

What is the impact of employer-led interventions or approaches to support young employees in the workplace? A Rapid Review

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Report number: RR0059 (August 2026)

What is a Rapid Review?

Our Rapid Reviews (RR) use an abbreviated systematic review approach to generate evidence to inform stakeholders promptly whilst maintaining attention to bias.

Who is this Rapid Review for?

This rapid review was requested by Healthy Working Wales.

Background / Aim of Rapid Review

Young employees may face additional challenges in the workplace that impact wellbeing such as low confidence, struggles adjusting to working routines and financial stress. The aim of this review was to explore the impact of employer-led interventions or approaches to support young employees in the workplace.

Results of the Rapid Review

Recency of the evidence base: The included studies were published between January 2022 and April 2026.

Extent of the evidence base:

- Nine publications conducted in a range of employment sectors and countries were identified (two of which reported findings on the same study). This included qualitative studies (n=3), before and after studies (n=2), mixed method studies (n=2), a non-randomised controlled study (n=1) and a cross-sectional study (n=1).
- Studies looked at flexible working interventions (n=3, reporting on 2 interventions), workplace culture interventions (n=2), individual wellbeing interventions (n=1), support for specific employee group interventions (n=2) and one study looked at employee perspectives of workplace wellbeing initiatives (n=1). All studies had some methodological limitations.
- Four studies focussed on young employees, however this often included participants aged older than 24. Two studies specifically focussed on graduates (with no age restrictions). Three studies did not focus on young employees but included those aged under 24 in their sample, one of which provided findings related to younger employees.

Key findings and certainty of the evidence

- Flexible working interventions: The 4-day work week (n=2 reporting on the same study) was found to improve sleep problems, fatigue, burnout, mental health, anxiety, negative or positive emotions, life and job satisfaction, work-related stress, and work ability. Some improvements were also found in physical health, exercise frequency, job demands, schedule control and work relatedness/perceived support. However, improvements varied when looking at hour reductions at the company or individual level. The 4-day work week was also found to decrease new hires and absences, while increasing retention and revenue (average of 35% in UK companies). Remote working was found to improve physical health, productivity, and increase the adoption of sustainable practices. However, stress varied depending on age, showing a higher remote work intensity increased stress only for those younger than 25 years.
- Workplace culture interventions: Training targeting bullying and mental health for young apprentices was found to improve confidence in the ability to identify issues in the workplace, awareness of and where/how to access support for workplace bullying, mental health, and suicide, improve efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism, meaning at work, sense of belonging, emotional attachment, long term commitment, enjoyment discussing the industry and reduce perceptions of acceptability around bullying. The 'Stress or Bless' intervention which trained young employees to identify challenges found participants identified multiple workplace challenges such as administrative burden, organisation culture, and high workloads.

- Individual wellbeing interventions: The mindfulness-based intervention for graduates was found to improve self-efficacy however, no significant improvements were found for work-life balance.
- Specific employee group interventions: The autism DISCLOSURE decision-aid tool for young employees was found to improve decision-making capabilities, self-determination and disclosure capabilities, although no significant improvements were found for self-realisation or empowerment. The newly graduated nurse transition programme involving managers was reported to create a supportive and safe atmosphere, provided a designated space for discussions, improved relationships with managers and led to organisational changes.
- Graduate employee perspectives highlighted that daily informal support such as free coffee, initiatives aimed at improving social connection, workplace culture, and hybrid or flexible working had the biggest impact on wellbeing. Social connection interventions had the greatest impact on engagement, whereas flexibility or hybrid working and workplace culture had the greatest impact on employee retention. Workplace culture was reported to impact engagement with wellbeing resources and more formal wellbeing initiatives were reported to be less impactful, being delivered inconsistently and not tailored to graduate employees.
- All interventions were successfully implemented into organisations although there was some variation in uptake across studies. Where reported, the interventions were generally well accepted by employees.
- Overall, there is evidence to suggest a range of employer-led interventions may help to support young employees' mental health. However, given the diversity of interventions, they could not be directly compared. As such the confidence in the findings for each intervention is 'low'.

Policy and Practice Implications

- The evidence base was limited in number of studies and quality however the findings may help to inform the development of future interventions to support young employees.
- The barriers and facilitators inferred highlight that successful implementation may be impacted by organisational support, workplace culture, whether the content is tailored to younger employees, engagement of those delivering the interventions and commitment of those receiving the intervention, approaches to prepare for adoption or sustain changes after, how often interventions are delivered, accessibility, and awareness.
- Many of the approaches identified including flexible working options, improving workplace culture, providing tailored information, supportive supervision, social connection activities, and improved communication may be implemented with relatively limited financial investment.

Research Implications and Evidence Gaps

- There was a paucity of recent high-quality evidence, particularly UK based, that focused on young employees. Further robust studies assessing long-term impacts of interventions designed for young employees are needed to better understand how to support those entering the workforce.
- There was limited evidence on equity, future studies should evaluate the differential impact of employer-led interventions on groups at higher risk of health and social inequalities.
- Further research could also look to compare the impact of employer-led interventions across different occupations to determine what works best and for whom.

Economic considerations

- When considering costs and benefits of implementing interventions or approaches to support young employees, employers should consider the long-term economic potential of younger employees remaining in the workplace and factor in the considerable costs associated with replacing lost staff members (earning £35,694 or more a year), estimated to be a mean cost across sectors of £43,709.
- The Wellness in Work economic evidence review, 2024, presented economic evidence of interventions supporting people in work and assisting people to return to the workforce. Most interventions evidenced a positive return on the investment, often driven by reduced work absence.