# Early Careers Virtual Roundtable

**No. 2**
Thursday 14th May
10am – 11:30am

TheTalentPeople

**Overview**

As the nation looks ahead to a life without 'lockdown', an opportunity has presented itself for organisations to plan for a future workforce. Continued uncertainty over the speed of restriction-easing, however, still acts as a barrier to implementation.

TheTalentPeople with Class Careers hosted a 'virtual' round table on 14th May, to discuss the ideas held by some of those forward-thinking organisations, and the routes that others hope to follow to avoid a 'lost year' of talent.

**The roundtable covered three main areas of discussion:**

1. Promoting your brand and keeping candidates engaged
2. Onboarding of new talent in a 'virtual' world and maintaining employee wellbeing
3. Planning 2021 and future talent pipelines

**Attendees of the event included**

# Executive Summary

1. There is a desire to go ahead with candidate intake but start dates are constantly being pushed back, not helped by uncertainty on government policy and internal stakeholders changing or delaying decisions. Regular contact by phone is still proving crucial but how long can this continue remains the question for many employers before candidates lose interest or patience.

2. Students that come from non-affluent and alternative 'parent backgrounds' find company hiring processes very intimidating and this could be made worse by everything going digital. Research has shown that showing what it's like for a candidate similar to them can help but this still remains a huge challenge in the current digital era.

3. Regular contact through a range of channels and setting clear and concise deadlines with young talent remains crucial for employee wellbeing. Without constant contact similar to that of an office environment, some individuals are likely to push themselves too far or not enough to hit assumed deadlines and objectives.

4. Manager training is essential in order to make sure the candidates have the best resources, help and advice during their programmes. The management landscape has changed and managers need to change to fit this. There is also a clear challenge with IT for new starters and giving candidates enough time to get comfortable with their laptops and systems is crucial.

5. Various research shows that we are potentially heading for around 1 - 1.2 million young unemployed people and that six months of unemployment for young people can make the eventual transition into employment very difficult. This could have a huge knock-on in a few years' time on critical skills gaps which already exist in the UK. There could be a bigger uptake of apprenticeships as candidates look for job certainties moving forward but ongoing questions remain on this because of the stigma of apprenticeships, the challenge of schools and employers connecting and the funding allocated to Higher Education.
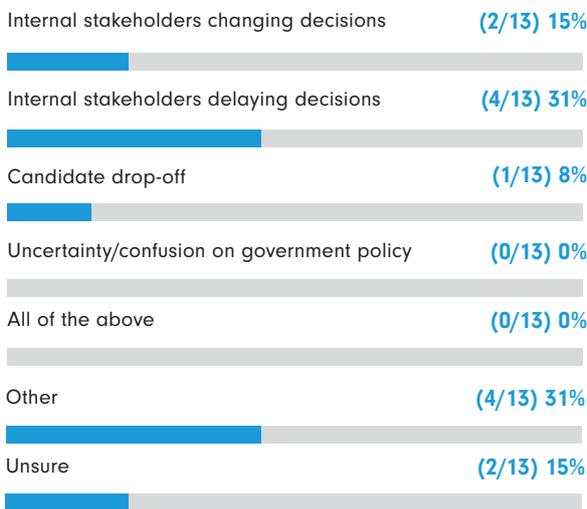
## Overview

With over 70% of early talent still requesting updates and information from organisations on their plans to hire (TheTalentPeople Candidate Survey, May 2020) it appears that the secret to success in creating and maintaining a talent pool is within direct candidate contact. But before an organisation is capable of undertaking such a campaign, it must be clear on its own objectives. This is easier said than done in light of the current timeframe challenges.

To better understand the current environment, a selection of polls were used and the following was identified:
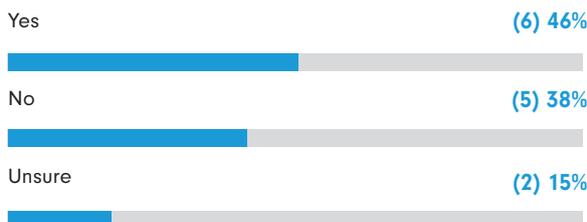
### If you've had to reopen vacancies for applications, what has driven this? (Multiple choice)

Inability to plan for talent accurately and effectively is affecting many levels of the attendees' company hierarchy. Roles have been reopened as a result of delayed internal discussions (among other reasons) affecting the desired candidate intake.
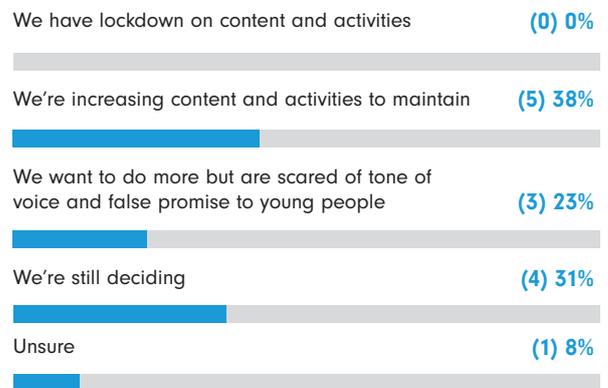
Internal stakeholders changing decisions **(2/13) 15%**

Internal stakeholders delaying decisions **(4/13) 31%**

Candidate drop-off **(1/13) 8%**

Uncertainty/confusion on government policy **(0/13) 0%**

All of the above **(0/13) 0%**

Other **(4/13) 31%**

Unsure **(2/13) 15%**

### What's the position of your current brand?

When it comes to branding, many attendees are split on their decisions. Branding is affected whether communicating regularly with target audiences or not at all; but the effect of either is a unknown when uncertain on what content to push.

We have lockdown on content and activities **(0) 0%**

We're increasing content and activities to maintain **(5) 38%**

We want to do more but are scared of tone of voice and false promise to young people **(3) 23%**

We're still deciding **(4) 31%**

Unsure **(1) 8%**

### Are you finding it more diffcult to reach young people and candidates in the current climate.

Despite the majority of candidates looking for opportunities and requesting more information from employers, the majority of attending organisations are actually finding it difficult to reach them.

Yes **(6) 46%**

No **(5) 38%**

Unsure **(2) 15%**

### Has early careers changed in priority for the internal business since Covid 19?

For most attendees, the desire to hire has remained consistent during the COVID-19 lockdown. For some organisations, a greater need has identified itself where skills gaps have appeared.

Its become more of a priority **(3) 33%**

Its become less of a priority **(0) 0%**

It remains unchanged **(6) 50%**

Unsure **(1) 8%**

You'll need to ask the boss **(1) 8%**
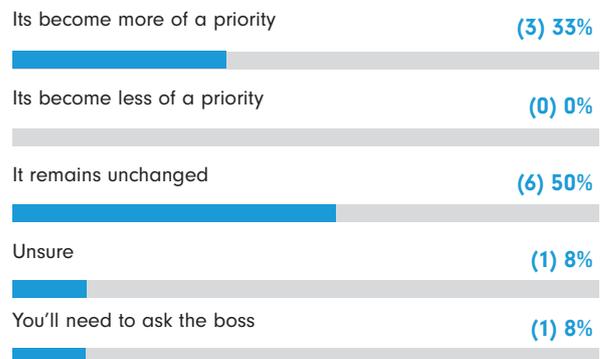
# The conversation

1. **Uncertainty around government time frames and organisational capabilities** is creating disparity between what to communicate to candidates and how to keep them 'warm' in the process of determining vacancy details. Desire to continue with candidate intake exists but uncertainty is pushing back starting dates on both attraction and onboarding.

2. **Getting 'buy-in' from candidates when attraction is virtual, is a current challenge.** Online processes are also making it hard to gauge a candidate's cultural fit due to some of the personal elements of communication being lost.

   Some attendees are succeeding, however, with personality tools to provide some insight into engaged candidates. By measuring them against current employees of the company, a baseline can be identified and worked up from.

3. **Regular candidate contact by phone is still proving successful** in maintaining engagement, building relationships, making candidates feel valued and keeping them 'warm' for when hiring and onboarding does kick off.

   This has been proven with one attendee to 'hold' 320 candidates over a period of two months so far. No confirmation of colleges training start-up timeframes is making it harder moving forwards, however.

4. **Students that come from non-effluent and diverse parent backgrounds find company hiring processes very intimidating.** Family interaction (ie. dinner table conversations) and in-class discussion can combat this, but it's never fully overcome.

   Candidates/students like knowing about what it feels like to be in a company, not necessarily what a day in work looks like. Employers engaging with 6th forms to provide even a small amount of work experience had drastically good impacts for not only the students' mindset and knowledge, but also the employer's hiring funnel. This is even the case for less appealing industries and smaller brands.

**TheTalentPeople insight**

Our research has found that giving a candidate insight into a business' culture from the perspective of an individual similar to themselves has greater positive effects for hiring. This approach has seen great results for fulfilling social inclusion and diversity as the searching individual can often relate better. We have also experienced that candidates do really welcome a phone call to give that personal touchpoint, especially in light of no face to face contact from employers.
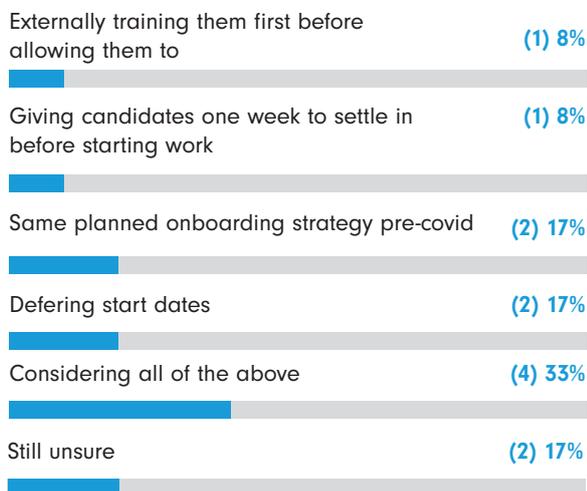
# Onboarding and maintaining employee wellbeing

Some employers have managed to start onboarding successfully, but challenges still exist for most. Lockdown and furlough is putting pressure on remaining human resource to facilitate introduction of new candidates to the business. But with uncertainty, it's hard to plan for the future and change this. As a result, challenges have expanded to maintaining the retention of new candidates too.
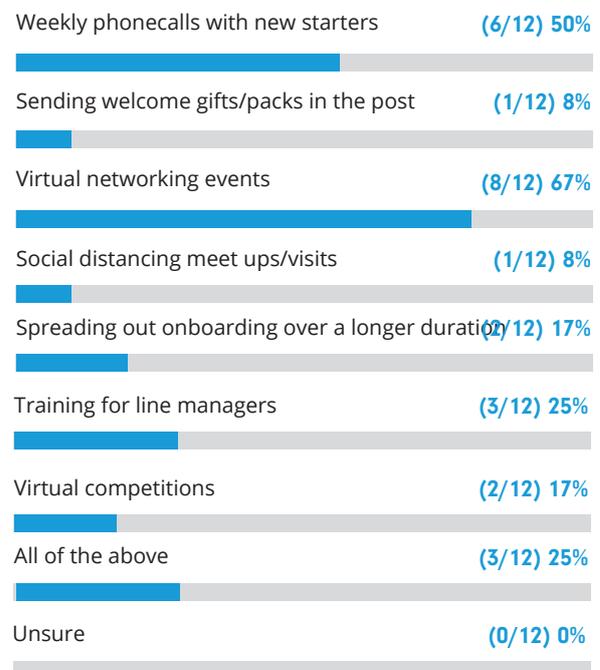
## Overall, what strategy are you taking with onboarding?

When it comes to onboarding, attendees were spread evenly across a selection of methods. Different roles, candidates and companies require a different approach, and organisations aren't limiting themselves to one route, for the best part.

Externally training them first before allowing them to **(1) 8%**

Giving candidates one week to settle in before starting work **(1) 8%**

Same planned onboarding strategy pre-covid **(2) 17%**

Defering start dates **(2) 17%**

Considering all of the above **(4) 33%**

Still unsure **(2) 17%**

## What approaches are you planning to maintain job satisfaction and employee wellbeing with current or new apprentices/students/graduates? (Multiple choice)

Virtual networking events top the list of methods used by attendees to maintain job satisfaction and staff engagement. Along with second place, weekly phone calls with new starters, it is clear the including a (virtual) face-to-face offering is popular.

Weekly phonecalls with new starters **(6/12) 50%**

Sending welcome gifts/packs in the post **(1/12) 8%**

Virtual networking events **(8/12) 67%**

Social distancing meet ups/visits **(1/12) 8%**

Spreading out onboarding over a longer duration **(2/12) 17%**

Training for line managers **(3/12) 25%**

Virtual competitions **(2/12) 17%**

All of the above **(3/12) 25%**

Unsure **(0/12) 0%**

# The conversation

1. **Contact is key for almost all of the attendees,** with the ability to be personable, honest and accommodating paying dividends to new starter mentality. Linking staff members to mentors and managers on a weekly cycle was particularly effective for one organisation. This facilitated the increase in flexible project work, which also allowed the staff member to work remotely from wherever they want too.

2. **Being able to travel back to family and friends has drastically improved positivity** amongst the younger work force. Virtual teambuilding and coffee mornings have continued this mindset.

3. **Three-week onboarding for new starters** via both face-to-face AND other virtual methods, depending on the availability of the company and the candidate has proven successful so far for one attendee. In general, members of the Roundtable agreed that providing multiple routes to the same outcome is good practice in order to facilitate successful integration and onboarding.

4. **Virtual events are a strong consideration** for maintaining candidate contact and filling the funnel for future access. Typically done face to face, virtualisation of candidate events will help keep reach high with students and other young individuals. Closed schools and dispersion of this audience is making this more difficult, however.

5. **Manager training has been essential** in order to make sure the candidates have the best resources, help and advice at the other end of the conversation. The management landscape has changed, and managers need to change to fit this now in order to support apprentices, students and graduates and maintain their wellbeing.

6. **Setting clear and concise deadlines with new young talent is very important.** Without constant contact similar to that of an office environment, some individuals are likely to push themselves too far or not enough to hit assumed deadlines and objectives. Knowing what needs to be done and when for is better for all stakeholder planning.

# "You can't communicate too much at this time. The more the better."
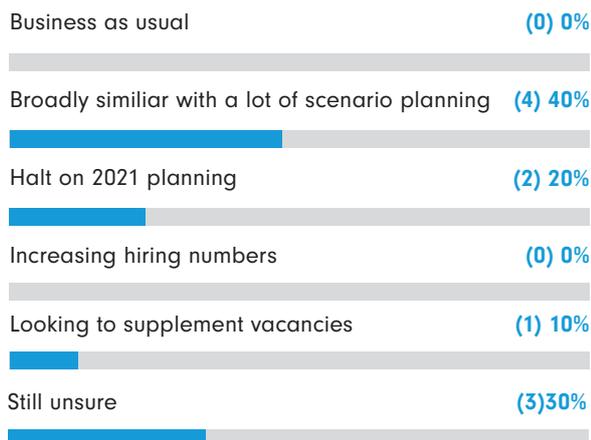
## Planning 2021 and future talent pipelines

At present, despite lack of clarity on many topics, it is widely agreed that an organisation who can better engage with individuals now will have the best pick of talent in the future. Efforts to connect with young individuals will also help reduce the planned young people unemployment figures of 1.2 million after the school year ends.

TheTalentPeople has seen positive correlation in young talent being out of work for longer periods of time, and a change of mindset preventing that young talent from engaging with careers. The race is on to secure a future workforce, but what can be achieved under the current circumstances? Polls held in the Roundtable found the following:

### What is your hiring and early careers plans in 2021?

Typically, many of the attendees repeat hiring practices year-on-year. The results of the first poll reflected this with extra caution adhered as a result of the uncertainties caused by COVID-19. This uncertainty was also reflected in the popularity of the 'still unsure' selections.

Business as usual **(0) 0%**

Broadly similiar with a lot of scenario planning **(4) 40%**

Halt on 2021 planning **(2) 20%**

Increasing hiring numbers **(0) 0%**

Looking to supplement vacancies **(1) 10%**

Still unsure **(3)30%**

### What is your planning window for early talent requirements?

Again, current uncertainties are shielding the foresight of many organisations and their plans to hire. Many attendees usually plan for a window of up two years for their talent. The realities of the current situation don't make this possible for all.

We predict the number of hires for 1-2 years **(3) 30%**

We predict the number of hires for 3-4 years **(0) 0%**

We predict the number of hires for 5+ years **(1) 10%**

All of the above **(1) 10%**

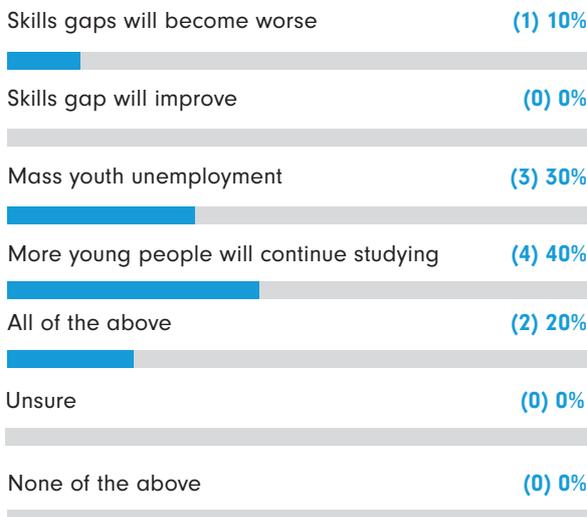We still don't know what next week looks like **(3) 30%**

Unsure **(2) 20%**

### What are you predictions at a macro level?

As recently mentioned in the news, many of the attendees predict high degrees of mass youth unemployment and an extension of youth studying. The latter reflecting students' desire to overcome challenges in planning for employment for the short-to-medium term.

Skills gaps will become worse **(1) 10%**

Skills gap will improve **(0) 0%**

Mass youth unemployment **(3) 30%**

More young people will continue studying **(4) 40%**

All of the above **(2) 20%**

Unsure **(0) 0%**

None of the above **(0) 0%**

# The conversation

1. **There is a desire in the industry to continue with apprentice intake** this year (September) where possible. Some employers have gone live with plans in the last week, but many are still deciding. This largely depends on the industry and the effect of Coronavirus has had on the businesses within them.

2. **Major 6th Form and College concerns are around work experience opportunities** at the moment, especially with the smaller firms. Larger firms can generally still facilitate. Small firms who generally interact more with students don't know where to start with hiring for this coming intake due to challenges with money and human resource needed to facilitate new/young starters.

3. **Small firms that have reduced young candidate intake one year have seen an increase in organisational challenges later on.** Because of this, the desire to hire is potentially larger now than before, but the COVID-19 challenges are counteracting these notions.

4. **The knock-on effect to candidate experience, skills and therefore their CVs will likely be significant.** How does an employer choose the right candidate if their knowledge and skills history aren't there? Will there be a bigger focus on soft skills and the measurement of those? How will the candidate job profile change to reflect this?

5. **There could be a bigger uptake of Apprenticeships as candidates look for the job certainties associated with them, moving forwards.** However, this will likely also require an increase in Employer demand in order to facilitate this and combat the increased funding that the higher education sector so often receives.

6. **Employers are likely to rely on schools and colleges to push the benefits of apprenticeships and other non-higher educational routes** in order to drive their importance. With employers unable to attend schools and colleges now to push this message, help is needed to maintain intake in these areas.

7. **One employer has found that older employees working from home has put certain members of staff into the mindset of early retirement and this could speed up the need for succession planning.** This number was 7-9 people retiring yearly but is expected to increase now as the steps taken toward retirement are already 'half-way completed' by being in lockdown and/or on furlough.

A virtual world presents us with new employee challenges. But it's important to also view this as a chance to take advantage of new opportunities. A new wave of talent might not know any different and so making sure the company has the right tools to provide for new starters will create smooth transitions. This might be a learning curve but by being honest, open and employee-led, fantastic growth environments can be generated.