



# The Guardian Jobs employers' guide to recruiting Generation Z

Truths, myths and making the most of Gen Z recruits

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## Welcome to The Guardian Jobs employers' guide to recruiting Generation Z

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**This guide gives an overview of employers need to think about and implement when it comes to attracting, recruiting and retaining the best of Generation Z talent**

Even when you're right at the end of the alphabet, you still want to be first in line for the best jobs. At least, that's what Britain's growing Generation Z workforce is aiming for as it takes its first tentative steps onto the career ladder.

If you're unfamiliar with the term, Generation Z is the name given to the young people coming of age hot on the heels of the millennials. Definitions vary - some consider Gen Z to be those born from the mid-nineties, others from 2001. Either way, Generation Z is soon to take centre stage in Britain's economy - it's estimated it will account for 24 per cent of the global workforce by next year.<sup>1</sup>

For employers already grappling with the shift in focus required to successfully employ millennials, Gen Z represents a new challenge.

This guide takes a look at how to get the best from Gen Z, whether you're taking your first steps in recruiting them or looking to motivate existing employees.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.growthbusiness.co.uk/will-millennials-and-gen-z-rule-workforce-2020-2551152/>

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## Section 1: Who are Gen Z and why should I care?

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There are lots of theories about Generation Z and it can be hard to separate the buzz from the reality. So let's start with some facts.

Whichever definition you apply to Generation Z, the formative years of most of its members have been shaped by two factors: the inexorable rise of technology and the aftermath of the 2007 financial crisis.

"They can't imagine a world without social media and smartphones," says Catherine Whitaker, CEO of EtonX, an educational technology group spun out of the famous public school. "They're also used to a massive speed of change - they know the technology they're using now will be out of date really soon - it's something this generation has to be able to cope with."

This means Gen Z sees the world differently from millennials, although the two share some characteristics. Gen Z'ers are more likely to be frugal (which may make them less willing to face university debt, driving them into the workplace earlier) and have more traditional aspirations than their older brothers and sisters. At the same time, they have shorter attention spans - an estimated eight seconds instead of 12, and are more influenced by celebrities and YouTube than their millennial peers<sup>2</sup>.

Although Gen Z's influence in the workplace is currently small, it's growing every year. Bloomberg (defining them as those born since 2001) says Gen Z now comprises nearly a third of the population, fast overtaking millennials<sup>3</sup>. It's an even higher percentage if you employ other definitions of this generation. Those recruiting graduates fresh from university this year, for example, will be employing early members of Gen Z, while this year's crop of young apprentices will fit even the most conservative definitions of Gen Z, as newly-minted 16-year-olds were born in 2003.

Alison King, managing director of independent HR consultancy Bespoke HR, says recruiters need to get it right with Gen Z if they're to successfully integrate them into their organisations.

"Unlike millennials, who can still just about remember the slower pace of technology, this generation has grown up in an era which is adaptable, on-demand and customisable. This is reflected in their demands of employers," she says.

Like other experts, she believes that companies need to adapt their recruitment processes to ensure they're finding, attracting and retaining Gen Z recruits. The approach has to be different from changes that were made for millennials - also known as Generation Y.

Ali Shalfrooshan, a business psychologist and managing R&D consultant at PSI, a provider of assessment and talent management solutions, says the two generations are too often lumped together.

<sup>2</sup><https://www.visioncritical.com/blog/gen-z-versus-millennials-infographics>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-08-20/gen-z-to-outnumber-millennials-within-a-year-demographic-trends>

“Millennial has almost become a catch-all term for young people,” he says.

Shalfrooshan has carried out recent research into workplace expectations of the two generations and says the results throw up some surprising differences. “HR departments need to make sure they understand these differences and address them. That’s not about changing things for the sake of it, but ensuring that there is a focus on Gen Z expectations and priorities.”

The good news is, getting it right for Gen Z is likely to benefit everyone, as many of the strategies that will retain these younger people will also motivate the rest of the organisation. Kate Turner, who runs consultancy Motivational Leadership, says that when working with this cohort, her biggest aim is to get them to turn up as “the best versions of themselves, inspire others to do the same and deliver results”.

“To do this, we must be clear on why people do what they do, or in other words - their motivation,” she adds. “This ‘why’ is the key to delivering sustainable changes in behaviour and performance. Because when people love what they do, they do it so much better.”



## Section 2: Sorting the myths from the facts

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Do you know Generation Z, what drives them, and their strengths and challenges?

**Myth:**  
**They live their lives online**

While Generation Z are what is known as “digitally embedded”, and cannot imagine life without the internet, studies show they also crave “real-world” experiences. For example, Generation Z is more likely to visit the opera, book shops and art museums than the average consumer<sup>4</sup>.

**Myth:**  
**They're bad with money**

They might be young, but studies show that Gen Z are already preoccupied with their finances. They're averse to student debt, and 21 per cent had a savings account before the age of 10<sup>5</sup>.

**Myth:**  
**They excel in soft skills**

Far from being the emotionally literate generation that many consider them to be, Gen Z excels in “hard skills”. Three quarters rate their technology literacy as good or excellent, but more than half believe that although they have the technological skills to thrive, they're lacking in non-tech areas<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/three-biggest-gen-z-myths-busted/1490392>

<sup>5</sup><https://genhq.com/gen-z-2017-research-infographic-stats-money-saving-debt/>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.dataiq.co.uk/news/news/tech-savvy-gen-z-worried-about-lack-soft-skills>

## Other truths

**Fact:**  
**They have traditional values**

Thinking like your parents is back in fashion! Generation Z's top life goal is to get their dream job, followed by buying a house. Sound familiar?

**Fact:**  
**They're job-hoppers**

Generation Z is more than three times more likely to change job than Baby Boomers, and 20 per cent have already averaged four or more full-time jobs despite their limited time in industry<sup>7</sup>.

**Fact:**  
**They're family oriented**

While older generations think Gen Z is phone-obsessed, they actually put family first - 44 per cent of Generation Z said family was the most important thing to them<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup><https://blog.linkedin.com/2018/october/11/the-job-hopping-generation-young-professionals-are-on-the-move>

<sup>8</sup><https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/opinions-generation-zs-ambitions-and-priorities-differ-greatly-between-generations>

## Section 3:

# Recruiting and retaining Gen Z

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Engaging with Generation Z is key for all employers as this tech-savvy generation becomes a higher proportion of their staff.

Ali Shalfrooshan, of PSI, says companies need to understand what drives them. "Competition is fierce - we're all fighting for the same talent," he says. "Companies need to improve the recruitment experience if they're to get the best people. Gen Z's motivations are different and need to be understood."

Recruiters need to ensure they're appealing to the right candidates for their sector but they might be surprised by sectors that do appeal to Gen Z. Recent studies suggest they're attracted to jobs they consider to be "future proof" - and they're not just focused on tech. According to Indeed.co.uk, some of the most popular jobs include traditional roles such as bookseller and daycare assistant<sup>9</sup>.

Here are some changes that can make a real difference when it comes to attracting Gen Z candidates.

### Use the right channels

In addition to traditional job advertisements, placing adverts on social media is crucial if you're to catch the eye of digital natives. Alison King, at Bespoke, says that LinkedIn, Facebook Jobs and Instagram are the best places to go.

"Use relevant hashtags," she advises. "If you're a small business, make sure your corporate social media channels are up to scratch - potential candidates are likely to research online and nothing looks worse than unloved and unused accounts."

### Get the emphasis right

Shalfrooshan, from PSI, believes there's too much focus on millennial priorities in many job advertisements and recruitment programmes. "Gen Z are slightly different and you should try to reflect that," he says. For example, salary and benefits are more important to Gen Z than to millennials, so putting these high up in your advertisement will help attract them. Conversely, although vision and values are important to Gen Z, they "aren't the be all and end all" he says.

However, King says that values should still be a prominent part of your advertising - even if salary and career progression take centre stage. "This generation cares about sustainability; they have ethics and morals and if your company or brand can demonstrate all of these then you're likely to attract a high calibre of employee."

<sup>9</sup><http://blog.indeed.com/2018/09/06/popular-gen-z-jobs/>



### **Go deep on the job description**

Due to the technology they've grown up with, Generation Z are excellent multi-taskers, King says. "They can handle numerous jobs and can work on the move. Don't be afraid to incorporate this in the job description, spelling out exactly what the role will involve, and when."

### **Offer a chat**

Alison King says that offering informal, face-to-face methods of communication early on can help attract Gen Z. Her suggestions include ditching traditional recruitment processes for early stage informal chats. "This generation are more likely to want to have a conversation," she says.

### **Get them to contact you**

Once you've received applications, it can be difficult finding the best people for your role through traditional interview methods. Sanjay Aggarwal, who runs Spice Kitchen, changed his recruitment methods to ensure he gets candidates with a chance of lasting the course. "A lot of young people really do want to work," he says, "But it can still be a challenge to find ones willing to turn up for an interview, an initial trial and then week in week out."

His process involves asking applicants to call him back proactively if they're interested in a job, and then asking them to call the morning before their interview to confirm they're turning up. Even after recruitment, for an initial period he asks them to call every day to say they're coming into the office.

### **Consider an apprenticeship programme**

This generation is attracted to employment routes that don't involve student debt. Research suggests a large percentage will not go on to higher education due to tuition-fee costs. Therefore, offering training opportunities or professional development at work is a great incentive, believes Alison King.

Companies confirm these schemes can increase diversity within their workforces. Even traditional graduate employers, such as Deloitte and Aviva, run large apprenticeship programmes. "Our apprentices bring new ideas and different approaches to the work we do, thus forming a crucial part of our workforce today and in the future," says Georgia Greer, head of student recruitment at Deloitte.

Gary Woodhall, head of audit and accounts at national accountancy firm Haines Watts, says that employing school leavers through the scheme "adds valuable diversity to the culture of the business".

### **Promote progression**

Gen Z want to know where they're going so emphasising your firm's role in this at the interview will attract them. "Gaining a 360-degree view of a company is an attractive prospect to young, ambitious workers. Be sure to state this - mapping out the development opportunities and being clear about the timescales for promotion," says Kate Turner of Motivational Leadership.



### **Don't use tech for the sake of it**

Shalfrooshan, at PSI, researched the popularity of new recruitment techniques such as using technology-based games to gauge suitability for a role. "Millennials love technology but the Gen Z'ers were less impressed," he says. They don't mind technology but ultimately they want the tests to feel accurate and relevant, so don't expect them to be impressed by the 'shininess' of your recruitment process."

### **Retaining and progressing Gen Z**

As we've seen, Gen Z are more likely to job-hop than Gen X or the Baby Boomers. This represents a challenge for employers who have invested a large amount of time and money in young employees. However, by taking appropriate steps it's possible to nurture Gen Z so that they stay and enhance your organisation, while gaining much-needed skills themselves.

### **Prepare the ground**

Colette Reilly, coach and director at Potential in Me, says it's as important to talk to older, existing staff, as it is to speak to new recruits.

"It's about helping businesses to understand what it's like to be a young person and to work out what is going on with them - to be clear about expectations and perspective," she says. "We now know that the brain isn't fully formed until around the age of 25 and a lot of people don't understand the implications of that. We need to teach managers to adapt, to ask better questions, but also to be organised. Make sure you have a framework that you're inviting them into, not just a recruitment plan."

### **Get it right from the start**

Onboarding (the process of inducting new staff) is really important to Gen Z. "In many of the exit interviews we conduct, employees cite poor onboarding as a major factor for their unhappiness and decision to leave. A good experience from day one is more likely to keep your employee motivated and enthused," says Alison King.

Ensuring the new employee has a mentor in place is also a major factor for success.

Gary Woodhall, at Haines Watts, says the firm assigns a mentor immediately and this person sticks with them through their training contract. "This gives them an immediate point of contact to start building a relationship and becoming part of the team," he says.



### Make it fun

While Gen Z are more salary and career-path oriented than their millennial counterparts, they still want to enjoy coming to work every day.

Winifred Bullock, a 21-year old cryptography apprentice at Barclays, advises companies to focus on the environment and social aspect. "I'd suggest making the work environment more flexible, fun and colourful. The campus at Barclays encourages many people to join the scheme. The onsite gym is an added bonus. There are additional benefits compared to a college course, which is appealing to young people."

Gary Woodhall, at Haines Watts, agrees the social aspect is important. "It's about building a peer group who they'll have a shared experience with, as well as inducting them in to the team they'll be working with. This can be everything from a shared chat group, invites to social events and a welcome package on arrival."

### Don't take tech knowledge for granted

We all tend to fall back on the "digital native" label with Gen Z, but Dan Pillay, head of operations at Broadplace Advertising, says it's easy to assume young people know more than they do.

"I've seen and experienced the myth first hand of assuming that Gen Z are 'digital natives' and are therefore somehow future-proof. Just as for other members of the workforce, these skills need to be nurtured and directed appropriately," he says. "The assumption that Gen Z have used PowerPoint or built a basic website during their education and that this will automatically be transferred or explored in the workplace hasn't rung true.

"When looking to keep Gen Z engaged, the most important thing has been for us to constantly present the opportunity for change and actively encourage our teams to develop and apply those skills."

### Be flexible

"The 9-5 model is outdated and both millennials and generation Z are coming to expect something different," says Alison King.

"Offering flexible working opportunities is a massive plus and demonstrates that a business is forward-thinking."



## Section 4: Case studies and further information

### Employer case study: Victoria Usher is head of PR company GingerMay, which employs several Gen Z juniors

“Generation Z are different and we’ve changed our strategies in order to work with them. They’re the first genuinely tech-savvy generation. They engage differently and we have to be cognizant of that.

“Career progression is very important to them, and they expect a continuous feedback loop – instant gratification. We’ve worked with this and have daily meetings with junior staff, giving continual feedback. They know what’s expected of them and what success looks like. That’s important to this generation. We’ve created ‘Ginger Passports’ which give a clearly mapped career profession. They can see what they need to do to get promoted and what competencies they need to achieve.

“Generation Z are very entrepreneurial, very open-minded and they are not limited by fear of failure. They push past boundaries. It’s important to us that we keep our young staff, and by making changes we do retain them.”



**Generation Z are very entrepreneurial, very open-minded and they are not limited by fear of failure. They push past boundaries.**

**Victoria Usher,**  
Head of PR company, GingerMay

### Gen Z case study: Like many Gen Z’ers, Lauren Hope, 16, was eager to start work rather than get into debt

“I wanted to be out working as soon as possible and when I did my Year 10 placement at an assisted living complex in Darlington, I was sure I’d found somewhere I could do really well.

“I took an apprentice job at Rosemary Court, working for a charity called Making Space, and started doing a 30-hour week after turning 16. I love that I’m learning through ‘doing’ rather than taking a college course. I definitely want to stay in this sector and would like to work in a hospital one day.

“I know I’ve made the right choice whenever I see placement students coming in from college. They often have to ask me what to do. I like being seen as a member of staff. It makes it easier to do a good job as our tenants think of me as a support worker, not a student. It’s great to know that by the time I’m 21 I’ll have four years’ experience and there will be many doors open to me.”



## Useful contacts

**Institute of Student Employers**  
[www.ise.org.uk](http://www.ise.org.uk)

**Government Apprentice Service**  
[www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship](http://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship)

**Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education**  
[www.instituteforapprenticeships.org](http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org)  
[advertising.theguardian.com/jobs](https://advertising.theguardian.com/jobs)

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