



BUILDING & ENHANCING YOUR EARLY CAREERS STRATEGY GUIDE

This guide is designed to help you understand and make the most of early career opportunities for your business. It covers the basics of early careers, and the advantages and challenges you may encounter when recruiting and managing early career talent.

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What is **Early careers?**

The world of work is changing rapidly. The effect of the pandemic on young workers, those under 25, was devastating. According to the ONS, almost two-thirds of the people who lost their jobs were under 25 years of age.

A report by the National Youth Agency and Youth Employment UK in 2021 said that, 1,000 new jobs or training places a day would be required to get back to pre-pandemic levels by October 2021 to avoid a 50% rise in the number of 16 to 24-year-olds not in employment, education, or training.

Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2012, are starting to enter the workforce. In 2020 they accounted for 24% of the global workforce but had very different needs to other demographics. They expect excellent training and development opportunities, a focus on diversity and inclusion and want an employer who cares about their wellbeing. Gen Zs preferred style of work is collaborative within teams, and they thrive in a technology-rich environment.

Millennials dominate the current employment marketplace, with over 85% employed and older workers; 55-64-year-olds have 64.5% employed, while 15-24-year-olds only have 54.1% employed.

TOP TIP

L&D must be integral from the onset of any Early Careers scheme, working in tandem with recruitment to ensure new talent see a return on investment. Onboarding must be followed by an effective training/development plan to ensure the scheme's success.

However, this is predicted to change as Gen Z is expected to account for 30% of the global workforce by 2030.

Given these statistics, Gen Z will be a powerful and significant section of the employment marketplace and must be approached differently than when you recruit other talent.

Although Early Careers typically refers to anyone with less than three years of work experience, any organisation considering implementing such a scheme must ensure it remains inclusive and can include anyone looking to build industry experience. So, this includes everything from entry-level and graduate roles to internships, placements and apprenticeships, as well as work experience and shadowing opportunities.

Gen Z were some of the people most affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic disrupted their education with cancelled exams, and much of the traditional university experience, including proms and graduations, couldn't happen. As a result, these students who have had years of their early adulthood put on hold will enter the workplace with disrupted education and less work experience than previous cohorts.

This will impact early career programs and strategies. Businesses will need to ensure these people have the right skills and mindset to thrive in the workplace.



How can **early careers** **benefit your business?**

Implementing an Early Careers Scheme, will provide your business with innumerable benefits, but additionally, they will replace the skills lost through attrition, internal moves and retirement. It is important that these skills gaps are identified and that when considering creating an opportunity within your organisation, you identify the critical skills you need to recruit for.

According to a recent CNBC Technology Executive Council survey, 55% of tech leaders view labour market churn as an excellent way to attract top talent. Their approach is to increase hiring when others are slowing down or stopping, allowing them to attract the highest quality candidates, differentiating them from their competition.

With millions of graduates entering the workforce each year, you can achieve a long-term competitive advantage by recruiting early talent. Additionally, having a multi-generational workforce will allow you to sell your product and services across the whole spectrum of age groups.

Businesses will often find that recruiting early talent can add unexpected benefits for their organisations, Early talent is often:

- Extremely motivated
- Keen to prove themselves
- Up to date with the latest trends
- Digitally competent
- Uninhibited by the status quo

Investing in early talent can be one of the best investments your business can make for the long-term success of your organisation. By allowing them to grow and gain experience, you could discover a wealth of talented, creative people keen to stay with you for significant periods.

As you are the one who gave them their first big break, they will often have a deeper sense of loyalty to your business, and your investment in them will reap the rewards for your bottom line.

Whilst ensuring any scheme remains inclusive, the majority of talent organisations typically attract within their Early Careers is Gen Z. Gen Zers are uniquely positioned to help your business grow and thrive over time. Here's why.



Digital Natives They have grown up surrounded by technology, so they can provide valuable skills and experience for companies that are keen to innovate and stay ahead of their competition. These skills mean they will have less of a learning curve when adopting flexible, remote working that uses technology platforms to keep in touch and complete their tasks.





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Autonomous

Because of the environment they grew up in, Gen Z are used to rapid access to infinite knowledge, making them proactive and determined. They know how and when to ask questions but are eminently capable of finding the answers for themselves. Give them a task and watch as they discover new, creative ways to problem-solve and develop innovative solutions.

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Career-driven

Many of this generation remember watching family members struggle during the global recession in 2008. These memories have meant that career development and job stability are essential. They're used to digitally upskilling using YouTube and Duolingo and worked hard through school so they can get ahead with a meaningful role in a business they admire.

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Diverse

Gen Z is the most diverse generation and are keen to work with employers who value diversity, equity and inclusion. It is estimated that around 80% of Gen Zers think it's crucial for a brand to demonstrate diversity and inclusion as part of its company culture.

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Values-driven

Whether making buying decisions or deciding where to work, Gen Z value human rights, DEI, environmental sustainability and transparency. If you want to attract early talent, their values and your businesses must align.



TOP TIP

When considering graduates to join your business, it is important to remain inclusive with the background/discipline of their degree itself. The time for using the “golden ticket” approach based on specific universities is past us.

Requirements and funding

Early career recruitment isn't just about attracting graduate talent to your business; there are other options to attract school leavers to your organisation that can be equally beneficial to developing talent in your company.

Before you begin your search into the most suited schemes, providers, and funding, it is important that as an organisation you have created a valid business case and in turn have positive buy-in from your people leaders. A number of businesses focus on the here and now and not the future. You need to understand how you can make the space to bring in and nurture future talent and your leaders should dedicate time to develop and grow them. This can be achieved by running workshops to gain engagement, create clear responsibilities and in turn ensure a positive approach to Early Careers.

Businesses have several options open to them, including apprenticeships, sponsored degrees and school leaver schemes to help them recruit early talent. Depending on the roles you want to recruit for, one or all of these options may be applicable.

Apprenticeships

Apprentices would be employed by your organisation and spend around 80% of their time at work and the remaining 20% studying. There are different levels of apprenticeship, ranging from a minimum of one year up to five or six years for some degree apprenticeships.

Businesses that want to offer apprenticeships can do so to new or existing employees, and they must be over 16 years of age and paid at least the minimum wage. As their employer, you are responsible for ensuring your apprentice:

- Works with experienced staff
- Learns job-specific skills
- Gets time off during the working week for apprenticeship training

When you hire an apprentice, there are several steps you need to follow.

Choose an apprenticeship

As an employer; you can find training for your apprentices; choose an appropriate training course that is at the right level and covers the skills you need the apprentice to acquire and find a suitable training provider. Find helpful information [here](#).

Check what training funding is available

You can get help from the government in the UK towards the cost of apprenticeship training. The amount of funding available to you is dependent on whether you pay the apprenticeship levy. Generally, organisations with an annual pay bill of more than £3 million annually. More detailed information is available [here](#). If you don't pay the levy, you'll pay 5% for training and assessing your apprentices, and the government will pay the remainder. If you are liable for the apprenticeship levy, you'll get funds to spend on training, and the government will add 10% on top of that. You can also get an additional £1000 per apprentice to support them; more details are [here](#).

Create an account

The account will be used to advertise apprenticeships, accept employer agreements with the Department for Education (DfE), give account access to people within your organisation, set permissions for training providers to allow them to do some things on your behalf (such as advertising apprenticeships). You can also use this service to add details about your organisation(s) or company, your PAYE scheme, and your apprentices.

Advertise your apprenticeship

You'll need to create an account in the advert section of your apprenticeship services account. This advert will be approved or rejected within 24 hours. Full details of the procedure you need to follow can be found [here](#).

Make an apprenticeship agreement and training plan

You need to sign an apprenticeship agreement with your apprentice giving details of the skill, trade or occupation the apprentice is being trained for, the name of the apprenticeship they are working towards, the start and end dates and the amount of training you'll provide. Additionally, you must sign a training plan with your apprentice and the training provider. More details are available [here](#).

Sponsored Degree

Sponsored degrees are in some ways similar to degree apprenticeships, but there are some notable differences, including those on sponsored degrees don't have to be employed by the sponsoring company.

The specific package can vary from employer to employer - full-time, part-time study, bursary, salary or course fees paid.

A complete guide to the degrees available and how to apply is available [here](#).

School Leavers

Employers typically run school leaver schemes, offering professional qualifications rather than academic ones. These schemes are common in the finance, professional services and retail management sectors.

Whichever scheme you're considering offering to attract early years talent to your organisation, carefully considering the following will help clarify what's best for your business.

- How will their time be split between work and study?
- What qualifications are on offer?
- How long is the scheme?
- Will they be paid?
- Will they be employed?
- Who will pay for any course fees?
- What happens after the scheme?



The recruitment process

The majority of early careers talent organisations are looking to recruit will be in the final stages of college or university or be recent graduates who have dipped their toes into the workplace for the first time.

Because of their lack of professional experience, it is tempting to discount this demographic, but in reality, they are the ones who will be driving digital transformation over the next few years and can inject new life into company culture, shaping the future of your organisation for years to come.

For Gen Z, diversity is a strong driver; this isn't surprising as they are the most diverse group to enter the workforce, representing more racial, cultural and gender communities than ever before.

They are also the most digitally active demographic as they have grown up with technology; social media is part of who they are and where they share experiences, good and bad. Providing a positive, exciting experience is essential so they'll tell their peers you're a great place to work and consequently boost your early career talent recruitment.

Since the pandemic, virtual graduate recruitment has become commonplace. Research by the Institute of Student Employers (ISE) found that 93% of employers have moved their recruitment process online. In addition, 48% of employers anticipate their recruitment processes will be virtual in five years.

When planning to recruit graduates, it's vital to understand what puts them off applying to an employer. For example, 23% of graduates say a poor or unimpressive experience when meeting representatives for a company would discourage them, and 22% say that a long, complicated application process would deter them from applying.

Your organisation will not be the only one that this talent will be considering, so it is imperative that you offer a seamless and positive candidate journey from the very start.

TOP TIP

What is your ROI? Consider the benefits of introducing an Early Careers scheme and what positive impact that can have on your organisation.

Where do graduates hear about career opportunities?

A survey by ISE on student recruitment trends lists the most popular channels as follows:

- Career websites - 87%
- Social Media - 48%
- Career events, both virtual and in-person - 40%

The most effective from an employer's point of view is:

- Job adverts and job postings on job boards
- Giving talks and workshops
- Career fairs
- Social media marketing
- Insight/open days

However, research by Pew Research Centre shows that 79% of job seekers use social media when searching for a role. Moreover, this figure is growing as Gen Z automatically defaults to digital in many areas of their life.

Other avenues to attract graduates to your early careers initiatives include careers fairs on campus and bringing recent recruits from the same university or college to engage and mentor potential applicants and share why your organisation is a great place to work. In addition, they can share the process from application to assessment centres and onboarding for successful applicants.

When recruiting Gen Z for your Early Careers talent pipeline, knowing and understanding them is a must rather than a nice to have. According to research by CareerBuilder, videos have a 34% higher job application rate than any other content type.

To engage graduates using video, it is essential to consider the following:

- Use their peers to get the message across as people trust them to provide an honest account of what working with you is like
- Show employees your company culture
- Promote early careers programme support
- Leverage National Apprenticeship week and other career events

Finally, according to a survey conducted by InsideOut Development 40% of Gen Z want job stability and 36% were afraid of being stuck in the same position for years without the opportunity for growth. Therefore, offering paths for career advancement is essential if you want to attract and retain Gen Z talent in your workforce.

Job boards and tools

When you are looking for Early Careers talent, it's essential that you are advertising your opportunities where graduates and those looking for apprenticeship opportunities are looking.

Targeting social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter is a good start, as is the recruitment page on your company website. However, there are several other avenues it would be worth considering to attract the talent you need.

Job Boards

There are many generalist job boards advertising roles ranging from graduate-level roles to positions requiring significant experience and acquired skills.

However, there are some job boards that are either graduate-specific or have a considerable graduate offering.

Indeed

Is one of the most popular job sites worldwide. Simple to use and free to access, it has been helping jobseekers find roles since 2004. It allows job seekers to search for opportunities by job title, keywords, company name or location. Indeed is a busy global job board with as many as ten vacancies uploaded a second across the globe. They also allow company reviews and testimonials from employees, so potential talent can find out what it is really like to work for you.

Save the Student

This student website covers many topics, including accommodation and recruitment job hunting. Students and graduates can find part-time jobs, graduate jobs and grad schemes through it. The live graduate job search engine is an aggregate of suitable grad opportunities from UK graduate job websites and agencies and includes filtering for keywords and locations. In addition, Save the Student provides valuable articles on average grad salaries and how-to guides.

Graduate Recruitment Bureau

A free student and graduate careers platform listing graduate jobs, grad schemes, placement year opportunities, and internships. The site features graduate opportunities with leading employers and can match graduates to your position based on their course disciplines.

TargetJobs

Connects students and graduates with graduate job opportunities and internships. The site also indicates whether the company is featured in the UK's 300 top graduate employers, displays the number of graduate vacancies on offer and provides advice on what companies are looking for.

LinkedIn

Remains one of the best places to post graduate jobs. Its direct messaging functionality lets graduates interact directly with your recruitment team and apply for graduate roles on their extensive jobs database. LinkedIn also enables you to search for graduates with the skills you need for the role and approach them to assess if your opportunity is of interest.

Prospects

This is the UK's largest graduate job site, with more than two million monthly visitors. The site actively works to link graduates to the best opportunities and provides webinars and a podcast for guidance.

Grad Cracker

Geared towards STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths), Grad Cracker jobs are posted under specific headings to make them searchable by discipline. They also provide career advice via eBooks and webinars.

Digital Grads

Is designed to match career opportunities in the technology and media sectors. It features a range of innovative and entrepreneurial roles across fintech, software, gaming and edtech. Additionally, the site offers free personal development training for graduates.

Milkround

Allows grads to streamline their search for a graduate job, grad scheme, internship or placement. In addition, they can search for opportunities by sector, location or company.

Reed

Is used by over 250,000 companies and has an extensive database of opportunities at various levels. More than 9,000 jobs are added daily, so it is popular for graduates looking for their first role.

Career Fairs

Career fairs at universities and colleges are an excellent opportunity for your company to engage with potential early careers talent and give them a look at why working with you might be a good option. In addition, it allows you to show your company's culture, let them meet recent hires to get an insider's view of working for you, and enable you to demonstrate your DE&I.

Consider gamifying some assessments to give you an indication of graduates who might be a good fit with your organisation and the roles you are recruiting for in a relaxed, fun way.

Although more labour-intensive than online job boards, career fairs are a proven and successful way to recruit early careers talent and should be part of your overall graduate recruitment strategy.

TOP TIP

The world of work can be quite abstract to those looking at starting a career, therefore it is important to share an immersive experience throughout. Consider how you will assess the skills you need, whilst also giving the individuals a real insight into what the role will be like.

Apprenticeship timescales

Apprenticeships come in many guises and apply to everyone, from school leavers to older candidates looking to gain formalised training in conjunction with a degree.

School leaver schemes tend to be run by employers and offer professional qualifications instead of academic ones.

There are four levels of apprenticeship - level two (intermediate), level three (advanced), level 4/ 5 (higher) and degree apprenticeships.

Level Two Apprenticeships

A level two apprenticeship is open to those with 2 GCSEs graded 9 to 4 (A to C), a traineeship or recent work experience.

Level Two apprentices will gain on-the-job experience alongside qualifications equivalent to 5 GCSEs and will be paid a full-time wage for the duration of the apprenticeship.

The apprenticeship will take 12-24 months to complete, allowing them to progress to a level three apprenticeship, a BTEC or full-time employment.

Level Three Apprenticeship (Advanced)

Level three apprenticeships are open to those who have completed a level two apprenticeship or are school leavers with five GCSEs at grades 9 to 4 (A to C).

Similarly to a level two apprenticeship, level three apprentices combine work training with academic study. You'll also get paid a wage and gain qualifications equivalent to two A-Levels.

Level four/five apprenticeship (Higher)

These apprenticeships are designed for school leavers aged 18+ and focus on developing management-based skills and practical skills required to work in a particular field.

They can last three to four years, and the academic content is usually taught in a further or higher education institution. The remainder is spent working for the company.

These apprenticeships are open to school leavers with either two A levels or a level three apprenticeship and give, in addition to work experience, qualifications equivalent to a foundation degree, Higher National Diploma (HND) or Higher National Certificate (HNC).

TOP TIP

Align to an apprenticeship standard! When looking for the right training provider, ask around.

Get references from other employers before making your choice.

Degree Apprenticeships

A degree apprenticeship allows you to work towards a degree without the typical costs associated with tertiary education while earning a wage working for the company funding your degree.

Your degree apprenticeship will typically take 3 to 6 years to complete and will combine a minimum of 30 hours at work each week and 20% of the time in off-the-job training.

Apprenticeships are becoming increasingly popular, with the percentage of employees who were employed rising from 3.2% to 3.5% during the 2021/2022 period. This equates to 740,400 people participating in an apprenticeship.

Advanced apprenticeships accounted for 43.3% of people starting apprenticeships, and higher apprenticeships for 30.5%. Starts in degree apprenticeships grew to 43,200, representing 12.4% of people taking an apprenticeship.

Technology continues to dominate as the most in-demand skill, with data science, AI and Machine learning engineering and software development all extremely important.



Mentor support for early careers


It's undeniable that mentoring will help you retain your early careers talent and others in your organisation.

97% of individuals with a mentor feel they are highly impactful and valuable, and 87% of those who were mentored said they would mentor someone in the future.

Mentoring and career progression go hand in hand, with mentoring seen as one of the top career development and progression strategies. In fact, a large number of professionals are actively seeking mentoring relationships to advance their careers.

Whether you're a mentee or mentor, it is equally valuable for your career. Mentees are 5 x more likely to be promoted than those without a mentor, and mentors are 6 x more likely to be promoted than their co-workers.

Additionally, a recent study showed that 25% of employees in a mentoring program had a salary increase compared to the 5% who didn't participate.



With early careers, talent retention is vital, but many businesses ignore the importance of an employee's first days in an organisation. More than 22% of staff turnover happens in the first 45 days and replacing that employee costs 3 x their annual salary.

Consider this -

- 50% of younger professionals say workplace mentorship would make them more likely to stay at a company.
- 94% of employees said they would stay at a company longer if offered opportunities to develop and grow in the organisation and their careers.
- 9 in 10 workers with a mentor say they feel happier in their career, while 4 in 10 without a mentor have considered quitting in the last three months.

Mentoring of early careers talent can take several forms. Whether it is initial onboarding to integrate them into the company culture, work-based learning, job shadowing, or a structured mentor/mentee relationship where they meet regularly, they all solidify the feeling of being valued and part of the team and the company.

Most mentoring is carried out in-house, though external consultants can be helpful in providing initial mentoring support and assist in developing in-house mentors for the future.

TOP TIP

What is the end goal? Consider next steps for Early Careers candidates, to benefit your business and plug the skills gap. Have long term prospects lined up, so they have a goal to work towards.



About us

eSift are an award-winning recruitment process outsourcing provider. Founded in 2008, we specialise in promoting, enhancing and delivering agile recruitment solutions.

Our Aim is Simple - It is to be an industry-leading recruitment process provider, engaging quality talent of the future and building the foundations of culture and diversity whilst retaining the human factor with our clients and building lasting relationships.

For more information on how we can help you recruit early careers talent for your organisation, call on 01252 624 699.