



SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Online employer roundtable
Inspiring the next
generation in a
remote world

No. 11

Wednesday 10th
March 2021
10am - 11:30am

In partnership with



Overview

The growth and development of future skills, the building of talent pipelines and the communication of available careers opportunities all start with inspiring the next generation of talent. Whilst many organisations begin to get to grips with aspects of the changing environment, gaps have grown in the engagement of early talent.

In this roundtable, we discussed how businesses are working to build an inclusive environment that considers the struggles these individuals are facing.

Key topics included:

1. Engaging with education
2. Designing and delivering a remote work experience
3. Inspiring underrepresented groups

Attendees of the eleventh roundtable include:



With many more attending...
Cabinet Office
Macquarie
JCB
RICS

KPMG
Ocado Group
Motus Commercials
Manchester Met
University

Meggitt
John Lewis
Partnership
TfL
AstraZeneca

**In partnership with
WorldSkills UK**

worldskillsuk

1 Engaging with education during a pandemic has been challenging for employers across the board, but for many this has not stopped them from trying to connect with school leavers either directly through advertising and events, or through a third party.

2 Organisations are keen to find new ways to measure candidate suitability for an early careers role that does not solely rely upon academic attainment. However, some businesses still require grades to ensure they are not setting candidates up to fail.

3 Utilising role models from the existing apprentice base within their organisation is crucial for many businesses in engaging with school leavers to reduce the fear factor and combat “you can’t be what you can’t see”.

4 Businesses see huge value in work experience with many moving their work experience programmes online; an adjustment that is helping with uptake and early talent engagement. Many businesses are hoping to capitalise on the traction achieved in the new style of remote working and move towards a blended approach of the physical and virtual world in the future.

5 When it comes to diversity, businesses should self-reflect and understand the diversity of their existing workforce, the points at which underrepresented candidates are lost in the application journey and ensure the external picture they portray is representative of the current workforce.

6 Organisations should seek to be authentic and give candidates an honest picture of their business. In doing so they are ensuring they are giving candidates the best chance for success. Genuine appearances create genuine interactions.

Engaging with education



When attracting, onboarding, and supporting early talent, it is important to understand the individuals need. With schools opening after Lockdown 3.0, education engagement was a high priority for many businesses looking to secure their intake for 2021 and 2022. But with schools focused on the core curriculum and making up for lost time, real challenges were expected by attendees looking fill the gap of careers engagement.

The conversation



For most organisations, the purpose of partnering with educational institutions is to attract school leavers who might consider their business as a place to start their career. Some keep it locally targeted to generate a strong and engaged pipeline, whilst others take a nationwide approach. To enable a wider reach, some organisations use a career and enterprise company who have strong connections with schools. This allows their business to tap into this audience without the need for additional headcount in their HR or Early Careers team. Partnering with these types of companies has allowed them to put apprenticeship and early-careers-focused content directly in front of thousands of students. Others expressed that they utilise alternative methods as they have struggled to engage effectively with educational institutions. These include traditional recruitment tactics such as advertising and events, including virtual events which they are keen to continue even after the transition to the 'new normal' is complete. As one participant stated, these events are important to "put a face to the global brand".

Representatives from WorldSkills UK spoke about their Spotlight talks which focus on technical and apprenticeship pathways. These events have allowed WorldSkills UK to engage with over 700 educational institutions, and often bring employers into these talks too, helping broaden the employers' reach. They have also developed content that fits into lesson plans but is on the educator's terms. For some organisations, engaging with education is more than attraction. It is about providing school leavers with an experience that helps them understand more about the business, and about themselves. One participant shared their Bootcamp Programme which invited young people onsite to educate them about the breadth of career paths and roles available and provide a meaningful experience that would stay with them long-term.

When it comes to the type of content, many participants have a strong internal apprentice network, and regularly call on this network to be advocates for this route to work. It was agreed unanimously that a current apprentice speaking to a school leaver is likely to create a far stronger connection than the school leaver speaking to someone walking a slightly different path to the one they want to know more about. Ultimately, it is all about demonstrating the options available and reducing the fear-factor for candidates.

Many attendees, it seemed, are reviewing or want to review their entry requirements to be more inclusive and provide an “alternative route to apprenticeships” too. One participant shared that they have changed their recruitment process to hire based on potential, not academic attainment as “if the route is different, the process by which you get there should be too”. They believe that by looking solely at grades their organisation was missing out on potentially amazing individuals. Another individual from the IT industry stated that if new recruits lack the skills needed for their technical roles, they are put onto a 3-month coding course to fast track and get them up to speed. However, for some businesses, particularly in areas such as Accountancy, GCSE grades still have a part to play in ensuring that apprentices have the required base knowledge to succeed in their role.

Several organisations spoke about the use of data to “get into the psyche” of the students, identifying what candidates need to know and how businesses can better understand them before they create their attraction campaigns. There is a desire to understand more about where applications are coming from e.g., which schools and media, however it appears many ATS systems that are being used do not capture this information.

Check out our recent research on the resource hub [here](#) for examples of what in-depth candidate data analysis can identify for your recruitment strategy.

Designing & delivering a remote work experience



All our participants agreed that work experience is an important way for school leavers to understand more about a business, as well as a great way to generate early careers pipeline for their organisation. There are currently challenges with management buy-in, however, with lean organisational teams understaffed and unable to provide opportunities, and not being able to have individuals on premises during the pandemic. So how were the participants navigating this?

The conversation



Due to challenges caused by the pandemic, some attendees opted not to go ahead with work experience 'virtually' this year, as they felt it would not be as effective for their business. They will, however, be conducting internships and summer programmes in line with opening restrictions in order to build back candidate-brand relationships, recognising that it does have a positive impact on both sides of the conversation. Some other attendees had continued with their work experience programmes with one business recently having 45 students join. Offering students upskilling sessions, presentations, and breakfast events has also seen positive results. As their representative states, "We can't let the virtual world hold us back".

With the virtual and remote world in mind, how has this affected the work experience opportunities businesses can provide? Some attendees question how meaningful a virtual work experience programme can be in building confidence and transferable skills if the individual is just listening. However, others stated that virtual working is likely to be the 'new normal' for many of the current and incoming workforce, especially in corporate environments. They believe that we must make sure a young person can understand and get involved with this, and work with talent to move into a new remote world of work.

Virtual and remote work experience has also enabled increased engagement from within organisations, with greater buy-in and participation from leadership teams and colleagues throughout the business. One leading FMCG business stated they were initially sceptical about moving to a virtual work experience programme, so they looked to a partner to help them run it. Following incredible engagement from colleagues and candidates, they are now looking to grow virtual engagement and offer more on-demand opportunities for candidates to engage with their brand and the opportunities it has.

Many agreed that physical meetings will be important too, and that going forward a blended approach will likely be best practice.

But does virtual work for everyone? For areas such as automotive, manufacturing or engineering where individuals are better suited to practical hands-on activities, organisations have struggled to create a programme that would be meaningful.

There was some debate about what the most meaningful length of time for a work experience programme is, and how you can ensure it is meaningful. Some have reduced two-week programmes to three days, and are putting together internship and summer programmes, whilst others stick to a 1-week placement. Although there was no unanimous decision on duration, many agreed that for work experience to be effective, you should consider the whole person, their aims, and wellbeing, and not focus solely on preparation for working for your organisation.

The type of content organisations use varies, but many agreed that role models play an important part in work experience programmes. Utilising staff within the business to showcase their roles and experiences can help engage early talent who are considering a work experience programme. It is inspirational for young people to see role models who are passionate about what they do, and even more so if it is someone like them - a young person and a current or former apprentice. One attendee shared their experience in having a School Engagement Team which is run entirely by existing apprentices which can scale to reach a large number of schools.

One participant stated that she likes to involve all her current apprentices in the work experience programme and promotion of apprenticeship schemes. Where some organisations have specific people they always utilise to advocate for apprenticeships, she looks at the type of person and tailors their involvement accordingly. For example, if they are introverted, she will showcase their projects to build their confidence in their work, whilst those who are more extroverted are more likely to appear in video content to share what they know.

Pre-recorded and pre-prepared content seems to be popular amongst the group as it makes their businesses more accessible to a larger number of people.

Aside from the benefits of learning about a business, there are other benefits on offer for work experience individuals. When it comes to pay for those who are on a work experience programme, one attendee stated that "Yes – if we are taking them away from other things [such as education or paid work], they should be paid". Another business also provides mentoring sessions to provide employability assistance and will employ individuals if they performed well during their one-week work experience. Many attendees also have a strong focus on employability. Two are offering fully paid university placements for three individuals who otherwise may not have been able to afford to go. One is also offering 500 Kickstart placements in 2021 and has started taking some of the teachings from the Kickstart programmes and applying it to their own engagement and onboarding processes.

Inspiring underrepresented groups



Diversity and inclusion have been a hot topic for several years, with many HR leads actively working to ensure good representation across their organisations. There are many routes to help organisations achieve their goals. But how can employers ensure they attract and retain employees when targeting specific demographics?

The conversation



Representatives from WorldSkills kicked off this discussion stating that they firmly believe in the role model approach which was briefly touched upon in the work experience section of this Roundtable. Their research showed that a candidate of a similar age and with similar experiences to the new talent is most appealing. They are working with colleges to put these role models in front of more future talent and aim to work with training providers to expand their reach.

Further discussion led to the agreement that having a role model that is aspirational, is crucial to combatting “you can’t be what you can’t see” too. This was considered just as important as ensuring the messages that you are communicating and the information you are displaying is authentic. Everything must reflect who the company is and who the company wants to be. It was understood that there is a danger that if you are not authentic and honest, you risk overselling the underrepresented. As one participant says, “there is a fine balance between positive role modelling and not reflecting the reality of the organisation”.

One individual stated that they have personally faced this themselves, by being utilised by the business to represent various demographics. They stated that businesses need to review the image library they use for external communications and consider if it is representative of their organisation and their workforce.

Another attendee had been using internal focus groups with established candidates from underrepresented groups to understand their experience and has been using this knowledge to approach new talent. Whilst this business originally used mainstream channels to reach new talent, this did not always work for diverse new talent. So, they switched tactics to target local and urban radio stations, community centres, and local social media groups which have worked very well. Their advice – “get out there and be creative”.

Other attendees run internships specifically targeted to women and those of underrepresented ethnicities to promote and increase the diversity in their workforce. These internships run for three days and incorporate an introduction and a case study for them to work on followed by an assessment. The programme is short so that it can be carried out effectively, and the business is making efforts to ensure these engagements are still meaningful to attendees. In a similar vein, one participant spoke about their virtual work experience programme which 100 females attended. They then launched their four-month mentorship programme, which 60 individuals have signed up to, where members of this attendee’s organisation will mentor females in their last year of college and help them work out their next steps in their career journey.

Another attendee leading a financial services business runs an Intrapreneurs Club, which is all about extending the business reach to underrepresented groups.

Some of the participants noted that to truly understand the impact your business is having, you must analyse your pipeline to look for any potential adverse impact on under-represented groups and monitor each stage of the recruitment process taking action to correct any issues.

Echoing this focus on data, David Allison from TheTalentPeople summarised how best to identify whether your campaigns are inspiring and reaching the right demographic. In this remote world, TheTalentPeople has seen a big shift in how campaigns can be measured, and real-time analytics can help to tweak the model while engagement is in progress. For example, on a campaign that TheTalentPeople ran for an employer who wanted to attract females in IT, engagement from the target audience dropped off at an early stage. Being able to identify this and work out why means they were able to tweak it early on and generate better results for the rest of the campaign. **The [MAJIC model for early talent attraction](#) is a valuable tool in creating this kind of strategy.**

Ultimately, organisations should seek to be authentic and give candidates an honest picture of their business. In doing so, they are ensuring they are giving candidates the best chance for success. Genuine appearances create genuine interactions.

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You can also catch up on our previous discussions via our [resource hub](#).

If you're looking for more in-depth insights into candidate behaviour, we're pleased to be able to offer you our own research into the world of early talent – read more [here](#).



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