



WHAT MAKES A STANDOUT CANDIDATE **EXPERIENCE FOR** **EMERGING TALENT?**

Graduate & Apprentice Candidate Experience
Report 2020/21



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FOREWORD

Earlier this year we surveyed students, graduates and apprentices across the UK to lift the lid on their recruitment experiences and find out what separates the best early careers employers from the rest.

What we found was a landscape where candidate expectations of recruitment experiences have plateaued.

On the one hand, we found plenty of examples where employers were causing entry-level candidates unnecessary stress and concern. Our data showed that 2 in 3 candidates reported feeling nervous, stressed or worried before an assessment centre, and over 40% of applicants received no more information than the time and location of their assessment centre before attending.

Whilst on the other hand, candidates seemed mostly satisfied by the interactions they are having with employers: 49% rated their last recruitment experience 'good'.

So, why do candidates appear to be so accepting of negative experiences?

In the last few years, we've seen extreme acceleration of technology and its application in talent acquisition. Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS), that use AI and automation to help screen candidates and automate communications, have undoubtedly improved the efficiency and consistency of recruitment processes.

But put simply, this standardisation of processing candidates is resulting in 'copy-cat' candidate journeys across graduate and apprentice programs.

Candidates are progressing through potentially dozens of these copy-cat processes at a time – being tasked with the same situational judgement tests and receiving the same automated responses in return.

They're used to the way things work, and their expectations of employers have settled – this is just the way it is...right?

Employers are failing to create a candidate experience that is truly memorable and stands out to those talented young people they have worked so hard to find.

Automation will often focus on efficiency over effect, resulting in communications that lack the nuance and empathy associated with more personalised and human interactions.

Yet, in our study, human interaction was consistently one of the most influential and valued elements of a candidate's experience. 63% of candidates said that their perception of an organisation improved after speaking with existing employees or hiring managers. Candidates also reported that the rapport they build with existing employees plays a greater role in their decision making than rewards package when deciding between two employers.

Candidates expressed to us that two-way dialogue allowed them more opportunity to express their full potential to an employer, and to ask questions of personal importance. Both are acts that increase the feeling of being valued as an individual by an employer rather than giving the impression that you are just a number being passed through a process.

A serious implication of communications that stop candidates from feeling like valued applicants and potential employees, is that they are barriers to real inclusivity.

The data in this report shows that female and BAME candidates are significantly more likely to withdraw themselves from a recruitment process. The top reasons for withdrawing from a process were a perceived lack of 'fit' with an organisation or the impression that they would not be successful in the recruitment process.

Female and BAME candidates are significantly more likely to withdraw themselves from a recruitment process.

During a year when racial inequality is being discussed and condemned so publicly, this is disappointing news. That conversations between early careers employers and candidates are still resulting in BAME individuals being disproportionately less confident that they belong and could thrive at their organisation of interest.

Next, we must address an obvious issue in a year like no other.

The coronavirus pandemic brought normal ways of life to an abrupt halt in March, and the shockwaves have gone on to impact young people in numerous ways.

A traumatic exam results period and uncertainty about travel and life on campus, left many rethinking plans of university and further education.

The extreme loss of jobs and depressed graduate rates of pay have made the 800,000 young people leaving education in 2020 among the worst hit by the economic impact of Covid-19. Standout experiences come from understanding, respecting, and responding to your audiences' needs. Employers must react to those needs in a way that makes individuals feel understood and valued. The experience must feel one of a kind and synonymous with your brand.

Now amid the chaos of the pandemic, this has taken on a new significance.

We truly believe the early careers market has been presented with an opportunity to make some real and very significant change. The stand-out employers for graduates and apprentices in 2021 will be those that really recognise the impact on young people's lives and show greater support and encouragement to help them succeed. This will help to turn candidates into brand advocates whether they are eventually hired or not.

It has been exciting to see that some employers are already stepping up their communications; exploring technological solutions to enable authentic two-way conversations and compensate for the loss of human interaction normally made at in-person events.

We encourage readers to take the findings of this report as cause to look again at their candidate experience, and hope you find the final recommendations a useful starting point.

Your early careers candidate journey may be on par, and your recruitment process functional – but your early careers brand could – and should achieve – so much more.

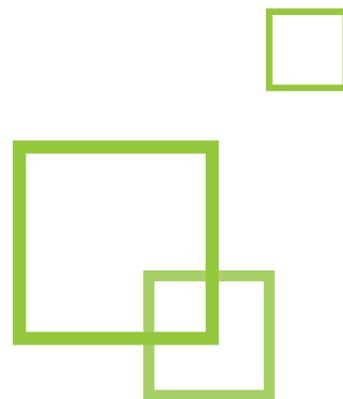
Finally, we would like to thank MyKindaFuture for connecting us with their student network and making this research possible.

HOW WAS THE RESEARCH CONDUCTED?

Between May and June 2020, we surveyed over 300 UK graduates, apprentices and final year students. We asked them to tell us about the experiences they have had applying for graduate and apprenticeship schemes – shining a light on candidate preferences and employer expectations.

A SNAPSHOT OF OUR RESPONDENTS

- 46% identified as female
- 60% of participants are Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME)
- 4% Declared a disability
- 55% aged 16-18
- 72% still in full-time education
- Top 3 sectors our candidates applied to:
 - Engineering
 - Law
 - Accountancy



KEY FINDINGS

DECIDING WHERE TO APPLY

- 55% of candidates will spend 1 - 2 full days researching employers before applying.
- The top 3 research resources are: careers websites, careers fairs, and LinkedIn.
- The #1 thing candidates want to have insight on is what a typical day would be like.

APPLYING FOR A ROLE

- The #1 barrier to candidates applying is the belief that they would be unsuitable for the role.
- Over half of all candidates started an application and then did NOT submit it.
- Females and candidates from underrepresented communities are more likely to abandon an application form.
- The #1 reason for failing to complete an application is the form (and process) taking too long to complete.
- BAME candidates are 8% more likely to decide not to apply for a role because they believe they would be unsuccessful during the recruitment process.
- Female candidates on average are 5% more likely not to apply for a role because they think they are unsuitable for it.
- 26% of candidates that did not hear back from a company after submitting an application would never apply to that company again – 10% would stop using their products and services.
- 1 in 4 candidates felt they were unable to show their full potential during the application stage.

INTERVIEWS AND ASSESSMENT

- 40% of applicants received no more information than the time and location of their assessment centre before attending.
- Only 11% of candidates report feeling confident before assessment centre or interview.
- Two-thirds of candidates report feeling nervous, stressed or worried before assessment centre.
- Increased nerves have a greater impact on female and BAME candidates.
- Only 63% of candidates said that current employees they encountered at assessment centre improved their opinion of a company.

RECEIVING A JOB OFFER

- Rapport built with existing employees during the recruitment process is more influential than the overall rewards package when candidates are choosing between multiple job offers.
- 34% of candidates who had secured roles continued to have doubts about joining a company up until the day they joined.
- Over a third of candidates have turned down an offer of a graduate or apprentice role.
- Not having enough information about the day to day role requirements is the #1 cause of doubt in candidates after accepting an offer.

THE CANDIDATE JOURNEY

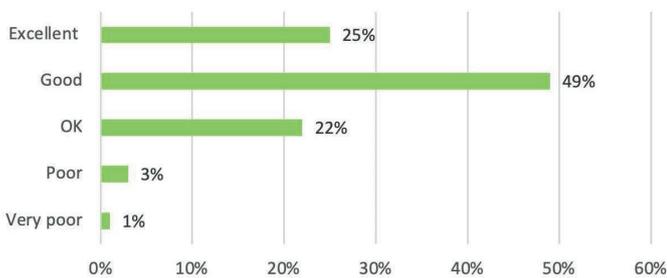
Overall Experience

HOW DO CANDIDATES PERCEIVE THEIR RECRUITMENT EXPERIENCE OVERALL?

Our 2019 research into candidate experiences of experienced hires found that only 5% of individuals would rate their overall experience as “excellent”. In this research we find that graduate and apprentice candidates are reportedly having a better experience. Nearly half of candidates would rate their experience as ‘good’.

But is “good” really good enough?

Figure 1: Please rate your last experience as a candidate in an graduate or apprentice recruitment process



This initial poll indicates that candidates are, by and large, accepting of their experiences. Meanwhile, the rest of this report will go on to reveal that a ‘good’ rating may not be enough to retain diverse talent and protect your brand.

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To give one example, you’ll find that over 40% of candidates reported that they received no information about their assessment centre, other than the time and date.

This lack of information can cause unnecessary stress and can impact assessment centre performance with a knock-on effect on the diversity of your hires.

We also discovered that 34% of candidates who had secured roles continued to have doubts about joining a company up until the day they joined.

Both of these findings, and more in the pages that follow, suggest that although the majority of candidates are not overtly aware that the recruitment processes they are taking part in could be improved, the number of brands who are creating really exceptional and memorable experiences are few.

There are still plenty of opportunities for us as employers to go beyond what is widely accepted as ‘good’ - to surprise, excite, support and build stronger relationships with emerging talent, with truly stand out experiences.

Researching an Employer

WHAT RESOURCES ARE MOST POPULAR AMONGST CANDIDATES?

Careers websites and careers fairs are the most consistently used resources for candidates researching apprenticeship and graduate opportunities; the only channels to be utilised by over half of the surveyed respondents.

This response will have been greatly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Social distancing measures have caused widespread cancellation of face to face events and the future of large-scale careers fairs that bring potential employers all under one roof seems uncertain.

This being the case, employers must think more creatively about how they can recreate the experiences and brand interactions candidates usually seek at careers fairs in an online environment.

Increasing awareness through targeted digital activity works. This compensates for lost brand exposure from 'browsing' several employers from a distance at a fair.

We also found that digital resources were favoured by BAME candidates. This audience were less likely to attend careers fairs than their peers (53% vs 63%) but were significantly more active on LinkedIn (54% vs 42%).

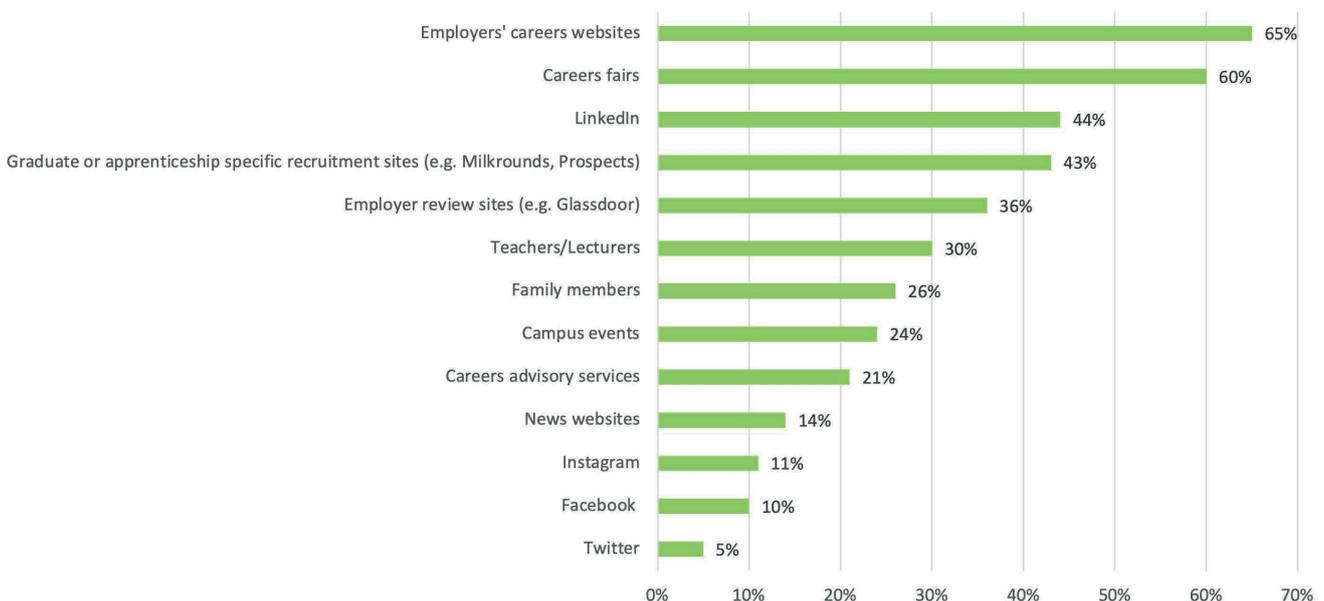
Our research found that graduate and apprentice job seekers will use at least 4 different resources to investigate a potential employer and female candidates will use more resources on average than their male counterparts. Employers must respond by ensuring their brand is presented consistently across a range of platforms to cover the range of channels that job searchers are using.

So where should you focus your efforts online?

Clearly the results shown in Figure 2 puts a focus on your careers website. This must look and feel relevant in a post-pandemic world.

The untold story here is in social media. Only 10% of participants consider Facebook and Instagram a research source. We know from experience that social media use has spiked with this demographic – 12% in the last 12 months because of the Covid-19 pandemic and periods of lockdown (Hootsuite) – making it a key tool for you to get candidates to your website and something that can't be overlooked.

Figure 2: Which of the following resources did you use when searching for information about potential employers and training programmes?



HOW MUCH TIME ARE CANDIDATES TAKING TO RESEARCH YOU AND OTHER POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS?

In general, 55% of students take 1 - 2 days, and more, to review employers before deciding where to apply. BAME participants tended to be briefer. Only 42% reportedly spent more than a day to do their research compared to 67% of their white peers.

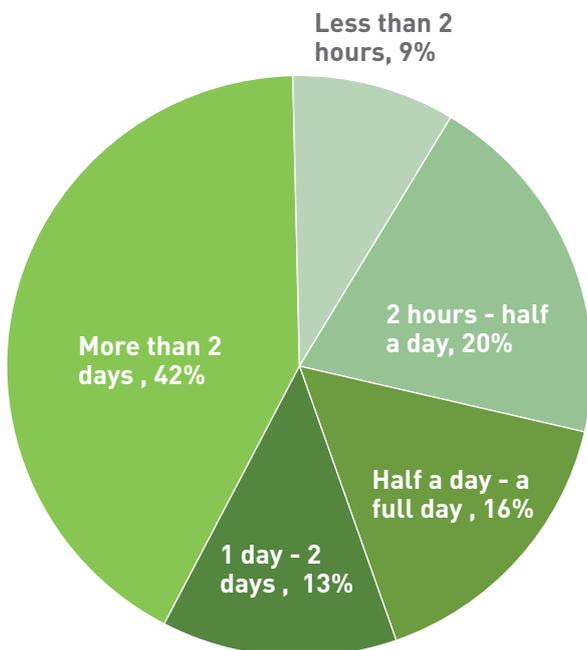
We call this the 'consideration phase' in a candidate's journey to your door.

In this time, young job seekers look at on average 25 different positions (graduatejobs.com research 2020) and potentially as many employers. The time and 'window' you have to impress and persuade your candidate that they will be successful with you is extremely short.

And do not dismiss that nearly 30% are spending less than half a day to do ALL of their research.

Getting seen and being bold enough to stand out from your competitors is vital to make the lasting impression necessary.

Figure 3: When you were last seeking a graduate or apprentice role, how much time did you spend researching potential employers?



HOW DO CANDIDATES DECIDE TO APPLY TO YOUR ORGANISATION?

As we've seen, getting the right content in front of candidates at the right time to influence their decision-making is extremely important; but what is it that candidates most want to know about your organisation when they are deciding whether to apply or not?

33% of participants ranked knowing "What a typical day is like in the role" as their #1 priority when researching an employer.

It was a top 3 choice for over 70% of the early careers talent we surveyed. Followed by wanting to know about "Development and Training opportunities" and "Company culture and values".

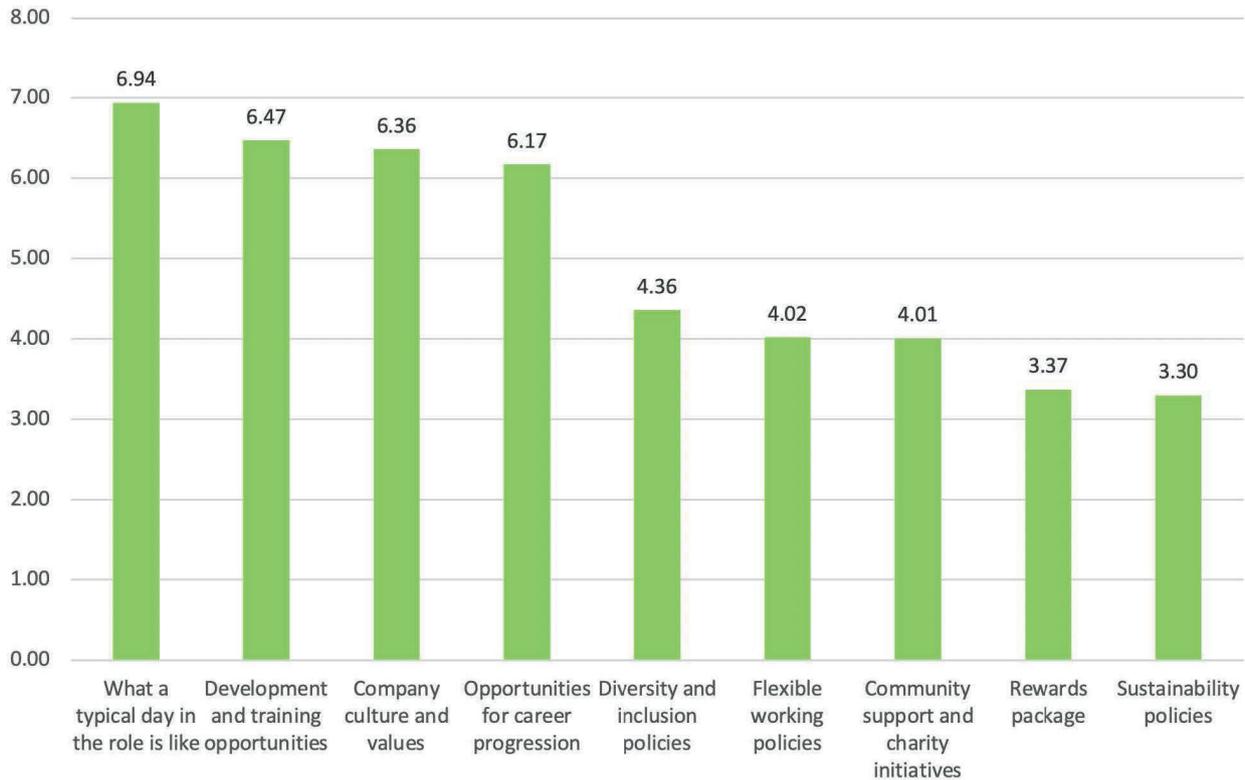
"Rewards package" was most frequently ranked as the least important information when deciding where to apply.

We interpret from this that graduates and apprentices want reassurance that their first job will be enjoyable, workable on a day to day basis, and a wise investment in their future. They are prioritising emotional security and personal purpose over financial reward.

Are your value propositions and marketing content up to date and reflective of your post-Covid culture and career prospects?

Are you 100% clear on how your brand is building confidence in candidates that they can do the job?

Figure 4: When looking for graduate and apprenticeship training programmes what information did you want to know about the role or employer before you applied? (Weighted average showing highest preference)



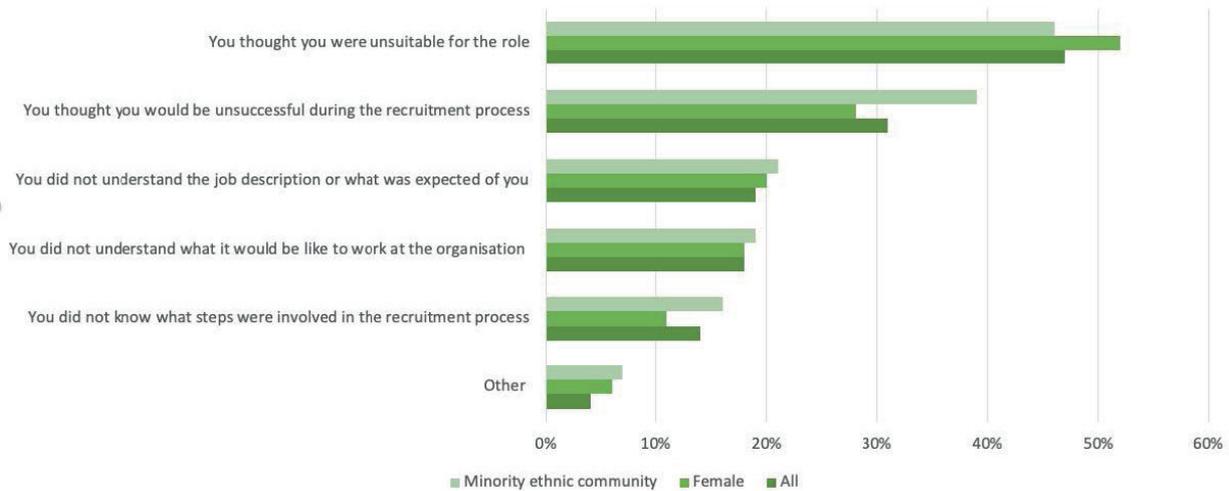
This is especially important for ensuring diversity of applicants, the top priority for early careers recruiters as reported by the Institute of Student Employer’s (ISE) most recent study.

Candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds are unlikely to have access to a network who can share experiences of working in the sector that they are interested in, in order to envisage themselves there too. You can help them achieve this by turning the job inside out and to give your candidates a realistic insight into

the demands of the role.

Gathering stories from your current graduates or apprentices to create authentic user-generated content is a powerful way of doing this. This builds a tangible sense of how it would really be to work for your organisation. It enables candidates to make an informed decision about whether or not they want to apply and can also generate excitement by eliminating uncertainty and the unknown.

Figure 5: Have any of the following stopped you from applying for a graduate or apprenticeship training programme?



WHAT IS PREVENTING CANDIDATES FROM APPLYING FOR YOUR ROLES?

When we looked at the reasons that candidates are often convinced that they should not apply for a role, a similar logic followed.

The most common answer was that candidates thought they were “unsuitable for the role” followed by a fear that they “would be unsuccessful during the recruitment process”.

For employers with ambitions to recruit more diverse candidates, it is worth noting that;

1. Women are 5% more likely to think they were unsuitable for a role, and
2. BAME candidates are 8% more likely to think that they would be unsuccessful during the recruitment process.

Considering that we’ve witnessed some key progression in the discussion of racial inequality in 2020 it is disappointing to see that candidates from underrepresented communities are distinctly less confident, not necessarily in their personal abilities but in their ability to succeed in the recruitment processes of companies that they want to apply to.

Whilst the vast majority of employers promote their commitment to value diversity and inclusion, there still seems to be a disconnect in the degree to which candidates see themselves belonging in organisations.

It is our duty as employers to objectively assess our candidate journeys to understand them from a candidate’s perspective and improve their experience

This research indicates that were these highly sought after and talented young people more confident in their suitability, the more likely they would be to apply, stay in the recruitment process, and be successful.

from start to finish, particularly for those from underrepresented groups.

Viewing these results in light of 2020’s coronavirus pandemic provides further food for thought; 16 to 24-year olds are amongst the worst hit by the economic impact of Covid-19. This year, 29% of final students have lost jobs, 26% have lost internships and 28% have had their graduate job offer deferred or rescinded (Prospects). Whilst for those managing to find work, pay is forecast to be significantly lower than before.

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to restrict so many aspects of everyday life, many young people also face real uncertainty about their future place in the world and their financial security. This has serious implications for mental health. Whereas in previous years it was often the goal of early careers employers to inspire this generation with their recruitment messages and show them a road map to achieving their dreams. Now, we believe, the stand-out employers will surely be those that offer school, college and university-leavers more reassurance help and support through these undeniably difficult times with heartfelt and genuine understanding of the challenges these young people face.

Applying For a Role

WHAT IS THE APPLICATION EXPERIENCE LIKE FOR CANDIDATES?

We asked our participants how long application forms themselves are taking to complete.

31% of respondents spent over an hour on a single application form.

We saw earlier in this report that students are applying to upwards of 25 roles, which, when added to each application made, gives an idea of just how much time young people are investing.

Figure 6: When you last applied to a graduate or apprenticeship programme, how long did the application form you submitted take to complete?

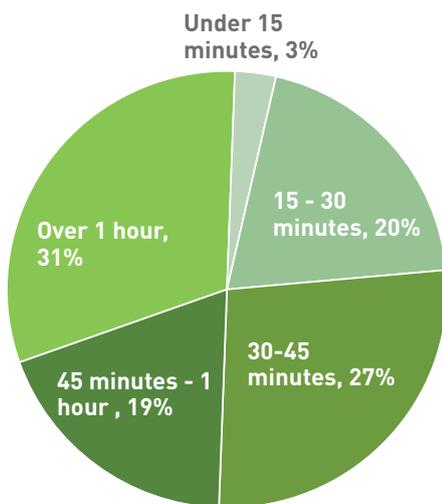
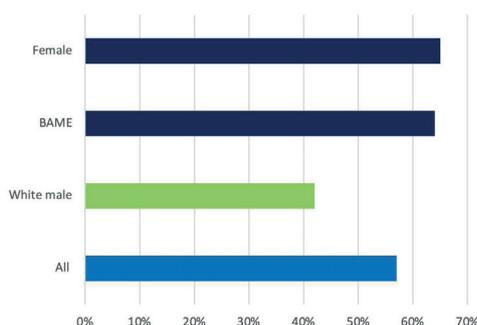


Figure 7: Percentage of participants that have started an application form and not completed or submitted it.

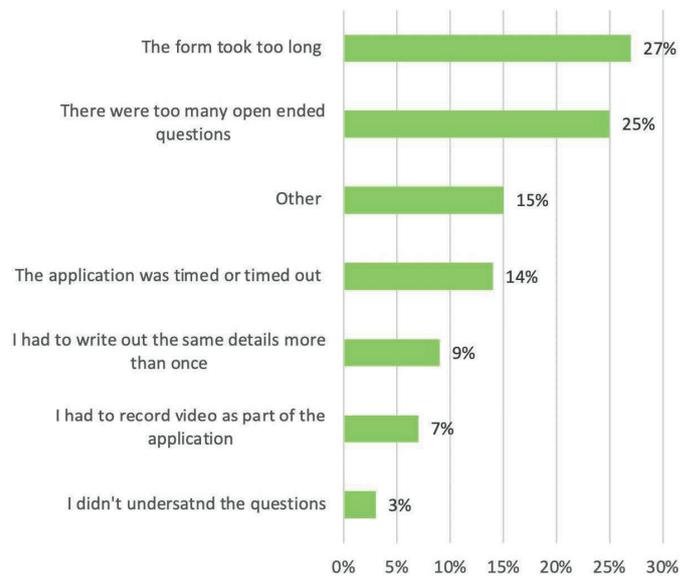


Over half of all the participants we spoke to have, on at least one occasion, started an application form and not gone on to complete or submit it.

Alarming, BAME and female candidates were disproportionately more likely to abandon an application than the white males surveyed.

In Figure 8 we look at the root causes for abandoning an application form, the most frequent of which is a form that takes too long to complete.

Figure 8: What caused you to not complete or submit an application form?



Earlier we reported that BAME and female are less confident about approaching an application in the first instance. It seems to follow here, that the longer the application form, the more likely that lack of confidence will result in a withdrawn application.

Length of form is closely followed by 'too many open-ended questions' as the second most common reason for withdrawing an application.

Open ended, or free text, questions allow broader interpretation when constructing a response and often requires candidates to showcase more of their personality, skills and achievements when writing long-form answers. For the candidate this space and exposure creates ambiguity and increased risk of 'getting it wrong'.

As we've seen, fear of failure is a real concern for candidates, thereby if your form contains too many open-ended questions you are likely to be losing applicants and decreasing the diversity of your candidate pool.

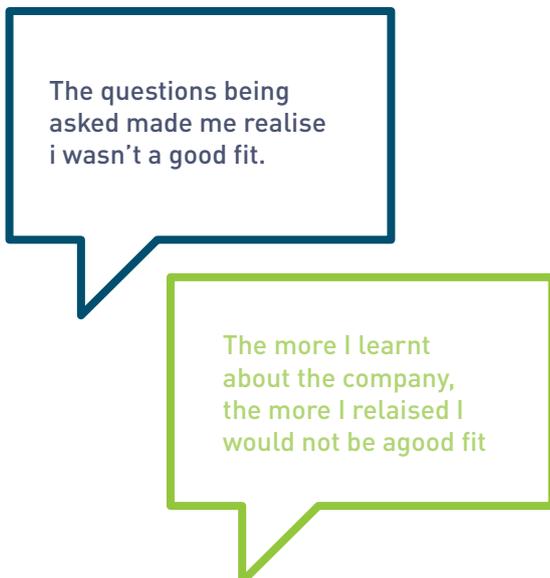
Interestingly amongst the 15% of participants who cited "Other" as the reason for not completing a form, their written justifications most frequently reported that the form itself had made them feel as if they were a poor fit for the company, as shown in Figure 9.

Whilst you may at first regard this as helpful, i.e. a candidate self-selecting out, we invite you to consider it this way instead:

This is the metric – number of incomplete applications – that measures the success of your pre-application communication with candidates.

Clearly short and succinct application forms are needed.

Figure 9:



On top of this, if you do not want to lose your diverse applicants, it is imperative that you present them with the content they want and need during the 'consideration stage' – i.e. when they are deciding which companies to dedicate their time to research and apply to – that enables them to make an informed decision about their suitability before embarking on the application form.

When your communication is targeted correctly, speaks to and addresses candidate fears and needs, and reaches them when they are online and in person, the number of incomplete applications will decrease.

Figure 10: Do you feel that the application form allowed you to show your full potential as a candidate?

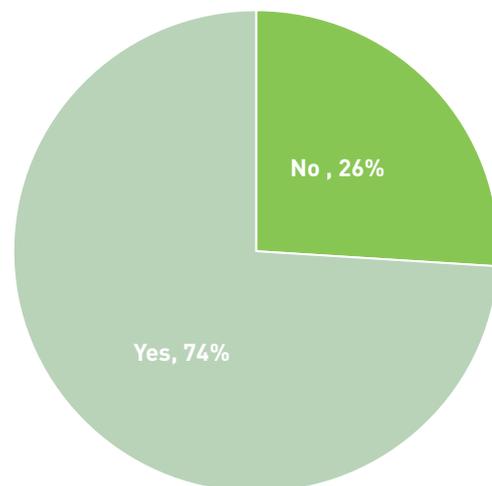


Figure 11: 4 most common reasons that candidates feel unable to show their full potential in an application form



1. Difficulty expressing personality and characteristics (such as ability to learn and a passion for the job or industry) in the rigid structure of the form.
2. Candidates did not have space to demonstrate their personal achievements or motivations outside of the work setting.
3. Lack of opportunity to show potential through performing tasks relevant to the role.
4. A preference for video and face-to-face interactions that allow direct human communication.

HOW DO CANDIDATES FEEL THEY ARE PERFORMING AT APPLICATION STAGE?

1 in 4 candidates felt they were unable to show their full potential during the application stage.

For those who felt unable to show their full potential, the reasons given fell into four distinct categories shown in Figure 11.

WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO TO STRIKE A BALANCE?

Many organisations will be restricted by the applicant tracking system (ATS) technology that they have chosen to adopt.

If you have flexibility, we recommend an assessment strategy that gathers layers of information about each candidate at every stage – from application to assessment centre – only asking what’s necessary in the simplest most engaging way possible.

This builds you a fuller, richer picture of the candidate’s potential, whilst keeping the interactions with candidates as frictionless as possible.

Besides the form itself, review and optimise your careers site content, and job descriptions/adverts.

Emphasise the soft skills necessary to succeed in the role rather than academic achievements. This helps candidates appreciate the way in which their personal skills and characteristics align to the role and the needs of the organisation.

Aligning your recruitment criteria with values and skillset rather than traditional measures such as academic background will also open up opportunities to a more diverse set of applicants.

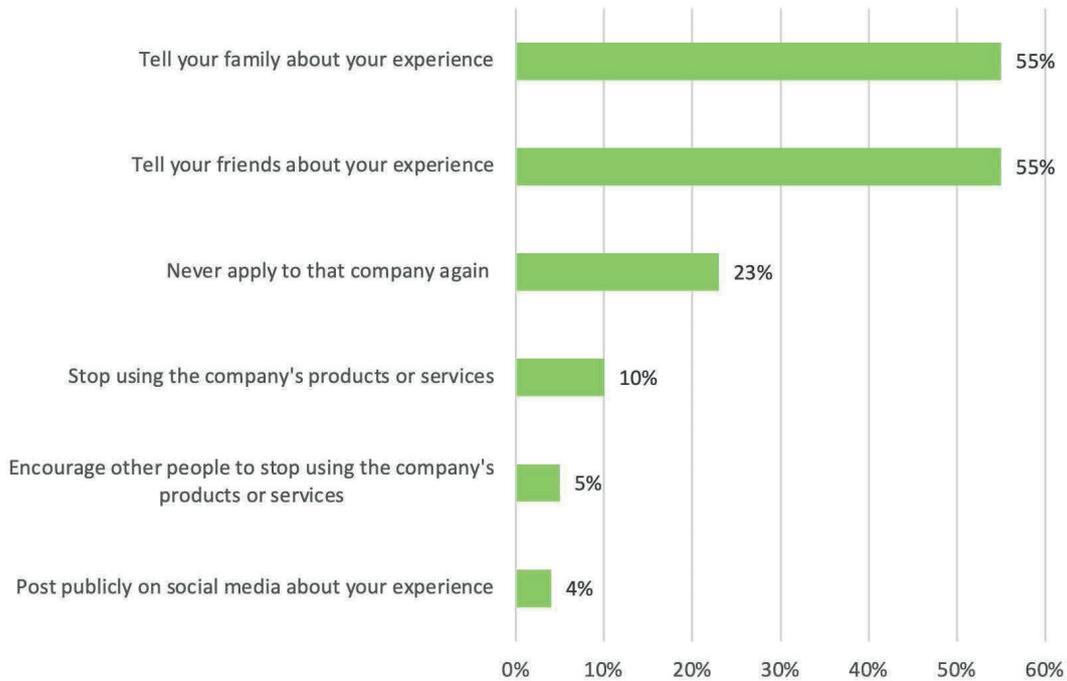
HOW DO CANDIDATES FEEL ABOUT EMPLOYERS THAT DO NOT RESPOND TO APPLICATIONS?

It is common when talking with graduates and apprentices to find that they have had the experience of submitting an application to never hear back. In fact, rather than communicate disappointment as you might expect at this poor experience given their investment, many graduates we encounter tell us they simply expect this scenario.

We wondered how this impacted candidate perceptions of these organisations, and were shocked by what we found...

Whilst the majority would not go to the lengths of publicly sharing their negative experience on social media, instead opting to talk to family and friends, 26% would decide never to apply to that company again, 10% would stop using their products and services, and 5% would encourage other people to stop using their products and services.

Figure 12: If you submitted an application to a company and they did not respond, would you do any of the following?



This data highlights both the reputational and financial implications of a poor candidate experience.

The impact is serious, and likely to be exacerbated now due to the increase in social media use by early careers candidates, and a lack of face to face opportunities for brands to build reputation. Fortunately, it can be easily rectified with a more empathetic approach to candidate communications and intelligent use of automation.

Investing in technology that auto-scores answers at the application stage and generates personalised feedback for each candidate, is a way to surprise, delight and add

tangible value. Creating an excellent experience whether that candidate progresses further with you or not, without any increase in administration resource.

However, this may require you to uproot the beliefs of your organisation, if they stand by the view that the best assessment tool at application stage is the free text box or CV.

We hope this report provides you with the evidence to open a conversation internally to explore other more efficient, effective, and impressive application forms.

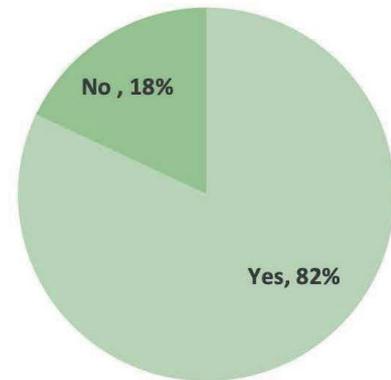
Interviews and Assessment

WHAT DO CANDIDATES THINK OF YOUR ONLINE ASSESSMENTS?

When it comes to online assessments, many candidates feel they have a good understanding of the relevance of the tests.

It is only when we progress to assessment centre stage that candidates appear to have less clarity around the content and expectations of the assessment they are being asked to take part in.

Figure 13: The last time you took part in online testing, did you understand the relevance of the tests and why you were asked to do then?

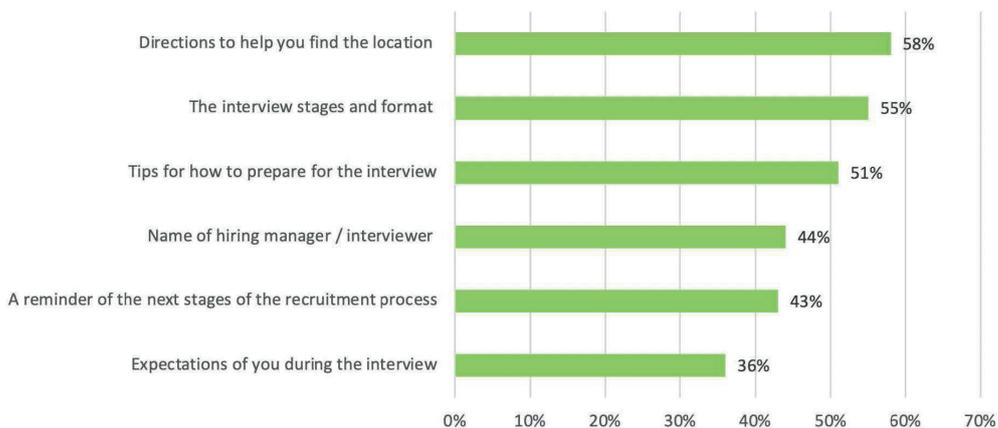


WHAT DO CANDIDATES THINK OF YOUR ASSESSMENT CENTRES?

We asked candidates to tell us what information, other than the time and location of the interview or assessment centre, they had received from their prospective employer before attending?

Staggeringly, over 40% of applicants receive only the time and location for their assessment centre.

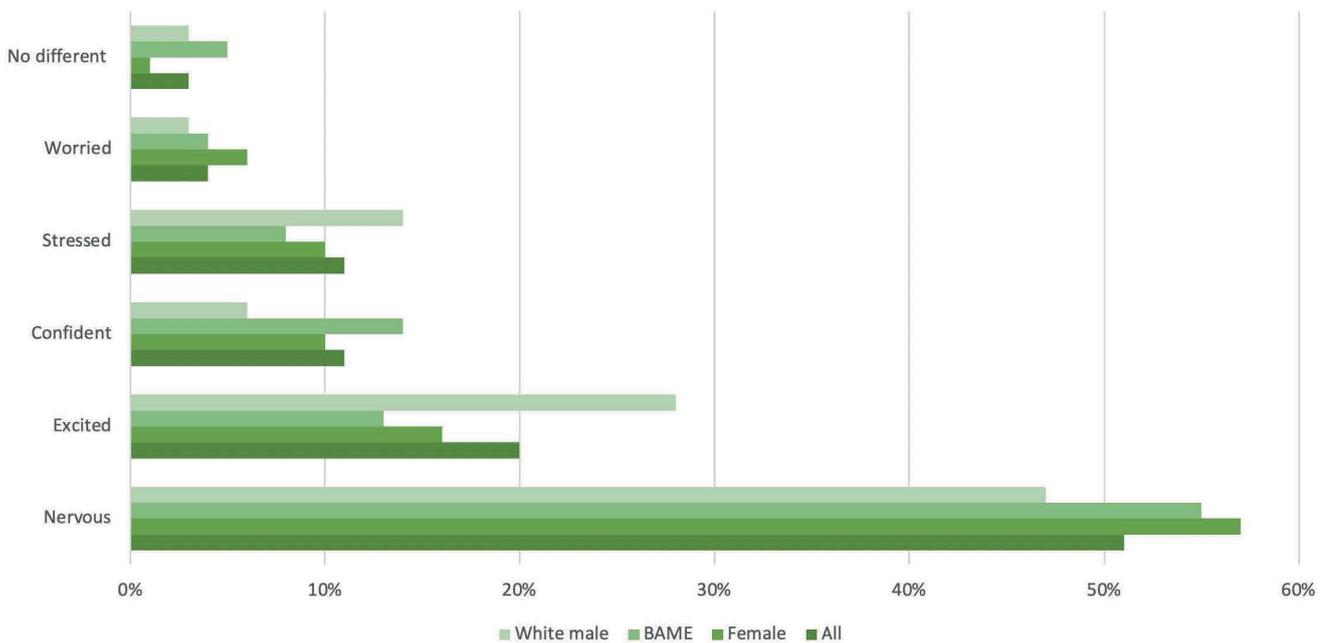
Figure 14: When you were last invited to attend an interview or assessment centre, other than time and location, what other information did you receive before you arrived?



64% were not given any information to say what was expected of them during the interview.

We were also surprised that only half of candidates were given an overview of the interview format and stages or advice on how they should prepare – information that could drastically decrease anxiety about the day.

Figure 15: Which of the following best described the way you felt before you attended the assessment centre?



A candidate centred review of your communications would never let this happen.

Whilst sharing only the most basic information is clearly common practice, it will certainly lead to a poorer candidate experience. This is supported by our finding that over 60% of candidates reportedly felt nervous, worried or stressed prior to an assessment centre.

You may face concerns from your organisation that sharing more practical, logistical information creates opportunity for cheating or over-preparation that hides a candidate’s true ability.

Our experience is entirely opposite.

Rather than ‘giving away too much’ these pieces of information reduce candidate anxiety which can interfere with performance and result in your hiring manager overlooking excellent talent. Employers should look to nurture their incoming talent to maximise their potential, rather than attempt to catch them out.

Furthermore, nerves are having a disproportionately negative impact on BAME and female candidates, whilst white male candidates are more likely to report excitement.

Ironically, this practice of withholding information to level the playing field is having the opposite effect and increasing the chances that diverse candidates will withdraw from the process.

As previously outlined, the bar has been set low in terms of the candidatecentricity of recruitment processes, and as a result, candidate expectations of employers in terms of communication and support is often low and rather forgiving.

To compensate for the lack of proactive support from employers, many candidates spend hours on sites like Glassdoor and GradJobs to determine the various stages of an assessment centre and how they should prepare.

We see a clear opportunity for brands that want to demonstrate empathy and understanding of candidates, recruit more diverse early career talent, and respond to the pressure that Covid-19 is exerting. Simply provide additional support and relieve some of this burden whilst increasing trust with a transparent approach.

Once at the assessment centre experiences become more positive.

Three quarters of candidates reported being able to show their full potential during their assessment centre or interview. Just 17% of students surveyed reported having a negative experience at an assessment centre, which is extremely positive feedback for the majority of employers.

Unfortunately, when we asked the 17% to expand on their poor experiences, the most common explanation was that:

- Candidates had been left with a negative impression of the hiring manager or other staff members they had interacted with.

Figure 16: Do you feel that the assessment centre or interview process allowed you to show your full potential as a candidate?

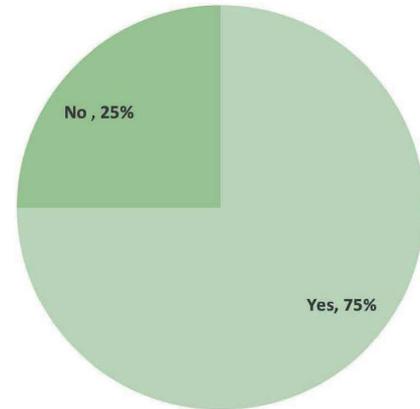


Figure 17: Have you ever had a negative experience at an interview or assessment centre?

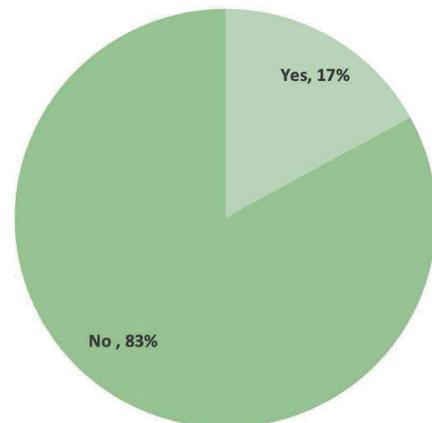
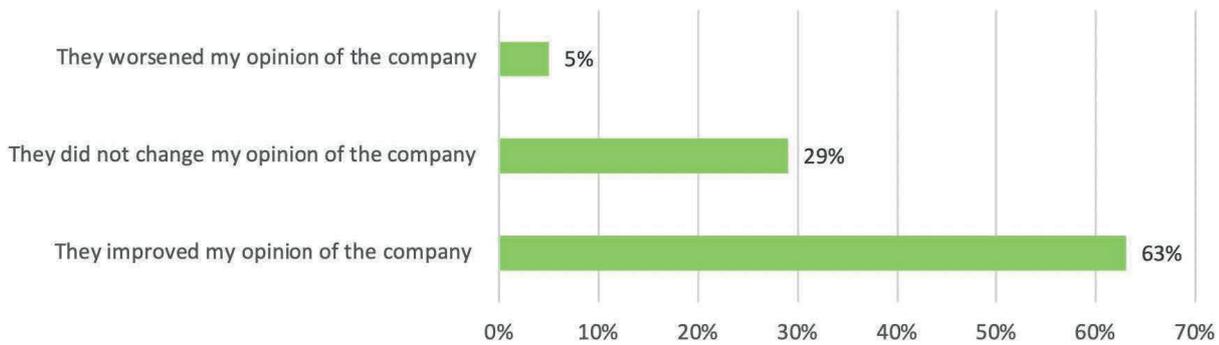


Figure 18: Did the existing employees you met during the recruitment process change your view of the company?



This was followed by other poor experiences such as ...

- The interviewer forgot the appointment or was late to arrive.
- The reason for completing tasks and/or the success criteria for tasks were not communicated clearly.
- No feedback was given on performance.
- There were too many group exercises (giving an unfair advantage to extroverts).
- Questions were perceived to be unrelated to the role.

In total 5% of the candidates we spoke to told us that the employees they met during the recruitment process negatively impacted their view of the company.

By contrast over 60% of candidates said their opinion of the company improved after meeting existing employees, demonstrating how influential the employees involved in your recruitment process are in the candidate decision making process.

The fact that hiring managers are negatively impacting candidate perceptions of their employer brand is worrying news for the 5% of organisations reported by our candidates. These employers are surely investing significant time and budget in the running of these events.

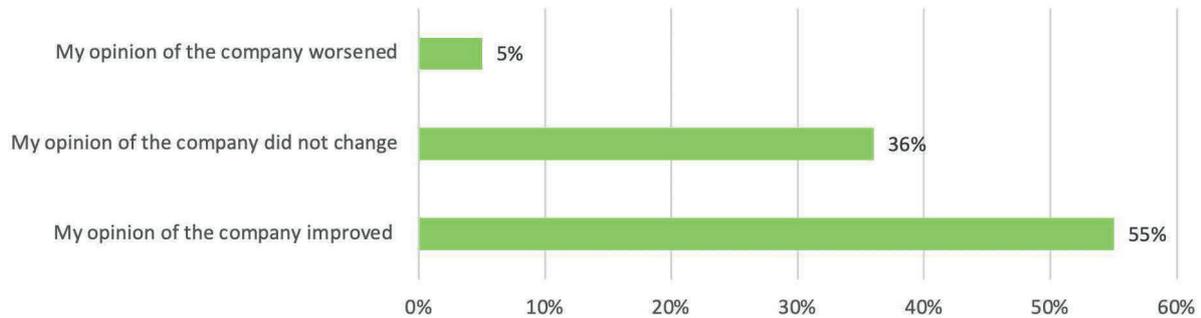
When top candidates have more than one offer on the table the memory of a hiring manager who was late vs. one who welcomed them at the door as they arrived can

form a critical part of their decision-making process. Human interactions create powerful impressions of a company's culture and can cement stronger emotional attachments to your brand, that inexplicable 'gut-feeling' of whether a job is right or not.

However, contact with existing employees should not be reserved for the assessment centre, they can be introduced at every stage of the recruitment journey to create standout experiences. At a basic level this means your employees should be visible on your careers site and social channels sharing insights into their role and experiences, but when you facilitate real conversations between candidates and employees that's when the experience becomes personal and more memorable.

You can introduce this two-way dialogue into your candidate experience using technology like Meet & Engage or PathMotion, by running candidate webinars, or providing mentoring opportunities for groups of candidates.

Figure 19: Did your view of the company change after you attended the assessment centre or interview?



WHAT PREVENTS CANDIDATES FROM PERFORMING AT ASSESSMENT CENTRES?

Candidates on the whole believe that assessment centres are being designed in a way that allows them to showcase their potential, and over half are leaving assessment centres feeling more positively about the company than before they came.

Digging deeper, the top three factors that candidates felt enabled them to show their potential were:

- 1. Assessment centres that were structured with a mix of activities that enabled candidates to use a range of their skills.**
- 2. Being given the opportunity to talk about themselves and show their personality.**
- 3. The interviewer and questions they asked put the candidates at ease/ the interview was conversational in tone.**

Other frequently cited enablers were:

- Plenty of opportunity to ask questions to different people – formally and informally.
- Receiving honest practical feedback.
- Understanding the relevance of tasks to the role.
- Speaking with current graduates and apprentices who were already on the programme.

This was corroborated by the feedback from those who felt unable to show their potential. This group describe the same factors in reverse. They said:

- 1. The assessment tasks/questions were not relevant enough or too generic.**
- 2. Activities did not test a range of skills.**
- 3. Candidates were not given enough opportunity to talk about themselves and relevant skills experience.**

- 4. Group exercises did not give everyone in the group a fair opportunity to communicate.**

- 5. Candidates felt judged on appearances.**

This is your recipe for success. Objectively evaluating your assessment centre for these factors will give you immediate focus areas for improvement.

As we enter another year of disruption caused by Covid-19 and it is likely that more assessments will be conducted virtually, think again about how these principles can be incorporated into online activities.

Ensure that the opportunity for two-way conversation is not lost and that candidates feel able to express themselves to a human assessor.

Pay attention to the atmosphere that is being created by interviewers, so that candidates are getting a positive insight into life at your organisation.

Diversify the types of activities candidates participate in and explain their relevance.

All these elements help candidates establish a feeling that the assessment is 'fair' and allows them to present themselves in a rounded way.

This sense of whether an assessment is fair or not is an important perception. Research by the ISE found that white candidates are more likely to agree that they have been treated fairly by employers during a recruitment process. BAME candidates who feel unfairly treated are clearly less likely to continue with your organisation.

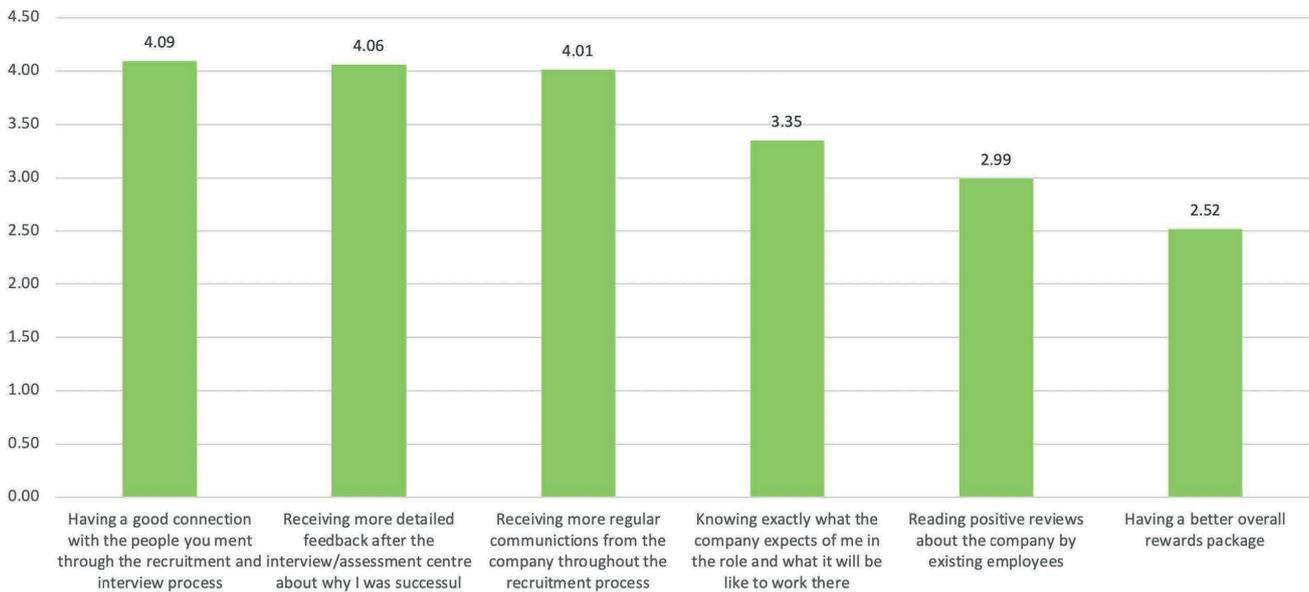
It is only if you recognise that these differences in perception are shaping candidates' experiences of your process and respond to them effectively, that you will be able to be more inclusive.

Receiving a Job Offer

HOW DOES A CANDIDATE DECIDE WHETHER TO ACCEPT YOUR JOB OFFER?

The idea that regular, and emotive communication is of paramount importance before, at the time of offer, and after it is accepted, is verified by the ranking in Figure 20.

Figure 20: If you were offered roles at more than one company, which of the following factors would be most important to you when making the decision of which company to accept? (Preference shown as weighted average of rankings below)



These interactions significantly influence the vision candidates create of whether they would be happy to work for you or not.

Crucially and perhaps unexpectedly, the data tells us that candidates rely on these impressions more than the testimony of others when deciding where to accept an offer.

What's more, having the right sort of 'feelings' and trust in a brand and its representatives outweighs the importance of a more impressive rewards package.

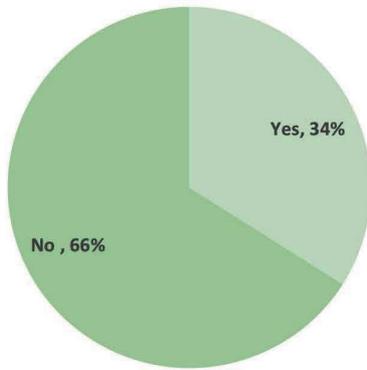
Specifically, the more that these communications encourage confidence in a candidate's ability and validates why they have been successful the better: the deciding factor most often ranked #1 was "Receiving more detailed feedback after the interview/assessment centre about why I was successful".

Confidence has been a key theme throughout the results, and if you can inspire confidence in candidates, you'll certainly seem to have the edge on attracting the best talent.

Over a third of our survey audience who had received an offer of a graduate or apprentice role, said that they have gone on to reject it.

As we discovered at the application stage, safety is an important motivator. The mentality here is that it is safer to accept an offer than to wait for your 'top job' to get back to you, when applying for multiple opportunities.

Figure 21: After receiving a job offer from a company have you ever decided not to accept the role?



Even after accepting an offer, employers should be aware that as many as **32% of candidates** may be having second thoughts about starting their role.

The three most frequent reasons participants gave for having doubts could be categorised as:

1. **Not having enough information about the day to day role requirements.**
2. **Candidates did not trust that they had been presented with an authentic view of the company through the recruitment process.**
3. **Unsure of company fit.**

So not only is confidence in their ability important but also confidence that they have fully understood and trust the organisation that they are signing up for.

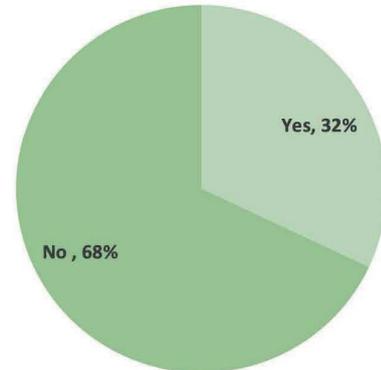
The implication for your organisation is that candidates will be considering their decision up until the last minute, when all of their options are clear. An accepted offer is not a guarantee of a new starter.

Even after they have said 'yes', they are making up their minds about you.

If you are not regularly nurturing your candidate relationships at these last stages of the process, then their gut feeling could take them elsewhere at the last minute to someone who has.

As a result, you need to give your pre-boarding and on-boarding experiences the same candidate-centric consideration that you do for attraction and assessment.

Figure 22: Have you ever had doubts about joining a company after accepting a job offer?



These interactions have taken on an even greater importance in the time of Covid-19. The pandemic has frequently created uncertainty about where and when placements will start, how remote working might limit the role and activities of candidates when they join, and their ability to feel a true sense of belonging within their employer organisation.

So, rather than these interactions becoming overly functional in tone (i.e. just a series of screening emails), remember to continue the two-way dialogue with soon to be employees.

Allowing them to share questions and concerns, whilst sharing content that helps them prepare for their first day and builds excitement about the work they are soon to be involved in.

The employers we see that have been doing this exceptionally well, are those that have created a space for new hires to build a community between themselves.

Whether that is by setting up a private Facebook group where new joiners can connect and share information, connecting them with email 'buddies' who they can chat to before starting, or by hosting a series of virtual events.

By creating communities, these employers facilitate a stronger feeling of belonging and support that bonds candidates to their organisation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

HOW CAN EMPLOYERS BUILD EXCELLENT CANDIDATE EXPERIENCES?

1

Candidate decision making is most influenced by human connection. In our new reality where face to face events and assessment centres are now conducted virtually – seek to bring human elements and personalisation into virtual hiring processes. Build online communities to make up for the lost in-person contact and instil a crucial sense of belonging in future talent so that they can thrive in your organisation.

2

Encourage diverse applicants to progress throughout your recruitment journey by creating careers content that gives tangible insight into the roles on offer. Make a diverse group of employees visible throughout your candidate journey (facilitating two-way conversation by utilising tools like live chat and digital mentoring where possible) and focus on the soft skills and mindset needed to succeed, so that candidates from all backgrounds can grasp a true understanding of your company culture and their fit within the organisation.

3

Give your existing graduates and apprentices a platform to share their stories. Candidates want to hear about your culture and development opportunities, and advice from peers is the most authentic and trusted way of delivering this information, for example through chatrooms, and video content featuring your employee advocates.

4

Rationalise your application form:

If the tone and tasks do not accurately represent your employee experience you may convince candidates that they are not right for the job at a critical moment.

An unnecessarily long form could prove a barrier to attracting diverse applicants.

5

Help candidates prepare for the assessment centre by sharing the format and expectations of the day, reducing unnecessary stress and encouraging their best performance to shine through. On the day ensure tasks are varied in format so candidates feel satisfied they are able to show their full potential and feel prepared regardless of their background.

6

Interactions with existing employees during the recruitment process can be make or break in terms of brand perception. Ensure hiring managers are well versed in your Employee Value Proposition and embody your cultural values when interacting with potential hires.

7

Give serious consideration to the candidate experience of unsuccessful candidates, you will reject more candidates than you hire, and the repercussions of poor experiences can be both reputational and financial.

Nurture your relationship with your silver medallists by providing useful feedback and inviting them to join a talent community – this talent pool is critical in building future pipelines.

For others, ensure communications are human and empathetic, avoid candidates feeling like a number in a process. You should instil a sense of belonging from early on in the candidate's recruitment journey.

8

Finally, the recruitment journey does not end when a candidate accepts your offer. Preboarding and on-boarding communications need to reinforce your attraction messages and grow relationships with your new starters to keep them from straying if they receive other offers. A sense of belonging will help them to thrive once in the organisation and keep them in role.

PEOPLESCOUT CONTACTS

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