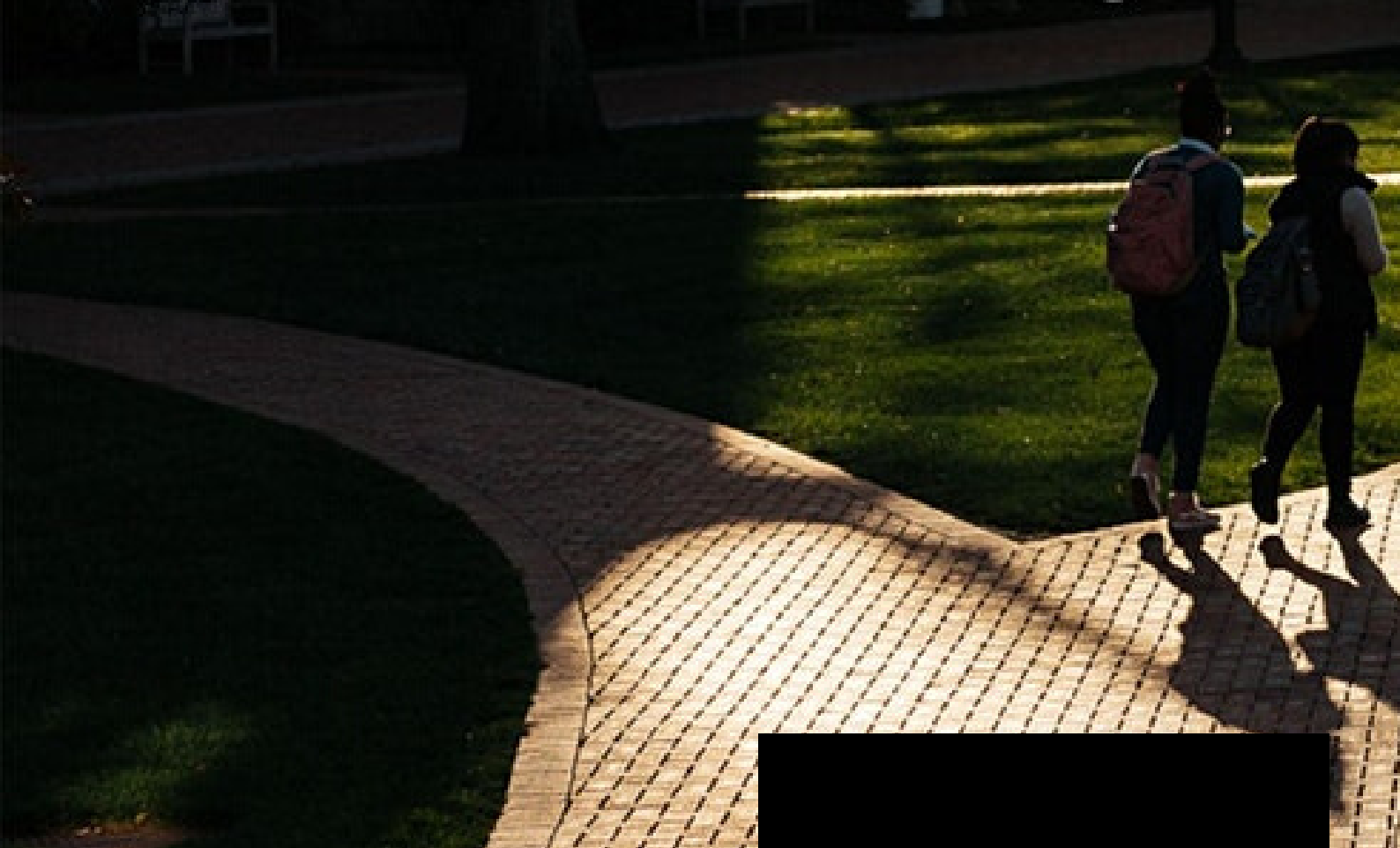# Virtual Recruitment
Opportunities and challenges

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A DIGITAL DISCUSSION EVENT ON 25TH JUNE 2020

About the event

On Thursday 25th June 2020, Handshake and Gradconsult brought together c50 professionals from across the sector to discuss the opportunities and challenges presented by digital recruitment.The session was hosted by:

Rebecca Fielding
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Mike Grey
Head of University Partnerships
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Head of Handshake UK
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University Partnerships
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The aims of the online session were to:
- Create a space for community, collaboration and connection
- Enable idea generation and exploration
- Share market insight
- Create a change in mindset. This period is not just about digitising what you've done offline, it is about thinking differently to take advantage of the best elements of virtual connectivity and approaches
- Focus on actionable, pragmatic solutions that participants can implement in the short-term

We asked two sets of questions looking at digital recruitment. For each set of questions, the participants were split into zoom breakout rooms to confidentially discuss their insights, ideas and challenges, with each group sharing back to the main group using PollEV software. We have collated a synthesised summary of the insights from the session in this paper. The session began with three key questions to set the scene....

Are you currently training students on digital recruitment?

Yes **A**	62%
No **B**	
Not yet, but we are planning to **C**	38%
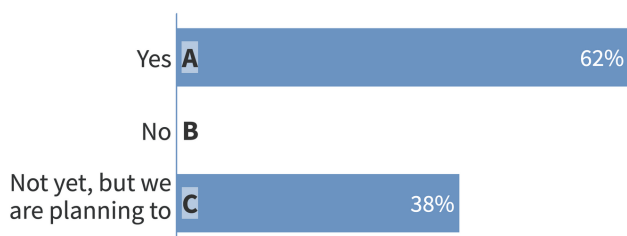
Are you currently offering training for employers to support them in a digital recruitment process?

Yes **A**	17%
No **B**	42%
Not yet, but we are planning to **C**	42%
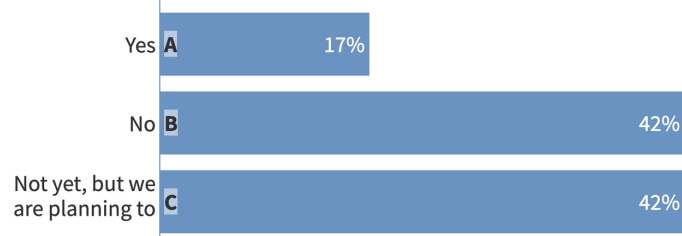
Have you personally gone through a digital recruitment process?

Yes **A**	8%
No **B**	92%

This last finding was perhaps the most interesting, in that whilst many of us are advising employers and students, very few of use have experienced it ourselves.

Q1. Supporting students...

Each breakout room were asked to discuss the question 'How can we help students to prepare and support them through a digital recruitment process?' with the follow up prompts:
- How can we familiarise ourselves with the processes?
- What simulations could we deliver to give students an opportunity practice?
- What sort of authentic assessments could we embed in the curriculum to prepare students for the digital recruitment process?
- How could we support students to overcome digital accessibility issues?

Key takeaways from the groups
- Build it into assessment – even application to a course at Imperial
- Training academic staff to understand new approaches – benefit for academic advisers and ongoing conversations, not just one-off sessions or modules
- Digital can make embedding employers much easier than face to face with time commitments - into classroom
- Build into competition rounds eg business pitches
- Gaining intelligence from employers on what their digital processes will include and using these to guide the activities for students is crucial.
- Student feedback on recruitment processes can be helpful
- Building up library of digital recruitment assessment examples by speaking with employers who are experimenting with different approaches
- Lots of different providers – how do we keep up?
- Make space for assessing videos from staff time freed up from on campus sessions
- Training for students in awareness of reasonable adjustments in recruitment practices as well as just digital skills/simulations
- Employers probably haven't changed the behavioural capabilities that candidates need to demonstrate – it's the tool that's different. Perhaps we need to focus on that in the curriculum and then the careers service can pick up the more practical advice and experiential work on the new virtual tools.
- Dispelling or debunking myths; transparent about constantly changing processes on both sides; Digital Skills course institution wide to assist learning but built with Careers Service input to ensure focus on employability

Our summary

There was a significant amount of uncertainty and concern about the pace of change and new technologies being used by employers in such a short space of time. There is clearly a need for all careers and employability colleagues themselves to have the opportunity to experience and learn more about what is being used, how and why.

Employers and students were both identified as key partners in this learning process, which will be key to engaging academic and embedding these new forms of assessment into curriculum if impact at scale is desired.

A wide range of authentic assessment models are available and are starting to be well used across the sector, including but not limited to reflective video interview journals, simulated assessment centres and business challenges.

And finally adjustments and access were a key point of discussion and how to work with employers to continually improve and develop these technologies to ensure fair access for all students.

Q2. Supporting employers

Each breakout room were asked to discuss the question 'How can we help employers prepare and support them through a digital recruitment process?' with the follow up prompts:

- How can we better understand employers evolving needs and requirements?
- How will the needs of SME and low volume graduate employers be different to that of corporate graduate schemes?
- What training and resources could we provide to employers to support them to develop their processes?
- What platforms or technology could we provide employers access to for delivering elements of a digital recruitment process?
- How else can we add value to the process?

Key takeaways from the groups

- E learning module for employers, available when they want it.
- Run seminar with our Ed Tech / ICT team
- Provide a package approach so SME can access recruitment processes run by universities to save companies costs
- Inviting smaller employers to assess as part of a simulated assessment centre so they are learning as the students are
- Allow employers to use university systems to sift and host element of digital recruitment (integrated online rather than taking manual processes like shortlisting offline on the employer)
- Increase regional collaboration for SMEs. Look at best practice, Scotland and Wales have strong connections with each other.
- Is there an opportunity to supports SMEs who are in the supply chains of larger businesses? Use the brand of the larger business to drive student/SME attendance to a series of webinars?
- Creating online profiles/portfolios for students that demonstrate competence (e.g. participation in simulated online recruitment activity), which could give employers confidence in talent pool (Staffs example)
- Bring employer's into course content to raise profile and build insight for students and employers
- Can we collate applications or offer support SMEs where we provide the initial part of the recruitment process?

Our summary

There was universal recognition and agreement that SMEs and mid-tier businesses would be the main audience seeking support and advice from university teams, whereas larger ISE/corporate recruiters are already responding and have the funds and expertise to put solutions in place. Competing for brand awareness, offering webinars, bite sized videos, how to guides and accessible (just in time) content for this type of employer were all key recommendations. Many participants also recognised the cost barrier as a significant challenge for those employers who do not hire at scale and suggested either undertaking part of the selection process or offering up access to university systems/tech (like an ATS or video interviews) as key to enabling this population of employers to recruit. Overall we know from previous recessions that SMEs will be the most agile, amongst the first employers to start hiring graduates in numbers again and key to economic recovery and graduate outcomes. As such those universities who are able to best support this population to recruit in a speedy and cost effective way, will no doubt be offering both their regional economy and recent graduates a distinct advantage.

Global insights

We finished the session with some insights collated from the vast amount of research that Handshake have done into connecting employers and students virtually. They shared three key trends in digital recruitment:

| Jobs printed in a binder / classifieds	Classifieds move online w/ job boards.	Proactive engagement
You find the job.	You find the job.	The job finds you.

University recruiting is here.
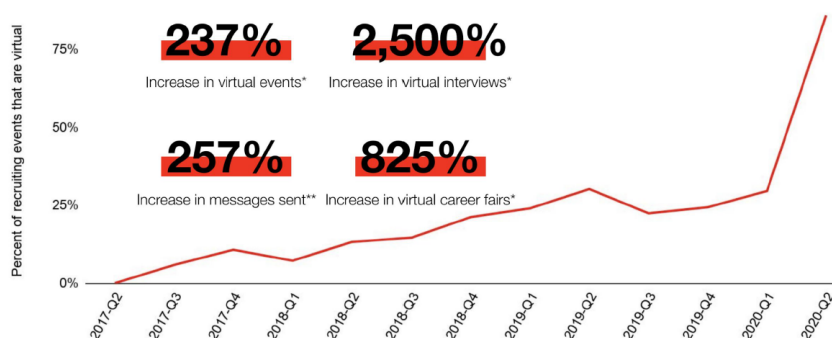
Trend 1: Early career recruitment is moving from reactive to proactive.

For a long time, the onus has been on the individual to find the opportunity that is right for them. However this strategy negatively impacts those students and employers who possess less resources, connections and prior knowledge. For this reason we have seen early career recruitment move towards more proactive strategies, and we believe this is now more important than ever before.

Trend 2: Digital is evolving to offer authentic connections @ scale.
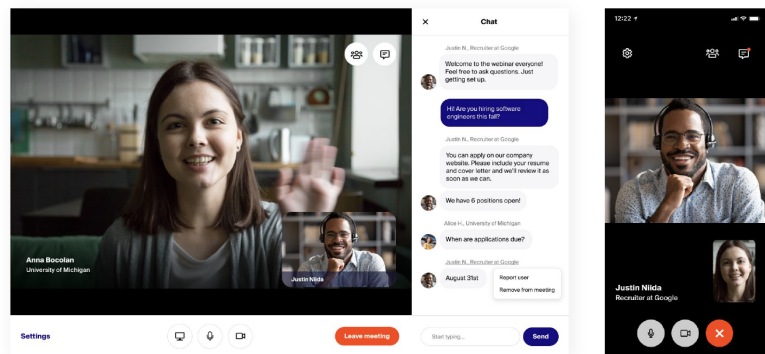
The rapid and widespread switch to digital has accelerated the evolution of how we all utilise technology and think about its usage to evolve our work. Rather than technology overcomplicating processes, technology is supporting meaningful connections and conversations at scale.

237%
Increase in virtual events*

2,500%
Increase in virtual interviews*

257%
Increase in messages sent**

825%
Increase in virtual career fairs*

Trend 3: Covid-19 has really accelerated this shift to digital.

*Source: Handshake platform data, March 30, 2020-April 13, 2020 (planned events) as compared to April 1, 2019-April 27, 2019
*Source: Handshake platform data, March 9, 2020-April 13, 2020 (planned events) as compared to March 11, 2019-April 8, 2019

At Handshake we have seen digital recruitment activities steadily growing in recent years, but in Q2 of this year growth accelerated across the network, from employers both big and small. Supporting students and employers with this accelerated growth will be key moving forward.