

Fair Work opens doors for us

“I’m a big fan of workforce development. I struggle to see a downside to it.

In our experience, it’s never been easier to get hold of information and support on Fair Work and best practice.”

Ewan Reid, Managing Director, Matthew Algie



Who we are

Matthew Algie was born and bred in Glasgow. Our business was founded on the Clyde back in 1864, and we’re still here today. We are proud to roast exceptional coffee for thousands of cafés and hospitality businesses across the UK & Ireland.

Our Fair Work journey

Businesses in Scotland are hearing a lot about ‘Fair Work’ these days, but for many of us, the concept is not new. At Matthew Algie, we’ve been working on some of these best practice employment approaches for years.

Recently, we’ve started embedding the ‘Fair Work principles’ more formally into our business, and see both **commercial imperatives** and **commercial opportunities**:

- The Fair Work principles are increasingly a requirement to access public sector funding and contracts in Scotland,

and we expect this to extend into university and college procurement.

- Similar employment practices are already required, or will be, by customers outside Scotland as well, including many supermarkets and large retailers.
- Fair Work principles such as training, developing and listening to staff can feed directly into **staff job satisfaction, loyalty and productivity**.

Fair work in practice: employee voice

The Scottish Government’s Fair Work action plan has five key asks of business, and one of these is giving the workforce an effective voice. For us, that comes down to **consulting and communicating** effectively – it makes people feel respected and fulfilled, and they have an opportunity to make their work more stimulating or satisfying.



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In terms of consulting:

- We've been doing an **annual staff survey** for around 20 years.
- We have a formal **Staff Forum**, which meets quarterly. We wanted to use an externally endorsed best practice framework, so we adopted the [ACAS model](#).
- The Forum has **representatives from all parts of the business**, including our remote workforce of service engineers, customer trainers and other field staff. It's important their voice is heard.



Then there's the communicating aspect:

- We've had an intranet for about 20 years, but during the pandemic we also introduced **Workplace from Facebook** – essentially Facebook for businesses. The intranet is useful as a repository for documents, but the Facebook tool is more interactive and engaging.
- We use Facebook to communicate company-wide and encourage employees to post their own content, for example if a colleague does a great piece of work.

- We know from staff surveys that some teams still want traditional paper-based communications, so we do a monthly printed newsletter for our production division, which we put in the factory and canteen.

Workforce development

Another of the Scottish Government Fair Work asks is investment in skills and training, which has always been a priority for us. We know that staff want to work for employers who invest in them.

Some businesses query the cost of training and developing people, but we'd encourage them to look at this from a different angle: what's the cost of **not** training, developing and retaining staff? For a start, there's the cost of recruitment and lost productivity through vacancies.

During the pandemic, we migrated our skills and training delivery to an **online training package**.

- We use it for mandatory compliance training – from food hygiene to modern slavery training – and also for developmental aspects, e.g., such as training managers in coaching and mentoring skills.
- It's made our training offer more flexible and democratic in terms of access. Traditional classroom approaches meant people had to be in a certain location on a certain day for training. Now skills development is just a click away.

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We also have apprenticeship schemes and paid student placements in different parts of the business; it helps with recruitment, and we also see it as a part of a societal obligation to develop young talent.

Staff ideas and problem-solving

In the past five years or so, we've also invested significantly in **continuous innovation capacity**. It gives employees an opportunity to develop their skills and make a real impact on the business, which in turn promotes staff retention.

We also see operational benefits from this. For example, projects underway in our production area are expected to, respectively:

- **reduce our packaging by 9.2 tonnes per annum** – a potential saving of over £50,000 a year, as well as reducing our carbon footprint.
- **increase production throughput by 2-3% annually**, through improved operational efficiency.

Those are two perfect examples of why 'Fair Work' and employment best practices shouldn't be viewed as a burden on business; for us, the benefits are not just supporting a better workplace culture, they're directly impacting our bottom line.

Where to get advice and support

At Matthew Algie, we would recommend:

- The [Investors in People](#) standard
- Advice from [ACAS](#) on workplace consultation (and other workplace best practice)
- [Scottish Manufacturing Advisory Service \(SMAS\)](#), run by Scottish Enterprise, for support on continuous innovation
- Trade associations and membership bodies, such as [Food & Drink Federation Scotland \(FDFS\)](#)
- Local authorities
- [Skills Development Scotland](#) for advice on workforce development and skills
- Scottish Enterprise [Fair Work Employer Support Toolkit](#)
- For further information about Apprenticeships click [here](#)

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What is Fair Work?

The Scottish Government's concept of 'Fair Work' is 'work that offers effective voice, respect, security, opportunity and fulfilment'.

In practice, the Scottish Government's [Fair Work First guidance](#) asks businesses to, e.g.:

- Invest in skills and training
- Have an effective workforce voice (this could be through unions but there are other ways too)
- Ensure no inappropriate use of zero hours contracts
- Take action to tackle the gender pay gap
- Pay real living wage

Many food and drink businesses find they are already following Fair Work practices (or are going beyond them) as part of their audits for certification schemes or retail contracts. They're also becoming a requirement for many public sector contracts and grants.