

THE EARLY TALENT HIRING SCORECARD

How does your graduate hiring
process measure up against what
students actually told us in 2026?

About Handshake

Talent is everywhere. Opportunity isn't. Handshake was built to change that. To make sure where you grew up, which school you attended, or who you know doesn't define where your career takes you.

For employers, that translates into something concrete: access to over 1 million verified students and graduates across 250+ UK universities, actively exploring careers and ready to engage. Not just browsing. Not submitting AI-polished CVs at scale. High-intent candidates who convert.

This scorecard is built on Handshake data. Every benchmark you're scoring against comes from the Handshake Network Trends Survey 2026 — 10,678 student responses, 51 questions, designed in partnership with employers to answer the intelligence gaps TA teams told us they most needed to fill.

1.04M

students and recent
graduates across
Europe

54%

Female

45%

Male

0.6%

Other

13%

Black Heritage

1 in 5

come from lower
socio-economic
background

Students from
250+
universities





About this scorecard

The way students search for jobs, research employers, and decide whether to apply continues to shift. Yet most early talent hiring processes haven't kept pace and the gaps are largely invisible to employers.

This scorecard is built from the Handshake Network Trends Survey 2026, which captured responses from over 10,000 students and recent graduates across the UK. It translates the survey's six key findings into criteria you can score your own process against — honestly, in under 10 minutes.

There are no right answers to aim for. The goal is to surface where your process is well-calibrated to what graduates actually experience and where it isn't.

How to use this scorecard

Score each category from 1 (needs attention) to 2 (developing), or 3 (best in class). Be honest, base your score on where things are right now, not where you'd like them to be. At the end, tally your score and use the interpretation guide to identify where to focus first.

Want to complete the scorecard digitally?

This scorecard is a great option to print out and complete at your desk. Alternatively, you can complete this using our digital scorecard using the button below.

Digital scorecard

Score guide

1

Needs attention

2

Developing

3

Best in class

Your scorecard

Score each category honestly. Let’s get started!

Category	Benchmark data	Needs attention (1)	Developing (2)	Best in class (3)	Score
Employer brand tone & framing	65.7% of students pessimistic about career prospects.	Copy leads with aspiration and excitement; assumes a confident, self-directed applicant	Some acknowledgment of market difficulty; mixed messaging	Normalises uncertainty; speaks to anxious majority, not assured minority	/3
AI-readiness of screening & DEI impact	50% of students use AI in applications. Asian & Black students 20–27pts higher than White peers	Relies on CV polish & format which is easy to replicate with AI	Some skills-based elements. No clear position on whether AI-assisted applications are acceptable	Skills-based assessment in place; AI use in applications addressed; screening reviewed for format bias	/3
Salary transparency	68.9% less likely to apply without salary. 70.1% of women won't apply at all	No salary range on most or all active postings	Salary visible on some postings but not all	Salary range on all active postings with a brief rationale for where roles sit in the brand	/3
Job posting clarity & realism	Unclear responsibilities and unrealistic criteria are cited as top reasons not to apply	Long person spec; desirable criteria listed as essential; vague role description	Some clarity; room to tighten criteria and role scope	Clear responsibilities. Essential vs. desirable criteria separated; realistic entry-level requirements	/3
Multi-channel presence	Students average 2+ engagement preferences. Single-channel strategies miss the majority	1 primary channel only	2 channels; limited coordination between them	3+ consistent touch points across channels; campus, digital, and conversational all represented	/3
1:1 recruiter accessibility	40.3% want a direct recruiter conversation before committing to an application	No structured way for candidates to reach a recruiter before applying	Recruiter contact available but not proactively promoted or easy to find	Recruiter conversations proactively offered via events, DMs, or campus; clearly communicated pre-application	/3
Career progression visibility	39.7% expect to stay 2 years or less. Learning new skills is the #1 priority ahead of salary	No clear progression pathway visible pre-application; no 'where this role leads' narrative	Some progression info available; not consistently front-loaded in hiring comms	Clear 1–2 year pathway visible in JDs and employer brand content; structured development and milestones described upfront	/3
Female candidate experience	Women: 68.5% pessimistic, 39.3% not confident, 70.1% won't apply without salary. The widest gaps of any group	No specific consideration of female candidate experience; process treats all applicants the same	Salary transparency in place, limited additional consideration of confidence or friction points	Process reviewed through a female candidate lens: salary visible, messaging normalises uncertainty, process clearly communicated	/3

Tally your score

Criterion	Your score
01 Employer brand tone & framing	/3
02 AI-readiness of screening process	/3
03 Salary transparency	/3
04 Job posting clarity & realism	/3
05 Multi-channel presence	/3
06 1:1 recruiter accessibility	/3
07 Career progression visibility	/3
08 Female candidate experience audit	/3
TOTAL	/24

What your score means

20–24

Well-calibrated

Your process is broadly aligned with what graduates expect in 2026. The focus now is fine-tuning — look at your lowest-scoring criteria and consider whether small changes could meaningfully improve conversion for specific candidate groups.

13–19

Developing

You have a solid foundation but there are meaningful gaps. Look at where you scored 2 or below — these are the areas most likely to be costing you candidates you don't know you're losing. Start with salary transparency and progression visibility, as both are low-cost, high-impact fixes.

Below 13

Needs attention

There are significant gaps between your current process and what graduates expect. This isn't unusual as most processes were built for a different hiring market. Prioritise the criteria where you scored 1 and focus on one at a time. The data gives you a clear brief for what to fix and why.

Where to start

Don't try to fix everything at once. Look back at your lowest scores and pick one area to focus on first. The actions below are drawn from the report's hiring checklist — practical, low-cost, and implementable before your next hiring cycle opens.

If you scored low on 01, 03 or 04

Employer brand & job posting quality

Audit your employer brand copy: does it speak to an anxious majority, or an assured minority?

Add a salary range to every active job posting — and a one-line rationale for where roles sit in the band.

Publish a clear application timeline on every job posting.

If you scored low on 02

AI & screening

Identify one stage in your application process that could be replaced with a skills-based task.

Check whether your ATS filtering criteria screen for format rather than substance.

Decide and communicate your position on AI-assisted application - candidates are making assumptions either way.

If you scored low on 05 or 06

Engagement & recruiter access

Map your campus presence: how many distinct touchpoints does a student have before they apply?

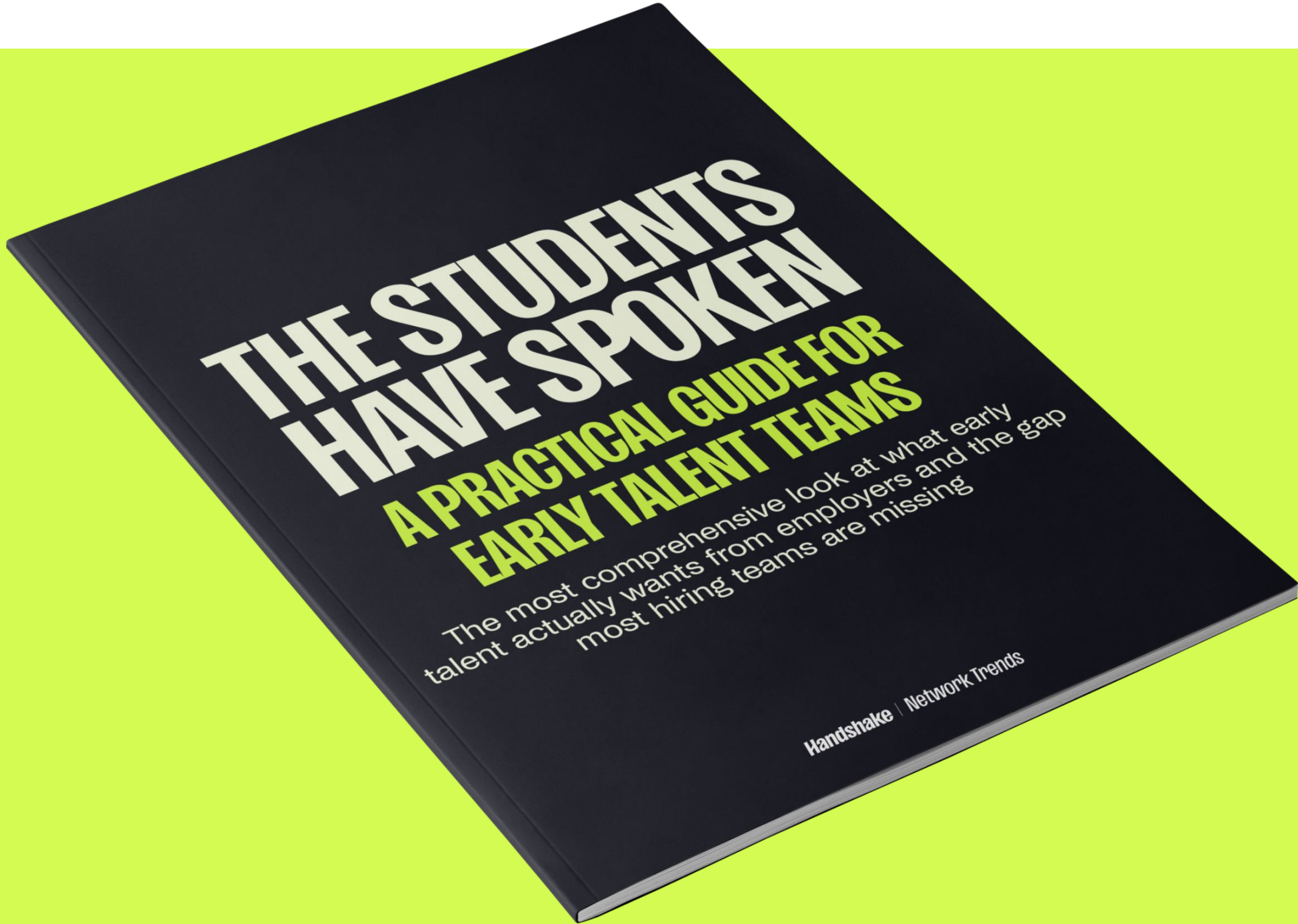
Identify one opportunity to add a conversational or in-person touchpoint to your recruitment calendar.

If you scored low on 07 or 08

Progression, retention & equity

Add a 'Where this role leads' section to your top graduate job descriptions.

Walk your end-to-end hiring process through the lens of a female candidate — from job posting to offer.



Want the full data behind this scorecard?

The Handshake Network Trends Report 2026 covers all six chapters in detail with demographic breakdowns and the complete set of 12 actions.

Download the full report here

Handshake / Network Trends

WANT TO ACT ON YOUR SCORES?

Handshake gives early talent teams direct access to over 1 million verified, high-intent students and graduates and the targeting tools to reach the right ones, faster. That's precision hiring at scale.



Ready to get started? Scan the QR code or click here to book a conversation with the Handshake team!