

Candidate Attraction

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Introduction

Business confidence in the UK economy has improved considerably with the easing of restrictions, resulting in a surge in job vacancies, particularly for temporary staff¹. The fact that the demand for temporary workers has increased signposts that employers continue to err on the side of caution when it comes to resource planning.

The temporary and agency worker model has many benefits including providing flexibility, getting people quickly into work and enabling organisations to hire staff in unstable times. However, the pandemic and Brexit has led to significant changes in the labour market, culminating in resource scarcity in many sectors, therefore employers need to seriously consider their approach to candidate attraction, skills development and retention.

A recent example of the challenges surrounding candidate attraction and retention exists in the Leisure and Hospitality sector. Figures suggest that one in ten hospitality workers in the UK have left the industry in the past year, finding alternative employment and careers during lockdowns. This has left many venues struggling to fill vacancies, forcing them to consider limiting opening times or assessing whether they even have the capacity to reopen².

Now, more so than ever, employers must stay focused on candidate attraction. This paper aims to provide a guide on why candidate attraction is challenging in the current environment and how you can set your organisation apart from the competition through a step-by-step process to sourcing the right people for your organisation.

RE Recruitment has supported many of our clients, both Blue Chip and SMEs, in making their worker offering fit today's challenging employment market. If you are struggling to attract and retain workers on an ongoing basis or for peak periods in the year, contact RE Recruitment to see how we can help.

Why is candidate attraction a challenge in the current environment?

Quite simply, it is based on supply and demand – the more vacancies and career options that outweigh labour supply, the more discerning human resources become; people will be attracted to those roles, or other environments, that help service basic, psychological and self-fulfilment needs.³ See [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#) for more information on the human psyche.

Possibly hard to believe when unemployment rates have risen to 4.9% in April 2021 (4% in pre-pandemic February 2020⁴), although the pandemic has forced us all to assess our health, wellbeing and work-life balance, therefore those roles that afford flexible working, opportunities to develop and in general a rewarding and respectful working environment become more attractive. Pandemic aside, there has been an overarching decline in skills investment over recent years which further tightens the labour market.

Moreover, the UK's benefits system, furlough and other Covid-19 support schemes remain to keep people safe and warm with increases and extensions. Admittedly, an increase of £20 per week in Universal Credits is not enough for some, but it could make a difference when deciding to seek employment at slightly above NMW in a role that does not fit around family needs and/or is an unpleasant working environment with little prospects.

1 JobsOutlook: Demand for temporary workers surges as the economic outlook improves :: The REC

2 Restaurants struggle to find staff ahead of reopening - BBC News

3 Labour market overview, UK - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

4 Employment in the UK - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

5 Coronavirus Universal Credit & Benefits (moneysavingexpert.com)

Other challenges in the labour market centre on employee nervousness and the desire for job security, therefore those industries that rely on a temporary model to meet their resourcing needs must honestly assess their working environment and person specifications for new workers and develop skills training and retention schemes.

Employers recruiting for permanent positions must contend with the issue of those currently in roles, too nervous to switch employers due to uncertain times, and people still on furlough concerned that if they moved to a new role, they would not qualify for the scheme in the event of another lockdown.

Then there is the EU labour market quandary; even though there has been a rise in EU nationals coming to work in the UK over recent years, the increase has not been in line with overall employment growth.

Now this labour supply has been thwarted with Brexit red-tape and has limited labour flow into the country, especially for those seeking workers for semi-skilled or unskilled roles.

Many employers report that the main reason for seeking EU nationals is due to not finding domestic applicants to fill these vacancies⁶ – we all need to ask ourselves why this is the case. Whilst the EU Settlement and [Frontier Worker Schemes](#) do offer a lifeline and route to work in the UK, closing dates are fast approaching.

All these factors have created a ‘perfect storm’ in terms of candidate attraction. Some influences have been unforeseen and crept up on employers, such as the pandemic and associated fall-out, whilst others might have been glaringly obvious over the last few years, such as Brexit and lack of skills investment.

The onus is now on employers to differentiate themselves as a ‘go to’ employer; read on for advice on combating recruitment difficulties in a fiercely competitive market

⁶ [Workforce trends: the impact of Brexit | CIPD](#)



How to effectively attract candidates

Whilst the previous section may paint a bleak picture, there are several ways in which an employer can stand out from the crowd to effectively attract and retain the right people – as we all are aware, it is far more cost-effective to retain than recruit.

THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT – pay, benefits and working hours.

PAY

The tight labour market is putting upward pressure on wages for many workers and employers are beginning to increase starting salaries to counteract recruitment challenges (see our [blog](#) on how pay rates are challenging the hospitality sector). Therefore, the first rung on the ladder to improved candidate attraction must be an assessment of pay rates.

Benchmark your organisation with others, both within your sector and similar industries and ask:

- Who are your main competitors in terms of attracting candidates?
- Where do you rank on the entry-level and other pay scales?
- Does your production/turnover capacity enable a pay increase in the short, medium and/or long-term and can you shift resources to manufacture an increase in pay to remain competitive?

If the answer to the last question is no, you will need to think outside of the box when it comes to differentiating your organisation as an attractive employer.

BENEFITS

Aside from offering more attractive pay, employers can look to non-financial benefits such as meaningful career progression and flexible working arrangements for differentiation.

While flatter structures seem in vogue, they can stifle vertical career opportunities. Do not neglect to offer a working environment that drives personal aspiration and growth and ensure you have good management, workplace processes and culture in place that generates **clear career pathways** within your organisation.

Assess role attractiveness – does it provide for employee growth and fulfilment? Examine how the role might be widened to allow for the use of a broader skillset or provide more exposure to other parts of the organisation through team collaboration. Are there opportunities for internal secondments etc.?

Flexible working is an important motivator for candidates, especially now after the awareness raised through the pandemic, people's reassessment on how they live their lives and a growing population of carers who also want to work. This is a key trump card an employer can play in a time of low labour supply.

THE EMPLOYER BRAND

Too often thought, time, money and effort are habitually focused on product/service branding at the expense of enhancing and maintaining the employer brand. In a discerning labour market, candidates often look to what an employer 'stands for' and how it values their people, processes, social issues and the environment. This is especially on the radar for the Gen-Z7 talent pool.

Employers must realise **candidate-centric processes** to build this employer brand to attract people to their organisation. Create an emotional connection to the organisation before a candidate has determined whether a role is suitable.

A candidate will focus on the 'what's in it for me' factors and 'do I want to be associated with this organisation,' so an effective starting point for an employer is to truly understand the employee value proposition (EVP). This value stems from working for you – your benefits and rewards, the tangible aspects such as pay, bonuses, other financial benefits, and the intangibles like recognition, appreciation, sincere career development etc. Ensure you convey these messages in a clear and simple way.

Remember...

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Next, is to take an external perspective on your brand: how are you regarded as an employer by the outside world? Candidates may lean towards an employer who displays genuine corporate social responsibility (CSR) and is associated with worthwhile causes and initiatives; as an example see [our CSR journey](#) so far.

Differentiate your organisation by being inclusive and gaining an Investors in People accreditation. Develop a strong culture of CSR and be consistent with your initiatives – this will all contribute to a strong employer brand and your investment will be rewarded in terms of candidate attraction.

7 Gen-Z or Generation Z is the demographic that succeeds Millennials and precedes Generation Alpha. Media and researchers use the mid-to-late 1990s birth years and the early 2010s as ending birth years.

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Manage your ideal candidate expectations

In a labour scarcity situation, employers must manage their expectations regarding person specifications.

It is highly likely that you will not get all boxes ticked and again you need to adopt innovative thinking to manage these challenges.

We often see lists of endless, essential or minimum requirements on job specifications such as English speakers only, minimum 3 years' experience, must have own transport, minimum skill requirements of X, Y, Z etc.

These high bars wipe out a large proportion of keen, willing to learn (and work) candidates.

Some examples and possible solutions include:

School leavers, graduates and those seeking a career change are often excluded in terms of a minimum year experience or skill asset criteria.

This candidate pool can be moulded/trained to become exemplary employees who repay an employer's investment and trust through loyalty and productivity.

Employers should reassess their training offerings and make use of apprenticeship schemes and other training programmes to drive candidate attraction. Do not put all your eggs in one basket as the 'ideal candidate' just might not exist at the recruitment stage but can most certainly be made into one given your time and effort.

EU and other foreign nationals with minimal or no English can be ignored despite having all other required skills, abilities, enthusiasm and other personal traits. Think about how you can adapt your working practices to be more inclusive, such as:

- ⇒ Assess the job role and the level of English language skill required to operate safely and effectively.
- ⇒ Consider English language skill assessments to understand the training need required.
- ⇒ Provide English lessons to promote effective communication and upskill personnel.
- ⇒ Create and distribute multi-lingual documentation, policies, safety and other signage.
- ⇒ Implement a 'Buddy' system whereby those that lack language skills work with same-language and bi/multi-lingual employees.
- ⇒ Train managers and team leaders on cultural differences and how to assess language levels.

Remember that some native English speakers might never be attracted to certain roles, so be sure not to restrict the recruitment net.

Drivers v non-drivers – some great workers simply cannot afford to run a car or do not have a driving licence. There are ways around this such as providing transport, offering reduced-priced travel schemes, loans for public transport costs, car sharing etc. Or think about how the role could be adapted to embrace [hybrid or completely remote working](#) to negate the transport issue. Every problem has a solution, so make use of technology for remote employees and be mindful not to create unnecessary barriers to your resource plan.

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Respond to applicant shortages

Do not bury your head in the sand if you see a drop in applicants for vacancies and constantly interrogate why this might be happening.

If your ideal candidate cannot be found in the first or second application pool, you need to assess the recruitment campaign as new directions may need to be established to attract people to your vacancy.

There is likely to be a negative impact on cost, productivity and your team, especially if other employees need to cover the duties of a vacant role over and above what is sustainable. Consider these measures for hard-to-fill roles:

Be inclusive

As previously mentioned, recruiting from broader, more diverse demographics that might be typically underrepresented in the labour market can drive candidate attraction. People who are disabled, long-term unemployed, ex-service personnel, single parents, carers, ex-offenders etc., that might need alternative support but who could provide vital skills and labour to your organisation.

Employers should take a wider view on transferrable skills and search for those with not only the required experience but also those who have potential and can be developed and grow with the organisation. This would help to manage rapidly changing skill sets and avoid playing catch up.

Moreover, all elements of the recruitment process should be assessed, from advertising to job descriptions and interview processes. If you are to drive genuine inclusion, start with a job analysis exercise and extend this to the construct of the interview. For example, interview processes that call for group tasks or prolonged eye contact can disadvantage neurodivergent applicants, who represent over 10% of the population.





Respond swiftly

Employers need to be able to respond swiftly to changes in the labour market by embarking on strategic workforce planning.

Accessibility can also hinder a company's recruitment drive. Relying on burdensome application methods with an array of lengthy form filling, covering letter writing and endless screening questions can put people off applying and prevent access for several disadvantaged groups.

Although these stages might have relevance for candidate selection, think about how you can do this differently, decomplexify the process and set yourself apart from the competition. Technology can help; using QR codes that direct people straight to online (condensed) applications can attract a wider range of people, quickly, is just one example.

Strategic workforce planning and training

With fewer candidates comes the likelihood of skills gaps in organisations – some must face the likely prospect of not being able to find ready-made skills for their needs. Therefore, employers need to be able to respond swiftly to changes in the labour market by embarking on strategic workforce planning to help identify the skills they need now and in the future.

Performing this skills assessment regularly will in turn help to narrow the focus of learning and development required within an organisation. Keep workforce training at the forefront of strategy to future-proof operations.

Recruit to Retain

Getting the balance right, recruit to retain and invest in your workforce to save spending time on recruitment.

Ask yourself, are you focusing too much attention on filling vacancies rather than investing in your current workforce to prevent attrition and skill loss? It is a fine line to tread and a study by Oxford Economics highlighted that the average cost of backfilling a single vacancy equated to circa £30,000 (sector/role dependent), with a large proportion of this loss deriving from a reduction in productivity as it takes time to get a new recruit up-to-speed. For those employers that have a high proportion of migrant workers for temporary or seasonal roles, retention and ensuring workers return is vital for productivity and keeping costs down, especially in a post-Brexit climate.

Arguably, money could be used more wisely on improved retention initiatives, although it is also important to recruit personnel that fit with your organisation's culture, mission and values from the outset – this is what we do best as a recruiter for our clients!

Retention measures can include the obvious financial rewards, but do not forget the priceless intangibles such as those already mentioned – recognition, praise, regular feedback opportunities, skills training, career development and a general inclusive approach to talent management.

So, ask yourself:

- Are your retention and due diligence practices effective?
- What is your worker retention strategy?
- Is your onboarding process fit for purpose?
- What do you do to ensure workers feel involved and engaged?
- What activities are affecting your ability to successfully retain workers?
- For temporary/seasonal workers:
 - Are your working and living conditions appropriate?
 - Are you increasing the number of seasonal worker returnees?

Then consider the following retention activity:

Strategy and policy

Develop processes and procedures to ensure they promote retention covering induction, fair assignment of work, worker voice, communication, working environment and returnee policy (for temporary/seasonal workers), and identify areas that will be your and your managers' responsibility. Design work that is the most attractive you have to offer to encourage workers to stay and always review practices and KPIs. Measuring and assessing why people leave is key to developing and continually adapting an effective retention strategy.

Induction

Ensure pre-start/arrival information and welcome packs are sent in advance, so new starts know what to expect and any queries can be managed in advance. Make sure you have a clearly defined, robust and inclusive onboarding programme, so take time to develop 'buddy' and coaching schemes to get new hires performing quicker, more effectively and safely. Regular check-ins are vital to ensure new starts are settling in.

Optimise labour planning

You must have a clear work plan with effective lines of communication, so develop a detailed plan to provide clarity on work rosters or allocation and distribute regular updates on any changes. Ensure clarity on working hours and for temporary/seasonal workers be clear on what hours they want to/can work each week; be in line with ethical standards and Working Time Regulations. Any work allocation and overtime must be distributed on a fair and transparent basis based on worker skills and availability; employees must be aware of and understand the procedure of how to inform you if their circumstances change and they need to work different hours, shifts etc.

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Recruit to Retain cont'd

Involve workers and working environment factors

These are the key reasons people leave as they do not feel heard, involved or experience a poor working environment. Having employee representatives, committees and forums can enhance the free flow of communication across all levels. Get regular feedback from workers through surveys/polls, one-to-ones etc., and ensure that you provide information back to workers on issues and concerns raised through all communication channels.

Workers that feel informed also feel valued and are more likely to stay. Ensure a safe, Covid-compliant working environment with effective practices and PPE with a good level of facilities for people to be able to work productively. Keep rewarding/praising good work and deal with issues professionally and appropriately as and when they arise.



Guiding Principles



Collaborative

We work collaboratively towards a shared goal of becoming the best and most professional business partner our clients could wish for, becoming an extension of their team, helping to shoulder their burden, and achieving mutual success.

Authentic

We remain true to the principles that have brought the business to where it is now, never forgetting that we are a people business, and that developing long lasting, genuine and human relationships is key to our success.

Loyal

We're committed to the people around us, and demonstrate our loyalty by trusting, nurturing and supporting each other at every turn.

Inclusive

We're open-minded and listen carefully to all our colleagues' ideas and suggestions without pre-judgement. And we always remain mindful of our language and behaviour towards others.

Brave

We're never afraid to challenge the status quo and actively encourage each other to be bold and inventive in our thinking to find the best solutions possible for our clients, our candidates and our business.

Resilient

When faced with challenges, we show the strength of character needed to find new ways to get the job done, and to recover quickly from any setbacks we may face.

Empowered

Our biggest asset is our people and we want them to grow in confidence and ability - so we empower individuals to make their own decisions free from the shackles of bureaucracy and a strict KPI structure.

Summary

With the labour market tightening following Brexit, the pandemic, candidate shifts and subsequent skill shortages, employers must look ahead, be more flexible and operate effective resource planning. Improving current productivity and retention as well as addressing skills needs in the longer term must be a going concern.

Employers need to build on employee offerings to attract candidates through both financial and non-financial benefits, enhancing your brand along with inclusive recruitment practices. This will not only manage hiring challenges in the short-term but also make your organisation more attractive as an employer in the long run.

Acting on labour market desires for fair pay, flexible working, clear career pathways, training and development opportunities will help your organisation to be competitive and attract and retain the people and skills you need.

Other sources:

[Labour Market Outlook \(cipd.co.uk\)](https://www.cipd.co.uk)

ALP - OCTOBER 2020 GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE TO SOURCING WORKERS

ALP - OCTOBER 2020 GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE TO RETAINING WORKERS

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