

Inclusive recruitment: How Aviva is supporting young people into employment



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This case study looks at how [Aviva](#), a UK-based insurer offering everything from pensions to home and travel cover, created its first pilot programme to support young people in Sheffield. The programme focused on 18-year-olds leaving college who were not planning to go to university and aimed to help them move into employment.

The pilot offered practical preparation, feedback and clear routes for progression. It was very successful, and Aviva now plans to refine and run it again next year.

Starting points and motivations

The pilot emerged from a shared interest between Aviva and Sheffield College in widening access to employment and supporting those students who may not naturally feel confident applying to large organisations. They felt many young people held misconceptions about the insurance industry, seeing it as 'just numbers or finance', and Aviva wanted to show the breadth of roles available.

Aviva also identified a need to build confidence and workplace understanding among students who had limited experience of professional settings.

Alongside broadening access, the programme reflected Aviva's commitment to developing a future workforce that is diverse, skilled, and reflective of the communities they serve.

What the pilot programme involved

Aviva's approach began with conversations with Sheffield College about how to support students who were leaving college and not planning to go to university. It focused on helping them build confidence and navigate the transition into working life. This led Aviva to design a structured set of sessions delivered directly at the college.

The pilot involved four core components:

- **Introducing Aviva and the workplace:** An introductory session offering a general overview of what Aviva is, aimed at demystifying the workplace and raising aspirations.
- **CV and interview skills training:** Practical guidance on CV writing and interview preparation. Many students initially assumed their part-time roles 'didn't count' as relevant work experience, but Aviva helped them recognise that work in retail, hospitality or caring for family had built reliability, teamwork and communication skills.
- **Mock interviews and strengths-based feedback:** Aviva undertook structured mock interviews, using real interview questions, and provided immediate feedback after each question: 'We didn't move to the next question until we broke it down and gave feedback in the moment'. This approach helped candidates recognise the relevance of their experience and build confidence.

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We're not looking for perfect answers – we're looking for empathy and conversation skills. The rest we can teach.
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- **A guaranteed opportunity:** Ten roles were ring-fenced for participants, ensuring this was a genuine employment pathway.

Partnerships and outreach

Partnership working was fundamental to the pilot. Collaborations with Sheffield College, the [See It Be It](#) programme (which connects employers with schools to help young people explore the world of work) as well as local charities, the Jobcentre, and [Seetec](#) (a service offering free support with job searching, training, apprenticeships and wellbeing)

enabled Aviva to reach young people from across the city, including those who may not otherwise have considered applying.

The Recruitment Lead emphasised how much this broadened the team's understanding: 'We've learnt so much more going into communities. We didn't realise that for some people, even catching a bus out of their area is a big thing'. This insight reinforced the importance of accessible pathways and local engagement. As they noted, recruiting inclusively requires flexible sourcing in building the candidate pipeline: 'Your source isn't always going to be an advert on Indeed. Candidates can come from many different places'.

Internal development

Insights from the pilot prompted Aviva to review aspects of their approach to supporting young people into entry-level roles. Conversations with young employees already in the business highlighted areas where the transition into work could be challenging.

One unexpected learning point was how confusing new starters found their first payslip. This led Aviva to build more foundational guidance into induction.

Training delivery was also adapted. Some sessions had previously been too long or less effective when delivered online. The pilot reinforced the value of shorter, clearer, in-person learning, with more opportunities for questions and reassurance.



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Rethinking the Recruitment Journey

The pilot prompted Aviva to refine aspects of their recruitment process to ensure it supported young people effectively while remaining fair and transparent. Interviews were structured to be clear,

with candidates encouraged to ask for questions to be repeated or rephrased. Interviewers focused on potential rather than polished responses.

Where candidates showed potential that suited a different role, Aviva explored alternative pathways within the organisation. In one case, a young person was not the best fit for the original role, but staff recognised his strengths and invited him to interview for a more suitable administrative position, which he successfully secured.

Constraints

A number of constraints emerged during the pilot. One was balancing support with fairness: helping young people who lacked confidence in interviews while keeping the process consistent for everyone. Staff sometimes paused, broke questions down, or offered reassurance, while being mindful not to give any applicant an unintended advantage.

Practical constraints also shaped what was possible. Aviva could employ young people on visas if they already had the right to work in the UK, but the entry-level roles offered through the pilot were not at the pay grade required for visa sponsorship. This meant that some candidates could take part in the programme but might not be able to stay in the role long term if their visa could not be renewed.

Despite these constraints, the organisation highlighted the positive impact of the programme: 'We've got ten new fantastic people. They bring different ideas, different skills. These young people are the future'.

Looking ahead

Aviva has completed one pilot of this programme, which they felt was a highly successful and valuable for both the organisation and the young people involved. On the strength of this, they plan to run the programme again next year, building in more preparation time and deepening collaboration with partners.

Get in touch

Belen is part of the cross-sector, collaborative team working on the '[Good Work and Better Business](#)' work package of the Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership (YPIP). Contact [Belen](#) to find out more about this case study.

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