



The Step Graduate Hiring Checklist

Helping you hire the right
graduate, first time.



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Bringing Business
+ Graduates together

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Hiring graduates should feel like an investment in your business's future, but the way many SMEs approach it doesn't always reflect that. Relying on methods like visiting a single university, holding assessment days based on generic psychometric testing, or hoping word-of-mouth will surface the right candidate often narrows your talent pool without you realising.

This checklist challenges familiar habits that can limit your access to great candidates, like filtering by grade, prioritising experience over potential, or assuming every graduate starts with the same support, network, or level of confidence. These approaches might feel tried and tested, but if they're not delivering the outcomes you want, it could be the right moment to try something different, one that's more in tune with how today's graduates think, apply, and choose where to work.

Created with insights from two decades of experience supporting SMEs, this checklist is your step-by-step guide to building a graduate hiring strategy that's inclusive, practical, and aligned with what today's graduates actually want. Use it to make confident decisions at every stage and turn early-career hiring into a long-term strength for your business.

STAGE 1: Build a graduate-ready employer brand

- Share graduate case studies on your website and social media. Include real names (with permission), job titles, and where they started versus where they are now — it shows a clear growth path.
- Promote how you support early-career growth, detail your induction process, mentorship structures, and internal mobility options.
- Engage where Gen Z already is, this could mean partnering with specific university departments, using TikTok or Instagram for employer content, or sponsoring a student event.

Your brand is more than just your logo — it's how you communicate, support your team, and live out your values. Graduates tend to seek out employers whose actions reflect what they say they stand for.

STAGE 2: Conduct a needs analysis - are you ready to hire a grad?

- Identify what kind of support the graduate will need: Will they have a line manager with the time and capability to train them? What resources (courses, shadowing, mentoring) can you provide?
- Check internal expectations — hold a short team meeting to clarify what support is expected from peers and managers, explain the purpose of hiring a graduate, and ensure line managers are fully bought in to the process. Their engagement is crucial to delivering a positive early-career experience and long-term success.
- Ask yourself: Are you open to different academic backgrounds, neurodivergent thinkers, or people without previous office experience? If not, consider what you might be unintentionally excluding.

Hiring a graduate isn't about lowering the bar — it's about raising your investment in the future. Being ready to support someone from day one increases success and retention.

STAGE 3: Attract and recruit the right graduates fairly

- Speak to Gen Z's values: Think beyond salary — talk about impact, flexibility, community, and wellbeing. List your benefits in plain English and avoid jargon.
- Be concise and clear, write your advert with mobile users in mind. Break content into short paragraphs and bullet points. Include a short 'About You' section showing the soft skills and attitudes that matter most.
- Minimise barriers in your recruitment process by reducing the number of interview stages, avoiding unnecessary travel, and giving plenty of notice. This reduces cost for applicants, supports those with caring responsibilities, and promotes social mobility.
- Clearly outline your application process in the job advert or follow-up email, including the stages, who candidates will meet, and how long things will take. Share this information well ahead of time so applicants know what to expect and can prepare adequately. This is especially important for neurodiverse and disabled candidates, who may need additional time or context to feel confident and perform at their best.

Being transparent about the process builds trust and confidence, especially for graduates who may not have been through a formal recruitment journey before. It's also a simple but powerful way to promote inclusion and fairness for all applicants.

STAGE 4: Onboard with intention

- Start onboarding before day one, send a personalised welcome email, a short video from their manager, and a clear schedule for their first week.
- Assign a buddy or mentor, ideally someone one or two years ahead of them, to offer reassurance and practical advice.
- Use structured check-ins at 30, 60, and 90 days to discuss wins, worries, development areas, and culture fit.

Graduates who know what to expect and who to turn to are more likely to settle quickly, grow in confidence, and stay longer. When you invest in structured support, you're not just helping graduates thrive, you're enabling them to add real, lasting value to your business.

STAGE 5: Retain and develop your graduate

- Build a clear development plan with input from the graduate. Break it into monthly milestones for the first 6 months, then review.
- Share internal progression stories, for example, highlight someone who started as an intern and is now managing a project or team.
- Create space for feedback and reflection, schedule monthly one-to-ones, pulse surveys, or short anonymous check-ins.
- Make use of the government's many training schemes to support your graduate with industry-specific development. Consider sponsoring them for professional qualifications (e.g. CIPD, CIM, ACCA, CIMA) or certifications like PRINCE2 to build loyalty and capability.

Retention isn't about beanbags or beer fridges. It's about trust, feedback, and making growth feel achievable and real.



Want help putting this checklist into action?

We've helped hundreds of SMEs get graduate hiring right, not by doing more, but by doing things better.

Book a free 15-minute graduate hiring review.

We'll assess your current approach and give you 2–3 quick wins to improve attraction, engagement and retention.

Or just drop us a [message](#); we're always happy to talk.



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