



WELCOME ONBOARD: FOUNDATIONS FOR A STRONG START

Essential Practices for Hiring and Onboarding New Employees in the Screen Sector

Starting a new role should feel exciting, not overwhelming. A thoughtful onboarding process sets the stage for success - it ensures legal obligations are met, policies are understood, and, most importantly, new team members feel welcomed, valued, and supported from day one.

This guide is designed to help you cover the essentials while also creating a positive experience that reflects your business's culture. The focus here is around onboarding employees or those legally classed as workers and does not apply to the onboarding of freelancers or contractors.

Good employee onboarding is about more than paperwork. It:

- **Keeps you compliant** - meeting legal requirements for contracts, right-to-work checks, and policies.
- **Builds clarity and confidence** - setting out expectations, responsibilities, and support structures.
- **Strengthens engagement** - making new hires feel connected to the team and aligned with business values.
- **Supports retention** - employees who feel settled and included early on are more likely to stay and thrive.

Use this guide as both a checklist and a playbook: to tick off the legal must-dos and to create a consistent, people-first experience for every new employee.

1. PRE-DAY ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

Onboarding starts the moment someone accepts your offer. What happens before their first day can make the difference between a new hire arriving feeling anxious or arriving feeling excited and prepared.

Why Pre-Day One Matters:

- Reduces first-day nerves and builds confidence.
- Shows professionalism and organisation, reinforcing that they made the right choice.
- It helps you get the admin out of the way so one can focus on people, not paperwork.

What to Cover Before Day One:

- Welcome email or pack - confirm start time, location (or remote log-in details), dress code, and who will greet them.
- First-day agenda - a short schedule for their first day helps reduce uncertainty.
- Contract and paperwork – issue contracts, collect signed copies, and request new starter, payroll/tax and right-to-work documents in advance where possible. (See section 2 below regarding employment contracts).



- Equipment ready - ensure laptops, software licences, security passes, or other kit are prepared and systems access granted.
- Introductions set up - let the team know a new colleague is joining and encourage them to give a warm welcome.
- Buddy or mentor assigned - if you use a buddy system, introduce them before day one so there's already a friendly face.

Taking these small steps means your new starter can focus on learning, meeting people, and settling in, rather than worrying about where to go or how to log in.

2. THE EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT

A legally compliant employment contract sets the foundation for a productive working relationship. It is your first, and most critical obligation when bringing on a new hire.

Key Points to Remember:

- Under UK employment law, all those legally classed as employees or workers (not genuine freelancers/contractors) must receive a 'written statement of employment particulars. The written statement of employment particulars is split into two sections: the *principal statement* and the *wider written statement*.
- **The principal statement** must be provided on or before the employee's **first day of work** and, at a minimum, must include the following:
 - the employer's name
 - the employee's or worker's name, job title or a description of work and start date
 - how much and how often an employee or worker will get paid
 - hours and days of work and if and how they may vary (e.g. if employees or workers will have to work on Sundays, during the 'night period' or take overtime)
 - holiday entitlement (and if that includes public holidays)
 - where an employee or worker will be working and whether they might have to relocate
 - if an employee or worker works in different places, where these will be and what the employer's address is
 - how long a job is expected to last (and what the end date is if it's a fixed-term contract)
 - how long any probation period is and what its conditions are
 - any other benefits and lunch period
 - obligatory training, whether or not this is paid for by the employer
 - for employees, it must also include the date that a previous job started if it counts towards a period of continuous employment.
 - if an employee or worker has to work outside the UK for more than a month, the principal statement must also include:
 - how long they'll be abroad
 - what currency they'll be paid in
 - what additional pay or benefits they'll get
 - terms relating to their return to the UK



- On the first day of employment, the employer **must** also provide the employee or worker with information about:
 - sick pay and procedures
 - other paid leave (for example, maternity leave, paternity leave etc.)
 - notice periods

The employer can choose whether to include this information in the principal statement or provide it in a separate document. If they provide it in a separate document, this must be something that the employee or worker has reasonable access to, such as on the employer's intranet or an easily accessible staff handbook.

- The **wider written statement** must be provided to employees and workers **within 2 months** of the start of employment and must include information about the following:
 - pensions and pension schemes
 - any collective agreements
 - any other right to non-compulsory training provided by the employer
 - disciplinary and grievance procedures
- Failing to issue a written statement of employment particulars is a legal risk which could lead to both financial and disciplinary penalties through an employment tribunal, also damaging the business's reputation.
- Although the above outlines your legal obligations as an employer, it is best practice and common for employers to issue a full contract of employment on or before an employee's first day. A full contract goes beyond all of the essentials listed above for both the principle statement and wider written statement, setting out additional terms on areas such as confidentiality, data protection, intellectual property, lay-offs and short-time working, and post-employment restrictions. Providing this upfront helps ensure employees clearly understand the terms of their employment and sets expectations from day one.
- It's highly recommended that your employment contract template be created or reviewed by a qualified solicitor or HR professional. This ensures compliance with employment law and alignment with your business's specific needs, especially for IP rights, remote work, or flexible hours, which are common in the creative sector.

3. CORE POLICIES

Policies are your internal rulebook and help define a safe, respectful, consistent workplace.

At a Minimum, Provide Clear Policies For:

- **Health & Safety.** A written health and safety policy is a legal requirement if you employ five or more people. Even with fewer, you still have a duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.
- **Disciplinary & Grievance Procedures.** This is required under the Employment Rights Act 1996 and as a minimum should follow the ACAS Code of Practice (failure to follow it can increase Tribunal awards by up to 25%).



- **Equal Opportunities /Anti-Discrimination.** To reflect your obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and to make sure your workplace is inclusive, fair, and free from harassment or discrimination.
- **Data Protection & Privacy.** Compliance with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 is essential where you collect, store, or process employee data.
- **Whistleblowing.** While not mandatory for all employers, having a clear policy ensures compliance with the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and reassures staff that they can raise concerns safely.

While the list above ticks the legal boxes, most modern, people-focused companies go further. The following policies aren't strictly required by law, but they make your workplace healthier, more transparent, and more appealing:

- **Code of Conduct.** Bridges the gap between legal compliance (e.g. Equality Act obligations) and cultural expectations (e.g. collaboration, creativity, communication). Provides a clear framework for expected behaviours - covering respect, integrity, use of business property, conflicts of interest, and professional standards.
- **Flexible & Hybrid Working.** To clarify how requests will be handled (and to meet obligations under the Flexible Working (Amendment) Regulations 2023, which give employees the right to request from day one).
- **Bullying & Harassment / Dignity at Work.** To show zero tolerance, outline reporting routes, and protect wellbeing.
- **Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI).** Goes beyond compliance to set out your proactive commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, shaping culture and embedding values across recruitment, progression, and everyday workplace practices.
- **Wellbeing.** A proactive policy signals that you take psychological safety as seriously as physical safety.
- **Parental Leave & Family-Friendly Policies.** While statutory rights exist, setting out your own approach (including any enhancements) helps employees plan and feel supported.
- **Social Media & Acceptable IT/Tech Use.** Clarifies boundaries between personal and professional conduct, protecting both staff and the business's reputation.
- **Sustainability & ESG Commitments.** Increasingly important in the creative sector, and a great way to demonstrate values in action.

4. EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

An employee handbook is more than a document, it's a communication tool that brings together your culture, policies, and expectations. While not a legal requirement, a handbook is considered best practice because it gives clarity and consistency across the business. Employers must provide certain information and policies by law as outlined above, but putting information into one accessible resource makes life easier for both managers and employees.

Why It Matters:

- Provides a *central reference* for employees



- Reinforces *business values and culture*
- Reduces queries by offering self-service clarity
- Supports legal compliance and transparency
- Creates *consistency*
- Clarifies what is *contractual* vs. *non-contractual*

What to Include in a Handbook:

- **Welcome & Business Background.** A personal message and overview of your story, mission, and values to set the tone.
- **Summary of Key Policies.** Highlight the *legally required* policies (e.g. health & safety, disciplinary & grievance, equal opportunities, data protection) and signpost to the full documents.
- **Workplace Expectations.** Practical day-to-day guidance such as working hours, remote/hybrid arrangements, conduct, punctuality, and dress code.
- **Benefits & Perks.** Outline what's available beyond pay, from annual leave to wellbeing initiatives and professional development.
- **Communication & Feedback Channels.** Explain how employees can raise questions, concerns, or ideas, and how the business commits to listening.
- **Contacts & Resources.** Key HR/admin contacts, IT support, and links to resources.
- **Onboarding & Practical Information.** Checklists or guides for new starters to help them settle in quickly.
- **Cultural Extras.** Things like sustainability commitments, volunteering opportunities, or “how we celebrate success” can make the handbook feel more alive and unique.

TIP: Tailor your handbook to your businesses tone - creative environments benefit from a balance of professionalism and personality.

5. ONBOARDING CHECKLIST (AT A GLANCE)

Use this checklist to ensure you're covering the fundamentals when a new employee starts:

- Contract issued, signed on or before day one
- Job description made available
- ID, right-to-work checks completed
- New starter, payroll & tax info collected
- Key policies shared, acknowledged
- Equipment provided and set up & systems, tools access granted
- Health & Safety briefing covered Introduction to team, key stakeholders
- First-week, first month and first three months plan defined
- check-ins and probation reviews scheduled
- Handbook issued, explained
- Mentor/buddy assigned
- Wellbeing support/resources signposted
- Training plan shared for any mandatory training

Final Note:

Solid onboarding supports retention, engagement, and performance. Investing in onboarding ensures legal compliance and helps your team members feel valued from day one.