

Fact Sheet 5: Youth Employment Risks vs Rewards

Purpose: Help SMEs understand the perceived risks and real rewards of employing young people, especially from non-traditional backgrounds.

Perceived Risks

Many SMEs fear taking on young staff due to perceived challenges:

Risk	Context	Mitigation
Inexperience	Young people may have limited prior work experience.	Use structured mentoring and buddy systems. Apprenticeships combine learning with work.
Time investment	Supervising and training a new hire takes time away from other business tasks.	Break onboarding into clear, time-boxed steps (see 30-60-90 day plan). Use mentor and team support.
Retention concerns	Fear that young employees may leave quickly.	Set clear expectations, offer progression opportunities, and maintain regular check-ins.
Cultural fit	Worry that young workers won't integrate into small teams.	Include team in onboarding; encourage mentoring and collaborative tasks.



Evidence-Based Rewards

Rewards	Context & Evidence
Skills shaped to your business	Apprentices and young employees often learn skills specifically tailored to your company's needs.
Fresh perspectives	Young staff often bring new ideas, digital literacy, and creative problem-solving.
Retention & loyalty	Supported young employees who receive mentoring often stay longer and become ambassadors for your business.
Cost-effective talent development	Apprenticeships often include government funding; even standard hires are an investment in bespoke talent.
Improved social value & reputation	Supporting young people enhances local community impact and brand perception.

Case Examples:

A small marketing SME hired a 19-year-old apprentice. Through structured onboarding and mentorship, they rapidly became a confident junior marketer, ultimately taking on campaign management within 6 months, while also bringing fresh digital content ideas.

Practical Advice

- Don't let perceived risk outweigh potential benefits.
- Start small (one hire or placement) and structure support.
- Use funding opportunities to reduce financial risk.
- Track outcomes: confidence, skill development, retention.

Resources/Links:

- GOV.UK Apprentice info: www.gov.uk/apprenticeships-guide
- King's Trust Employer Toolkit: www.kingstrust.org.uk/how-we-can-help/tools-resources/business-tools

