



The Herald **s1**jobs

RECOGNISING
THE BEST
WORKPLACE



TOP EMPLOYER — AWARDS —

CELEBRATING EMPLOYERS WHO PUT PEOPLE FIRST

**ENTRY
DEADLINE**
Friday,
August 15,
2026

Entry Guide



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Contents



Welcome	03
Categories & Criteria	
 ATTRACT & INSPIRE	04
Employer Brand of the Year – National/Local	
Recruitment Campaign of the Year	
Candidate Experience Award	
 BELONG & CONNECT	05
Employee Culture Award	
Employee Engagement Strategy Award	
Onboarding & Integration Programme of the Year	
 WORK & FLOURISH	06
Flexible Working Initiative of the Year	
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Reward, Benefits & Wellbeing Strategy of the Year	
Employee Recognition Programme of the Year	
 GROW & ADVANCE	07
Apprenticeship/Graduate Programme of the Year	
Learning & Skills Development Initiative of the Year	
Employee Career Development Award	

Welcome

The Herald and s1jobs Top Employer Awards 2026 recognise Scottish organisations that create outstanding workplace culture. These awards recognise the employers who go beyond the basics, for those who create workplaces where people want to be, not just where they have to be.

Whether it's how you attract top talent, build a culture of belonging, support flexible working, or invest in career development, we want to hear your story. Across four key pillars and 12 free-to-enter categories, businesses of all sizes can showcase what makes them stand out as an employer.

Entries close Friday, 15 August, with winners celebrated at a prestigious ceremony in Glasgow on 28 October.



Entrant checklist

Before submitting your entry, make sure you have:

Chosen the most relevant category or categories.

Completed all required fields, including organisation and contact details.

Answered each question clearly and addressed the category criteria.

Explained the challenge or opportunity, your approach, and the outcome you wanted to achieve.

Shown evidence of collaboration, impact, inclusion, sustainability, and plain-language communication.

Included context for any data, plus supporting evidence such as testimonials, case studies, or images.

Confirmed all information is accurate.

Choosing the right category



Attract & Inspire CATEGORIES

Employer Brand of the Year – National / Local

This category recognises organisations that have built a compelling and authentic employer brand that attracts and resonates with talent.

Judges will be looking for:

- A clearly defined employer value proposition (EVP) and how it reflects the organisation's culture and values
- Evidence of how the brand has improved attraction, engagement, and/or retention (e.g. application volume, quality of hire, brand perception)
- Consistency of brand messaging across multiple touchpoints (e.g. careers site, social media, campaigns)
- Innovation and creativity in storytelling, visual identity, and tone of voice
- Demonstrated authenticity – how the brand reflects real employee experiences
- Collaboration between HR, marketing, and leadership to develop and deliver the brand

Recruitment Campaign of the Year

This category celebrates standout recruitment campaigns that successfully attract talent through targeted, creative, and results-driven activity.

Judges will be looking for:

- Clear campaign objectives, target audience, and rationale for approach
- Creativity and innovation in campaign execution (e.g. channels used, messaging, content formats)
- Evidence of measurable impact such as application numbers, quality of candidates, time-to-hire, or diversity outcomes
- Strong alignment between campaign messaging and the employer brand
- Effective collaboration between HR, marketing, and external partners (if applicable)
- Insight-led approach, including use of data to inform and optimise the campaign

Candidate Experience Award

This category recognises organisations that deliver a positive, engaging, and inclusive experience for candidates throughout the recruitment journey.

Judges will be looking for:

- A clearly designed candidate journey from application through to onboarding
- Evidence of improved candidate satisfaction, engagement, and/or acceptance rates
- Use of feedback or data (e.g. candidate surveys, drop-off rates) to shape and improve the experience
- Personalisation, communication, and transparency at each stage of the process
- Inclusive and accessible practices that support diverse candidates
- Demonstrated alignment between the candidate experience and the organisation's employer brand



Belong & Connect

CATEGORIES

Employee Culture Award

This category focuses on the everyday culture employees experience, recognising organisations that have built a strong, values-led culture where employees feel a genuine sense of belonging and shared purpose.

Judges will be looking for:

- A clearly defined organisational culture, including values, behaviours, and how these are communicated and embedded
- Tangible evidence of cultural impact (e.g. engagement scores, retention, performance, culture focused stories and examples)
- Demonstration of long-term cultural indicators (e.g. values being referenced in decisions, cross-functional collaboration, ethical behaviour)
- Visible leadership role-modelling and accountability in shaping and sustaining culture
- Examples of employee voice influencing cultural initiatives and decision-making
- Consistency between stated values and lived employee experience

Employee Engagement Strategy Award

This category celebrates organisations that take a structured, insight-led approach to improving employee engagement. Entrants should demonstrate a clear, documented approach to understanding, designing, implementing and reviewing engagement initiatives.

Judges will be looking for:

- A clear engagement strategy with defined objectives, priorities, and success measures
- Use of data and employee insight (e.g. surveys, feedback tools, listening strategies) to inform actions
- Evidence of measurable improvements in engagement, retention, performance, or wellbeing, including baseline and follow-up data where available.
- Demonstration of how inclusion, trust, and collaboration are actively fostered
- Strong leadership involvement and accountability for engagement outcomes
- Ongoing use of employee voice to shape, refine, and evolve the strategy

Onboarding & Integration Programme of the Year

This category recognises organisations that deliver a structured and impactful onboarding experience that helps new hires feel connected, supported, and set up for success.

Judges will be looking for:

- A clearly designed onboarding and integration programme, from pre-boarding through early tenure
- Evidence of positive impact on new hire engagement, retention, and time-to-productivity
- Inclusive and supportive practices that help individuals integrate into teams and culture
- Opportunities for connection, relationship-building, and understanding organisational values
- Use of feedback from new hires to continuously improve the experience
- Involvement of leaders and teams in creating a welcoming and cohesive experience



Work & Flourish

CATEGORIES

Flexible Working Initiative of the Year

sponsored by Flexibility Works

This category recognises organisations that have successfully embedded flexible working practices that benefit both employees and business performance.

Judges will be looking for:

- A clearly defined flexible working approach (e.g. hybrid, remote, compressed hours, job sharing) and why it was introduced
- Evidence of how flexibility has improved employee engagement, wellbeing, and/or retention
- Measurable business outcomes such as productivity, performance, or reduced absenteeism
- Demonstration that flexible working is embedded in day-to-day operations, not limited to policy or pilot schemes
- Inclusive design – how the initiative supports a diverse workforce (e.g. different roles, life stages, accessibility needs)
- Examples of leadership buy-in and cultural adoption across the organisation

Reward, Benefits & Wellbeing Strategy of the Year

This category celebrates organisations that deliver a holistic and effective approach to employee reward, benefits, and wellbeing.

Judges will be looking for:

- A clearly articulated strategy that links reward, benefits, and wellbeing to organisational goals and employee needs
- Evidence of impact on engagement, wellbeing, retention, and overall employee satisfaction
- Use of data or insight to design and evolve the offering (e.g. employee feedback, utilisation rates)
- Tangible outcomes such as improved productivity, reduced turnover, or enhanced employer brand
- Integration into everyday culture, rather than a collection of disconnected initiatives
- Consideration of inclusivity and accessibility across different employee groups

Employee Recognition Programme of the Year

This category recognises organisations that effectively celebrate and reward employee contributions in a meaningful and consistent way.

Judges will be looking for:

- A structured recognition programme with clear objectives and alignment to company values
- Evidence that recognition positively impacts employee engagement, motivation, and retention
- Measurable outcomes such as participation rates, feedback scores, or performance improvements
- Consistency and fairness in how recognition is delivered across teams and levels
- Integration into everyday culture, ensuring recognition is ongoing rather than occasional or ad hoc
- Examples of how recognition supports inclusion and ensures all employees feel valued



Grow & Advance

CATEGORIES

Apprenticeship/ Graduate Programme of the Year

This category recognises organisations that deliver high-quality early careers programmes that develop future talent and create clear pathways into the business.

Judges will be looking for:

- A well-structured apprenticeship or graduate programme with clear objectives, learning journey, and support mechanisms
- Evidence of career progression, including retention, internal mobility, or conversion into permanent roles
- Measurable skills development aligned to business needs
- Use of innovative approaches or external partnerships (e.g. education providers, training bodies)
- Demonstration of inclusivity and accessibility in attracting and supporting diverse early careers talent
- Long-term impact on both participants and organisational talent pipelines

Learning & Skills Development Initiative of the Year

This category celebrates organisations that deliver impactful learning initiatives to build skills and capability across their workforce.

Judges will be looking for:

- A clearly defined learning initiative linked to organisational goals or skills gaps
- Evidence of measurable skills development and application in the workplace
- Use of innovative learning methods (e.g. digital learning, blended approaches, partnerships)
- Tangible outcomes such as improved performance, productivity, or business results
- Accessibility and relevance for a diverse workforce
- Demonstration of sustained impact beyond initial delivery (e.g. ongoing capability building)

Employee Career Development Award

This category recognises organisations that actively support employees to grow, progress, and build long-term careers within the business.

Judges will be looking for:

- A clear approach to career development, including pathways, frameworks, or progression opportunities
- Evidence of internal mobility, promotions, and succession planning outcomes
- Support mechanisms such as mentoring, coaching, or career planning tools
- Demonstration that employees are empowered to take ownership of their development
- Inclusive access to development opportunities across different roles and levels
- Long-term impact on retention, engagement, and organisational capability

What happens next?



All entries are independently reviewed by the judging panel.



If shortlisted, you will be contacted by the events team and information will be provided on attending the awards night.



The Awards evening will be held on Wednesday, October 28, at the Marriott Hotel in Glasgow. The event is ticketed and more information can be found [here](#)



Need help?

If you have questions or would like support before entering, please contact the awards team.

The Herald/Newsquest Events Scotland & NI team
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We're here to help you submit your best possible entry.
If you're making a positive difference, we want to hear about it –
regardless of your size, sector or stage of journey!





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Wishing you the very best of luck!

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