

TURNING INTERNS AND TEMPS INTO FOOD SAFETY ASSETS

Interns and temporary staff are often brought into food safety and quality teams during busy production periods, audits, projects, or resource shortages. While they can add real value, they are also commonly under-utilised or poorly integrated – which can create risk instead of support.

Engaging interns and temporary staff effectively requires structure, clarity, and intention. When done well, they can strengthen your food safety culture rather than dilute it.

1. Start With Purpose, Not Just Tasks

One of the biggest mistakes organisations make is assigning interns only “admin work” without context. Quality and food safety systems rely heavily on understanding why controls exist.

Explain:

- How the FSMS protects consumers and the business
- Where their role fits into the bigger system
- How their work links to compliance, audits, or risk reduction

When people understand the impact of their role, accountability improves.

2. Provide a Clear, Structured Induction

Interns and temporary staff often miss formal induction because they are seen as short-term. This creates immediate risk.

A focused induction should cover:

- Basic food safety principles and site rules
- Key procedures they will interact with
- Escalation and reporting lines
- Expectations around documentation and record integrity

Even a short, well-planned induction builds confidence and reduces errors.

3. Assign Ownership — With Boundaries

Temporary team members should never be left guessing what they are responsible for. Clear ownership improves engagement and data reliability.

Good examples include:

- Assisting with internal audit preparation or evidence gathering
- Verifying completed records under supervision
- Supporting corrective action follow-ups
- Updating registers or monitoring trend data

Ownership should always be paired with defined limits and oversight.



4. Pair Them With a Mentor

Mentorship is one of the most effective ways to integrate interns into quality teams. **A mentor:**

- Provides daily guidance
- Explains decisions and audit findings
- Models correct food safety behaviour

This approach also benefits permanent staff by reinforcing accountability and leadership.

5. Involve Them in Real Quality Activities

Interns learn best by seeing systems in action.

Where appropriate, include them in:

- Food safety team meetings
- Root cause discussions
- Risk assessments or change management reviews

Exposure builds competence and reinforces the importance of disciplined systems.

6. Measure and Review Their Contribution

Even short-term team members should be included in feedback and review processes.

Consider:

- Reviewing accuracy of records they worked on
- Discussing lessons learned during their placement
- Capturing improvement ideas they observed

Fresh perspectives often highlight blind spots long-standing teams no longer see.

Interns and temporary staff are not a risk by default — unclear systems and poor integration are. With the right structure, support, and expectations, they can become valuable contributors to your quality and food safety objectives while strengthening your overall food safety culture.



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