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HR in Family Business: Earning a seat at the dinner table



SPECIAL FEATURE: PRESENTING THE FINALISTS FOR THE Hr NETWORK NATIONAL AWARDS 2026



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November 2026



Welcome to our November issue of Hr NETWORK magazine. Everyone seems to be super-excited as ever at this time of the year ahead of this month's annual Hr NETWORK National Awards Gala Dinner 2026 with the Hr NETWORK Team putting the finishing touches to what promises to be another great event for 2026, taking place in Glasgow on Thursday 12th November.

We have a wonderful evening of celebration planned and the prospect of hosting around 600 guests this year with the chance to recognise, acknowledge and reward the champions of the HR and people management & development industry in Scotland.

Awards Gala Dinner 2026

We are very grateful to all of our category and supporting sponsors for their support this year and thanks also to the many organisations that have secured a Table of 10 at the forthcoming Gala Dinner. Some organisations have gone one step further and secured two tables of 10 on the night.

This Issue

In this online edition of the magazine, Andy Moore looks at HR in the family business context and asks does HR have a seat at the dinner table?

We also have a full preview of all the finalists and sponsors in this year's Hr NETWORK National Awards 2025 and the following issue in January 2026 will feature the winners from the Gala Dinner.

The regular sections of the magazine include: News, Stats and ELU and a range of Insight features on some hot topics in the people management & development world.

I hope you enjoy your online copy of Hr NETWORK Magazine and look forward to welcoming everyone attending the Awards Gala Dinner on 12th November in Glasgow.

Lee Turner
Publisher

Contributors: Natalie O'Hare, Mairi Mickel, Ryan Eripse, Sarah Fowler, Tsvetelina Hinova, Patti Turfrey

AI can't fix productivity if the workplace is broken!

Businesses have spent billions adopting AI tools, new software, new platforms and new ways of automating work, yet most offices today look almost identical to what they did a decade ago.

The same open plan layouts, with lots of noise, interruptions and expensive distractions. The technology has evolved, but the workplace hasn't, and that disconnect is where productivity is being lost. That's the view of Tyson Gundersen, Co-Founder of Bureau.

Workplace distraction is estimated to cost UK businesses around £488 billion every year. As organisations invest heavily in AI to improve efficiency, many continue to overlook one of the biggest barriers to performance, the physical environment people work in every day.

As return to office mandates continue across both the public and private sectors, this matters more than ever. The challenge is no longer convincing people to come back into the office, it's ensuring the office is somewhere people can actually concentrate and do their best work.

Workplace design should actively support concentration, privacy and productivity, rather than simply provide somewhere for people to sit. The future office won't be defined by AI alone, or by design alone, but by the combination of intelligent technology and environments built around how people actually work.

For the first time, organisations can use data not just to measure productivity, but to improve the conditions that enable it, transforming office design from something static into something dynamic, continually adapting to reduce friction, protect focus and support better performance.

Businesses have spent years asking how AI can make employees more productive. The better question is how AI can help create workplaces where productivity is actually possible. AI didn't create the modern office's biggest challenges, but combined with smarter workplace design, it may finally help solve them.

Asda creates 210 new Supported Internships for young people with special educational needs

Asda has become the country's largest supported internship provider after creating 210 new placement opportunities for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) across 35 stores nationwide.

The expansion means Asda's supported internship programme now operates in more locations than any other UK business, addressing a significant employment gap facing young people with learning disabilities. Only 4.8% of people in England and 4.1% in Scotland with a learning disability go on to secure paid employment after completing their education, compared with around 80% of their peers.

Delivered in partnership with DFN Project SEARCH, Asda's year-long Supported Internship programme combines real workplace experience with tailored education and employability training, helping young people develop the skills, confidence and experience needed to eventually move into work.

Since Asda began working with DFN Project SEARCH in 2023, 43% of interns have progressed into employment – be it with Asda or another business*. With fewer than 6% of young people with learning disabilities in paid work nationally**, supported internship programmes like Asda's play a vital role in helping participants take their first steps into the workplace.

The expansion comes at a time when policymakers and employers are increasingly focused on tackling youth economic inactivity and creating more pathways into employment for young people who face barriers to work.

James Goodman, Chief People Officer for Asda, said: "We're incredibly proud to be expanding our Supported Internship Programme and giving more young people with special educational needs the chance to gain real workplace experience.

"Supported internships have been shown to be an effective route into work and we've seen first-hand the difference these placements can make, helping young people to build confidence and take important steps towards paid employment. As we continue to grow the programme, we hope more young people can benefit from supported internships and the opportunities they create to build skills, gain experience and move into work."

Kirsty Matthews, CEO of DFN Project SEARCH said: "We are delighted to see the expansion of our successful programmes with Asda. Through such strong employer partnerships, we are showcasing the incredible impact that supported internships can have.

"We're so grateful to work with companies like Asda because they demonstrate that when businesses make disability inclusion a priority, everyone benefits. These young people have so much to offer, and programmes like this give them the platform to showcase their talents and build meaningful careers. We look forward to continuing to work with Asda to reach our overall goal of supporting 10,000 young people into employment by 2030."

Devolved nations facing 'soft skills' employment crisis as job applicants lack workplace basics

Three quarters of employers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland struggle to hire candidates with everyday workplace abilities, according to a new report.

The research, published in a new report by skills development organisation City & Guilds, revealed that 74% of employers across the devolved nations agree that it is getting harder to find candidates with the 'soft skills' they need with aptitudes like self & time management, face-to-face communication, and growth mindsets more difficult to find within these nations than in other regions.

The report found that the consequences of these skills shortages were already in evidence, with more than a third of employers experiencing operational errors and delays, increased staff turnover, low morale and lower efficiency as a direct result.

And nearly three-quarters of employers nationally (74%) say soft skills (also termed 'employability' skills) are now more important than technical expertise for workplace success.

The report also revealed factors, which could account for the skills shortage, with half of the young people surveyed (50%) saying anxiety or mental health conditions have affected their confidence when communicating face-to-face. More than a quarter (27%) reported that pandemic-related factors had impacted their confidence, with significant numbers responding that they simply do not know where to turn for support.

In contrast, young people taking apprenticeships were the most likely to feel completely confident in face-to-face communication skills (48%), with three quarters (74%) benefiting from dedicated employability skills training – more than any other segment.

Andy Moss, Interim Chief Executive Officer of City & Guilds, said: "Employers are telling us loud and clear that employability skills matter just as much as technical know-how, if not more. Yet we're now seeing a growing human skills shortage. Our findings confirm that apprenticeships and vocational training are highly effective routes to developing the employability skills businesses need, together with the practical experience that's critical for success in today's workplace."



The advice students don't get told on how to budget and meal prep

Students are starting to settle into life at university, with many realising that food shops are actually more expensive than they thought. Budgeting can be difficult when trying to prioritise your coursework, social life and getting used to fending for your own and figuring out what to cook.

Most student recipes will tell you to make spaghetti bolognaise or a stir-fry and keep in the freezer, but do students know how long to keep food in the freezer? How strict are expiry dates on foods, what are the essentials to get in your shop, how do you reheat your meals?

Sam Richards, Recipe Development Manager at food box provider HelloFresh, shares some of the advice that students don't get told.

"Moving out to uni is already such a big change, it's exciting and nerve racking," Sam says. "Once you start to get settled after freshers and the coursework starts to pile up, the last thing you want to be doing is a food shop."

"Before university, many students have never done a full food shop, so having to go out, budget and plan meals can seem daunting at first. It doesn't need to be, once you know what to buy, how to manage your meals for the week, it makes life so much easier."

Sam shares his top tips on how to budget and how to plan ahead. Bulk cooking your meals can be a simple way to save money and have enough food in the flat for the rest of the week. You can freeze most of your meals such as pasta sauces, soups and curries.

Having some cupboard essentials is always a good idea to make sure you have at least something that you can quickly put together.

Scientists trusted less than business leaders when discussing social issues, study finds

People more likely to see scientists as credible experts when they discuss technology than when they comment on wider social issues.

A study of more than 6,000 people in the UK and Sweden suggests that although scientists are generally regarded as credible, their status as experts is more contested when they discuss issues such as health, education and employment.

Researchers from The University of Manchester and KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden found that scientists were perceived as more credible than government officials, but were no more credible - and in some circumstances less credible - than businesspeople and campaigners.

The findings challenge the assumption that scientific expertise automatically gives academics greater credibility when they contribute to wider public debates.

The researchers wanted to examine whether people actually regard scientists as more credible than other groups when presented with the same claims about society.

Rather than simply asking people whether they trust science, the study used a survey experiment in which participants were asked to assess statements attributed to different types of experts. These included an academic scientist, businessperson, government official or issue advocate.

The statements covered technological and non-technological issues, allowing the researchers to examine whether the identity of the person making a claim affected how convincing it appeared.

The study involved nationally representative samples of adults in the UK and Sweden. Data was collected online, with 6,198 complete responses ultimately included in the analysis. Each participant assessed 8 different combinations of statements and expert types.

The researchers suggest this may reflect the different ways people understand scientific expertise. Technology-related questions may be seen as areas where scientists possess particularly relevant specialist knowledge. Wider social questions, by contrast, can involve competing values, political judgements and forms of knowledge outside academia.

The researchers found that these three forms of distrust were associated with the credibility disadvantage experienced by scientists. They also found that the specific credibility gap between technological and non-technological issues was largely driven by people who expressed these concerns.

The researchers say the findings highlight the difference between public trust in science in general and the credibility of scientists when they act as experts in specific public debates.

The study suggests that people may broadly support science while being more selective about whether they regard scientists as credible sources of advice on particular social questions.

Even seasoned UK leaders are faking it on AI - nearly one in four admit to bluffing

Nearly one in four UK senior leaders (23%) admits pretending to understand more about AI than they actually do, according to new research from technology and management consultancy Emergn. Every respondent had been in their role for at least five years, proof that experience alone is no defence against AI anxiety.

Behind the confident front, there are worries about what comes next. More than a third (38%) believe their career prospects will suffer unless they seriously improve their AI skills within the next year.

The pressure is reaching beyond the working day. More than a fifth (22%) say they feel anxious or lose sleep over how fast AI is changing their industry. Separately, 22% feel out of their depth because of AI's impact on their role.

The findings suggest that even people well established in their careers can struggle with the expectation to keep up. Every respondent had been in their role for at least five years. Experience has not put them beyond the reach of AI anxiety.

Admitting that uncertainty is another matter. For someone expected to answer questions and guide colleagues through change, saying "I don't understand" can feel uncomfortable. The finding that nearly a quarter pretend to know more than they do raises a question for employers: how easy is it for people to ask for help?

Some would be prepared to find that support elsewhere. Four in ten (40%) would change jobs for an employer offering better AI training. For businesses trying to hold on to experienced staff, the opportunity to learn could become an important reason to stay.

The career stakes extend to how leaders judge skills themselves. More than four in ten (43%) rate AI skills above formal qualifications. The finding adds to the picture of people weighing what they already know against what their working future may demand.

Emergn's report calls for learning and coaching to become part of everyday work, giving people help with the problems they actually face. It also highlights the importance of leaders openly learning themselves, so asking a question becomes an accepted part of the job.



Employees recognise the need to reskill, but managers need stronger tools and organisational support to help people keep pace

Employers face a growing workforce risk as employees struggle to understand which skills they need and how to develop them quickly enough to keep pace with changing work, according to WTW's latest EX Intelligent report.

The proportion of employees who say their manager helps develop their abilities has shifted from 84% to 78% over the past four years, highlighting the need to give managers more support for development conversations. At the same time, only about 30% of organisations have established processes for identifying, assessing and tracking workforce skills.

This mismatch risks creating "capability anxiety": uncertainty among employees about whether their skills will remain relevant, what capabilities will matter most and where they should focus their development.

Employees understand that work is changing. 45% say AI is already important to their daily job and another 22% say it will fundamentally change their work in the future. The pressure point is not change itself, but rather the uncertainty of whether they can keep up, what skills matter most and where to focus next.

Gaby Joyner, Head of Employee Experience Europe at WTW, said: "Employees recognise that work is evolving, but many lack clarity on what skills matter most and how to prepare for what comes next. Without that visibility, uncertainty can become a barrier to confidence and growth.

"To address this, employers need to make development more tangible by equipping managers to have meaningful career conversations, creating clearer visibility into skills and career opportunities, and linking learning directly to the work employees do every day."

For organisations, skills uncertainty can create a blind spot. If employees cannot connect their current role with future opportunities, confidence may erode, adaptability may slow and investment in new technology may fail to translate into stronger performance.

Joyner added: "Workforce transformation is more likely to succeed when employees can see a clear path to growth and organisations have the infrastructure to support it. By making skills, career pathways and development opportunities more visible and actionable, employers can reduce capability anxiety and build a workforce better equipped to adapt, grow and perform."

Learning and Development Delivers Results, but Boardrooms Still Aren't Listening, Finds Rise Up Report

Despite demonstrating clear results, Learning and Development (L&D) leaders face a tough truth: most of their strategies never make it past leadership. This is one of the key takeaways from the 2025 State of Learning report published by Rise Up.

The survey, conducted among 300 senior L&D professionals across the UK, found that 40% of respondents say less than half of their initiatives are approved by senior management, showing little improvement from last year. However, perceptions of L&D's strategic importance have grown, with 48% now stating it is central to their business strategy, up 7% from 2024.

The benefits of L&D remain evident. While 55% reported improved engagement - a slight decline from 64% in 2024 - more respondents noted positive impacts on productivity (31%) and innovation (30%), suggesting that L&D is increasingly tied to tangible business performance outcomes. One person was quoted as saying: "I focus on leadership and management and the grievance level has decreased while the skill level has increased."

Despite this, many still face barriers in terms of shrinking budgets and lack of boardroom approval. While the benefits for people have been well received, the metrics that matter from a business perspective - revenue, customer satisfaction and innovation - are less evident.

The report goes on to highlight how investment in L&D has stagnated or declined over the last twelve months. While 23% of organisations reported increased L&D budgets, the majority of those surveyed have limited resources.

Despite these challenges, the findings indicate a gradual shift in mindset: L&D is increasingly recognised as a core part of business strategy, though professionals continue to face boardroom blockage.

Four Women Hired, One Transitioned into Leadership: SecuriGroup & Code First Girls Partnership Opens New Routes into Tech Careers

Four women who had never previously worked in technology are now building software, engineering data solutions and shaping business intelligence systems at SecuriGroup thanks to a partnership with Code First Girls (CFG), one of the UK's largest providers of free technology education for women.

PSince launching the initiative, SecuriGroup has recruited four women from non-traditional backgrounds into technology roles and seen one recruit promoted into a leadership role within its technology team.

The results come at a time when women remain significantly underrepresented across the technology sector. Women account for around 29% of the UK's technology workforce, while in Scotland they represent just 23% of digital technology roles, despite continued growth and demand for technology skills.

Recognising both the challenge and the opportunity, SecuriGroup partnered with Code First Girls to help create new pathways into technology careers for women from non-traditional backgrounds. The partnership was built on a shared belief that career potential is not defined by a person's first career choice and that individuals who actively choose to reinvent themselves often bring exceptional motivation, adaptability, and fresh perspectives.

Recruits from hospitality, finance, insurance and the charity sector now contribute across software development, data engineering and business intelligence, supporting SecuriGroup's core operations and more than 4,500 operatives across the UK.

The success of the programme was recently marked by a visit from Code First Girls CEO Anna Brailsford MBE to SecuriGroup's Glasgow headquarters, where discussions focused on expanding opportunities for women pursuing careers in technology.

The partnership's impact extends beyond those recruited directly into employment. Under their Social Value Model, for every woman deployed into employment, more than 10 women are trained through Code First Girls programmes.

Nearly half of employers plan to expand workplace healthcare benefits this year, yet one in ten employees haven't tried to use them

Research from Healix Health's Hidden Workplace Healthcare Gap Report has found that nearly half (49%) of UK employers plan to expand their workplace healthcare benefits in 2026, even though one in ten employees haven't tried to use the benefits they already have.

The research points to a consistent pattern of employer overconfidence, and comes as businesses in the government's Keep Britain Working programme draw up new best practice guidelines on workplace health, due by the end of the year.

Nine in ten employers (91%) think their employees find workplace healthcare benefits easy to access, but only 69% of employees say they've found them easy to use, on what is the most basic measure of whether a scheme is working. The gap is wider still at organisations with 2,000 to 6,000 employees, where 90% of employers think access is easy compared with just 63% of their own workforce.

The same pattern runs through how employers see their benefits more widely, suggesting the disconnect goes beyond access. Almost all employers (98%) are confident their employees can get timely healthcare when they need it, compared with 87% of employees themselves, while 96% say their benefits meet employee needs, against 83% of employees.

Almost three in ten employers (29%) see confidentiality concerns as one of the biggest barriers to employees accessing their benefits, more than any other barrier they cite. Yet only 14% of employees say confidentiality has been a barrier for them, the lowest of any barrier employees cite, which suggests many employers may be focusing on the wrong problem.

What employees report instead are practical barriers, with a lack of available appointments, time-consuming processes and long waiting times each cited by 19% of employees.

More than a quarter (26%) of 18 to 24-year-olds say they don't know how to access their workplace healthcare benefits, more than double the 10% of employees over 55 who say the same. Just 6% of 18 to 24-year-olds say they haven't faced any barriers at all, compared with 29% of employees overall, meaning the vast majority of younger workers have run into at least one barrier when trying to use their benefits.



THE RISE OF AI GRIEVANCES: RESPONDING WITH HUMANITY, NOT HYSTERIA



Natalie O'Hare
AAB

Artificial intelligence is rapidly changing the workplace. The impact has been discussed on productivity, recruitment and workforce planning, but another trend is emerging that HR professionals cannot afford to ignore, the rise of AI-assisted workplace grievances. Increasingly, employees are using various AI tools such as ChatGPT, Copilot and Gemini to draft concerns, complaints and formal grievances.

What may once have been a short email outlining a workplace issue is now arriving as a detailed document containing legal terminology, references to legislation, lengthy allegations and proposed remedies. HR departments across the UK are reporting a growing volume of AI-generated grievances, many of which are significantly more detailed and legalistic than traditional complaints. For HR professionals, the challenge is not determining whether AI has been used. The challenge is understanding what sits beneath it.

The grievance is still real

One of the biggest mistakes employers can make is dismissing a grievance because it appears AI-generated. Whether an employee has drafted the complaint themselves or used technology to structure their concerns, the underlying issue may still be entirely genuine. Employees often turn to AI because they feel uncertain about how to communicate their experience. AI can help people organise their thoughts, present information more clearly and feel more confident in raising concerns.

The danger comes when organisations become distracted by the style of the grievance rather than the substance. A professionally written complaint is not necessarily a stronger complaint. Equally, a poorly written complaint is not necessarily a weaker one. HR's role is to identify the issues being raised, establish the facts and determine an appropriate outcome. That principle has not changed simply because technology has entered the process.

Separating fact from amplification

AI is exceptionally good at producing persuasive language. It is considerably less effective at understanding workplace context. A common feature of AI-assisted grievances is the tendency for relatively straightforward concerns to be reframed through multiple legal and policy lenses. A disagreement with a manager may suddenly be described as bullying, harassment, victimisation, discrimination and breach of trust and confidence within the same document.

Employment law commentators have also highlighted that AI can misapply legislation and even generate references to legal authorities that do not exist. This can undoubtedly create additional work for HR teams. However, it should not fundamentally change the way concerns are investigated. Rather than becoming drawn into every legal reference, HR professionals should focus on the core facts. What happened? When did it happen? Who was involved? What evidence exists? Returning to these questions helps strip away the noise and identify the actual issues requiring investigation. Good grievance handling has always been rooted in evidence rather than rhetoric.

The risk of becoming defensive

Another challenge is the reaction these grievances can create among managers and business leaders. When managers receive a highly polished and legalistic complaint, the instinct is often to become defensive. The language feels formal, the allegations appear more serious and the document itself may resemble correspondence from a solicitor rather than an employee. This is precisely where HR's role becomes most important.

An AI-generated grievance should not automatically force an organisation into an adversarial position. In many cases, the employee is seeking resolution rather than conflict. The technology may have changed the presentation, but it has not necessarily changed the objective. Organisations that remain calm, objective and focused on resolution will often achieve far better outcomes than those that immediately respond with increased formality and procedural complexity.



Focus on process, not technology

In many ways, AI does not change the fundamentals of effective grievance management. Employers should continue to follow established grievance procedures, investigate concerns thoroughly and ensure employees have opportunities to explain their experiences in their own words. The fact that a grievance appears legally complex should not result in a different standard of investigation.

What organisations may wish to consider, however, is whether their policies adequately address employee use of AI. Employees should understand their responsibilities around confidentiality, data protection and the sharing of company information when using publicly available AI tools.

The objective is not to prevent employees from using technology but to ensure that it is used responsibly and safely. Ultimately, good grievance handling is about understanding people, not documents.

The future of grievance management

AI-generated grievances are unlikely to disappear. As employees become more comfortable using AI in their daily lives, its use in workplace disputes will inevitably become more common. The organisations that respond most effectively will be those that avoid overreacting. Instead of asking whether AI wrote the grievance, ask whether the employee feels heard. Instead of focusing on the sophistication of the language, focus on the evidence.

While the Employment Rights Act does not fundamentally change the grievance process itself, it does increase the importance of handling grievances effectively. As employment protections expand and tribunal claim time limits increase, employers may find that the quality of their grievance handling is subject to greater scrutiny than ever before. In this environment, distinguishing between the presentation of a concern and its underlying substance becomes increasingly important.

So instead of viewing AI as the problem, recognise it as a tool being used by employees who may be seeking clarity, confidence and support when raising concerns. Technology may change how grievances are written, but it does not change the fundamentals of effective HR practice. Fairness, objectivity, empathy and professional judgement remain the cornerstones of good employee relations.

In a world increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, HR's greatest strength remains something entirely human - the ability to listen, investigate fairly and make balanced decisions based on evidence, not algorithms.

HR in Family Business: Earning a seat at the dinner table



Succession, governance and leadership transitions are sometimes challenging when family and business interests overlap. Andy Moore explores how HR professionals can help family firms navigate complex family matters, while building the foundations for long-term success.

The old saying that "you can't be a prophet in your own land" often rings true in family businesses.

It can be difficult to provide objectivity when you're all at the helm. And this is why many may benefit from embedding independent HR people practices. Less prophet, more collaborator.

Family firms are often built on strong values, trusted relationships and deep-rooted ways of working. While these qualities can be a source of competitive advantage, they can also make it difficult to challenge established thinking or address sensitive issues.

As organisations grow, HR can provide the neutrality, structure and trusted advice needed to help the business and the family thrive.

The importance of getting people decisions right in family businesses should not be underestimated. Research from the Family Business Research Foundation estimates the UK had around 408,000 family-business workplaces with five or more employees in 2025.

Family businesses often face a unique set of people challenges. Questions around succession, family employment, governance, leadership development and personal relationships might be sensitive.

Business and family decisions often overlap. At the same time, their strong cultures, long-term outlook and commitment to communities can create fertile ground for HR professionals to make a meaningful difference.

According to Mairi Mickel (pictured), founder of family business coaching consultancy, The Mickel Practice, the effectiveness of HR within a family business depends on factors including organisational size and growth ambitions. It may also depend on the generation leading the business and, crucially, the relationship between the HR practitioner and the family leadership team.

Mairi explains: "If you don't have the ear of the family member, as the HR person, you might not be invited into having a conversation about the business' growth ambitions and direction. This often involves family members of the rising generation."

She highlights that technical HR expertise alone is rarely enough. Influence is often earned through trust, credibility and discretion. Without those qualities, HR may struggle to gain access to the conversations where it can create the greatest value.

"I have seen family business owners not include HR functions at all," says Mairi. "I have coached senior people in significant family businesses. The rewarding part is knowing you have been invited into the business to build a relationship with the owner where there is a genuine mutual understanding."

In many family firms, HR professionals become much more than functional specialists. They often act as trusted advisers and sounding boards to owners and senior leaders, particularly during periods of growth or organisational change.

One of the greatest opportunities for HR lies in supporting the transition between generations. However, Mairi believes succession is about much more than creating leadership opportunities for current and generational family members.

She says: "They have to bring real, recognisable value. They have to be visibly supported by their parents and they need a proper career plan and clear role definition. None of this 'we'll see what happens when they turn up tomorrow'. That's very dangerous from a fairness perspective."

Her comments underline another important contribution HR can make. Clear job design, structured career pathways and transparent performance expectations help ensure family members are developed appropriately while reinforcing fairness across the wider workforce.





They also help avoid the perception that opportunities are awarded solely through family connections.

However, succession planning is not just about preparing the next generation. It is equally about preparing the organisation.

“If you want stability then there’s so much around separating family and business decisions,” says Mairi. “There’s a lot to do to prepare the business as there is to prepare the rising generation that wants to come into a leadership role, or indeed any role.”

Creating this separation can be one of the most difficult aspects of running a family business. Conversations about ownership, employment and future direction can easily become intertwined with family dynamics.

“It’s often difficult to do your own governance in your family business,” she says. “You need space for the family to have conversations about the business together. But you also need to be clear about who’s in the room, what issues are being discussed and where family matters stop and business matters begin.”

For family firms, this does not mean implementing complex governance structures or investing immediately in a dedicated HR function. Instead, the focus should be on creating proportionate people processes that support current needs and future ambitions.

For many organisations, external HR advisers can provide a useful starting point. Independent specialists can bring objectivity, facilitate difficult conversations and offer perspectives that may be harder to provide from within the family itself.

That external viewpoint can be especially valuable because family businesses are often motivated by factors that extend beyond financial performance.

“Often in a family business, profit should not be the first motivator,” adds Mairi. “It’s about supporting the community, providing jobs for the community and recognising long service from employees.”

In family businesses, HR is rarely just about policies and procedures. At its best, it becomes a trusted advisory function that helps preserve family values while preparing the organisation for the future. In businesses, where personal relationships and commercial interests are closely connected, that may be one of the most valuable contributions HR can make.

More information about Mairi’s business can be found at: **www.themickelpractice.com**

Earning a seat at the family table:

- Trust and credibility matter as much as technical HR expertise in family businesses.
- HR often adds greatest value when acting as a trusted adviser, not just a functional specialist.
- Successful succession planning requires preparing the business as well as the next generation.
- Clear career pathways and role definitions help ensure fairness for family and non-family employees.
- Separating family matters from business decisions is critical to long-term stability and growth.
- External HR perspectives can help family firms navigate difficult conversations and future-proof their people strategy.

3 in 4 UK Employees Handle Personal Tasks During Working Hours. Most Say It Makes Them More Productive

More than 3 in 4 employees surveyed across the UK (76%) say they handle personal tasks during working hours at least a few times a week, according to LiveCareer UK®'s Modern Workday Report 2026. Almost half of surveyed Brits (48%) do so every day.

Key Findings

- **Personal tasks are a regular part of the workweek:** 76% handle personal matters during working hours at least a few times a week, including 48% who do so every day.
- **Most believe short breaks support productivity:** 86% say short personal breaks help their productivity, compared with just 3% who say they hurt it.
- **Most report spending no more than one hour:** 71% spend one hour or less per workday on personal activities.
- **Household chores are the most common personal activity:** 54% handle household chores during working hours, followed by personal errands (51%) and social media scrolling (50%).

Personal Tasks Are Now Part of the Workday

The survey found that stepping away from work to handle personal matters has become a regular, accepted part of the modern workday:

- **48%** said every day
- **28%** said a few times a week
- **13%** said a few times a month
- **6%** said rarely
- **5%** said never

In total, **76%** of employees report handling personal responsibilities on company time at least weekly.

Short Breaks Boost Productivity, Not Distract

Contrary to the belief that personal tasks detract from work performance, employees overwhelmingly view these moments as beneficial resets. When asked how short personal breaks impact their productivity:

- **86%** said they improve productivity
- **11%** said they have no impact
- **3%** said they hurt productivity

Overall, 97% believe these activities either help their productivity or have no meaningful effect.

Most Spend One Hour or Less on Personal Activities

Although personal activities are common, most respondents report limiting the amount of time they spend on them. During a typical workday:

- **14%** spend less than 30 minutes
- **57%** spend between 30 minutes and one hour
- **19%** spend more than one hour but no more than two hours
- **6%** spend more than two hours
- **4%** spend no time on non-work activities

In total, **71%** spend up to one hour on personal activities during a typical workday. Six percent report spending more than two hours.

UK vs Europe

Compared to their peers in mainland Europe (Germany, Spain, France, and Italy), UK workers are more likely to mix personal tasks into their workday.

Here is how UK and European workers compare:

- **More frequent breaks**: Nearly half of UK workers (**48%**) handle personal tasks every single day, compared to just **27%** of European employees.
- **Chores instead of chats:** The most common personal task in the UK is household chores (**54%**), pushing most Brits (**57%**) to spend between 30 and 60 minutes a day on non-work activities. In contrast, Europeans keep it shorter - **31%** spend less than 30 minutes, and their top activity is personal messaging (**43%**).
- **Higher confidence in productivity:** Despite spending more time on daily life admin, UK employees are more confident that this flexibility pays off. **86%** of Brits believe these breaks boost their productivity, compared to **72%** in mainland Europe.

The New Shape of the Workday

For employers, the findings suggest that occasional personal breaks are no longer viewed by employees as time lost but as part of a more sustainable approach to managing work and life throughout the day.

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PRESENTING THE FINALISTS FOR THE Hr NETWORK NATIONAL AWARDS 2026

By Teresa Flannigan

The excitement is building as Hr NETWORK proudly presents the finalists for the **Hr NETWORK National Awards 2026**.

Once again, we have been hugely impressed by the quality, diversity and breadth of this year's entries, reflecting the outstanding contribution being made by HR and people professionals, teams and organisations across Scotland.

The winners will be revealed at the 18th annual Hr NETWORK National Awards Gala Dinner, taking place at the magnificent Hilton Glasgow on Thursday 12th November 2026, when more than 600 members of Scotland's HR community will come together to celebrate achievement, recognise excellence and honour the people and organisations making a real difference.

Among this year's categories are HR Assistant/Officer of the Year, sponsored by Skyscanner; Organisational Development Award of the Year, sponsored by Alvarez & Marsal; and HR Director of the Year, sponsored by LHH.

This year, the HR Business Partner of the Year category will be sponsored by Right Management, marking an incredible 19 consecutive years of support for this hugely respected award.

The Gala Dinner

Returning to host the Awards Gala Dinner for a fourth consecutive year is popular radio presenter and broadcaster **Scott Wilson**.

One of Scotland's best-known broadcasting voices, Scott has more than 20 years' experience in radio and is a familiar voice across television and radio advertising campaigns both in the UK and internationally.

With the finalists now revealed, the countdown to one of the biggest nights in the Scottish HR calendar is well and truly underway.



Award Finalists, Categories and Sponsors:

HR Graduate of the Year

sponsored by:

ROBERTSON

Robertson is one of the largest family-owned construction, infrastructure and support services businesses in the UK. Their purpose is to assure a sustainable future. They achieve this by working in partnership and through sustainable growth, which enables us to invest in our business, the future of their people and communities, and to deliver a wide range of projects for customers nationally. Ultimately, everything they do is about making progress safely towards a sustainable future for their people, communities and their business. It's the Robertson Way.

For further information, please visit: **www.robertson.co.uk**



Lauren Feeley, Glasgow Caledonian University

Lauren is an ambitious and highly driven HR professional whose career has been built on continuous learning, adaptability and a passion for solving complex people challenges. Having gained experience across public sector, professional services, consultancy and defence environments, she brings a diverse perspective to workforce strategy and organisational success. Since joining BAE Systems, Lauren progressed from HR Advisor to HR Manager within six months, reflecting her impact, leadership and commitment to excellence. She is recognised for developing innovative workforce solutions, including a recruitment governance process that significantly improved delivery outcomes. Alongside her career, Lauren completed her MSc and is currently studying British Sign Language to further support workplace inclusion and accessibility.



Shannon Haggarty, University of Strathclyde Business School

Shannon is a high performing early career HR professional whose academic distinction, career progression, and commitment to organisational and societal impact clearly mark her as a future leader in the profession. She studied part-time towards her MSc in HRM at the University of Strathclyde and graduated in 2025, earning the Professor John Gennard Award for achieving one of the highest marked final dissertations. She currently works at Edinburgh University Students' Association as a HR Coordinator.



Emily Heron, University of Strathclyde Business School

Emily is an emerging HR professional whose academic excellence and early career achievements have distinguished her as a future leader in the profession. Graduating with Distinction from the University of Strathclyde's MSc Human Resource Management and recipient of the Professor John Gennard Prize, she has combined outstanding academic success with practical impact. Now the sole HR representative in Scotland for HOCHTIEF Operations UK and Ireland, Emily supports 160 employees while driving process improvements, organisational change initiatives, and her on-going professional development toward Chartered CIPD status.



Garima Somani, University of Strathclyde Business School

Moving from Nepal to Glasgow to pursue her career ambitions, **Garima** graduated with Distinction from the University of Strathclyde's MSc International Human Resource Management and was awarded the Professor John Gennard Prize for the highest project mark in her cohort. After starting her career in media, she moved into HR and helped support a company's growth from 15 to 110 employees. Her experience now spans HR operations, research, and sector-wide projects.



Attraction & Resourcing Award of the Year

The **Aberdeen** Talent Acquisition Team led Project Sennen, one of Aberdeen's most ambitious talent transformation programmes. In response to a strategic need to build technology capability, the team delivered a large-scale direct sourcing campaign, hiring over 120 specialist roles while reviewing more than 7,000 applications and conducting nearly 1,000 interviews. The programme generated significant cost savings, strengthened internal capability, enhanced diversity outcomes, and demonstrated how recruitment can act as a strategic driver of business transformation.

The People & Culture team has transformed **DFYNE's** attraction and resourcing strategy during a period of rapid growth, creating a modern, efficient and people centred recruitment experience. They redesigned the full candidate journey, introduced Testlify, strengthened employer branding and built processes that attract high quality talent while protecting DFYNE's culture. Their innovative, values-driven approach has improved candidate quality, hiring outcomes and retention, making a significant contribution to DFYNE's success and earning well deserved recognition for Attraction and Resourcing Team of the Year.

Highland Spring Group has transformed attraction and resourcing into a more strategic, evidence-led and future-focused approach to talent. By strengthening direct attraction, employer brand, assessment, hiring-manager capability and quality-of-hire insight, the organisation has built a model that goes beyond filling vacancies. It is designed to improve candidate experience, strengthen decision-making, build sustainable talent pipelines and ensure recruitment plays a meaningful role in supporting capability, culture and long-term business growth.

Strathclyde's staff recruitment campaign was a strategic initiative delivering a high-quality workforce for the establishment of Strathclyde's international campus in Bahrain. The campaign contributed to the University's internationalisation strategy and global engagement agenda, supporting the development of a research-led, academic hub aligned to Bahrain's innovation priorities. The campaign demonstrated effective delivery of a complex recruitment initiative, combining strategic workforce planning, targeted attraction, and strong stakeholder collaboration to achieve high-quality outcomes within a challenging, time-sensitive environment.



HR Assistant/Officer of the Year

sponsored by:

Travel is so much more than moving from one place to another. It's about discovery, excitement, adventure, meeting new people, experiencing new cultures and breaking from the norm. It's about journeys and destinations that make your eyes light up and neurons fire. At **Skyscanner** they fully embrace the joy of travel and strive to bring this ethos of discovery, community, and culture into what they do every day. In how they operate as a company, how they treat their people and how they deliver for their travellers. Skyscanner is The Real Deal. Their people are The Real Deal. Sponsoring the HR Assistant/officer of the year category is a pleasure as having an awesome people team encapsulates everything they stand for at Skyscanner by recognising emerging talent.

For further information, please visit: **www.skyscanner.net**



Raza Khan, The Action Group

Raza plays a key role in delivering an effective and people-focused employee experience. He manages the full on-boarding and off-boarding lifecycle, recruitment, flexible working requests and the shared HR inbox, while supporting stakeholders with employee relations matters. Raza also leads on immigration and HR compliance, ensuring processes are fair, and legally compliant. His commitment to customer-focused HR makes a positive impact across the organisation.



Miah McNeil, Aimbridge Hospitality

Five years ago, **Miah** arrived at Aimbridge as a business administration apprentice. Today, she is a trusted partner to managers across an international support centre and a consistent champion of a people-first culture. Her progression from apprentice to HR Advisor is a reflection of the consistency, curiosity, integrity, and genuine care for people Miah brings to everything she does. More than just supporting the business today, Miah helps shape what the business will become tomorrow.



Olivia Reed, City of Edinburgh Council

In 2023, **Olivia** took a bold step into HR, joining the City of Edinburgh Council as a HR Consultant after five years in store management at M&S. She has used her lived experience as a professional in her HR role, bringing a practical, people-focused perspective to employee relations and policy. She identified gaps in guidance around pregnancy and baby loss, bereavement, and fertility treatment and created clearer support promoting compassion, flexibility, and fairness. She has championed a more supportive approach to performance management, helping colleagues be their best. Nothing fazes her; she embraces every new challenge, continues to develop her HR knowledge, and is always willing to get involved, making a valued contribution across the wider HR team.



Katy Saunders, Tiso

Katy is HR & Payroll Coordinator at Tiso, Scotland's outdoor clothing and equipment specialist. Since joining Tiso, Katy has quickly established herself as a valued and dependable member of the HR team. Her role spans HR administration, payroll support and supporting colleagues, where her attention to detail, positive attitude and a willingness to take ownership has made a real difference. Katy has embraced every opportunity to develop her skills and has grown significantly in confidence and capability. She is approachable, organised and always willing to help, making her a trusted colleague across the wider Tiso business and a real asset to the HR team.

Employee Engagement Award of the Year

sponsored by:

MULTREES

Multrees Investor Services was incorporated in the UK in 2010. Multrees exists solely as a provider of outsourced services to wealth managers. In their most successful client relationships, their client partners consider their team as part of their own operation. The background and heritage of their firm is in understanding and supporting the high-quality services requirements of the unique industry they operate within. Their view remains as it was when they formed as a business, namely that the UK wealth management sector requires stronger support from dedicated partner firms that can supply scalability and client outcome driven solutions across the full breadth of the consumer journey. Currently they have 130 members of staff located between Edinburgh, Glasgow, and London.

For further information, please visit: **www.multrees.com**

BARCHESTER
Celebrating life

Barchester is a leading Adult Social Care provider with circa 20,000 employees and over 260 homes. The People Services team, headquartered in Inverness, fully support the delivery of the highest quality of care for residents through supporting the retention of great people in an environment conducive to great performance. Their comprehensive approach to engagement goes way beyond a yearly survey to a fully integrated programme delivering meaningful actions to improve their people's experience of work.

element

Element has embedded colleague engagement at the heart of its people strategy through a robust, data driven approach that combines continuous listening, leadership accountability, and meaningful action. In partnership with Willis Towers Watson (WTW), Element delivers annual engagement surveys and regular pulse surveys, ensuring colleague voice informs decision making at every level. Insights drive targeted action plans, leadership development, wellbeing, inclusion, and career growth initiatives, creating a culture where colleagues feel heard, valued, empowered, and connected to organisational success.

TAQA UK has taken a thoughtful, practical approach to supporting employees through a significant workforce transition. Through close collaboration between HR, HSSEQ, Corporate Communications and business leaders, a range of initiatives have been designed to help employees understand the organisations decommissioning journey, building resilience, developing new skills and preparing for the future. This integrated approach has kept employees informed and engaged during major change, contributing to a 70% engagement score and virtually nil voluntary turnover.

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is recognised for its people-first approach to employee engagement, creating an inclusive culture where employees can thrive, grow, and contribute meaningfully. Through a strategy centred on wellbeing, inclusion, learning, recognition, career development, and social connection, TCS empowers a diverse workforce of 23,000+ employees across the UK. Guided by its values of Leading Change, Excellence, Integrity, Learning and Sharing, and Respect for the Individual, TCS fosters belonging, collaboration, and sustainable business success.



HR Technology Award of the Year

sponsored by:

Be-Group brings together three specialist organisations delivering excellence across recruitment and consultancy. Be-IT Resourcing Ltd is Scotland's leading IT recruitment consultancy, trusted by top tech employers and talent. Be-IT Projects provides high-impact consultancy across technology, transformation, and professional services. Be-Resourcing focuses on Financial and Professional Services recruitment, led by Scotland's most experienced recruiters, with deep sector expertise and a sharp eye for quality. Our team has spent decades delivering top-tier talent and career-defining opportunities across countless appointments, campaigns, and projects. United by a commitment to innovation and results, the Be-Group empowers organisations to grow, adapt, and succeed in a fast-changing digital landscape.

For further information, please visit: **www.be-it.co.uk**

Aimbridge Hospitality EMEA made a deliberate choice: invest in the skills already inside the HR function to build something the business was missing. A single, fully integrated platform connecting strategic planning to individual performance, across 3,500 people in 7 countries, at zero additional cost. Built entirely in-house within Microsoft 365, the solution gives leaders at every level a clear line of sight from their own goals to the priorities driving the business forward.

DYFNE's People & Culture team has delivered a standout HR technology transformation by introducing Testlify as DFYNE's assessment platform. Replacing manual processes with a scalable, data led solution, they modernised recruitment, improved hiring speed, reduced costs and strengthened decision making. Testlify now supports both candidate assessment and leadership development, becoming a core part of DFYNE's wider people strategy. This innovative, high impact implementation has significantly enhanced efficiency, consistency and organisational growth.

Highland Spring Group's HR team is reimagining how people processes are designed through automation, systems integration and generative AI. Rather than simply digitising existing ways of working, the focus is on removing unnecessary administration, improving consistency and creating greater capacity for higher-value people activity. This evolving, human-centred approach to HR technology combines innovation with clear judgement, governance and accountability, helping create more efficient, scalable processes while keeping people at the heart of decision-making.



Skyscanner

AI Unlocked is Skyscanner's organisation-wide AI capability transformation programme, designed to help employees use artificial intelligence safely, confidently and effectively in real work. Sponsored by the CTO and CAIO, it combines practical learning, experimentation, governance and responsible-use guidance. Following a Glasgow pilot, the programme scaled globally, reaching more than 900 employees across five offices. Its measurable impact includes increased prototyping, collaboration and workflow integration, while employee-generated ideas are creating value for Skyscanner and its travellers.

HR Project of the Year

EDINBVRGH
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

The HR data and insight team at the **City of Edinburgh Council** transformed workforce planning and governance by introducing a realtime dashboard that gives colleagues and managers instant access to key data. Built in partnership with staff, this tool empowers data driven decisions, making it easier to review resources and respond quickly to changing needs. The team's collaborative, people first approach has strengthened trust, engagement and workplace culture, ensuring everyone feels informed, valued, and better equipped to support the organisation's goals.

MULTREES

Fifteen years from start up, **Multrees** reached a point where a cultural transformation was needed to align everyone behind a set of values we could all agree represented the Multrees of today, and shape us for tomorrow. It was essential that these were not a "top down" tell. 156 hours of colleague engagement created values and behaviours that truly belong to our people – giving everyone a shared blueprint for how we work and grow together.

Northern Marine

Northern Marine Group is proud to represent the team behind Licence to Lead, their Group's management development programme. Working collaboratively with colleagues across the business, they helped create a practical and engaging learning experience focused on up-skilling managers, embedding values-led leadership and driving a positive management culture shift. Developed in response to an increasingly complex external environment, the programme aims to strengthen leadership capability, raise management standards and equip leaders with the skills needed to navigate change. The programme reflects a shared commitment to investing in people, strengthening organisational culture and building the capability required to support future growth, performance and long-term business success.

Public Services Delivery Scotland

This project by **PSDS** strengthened the HR and OD function by building the skills and knowledge needed to meet current and future workforce challenges. A CIPD-led 360 review of the HR Target Operating Model, supported by a Development Insights Tool assessment, provided an evidence-based view of strengths and development needs. The findings informed a targeted improvement plan that enhanced services and people practice, leading to the organisation becoming the first Scottish-headquartered organisation to achieve CIPD People Development Partner status.





HR Manager/Advisor of the Year

sponsored by:

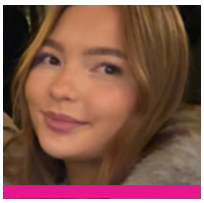
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At **AAB**, they don't believe in one-size-fits-all solutions. They will work closely with you to truly understand your business inside out, and together, they will craft innovative, commercially driven strategies spanning Employment, Pay and People. Their strategic and outsourced services across HR, H&S, Learning & Organisational Development, Whistleblowing, Payroll and Corporate Benefits are personalised and designed to fit your current needs and future aspirations. They don't just give you "off the shelf" solutions, their team of experts will seamlessly integrate as an extended part of your team whether you're just starting out or are well-established. They will provide creative interventions and flexible, hands-on support every step of the way.
For further information, please visit: **www.aab.uk**



Stephanie Lumb, University of Strathclyde

Stephanie is the embodiment of what an HR Manager should be. She consistently demonstrates professionalism, insight and dedication. As a relatively new manager, she has become a vital member of the department, supporting the development of her team members and building a strong track record of leading strategic initiatives that have delivered measurable improvements in business performance and operational efficiencies. Her approach is always driven by the University's values.business strategy.



Megan McAdam, Enhance Healthcare

Megan has worked in HR for three years, beginning her journey by studying Human Resource Management at South Lanarkshire College before progressing to UWS, where she completed her degree in HRM and Business. She began her career as an HR and Recruitment Officer within private healthcare, where she gained valuable experience before completing her CIPD Level 5. After two years, she joined Enhance Healthcare as an HR Coordinator, and as her role evolved, she progressed into an HR Advisor position. Megan enjoys working in HR because no two days are the same, and she loves problem-solving, supporting people and working collaboratively as part of a team.



Rachel Miller, Multrees Investor Services

Rachel is a Multrees success story. Joining the company from school as an apprentice, Rachel brings energy, ambition, and a strong organisational focus on people. In five years, her professional approach has seen a rapid rise to trusted People Advisor leading strategic business programmes. Recognised for her expertise and professionalism, her impact is evidenced throughout the business from leadership capability, attendance and retention, to values-based policy introduction and improving workplace wellbeing.



Jennifer Sorley, Simple Online Healthcare

Jennifer is an HR Advisor who is passionate about making HR feel human, fair and supportive. She supports employees and managers through sensitive situations, including complex and sometimes difficult people matters, helping to build trust in HR and create positive outcomes. Over the past year, she has strengthened maternity support by creating clearer communication and guidance. She also created a menopause policy and provided support and guidance to employees and managers on menopause to ensure their people are supported. Jennifer has also completed the Mental Health First Aid training and achieved her CIPD Level 5 while working full time, something she is incredibly proud of and sees a reflection of her commitment to continued professional growth.

Health & Wellbeing Award of the Year

MINTRA®

Mintra, a leading provider of learning and workforce management solutions for safety critical industries, has embedded wellbeing into the heart of its culture. Through mental health support, wellness programmes, flexible and family-friendly working, fitness initiatives and open communication, employees are supported to thrive both personally and professionally. The results speak for themselves: sustained low sickness absence, improved engagement, stronger productivity and better retention. Mintra demonstrates that a genuine people-first approach doesn't just create a healthier, more engaged workforce, it delivers measurable business benefits and underpins sustainable organisational growth.

NHS Lanarkshire has redefined workforce wellbeing by creating an innovative, system-wide partnership supporting over 15,000 staff. Uniting Occupational Health, Trade Unions, Psychology, Spiritual Care, Health Improvement, HR and Communications, the programme combines strategic leadership, real-time wellbeing intelligence and a £16.5 million annual investment to deliver a whole-person, bio-psychosocial approach. The result is a sustainable, data-led wellbeing culture that improves staff experience, strengthens organisational performance and ultimately enhances patient care.

At **TCS**, employee wellbeing is a strategic priority embedded across the employee experience. Through a holistic approach supporting emotional, social, physical and financial wellbeing, employees and their families have access to initiatives including Mental Health First Aiders, the Employee Assistance Programme, TCS Cares, Maitree, Fit for Life and the Yoga Council. With more than 8,000 associates participating in wellbeing programmes during FY25, TCS continues to foster a culture where people feel supported, connected and empowered to thrive.

The University of Strathclyde's Workplace Wellbeing Team is creating a culture where people feel safe, valued and able to thrive. Guided by the University's Culture of Care, the team brings psychological safety, belonging and kindness into everyday working life. Through wellbeing reviews, manager development, inclusive health programmes and tailored disability support, it combines strategic ambition with practical, compassionate action. Its evidence-led approach ensures wellbeing is not simply an initiative, but a shared commitment across the University.

Diversity & Inclusion Award of the Year

Within the **City of Edinburgh Council**, diversity and inclusion are more than just policies, they are core to the council's success. Through compulsory equalities training, targeted programs, and fair recruitment, they create an environment where everyone is valued. Colleague networks and reverse mentoring drive authentic culture change, while rigorous measurement keeps us accountable. Their Workforce EDI Strategy tackles barriers and supports resilience. By embedding equality at every level, they build a workplace where all can thrive and contribute fully.



Element has embedded diversity, equity and inclusion into its business strategy, recognising that inclusive workplaces drive stronger engagement, innovation, collaboration and long-term performance. Through executive accountability, inclusive leadership development, colleague resource networks, equitable talent practices and global inclusion initiatives, Element is building a culture where every colleague feels valued and empowered to contribute. This commitment strengthens colleague attraction, retention and development while creating a more connected, high-performing organisation that is better positioned to serve customers and achieve sustainable growth.

Reporting A Discriminatory Incident (RADI) is a pioneering digital innovation transforming how discrimination is reported, understood and addressed across **NHS Lanarkshire**. Co-designed with staff networks, trade unions, HR, organisational development and technical experts, it provides a trusted reporting route while generating valuable workforce intelligence. RADI strengthens accountability, builds staff confidence, informs targeted interventions and supports progress on equality, inclusion and wellbeing, helping to create a workplace where everyone can thrive.

Skyscanner's RISE programme is a global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion strategy designed to make belonging part of the employee experience. Through four pillars—Represent, Inspire, Support and Empower—it combines ambitious targets with measurable action across recruitment, progression, leadership, wellbeing and workplace culture. Employee-led networks, senior and executive sponsorship, inclusive policies and targeted talent programmes are creating stronger representation, supporting retention and enabling colleagues to thrive. Its impact is recognised through improved outcomes and external awards globally.

Learning & Development Award of the Year

sponsored by:

Connect Three

Connect Three is an award-winning leadership and development consultancy transforming how organisations lead, grow and perform. They partner with ambitious businesses across all industries to build inspiring leaders, thriving cultures and sustainable impact through consultancy, coaching and practical learning experiences. Working with SME's to large global businesses, they're the trusted global partner for market-leading organisations. They work as an extension of your team, dig deeper to uncover every hidden gem and look at the bigger picture in a holistic stance to design multi-layer learning programmes aligned to your people and culture strategy. Connect Three care about making a difference to people and business. In fact, they've legally committed to put people over profit as a certified B Corp.

For further information, please visit: **www.connectthree.co.uk**

Forth Ports' integrated leadership development framework, delivered in partnership with Tack TMI, is building a future-ready leadership pipeline across Emerging, Transformative and Strategic Leader programmes. Grounded in talent review insight and succession planning, the programmes combine diagnostics, coaching, experiential learning and business application to drive behavioural change, strengthen collaboration and support internal progression. By embedding leadership development into business planning, Forth Ports is creating sustainable organisational capability and long-term leadership readiness.

Chase's Operational Learning team supports colleagues across the UK, US, Germany and the Philippines. Combining Learning Partners, digital designers, faculty and transformation specialists, the team has created an agile, AI-first learning ecosystem connecting development directly to business performance. Flagship programmes including Skills Passport, Excellerate, New to Role Re-imagination and Aspiring Leaders have accelerated capability, strengthened leadership pipelines and improved customer outcomes – demonstrating how collaborative, data-led learning can transform people, performance and culture at scale.

The **National Fostering Group** Learning and Talent Team support over 300 Foster Carers and nearly 40 staff across Scotland, creating innovative, accessible and trauma-aware learning. The team has increased training compliance by 10 percentage points while developing programmes aligned with Scottish legislation. Through therapeutic parenting, VR-enhanced learning and their Associate Trainer programme, they empower carers and colleagues with the confidence and skills to strengthen placements, support complex needs and improve outcomes for children and young people.

Scottish Water's Take the Lead Programme was a learning and development (L&D) initiative designed to build future leadership capability and develop aspiring leaders. Created in response to organisational learning needs, and inclusive by design, the programme supported participants to grow their confidence, skills and readiness for future leadership roles. Take the Lead demonstrated how targeted L&D can deliver significant business benefits, strengthen talent pipelines, improve career progression for individuals and deliver lasting organisational value.



Organisational Development Award of the Year

sponsored by:

ALVAREZ & MARSAL

Founded in 1983, Alvarez & Marsal is a leading global professional services firm specialising in advisory, business performance improvement and turnaround management. Renowned for its hands-on, results-driven approach, A&M helps organisations navigate complex challenges, drive transformation and unlock value. Its People Services team brings together expertise across four key areas: People, Reward & Performance (PRP), Executive Reward, Employment Tax and Equity Reward. Combining data-driven insights with practical and technical experience, the team helps organisations develop effective reward strategies, performance frameworks and people solutions that attract, retain and motivate talent, align workforce capability with business ambitions and accelerate organisational performance.

For further information, please visit: **www.alvarezandmarsal.com/expertise/emea-tax/people-reward-performance-services**



Aimbridge EMEA

Aimbridge Hospitality EMEA listened to what employees were telling them: career progression, development, and communication were the consistent themes. The answer was a connected programme of change that included leadership development at every level, visibility through career pathways, structural redesign, and the organisation's first ever company-wide strategic planning process. Two years on, the organisation is more structured, transparent, and considerably more ready for what comes next.

McQueens DAIRIES

McQueens Dairies has transformed its approach to organisational development to support rapid growth, digital transformation and long-term business performance. By connecting people, process, performance and technology, the organisation has strengthened on-boarding, leadership capability, workforce development, and cross-functional collaboration. Learning and development has become embedded within wider business planning, supported by improved digital learning, workforce data and performance insight. The programme has increased learning engagement, improved operational consistency, and strengthened organisational readiness for change. Most importantly, McQueens has shifted from a reactive approach to development towards a proactive culture focused on continuous improvement, capability growth and sustainable organisational performance.

MOTT MACDONALD

Mott MacDonald's APD Mid-Career Professionals (MCP) Network is an innovative and ever-evolving workforce initiative, supporting the 65% of employees who form APD's 'critical middle' and future leadership pipeline. This unique employee-led programme combines community, networking, personal and professional development into a single integrated model. It addresses a career stage often overlooked by traditional talent programmes. Executive sponsorship, measurable outcomes, and continuous improvement have strengthened engagement, career progression, organisational connection, wellbeing, happiness, and retention of our employees.

NHS Lanarkshire

NHS Lanarkshire's Values Programme is transforming organisational culture across a workforce of 15,000 staff. Delivered by a small, dedicated L&OD team, it brings values and behaviours to life through engaging conversations that empower every team to shape their culture. At the heart of wider wellbeing, inclusion and anti-discrimination initiatives, the programme is fostering positive workplace experiences, collective ownership and lasting change. Independent university evaluation will evidence impact and support continuous improvement.



Best Employer/ Workplace of the Year

sponsored by:

International Beverage

International Beverage is an award-winning premium spirits business brought together through a family of authentic, local brands each possessing a rich history and unique character. As an accredited Great Place to Work they nurture an inclusive workplace where everyone is encouraged to be their true selves, embracing the unique perspectives and backgrounds that their diverse, global teams bring to the table. Working together as one team, fostering meaningful relationships, sharing experiences and inspiring each other, their purpose is all about creating connections. These connections span between their people, customers, consumers, and the communities in which they live and work. People are at the heart of the business, a business shaped by their extraordinary spirit. Delivering on promises, they are committed to the long-term investment of their people, their brands and their vision for the future, remaining focused but evolving, whilst staying true to who they are.

For further information, please visit: **www.interbevgroup.com**



DFYNE

DFYNE stands out as a workplace where people genuinely thrive. Their culture is built on trust, flexibility and real investment in their team, supported by perks that go far beyond the norm - from wellness benefits and development opportunities to an environment that feels energising, supportive and fun. They're proud to create a space where people feel valued, motivated and excited to grow, making DFYNE a truly exceptional place to work.

HIGHLAND SPRING

Highland Spring Group has created a people-centred, values-led workplace where culture, wellbeing, leadership and employee voice are embedded into everyday operations. Guided by their values of *We're a Team, We're Proud, We Care*, the organisation has strengthened and improved their engagement, leadership capability and employee experience. A deliberate focus on listening, development and recognition has helped establish our talented, engaged and committed workforce as a genuine competitive advantage - and as a critical enabler of their organisation's continued growth and success.

MULTREES

We know that great people in a great workplace deliver exceptional performance, influencing those around them and creating an environment where everyone thrives in their own way. Sustainable growth needs more than operational excellence, so we asked our people to shape the **Multrees** of the future. And it worked. Our culture continues to evolve because we continue to listen, encouraging colleagues to contribute and grow, and be recognised for what they do.

Skyscanner

Born in Scotland and now operating worldwide, **Skyscanner** is a global travel technology company helping millions of people plan and book better journeys. With two Scottish offices in Glasgow and Edinburgh, Skyscanner is creating a workplace where people feel heard, supported and proud to contribute. Its highest employee engagement score recorded to date reflects a culture built on connection, collaboration and care. The new offices support wellbeing, creativity and different ways of working, while flexible benefits, development opportunities and leadership listening help people thrive. Innovative, company-wide hackathons and experiential learning opportunities also help colleagues embrace AI tools, move faster and deliver more value to travellers.

HR Business Partner of the Year

sponsored by:

Talent Solutions Right Management ManpowerGroup

Right Management help organisations make their talent their ultimate competitive advantage by building the capabilities needed to up-skill, adapt and transform their workforce. With over 40 years' experience and global expertise spanning more than 75 countries, they know how to help you unlock the value of your most important asset - your workforce. Their assessment, coaching, leadership, career development, change and outplacement programmes will accelerate performance and future-proof your talent.

For further information, please visit: **www.rightmanagement.co.uk**



Rajana Antony, Tata Consultancy Services

Rajana is a Senior HR Business Partner at Tata Consultancy Services, supporting over 1,200 employees across Scotland and the UK. A Chartered MCIPD professional and SHRM-SCP, she is recognised for aligning people strategy with business outcomes through workforce transformation, leadership development and employee engagement. Over the past year, Rajana has led complex change programmes, strengthened talent pipelines, enhanced workforce capability and advanced community impact initiatives, delivering measurable results while championing a people-centred approach to business success.



Erin Bruce, DFYNE

Erin is an exceptional HR Business Partner whose impact is felt across every part of DFYNE. She brings clarity, calm confidence and a genuinely people centred approach to even the most complex situations. Erin builds strong relationships, supports leaders with practical insight, and consistently raises the standard of our people practices. Her dedication, judgement and partnership style make her an invaluable part of our team and thoroughly deserving for HR Business Partner of the Year.



Sean Davidson, Simple Online Healthcare

As Learning & Development Specialist at Simple, **Sean** has focused on making learning more accessible, practical and part of how we work every day. He's built a bespoke L&D platform that gives people year-round visibility of development opportunities and more ownership of their own learning. Alongside 98% LMS engagement, over 1,000 course completions and 100% participation in leadership development, He is particularly proud of the impact this has had on our managers, building confidence, encouraging earlier conversations around performance and helping create a culture where development is everyone's responsibility.



Rachel Lucken, TAQA UK

Rachel is an HR Business Partner at TAQA UK, where she leads strategic HR initiatives across a complex business environment supporting late-life operations and decommissioning. Recognised for her people-first leadership, Rachel has played a key role in delivering major organisational change, workforce planning and employee engagement programmes, ensuring people remain at the heart of business decisions. Through a combination of strategic insight, collaboration and empathy, she has supported employees while maintaining trust, engagement and organisational performance.

HR Team of the Year

sponsored by:

CIPD

The **CIPD** has been championing better work and working lives for over 100 years. It helps organisations thrive by focusing on their people, supporting our economies and societies. It's the professional body for HR, L&D, OD and all people professionals – experts in people, work and change. With over 160,000 members globally – and a growing community using its research, insights and learning – it gives trusted advice and offers independent thought leadership. It's a leading voice in the call for good work that creates value for everyone.

For further information, please visit: **www.cipd.co.uk**

Aimbridge EMEA

The **Aimbridge Hospitality EMEA** HR team is fifteen people who support a business of 3,500 across seven countries. What sets them apart is not their size but their ambition: to build a business where people are developed, recognised and given the tools to grow. From the hotels in their portfolio to the leaders they develop, this is a team that believes great people strategy and great commercial performance are the same thing.



The People Team has delivered an outstanding year in Avidity across all the functions. During a recent period of significant client change and growth, the team led the restructure of 25% of the workforce, redeployed 82% of affected colleagues and filled 95% of vacancies, well in excess of expected targets. Alongside this substantial change agenda, the team also launched a flagship Leadership Capability programme, training over 150 managers in inclusive hiring and employee relations practices.

The **City of Edinburgh Council's** HR team has transformed organisational culture through a people first initiative centred on Respect, Integrity and Flexibility. By co-creating a behavioural framework with staff, enhancing engagement, and prioritising wellbeing, they have started to rebuilt trust and boost morale following challenging years. Their shared commitment has made a real difference to daily working life, helping staff feel happier, more engaged, and proud to be part of the Council community.



Over the past two years, the **McQueens Dairies** HR team has transformed the People function into a strategic force behind one of the organisation's most significant periods of growth. Supporting a workforce increase of more than 60%, the team has delivered sustainable improvements across leadership, recruitment, retention, systems, workforce planning and employee experience. By bringing HR, Recruitment and Learning & Development together as one integrated function, the team created a more agile, collaborative and business-focused service. The implementation of Sage People, strengthened leadership capability and data-led decision-making has delivered measurable impact, including reducing labour turnover from 205% to 165%. Their contribution was recognised through the 2024 Support Function of the Year award.
mpact on tenants.

HR Director of the Year

sponsored by:

LHH helps individuals, teams, and organisations find and prepare for what's next in the world of work. We support client's needs throughout the talent journey, from recruitment to career transitions and leadership development. We empower organisations to expand their capabilities and workers to build brighter futures.

For further information, please visit: **www.lhh.com/en-gb**



Sara Copeland, Avidity

Sara is an accomplished people leader with over 25 years' experience delivering organisational transformation, leadership development and business performance across the private, public and third sectors. As Group People Director at Avidity, she has transformed the People Function into a strategic business enabler, aligning people strategy with commercial growth and organisational capability. Sara has led initiatives in leadership development, employee relations, talent acquisition and DE&I, while championing values-led leadership, governance and colleague experience.



John Jarvie, Highland Spring Group

John is HR Director at Highland Spring Group. Over the past five years, as the business has grown and transformed significantly, John and the HR team have played a central role in enabling that change — strengthening leadership, culture, capability, talent and ways of working. With Highland Spring now positioned for further growth and transformation, John continues to focus on ensuring the organisation, its leaders and its people are equipped to deliver the business's ambitions.



Carole Lamond, Multrees Investor Services

Carole, Chief Culture & Communications Officer at Multrees Investor Services, is redefining culture into a powerful commercial advantage. An exceptional leader, she unlocks potential, inspires high performance, and embeds AI, automation and innovation to build lasting organisational capability. Combining commercial acumen with unwavering belief in people, Carole has created a culture where innovation accelerates performance, human expertise remains the competitive advantage, and sustainable growth becomes the



Fiona Zebik, LendInvest

Fiona is People Director at LendInvest, with significant experience in People leadership. She's built her career turning HR from an administrative function into a genuine driver of commercial strategy, leading culture change, organisational design and executive-level influence. Known for cutting through complexity and challenging conventional thinking, she builds high-performing teams and holds leaders to account when it matters most. Outside of work, Fiona is mastering stakeholder management on a whole different level, as mum to 18-month-old triplets.

Outstanding Contribution to Scottish HR

The Outstanding Contribution to Scottish HR Award is Scottish HR's most prestigious award made to an organisation or individual who has demonstrated a distinguished service to the HR profession.
The winner of this most prestigious award will be announced at the Gala Dinner on Thursday 12th November 2026.

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Secure Your Table of 10

Demand for this year's Awards Gala Dinner has been exceptional, with table sales already at an all-time high.

For sponsors, partners and table hosts who want to ensure they can join us once again this year, we strongly recommend securing your table as soon as possible. Tables of 10 are expected to be in particularly high demand.

There is also a small number of single seats available for those wishing to attend without booking a full table.

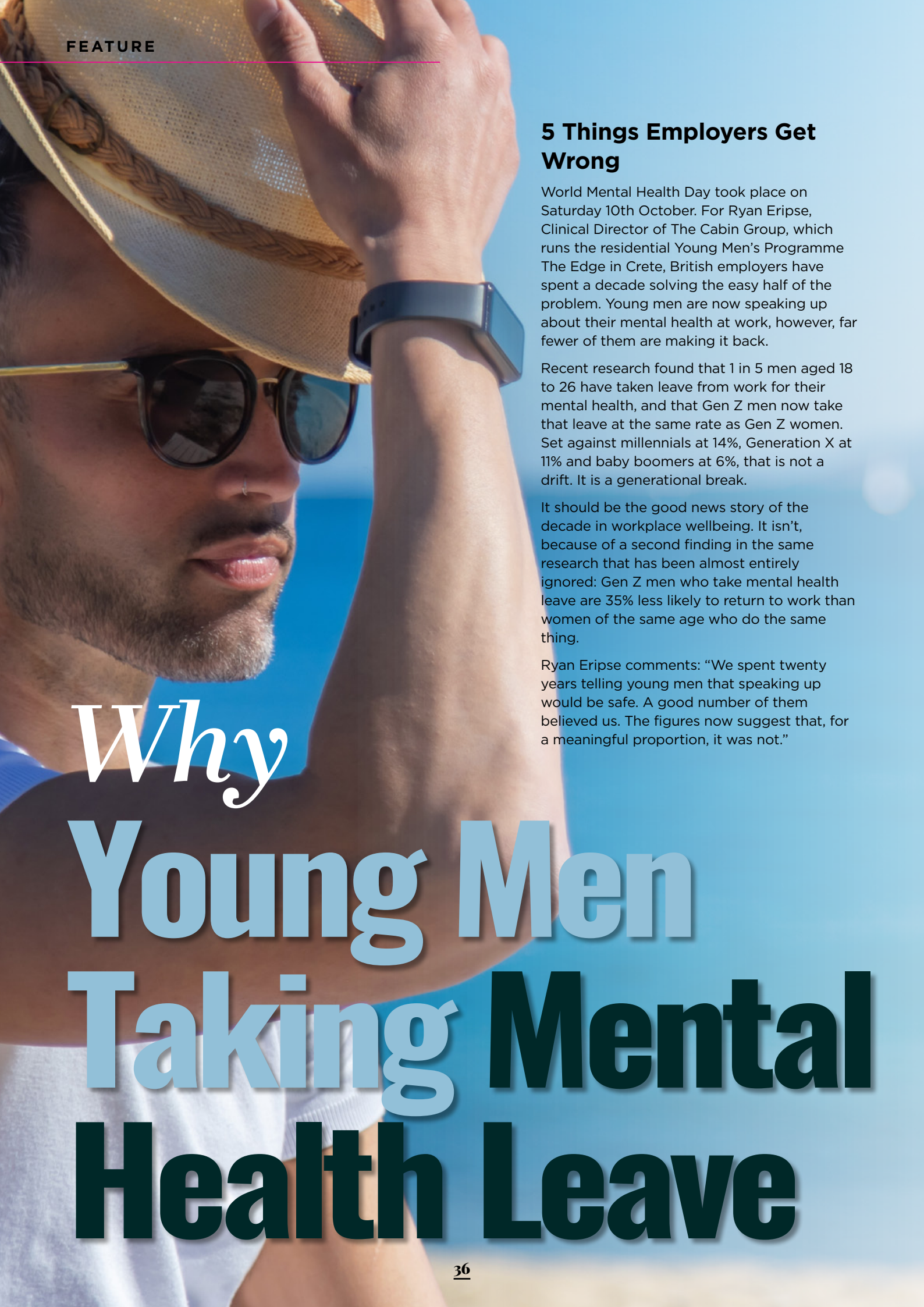
If you have any enquiries in relation to sponsorship or becoming a table host at the Gala Dinner at the Glasgow Hilton in November 2026, please contact: Tel: 0131 625 3267 or email:

awards@hrnetworkscotland.co.uk

www.hrnetworkjobs.com/events/awards/







Why Young Men Taking Mental Health Leave

5 Things Employers Get Wrong

World Mental Health Day took place on Saturday 10th October. For Ryan Eripse, Clinical Director of The Cabin Group, which runs the residential Young Men's Programme The Edge in Crete, British employers have spent a decade solving the easy half of the problem. Young men are now speaking up about their mental health at work, however, far fewer of them are making it back.

Recent research found that 1 in 5 men aged 18 to 26 have taken leave from work for their mental health, and that Gen Z men now take that leave at the same rate as Gen Z women. Set against millennials at 14%, Generation X at 11% and baby boomers at 6%, that is not a drift. It is a generational break.

It should be the good news story of the decade in workplace wellbeing. It isn't, because of a second finding in the same research that has been almost entirely ignored: Gen Z men who take mental health leave are 35% less likely to return to work than women of the same age who do the same thing.

Ryan Eripse comments: "We spent twenty years telling young men that speaking up would be safe. A good number of them believed us. The figures now suggest that, for a meaningful proportion, it was not."

Why this lands now

This arrives at an awkward moment for British employers. Sir Charlie Mayfield's Keep Britain Working review, published in November 2025, put the cost of health-related economic inactivity at £212 billion a year, around 7% of GDP, and found 800,000 more people out of work for health reasons than in 2019. Its central conclusion was that employers are uniquely placed to act on prevention and early intervention, while the NHS concentrates on diagnosis. Its Vanguard Phase runs from 2026.

Employers have just been handed formal responsibility for keeping people in work, and the best available evidence on the group most willing to disclose says that disclosure, in its current form, is associated with leaving work altogether. For a small business without an HR team or occupational health provider, that responsibility lands on a manager who has usually had no training for it.

Key statistics:

- 1 in 5 men aged 18 to 26 have taken leave from work for their mental health, the same rate as Gen Z women. By generation: Gen Z men 20%, millennials 14%, Generation X 11%, baby boomers 6%.
- Gen Z men are 35% less likely to return to work after mental health leave than Gen Z women.
- Health-related economic inactivity costs an estimated £212 billion a year, about 7% of GDP, with 800,000 more people out of work for health reasons than in 2019.
- Sickness absence is running around 50% higher than before the pandemic, the highest level in 15 years.
- 65% of men perceive stigma attached to men's mental health, and 30% say they do not know where to turn for help.

Disclosure is a one-way door

The gap between taking leave and returning from it is not a gap in resilience. It is a gap in what happens during the leave and what waits at the end of it. Both are within an employer's control, and neither is usually designed at all.

Consider what mental health leave looks like for a man in his first or second job. He is early in his tenure, so his working relationships are thin and largely task-based. He has less accrued goodwill than a longer-serving colleague, and he knows it. His absence is covered informally by a team who are told almost nothing. And he returns to a workplace where he is now the person who went off, in a role where he had not yet established what else he was known for. None of that is inevitable. All of it is design, or the absence of it.

Ryan Eripse says: "Organisations plan the absence; the cover, the paperwork, the handover. Nobody plans the Monday he comes back, and that is the day that decides whether any of it worked."

Five things employers get wrong:

- Leave is treated as the intervention: Time away from work is not treatment. If nothing therapeutic happens during it, he returns to identical pressures with identical coping strategies, and one new reason to feel exposed.
- The return has no structure: Phased returns are common on paper and rare in practice for junior staff. A man who comes back to a full workload on day one has been set up to fail twice.
- Silence is mistaken for discretion: Telling a team nothing protects privacy and creates a vacuum, which colleagues fill with speculation. Agree with him what will be said, then say it.
- Support is offered in one format only: An EAP number and a counselling referral is a single modality. Nearly a third of men say they do not know where to turn, which is not a statement about willingness.
- Nobody measures the return: Very few organisations can say how many people who took mental health leave were still employed twelve months later. That is the only number that shows whether the policy works.

Practical tips for employers and small business owners:

- Plan the return on the day the leave starts: Not the date, which will move, but the shape: what he comes back to, at what volume, and who owns the conversation.
- Give the leave a purpose: Leave with treatment attached is different from leave alone. If the business is funding the time, it should be able to say what the time is for.
- Keep one agreed thread of contact during the absence: One named person, one agreed rhythm, no performance content. Total silence for six weeks reads as erasure rather than respect.
- Restore a role, not just a desk: Being needed for something specific rebuilds standing. A vague return to general duties leaves him defined by the absence.
- Track twelve-month retention: Report it to the board or, in a small firm, review it yourself. If men who disclose subsequently leave, the policy is operating as an exit route.

Ryan Eripse comments: "The men we treat are rarely the ones who never said anything. A great many of them said something once, watched what happened next, and drew a conclusion about what disclosure costs. That conclusion is far harder to undo than the original silence was. This World Mental Health Day, if an employer wants young men to keep speaking, the thing to get right is not the campaign. It is the eight weeks after somebody takes them up on it."



COULD *BRINGING DOGS TO WORK* HELP EM AND RET



G

MPLOYERS ATTRACT
TAIN STAFF?

As demand for pet-friendly workplaces grows, one business has been letting dogs into the office as standard for years – The UK is a nation of dog lovers, with research revealing the UK is home to 13 million pooches, and 31% of households owning at least one dog. But for owners working full time, simply leaving the dog at home isn't so straightforward.

Demand for pet-friendly workplaces is increasing – over half of workers say they would consider switching jobs if it meant they could bring their pet to the workplace (55%), while 41% of 18 to 24-year-olds are actively looking for pet-friendly policies when job hunting.

But while bringing a dog to the office might sound the ultimate workplace perk, the reality is few employees have access to it. According to The Kennel Club, less than a third of dog owners are able to bring their dog to their workplace.

This isn't the case for one Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire-based business. Fish4Dogs has been making nutritious fish-based food and treats for more than 15 years. And with the health and welfare of dogs at the heart of its business, the company has always welcomed man's best friend into the workplace, not only benefitting the dogs, but the people too.

"We've noticed that for many people, the dogs bring a welcome relief during the working day," Sarah Fowler, CEO of Fish4Dogs, commented. "At the very least, they are a reason for people to get out from behind their desks and into the fresh air with the dogs for the necessary 'comfort breaks'.

"We also find that the dogs create a social opportunity – staff members from different teams walk together, so the dogs break down boundaries between teams effortlessly."

The office's canine community started small, with two dogs belonging to the company's Finance Director, Lucy and Amber. As the business grew, so did the pack. Today, the Fish4Dogs office can have up to 11 dogs on its premises on any given day, all of whom are expected to be properly toilet trained and well behaved enough to work alongside their human colleagues.

But having a dog-friendly office isn't simply a case of opening the doors and letting the dogs roam free. Fish4Dogs has spent years working out what does (and doesn't) work when dogs and people share a workplace...

1. Give dogs their own space...

Just as employees need somewhere to concentrate, dogs need somewhere they can retreat to when the office gets busy.

At Fish4Dogs, every dog has its own bed beside or underneath its owner's desk. These provide a familiar, safe space where the dogs can settle down during the working day. The company has also used baby gates in the past to create a more contained area for individual dogs when needed.

2. Keep dogs exercised and give them regular breaks...

A working day can be a long time for a dog to spend in one place.

Owners should regularly take their dogs outside for exercise and toilet breaks, giving dogs the opportunity to get outside, interact and burn off some energy before returning to their beds.

3. Put it in writing...

For businesses considering a dog-friendly policy, employers should set out their expectations from the beginning.

A written policy will ensure the responsibility lays at the feet of the owner and avoids any scope for disagreements down the line.

It's also an opportunity to establish some basic principles, such as dogs being housebroken and what to do if someone isn't comfortable with dogs.

4. Be mindful of unsuitable areas...

A dog-friendly office doesn't mean every part of a business needs to be dog-friendly.

Safety and hygiene should always be paramount in a workplace, so areas like kitchens, toilets or dangerous areas, such as warehouses, should be out-of-bounds for four-legged friends.

It's also a good idea to establish dog-free zones where employees and visitors who don't want to interact with office dogs. Afterall, a genuinely successful dog-friendly workplace has to work for everyone, including people who don't own dogs.



5. Make sure dogs are truly ready for the workplace...

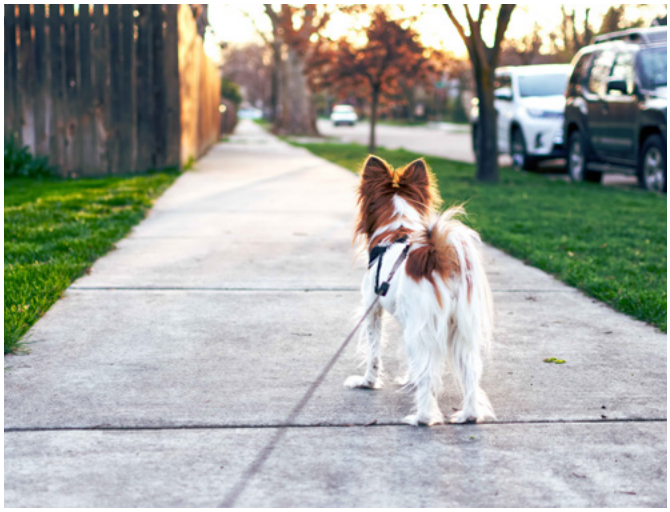
More often than not, the workplace is a louder and busier space than at home. So, an office may not be right environment for every dog, and both owners and employers need to acknowledge this and be responsible.

That doesn't mean every dog needs to be perfectly behaved, mistakes are going to happen. But placing a highly reactive dog, for example, in a high-stress environmental should never happen, for the wellbeing of other dogs, employees, and that dog itself.

So, should every office allow dogs? Not necessarily.

But for businesses that can make it work, the potential benefits go far beyond having a few furry faces around the office.

"We've noticed that for many people, the dogs bring a welcome relief during the working day,"





Choosing a recognition platform for 2027: A month-by-month plan and five traps to avoid



With employee recognition featuring in 2027 budgets, the next six months offer an opportunity to rethink how organisations make people feel valued. Here, Tsvetelina Hinova, founder of Thankbox, shares a practical guide to choosing and implementing a recognition platform, and the common pitfalls to avoid.

November: Define the problem

Before comparing platforms, be clear about what you want recognition to achieve. Is good work going unnoticed, appreciation inconsistent between teams, or employee contributions rarely acknowledged?

Trap 1: Mistaking activity for appreciation. A high volume of generic messages does not necessarily mean people feel valued. Encourage specific, thoughtful recognition explaining what someone did and why it mattered.

December: Shortlist and demonstrate

Use your objectives to assess potential platforms. Consider ease of use, accessibility, integration, reporting, privacy and administration. Involve employees and managers in demonstrations rather than leaving the decision entirely to HR.

Trap 2: Buying a bundle of features. A platform can offer extensive functionality without becoming part of everyday working life. Test whether employees would naturally use it to celebrate achievements or organise a leaving card without prompting.

Trap 3: Turning thanks into a points economy. Rewards have their place, but recognition risks losing personal meaning when employees focus on points, leaderboards or monetary value rather than the contribution being celebrated.

January: Build the business case

Connect recognition to outcomes that matter, including retention, collaboration, employee experience and a stronger feedback culture.

Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2026 report found that just 20% of employees worldwide were engaged in 2025 and estimated that low engagement cost the global economy around $10 trillion in lost productivity. These global figures are not a forecast of savings for individual employers.

Build your business case around your organisation. Identify desired behaviours, establish a baseline and agree how progress will be measured.

February: Pilot before committing

Choose a representative team and run a short pilot. Explain its purpose, gather feedback and observe whether people use the platform naturally. Check whether managers participate, appreciation feels meaningful and any groups are overlooked.

Trap 4: Expecting immediate results. A successful launch does not mean a culture of appreciation has been established. Recognition requires consistency and commitment to become part of everyday working life. Focus on building habits, supporting managers and measuring engagement over time. A platform is a long-term investment in people, not a quick fix.

March and April: Roll out, measure and adapt

Use pilot findings to refine your approach before expanding organisation-wide. Build recognition into existing routines, including team meetings, project reviews and one-to-ones, without making it another compulsory task.

Trap 5: Overlooking who gets recognised. Overall activity tells only part of the story. Examine who receives appreciation, whose contributions are missed and whether recognition is distributed fairly across teams, roles and working patterns.

The bottom line

The best recognition platform is not necessarily the one with the most features. It is the one supporting a culture where people notice each other's contributions and express appreciation sincerely and consistently.

For more information, visit: www.thankbox.com/business

What Effective Employee Voice Really Looks Like



Most organisations now have ways to listen to their employees. The more important question for 2027 is whether that listening helps them understand how work is actually experienced by different people. Here, Patti Turfrey looks at why this matters particularly in Scotland, where Effective Voice is one of the five dimensions of the Fair Work Framework.

Effective voice isn't simply about giving people a channel to speak. It means different views are heard, taken seriously and capable of influencing what happens next.

The Scottish Government's 2026 evaluation of Fair Work First highlights the gap. While 78% of surveyed workers agreed their employer provided appropriate individual voice channels, including surveys and one-to-ones, only 60% agreed their voice was listened to and could make a difference at work.

Look beyond the average

An organisation-wide engagement or inclusion score can look reassuring while masking very different experiences across teams, locations or groups.

Good employee listening asks not only, "*How are we doing?*" but, "*Whose experience is different, and what might be driving it?*"

A lower score doesn't explain why, but it can show where further investigation is needed.

Listen to experience, not just sentiment

Inclusion isn't a single experience. It can show up through belonging, fairness, psychological safety, leadership and people's everyday experience within their team.

Employee voice illustrates this well. Having a way to give feedback isn't the same as feeling able to use it. CIPD's 2025 Good Work Index found that 51% of employees said their manager was good at seeking employee views, but only 46% said they responded well to suggestions. Just 37% said their manager was good at allowing employees or representatives to influence final decisions.

CIPD's latest employee voice evidence also reports that around a quarter of employees experience high levels of employee silence. Perceived risk, power dynamics and doubts about whether speaking will make a difference can all contribute.

Make listening lead somewhere

More listening isn't automatically better listening. What matters is what organisations do with what they hear.

The Good Work Index found that 81% of employees who rated their manager as good at allowing employees to influence final decisions said they suggest innovative improvements, compared with 52% where managers were rated poorly. This doesn't establish cause and effect, but it highlights the relationship between effective voice and how people contribute at work.

For HR teams, the answer isn't necessarily another pulse survey.

Start with what you need to understand. Choose the smallest useful set of questions. Look at where experiences differ, then use those findings alongside other evidence to decide where action is needed. Listen again to understand whether the experience is changing.

The opportunity for 2027 is a more responsive approach to employee voice: one that helps leaders see beyond averages, understand different experiences and make better-informed decisions.

Because effective voice isn't measured by how often you ask people what they think. It's demonstrated by what happens when they tell you.

For more insights on how employee voice can impact your effective voice and organisational performance, head to **www.hive.hr**.





The Annual Hr NETWORK National Awards Nominees Lunch took place on Thursday 22nd October at the APEX Hotel in Edinburgh's Grassmarket.

The APEX Hotel has become a regular venue choice of Hr NETWORK Magazine over the past few years with stunning views of Old Edinburgh from the 5th Floor Heights Restaurant including the Grassmarket below, Edinburgh Castle and right across the city's rooftops.

Around 60 guests from this years' Awards shortlist, as well as members of the judging panel and some specially invited HR guests, joined Lee Turner and the Hr NETWORK team for the annual lunch-time gathering.

The lunch forms part of the build up and excitement to the Hr NETWORK National Awards 2026, with the winners being announced at the Awards Gala Dinner, which takes place at the hugely impressive Hilton, Glasgow on Thursday 12th November.

During the Lunch, founder & publisher of Hr NETWORK Magazine Lee Turner offered his congratulations to all the FINALISTS attending, for reaching the last stage of the Awards for 2026.

Lee said: "The Lunch is an excellent opportunity for us to recognise, acknowledge and celebrate the wonderful contribution made by all the finalists ahead of the annual Gala Dinner and we would simply not be able to host the Lunch or the Gala Dinner without the support of all our sponsors."

Lee added with a message to the gathered finalists: "With lots of excitement for everyone on the night, plus the odd drink or two, there might not be the chance to say this, however please take being part of this process as a huge achievement, whether you are the winner of you category on the night or not. You have been shortlisted in what is an incredibly robust and stringent process and that's an achievement in itself to be a finalist in the Hr NETWORK National Awards, which you should be rightly proud."

The lunch offered guests, particularly the shortlisted finalists the chance to meet with other finalists in their categories and to 'weigh up the opposition' before the winners are announced at the Gala Dinner taking place in November at the Glasgow Hilton.

Hr NETWORK would like to wish all the finalists the very best of luck for the Awards Gala Dinner on Thursday 12th November 2026.

Hr NETWORK Nominees Lunch 2026

"The Lunch is an excellent opportunity for us to recognise, acknowledge and celebrate the wonderful contribution made by all the finalists ahead of the annual Gala Dinner and we would simply not be able to host the Lunch or the Gala Dinner without the support of all our sponsors."

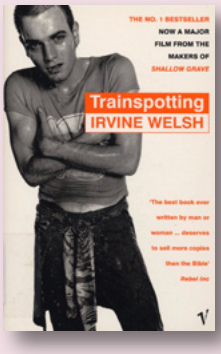




MY Three FAVOURITE BOOKS



In this issue, we've asked **Paul Bridges**, Principal Consultant at Everywhen Employee Benefits, to list his three favourite books:



Trainspotting

By Irvine Welsh

Mark Renton is an unrepentant drug abuser, doing his level best to elude the claims and responsibilities Life throws up to him. His pals - Spud, Sick Boy, Tommy and Begbie - are devoted to much the same heroically seedy existence. Both harrowing and hilarious, **Trainspotting** charts the disintegration of this unlikely gang, as their appetites for intoxication and mayhem lead them unerringly into the worst kinds of trouble.

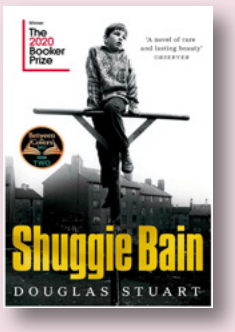


The Slough House Series (8 book collection)

By Mick Herron

Slough House is located not in Slough, but in the City of London near Barbican tube station. A slough is a wetland, usually a swamp, often a backwater. Appearing from the outside as an unassuming office building, Slough House is a dead end. It is a place where the British Intelligence service sends their rejects, failures and embarrassments—the "Slow Horses"—in the hope that they quit or prematurely retire. The office is overseen by Jackson Lamb, an ageing agent who cut his teeth during the Cold War and resents the Slow Horses who end up on his doorstep.

Also available in the Slough House 8-book collection is: Slow Horses, Dead Lions, Real Tigers, Spook Street, London Rules, Joe Country and Bad Actors.



Shuggie Bain

By Douglas Stuart

It is 1981. Glasgow is dying and good families must grift to survive. Agnes Bain has always expected more from life, dreaming of greater things. But Agnes is abandoned by her philandering husband, and as she descends deeper into drink, her children try their best to save her, yet one by one they must abandon her to save themselves.

It is her son Shuggie who holds out hope the longest. Shuggie is different, he is clearly *no' right*. But Shuggie believes that if he tries his hardest, he can be normal like the other boys and help his mother escape this hopeless place.

Shuggie Bain lays bare the ruthlessness of poverty, the limits of love, and the hollowness of pride. For readers of A Little Life and Angela's Ashes, it is a heartbreaking novel by a brilliant writer with a powerful and important story to tell.

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