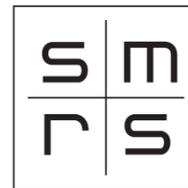

WHAT MATTERS TO CANDIDATES

Eight lessons for recruiters

October 2017



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Introduction – Tough times at the coalface

It is perhaps ironic that, at a time of political and economic uncertainty, and of sluggish growth, recruitment in the UK is one of the toughest tasks for so many businesses.

- UK employment, at 75.1%, is at its highest ever, in both absolute terms and as a proportion of the population.
- As the modern economy adapts to disruption caused by technology, skills shortages, particularly in tech, cause distortions and pressure on wages.
- At the same time, slow growth and intense competition across a number of sectors keeps pressures on to keep prices down.
- Yet inflationary pressures caused by a weak pound put pressure on employers to increase wages.

The purpose behind our survey was to partner with Reed, the leading UK job board, to understand job seeker behaviours across a good cross section of the active job seeking market. We wanted to understand this in answer to three key questions:

- What makes people move?
- How much does company brand, reputation and values mean when changing jobs?
- What can recruiters do to gain the edge in the competition over talent?

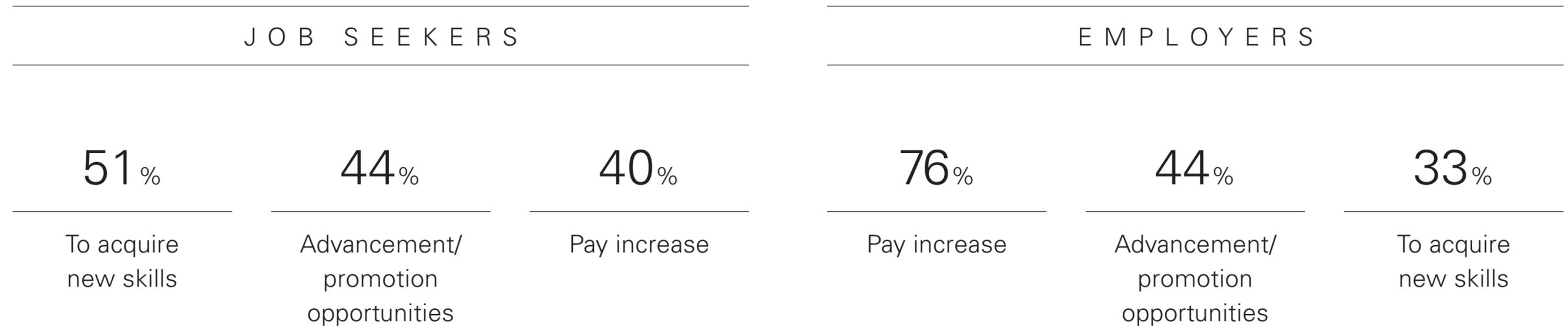
We received nearly 2,000 replies from active job seekers – see Appendix for more detail about the audience and its makeup.



EIGHT THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW,
IN ORDER TO SUCCEED

1. It's not about the money

We asked our audiences to rank the three most important factors in why they would move job. They were given a list of 10 likely motivations to choose from, and responded as follows.



1. It's not about the money

Although both sides agreed on the three most important factors that drive people to change jobs, there was a revealing disconnect between the most important.

The ranking of pay is only the third most important, among just over a third of respondents – against nearly three quarters, according to those the other side of the desk – indicates quite a mismatch.

This indicates a difference in expectation between job seekers and employers around ownership for advancement. This feeds into broader themes in recruitment about the end of the 'job for life' and, even, a breakdown in the 'social contract' between an employer and their charges.

The expectation would seem to be that job seekers prioritise above all else the opportunity to gain skills at their employers' expense, whether that is through formal, paid training or 'on the job' learning.

It also suggests a chance for employers to think about skills and development as a lure to potential employees – especially in tight labour markets and uncertain economic times, when the promise of training tomorrow is easier to squeeze out of the budget than a pay rise. It also suggests job seekers are not quite the cynical bunch their prospective employers think they might be.

2. Traditional channels are not dead

You might expect this answer from research sponsored by one of the UK's leading job boards, but, in truth, it bears out anecdotal evidence from both candidates and recruiters we speak with every day.

When we surveyed these job seekers, we didn't want confirmation bias to drive the answers, as we wanted to understand if the channels we think they use are, in fact, that important to them.

But attributing the real source of a job seeker's inspiration is tricky; was it the mate who pointed out the job board to you, the job ad you saw online or the company website you landed on that was the source? We have to wade through the way people describe how they came across a job, and pick the bones out of what we find.

This makes answers quite non-specific, but when we marry them up with where our employers actually find candidates from, there are some interesting insights to be uncovered.

It should be clear to all that online media channels dominate the way people look for jobs, although traditional channels such as local print media and job centres are not completely dead.

- Google is the starting point for the highest number of respondents (with a stubborn single Bing user, out of 1,760 replies), but how they go about using it is also interesting.

- There were a number of named job boards – TotalJobs, Monster, Reed, GuardianJobs – though with the exception of Reed (from where the data was taken, so we need to rule this out), no individual named website made it into double figures, apart from Indeed. However, around 100 people named non-specific 'job board' as a source; if collated, job boards would have outperformed Search.
- This suggests they remain popular as a first port of call for a lot of job seekers, though individual loyalty to one site is weak. This is partly because Google search comes one step ahead of landing on a job board, as candidates search by job title, meaning the best performing job boards are the ones that index the best on search engines, but by so doing, their individual brand impact is diminished.

One of the most obvious routes is organic search into Indeed, the best performing named media, despite the fact the respondents were taken from a Reed database. Reed did score second highest, with 135, but we would have to consider that a statistical anomaly based upon the source data, given other named channels barely made it into double figures.

2. Traditional channels are not dead

Outside of this, the blank phrase “online” “the internet” and “the world wide web” don’t give us much to go on at first sight (or a particular favourite, “online websites”).

But overall, we observe that the talk of the death of job boards may be overstated. Of course the respondents are taken from a job board, so we should expect a distorting propensity to use them. But it also ties in with employer experience. A greater piece of work is required to understand how the job board fits into users’ online journey, because we suspect it will not be a straightforward trajectory.

Referral remains the third most popular source of candidates for recruiters but a surprisingly high number cite the company website as either a source of speculative applications or a direct hire source, actually ahead of perennial fall-back source: high street agencies. Again, it is difficult to unpick that dynamic – the relationship between web searches and company websites.

We were interested to note a surprising number of active job seekers who said they approached the websites of businesses they wanted to work for as the first place to look – not, that they had stumbled across the careers pages through paid or organic search, or via a job board.

3. Social is beginning to deliver results

Social media, it would seem, has not yet overtaken other tools for both audiences, with LinkedIn dominating the landscape for searcher and searchee alike.

LinkedIn's impact is clearly huge, and not restricted to so-called professional roles, but more widely across more junior levels. It is regularly cited as the most important job seeking social media channel and, in fact, the single biggest source of any named site.

- 356 candidates out of 1,763 respondents stated they had found a job via social media, just over 20%.
- Of these, they were across just 3 channels: 40 Facebook, 280 LinkedIn, 6 Twitter, with the remaining 28 not stating the name of the channel.
- For employers, LinkedIn also proves to be the single greatest source, squeaking ahead of job boards for sourcing candidates.

Social seems to have the greatest impact as an information and content source at the research phase, once a candidate has identified either a specific job or employer – though there is a disparity between employer and prospective employee as to how important it is at this point.

Among those looking to hire, apart from LinkedIn, around a third of respondents said they had successfully sourced candidates from Facebook and, perhaps surprisingly, nearly as many also mention Twitter as a channel that had provided hires. Given the small sample size, we need to be circumspect about how representative this is, but it would seem that Twitter does have impact beyond awareness-raising and content pushing. Its immediacy and flexibility make it well suited to the agile recruiter who understands the Twitter users' dynamic and the right 'tone'.

4. Who you are is less important than what you stand for

We also wanted to understand the importance of an employer brand to this audience, so we asked our audience to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, how important it was to have heard of a business before you apply and to share their values, with 1 being Completely Unimportant and 5 being Very Important.

Among our jobseekers, a majority believed it was important to have heard of the company, though it was not important, with the biggest segment clustering around 'somewhat important' (the second biggest segment was 'unimportant').

In these days of the world's knowledge being at our literal fingertips 24/7, it is simple enough to find out about a business with very little bother, albeit that we need to be wary of believing everything we read on the Internet. This meant the 'Weight Average' for the question was exactly 3 out of 5 – hardly overwhelming.

However, when it came to alignment with your employers' values, the evidence was clear across all 1,933 respondents.

- 78% of respondents believed it was either Important or Very Important to share the values of the business you work for.

- By contrast, those who believed it was Completely Unimportant or Unimportant were 0.98% and 2.79% respectively, giving a weighted average of 4.08 out of 5.
- Employers, as you might imagine, are almost unanimous in their emphasis on the importance of employer branding, with 89% saying it is either Very Important (the mode, at 63%) or Important, and none saying it was unimportant.

There have been numerous studies over the last 30 years about the objective importance of a good employer brand, and the difference it can make in terms of a business's productivity, turnover, cost-per-hire etc.

But it also seems there is competitive advantage to employers to create candidate engagement content that draws upon the values of a business, as a point of difference and to connect with your potential candidates.

This survey seems to bear out the suggestion that workers, particularly millennials, are keen to make the connection between the work they do and the social contribution their employer makes.

5. Everything you do is your brand - use it

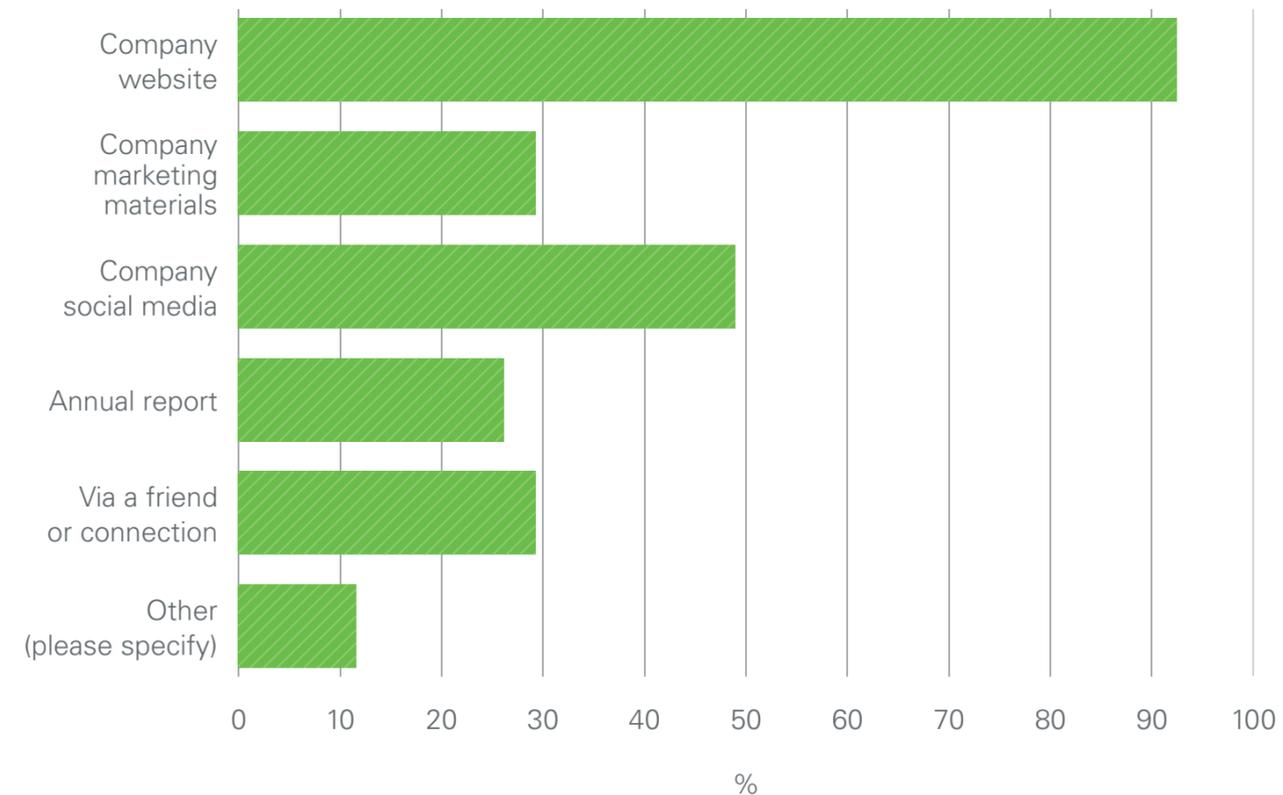
When it comes to understanding the channels candidates use to understand your business and its values – to learn a bit more about the business they intend to work for – there is a potential mismatch between those looking for the jobs and those looking to hire.

5. Everything you do is your brand - use it

Below are the sources of company information that candidates might use to learn about your business, its activity and its values, and how they are used by the jobseekers versus the perceptions of those sources.

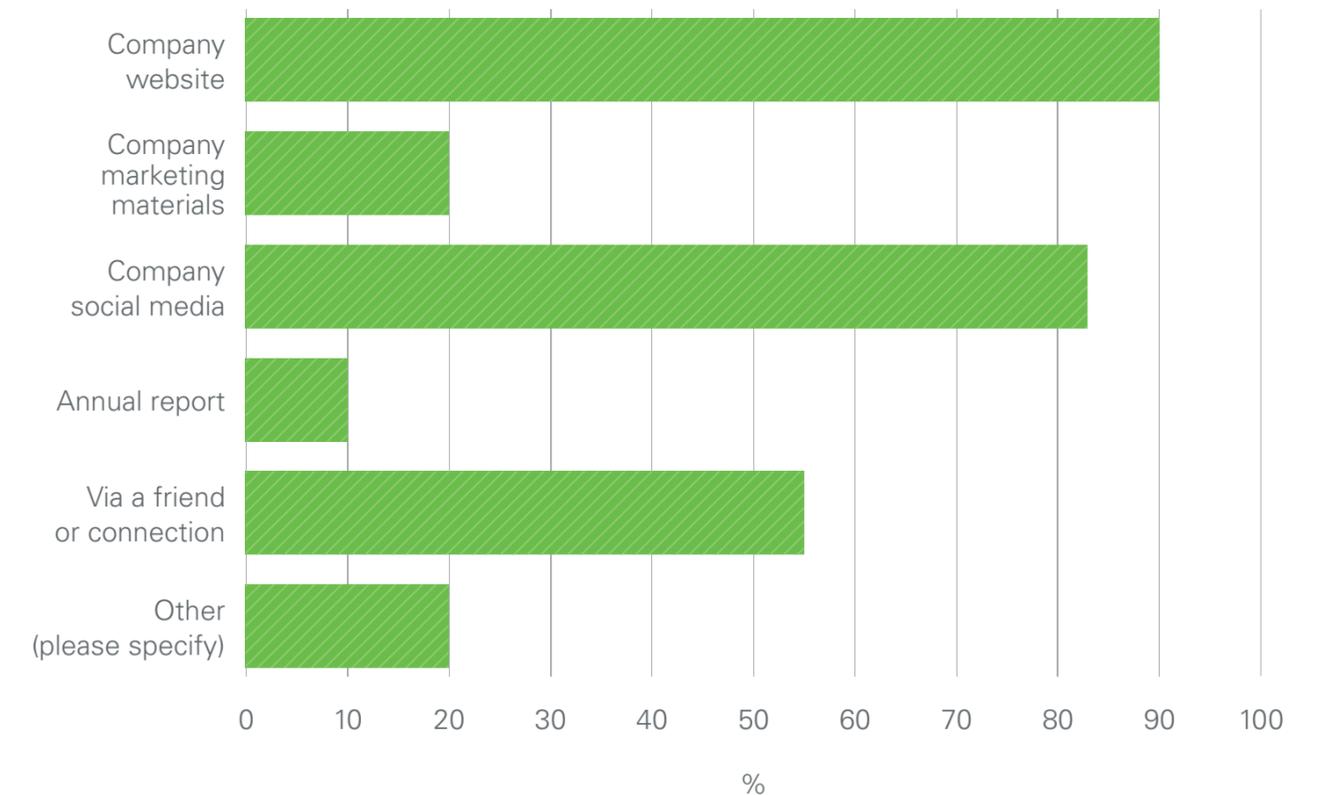
Candidates

How do you find out about a business either before you apply or during the application process? Please select all that apply.



Employers

What, in your experience, are candidates' favourite sources of information about your company, during the application process? Please select all that apply.



5. Everything you do is your brand - use it

Obviously the company website is the most important source of information for candidates, and any business that is not maximising its own website for careers is, quite simply, increasing its own hiring costs.

But below this common standard, there is some surprising disagreement.

- Employers seem to overstate the value of social media as a source of company information by a ratio of nearly 2:1 versus candidates (83% vs. 48%). Some of this might be terminology – some candidates might enjoy a business’s Facebook content and get a feel for it, without necessarily thinking about it in terms of ‘information’.
- Social media is clearly important – as the second biggest response by our audience. However, there seems to be a definite underestimation of more traditional materials and the way candidates use them – that even surprises us, who speak with potential candidates all the time.

- Company annual reports are important information sources for candidates, far more than the businesses themselves even consider. This reinforces the point that when we are considering employer brands, and what we classify as ‘marketing material’ – it goes a lot deeper than we think.

The importance of, apparently, disparate sources in reinforcing an overall perception means employers need to not only understand what is at the heart of their brand proposition, but also think about every manifestation of it, from annual reports to vehicle livery.

Likewise the importance of word of mouth in reinforcing/informing candidate opinions about a business seems to also be overstated by employers as twice as important to job seekers as they themselves think. This might be because there is less need to seek this out, with the abundance of objective information out there or, simply, that the diversification of the UK economy and growth in new jobs and sectors means the chances of you knowing someone who has actually worked for the same business is diminishing.

6. Don't make me work

We asked both parties to rank, in order of importance, 7 things that would impact on the candidate experience: how easy it was to apply, how convenient and how personal, for example. Although this shortlist was by no means definitive, it covered the basic considerations.

There was an almost exact correlation between those completing the applications and those evaluating them. Both sides had the same top four in terms of priorities; although job seekers ranked 'CV instead of application form' higher than 'shortness of application process', the score for the former was exactly the same by each side.

Most important factors to job seekers in the application process (scored out of 10):

	Job seekers	Recruiters
Ease of application	5.08	5.9
Speed of application process	4.79	5.07
CV instead of application form	4.43	4.27
Shortness of process	4.27	4.07

Bottom of the list for candidates was having an online application form. The expectation, increasingly, is that recruiters will be able to tap into existing information about candidates rather than make them jump through hoops to apply for a job. To Gen X employers, this may seem like Millennial laziness, but increasingly it seems perverse to candidates to reproduce existing application data for your convenience.

7. The personal touch goes a long way

Candidates valued having a personal, named recruiter throughout the process and an imaginative application process considerably more than recruiters.

This is probably partly a question of practicality apart from anything else. Employers would no doubt love to personalise the process to the nth degree for everyone. But the reality of finite resources means personalisation depends on things beyond most their control: the ATS, size of recruiting team etc. Because it is impractical for employers, they demote it down the list of priorities.

When we asked recruiters about how they kept candidates warm, the average number of touch points between recruiter and candidate before onboarding was 3 or 4, though a quarter of recruiters claimed to contact their candidates 5 times or more.

Overwhelmingly, despite the growth and diversification of media channels in recent years, the most popular channels for candidate communication is email and phone, almost neck and neck, a long way ahead of face-to-face contact, a distant third.

This is unsurprising, perhaps, given that these are the two most fundamental office tools; phones are also a simple way of making direct and personal contact. However, given the difference in priorities, there is an opportunity for imaginative employers to keep candidates warm using a more imaginative toolkit of techniques, in particular social channels.

8. You need to be quicker

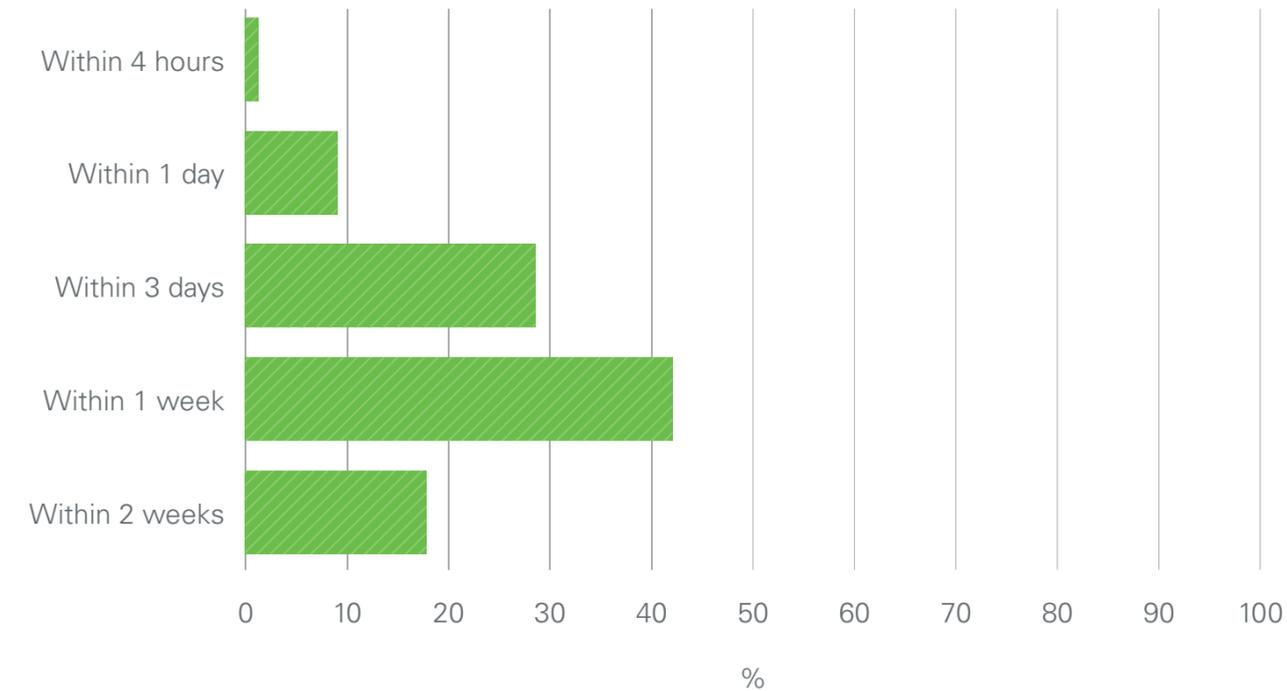
Finally, we asked about the age-old gripe of candidates: responding in a timely fashion.

We asked both sides about response times: expectations and the reality, to job applications.

In side-by-side comparisons, it would seem our sample employers outperform candidate expectations.

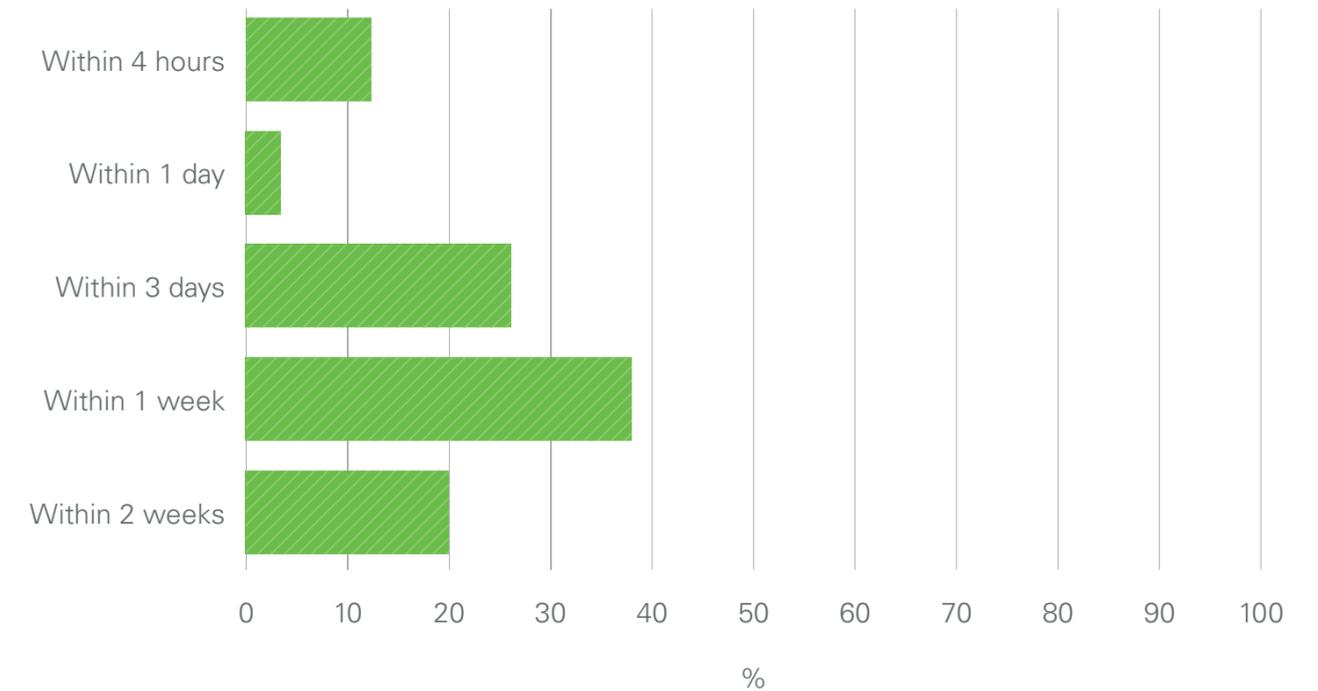
Candidates

How quickly do you expect to hear back from an employer after submitting an application?



Employers

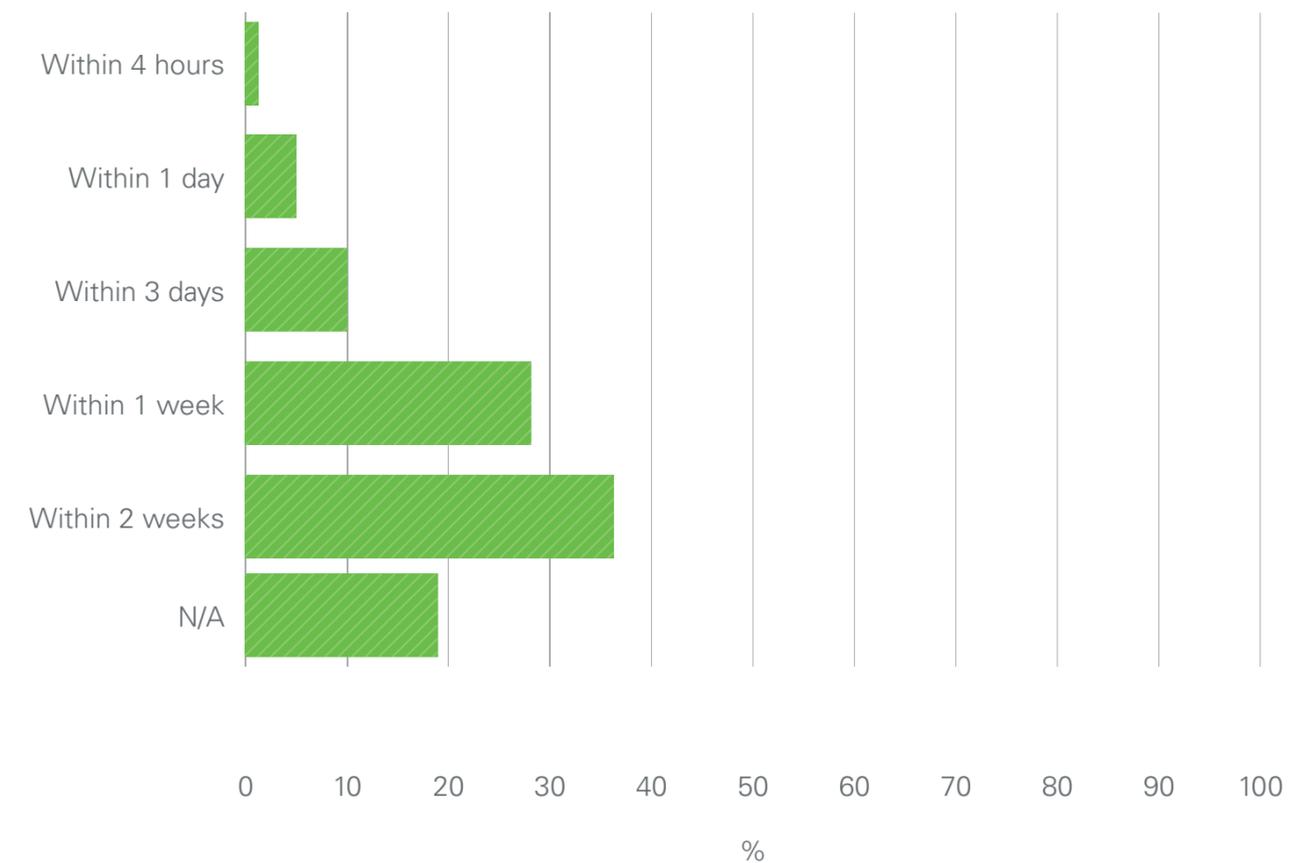
How quickly does your company respond to applications received?



8. You need to be quicker

However, the reality is slightly different...

Typically, how quickly do you actually hear back from an employer after submitting an application?



So it would seem speed of process – which, if you remember was valued as the second most important thing by both candidates and recruiters – is still behind expectation.

Maybe this is why a significant number of recruiters have more than 5 'check-ins' with candidates throughout the process? It would certainly link to the relegation of personalisation and imaginative application process down the list of priorities of recruiters – things that we have attributed to smaller-than-desirable team sizes.

It would be worth looking in more depth at the impact recruitment team resources make upon the success of recruitment across employers in all sectors and markets.

Appendix - The audience

The survey was modestly incentivised, and sent out to a wide range of active reed.co.uk candidates across a broad variety of sectors. We did not attempt to cut the responses to make the sample statistically representative (as with an opinion poll), in part because we were satisfied with the selection of responses we received. Overall, our audience was adequately diversified in terms of age, earnings, job status, location; and united by a high propensity to leave their job in the next 12 months, so the questions we asked were pertinent to their circumstances.

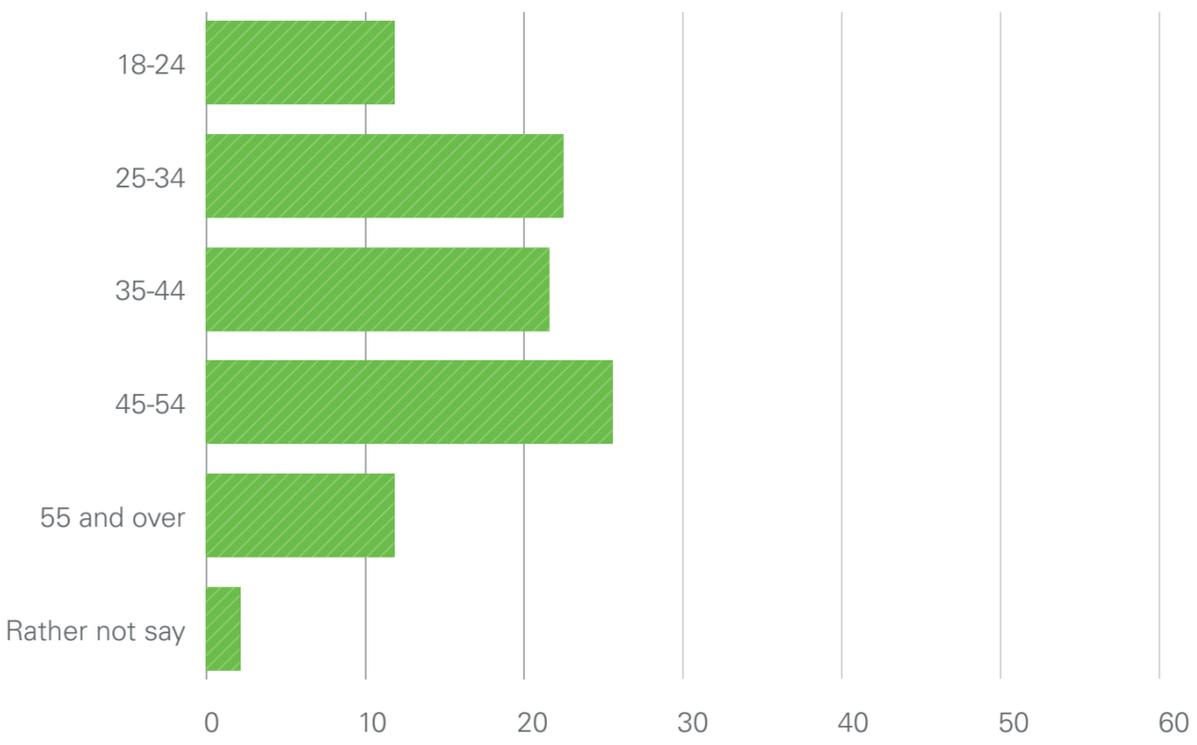
Specifically:

- On a scale of 1-10 of 'likely to leave their jobs in the next year' the mean score was 8 but the mode was 10, with 53%, indicating an audience very engaged with the topic, and self-selecting because of that.
- The spread of earnings was surprisingly broad, with a clustering between £15-25k per annum and a similar number between £30-39k.
- Geographically, they were spread in a very representative way of population distribution in the UK – with highest concentrations around London and the South East, fewest in Wales and Northern Ireland.
- There was a slight male bias (56:44) but this is broadly reflective of the UK working population (actual UK labour force gender split is 54:46).

Appendix - The audience

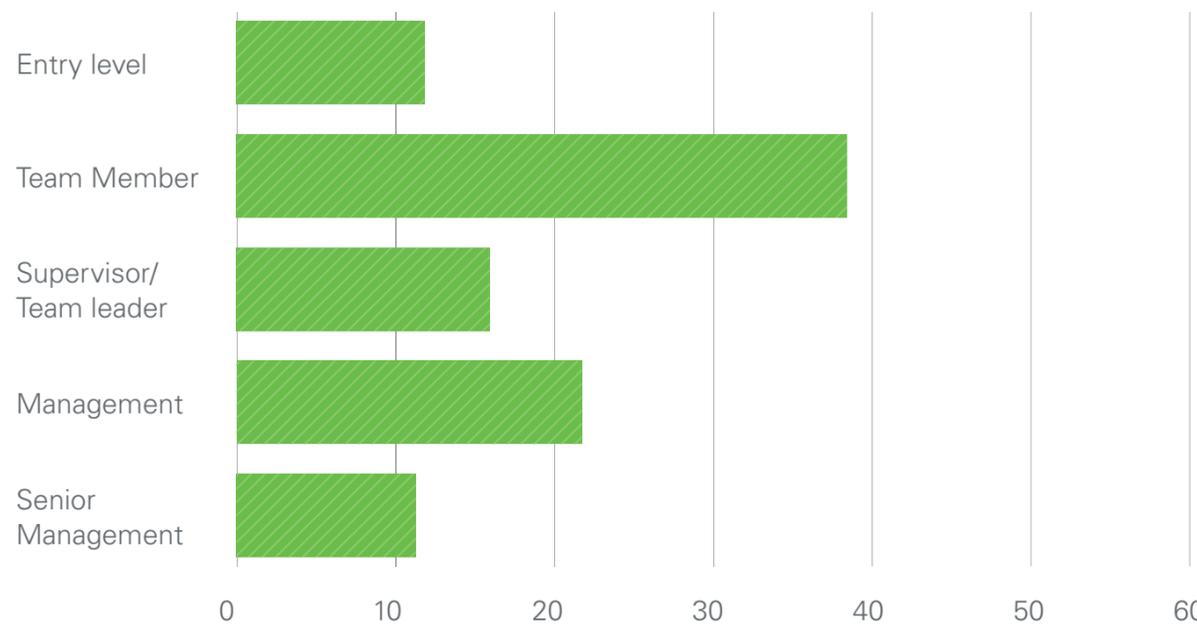
Age – spread of respondents

What is your age?



Job levels – spread of respondents

At what level have you worked most recently?



Appendix - The audience

So, overall, although this might not have been a universe that is nationally representative, in terms of the overall population, it is a good sample of active job seekers, with key groups all represented.

To add spice to the mix, we cross-referenced the questions with corresponding questions put to HR recruitment contacts from our own database. The point about the cross-referencing was not to get an equivalent match in terms of numbers – there is no way we could compete with Reed’s resources on that front. But from 30 select employer recruiters, we thought it would make an interesting counterpoint, and maybe provoke some thoughts about potential mismatches or imbalances in expectations between employers and employees.

The employers were drawn from SMRS contacts. Naturally they would be more invested in the exercise professionally, and the sample was nice enough to throw light and shade upon the employee audience. In truth, never intended to be anything other than a Greek Chorus, commenting on the main action, rather than a direct comparison. This leaves us with the opportunity to do follow up work on questions where we want to investigate in more depth whether there really is a mismatch in perception between audiences or just a statistical hiccup.

The way to consider the Employer audience is as ‘critical friends’. SMRS has twenty years’ experience in working with businesses to help them recruit better people and keep hold of them longer. To that extent, we have accumulated a lot of experience and understanding of candidate motivation and drivers. But we don’t interview and appoint people every day and we don’t sift applications and talk with candidates to the same degree as our clients. So, rather than trying to mirror the scale of the Jobseeker cohort, we asked some of our closest contacts to give their thoughts to help steer our own interpretations and expectations of the audience. These are the opinions of experienced recruiters.

It should be noted that we did not mirror all questions, simply because they were not relevant to both sides. But we did tweak some employee questions to dovetail with more technical Employer questions, to allow us to make extrapolations – for example, around the idea of an Employer Brand, which, if addressed in those terms, would likely alienate the job seeking audience, or provoke answers based upon misconceptions.

About SMRS

SMRS understands employer marketing. They know how challenging it can be. And they come up with plenty of smart and innovative ways to help all kinds of organisations find, keep, motivate and engage their kind of people.

The SMRS team loves helping businesses tell their story of why they're a great employer. They're equally excited about finding ways to attract great candidates for specific roles.

For more information on SMRS contact info@smrs.co.uk, call 0161 200 1444 or visit smrs.co.uk.

About reed.co.uk

In 1995, reed.co.uk became the first recruitment website offered by a recruitment agency in the UK.

Since then, reed.co.uk has branched out to become the UK's #1 job site, featuring vacancies from over 25,000 recruiters a year, including private and public sector employers and leading recruitment agencies.

Their mission is simple: to help the world Love Mondays.

Each month, more than 7 million jobseekers turn to reed.co.uk in their search for work, making over 160,000 applications every day.

Direct employers and recruitment agencies can choose from a range of services, including: job advertising with full applicant management, CV search, a platform for specifically hiring temporary staff, branding, display advertising and email services.

For more information about reed.co.uk call on 0845 241 9293 or visit: reed.co.uk/recruiter

Thank you

