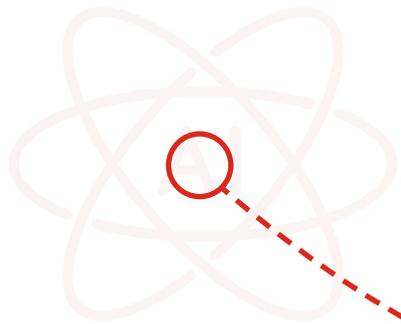
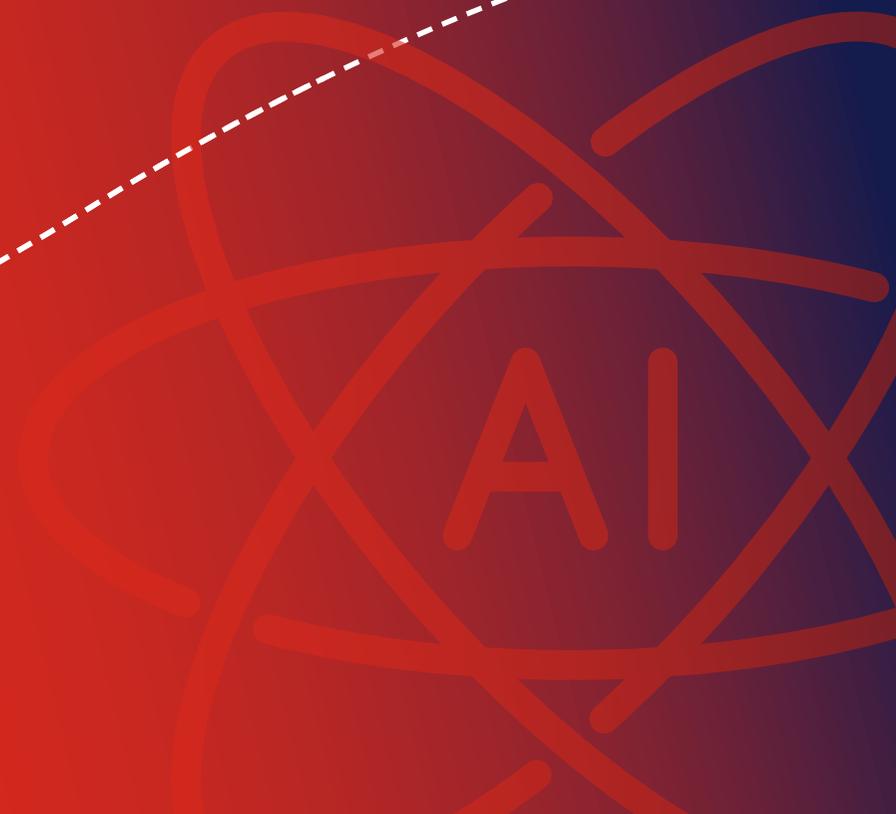


# The Omni Candidate Experience Report

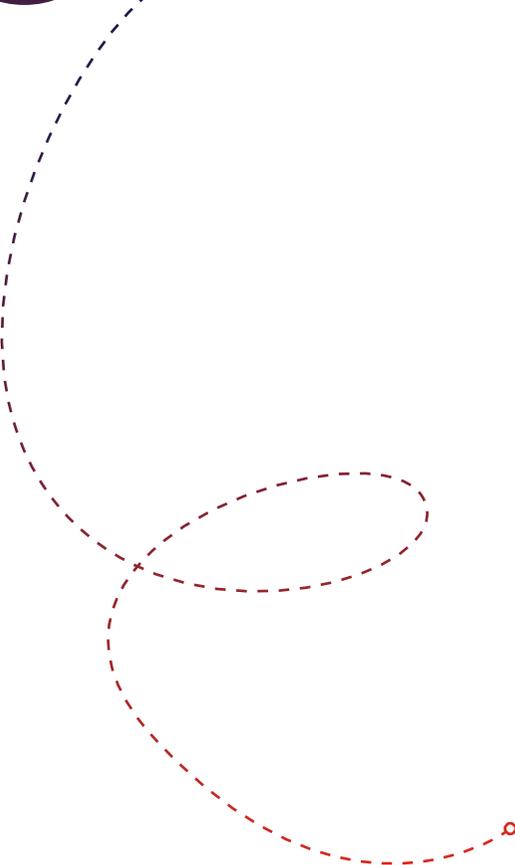
## 2026: Trust, AI and the future of hiring



omni  
talent is everything



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# Foreword

**C**andidate experience is changing. AI is influencing how organisations recruit, while candidates are using it to search, apply and present themselves in new ways. What stands out in our research this year is not just the growing presence of AI, but the implications for trust.

Candidates are reacting not only to where AI is used but also to where they believe it is being used. In many cases, long-established recruitment processes and automation are now being interpreted as AI-led decision-making. This lack of clarity is emerging as a material trust issue. Clear communication about where AI is involved, and how it supports rather than replaces human judgement, will be critical to maintaining candidate confidence.

At the same time, organisations are facing growing pressure. Rising candidate volumes, driven by the labour market and AI, are putting strain on organisations' ability to manage, assess and convert talent at scale.

Even so, hiring remains fundamentally human. Candidates still want to feel confident in the organisations they engage with. That confidence is built through small moments: clear job descriptions, timely updates and processes that respect their time.

Hiring is one of the most visible ways an organisation shows who it is. For many candidates, it is their first real insight into how it operates.

Our research highlights where candidate confidence is built and where it is lost in the age of AI. I hope it offers a useful lens for organisations to reflect on their hiring processes and identify where that experience can be strengthened.

**Louise Shaw**  
Managing Director, Omni RMS

“

What stands out this year is not just the growing presence of AI, but the implications for trust ”

”



## Guest commentary: designing hiring for trust

Kerri O'Neill, Chief People Officer UK & Ireland, Ipsos UK

**To strengthen candidate trust, organisations must be completely open and honest about when, where and how AI is being used in recruitment. Trust is built when candidates understand why a technology is being deployed and how it adds value to their experience.**

There's no one-size-fits-all approach. How AI is used should look very different depending on the roles being recruited. In high-volume entry-level hiring, AI can support initial screening or scheduling, ensuring candidates receive faster responses and clearer communication. For more specialised or senior roles, AI's role is likely to be much smaller. The key is intentional design: use AI where it genuinely improves the process, and be upfront about it.

### Transparency builds trust

Transparency is critical because it is inextricably linked to trust. Omni's study demonstrates that a significant portion of candidates already have less trust in AI-supported recruitment than in human-led processes, so leaving them in the dark

will only exacerbate that scepticism. When candidates are unsure if they are interacting with a machine or a human, it creates anxiety and can damage the employer brand. Setting clear expectations from the outset helps demystify the process and reassure candidates that AI is there to assist, not make final decisions.

### Beyond the CV

With nearly half of candidates using AI to optimise applications, traditional CVs are becoming less reliable indicators of capability. This is pushing organisations towards real-time assessment of skills, judgement and critical thinking. There also needs to be a renewed focus

“ Hiring is one of the most important strategic decisions you make. At Ipsos, we won't offer a role unless we've met a candidate face-to-face ”

“ The secret is putting AI where it improves effectiveness, and people where they can be more meaningful ”

on human interaction, particularly where this has been lost through remote or highly automated recruitment.

Hiring is one of the most important strategic decisions you make. You cannot replicate the nuance of human interaction through a screen. At Ipsos, we feel so strongly about human connection that we won't offer a role unless we have met a candidate face-to-face.

Both AI and humans carry bias. There's an opportunity to use AI to generate a wider, more objective set of data on a candidate's skills,

empowering human recruiters and hiring managers to make fairer, more holistic and better-informed judgements. AI should inform decisions, but humans must always make them and be accountable.

### More considered hiring journeys

Looking ahead, we'll likely see a shift in how hiring processes are designed. After years of trying to make applications easier (think LinkedIn's 'Easy Apply' button), employers are now facing the unintended consequence of AI-generated mass applications. In response,

some friction may need to be reintroduced deliberately, perhaps through bespoke, real-time assessments or questions that require genuine thought, helping to ensure candidates are truly invested in the opportunity.

Candidates will also have a sharper knowledge of their skills and value, creating a more equal relationship in hiring, with organisations being assessed as much as candidates. I'm also convinced that an organisation's approach to AI will increasingly signal the kind of employer it is, much like flexible working policies have done. Technology will shape the employee value proposition in ways we have not seen since the smartphone.

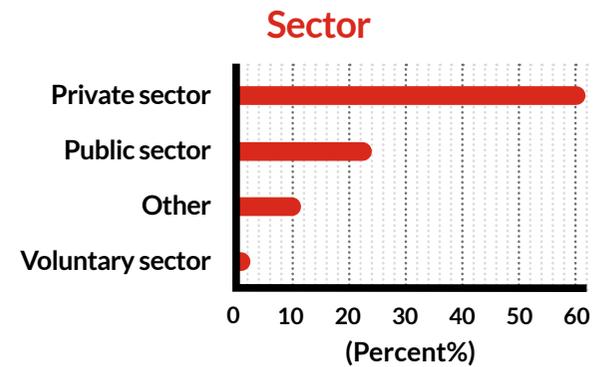
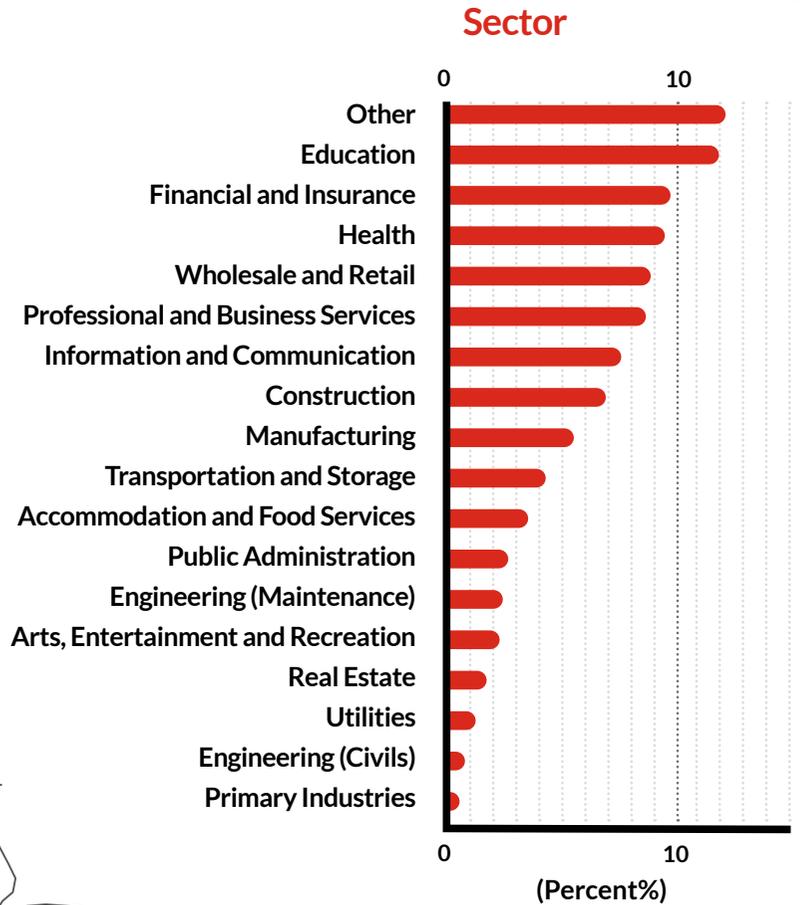
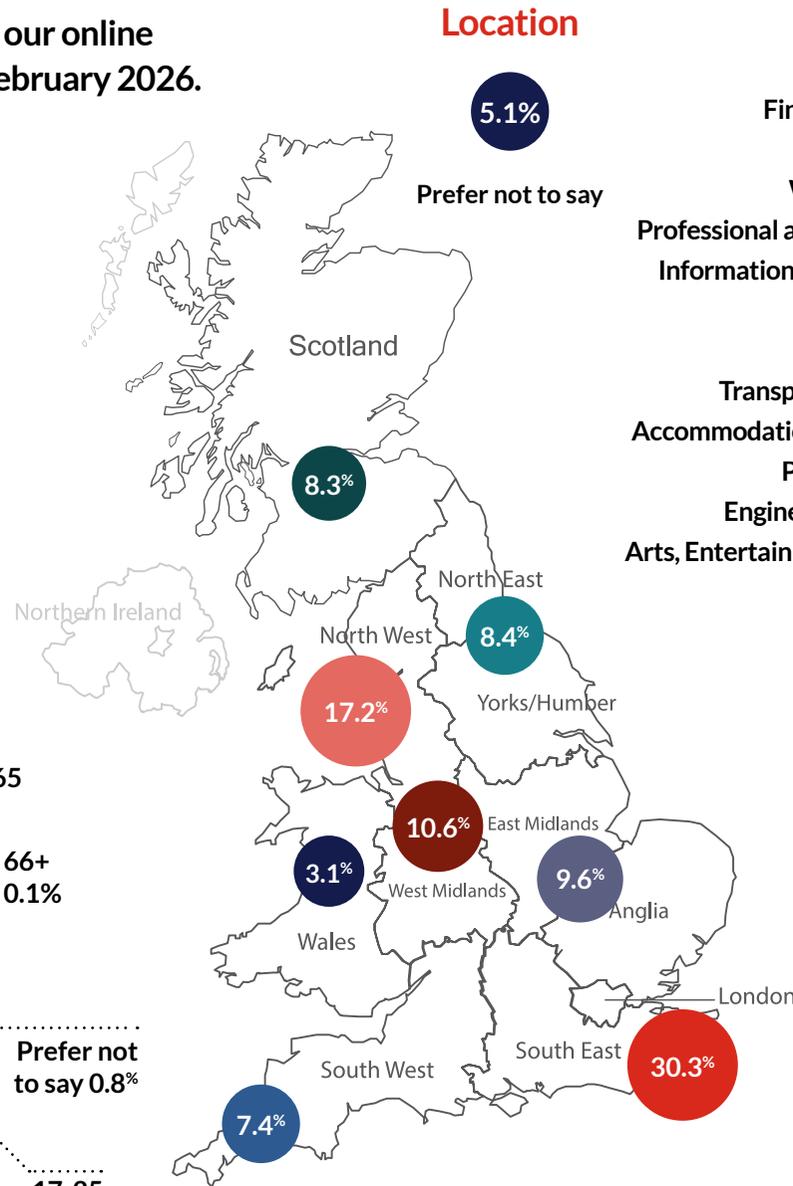
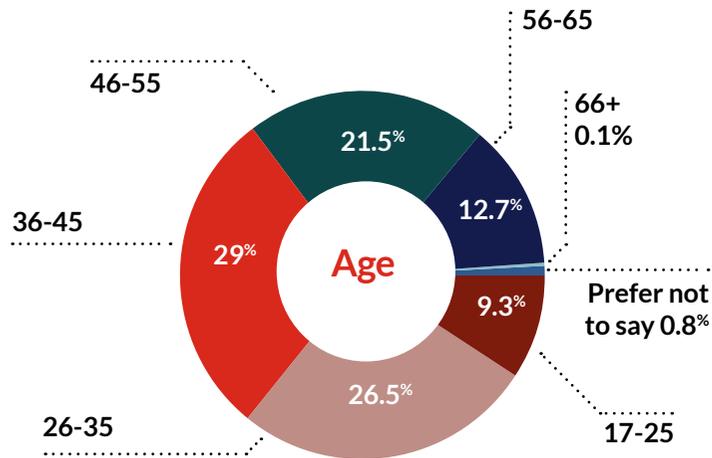
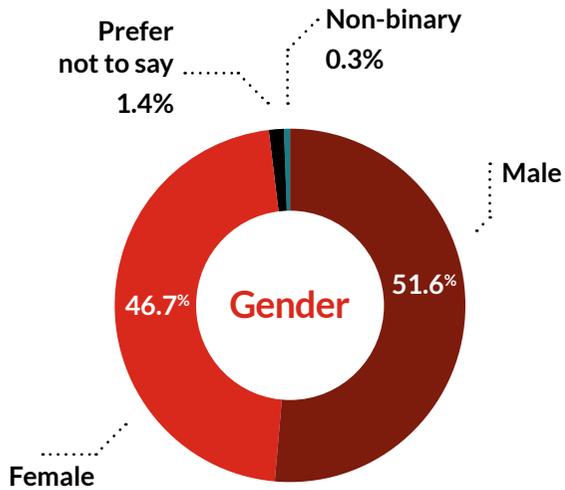
### Keep people at the centre

Ultimately, this must be a blended approach. Employers must build better experiences, integrating AI thoughtfully and meaningfully. The secret is putting AI where it improves effectiveness, and people where they can be more meaningful.

At the heart of everything is people. Pace matters, but wrong decisions slow you down. As technology accelerates, it's easy to be distracted by efficiency, automation and tools. Do not forget the human element, because that's what drives better decisions.

# Who we heard from

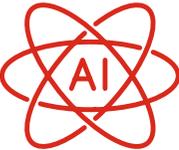
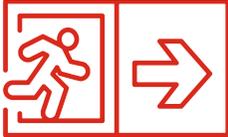
739 people across the UK responded to our online survey about candidate experience in February 2026.



# Omni Candidate Experience Report 2026

## Trust, AI and the future of hiring

### 5 themes shaping candidate experience:

<p>AI adoption is uneven among employers</p>	<p>Candidates are adopting AI tools faster than employers</p>	<p>Trust still sits with human decision-making</p>	<p>Process friction carries a direct conversion cost</p>	<p>Hiring experience shapes employer credibility</p>
 <p><b>34%</b> of candidates report experiencing AI in recruitment</p>	 <p><b>47%</b> have used AI during their job search</p>	 <p><b>42%</b> trust AI-led hiring less than human-led</p>	 <p><b>49%</b> would withdraw from a process that takes too long</p>	 <p><b>55%</b> say clear and transparent job descriptions build trust</p>

Data collected in February 2026

### What this means for employers:



Use AI to support decisions, not replace them



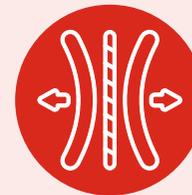
Introduce AI with transparency



Evolve assessment to reflect AI-assisted applications



Align hiring design with candidate expectations



Reduce friction across the hiring journey

Outlook is optimistic:



**46%**

of candidates believe AI will improve recruitment in the next few years

# Introduction

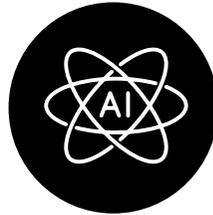
In the age of AI, candidate experience is being shaped as much by how hiring is designed and delivered as by what employers offer.

AI is starting to transform the recruitment journey, influencing how candidates search, apply and engage with employers, while organisations are experimenting with how it can support hiring decisions and improve efficiency. However, its use remains uneven and continues to evolve. As its presence grows, expectations around transparency, fairness and human oversight are rising.

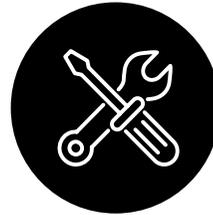
Against this backdrop, the fundamentals of job choice remain stable, as pay, flexibility and career development continue to anchor candidate priorities. But candidates are now judging employers by the experience of applying itself: how clearly roles are defined, how well organisations communicate, and how decisions are made.

The 2026 Omni Candidate Experience Report: Trust, AI and the future of hiring, based on responses from more than 700 UK jobseekers, shows that clarity, efficiency and transparency throughout the recruitment process are becoming critical drivers of candidate confidence.

Our research highlights five themes shaping candidate experience today:



AI is beginning to shape recruitment, but confidence in AI-supported hiring depends on transparency and visible human involvement in decision-making.



Candidates are adopting AI tools faster than employers, raising new questions about how capability is differentiated and assessed.



Core job drivers remain consistent, though their relative importance varies across candidate groups and career stages.



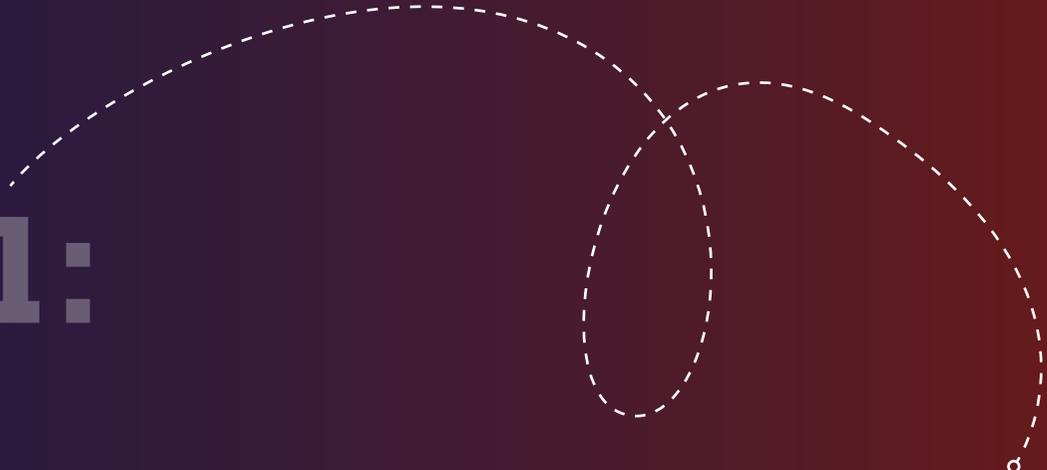
The hiring experience shapes employer credibility, with clarity, simplicity and consistent communication driving trust.



Process friction carries a direct conversion cost, with nearly half of candidates saying they would withdraw from a slow recruitment process.

Overall, confidence in how organisations hire is becoming a defining feature of modern candidate experience. Those that design transparent, efficient recruitment experiences and use AI responsibly, with clear human oversight, will be best placed to attract talent in an increasingly technology-enabled landscape.

**Section 1:**



**AI in recruitment:  
adoption and  
confidence**

# AI in recruitment: adoption and confidence

## How is AI changing the candidate experience?

Artificial intelligence is becoming more visible in recruitment, often positioned as a way to improve efficiency and reduce friction in hiring. Yet without transparency or clear human oversight, it can introduce uncertainty and compromise trust.

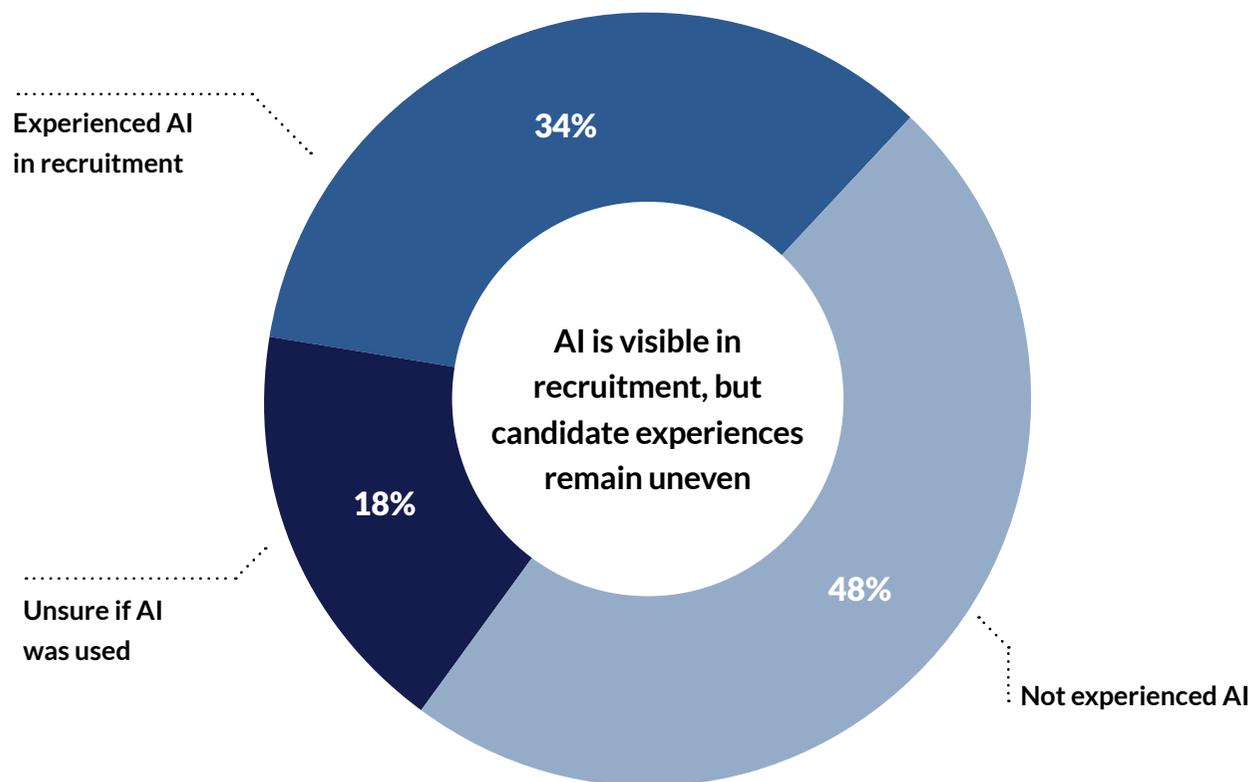
Our findings suggest that confidence in AI-enabled hiring is shaped less by the technology itself and more by how transparently it is used, and whether human judgement remains clearly part of the process.

### AI visibility: present but uneven

AI is already appearing across parts of the recruitment process, but its use is not consistent. While wider narratives suggest widespread adoption, candidate experiences tell a more varied story.

Around a third of candidates (34%) report encountering AI during recruitment, while nearly half (48%) say they have not, and 18% remain unsure.

There is clearly a transparency gap here. Candidates are often unsure whether AI is being used at all, or assume it is when it is not. Established forms of recruitment automation, like application filtering, online assessments and structured workflows, can sometimes be interpreted as AI-led decision-making.



“Confusion between AI and existing recruitment technology points to a wider transparency gap in the hiring process”

## Familiarity is not acceptance

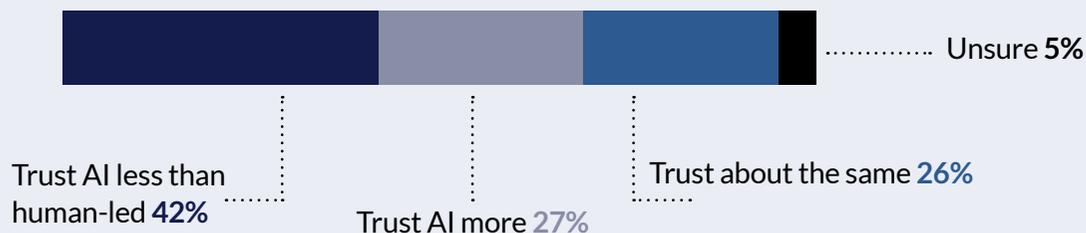
Generational differences in AI perception are complex. While younger candidates are more likely to encounter AI in recruitment, this does not automatically translate into greater trust.

Among Gen Z (17-25), 37% say they trust AI-supported recruitment less than human-led processes, while 33% say they trust it more. And over a third (36%) say they would consider withdrawing if AI appears to be overused, the highest proportion across all age groups.

Trust in AI-supported hiring more broadly remains divided, but leans towards human-led processes, with 42% saying they trust AI less than human decision-making.

This likely reflects the nature of early talent processes, where automation (online assessments, video interviews and automated workflows) is

## Human-led hiring still drives greater trust than AI-supported processes



more prevalent. When human interaction is limited, particularly in these early stages, hiring can feel impersonal, leading candidates to assume decisions are being made solely by technology.

Familiarity with AI does not remove the need for transparency, human interaction and clear communication.

## Tolerance depends on trust

A key insight is that candidate tolerance of AI is shaped by how they perceive the organisation itself. AI use does not automatically deter candidates, but it is highly context-dependent. Nearly a third (29%) say they would consider withdrawing if AI appears to be overused, while a further 36% say it depends on the role or organisation.

AI is therefore not a neutral feature of the hiring process; its impact depends on how it is communicated, how visible human involvement remains, and the strength of the employer brand. In practice, this means more than around two-thirds of candidates (65%) are at risk of disengaging depending on how AI is implemented.

Where candidates trust the organisation, understand how the process works and perceive the role as attractive, they may be more willing to accept AI involvement.



## Omni perspective: AI is an enabler, not an authority

Louise Shaw, Managing Director

As AI is used more widely in hiring, accountability remains with the employer.

Responsibility does not sit with the technology or the vendor, but with the organisation using it. This includes understanding and mitigating the risk of

unintended bias in automated decision-making.

AI can support hiring decisions, but it cannot replace accountability. Human judgement, oversight and clear governance remain essential.

Recent legal challenges highlight the risks where AI-driven processes are seen to disadvantage candidates. Organisations must understand and monitor how these tools are used to ensure decisions remain fair and defensible.

## What builds confidence in AI?

Confidence in AI is driven by visibility and understanding. Around a third of candidates (33%) say clear human involvement alongside AI decision-making is the most important factor, followed by a clear explanation of how AI is used (26%) and transparency around data use and privacy (17%).

Interestingly, fewer candidates prioritise evidence that AI reduces bias (11%) or the ability to challenge decisions (4%). Trust is driven less by what AI claims to do, and more by whether candidates can see, understand and contextualise it, particularly



where there is a risk that automated decisions may introduce or reinforce bias.

## Cautiously optimistic outlook

Despite current caution, candidates are not wholly sceptical about the role of AI in recruitment. Almost half (46%) believe AI will improve the candidate experience over the next few years, although this optimism varies by age.

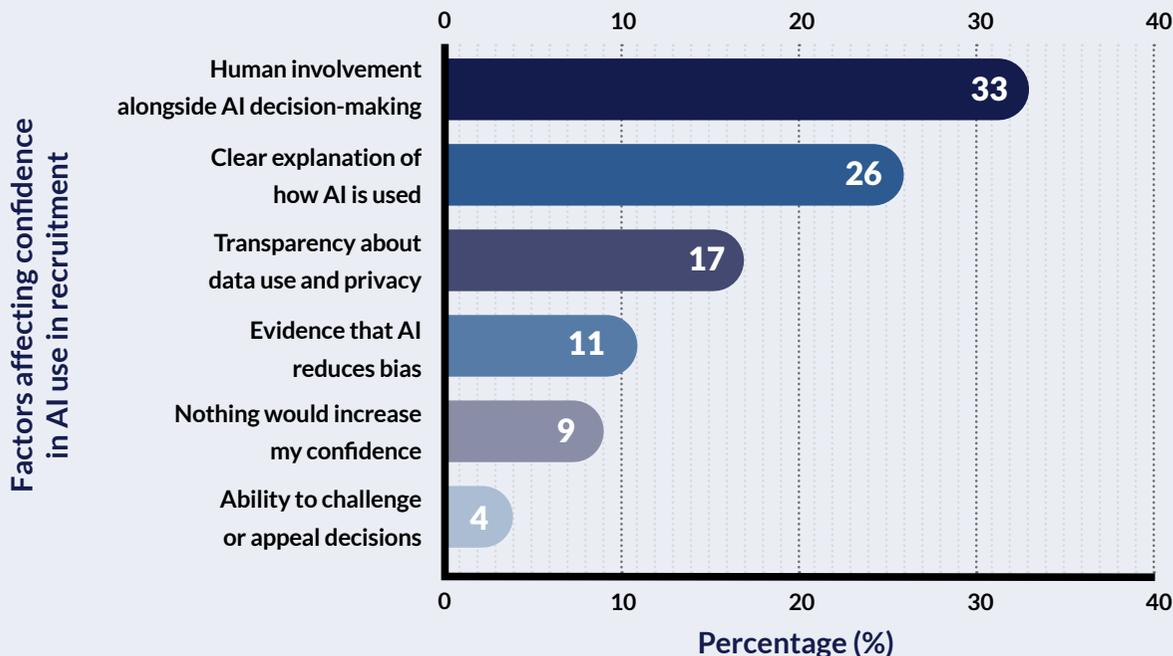
While AI has clear potential, confidence remains conditional and varies across the workforce. It is highest among candidates aged 26-35 (58%) and declines steadily, falling to 27% among those aged 56-65. More than a third of this older group (37%) believe AI will worsen the recruitment experience in the future.

“ Trust is driven less by what AI claims and more by whether candidates can see, understand and contextualise it ”

Even as candidates expect transparency and human oversight today, many are open to the benefits AI could bring, particularly where it helps improve efficiency, communication and speed.

AI adoption alone does not determine confidence. What matters is how transparently it is used and whether human judgement remains clearly visible.

## What builds confidence in AI?

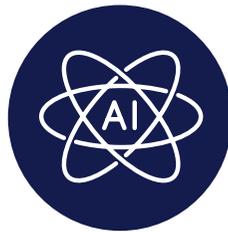


# Practical takeaways for HR and talent leaders



## Be explicit about how AI is used

Clearly communicate where AI supports the process, what it does and how decisions are made (for example, within job adverts, application portals or candidate communications).



## Clarify what is not AI

Help candidates distinguish between automation and AI-driven decision-making to avoid misplaced concerns about fairness.



## Maintain meaningful human involvement

Ensure candidates have opportunities to engage with people at appropriate stages of the process, particularly in early talent hiring.



## Embed governance and fairness checks

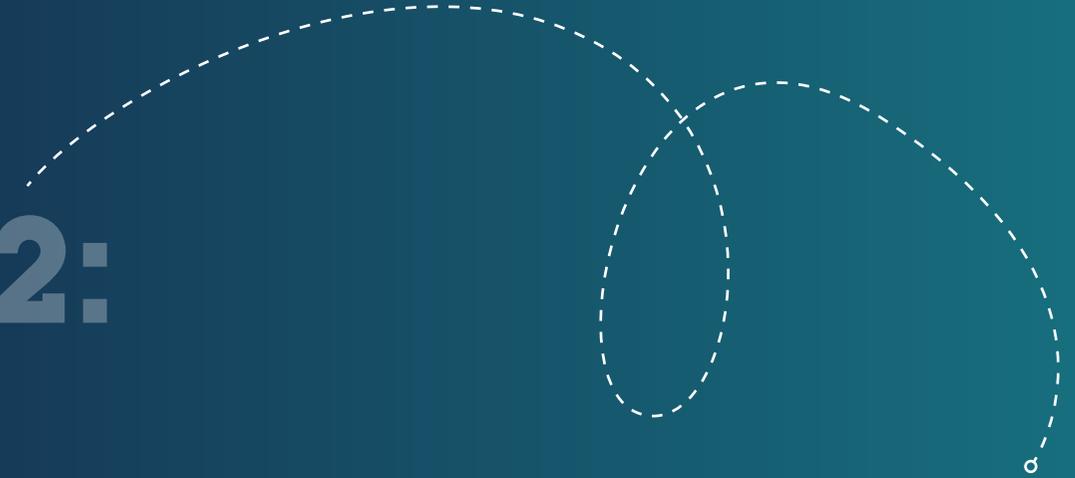
Where AI is used, monitor outcomes to ensure there is no adverse impact on candidates from protected groups.



## Treat AI as part of your employer brand

How you use and communicate AI shapes perceptions of trust and credibility.

**Section 2:**

A decorative graphic consisting of a dashed white line that starts as a wide, shallow arc on the left, then loops back to the right, forming a shape similar to a stylized '2' or a bracket. The line ends with a small open circle.

**AI and the new  
application  
landscape**

# AI and the new application landscape

## How AI is changing how candidates apply

While much of the conversation around AI focuses on how employers are adopting it, candidates are also using these tools in ways that are changing how applications are written, submitted and assessed.

### AI-assisted job search is growing

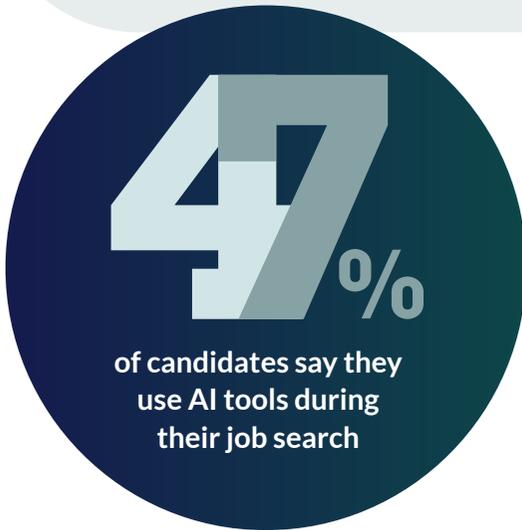
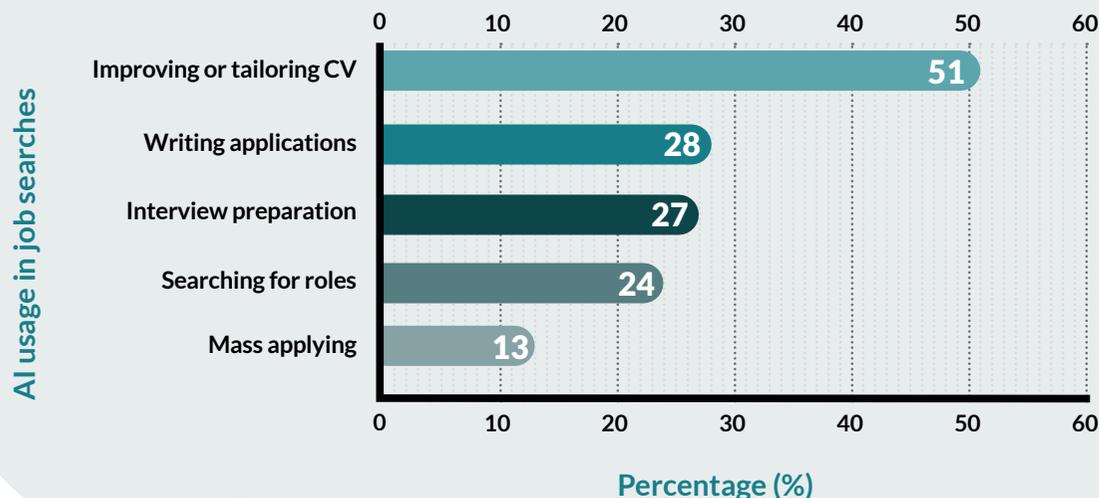
Nearly half of candidates (47%) report using AI tools during their job search, highlighting how quickly these technologies are becoming embedded in the application process.

Most commonly, AI is used to improve CVs, with over half of candidates (51%) saying they have used AI tools to refine or optimise theirs, but they are also using AI to write or structure job applications (28%) and prepare for interviews (27%). For many, AI acts as a form of digital assistance, helping them present their experience more effectively.

### Younger candidates use AI most

Adoption is strongest among early-career talent, with around 57% of Gen Z and nearly 60% of candidates aged 26-35 using AI tools during their job search. Usage declines steadily across older age groups, suggesting that AI is already embedded in how emerging talent approaches applications.

### AI is already part of the candidate toolkit



However, higher usage doesn't translate into greater acceptance of AI when encountered within hiring processes. Younger candidates are also the most decisive in their response to AI overuse by employers: over a third of Gen Z (36%) say they would withdraw from a recruitment process if AI appears to be overused, the highest proportion across all age groups, while older candidates are more likely to take a conditional view (52% of 56-65s say it would depend on the role or organisation).

Nearly half of candidates now use AI to support their applications, yet 42% say they trust AI-supported recruitment less than human-led processes. Human involvement (33%) remains the most important factor in building confidence.

### Candidates outpace employers

Candidates may be adopting AI more rapidly than organisations are integrating it into recruitment. While our data shows a significant use of AI among candidates, wider studies suggest employer adoption of AI is patchy at best. The CIPD's Resourcing and Talent Planning report, for example, found only around 31% of organisations currently use AI or machine

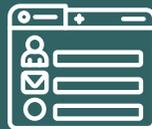


learning in recruitment, while LinkedIn's Future of Recruiting data suggests only around a quarter of recruiters (27%) are currently using or experimenting with generative AI tools.

This creates a disconnect. While candidates are already using AI tools to refine applications, tailor CVs and practise interview responses, many organisations are still exploring how to respond.

It begs the question: what's the implication for employers in effectively assessing and differentiating capability?

#### Traditional application process



- ➔ Find role
- ➔ Research organisation
- ➔ Write CV / cover letter
- ➔ Edit and tailor application
- Submit application

#### AI-assisted application process



- ➔ Find role
- ➔ Generate tailored CV
- ➔ Generate application draft
- ➔ Quick review and edit
- Submit applications to multiple roles

AI tools reduce the effort required to apply for jobs and increase the scale of applications.

## Applications are easier to produce, and harder to evaluate

AI is changing not only how candidates search for jobs but also how applications are created and submitted. Tools that enable rapid CV tailoring, application writing and even ‘auto-apply’ functionality are reducing the effort needed to apply for roles, contributing to what some recruiters have referred to as an “applicant tsunami” in some parts of the market.

And it is happening now. Applications made via LinkedIn have increased by more than 45% over the past year, with the platform now receiving an average of around 11,000 per minute – and generative AI is widely seen as one factor making it easier for candidates to produce tailored applications at speed.

While this behaviour did not emerge strongly within our survey data, many organisations are



already discussing the potential impact of AI-enabled mass applications and automated job searching. As the effort required to apply reduces, candidates may be able to submit far more applications in a shorter period of time.

For employers, this shifts the emphasis from attracting talent to designing hiring processes that can filter and assess it effectively.



## Omni perspective: rising volume, different challenges

Katie Noble, Talent Strategy Director

Organisations are experiencing very different impacts depending on the roles they are hiring for. In high-volume environments, employers may receive 100+ applications per vacancy, shifting the focus towards robust selection processes that enable

candidates to self-select out and support consistent, evidence-based assessment.

By contrast, organisations hiring for scarce or specialist skills continue to face talent shortages, where the focus shifts to compelling employer

branding, proactive talent identification and nurturing future pipelines.

In both scenarios, consistent candidate engagement, clear communication and transparent processes remain critical.



## Omni perspective: responding to AI-assisted applications

Katie Noble, Talent Strategy Director

Organisations are still navigating AI-assisted applications and emerging risks, with many approaches shaped by uncertainty rather than clear strategy.

Our approach focuses on fairness, authenticity and consistency, recognising AI as a useful tool and a standard part of job seeking. The priority is not to eliminate AI, but to ensure employers can still assess true capability, judgement and potential.

The key is distinguishing between AI-assisted and AI-dependent candidates, supported by:



Clear expectations and guidance



Assessment design that tests real capability



Selective use of detection tools

The focus is on designing hiring processes that remain robust, transparent and able to identify real talent.



## Omni perspective: assessment design that reduces over-reliance on AI

Katie Noble, Talent Strategy Director

Organisations are evolving their assessment methods to focus on demonstrated capability rather than polished applications. This includes moving away from CV-led screening and introducing structured assessments that are harder to complete using AI alone.

### This can include:



Situational judgement questions with role-specific context



Work sample tasks requiring reasoning, prioritisation and explanation of choices



Live problem-solving discussions during interviews



Behavioural questions based on real experience, supported by strong interviewer probing

Where written responses may be AI-assisted, organisations are also introducing live validation steps, such as follow-up discussions or walkthroughs of submitted work, to ensure candidates can explain their thinking and demonstrate depth of understanding.

## Authenticity, credibility & risk

As AI becomes more embedded in applications, new questions about authenticity and verification are also being raised. Some organisations are reporting concerns about fraudulent or AI-generated candidates, with around 17% of hiring managers saying they have already encountered deepfake technology during interviews, particularly in remote hiring processes.

As such tools become more widespread and accessible, organisations may need to strengthen identity verification and screening processes to maintain confidence in hiring decisions.

## Assessment must evolve

AI-assisted applications make it harder to differentiate effectively between candidates using traditional screening methods alone. As a result, organisations are placing greater emphasis on

demonstrated capability through structured interviews, work-based assessments and practical exercises that test how candidates think, solve problems and apply their skills.

Many traditional assessments (such as psychometric tests and cognitive assessments) were originally designed to evaluate skills like logical reasoning and analytical problem-solving. These are exactly the kinds of areas where AI can now perform extremely well, and in some cases, even better than humans.

Rather than focusing on capabilities that AI can replicate or enhance, assessment processes will need to prioritise the skills that remain uniquely 'human', including creativity, collaboration and the ability to navigate ambiguity.

The focus is moving towards identifying genuine capability, rather than just well-optimised applications, while maintaining confidence in hiring decisions.



AI may be shifting the hiring challenge from attracting applicants to filtering and evaluating them effectively



# Practical takeaways for HR and talent leaders



## Recognise AI as part of the candidate toolkit

Rather than attempting to eliminate AI use, recognise it as a standard part of modern job searching and design processes accordingly.



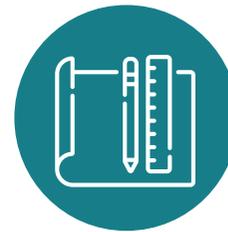
## Focus on real capability

Ensure hiring processes are designed to assess skills, judgement and potential, not just the quality of a written application.



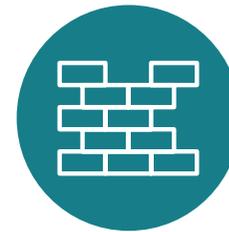
## Set clear expectations on AI use

Provide clear guidance early in the process on where AI use is acceptable, limited or prohibited.



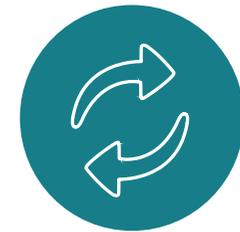
## Redesign assessments

Use methods that are more difficult to complete using AI alone, such as situational judgement questions, work sample tasks, live problem-solving discussions and behavioural questions based on real experience.



## Build validation points into the process

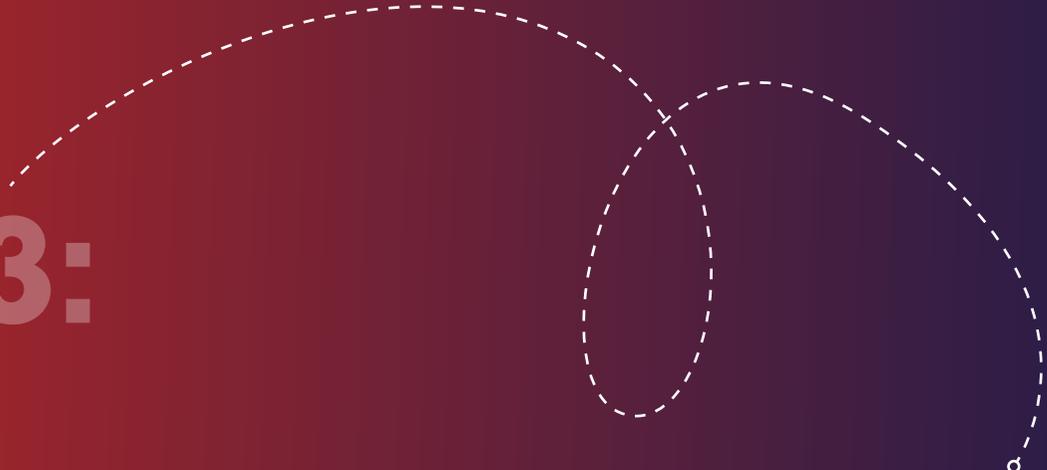
Introduce follow-up conversations or walkthroughs of submitted work, giving candidates the opportunity to explain their thinking and demonstrate ownership.



## Continuously review and adapt

Regularly review assessment methods, monitor candidate behaviour and equip hiring managers with the skills to assess effectively in an AI-enabled landscape.

## Section 3:



**Stability at the  
core, movement  
at the edges**

# Stability at the core, movement at the edges

What drives candidates to apply for a role?

## Fundamentals still matter

Although attention is widely focused on AI, automation and changing candidate expectations, the factors that influence whether people apply for jobs remain largely consistent and rooted in the fundamentals of work, reflecting the findings of our 2023 research, even though the labour market has shifted since then.

Pay and benefits tops the list, cited by 49% of respondents, underlining the central role of financial reward in job decision-making. In a more cautious labour market, with vacancies falling and unemployment rising, candidates are placing greater emphasis on stability and immediate financial return.

But while the priorities remain consistent, how candidates evaluate them is changing. More than ever, the hiring experience itself is shaping how roles and organisations are judged.

## Top 5 job move motivators

### 2023:

- 1 Pay & benefits - 55%
- 2 Career development - 44%
- 3 Working from home / hybrid - 35%
- 4 Flexible working - 30%
- 5 Organisational values - 25%

### 2026:

- 1 Pay & benefits - 49%
- 2 Flexible working - 41%
- 3 Working from home / hybrid - 29%
- 4 Career development - 28%
- 5 Organisational values - 22%



Even though the underlying drivers of job choice remain stable, the hierarchy of those priorities is beginning to shift



## Career development is a core expectation

While career development has moved slightly down the rankings this year, moving from second to fourth, candidates continue to value clear progression, learning opportunities and long-term growth, with 28% of candidates selecting it.

For many, development opportunities represent not only a pathway to future advancement but also a signal that employers



Candidates now seek employers who demonstrate a clear commitment to building capabilities over time

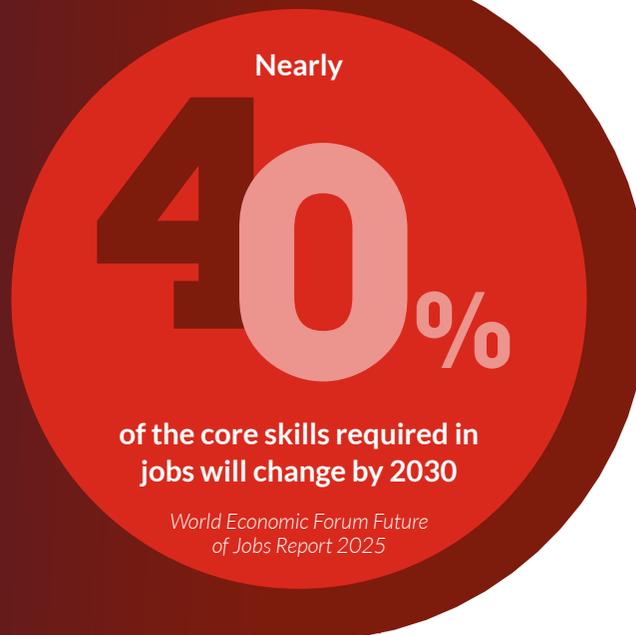
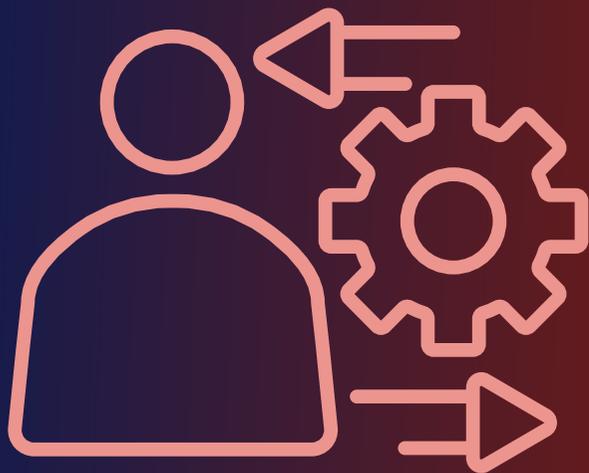
are invested in the long-term success of their workforce. LinkedIn's Workplace Learning Report consistently finds that providing learning and career development opportunities is one of the most effective strategies used to improve employee retention.

In an employment landscape characterised by rapid skills change, candidates now seek employers who demonstrate a clear commitment to building capabilities over time. The scale of this challenge is significant, with the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 estimating that nearly 40% of the core skills required in jobs will change by 2030.

It's no surprise, then, that continuous learning and development is rising up the agenda for both employees and organisations. Employers that articulate how roles evolve, how skills are developed and how employees can progress internally are therefore more likely to attract candidates looking for long-term career growth rather than short-term job moves.

## Flexible working rises

The most notable change this year is the rise of flexible working, which has moved ahead of career development as a priority and cited by 41% of respondents.



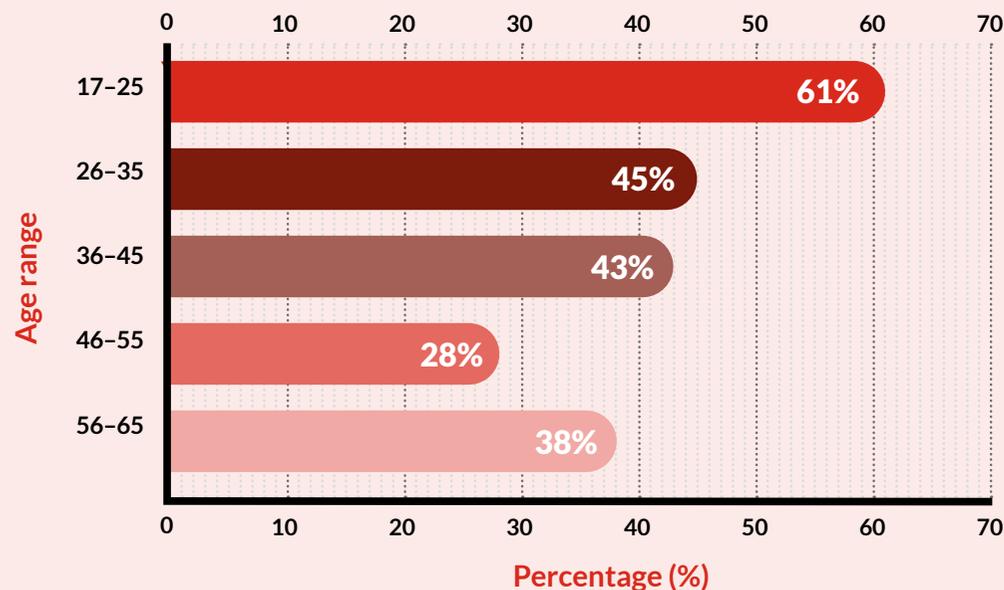
This mirrors wider sentiment across the workforce landscape, particularly as some organisations revisit remote and hybrid models. External research supports this pattern: LinkedIn's Global Talent Trends highlights work-life balance and flexible working arrangements as key drivers influencing whether candidates consider a role.

Flexibility is also linked to broader workforce challenges. More than nine million working-age people in the UK are currently economically inactive, with rising long-term sickness reversing a decades-long decline in labour participation. Flexible working can play an important role in enabling organisations to access talent that might otherwise remain outside the workforce.

Of course, flexibility is not just about whether people can work from home. For many, it also

## Flexibility expectations vary by career stage

Younger candidates place significantly greater emphasis on flexible working.



### Omni perspective: 2023 v 2026 – a contrasting jobs market

Louise Shaw, Managing Director

Since 2023, vacancies have fallen significantly, from around 1.12 million to approximately 726,000, while the number of unemployed people per vacancy has more than doubled. The labour market has shifted from tight to cautious.



**2023:**

Employers were still competing for talent, even as hiring slowed.

Permanent vacancies declined, but temporary roles absorbed uncertainty.



**2026:**

Employers are no longer vacancy-constrained. The balance of power has shifted, with temporary hiring becoming a more deliberate workforce planning strategy rather than a short-term response.



Flexibility is becoming a defining feature of the modern employee value proposition and a baseline expectation in this labour market



includes being able to vary working patterns, have autonomy over schedules and the ability to work around modern life and commitments. This echoes the findings of the CIPD's Resourcing and Talent Planning research, conducted with Omni in 2024, which found that nearly three-quarters of organisations (74%) now advertise at least some roles as open to flexible working.

Ultimately, flexibility is becoming a defining feature of the modern employee value proposition (EVP) and a baseline expectation in today's market.



**Candidates continue to value clear progression, learning opportunities and long-term growth**



### Candidate priorities vary

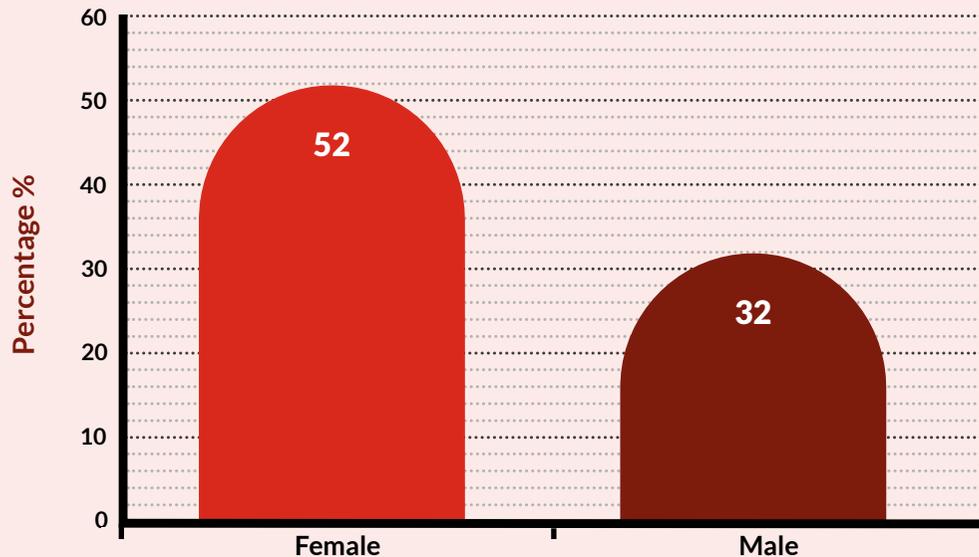
While the core drivers of job choice remain consistent, the findings also show clear differences in how different candidate groups prioritise them.

Flexible working is particularly influential for early-career candidates. More than 60% of respondents aged 17-25 say flexibility influences whether they apply for a role, making it the strongest driver within this group. The importance of flexibility then declines across mid-career respondents, falling to around 28% among those aged 46-55, before rising again among candidates aged 56-65 (38%).

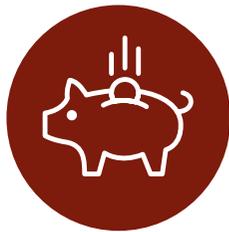
Flexibility plays different roles across career stages, from expectation among early-career talent (most of whom entered employment during a period of widespread remote work) to a support mechanism for later-career employees.

Gender differences also emerge. Continuing the trend of our 2023 report, female candidates (52%) place greater emphasis than males (32%) on flexible working, reflecting broader patterns around work-life balance and caring responsibilities.

### Flexibility expectations by gender

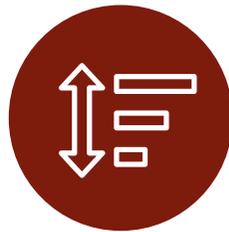


## Practical takeaways for HR and talent leaders



### Segment your EVP by audience

Candidates prioritise job drivers differently depending on career stage and personal circumstances. Ensure your messaging reflects these differences.



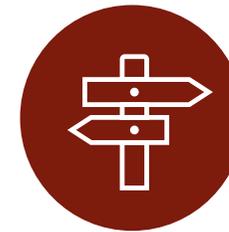
### Define flexibility clearly

Communicate clearly what flexibility means in practice within your roles and consider potential untapped talent pools.



### Balance reward with progression

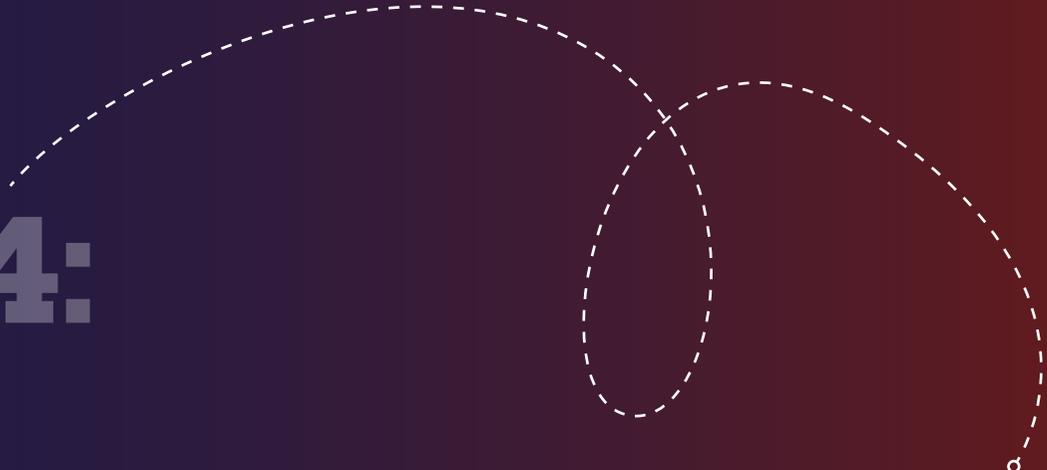
Pay remains the primary driver of job applications, but development opportunities remain an important differentiator.



### Align job descriptions with candidate priorities

In a tighter candidate market, job descriptions are often focused on attracting as many applicants as possible. As application volumes rise, clearer role definitions around pay, flexibility and expectations can help candidates assess fit and improve hiring alignment.

## Section 4:



**Execution is the  
experience**

# Execution is the experience

## How candidates experience the hiring process today

Candidates now judge organisations not just by what they say about themselves, but also by whether their hiring processes inspire confidence and are authentic to the messages they are hearing. The way roles are described, how applications are handled and the quality of communication throughout the process all influence whether an employer is seen as trusted, transparent and credible.

### A strong start, but the process must hold together

Applying for a role is one area where many organisations are getting it right. Over half of respondents (55%) said this

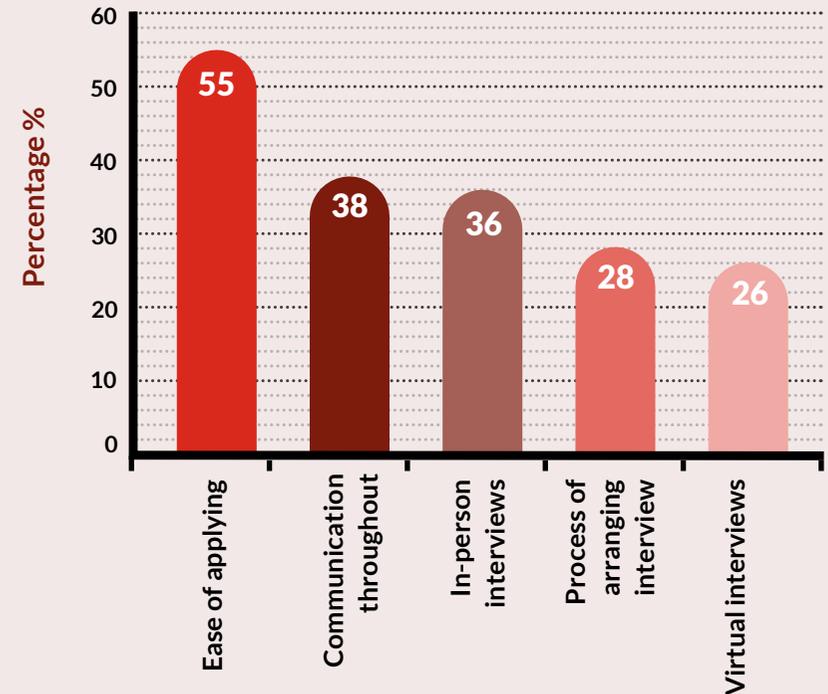
was the aspect of the recruitment process that impressed them the most.

However, a smooth application stage alone isn't enough. If it is followed by slow decision-making, inconsistent communication or poorly coordinated interviews, the experience can quickly deteriorate, sometimes leading candidates to disengage or "ghost" the process entirely.

This is not just a candidate experience issue, but a growing talent risk. In the 2024 CIPD & Omni Resourcing and Talent Planning Report, more than a quarter of UK employers had experienced new

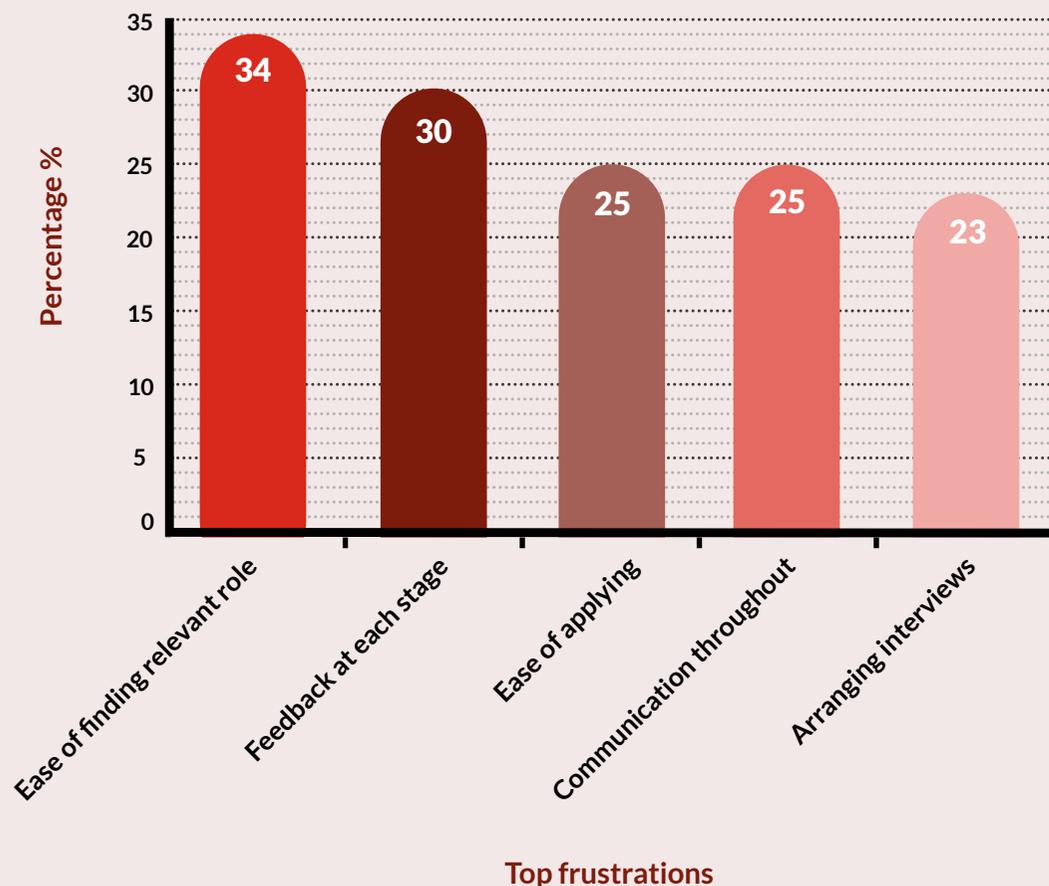
“Candidate experience functions as a system. When one part of the process breaks down, it can undermine the entire hiring journey”

## What aspects of the recruitment process impress candidates most?



Processes that are working well

## What frustrates candidates most during the hiring process?



“ You are only ever as strong as the weakest point in your process ”

starters failing to turn up on their first day, highlighting how fragile engagement can be between offer and onboarding.

Candidate experience works as a system: when one stage falters, it can undermine everything that came before. You are only ever as strong as the weakest point in your process.

### Communication remains the most visible failure point

Despite improvements in application design, feedback (30%) and communication (25%) remain among the biggest frustrations candidates experience, just as in 2023.

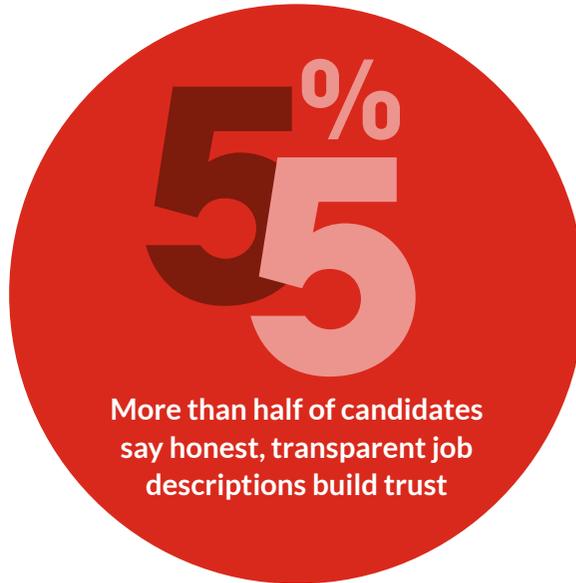
Candidates consistently highlight the importance of clear timelines (54%), regular updates (36%) and feedback following interviews (21%) as elements of the process that would increase their trust in an employer. Where communication is inconsistent or absent, candidates are more likely to question both the organisation’s professionalism and how well the process is being managed.

In many cases, these issues don’t arise from a lack of intent. More often, communication breaks down because hiring processes are fragmented, ownership is unclear, or hiring teams are simply stretched too thin.

## Clarity builds trust

A recurring issue for candidates is finding roles that clearly match their skills and experience, with 34% saying that the ease of finding relevant opportunities could be improved.

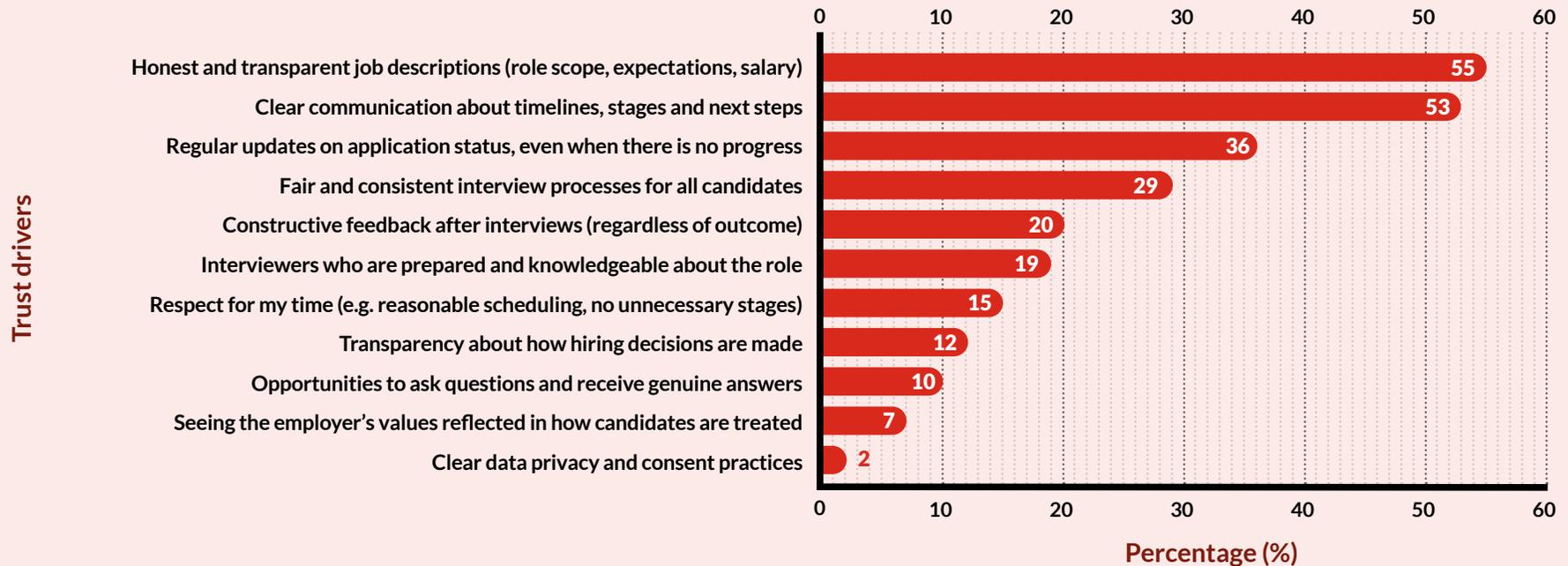
This is more pronounced for younger candidates. Around 38% of those aged 17-25 say finding roles relevant to their skills could be easier, compared with around 32-36% across other age groups. This reflects a common early-career problem: translating



emerging skills, education and potential into roles often defined by prior experience.

As momentum grows behind skills-based hiring, this raises questions about whether traditional job descriptions and CV-based screening remain the most effective ways to match talent to opportunity. But moving towards clearer, skills-based role definitions and mapping roles to work outcomes is not straightforward, often requiring changes to job architecture, hiring processes and internal talent frameworks.

## What increases candidate trust in recruitment?





**Candidate experience is shaped less by individual touchpoints and more by how effectively the hiring process works as a coordinated whole**



At the same time, clarity remains critical. More than half of candidates (55%) say honest and transparent job descriptions, including responsibilities, expectations and salary, increase their trust in an employer. Credibility in the hiring process may well begin earlier than many organisations assume.

### **Values are not enough**

The findings also highlight an interesting contrast between employer messaging and what candidates actually value. Just 8% of respondents said seeing an employer's values reflected in how candidates are treated would increase their trust during recruitment. Given the emphasis placed on purpose in employer branding in recent years, this is notable.

Even among younger candidates, where purpose is often assumed to be a major driver, just 4% of 17-25 year olds selected this. The highest response levels were among 26-35 and 56-65 year olds (both 10%).

Instead, candidates may place greater weight on tangible signals like clear communication, transparent job descriptions and well-run processes than on stated values alone.

Ultimately, candidate experience is shaped less by individual touchpoints and more by how effectively the hiring process works as a coordinated whole.



### **Omni perspective: why communication still breaks down**

**Richard Bradley, Commercial Director**

Candidate communication often fails because ownership is unclear. When responsibility is fragmented across recruiters, hiring managers and onboarding teams, communication easily falls between stages.

High-performing organisations treat recruitment as a single end-to-end process, with clear accountability for updates, timelines and decisions.

The same applies post-offer. Where onboarding lacks structure and ownership, communication breaks down, increasing the risk of early disengagement or even attrition.

## Practical takeaways for HR and talent leaders



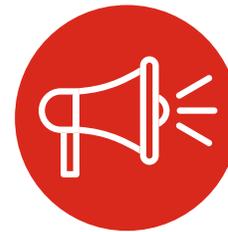
### Treat the candidate journey as a core part of your employer brand

Candidates increasingly judge organisations by the experience of applying, interviewing and receiving feedback, through to onboarding and induction.



### Ensure clarity in role design and job descriptions

Transparent job descriptions help candidates understand expectations and build trust early.



### Improve communication cadence

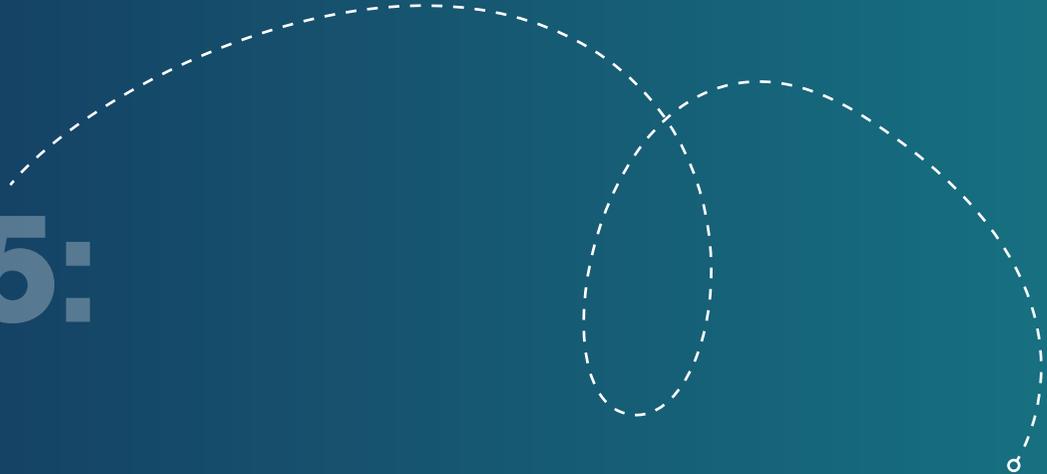
Regular updates and clear timelines are critical to maintaining engagement.



### Review your process end-to-end

A smooth application stage cannot compensate for breakdowns later in the journey.

**Section 5:**



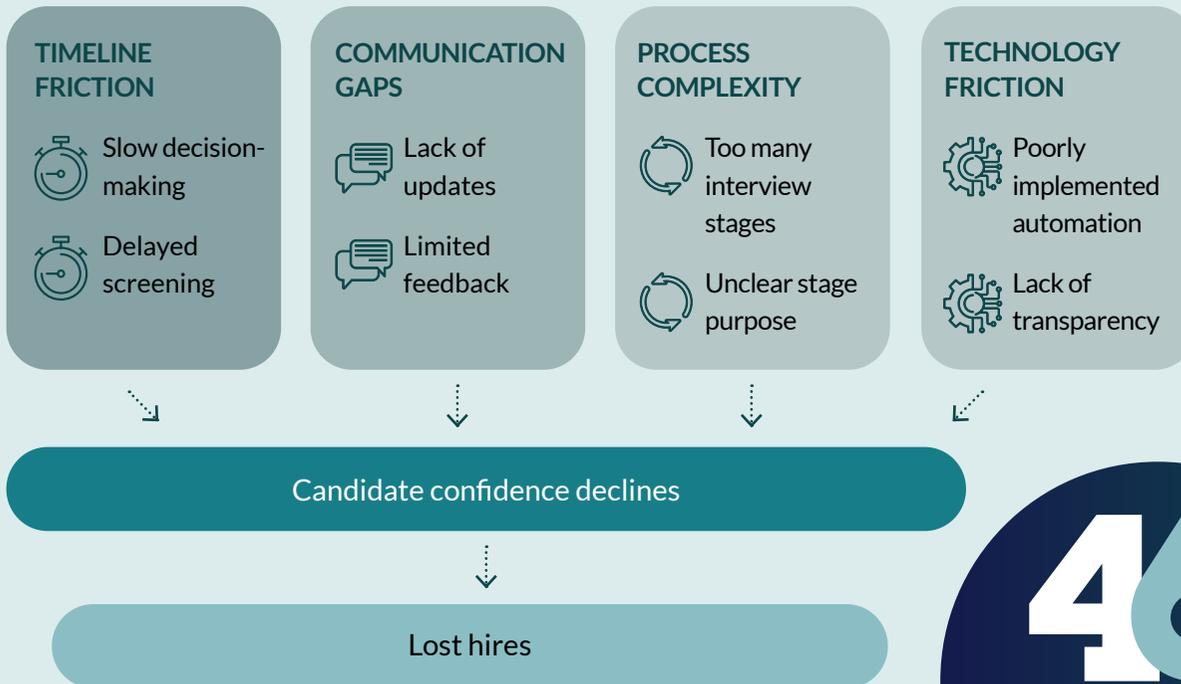
**The cost  
of friction**

# The cost of friction

Where hiring processes break down – and candidates drop out

## Where hiring processes create friction

Four common sources of candidate drop-off



If candidate experience shapes employer credibility, the next question is where it breaks down.

Our findings show that friction within hiring processes remains a major driver of candidate drop-off, turning otherwise interested applicants into lost hires. In this sense, the hiring process has become a point of competitive advantage.

“ Friction in hiring processes carries a direct conversion cost ”

**46%**  
of candidates say they would withdraw due to poor communication

Many organisations focus heavily on attraction, yet the greater risk lies in losing candidates once they enter the hiring process. Nearly half of respondents (49%) say they would withdraw from a process that takes too long, highlighting how sensitive candidates are to delays.

Communication is critical to sustaining engagement as timelines extend, with 54% of candidates saying clear updates on timelines, stages and next steps would increase their trust in an employer. Conversely, poor communication and lack of feedback remain among the most common reasons candidates consider withdrawing.



**More than half of candidates say clear updates on timelines, stages and next steps would increase trust in an employer**

That said, there are signs that tolerance may be shifting slightly. In this year's survey, 46% of respondents said poor communication could lead them to withdraw, compared with 59% in 2023. While these datasets are not directly comparable, this apparent reduced threshold may reflect the sentiment of a more cautious labour market. But tolerance is conditional and can quickly deplete where communication is inconsistent or absent.

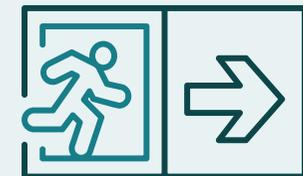
## The biggest drivers of candidate disengagement



## The hidden conversion problem in hiring

**49%**

of candidates say they would withdraw from a recruitment process that takes too long.



Many organisations focus heavily on attracting candidates, yet the greater risk may lie in losing them during the hiring process itself.

Attracting candidates is only half the challenge. Converting them through the hiring process is where organisations win or lose talent.

“

Without clear process design and human oversight, automation can simply move friction from one stage of the process to another”

Process complexity also contributes to drop-off. Around a third of respondents (31%) say that multiple in-person interviews would discourage them from continuing with a process, up from 25% in 2023. While additional steps are often designed to support better decision-making, candidates often view them as unnecessary if their purpose is unclear.

### Technology: reducing friction, or creating it?

New technologies are reshaping how organisations manage recruitment

processes, creating opportunities to reduce friction and improve efficiency.

Automation tools and AI-enabled systems can streamline attraction, support better communication and help accelerate decision-making.

However, technology alone does not automatically improve the candidate experience. Without clear process design and human oversight, automation can simply move friction from one stage of the hiring process to another.



### Omni perspective: candidate tolerance is uneven

Katie Noble, Talent Strategy Director

Candidate tolerance is not consistent across roles or sectors.

While vacancy volumes have fallen, many organisations still face skills shortages. In these sectors, candidates are far less likely to tolerate slow

or complex hiring processes.

Delays, poor communication or excessive stages can result in losing high-value candidates to faster-moving competitors.

There is also a wider employer brand risk, with hiring

experiences shared more widely on platforms like Glassdoor.

Even in a more cautious market, poorly managed processes can quickly damage employer reputation.

## Friction has a direct cost

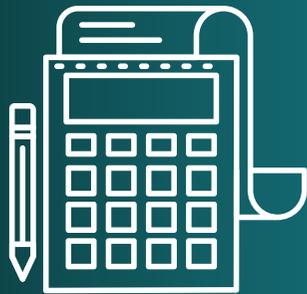
What our findings make clear is that friction in hiring processes carries a direct and measurable cost for employers.

Slow timelines, fragmented communication and unnecessary complexity do not just impact candidate experience, they reduce conversion at every stage of the hiring funnel.

Improving hiring outcomes is therefore not only about attracting more candidates, but about designing processes that enable candidates to move through the hiring journey with clarity and momentum.

For organisations competing for talent, reducing friction improves processes, strengthens candidate confidence and ultimately creates a competitive advantage.

## Recruitment Cost Calculator



Friction in hiring processes has a direct financial impact.

Omni's recruitment cost calculator helps organisations quantify how delays, drop-off and inefficient processes affect cost-per-hire, time-to-fill and productivity. Even small increases in candidate withdrawal can significantly increase hiring costs and extend vacancy periods.

Understanding where candidates are lost, and what that costs, enables organisations to prioritise process improvements that deliver both better candidate experience and stronger organisational outcomes.

FIND  
OUT  
MORE



## Technology is reshaping hiring processes

CIPD & Omni Resourcing and Talent Planning Report 2024

78%

Increased use of recruitment technology

Use AI or machine learning in recruitment

66%

31%

Report improved hiring efficiency

# Practical takeaways for HR and talent leaders



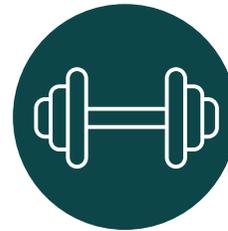
## Review hiring timelines and decision speed

Long processes increase the risk of candidate drop-off and lost offers, with a direct impact on cost-per-hire and time-to-fill.



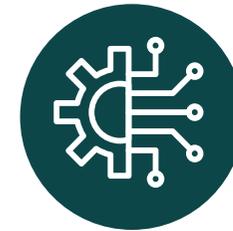
## Design hiring stages with a clear purpose

Each step in the recruitment journey should add value and be clearly communicated to candidates.



## Strengthen communication throughout the process

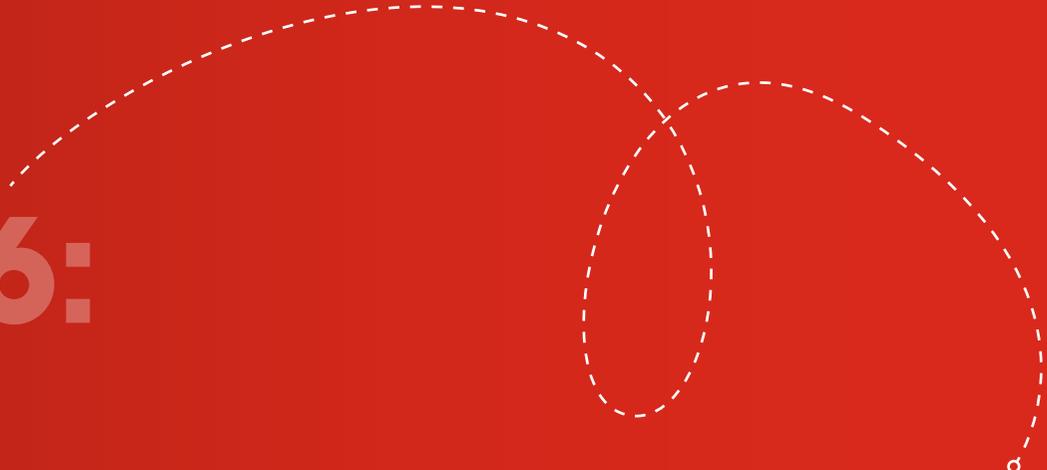
Regular updates and meaningful feedback help maintain candidate engagement.



## Use technology thoughtfully

Automation and AI can reduce process friction, but transparency and human oversight remain essential.

**Section 6:**



**Designing hiring  
for candidate  
confidence**

# Designing hiring for candidate confidence

How organisations can respond to the changing candidate experience

**A central theme runs through the findings in this report: confidence in the hiring journey is becoming a defining feature of modern candidate experience – and this is a real differentiator for employers.**

AI may be starting to reshape hiring, but it is confidence, not technology, that will determine whether it succeeds. As candidates use AI to support their applications, and employers explore its role in recruitment, expectations around trust, transparency, fairness and human involvement are unequivocal.

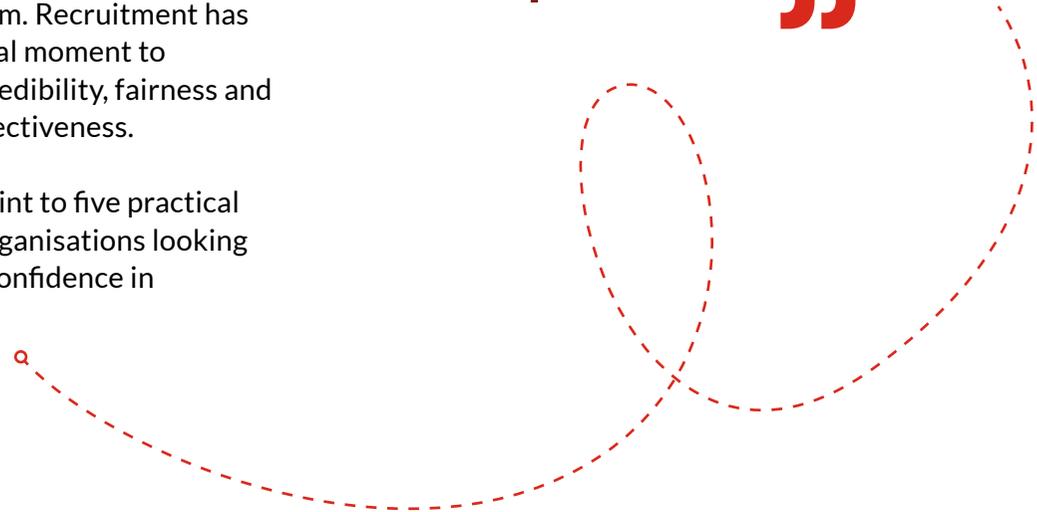
For HR and talent leaders, this means creating experiences that feel clear, credible and consistent end-to-end.

Rather than focusing on isolated improvements, there is an opportunity here to think more holistically about the hiring system. Recruitment has become a critical moment to demonstrate credibility, fairness and operational effectiveness.

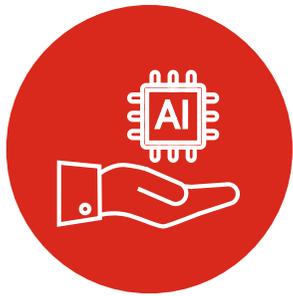
Our findings point to five practical priorities for organisations looking to strengthen confidence in how they hire.



Confidence in the hiring journey is becoming a defining feature of modern candidate experience ”



## 5 practical priorities



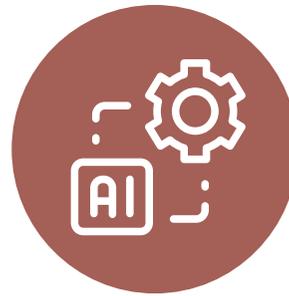
### 1 Use AI to support decisions, not replace them

AI can improve efficiency, but accountability must remain with people. Organisations are responsible for how it is used, including third-party tools. Apply AI openly, monitor for bias and ensure clear governance. Candidates should understand where AI is used and see that human decision-making remains central.



### 2 Introduce AI with transparency

Candidate confidence depends on how transparently AI is used in the hiring process. Be explicit about where it is involved and ensure human judgement remains visible in decision-making.



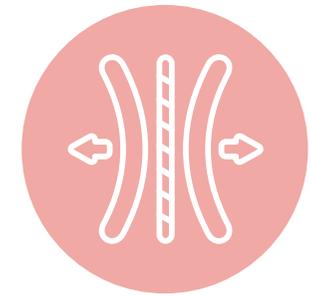
### 3 Evolve assessment to reflect AI-assisted applications

As more candidates use AI tools to refine applications, traditional screening methods become less effective. Assessment should focus on demonstrated capability, including structured interviews, skills-based assessments and practical exercises.



### 4 Align hiring design with candidate expectations

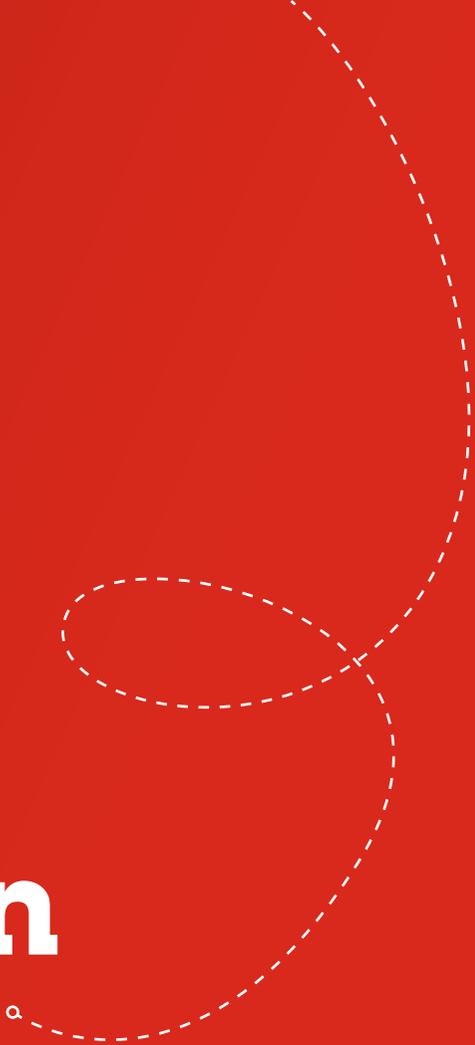
Design hiring around what candidates actually experience. Use clear role definitions, clear communication and structured processes to build trust. Reflect what matters most to your target candidates, signalling flexibility, development and stability where relevant.



### 5 Reduce friction across the hiring journey

Slow timelines, unclear communication and overly complex interview structures quickly undermine confidence. A joined-up, end-to-end approach ensures each stage adds value and maintains momentum.

**Conclusion**



# Confidence: the defining feature of modern candidate experience

**As technology reshapes the talent landscape, the hiring process has become one of the most visible signals of how organisations operate. Candidate confidence is no longer a by-product of hiring, but a core outcome in its own right.**

While AI is becoming more visible, our findings suggest its use remains uneven and not as prevalent as the current narrative suggests. However, adoption and acceptance are growing, and its influence on both candidate behaviour and hiring processes will continue to increase.

The fundamentals of job choice remain familiar. Pay, flexibility and career development still matter. What has changed is how candidates evaluate employers around those fundamentals. The experience

of applying, how clearly roles are defined, how well organisations communicate, and how transparently technology and AI are used all play a role in shaping trust.

In this environment, talent acquisition is no longer simply a gateway to employment. It is a direct reflection of credibility and capability. The organisations that recognise this, and treat hiring as a system that must consistently build confidence, will be best placed to attract and secure the talent they need.

As AI becomes more embedded, the ability to balance efficiency with clarity, fairness and human oversight will become more important. In a tech-enabled market, confidence in how you hire is becoming just as important as what you offer. 🔄



## About Omni

**Omni RMS supports organisations to solve their biggest hiring challenges today, whilst strengthening their talent capability for tomorrow.**

At our core, we are trusted talent partners, helping organisations deliver the fundamentals of hiring consistently and at scale. But our value goes far beyond recruitment delivery alone.

We bring real breadth and depth across the wider talent ecosystem. From workforce planning, employer branding and recruitment delivery to technology, data, automation and executive search, we support clients with both the strategy and execution needed to solve complex talent challenges.

Whether the priority is building stronger hiring performance, shaping a more effective talent strategy, or securing and developing leadership capability, everything we do is grounded in what works in the real world.

By connecting people, process, technology and insight, we turn ideas into practical solutions that strengthen talent outcomes today and build resilience for tomorrow.

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more**





omni

talent is everything