



HR UPDATE

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WOODCOTEHR TURNED 2 LAST MONTH A MESSAGE FROM CLAIRE

"Two years ago, I took the leap into running my own HR consultancy, and what a journey it's been.

Year 1 was full of "firsts" and finding my rhythm as a new business owner. Year 2 has been about building, strengthening, and growing - both the business and myself!

In year 2, WoodcoteHR has:

- Continued to grow an amazing client base, whilst building deeper relationships with existing clients.
- Created and strengthened partnerships with our suppliers, including HR system providers.
- Started the journey to innovate our services to help clients navigate people challenges with confidence.



Claire

Running WoodcoteHR has taught me so much about resilience, adaptability, and the importance of a great support network.

I'm so grateful for every client who's trusted me and every fellow business owner who's shared advice and encouragement along the way.

Here's to the next chapter - I can't wait to see where year 3 takes us! And we're kicking things off by building something very exciting, stay tuned ☺☺"


WOODCOTEHR®
is





EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK



18 September marked International Equal Pay Day, a UN-recognised day which serves as a reminder of the importance of ensuring that men and women receive fair pay for work of equal value.

Despite progress over the years, a gender pay gap still exists across every region of the world, with women on average earning less than men. The reasons behind this are complex and mostly shaped by longstanding inequalities and barriers to opportunities that continue to hold women back.

Many businesses agree that equal pay matters. But turning that principle into everyday practice isn't always straightforward. It requires awareness, commitment, and a willingness to challenge old systems and ways of working.

At WoodcoteHR, we believe conversations like this matter. They're not only about fairness, but also about building stronger, more sustainable businesses where everyone can thrive.

How often do you reflect on your pay structures and workplace culture?

If you'd like support in reviewing your approach, book a FREE Discovery Call!

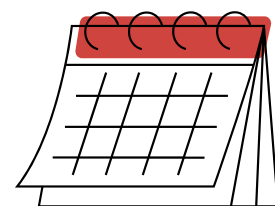
JOB VACANCIES DROP AS HIRING COSTS RISE

UK job vacancies fell by 63,000 at the end of spring 2025, as higher wages and increased employer National Insurance contributions made hiring more expensive for small businesses.

Instead of expanding your team, focus on keeping your best people happy and helping your current staff to develop new skills.

It's cheaper than recruiting and you'll get better results from people who already know, and care about, your business.

If you need help with creating a retention strategy for your team, we can help you.



Book a FREE Discovery Call here!



THE ONE STEP THAT INVALIDATED THIS EMPLOYER'S RIGHT TO WORK CHECK

You can do everything you think is right and still get hit with a massive fine. That's exactly what happened to a fish and chip shop owner in Surrey.

They thought they'd covered all the bases. The person they hired had a National Insurance number, benefit paperwork and was already on PAYE with another employer. Everything looked legitimate.

But the Home Office disagreed and the business was fined £40,000.

Where it went wrong

The employee had presented forged documents. The business owner never physically saw the original passport, which would have revealed the forgery.

That single missed step invalidated their entire right to work check. All the other paperwork meant nothing.

It's easy to assume that having a National Insurance number or P45 proves that someone can work legally in the UK. It doesn't.

What you actually need to do

The rules are stricter than most people realise:

- You must physically inspect original documents (or use approved digital services)
- Take copies and record the date you checked them
- Complete everything before the person starts work
- Keep records for the whole employment period plus two years.

Miss any of these steps and you lose your legal protection. Sadly, the Home Office doesn't care if you acted in good faith or if your business only has 3 employees... they are treating businesses of all sizes equally.



The reality of enforcement

Right to work checks aren't just paperwork exercises anymore. The Home Office is actively targeting businesses and the fines keep getting bigger.

It can be £60,000 per illegal worker if you're a repeat offender. For most businesses, that's enough to cause serious financial damage.

The Surrey case shows that it can happen to anyone. The business owner had no idea they were hiring someone illegally, but that didn't matter when the fine arrived.

Protecting yourself

Right to work checks aren't bureaucracy for the sake of it. They're protection for your business. Take an honest look at your current process.

- Are you physically checking original documents for every new employee?
- Are you keeping proper records?
- Does everyone involved in your hiring process know these rules?

If you're not confident about any part of your right to work process, get it sorted now. It's a lot easier to put a system in place now than try to fix things after the damage is done.

Get in touch if you want help with setting up a system that actually works.





EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: ESSENTIAL, NOT OPTIONAL



Recent research by HR software, Lattice, has shown that many organisations still don't have dedicated roles focused on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). In fact, the majority of HR professionals surveyed said their business has no plans to create or invest in these positions.

At a time when EDI should be seen as central to building resilient, innovative and fair workplaces, this lack of focus is worrying. Some organisations are even scaling back on existing EDI roles, signalling a step backwards.

For us at WoodcoteHR, equality, diversity and inclusion aren't just a nice-to-have. They are essential foundations of a great people strategy. Having said that, EDI initiatives must be embedded properly and not just tagged on and seen as a tick-in-the-box. Basically, businesses need to strike the right balance.

When was the last time you considered how EDI is reflected in your business? If you'd like to explore how to embed equality, diversity and inclusion into your people strategy, let us know.

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5 THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER ASK IN INTERVIEWS

Here are 5 things you should never ask in interviews:

- ✗ Don't ask about partners or children
Even innocent chat about family can look like bias. Stick to role requirements instead.
- ✗ Avoid discussing health or disability
You can ask about interview adjustments, but health questions usually have to wait until after you've made an offer.
- ✗ Don't ask about spent convictions
Most jobs don't allow you to ask about old convictions. Only certain roles, like working with kids, are exempt.
- ✗ Avoid asking about union membership
Questions about unions aren't relevant to most roles and could be seen as discriminatory.
- ✗ Don't ask about age
Avoid direct age questions or trying to work it out with questions like "what year did you leave school?"

These rules aren't meant to make interviews harder; they keep things fair and protect your business from claims.

The best interviews focus on job-relevant questions anyway.





WHAT SMALL BUSINESSES CAN LEARN FROM THE MCDONALD'S CULTURE CRISIS

McDonald's recently faced serious allegations about sexual harassment and misconduct across some of their UK restaurants.

Many of the reports came from young employees about other young employees - crossing lines, normalising inappropriate behaviour and lacking the maturity or training to know what's acceptable in a workplace.

McDonald's didn't dismiss it as a few isolated incidents. They recognised a deeper problem: a culture that hadn't kept pace with the needs of a young workforce.



Here's what they did and what small businesses can take from it:

1

Create a culture where speaking up feels safe and normal

McDonald's found that staff weren't always sure what counted as 'harassment' - and feared they wouldn't be taken seriously. You need to make it easy, safe and judgment-free to raise concerns.

2

Use the language your team relate to

Their staff co-created a campaign called 'Red Flags'. A phrase young people already use to call out bad behaviour. Speaking their language helped to make the message land.

3

Support young managers

Many team leaders were also young and unprepared for the responsibility of handling sensitive issues. Training and support for junior leaders is essential if you promote from within.



This is a great example to demonstrate the importance of culture. Ultimately, many workplace issues boil down to culture.

So, if you have the same problems happening, it will be worth getting in touch to see if there is a wider culture problem at play.



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Top HR Questions

How do you handle an employee who refuses to do tasks outside of their job description?

If the task is reasonable and clearly linked to their role, it's well within your rights to expect it. Have a clear conversation about what you need, remind them of their contractual duties and explain how this fits their responsibilities.

If their job has genuinely evolved since you hired them, update the job description to formalise these new responsibilities. This gives you the clarity and authority you need to manage expectations properly.

Can I offer a job to someone and delay their start date until business picks up?

You're within your rights to delay the start date or hold off on making a formal offer until you're ready. Just be upfront about the situation - tell them that you're interested in hiring them when business improves, but you can't commit to a specific timeline just yet.

It's smart to wait until you're confident the role is viable. This keeps good candidates on your radar without creating any expectations that you might not be able to meet or putting them in the awkward position of resigning before you're certain.

Do I have to give the same benefits to part-time and full-time staff?

Part-time staff should receive benefits worked out proportionally - so if your full-time employees get 20 days leave plus bank holidays, someone working three days a week would get 12 days leave plus the equivalent pro-rated bank holidays.

The important thing is being fair and consistent. If you treat part-time staff poorly compared to full-time employees, you'll end up with unhappy people and potential legal problems.

Do I have to allow pets in the workplace as a reasonable adjustment?

Generally no, but it depends. If someone has a disability and genuinely needs an assistance dog or support animal, you've got to think about it seriously.

You can say no if there are proper reasons, like health and safety or allergies. Just regular pets because someone wants them? You don't have to allow that.

