

milkround

BEYOND THE
BUZZWORD

Defining and attracting
top graduate talent

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Introduction

Students and graduates in the UK have faced a multitude of challenges this year. The current context of the Covid-19 pandemic, coupled with Brexit on the horizon, has contributed towards feelings of uncertainty for many individuals. Whilst the future of university life and the graduate recruitment landscape is still unclear, it is more important than ever to assess how businesses are rising from the pandemic and shaping their future recruitment strategies, particularly when supporting entry-level talent in 2021 and beyond.

In our Beyond the Buzzword report, we reveal the views and attitudes of over 1,000 UK students and graduates on how universities and businesses are currently approaching diversity strategies. We also uncover how over 250 HR decision makers in the UK are defining top talent, their business values when it comes to hiring a diverse workforce and how, or if, they are implementing inclusive recruitment strategies.

In doing so, this will highlight whether there is a discrepancy between the profiles that businesses publicly list in their job descriptions, and who they are actually hiring.

At Milkround, we aim to support students across the UK from all different backgrounds, helping them succeed in their graduate job search and thrive throughout their careers. Whilst there is already progress being made internally at many companies, in turn, we want to understand the challenges businesses face in their current recruitment strategies, to ensure this is more than a tick box exercise. We want to help recruiters and employers understand how they can attract and retain graduates who can bring a range of different views, opinions and experience to help the future success of their business and ensure everyone is welcome and has a seat at the table.



Key findings

- ✔ Physical appearance (58%) is the top trait students think has the greatest impact on companies' recruitment, followed by race and/or ethnicity (52%) and nationality (52%)
- ✔ Students feel that Arts and Culture (67%), Healthcare (45%) and Education (38%) have the most positive reputation for diversity and inclusion in comparison to Manufacturing and Utilities (4%), Legal (5.5%) and Finance (5.7%)
- ✔ Eight in ten (81%) students believe universities should particularly support students from marginalised backgrounds and identities in finding their first job

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Students and graduates said

HR decision makers said

- ✔ **81%** of students and graduates think nepotism is still a major factor when it comes to who is offered a job
- ✔ **66%** of students and graduates believe not enough companies employ a truly diverse workforce
- ✔ **81%** of students and graduates don't think companies are doing enough to ensure they're recruiting a diverse workforce
- ✔ Students and graduates feel that HR decision makers favour prior work experience within the same industry (**64%**), first class degrees (**59%**) and graduates from Oxford or Cambridge (**26%**) when recruiting
- ✔ Students and graduates believe companies should use strategies such as blind recruitment (**62%**), offering living-wage salaries for graduate level workers (**49%**) and using diverse interview panels (**48%**)

- ✔ Only **6%** of HR decision makers said nepotism is a factor
- ✔ **53%** of HR decision makers said that their business employs a diverse workforce
- ✔ **59%** of HR decision makers believe their business is doing enough to ensure a diverse workforce
- ✔ HR decision makers say that the top factors that they filter candidates on are strong professional references (**23%**), mention of industry relevant skills in their CV (**22%**) and prior work experience within the same industry (**20%**)
- ✔ The most common recruitment strategies used by HR decision makers are offering flexible working opportunities (**28%**), removing minimum requirements from job adverts (**18%**) and demonstrating they have a pre-existing diverse workforce (**16%**)

What's the discrepancy?

The top markers of employability that companies use to filter applicants include having strong professional references (23%), mention of industry relevant skills in their CV (22%) and prior work experience within the same industry (20%), according to HR decision makers.

The HR decision makers survey showed that employers believe the most successful workers possess a willingness to learn new skills (24%). However, only 15% of HR decision makers mentioned this factor as a key marker of employability, revealing a large discrepancy between the skills which HR decision makers look for in candidates, and those which result in the most successful workers. With the increased recognition of the importance of softer skills, such as the willingness to learn, going forward many companies should consider removing entry requirements, to focus on behavioural testing. This could include situational judgement tests, gamification in recruitment or interactive e-tray exercises, which simulate the reality of the company workplace and role.

When compared to the findings from current students and graduates, respondents clearly perceive a discrepancy between who employers say they are looking to recruit, and how they filter applications. Interestingly, 81% of today's students and graduates think nepotism, favouring relatives or friends by giving them a job, is still a major factor when it comes to

who is offered a job, despite just 6% of HR decision makers saying this is a factor.

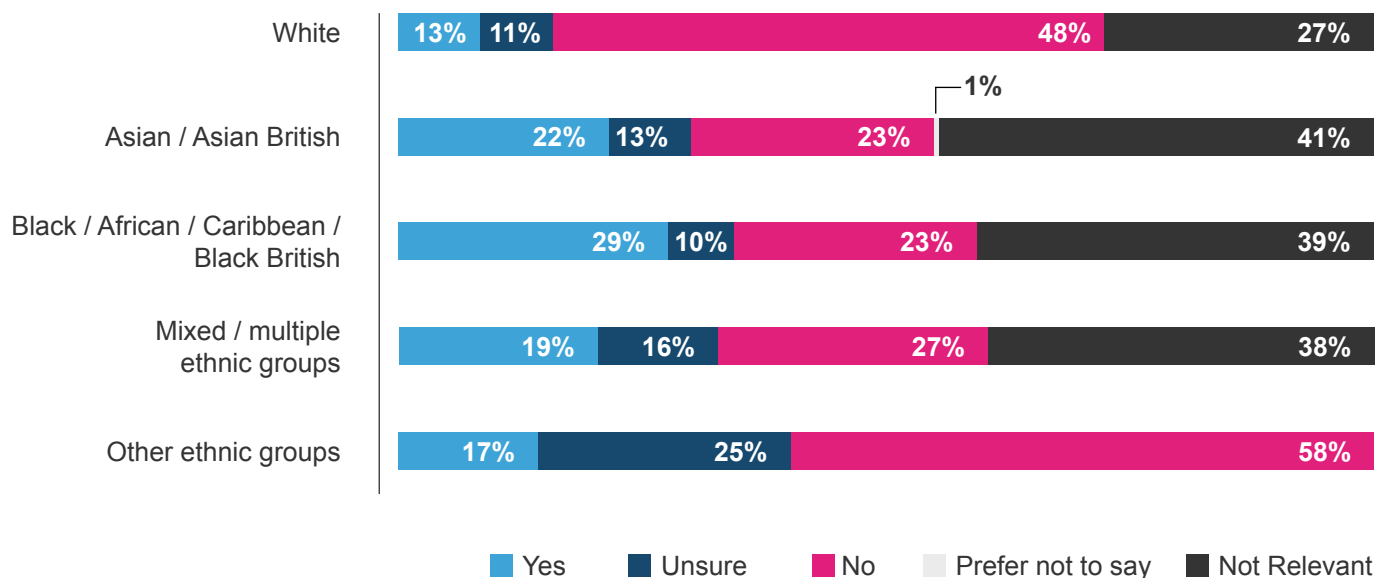
Whilst student and graduate respondents recognise the importance of work experience, agreeing that recruiters favour candidates with prior experience in the industry (64%), well over half revealed top first class degrees (59%) are still believed to be heavily favoured by employers. When asked what they believe recruiters should prioritise, soft skills (46%) came out particularly high for students and graduates.

Seemingly, students and graduates hold an entirely different perspective to employers when it comes to how companies filter graduate candidates according to personal characteristics, with 58% believing that physical appearance has the greatest impact on companies' recruitment. Race and/or ethnicity (52%) and nationality (52%) follow closely behind, whilst 44% think whether a candidate went to a Russell Group university is factored into companies' recruitment decisions. In contrast, only 2% of HR decision makers said they filtered for Russell Group graduates when sorting through job applications.

When asked about whether their background, identity or personal characteristics have negatively affected their application for a graduate job, respondents from varying ethnic demographics responded differently, as depicted in the graph on the next page.



Have you ever felt like your background, identity or personal characteristics have negatively affected your application for a graduate job role?



What students and graduates would like employers to know about them?

That I'm more than the sum of my qualifications or identities

My accomplishments, what I can bring to the company and my views on diversity

That my qualifications exist beyond my college degree

I'm hard working and eager to train and learn new things

My previous experience and what I can bring to the job

The soft qualities I have that will really benefit them

I would like them to think of me as equal to every other candidate



Promoting a diverse workforce

When it comes to various industries, students and graduates feel that Arts and Culture (67%), Healthcare (45%) and Education (38%) have the most positive reputation for promoting diversity and inclusion. On the other hand, Manufacturing and Utilities (4%), Legal (5.5%) and Finance (5.7%) are seen as being the least diverse and inclusive industries.

According to HR decision makers, almost two fifths (59%) believe their business is doing enough to ensure they are recruiting a diverse workplace and over half (53%) believe their business is diverse. Despite this positive outlook from recruiters, this appears to be getting lost in translation to students and graduates, as eight in ten (81%) surveyed do not think companies are doing enough in this area and two thirds (66%) agree that not enough companies employ a truly diverse workforce. This highlights the clear gap between the work that companies are doing towards implementing diversity and inclusion internally and how their initiatives are promoted or perceived by prospective candidates.

Companies should ensure they are addressing this issue, as over a third (34%) of students and graduates surveyed said they would consider how committed a company is to diversity and inclusion before applying for a job role. When this statistic is broken down into different demographics, only 23% of men said they would consider this, rising to 39% of women and 73% of those who identify as non-binary. In addition, 34% of White respondents said they would consider this before applying, compared to 43% of Asian/Asian British respondents, 45% of Black/African/Caribbean/Black British respondents, 46% of Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups and 58% of other ethnic groups.

Interestingly, when this question is broken down into different age respondents, all three age groups (Under 21, those aged 21-29, and those aged 30+) responded the same, with 33% agreeing that

they would consider a company's commitment to diversity and inclusion before applying, suggesting that individuals' attitudes on this matter are less dependent on their age, and more influenced by other demographic factors.

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67%

of students and graduates feel that Arts and Culture have the most positive reputation for promoting diversity and inclusion

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66%

also believe that not enough companies employ a truly diverse workforce

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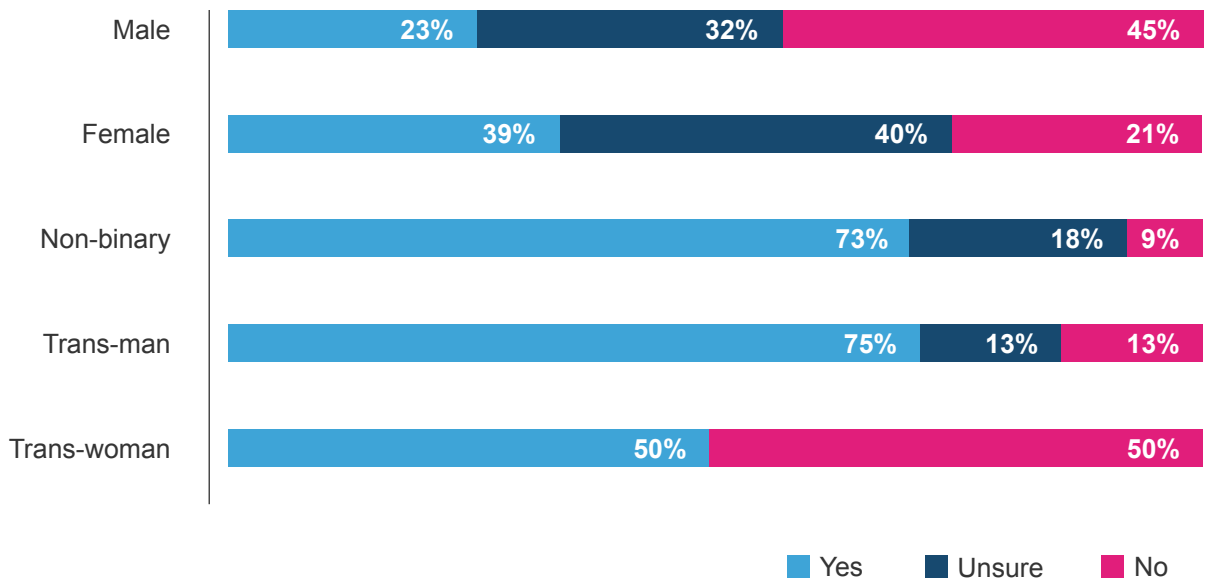
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37%

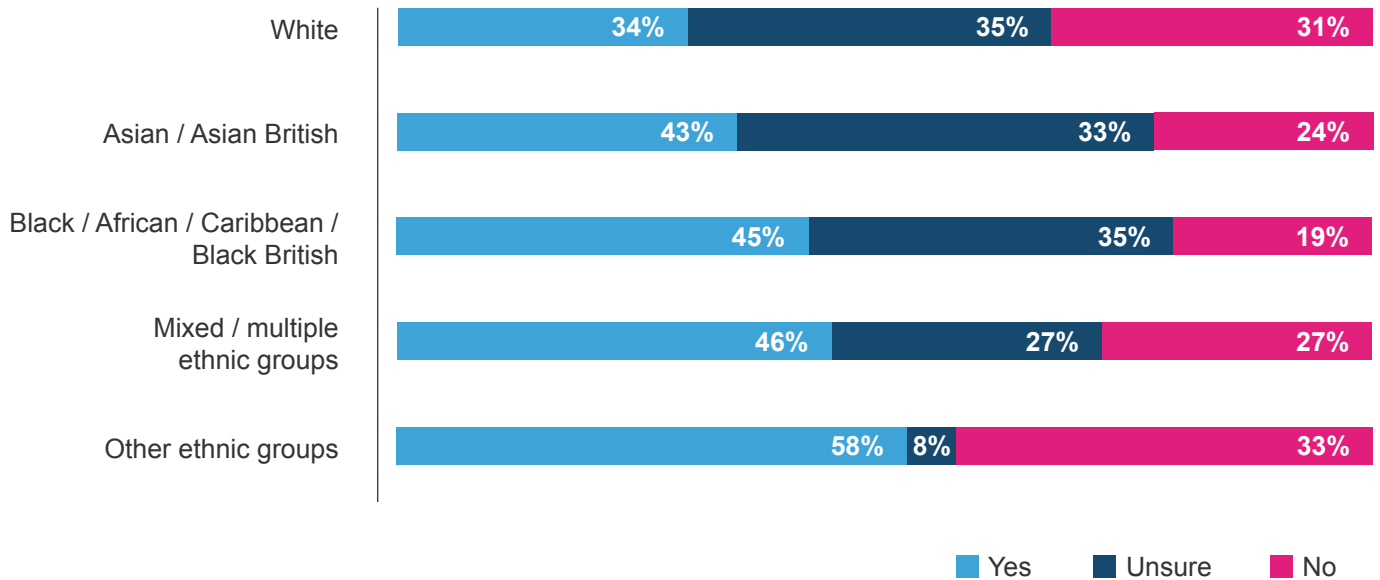
of women consider how committed a company is to diversity and inclusion before applying for a role, compared to 22% of men

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Do or would you consider how committed a company is to diversity and inclusion before applying for a job role?



Do or would you consider how committed a company is to diversity and inclusion before applying for a job role?





Strategies in place

So, how can companies ensure they are being representative and encouraging students and graduates from all backgrounds to apply for their roles?

Students and graduates believe companies should use strategies such as blind recruitment (62%), offering living-wage salaries for graduate level workers (49%) and using diverse interview panels (48%) to promote their support of those from minority backgrounds.

Blind Recruitment is the process of removing all signals about a candidate's socio-economic background, ethnicity and immigration status that might influence a hiring manager's decision. Companies can adopt this by removing the candidate's name and other identifying factors – such as age, address or location, years of experience, and school or university names – from their application.

A living-wage salary for graduate workers is paying all directly employed staff a living-wage rate, as calculated by the Living Wage Foundation (currently £9.30 an hour or £10.85 an hour in London). This is calculated according to what people need to afford a decent standard of living. Companies can adopt this voluntary higher rate of base pay, which is higher than the government's National Minimum Wage rates.

A diverse interview panel is bringing underrepresented employees into your interview process to show that you're committed to different points of view and opinions. Companies can do this by bringing in people from varied backgrounds and experiences as part of their interview panels. As a minimum rule – never use an all-white, all-male panel.

From an employer perspective, almost a quarter (23%) of HR decision makers said that their company does not currently have any diversity and inclusion recruitment strategies in place. For those who do, the most common diversity and inclusion recruitment strategies include offering flexible working opportunities (28%), removing minimum requirements from job adverts (18%) and demonstrating

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62%

of students and graduates believe companies should use strategies such as blind recruitment

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a pre-existing diverse workforce (16%). In addition, while only 14% of employers currently practice blind recruitment, a third of those not practicing it (37%) are planning to implement this strategy in the near future.

Looking closer at graduates' experiences once they enter the workplace, respondents feel that to ensure everyone in a company feels equal and a sense of belonging, companies should offer extra support to people with reduced mobility (50%), those from lower socio-economic backgrounds (42%) and minority backgrounds (42%). Positively, these findings were echoed amongst HR decision makers.

However, despite recognising these commitments to equality, 14% of businesses surveyed do not have a

formal policy or strategy in place to support colleagues of marginalised backgrounds, if they do not feel fairly treated in the workplace. Therefore, there is more to be done to ensure those employees feel supported and comfortable to approach their managers and talk about their experience once they have entered the workforce.

According to the student and graduate survey, 31% of males said someone's identity, background or personal characteristics had a negative impact on their career, compared to 42% of females and 50% of non-binary people.





Diversity and inclusion in context

This year in particular, the increased attention on the need for social change, exemplified by the Black Lives Matter movement, has meant that almost three in ten (29%) of HR decision makers have stimulated discussions around recruitment strategies at their company. Similarly, seven in ten (70%) of student and graduate respondents said that they are more likely to consider a brand's reputation for diversity and inclusion, as a result of wider purpose-led campaigns and social movements.

On a practical level, 69% of student and graduate respondents think companies should do more to show

what actions they are taking in order to hire a diverse workforce, with 69% also believing all companies should use publicly available reports to show the work they're doing to ensure diversity and equity in the workplace. This would improve candidates' awareness of companies' values and their approach to welcoming employees from all backgrounds.

Once introduced into the company, 66% of students and graduates think all companies should use internal forums for discussion, to ensure dialogue and conversations are ongoing throughout their time with the business.

“ The Black Lives Matter movement has meant that almost three in ten of HR decision makers have stimulated discussions around recruitment strategies at their company ”

“ 70% of students and graduates said that they are more likely to consider a brand's reputation for diversity and inclusion, as a result of wider purpose-led campaigns and social movements ”

How can universities support?

Reflecting on students' experiences before graduation, eight in ten (81%) students and graduates think that universities have an important role to play in supporting students from marginalised backgrounds and identities in finding their first job.

Additionally, organisations being involved in university-led mentoring and access schemes have proven successful and beneficial in enabling greater access to jobs. Of those students and graduates who

have experienced these schemes, (77%) confirmed they were effective in encouraging them to apply for a role at that company.

We have seen how universities have adapted throughout the pandemic, finding new ways to support their student bodies and graduate alumni to help secure a job as well as developing new skills. Leading the way, The University of Westminster share their key employability initiatives on the following page.

Case study:

The University of Westminster

UNIVERSITY OF
WESTMINSTER

The University of Westminster has a legacy of helping students from different backgrounds fulfil their potential since 1838. A significant proportion of Westminster's undergraduate population continues to be made up of students from economically or socially disadvantaged households and students from a wide range of cultural backgrounds.

Employability is one of four key objectives of the university's 2018-2023 strategy, named Being Westminster. This strategy requires that, by 2025, every undergraduate course will include a mandatory short-term Work Based or Placement Learning provision to actively support the engagement of BAME and disabled students.

The university has many initiatives in place, such as: 'Skills Academy' workshops and Inclusive Futures Fair, as well as Westminster's Creative Enterprise Centre and mentoring schemes. In addition, the service also offers targeted support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds via:

1

Inclusive Futures Insights

An initiative offering insights into the career opportunities that students from disadvantaged backgrounds can access and a route to building their professional network.

2

Membership of MyPlus Consulting Universities' Club

Enabling students with disabilities and long-term health conditions to access additional resources and connect with employers.

3

Class of 2020

Keeping students motivated to develop work-ready skills during the challenging context of the current labour market conditions. This offers graduating students an extension of careers and employability support, including access to online resources, one-to-one appointments, a new interview preparation platform and a bespoke digital assessment centre.



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Westminster’s employability offer is built on our commitment to help students from different backgrounds fulfil their potential and we are very pleased to have launched our Class of 2020 – a careers support programme created especially for our graduating cohort. It’s a tough year to be entering the labour market and our programme is designed to keep our graduates motivated and engaged in developing work-ready skills as well as preparing for digital assessment centres and navigating online recruitment and selection processes.

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Monica Deshpande
Head of Employability and Graduate Success,
University of Westminster

What can employers do?

Training and educating teams on unconscious bias is a great place to start and should be a key priority for all companies. Employers also need to communicate their actions on an internal level to show current employees what they are doing to attract a more diverse workforce and increase applications amongst talented entry-level students and graduates.

Milkround discussed the findings from the report with various UK businesses working on improving their diversity and inclusion strategies.



As a result, here are some top first-hand tips direct from those companies into what graduate employers can be doing moving forward:

- 1** Instilling career confidence in those who may not feel confident applying for roles is important. This can be done by offering coaching workshops or sessions with students across the country
- 2** Work with a variety of universities across the UK, not just Russell Group universities that perhaps other employers traditionally do not work with and engage with them around key moments to encourage inclusion
- 3** Take accountability in creating and implementing diversity 'scorecards' when hiring, to ensure gender, BLM, LGBT+, disability and social mobility initiatives are in place
- 4** Remove minimum graduate requirements and start thinking about introducing elements of blind recruitment into the overall selection process
- 5** Offer support to graduate employees from marginalised backgrounds when they join the business, including onboarding, mentoring and connecting with employee networks and senior leaders from similar backgrounds

Summary

The unprecedented nature of the last year has shone a light on significant social and cultural movements, which deserve immediate attention. Employers need to re-visit and address their recruitment strategies to ensure diversity and inclusion is at the heart and they are welcoming and supporting students and graduates from all backgrounds.

Diversity in the workplace will often result in a much broader spectrum of creativity, from graduates and candidates with different backgrounds, skills and experiences. Employees can better understand each other's differences and embrace individuals' strengths, as well as instil wider team confidence, which is incredibly important for entry-level talent. In turn, encouraging diversity can help to boost performance and engagement across the board, as employees who feel included will be more engaged and motivated to do well. Essentially, a more engaged team will often yield better team performance.

Making the challenges of diversity an urgent topic of conversation is important and should be discussed more frequently both within universities and amongst companies to ensure policies and processes are frequently evaluated and improvements are made accordingly. Going forward, employers and HR teams should take accountability in ensuring their workforces are diverse and inclusive. Hiring a wide range of diverse individuals to simply 'tick a box' isn't enough, companies need to ensure that the participation and recognition of all employees is equal. There is ongoing work to be done to identify problems and create strategies for success, however this is a vital part of workplace culture to ensure the well-being of employees and business success combined.

Milkround surveyed 250 HR/Recruitment decision makers via Opinium between 28th September and 2nd October, and 1,000 students and recent graduates via Student Hut between 6th October and 20th October.

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student and graduate recruitment campaigns.

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