

Your first employee checklist

What to have in place before, on and after their first day. For UK small businesses. Updated October 2026.



LEGAL REQUIREMENT something the law says you must do

GOOD PRACTICE not required, but it saves trouble later

1. Before you offer the job

- ☐ **Write down the role, hours and where they'll work.** It makes the advert, interview and written statement much easier. **GOOD PRACTICE**
- ☐ **Check the pay is at least the legal minimum.** National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage rates depend on age and change each April, so check the current rate on GOV.UK. **LEGAL REQUIREMENT**
- ☐ **Take up a reference before confirming the offer.** **GOOD PRACTICE** In care and early years, your regulator expects specific references and checks.

2. Before they start

- ☐ **Check they have the right to work in the UK,** before their employment starts, and keep a record. Do it for everyone, not just people you think might need it. **LEGAL REQUIREMENT**
- ☐ **Register as an employer with HMRC.** Usually up to four weeks before your first payday; you can't register more than two months in advance. **LEGAL REQUIREMENT**
- ☐ **Get employers' liability insurance** from an authorised insurer, covering at least £5 million, as soon as you become an employer (very limited exceptions). **LEGAL REQUIREMENT**
- ☐ **Set up payroll,** yourself or through an accountant or payroll provider. You report pay and deductions to HMRC on or before each payday. **LEGAL REQUIREMENT**
- ☐ **Only run a DBS check if the role is eligible,** mostly work with children or vulnerable adults. You can't run one just because you'd like to. **LEGAL REQUIREMENT**

3. On or before day one

- ☐ **Give them a written statement of employment particulars.** GOV.UK says the main (principal) statement must be given on the first day, and the wider statement within 2 months. Most employers cover this in a written contract. **LEGAL REQUIREMENT**
- ☐ **Plan a proper first day and induction:** who they'll work with, what good looks like, and where to find things. **GOOD PRACTICE**
- ☐ **Share the few policies they'll actually need,** such as sickness reporting, holiday requests and conduct, ideally in a short handbook. **GOOD PRACTICE**

4. In the first weeks

- ☐ **Give itemised payslips** on or before payday, showing gross pay, deductions and net pay.
LEGAL REQUIREMENT
- ☐ **Assess them for a workplace pension.** Automatic enrolment duties start from the day your first employee starts. Enrol them if they meet the age and earnings thresholds, pay employer contributions, and complete your declaration of compliance with The Pensions Regulator. **LEGAL REQUIREMENT**
- ☐ **Give at least the statutory minimum holiday:** 5.6 weeks of paid holiday a year for full-time workers, which can include bank holidays. **LEGAL REQUIREMENT**
- ☐ **Know how sick pay works.** Statutory Sick Pay is up to £123.25 a week, paid by you for up to 28 weeks. Check eligibility on GOV.UK. **LEGAL REQUIREMENT**
- ☐ **Keep pay and hours records.** HMRC can ask to see them, and they protect you if a pay question comes up. **LEGAL REQUIREMENT**

5. Setting them up to stay

- ☐ **Agree a probation period with review dates in the diary,** and talk early if something isn't working.
GOOD PRACTICE
- ☐ **Hold short, regular check-ins** and make a few dated notes after any difficult conversation.
GOOD PRACTICE

Worth knowing: from 1 January 2027, the qualifying period for ordinary unfair dismissal drops from two years to six months. A clear contract, a real induction and a probation process you actually use matter more than ever.

Want a second pair of eyes?

Book a free 20-minute call: cal.com/arrun-greaves-sgfygb/20min
Or see thepockethr.co.uk/outsourced-hr-for-small-businesses.html

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General guidance, not legal advice. Sources: GOV.UK guidance on right to work checks, registering as an employer, employers' liability insurance, written statements of employment particulars, payslips, holiday entitlement and Statutory Sick Pay; The Pensions Regulator on automatic enrolment; Employment Rights Act 2025. Checked October 2026.