BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY

The Prince's Responsible Business Network

HRH THE PRINCE OF WALES ROYAL FOUNDING PATRON

Toolkit

REDUCING INTERSECTIONAL BIAS IN RECRUITMENT

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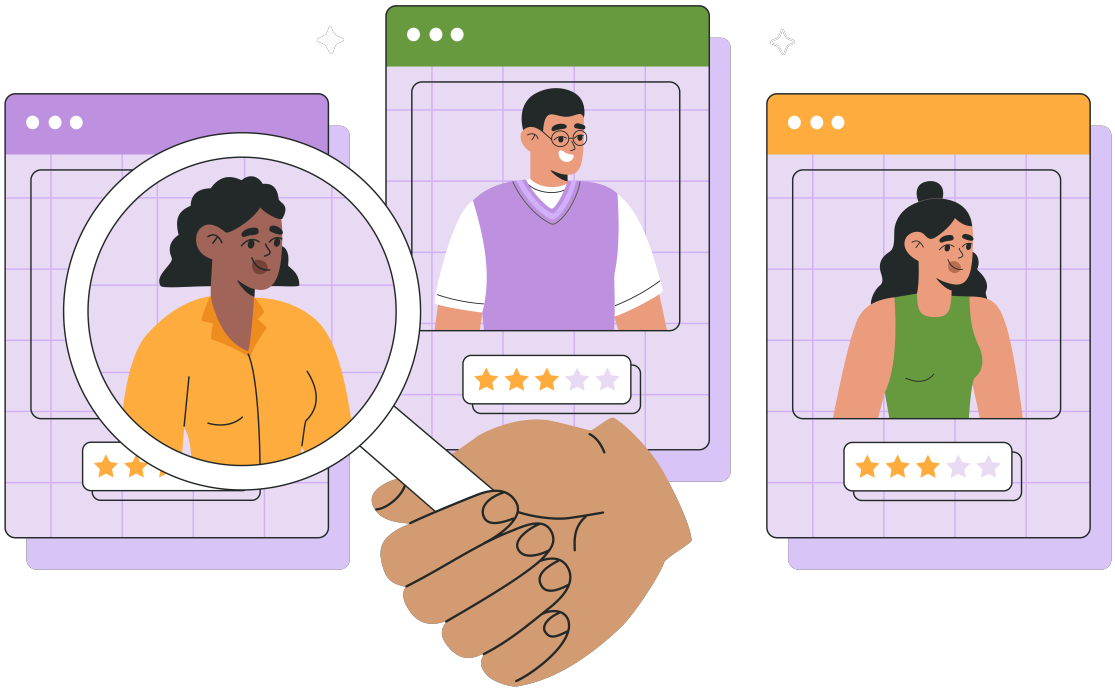

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TOOLKIT

REDUCING INTERSECTIONAL BIAS IN RECRUITMENT

When it comes to securing good work, jobseekers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often find themselves at a disadvantage compared to their peers which can be compounded by an intersection of other factors, such as gender and race.[i] Though some businesses are making progress in their approach to social mobility, many haven't yet started to consider how an individual's different characteristics and experiences can intersect to create new and additional barriers.

In 2024, Business in the Community (BITC) launched 'Opening Doors: What Works', an innovative research project, in collaboration with Aldermore, Heathrow Airport Limited and Lloyd's Register, to develop recommendations for businesses who want to improve the inclusivity of their recruitment processes by applying an intersectional lens. Based on our Opening Doors inclusive recruitment framework, this toolkit draws on insights from jobseekers to identify which employer actions will have the greatest impact in supporting people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who face intersectional barriers, into work.

Introduction

Opening Doors is BITC's flagship inclusive recruitment campaign. Launched in 2022, its ambition is to make two million jobs more accessible to diverse talent, by inspiring businesses to make changes to the way they recruit. The campaign identifies 25 actions that help level the playing field for all jobseekers, regardless of their background or experience and calls on employers to implement at least three.

Most actions in the framework will improve access for all jobseekers, regardless of background or experience, to some extent. However, certain actions will be more impactful for some people than others.

'Opening Doors: What Works' has been designed to help businesses add nuance to their inclusive recruitment strategies so that they can ensure the actions they take are the ones most likely to benefit the people that they are trying to attract into their organisations.

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The aim of this toolkit

We commissioned YouGov to survey 2250 individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds[ii], asking them to identify key employer actions that they believed would be most effective in:

- Supporting them to search for vacancies.
- Making it easier to submit an application.
- Identifying suitable employers.
- Improving their overall experience of the recruitment process.

We followed this up with three focus groups to obtain qualitative insights.

Drawing on the Opening Doors framework, the toolkit sets out how intersectional characteristics impact an individual's experience during different parts of the recruitment process.

We also commissioned YouGov to survey 650 employers from a wide range of sectors[iii], aiming to identify current and planned inclusive recruitment practices.

Businesses are encouraged to use the findings set out in the main section of the toolkit to inform their approach to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

GETTING STARTED

There are very clear inequalities across the UK.[iv] Economic opportunity and the quality of jobs and wages is key to improving social mobility.[v] Employers have a crucial role to play in levelling the playing field. Businesses should:

1. Build social mobility into your EDI strategy.

Although more than half (53%)[vi] of UK businesses are making efforts to improve the diversity of their workforce, just one in six (16%) are collecting jobseekers data based on their socioeconomic background.

Many social mobility interventions target individuals from the C2DE socioeconomic classification. However, people within the C2 classification are in 'skilled manual occupations' whereas those within social grade E are 'non-working' or in insecure work,[vii] therefore their experiences can be very different. Interventions to support jobseekers into work should recognise this distinction.

2. Look at social mobility through an intersectional lens.

There is a growing recognition that social mobility outcomes do not only depend on who your parents are, your education and your skills, but also on where you grew up.[viii] There are also marked differences in outcomes for people depending on their gender, ethnicity and health.

The demographics that we know face barriers to work are overrepresented in lower socioeconomic backgrounds: :

- People in Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and other ethnically diverse households are more likely to be in persistent low income than people in White households.[ix]
- Nearly half of everyone in poverty is either disabled or lives with a disabled person.[x]
- Nearly half of children in single parent families live in relative poverty and around nine in ten single parents are women.[xi]

As such, efforts to tackle social mobility cannot exist in isolation but must be part of a holistic EDI strategy that looks at how different characteristics and experiences interact.

3. Collect diversity data throughout the recruitment process.

Half of employers (51%) do not collect recruitment data.[xii] Meaningful data collection and analysis are crucial for businesses that want to identify existing biases and gaps so that they can implement targeted and focused initiatives that will bring about real change.

INTERSECTIONALITY: WHAT WORKS

The main section of this toolkit sets out how intersectional characteristics impact an

individual's experience during different parts of the recruitment process.

A. Barriers to work: applying an intersectional lens

To identify which employer actions will have the biggest impact on different groups of jobseekers, it is useful to first establish what the main recruitment barriers are, and how their significance varies according to a jobseeker's intersecting characteristics and experiences.

When looking at all lower socioeconomic background individuals, the most cited barriers to applying for a job were 'not having enough personal confidence to apply' and 'not having the right skills for the jobs that are available', identified by 31% and 30% respectively.

Other barriers were recognised by a significantly lower percentage overall which may suggest that they are far less important. However, an analysis of responses by social class shows that E individuals gave more weight to some barriers than their C2 peers:

- Not knowing whether the job can be done flexibly (C2- 13% vs E – 20%).
- Belief that 'people like me' don't do that kind of job (C2 – 12% vs E – 21%).

Gender

'Not having enough personal confidence to apply' was identified as the primary barrier by both men (24%) and women (38%). But women were more than twice as likely as men to cite 'not knowing whether a job can be done flexibly' as a barrier (19% vs 9%) and were significantly more likely to cite 'not understanding the job description' (16% vs 10%).

Gender and ethnicity

Women across all ethnic groups except Mixed Ethnicity were more likely to identify with the 'belief that people like me don't do that kind of job' as a barrier. The rate was especially high amongst Black women (21% - compared to 15% of both White and Asian women).

Gender and age

For 18–24-year-old males, 'not having time to look for a job, e.g., because of caring responsibilities' was a significant barrier – 18% (compared to 3% of women of the same age). The same group were also more likely to identify with 'not knowing how to search for jobs' as an issue than their female peers (11% vs 3%).

Older women (age 55+) were twice as likely to identify as 'not having the digital skills to apply' as their male counterparts (12% vs 6%).

Gender and disability

The most significant discrepancy across gender and disability was in relation to 'not having enough money to pay for transportation costs to the interview'. This was pinpointed by 12% of disabled men, compared to just 5% of disabled women and 3% of non-disabled men.

Gender and social class

Men in social class E were more than twice as likely as any other lower socioeconomic jobseeker to cite 'any physical or mental health concerns' as a barrier to applying for work: 20% compared to 11% E women, 7% of C2 males and 8% of D males.

Ethnicity

'Not having enough personal confidence to apply' was identified as a barrier by the highest percentage of individuals from a White British (33%) or Black Caribbean (31%) background. All other ethnic groups identified 'not having the right skills for the jobs that are available' as the main barrier: White Other (36%), Black African (26%), Other Asian (45%), Pakistani (30%), Indian (29%) and Mixed Ethnicity (24%).

Ethnicity and disability

14% of disabled ethnic minority respondents identified a lack of digital skills as a barrier to applying for jobs, compared to 8% of their disabled White British peers.

For 13% of disabled Asian individuals, a lack of digital access was also a barrier, compared to just 4% of their White British counterparts.

Age

The barrier identified by the highest percentage of people across all age groups was 'not having enough personal confidence to apply', except for individuals aged 25-34, the highest proportion of whom cited 'not having the right skills for the jobs that are available' (37%).

The youngest respondents were much more likely to cite 'having time to look for the right job – (need to take the first one you get)' than those aged 55+ (19% vs 7%). A higher percentage of 18-24-year-olds (18%) also identified 'not understanding the job conditions' compared to 45-54-year-olds (7%) and 55+ (3%).

Twice as many 18-24-year-olds said that they couldn't access training to get the right skills for the jobs, compared to 45-54 and 55+ (16% vs 8% vs 7%).

Three times as many older workers identified with 'not having the digital skills to apply' as those aged 18-24, but conversely, they were less likely to cite 'not having sufficient digital access to apply' (2% vs 4%).

Age and disability

Disabled jobseekers aged 18-34 were significantly more likely to cite 'physical or mental health concerns' as a barrier than their non-disabled counterparts (44% vs 5%).

A much higher proportion of disabled individuals aged 18-34 identified with 'not having enough money to pay for transportation costs to the interview' than non-disabled young people (14% vs 4%).

Age and social class

22% of respondents aged 18-34 in the E social class identified with 'not understanding the job conditions, e.g., working hours, pay, location' as a barrier, compared to 17% of C2s.

"I had to exit the interview process because it was advertised as an office job but in fact, it required at least once a month trips and overnight stays around the UK."
Focus group participant

Disability

The most cited barrier to applying for work by disabled people, who describe themselves as 'limited a lot', was 'any physical or mental health concerns' (48%); for disabled people who identify as 'limited a little', the most identified barrier was 'not having enough personal confidence to apply' (39%).

"Facing ableism; employers assume we can't perform, but it would be better to assume we can and give us a chance."
Focus group participant

Disability and social class

18% of disabled people in social class C2 identified with the barrier 'belief that people like me don't do that kind of job'. This increased to 42% for disabled people in social class E.

Nearly half (47%) of disabled people in social class E cited 'not having the right skills for the jobs that are available' and one-fifth (20%) of the same group cited 'not being able to access training to get the right skills. This was less of an issue for disabled people in C2 – 30% pinpointed not having the right skills, and 13% not being able to access training.

B. Advertising vacancies

The Opening Doors campaign recommends that businesses 'advertise vacancies on channels that attract diverse jobseekers'. Different channels appeal to different demographics, so employers need to understand how the groups that they are targeting are most likely to search for jobs.

Overall, C2DE individuals are most likely to use online channels to search for jobs:

- Online job boards (49%).
- Employer websites (44%).

Recruitment agencies come third, used by 25% of lower socioeconomic jobseekers.

The difference in the percentage of males searching for vacancies on online job boards compared to employer websites was very small for both C2 (48%vs49%) and D (45%vs42%) social classes. However, far fewer individuals from social class E used employer websites (51%/36%).

Gender

There were few notable disparities between the way that men and women search for jobs. The only significant area of difference was in the use of personal contacts. Men were more likely to search via friends (21%) and their personal network (15%), compared to women (16% and 9% respectively).

Gender and ethnicity

The main difference between how White British men and women search for jobs was in relation to the use of personal contacts (friends and networks), which 28% of men identified compared to 18% of women.

There were more significant differences in job searching methods between ethnically diverse men and women. Black women were more likely than Black men to use online job boards (60% vs 44%) and charities (10% vs 2%), whereas Black men made greater use of recruitment agencies (44% vs 34%). Asian men were also more likely to use recruitment agencies than Asian women (39% vs 28%).

Gender and age

There is some disparity in the way that young (18-24 years old) men and women search for jobs:

- Employer websites (50% / 39%).
- Personal contacts (44% / 31%).
- Charities (0% / 7%).
- Jobcentre Plus (6% / 11%).

Young men seemed to have more confidence than young women in terms of looking at employer websites and utilising personal networks. Young women were more likely than men to seek professional support (i.e via charities and job centres).

Gender and disability

Disabled men were more likely than disabled women to search for jobs on employer websites (52% vs 44%) and via recruitment agencies (26% vs 19%) than disabled women. More disabled women than disabled men reported searching via job centres (18% / 11%).

Gender and social class

Nearly half (49%) of C2 males reported searching for jobs via employers' websites, compared to about a third (36%) of E males, although this number is much higher (44%) for E females counterparts.

Ethnicity

All ethnic groups identified online job boards and employer websites as the tools they are most likely to use to search for jobs.

Ethnically diverse individuals reported higher combined use of friends and personal networks than their White peers (33% vs 23%), and this was especially high for the Black African and Other ethnic groups (41%, respectively)

'Charities supporting jobseekers' was the least commonly used job searching tool for all groups, but was higher for Other White (5%), Other Ethnic (5%) and Black (4%). Only 1% of White British individuals and none of Asians reported using this method. It is not clear whether these latter two groups are less likely to be the focus of charities or whether they are less likely to reach out for support to these organisations.

Ethnicity and age

Ethnically diverse individuals of all ages reported being more likely to use a recruitment agency than their White British peers. Usage is highest amongst ethnically diverse respondents aged 45-54 (40% - compared to 22% White British).

Ethnicity and disability

Ethnically diverse disabled individuals are far more likely to search for a job in newspapers (20%) than White disabled jobseekers (6%), or their ethnically diverse non-disabled peers (10%).

Ethnicity and social class

There were few disparities in searching methods between the different social classes amongst White British jobseekers, however, the differences were starker across ethnic minorities: 96% of ethnically diverse individuals in C2 reported using at least one of the listed job searching tools, compared to 89% of those in DE. Ethnically diverse individuals in DE reported lower usage levels than their C2 counterparts of online job boards (52% vs 56%), employer websites (45% vs 53%) and social media (27% vs 34%). This suggests that knowledge of, and/or confidence using job search methods is lower among this group.

Other White individuals from DE classes were significantly less likely than their C2 peers to use employer websites (43% vs 54%) and are much more likely to use Jobcentre Plus (13% vs 7%).

Age

A jobseeker's age impacts on their searching methods. A far higher percentage of individuals aged 18-24 reported searching for vacancies online than jobseekers aged 55+:

- Online job board (57% / 36%).
- Employer website (45% / 31%).
- Social media (40% / 14%).

There was no single search method used by more than 36% of individuals aged over 55. Therefore, employers wanting to attract older workers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may need to consider advertising their vacancies across a broader range of channels, including recruitment agencies (used by 22% of older jobseekers) and JobcentrePlus (14%). The same diversity of advertising channels is not as important for employers wanting to attract younger jobseekers.

Age and disability

7% of young disabled individuals reported searching for a job via a charity. Older disabled jobseekers, aged 55+, and non-disabled young jobseekers were far less likely to use this route (2% and 1% respectively).

Age and social class

Young people in the C2 group responded that they would be more likely to search for jobs online than their DE peers:

- Online job board (62% vs 54%).
- Employer website (49% vs 43%).
- Social media (50% vs 34%).

Overall, 99% of C2 18–24-year-olds reported using at least one of the job searching methods set out in the survey, compared to 88% of DE jobseekers of the same age. This could suggest that a higher percentage of young people in the lowest social grades struggle to navigate the job market altogether.

Disability

Overall, there aren't significant differences in the way that disabled and non-disabled people search for jobs. The main point of difference was that

disabled people who describe themselves as 'limited a lot' were more likely than non-disabled people to use job centres (17% vs 10%) and employer websites (55% vs43%).

The higher use of employer websites by disabled people is supported by views expressed in the focus group that disabled jobseekers want to know more about the practical actions employers are taking to support inclusivity (i.e they may want to visit the site so that they can learn more about the company).

C. Attracting applications from diverse talent

Opening Doors encourages businesses to:

- *Publish all value statements, diversity pledges, commitments, and accreditations on your website.*
- *Use diverse images and role models in your communication.*
- *Ensure that job descriptions:*
  - *Include all essential information.*
  - *Are clear on what the role entails.*
- *Ask for skills rather than experience and qualifications.*
- *Only ask for skills that are essential for the role.*
- *Specify if the role allows any form of flexibility.*

We asked individuals for their views on the actions employers could take to make their organisation more appealing to diverse talent.

Two-thirds of individuals identified 'including all essential information in the job description, including salary, working hours and location' as an important action that employers could take to encourage applications from diverse talent. This was followed in terms of importance by 'set out the day-to-day activities of the role in the job advert' (47%) and 'ask for skills rather than qualifications and experience' (42%).

"I passed the interview but they offered me a wage £5,000 lower than was advertised. They said it was because I was new. The advert did not say that the salary was dependent on experience."

Focus group participant

Gender

Women were significantly more likely than men to identify 'make clear what kinds of flexible working requests they will consider' (46% vs 32%) and 'include all essential information in the job description, including salary, working hours and location' (73% vs 61%) as key actions.

Gender and ethnicity

'Include all essential information in the job description, including salary, working hours and location' was identified as a high priority for Mixed Ethnicity females (65%), Asian females (70%), White British females (75%) and Other White males (74%).

'Make clear what kinds of flexible working requests they will consider' was more important to women than men across all ethnic groups but was particularly important to White British women (47%) and Asian women (46%). It was of least importance to Mixed Ethnicity women (32%).

Gender and age

Males aged 18-24 were significantly more likely (21%) than females of the same age (13%) and males in other age groups to cite 'publish all value statements, diversity pledges, commitments, and accreditations'.

One in five young women (19%) identified 'use diverse images and role models in their public-facing communications'.

Gender and disability

Disabled women were significantly more likely to cite 'set out the day-to-day activities of the role in

the job advert' (53%) than either non-disabled women or men.

Ethnicity

'Including all essential information in the job description, including salary, working hours and location' is the action identified by the highest percentage of jobseekers across all ethnic groups.

22% of Black jobseekers pinpointed 'publishing all value statements, diversity pledges, commitments and accreditations on their website' as a key employer action (identified by 19% ethnically diverse jobseekers overall).

Using diverse images and role models is important to a significantly higher proportion of ethnically diverse individuals than their White peers (17% / 7%) and matters particularly to Black Caribbean people (26%).

More than half (51%) of Other Asian respondents wanted employers to 'ask for skills rather than qualifications and experience'.

Ethnicity and age

42% of ethnically diverse individuals aged 55+ wanted employers to 'provide the contact details of an individual at the organisation that you contact with any queries', compared to just 19% of their White British peers.
'Set out the day-to-day activities of the role in the job advert' was more important for White British jobseekers of all ages than their ethnically diverse peers but it was especially important for White British respondents aged 18-24 (54%, compared to 32% of young ethnically diverse people).

More than a quarter of young ethnically diverse individuals (26%) wanted businesses to 'publish all value statements, diversity pledges, commitments and accreditations on their website'.

"Job descriptions don't match the role in reality. Hopes and expectations are shattered because of that."
Focus group participant

Ethnicity and disability

36% of ethnically diverse disabled individuals suggested that employers should 'provide the contact details of an individual at the organisation that you could contact with any queries'.
42% of White British disabled jobseekers wanted employers to 'make clear what kinds of flexible working requests they will consider' compared to 29% of ethnically diverse disabled respondents.

Ethnicity and social class

Black C2 individuals were significantly more likely than Black DE respondents to choose 'make clear what kinds of flexible working requests they will consider' (49% vs 33%).

Age

Explicit flexible working arrangements were more important to fewer jobseekers at both ends of the age spectrum than those aged 25-54.

'Publishing all value statements, diversity pledges, commitments and accreditations on their website' and 'using diverse images and role models' were more likely to attract jobseekers aged 18-24 than 55+ (18% and 16% / 12% and 8% respectively).

Age and social class

DE jobseekers aged 55+ were far more likely to cite 'ask for skills rather than qualifications and experience' than their C2 peers (46% / 38%).

More than a third (36%) of young C2 jobseekers would like employers to 'provide the contact details of an individual at the organisation that you could contact with any queries' compared to less than a quarter (23%) of young DE jobseekers.

Nearly a quarter (23%) of 18–24-year-old C2 respondents wanted businesses to 'publish all value statements, diversity pledges, commitments and accreditations on their website'. This was less important to DE young individuals, of whom only 16% selected this action.

Similarly, 29% of young C2 individuals identified 'use diverse images and role models in their public-facing communications' as a key action,

compared to just 7% of DE. Younger people in the lowest socioeconomic classes seem to be much more disengaged in employers' approaches to diversity and inclusion than other groups.

Disability

The most important action for disabled people of all ages (66%) was 'include all essential information in the job description, including salary, working hours and location', followed by 'set out the day-to-day activities of the role in the job advert' (49%).

Publishing all value statements was important to a significantly higher proportion of disabled individuals than those without a disability (19% vs 13%).

Disability and social class

49% of disabled people from social class C2 wanted employers to ask for skills rather than qualifications and experience, compared to 40% of disabled DE individuals and 42% of non-disabled C2 respondents.

The second most important action for disabled DE jobseekers was for employers to 'set out the day-to-day activities of the role in the job advert', identified by 53% of respondents; for disabled C2 jobseekers, the second most important action was to 'ask for skills rather than qualifications and experience' (49%).

For all ethnic groups except Indian, flexible working arrangements were identified as important by a higher percentage of C2 jobseekers than DE ones.

D. Making it easier to apply for jobs

Opening Doors recommends that businesses:

- *Ensure each stage of assessment is appropriate for assessing skills.*
- *Set out the different stages of the application process and the associated timeframes.*
- *Accept applications in a range of formats.*
- *Provide information in accessible formats and different languages.*
- *Ensure that the application process is mobile-friendly.*

We also asked individuals for their views on the actions employers could take to make applying for jobs fair and accessible.

All LSEB individuals

Overwhelmingly, all individuals want a simpler application process. Being able to apply via a CV or a single application form were identified as key actions that employers could take to make the application process easier by around half of LSEB respondents, regardless of any other characteristic.

Compared to their C2 and D peers, individuals from the E social grade were much more likely to cite 'information about the timeline and length of the recruitment process is clearly stated in the job advert' (50% vs 38% for C2 and D).

Gender

More than half of female respondents (53%) cited 'being able to apply by just filling in a form' compared to 44% of males. They were also significantly more likely to identify with 'information about the timeline and length of the recruitment process is clearly stated in the job advert' (44% / 35%).

Gender and ethnicity

Other White females (21%) and Black males (27%) were more likely than other respondents to want information about the job and recruitment process provided in accessible formats.

Gender and age

A higher proportion of women than men, across all age groups, selected 'being able to apply by just sending a CV' but it was particularly important to women aged 18-24 (60%). In the same 'being able to apply by just filling in a form' generally was more important for more females than males in any age group, but more important

to 55+ females than any other age/gender group (58%).

Being able to apply for a job on a mobile phone was cited by 39% of women aged 55+ compared to 29% of men of the same age.

Having information about the timeline and length of the recruitment process was important to a higher percentage of women than men of all ages, but especially more important for women under 35 years old (52%) and 55+ (39%) compared to men in the same age brackets (38% and 29%, respectively).

Gender and disability

Disabled females were much more likely (52%) than disabled males (35%) and non-disabled females (42%) to cite 'information about the timeline and length of the recruitment process is clearly stated in the job advert' as important.

Gender and social class

'Being able to apply for a job using just a CV' was cited by 60% of men in the E social grade, compared to 49% and 48% of C2 and D males respectively.

'Having information about timeline and length' was particularly important for females in E (53%) males counterpart (44%) and females in C2 grade (41%). 1

Ethnicity

Ethnically diverse individuals were significantly more likely than their White peers to identify 'the application could be submitted in-person, on the phone, or via a third party' as important (20% vs 13%). This was particularly important to those from Other Asian (23%) and Mixed (26%) ethnic backgrounds.

They were also more likely to want information about the job and the recruitment process to be available in a language other than English (8% vs 3%.)

Ethnicity and age

Providing information about the job and the recruitment process in a language other than English was significantly more important to young ethnically diverse individuals (15%) than other groups; it was particularly important to young Black respondents (18%).

Ethnicity and disability

Disabled Asian individuals were more likely to want to be able to submit an application in-person, on the phone or via a third party than their non-disabled Asian (26% vs 18%) or disabled White (15%) peers.

Providing information about the job and recruitment process in an accessible format was important to 38% of disabled Black respondents, compared to 16% of disabled White people and 21% of Black non-disabled individuals.

Ethnicity and social class

51% of mixed ethnicity individuals from the C2 social grade cited 'information about the timeline and length of the recruitment process is clearly stated in the job advert' as a key measure to make it easier to apply, compared to 36% of mixed ethnicity respondents from social grades DE.

Age

Nearly a quarter (23%) of the youngest individuals surveyed cited being able to 'submit the application in-person or via a third party' as a preferred way to make applications easier – a much higher proportion than other age groups.

The youngest respondents were also four times more likely to want information about the job to be available in a language other than English (8% of 18–24-year-olds vs 2% of 55+).

More than a third of individuals in almost every age group cited being able to apply on mobile phones as a valuable action to reduce barriers to

application. This was only identified by 23% of jobseekers aged 55+.

Age and disability

Being able to apply by sending a CV was important to 67% of disabled people aged 25-34, a much higher proportion than across other age groups.

Age and social class

40% of people aged 45-54 in the DE social grade identified 'information about the timeline and length of the recruitment process is clearly stated in the advert' as important, compared to 29% of C2 people of the same age.

Being able to apply via a mobile phone was important to a higher percentage of C2 individuals aged 25-34 (49%) or 35-44 (41%) than DE respondents (38% / 35%).

E. Reviewing the recruitment process

We asked respondents to identify up to five things that would make the biggest difference to their experience of the recruitment process overall.

The top five responses across all respondents were:

1. Getting constructive feedback at each stage of the process (39%)
2. The job allows for flexible working, e.g. hybrid, working from home (38%)
3. Feeling respected and included (35%)
4. The job provides flexible working hours (35%)
5. The recruitment process focuses on skills rather than experience and qualifications (30%).

Around one in seven jobseekers identified 'not asking for salary expectations' as a key improvement to the recruitment process.

Gender

There weren't significant disparities between the responses of men and women, except in relation to flexible working. Nearly half (46%) of women identified 'the job allows flexible working' and 41% selected 'the job provides flexible working hours', compared to 30% and 28% of men respectively. The other discrepancy was in relation to 'feeling respected and included', which was cited by 39% of women compared to 31% of men.

"Some jobs restrict family commitments. I'd dislike a 9 to 5 job, certain roles hinder interactions with family and disrupt school pick-up – this would be a reason that I would decline a job offer."

Focus group participant

Gender and ethnicity

Across all ethnic groups, women were more likely to cite 'blind CVs' as important compared to men, with the exception of White Other. 28% of males in this group selected this action (at least nine percentage points higher than males in any other ethnic group) compared to 17% of women.

Males in the Asian ethnic group were more likely than males in any other group to select 'feeling respected and included' (39%). Women in all ethnic groups, with the exception of Black, were more likely to identify this action than their male peers.

Gender and age

The 18-24-year-old age group was the only one in which 'the job allows for flexible working' was less important to women (26%) than men (28%). Flexible working was most important to women aged 35-44 (58%).

More than a quarter (26%) of women aged 18-24 selected 'not asking for salary expectations' – at least eight percentage points higher than all other groups.

Gender and disability

A quarter (25%) of disabled men cited 'alternative assessment methods', e.g. work trials compared to 16% of non-disabled men.

'The job allows flexible working' was the most popular answer for disabled women (44%) but was cited by just 33% of disabled men. There was less variance along gender lines in relation to 'the job provides flexible working hours', selected by 37% of disabled women and 34% of disabled men.

Ethnicity

The most cited action differed according to each ethnic group:

- *White British* - Getting constructive feedback at each stage of the process (40%).
- *Black* – The job provides flexible working hours (37%).
- *Asian* – The job allows flexible working (44%).
- *Mixed* – Feeling respected and included (36%).

'The business publishes all value statements and diversity pledges and commitments on its website' was identified as important by 12% of ethnically diverse jobseekers, compared to just 5% of White British ones.

The percentage of Black Caribbean jobseekers choosing 'blind CVs' was significantly higher (at least eight percentage points) than for any other group (37%).

"When I do not disclose that I am a woman and my ethnic origin, I am invited for interviews."
Focus group participant

More than a third (22%) of Black respondents cited 'support with the application form' as important.

Ethnicity and disability

14% of ethnically diverse disabled individuals cited 'diverse role models' as a key action for employers, compared to 4% of White disabled peers and 10% of ethnically diverse non-disabled respondents.

Ethnicity and social class

One third (31%) of Black DE respondents identified 'diverse interview panels', the highest proportion of any other group.

"Is there a need for three people on the panel? It puts pressure on candidates."
Focus group participant

Age

Age and disability

The importance of asking about adjustments decreased with age: from 25% of 25-34-year-olds to 9% of those aged 55+.

The most cited action for disabled people aged 35-54 was 'the job allows flexible working'. 'Getting constructive feedback' was important to a larger cohort of disabled individuals aged 25-34 and 55+.

Age and social class

The highest proportion of DE respondents across all age groups selected 'the job allows flexible working' with the exception of 18–24-year-olds, for whom 'receiving constructive feedback' was the most popular response. There is much greater diversity between age groups for the C2 individuals: the most cited response for 18-24-year-olds was 'feeling respected and included', for 25-34-year-olds it was 'receiving constructive feedback', for 35-44-year-olds and 55+ it was 'the job allows flexible working' and for 45-54 it was 'the job provides flexible working hours'.

Disability

A quarter (24%) of disabled individuals would like employers to use alternative assessment methods, such as work trials, compared to one fifth (19%) of non-disabled respondents. Twice as many disabled people (18% vs 9%) cited 'the business asks if you need adjustments at every stage of the recruitment process' as a key action.

"I started an admin job, and the interview was accessible, but the actual job wasn't."
Focus group participant

Disability and social class
18% of disabled DE individuals identified 'not asking the date when previous employments were carried out' as important, compared to 12% of disabled C2 respondents.

Conclusion

The research shows that while most Opening Doors actions will benefit the majority of jobseekers, regardless of their background or experience, the specific needs and wants of people with different characteristics mean that businesses that want to target particular groups would benefit from a more nuanced approach.

Although Opening Doors: What Works was designed to focus specifically on supporting jobseekers from low socioeconomic backgrounds, its findings are of relevance to all employers wanting to improve the diversity of their workforce.

The groups that we work with face some of the biggest disadvantages in terms of finding work. Women, ethnic minorities, disabled people, carers, people with convictions, and refugees are all over-represented in the 'low socioeconomic background' category. As a result, regardless of whether an employer is making deliberate efforts to improve social mobility, a strategy to support any one diverse group would be lacking if it didn't consider the specific barriers faced by the individuals from low-income households.

When developing a strategy to support jobseekers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, a key finding of the research is that there is considerable variance within the C2DE social grouping itself. People within the C2 bracket are skilled workers whereas people from E are generally not working or occupy persistent insecure employment. People in the latter group generally less confident, less engaged with employers, and less interested in their EDI commitments.

If employers are committed to diverse and inclusive workforces, it's essential that they recognise that one size really does not fit all

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[i] Welsh Government, 2021
[ii] Total sample size was 2256 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 18th March - 10th April 2024. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative UK adults (aged 18+) in social grade groups C2, D & E by gender, age, region and ethnicity.
[iii] Total sample size was 650 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 18th March - 10th April 2024. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of those in senior management positions in HR or recruitment by business size, sector and UK region (aged 18+).
[iv] Social Mobility Commission, 2023
[v] Social Mobility Commission, 2023
[vi] BITC YouGov employer survey, 2024
[vii] ONS, 2021
[viii] Social Mobility Commission, 2023
[ix] Gov.uk, 2023
[x] Disability Rights UK, 2020
[xi] Gingerbread, 2023
[xii] BITC YouGov employer survey, 2024

ANNEX 1 - A SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

BARRIERS TO WORK - This table provides a summary of the main barriers to applying for jobs identified by individuals from a lower socioeconomic background.

Gender (women)	Ethnicity	Age	Disability	Social class (E)
Not having enough personal confidence to apply (38%) Not knowing whether a job can be done flexibly (19%) Not understanding job description (16%) Belief that 'people like me' don't do that kind of job (White – 15%, Asian – 15%, Mixed – 15%, Black – 21%).	Not having enough confidence to apply (White – 33%, Black Caribbean – 31%) Not having the right skills for the jobs that are available (White Other – 36%, Black African – 26%, Other Asian – 45%, Pakistani – 30%, Indian – 29%, Mixed Ethnicity – 26%) Not having the digital skills to apply (Net ethnic minority – 14%)	Not understanding the job conditions (18-24 - 18%) Not being able to access training to get the right skills for the jobs (18-24 – 16%) Not having sufficient digital access (18-24 – 4%) Not having the right skills for the jobs that are available (25-34 – 37%) Not having the digital skills to apply (55+ – 9%)	Not having enough money to pay for transportation costs to the interview (Men – 12%, 18-34 – 14%) Any physical or mental health concerns (18-34 – 44%) Not having enough personal confidence to apply (Limited a little – 39%) A lack of digital access (Asian – 13%) Belief that people like me don't do that	Any physical or mental health concerns (Men – 20%) Not understanding the job conditions, e.g., working hours, pay, location (18-24 – 22%) Not having the right skills for the jobs that are available (47%) Not being able to access training to get the right skills (20%) Not knowing whether job can be done flexibly (20%)

			kind of job (Social class E – 42%)	Belief that people like me don't do that kind of job (21%)

ADVERTISING VACANCIES – Overall, C2DE individuals are most likely to use online channels to search for jobs, particularly online job boards and employer websites. The table below sets out key differences between lower socioeconomic groups when it comes to job searches.

Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Disability
Men are more likely than women to seek the help of friends and personal networks.	Black women are more likely than Black men to use online job boards and charities than Black men. Black and Asian men make greater use of recruitment agencies. Ethnically diverse groups are more likely to rely on friends and personal networks, they are also more likely to use a recruitment agency than White peers. Other White individuals from DE classes are less likely to use employer websites and more likely to use JobCentre Plus.	There was no single search method used by more than 36% of individuals aged 55+ (and far lower levels of use of online channels compared to other age groups). Young women are more likely to use charities and Jobcentre Pluses than young men.	More disabled women than men use Jobcentre Pluses. 20% of disabled men search for jobs in newspapers. People who are 'limited a lot' are more likely to use Jobcentre Pluses and employer websites.

ATTRACTING APPLICATIONS FROM DIVERSE TALENT – Based on the survey responses, the most impactful outward-facing Opening Doors actions for jobseekers are:

- Ensure that job descriptions include all essential information and are clear on what the roles entails.
- Ask for skills rather than experience and qualifications

The table below sets out which additional actions were most popular among the different lower socioeconomic backgroundgroups.

Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Disability

Specify if the role allows any form of flexibility (women).	Publish all value statements, diversity pledges, commitments, and accreditations on their website. Use diverse images and role models.	Specify if the job allows any form of flexibility (35-54). Publish all value statements, diversity pledges, commitments, and accreditations on your website (18-24, 55+). Use diverse role models. Ask for skills rather than qualifications and experience (55+).	Specify the day-to-day activities of the job. Publish all value statements, diversity pledges, commitments, and accreditations on your website.

MAKING IT EASIER TO APPLY FOR JOBS – BASED ON THE SURVEY RESPONSE, THE MOST OUTWARD-FACING OPENING DOORS ACTIONS FOR LSEB JOBSEEKERS ARE:

- Ensure each stage of the assessment is appropriate for assessing skills.
- Set out the different stages of the application process and the associated timeframes.

The table below sets out which additional actions were most popular among the different lower socioeconomic backgroundgroups.

Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Disability
n/a	Advertise and accept applications across different media (i.e., not just online. Provide information in accessible formats and different languages.	Advertise and accept applications across different media (i.e., not just online (18-24). Provide information in accessible formats and different languages (18-24). Ensure that the application process is mobile friendly (18-54).	Ensure that the application process is mobile friendly. Advertise and accept applications across different media (i.e., not just online.

REVIEWING THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS – WE ASKED RESPONDENTS TO IDENTIFY UP TO FIVE THINGS THAT WOULD MAKE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE TO THEIR EXPERIENCE OF THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS OVERALL. MAPPING THOSE TO THE OPENING DOORS ACTIONS, THE KEY ONES WERE:

- Specify if the role allows any form of flexibility.
- Ask for skills rather than experience and qualifications

Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Disability
Ask all candidates if they need any adjustments at every stage of the process.	Publish your value statement(s) and all diversity pledges and commitments on your website. Include diverse colleagues on interview panels.	Include all essential information in the job description including salary, working hours and location (18-24).	Include diverse colleagues on interview panels. Ask all candidates if they need any adjustments at every stage of the process.