

FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT!

Getting your international student started at work

This guide was written with a focus on induction for an international student graduate – but you can use most of the suggestions to help you introduce any new staff member to your organisation.

Now that you have found a great person for the job, you'll want to retain them.

A good employee induction process helps new employees feel welcome and valued as part of your team. It's the first step to helping your international student graduate to settle in and do their best.

You may already have an induction process – which is great. But what can you do to ensure you provide a great start for an international student graduate?

Did you know the words “welcome on board” can be confusing – particularly if your workplace is on land and not at sea!

International student experience

“I got embarrassed when the HR Manager at my new workplace said ‘welcome on board’ – he spoke so fast and I did not know what he meant. If he had slowed down a bit and said ‘welcome to the team’, I would have understood and felt much better about my first day.”

The process needs to set expectations, build relationships, and provide support for employees to perform at their best.

Before they start

Make sure you have checked your new employee's visa status. Knowing the conditions of your employee's visa can help streamline your onboarding. For example, temporary visa holders are not eligible for Kiwisaver, so there is one set of documentation you do not need to give them.

If you have to get through a lot of information on day one, consider sending out print or electronic copies of important policies and operating instructions a few days before. This gives your new employee a chance to work through the documents and translate terms that are new to them if they need to. It reduces the information overload that many new employees experience on their first day, which can be even more challenging for people working in their second language.

You can help reduce your new worker's anxiety by letting them know what will happen on their first day.

- ▼ Give them clear instructions about when to arrive.
- ▼ Tell them what to wear. If you have a dress code, it may be wise to send pictures of the dress code rather than using terms like “business formal” or “smart casual”. You could send some pictures of your staff in the clothes you expect them to wear.
- ▼ Tell your new hire who will meet them at reception when they arrive.
- ▼ Make appointments for them to meet the key staff they will be working with, and organize a tour of your premises.

Assign a buddy

Perhaps the best thing you can do to help your new hire settle quickly is to assign them a buddy. A buddy helps by explaining informally how the business works. A buddy is someone who helps your new employer understand how things are done in your workplace. They can also help your new hire understand the slang and business terms you use. A buddy relationship can provide moral support or could help a new person to get involved in the social life of your workplace.

When choosing a buddy, look for someone who has something in common with your international student graduate. Maybe they have children around the same age,



“Give us a buddy. Someone who is patient and is good at putting ideas into easy to understand words.”

Simon Zhang, IT at Whanganui District Council

or similar interests outside of work. For the buddy themselves, it is a great opportunity to gain practical leading and mentoring experience.

Culture and communication

If you are not familiar with the way people from your new worker's home culture like to be managed, consider doing some research into how workplaces operate where they are from.

Find out about the values and work styles of your new worker's culture. Immigration New Zealand has developed an employer toolkit with information that may help with this. You can find the toolkit here: <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/employ-migrants/guides/inz2-guides-employer-toolkit.pdf>.

Examples

- ▼ In some cultures, employees are expected to defer to their managers and employers, and would usually get direct instructions (more like orders). People from these backgrounds may not be sure what they are expected to do if their employer says to them 'we will need a cost estimate'. A more direct instruction such as 'I want you to prepare a cost estimate' will be easier for them to follow.
- ▼ If your international student graduate has come from a place with a highly competitive system like India or China, they may have learned not to show weakness. So they might not say when they need help. Let them know that it is OK to ask for help.

Learning about how people from different cultures interact with authority figures in the workplace may help avoid situations where your new employee feels stressed or is worried that they can't deliver on promises.

On their first day

Welcoming any new employee effectively can have a significant impact on their future at the company. The faster you can integrate your new worker into the team, the sooner they'll settle in and be able to work productively and the more likely they are to stay. Take the time to make sure they understand the basics. You might want to clarify job expectations once again, discuss the purpose of the position and introduce them to who they will be reporting to.

To get your new employee engaged, take them on an orientation tour (showing them where things are) and introduce them to people. It is good practice to leave any non-essential paperwork until later in their first week.



Haruni says everyone was really welcoming on her first day at Westpac, and she has started her career with an amazing team. She was feeling nervous because it was her first banking job, but it all went very well.

Haruni Fernando, Customer Service Representative, Westpac

Make sure you have all the tools, PPE and a workstation ready for the person to start. Show them where they will be working and where they can find and store the things they need.

Organise a welcome event (e.g. morning tea, shared lunch, welcome meeting), or provide a welcome pack. Personal touches as simple as a welcome sign, a sweet treat or a card for when they arrive make for a positive first day experience – something your new person will remember.



“My employer really helped me feel part of the team by introducing me to all staff, and invited me for lunch on my first day at work. They are a great employer.”

Ernest Sullivan, Senior Accountant, First Commercial Ltd

Introduce the person to their buddy and make sure the two of them have something to do together – for example, the buddy could act as site tour guide, or be responsible for introductions to the team.

Encourage the rest of the team to show an interest in their new colleague. For example, you could ask those who are training your new staff member to finish their briefing by asking your new hire how the job would be done in their home country. You never know – finding out how another culture completes a task may lead to an immediate productivity or economic gain.



“I was upset at the way we wasted food by overstocking the pie cabinet at the service station where I worked, despite the availability of data that these pies would have to be thrown out. I had studied operations and management and consumer behaviour. I knew that a hungry customer will still grab a sandwich or a cookie if no pies are available.”

Rahul Bhardwaj, IT Assistant at Scots College, Wellington

Over their first week

Your new worker will have fielded many questions about their new job from friends and relatives. If you are a well-established organisation, give your new employee an outline of your history. Knowing the organisation's story can help your new employee to emotionally commit to the business. If you are a new company, share your vision and how you believe the new employee can help you achieve it.



“I am proud that Carac’s TrackGrip, patented in 2018, is used on tens of thousands of diggers, bulldozers and other tracked vehicles. I think it is great that this business worth millions grew out of Eltham, Taranaki.”

Pratik Bhavsar, Carac Group

You may like to arrange some fun activities for your new employee. When it comes to the company tour, don't be afraid to stray from the norm and have a more social focus. A scavenger hunt where teams race around the workplace solving clues is a great way to introduce your new hire to their colleagues and their workplace, and have fun doing it.

If you have company branded merchandise, you can help your new employee feel part of the team by providing them with a welcome package that includes branded stationery, hats or apparel.

Be patient with your new worker, especially if they are from countries where simple greetings and farewells are not the norm. Encourage your new colleague to join in the small talk at tea breaks and lunch breaks.

If there is a lot of joking around in your workplace, include them in this. Again, this may not be something they are used to, but you can help them understand that it is an important part of many New Zealand workplaces.



“I was shocked at how open kiwis are. Back home in Colombia, if someone asks you for information about yourself, you immediately question their motives. I think they are trying to take advantage of me or my family. Now I have been here some years, I know I can share details of my life comfortably”

Hedy Carillo, Systems Administrator, Wellington

At the end of their first week it's a good idea to check with the person to see how things are going.

One way to check that your new hire has understood what is expected of them is to ask them what they will do first thing on Monday or whenever their next day at work is. This technique allows you to see whether some further training or support is needed to get your new hire ready to contribute.

Some employers will catch up to offer some feedback so the new employee can see how they are going. The feedback could be very simple, e.g. 3 things that have gone well and 3 areas for attention or improvement. This is a good chance to answer any questions that have occurred over the week.

Over the first few weeks and months

The first three months of any employee's time in the job is crucial. It will take a while before they are working at peak performance.

Create a plan of measurable milestones for them to work towards as part of a Personal Development Plan.

Hold short one-on-one meetings every few weeks to keep up contact and check progress. You should also hold a more comprehensive three-month meeting to evaluate performance and plan your employee's next steps.

You may need to support your new hire as they develop skills in upward communication. As mentioned before, some people will come from cultures where deference to managers is expected. They many view managers as remote figures, to be feared as well as respected. Raising any concerns with their manager can be daunting for these people.

One way to counter this is to set up regular meeting times to get your new hire comfortable in talking to you about their work and their performance.



What one employer says to international student graduates

“Don't be scared to ask for help. We know that some of you come from places where showing that you are struggling is not OK. In New Zealand we don't want you to say 'yes' to everything. We can arrange help or support if you have a lot on. In New Zealand we will all be happy, managers included, to help you out if it is for the good of the team”

Mike Doyle, General Manager, Carac Group

Outside of work

Your new employee may have a partner and a family. Partners, particularly if they have difficulty with English, can struggle. You can help by organising some staff and family get-togethers, or setting up a partners' network.

Ideally the buddy you choose for your new hire will be a similar age or have children roughly the same age. If your new hire and their family can develop a relationship with their buddy's family, you are well on the way to settling them in.

If you do a good job of introducing your new person to their job and your company, you're likely to keep them for longer.

Retaining your best staff is simply good for business.

More information

- ▼ <https://www.xero.com/nz/resources/small-business-guides/how-to/guide-to-hiring-staff/employee-onboarding/>
- ▼ [https://www.exceldigitalonline.net.nz/immigration-products/assets/Employer_toolkit-\(NEW\).pdf](https://www.exceldigitalonline.net.nz/immigration-products/assets/Employer_toolkit-(NEW).pdf)
- ▼ <https://www.business.govt.nz/hiring-and-managing/managing-people-day-to-day/how-to-set-up-a-new-employee/>
- ▼ <https://nzentrepreneur.co.nz/a-complete-onboarding-checklist-for-new-employees/>
- ▼ <https://sourced.nz/resource/an-onboarding-guide-for-it-employers>