

# Retention and Onboarding: Why Engaging Candidates Early On Matters

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*Insight from 300 North's Emma Thornton*

The UK recruitment market continues to be very competitive, and to ensure access to the best candidates, employers are having to make themselves more attractive from the beginning. Rising costs and competition for talent mean retention is especially valuable to companies.

The recruitment process is becoming more of an experience for candidates and people are critically assessing companies' hiring processes and evaluating employers based on their "performance". Potential hires are looking to see whether a company aligns with their values and shows that it cares about its employees.

Recent research from multiple areas of the market has shown over half of people would feel comfortable leaving their job, despite not actively looking for work. Candidates continue to hold significant power because of this, understanding the squeeze on talent and employers' willingness to meet their expectations. However, retention strategies are not always in place, and many companies don't focus on retention until an employee hands in their notice, resulting in costly counter-offers to keep employees from leaving. Such counter-offers are often ineffective in the long term, as employees may leave later anyway, as the underlying issues that led them to consider leaving in the first place remain unresolved.

Good retention starts with recruitment. Companies with a poor candidate experience in the hiring process are 50% more likely to have a high turnover rate. Employers must, therefore, focus on creating a recruitment process that feels organised, efficient, welcoming, and fair. This starts by advertising accessible and well detailed job descriptions, to having a prompt and robust feedback process, and a

streamlined, efficient interview timeline. It is vital that the candidate feels valued and individual throughout the process, so communicating with them quickly to arrange interviews and let them know outcomes can really differentiate one employer from another.

Recruitment partners can help companies create an effective pre-boarding and onboarding process that engenders engagement before an employee even starts. By working closely with internal recruitment teams and hiring managers, recruitment partners can ensure that the candidate feels comfortable throughout the process. Effective communication is key to a successful recruitment process, and an active recruitment partner can be invaluable in helping the hiring team communicate relevant information to the candidate and mediate any concerns.

Companies can work with new hires before the start date to show care and support. Through the recruitment partner, they can provide resources to help candidates navigate handing in their notice and avoiding counter offers. Sending out contract paperwork as soon as possible after an offer shows that you're serious about hiring the candidate and value their time. Providing a starter care package and inviting the employee to a company social event to meet their new team can make them feel welcome and give them something to look forward to before the first day.

On the first day, line managers should be aware of any company-wide induction policy and be trained in implementing it. Expectations can be clearly outlined in documentation shared with the recruitment partner and the candidate before the first day so that they can familiarise themselves with the process and ask any questions or make accessibility requests beforehand.

The most successful onboarding processes have several reviews and encourage feedback. Reviews can be held even 3 months into employment to get honest and open feedback, having allowed the newcomer to reflect on the experience more broadly and make suggestions. Communication is key, and a good onboarding process will encourage feedback in dialogue, where both parties are able to provide critique. This allows a line manager to assess progress and give the newcomer space to provide constructive feedback on their role and the onboarding process. This upward communication is vital to building an inclusive onboarding process that is flexible enough to change on demand and meet the needs of the people it is intended to serve. Providing space for feedback promotes inclusivity, makes people feel engaged in the process, and shows that the company values their input.

High retention rates and length of service are directly linked to good onboarding and clear management of the recruitment process. Employers must endeavour to create a positive and inclusive recruitment experience that fosters participation before the employee even starts. By adopting a candidate-centred approach for your recruitment process, you will ensure that candidates feel valued throughout and will become more dedicated employees. Engagement through the early stages of the recruitment process increases retention, employee loyalty, and productivity in the long term.

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