How can employers support young employees in the workplace?

Employer Round Table Report

12 November 2025

Contents

Summary

A round table discussion took place during the Healthy Working Wales New Service Launch Event on 12 November 2025, bringing together 78 participants from organisations across South and Mid Wales. The aim of the session was to explore how employers can better understand and support young people aged 16–24 in the workplace, recognising the challenges this age group faces when entering and sustaining employment.

Through structured discussion, participants identified six key challenge themes affecting young employees:

1. Confidence, communication and resilience

2. Work habits, routine and executive functioning

3. Mental health and wellbeing

4. Economic and financial stress

5. Workplace culture and accessibility

6. Workforce mobility

Despite the challenges, participants also highlighted positive, practical ways employers can strengthen support. The discussions led to nine recommendations for what employers can do, including:

1. Train line managers in wellbeing, communication and neurodiversity

2. Improve and adapt recruitment processes

3. Provide mentoring or buddying opportunities

4. Offer guidance on being organised and developing routines

5. Balance hybrid, remote and in-person work

6. Promote healthy work–life balance

7. Support employees' financial wellbeing

8. Provide opportunities for growth and development

These insights will help inform future Healthy Working Wales guidance, support and resources to strengthen how organisations across Wales recruit, retain and develop young people entering the workforce.

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings from round table discussions at the Healthy Working Wales (HWW) New Service Launch Event, held in November 2025. This brought together employers, stakeholders and young people from across South and Mid Wales. The event was designed to showcase and [formally launch three new programmes developed by Healthy Working Wales](#).

 The discussions explored how workplaces can more effectively understand, support and engage young employees aged 16–24. They focused on the realities young people face when entering the workforce and identified ways employers can improve the conditions that help them remain and progress in work.

The intended audience for this report is the event participants, employers in Wales, and wider partners with an interest in workforce development, young people's wellbeing and healthy workplace practice. It provides an overview of the discussions that took place during the round table sessions and summarises the key themes that emerged. Insights from this round table will inform future HWW activity designed to strengthen employer support for young people and enhance the conditions that help them thrive at work.

2. Background

This work recognises the growing importance of supporting young people in the workplace, acknowledging that good work is a key determinant of health and long-term wellbeing.

Young employees aged 16–24 face unique challenges when entering and sustaining work, including job insecurity, low pay, limited career progression and the growing pressures of hybrid and remote working. These factors contribute to high levels of stress, anxiety and depression, which in turn affect young people's ability to remain in work and progress in their careers.

Mental health problems are a major concern for young people. The latest [NHS Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (2023)](#) found that nearly one in four young people aged 16–24 reported experiencing a mental health condition such as anxiety or depression, with prevalence notably higher than in older age groups. These findings show that young employees are especially at risk as they enter and establish themselves in the workforce. Work-related stress and anxiety are among the leading causes of sickness absence, and younger employees are disproportionately affected, further underlining the need for targeted support and resources.

In Wales, these challenges are reflected in lower employment rates for young people: in 2025, only [52.5%](#) of 16–24 year olds were in employment, compared with 73.4% of all working-age adults. Mental health difficulties, alongside insecure and low-paid work, are key contributors to this disparity.

Addressing the health and wellbeing needs of young employees is therefore vital to:

- Improve retention and reduce absenteeism.

- Support equitable employment outcomes.

- Build a resilient, future-ready workforce.

- Align with Wales' broader goals of reducing health inequalities and promoting fair work.

The learning captured through this report provides a foundation for ongoing work with employers across Wales. It will help shape future resources, guidance and support available through Healthy Working Wales and will inform collaborative efforts to build inclusive, supportive workplaces where young people can flourish.

3. Aim

The aim of the round table was to identify both the challenges young people face in today's world of work and the opportunities for employers to help them thrive.

4. Participants

The event brought together 93 participants including stakeholders and businesses from across South and Mid Wales. The list of businesses and attendees are available in the appendix.

5. Workshop delivery

The round table discussions took place after a series of speakers at the HWW event, where the speakers touched upon the general workplace health and wellbeing and reflected on recent [research carried out by Hapus](#) around young person mental health.

Participants were randomly allocated to five round table groups. Each table was supported by a Healthy Working Wales adviser and a young volunteer from Public Health Wales. The volunteer helped guide the conversation and took notes, while the adviser introduced the questions and scenarios, kept discussions focused, and provided any additional support needed.

Each table was allocated a specific question related to young people in the workplace, followed by a scenario to explore (see appendix). The activity was introduced with a solutions-focused approach, encouraging participants to respond to the challenges presented by offering practical examples and ideas that could support improvements within the workplace.

Each group had 50 minutes for discussion.

The session enabled employers to:

- Engage in open conversations about the value young people bring to the workplace, including their contribution to organisational culture, innovation and future workforce development.

- Examine the barriers young employees may experience, such as confidence, communication, cost of living, transport issues and wellbeing concerns.

- Identify examples of good practice and discuss practical solutions and quick wins that could positively impact both young people and employers.

- Build stronger connections with peers by sharing insights and approaches to support the recruitment, development and retention of young employees.

6. Analysis of results

Following the HWW event, all notes from the five round table groups were collected, reviewed and brought together into a single dataset. A thematic analysis was then carried out to identify the key issues, patterns and recurring ideas shared by participants. This process involved reading through all the notes taken on each table, grouping similar points and coding them into core themes. These themes were then refined and summarised to reflect the collective insight from employers, stakeholders and young people. The analysis enabled us to highlight six overarching challenge areas and nine practical recommendations for employers, ensuring the findings in this report are grounded in the real experiences, reflections and solutions generated during the discussions.

7. Findings

Participants highlighted a wide range of issues relating to young people's experiences of entering, remaining and progressing within the workplace. These insights are presented thematically in the sections that follow.

Overall, participants welcomed the opportunity to come together and share knowledge, experiences and perspectives across different organisations. Many expressed that such opportunities to learn from one another are valuable but not frequent, and that the round table created a space for open and honest discussion.

The round table format proved effective in generating rich, practical insights. Participants engaged well with the solutions focused approach, offering examples of what works in their own organisations as well as identifying gaps, challenges and areas where young people often require additional support. Conversations surfaced a range of issues from digital skills and communication styles to financial pressures, wellbeing needs and the importance of supportive management. Reflecting the complexity of young people's experiences in the workplace and the difference a supportive workplace can make.

Participants also noted that employers often have limited access to clear, consistent information on young people's needs and the broader factors shaping their experiences of work. This highlights the value of continued collaboration and shared learning, particularly as organisations adapt to social, economic and generational changes affecting early employment. The themes presented in the following sections capture the collective insights from the round table and illustrate the opportunities for employers, partners and Healthy Working Wales to strengthen the guidance available to employers in supporting young workers.

7.1. Challenges Identified

Six themes emerged from the discussions around challenges faced by young employees:

- Confidence, communication and resilience

- Work habits, routine and executive function

- Mental health and wellbeing

- Economic and financial stress

- Workplace culture and accessibility

- Workforce mobility

7.1.1 Confidence, Communication & Resilience

- Low confidence and social anxiety

- Difficulty reading social cues

- Emotional overwhelm and reduced resilience

- Limited support networks outside work

Many new starters lacked experience navigating professional expectations, having transitioned from school/college environments with different structures.

7.1.2 Work Habits, Routine & Executive Function

- Difficulty adjusting to routine working hours

- Struggles with punctuality, diary management and task prioritisation

- Executive functioning challenges (linked in some cases to neurodiversity)

- Worries about being micromanaged, yet needing close support

Some employers felt unsure how much structure vs. independence to give.

7.1.3 Mental Health & Wellbeing

- Increased openness about emotions is positive, but managers felt unsure how to differentiate typical stress from mental health concerns

- Some managers lack confidence to have sensitive conversations

- Hybrid working can intensify loneliness or reduce opportunities for skill-building

7.1.4 Economic & Financial Stress

- Cost-of-living pressures

- Limited financial education

- Widespread use of "buy now, pay later" products

- Difficulty living independently despite full-time employment

7.1.5 Workplace Culture & Accessibility

- Lack of structure or an unsupportive line manager significantly affects retention.

- Neurodivergent young workers often face accessibility barriers, especially during onboarding.

- Managers may misunderstand neurodiversity or lack training

7.1.6 Workforce Mobility

- Young workers "shop around" for better roles

- Higher expectations around development, culture and flexibility

- Risk of losing young talent due to organisational inflexibility

7.2. Solutions and Good Practice Identified

Eight themes emerged from the discussions around solutions and good practice to support young employees:

- Line Manager training

- Improved recruitment processes

- Mentoring and buddying

- Structured support for routine and executive function

- Balancing hybrid, remote and in-person work

- Promoting healthy work-life balance

- Building financial wellbeing support

- Providing opportunities for growth

7.2.1 Line Manager Training

Participants strongly agreed that investment in line managers is a number one priority. Training should include:

- Starting wellbeing conversations

- Understanding neurodiversity

- Managing sensitive issues

- Supporting new starters through transition

- Setting boundaries and expectations clearly

7.2.2 Improved recruitment processes

Delegates recommended:

- Tailored interviews for young staff

- Clear instructions, visuals of locations, named contacts

- Access to mentors or "buddies"

- Early discussion of workplace expectations and boundaries

- Introduction to organisational values and working styles

Delegates shared good practice examples including:

- Providing interview questions in advance

- Clear communication before start dates

- Autism- and ADHD-friendly employers

- Ensuring HR and managers understand reasonable adjustments

This was particularly beneficial for neurodivergent employees.

7.2.3 Mentoring & buddying

Examples of good practice to build confidence and resilience included:

- Young workers paired with mentors outside their directorate

- Regular check-ins and coaching conversations

- Facilitated peer networks for young workers

7.2.4 Structured support for routine & executive function

Proposed employer actions:

- Clear task lists

- Visual reminders

- Regular catch-ups

- Support with diary management

- Break down tasks into steps

- Scheduled feedback opportunities

7.2.5 Balancing hybrid, remote & in-person work

Delegates emphasised:

- The need for regular in-person interaction

- Opportunities to learn soft skills face-to-face

- Combatting loneliness through team days

- Transparent expectations around remote working

7.2.6 Promoting healthy work-life balance

In addressing burnout scenarios, attendees recommended:

- Leaders modelling healthy behaviours

- Avoiding email sending outside working hours (or scheduling for next day)

- Email footers clarifying: "My working hours may be different to yours; no response needed outside your own hours."

- Manager responsibility to recognise early signs of burnout

7.2.7 Building financial wellbeing support

Suggested approaches:

- Financial literacy sessions
- Signposting to reputable money advice services
- Including financial wellbeing in wellbeing calendars
- Training to reduce stigma around financial conversations

7.2.8 Providing opportunities for growth

Recommendations included:

- Offering work experience programmes
- Giving young staff stretch projects
- Working with them to identify career pathways
- Ensuring development opportunities are accessible and visible

8. Conclusion

The workshop brought together a diverse group of employers, practitioners and young people to reflect on the realities facing young employees aged 16–24 and to explore how workplaces can better support them to enter, stay and progress in work. Across the discussions, participants demonstrated a strong willingness to understand the needs of young people and to share practical examples of what works within their own organisations.

The findings highlight that young people bring significant value to the workplace energy, digital competence, openness to change and a willingness to discuss wellbeing. At the same time, the conversations underscored several persistent challenges, including financial pressures, confidence and communication barriers and the need for clearer guidance, supportive management and accessible workplace structures. Participants also emphasised that positive early experiences of work are crucial in shaping long-term confidence, mental health and career development.

Importantly, the workshop confirmed that employers are not only motivated to improve support for young employees but also recognise the benefit of shared learning and collaboration. Many expressed that opportunities to connect with peers and discuss challenges openly are limited and that continued engagement of this kind would be valuable for strengthening practice across Wales.

Overall, the workshop has provided a strong foundation of insights which will directly shape the future of Healthy Working Wales guidance, resources and support services.

9. Recommendations

9.1 What Healthy Working Wales will do

- Develop resources and guidance for employers

Healthy Working Wales will consolidate insights from the workshop to produce clear, accessible guidance for employers. This may include tools such as:

– guidance on onboarding and induction for young staff

– templates for supportive conversations

– examples of low-cost adjustments and good practice

- Promote collaborative learning opportunities

Participants valued the chance to share experiences. Future activity may include:

– follow-up workshops focused on specific themes (e.g., wellbeing, communication, neurodiversity)

– peer mentoring networks or communities of practice for employers

– success stories showcasing effective approaches already in use

- Continue engaging young people directly

The involvement of young volunteers was widely recognised as valuable. Maintaining youth voice will be central to future work, informing the design of resources, tools and further engagement events.

9.2 What employers can do

- Train Line Managers on confidence, conversations, neurodiversity and wellbeing

- Offer accessible recruitment processes that are adaptable to individual needs

- Offer mentoring or buddying

- Create structured inductions and support, including wellbeing

- Promote regular in person contact, especially early on

- Establish clear communication channels for open dialogue and feedback

- Provide financial wellbeing support

- Provide opportunities for growth and development

- Reach out to Healthy Working Wales for adviser support

10. Appendix

Table 1

Question: When you think about the young people you've worked with, what stands out about the value they bring to your workplace or team?

Scenario: Financial Stress

Table 2

Question: What are the main challenges you've seen young employees face in starting or sustaining work, and how have you, or could you, address these barriers (e.g. confidence, communication, wellbeing)?

Scenario: Career Progression and Communication

Table 3

Question: What are the main challenges you've seen young employees face in starting or sustaining work — and how have you, or could you, address these barriers (e.g. confidence, communication, wellbeing)?

Scenario: Financial Stress

Table 4

Question - How can workplaces help young employees grow, take on new roles, and play a part in shaping the future of the organisation?

Scenario: Career Progression and Communication

Table 5

Question: What strengths, perspectives or qualities do young people (aged 16-24) bring to your workplace – and how can employers better recognise and build on these?

Scenario: First Job Nerves

Businesses who attended

Business	Size	Sector
Care & Repair Cymru	10-19	Charity or voluntary sector (including social enterprise)
Expanding Horizons	100-249	Private sector
CASE-UK	100-249	Charity or voluntary sector (including social enterprise)
Welsh Water	1000+	Not for Profit
Neath Port Talbot CBC	250-999	Public sector (local or central government financed organisation)
Swansea Bay UHB	1000+	Public sector (local or central government financed organisation)
Sight Cymru	20-49	Charity or voluntary sector (including social enterprise)
Serco	1000+	Private sector
Welsh Government	1000+	Public sector (local or central government financed organisation)
Geochemic ltd	10-19	Private sector
Monex	100-249	Private sector
Cardiff and Vale College	1000+	Public sector (local or central government financed organisation)
DVLA	1000+	Public sector (local or central government financed organisation)
CAVC	20-49	Public sector (local or central government financed organisation)
Social Care Wales	100-249	Public sector (local or central government financed organisation)
Balmoral Tanks LTD	100-249	Private sector
Môr Cleaning Ltd	20-49	Private sector
Mono Equipment	100-249	Private sector
Money & Pensions Service	250-999	Public sector (local or central government financed organisation)
Cardiff and Vale UHB	1000+	Public sector (local or central government financed organisation)
Early Years Wales	20-49	Public sector (local or central government financed organisation)
NPTC Group of Colleges	250-999	Education
Business Wales	100-249	Charity or voluntary sector (including social enterprise)
Monmouthshire County Council	1000+	Public sector (local or central government financed organisation)
Neath Port Talbot CBC	250-999	Public sector (local or central government financed organisation)
Care & Repair Cymru	10-19	Charity or voluntary sector (including social enterprise)
CVUHB	1000+	Public sector (local or central government financed organisation)

Federation of Small Businesses Wales	100-249	Charity or voluntary sector (including social enterprise)
Bluestone National Park Resorts	250-999	Private sector
Disability Sport Wales	20-49	Charity or voluntary sector (including social enterprise)
WCVA	50-99	Charity or voluntary sector (including social enterprise)
Public Health Wales	1000+	Public sector (local or central government financed organisation)
Mind Powys	10-19	Charity or voluntary sector (including social enterprise)
CIPD		
Admiral	1000+	Private sector