Centre for Ageing Better

Good recruitment for older workers

The current and future recruitment landscape

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In partnership with:

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About us

Centre for Ageing Better

The UK's population is undergoing a massive age shift. In less than 20 years, one in four people will be over 65.

The fact that many of us are living longer is a great achievement. But unless radical action is taken by government, business and others in society, millions of us risk missing out on enjoying those extra years.

At the Centre for Ageing Better we want everyone to enjoy later life. We create change in policy and practice informed by evidence and work with partners across England to improve employment, housing, health and communities.

We are a charitable foundation, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, and part of the government's What Works Network.

Institute for Employment Studies

IES is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in public employment policy and HR management. It works closely with employers in all sectors, government departments, agencies, professional bodies and associations. IES is a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets, and HR planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation.

Acknowledgements

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Executive summary

Although the proportion of people aged 50 and over in the workforce has steadily increased over the past three decades, many older workers are not able to find the fulling work that they desire. When seeking a new role, age discrimination may be a significant barrier for older workers, as age is the least scrutinised and most widely accepted form of discrimination in the UK (Abrams, Swift and Houston, 2018). To better understand how to support good recruitment for older workers, the Centre for Ageing Better (Ageing Better) has commissioned this research to explore the current recruitment landscape in the UK in the context of older workers. This research explores employers' current recruitment practices and approaches to addressing diversity and inclusion, specifically age, in recruitment. The method consisted of a rapid evidence review of grey and academic literature, a secondary data analysis of existing surveys of HR and recruitment professionals and interviews with recruitment, inclusion and diversity and Human Resource (HR) professionals from a range of industries.

Several global events shaped the wider context of this research. In March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic forced the UK into lockdown, causing many industries to temporarily cease operating. The impact of Covid-19 presented several issues for this research: difficulty in securing interviews with recruitment and HR professionals in the desired industries; and a substantial shift in the current recruitment landscape as employers adapted to new virtual working practices. Additionally, the Black Lives Matter movement came to the forefront of international media attention and it is likely that, to some extent, this shaped the content of our interviews, increasing their focus on racial and ethnic diversity in the workplace.

The findings suggest that the employers in this sample generally followed a comparable recruitment process involving similar types of activities, which included creating a job description, advertising and shortlisting, multiple interviews and skills testing, with some variations in the implementation of specific recruitment methods. The sector and size of an organisation appeared to influence the process, over and above industry. Public sector and larger organisations tended to have organisational strategies, centralised processes and guidance and tools that they could draw upon, resulting in a more structured recruitment process that integrated practices aimed to improve some elements of diversity (most commonly gender, ethnicity and disability).

Age was not seen as a priority diversity issue by the employers involved in this research. This was due to most employers believing they are already diverse in relation to age and therefore did not have a 'age problem' requiring action. A small number of employers analysed workforce age data to guide and justify this decision making, however others suggested they could tell their organisation was age diverse by simply 'looking around the organisation'. On the whole, employers did not analyse the age data of their workforce or candidates to support organisational prioritisation and decision making. In contrast, gender and ethnicity were most often cited by organisations as areas of diversity that needed immediate action and were more commonly measured and analysed. Therefore, most employers did not report implementing any specific age-friendly practices to support the recruitment of older workers. In a small number of employers who had considered age, it was the lack of younger workers that they believed was problematic. Some employers suggested there would have to be a 'specific problem', such as an age discrimination claim, to be motivated to act on the age agenda. When probed on age, employers tended not to think about age and HR practices in a binary way e.g. implementing different practices for older worker compared to younger workers. Instead, they conceptualised age as a spectrum where their recruitment activities can be applied to and benefit, people of all ages e.g. graduate recruitment is not just designed for those under 25.

From analysing the recruitment practices described by the employers involved in this research, several areas of risk threatening the inclusivity of the recruitment process for older workers were identified:

– Lack of diversity strategies within an organisation, or the exclusion of age as a core element of a strategy.

– Job descriptions that are not assessed for ageist language or include criteria that excludes older workers, such as particular qualifications or experience.

– Presence of age-related stereotypes and negative perceptions, such as older workers being less 'presentable', less physically fit, or having poor IT skills in comparison to younger workers.

– Poor use of age data; assumptions about the extent to which age diversity is an issue within an organisation are often made without critical analysis workforce or recruitment data.

Other risk factors that threatening the inclusivity of the recruitment process more widely, not just in relation to older workers, were also identified:

– An emphasis on assessing the 'cultural fit' of a candidate, typically using subjective and unstructured approaches that are liable to age bias.

– Use of unstructured interviews where interviewers do not use the same questions for all candidates, or only one interviewer is present. This can result in candidates being assessed on different criteria and individual bias entering the recruitment process.

– Gathering of subjective feedback – the collection of 'informal' feedback from a wider team or the non-standardised evaluation of candidate performance increases the likelihood of biased views related to age.

– Individual decision-makers can often have the final say on a recruitment decision, without much consideration given to the potential attitudes and biases held by that person.

Overall, most employers from this sample did not report implementing any age-specific recruitment practices to support older workers. The literature however, although sparse, provided some evidence of recruitment practices that may be effective in reducing old age bias:

– Using a wide range of advertising methods that specifically target older workers, such as using imagery of older workers on advertising collateral and using a range of advertising channels more relevant to older workers, thus increasing the likelihood of an age-diverse longlist.

– Using application methods that reduce the likelihood of capturing explicit and implicit age cues. For example, explicitly stating that candidate's age or date birth are removed from CVs and only accepting application forms that ask job-relevant questions.

– Considering the attitudes and overall influence of the decision maker – ensuring that decision-makers do not hold ageist attitudes and consider multiple decision makers to reduce the undue influence of individuals. One way this could be addressed is by taking an organisational approach to create an inclusive culture that challenges negative attitudes and celebrates the contribution of workers of all ages (Fasbender and Wang, 2017).

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

UK employers currently have compelling reasons to hire and retain older workers. The age profile of the UK's population is continuing to increase, with people aged 50 and over now making up a third of the UK workforce compared to just one-fifth in the early 1990s (ONS, 2018). Changes in pension provision, with the removal of the default retirement age[1] and the raising of the state pension age, coupled with an increase in life expectancy (ONS, 2019) and less generous employer benefits, will result in people needing to remain in the workplace longer. Employers are facing a skills shortage as a large generation of those born in the 1950-60s start to retire and the skills desirable in the UK labour market shift toward automation and digitalisation (The Edge Foundation, 2020); the current labour market is lacking the basic skills that employers seek. The combination of these factors suggests that longer working lives are not only inevitable, but can offer benefits to the individual, employers and society more widely. Despite this, just one in five employers report discussing age strategically and a quarter feel they are unprepared for the demographic shift in their workforce[2].

Many older workers are leaving the labour market before they want to, often due to being unable to find suitable work as they get older. The employment rate currently falls by 8 percentage points for 50 year olds, to 56% for 60 year olds and 24% for 65 year olds (Department for Work and Pensions, 2020). Older workers bring a wealth of skills and experience to the labour market that employers are currently failing to take advantage of.

To increase participation in the labour market of people aged between 50-69, Ageing Better identified five age-friendly practices to attract and retain older workers (Centre for Ageing Better, 2018). A core component is reducing age bias in recruitment. While it is difficult to estimate prevalence of age bias in recruitment, data suggests that one third of people aged 50 and over in the UK believe they have been turned down for a job because of their age and two-fifths think their age would disadvantage them when applying for a job[3]. Discrimination against older workers remains a significant problem and legislation alone has not been sufficient to eliminate age discrimination in recruitment.

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[1] However, in some cases employers can introduce a 'compulsory retirement age' if they have a valid reason e.g. the role requires specific physical capabilities.

[2] www.ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-09/Becoming-age-friendly-employer.pdf

[3] See: www.ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-09/Age-friendly-employers-stats.pdf

In some sectors younger male applicants are 3.6 times more likely than an older males to be invited to a job interview than an older male applicant, and in office jobs, restaurant vacancies and shop roles, young female applicants were 5.3 times more likely than older job applicants to receive a job interview (Drydakis et al, 2017). Moreover, ageism may be further exacerbated when an individual is also from a minority ethnic background. Evidence shows older Black-British applicants are 9.4 times less likely to be invited to an interview, compared to an older White-British applicant and are invited to interviews at firms offering 5.8 times lower salaries compared to the salaries of firms that White-British applicants are invited to attend (Drydakis et al, 2018).

Alongside factors such as geographical mobility, job commitment and existing progression, the experience of discrimination when applying for new jobs could be contributing to the lower job-to-job mobility rates observed in older workers compared to their younger counterparts. Only 0.31% of people aged 50 and over voluntarily moved job roles in March 2020, compared to 1.31% of 18-29 year olds[4]. Job mobility is a route to better quality work and career progression (D'Arcy and Finch, 2017). Therefore the inability to progress due to factors outside of an older worker's control is likely to lead to decreased job satisfaction and poorer quality of life.

To better understand how to support good recruitment for older workers, Ageing Better has commissioned three projects exploring how to reduce age bias in recruitment. This research focusses on widely varying employer recruitment practices. There are also different recruitment and selection stages where bias can materialise. Developing support for employers requires a full understanding of their current practices, their approach to diversity and age, the barriers they face and an understanding of future trends.

1.2 Research context

At the time this research commenced, several significant events were happening across the UK and the rest of the world. In March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic forced the UK into lockdown, causing many industries to temporarily cease operating. Hospitality, retail, tourism and construction were among those where all but essential operations had to stop. The immediate impact of Covid-19 has presented several issues for this current research. These included: difficulty in securing interviews with recruitment and HR professionals in the desired industries and a substantial shift in the current recruitment landscape as employers adapted to new virtual working practices. The data and associated media narrative of the negative impact of Covid-19 on younger people may also have influenced the interviewee's perception and prioritisation of the current need for age-friendly practices or interventions to target older workers.

[4] See: www.resolutionfoundation.org/data/job-to-job-moves/

At the beginning of lockdown, the number of job vacancies posted online halved (decreasing by 51 percentage points) compared to pre-crisis levels (Papoutsaki et al, 2020); numbers only very modestly increased over the two month period and after the easing of lockdown restrictions (Papoutsaki and Williams, 2020). Over the course of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), 1.2 million employers furloughed 9.6 million jobs[5]. Those in employment fell by at least a million, with immediate job losses most severely affecting the youngest (16-24 year olds) and oldest workers (people aged 65 and over) (Institute for Employment Studies, 2020).

Recent research by the Centre for Ageing Better (Centre for Ageing Better, 2020a) has indicated that the pandemic could reverse the significant gains made in recent years in employment levels for older workers. The proportion of older workers seeking unemployment benefits during lockdown doubled and unemployment rates are likely to increase further as the furlough scheme ends. Some sectors with a significant number of older workers, which have been disproportionately affected by lockdown, may struggle to recover. This may particularly impact older women who are more likely to work in effected sectors, especially retail (Gable et al, 2020). Additionally, the lockdown has increased worries about people's finances, with almost half of people in their fifties and sixties believe their finances will worsen in the year ahead. Nearly seven in ten (68%) of those who are currently workless do not feel confident that that they will be employed in the future (Centre for Ageing Better, 2020b).

In addition to Covid-19, the murder of George Floyd in the USA[6] and subsequent global protests once again brought the Black Lives Matter movement to the forefront of international media attention. It is likely that this context shaped the content of our interviews with HR professionals to some extent, increasing their focus on racial and ethnic diversity in the workplace.

1.3 Research aims

To better understand how to support good recruitment for older workers, this research aims to understand the current and future recruitment practices and employer approaches to diversity and inclusion, in the context of bias against older workers. The specific research questions are:

What are the most common recruitment approaches?
– How do these differ by industry, occupation and seniority?

– What are the future trends in recruitment?

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[5] See; www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmrc-coronavirus-covid-19-statistics
[6] See; www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cv7wlylxzg1t/george-floyd-death

How do recruiters and employer think about and act on bias, particularly age bias?
– To what extent do effective age-inclusive approaches exist?

How do HR professionals approach recruitment and the diversification of recruitment?
– Who do organisations/recruiters look to for guidance?

– Why do they choose certain approaches?

1.4 Method

The method consisted of a rapid evidence review and interviews to answer the above research questions. The rapid evidence review included:
– Secondary data analysis of existing surveys of HR and recruitment professionals. In total, 16 surveys were initially reviewed, resulting in the inclusion of nine in the final report. Data sources were evaluated based on the sample size and characteristics (i.e. range in sectors and organisation size), research methodology, inclusion of UK specific data and relevance of the findings in relation to the research questions.

– A review of 31 pieces of grey and academic literature, resulting in the inclusion of 17 articles in the final review. Searches were conducted across three meta-databases (PsychInfo, Business Source Premier, Scopus and Google Scholar) using a search strategy. To supplement the academic literature, evidence from think tanks, HR Bodies and recruitment bodies was also reviewed.

The qualitative interviews provided both depth and breadth of understanding. The interviews consisted of:
– Five interviews with recruitment and diversity specialists.

– Twenty interviews with HR or recruitment professionals. The sampling strategy aimed to target four types of sectors: sectors with a higher proportion of older workers, sectors with a lower proportion of older workers, sectors where job sustainability declines with age and sectors with potential for greater Brexit impact. The final sample included interviewees from a diverse range of employers:

  - The sample was predominantly female and aged between 25-57 years old[7].

  - The majority of interviewees worked in the private sector in industries including: manufacturing, financial services, hospitality, technology, and healthcare.

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[7] This gender spit is representative of the HR profession. As of 2017, CIPD reported that 79% of its membership were women. See: www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/long-reads/articles/hr-gender-challenge

- Organisations ranged in size including micro (less than 10 employees) and small organisations (10-49 employees), but more than half the interviews were conducted with interviewees from large organisations (250+ employees).

– Four cognitive interviews with employers using a 'think aloud' approach to explore their recruitment process in more detail. This method is used to understand an individual's thought processes about a subject without directly asking about it. Using this technique allows the interviewee to control the narrative, enabling enables the researchers to gain an organic insight into how participants think about diversity and inclusion.

- Interviewees were presented with each of the elements of the recruitment process (employer branding, job description, candidate attraction, sourcing, applications, interview, assessment tools, skills tests, final selection, contract package) alongside three prompts to guide their narrative: 'Describe the process', 'How is inclusivity facilitated?' and 'How could this be improved?'.

- The interviewer did not speak or prompt during the exercise, rather interviewees were asked to speak continuously and voice all the thoughts they had and refer to the written prompts to guide them.

- This method elicits information about an individual's views without direct questioning and enables researchers to see if the interviewee naturally considers age bias.

- Employer interviewees included a small manufacturing business, a large financial services firm, a large technology-travel employer and a small healthcare organisation.

While the findings demonstrate the range of approaches across several industries, they were not intended to be representative or generalisable to all employers, or to be indicative of the scale of employer activity on this agenda.

2 Common recruitment approaches

This chapter details the common recruitment practices in the UK and the potential impact on older workers, based on evidence from the secondary survey data and the primary employer interviews. The analysis is grouped into three main phases: pre-interview, interview and post-interview. Similarities and differences in recruitment approaches by industry, occupation or seniority are explored throughout the chapter.

2.1 Pre-interview stage

2.1.1 Annual planning and identifying a need

Interviewees from several organisations described a process of annual planning to assess the recruitment need and budget for the upcoming year, which was most commonly reported by those working in public sector organisations. In the absence of annual planning, the recruitment process typically begins when a hiring manager identifies a need within their team. If it is a new role, it often goes through an approval process, outlining the business case to the senior team or HR. A business case may include information such as: the justification to recruit, whether it is financially feasible and any alternative options (e.g. dividing responsibilities across existing roles in the organisation). In larger organisations approval will often require a formal document to be completed. For role replacements or very junior roles, interviewees in non-public sector organisations suggested that the business case step can sometimes be omitted.

A process of annual planning enables organisations to assess their future recruitment needs and align the recruitment approach to a wider organisational and/or diversity strategy. A lack of forward planning can present several risks to diversity:

– Employers are likely to resort to similar methods they have used previously, resulting in the stagnation of the recruitment process. If these methods are not already age friendly, the hiring of older workers is likely to suffer.

– Use of quick and reactive methods – an unplanned and urgent recruitment need may lead to 'shortcuts' being taken in the recruitment process. A less structured approach can be detrimental to diversity and inclusion and will likely have a detrimental impact of the older candidates (Wolgast, Bäckström and Björklund, 2017).

2.1.2 Creating a job description and advert

A job description (JD) outlines the main responsibilities and capabilities required for a role and is typically created by the hiring manager in collaboration with HR (or a recruitment/business partner in some larger organisations). A job description is typically created after undertaking a 'job analysis' to determine the responsibilities and tasks the role will involve and the specifications and experience of the desired candidate, as well as factors such as the number of vacancies, seniority of position and length of contract. The job analysis process can vary, but interviewees typically had a formal meeting involving the hiring manager and HR to understand the core components of the role. Along with a description of the role, core responsibilities and the desired person specification, a JD will sometimes include information about the company's values and culture. The JD is the foundation of all future recruitment activities in terms of advertising, shortlisting, interviewing and selection.

When detailing the person specification, content will typically include requirements around knowledge, skills, behaviours, qualifications and experience. However, some employers are trying to move away from defining the 'experience' candidates require, instead focusing on capabilities that will allow people to succeed in the role. Considering capability over experience is an approach that some employers are taking to increase the potential pool of candidates and to attract talent with a range of backgrounds, rather than specifying a static set of requirements, which some groups may be less likely to fulfil. In the public sector, the use of the 'Success Profile Framework' to design (and assess against) a role facilitates a capability first approach. This means for each role advertised, employers consider what candidates need to demonstrate to be successful.

A capability, or potential, first approach could be an effective way for employers to increase diversity, particularly in relation to older workers. Removing barriers related to qualifications or degrees that older workers are less likely hold or relaxing the need for specific work experience (e.g. in particular industries that employ lower proportions of older workers). However, one public sector interviewee thought that the removal of specifying the minimum number of years' experience required could adversely impact older workers, where typically they could gain an advantage, due to the experience gained from 'previous careers':

> " We have a large older workforce and often get people in their second careers. Might have been working in [related practical fields], and then transition to [the employer], setting standards and assessing rather than being hands on." Large employer, Public sector

The use and impact of the language and content of job descriptions was considered by several employers, particularly in relation to gender. Several interviewees discussed the negative impact on the attraction of women to job description and adverts that use 'masculine' themed content, such as

'determined', 'competitive' or 'ambitious'. In some cases, organisations used online tools (such as Textio) to 'decode' gendered language in job adverts. However, the same consideration was not given to use of 'ageist' language. Although potentially 'age unfriendly' language can appear in a person specification (e.g. 'ambitious' or 'digital native') and in how a company chooses to represent itself, (e.g. 'frequent nights out' or 'we work hard, play hard') interviewees did not identify this as an issue. This has a considerable impact on the inclusiveness of job descriptions and adverts for older workers and it likely to lead to older workers self-selecting out of the recruitment process, or being evaluated against unfair criteria.

> **"A lot of this [improving diversity] is in the wording – very strict on wording – careful about him/her pronouns. Making sure each piece is completely neutral, not biased, Focus is to encourage people with the right talent. Not based on their characteristics."** Large employer, Public sector

In some industries, such as manufacturing and construction, physical fitness is a core requirement for the job and so is stated on the job description as an essential requirement. For example, candidates in one manufacturing organisation are required to have 40kg upper arm strength. At interview stage, candidates can be asked to undertake a physical assessment or a trial task that will demonstrate physical capability.

Interviewees in smaller organisations described that roles are sometimes less well defined and often contain a wider range of responsibilities that may be more typically managed by more than one member of staff in a larger organisation. Less well-defined job roles are potentially detrimental for older workers as an excessive need for multitasking in a role may not align with negative stereotypes individuals hold about older workers' inability to work quickly or under pressure.

2.1.3 Candidate attraction and employer brand

Employer branding is used to attract candidates to an organisation by focusing on their reputation and sharing their values. Employer interviewees considered their employer brand at the beginning of the recruitment process because they believe it works to initially draw talent to your organisation. Analysis of the secondary data suggested that employers found social or professional networks and their own career website the most effective channels for growing their employer brand (Jobvite, 2015). The secondary data also showed that in the past two years, employers reported taking several steps to improve their brand, including:

– Developing their corporate website.

– Improving the candidate experience (but without much detail as to what this means in practice).

– Attended careers fairs or networking events.

– Made pay and benefits more competitive.

– Made changes to their value proposition to improve their reputation (but without much detail as to what this means in practice).

– Monitored feedback received through other websites.

– Taken steps to measure the impact of their employer brand.

– Increased the activities that benefit the wider community and society (CIPD and Hays, 2017).

The primary motive for employers to focus on their brand is to attract candidates to their organisation. However, the secondary data showed HR professionals perceived some elements of branding as more important than others. Articulating organisational values, career development opportunities, pay and benefits, and working practices (e.g. flexible working) were amongst the elements rated most important by HR professionals in one survey (CIPD and Hays, 2017). Whereas respondents reported that employee communications and involvement, corporate social responsibility agenda, use of technology and a diversity and inclusion agenda were the least important brand elements for attracting candidates.

The degree of importance did vary slightly by sector. Values were perceived as more important in not-for-profit organisations, compared to the public and private sector, while career development was less important in not-for-profit compared to the public and private sectors. Corporate social responsibility was slightly more important within the not-for-profit sector, and a diversity and inclusion agenda slightly more important in public sector organisations (CIPD and Hays, 2017).

Interviewees from technology and public sector employers were more likely to discuss employer branding. Creating a strong and attractive brand was considered to make the organisation a more desirable place to work and therefore increase their talent pool. However, the type of brand an organisation chooses to portray can have an impact on the types of people who will choose to apply for an organisation. Some interviewees had considered this impact of brand on hiring outcomes. For example, a public sector organisation discussed using different imagery aimed at increasing the hiring of older workers due to the 'life experience' they can bring to the organisation:

> " In our imagery, we try to use more mature people. For our degree-holder programme, we are getting more people in their 40s. There is a slight shift and the rebranding include [specific job role] to get more mature applicants [for that role specifically]... [We] have metrics to monitor but have to ask for them, could commission age-related data but it's not a focus."
> Large employer, Public sector

Some organisations, either knowingly or unknowingly, may be building a brand that is unattractive or exclusionary to older workers. Organisational values, job descriptions, employee benefits, the working environment, social activities and flexible working arrangements all contribute to the image of an employer. If these factors are explicitly, or implicitly, aimed towards a certain demographic (such as younger workers), employers are likely to have more difficulty attracting certain demographic groups, like older workers.

> " When I was in [a recruitment] agency you were told that you didn't want people who were old working in young tech companies. Clients we worked with wouldn't say it directly but would say things like "graduated in the last 6 years". Large employer, technology

One employer discussed the need for branding to reflect the businesses views, values, approach and culture, and to test where the branding is landing. For example, to evaluate if the channels the organisation is using are diverse and if they are reaching a broad range of people.

> " It is difficult to make it [branding] inclusive as it has to reflect what the business is doing so if the business is really inclusive then their brand will be too." Large employer, Financial services

Offering flexible working was also identified by some interviewees as a way of attracting candidates and increasing the diversity of applicants. This finding was supported by the secondary data analysis, which suggests that work-life balance and flexible working arrangements are highly valued by candidates:

> " Advertising all jobs as available flexibly has made a big difference in bringing in a more diverse applicant pool. It was work to get managers on board but now they are seeing how working flexibly can work. This is an easy win-win and a benefit to lots of disadvantaged groups, it covers many diversity strands." Large employer, Education

Interviewees reported that brand can be built and maintained via the communications it publishes about itself, but also external employee led platforms such as Glassdoor, which can be helpful to increase positive brand awareness. While tracking the impact these efforts have on building positive brand image is difficult, employers do track the source that job applications that originate, including from platforms like Glassdoor.

"We have great reviews on Glassdoor and always reply to every single person who applies. It's really important to us that the candidate journey is a great experience, regardless of the outcome." Large employer, Health

In addition to a positive employer brand, secondary data analysis showed that employers used a range of other methods to attract candidates to apply to their organisation. Posting content on social media and their organisation's website are the attraction methods used most often on a daily, weekly and monthly basis (Eploy, 2019). LinkedIn and Facebook are typically the sites used by employers for attracting candidates (XpertHR, 2019). Interviewees discussed typically posting adverts on the own website and job boards, as well as social media platforms, with LinkedIn being commonly mentioned. Many interviewees would track the effectiveness of each platform and use the data to influence advertising decisions. Attending events, jobs fairs, or open days is the most common method used 'occasionally' and video was the method that most employers reported they were planning to use in the future (Eploy, 2019).

However, it is important to emphasise that in order for the benefits of branding and attraction to translate to positive employment outcomes, the sold experience needs to match the reality of the job role. Realistic Job Previews (RJP) are presentations of both positive and negative aspects of a position and organisation to provide a candidate a realistic view of the job role. They have been shown to have a positive effect on intention to proceed with an application, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, turnover and performance, which emphasises the need for truthful branding (Earnest, 2011; Ward, 2016). Interviewees reported using variations of RJPs to demonstrate the elements of a job role and to assess potential capability in a role. For example, the use of trial shifts in the hospitality industry. Applicants also have access to informal RJPs via websites, such as Indeed and Glassdoor, that hold testimonials from previous employees and applicants about their experiences. Using techniques such as RJP could benefit older workers by providing them an opportunity to demonstrate their capability to fulfil a role; as long as the candidate is evaluated fairly against a predefined set of job-relevant criteria. However, it also provides more opportunity for employers to make biased judgements based on personal characteristics.

2.1.4 Candidate sourcing and advertising
Looking internally
Interviewees from the public sector were more likely to report utilising internal recruitment methods. Interviewees from other industries described how they make an assumption that they do not have the required skill set internally and therefore move straight to external advertisement. This can be a barrier for employees who are trying to change roles internally, but particularly for older workers, who also suffer from negative stereotypes about not possessing certain skillsets. In some industries, such as technology, interviewees thought that 'refer a friend' schemes were 'very successful' for candidate sourcing. Word of mouth and personal recommendation were found to be the most popular recruitment methods used in a sample of over 80,000 employers, with 71% using this approach in 2019 (Department for Education, 2020). However, some interviewees from public sector organisations reported not using such as approach due to budgetary restrictions.

However, looking internally for recruitment needs can also present a barrier to diversity. While internal recruitment is a way of developing an internal talent pipeline, it can hinder diversity and inclusion if the organisation's existing demographics are not diverse. Therefore, there is sometimes a need to recruit externally to achieve diversity targets. Similarly, 'refer a friend' schemes can also be detrimental to diversity if not managed effectively, as employees are likely to surround themselves with (Montoya, Horton and Kirchner, 2008) and therefore recommend, people who are similar to themselves. If an organisation already has a low proportion of older workers, these schemes are unlikely to support the hiring of older people.

In-house versus outsourced recruitment
According to the secondary data analysis, most employers reported using either in-house recruitment, or a combination of in-house and outsourced methods (CIPD and Hays, 2017). Who was responsible for recruitment also varied by size of the organisation. In small businesses (up to 250 employees), sourcing candidates for vacancies usually fell to a HR generalist or business partner, dedicated recruiter, or talent acquisition specialist (Eploy, 2019). Hiring managers were most commonly responsible in organisations with 251-1000 employees and recruitment agencies were most relied upon by organisations with between 1001-5000 employees. However, the majority of organisations with over 1001 employees reported having a dedicated recruiter or talent acquisition specialist who was responsible for sourcing.

Interviewees tended to report that outsourced recruitment is particularly expensive and reduces the control the employer has over the process. If an organisation is trying to improve diversity and has specific interventions in place, using an external recruiter could threaten its success. Smaller organisations tended to report outsourcing more often because they do not have resource or expertise in-house. Niche and senior level roles were more likely to be sourced using external recruiters:

" For senior recruitment, we use executive search firms who may use different methods [to their internal recruitment methods]. In our protocol, they have to return 30% female candidates or provide an explanation as to why this wasn't possible. This needs more work for greater diversity and would like to get the gender balance to 50%. Recruitment keeps an eye on this target."
Large employer, Education

Targeting older applicants
Research has examined factors that influence an organisation's decision to target older workers. Organisations that value and understand the importance of diversity and know the average age of applicants were positively associated with the recruitment of older workers. Targeting older applicants was also associated with the number of recruitment sources used – employers who particularly target older workers used more diverse recruitment pools to select candidates. The research highlighted that efforts aimed at targeting recruitment to specific groups are likely to be more effective when inclusiveness towards all groups is displayed (Goldberg et al, 2013).

Advertising
The secondary data showed that the most common channels used for recruitment are online job adverts using a company career website (90%), or general job boards (85%), social media (85%; primarily LinkedIn (93%), Facebook (62%) and Twitter (44%) and internal applications (78%); (XpertHR, 2019[8]). There are some differences between the channels used by internal and external recruiters. In-house recruiters relied mainly on their website, professional social media and employee referrals (Eploy, 2019). Whereas agencies also reported using existing talent pools, CV databases and non-professional social media. Attending events, job fairs and open days were also common, but print media and pay-per-click advertising were rarely used (Eploy, 2019).

Evidence from interviews suggests that Indeed and LinkedIn are commonly used job boards. However, in some technology employers, LinkedIn is considered 'outdated' – with interviewees opting to use the platforms that are more relevant to their potential candidates, such as using GitHub to find technology specialists. Interviewees from technology companies felt that LinkedIn did not produce the calibre of candidates for specialist technology roles and believed this was because highly skilled technologists no longer used LinkedIn due to being 'hounded' by recruiters. Many interviewees discussed using advertising methods specific to their industry for more targeted recruitment; for example, hospitality employers posting adverts on catering websites. They believed that using a targeted

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[8] xPertHR 2019/20 survey had responses from 125 organisations. The majority of respondents were from private-sector services (75%), then manufacturing and production (18%), and 6% from public sector. Organisation size varied, most commonly respondents were from organisations with 1-249 employees (48%), while 29% came from organisations with 250-999 employers and 23% from organisations with more than 1000 employees.

approach to advertisement would lead to more relevant and skilled applications; this appeared to work to varying degrees. For example, an interviewee posting job adverts on a specific healthcare website did not find it to be successful.

The secondary data analysis shows that not-for-profit and public sector organisations felt that recruitment through an employer's own website was most effective (CIPD and Hays, 2017). Whereas private sector employers felt that professional social media and job boards were the most effective channels and recruitment consultants were most frequently endorsed by manufacturing and production organisations. Speculative applications, referrals or those based on word of mouth were perceived as more effective channels to source candidates by individuals from private, not-for-profit and the manufacturing and production sectors, compared to those in public sectors. It was not clear in the secondary data if the respondents' perceptions of effectiveness were based on objective measures, or personal opinions on what they think works best.

The secondary data analysis also showed that the candidate sourcing methods varied according to the seniority of the role. Recruitment agencies are commonly used to fill senior manager/director, middle/junior manager and professional/specialist roles (CIPD and Hays, 2017). Commercial job boards and the organisation's own website were regularly used to fill administrative/secretarial, technical, services and manual/craft roles. Interviewees reaffirmed that recruitment agencies are used occasionally, but this often depends on the role type. Senior and more specialist roles will often go to agencies, as they tend to be more difficult to fill. While in some of the technology companies, difficult roles are assigned to an in-house 'sourcer', whose role is to proactively find candidates for the job. 'Sourcers' can use the technology platforms and networks that desired candidates use (e.g. GitHub). A large technology employer was commonly recruiting for niche or specialised roles, so recruiters had to 'think outside of the box' and use targeted headhunting methods to identify candidates with the right skills. From a business point of view, they often felt they had to prioritise skills over other diversity and inclusion aims because the skills needed are in such high demand that the recruitment process is often very time pressured – they perceived that generating a diverse shortlist is more time intensive. The methods used - online forums and websites such as Reddit and GitHub - could also be potentially detrimental to diversity of candidates as these channels are not used by everyone.

2.1.5 Applications and shortlisting
The secondary data and interviews suggest that employers typically ask for candidates to submit a CV and sometimes a cover letter, either via email or an online application portal (XpertHR, 2019). Some organisations use external Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) or have their own careers portal built into their website. Some interviewees from public sector organisations reported using the Civil Service job website for applications.

Some interviewees described a process where HR or hiring managers do an initial 'sift' of CVs, assessing for job skills, experience and/or capability and organisational 'fit', to remove any unsuitable applications. To make the sifting process fair, some public sector organisations reported using a diverse panel to assess the quality of the applications:

"Line Managers do the sift in a recruitment panel, typically of 3 people, which must have gender diversity. This year, we are also asking for people with BAME background or disability on panels. They must have attended training (there is an eLearning module around bias). The panel sift individually and then combine to get the shortlist." Large Employer, Public Sector

Occasionally, HR will also conduct an initial 'screening' telephone interview. 'Fit' is considered very important by interviewees from all industries and is typically evaluated by assessing if an applicant aligns with the 'values and culture' of an organisation.

Employers evaluate fit in a variety of ways; some organisations will have a framework that outlines the expected behaviours and competencies associated with a specific organisational value, which they evaluate a candidate against. Other organisations will take a less structured approach and assess fit from the general 'feel' or content of an application and evaluate it against their own interpretation of what type of person belongs' in the organisation.

"It wouldn't be good to have someone who is clearly on a different page as the person would probably just leave within 6-12 months." Large employer, technology

A less structured approach is more likely to be influenced by personal biases and more likely to negatively impact certain groups of candidates that are not similar to the current make-up of the organisation. This is detrimental for older workers as it introduces more opportunities for biased views and decision, particularly if an organisation has a younger age profile.

After an initial shift, CVs are passed to the hiring manager for further shortlisting. In some cases, the ATS anonymises applications on submission, while in other organisations HR will remove demographic details before hiring managers shortlist the applications. In one organisation, 'blind' CVs are designed to reduce the bias associated with knowing any personal characteristics of the candidate. The extent to which 'blinding' is implemented varies across organisation and by roles. For example, the success profile approach used in the civil service aims to ask questions to assess potential in the role, rather than previous work experience

history, or personal attributes. Other employers may simply ask for a traditional CV format, but with the personal data removed. In one organisation, the extent to which applications are blinded varied by role. Applications for graduate roles were blind because the applications were taken through a different channel that used software to remove the personal information; however more senior roles asked for CV applications and it was considered too time consuming to blind them in-house. The interviewee also felt that hiring managers want to know the full background of the candidate for these roles.

Simply removing demographic details still leaves many other cues on a CV, although the interviewees did not identify this as an issue. For example, assumptions can be made about the age of a person based on their name, work experience history, career breaks, types of qualifications and hobbies. For organisations who wish to develop a more age balanced workforce, simply removing age and date of birth from CVs will not go far enough to tackle to potential bias.

Concealing age-related information
Evidence from the literature provides insight into the effectiveness of removing age-specific information from CVs to improve hiring outcomes for older workers. Derous and Decoster (2017) found that applicant CVs that included more implicit cues referring to old age (such as their name or hobbies) were seen as less suitable for the role, even when more explicit age cues (e.g. date of birth) were absent. Zabinoni et al (2019) examined how explicit and implicit age stereotypes on CVs affected hiring outcomes. The results found more negative explicit age stereotypes towards older than younger workers. Younger applicants were seen more positively on measures related to selection and recruitment. The results indicate that, regardless of removing explicit age information, traditional CV applications contain implicit age cues that continue to disadvantage older workers. However, the removal of all age-related information could be difficult as common recruitment questions, such as detailing employment history, allow age to be inferred. To mitigate these effects, application processes that reduce implicit cues, such as standardised application forms should be considered.

2.2 The Interview stage

The secondary data suggests that (prior to Covid-19) most employers used a face-to-face interview as part of the assessment process, however telephone interviews are also common, particularly within the private sector (CIPD and Hays, 2017). Video interviews are less common (taken from data gathered prior to Covid-19) but tended to be used more often within the private sector and manufacturing and production, compared to other sectors. Interviews were usually based on a defined set of competencies (78%) or followed the contents

of the candidate's CV or application form (74%; CIPD and Hays, 2017[9]).
The benefits of structured interviews for improving diversity are discussed
further in chapter 3.2.2.

Data from the interviewees suggested a two to three stage interview process is
most common across employers in this sample. The use of technology in the
recruitment process has increased significantly during Covid-19. In particular,
video calls have replaced face to face interviews in many organisations.
Interviewees highlighted the benefits of using video as an employer, such as
reduced costs and increase time efficiency, but also the potential benefits for
older candidates. Long-term conditions are more prevalent in older people,
58% of over 60s compared to 14% of under 40s (Department of Health, 2012),
which could present physical and psychological barriers to attending physical
job interviews. As the generation gap in internet use closing, 83% of those aged
65 to 74 having reported recently using the internet in a 2019 survey (Office for
National Statistics, 2019), it seems that increased use of web-based recruitment
methods could be less of a barrier for some older workers. However, not all jobs
or industries may lend themselves to online interviewing, particularly those that
may require skills testing, which could disadvantage some older workers in these
jobs or industries:

> **"We will absolutely keep online interviewing – it's more efficient and
> better. We used to have assessment centres [across the country] but too
> expensive to travel to for some. This is no cost and greener and it makes
> a big difference to the team not to have to deal with room booking issues."**
> Large employer, Public sector

> **"If they did do all stage one interviews online it does help more
> people partake, for example if someone has caring responsibilities,
> they could do the interview out of hours to be more accommodating."**
> Large employer, Financial Services

2.2.1 First interview
Typically, the first interview is conducted by the hiring manager and a member
of the HR team. In public sector organisations interviewees reported that a panel
interview usually consists of two or three members, some of whom might be
selected to ensure the panel is representative:

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[9] The 2017 CIPD and Hays survey was conducted with 1068 UK based HR professionals from organisations
that ranged in size, and sector. Just under half of the sample was from the private sectors (48%), while 22%
were public sector organisations, 17% were in manufacturing and production, and 13% in not-for-profit.

> **"We don't insist on a BAME representative like [other employers] do now – we used to in the past but have moved away from this. We may change again given recent events but have struggled with the idea that a token person the panel makes it balanced. Much more powerful to teach everyone to challenge themselves."** Large employer, public sector

The structure of the interview itself appears to vary depending on the size and/or sector of the organisation. For example, interviewees from public sector organisations reported using competency-based interviews where all candidates are asked the same questions, which are scored by each interviewer independently. Interviewees who adopted a structured questioning approach did so to increase the fairness of the interview process by ensuring that all candidates were answering, and being assessed on, the same interview criteria. The importance of using structured interviews, versus unstructured, for the questions to reliably measure the intended job-related construct has long been established; structured interviews are significantly more likely to measure the intended construct across multiple interviews (Conway, Jako and Goodman,1995). Some interviewees from other industries reported using competency-based interviews, however many described the process as a 'loose set of questions', which could be adapted by the hiring manager. This could include adding questions about skills required the role itself, or questions derived from information on the candidate's application. Structured panel interviews, using predefined questions and scoring mechanisms will support the hiring of older workers as it reduced the influence of (potentially biased) individuals within the interview process.

The first interview is also used to assess cultural fit, as well as suitability for the job role. For example, an interviewee reported that their organisation looks for someone who is 'dynamic and ambitious' or 'sociable and outgoing'. Cultural fit is considered important by many employers because they 'can train-in the skills but they need to share values and outlook'. As mentioned previously, the level of objectivity involved in assessing fit varied across organisations. In some cases, competency type frameworks provided structure and behavioural indicators to evaluate a candidate against. While others took a more subjective approach, assessing the candidate's responses, actions and behaviours against a non-articulated set of criteria. When discussing cultural fit, on the whole interviewees did not volunteer any perceived issues or opportunities for potential bias when evaluating for 'fit', even if the employer used a very unstructured approach. This is a barrier for older workers as ageist views can masquerade as 'poor cultural fit'.

> **" [They] will assess candidates scores but also the team fit and cultural fit of the candidate through their conversations... Have to find a balance between a good fit and someone who scores highly."** Large employer, Manufacturing

Some employers reported training hiring manager in recruitment skills. This could include 'unconscious bias' training, coaching skills, interviewing techniques and organisational specific processes.

2.2.2 In-tray exercises, skills tests and psychometrics

Often, interviewees reported using in-tray exercises, skills tests and psychometrics as an additional layer of assessment. In-tray exercises are work-based scenarios presented to candidates during interview and are designed to assess their job-related skills. Psychometric test is a term that encompass a range of different tests that can identify candidate skills, knowledge and personality factors. For example, roles with managerial or leadership responsibilities can often include psychometric testing because of the additional competencies required for roles with management or leadership responsibilities. Lower skilled roles, such as administration, are sometimes treated differently and do not require psychometric testing, but they can include an 'in-tray exercise' to assess the capability of the candidate in a 'job specific' scenario. Some interviewees from the public sector reported 'always' using 'some type of assessment', which can vary by role.

While interviewees did not explicitly mention if the psychometric tests were equality tested, many public sector employers did highlight the involvement of a qualified psychologist overseeing this process to ensure they are designed, distributed and interpreted appropriately. It is critical that qualified professionals are involved in the use of psychometric tests, as evidence shows that some tests can have an adverse impact on particular groups. For example, some tests such as general intelligence, spatial ability, memory and mental processing can adversely impact older people (Hough, Oswald and Ployhard, 2001). Therefore, older workers will be significantly negatively impacted if these tests are solely relied on during the recruitment process, or not used appropriately. Firstly, recruiters and HR professionals should evaluate the benefits and risks of using psychometric tests before implementing them in the recruitment process. If recruiters do wish to use psychometric tests within their process, they need to ensure they are well-validated and are carried out by a trained individual. Recruiters need to use critical judgment to assess the quality and reliability of the tests they choose and avoid just using the ones they are provided by default. For example, one interviewee described using a set of cognitive reasoning and personality tests within their recruitment because they came as a 'bundle deal'. The interpretation and subsequent decisions associated with such tests should be led by a trained professional to reduce any potential bias.

From the secondary data analysis, methods of assessment in addition to an interview frequently included:

– tests for specific skills (53%)

– general ability tests (41%)

– an assessment centre (39%)

– literacy and numeracy tests (38%)

– personality or aptitude questionnaires (35%; CIPD and Hays, 201720)

The analysis showed the primary focus when assessing candidates was their previous experience, skills and references (CV Library, 2019; Jobvite, 2015). However, age-stereotyped factors of both young and old individuals were also amongst the most important: cultural fit potential, conversational skills, enthusiasm, appearance and punctuality (Jobvite, 2015), although it was not clear in the data how recruiters tested these attributes.

For the most part, exercises and tests came in the final stage of the recruitment process. However, for some roles (such as graduate roles and in technology) interviewees suggested that employers tested their skills prior to interview to use a shortlisting technique. Interviewees from some public sector organisations reported using psychometrics prior to interviewing to 'guide' the design of the interview questions.

2.2.3 Second stage interview
Some interviewees from non-public sector organisations, described a second stage 'meet the team' interview, often used to assess 'fit' – this appears to be unstructured but is considered an important element of the process. At this stage, more senior roles seem to require input from senior members of staff, which appears to vary and lack structure.

2.2.4 Third stage interview
Some interviewees from non-public sector organisations, reported that particularly for senior and specialist roles the process may include a third stage interview. At this point, they may meet senior member(s) of the organisation, either for an 'informal meeting' or a structured presentation. Interviewees described that it is the attendees at this interview stage who will have the final decision. This step could also include a very informal senior stakeholder interview or meeting, to see how they 'gel' together and asses the 'synergy between them'.

2.2.5 Assessment centres and group interviews
Assessment centres were not commonly used by employers interviewed, with many reporting a 'move away' from using them, apart from specific circumstances such as graduate or mass recruitment. Some interviewees considered them to be 'impersonal', costly and time consuming. Following Covid-19, some interviewees are considering moving the elements of assessment centres online and not returning to their old approach. A small number of interviewees reported using small group interviews for some specific roles or if they have multiple vacancies.

2.3 Post-interview stage

2.3.1 Work trials and temporary contracts

Interviewees from some industries, such as manufacturing and hospitality, were more likely to report using 'work trials' as part of their recruitment process. For the most part these were paid, and the candidate given a temporary contract during the trial period, which could last between a week and 3 months. However, some offered shorter, single-shift, unpaid trials. The trials are used as an extended 'in-tray exercise' to assess the capability of the individual in the role, as well as their 'fit' within the organisation. Interviewees reported making decisions following a trial shift by collecting feedback from staff, assessing how well the 'got on' with the team and their capability in the role. Some interviewees suggested the trial shift is also an opportunity for the candidate to decide if the role is suitable for them. Asking candidates to participate in a trial shift provides employers with more information about an individual's capability for a role prior to making an employment decision. However, it also gives the opportunity for employers to assess candidates based on non-job specific criteria, such as personality factors or social factors. This could be particularly detrimental for older workers entering working environments with a younger demographic, especially if feedback is collected from the wider workforce, as people tend to favour those similar to themselves (Montoya, Horton and Kirchner, 2008).

2.3.2 Employer decision making, selection and offers

According to interviewees, the hiring decision is typically made by the hiring manager sometimes in collaboration with HR. In some organisations, particularly within the public sector, interviewees reported that the hiring manager made the decision without HR input. Senior management also played a significant role in the selection decision for senior positions. Interviewees reported collecting feedback and scores from every stage of the interview process – either via the ATS or a 'debrief' meeting – this could include collecting feedback from team members who participated in 'meet and greets'. The structure of this process varied, with some employers using strict scoring mechanisms, while others took a more informal approach by collecting personal views of those involved in the process. Interviewees who reported a less structured decision-making approach did not specify how much 'weight' was given to each stage of the recruitment process. However, it appeared that line managers and senior leaders have significant influence when it comes to the final decision. Diversity and inclusion can suffer when individuals have a disproportionate impact on the final recruitment decision. Gathering feedback from a range of stakeholders, that is based on evidence from the recruitment process, about the candidate's performance on job-related criteria can help mitigate the impact of individual biases in the recruitment process.

" **You have to find a balance between a good fit and someone who scores highly.**" Manufacturing, large

Role of the decision maker

The literature review suggested that the individual biases of decision-makers can influence selection and recruitment outcomes. Fasbender and Wang (2017) found discriminatory behaviour among job recruiters; older participants were less likely to be ranked as suitable, despite having equal qualifications to other applicants. If a decision-maker held negative attitudes towards older workers, they were less likely to be hired. Conversely, if a decision maker held positive attitudes about the ability of older workers, this reduced the negative impact on older workers. The authors concluded that organisations should be doing more to tackle negative attitudes, including creating positive age climates and improved diversity policies.

> " Recruiting managers always say they want someone young.
> They have a perception of older workers that they will be a disadvantage
> "55 might break a hip", more ill-health, slower and less hard working."
> Medium employer, manufacturing

2.4 Age-friendly recruitment approaches

When asked specifically about 'age-friendly' approaches, several interviewees discussed recruitment approaches designed to attract younger applications, such as graduate recruitment, partnering with local education institutes and offering apprenticeships. While interviewees discussed open and inclusive recruitment approaches, some employers were focusing on optimising the process to attract younger workers. It is not clear if the redesign of the process was based on feedback from younger workers, or stereotypical views about younger people.

> " The workforce is ageing so recruitment needs to focus on younger generation
> and bringing in fresh talent. Millennials and Gen X are tech savvy and want
> an interactive and efficient recruitment process – not clicking through lots of
> clunky pages or long application forms." Large employer, manufacturing

Interviewees did however highlight that these techniques, while used more commonly to attract younger workers, are open for every age group. One interviewee suggested that these approaches do attract a diverse range of candidates, as they are seeing more applications from over 40s for graduate programmes, but that it is difficult to draw conclusions from one example. While none of the interviewees reported any recruitment practices specifically targeted at supporting older workers, some employers described how they are trying to

use more 'mature' people (in the context of their organisation, this meant people aged over 40) in their imagery for recruitment collateral, in order to create a more inclusive brand.

Many of the interviewees did not think that age diversity was a problem within their organisation; they reported having employees from a 'wide range' of ages and were able to provide demographic information to reinforce this. Some interviewees suggested that if they 'look around' their organisation, age is not a 'blatant issue', unlike some other protected characteristics such as ethnicity and gender. Interviewees suggested that there would need to be a 'significant issue', such as an age discrimination claim, to prompt them to do something about age-inclusivity. Interviewees did not typically consider the demographic profile of their workforce and potential candidates separately; there was an assumption that having an age diverse workforce, (often based on a subjective judgment) indicates an age diverse pool of applicants. Other factors, such as the retention of employees, leading to an older workforce, were often not considered.

> **"If it became a blatant issue if you look around, but it isn't like that. We don't need to focus on it because it happens naturally."** Large employer, technology

Although interviewees did not consider age to a problem, very few reported critically analysing their workforce and/or recruitment data by age. Therefore, in some cases employers are making assumptions about diversity priorities based on very limited evidence. If employers do not analyse their data by the full range of protected characteristics, they cannot be sure if there is a specific diversity issue within their organisation. Therefore, certain groups, including older workers, are likely to continue to be adversely affected during the recruitment process.

Throughout the course of the interviews, some negative perceptions of older workers emerged, such as:

– Older workers do not tend to want to work in junior roles.

– Older workers have poor IT skills.

– Older workers are more likely to have issues with their fitness levels, impacting their effectiveness in physical role.

– Younger people are more flexible to the needs of the business, particularly in terms of working patterns and availability to work in the evenings and the weekend.

– The appearance of younger staff being more 'presentable' for customer facing roles as they are less likely to look 'worn-out'.

> " Don't want worn out looking people on front of house – they can work
> in back of house if [sic] can get the work done. It's important for the face
> of the restaurant – if they are old but well maintained then that is ok."
> Small employer, hospitality

Some of the assumptions made about older workers by the interviewees are stereotypical views that are commonly found in the workplace. Older workers are often perceived to perform more poorly than their younger counterparts and to be less flexible and more resistant to the needs of the business. Despite little evidence to support these assumptions, this type of stereotypical thinking can be pervasive throughout organisations (Posthuma and Campion, 2009).

2.5 Measuring the effectiveness of the recruitment process

In general, the secondary data analysis showed that most recruiters perceived their recruitment process as effective (XpertHR, 2019). The secondary data and employer interviews identified consisted metrics used by employers to measure the effectiveness of the recruitment process:

– Cost per hire (81%).
– New hire turnover (75%).
– Performance of new hires (50%).
– Number of applicants (50%).
– Time to fill a role (46%).
– Effectiveness of sourcing channel (46%).
– Applicant to hire rate (42%).
– Candidate satisfaction (30%).
– Offer acceptance rate (39%).
– Interviews per hire (27%; Eploy 2019[10]; CV Library 2019[11]).

The interview data suggests that in this sample, larger employers are more likely to track systematically the effectiveness of their recruitment process. This may be easier, as the tools they use (e.g. ATS) provide standard recruitment reports.

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[10] Eploy report on the results from a 2019 survey of just under 900 UK recruitment professionals (564 UK in-house recruiters and 332 agency recruiters). The respondents came from a range of 20 different sectors of different sizes (30% under 250 employees, 25% 251-1000, 24% 1001-5000, 12% 5001-10000, 9% 10001+).
[11] CV Library Recruitment Trends 2020 paper reports on a study of 300 UK recruitment professionals conducted in 2019.

2.6 Recruitment process alignment with wider organisational strategy

For the most part, interviewees from smaller organisations did not report linking their recruitment process to their wider HR strategy. In many cases, this was because the organisations did not have an HR strategy in place. Interviewees from larger organisations were more likely to report that their recruitment practice was aligned to a wider HR strategy. The focus of the wider strategy varied across employers, with some employers focusing on 'attracting and retaining key world-class individuals'; and others on 'succession and talent planning'. Diversity and inclusion was a key facet to the strategy of several organisations and was particularly reported by interviewees from public sector organisations. To operationalize diversity and inclusion strategies within recruitment, interviewees reported working closely with diversity partners in the organisation. However, when interviewees discussed the specific areas of work, gender, ethnicity and disability were most commonly cited.

> " With everything going on [referring to BLM] the diversity and inclusion team have had lots of feedback from BAME workers and pressure to increase BAME leadership and senior roles." Large employer, Transport

Age was not typically considered as part of the diversity approach, with one interviewee stating it had 'less of a profile'. If age was considered by employers it was typically in the context of attracting younger workers. However, some interviewers reported trying to 'tap into people later in their careers' to help maintain a good talent pipeline, although age was not the core focus of the strategy. For HR and recruitment professionals to fully prioritise age within their recruitment strategy, the senior leaders who drive the overall direction of the organisation must acknowledge age diversity as an organisational priority. Without the alignment to the wider strategy and commitment from 'the top' it will be more difficult to create a burning platform and act on ageism in recruitment.

A large manufacturing employer with an HR strategy that focuses on succession and talent planning, designed a structured, competency based recruitment approach that gets 'the best fit person the first time', rather than 'desperately' recruiting and getting the wrong person – even if this takes longer. The recruitment methods they adopted included scored panel competency interviews and in-tray exercises to evaluate capability, as well as an informal 'meet the team' to assess cultural fit. A large financial services employer had an HR strategy that aimed to attract and retain key, world-class individuals; attraction was a large element of their recruitment strategy. Linking the recruitment approach to the wider workforce aims of the organisation is considered critical by some employers. For some employers, they only recruit

if it is in the workforce plan, which is linked to financial plan and this allows them to carefully plan their recruitment cycle.

The secondary data analysis revealed that in the past few years both internal and external recruiters have faced a saturated market and found it difficult to fill roles, address skills shortages and retain their talent. Employers who responded to the surveys reported numerous strategies taken in the past two years to improve recruitment and retention. The most common strategies highlight the present focus on developing new talent and putting forward an attractive package:

– Increasing their investment in training.

– Offering apprenticeships.

– Invested in the brand of their organisation to attract a wider set of applicants.

– Improved their workforce planning strategy (CIPD and The Adecco Group, 2019).

Making greater efforts to recruit and retain older workers was also endorsed by employers, but not to the same extent as other recruitment strategies. The reasons for this were not explored in the data, but as the interviews show this was probably because employers did not see age as a particularly relevant or important protected characteristic. To address difficulties filling permanent roles, employers most frequently indicated they would recruit again and make greater efforts to recruit either locally or from a wider region, or they would employ people on temporary or atypical contracts to fill the gap (CIPD and The Adecco Group, 2019). Similarly, to address skills shortages employers reported they hired temporary or contract workers, increased use of recruitment agencies and recruiter more apprentices. Some, although fewer employers, indicated that they would aim to encourage a more diverse range of candidates.

2.6.1 Diversity policies and practises

There is evidence to suggest that placing emphasis on organisational diversity and inclusion policies may be important for improving selection and recruitment policies, as this can lead to organisations having a joined-up approach at all stages of the process (Drydakis et al, 2017). However, although there is an understanding that this is important, evidence of implementation remains patchy. The CIPD (2018) reported that there are important business reasons to increase their focus on diversity and inclusion, especially in relation to organisational performance outcomes, retention of more diverse talent and improved employee satisfaction and wellbeing. In their survey, although 85% of respondents recognised that increasing diversity is recruitment and selection is important, 46% did not have a strategy to attract more diverse candidates. A PWC (2017) survey found that a financial service organisation that had more success in attracting women and minority groups, adopted a more systematic approach to recruitment in line with other organisational diversity policies.

Madera (2013) researched practice in diversity management in customer service organisations. Focusing on fourteen organisations from hospitality and service organisations, the research found seven diversity management approaches that all organisations used. These included:

Corporate diversity council (their function is on focusing management and staff on diversity issues and actions).

– Diversity training programmes.

– Supplier diversity programmes.

– Employee networking and mentoring programmes (it was widely recognised that such networks are central to a person's mobility, promotion and emergence as a leader).

– Cultural awareness (usually developed through training programmes to promote cultural diversity among the workforce (a subtheme of this included some organisations providing training on language proficiency).

– Support for women (all firms focused on recruiting, developing and retaining women, recognising the value of creating avenues for women in top management positions).

– LGBT Programmes and same-sex benefits (all 14 organisations offered same-sex benefits to their employees).

However, without conducting a 'process evaluation' assessing how recruitment and selection interventions are implemented, it is difficult to say whether changes in diversity and inclusion occur by 'what' is done, and/or 'how' interventions are implemented. Between the fourteen organisations used in this research the strategies were implemented differently (e.g. the composition of corporate diversity councils differed between the organisations; the delivery of diversity training programmes also varied – mandatory vs non-mandatory). Additionally, there was no understanding of which of the diversity management strategies had the most impact for improving recruitment and selection outcomes.

Robert-Walters (nd) reported that 45% of respondents to their survey believed their current recruitment tools were ineffective at helping diverse candidates and 85% saw improving this as a priority. However, only 50% had sufficient strategies and plans to attract, develop and retain inclusive workforces; and only 45% monitored and measured diversity. There was some evidence that businesses believe that strategies could help improve diversity, but only 13% of employers monitored how much time is spent discussing diversity and inclusion strategies at senior management meetings. The key findings of the research focused on the need to recognise fully the importance and implementation of diversity strategies and ensuring they are achieved across the whole recruitment and selection process.

2.6.2 Advice and guidance

Interviewees reported seeking advice and guidance from a number of sources, the most common being:

– HR networks such as CIPD, XpertHR, Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion and LinkedIn.

– Mentors (internal and external to the organisation).

– Government or industry bodies.

– Academic journals.

– Colleagues and peers.

2.7 Factors influencing the choice of recruitment methods

When asked about the factors that influence an employer's choice of recruitment methods, interviewees reported several internal and external factors that appeared to be consistent across industries. These included:

The labour market and industry specific trends
Some industries, such as construction, are facing skills shortages, which can make recruiting more difficult and therefore more focus is placed on the attraction and advertising elements. Employers may also seek out advertising methods that are specific to their industry, rather than generic methods; e.g. employers in the hospitality industry advertising with 'The Caterer'.

Skilled, niche and hard to fill roles
Roles that require a more specialised skillset are often treated differently at the candidate attraction and interview stage. These types of roles e.g. in technology or manufacturing, sometimes require additional input from an internal or external recruiter. Due to the increased cost of using external recruiters, interviewees reported only calling upon them for hard to fill positions. As discussed previously, specialist or technical roles will often have an additional 'skills test' included in the recruitment process.

Budget and time constraints
some interviewees highlighted the impact of financial and time constraints on the recruitment process. Particularly in smaller organisations, budget per recruitment campaign can be small and the implementers of the process often short on time. Interviewees described how these challenges can affect the structure of the process. In some cases, where money and time is tight, interviewees suggested that diversity and inclusion can become less of a priority.

Cultural and organisational fit

interviewees from different types of organisation discussed how cultural and organisation fit is a key driver in the recruitment process. That is, how a candidate's values, attitudes and ways of working align with that of the organisation. Some interviewees discussed the potential issues with this approach, especially in relation to diversity and inclusion and were clear that this approach did not influence recruitment by way of looking for particular personal characteristics. However, many interviewees did feel that many candidates can 'do the work,' but they will not be successful if they do not 'get on' with the team.

2.8 Findings from employer cognitive interviews

The cognitive interview data was analysed thematically to investigate how employers think about their recruitment process in terms of diversity and inclusion. The analysis is based on interviewee data and the researcher interpretation and evaluation of the cognitive interview.

Interviewees were asked to discuss their own recruitment process, describe how it facilitated inclusivity and how it could be improved. Some interviewees could easily narrate this topic, but others, particularly those from smaller organisations, found it difficult to critically analyse their processes in this way. The difficulty appears to stem from a lack of knowledge on the diversity and inclusion agenda, leading to an inability to articulate how their recruitment processes support or hindered diversity. Interviewees found it easier to discuss the implications of the recruitment process on diversity if their employer had some existing diversity and inclusion policies or practices in place. In general, interviewees were more confident with the exercise when discussing the pre interview element of the recruitment process (i.e. employer branding, job descriptions and applications). There was less evidence that employers could identify ways they do, or could, facilitate inclusivity in terms of the interview and selection processes. While this could be because of participant fatigue, it does suggest that employers think about and apply diversity and inclusion methods earlier in the process.

The findings also showed that when employers were asked to evaluate their processes, age bias was not at the forefront of their thinking. During the think aloud exercise interviewees tended to evaluate their methods in terms of gender and ethnicity, suggesting these are the primary characteristics employers are thinking about. However, some interviewees did discuss how the diversity approaches they used could be extrapolated to tackle other biases or barriers. Interviewees consistently identified language as a method of improving diversity and inclusion in their recruitment process and it was clear they felt this was an important tool and one they were executing well. However, it was unclear how they were determining that the methods they had in place were effective. Use of inclusive language was identified as applicable to employer branding, job

descriptions, and sourcing of candidates. One interviewee described how they needed to make sure the language they used within their brand was reaching as broader group as possible in terms of gender. They explained they use an online word checker tool to help spot and correct gendered language and they suggested a similar tool could be used for other protected characteristics.

Interviewees identified several other methods they could use to improve diversity:

– Ensure the channels used to advertise are wide-reaching and inclusive. For example, recognising not everyone uses LinkedIn so they may be creating a gap in who they attract.

– Require recruitment agencies to ensure the shortlists they provide are balanced on other characteristics not just gender.

– Measure and analyse the characteristics of applicants such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, to understand the diversity of applicants rather than just the current workforce.

Another consistent theme identified was that employers felt that implementing optimal recruitment methods simply was not always possible in their organisation. Interviewees commented on situations where they recognised they could do more to enhance their diversity and inclusion practices, but they were limited by the existing demographic profile of the particular industry or job field. In these cases, they felt that there was a wider issue with the perception of the industry that was limiting diversity, but this was not something they felt able to influence. For example, the perception of construction or manufacturing as a male industry.

One interviewee described a policy mandating a female employee being present on an interview panel, ideally having one male and one female. They would like to have an ethnically diverse panel, but it is not possible because their current workforce is not ethnically diverse enough. Another interviewee reported that as a small organisation they do not recruit often enough or get enough applications to be able to take any meaningful action in relation to diversity of candidates they bring to interview. Similarly, another interviewee explained that for some roles they have shortlisting quotas for example to ensure they are gender balanced, however they recognise that is not possible in all areas of the business because they just do not get enough diversity in applicants.

The findings also suggested that for many elements of the recruitment process the interviewees felt that the decisions and the power to implement change lay elsewhere with the business, such as with senior leadership, the hiring manager, or an external recruitment agency. For example, one interviewee described how their entire process was driven by the organisation's values which underpinned elements such as branding, job descriptions and interview framework. While this ensured a degree of consistency and fairness in the process diversity and

inclusion was not explicitly included in the values. The interviewee discussed that including it as a value would help improve inclusivity in their recruitment but they were also not sure if it was 'a conscious choice by the business to stay neutral on the matter'.

Another interviewee stated they would be keen to include more blinding of applications or using blind telephone interviews within their process but thought managers might be opposed to it. The interviewee felt that managers would want to know the background of applicants to provide some context and would want full understanding of the experience they had. This was not, however, highlighted as a potential risk to diversity.

Similarly, interviewees described how the hiring decision often fell to the hiring manager or a senior manager to sign off on. In one case the interviewee reported that they had no say in the final decision and had experienced times where they had disagreed with a choice. Another interviewee emphasised that it was their aim to equip and empower hiring managers to make the right decisions, while another reported that for senior hires the decision will be made by a business partner or director, or may involve the partnership council. By giving the final decision to someone other than the recruitment expert efforts to improve diversity along the way could fall flat, however the interviewees did not recognise this as a potential area for bias.

Summary of the cognitive interview findings:
–   Employers with no track record of diversity and inclusion practices appear to find it more difficult to evaluate their own recruitment process, seemingly due to a lack of knowledge.

–   The use of 'tools' such as language decoders are popular, although seeming not tested for efficacy by users, and are primarily aimed at detecting gender biased language. Employers may be focusing on language in the recruitment process because using an online tool is a relatively quick and easy way to assess it. Other practises that can improve diversity may be being perceived as too complicated or time-consuming.

–   There appears to be a lack of knowledge about methods that could be used improve diversity in recruitment particularly in relation to the interview and post interview stage. Additionally, risks in the current recruitment process are not always assessed or identified.

–   HR professionals can sometimes feel powerless to influence diversity and inclusion due to organisational, labour market and industry barriers. However, focusing on the external factors may reduce an employers perceived agency and responsibility to proactively tackle diversity issues internally.

– Hiring manager and senior leaders could present a particular risk in the recruitment process as they often have the final selection decision but are l ess likely to understand and mitigate the impact of bias. Cultivating a positive relationship between HR and hiring managers may enable HR to support managers to make non-biased selection decisions.

3 Inclusive Recruitment Methods

In addition to exploring the age-specific approaches used by employers, evidence gathered from the interviewees and the literature provide insight into recruitment methods implemented to address diversity and inclusion more generally.

3.1 Recruitment approaches addressing diversity and inclusion and their effectiveness

Interviewees were asked about their approach to diversity and inclusion in recruitment. When reflecting on this, they typically mentioned approaches to address gender and ethnicity bias. No interviewees voluntary identified age as a protected characteristic of interest, and they were not investing in any specific age friendly recruitment initiatives.

Interviewees from larger organisations were more likely to report having inclusive methods and were able to describe their approach to tackling diversity and inclusion in recruitment. Regardless of the existence of formal interventions or not, all interviewees clearly stated that their organisation does not accept discrimination and their recruitment process is not biased. In many cases, interviewees reported that they just wanted 'the best person for the job' and that personal characteristics of the person were not important. However, in some cases interviewees did not track or evaluate the effectiveness of the methods therefore firm conclusions about utility cannot be drawn. Drawing on evidence from the interviews and the literature review, recruitment approaches used to address diversity and inclusion beyond age are outlined below.

3.1.1 Using blind CVs to remove details of personal characteristics
There was evidence of use of 'blind' CVs; where names and demographic details are removed before the shortlisting process. This was most common in larger organisations with systems and the capacity to do this, with the intention of ensuring that the shortlisting panel was focused on the main application content. One public sector interviewee reported that adopting blind recruitment methods improved ethnic diversity at first stage interview, but the positive impact reduced through the interview stages. There is mixed evidence about the effectiveness of blind or anonymised CVs. Some research suggest it is an effective approach to reduce some types of discrimination, e.g. people who are obese (Lacroux and Martin-Lacroux, 2019). However, other evidence suggests that removing

demographic details does not have an effect on gender (Krause, Rinne and Zimmerman, 2012) or ethnicity bias (Behaghel, Crepon and Barbanchon, 2015). The researchers suggest that the lack of effect could be attributed to bias generated by more subtle implicit cues (e.g. names, hobbies and years of experiences) found in candidates CVs, they recommend that employers consider using standardised application form rather than accepting CVs (Lacroux and Martin-Lacroux, 2019).

3.1.2 Panel and competency interviewing

Many of the interviewees discussed the composition of their interviewing panels and their approach to interview questions. In several cases, they required a gender mix on the panel and in some, an ethnicity mix. This was only possible in larger organisations that had the existing diversity of staff to enable this. They also discussed their use of competency interviewing in which the competencies needed for the role that have been established during the writing of the job description are explored through the interview questions that are asked:

> **"One of the difficulties we have in diversity is when we are looking for a specific skill set that comes from a certain industry and that sector doesn't have the diversity we would like, so we're trying to be open about different backgrounds: if we have a candidate who can do everything that is needed but their only gap is time spent within the particular industry, we will prioritise diversity over industry."** Medium employer, FinTech Organisation

3.1.3 Using a diverse range of individuals in internal recruitment sites

Several interviewees talked about the importance of their recruitment websites or career portals, which were typically a sub-section of the main external website. Some organisations also had further micro-sites related to particular campaigns, or that were only accessible to candidates who had been shortlisted. They discussed the importance of using authentic experiences from a variety of existing staff, going beyond diversity and inclusion statements to establish that people from a range of backgrounds belonged within the organisation and would have positive experiences there:

> **"A lot of employers are keen to portray their workforce and how it spans across different age ranges. There needs to be authenticity to make a difference. It is not just about giving the message but showing the messenger. Think about some [employer TV advertising] campaigns where different employees profile different ways of working."** Large Recruiter

3.1.4 Having a positive action team / employee networks to support under-represented candidates

Some of the interviewees had processes in place to provide additional support to candidates from under-represented backgrounds through the application process. This could either be a specific team within recruitment or members of staff who belonged to existing employee affinity networks. These people would contact applicants to explain the recruitment process in further detail and to provide additional support as well as re-enforcing by their presence that diversity did exist within the employer organisation:

> **"We have a [member of] staff from our employee networks to support under-represented candidates; they give coaching sessions during the application process to talk through the competency value framework as well as confidence sessions prior to interview and to starting so they can discuss the experience of working here."** Large employer, Public Sector

3.1.5 Engaging with underrepresented groups in the community

In order to boost recruitment from under-represented groups – again focusing on characteristics other than age - some organisations focused on outreach and engagement, taking part in community events to build connections within the community, or organising their own information events and inviting specific groups to take part. In some cases, these events would be attended by the positive action teams or members of the affinity networks who could answer questions about the recruitment process and provide more general information about their experiences of working within the organisation.

The secondary data analysis[12] suggests the most used methods to address diversity and inclusion in recruitment are:

– Monitoring recruitment and/or staffing information to obtain data on protected characteristics.

– Training interviewers and hiring managers in unconscious bias[13], understanding of diversity and the impact of stereotypes.

– Operating diversity policies that go beyond legislative requirements.

– Assessing job advert language and role requirements.

– Advertising vacancies in different sources to attract underrepresented groups.

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[12] CIPD, 2017; Hays, 2017; REC, 2020.

[13] Despite the apparent popularity of unconscious bias training, the academic evidence suggests that unconscious bias training does not change biased behaviour (Forscher et al, 2019) and can be considered a 'pointless' intervention to eliminate bias such as racism in the workplace (Noon, 2017).

Monitoring the characteristics of staff and training of interviewers were more common within public and not-for-profit sectors (CIPD and Hays, 2017). Interviewees from public sector employers also more commonly mentioned being Disability Confident and Stonewall employers. Disability confident employers reported proactively encourage applicants with disabilities, giving them priority interview slots and offering to make any reasonable adjustment at interview stage. In addition, some public sector employers work within the Civil Service Commission rules to ensure the process is fair and open and that applicants are appointed on merit.

Having additional policies in place was also most common in the public sector and using different sources to advertise vacancies was a method implemented more frequently within the not-for-profit sector. The data also suggested that diversity and unconscious bias training for hiring managers was most common amongst larger organisations with more than 250 employees (REC, 2020).

3.1.6 'Un'-conscious bias

Employer interviewees described either the current use, or the intended future use of unconscious bias training to tackle bias in recruitment. Hiring managers, along with HR professionals, were identified as key stakeholder who would benefit from this training. Interviewees suggested that training should be mandatory, but that they can have difficulty ensuring that senior members of staff attend. None of interviewees raised any concerns about the effectiveness of unconscious bias training, and some interviewees believed they had observed an impact of the training on manager behaviour (although this was not measured). The recent literature exploring the utility of unconscious bias training suggest that it is not effective in changing people's biased behaviours (Forscher et al, 2019). Rather than focusing on the 'unconscious', using strategies to change 'conscious' biased behaviour is thought to be more effective in reducing biased recruitment practices. For example, developing questions aligned with job requirements, using standardised questions during interviews, evaluating candidates based on facts and the data provided (Chamberlain, 2016).

3.1.7 Structured recruitment processes

There was evidence to suggest that providing more structure to recruitment and selection processes could lead to more diverse and inclusive outcomes. Wolgast, Bäckström and Björklund (2017) analysed a job analytics tool, which focussed on tasks, duties and relevant characteristics needed in jobs to help recruiters identify applicants with the relevant skills and abilities, rather than relying on 'idiosyncratic beliefs and attitudes'. The results indicated that when there was increased structure within processes, recruiters selected both more competent and ethnically diverse candidates. The researchers also discussed how improved structures at the selection stage should and could be emphasised at other stages of the recruitment process also. However, the use of students in this research limits the extent to which it can be applied to the workplace.

The employer interviewees also discussed the benefits of a structured recruitment process in relation to diversity and inclusion. Many of the larger organisations ensure all the candidates have the same interview experience, including the questions they are asked, the tasks they perform and the interviewers they meet. This structured approach was perceived to be the fairest for candidates as they are evaluated 'like for like' based on the same data.

3.1.8 Competency frameworks
Related to the development of more structure processes is the development and use of competency frameworks during the recruitment process. Competency frameworks outline the knowledge, skills and behaviours expected from people to be successful within a particular role. These frameworks can also encompass 'softer' skills, such as describing the behavioural expectations of employees to align with the values of the organisation. Evans (2012) researched diversity management initiatives in recruitment practices, specifically aimed at increasing gender diversity within IT organisations. Competency frameworks were perceived to be gender neutral and focus on the skills and qualifications required for the role, matching them to the tasks the role will include. Interviews with senior HR representatives and hiring managers highlighted that there had been a greater emphasis on the use of competency frameworks within the IT industry and they were positioned as a key lever to help with the recruitment of female applicants. Among the sample there was an unquestioned assumption that competency frameworks were fair and gender neutral, but there were questions regarding how different genders could still interpret the competencies required. This paper highlights the need to question and evaluate an individual's assumptions that may be biasing the recruitment process, even when using structured methods.

CIPD (2017) research reporting on diversity in recruitment and selection acknowledged that a popular method in selections was the competency-based interview, where candidate questions revolve around role tasks and skills and that this could be used (alongside other strategies) to improve diversity and inclusion. However, many organisations do not collect monitoring data and if they did the data was not used to evaluate the recruitment and talent strategies. Therefore, the understanding of the effectiveness of such practices is still limited.

3.1.9 Search and selection
Bilimoria and Buch (2010) discussed methods as to how to improve the under-representation of women and ethnic minorities in STEM university faculties. When looking at longitudinal data the researchers suggested that diversity could be improved by increasing the range of candidates earlier in the process. As a result, several strategies were implemented by a university case study to improve diversity at the search and selection stages. These included:

– Training to ensure that faculty members involved in the search process have expertise in basic recruitment and hiring processes to make them 'bias aware'.

– Faculty demonstrating their commitment to diversity and achieving diversity goals.

– Selection practices aligned to other institutional policies and practices.

It was concluded that outcomes may be improved by increasing the diversity of candidates in the early stages of the faculty process, although no evaluation of the strategies was provided.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) also looked at how organisations can target various populations that they may wish to focus on for selection. Methods included:

– Employee referrals so that current employees can refer those they feel will be suitable for the role, whilst also providing a realistic preview as to the role and the organisation to the potential candidate - although this will only be effective if there is already a diverse workforce.

– Website recruitment to increase selection reach and where job information is clearly displayed.

– Job boards and social networks to focus on targeted candidate searches, and clear diversity messaging in recruitment adverts.

Working with recruitment agencies
There is evidence to suggest that some organisations are beginning to use external recruitment agencies to help diversify candidate pools. The Robert-Walters (no date) survey reported that 61% of businesses believe that working with other organisations which focus on improving diversity means that they have access to wider applicant pools and 54% responded that these organisations can help advise them on best practice for diverse strategies. Despite reporting these benefits however, only 32% use them. Additionally, 52% of employers reported they do not ask recruitment consultancies to provide a diverse shortlist, which therefore misses opportunities to access more diverse networks. However, interviewees did prefer to keep their recruitment process in-house in the first instance, only reaching out to recruitment agencies if they have particular roles to fill.

3.2 Summary of the literature review

This research has highlighted a range of approaches that organisations are currently using to enhance diversity and inclusion, however most are not aimed explicitly at age and questions remain regarding their efficacy. Very few evaluations – process, impact or both – have been conducted in this area and monitoring data remains patchy as many employers do not collect it, especially with regards to age.

Evaluations of the effectiveness of current approaches are also affected by methodological constraints. Some of literature focussed primarily on just one stage of the recruitment or selection process. However, the results overall suggest that for diversity and inclusion to be managed effectively, diversity practices need to be considered at all stages and match an organisation's culture towards such issues, using a more whole-systems approach. For example, Drydakis et al (2017) concluded that firms need to adopt ageing at work policies that explicitly cover all stages of the recruitment process and include social dialogue between employers and employee representatives, who have a crucial role to play in effectively ensuring that national regulation is effectively operationalised at the organisational level. It was argued that this dialogue has the potential to change organisational attitudes towards older workers and inform both parties of effective organisational practices and policies to attempt to eliminate ageism in recruitment. The researchers also argued that age discrimination in recruitment should not be treated in isolation, but should be considered in the context of other protected characteristics such as: race, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background and disability, as these characteristics are also likely to moderate the effects of ageism. For example, the stereotypical image of a women not being strong enough for some 'blue collar' roles was heightened when a woman was older. However, more research is needed to look at this 'whole-systems' approach to understand whether this too will be an effective strategy.

Similarly, CIPD (2015) viewed the attraction of candidates as a 'journey' and all stages of this process needed to pay attention to diversity and inclusion practices. To improve effectiveness, job adverts need to consider language used, where advertisements are placed, whether outreach channels or external recruitment companies have been briefed sufficiently with the necessary diversity and inclusion requirements. In selection, consideration needs to be made with regard to the tools that are used, how assessors are chosen and trained and the information collected, on which the final decision is based. A similar approach was also advocated by the Chartered Insurance Institute (2018), who added that organisational recruitment strategies and diversity and inclusion strategies need to be aligned if they were to be successful, but for the majority of organisations in their research this was not yet the case. Robert-Walters concluded that the key findings from their research included the need for the value of diversity in organisations to be recognised and actions need to be supported by organisational diversity and inclusion strategies. Added to this, the strategies need to be implemented at all organisational levels and that cooperation and collaboration need to be encouraged.

4 Future trends in recruitment

The following chapter describes the future trends in recruitment, identified by the evidence review and employer interviewees. There did not appear to be a marked difference in the future trends discussed in the interviews based on the industry or size of the employer.

4.1 Developing an employer brand to attract candidates

4.1.1 Marketing an employer brand is essential for attracting diverse candidates

The interviews and evidence review revealed that organisations are beginning to use traditional marketing approaches, more typically associated with selling products, to build an employer brand that attracts talent to their organisation (Verlinden, 2019b). Articulating and communicating an organisation's values helps candidates ensure their own values are aligned with the employer before they apply. Congruence between candidate values and those of an organisation are associated with later reports of higher employee job satisfaction, satisfaction with their employer, and commitment to their organisation (Patterson et al, 2016). The CIPD recommended that employers make age diversity part of their brand to appeal to both customers and potential employees (CIPD, 2015). The report identified employers who were successfully engaging older workers through their employer brand. For example, McDonalds have run campaigns that aim to make it be seen as a place for people from all walks of life and identify that 'creating an employer brand that is attractive to employees of different ages is inextricably linked to developing a customer brand which appeals to multiple generations'.

4.1.2 A strong brand helps you build a talent pool

A strong brand is also beneficial for building a 'talent pool'; this is a database of candidate profiles who have registered their CV with an organisation, which could include candidates who have previously applied, 'silver medallists' who were second in line for a previous position, candidates identified through referrals, current and former employees. When job arise, employers have a large database of candidates. A strong employer brand generates interest in an organisation and encourages candidates to stay engaged with an employer and register an interest in future vacancies (Verlinden, 2019a). Just over a third of recruiters reported that they plan to prioritise building talent pools for the future in 2020 (CV Library, 201922). Building a talent pool enables employers to have access to qualified candidate profiles which makes the recruitment process faster and simpler.

4.1.3 Branding is key for engaging passive jobseekers

In one survey, more than a third of recruiters reported that they intend to target passive job seekers in 2020 (CV Library, 2019). Targeting of passive job seekers could benefit older workers who have relatively lower job-to-job mobility compared to younger workers. Successfully engaging passive job seekers is accomplished by enabling people to naturally come across an organisation or role via platforms such as social media, career sites, or blogs (Evans, nd). Branding through platforms such as LinkedIn provides employers with a mechanism to be seen by passive candidates and sharing interesting and useful content with them will encourage them to connect, share their details and join an employer's talent pool. In a survey of senior executives and human capital leaders, almost three quarters reported that they are creating specific talent communities and developing content plans that will engage and nurture the future talent pipeline (Randstad, 2019). CIPD reported that car rental firm Enterprise used various marketing channels in order to appeal to different ages, for example advertising through organisations such as 'Where Women Work' and 'WorkingMums' to attract working mothers (CIPD, 2015).

4.2 Creating a positive candidate experience improves the recruitment process

Analysis of the future trends literature suggests employers are placing increased focus on the candidate's experience of the recruitment process. In the pre-Covid-19 landscape, 80% of recruiters believed candidates held the power, and 77% reported feeling pressure to focus on offering a great candidate experience (CV Library, 201922). A good experience ensures both successful and unsuccessful candidates maintain a positive perception of the organisation and potentially influences whether unsuccessful applicants will remain in contact with the organisation and if they would apply again (Zojceska, 2018b). Indeed, more than half of talent in one survey reported that they would recommend an employer to others if they had a positive experience as a candidate (58%), and more than a third said a positive experience would prompt them to share their experience on social media (39%), follow the company on social media (35%), or reapply (41%; Randstad, 2019).

A positive candidate experience requires that information about the organisation and the role should be clear and honest to allow candidates to make informed decisions about whether to apply, reinforcing the need for realistic job previews (Verlinden, 2019a). It may be beneficial to include an opportunity for potential applicants to engage with the employer before applying so they can get an impression of the organisation. Employers should keep applicants updated about the recruitment process, questions from candidates need to be answered quickly, and all other communication should be made within the specified time frame. Feedback on applications is important to candidates, and if they were unsuccessful then they value being informed of the reasons (Chatfield, 2018).

Communication can be improved by using technology such as chat bots, particularly when there are large numbers of recruits, as they are more available, can answer some questions quickly, or can direct candidates to the appropriate place to find the information they need. Other uses of technology, which contribute to creating a positive and memorable candidate experience, are through application methods such as making them compatible with smartphones; and assessment tools such as gamification (the application of gaming elements to recruitment processes such as skills tests), virtual reality tests, and video-interviewing.

4.3 Technology and analytics are set to transform recruitment

The many emerging uses of technology and analytics within organisations have the potential to transform the recruitment process. Suggestions for their use appear in multiple places along the recruitment timeline, from assessing skills gaps, candidate sourcing, communication and administrative tasks, assessment analytics (such as test validity and voice or facial expression analysis) and selection analytics (such as tracking the accuracy of referrals or interviewers; Johansson and Herranen, 2019). According to responses from one survey, technology that will have the biggest impact in the next 5 years are tools to find and engage candidates (68%), to conduct soft skills assessments (60%), and to analyse the talent market (54%; LinkedIn Talent Solutions, 2019[14]). The literature suggests that technologies that will play a major role in the future of recruitment are artificial intelligence (AI; 32 %), video (29 %), semantic search (20%), data science (14%), and chatbots (5%; CV Library 2019).

The literature also predicts there will be an increase in the use of big data sources and analytics to provide insights into people and processes. Almost three-quarters (73%) of talent professionals in one survey said people analytics will be a major priority for their company over the next 5 years (LinkedIn, 2020[15]). Of talent professionals who use or plan to use people analytics in the next 5 years, the most common uses they reported will be:

– Measuring employee performance (82%).

– Strategic workforce planning (77%).

– Identifying skills gaps (70%).

– Evaluating recruiting channels (67%; LinkedIn, 2020).

[14] The LinkedIn Talent Solutions report surveyed 2,848 recruiting professionals from more than 80 countries.
[15] LinkedIn Global Talent Trends reports on findings of a survey of 7,089 talent professionals and hiring managers and behavioural insights from LinkedIn's member data.

The literature suggests that the ability to analyse internal and external employee data will play a critical role in sourcing, attracting, engaging and retaining talent. Findings from one survey showed the proportion of senior executives and human capital leaders reporting they were already investing in people analytics to enhance talent attraction and engagement was slightly lower (72%; Randstad 2019[16]). Some interviewees planned to use technology to streamline the recruitment process (e.g. introduce screening questions to reduce the number of applications) and to make it more attractive to young candidates who they believe value an efficient and modern process. This demonstrates the ageist belief some employers hold about the link between age and technology and their willingness to tailor their recruitment to the preferences of younger candidates.

4.3.1 Recruiters are cautious about implementing new technologyy

However, there is a marked gap in what is perceived as an important future trend with many possibilities and where recruiters are confident and planning on focusing their resources. While three quarters of recruiters reported that they believed it is important for hiring professionals to understand technology and analytics, 53% of them reported that they do not plan on using these technologies in the next 12 months (CV Library, 2019 22). For example AI was believed to be successful at replacing processes which involved gathering candidate data such as searching talent pools or ranking candidates and for creating a positive candidate experience through enhanced communication; but individuals were less confident about replacing the human decision making involved in tasks such as setting recruitment objectives and strategy development with AI (Johansson and Herranen, 2019). This was in part due to a lack of trust in AI's ability to understand an organisations core goals and values, but also concerns about being able to confirm the validity of the data and a general feeling that AI could not be more effective at a task than a human. There are multiple perceived benefits of using technology within the recruitment process: 83% of professionals believed it helps them make smarter hiring decisions, and 71% believed it reduced the amount of risk (Randstad, 2019). However, it is important to emphasise that technology and data analytics may only be an effective asset if it is implemented properly. One of the key issues is that the intelligence tends to be based on correlations in existing data that are largely contextual, rather than causal relationships, which can lead to the AI learning and then replicating human biases[17].

For AI to be used effectively, staff need to be adaptable to accept changes to the recruitment process and have trust in the technology to carry out the tasks effectively and for the tool to be adopted whole-heartedly into the process.

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[16] The Randstad report presents results of a survey of more than 800 senior executives and human capital leaders as well as 1700 working professionals across 17 countries.

[17] assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/819055/Landscape_Summary_-_Bias_in_Algorithmic_Decision-Making.pdf

Secondly, it is important to consider the biases that could occur as a result of the programming, training of users, and any barriers due to language and cultural differences. More than a third of employers in one survey reported using AI, big data and machine learning to reduce bias in recruitment (37%), or to help source and attract more diverse candidates (34%; Randstad 201928).

4.3.2 The role of recruiters is set to change

As many of the administrative tasks traditionally undertaken by recruiters are replaced by automation, the teams carrying out the remaining work will need more specialised skills. Recruiters will be trained in skills such as marketing, sales, and negotiation. Skills considered the most important in the next 5 years included engaging passive candidates (85%) and analysing talent data to drive decisions (84%; LinkedIn Talent Solutions, 201926). Organisations will be looking for specialists in talent analytics, recruitment marketing and recruitment tech. The most impactful new roles in recruitment in the next 5 years will be talent analytic specialists (47%), recruitment marketing specialists (45%), and recruiting tech specialists (43%; LinkedIn Talent Solutions, 201926). It is also suggested that recruiters will play a larger role in business strategy planning and providing advice to organisation leaders, with 82% of professionals considering this as one of the most important skills recruiters will need in the next 5 years (LinkedIn Talent Solutions, 2019).

The analysis suggested that employer's reliance on, and relationship with, external recruitment agencies is changing. Approximately half of employers in one survey reported they had or planned to reduce their reliance on agencies, whereas a quarter said they had formed a closer business partnership with them (CIPD and Hays, 2017).

4.4 Employers are thinking about their future workforce needs

Alongside discussions about the future of work and the changes that are approaching particularly in terms of technology and automation, employers are focusing on how to prepare their workforce accordingly. Almost all companies in one survey reported taking some action to prepare for the future of work (99%). Common actions organisations reported undertaking included identifying the gap between current and required skills supply (52%), develop a future-focused people strategy (51%), and adapting skills requirements to new technologies and business objectives (48%; Mercer, 2019[18]). To meet the needs of the future, recruiters will focus on assessing candidates' potential and their ability to learn in order to produce an adaptable workforce who can understand and operate technology. Meanwhile recruiters will also need to continue to recruit for skills that cannot be replaced by automation or technology.

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[18] Mercer's 2019 survey had more than 7300 respondents including senior executives, HR leaders and employees across 16 countries and 9 industries.

Preparing for the future is not only about organisations ensuring their employees have the necessary skills to implement and effectively use new technology. Some predictions suggest recruiters will need to focus on providing increased flexibility in their offers. For employers, flexibility in terms of a larger non-permanent workforce provides them with agility to adapt to change and recruit project-specific talent. For candidates, flexible working has transitioned from a rare accommodation by an employer to an important factor for attracting talent and whilst freelance and the gig economy work poses risks in terms of quality, it also offers many candidates the level of flexibility they desire.

5 Conclusions

This chapter draws together the findings to discuss the overall recruitment landscape, any methods implemented by employers aimed at improving inclusivity and diversity, specifically related to age, and how methods differ depending on industry, occupation and role seniority.

5.1 The current recruitment landscape for older workers

The recruitment methods implemented by the employers in this sample followed a similar overall process, although the structure of the process and the specific recruitment activities varied by several different factors. The process can be grouped into three stages: pre-interview, interview and post interview stage. The types of activities falling within each stage are depicted below.

Figure 1: Types of recruitment activities

Pre-interview	Interview	Post-interview
Annual planning and identifying a need	'Screening' phone interview	Work trials and use of temporary contracts
Creating a job description	First stage panel interview	Collating feedback and internal decision making
Candidate attraction and employer brand	'Meet the team' interview	Job offers and negotiation
Sourcing candidates and advertising	Interview / informal meeting with senior leaders	Employee benefits package
Applications – CV, cover letters and application forms	Presentation	
'Sifting' and shortlisting	Assessment centres / group interviews	
	In-tray exercises, skills tests and psychometrics	

The types of activities identified by employers in the sample appears to be relatively consistent, but how an activity is operationalised did vary across employers. The employer size, sector/industry, role occupation and seniority and the culture of the organisation all appeared to influence how an employer implements a specific activity to some extent. The specific context in which an organisation operates plays a large role in the design of the recruitment process. For example, employers will use industry specific advertising platforms to attract suitable candidates, or roles in certain occupations will have a specific skill testing element to assess capability in the role. Employers commonly reported adapting the process to fit their operating context to maximise the effectiveness of their approach.

5.1.1 Employers do not consider age to be priority diversity issue

Based on the sample in this research, age was not seen as a priority diversity issue by employers. Many argued that they were already diverse in relation to age and therefore this was evidence of being age-friendly, but few, if any, actually measured age diversity and so it is hard to say for sure whether this is true. Given the wider context of an ageing workforce, employers appear to need help to see age as an important part of being a diverse organisation (based on the interviews, the strands currently given most attention are gender, ethnicity, disability and social mobility). When prompted on age, the interviewees in this sample tended not to think about age, and associated activities, in a binary and differentiated way e.g. implementing different practices for older worker compared to younger workers. Instead, they conceptualised age as a spectrum where their recruitment activities can be applied to and benefit, people of all ages (e.g. graduate recruitment is not just designed for those under 25). However, attracting younger workers was a core component of some organisations HR strategy and therefore efforts were made to create a recruitment process that was considered attractive to younger workers. This was often the case in industries that have a particularity ageing working and suffer with skills shortages, such as manufacturing and construction.

5.1.2 Age is not a protected characteristic that is typically considered in the recruitment process

As age was not considered a priority diversity area, therefore it was not a core element of the recruitment process – with the exception of some employers aiming to attract more younger workers. To attract younger workers, employers engaged with local universities, developed their employer brand and a streamlined their 'clunky' recruitment processes using technology. It is unknown if the steps taken to attract younger workers were based on evidence, or potentially stereotypically assumptions about younger workers. On the whole, larger employers in this sample were more likely to measure the effectiveness of the recruitment process using multiple metrics such as: number of applicants; time to fill a role; cost per hire; offer acceptance rate and retention rate. Diversity of applicants was sometimes measured, but mostly in relation to gender and ethnicity, whereas candidate age was not commonly collected or analysed.

5.1.3 Unstructured and informal recruitment practices could disadvantage older workers

The extent to which the recruitment process was structured also varied by the size of the organisation. With larger employers having more processes in places that appeared to be more rigorously adhered to. While smaller employers seem to have broad processes in place, they tended to be more flexible, with more opportunities to adapt the various activities to the role or candidate. The sector of an organisation appeared to influence the structure, over and above industry, with public sector employers tending to have governing bodies, organisational strategies, centralised processes, guidance and tools that they could draw upon, resulting in a more structured and inclusive recruitment process. These employers were also more likely to have diversity and inclusion strategies that unpinned their recruitment process. In saying this, some deviation from a structured process tended to be reported by most employers in this sample, typically when it came to more senior roles. For senior roles, there are often 'more hoops to jump through' as additional stages are added to the recruitment process, such as informal meetings, psychometric testing and presentations to a senior team. A more structured process is likely to be critical to supporting diversity and inclusion across all personal characteristics, including age. In many cases, semi-structured interviews and informal 'meet the team' elements were introduced to assess the 'cultural fit' of a prospective candidate. Assessment of fit was typically based on the team's general views of the individual and rarely appeared systematically evaluated. Fit was considered very important in the selection process, but few interviewees seemed to recognise the fact this could disadvantage older workers as judgments could be made based on personal characteristics and not job suitability.

5.1.4 Employers are not using age related workforce and recruitment age data to guide decision making

Some employers collected data to monitor age diversity to guide their decision making, however others suggested they did not have an age issue as they could see age diversity by just 'looking around the organisation'. To be motivated to act on the age agenda, some employers suggest they would have to perceive there to be a 'specific problem' or burning platform, such as an age discrimination claim. Overall, employers from this sample did not report implementing any age-specific recruitment practices to support older workers, often based on an assumption that they do not have a problem related to age diversity.

5.1.5 Age-friendly recruitment practices

The literature, although sparse, provided some evidence of recruitment practices that may be effective in reducing old age bias:

– Use a wide range of advertising methods that specifically target older workers, thus increase the likelihood of an age diverse longlist.

– Use application methods that reduce the likelihood of capturing explicit and implicit age cues. For example, not asking for age or date of birth and using application forms that only ask only for job-relevant questions.

– Consider the attitudes and overall influence of the decision maker – ensure that decision makers do not hold ageist attitudes and consider multiple decision makers to reduce any undue influence of individuals. This can be tackled taking an organisational wide approach to create an inclusive culture that challenges negative attitudes and celebrates the contribution of workers of all ages.

Some of the practices already used by employers to tackle diversity more generally may also be effective if applied to age, although age-specific evidence is lacking so firm conclusions cannot be drawn at this stage. These included: 'neutral' language in recruitment collateral; utilising diverse advertising platforms; using application forms to reduce implicit and explicit demographic cues; structured interviewing; adopting a strategic system-wide approach and implementing diversity strategies. Therefore, some employers may already, albeit unintentionally, be using techniques that could help to reduce age bias if applied appropriately. This provides employers with a foundation in which to grow their age-inclusive practices without having to start from the beginning.

5.1.6 Common recruitment practices that could disadvantage older workers

From analysing the recruitment practises described by the employers involved in this research, several areas of risk that threaten the inclusivity of the recruitment process for older workers were identified:

– Lack of diversity strategies within an organisation, or the exclusion of age as a core element of a strategy.

– Job descriptions that are not assessed for ageist language or include criteria that excludes older workers, such as particular qualification or experience.

– An emphasis on assessing the 'cultural fit' of a candidate, typically using subjective and unstructured approaches that are liable to age bias.

– Use of unstructured interviews where interviewers do not use the same questions for all candidates or only one interviewer is present. This can result in candidates being assessed on different criteria and individual bias entering the recruitment process.

– Gathering of subjective feedback – the collection of 'informal' feedback from a wider team or non-standardised evaluation of candidate performance increases the likelihood of biased views related to age.

– Presence of age-related stereotypes and negative perceptions, such as older workers being less physically 'presentable' or having poor IT skills in comparison to younger workers.

– Poor use of age data – assumptions about the extent to which age diversity is an issue within an organisation are often made without critical analysis workforce or recruitment data.

Individual decision-makers can often have the final say on a recruitment decision, without much consideration given to the potential attitudes and biases held by that person.

5.2 Employers' approach to diversity and inclusion

While employers in this sample did not identify age friendly approaches, some had implemented methods the believed supported diversity and inclusion in recruitment. These activities most commonly included: implementing a structured recruitment process that is aligned to a wider organisational diversity; blind CVs; panel interviewees and competency-based interviews. The extent to which activities are consistently implemented does tend to vary and there are certain stages (such as the interview stage) where these are more likely to deviate. The extent to which employers evaluated the effectiveness of these methods varied. Some, usually larger, employers collected and analysed the demographic data of their candidates (although rarely in relation to age) to assess diversity, whereas others did not evaluate it at all. There was little evidence that employers critically evaluated each phase or specific activity in the recruitment process.

Interviewees stressed they do not discriminate and that their practices were not biased as they focused on hiring 'the best person for the job', regardless of their characteristics. However, in some cases it appeared that there was a lack of awareness of where bias could enter the recruitment process and how to address it. For example, 'informal' meetings with senior members of staff were often reported, but often without consideration of the potential influence of one voice. Or not considering how pre-interview activities could limit applications from candidates with particular characteristics, or how the assessment of the candidate may benefit some people more than others.

Recruitment agency interviewees discussed their role in providing advice to employers on steps that could be taken to increase inclusion. They also reported being able to provide honest candidate feedback on their perceptions of the employer brand and of their experience in the recruitment process. Some of the employer organisations talked about the role recruitment agencies could play in meeting targets for candidate diversity such as mixed gender shortlists.

Employers talked about proactively looking for advice and best practice on effective recruitment processes and on inclusive approaches. They reported making use of expertise within their HR and recruitment teams gained from their experience within different employers, connecting to peers in other employers through industry and sector recruitment networks including some on LinkedIn, seeking advice from external advisers, such as recruitment agencies and reading advice and recommendations from bodies, such as the CIPD and government.

5.3 The impact of Covid-19 on future trends

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the recruitment landscape was characterised by many recruiters as a tight, candidate-driven market in which employers had to work hard to attract top quality talent. Following the crisis, and as the market enters an economic recession, the trends in recruitment may change.

Most notably, an increase in job losses and greater numbers of people job-seeking will provide a wider pool of talent for employers to choose from but may also mean vast numbers of applications per vacancy. One interviewee reported they had received 500 applications for a single administrative role, considerably higher than expected.

It will be even more important for organisations to have efficient and effective processes in place to handle this extra leg work. In part this may mean a greater reliance on technology to do some of the work for them. The literature mentioned use of AI in some recruitment processes, however this was not reflected in the interviews.

During the lockdown many employers will have relied on technology to continue recruitment, with video interviews and virtual on-boarding including the use of e-learning platforms. These virtual methods have not only allowed recruiters to continue hiring through the lockdown, but they remove the geographical limitations resulting in a wider talent pool to recruit from. Evidence from the interviews suggest than many employers intend to continue using virtual interviewing methods in the future. The age diversity impact of increased use of virtual methods is not clear and will require further future research.

Similarly, many employers have been forced to introduce remote working practices to continue working during the crisis. Many employers have discovered the benefits of remote working and will continue to offer it as more than just an occasional perk. This will also help widen employer's talent pools, as recruiters will not be limited to people within a commutable distance or those who are willing to relocate.

Employer brand is also likely to continue to be a focus as there are fewer opportunities for candidates to interact with employers at jobs fairs for example. Communication with candidates will be key to draw attention to opportunities within an organisation. Strong employer branding and online presence is also a useful tool to keep talent interested and engaged even if there are not active vacancies.

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