

STAFF HANDBOOK

THEY ARE NOT SO DAUNTING



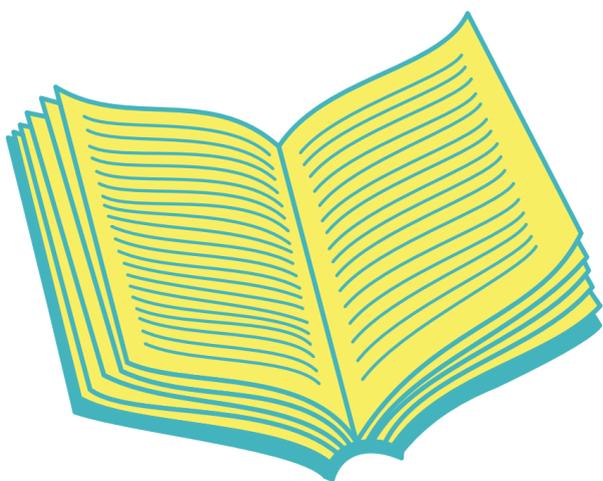
Does your business have a staff handbook? Is it one that was created years ago with little or no updates since? Many SMEs do not realise that a staff handbook is a vital part of their business and compliance structure.

Here are few of the key benefits of utilising a staff handbook:

- a comprehensive company introduction for new starters to the business
- a centralised place for communicating all relevant policies, procedures and entitlements
- clarity and certainty for many aspects of running your business;
- reduction in disputes and disciplinary matters.

Admittedly, creating the right staff handbook that truly reflects the values of your organisation does take time, but not having one can result in significantly more time and can expose the business to unnecessary financial costs.

A properly prepared staff handbook will be welcomed by staff as it should be viewed as a valuable source of information relevant to all. The business can use it as an opportunity to communicate values, goals and aspiration to ensure it is well run.

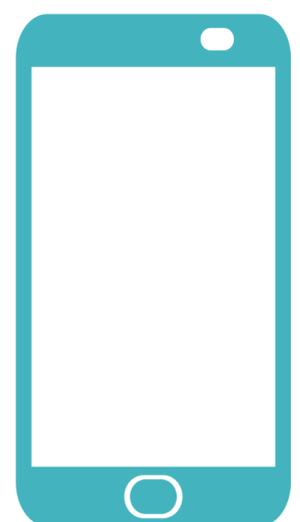


What is a staff handbook?

Although a staff handbook should not include contractual employment matters (although some do) as they should be included in a well-constructed employment contract, it should give staff an understanding of what is expected of them, and also what they can expect from the business.

Employees can use the staff handbook to find information on what they should do in various operational situations specific to the running of your business. For example:

- dealing with incoming and outgoing written communications and telephone calls
- how clients/customers and third parties are to be dealt with
- financial transactions and banking
- GDPR rules and procedures
- complaints.



Also, staff will be very interested in having a clear understanding of:

- holiday leave procedures;
- sickness entitlement and procedures;
- flexible leave entitlement;
- maternity, paternity and foster leave entitlements; and
- grievance and disciplinary procedures.



Why do businesses need a staff handbook?

Although having a staff handbook isn't a legal requirement for UK businesses, they are very useful for communicating with staff and enforcing your employment policies.

Here are some of the main benefits:

- **it reduces legal risks** – if an employee wanted to take you to tribunal, a handbook that shows the policies you have in place could be invaluable
- **it improves consistency** – everyone has to meet the same standards set out in the handbook, with one central document to refer back to

- **it saves time for HR staff** – instead of every staff query taking up time for your HR department, employees can refer to the handbook
- **it improves staff relations** – a handbook is a great communication tool, helping to keep staff engaged and informed.

Many staff handbooks also include information on the company's equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory at work policies.

Here are some of the other policies you may want to include in the handbook:

- email and internet policy
- data protection and privacy notices
- bribery and gifts policy



Staff HR policies

A staff handbook will also need to include your company's HR policies on things like:

- sickness
- holiday
- maternity and paternity leave
- flexible working
- bereavement/compassionate leave



What else can you include in your staff handbook?

Some companies use a staff handbook to set out their expectations on dress code and lateness. It could also include key business objectives, as well as an overview of the company's culture and values.

When do you need to give employees a copy of the staff handbook?

It is worth issuing employees with a copy of the staff handbook as soon as they join, or during their induction process. This allows them to read up and ask questions during their probation period

You'll also need to reissue the handbook to all staff every time it's updated, for example if your policy on holidays being carried over changes.

How often should you review the staff handbook?

A staff handbook should be reviewed around once a year, according to the Federation of Small Businesses.

If you update contractual policies in the handbook, you'll need to consult with staff and get their agreement before making any changes. This helps to protect you against breach of contract claims.

As mentioned above, you can make changes to non-contractual policies without asking staff.



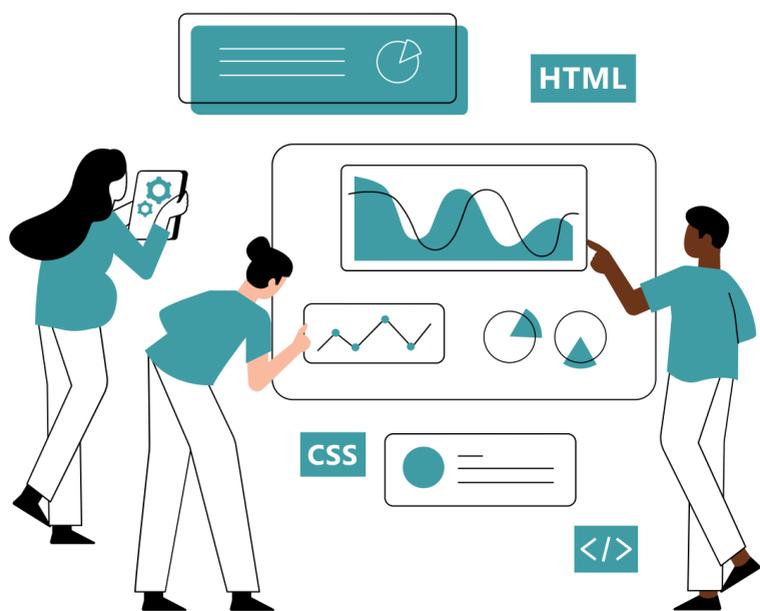
How to create a staff handbook

Most staff handbooks will follow a simple structure with an introduction, followed by an overview of policies, and then extra information such as business objectives and company values.

It's best to keep the handbook as short as possible, although it needs to include all the key information.

A digestible layout and images will help make it more likely to be properly read.

When writing the handbook, make sure it matches your brand's tone of voice. Also, use simple language where possible, so it's easy to read and understand.



How should a staff handbook be presented?

You can send PDF copies of the handbook to staff via email or give them a physical copy. Alternatively, you could upload the latest version to an online hub such as an intranet or shared drive for staff to download.

It's important that staff acknowledge they have received the handbook and have read it in full – particularly if you've included contractual policies. They could do this by giving written confirmation in an email, ticking a box, or signing a physical or digital copy of the handbook.



Make sure staff are aware of the handbook

Creating a handbook is a good start, but you need to make sure it is read by all staff and referenced by managers when dealing with their teams.

If you are taken to a tribunal and it became apparent that staff were not aware of the policies in the handbook, this could cause you a problem.

What's more, getting buy-in from the staff increases chances of consistency, new recruits adapting quickly, and managers being able to deal with issues quickly without involving HR, or giving the wrong guidance.

Staff handbook template

Staff handbook and policy examples can help you to work out what you need to include and how the information could be presented. It's important that you only use a template as a guide and customise it with your own company policies and procedures.

In conclusion

Despite the significant number of matters a staff handbook can include, many of the better available templates will apply to most business with little requirement for amending. The ones that do require more input tend to be really worth the effort for a business to get the most out of them and the time invested in them.



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