

# FE FUTURES: RECRUITMENT & RETENTION BLUEPRINT

*A strategic guide to attracting, developing,  
and retaining talent in Further Education.*

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# INTRODUCTION

To build a resilient and thriving workforce that meets the evolving needs of learners, employers, and communities.

To build a resilient and thriving workforce that meets the evolving needs of learners, employers, and communities, the Further Education (FE) sector must move from reactive staffing models to proactive, strategic workforce planning. This blueprint outlines a series of recommendations and actions designed to strengthen recruitment, retention, and professional development across Further Education. It reflects the collective insights following Northern Skills Network engagement activity, and sector leaders working to address long-standing challenges.

The sector continues to face significant barriers: salary levels are constrained by funding bands, limiting the ability to attract and retain talent; recruitment often draws from the same limited pool of professionals; and FE remains largely unknown to many in industry. Retention is also a concern, with staff frequently leaving roles due to lack of progression or support.

This blueprint has been developed by the Northern Skills Network, in partnership with Dovetail & Slate.



The Northern Skills Network (NSN) is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to representing and advocating for training and education providers across the North of England. NSN is passionate about enhancing productivity and prosperity in the North. We aim to elevate skill levels for both young people entering the workforce and current employees seeking further development.

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NSN comprises nine provider networks from various regions, including North East, Tees Valley, Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Greater Merseyside, Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, and Cheshire and Warrington. Collectively, we represent over 400 Training Providers, of all types, including FE Colleges, ITPs, VCSE Organisations, Local Authorities, Employer Providers, and more!



Dovetail & Slate is the UK's fastest-growing education recruitment specialist (Sunday Times 2025), dedicated to supporting the Further Education (FE) and skills sector. Their mission is to connect education providers with the talented professionals who deliver outstanding teaching, learning and support services; empowering learners, employers and communities to thrive.

As a nationally recognised, award-winning partner, Dovetail & Slate combines deep sector expertise with innovative recruitment and retention strategies to address the unique challenges and opportunities within FE. Moving beyond reactive hiring, they work alongside colleges and training providers to build resilient teams, develop future talent pipelines and ensure the workforce is equipped for both current and emerging demands.

Playing a pivotal role in shaping the future of Further Education, Dovetail & Slate creates opportunities, advances careers and delivers lasting impact.

# RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

## Why Strategy Matters

A strong recruitment strategy shifts hiring from a reactive scramble to a proactive, planned process. By forecasting needs in advance, organisations can ensure their workforce is properly aligned with curriculum requirements, long-term organisational goals and cultural values. This forward-thinking approach also reduces the risk of costly vacancies and high turnover, in turn creating greater stability across teams.

## Benefits

When recruitment is approached strategically, candidate quality improves through targeted sourcing methods that attract the right talent, not just available talent. A clear, consistent process ensures a positive candidate experience, resulting in a strong employer brand, whether they are hired or not. In addition, streamlined processes save both time and budget, making hiring more efficient and cost-effective.

## This section covers:

- Workforce and headcount planning
- Writing culture-focused job descriptions and adverts
- Choosing effective attraction channels
- Hiring efficiently and at pace
- Managing agency partnerships & PSLs
- Enhancing candidate experience and employer brand

**GUY WALKER, CEO, Dovetail & Slate** "When colleges and training providers plan ahead, they build teams that are aligned with their values, equipped to deliver excellent learning experiences and committed to the long term.

**"The sector deserves a workforce strategy that matches its ambition, and that starts with treating recruitment as a strategic priority, not an administrative task."**

# RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

## STAGE 1: WORKFORCE & HEADCOUNT PLANNING.

### Purpose

Effective workforce planning ensures recruitment activity is proactive rather than reactive. By forecasting staffing needs in line with curriculum delivery plans and funding cycles, organisations can identify potential gaps well in advance. This avoids the disruption of last-minute recruitment drives and allows time to attract the best possible talent.

### Key Actions



Collaborate closely with academic and finance teams to produce accurate forecasts.



Build talent pipelines for critical or hard-to-fill roles – if you've got a great Applicant Tracking System (ATS) (more in Stage 4, below), you should be able to 'tag' the talent you've already acquired and run easy searches when the time for a new hire arises.



Schedule recruitment campaigns well ahead of term start dates to ensure readiness.



Collaborate internally with Marketing teams to support staff recruitment campaigns, and engage externally with partners including local media, sector networks and community organisations to maximise reach and impact.

### appris

Appris, a leading engineering training provider in West Yorkshire, has tackled the national shortage of skilled tutors by adopting a "grow our own" approach – helping engineers from industry transition into teaching and assessing roles.

This strategy bridges the FE skills gap, enriches training with real-world experience, and strengthens staff retention.

Through mentoring, professional qualifications, and access to advanced facilities, Appris supports staff like Ellie Saxby, Chris Hewson, and Scott Tennant in developing rewarding careers in education.

Their success demonstrates how investing in people enhances learner engagement, builds a strong workplace culture, and ensures the continued delivery of high-quality engineering education.

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### Benefits

Taking a planned approach creates a smoother recruitment process with less operational pressure. It also improves candidate quality by allowing for targeted and timely sourcing. Ultimately, this leads to greater organisational stability and stronger learner outcomes.

# RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

## STAGE 2: ROLE DEFINITION, JOB DESIGN & ADVERTISING

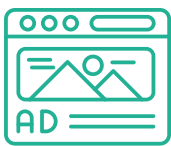
### Purpose

Clearly defining each role is essential to attracting candidates who are both capable and aligned with organisational values. A strong job description does more than list duties; it tells a compelling story about the role, the culture, and the impact the successful candidate will make. By weaving in organisational values, you create a message that resonates with the right people and filters out those who may not be the right fit.

### Key Actions



Regularly review and update job description templates to ensure accuracy and relevance.



Ensure adverts aren't just a copy/paste of the job description, that they are appealing as well as functional, and don't get 'forgotten' and labelled simply as an administrative task.



Highlight opportunities for personal growth, development, and contribution to organisational goals – this always rates incredibly highly as 'pull factors' from candidates. Having tangible case studies on your jobs site will back this up.



Ensure you're using inclusive language in advertising and job descriptions, for example, 'educator' instead of 'male/female teacher', 'chairperson' as opposed to 'chairman' and replace gendered language such as 'competitive salary', which can be viewed as a masculine-coded term, with 'attractive salary'.

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

### Benefits

A well-crafted role profile improves candidate quality and engagement from the outset. It helps reduce mismatches and early turnover by setting clear expectations and attracting those who share the organisation's ethos. This approach also strengthens your employer brand by presenting an authentic and consistent message. Gender neutral language helps attract a broader range of candidates, including those from underrepresented groups, career changers and people with diverse experiences, thus helping to expand your talent pool and remove barriers to entry.

### A Great Job Description

- **Starts with impact** and highlights the difference the role makes to learners or the community, creating emotional connection and purpose rather than listing tasks.
- **Shows authentic culture** provides a genuine insight into team dynamics and demonstrates values in action, not generic corporate statements.
- **Uses inclusive language** to improve accessibility to career changers and industry professionals by avoiding jargon and gendered terminology.
- **Distinguishes essential from desirable** skills and encourages applications from those who meet core requirements.
- **Highlights development opportunities** and career progressions, demonstrating investment in staff.

# RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

## STAGE 3: ATTRACTION CHANNELS & TARGETING

### Purpose

Choosing the right attraction channels is about more than just posting a vacancy online; it's about ensuring your message reaches the candidates who are most likely to be the right fit. By strategically selecting platforms and methods, you can target your ideal audience, improve the quality of applications, and make every advertising pound work harder.

### Key Actions



Assess job boards and online platforms for relevance to the role (e.g., LinkedIn, Indeed, specialist sector sites) - are you recording your candidate sources and testing them for ROI (a good ATS will again help here!).



Use targeted advertising to focus on specific skill sets or demographics.



Tap into internal referral schemes (your employees should be your greatest salespeople!) and professional networks (is everyone a member of BACH for example?) to reach high-quality passive candidates.

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

### Benefits

This targeted approach reduces the number of unsuitable applications and increases the likelihood of engaging candidates who meet both the technical and cultural requirements of the role. It also maximises recruitment budget efficiency by investing only in channels that deliver measurable results.

# RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

## STAGE 4: HIRING EFFICIENTLY AND AT PACE

### Purpose

Once you've brought some brilliant candidates to the college via effective advertising in the right places, you'll need to secure them quickly. In a competitive market such as Further Education, candidates will often have multiple application avenues running concurrently and will often consider several offers. If you're slow to make decisions, great candidates will slip through your fingers. Move quickly and decisively – technology solutions are also your friend here.

### Key Actions



Ensure internal processes such as job requisitions, feedback flows and offer approval are efficient and fit for purpose. A candidate waiting two weeks from application to interview request will most likely have gotten another job by the time you want to meet them.



Use an Applicant Tracking Software (ATS) solution if you can, and if you've got one and it isn't working for you – see what's out there in the market (we can help!)



Use data-led decision making to inform your hiring process – this means you can refine it over time based on real data, not just anecdotal feedback.



Build candidate pools in your ATS with tags so all of your candidates (from application to offer) are captured and you can quickly revisit when a new vacancy is released.



Utilise other software solutions where possible e.g. DocuSign, online vetting services, to streamline lengthy and possibly confusing email chains to get the documents you need. ATS software can help here too, including by automating email flows so you don't even need to remember to ask a candidate to provide the right information – it's all done seamlessly.

### Benefits

Put simply, if they are great, get them through the hiring process and to the vetting and onboarding stages as quickly as you can. Decreasing your time to hire brings those superstars into your classrooms, workshops and support teams faster, giving a better experience to learners and helping the college run as smoothly as possible. A swift and efficient process will also encourage candidates and improve your employer brand. Starters who have been hired better, also tend to start better.



Wigan & Leigh College and University Centre is a learning institution delivering both Further Education and Higher Education courses to the people of Wigan, Leigh and indeed garnering students from across the North West of England. The College's student body numbers nearly 10,000 funded learners, managed by a team of 583 (FTE) educators, education support and other support staff across 25+ departments. When hiring staff, speed is often of the essence to ensure key services can be delivered to students on time, but never at the expense of quality nor safety.

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# ONBOARDING

## Why Onboarding Matters

Onboarding is more than just a first-day introduction; it's the foundation for long-term employee engagement, performance, and retention. A well-structured onboarding process ensures that new employees feel welcomed, informed, and confident as they integrate into their new role and the wider team. It provides the clarity and support needed for them to contribute effectively from the outset.

## Benefits

Effective onboarding helps employees reach productivity faster by equipping them with the tools, knowledge, and relationships they need to succeed. It also reduces early turnover by building a sense of belonging and commitment during those crucial first weeks. Over time, this fosters stronger long-term loyalty and performance, benefiting both the individual and the organisation.

## This section covers:

- Pre-start engagement
- Day one experience
- Induction programme
- First 90 days support
- Continuous improvement

# ONBOARDING

## STAGE 1: PRE-START ENGAGEMENT

### Purpose

The period between offer acceptance and a new hire's first day is a critical window to build connection and commitment. Effective pre-start engagement ensures new employees feel genuinely welcomed and valued before they even arrive. By providing timely information and support, organisations can ease any anxieties, boost confidence, and maintain excitement about the role. This reduces the chance of dropouts or last-minute hesitations, setting the stage for a successful start.

### Key Actions



Provide a welcome pack including role details, team introductions, and practical information – talk to Dovetail & Slate to support with creation of a personalised pack



Assign a buddy or mentor to start building early relationships.



Maintain regular, friendly communication to answer questions and sustain enthusiasm – this should ideally come directly from the Hiring Manager, even a friendly text message, 'really looking forward to meeting you next week' is a great personal touch.

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

### Benefits

Strong pre-start engagement fosters a sense of belonging and trust from the outset, smoothing the transition into the organisation. It helps new hires arrive motivated, informed, and confident, ready to contribute from day one. Ultimately, this reduces early attrition and enhances overall retention, laying the foundation for long-term success.

# ONBOARDING

## STAGE 2: DAY ONE EXPERIENCE

### Purpose

The first day is a crucial opportunity to set a positive tone for the new hire's entire journey. It establishes their initial impression of the organisation and directly impacts their engagement and motivation. By creating a welcoming, structured, and supportive environment, organisations can help new employees overcome natural anxieties, quickly feel part of the team, and begin to understand the culture and expectations. This early connection lays the groundwork for ongoing success and retention.

### Key Actions



Personally welcome new hires and provide a clear agenda for the day to set expectations.



Introduce key colleagues and familiarise them with the working environment to build connections.



Ensure IT equipment, system access, and workspace are fully set up before arrival to avoid disruption.

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

### Benefits

A well-executed first day boosts new hires' confidence and sense of belonging, helping them settle in faster and engage more deeply with their role. It reduces uncertainty and stress, enabling smoother integration into the team and organisation. Ultimately, this strengthens employee retention and accelerates productivity, making the onboarding process more effective and rewarding for both parties.

# ONBOARDING

## STAGE 3: INDUCTION PROGRAMME

### Purpose

The induction programme is essential for equipping new hires with the knowledge, skills, and relationships they need to perform confidently and effectively. Beyond just understanding their role, it helps embed the organisation's culture, values, and expectations from the outset. A well-designed induction creates a strong foundation that supports ongoing development and fosters a sense of belonging. Tailoring the programme to individual experience levels ensures relevance and maximises engagement, helping new employees transition smoothly into their responsibilities.

### Key Actions



Deliver structured training that covers the role, organisational policies, and key systems.



Facilitate interactive sessions to build connections with colleagues and leadership.



Tailor induction content to match the new hire's role and experience level.

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

### Benefits

A thorough induction accelerates new hires' competence and confidence, enabling them to contribute effectively sooner. It deepens engagement with the organisation's values, fostering commitment and motivation. Additionally, it helps reduce early-stage errors and misunderstandings, supporting a smoother transition and longer-term success.

# ONBOARDING

## STAGE 4: FIRST 90 DAYS SUPPORT

### Purpose

The first 90 days are critical for helping new hires settle into their roles with confidence and clarity. Providing structured support during this period ensures they understand performance expectations, receive timely feedback, and feel valued. This phase is essential for building engagement, addressing any early challenges, and fostering long-term commitment. By offering guidance and opportunities for development, organisations can set the stage for sustained success and growth, reducing turnover and enhancing job satisfaction.

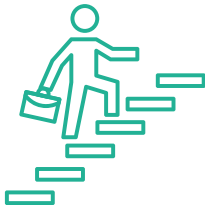
### Key Actions



Schedule regular check-ins between new hires and their line managers to discuss progress and concerns.



Set clear, achievable SMART goals and provide constructive, ongoing feedback to support development.



Offer early Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities and initiate career development planning.



Luminate Education Group have recognised the need to support new and experienced tutors of apprenticeships, so that they are able to contribute effectively to the role and to support the reality of the role for new entrants. To do this, the college group have launched a new Achievement, Progress & Retention Manager roles. These newly recruited Managers are in place to support tutors especially those coming from industry

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### Benefits

Consistent support during the initial months strengthens employee commitment and job satisfaction. It helps identify and resolve potential issues early, preventing them from escalating. Ultimately, this structured approach lays a strong foundation for ongoing performance, growth, and retention, benefiting both the individual and the organisation.

# ONBOARDING

## STAGE 5: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT.

### Purpose

Continuous improvement ensures that onboarding processes remain effective, relevant, and aligned with organisational goals. By systematically collecting feedback and reviewing existing practices, organisations can identify what works well and what needs adjustment. This ongoing refinement allows onboarding to evolve with changing organisational priorities, sector developments, and new hire needs. Ultimately, it supports a culture of learning and responsiveness that benefits both employees and the organisation over time.

### Key Actions



Gather regular feedback from new hires and their managers to understand the onboarding experience – use a mixture of 'stay interviews' and surveys to assess what you do well and not so well.



Review onboarding materials and processes on a scheduled basis to identify areas for enhancement.



Update content to reflect changes in organisational strategy, sector trends, or regulatory requirements.

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

### Benefits

A commitment to continuous improvement enhances the effectiveness of each onboarding cycle, making new hires feel valued and supported. It strengthens employee satisfaction and engagement by demonstrating that their experiences matter. Moreover, it fosters organisational agility, ensuring onboarding remains a dynamic tool for learning, adaptation, and sustained success.

# RECRUITMENT STRATEGY AND ONBOARDING SUMMARY

## Recruitment Strategy

Proactive workforce planning helps avoid last-minute hiring pressures. Clear role definitions that include cultural fit and development opportunities attract the right candidates. Targeted channels and strategic agency management improve candidate quality. Throughout, maintaining a positive candidate experience strengthens your employer brand and secures top talent.

## Onboarding

Effective onboarding starts before day one, keeping new hires engaged and prepared. The first day should be welcoming and well-organised to make a strong impression. A tailored induction equips employees with the skills and connections needed to succeed. Ongoing support during the first 90 days builds confidence and addresses challenges early. Regular reviews keep onboarding practices relevant and effective.

## Key Takeaway

A proactive and structured recruitment and onboarding approach enhances candidate quality, retention, and builds a committed, high-performing workforce.

# RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

## STAGE 5: AGENCY USE & PSL MANAGEMENT.

### Purpose

Working with recruitment agencies can be highly effective when managed strategically. By building strong partnerships and setting clear expectations, you can ensure that agency support enhances your internal recruitment efforts rather than duplicating them. A structured approach helps maintain quality, compliance, and consistency across all hires.

### Key Actions



Create and maintain a Preferred Supplier List (PSL) with agencies that specialise in education recruitment.



Create tiering systems and use 'release windows' to encourage your most valuable agencies to offer best priced solutions.



Agree clear protocols for CV submission, candidate ownership, and communication. This does not necessarily mean cutting off all agency- Hiring Manager contact – if controlled in the right way, that dialogue can be invaluable.



Regularly review agency performance, sharing constructive feedback to maintain standards and improve outcomes.

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

### Benefits

This approach streamlines the sourcing process, reduces wasted time reviewing unsuitable candidates, and fosters long-term, trusted relationships with agencies. It also ensures compliance with agreed processes and prevents duplication, ultimately saving time and improving candidate quality.

# RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

## STAGE 6: SHORTLISTING & CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE.

### Purpose

A well-structured shortlisting process not only ensures you identify the right candidates but also creates a positive and professional impression of your organisation. Candidates who feel respected and informed are more likely to remain engaged and accept offers, even if the process is competitive.

### Key Actions



Apply consistent, objective criteria that consider both job requirements and cultural fit. Again, using a qualitative, data-led approach can help hone future searches.



Maintain clear and timely communication with all applicants throughout the process – email automation can help here!



Ensure interviews and microteaches are appropriate, realistic representations of what the role and provider life entail.

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

### Benefits

This approach improves the fairness and accuracy of selection, strengthens your employer brand, and boosts candidate engagement. It also reduces the risk of drop-outs during the process and increases the likelihood of successful offer acceptance.

# RETENTION STRATEGIES

## Why Retention Matters

Recruitment may bring talent through the door, but retention ensures that talent stays, grows, and thrives. A proactive, whole-organisation retention strategy transforms workforce stability from a hopeful outcome into a deliberate goal. By investing in staff development, wellbeing, and career progression, organisations can reduce turnover, preserve institutional knowledge, and foster a culture of loyalty and excellence.

Retention is not just a reactive response to staff leaving, it's a strategic commitment to creating an environment where people want to stay. When staff feel supported, valued, and see a future within the organisation, they are more likely to contribute meaningfully and remain engaged long-term.

## Benefits

Strategic retention leads to stronger teams, reduced recruitment costs, and improved learner outcomes. Staff who experience structured support, clear career pathways, and opportunities for professional growth are more likely to stay and succeed. A positive organisational culture, where wellbeing, recognition, and development are prioritised, enhances morale and builds a reputation as an employer of choice.

## This section covers:

- Building a positive, inclusive organisational culture
- Supporting early success through induction, mentoring, and protected time
- Embedding wellbeing and work-life balance
- Creating clear career pathways and progression maps
- Investing in professional growth and CPD
- Aligning staff development with industry expertise
- Recognising and rewarding staff contributions
- Measuring retention and progression effectively

# RETENTION STRATEGIES

## BUILDING A POSITIVE ORGANISATION CULTURE

### Purpose

A positive organisational culture is the foundation of long-term retention. When staff feel included, supported, and heard, they are more likely to stay and contribute meaningfully. Culture shapes how people experience their work – how they're treated, how decisions are made, and how leadership communicates. A strong culture fosters collaboration, trust, and pride in the organisation.

### Key Actions



Promote inclusive, supportive environments where staff feel safe to share ideas and feedback.



Ensure strong, transparent leadership communication across all levels.



Embed staff voice in decision-making processes and innovation.



Equip leaders with the skills to develop, coach, and support their teams.



Celebrate team successes and foster a sense of shared purpose.

### Benefits

A positive culture enhances staff wellbeing, engagement, and loyalty. It creates a workplace where people feel they belong and can thrive. This not only improves retention but also strengthens team cohesion, organisational resilience, and overall performance.

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

# RETENTION STRATEGIES

## SUPPORTING EARLY SUCCESS

### Purpose

Retention begins on day one. Supporting early success through structured induction, mentoring, and workload management helps new staff feel confident, capable, and connected. The first few months are critical for shaping long-term engagement and performance. By investing in this phase, organisations lay the groundwork for staff to thrive, reducing early attrition and building a culture of support and development.

### Key Actions



Implement structured induction programmes covering organisational values, role expectations, and key processes – ensuring a positive and impactful first 90 days



Pair new staff with mentors or coaches to provide guidance and build relationships



Schedule regular check-ins to monitor progress, address challenges, and celebrate early wins



Consider initial reduced workload, or protected time for training and study – especially important if they have come from industry

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

### Benefits

Early support fosters a sense of belonging and purpose. Staff who feel equipped and valued from the outset are more likely to stay, perform well, and contribute positively to the organisation. This approach also helps identify and resolve potential issues before they escalate, improving overall retention and job satisfaction.

# RETENTION STRATEGIES

## EMBEDDING WELLBEING AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

### Purpose

Retention is deeply influenced by how staff feel at work – physically, mentally, and emotionally. Embedding wellbeing and work-life balance into organisational culture is not just a moral imperative; it's a strategic one. When staff feel supported, respected, and able to manage their workload sustainably, they are more likely to stay, perform well, and contribute positively to the organisation.

### Key Actions



Develop policies that support flexible working, workload management, and staff wellbeing



Provide access to mental health support services and employee assistance programmes



Encourage open conversations about wellbeing and normalise seeking support



Promote a culture that values rest, recovery, and personal time e.g. protected CPD time, wellbeing days



Train leaders to recognise signs of burnout and respond with empathy and action



Discover how DH Associates transformed staff wellbeing from a pandemic response into a long-term strategy driving retention, morale, and performance. From menopause support to flexible working and wellbeing champions, learn the initiatives, impact, and lessons shaping their culture, and why wellbeing is now business-critical.

READ MORE



### Benefits

A wellbeing-focused culture improves morale, reduces absenteeism, and strengthens staff loyalty. It signals that the organisation cares about its people beyond their output, fostering trust and long-term commitment. Staff who feel balanced and supported are more likely to stay, grow, and advocate for the organisation.

# RETENTION STRATEGIES

## CREATING CLEAR CAREER PATHWAYS

### Purpose

Clear career pathways are essential for retaining staff who want to grow and progress within the organisation. When employees understand how they can advance, and what support is available to help them do so, they are more likely to stay, engage fully, and invest in their own development. Transparent progression routes also help build trust, motivation, and a sense of purpose, particularly in roles where long-term career planning is key.

### Key Actions



Develop and share role-specific progression maps that outline potential career routes within the organisation



Ensure visibility of promotion opportunities and internal mobility across departments and functions



Use career maps as part of induction, appraisals, and development conversations



Define clear criteria for progression, including qualifications, experience, and competencies



Regularly review and update career pathways to reflect organisational changes and staff feedback

### In Practice

See how career maps can turn progression from abstract to achievable. By showing clear pathways, required skills, and development opportunities, they boost staff engagement, retention, and recruitment. Discover practical steps to design transparent, inspiring maps that bring careers to life and support growth at every stage.

[READ MORE](#)



### Benefits

Career pathways empower staff to take ownership of their development and see a future within the organisation. They support succession planning, reduce turnover, and help attract new talent by showcasing growth potential. When progression is transparent and achievable, staff feel valued and motivated to contribute long-term.

# RETENTION STRATEGIES

## INVESTMENT IN PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

### Purpose

Ongoing professional development is a cornerstone of effective retention. When staff are supported to grow their skills, gain qualifications, and pursue meaningful career goals, they are more likely to remain engaged and committed. A culture of continuous learning not only benefits individuals but also strengthens the organisation's capacity to adapt, innovate, and deliver high-quality outcomes.

### Key Actions



Provide structured CPD pathways tailored to different roles and career stages



Offer access to accredited qualifications and funded training routes (e.g. apprenticeships)



Promote a "grow your own" model by supporting industry professionals to transition into teaching and leadership roles



Encourage staff to take ownership of their development through regular goal-setting and review conversations



Link development opportunities to career maps and progression frameworks



### Tameside College

Discover how Tameside College tackled Skills Coach shortages by "growing their own." Through apprenticeships, mentoring, and structured pathways, industry professionals transitioned confidently into FE roles, boosting retention, quality, and sustainability. See how this model empowers staff, supports progression, and offers lessons for workforce development across the sector.

[READ MORE](#)



### Benefits

Investment in professional growth enhances staff capability, confidence, and satisfaction. It signals that the organisation values its people and is committed to their long-term success. This not only improves retention but also builds a skilled, future-ready workforce that can respond to sector demands and learner needs

# RETENTION STRATEGIES

## INDUSTRY ALIGNMENT

### Purpose

Retaining staff in Further Education means keeping them connected to the industries they teach. When vocational staff maintain current expertise and industry relevance, they feel more confident, credible, and fulfilled in their roles. Industry alignment also supports curriculum quality and learner outcomes, making it a strategic priority for both retention and excellence.

### Key Actions



Facilitate regular industry placements or secondments for staff to refresh their vocational knowledge



Build partnerships with employers to offer workshops, site visits, and collaborative development opportunities



Encourage staff to engage in sector networks, events, and professional bodies



Integrate industry updates into CPD programmes and curriculum planning



Recognise and reward staff who actively maintain industry engagement

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

### Benefits

Industry alignment boosts staff confidence, credibility, and satisfaction. It helps vocational educators stay passionate and informed, reducing the risk of burnout or disengagement. For the organisation, it ensures teaching remains relevant and responsive to employer needs—enhancing reputation, learner outcomes, and staff retention.

# RETENTION STRATEGIES

## RECOGNISE AND REWARD

### Purpose

Recognition is a powerful driver of retention. When staff feel that their contributions are noticed and appreciated (formally or informally) they are more likely to stay engaged and committed. A well-rounded reward strategy goes beyond pay, incorporating meaningful gestures, career development, and a culture of appreciation that reinforces staff value and impact.

### Key Actions



Implement formal recognition schemes for achievements, innovation, and impact



Offer performance-linked pay progression and bonuses where possible



Introduce non-financial incentives such as wellbeing days, birthday leave



Celebrate successes publicly through newsletters, staff briefings, or internal awards



Encourage peer-to-peer recognition and feedback to build a culture of appreciation

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

### Benefits

Recognition boosts morale, motivation, and loyalty. It helps staff feel seen and valued, which is essential for long-term retention. A thoughtful reward strategy also strengthens organisational culture, making it a place where people want to work, and stay.

# RETENTION STRATEGIES

## MEASURING RETENTION AND PROGRESSION

### Purpose

Retention strategies are most effective when backed by data. Measuring retention and progression helps organisations understand what's working, where improvements are needed, and how staff are moving through the organisation. These insights support evidence-based decision-making and ensure that retention efforts are aligned with organisational goals and staff needs.

### Key Actions



Monitor internal promotion rates to assess the effectiveness of career pathways



Conduct regular staff satisfaction surveys to gather feedback on culture, development, and wellbeing



Use exit interviews and stay conversations to collect actionable insights from both departing and current staff



Analyse data (including annual retention rates and average tenure by role) to inform strategic planning and refine retention initiatives

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

### Benefits

Measuring retention and progression provides clarity and accountability. It enables organisations to celebrate successes, address challenges, and continuously improve the staff experience. Transparent data also builds trust with staff, showing that their feedback leads to meaningful change.

# INDUSTRY ALIGNMENT

## Why Industry Alignment Matters

Bringing employers and the skills system closer is crucial to ensuring we have the currency of skills and knowledge for the next generation of industry professionals. When employers are involved in setting the standards & knowledge that we use when developing curriculum or teaching young people and adults, it ensures institutions and their staff are focused on the latest industry practices and technology. By co-designing curriculum, inviting employers to complete industry talks and most importantly bringing industry into teaching, we are enhancing and advancing the experiences of our students and apprentices, as well as properly preparing them for the realities of workplaces and ensuring curriculum currency.

## Benefits

Developing strategies that enables institutions to align education and industry has a multitude of benefits. From curriculum currency, to developing dual professionals, to ensuring expert local knowledge is not lost due to retirement or career changes, but is bought into the FE sector. Benefits include -

- Relevance of Skills
- Improved employability and career readiness
- Innovation and advancements in technology
- Forming stronger partnerships
- Economic impact

## This section covers:

- Recruiting from industry
- Keeping pace with labour market changes
- CPD linked to industry
- Dual professionals and secondments
- Curriculum co-design with employers

# INDUSTRY ALIGNMENT

## RECRUITING FROM INDUSTRY

### Purpose

Recruiting staff directly from industry remains one of the most effective ways to ensure that teaching reflects current professional practice. Industry-experienced educators bring:

- Up-to-date technical knowledge and sector insights
- Real-world examples that enrich learning
- Professional credibility that resonates with learners and employers

However, attracting industry professionals requires competitive employment packages, flexible working arrangements, and clear pathways for transitioning into teaching roles. Organisations benefit from developing targeted recruitment campaigns and offering initial teacher training support to ease this transition

### Key Actions



..Pay disparities remains the biggest issue for industry recruitment, find the other benefits to joining the FE sector



Engage with the sector to identify what roles or approaches they would best fit



Provide examples of professional and personal development and wins that working in education brings and the other benefits, such as predictable holidays and work times

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

### Benefits

Ensuring currency with industry standards and approaches is key. The advancement of tech in industry needs to be brought into the classroom so institutions are teaching the most up to date ways that makes our learners and apprentices more employable.

# INDUSTRY ALIGNMENT

## KEEPING PACE WITH LABOUR MARKET CHANGES

### Purpose

Rapid technological, economic, and regulatory shifts mean that labour-market intelligence (LMI) must be continuously monitored and embedded into strategic planning. Effective approaches include:

- Regular analysis of regional and national LMI
- Engagement with employer bodies and sector skills councils
- Using LMI to inform curriculum planning, resource investment, and staff development

By staying responsive to emerging trends, organisations can ensure that learners develop the skills required for current and future employment opportunities.

### Key Actions



Keep an eye on LMI and changes to industry to ensure curriculum, teaching and engagement has currency



Raise awareness of LMI and industry changes with staff, through industry talks, days and peer sharing



Identify approaches for bringing LMI into the classroom or curriculum so learners & apprentices are aware of the industry changes, making them more aware and ready for next steps

### Benefits

Having LMI as a core feature at meetings and standardisation will bring the curriculum more to life, align to industry currency and open the doors for more dual professionals. As the response to industrial strategy and regional growth sectors evolve, institutions need to position themselves as direct responders. This may also open the door to more industry partners working with FE



The ten-year timeframe set out by the Prime Minister in the industrial strategy gives the UK time to invest in its technical education workforce so we can shift from teaching for competence to teaching for excellence. We know the appetite is out there. Our centre of excellence programme, in partnership with NCFE, has shown enormous demand for a pedagogical approach that focuses on skills excellence.

READ MORE



# INDUSTRY ALIGNMENT

## CPD LINKED TO INDUSTRY

### Purpose

CPD that is directly informed by industry practice is essential for maintaining teaching quality. This includes:

- Industry-led workshops and training sessions
- Access to new technologies, equipment, and processes
- Opportunities for staff to observe or participate in live industry environments

Linking CPD to industry ensures that educators remain confident, competent, and able to deliver contemporary, relevant learning experiences.

### Key Actions



Design an roadmap for all staff to undertake CPD in industry



Curriculum staff should all have vocational, industry and pedagogical CPD planned in accordance to their needs



Ask industry partners to complete talks and showcases on the latest approaches, tech and advancements to staff so they can then pass onto students



provide industry literature to staff during curriculum planning cycles, develop industry related projects for learners and apprentices to take part in

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

### Benefits

Ensuring a robust CPD plan that is contextualised to industry and individuals knowledge and aspirations, will have untold benefits to learner experience and curriculum development. Bringing rich experiences back into the classrooms enables learners and apprentices to feel more prepared for the realities of work and boosts engagement with industry

# INDUSTRY ALIGNMENT

## DUAL PROFESSIONALS AND SECONDMENTS

### Purpose

Dual-professional models—where staff maintain both teaching and industry roles—offer significant benefits. They help:

- Maintain current industry expertise
- Strengthen employer relationships
- Bring authentic, practice-based learning into the classroom

Secondments, whether short-term or extended, allow staff to refresh their skills, understand new industry developments, and bring back insights that enhance curriculum delivery.

### Key Actions



Create flexible employment structures that allow for staff to split their time between teaching and industry work



Establish formal secondment pathways – partnering with employers and length of terms



Build strong employer partnerships that identify and place priority on aiding the development of teaching & working



Monitor impact ongoing and track the effectiveness of approaches to ensure staff wellbeing and learner satisfaction

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

### Benefits

Dual-professional models thrive when organisations create flexible structures, strong employer partnerships, and a culture that values industry engagement. The actions above help ensure staff remain current, learners benefit from real-world expertise, and employers see education providers as credible, collaborative partners.

# INDUSTRY ALIGNMENT

## CURRICULUM CO-DESIGN WITH EMPLOYERS

### Purpose

Co-designing curriculum with employers ensures that programmes reflect real workplace expectations. Effective co-design involves:

- Joint development of learning outcomes and assessment methods
- Employer input into practical skills, behaviours, and technical competencies
- Collaboration on project-based learning, live briefs, and work-based experiences

This approach increases learner employability and ensures that qualifications remain relevant and valued by industry.

Co-designing curriculum with employers is most effective when it is structured, collaborative, and ongoing. By taking these actions, organisations ensure that programmes remain aligned with real workplace expectations, enhance learner employability, and strengthen long-term employer relationships.

### Key Actions



Identify and engage the right employers, that align well to curriculum areas and have the right vision and ethos



Conduct joint skills and role analysis that identifies the technical, behaviour and knowledge links



Collaborate on learning outcomes, ensuring they reflect real work briefs and tasks.



Validate and review curriculum jointly that invites employers to take part in curriculum reviews and performance.

### In Practice

Case study coming soon!

### Benefits

Strong networks and partnerships are the foundation of sustained industry engagement. These relationships support:

- Guest lectures, mentoring, and employer-led masterclasses
- Work placements, apprenticeships, and internship opportunities
- Collaborative innovation, research, and resource sharing

Active participation in professional networks also enables organisations to stay informed about sector developments and contribute to shaping industry standards.

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**Dovetail  
& Slate**

## THANK YOU FOR READING!

WE HOPE YOU FOUND THIS FE FUTURES: RECRUITMENT & RETENTION BLUEPRINT USEFUL!

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch with:

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