What do students want?

Institute of Student Employers
ise.

Debut

Listening to the voices of young jobseekers

This research was conducted as a partnership between the Institute of Student Employers (ISE) and Debut.

The analysis and writing of this report were undertaken by Tristram Hooley.

Foreword

Stephen Isherwood
ISE

What do students want? A question that generations of recruiters have sought the answers to. With the daily diet of difficult headlines, we could be forgiven for thinking that currently any job will do, preferably one with a respectable salary.

But the authors of this report find that for most students, it's not 'all about the money'. Students still pace a high value on development opportunities and work content. And students from different backgrounds, ethnicities and genders think differently about their career options and what they want out of the recruitment process. Recruiters aiming to appeal to a diverse pool of student talent will find plenty to act on in this report.

Men and the privately educated are more likely to be confident about their career prospects so may be more likely to engage in the jobs market. Only 64% of non-white, female, state educated respondents are comfortable with psychometric assessments compared to 83% of white, male, privately educated respondents, so may not be as confident through the selection process. Non-white, non-Russel Group students are more likely to be focused on a specific career, so may not be thinking flexibly enough about their career options.

Covid-19 will change how employers should target and speak to a range of student communities. This report demonstrates that students still want a blend of information, they want to know how to do well in the section process and what the work really is like. And despite Covid constraints, students still want face-to-face experiences. Although this may be hard to deliver at the moment, employers can think about how to replicate the on-campus or in-office experience as closely as possible on-line.

Students are finding the current jobs market competitive and challenging, particularly when they hear what appears to be conflicting advice about vacancies. Employers that heed the information in this report and develop strategies that are sensitive to different student demographics will attract the best, most diverse student talent.

Michele Trusolino
Debut

2020 has presented students and graduates (and us all) with an unprecedented situation, which created an economic downturn and massive job cuts across most sectors. Despite the fact that outgoing graduates will face a tougher and more competitive job market, they are still hopeful and showing incredible resilience during these trying times.

What is still important for Gen-z in light of these recent changes? In this survey that Debut conducted in collaboration with the ISE we found that this new generation cares about a variety of things, some of which may not have been as important to previous generations. Often we see employers assume that the class of 2020 and beyond will respond to the same recruitment messages and marketing strategies that haven't really changed much over the years, but that assumption has some flaws.

In the survey we addressed 7 big questions that will allow recruiters to understand how to shape their messaging to the new generation. For instance, we found that the traditional package of an attractive salary and swanky office won't necessarily attract the best talent anymore. Respondents have indicated that other intangible benefits like fair treatment, work aligning with values and training and development hold greater importance than salary. There are some distinct differences here, often based on demographic and socio-economic class, with women, for instance, displaying more interest in environmentally sustainable organisations than men (89% vs 80%), and non-white respondents ranking salary higher than white respondents (90% vs 84%).

Another interesting outcome of this survey was the effect of Covid on students' career ideas, with women much more likely to explore new career paths than men since the start of the pandemic (61% vs 52%). Employers might assume general confidence levels have gone down and students may settle for unemployment or underemployment, but the reality is that this is quite split and results show that this is largely affected by gender and class. This raises obvious concerns and is something employers should really consider in their messaging when trying to improve diversity in the workplace.

When it comes to communicating with these young job-seekers, the report highlights the students' desire for separation between their "private" and "professional" lives. The usual suspects like e-mail, LinkedIn and Debut ranked highly, while social media was considered too intrusive. Not surprisingly, students also felt that employers could be more forthcoming about their requirements in a candidate and in general, have more information readily available.

The main takeaway from the data gathered and our analysis is that different groups and demographics display different interests and care about different elements in the job and its application process. This means that a one-size-fits-all approach is no longer sustainable as a recruitment strategy and employers should tailor their messaging as much as possible to the audience they are trying to reach to maximise their impact. Times are changing and so are young job-seekers' attitudes towards work, so it is only natural that graduate recruiters follow suit and adapt their attraction and recruitment strategies to this new landscape.

Executive summary

Executive summary

This research poses a series of seven big questions asked by employers and allows over 2000 students and jobseekers to answer these questions. It is based on surveys conducted in June and July 2020 in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. It looks at students and jobseekers experience of the jobs market and recruitment process.

The questions and the answers

The seven big questions that employers wanted the answer to…	How young jobseekers answer this question…
How are young jobseekers thinking about and planning for their career?	Young jobseekers are positive and proactive in their career planning but they are concerned about the current employment climate.
What is important to them when they are choosing a job?	They would ideally like organisations that provide them with the opportunity to 'have it all'. This includes good career opportunities, work/life balance, interesting work, decent pay and the opportunity to work in an ethical organisation.
What sources of information are they using and finding helpful?	They are using a combination of online and face-to-face sources and want to have access to both deep learning opportunities and just-in-time information.
How should employers communicate with them?	They are open to a wide range of forms of communication, but skeptical about employers encroaching into more personal forms of social media.
What do they want to hear from employers?	They want a mix of information about how to succeed in the recruitment process and information about what it is like to work in that organisation.
How do they feel about different assessment approaches?	They are broadly comfortable with all of the main recruitment approaches that are in use and are mainly happy to switch to online recruitment where necessary.
How are they feeling about starting work?	They are positive about starting work and happy to participate in virtual inductions and home working where necessary.

Implications for employers

The findings of the research provide a range of ideas about how marketing and recruitment processes should be organised to ensure that your firm is attractive to students.

Key things to address in your recruitment process.

- **Careers matter.** Employers should be explicit that the jobs that you are recruiting for are the gateway to a fulfilling career whether this is pursued within your firm or outside of it.
- **Money isn't everything.** Young jobseekers do care about money, but they also want to hear about the wider opportunities that organisations will provide them with.
- **Tell everyone.** Employers should be careful not to narrow their attraction and marketing campaigns to too few channels.
- **Don't encroach on jobseekers' non-work social media.** There is concern amongst young jobseekers about the use of personal social media. It is important that your marketing strategy is sensitive to students' concerns.
- **Make a meaningful connection.** Jobseekers want to know about your organisation, its processes and its people before they make a commitment to join you.
- **Shift to online recruitment approaches if you need to do so.** Most students will cope with the approaches to recruitment that have emerged during the pandemic.
- **Be fair and be seen to be fair.** There is skepticism amongst jobseekers about the fairness of recruitment processes.
- **Jobseekers are comfortable with virtual induction and home working.** Candidates are generally happy to begin working for your organisation in this way.

Ensuring diversity

The research reveals that there are some big differences in the ways that different demographic groups think about and engage with the recruitment process. Employers may want to think about some of the following issues as part of moving towards a more diverse staff cohort.

- **Think about how you communicate with candidates.** Different communication channels have different user profiles.
- **Give candidates opportunities to see how they will fit in (and make sure that these opportunities are positive).** This process of feeling confident that the fit is right seems to be more important to non-white and female candidates, who perhaps have greater concerns about whether organisations will really be welcoming to them.
- **Be clear and positive about your organisation's environmental policies.** Women are more interested in working for organisations that have strong environmental positioning.
- **Be careful about how talk about psychometric assessments.** Less-advantaged candidates are concerned about the use of psychometrics in recruitment processes.
- **Recognise what students have achieved in education.** Less advantaged students are more likely to want to be able to see a connection between their studies and their job.
- **Don't assume that students are geographically mobile.** Not all students want to be, or can be, mobile. Consider whether you really need to require students to be able to move.

Contents

Introduction

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Introduction

This has been a challenging year for all of us. The Covid pandemic has turned the world upside down, with many of us working and studying differently, the boundaries between work and the home getting increasingly blurred, and a lot of worrying signals from the jobs market.

For young people, either still in education or who have recently left it, the last few months have been particularly difficult. It isn't easy to find your first job during a pandemic, especially when almost three-quarters of a million people have lost their job[1] and the number of job vacancies has plummeted in comparison with last year. [2]

One of the difficult things for young people is balancing the general picture of a jobs market in decline, with the fact that there are a lot of jobs out there. Research by the Institute of Student Employers reveals that while the numbers of students that employers are hiring has fallen, it has not collapsed altogether, with most employers expecting to recruit only slightly few entry-level staff than last year.[3]

The confusing messages that students are receiving about the jobs market during and after the lockdown are causing considerable problems for recruiters. While social distancing has been challenging for employers, most have reconfigured their recruitment and continued to hire new staff using a range of digital techniques. They need students to continue to apply for jobs, but also to recognise that Covid has changed the jobs market and the recruitment process.

These changes make for a very fluid situation where tried and tested approaches to student recruitment may need to be rethought. Because of this the Institute of Student Employers (ISE) and Debut decided to partner on a research project to investigate what questions employers wanted the answers to from students, and then to ask students to answer them.

What employers want to know

We began by asking Debut's employer clients and the ISE's employer membership what they wanted to know about what students were thinking. Fifty-five employers responded to this call during June 2020 and provided us with 147 questions.

We analysed these 147 questions and realised that they boiled down to seven big questions that employers wanted the answer to.

The seven big questions that employers wanted the answer to…

1. How are young jobseekers thinking about and planning for their career?

2. What is important to them when they are choosing a job?

3. What sources of information are they using and finding helpful?

4. How should employers communicate with them?

5. What do they want to hear from employers?

6. How do they feel about different assessment approaches?

7. How are they feeling about starting work?

1   Sillars, J. (2020). Coronavirus: 730,000 jobs lost since lockdown began. *Sky News*. https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-730-000-have-lost-their-job-since-lockdown-began-12046850.
2   Papoutsaki, D. & Wilson, T. (2020). Monthly vacancy analysis: Vacancy trends to week-ending 9 August 2020. *IES Briefing*. https://www.employ-ment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/IES%20Briefing%20-%20w.c%2017.08.2020%20final2.pdf.
3   Institute of Student Employers. & AGCAS. (2020). *Covid-19: The impact of the crisis on student recruitment and development*. London: Institute of Student Employers.

Figure 1.1. The educational status of respondents

- Current undergraduate student
- Recently graduated (undergraduate)
- Recently graduated (postgraduate)
- Current postgraduate student
- A-level or equivalent student
- School/college leaver
- GCSE student
- Not provided

Figure 1.2. Ethnicity of respondents

- White
- Asian / Asian British
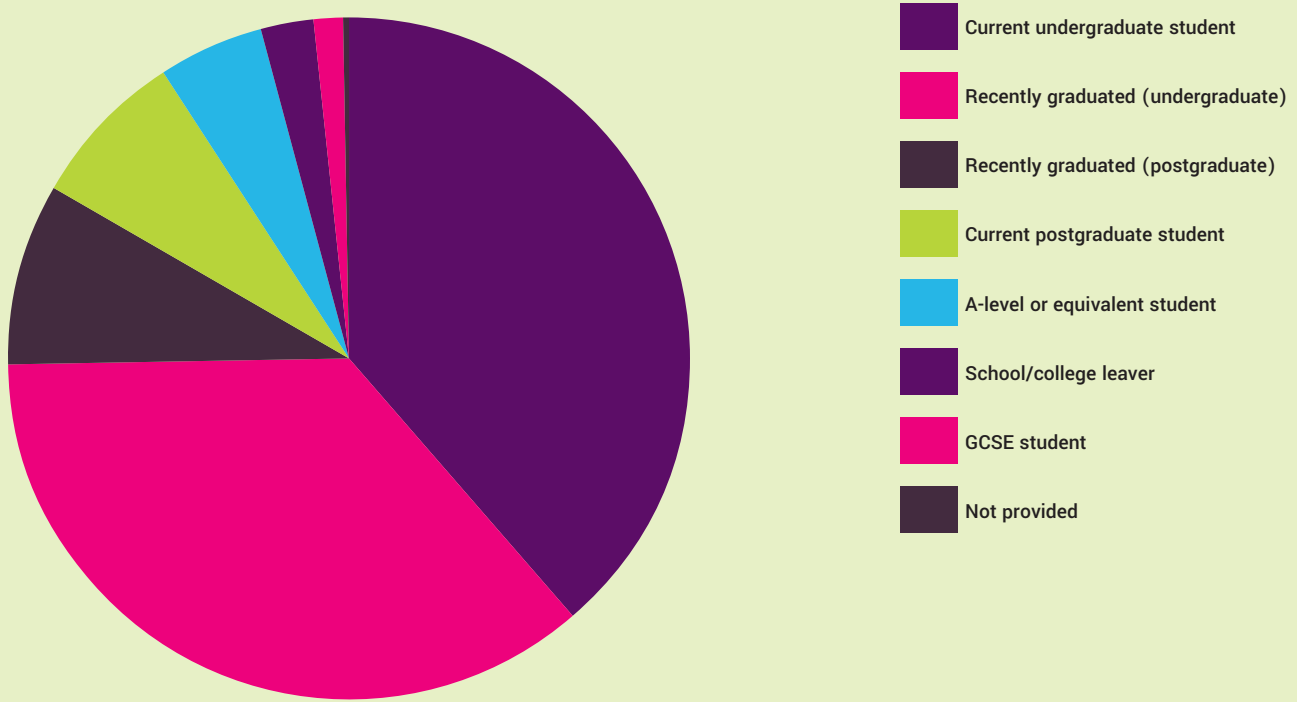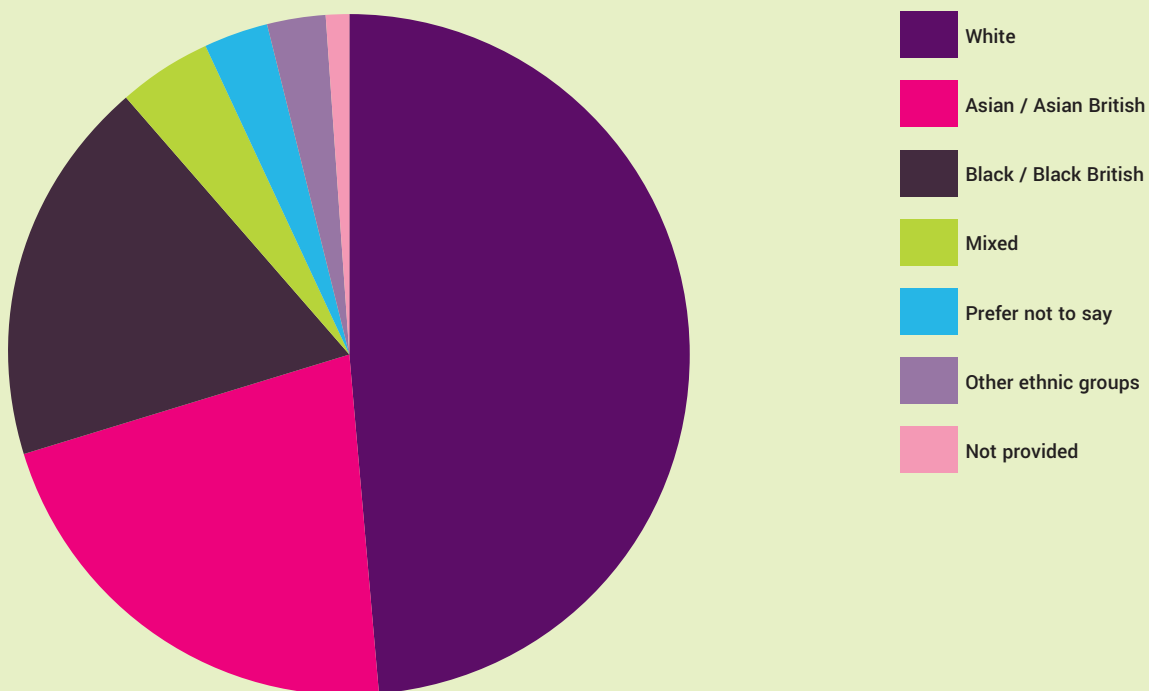- Black / Black British
- Mixed
- Prefer not to say
- Other ethnic groups
- Not provided

Asking students what they want

We then turned the seven big questions identified by the employers into a series of statements and asked students whether they agreed or disagreed with them. For example, as part of the question about how young jobs seekers were preparing for their career they were presented with the following statement.

I am strongly focused on a career path.

In response to this, and all the other statements, respondents were invited to answer with one of the following options.

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Agree
4. Strongly agree

This gave us a measure of both how many students agreed or disagreed with different statements and also a measure of the strength of their feelings.

The survey was distributed to users of the Debut careers app. The Debut app helps students and young jobseekers to find and apply for job opportunities that are interested in. It also allows employers to find candidates for jobs that they have amongst the apps users. Users of the app were directed to a survey in which they were presented with seven big questions and asked to provide some additional feedback to employers.

Who answered?

We received 2,162 valid responses from young jobseekers. Responses were received from a diverse group of users of the app. Most were either current undergraduates or recently graduated from an undergraduate degree, but there were also several school students, school leavers and postgraduates (see figure 1.1).

The majority (57%) identified as female, with almost all others (43%) identifying as male. They were also ethnically diverse as is shown in figure 1.2, with around half identifying as white.

In terms of their social background, the majority were (67%) state schooled, with 18% reporting that they attended a private school. A substantial minority (41%) were the first in their family to attend university and around a third (32%) had attended or were attending a Russel Group institution.[1]

Analysis

In the next sections we are going to present what the respondents told us and pay careful attention to the differences that exist within the cohort. The data were analysed by looking at the overall patterns that emerged as well as differences relating to gender, ethnicity, educational stage (e.g. student or graduate), whether they were state or privately educated, whether they were the first in their family to attend university, and whether they had attended a Russell Group university.

The data is rich and this report cannot address every possible analysis. We have sought to provide a clear answer to each of the employers' seven big questions and then to present substantial differences (>5 percentage points) between sub-groups where they exist.

At the end of the report we will gather together a series of key issues that employers should consider in relation to diversity and equality.

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1 The Russell Group is a self-selected group of high status UK higher education institutions. For further information see https://russellgroup.ac.uk/.

Career planning

2

Career planning

Big question #1. How are young jobseekers thinking about and planning for their career?

The first question explored career planning, asking respondents whether they feel informed about their career options, are considering further study, are focused on a career path, willing to move for their career, whether their ideas about career have been changed by the pandemic and whether they feel confident that they will find a job that they want quickly after leaving education.

Figure 2.1 shows the average answers that they gave to each of these questions. An average of 1 means that everyone strongly disagreed with the statement, while an average of 4 means that everyone strongly agreed with it. The mid-point is 2.5, so any score below that means that on average the respondents are feeling negative (we've indicated these responses in red).

In general respondents were feeling fairly positive about the statements that we gave them. So 'I am strongly focused on a career path' received an average score just above 3 (agree). This meant that 74% of respondents were either agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement.

Respondents also felt positive about moving to other places in the UK and outside the UK for their career, felt informed about the opportunities open to them and willing to consider further study. But, it was also clear that Covid was having an impact with the majority (57%) saying that their ideas about their career had changed since the start of the pandemic and less than half (42%) reporting that they were confident that they would find the job that they wanted quickly after leaving education.

A lot of students are worried about life after Covid (Female, Asian or Asian British, state educated)

Be patient as class 2020 is going through it. (Female)

Figure 2.1. How are young jobseekers thinking about and planning for their career?

I am strongly focused on a career path	3.00
I am willing to move to different places in the UK for my career	2.97
I feel informed about the job and career opportunities that are available to me	2.80
I am willing to move to different countries (outside the UK) for my career	2.76
I am considering further study (e.g. a Masters degree) after I finish this stage of my education	2.71
My ideas about my career have changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic	2.65
I feel confident that I will find a job that I want quickly after I leave education	2.34

Demographic differences

The general picture is of a student cohort who are positive and proactive in their career planning but concerned about the current employment climate. However, there are quite a lot of variations by demographics which employers should be aware of as they think about how to engage with students.

Focus on a career path. Non-white respondents are more likely to be strongly focused on a career path than white respondents (78% of non-white respondents agree vs 70% of white respondents). Drilling down further into the ethnicity categories reveals that Black or Black British respondents were most likely to agree that they were focused on a career path (82%). A stronger focus on a career path was also found amongst respondents who didn't attend a Russell Group institution (77% vs 68%) perhaps due to the stronger vocational focus in some non-Russel Group institutions.

Considering further study. There was also a clear pattern in the likelihood of considering further study. Again, non-white respondents are more likely to be reporting considering further study (64% vs 58%) with Black and Black British the most likely to be considering this route (67%). Respondents who had been privately educated are also more likely to be considering further study (68% vs 59%). Postgraduate study may be seen as a way that students can gain an edge in the labour market and therefore may prove attractive to both those who feel that they might experience discrimination in the labour market (which further credentials may help overcome) and those who can more readily afford to access postgraduate study. Whether postgraduate study necessarily affords a labour market advantage is more debatable, with relatively few employers actively seeking postgraduate degrees.[1]

Mobility. The ability and willingness to move in pursuit of your career also seemed to be structured by demographics. Men were more willing to move to different places in the UK than women (77% vs 70%) and to move outside of the UK (68% vs 60%). Social class was also determinant of international mobility with privately educated respondents (72% vs 61%) and those with a family history of higher education (68% vs 59%) also more likely to be willing to move out of the UK than state schooled students or those who were the first in their family to attend university. This raises issues for the diversity of firms that expect students be highly mobile in pursuit of career opportunities.

Confidence. As the prevailing narrative about employment opportunities for students in the post-Covid world is so negative there is a danger that some students will just give up and settle for unemployment or underemployment. Because of this, confidence is likely to be an important factor. Those who believe that they will find a job are likely to have a better chance of doing so as they believe it is worth continuing to look. This raises diversity issues as career confidence seems to be skewed by both gender and class. Men feel more confident about finding a job than women (48% vs 38%). Similarly, privately educated respondents feel more confident than state educated respondents (46% vs 40%).

Changing your career ideas. The Covid pandemic has had a profound effect on the career thinking of many people. As well as impacting on the labour market it has also changed the status of 'key workers' and changed many assumptions about work-life balance.[2] It is not necessarily a bad thing for young people to rethink their career aspirations, but it is interesting that women in our survey seemed far more likely to have changed their ideas about career than men since the start of the pandemic (61% vs 52%).

1   Hooley, T. (2019). Investigating the value of postgraduate education. *Adventures in Career Development.* https://adventuresincareerdevelopment. wordpress.com/2019/03/21/investigating-the-value-of-postgraduate-education/.

2   Hooley, T., Sultana, R., & Thomsen, R. (2020). Why a social justice informed approach to career guidance matters in the time of coronavirus. *Career guidance for social justice.* https://careerguidancesocialjustice.wordpress.com/2020/03/23/why-a-social-justice-informed-approach-to-career-guidance-matters-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/.

Choosing a job

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Figure 3.1. What is important to young jobseekers when they are choosing a job?

The organisation will treat me fairly	3.67
The work is interesting	3.61
Access to training and development	3.59
Good work/life balance	3.52
The work aligns with my values	3.47
Above average salary	3.19
The organisation is environmentally sustainable	3.13
Job allows me to use what I have learnt in education	3.05
I will be working with people like me	2.96

Choosing a job

Big question #2. What is important to young jobseekers when they are choosing a job?

The second question is key to recruitment as it explores the factors that influence students when they are choosing a job. Understanding the motivation of jobseekers can help employers to tailor their message and emphasise the aspects of their organisation that are most likely to appeal to prospective hires.

We asked respondents to indicate how far they agreed with a series of statements that addressed: the ethics of the organisation and how it aligns to their values, how interesting the work is and whether it will use the skills and knowledge they have learnt in education, whether the organisation offers good work/life balance, training and pay, and whether it will allow them to work with people like them. The findings are set out in figure 3.1.

Ideally respondents would like to see organisations that could let them have it all. The most important of these factors (the organisation will treat me fairly) received 98% agreement and even the least important (I will be working with people like me) still received 73% agreement. This list therefore offers a useful checklist for employers thinking about revamping their offer.

As a student I look for an employer that I feel is as invested in me as I am in them, I believe this to be a great motivator. (Male, white, state educated)

As a student, what I am looking for in entry-level jobs is work where I will continue to learn and develop everyday, and I am looking for an employer who is committed to supporting their graduates' development as they find their feet and start figuring out their own career path. (Female, white, state educated)

It is notable that while respondents were positive about organisations that offered an above average salary (with 87% agreeing that this was important), it was far from the most important factor that motivated students.

Demographic differences

There were some variations in how important various factors were to different groups. Most of the factors that motivated respondents to choose a job were similar across all of the groups, but there are some important exceptions.

Salary. As discussed above salary was important, but not the most important factor to respondents when choosing a job. However, non-white respondents were more likely than white respondents (90% vs. 84%) to say that an above average salary was important to them.

Use what you've learnt. The opportunity to apply what you have learnt in education to your first job was more important to some participants than others. Those who were state schooled (80% vs 73%) and who went to non-Russell Group universities (83% to 69%) want a job that allowed them to use what they had learnt in education. This is an important finding as only around 14% of student employers are looking for a specific subject.[1] Many broadcast their openness to a wide variety of different subject-backgrounds in an attempt to be more inclusive. However, this finding suggests that less advantaged candidates may be put off by this messaging and be hoping to more clearly be putting their education to work.

Environmental policy. The environment has continued to grow as a political and ethical issue over recent years. Students are generally motivated by working for organisations that have a strong environmental policy. This motivation is stronger amongst women who were more likely (89% vs 80%) than men to want to work in an organisation that was environmentally sustainable.

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1   Institute of Student Employers. (2019). *Inside student recruitment 2019: Findings of the ISE recruitment survey.* London: ISE.

Helpful information

4

Helpful information

Big question #3. What sources of information are young jobseekers using and finding helpful?

Information is everywhere. Jobseekers are increasing able to access a wide range of career information to help them to find a job and establish their career. In this question we explored what sources of information they found to be most useful as this should guide employers in developing their attraction and marketing strategy. We will then build on this in the next section where we look at employer communications and how jobseekers want to be contacted.

We asked respondents about whether they found online sources of information helpful to their job searching and look at how their responses compared to direct engagement with employers, the workplace and support available to them from career professionals, academics and teaching staff. The findings are set out in figure 4.1.

On average participants agree that all of these sources of information would be helpful. Young jobseekers are hungry for information and keen to access it from all available sources. They wanted to access both deep experiential sources of information e.g. 91% agreed that they would find face-to-face work experience helpful. But, the also wanted to have access to easily available online information e.g. 90% agreed that jobs boards and careers websites were helpful. There was no strong preference for either face-to-face or virtual opportunities with both being valued.

> A virtual internship experience is slowly becoming a trend and it would be amazing if the companies I was interested in could invest in virtual internship experiences or spring intern weeks; especially for undergraduates with no work experience in their chosen field of study.
> (Male, Black or Black British, privately educated)

The message for employers is that students are using a wide range of information sources to make decisions. They are making use of online sources of information, but these are balanced by a range of experiential and personal sources of information to help them to find work and make career decisions.

Demographic difference

There are not a lot of variation by demographics, with most respondents making use of information sources in similar ways. However, there are some distinctions worthy of note.

Careers services. Students found being able to access professional careers services more helpful than those who were not in education (80% vs 70%). This distinction is unsurprising as access to careers services is much stronger for current students than for those who have left education. This should remind employers that there is likely to be a pool of talent amongst unemployed and under-employed recent graduates who are likely to need a different marketing and attraction approach.

Academic and teaching staff. Non-Russel group respondents are more likely to find academics and teaching staff on their course more helpful for their career than those studying in Russel Group institutions. (62% vs 49%). This may be because of the stronger vocational focus in non-Russel Group institutions. Men were also more likely to turn to academics and teaching staff than women (63% vs 57%).

Online information. Women are more likely to find online sources of information useful than men. This was particularly evident in stronger agreement about the helpfulness of an online placement (79% vs 74%) and social media (79% vs 72%).

Figure 4.1. What sources of information are young jobseekers using and finding helpful?

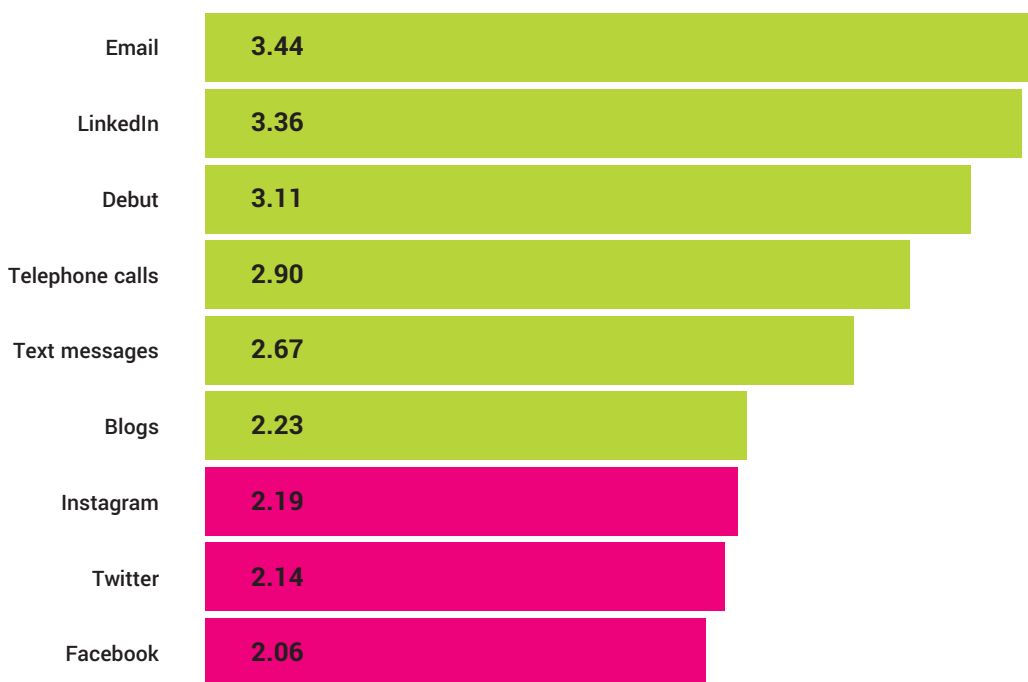| Source	Score
Undertaking a face-to-face work experience placement	3.39
Job boards and other career websites	3.21
Face-to-face careers fairs and other face-to-face employer events	3.07
Undertaking an online/virtual work experience placement	2.95
Social media	2.91
Careers service in my institution	2.85
Virtual careers fairs and other virtual employer events	2.82
Academics and teaching staff on my course	2.63

Communicating with jobseekers

5

Communicating with jobseekers

Big question #4. How should employers communicate with young jobseekers?

This question focused on what channels employers should use to communicate directly with students. We asked students to indicate their agreement about whether employers should communicate with them using various common channels and platforms. The findings are set out in figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1. How should employers communicate with young jobseekers?

Channel	Score
Email	3.44
LinkedIn	3.36
Debut	3.11
Telephone calls	2.90
Text messages	2.67
Blogs	2.23
Instagram	2.19
Twitter	2.14
Facebook	2.06

The results make for interesting reading, particularly in the light of the energy that many employers have devoted to developing social media strategies. Respondents were most positive about being communicated with via email and LinkedIn, as these two channels emerged as the most popular with 95% and 90%, respectively, of the respondents in agreement. There was less enthusiasm for more informal forms of communication via social media channels. On balance respondents disagreed that employers should use blogs, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to communicate with them.

Of course, just because people aren't positive about social media campaigns, does not mean that they do not respond to them. There were still substantial numbers of respondents who were positive about the use of social media channels. So 37% agreed that employers should communicate with them through blogs, 36% through Instagram, 33% through Twitter, and 28% through Facebook. But, the message was clear, respondents were at best lukewarm to being contacted through social media. Perhaps this concern is driven by a fear of surveillance and the idea that employers are moving into domains that are normally reserved for non-work activities.

Demographic differences

There were a range of differences in the preferences of different demographic groups in relation of employer communications. Many of these findings would benefit from further research as organisations develop their marketing strategies.

Telephone. A number of groups were more positive about the use of the telephone as a form of communication. So non-white respondents(76% vs 70%), Non-Russell Group (77% vs 65%) and male (77% vs 68%) respondents were all more positive about the telephone than white, Russel Group and female respondents.

Text messages. Non-white (65% vs 56%) and Non-Russel Group (65% vs 48%) respondents are more positive about the use of text messages.

Social media. Non-Russell Group respondents are more positive about Instagram (36% vs 31%) and Twitter (35% vs 29%). While, white respondents are more positive about Facebook (31% vs 26%).

What do you want to hear from employers?

6

What do you want to hear from employers?

Big question #5. What do young jobseekers want to hear from employers?

Our fifth big question looks at what jobseekers want to hear employers talking about. We offered respondents a series of statements looking at various aspects of recruitment as well as information about careers within the organisation and the organisation itself. Figure 6.1 sets out what we found.

Once again the findings reveal that young jobseekers are hungry for information. They were very positive about every type of information that we suggested that employers might be able to provide. The wanted to hear about the recruitment process and were keen to access information about what recruiters were looking for in applications, about assessments centres and to gain some tips on the application process. They also wanted to know about the career, training and social opportunities within the organisation and to hear from employees about what it was like to work there. Finally they were also interested in hearing about whether the organisation was committed to voluntary, charity and community work.

Communicate the purpose and values of the company and work/life balance. (Male, mixed, state educated)

Some of the qualitative comments revealed hunger for a greater level of interaction and feedback from employers, particularly in response to failed applications.

Additional feedback on applications would be hugely helpful at the moment. (Male, white, state educated)

For employers, this question reinforces the message that jobseekers want to understand what they are getting into when they are applying to work in your organisation. The more you can give them opportunities to directly interact with you and the more that you can provide them with opportunities to connect to your existing staff the better.

Demographic differences

Non-white and female respondents were looking for somewhat different kinds of information to white and male respondents. Broadly they were looking for reassurance that they would fit in and be treated well within the organisations that they were applying to.

Hearing from diverse employees. Non-white respondents (94% to 81%) and women (93% to 81%) are more likely to want to hear about the experience of employees from different backgrounds, genders, ethnicity and sexuality than white respondents and men. Some of these differences were cumulative with 97% of female, non-white respondents keen to hear from diverse employees, while only 71% of male, white respondents were interesting in hearing about this.

Social life. Non-white respondents are more likely to want to hear about the social aspects of the organisation (88% vs 82%) than their white counterparts. Again this may be linked to seeking confirmation that this an organisation that they will fit into.

Voluntary, charity and community work. There was also an important difference in which respondents were seeking information about organisation's voluntary, charity and community work. Non-white respondents (88% vs 82%) and women (90% vs 79%) are more likely to want to hear about corporate social responsibility. Again, this may be being used as a proxy for an organisation which individuals feel they will fit into and which will align with their values.

Figure 6.1. What do young jobseekers want to hear from employers?

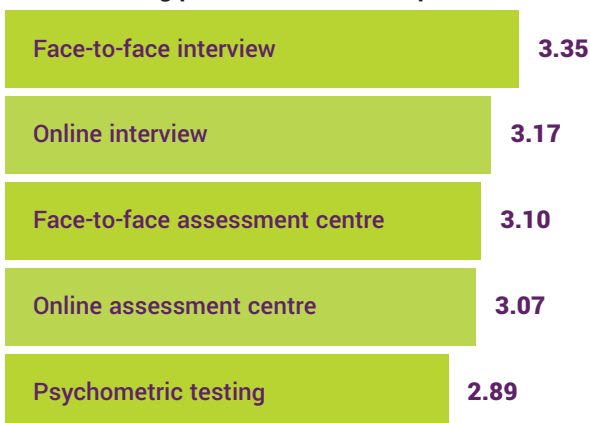|	
What recruiters are looking for in applications	3.65
Opportunities for training and qualifications	3.58
How to suceed at assessment centres	3.56
Information about the different career pathways within the organisation	3.54
Tips on the application process	3.51
Hearing from graduates currently in the role, how they got there, a day in the life	3.49
About the experience of employees from different backgrounds, genders, ethnicity and sexuality	3.30
The social aspects of the organisation	3.19
The organisations voluntary, charity and community work	3.15

Assessment approaches

7

Assessment approaches

Big question #6. How do young jobseekers feel about different assessment approaches?

The sixth big question focused on how jobseekers felt about different aspects of the assessment process. Figure 7.1 shows what we found.

In general, respondents were positive about all of the main approaches used by employers. Given the recent shift to online recruitment in response to pandemic we were particular interested to see whether students had a clear preference for face-to-face approaches to recruitment.[1] While there was a preference for face-to-face approaches to recruitment, the differences were not very big. So, for example, while 91% of respondents agreed that they were comfortable taking part in face-to-face interviews, 86% agreed that they were comfortable taking part in online interviews.

Figure 7.1. Do young jobseekers feel comfortable taking part in the following parts of the selection process?

Face-to-face interview	3.35
Online interview	3.17
Face-to-face assessment centre	3.10
Online assessment centre	3.07
Psychometric testing	2.89

In the qualitative date, respondents highlighted that this move online provided a new context for human relationships and interaction rather than an alternative to it.

> Although there are restrictions in place and considerations to be taken as a result of the pandemic, the human touch and the personal connection is even more important than before to establish both in the recruitment process and once onboarded. (Male, other ethnic group, privately educated)

Figure 7.2. Do young jobseekers trust employers to treat them fairly in the recruitment processes
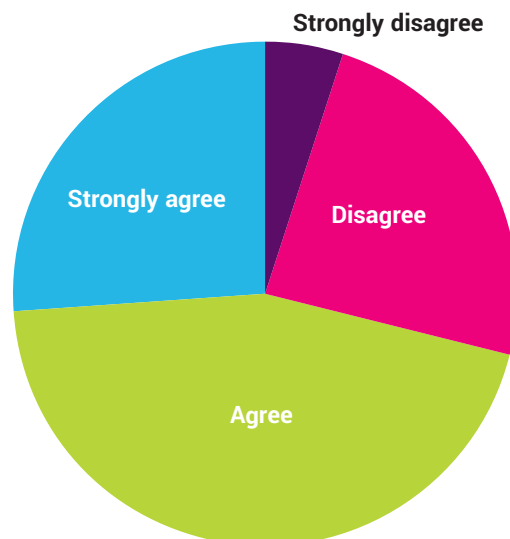
1 Institute of Student Employers. & AGCAS. (2020). *Covid-19: The impact of the crisis on student recruitment and development.* London: Institute of Student Employers.

We then asked a follow up question to explore whether respondents felt that employers' recruitment approaches were fair. Figure 7.2 sets out the responses to this question.

Overall 71% of respondents trust that employers will treat them fairly in the recruitment process. This still leaves almost a third of respondents who have questions about the fairness of the recruitment process. The qualitative comments submitted by respondents suggest that one of the reasons that they felt that employers' recruitment was not fair was because employers had unrealistic expectations about the skills and experience of candidates.

> A lot of students may not have the experience for the role thus may not get the job. Employees need to be given a chance and learn on the job. (Male, Asian or Asian British, state educated).

Other respondents emphasised the problems of a one-size fits all recruitment process that ignored what they had to offer.

> A lot of talent goes unrecognised because of standardised recruitment processes. Break the mould and truly get to know potential candidates. (Male, Asian or Asian British, state educated).

Others had more specific concerns about biases that they believed would impact on the recruitment process.

> Don't allow racial profiling to continue, where a graduate is highly talented and capable but his name is "Ahmad". Be part of the solution not the problem. (Male, Asian or Asian British, privately educated)

> Don't automatically filter people out because of A-Level grades, when they've proven themselves with their degree. (Female, white, state educated)

> Don't judge a book by its cover (Male, mixed, privately educated)

Demographic differences

Online assessment. White respondents are reported that they were more comfortable with online interviews than non-white respondents (88% vs 83%). While female respondents are more comfortable with online assessment centres than male respondents (84% vs 79%). One student argued that there should be greater used of 'blind assessments' to increase fairness.

> Blind interview processes should be used to avoid subconscious bias in interviewing candidates! (Male, Asian or Asian British, privately educated)

Psychometrics. There appeared be some big issues with the perception of psychometric testing where white (76% vs 67%), male (75% vs 69%) and privately educated (76% vs 71%) respondents are all more comfortable with psychometric testing than non-white, female and state schooled respondents. Again, these characteristics are to some extent cumulative meaning that 83% of white, male and privately educated respondents are comfortable with psychometric assessments in comparison to 64% of non-white, female and state educated respondents.

> A face-to-face interaction can better judge someone's ability to succeed than a psychometric test. (Male, Asian or Asian British, privately educated)

> Allow students the chance to shine as individuals. Psychometric tests put some of the best students off and are such a barrier. Written questions and video interviews are a much better way of truly seeing the person. (Female, White, state educated)

It is important to be clear that this finding is not a direct comment on the validity or fairness of the psychometric assessment itself. Indeed, some firms have sought to introduce psychometrics precisely to increase fairness and remove subjectivity and bias from their processes. But, there seems to be a problem with how this part of the assessment process is perceived by less advantaged candidates. This may influence both their willingness to apply for these roles and their performance in the tests themselves.

Fair treatment. There were also some difference in who perceived recruitment processes to be fair. White respondents (76% vs 67%) and those who attended non-Russell Group institutions (73% vs 65%) were more likely to agree that employers will treat them fairly in the recruitment process. Digging further into the ethnicity statistics there were important differences with black and black British (65%) and other non-white ethnicities (52%) less likely to agree that they trusted employers to treat them fairly.

> As a black man in the UK, its rare to see someone that looks like me at the other side of the table. Alot of the time, when I see that the hiring manager is white, I lose confidence in my application because applicants like me know they struggle of getting a job because of our skin colour. (Male, black or black British, privately educated)

Starting work

8

Starting work

Big question #7. How do young jobseekers feel about starting work?

In the final question we asked respondents to indicate their feelings about starting work. Figure 8.1 sets out their responses.

Most respondents (94%) agreed that they were excited to be starting work.

Students are fantastic and are very excited to start working. (Male, white, state educated)

Graduate students are more eager than ever to start work and work hard given the situation with Covid-19. (Female, white)

A similar amount (93%) were also happy to be starting work from home if they needed to do so. As many employers are planning to induct new employees virtually and set people up as home workers until the pandemic situation is more stable, these findings will be encouraging.

Although this year has struck everyone from left field, students are constantly reminded how resilient they are and employers should recognise that we are able to adapt to a virtual workplace. (Male, white, state educated)

There were no substantial differences between different demographic groups in relation to starting work.

Figure 8.1. How do young jobseekers feel about starting work?

Implications for employers

9

Implications for employers

In this section we draw out some of the key implications of this research for employers. Beginning by looking at the strategic implications for recruitment processes before going on to look at diversity issues.

Rethinking your recruitment process

The findings of the research provides a range of ideas about how attraction and recruitment processes should be organised to ensure that your firm is attractive to students. By listening to the voices of young jobseekers, organisations can optimise their recruitment and make sure that it is closely aligned with the interests and needs of its audience.

Key things to address in your recruitment process.

- **Careers matter.** Entry-level hires are just embarking on a lifelong career, they are not just getting a job. Employers should be explicit that the jobs that they are recruiting for are the gateway to a fulfilling career whether this is pursued within your firm or outside of it.
- **Money isn't everything.** While presenting clear salary information is important, employers should not just focus on money when they are trying to attract students. Young jobseekers care about money, but they also want to hear about the wider opportunities that organisations will provide them with, the likely work-life balance, and the ethical and environmental positioning of organisations.
- **Reach everyone.** Jobseekers are using a wide range of information sources. Employers should be careful not to narrow their attraction and marketing campaigns to too few channels as this may mean that they miss some potential hires.
- **Don't encroach on jobseekers' non-work social media.** The research suggests that there is concern amongst young jobseekers about the use of personal social media as a communication channel for employers. While this does not mean that you should not use social media at all, it is important that your marketing strategy is sensitive to students concerns.
- **Make a meaningful connection.** Jobseekers want to know about your organisation, its processes and its people before they make a commitment to join you. Provide opportunities for candidate to connect to and interact with you and the wider staff in your organisation.
- **Shift to online recruitment approaches if you need to do so.** Covid-19 has driven some big changes in recruitment processes. While it is important for employers to manage students' concerns about this shift online, this research suggests that most students will cope with the approaches to recruitment that have emerged.
- **Be fair and be seen to be fair.** There is skepticism amongst jobseekers about the fairness of the recruitment and selection processes that employers are using. It is important to ensure that your processes are fair, and that they are seen to be fair by candidates. This is particularly important as perceptions of fairness are structured to some extent by candidates' background and demographic characteristics.
- **Jobseekers are comfortable with virtual induction and home working.** In the current situation many new hires may have to begin working from home. While it is important to recognise that inducting new staff virtually does pose challenges for organisations, the candidates themselves are generally happy to begin working for your organisation in this way.

Ensuring diversity

The research reveals that there are some big differences in the ways that different demographic groups think about and engage with the recruitment process. Employers may want to think about some of the following issues as part of moving towards a more diverse staff cohort.

- **Think about how you communicate with candidates.** Different communication channels have different user profiles. The choices that you make about what channel to use might have implications for the demographic cohort that you are talking to.
- **Give candidates opportunities to see how they will fit in (and make sure that these opportunities are positive).** It is important to give candidates an opportunity to see if they will fit into your organisation. This process of feeling confident that the fit is right seems to be more important to non-white and female candidate, who perhaps have greater concerns about whether organisations will really be welcoming to them. Providing them with information and ensuring that this information is reassuring and credible (e.g. by providing access to diverse employees) is critical to building a diverse organisation.
- **Be clear and positive about your organisation's environmental policies.** Women are more interested in working for organisations that have strong environmental positioning. If you want to increase applications from female jobseekers, make sure that you have a clear story to tell on green issues.
- **Be careful about how talk about psychometric assessments.** Less-advantaged candidates are concerned about the use of psychometrics in recruitment processes. It is important to reassure them, to be transparent about the approaches that you use and to explain why these approaches can enhance fairness where they are properly used.
- **Recognise what students have achieved in education.** Less advantaged students are more likely to want to be able to see a connection between their studies and their job. They may view their qualifications as a big achievement and want to make sure that the effort they put in was worthwhile. Be careful not to dismiss their achievements with messaging like 'it doesn't matter what degree you did'.
- **Don't assume that students are geographically mobile.** Not all students want to be, or can be, mobile. Consider whether you really need to require students to move around the UK or overseas, or whether you could organise your hiring differently.

Final thoughts

10

Final thoughts

This research provides clear answers to the big questions that employers posed.

The seven big questions that employers wanted the answer to…	How young jobseekers answer this question…
How are young jobseekers thinking about and planning for their career?	Young jobseekers are positive and proactive in their career planning but they are concerned about the current employment climate.
What is important to them when they are choosing a job?	They would ideally like organisations that provide them with the opportunity to 'have it all'. This includes good career opportunities, work/life balance, interesting work, decent pay and the opportunity to work in an ethical organisation.
What sources of information are they using and finding helpful?	They are using a combination of online and face-to-face sources and want to have access to both deep learning opportunities and just-in-time information.
How should employers communicate with them?	They are open to a wide range of forms of communication, but skeptical about employers encroaching into more personal forms of social media.
What do they want to hear from employers?	They want a mix of information about how to succeed in the recruitment process and information about what it is like to work in that organisation.
How do they feel about different assessment approaches?	They are broadly comfortable with all of the main recruitment approaches that are in use and are mainly happy to switch to online recruitment where necessary.
How are they feeling about starting work?	They are positive about starting work and happy to participate in virtual inductions and home working where necessary.

Beyond these headline answers there is considerably more detail in the data that we have collected. Most importantly it has revealed the way in which participation in the recruitment process is structured by demographics and social backgrounds. Employers should reflect on this finding and use the recommendations in the previous section to help them to refine their recruitment processes so that they work well for everyone.

The research ultimately reminds us of the value of listening to the voices of students and other young jobseekers. Recruitment processes are ultimately directed towards this group and it is only by listening carefully to what they have to say, that we can hope to devise processes that are effective, efficient, and fair.