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# An Exploration of Graduate Competencies by Region

Know what to expect from your graduate cohort in 2023.



# Introduction

Today's graduates are entering a shifting job market – roles and teams are in a constant state of change but people and talent are still at the heart of the business agenda. As economic instability increases, organizations are looking to leverage their workforce differently. Graduates are seen as the foundation on which to build a strong and dynamic workforce that is equipped to meet the needs of now and the future.

While graduates may hold the formal qualifications, organizations are now looking for a more rounded view of their candidates. Are they ready for the role and will they fit into the organization? Do they possess the right competencies and thus potential for success? Where do their strengths and development needs lie? Do these vary by geographical region? And how can they be supported and nurtured to ensure long-term success?



# 11 Graduate Competencies that Lead to Success

At SHL, we know what competencies lead to success in graduate roles. We have gained this valuable insight through extensive and thorough job analysis exercises spanning the Occupational Information Network (O\*NET)<sup>1</sup> database as well as through engaging with multiple global partners

and subject matter experts. By incorporating data such as Knowledge, Skills and Abilities, and work activities into the job analysis conducted with our partnering organizations, we were able to identify eleven key competencies (Table 1) that are predictive of success in all graduate roles.

**Table 1. The Competencies Measured by SHL's Graduate 8.0 Job-Focused Assessment**

Competency Name	Definition
Takes Responsibility	This measures the extent to which the candidate is accountable for work outcomes and accepts responsibility when things go wrong.
Fosters Team Cohesion	This measures the extent to which the candidate energizes the team and keeps them cohesive.
Maintains Good Working Relationships	This measures the extent to which the candidate puts effort into developing good relationships with others.
Analyzes Information	This measures the extent to which the candidate identifies key factors and integrates information to understand data or situations.
Learns Quickly	This measures the extent to which the candidate picks up new information and techniques easily.
Generates New Ideas	This measures the extent to which the candidate creates innovative approaches.
Uses Time Efficiently	This measures the extent to which the candidate manages own time and delivers work on schedule.
Works to High-Quality Standards	This measures the extent to which the candidate completes every task with a high degree of quality.
Adapts to Change	This measures the extent to which the candidate accepts and adapts to changes without difficulty.
Copes with Setbacks and Criticism	This measures the extent to which the candidate stays positive when facing difficulties and does not dwell on negative events.
Strives to Achieve	This measures the extent to which the candidate sets demanding goals and makes a determined effort to meet or exceed them.

<sup>1</sup> National Center for O\*NET Development, Occupational Information Network (2022). O\*NET OnLine. Retrieved September 2022 from [www.onetonline.org](http://www.onetonline.org)

# Following the Data

We analyzed recent test scores from over 20,000 graduates across the globe to better understand how graduates were scoring against the competencies that are critical for success.

Data from the Graduate 8.0 Job-Focused Assessment was used to identify the key areas of strength and areas for development.



**Our findings challenge the common belief that this generation tends to display lower resilience than the generations before them.**

# Key Findings

## Areas of Strength

Our findings show that graduates' most common strengths are: **Takes Responsibility, Copes with Setbacks and Criticism, and Adapts to Change.** Interestingly, they echo themes of flexibility, adaptability, and resilience which were previously documented as areas for development at the onset, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating their evolution to meet the demands of today's workplace.<sup>2</sup>

## Areas of Strength



Takes Responsibility

Copes with Setbacks and Criticism

Adapts to Change

## Top Tip

Strengths-based learning supports higher employee engagement and lower attrition rates. Identify strengths through assessment and share this information with Hiring Managers at the

on-boarding stage. This helps managers leverage strengths through individualized task assignment and provide motivational stretch opportunities early in the employee journey.



Recruiters are **2X** more likely to find graduates that  **Take Responsibility** than **Use Time Efficiently.**

<sup>2</sup> SHL & The Adecco Group (2021). Equipping Gen Z to Lead an Unpredictable Future: Helping Graduates to Bridge the Gap. Whitepaper.

## Areas for Development

The key areas for development are the following three competencies: **Uses Time Efficiently**, **Strives to Achieve**, and **Analyzes Information**. One possible explanation for this could be linked to challenges faced in staying motivated and working in remote or hybrid environments. Taken altogether, these three competencies could be key areas for organizations to direct their efforts toward when designing onboarding and development plans.

## Areas for Development



Analyzes Information

Strives to Achieve

Uses Time Efficiently



## Top Tip

Build opportunities to objectively assess for these behaviors throughout your hiring process. In addition to SHL's [Graduate Job-Focused Assessments](#), tasks like analysis presentation exercises are effective measures of these

behaviors. Ensure that feedback is shared with candidates and Hiring Managers so that developmental activities can be built into the first 30 days of their onboarding plan.

# Do candidate competencies vary by region?

The data was further examined to understand how graduate competencies vary by different geographical region. Which competencies are candidates from each region more likely to score highly on than others?

Our findings show that across the five different regions as outlined in Figure 1, the key areas of strength are almost identical to those we find in an overall global graduate profile. **Takes Responsibility, Copes with Setbacks and Criticism**, and **Adapts to Change** are universal strengths. This is likely a by-product of the COVID-19 pandemic, which might have similarly impacted graduates and their experiences regardless of their geographical location. The exception to this trend comes from Africa, where **Works to High Quality Standards** replaces **Adapts to Change** as one of the key strengths.

## Areas of strength are more consistent across all regions compared to areas of development.

On the other hand, notable differences are observed in areas for development. **Maintains Good Working Relationships** was only an area for development in two regions, Africa and Oceania. **Generates New Ideas** was identified as a competency for development for the Americas only, and **Fosters Team Cohesion** was identified as a competency for development only for Europe. These results can give recruiters a better sense of what competencies to expect in the candidate pool and where to focus development initiatives in regional graduate recruitment programs.

Figure 1. Comparing Graduate Competencies by Region



### Areas of Strength

Takes Responsibility
Copes with Setbacks and Criticism
Adapts to Change

Copes with Setbacks and Criticism
Takes Responsibility
<b>Works to High Quality Standards</b>

Copes with Setbacks and Criticism
Takes Responsibility
Adapts to Change

Takes Responsibility
Adapts to Change
Copes with Setbacks & Criticism

Takes Responsibility
Copes with Setbacks & Criticism
Adapts to Change

Takes Responsibility
Copes with Setbacks & Criticism
Adapts to Change

<b>Maintains Good Working Relationships</b>
Copes with Setbacks & Criticism
Adapts to Change



### Areas for Development

Analyzes Information
Strives to Achieve
Uses Time Efficiently

Analyzes Information
<b>Maintains Good Working Relationships</b>
Uses Time Efficiently

Analyzes Information
<b>Generates New Ideas</b>
Uses Time Efficiently

Analyzes Information
<b>Fosters Team Cohesion</b>
Uses Time Efficiently

Strives to Achieve
<b>Maintains Good Working Relationships</b>
Uses Time Efficiently

Analyzes Information
Strives to Achieve
Uses Time Efficiently

Uses Time Efficiently
Strives to Achieve
<b>Works to High Quality Standards</b>



Note: Shaded competencies in bold indicate competencies identified for a particular region but not globally.



# Key Takeaways

What are the implications of this research for graduate recruitment?

1

## Take a Competency-Based Approach

As the graduate job market continues to evolve and economic conditions grow increasingly uncertain, employers are placing competencies at the forefront of their graduate recruitment strategy. 68% of graduate recruiters take a competency-based approach.<sup>3</sup> SHL's analysis has identified the 11 critical competencies that lead to success in all graduate roles (Table 1) and the latest findings in this paper will help organizations understand what they can expect from graduates within their region(s).

2

## Look Beyond Your Immediate Region

Many recruiters report difficulty in filling their graduate roles but technology has made the world a smaller place. Recruiters can now easily access a global talent pool and acquire competencies that might be missing in their immediate regions, offering a greater opportunity to fill the roles with the talent they need now and for the future.

3

## Leverage Talent Analytics

There are several crucial competencies that today's graduates need to develop in order to maximize their chances of success. Organizations should use this data to drive the investments they make in their graduates, from attraction, through to assessment, onboarding and development. Understanding the graduates being brought into the business will ensure you get the best out of them.

4

## Give Graduates Stretch Assignments

Trust that your graduates can thrive in the everchanging world of work. Graduates' ability to **Take Responsibility, Copes with Setbacks and Criticism**, and **Adapt to Change**, gives them a great foundation to succeed in current and future roles, however the world of work evolves.

“We have worked with SHL for a number of years on the graduate recruitment program, during this time we have seen an increase in candidate engagement and quality of candidates making it to the final stages. The end-to-end solution had a significant impact on our brand in the competitive graduate market.”

**Helen Alkin**, Emerging Talent Strategy & Resourcing Lead, British Airways

## Why SHL?

SHL's rich history of market-leading scientific research and innovation is able to help organizations today better understand the talent around them. We assess over 35 million candidates each year, of which over 1.5 million are graduates. SHL's Graduate Solution enables organizations to level the hiring field by evaluating readiness,

potential, and fit with a comprehensive portfolio of face-valid assessments. With our state-of-the-art hiring toolkit, our solutions help organizations identify current and future potential through easy-to-interpret talent insights - while delivering a uniquely designed, engaging experience to all candidates.



Hire for tomorrow, **today.**

Learn more about SHL's Graduate Solution at [shl.com/graduate](https://shl.com/graduate).

