



Employer Roundtable

2022 :
The year
ahead



Overview

With vacancy numbers still at a record high and application figures unable to match the available opportunities, the debate surrounding successful candidate attraction and engagement for the future continues.

Apprenticeships have struggled in the current high-wage economy and the numbers of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) are high. With the demand for new talent expected to rise, and young people as the solution to the UK's skills deficit, what will become of the early talent landscape in 2022?





Attendees

In this roundtable, the attending organisations broke down the core topics of early talent recruitment and discussed their expectations for the year ahead.

Attendees of the 21st roundtable included:

ORACLE

McCarthy & Stone
— Retirement living to the full —

Canal & River Trust
Making life better by water

WICKES

müller

RICS

MEGGITT

accenture

CLIFFORD
CHANCE

KPMG

BT

STELLANTIS

With many more attending...

Sodexo
Renishaw
L and G
TfL
Scottish Government
SMRS
Homes England



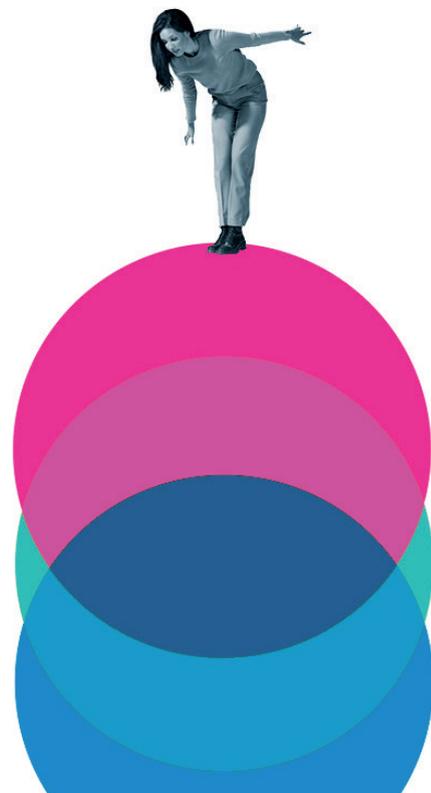
The market

With available talent in the market on a downward trend, competition is strong for new starters. Young people specifically offer one solution for filling skills gaps, but the market for these candidates also produces its own challenges.

Commenting on the rising number of young people who are NEET, despite available roles, one attendee stated that pay has been a real sticking point for their hiring prospects. According to the employer, many of their roles had been turned down despite offering the market value for an apprentice in their sector.

Other attendees agreed, suggesting that the rising costs of living and the abundance of choice among lower-level apprenticeship positions as a potential cause. Where previously advertising the benefits of an apprenticeship had drawn attention from potential candidates, now, wage is one of the few motivators for many. One organisation had even seen a request for a signing bonus from candidates.

Contrasting the difficulties with Level 2 and 3 apprenticeship positions, however, Level 6 positions were seen as easy to fill across the roundtable's attendees. For candidates at this level, diversity, sustainability, and long-term employment are widely seen as motivators instead.





Reaching new talent

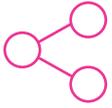
For some of the roundtable's attending organisations – particularly those who are not consumer-facing – branding had been a large issue when looking to attract new talent. One attendee shared that retention for new starters had been fantastic, but their reach for future prospects really struggled.

Many others agreed that the problem is self-fulfilling too. Educating young people on the available opportunities from lesser-known brands is only possible when those people can be reached and attracted. The issue, however, with being a lesser-known brand is that reach is a real challenge. One employee stated their target market were even served by the company's services which the candidates did not know about.

For other organisations, it was communicated that progress needed to be made in the subsequent stage of hiring – engagement (and education). Where many companies were changing shape and adding roles, communicating the breadth of what is available had been a real challenge.

Other attendees added culture to this communication challenge too, explaining that the mostly remote working experience had caused many problems in getting talent prospects to understand what the company was like to be a part of.

One organisation posed that training their managers would help satisfy the culture understanding gap, as their perspective of what it is like to join a company was largely out of date. If these managers could learn what it felt like to join an organisation at the present time, then it was expected that they could offer a tailored and far more valuable experience to those doing so.



Recruitment channels

When it came to discussing recruitment and onboarding, the conversation was somewhat divided depending on the level that each organisation was hiring for.

The conversation started with one employer stating that with daily operation still being remote-based two years on from the start of the pandemic, staff and talent have been reluctant to conduct and attend any more virtual recruitment events. It was thought by some that both sides of the recruitment conversation were struggling with virtual fatigue.

Not all agreed, however. Others in attendance had tried in-person events last year and had seen some positive results. Despite this, they continued with a largely virtual approach, with uncertainties in regulations being labelled as a major cause.

For higher education students specifically, there seemed a reluctance to engage in in-person events, causing universities to have to reconsider their relationships with employers in the promotion of careers.

Some organisations shared that for many new young starters, the idea of engaging and working remotely had been a positive one. These candidates were more than happy to browse opportunities, engage with recruiters, and then even work comfortably in the confines of their own homes, saving time and money on commuting. The attendees expected this experience to be short lived.

When considering future generations of workers and the promotion of early careers opportunities, the roundtable agreed that there were few alternatives to local schools partnering. Many were keen to get back into schools to pick up engagement activities with this demographic again.





Diversity and inclusion

Diversity and inclusion are widely agreed as an important topic for early talent recruitment, with many of the roundtable's attendees focussing on fair and equal hiring as one of their priorities. Several employers stated that one of the ways in which virtual recruitment had benefitted them was in the ability to access a variety of young candidates from across the UK.

With candidates less restricted by travel, finance, and access to opportunities as a result of the move to virtual, many underrepresented groups have now been made available to organisations.

The roundtable discussed the fact that access to diverse talent does not negate the challenge of hiring the right individual, but it does provide a greater opportunity to improve inclusion within hiring.

One attendee stated that allowing certain candidate groups more time to consider roles on their own had alleviated pressure and increased diverse hiring capabilities. Having material available to digest after events had made some candidates far more likely to consider them as an employing organisation. One attendee shared that they had been able to hire 100% more diverse candidates as a result of the same process.

Virtual recruitment strategies were still triumphed by the majority of the roundtable, however, for making it possible to improve engagement. Being able to reach candidates with technology in a way that suits them has been invaluable for diverse hiring.





Process

The last 12 months have seen a further overhaul of the recruitment landscape from 2020. But with behaviours, technology and appetite for talent constantly changing, the roundtable agreed that keeping processes up to date was one of the main keys to success.

Where virtual recruitment has made it easier for candidates to find and engage with opportunities, reneges rates have also seen a considerable increase. The conversation of the roundtable moved to the idea of 'joining the system up' and making sure that every stage of each employer recruitment strategy solidified them as the best option for their target candidate demographic.

Attending employers with a graduate requirement shared that partnerships with universities were imperative for maintaining a brand presence with young people. They also mentioned that becoming part of the university curriculum would allow students to try organisations like them before entering a recruitment style process, increasing retention at later stages of the process.

For lower-level apprenticeships, the group agreed on a similar strategy. If more students could undertake work experience with a variety of organisations, both they and employers could agree on the best fit more accurately and prevent any wasted effort on both sides.

The roundtable agreed that there is no one-size-fits-all approach and the entire recruitment process should consider changes in order to maintain healthy talent pipelines.

Assessment centres became a core focus for this conversation as each employer shared stories of tailored processes to maintain engagement and retention from candidates.

According to one employer 'keeping assessments fresh' was good for both candidates and talent managers in fighting virtual fatigue and getting the best out of prospects. A mixture of individual and groups sessions at assessment are still championed but incorporating hypothetical game-like scenarios to challenge candidate thinking had been both popular, and useful, when it came to identifying skills.

A small group of attendees explained that assessing candidates is essential, but to remember that employers should still be selling themselves at every stage of the process in order to maintain candidate interest. One employer continued to explain to their candidate pools all the ways in which they positively impact the environment, and how the candidates would help be a part of that. Another had used real-world working scenarios to demonstrate what the candidates would be helping contribute to.

For some attendees, virtual tours of the office had to replace those in-person but were still popular among candidates in selling the organisation. Seeing where they would eventually be working helped make the experience more real for them.

For other employers, simply maintaining a good flow between assessment activities had helped. Whether through the activities they had been undertaking or through feedback being passed between each team. Having a more joined-up experience had made the candidates feel more considered and like they are working towards a single goal or answer during the assessment.



Future Roundtables

If you would like to join the roundtable community and take part in future events, you can [sign up on our website here](#).

To catch up on previous roundtable conversations, [check out our online resource library](#).

For all other queries, please contact Chris as:
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