

The State of Volume Hiring 2026



A study of 1,650 job seekers, hiring managers, and TA leaders reveals that trust is breaking down as application volumes surge in the AI era.



ARCTIC SHORES

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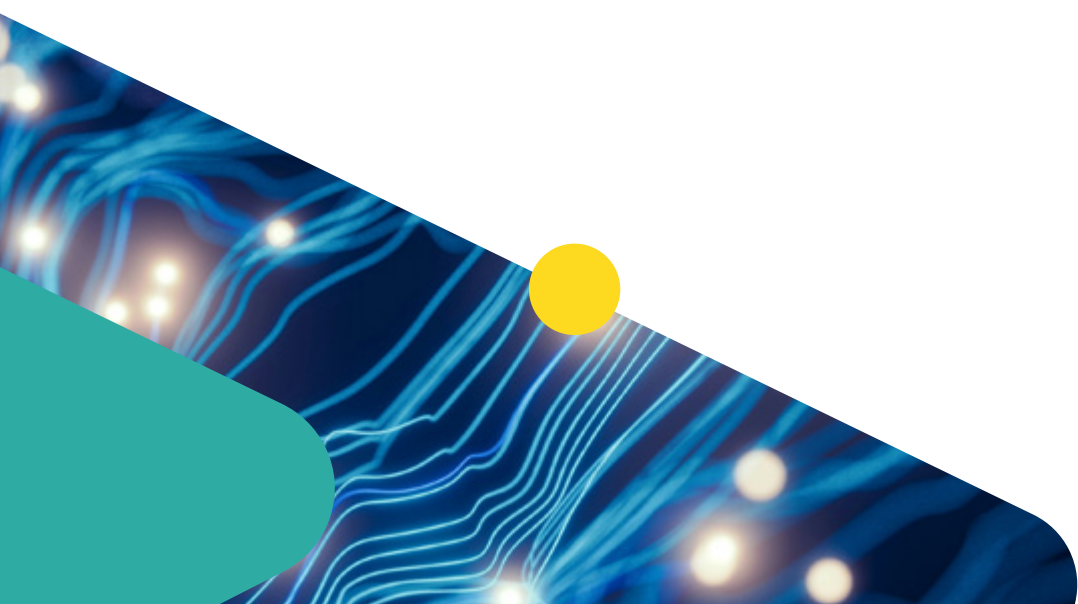
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The background is a vibrant, abstract digital composition. It features a grid of glowing, multi-colored lines in shades of blue, purple, and orange. These lines intersect to form a series of three-dimensional cubes and rectangular prisms. The cubes are rendered with a textured, metallic appearance and are illuminated from various angles, creating bright highlights and deep shadows. The overall effect is a sense of depth and dynamic energy, typical of a high-tech or data-driven environment.

Executive summary

Executive summary

From Robert Newry,
Co-Founder and Chief Explorer
of Arctic Shores



If you run a talent acquisition function that hires at volume, you already know the pressure you're under.

Application numbers have surged. Your team is stretched. And AI tools can enhance CVs, application forms, online interviews, and even question-based assessments with no specialist prompting. Further down the funnel, candidates use AI to prepare for and even complete interviews, leaving hiring managers questioning whether the capability they're seeing is real. Throughout the entire funnel, the tools and processes we've relied on for years are no longer providing the meaningful signals they used to.

Most TA teams have been focused on the most visible and immediate problem: managing the sheer volume of applications. But our data suggests that volume is only one side of the story. It doesn't explain why simply automating what we're already doing isn't making hiring more effective. Or why, despite everyone working harder, hiring managers, candidates, and TA teams are becoming increasingly frustrated with current hiring processes. In fact...

- **Only half of candidates trust recruiters and hiring managers to work in their best interests**
- **35% of hiring managers aren't convinced that candidates represent themselves honestly**
- **And only 2 in 3 hiring managers trust recruiters to send them qualified candidates**

This report set out to understand what's really going on and what to do about it.



We partnered with Researchscape, an independent market research firm, to survey 1,105 job seekers and 564 hiring managers in the UK, and conducted in-depth interviews with 10 talent acquisition leaders.

All data was collected between February and April 2026.

What we found goes beyond the headline that application volumes are exploding.

It reveals a structural problem in volume hiring. And a clear model for understanding it.

The Triangle of Trust in Volume Hiring

The data revealed that, for a volume hiring process to work, three elements need to hold together.



Efficiency

Does the process sift candidates efficiently?



Signal Quality

Does the process surface real candidate ability?



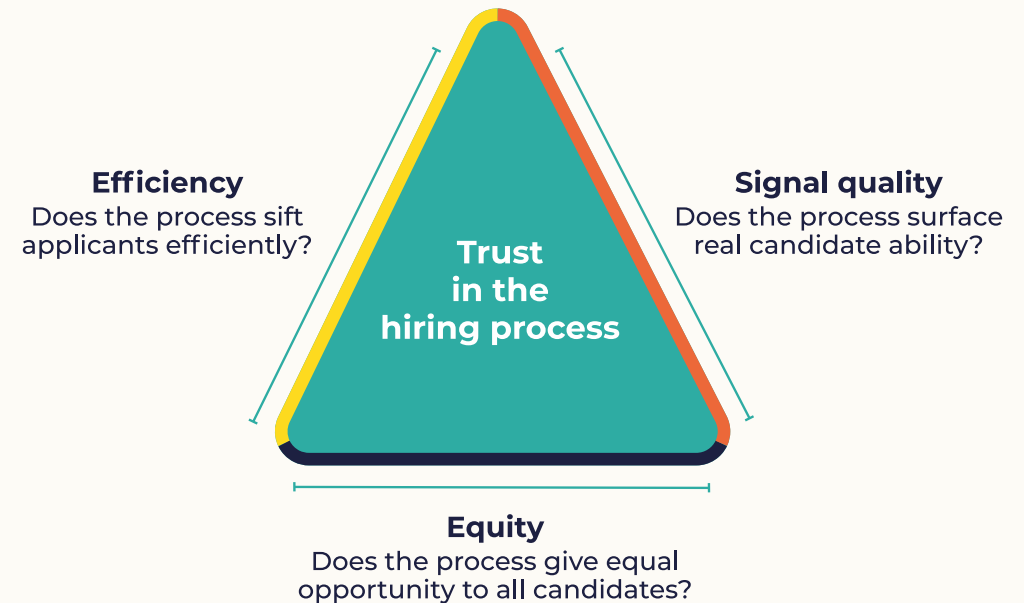
Equity

Does the process give equal opportunity to all candidates?

When all three hold, candidates trust they'll get a fair shot, hiring managers trust they're seeing the right people, and TA teams trust that the process will deliver. When they don't, trust breaks down. Not just in the process, but between the people inside it.

These three elements form a triangle. A structure known for distributing pressure across all sides. But when one side weakens, the load shifts to the others. When all three are under strain, the structure can fail.

The data shows that, today, all three sides are under strain. And when we analysed how they interact, three patterns emerged that every TA leader hiring at volume needs to understand.



There are three patterns emerging from AI adoption in the volume hiring process.



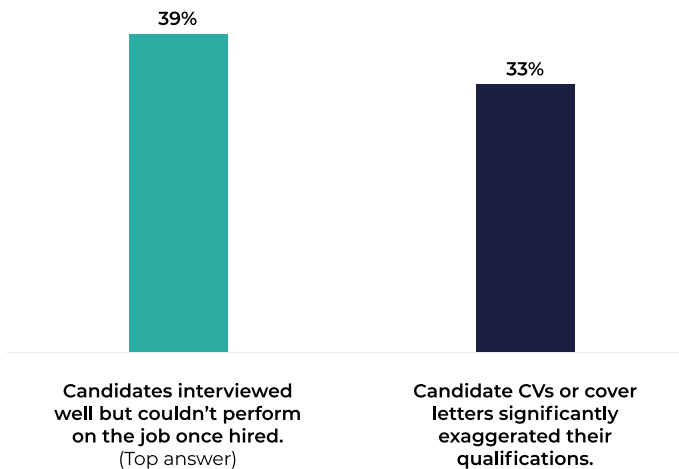
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Pattern #1

Signal quality, not volume, is the biggest destroyer of trust

Despite the surge in application volumes, the most striking finding in our data isn't about a corresponding drop in efficiency. It's about signal quality.

Question: Which of the following, if any, have caused you to lose trust in a hiring process?




Hiring manager survey

Have you ever taken any of the following actions as a result of losing trust in your hiring process?

57% "I raised concerns about the quality of candidates coming through"

Both candidates and hiring managers are losing trust in the hiring process because **the information it produces is no longer reliable.**

For hiring managers, the issue may run even deeper than unreliable signals. Many are questioning whether the interview process itself is still fit for purpose. Candidate skills and market demands are evolving rapidly, AI is reshaping how candidates present at every stage, and the selection methods designed for a pre-AI world haven't kept pace. The trust deficit hiring managers are experiencing may not simply be a symptom of poor data. It may be a sign that the process itself needs redesigning.



On the candidate side, the picture is equally stark: **only 40% trust that company hiring processes generally identify the best candidates for roles.**

The signals that hiring processes were built around – what candidates write on a CV, how they answer application questions, how they present in an interview – have always been imperfect. But AI has widened the gap between how candidates present and what they can actually do.

The data shows that **46% of candidates now use AI when applying for jobs.** In reality, this figure is likely much higher. Meaning every text-based and answer-based signal becomes less authentic and trustworthy. And both sides of the hiring equation know it.

TA teams are understandably focused on solving the most visible problem: volume. But our data suggests that if you solve only for efficiency without addressing the quality of the signals you're collecting, you risk further eroding trust with your main stakeholders.

A faster process collecting unreliable information still produces unreliable outcomes. It just produces them more quickly.

Different groups trust different parts of the process... and the gaps are significant

Trust in the hiring process is not uniform.

It fractures along lines of gender, ethnicity, age, and income. And the pattern reveals which groups feel the process is working for them and which groups feel overlooked.



Candidate survey

Question: How much, if at all, do you trust that company hiring processes generally identify the best candidates for roles?

Answer: A great or good deal



Candidates from lower-income households are the most likely to say their skills and potential are *not* being effectively evaluated.

Question: Do you believe that your skills and potential are being effectively evaluated by potential employers?

Answer: No



Gen Z candidates are the most likely to trust assessments that measure ability to learn and adapt to change; suggesting this group sees structured, capability-based evaluation as a fairer alternative to the traditional process.

Question: To what extent do you trust assessments that measure ability to learn and adapt to change, to predict job performance?

Answer: A great or good deal



Black candidates are the most likely to say they use AI because they lack the professional networks that other candidates rely on.

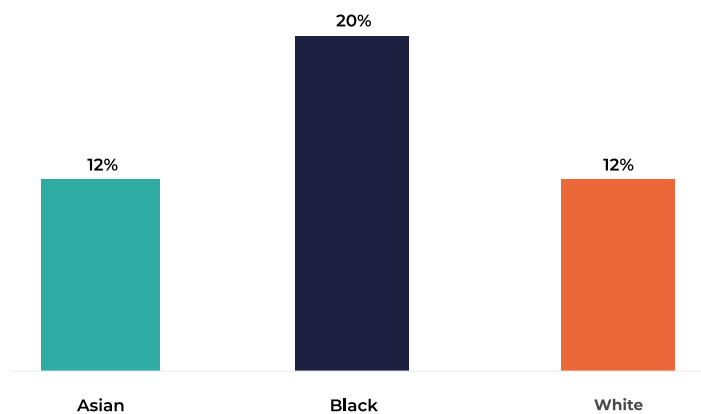
A rational response to a system they perceive as structurally disadvantaging them.

These findings matter because they show that equity isn't an abstract principle. It's a lived experience that directly shapes how candidates engage with your process: whether they trust it enough to show you who they really are, whether they stay in it, and what they say about your organisation afterwards.

When it comes to candidate experience, perception is reality.




Question: Which of the below, if any, describes your motivation for using AI in the job application process?

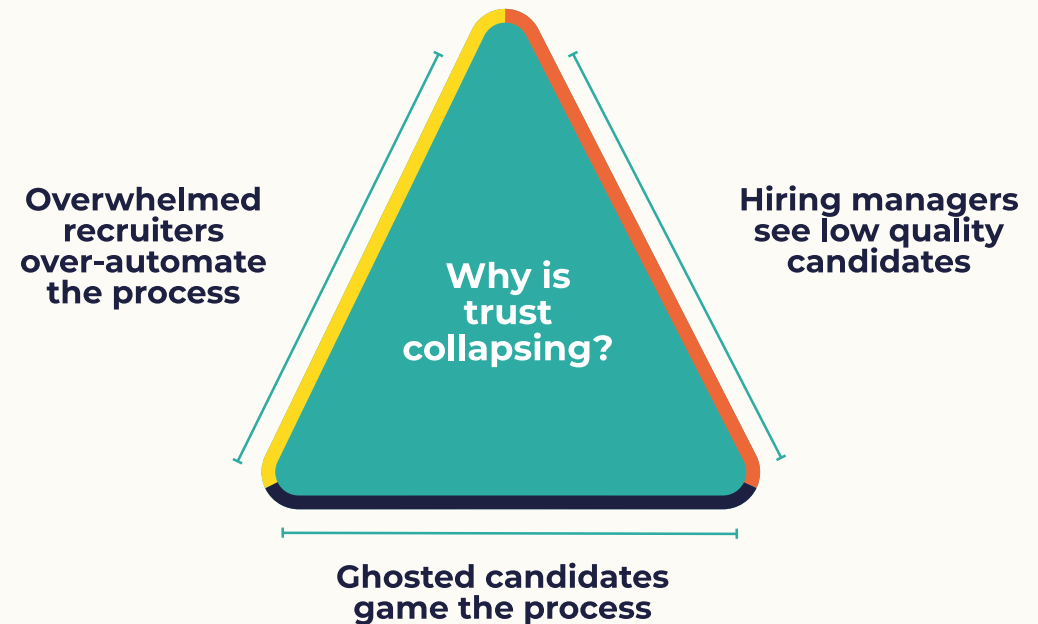
Answer: "I don't have enough connections or a big network, so it's the best chance I've got."



Each group's attempt to cope with pressure makes the experience worse for others

The third pattern is the most systemic. And the hardest to solve from inside the process.

-  Candidates, feeling ignored or rejected without explanation, are applying to more roles than ever — often using AI tools to accelerate the process.
-  Recruiters, already stretched thin, are overwhelmed by the surge in near-identical applications and increasingly rely on AI screening tools to cope.
-  Hiring managers then inherit a shortlist filled with candidates who look stronger on paper than they are in reality, leading them to doubt process integrity, candidate authenticity, and recruiter efficacy.



It's a vicious cycle

Candidates who are ghosted or rejected despite believing they're qualified respond by applying more widely and more aspirationally.

14% of candidates applied to 25 or more jobs in the past year, and only 6% applied strictly to roles where they met all the listed requirements. So overwhelmed TA teams respond to surging application volumes engage in behaviours that drive volume even higher.

Recruiters, drowning in applications, resort to shortcuts: reviewing only the most recent applications, or relying on blunt filters that miss strong candidates. 44% of candidates say they never heard back after applying. And candidates who feel unseen don't stay quiet: Gen Z candidates in particular are significantly more likely to withdraw applications, warn others not to apply, and decline offers based on how they were treated.

57% of hiring managers, seeing candidates who interviewed well but don't perform in the role, raise concerns about the quality of shortlists. And they begin to question whether the process is surfacing the right people. Some start going around the process altogether.

None of this is driven by bad intent. Each group is responding rationally to the pressure they face. But in doing so, they're inadvertently intensifying the strain on every other part of the system. The result is a cycle in which declining trust produces behaviours that further erode trust.



Candidate survey

51% Only half trust hiring managers to review their application fairly and without bias

48% Aren't confident that recruiters work in candidates' best interests



Hiring manager survey

35% of hiring managers aren't convinced that candidates represent themselves honestly

57% of hiring managers have raised concerns about candidate quality, undermining trust in recruiters and the process

19% of hiring managers say "I disregarded an assessment result because I didn't trust it."

What this means for TA leaders

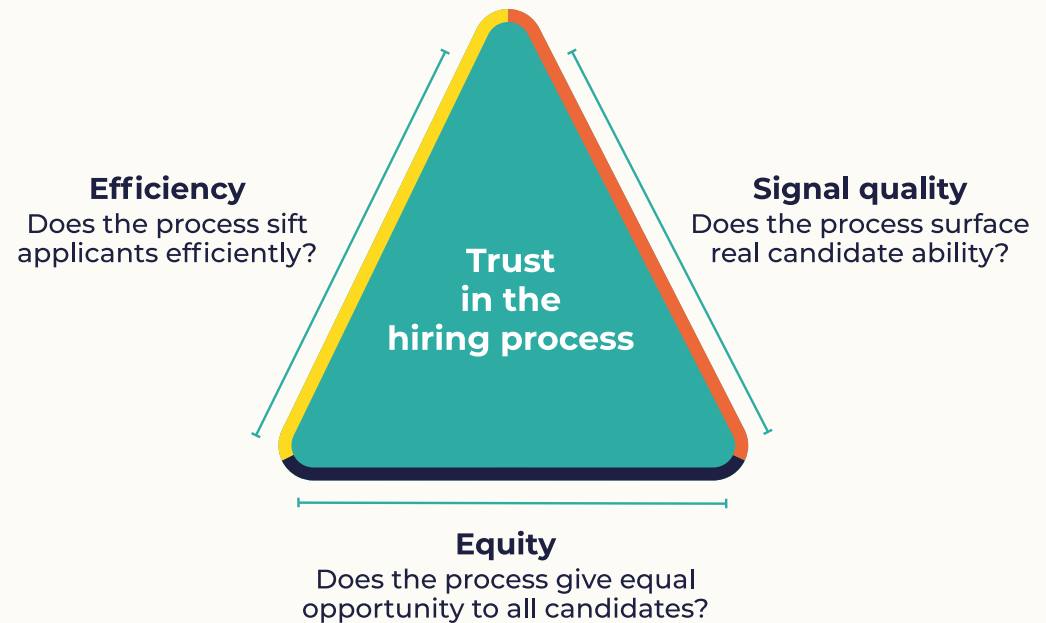
The Triangle of Trust is strained, but it hasn't collapsed.

Organisations that act now will be the ones that attract and retain the best people at scale. Can you tell who's actually right for the role? Can you manage the volume without losing them? And does your process give equal opportunity to all candidates? These are the questions every volume hiring team needs to answer.

The chapters that follow lay out the full evidence behind each side of the triangle, with the data, the voices of TA leaders, and nuance that headlines alone can't capture.

Chapter four sets out practical steps for rebuilding trust. Starting with the signals at the top of the funnel.

The time to redesign your hiring process isn't around the corner. It's now.



What TA teams are saying about trust

“Evidence suggests that candidates increasingly lack confidence in recruitment processes, a sentiment echoed through direct feedback, anecdotal reports, and discussions across various professional forums. The current job market presents unprecedented challenges, exacerbated by both micro- and macroeconomic factors, resulting in pressure on candidates, hiring managers, and TA teams in particular around the volume of AI-generated applications. Media coverage frequently highlights the lack of graduate opportunities, while the rapid emergence of AI adds another layer of uncertainty. I think there is a common misconception amongst job seekers that ATS systems are using inbuilt agents now acting in the place of a human to select candidates and reject others it deems unsuitable that the TA team never see.”

Emma Ponsonby,
Talent Acquisition Manager at MIGSO-PCUBED

“I trust assessments that measure candidate behaviours more than CVs. Writing a CV is so formulaic, and someone, particularly at the graduate level, won't have done very much of it. It's really a conversation starter or a facilitating exercise to log in an application. I don't think it's representative of a candidate's knowledge, abilities, interests, or strengths ... A computer science degree from two universities for two different individuals represents very different things because we're all very different. There's such a big spectrum. You may be a very outgoing person, a really strong relationship builder, and vice versa.”

Fleur Laffont,
Head of Graduate Talent, UK and EMEA at FDM Group

“I think the hiring managers are actually more trusting of the process because they're invested in us as experts. I think where the trust is less so is actually on the candidate side because they're using AI to put their application together.”

Ruth Hoggett,
Talent Acquisition Manager at Stantec

Chapter one

The overflowing bucket

What happens when the hiring process can't keep up with AI-driven application volume

Application volumes have surged, and TA teams are drowning

The selection funnel now looks more like an overflowing bucket

For organisations that sift more than 1,000 candidates per year, the selection funnel typically looks more like a bucket: candidates pour in at the top, and after a few steps to narrow down the best ones, hires come out of the bottom. But right now, an even greater number of candidates are pouring in at the top, causing the selection bucket to overflow.

Two forces are converging to spike volumes. First, more candidates are in the market at the same time; UK unemployment has **trended upward** in recent years. Second, AI tools make it easier for candidates to submit applications quickly. What used to take hours (tailoring a CV to a job description, writing a cover letter) now takes minutes, while **new apps** let candidates auto-apply to multiple roles in seconds.

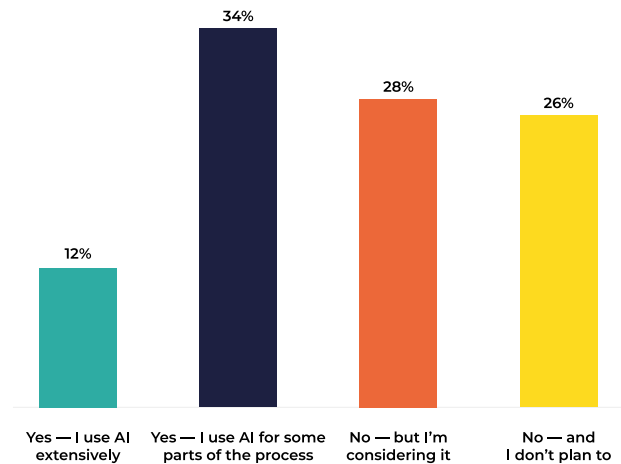
Even though the vast majority of candidates apply to fewer than 25 roles per year, more people are applying, at higher speed, supported by AI. For recruiters, the pressure compounds fast. And as more candidates decide to adopt AI, application volumes will only intensify.



Candidate survey

46% of candidates use AI when applying for jobs.

Question: Do you currently use AI to help you as part of the job application process?



A slice of candidates are “super applicants”:

14% applied to 25+ jobs in the past year.

Many organisations lack the means to sift the extra volume efficiently

▶ *So candidates are being ghosted by overwhelmed recruiters and losing trust*

Application volumes have overwhelmed recruiters so much that **44% of candidates never hear back after they apply**. When volumes are too great to manually review, some candidates are left waiting for answers. And in some cases, never getting them at all.

Besides ghosting, one in three candidates say they were rejected despite believing they were qualified for the job. Rejection is, of course, an unavoidable part of hiring. But when overwhelm is high and tooling is inadequate, **TA teams relying on manual review risk great fit candidates slipping through the cracks, while also damaging the candidate experience. This causes candidates to lose trust in the process.**

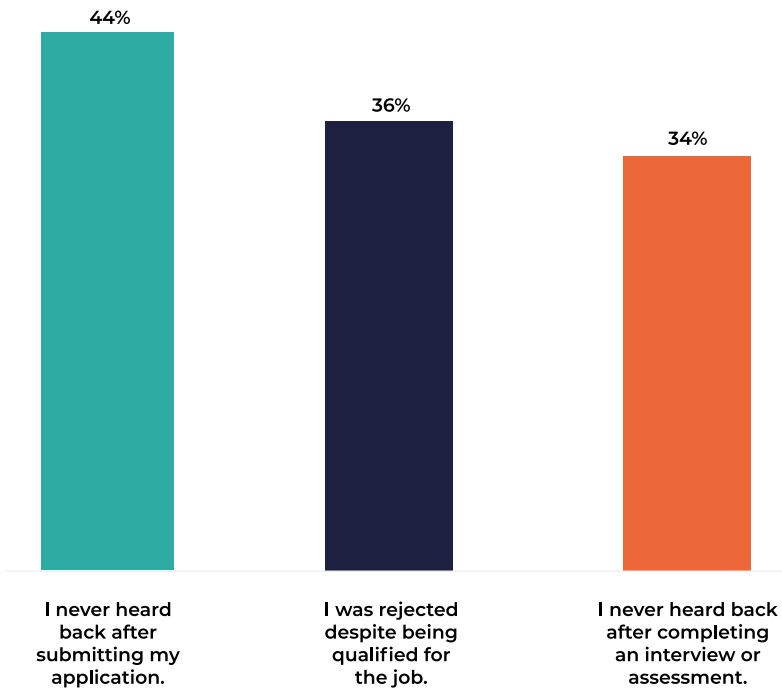
“When you work in early careers and you’re coming up against hundreds, if not thousands, of applications, it’s really easy to see that as simply a huge workload. But you can’t forget the human being behind every application. I try to look at 500 applications as 500 people’s careers.”

**Yasmin Millar-Trotter,
Graduate Recruitment
and Development Manager
at Burness Paull LLP**



Candidate survey

Question: Which of the following, if any, have caused you to lose trust in a hiring process?



Generational differences shape candidate reactions

Gen Z candidates are most likely to take action as a result of a negative experience

Not all candidates respond to a poor experience the same way. Gen Z candidates, the group that will make up an increasingly large share of the candidate pool in the years ahead, are significantly more likely to act on their frustration. They're more likely to withdraw their application, warn others not to apply, and decline a job offer based on how they were treated during the process.

This shouldn't come as a surprise. With more candidates competing for fewer roles and higher stakes than ever, the emotional investment in every application is significant. When that investment is met with silence or an unexplained rejection, the reaction is proportionate to what's at stake. And it's not contained: a poor experience today becomes a Glassdoor review, a warning in a group chat, or a TikTok tomorrow.

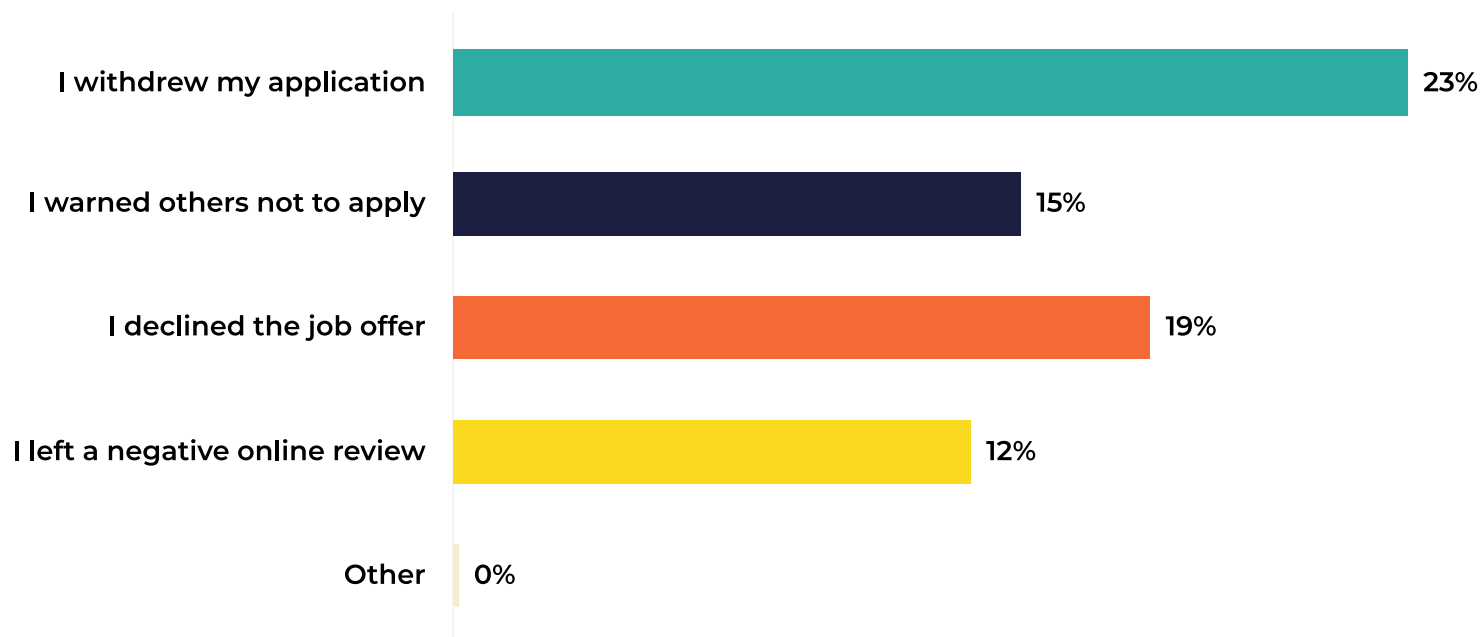
As Gen Z and Gen Alpha candidates become the majority of applicants, the most effective response is transparency: helping candidates understand the criteria they're being assessed on and why, so the process feels fair even when the outcome isn't what they hoped for.

“ I was at a conference recently and the majority of the students I was speaking to asked, ‘How would I get past the bots?’ and I said, ‘We don’t use AI, our process is based on a human-centric design, with every application reviewed by one of our Talent Acquisition professionals’, which is exactly what we have on our careers site too to make it clear for all candidates on what to expect and how we support them. ”

Craig Christmas,
Talent Acquisition & Employment
Brand Manager at Aegon UK



Question: Have you ever taken any of the following actions as a result of a negative experience during a hiring process?



Recruiter overwhelm creates a negative loop

Candidates respond to ghosting and rejection by spraying applications widely

Candidates respond to ghosting and rejection by applying more aspirationally to increase their odds of getting a fair shot. Even if they won't necessarily stay in the process.

The overwhelm creates a loop: Overwhelmed recruiters ghost and reject candidates, causing them to apply more widely and take negative action, exacerbating the overwhelm for recruiters.

2x Early Careers candidates (with fewer than 3 years of experience) are twice as likely to apply aspirationally.

“We’re seeing an increasing number of candidates accepting multiple offers and then later rescinding when they have all their offers, often at short notice.”

Alexandra Sternfeld Casasnovas,
Global Early Careers Director
at Arcadis

The loop of recruiter and candidate behaviours



As trust in the process breaks, trust in each other breaks, too

Candidates don't trust recruiters, and hiring managers don't trust candidates

The consequences of this cycle don't stay contained within the process. They spill into the relationships between the people inside it.

Candidates, competing in a sea of thousands of other applicants for the same role, stop trusting that recruiters are working in their interest. When they don't get a personal experience, or feel wrongly rejected, they lose faith. Not just in the process, but in the people running it.

At the same time, hiring managers are losing trust in candidates. They see offers rejected, candidates who can't commit, and shortlists that don't match what they asked for. They start questioning whether the process is surfacing the right people. And whether candidates can be relied upon to engage in good faith.

“I do think some hiring managers feel like candidates can't be fully trusted because they don't commit [after receiving an offer].”

Alexandra Sternfeld Casasnovas,
Global Early Careers Director at Arcadis



Candidate survey

51% Only half trust hiring managers to review their application fairly and without bias

48% Aren't confident that recruiters work in candidates' best interests

Volume is straining the efficiency side of the triangle. But the data shows that even if TA teams could process every application, a deeper problem remains: the signals they're collecting no longer predict who will succeed in the role. That's the focus of chapter two.

Chapter two

The quality-of-hire crisis

*Signals throughout
the selection funnel
are failing to predict
candidate quality.*



Spotting real candidate capability is harder than ever

▶ **42% of candidates told us they have used or would use AI to help them write their CV**

Before AI, the hiring process already had a structural flaw: application forms, CVs, cover letters, and interviews measure what candidates say they can do, not what they can actually do. TA teams have long known that candidates tend to overestimate their own abilities. That's partially explained by [the Dunning-Kruger Effect](#) and partially because people want to secure the job so they paint themselves in the best light.

Today, these already fragile signals are even less predictive of real candidate capability as they're being shaped, to varying degrees, by AI tools. As a result, **TA's overflowing candidate bucket is chock-full of lookalike applications.** It's hard to know which applicants have real capability and which are just presenting as capable.

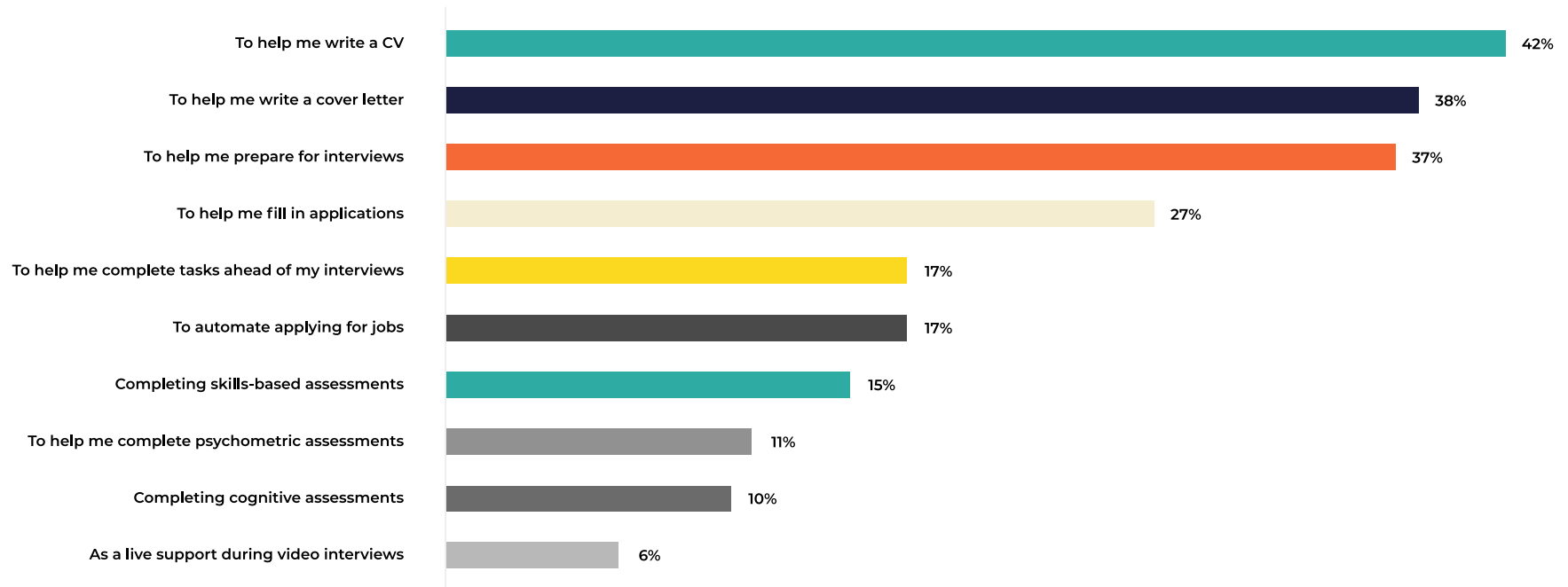
Some candidates even use AI to complete text-based assessments, leaving TA teams to wonder at every stage of the process: What signals can we trust in the AI era?

“ It's getting difficult to trust: 'Is this a real candidate?' We had a role last week in the U.S. where 90% of the applications had given exactly the same answers to the pre-screening questions ... it starts to make recruiters question everything that's coming through. ”

Lara Farrell,
Global Head of Talent Acquisition at IMI



Question: Which of the below areas of the job application process, if any, have you used – or would you use – AI for? (Select all that apply)



“ We see this consistently in post-assessment centre wash-ups. There’s often significant discussion about whether a candidate has relied too heavily on AI. For example, when candidates are asked to prepare a presentation, it can be immediately apparent if AI has been used.

That said, using AI as a starting point for research isn’t something we would criticise. The issue arises when we probe further, when candidates are asked to expand or provide deeper insight, the underlying understanding and knowledge often isn’t there.

To me, that reflects an over-reliance on AI to create outputs without developing the foundational knowledge behind them. ”

Danielle Holton,
Early Careers Talent and Development
Manager at Cushman & Wakefield

Most candidates don't have nefarious intent

Only 4% say they use AI to cheat, but hiring managers aren't so sure

Most candidates use AI to improve their writing or thinking, while giving themselves the best possible shot at getting a job. Only 4% say they use it to cheat. **Hiring managers, however, estimate that figure is closer to 13%.**

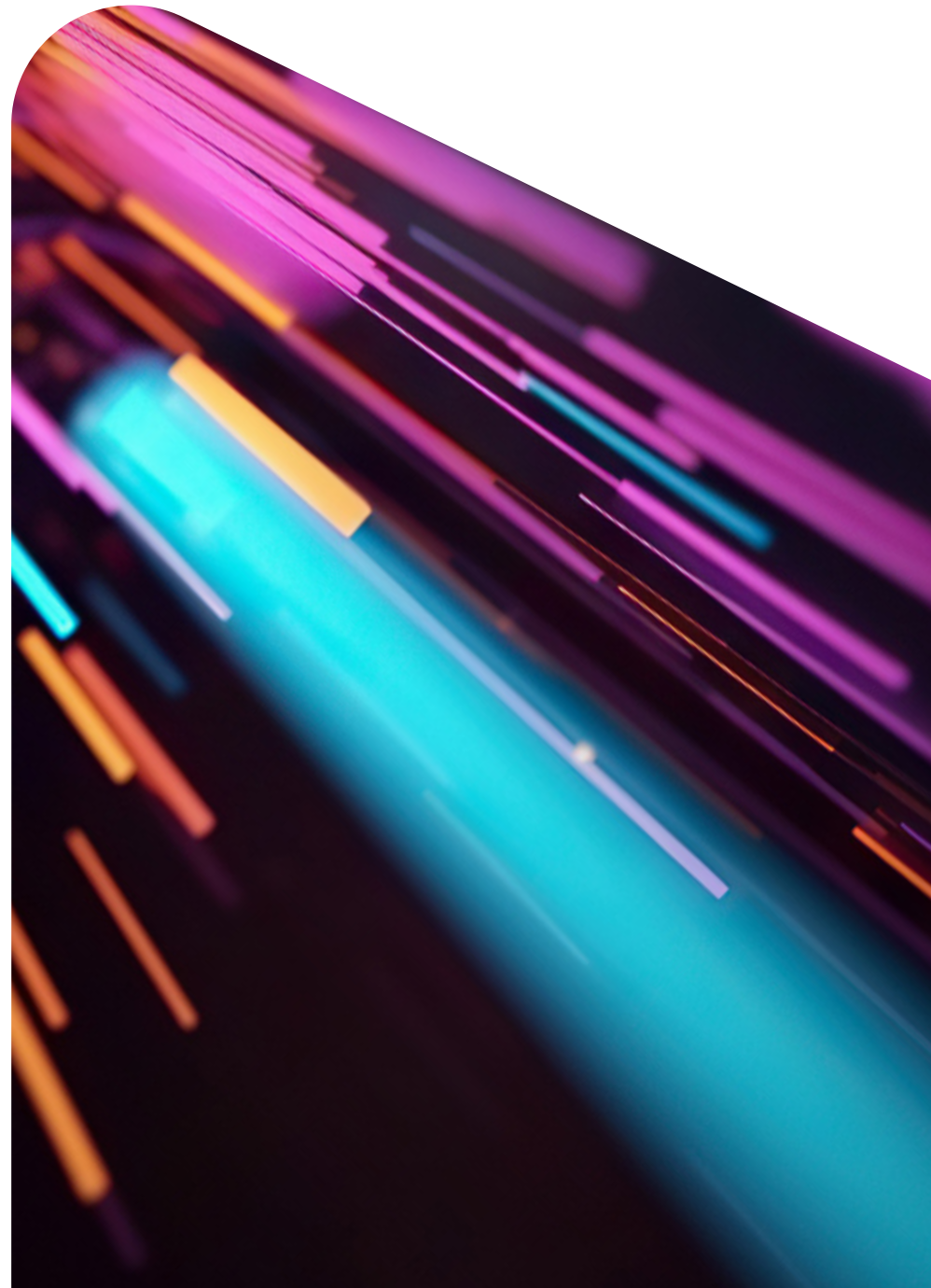
It's not a massive gap, but it's a gap rooted in two different vantage points. Candidates are reporting on their own intent. Hiring managers are reporting on what they see across many candidates throughout the selection and assessment process: in interviews where preparation feels scripted, in presentations that fall apart under questioning, and in assessment responses that don't match the person sitting in front of them. They're exposed to the downstream effects of AI use in ways candidates aren't always aware of.

The finding that matters here isn't who's right about the number. It's that both sides agree AI is reshaping how candidates present throughout the process. And neither side fully trusts what they're seeing.



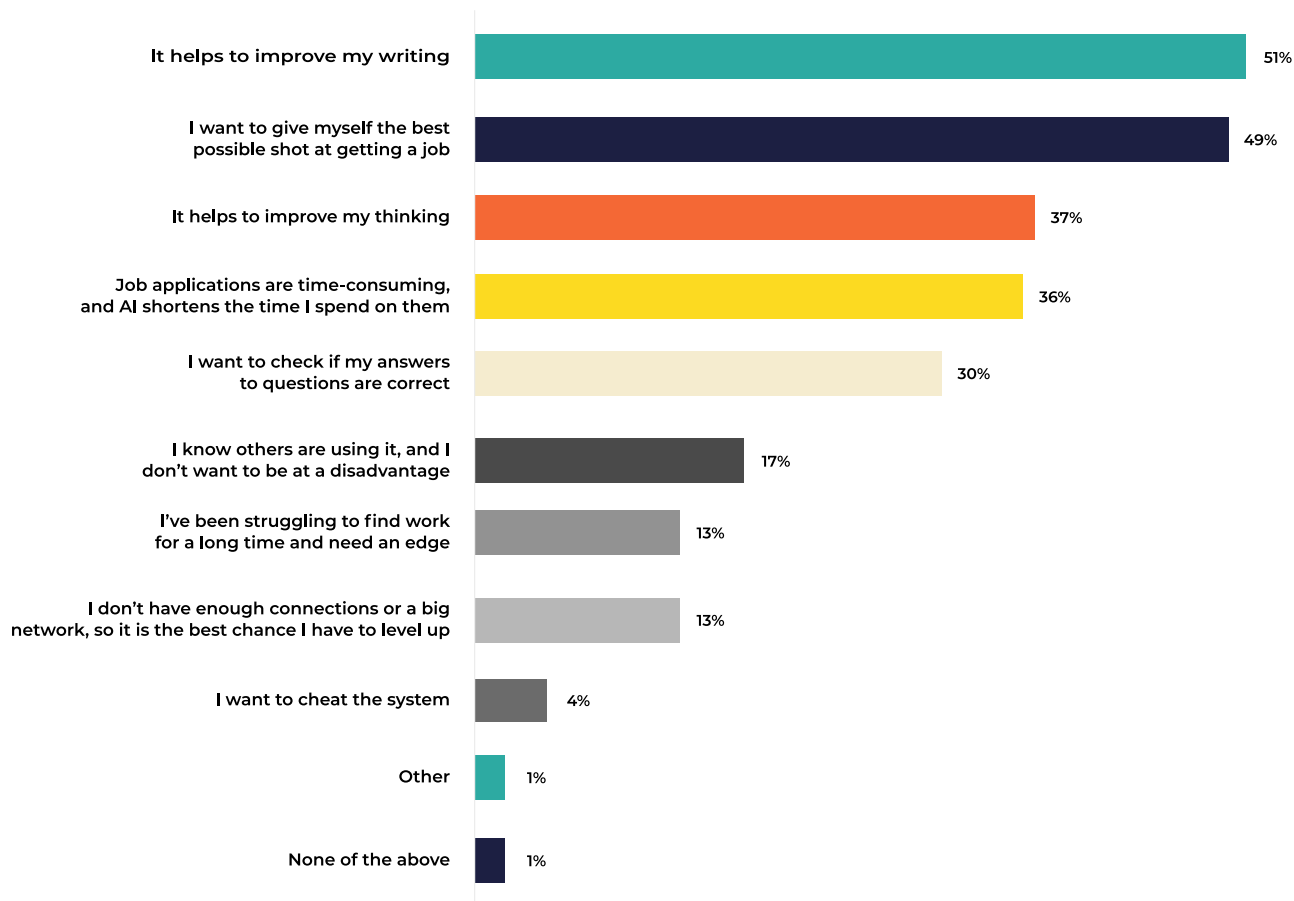
Hiring manager survey

13% say candidates "want to cheat the system."



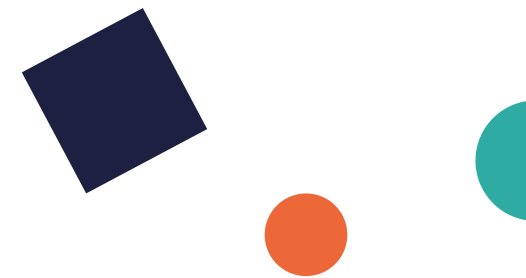


Question: Which of the below, if any, describes your motivation for using AI in the job application process?



As we explained in the Executive Summary, Black candidates are most likely to say they use AI because they don't have enough connections or a big network (20% vs 12% for Asian and 12% for White candidates) so it's the best chance they have to level up.

This adds an important dimension. Not all candidates are using AI for the same reasons, and for some groups, AI is less about gaining an unfair advantage and more about compensating for structural disadvantages in how the job market currently operates.



Two forces are converging to break experience-based signals

Only 51% of hiring managers say CVs accurately portray candidate skills and experience

The problems with CVs and text-based credentials aren't new. TA teams have known for years that past experience is an imperfect proxy for future performance. But two shifts are converging to make this problem significantly more acute.

The first is AI. When 46% of candidates use AI during the application process, the gap between what a CV claims and what a candidate can actually deliver widens further. Most candidates genuinely believe their CV reflects who they are:

87% of candidates say CVs represent their actual skills and experience accurately.

Hiring managers disagree: only 51% say the same. That's a significant disconnect. Candidates believe the document represents them. Hiring managers have learned, through experience, that it often doesn't.

“We are seeing a huge amount of very similar written applications. It is so difficult to find authenticity in those submissions, and there can be a question around whether a really good application is AI or not. Using AI isn't necessarily a problem, but it needs to be utilised effectively to showcase the candidate themselves rather than used to create a refined profile that doesn't match the role, or overstates experience.”

Yasmin Millar-Trotter,
Graduate Recruitment and Development Manager
at Burness Paull LLP

The second shift is bigger than AI. The nature of work itself is changing, and past experience is depreciating as a predictor of future success. According to the [World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025](#), 39% of existing skill sets will be transformed or become outdated by 2030.

The skills employers say they need most – analytical thinking, resilience, flexibility, curiosity, and the ability to keep learning – are not the skills that show up on a CV. They're adaptive capabilities: how people think, how they respond to change, how quickly they learn.

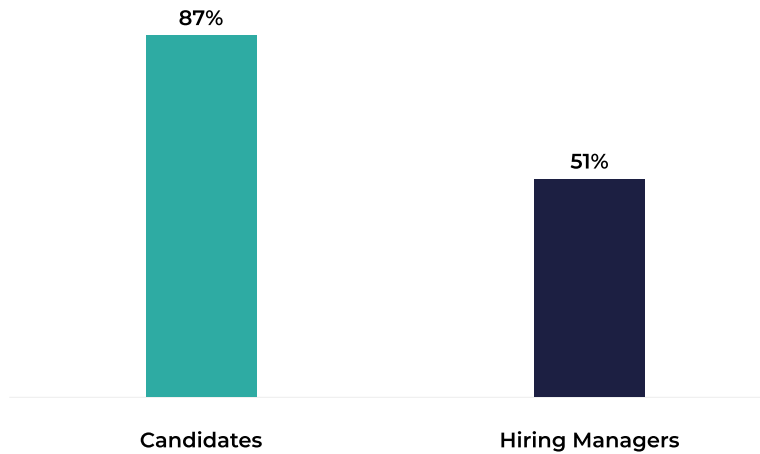
But most hiring processes aren't designed to evaluate these capabilities. And when hiring managers lack an alternative signal they can trust, they default to the false comfort of academic qualifications and years of experience: proxies that tell you where someone has been, not what they're capable of becoming.



Candidate survey

Question: How accurately do CVs represent candidates' skills and experience?

Answer: "A great deal" or "A good deal"



Hiring manager survey

Which of the following, if any, have caused you to lose trust in a hiring process?

33% say "Candidate CVs or cover letters significantly exaggerated their qualifications."

But the data also makes this finding actionable: candidates told us how they want to be evaluated. And hiring managers told us which types of assessment they trust most.



Hiring manager survey

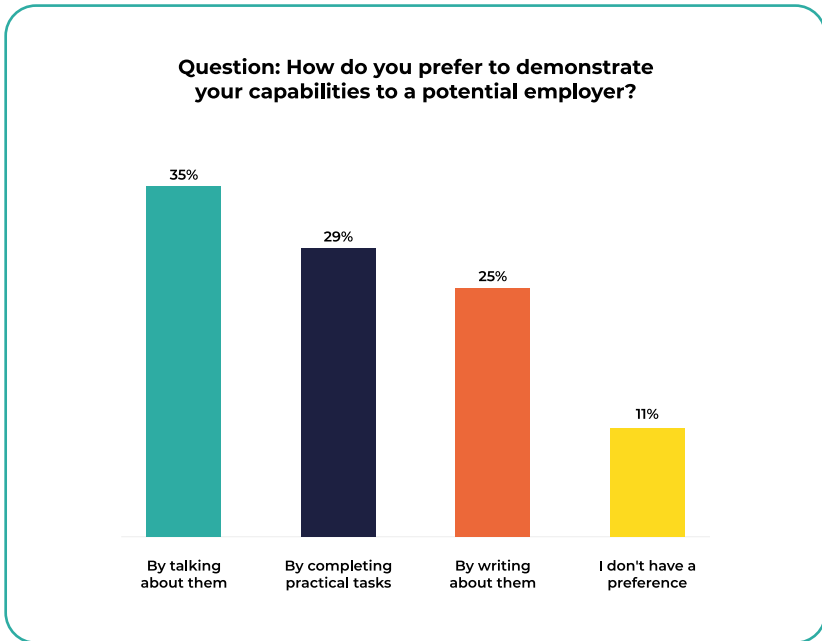
74% of hiring managers trust assessments that measure ability to learn and adapt to change.

Only a quarter of candidates prefer to demonstrate their capabilities in the format that many hiring processes rely on most heavily. Nearly a third would rather complete practical tasks. And that preference is strongest among Black candidates (42% vs an average of 29%).

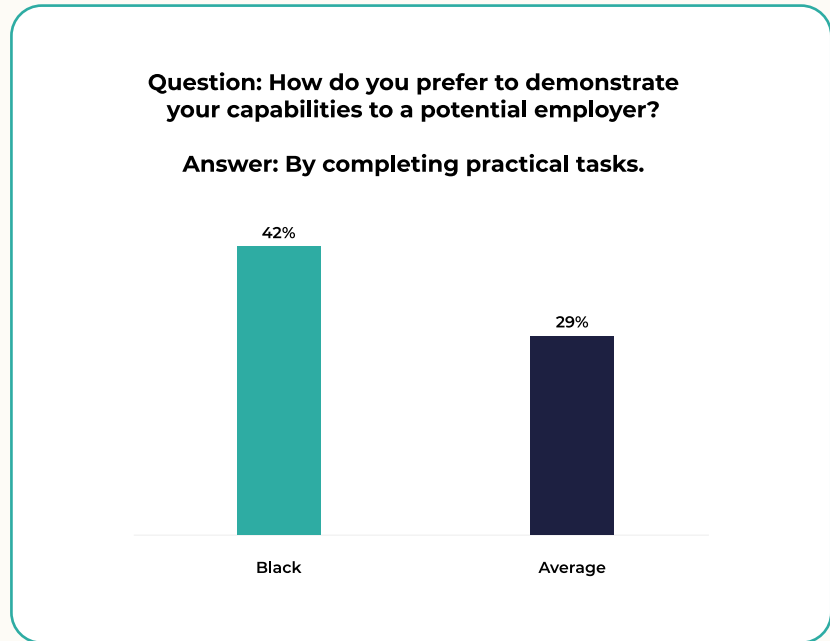
The process is measuring the wrong thing, in the wrong format. And both employers and candidates sense it. The question is no longer whether text-based signals are sufficient. It's what replaces them.



Candidate survey



Candidate survey



Integrity and authenticity are now under threat

Candidates perform well in interviews and text-based assessments, but not on the job once hired

The fragility of signals at the top of the funnel is well established by now. But the problem doesn't stop at CVs and application forms.

According to hiring managers, text-based assessments and interviews have also failed to predict who will actually succeed in the role. They're seeing more and more examples of candidates who performed well throughout a text-based and question-based selection process but couldn't deliver once hired. The signals they trusted to separate strong candidates from weak ones are no longer doing that job.

“With the rising CV sift scores and pre-Assessment Centre testing score rates we've had to significantly shift our candidate assessment pathway to a much more behaviour-focussed design to ensure true candidate quality is measured. In our Entry Talent Hiring space, our Hiring Managers are on this journey with us to reduce reliance on text-based input from our candidates in the earlier phases of the application process. The AI-enabled candidate landscape is moving at such a pace, we've had to make bold moves to keep up.”

Laura Harrington,
Talent Acquisition Manager at the Ministry of Defence



Hiring manager survey

Which of the following, if any, have caused you to lose trust in a hiring process?

39%

say “Candidates interviewed well but couldn't do the job once hired”
(Top answer)

When the signals that were supposed to differentiate candidates stop working, not just at the application stage but through interviews and assessments too, the entire process comes into question.





Which of the following, if any, have caused you to lose trust in a hiring process?
(Top 3 answers)



39%

Candidates interviewed well but couldn't perform on the job once hired



33%

Candidate CVs or cover letters significantly exaggerated their qualifications



33%

I received too many applications from poor-fit candidates

Hiring managers are questioning the process

More than half of hiring managers have raised concerns about candidate quality

When too many poor-fit candidates find their way in front of hiring managers, they start to question whether the process is really surfacing the right people. And when their trust dips, they raise concerns and in many cases find their own solutions.

When shortlists aren't producing quality candidates, it reflects back on TA's value and impact, even when the root cause is signal failure, not recruiter skill. Meaning that if TA teams don't have good enough signals to spot real candidate ability, roles stay open longer, mis-hires increase, attrition spikes, and business targets get missed.

Just as candidates lose trust in the process when they're ghosted or rejected instantly, hiring managers lose trust when the quality of candidates that get sent their way feels unpredictable. TA sits in the middle, caring deeply about both parties, but working inside a process that's weakening under the pressure of increasing AI adoption.

“ Our TA team has embraced AI technology, and its benefits for our team and our candidates, however our Hiring Manager community have raised concerns about the use of Gen AI in candidate CV submissions and during the interview, which can lead to distrust of the process and distrust in the candidates' authenticity. We are investigating new ways to bridge this trust-gap that will have lasting reach. Reducing our previous over-reliance on the CV and legacy sifting models is a critical first step. ”

**Laura Harrington,
Talent Acquisition Manager
at the Ministry of Defence**

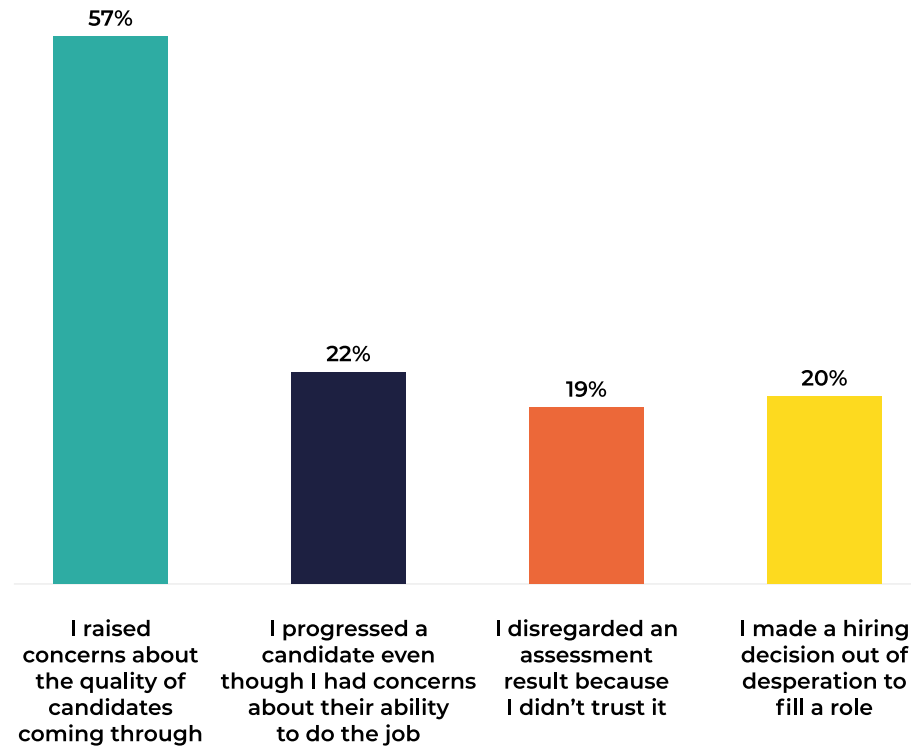


Hiring manager survey

Have you ever taken any of the following actions as a result of losing trust in your hiring process?

57% raised concerns about the quality of candidates coming through.

Question: Have you ever taken any of the following actions as a result of losing trust in your hiring process?



So which signals do hiring managers and candidates trust?

After decades of relying on CVs, application forms, and interviews to predict job performance, both sides have a clear view on what works — and what doesn't. The data reveals striking areas of alignment, some notable tensions, and one signal that neither side has confidence in. Where candidates and hiring managers agree may point to where the process needs to go next.

To what extent do you trust each of the following elements of the hiring process to predict job performance?

	% of hiring managers who trust it "a great deal" and "a good deal"	% of candidates who trust it "a great deal" and "a good deal"
Assessments that measure technical skills and job-specific expertise	77%	62%
Assessments that measure ability to learn and adapt to change	74%	63%
CV screening by humans	73%	64%
Structured interviews	70%	63%
Work samples	60%	55%
Assessments that measure personality traits	59%	51%
Unstructured interviews	58%	49%
Role play exercise	47%	38%
CV screening by AI	28%	28%

Both groups rank AI CV screening at the bottom, and at exactly the same level of trust. At the other end, hiring managers place the highest trust in assessments that measure technical skills (77%) and the ability to learn and adapt to change (74%), while candidates rank structured interviews and capability-based assessments almost equally. The clearest signal in the data may be the gap between how much trust hiring managers place in human CV screening (73%) and how reliably CVs actually reflect candidate capability (51%). A gap that suggests even trusted signals may not be as dependable as they feel.

Chapter three

The perception of equity

When candidates can't see how the process works, they start believing it's inequitable.

Candidates expect to know how they're being evaluated

78% say companies should disclose if they use AI in the hiring process

Candidates are clear: if you're using AI to assess them, they want to know about it. Nearly eight in ten say companies should disclose their use of AI in the hiring process.

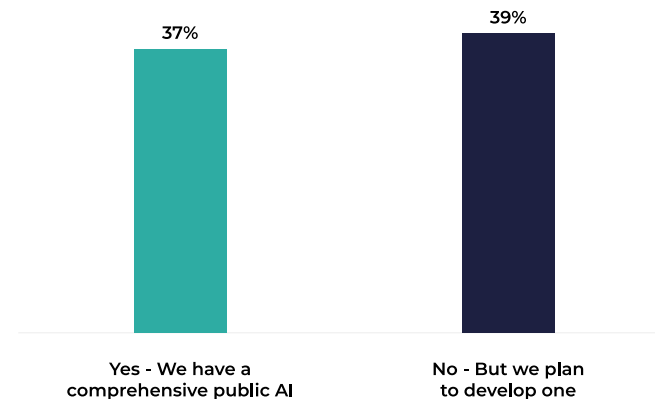
Many organisations have started doing the internal work. 37% have a comprehensive AI policy governing their hiring process, and a further 24% are actively developing one. **But most of that effort is invisible to candidates.** Only 10% have made their policy public-facing. Meaning the vast majority of organisations that have done the thinking haven't communicated it to the people who need to see it most.

The result is a trust gap driven by visibility, not intent. 39% of organisations have no policy at all. But even among those that do, candidates are largely unaware; left to wonder whether anyone is actually reviewing their application, whether AI is involved, and whether using AI themselves will help or hurt their chances. That uncertainty has consequences for the candidate experience, and for the quality of what the process actually produces.



Hiring manager survey

Question: Does your company have a formal policy that governs the use of AI in your hiring process?



Candidate survey

78%

say "If companies use AI in the hiring process to assess candidates, they should disclose it."

Lack of transparency creates a sense of inequity... even if the process is fair

37% of candidates say their applications are not being fairly reviewed

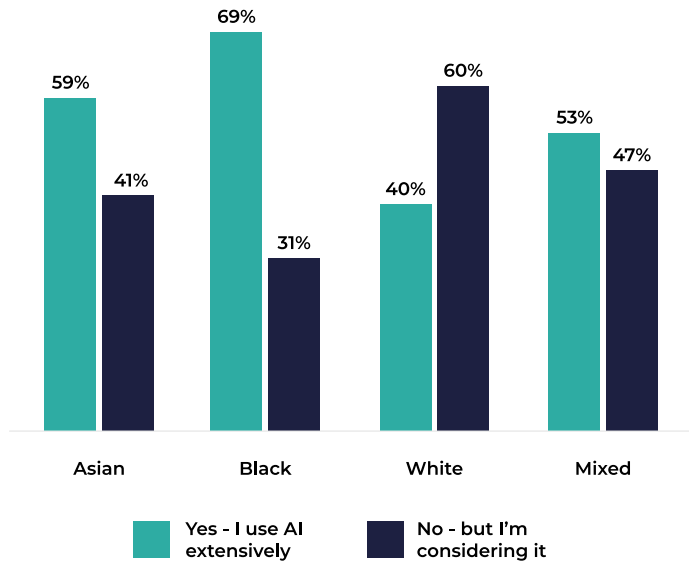
Your hiring process might be well-designed. It might be structured, consistent, and free from intentional bias. But if candidates can't see how it works, many of them won't believe that.

More than a third of candidates say their applications are not being fairly reviewed by potential employers. When asked about the hiring process more broadly, candidates are almost evenly split: 40% say it's fair, 35% say it's biased, and a quarter sit in the middle. Even among those who say they trust the process to identify the best candidates, most only trust it "somewhat". A lukewarm endorsement at best.

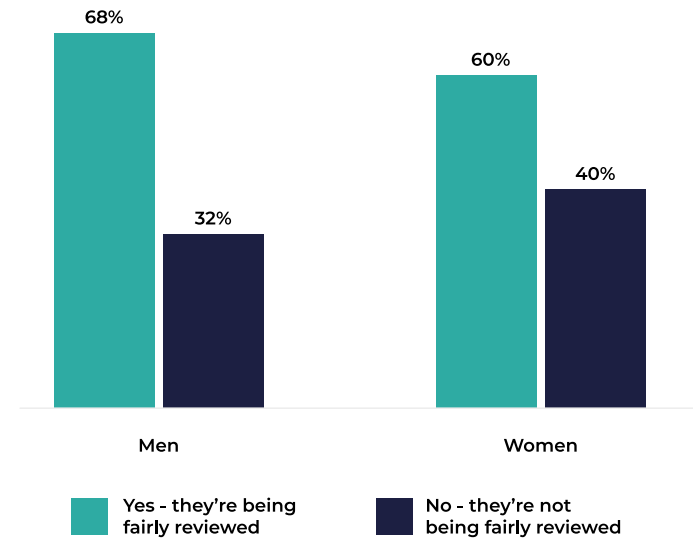




Question: Do you currently use AI to help you as part of the job application process?



Question: Do you believe that your job applications are being fairly reviewed by potential employers?



Digging into the data (statistically significant finding):

White candidates are less likely than Asian candidates and Black candidates to use AI. Women are more likely than men to say their applications aren't being fairly reviewed.

Complaints are surging, fuelled by a sense of inequity

▶ *As application volumes have risen, many TA teams report that so too have candidate complaints*

For most TA teams, this feels proportional: more applicants means more rejections, and more rejections means more people pushing back. That is partly true. But discussions with TA leaders tell a more complicated story.

While the volume of complaints has grown in line with application volumes, so has the intensity and strength of them. Candidates who don't understand why they were rejected aren't asking for clarification — they're responding to perceived unfairness. And because many are now using AI tools to research their rights, structure their arguments, and draft formal responses, those complaints arrive more thoroughly prepared; making them more time-consuming to address, more likely to escalate, and more likely to turn into a much bigger conversation internally. For TA teams that are simultaneously managing record application volumes with shrinking headcount, each complaint carries a disproportionate cost.

The pattern is consistent with what the rest of this report describes. When candidates can't see how the process works, they don't conclude it's working well and they weren't selected. They conclude it isn't working fairly. And they say so. .





New regulation rewards transparency and explainability

▶ *There's also a broader context shaping this dynamic*

In a job market where candidates are applying to more roles, facing more rejections, and demanding more transparency about how decisions are made, the pressure on recruitment processes has never been more visible — to candidates, to employers, and to regulators.

A rise in application volumes, growing adoption of automation to manage them, and greater candidate demands have prompted new guidance on what fair and responsible use of automation in recruitment should look like.

The Information Commissioner's Office published that guidance on 31 March 2026, underpinned by the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 (which came into effect in February 2026), which was designed to enable innovation and automation while managing the risks. And notably, when you map the guidance against the Triangle of Trust, parallels run across all three sides.

For TA teams, the headline shift is a broadly positive one. Where automated decision-making in recruitment was previously restricted, it is now permitted, provided the right safeguards are in place.

When you look at what those safeguards require, they map directly to all of the core elements that make up a hiring process that candidates, hiring managers, and TA teams can trust.



On efficiency

The green light to use automated decision-making at scale means TA teams can legitimately deploy the tools that make volume hiring manageable — and gives them a clearer framework for doing it responsibly.



On signal quality

The guidance places significant weight on the validity and explainability of automated tools. Processes that can demonstrate why a decision was made — grounded in evidence, not just a black box algorithm — are far better positioned under the new framework than those that cannot. The shift rewards rigour.

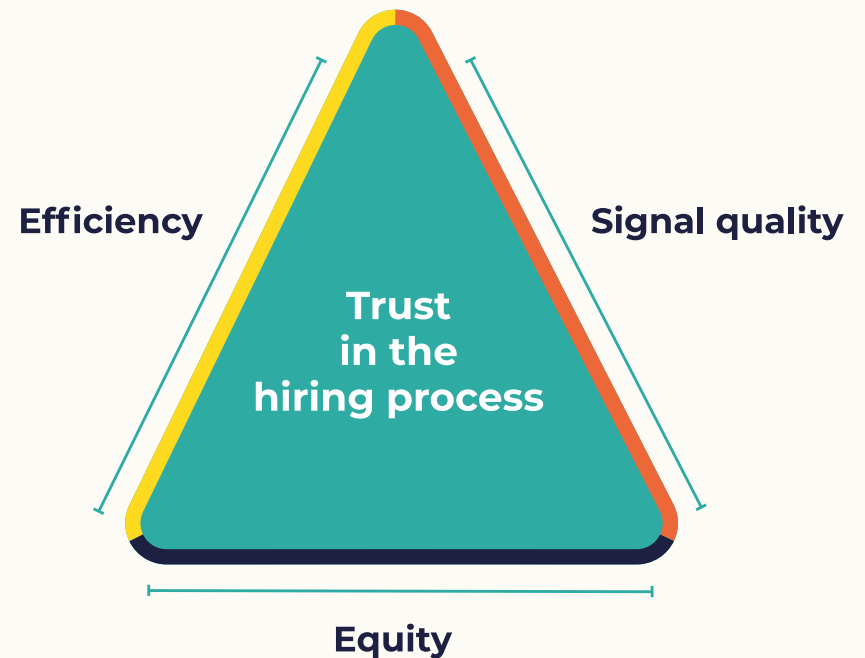


On equity

The most important safeguard in the context of trust is transparency. Under the new framework, candidates must be clearly informed — before a decision is made about them — that automated tools are being used, what those tools are assessing, and why. The information must be visible and specific. It cannot be buried in a privacy notice or left to candidates to discover after the fact.

The guidance also formalises the right for candidates to request a human review of an automated decision, and to formally contest an outcome. For organisations that have already built transparency and explainability into their process, these obligations will be significantly easier to meet. When you can show a candidate exactly how and why a decision was made, a request for review becomes a conversation, not a crisis.

These safeguards have the strongest potential to influence candidates' perception of equity — and rebuild their trust in you as an employer and in your hiring process.



For some TA teams, transparent candidate communication has long been part of their best practice. For others, this will mean a review of their candidate communication with an entirely fresh perspective: how can we help candidates understand what we're measuring, why, and how that will help us to make a fair and informed decision?

If this report tells us anything, it's that the shift the guidance is asking for should not be treated as a compliance exercise — but as a mandate to do what the data in this report already shows candidates want: to understand how they're being evaluated, through processes that are rigorous and fair, and to trust that they're being given a genuine shot.

What trust-first TA teams are already doing



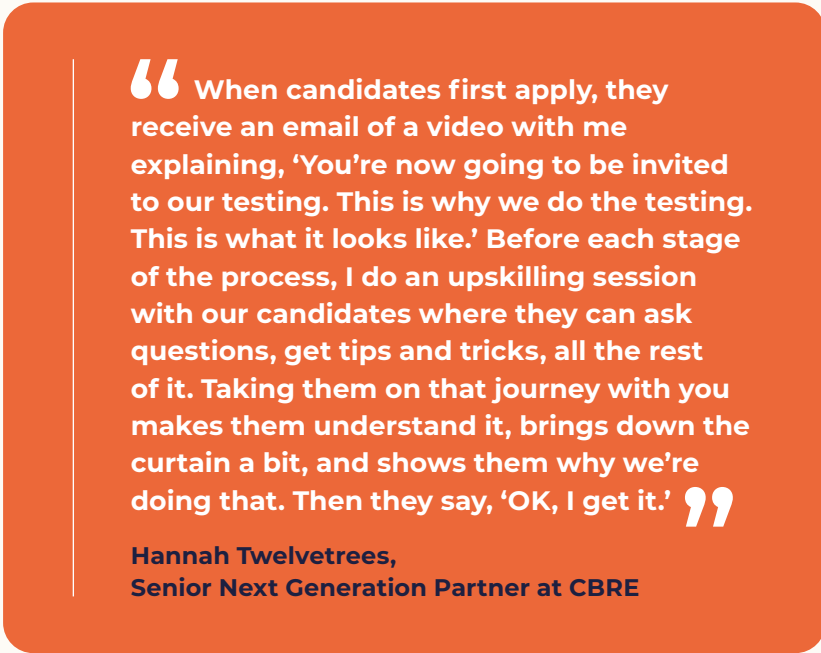
The TA leaders navigating this well weren't waiting for regulatory deadlines

They'd already recognised that transparency isn't a disclosure obligation — it's a core design principle in an effective hiring process. These TA teams bake trust and transparency into every stage of the process, not bolting it on at the end.

At the point of application, candidates receive a clear explanation of what they'll be assessed on and why — not in legal language, but in plain terms that connect the assessment to the role. Some organisations use short video messages from the TA team to bring this to life, making the process feel less automated and more considered, even when it isn't.

At the initial sift, candidates are told not just what is being evaluated, but why those specific qualities matter for the role — and why they're being evaluated in the way they are. This reframes the sift from a filter (something being done to them) into an opportunity to demonstrate who they actually are.

Throughout the process, the best-performing TA teams are building in moments where candidates receive something back: a sense of what's coming next, what the criteria are, and how the decision will be made.



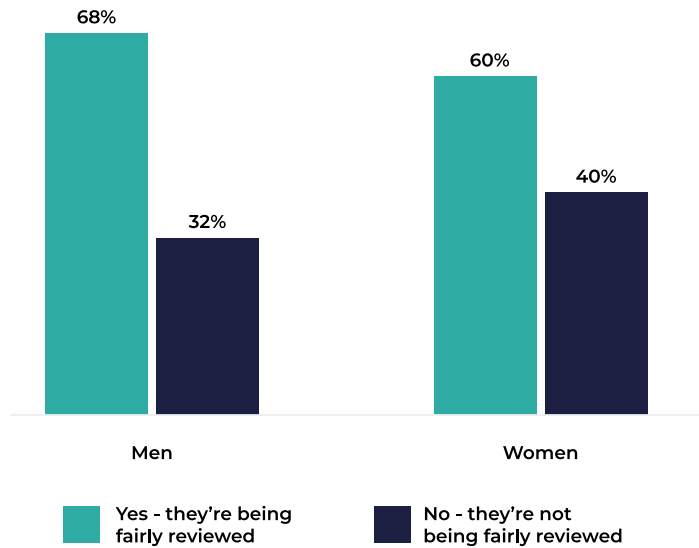
“ When candidates first apply, they receive an email of a video with me explaining, ‘You’re now going to be invited to our testing. This is why we do the testing. This is what it looks like.’ Before each stage of the process, I do an upskilling session with our candidates where they can ask questions, get tips and tricks, all the rest of it. Taking them on that journey with you makes them understand it, brings down the curtain a bit, and shows them why we’re doing that. Then they say, ‘OK, I get it.’ ”

Hannah Twelvetrees,
Senior Next Generation Partner at CBRE

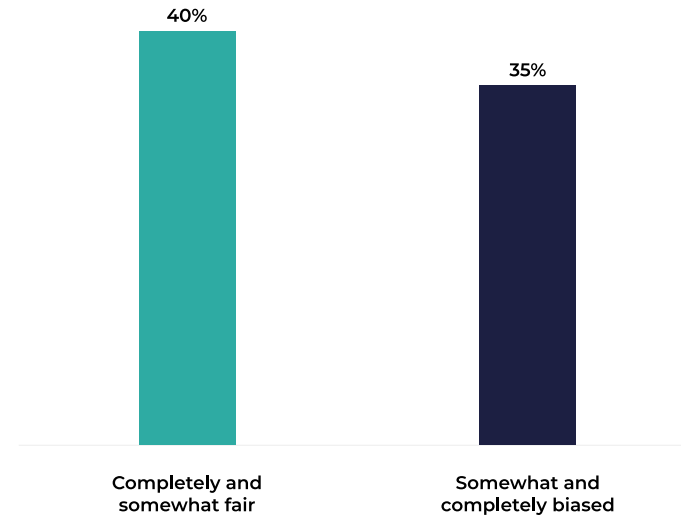
The evidence from this report suggests that candidates who understand what they're being assessed on engage more authentically — and produce better signals. Transparency, in other words, is not just good practice for regulatory purposes. It improves the quality of the information the process generates. It reduces the adversarial complaint that follows an unexplained rejection. And the trust that the Triangle depends on starts to rebuild because the process earned it.



Question: Do you believe that your job applications are being fairly reviewed by potential employers?



Question: How fair or biased do you think the hiring process is overall?



Efficiency is strained. Signal quality is failing. And the process doesn't feel fair to the people inside it. All three sides of the triangle are under pressure. And as the executive summary showed, the result is a cycle in which each group's response to that pressure makes it worse for everyone else. The question now is what TA teams can do about it.

We're close to breaking point

▶ *TA teams are working harder than ever inside a process that is increasingly failing to deliver*

Hiring managers, seeing candidates who interview well but can't perform, begin to question whether TA is surfacing the right people. Some start going around the process altogether.

Candidates who feel unseen or unfairly assessed don't stay quiet. They withdraw, warn others, and remember. For organisations where candidates are also customers, that experience doesn't stay contained within the hiring process. It travels into Google Reviews, Reddit forums, and TikTok.

Meanwhile, the business bears the brunt of the damage: mis-hires, attrition, wasted investment in tools that no one trusts, and growing legal exposure as regulation catches up with practice.

But this is a solvable problem.

Chapter four sets out what TA teams can do to rebuild trust, starting with the signals at the top of the funnel.

Chapter four

How TA can rebuild trust

Discover how to rebuild trust and protect your organisation from risk

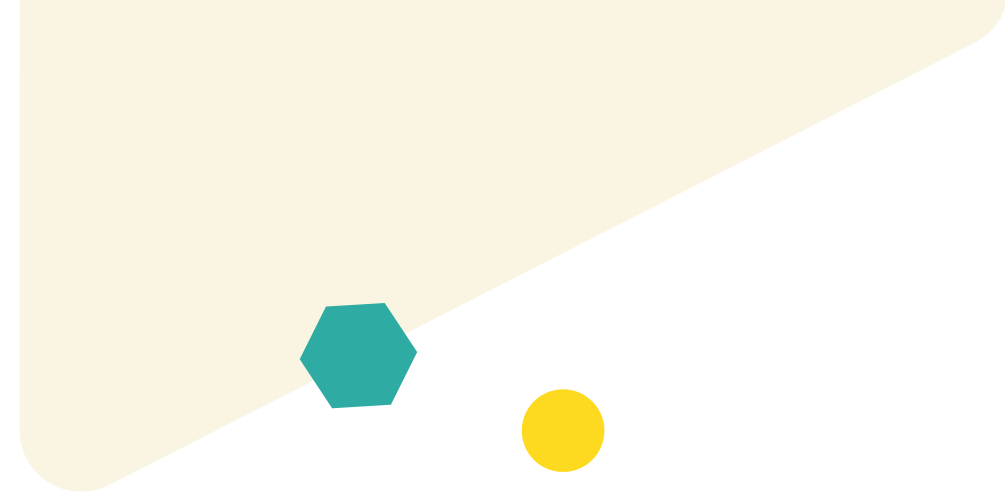
Hiring is optimised for the wrong signals

The process should identify who will excel in the role, not who excels at applying for it

The data in this report points to a clear conclusion: the signals most hiring processes rely on at the top of the funnel – CVs, cover letters, traditional assessments – surface candidates who present well on paper, not candidates who will perform well in the role. That distinction has always mattered. But in the AI era, it's become critical.

Throughout the entire funnel, text-based signals do the most gatekeeping work on the least reliable information. CVs that only 51% of hiring managers say accurately represent candidate capability. Application answers that AI can generate in seconds. Cover letters that are indistinguishable from one another. And interviews that all sound the same. These are the signals that decide which candidates progress and which are rejected. And they're the signals most vulnerable to AI.

But the fragility doesn't stop at the top. It compounds through the process. 39% of hiring managers say candidates interviewed well but couldn't perform on the job. 29% say candidates performed well on text-based assessments but couldn't deliver once hired. At every stage where the process relies on what candidates say, write, or claim – rather than what they can actually do – AI usage widens the gap between presentation and reality.



The result is a process that filters on polish, not potential. Candidates who are best at performing in the application process. While candidates who would be best at performing the job may never get the chance.

When at least 46% of candidates use AI during the application process, every signal that depends on language is now AI-assisted. The gap between how candidates present and how they actually think, learn, and respond is growing. And traditional selection methods, at the top of the funnel and through it, can no longer close it.

The shift: earlier, stronger, AI-resilient signals. The answer isn't more stages or more screening. It's measuring a better signal, sooner. TA teams need to capture authentic evidence of how candidates actually behave – their cognitive and behavioural responses – early enough in the process to make every subsequent stage more effective. And they need to stress-test signals throughout the funnel, not just at the first sift. Real behaviours can't be generated by AI. And they reveal the capabilities that actually predict success in role.

We need to measure actions, not answers.

Three steps TA professionals should take now

Based on the findings in this report, we recommend that volume hiring TA teams focus on three areas.

Each one is designed to surface authentic candidate capability and strengthen a different side of the triangle.

1

Step 1

Make candidates feel seen

44% of candidates never hear back after applying. Gen Z candidates, the fastest-growing segment of the candidate pool, are significantly more likely to withdraw, warn others, and decline offers based on how they were treated. When candidates feel processed rather than considered, they disengage.

Candidates who understand what they're being assessed on, and why, engage more authentically, producing better signals for everyone. Be transparent at every stage: what comes next, what you're looking for, and how decisions are made. Something as simple as explaining why you're measuring problem-solving ability rather than past experience can shift a candidate's mindset from performing in the application to showing who they really are.

2

Step 2

Get robust signals throughout the funnel

At the top of the funnel, where volume is highest, prioritise AI-resilient behavioural and cognitive signals: i.e. evidence of how candidates actually think and approach problems, not what they write about themselves. 29% of candidates would rather complete practical tasks than write about their capabilities. It's time we meet them where they are.

But don't stop at the first sift. Through the funnel, audit every stage for opportunities to evaluate actions, not answers. Interviews, assessment centres, and exercises should all be designed to surface real behaviour. Work with hiring managers to align on what actually predicts performance in the AI era, and stress-test critical thinking explicitly rather than assuming it will surface on its own.

3

Step 3

Design for fairness first

Women are more likely than men to say their applications aren't being fairly reviewed. Candidates from lower-income households are the most likely to say their skills aren't being effectively evaluated. The process doesn't feel equally fair to everyone, and the data shows that perceived inequity degrades both the quality of signals you collect, and your employer brand.

Build explainable, objective, evidence-backed methods into every stage. And set high benchmarks early to manage volume, but validate that they don't create adverse impact for underrepresented groups. Every decision to progress or reject a candidate should be defensible. In an evolving regulatory environment, a process you can't explain is a process you can't protect.

The triangle is strained, but it's not broken

The challenges facing TA teams hiring at volume are significant

Application volumes will continue to rise. AI adoption will accelerate. And the signals most hiring processes were built around will keep losing integrity and reliability. But with the right approach, these are not just solvable problems... they can become opportunities.

We've made this research freely available because these challenges affect the whole sector, not just our customers. Every TA team navigating the AI era deserves access to the data that shows what's really happening and where the pressure points are.

But understanding the problem is only half the battle. Teams stuck with manual processes, resistant hiring managers, and legacy tooling need more than a diagnosis. They need a practical roadmap for redesigning their process from the top of the funnel down.

That's why, later this year, we'll be publishing our Practitioner's Guide to Redesigning Volume Hiring for the AI Era: a step-by-step playbook for putting these findings into action.

But if you don't want to wait, speak to our team today about making a difference to your process right now.





In a world where AI can generate CVs, complete application forms, and outperform candidates on text-based assessments, the data most hiring teams collect at the top of the funnel is no longer reliable. Arctic Shores changes that.

Our task-based pre-hire assessment captures how candidates actually think, learn, and interact; measuring real behaviour through interactive tasks, not self-report or language AI can manipulate. With 6,000 data signals per candidate, you get a richer, more authentic picture of potential than any CV or questionnaire can offer.

The result is that talent teams can sift at scale with quality and fairness, surfacing great-fit candidates who might otherwise be overlooked. Built on decades of cognitive neuroscience, independently validated, and inclusive by design, our non-text tasks remove bias at the source and hold up to regulatory scrutiny.

Over 350 organisations and 3 million candidates assessed worldwide, including Amazon, ManpowerGroup and Molson Coors.

[Find out more here.](#)