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talent is everything

Candidate assessment has stood still. The world around it hasn't.

The CIPD Resourcing and Talent Planning Report 2026, supported by Omni RMS, shows that selection methods have barely changed since 2024. Meanwhile AI is reshaping how people apply for jobs and the Employment Rights Act is raising the cost of getting a hire wrong. Assessment now needs to predict how someone will perform, not just confirm what their CV says.

Ask most organisations how they choose new hires and you'll hear a familiar answer. Look at the CV, then interview. The CIPD Resourcing and Talent Planning Report, supported by Omni, bears this out. Almost every organisation uses some form of interview (96%) and the vast majority treat work history or experience as a key decision criterion (68%).

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Source: CIPD Resourcing and Talent Planning Report 2026

Competency-based interviews and interviews that follow the CV or application are the most popular formats. Values and strengths-based interviews are more common in the public sector and non-profits than in private companies. Yet the methods with the best record for predicting performance are still among the least used. Fewer than a quarter of organisations use work sample tests (23%). Only a fifth use assessment centres or critical reasoning tests (21%).

Employers are working in a very different environment from a few years ago, but the way they assess people has hardly moved. Methods that were good enough in 2019 are now carrying more weight than they were built for, and the cost of a mistake keeps climbing.

01

Why the stakes are higher

From 1 January 2027, the qualifying period for ordinary unfair dismissal drops from two years to six months and the cap on compensatory awards goes. Anyone hired from 1 July 2026 will have that protection on the day the change comes in. The government has also dropped plans for a lighter-touch statutory probation process. In practice, a six-month probation is no longer a quiet way out if a hire doesn't work. A poor selection decision has to be handled through a fair capability process, with uncapped exposure if it isn't.

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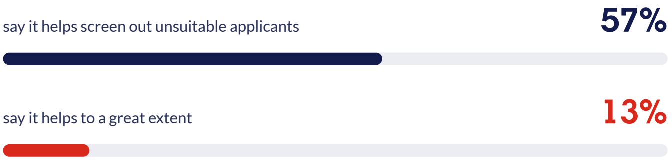
Employers already feel this. Most expect the Employment Rights Act (2025) to push up their costs and a sizeable share expect to recruit for fewer roles as a result.

That makes another problem worse. Fewer vacancies mean more applicants per role, and volume is already a headache. With AI, an application that used to take a couple of hours now takes minutes. Graduates ask HR leaders how to "beat the algorithm" rather than how to stand out. Candidates and recruiters are both frustrated and technology isn't breaking the cycle. Most employers (57%) say it helps screen out unsuitable applicants, but only 13% say it helps to a great extent.


Technology isn't breaking the cycle

Source: CIPD Resourcing and Talent Planning Report 2026

So organisations will make fewer hires, each one costing more and carrying more legal risk. The time to be confident about a decision is before the offer, not at the end of probation. The trouble is that the two most common methods both rely on what candidates say about themselves, and that evidence is getting weaker.

02

What AI does to self-reported evidence

Generative AI can turn out a polished CV, a tailored cover letter and a neat STAR answer in seconds. A rehearsed answer to “tell me about a time you managed conflict” tells you more about someone’s preparation than their ability. An interview that walks through the CV mostly just confirms the CV.

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Candidates are adopting AI tools fast, our Omni Candidate Experience Report 2026 found that 47% have used AI during their job search, and employers are reacting. A third (35%) now monitor jobseekers’ use of generative AI, and three-quarters of those reject candidates for it at least some of the time. The CIPD report that some have switched methods to make AI less useful, moving away from tests with clear right answers, such as situational judgement tests, towards ones with less obvious answers, such as personality questionnaires. Making a method harder to game makes sense. But it can cost you predictive accuracy.

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Source: CIPD Resourcing and Talent Planning Report 2026

The evidence on cheating is more reassuring than the headlines. Test publishers have seen no rise in cognitive ability scores since generative AI arrived. An international assessment publisher found that asking candidates to type "I agree" to a clear no-AI statement, instead of ticking a box, sharpy reduced unusual response patterns. Deterrence and good design do more than detection. Anyone who gets flagged should be retested under supervision rather than rejected outright, not least because neurodivergent candidates may respond in different ways.

03

The risks of AI on the employer side

Employers are also turning to AI to cope with higher volumes, and that brings its own problems.

AI scoring has biases of its own. Large language models tend to reward verbosity unless that’s designed out, so the people who write or say the most can come out on top. In one widely reported study in Nature last year, AI models favoured men’s CVs as more experienced even after names were swapped, picking up gendered signals elsewhere in the text.

> “Human in the loop” can be more reassuring in theory than in practice. If 1,000 candidates complete an AI interview and recruiters review the top 100 to move 50 forward, the AI has effectively made 900 decisions by itself.

1,000
candidates complete an AI interview

100
recruiters review the top 100

50
to move 50 forward

900
decisions by itself

And bolting AI onto a weak process doesn’t fix it. You just reach the wrong answer faster. Many organisations now buying AI hiring tools were still sifting on CVs and skipping validated online assessments and work samples, which already automate shortlisting at a similar or lower cost.

The Omni Candidate Experience Report findings back this up, with 29% of respondents saying they would drop out of a recruitment process due to the perceived overuse of AI.

04

Back to basics

The fundamentals are the same as they were 20 years ago. Does the method predict performance? Is it fair across groups? Does it make sense to candidates? Work samples, simulations, structured interviews and well-chosen behavioural assessments meet those tests better than unstructured conversations or years of experience. Combining methods adds more accuracy again. AI tools should be held to the same standards.

Most organisations aren’t checking, though. Only 7% track the predictive validity of their methods and only 19% measure the return on their hiring. When HR and talent acquisition professionals were asked what drives adoption of new AI talent tools, saving time and money came first, followed by fear of being left behind and pressure from leadership. Proven results came last. If you don’t know whether your assessment works, you can’t know whether it’s fair or defensible.

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05

A practical guide to modern candidate assessment

None of this means getting rid of interviews. It means going back to first principles (what are we looking for and what actually makes the difference?) and checking each stage of assessment against them.

For hiring managers

01 **Define what good looks like before you advertise.**

Agree the capabilities that really set strong performers apart in the role. Lean towards underlying qualities like critical thinking, judgement and adaptability rather than narrow technical skills that may date within months. Where a skill is changing quickly, decide whether you need it now or just the potential to learn it, and design the exercise accordingly.

02 **Ask about the job, not the CV.**

Swap CV walkthroughs for hypothetical questions and short exercises based on real moments in the role. People promoted from technical roles often fall back on their technical comfort zone under pressure, so look for evidence of behaviour as well as expertise.

03 **Score first, then discuss.**

Rate each candidate against agreed anchors on your own before the panel debrief. It weakens the pull of the most confident voice in the room and gives you a record you can stand behind. If someone says a candidate is “not the right fit”, ask: fit against what?

04 **Probe for depth, not polish.**

Follow-up questions like “what would you do differently?” or “what did the data show?” separate real experience from an AI-assisted script.

05 **Follow through after the hire.**

Fewer than a third of organisations measure new hires’ performance or retention in their first year. Share what the assessment showed with the new starter’s line manager so probation reviews at three and five months can build on it.

For talent leaders

01

Move assessment earlier.

Only 21% of organisations use pre-application assessments and 11% use self-selection tools, despite growing numbers of unsuitable applicants. Realistic job previews and short, relevant screening tasks cut volume and improve fit before anyone opens a CV.

02

Combine methods on purpose.

Pair a structured interview with a work sample, simulation or validated test chosen for the role. Each method should measure something the others miss. Assessment centres, used by just a fifth of employers, are worth another look. Face-to-face centres are winning back fans among leaders and candidates, partly for the human contact alone.

03

Design for candidates who use AI.

Favour live, interactive, job-specific tasks. Set a clear position on acceptable AI use and ask candidates to actively confirm it rather than tick a box. Retest anyone flagged under supervision.

04

Let AI support decisions, not make them.

Use it for scheduling, admin and consistency checks. Watch for bias in AI scoring and have people review a sample from across the whole ranking, not just the top.

05

Push vendors hard.

Before buying an AI assessment tool, ask who built it, what evidence is there for its reliability, fairness and predictive accuracy. Fewer than half of AI talent tool builders have involved an assessment specialist.

06

Check for adverse impact.

Monitor pass rates across groups at every stage, including any scored by AI. A method that predicts well but unfairly screens out certain groups is a legal and reputational risk.

07

Respect the effort candidates put in.

People are applying for more roles than ever, often below their level, and they want that effort recognised. Match feedback to the time asked of them: a short report after a 20-minute task, something fuller after an hour-long exercise.

08

Close the loop.

Link assessment scores to probation outcomes, performance ratings and early leavers. Joining the 7% who track predictive validity is the biggest single step most organisations can take.

06

Where this leaves us

The CIPD describes a market where attracting candidates is getting easier but finding the right ones isn’t. Organisations will hire less, pay more per hire and carry more risk when they get it wrong. That makes assessment one of the few areas where modest changes can pay off disproportionately. The CIPD’s own recommendations point the same way: align selection with the skills and behaviours that predict performance, take a clear position on candidate AI use and build capability before buying tools.

It can be done.

One global software company, Aveva, brought in structured assessment for senior hiring and promotion. It added rigour and an outside perspective, changed some decisions and widened the pool of people being considered. Early resistance faded once leaders saw it working, and some now ask for assessment at levels it was never designed for.

> The report leaves an uncomfortable but useful question. Do you know your assessment process actually works? If the honest answer is “not really”, 2027 is a good time to find out.

Omni’s assessment specialists help organisations design candidate assessment that is predictive, fair and defensible. Download the CIPD Resourcing and talent planning report 2026 or get in touch to review your selection process.