



GUIDE

Opening Doors: Timely & Constructive Feedback in Recruitment

Supporting employers to provide timely,
constructive feedback to candidates.

Opening Doors: Timely & Constructive Feedback in Recruitment

Supporting employers to provide timely, constructive feedback to candidates throughout the recruitment process.

As part of the 2026 update to the [Opening Doors Framework](#), Business in the Community (BITC) has introduced a new action to strengthen how employers communicate with unsuccessful candidates. The action encourages employers to provide timely and constructive feedback at key stages of recruitment, including to candidates who are not shortlisted.

Feedback is an important part of a fair and inclusive candidate experience. However, employers are managing growing application volumes, with 58% reporting an increase in unsuitable applications in 2025.ⁱ Constructive feedback is particularly valuable for young people, as only 55% feel they have the skills employers want.ⁱⁱ Some young people have also reported receiving little or no feedback following unsuccessful applications, limiting opportunities to understand employers' expectations and identify areas for development.ⁱⁱⁱ AI is also changing the recruitment landscape, making it quicker and easier for candidates

to apply for multiple roles and creating additional pressure for recruitment teams.^{iv}

Employers are encouraged to provide constructive feedback at all stages of the recruitment process, including to candidates who do not progress beyond the initial application stage. However, providing individual feedback to every applicant may not always be feasible, particularly in high-volume recruitment. Employers can therefore take a proportionate approach, using standardised but relevant feedback at earlier stages and more personalised feedback following interview or assessment. For example, the Scottish Government expects feedback to be provided to all internal candidates, including those unsuccessful at application stage,^v and Boots provides outcome communications at application stage, with feedback available following interview.^{vi}

The framework action:

4f - Provide constructive feedback to applicants at key stages of the process to help them develop their skills and improve future applications.

This action recognises that feedback is an important part of an inclusive recruitment experience. Clear and timely feedback

Opening Doors Framework: Timely & Constructive Feedback in Recruitment

helps candidates understand recruitment decisions, supports future development and improves transparency. Employers are expected to establish clear feedback processes to ensure communication is provided consistently and fairly throughout the recruitment process, including for candidates who are not shortlisted.

This guide supports employers to implement the new action by:

- Clarifying what constructive feedback means in practice.
- Setting out minimum expectations and leading practice.
- Providing practical steps and examples.
- Highlighting common risks and pitfalls.
- Signposting further guidance and resources.

This guide aims to support HR teams, Talent Acquisition teams, recruiters, hiring managers, early careers teams and EDI teams to review and strengthen candidate feedback practices across the recruitment process.

Key Definitions

- **Candidate feedback:**
Clear and accessible information explaining a recruitment outcome, relevant strengths and identified gaps.
- **Timely feedback:**
Feedback provided within an agreed

timeframe following a recruitment stage or decision.

- **Inclusive feedback:**
Feedback that is accessible and delivered in a way that considers candidates' different needs and circumstances, helping ensure no candidate is disadvantaged in receiving or understanding it.
- **Developmental feedback (feedforward):**
Feedback that helps candidates understand how they can improve for future opportunities.
- **Key stages of recruitment:**
The main points in the recruitment process, including application, shortlisting, assessment and interview.
- **Candidate experience:**
The overall personal experience and perception of an organisation throughout the recruitment process.

Why This Matters

Providing feedback is an important part of a fair and inclusive recruitment process. Feedback can help candidates understand recruitment decisions, build confidence and improve future applications.

Evidence from research highlights:

- CIPD recommends specific, developmental feedback for

Opening Doors Framework: Timely & Constructive Feedback in Recruitment

unsuccessful interviewees and encouraging strong candidates to reapply, helping employers retain diverse talent for future opportunities.^{vii}

- CIPD highlights that poor candidate experiences can damage employer brand and future recruitment, while timely follow-up and feedback can improve candidate experience.^{viii}
- Business Disability Forum recommends constructive feedback for unsuccessful candidates, including disabled candidates, to support a fair and welcoming recruitment experience.^{ix}
- DWP research with young people not in education, employment or training found that a lack of feedback made it harder to understand why applications were unsuccessful and how to improve them, potentially reducing motivation to continue job searching.
- Many young people have limited opportunities to develop skills, experience and confidence. Constructive feedback can support learning, development and progression between opportunities.^x

At the same time, constructive feedback can:

- Improve transparency and candidate trust.

- Support learning and future employability.
- Create a more positive candidate experience.
- Strengthen employer reputation.

The New Action at a Glance

Action	Core Aim	Starting	Fully Embedded
4f	Feedback for development	Meaningful responses at key stages	Inclusive, constructive and developmental feedback

What this means

All candidates should receive clear and timely outcome communications at agreed decision points throughout the recruitment process, including those who are unsuccessful. Feedback should be proportionate to the recruitment stage, using standardised but relevant feedback at earlier stages and more personalised feedback following interview or assessment.

While this action does not require the use of AI and can be achieved through traditional recruitment processes, employers may choose to use AI-supported tools to help deliver feedback at scale. Where AI is used, appropriate assurance

Opening Doors Framework: Timely & Constructive Feedback in Recruitment

reviews and monitoring of AI tools, as well as human oversight, should remain in place to ensure feedback is accurate, relevant and inclusive. See [our guide on AI actions](#) for more context.

Starting

- Provide timely, clear outcomes to all unsuccessful applicants.
- At the initial application stage, use standardised rejection emails that reflect key recruitment criteria or common reasons why candidates do not progress.
- Provide more detailed, criteria-based feedback to candidates who reach interview or assessment.
- Apply feedback consistently to all candidates at the same recruitment stage.

Fully embedded

- Provide meaningful feedback to all applicants where feasible, using standardised feedback where appropriate.
- Provide personalised and developmental feedback where possible.
- Where AI is used, use it responsibly to support feedback at scale, with appropriate human oversight.

- Consider different accessibility and communication needs.
- Use feedback insights to improve recruitment processes and candidate experience.

Leading practice spotlight:

Deloitte UK embeds meaningful candidate feedback at scale

Deloitte UK builds structured feedback into several stages of its Early Careers recruitment process. Following the Immersive Online Assessment, candidates receive a personalised feedback report highlighting their strengths and providing advice on areas they can develop, while candidates who progress to the Job Simulation receive a further strengths-based feedback report.

Deloitte also provides feedback following its final assessment stage to support candidates' continued development. For professional roles, Deloitte aims to provide feedback when requested, while recognising that this may not always be possible for roles attracting particularly high volumes of applications. This demonstrates a proportionate approach, using structured, developmental feedback at scale while providing more individual feedback where feasible.^{xi}

Opening Doors Framework: Timely & Constructive Feedback in Recruitment

Common Risks and Pitfalls

Without clear feedback processes, candidates may be left uncertain about outcomes, strengths and gaps, and employers may miss opportunities to improve candidate experience. Common pitfalls include:

- Providing no feedback to unsuccessful candidates.
- Delayed communication.
- Generic or low-value feedback.
- Inconsistent approaches across hiring teams.
- Over-reliance on automated responses without review.
- Feedback that is unclear, inaccessible or difficult to action.

Getting Started: First 90 Days

Employers can begin improving candidate feedback by introducing clear expectations, timelines and ownership.

- **Review what happens now** – check how and when candidates receive updates and feedback throughout recruitment.
- **Set clear feedback points** – agree when candidates will receive feedback, how quickly and who is responsible.
- **Make feedback consistent** – create simple guidance and templates to

ensure feedback is clear, constructive, fair and accessible.

Next steps

Employers can build on their approach to improve feedback quality and candidate experience.

- **Train your teams** – support recruiters, hiring managers and interviewers to provide useful and consistent feedback.
- **Test and improve** – trial the approach, gather feedback from candidates and recruitment teams, and make changes where needed.
- **Track the experience** – regularly review feedback quality, response times and candidate experience to identify areas for improvement.

Tools & Resources

As a starting point, we recommend the following resources:

- [CIPD – Inclusive Recruitment: Guide for People Professionals](#) – see ‘Share and collect feedback from all candidates’ for practical guidance on providing specific, standardised feedback.
- [CIPD – Fair Selection: An Evidence Review](#) – see pp. 7–8 of the Practice Summary for evidence and

Opening Doors Framework: Timely & Constructive Feedback in Recruitment

recommendations on providing useful candidate feedback.

- [Government Equalities Office](#)
– [Employer Guidance: Helping People Return to Work](#) – see ‘Recruitment’, including personalised feedback for unsuccessful applicants to support future applications.
- [Business Disability Forum](#)
– [Attracting and Hiring Disabled Candidates](#) – employer guidance recommending constructive feedback

for unsuccessful candidates, including disabled candidates.

- [Skills Builder Partnership](#)
– [Framing Feedback: Developing Early Talent](#) – practical guide to providing constructive feedback to support young people’s development.

Join the Network and Learn More

If your organisation is not yet an Opening Doors signatory, [join our network](#) to access practical resources, tailored support and opportunities to learn from peers.

ⁱ CIPD, *Resourcing and Talent Planning Survey*, 2026. Available at: <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/reports/resourcing-surveys/>

ⁱⁱ Youth Employment UK, *Youth Voice Census*, 2025. Available at: <https://www.thecdi.net/news/2025-youth-voice-census-report-shows-career-experiences-are-narrowing-for-young-people>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Youth Futures Foundation, *South Asian Heritage Month: Roots to Routes in Burnley*, 2025. Available at: <https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/discrimination-and-work/south-asian-heritage-month-2025/>

^{iv} Totaljobs, *Hiring Trends Update 2025/26*, 2025. Available at: <https://www.totaljobs.com/recruiters/hiring-trends-update-factsheet-2025>

^v Scottish Government, *Job Vacancies and Feedback for Unsuccessful Candidates in Recruitment Processes: FOI Release*, 2026. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202600513184/>

^{vi} Boots, *Application and Interview Process*, 2026. Available at: <https://www.boots.jobs/application-process>

^{vii} CIPD, *Selection Methods*, 2026. Available at: <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/factsheets/selection-factsheet/>

^{viii} CIPD, *Selection Methods* 2026. Available at: <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/factsheets/selection-factsheet/>

^{ix} Business Disability Forum, *Communicating inclusively with applicants and candidates*, section ‘Feedback’, 2022. Available at: <https://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/knowledge-hub/recruitment/communicating-with-candidates/>

^x Youth Futures Foundation, *Youth Employment Outlook 2025*, 2025. Available at: <https://www.youthfuturesfoundation.org/research-and-publications/youth-employment-outlook-2025/>

^{xi} Deloitte UK, *Deloitte UK, Early Careers Assessment*. Available at:

<https://www.deloitte.com/uk/en/careers/early-careers/early-careers-assessment.html>
Deloitte UK, *Professional Careers FAQ*. Available at: <https://www.deloitte.com/uk/en/careers/professional-careers/professional-careers-faq.html>



Business in the Community (BITC) champions responsible business as essential for long term economic growth and resilience. We convene, campaign, and consult with business to tackle society's most pressing challenges—from climate change and place-based regeneration to inequality, workplace wellbeing, and inclusive growth.

Founded by His Majesty King Charles III in 1982, BITC has over four decades of experience in engaging business and delivering measurable impact in both business and in communities through evidence-based interventions. As a trusted partner to business and government, BITC convenes leadership, influences policy, and accelerates action—helping shape a future-ready economy that works for everyone.

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