

ONBOARDING IN 2026

Most hiring mistakes don't happen at offer stage - they happen in the first 90 days.

Our experience shows us that when onboarding is rushed or inconsistent, even a great hire can disengage quickly and wind up leaving.

This is the framework we share with clients to make sure that doesn't happen.

WHY IS ONBOARDING SO IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW?

Onboarding has always been an important part of the hiring process, but recent and upcoming UK employment law changes, as well as a shift in attitude around our approach to work mean onboarding is more important than ever. What was once a low risk admin task can now be a compliance and reputational risk if it's handled poorly.

People are the biggest asset in your business, and a good onboarding process that takes into account their experience of their first few months, as well as yours, will help ensure the right people stick around longer.



Whilst updates to employment law are driving changes to onboarding in 2026, organisations who understand the positives that a structured onboarding process brings will see stronger staff retention and more satisfied workers in the long run. It's a win-win situation.

Sue Wallis
Joint Managing Director, Sewell Wallis

Recent & Upcoming Legal Changes

- April 2026: Day-one rights to paternity leave and unpaid parental leave
- April 2026: Statutory Sick Pay expanded (no waiting days, wider eligibility)
- April 2026: new enforcement body Fair Work Agency launches
- 2026: Right to Work checks tightened, with higher fines and digital verification
- 2026-2027: Expected change to bring in stronger worker protections, including guaranteed hours and shift compensation
- January 2027: Unfair dismissal qualifying period reduced from 2 years to 6 months

STAGE ONE: OFFER ACCEPTED → DAY 1

BUILD MOMENTUM & REMOVE UNCERTAINTY

Your candidate has accepted your offer, you've set a start date, they've signed their contract - don't go quiet on them now!

This stage is where a lot of people might be feeling **nervous about** starting their new role, so a strong presence and regular touchpoints are key.

Make sure you've covered these things:

- Confirm the start date, role expectations and reporting lines in writing
- Take some time to talk through what their first week will be like, who they'll meet and what they'll be doing.
- Send key company info: structure of their new team, current priorities and future plans
- Arrange IT and system access ahead of time
- Introduce key stakeholders and people they need to know via email, or LinkedIn
- Answer those important questions everyone has around holidays, parking and dress codes!



Employees with a better onboarding experience are 2.6x more likely to feel satisfied at work.

Gallup

STAGE TWO: THE FIRST WEEK

BUILD CONFIDENCE & SET THE TONE

These first impressions drive long term retention. If your onboarding process isn't reassuring, people might start to doubt their decision to join you.

If you get your onboarding right in this first week, you're ensuring:



That you're building trust from the word go. Structure means you've thought about the future - this is reassuring to new hires.



Your new starter understands their new role and has clear expectations moving forwards.



Satisfaction that your new hire has made the right choice - you're reinforcing the reasons they accepted the job offer.



Commitment - you're demonstrating that you're in this for the long run, and in return, your new hire is more likely to stick around long term.



29% of new hires decide whether to stay or leave within their first week.

TestGorilla

WHAT SHOULD YOUR WEEK ONE PLAN LOOK LIKE?

THINGS TO PLAN

A structured first day with defined tasks and meetings

A sit down with their direct line manager

A walkthrough of the team structure and key relationships

Clearly defined priorities for the first two weeks

Meetings with their team and any key stakeholders

A check in with their manager at the end of week one!

WHY IT WORKS

You can work those necessary admin tasks in amongst meetings so it doesn't feel as dull

Doing this on day one means your new starter can get to know their new manager ASAP!

Your new team member knows who they'll be working alongside

You'll reassure your new joiner that they're part of the team and you have a plan

Email is good for first contact, but meeting the people you need to know face to face is vital

This wraps the week up nicely and lets you get feedback on how your new starter is feeling

STAGE THREE:

WEEK 2 → WEEK 4

BUILD CONFIDENCE & INTEGRATION

These two weeks are where people either settle in and feel comfortable, or they start to question their decisions. The steps below can help candidates feel like they've made the right choice.

Ensure your new candidate feels confident by:

- Gradually increasing responsibility, with clear guidance
- Providing context behind tasks, not just instructions
- Scheduling weekly one-to-ones
- Encouraging early feedback, both ways - their feedback is as vital as yours!
- Identifying quick wins to build your new starter's confidence
- Continuing introductions across the wider business
- Sense checking workload and making sure everyone is crystal clear on expectations



86% of employees decide whether to stay with a company within their first 6 months, and that decision is heavily influenced by their first 4 weeks.

Enboarder

WHO'S RESPONSIBILITY IS ONBOARDING?

Onboarding feels like one of those things that just happens - of course someone's going to give you a laptop and make sure you've signed all the right things in your first week. Right?

In reality, a lot of things can slip through the cracks if there's no defined process with defined responsibilities for everything that needs to be done. The most effective onboarding is shared, not owned by one person or team.

THE ASSUMPTION

"Onboarding is HR's job."

"New starters will pick it up as they go."

"Someone else will handle that."

THE REALITY

The Hiring Manager...

- Sets expectations and defines success
- Owns role-specific tasks and training
- Drives performance and early feedback

The HR & People team...

- Manages process, compliance & structure
- Ensures consistency across the business
- Supports the employee experience

The wider team...

- Help integrate the new starter
- Provide informal learning and context
- Help to build connection early on

STAGE FOUR: MONTH 2

MAKING SOLID CONTRIBUTIONS

This is the period where new starters should start adding real value. They should be taking ownership of tasks and feeling settled in their new role.



Effective onboarding helps new starters become confident and productive in their role more quickly.

CIPD

Steps to take in this stage might include:

- Reviewing progress against that initial 30 day plan
- Adjusting responsibilities based on strengths demonstrated
- Bringing in more complex or independent work
- Encouraging independent decision making
- Keeping feedback consistent and constructive
- Addressing any concerns directly
- Sense checking workload and making sure everyone is crystal clear on expectations

THE KEY TO STRONG ONBOARDING

During the onboarding period, scheduling regular chances to sit down with your new starter to check in can be a game-changer.

So much of the feedback we hear from candidates is around the role not being what they expected. These are typically small things that can be managed and smoothed out, but they don't give that feedback because asking for a meeting feels uncomfortable. Scheduling meetings as the employer means the onus isn't on the candidate and they're more likely to speak up about things that could affect their longevity in the role if left unmanaged.

SCHEDULING IN FEEDBACK OPPORTUNITIES MEANS:



Small issues are identified early, before they escalate



New hires feel permission to speak openly



Expectations are realigned before frustration develops



“Nearly half of UK employees don't feel comfortable raising concerns at work. Without structured check-ins, small issues go unspoken until they become reasons to leave.”

MHFA England

STAGE FIVE: MONTH 3

FUTURE PROOFING

Don't go fully hands off yet! Stepping back too early can make people feel dropped before they're ready to fully take the reins.

Great steps to take here:

- Conduct a formal 90-day review
- Make sure you're aligned on expectations and future goals
- Discuss development opportunities
- Reconfirm long-term role scope
- Gather honest feedback from your candidate
- Take note of anything that feels like a risk to retention



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Queros

THE BOTTOM LINE

ONBOARDING CHANGES THE GAME

Hiring the right person is half the job - the next steps you take determine whether that person delivers value.

Get this right and you accelerate productivity and build loyalty. Get it wrong and even the best candidates can disengage or leave before they've had a chance to make an impact.

This is where most businesses fall short - treating onboarding as an admin task when it actually builds huge value.

Working with a specialist recruiter is not just about filling roles. At Sewell Wallis, we work closely with our clients to strengthen onboarding as part of the wider hiring strategy, and can advise on what steps to take to polish your onboarding in 2026.

We work closely with our clients to turn hiring into long-term success. If you'd like to do the same, talk to the team today.



A good onboarding experience results in 18x more dedication to the employer.

Bamboo HR

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