# Employee Handbooks: What Employers Should Include

An employee handbook makes workplace rules and procedures easy to find and apply consistently. It complements the employment contract and statutory written statement, rather than replacing either. The best handbook explains how everyday issues will be handled, with clear ownership and a way to keep policies up to date.

## 1. Start with the essential policies

| Policy area | What employees should be able to find |
|---|---|
| Conduct, discipline and grievances | Expected standards, how concerns are raised and how decisions can be appealed. |
| Sickness and attendance | Reporting absence, fit notes, return-to-work discussions and contacts. |
| Holiday and leave | Requests, notice arrangements, carry-over and family-related leave. |
| Equality, dignity and harassment | Behaviour standards, preventative measures and safe reporting routes. |
| Health, safety and information | Site rules, incident reporting, confidentiality and use of company systems. |

## 2. Distinguish a contract from a policy

The statutory written statement of employment particulars must include specified terms and normally be provided on or before the first day of work. Some information, including disciplinary and grievance procedures, may be supplied separately within the allowed period and referred to clearly. Policies are not a substitute for terms that must be stated contractually.

### Example A | A manager needs a sickness procedure

A new employee phones the wrong supervisor to report sickness because they were never shown the reporting process.

Employer response: Place the reporting route in the handbook, make it available during onboarding, and require the employee to acknowledge the relevant policy.

## 3. Make the handbook usable across sites

Employers operating multiple sites should distinguish organisation-wide policies from local site instructions. The central handbook can set consistent standards while site-specific documents cover emergency contacts, access requirements or other local procedures.

## 4. Keep updates and acknowledgements traceable

When a policy changes, record its version, effective date and who approved it. Explain material changes clearly, communicate them to the relevant staff and retain evidence of receipt or acknowledgement. An acknowledgement records communication; it does not automatically mean that the employee has agreed to a contractual variation.

### Example B | A revised harassment policy

The employer changes its reporting route so staff can contact HR without going through their line manager.

Employer response: Issue the new policy, notify staff, record acknowledgement and remove outdated versions from everyday access while preserving a history of what was in force.

## 5. Three common problems

- Having policies that staff cannot locate when they need them.
- Publishing an updated policy without communicating what changed.
- Using an outdated handbook that contradicts current working arrangements or statutory terms.

## How Assyst helps employers keep policies accessible and current

Assyst stores company and site documents within its workforce management platform, making relevant policies and procedures available in the staff app whenever employees need them. Instead of relying on a printed handbook left in a cupboard, employees can access the current documents in the palm of their hand at work. The staff app supports multiple languages, enabling employers to provide their policies and documents in appropriate languages so staff can better understand the instructions and standards expected of them. Employers can circulate updated policies, request electronic confirmation that employees have read them and retain those acknowledgements in each employee's HR record. This helps organisations keep information accessible, clearly communicated and consistent across locations.

## Discuss your workforce requirements with Assyst

Assyst Workforce Management is a workforce management platform for multi-site employers, bringing together HR and paperless onboarding, time and attendance, workforce scheduling, payroll calculations, task management and a mobile staff app. To find out more or discuss how Assyst could support your business, visit www.assyst.uk and contact us through the website.

## Useful official sources

Acas — What the written statement must include | https://www.acas.org.uk/what-must-be-written-in-an-employment-contract/what-the-written-statement-must-include

GOV.UK — Disciplinary procedures at work | https://www.gov.uk/disciplinary-procedures-and-action-at-work/how-disciplinary-procedures-work

Acas — Discipline and grievance | https://www.acas.org.uk/discipline-and-grievance

General guidance for employers in Great Britain, reviewed November 2026. Contract terms and individual circumstances may require professional advice.