any support and resources you have at your disposal that will help them get there.

WHAT YOUR BUSINESS COULD DO

Make career advancement and professional development a part of your culture from day one

Outline opportunities for advancement during your recruitment, assessment, and hiring process

Promote from within, rather than through external hires, wherever possible

Build progression conversations into your regular employee review discussions

Ask young people where they want to go—do not assume their career path will look one particular way

Invest in young people with talent but limited experience through apprenticeships, traineeships, and so on

Provide as many internal and employer-sponsored training initiatives as you can

Consider funding external training for employees who want to learn and advance if possible

THINGS TO BEAR IN MIND

Remember that career progression can look many different ways. Not everyone wants to be the boss! Making more money might be a motivating factor for some people, while others are more interested in working on more exciting projects. Some may not have any particular desire to advance, but be highly motivated to perform their current role even better.

Ask your young employees what matters to them in their career advancement and really listen. Offering individuals opportunities for advancement that are not a good fit for them can lead to frustration and disengagement.

It is also important to ensure that the opportunities for advancement are equitable and transparent. Young employees are often highly attuned to issues of fairness and inequality, and they will become very unhappy if they perceive that the opportunities for advancement are not available to everyone equally.

If they perceive that these opportunities are unevenly given based on protected characteristics, such as race or gender, your company could have serious reputational and legal trouble on its hands. Establish clear criteria for advancement and ensure that support is offered equitably to anyone who wants to progress.

Finally, be sure not to make false promises. For example, if someone expresses the desire to take on a specific role that is unlikely to become available (for example, one that is held by a long-serving employee who intends to stay until retirement) it is important not to mislead them. Or if someone wants to advance within a year but your organisation expects at least two years service before promotion, you need to be upfront and honest about this.

3. NURTURE A POSITIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE

As soon as prospective employees applicants walk through your door for an interview or research your business online, they will get a sense of the workplace culture from the things you say and do.

"Culture" is a nebulous term but one summary we like is "the cumulative effect that leadership practices, employee behaviour, workplace amenities, and organisational policies create on a worker/internal stakeholder. It can be measured as either positive or negative work culture."

(Definition: [Spiceworks](#).)

It is essential to start building and projecting a positive workplace culture immediately if you want to attract and retain talented young employees.

Some examples of a positive culture include:

- Communication is open, honest, and transparent, and employees feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas
- Employees are empowered to take ownership of their work and make decisions in the best interests of the organisation
- Employees have a healthy work/life balance and a life outside of the office
- Employees are recognised and rewarded for their hard work and achievements
- Employees are encouraged to share ideas and work together to solve problems in a collaborative way
- Employees are cordial and friendly towards one another
- The organisation invests in training, development, and career advancement for employees who wish to progress
- Diversity and inclusion are valued and there is a welcoming environment for employees from all backgrounds

It is important that your employees feel able to come to you (or an appropriate member of the management team) if they are having difficulties, and to know that you will be there for them. For example, the [BITC 2022 report](#) found that one third of employees have missed work due to not being able to afford travel costs, and two thirds of carers have had to give up work opportunities due to their caring commitments.

Providing flexibility, support, and signposting to resources where possible can help to bring people back into employment or keep them in jobs they may otherwise have to give up.

Without a positive workplace culture, young people will not feel happy and safe coming to work and will be far more likely to move on quickly.

And, since young people like to share their experiences and talk to one another, your organisation risks gaining a negative reputation if you have a poor workplace culture. This can impact your future hiring options.



WHAT YOUR BUSINESS COULD DO

Encourage employees to share their thoughts, ideas, and input	Make it safe for employees to make mistakes and take ownership of them	Strive to eliminate micromanagement and to give employees control over their own workload
Set and model clear work/life boundaries—for example, leave work on time and do not answer work emails outside of working hours	Give employees plenty of opportunity to get to know one another as human beings as well as co-workers	Invest in training, development, and career advancement opportunities for employees who want to progress in their careers
Foster an environment where diversity is celebrated and everyone is treated equitably	Make it clear that any form of bullying, harassment, or discrimination will not be tolerated	Recognise employees, both publicly and privately, for the good work they do and the contributions they make
Ensure staff are trained to recognise and deal with issues such as sexism, racism, discrimination and mental health at work	Introduce staff networks (e.g. LGBTQ+, disabled staff, or women's networks) to foster friendships and create collaboration opportunities	Recognise that sometimes life doesn't run smoothly and be flexible with employees when they have childcare emergencies, health problems, or personal life struggles

THINGS TO BEAR IN MIND

It's important to understand that building a positive work culture is a long-term process that requires ongoing commitment and effort. Much as you might want to, you can't change everything in a day! Creating a positive culture requires sustained effort and attention at all levels of the organisation and it's important to stay realistic and celebrate small changes as well as big ones.

All of your employees have a role to play in the process of building a positive work culture, and it is vital to get their buy-in. Involve your employees in the process of defining the organisation's cultural values and creating a plan for achieving those values. Solicit feedback and really listen to it, particularly from your younger employees.

Building a positive work culture requires a holistic approach. It is not just about implementing policies and procedures, but also about creating a supportive and empowering environment for your employees.



Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) must be front and centre to ensure that your culture is one of fairness and equitable treatment. Aim to ensure that young people of all ethnicities, backgrounds, and experiences can see themselves represented in your workforce and brand, and that everyone is able to be themselves and offer their own unique contributions.

4. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY

Though it sounds similar, this is slightly different to creating great jobs or offering opportunities for advancement. In this section, we are talking about providing opportunities for your young employees to develop their skills and gain experience in the course of their current role.

Give your young employees plenty of chances to take on new responsibilities, explore tasks outside of their normal day to day work, and stretch themselves. This could include inviting them to take on projects, attend and support events (or even speak at them), and explore the work of other employees (for example, through job-shadowing or collaborative projects).

This is a fantastic way to keep work exciting and dynamic for your young employees, ensuring that they will stay engaged and happy at work. It also helps to foster a sense of collaboration, community, and greater understanding between employees and teams in your organisation, which contributes tremendously to that positive workplace culture we discussed above.



Sometimes we all need a change, or think we might be better suited to a different role, but that doesn't necessarily mean we need to leave a company entirely. If new or current employees want to expand their role, learn new skills, or think they could use their skills in a different department, consider if you could provide the opportunity for them to do it.

WHAT YOUR BUSINESS COULD DO

Continually challenge your young employees by giving them new projects and tasks to try

Invite employees to attend, support, or speak at internal or external events (e.g. conferences)

Consider training options that allow your young employees to "upskill" in their current roles

Create opportunities for collaboration

Offer "job-shadowing" opportunities

THINGS TO BEAR IN MIND

If you invite an employee to take on additional responsibilities, work on a new project, or upskill in their role, it is important to make sure they have the time and resources to do so. This might include re-allocating some of their current work elsewhere. If the individual is already stretched thin, adding more responsibilities could lead to burnout and stress. Have an open and honest conversation with your employees about their current workloads before assigning them anything extra.

It is also important to ensure that your young employees are properly trained and supported in any new tasks or responsibilities you ask them to take on. New challenges can be exciting, but they can also be stressful, so be prepared to offer guidance and resources.

You will need to ensure that there is clear communication at every stage when someone in your team is taking on a new responsibility. This includes setting clear expectations, providing regular feedback, and making yourself available to answer any questions.

5. SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT FROM DAY ONE

Supporting all employees, not just young people, throughout their employment with your organisation is important. But introducing this support from the very beginning is key. This means starting things off on the right foot with a great induction process to introduce new employees to your business.

The right induction really can make or break an employee's journey with your business. The first day can pass in a blur; new employees may need to get their employee ID, set up their computer, ensure they have access to any equipment or facilities they need, and so on. And that's in between remembering their teammate's names, where the bathroom is, and how to work the coffee machine! It can be overwhelming. Ideally, the induction process should be structured and last for at least the first week.

Ensure new recruits have a mentor they know they can go to with any questions or problems. This might be their boss, supervisor, or a more experienced person within their team. Introduce new employees to everyone and give them plenty of opportunities to form connections and create

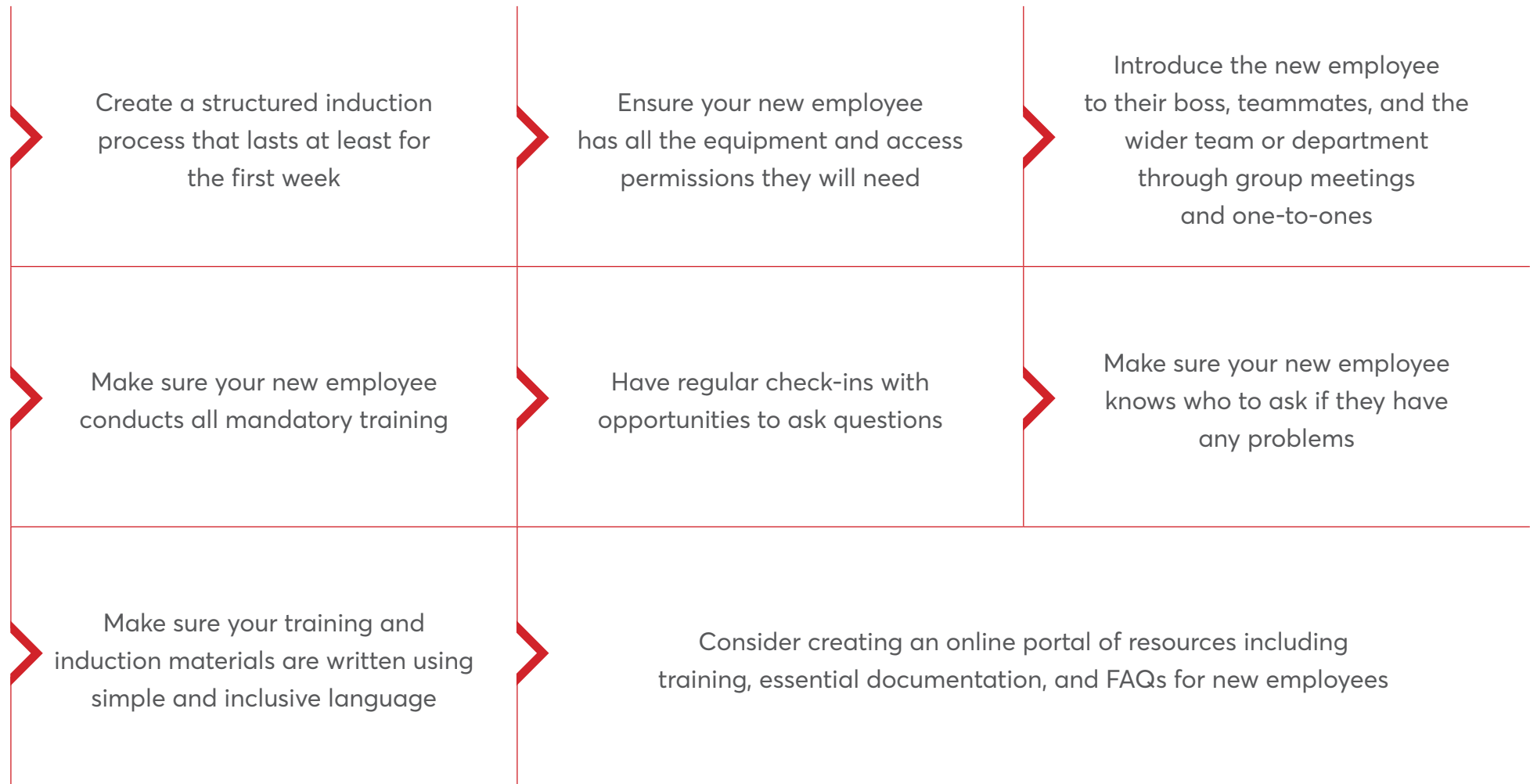


relationships with their new team. Include them in team meetings and discussions, but also set up one-to-ones with key team members they'll be working closely with.

Training is vital, too. Make sure that your new employee completes any mandatory training (such as manual handling, computer security, or EDI training) as well as any role-based training, and make yourself or an appropriate team member available to guide them through learning how to do their main job tasks.

Review their progress regularly through catch-ups and appraisals, checking in with how they are performing and how they are feeling. Make sure you give them the opportunity to raise concerns, ask questions, or seek any support they need.

WHAT YOUR BUSINESS COULD DO



THINGS TO BEAR IN MIND

Remember that your new young employees may not have as much experience in the workplace as older employees. This might even be their very first job! They might need more guidance and support than a more experienced hire, and the induction process should take this into account. Take the time to explain their role and responsibilities clearly and to provide clear guidance on your expectations. This will help them to feel confident, capable, and prepared!

You should also focus on creating and reflecting a supportive and inclusive work culture during the induction process. Young employees tend to value diversity and inclusion highly and, if they feel alienated by your induction and training materials, this can be difficult to come back from.

If your new employee is working remotely, you'll need to adapt your induction materials for this environment. They might not need a tour of the building, for example, but they will definitely need to know how to quickly contact IT support if they are struggling to log in from home. Remote employees can feel isolated and cut off from the team so, if your new young employee is working remotely, make an

extra effort to make them feel included, get to know them, and introduce them to the team.

For further support with early talent recruitment and development, you can sign up to the [Good Youth Employment Charter](#) or [work directly](#) with Youth Employment UK.

RESOURCES USED IN THIS ARTICLE

- > [How to inspire, hire, and grow diverse talent, 2022 report](#)
BITC
- > [The Good Youth Employment Charter](#)
Youth Employment UK
- > [Young Talent & Early Careers Recruitment Services](#)
Youth Employment UK
- > [Skills Gateway: Apprenticeships](#)
Business Wales
- > [Six benefits of an apprenticeship for a small business](#)
FSB
- > [Healthy Working Wales](#)
Public Health Wales
- > [2022 Youth Voice Census](#)
Business Wales

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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