

Workplace policies & procedures foundations checklist

Article: *Policies and procedures in the workplace: the ultimate guide*

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1. Define the purpose of each policy

Each policy should clearly explain why it exists and what risk, behaviour, or obligation it addresses. This is usually defined by compliance, HR, or senior management during policy creation. When the purpose is unclear, employees see policies as “paperwork” rather than guidance and are less likely to follow them.

2. Set a clear scope and audience

Every policy must state who it applies to, in what situations, and in which locations or roles. This is typically agreed upon by HR and departmental leaders. Without a clear scope, staff may ignore policies they assume are “not for them”, creating inconsistent practices.

3. Assign an accountable owner

Each policy must have a named individual responsible for updates and reviews. This is typically a compliance lead, HR manager, or department head. Without clear ownership, policies quickly become outdated, and no one feels responsible for fixing them.

4. Document legal and regulatory links

Policies should reference relevant laws, standards, or regulatory requirements that they support. This is usually handled by compliance or legal teams. When these links are missing, organisations struggle to justify policies during audits or inspections.

5. Link related procedures

High-level policies should always point to the procedures that explain how to follow them in practice. These links are usually maintained by governance or document owners. Without this connection, staff understand the rule but not how to comply with it.

6. Schedule regular reviews

Each policy should include a defined review frequency and next review date. This is normally managed by governance or compliance teams. If reviews are not scheduled, policies become outdated and may no longer reflect how the organisation operates.

7. Centralise access in an approved repository

All current policies should be stored in one official system or location that staff are trained to use. IT and governance teams usually manage this. When policies are scattered across folders and drives, employees rely on outdated or unofficial versions.

8. Apply consistent naming and formatting

Policies should follow a standard naming structure and document layout. This is usually controlled through templates. Inconsistent formatting makes policies harder to recognise and undermines their authority.

9. Control editing and approval rights

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11. Maintain version history

Every update should automatically create a new version that can be traced and restored. This is usually configured within the document management system. Without a version history, organisations cannot demonstrate how policies have evolved.

12. Archive obsolete and superseded documents

Old versions and retired policies should be moved to an archive area and clearly labelled. This is typically managed by governance administrators. Leaving obsolete documents accessible increases the risk that staff will use incorrect guidance.

13. Ensure policies are searchable and discoverable

Policies should be tagged, indexed, and organised so staff can easily find them. IT and content owners usually manage this through metadata and structure. Poor discoverability leads to low adoption and increased support requests.

14. Communicate policy availability to staff

Employees should be informed when new policies are published or updated. This is normally handled by HR, internal comms, or compliance teams. Without communication, even well-written policies go unread.

15. Provide basic guidance on how to use policies

Staff should understand how policies fit into their daily work and where to get help. This is often delivered through onboarding or training. Without guidance, policies are treated as reference documents rather than working tools.

16. Monitor awareness and acknowledgement

Where appropriate, organisations should track whether staff have read or acknowledged key policies. This is usually managed by compliance or HR. Without evidence of awareness, it is difficult to defend against regulatory or legal challenges.

17. Review alignment with organisational changes

Policies should be checked whenever there are major changes to structure, systems, or operations. This responsibility usually sits with governance leaders. Failure to do this results in policies that no longer reflect reality.