
A new era in graduate recruitment

Time for meaningful experiences



SHL

Optimising graduate recruitment continues to be a priority for most employers

The quest for the perfect solution - creating a stand-out employer brand experience while managing large volumes of applicants and identifying top talent, all with minimal cost - is ongoing.

Advances have certainly been made. Competencies and strengths-based models are in place in many organisations, and using assessment to objectively measure current capability and future potential is now commonplace. Integrated technology and applicant tracking systems have eased the burden on recruitment teams and helped create more streamlined processes.

However, organisations operate in an ever-changing world. Our analysis of employer requirements across the last decade shows that what they're looking for from graduates has changed significantly. In 2010 employers were looking for graduates who would "get stuff done". Now the emphasis has shifted towards collaboration, creativity, agility and resilience.

Alongside these evolving demands, there is a growing trend towards internal mobility and portfolio careers. Long gone are the days of recruiting a graduate for a one-track path to leadership. As graduates are looking to discover their 'truths'¹, employers are increasingly creating opportunities for new role and skill experiences.

In addition, a new generation has entered the workforce. Generation Z, a cohort with very different views and expectations to their predecessors in Generation Y. Born in the mid-1990s, Gen Z has been shaped by a dynamic and, at times, volatile world. A world constantly online and streaming digital content. Where mobile devices and social media have always been the norm for communication. With this as its foundation, Gen Z brings a unique set of priorities and worldview - a perspective framed by a digitally influenced quest for a more sustainable and fairer world.

We believe it's time for change in graduate recruitment - for a realistic and meaningful experience. Here's why.

¹ McKinsey, 2018

The expectations of graduates are changing

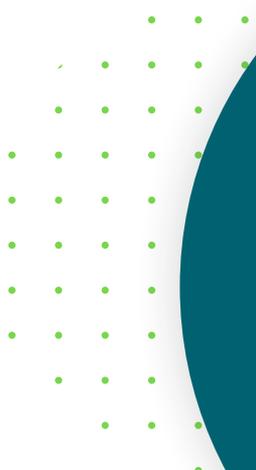
While Generation Y focused more on immediate progression and results, there has been a significant shift towards a desire for discovering 'truths'¹. Gen Z are now concerned with understanding their true identities through two-way dialogue, have a desire to make a genuine difference and want to give back to society. This translates to their job hunt too. This generation craves a meaningful and honest experience when applying for graduate jobs².

There is also a clear preference for an efficient and digital process (they're digital natives after all), but don't want to be patronised by gimmicks. Having worked hard to complete their degrees, they want the assessment process to closely resemble the tasks they will

experience in the role, and to feel that their capabilities have been fairly and properly assessed.

Furthermore, today's graduates often feel unprepared for the world of work. In fact, **one in three graduates believes they made the wrong decision when accepting a job offer**³.

What does this all tell us? The expectations of graduates are changing and organisations need to keep up if they want to capture their great potential. Overwhelmingly the message is clear: graduates today want an application process that will give them a realistic view of the job and allow them to showcase their capabilities fairly in a context relevant to the role which they are applying for.



"We were given 45 minutes to come up with a solution to a problem and it was interesting to see how the relationships unfolded. It felt really good that I was able to challenge myself and see that I could actually perform in a real business environment under all of that pressure."

Alexandros Varianos, Finalist at the Undergraduate of the Year Economics Award 2019

"Overall, it felt more like a stimulating conversation than a formal test and there was plenty of time to ask the interviewers questions of our own."

Madeleine Cullen, Winner of the Undergraduate of the Year Science Award 2019

¹ McKinsey, 2018 ² UK Trendence Graduate Survey, 2019 ³ HR Review, 2019

Employer needs are changing too

For 11 years we've partnered with GTI Target Jobs to run the Undergraduate of the Year Awards. Our analysis of the assessment data we have collated shows that over the last decade what employers want from graduates has changed significantly. Every year over 4,000 undergraduates enter to win an award with a top graduate employer, and they complete SHL assessments to help the judges identify the stars of tomorrow.

We have seen a significant shift over the last decade in what employers value in their graduates. In 2009, employers were searching for graduates who would “get stuff done” – those who could analyse and interpret information, organise and prioritise their days, and deliver results. Ten years on, we discovered **the emphasis had shifted towards engaging with peers, and the ability to collaborate, be creative and cope with constant change.**

Interestingly, our results have shown that there are some noticeable gaps between the in-demand skills and the natural strengths of undergraduates now entering the workforce.

It appears that today's graduates need targeted support to develop many of these capabilities – persuading others, thinking creatively, and showing resilience to pressure and change. In the ever-changing world of work, employers need to

be prepared to provide focused development and onboarding in order to help new graduates adapt to today's work environment.

Organisations are seeing an increase in the number of internal moves employees make, and this applies to graduates too. The goal is no longer to recruit a graduate for a one-track path to leadership. It's increasingly likely that both the individual and the organisation will want to create opportunities for sideways moves, secondments and placements to create a breadth of ever-evolving learning opportunities.

From an employer point of view, graduate recruitment needs to take a holistic approach to each candidate, measuring cultural fit, alignment of values, and potential to develop a new set of skills for the future of work. Aligning the employer brand with graduate expectations remains of utmost importance, in a way that satisfies the yearning for truth, not spin, and demonstrating the support they will offer throughout their journey. Organisations also need an agile solution, enabling data from the recruitment process to be used to onboard, develop and mobilise their talent once the graduate has joined the company.

A new approach

SHL's latest research involving almost 800 recent graduates confirmed how the changing world of work has impacted the experiences of graduates today:

- **Constant change.** 75% of surveyed graduates feel that their priorities change on a weekly basis, and almost 50% feel that the strategy they are working to changes within a quarter.
- **Self-belief.** Despite all the change, they are confident they are doing a good job. Two-thirds of graduates believe they are performing better than average compared to their colleagues.
- **Balancing work and life.** They report having difficulty adjusting to the demands of working life – less leisure time, commuting, balancing multiple tasks and fitting into the culture of the organisation in which they are working.
- **Enjoying the trade-off.** Graduates enjoy the responsibility and challenge of their role as well as their new found financial independence.

The main purpose of this research was to understand the core tasks and scenarios encountered by graduates today across roles, organisations and industries. To enable this, we undertook an extensive review of graduate's roles and the work required of them in their first year of employment. Through this review we identified a list of the typical challenges graduates encounter. We then surveyed current graduates, typically with less than one year's experience, to understand how often, how important, how challenging and how prepared they were to face each challenge identified in our review. This enabled us to build a model of 14 core challenges that were deemed most critical.



SHL's Model of Graduate Challenges

	Graduate Challenges	Frequency encountered, importance, level of challenge and readiness to tackle
1	Working on a cross-functional team to help solve a business challenge.	The most frequently seen and amongst the most important. Graduates typically felt comfortable and prepared for working with others in this way.
2	Learning a new skill or application through self-directed learning.	Seen as the most important and frequently required in role. Graduates felt prepared but considered this to be amongst the most difficult challenges.
3	Building relationships in an unfamiliar department/business unit.	Graduates reported being required to do this often and recognised its importance, but still found it particularly challenging.
4	Picking up a project at short notice and with limited briefing.	This was considered to be the most difficult challenge and one for which few felt prepared. Most had encountered this at least once, many frequently, and recognised it as a critical skill to acquire.
5	Managing a commercial relationship.	Interacting with suppliers or customers was something most graduates felt unprepared for, but despite this felt comfortable in their ability to manage effectively.
6	Providing and/or receiving challenging feedback.	Typically accustomed to and comfortable with feedback, the graduates recognised this as something they had to do reasonably often and that it was an important skill to master.
7	Working on a new client opportunity.	Working on tenders, chasing new leads and understanding client needs had been encountered by roughly half of the graduates. Graduates generally felt unprepared for this type of work and found it reasonably challenging.
8	Taking on management responsibility for others.	Although relatively few had experienced this scenario, those who had found it quite challenging and felt reasonably unprepared for this.
9	Working collaboratively with remote, virtual or international teams.	Recent graduates felt comfortable using technology to interact with colleagues and team members. They did not feel challenged by the lack of face-to-face contact in modern working environments.
10	Presenting options for solving a critical business problem.	Less than a third of graduates had done this at all, and only a few did it frequently. Consequently graduates generally felt unprepared for it.

11

Balancing further professional study against the demands of the day job.

Although this applied to relatively few of the graduates, those it did apply to found this amongst the most challenging of their work demands.

12

Organising an event.

A significant group of graduates had delivered this at least once and felt reasonably comfortable being able to manage it.

13

Exploring new technology options and making proposals for implementation within the business.

New graduates' comfort with technology showed that even though they didn't need to do this frequently, they felt comfortable doing so.

14

Producing a high level executive summary from complex, detailed information.

Though generally prepared for critical evaluation of information, many graduates tend not to do this type of work.

In summary, the challenges most frequently encountered by the graduates were:

- Working in a cross-functional team to help solve a business issue
- Learning a new skill or application through self-directed learning
- Building relationships in an unfamiliar team

The same three challenges came top when asked which challenges graduates felt were most important in their role and which they also felt most prepared to tackle.

However, the areas they listed as most challenging were:

- Picking up a project at short notice and with limited briefing
- Building relationships in an unfamiliar team
- Taking on management responsibility for others

This emphasises that today's graduates are highly likely to need further support in developing skills and behaviours to help them deal with ambiguity and change and building relationships when they enter the workplace.

With constant change and the balance of work and life a reality for graduates, employers need to clearly understand capability levels when graduates join to ensure they can offer the support required for them to flourish in-role. This shouldn't end at the first role or placement the graduate takes, but continue in each new role as their journey continues and the challenges evolve.



Using latest assessment science to build meaningful experiences

At SHL our research has shown that measuring fit to context is three times more powerful than standard approaches. As assessments have become commonplace, some question the value of measuring individual competencies in assessment centres since the ‘exercise effect’ means those who appear to perform well in the exercise tend to score highly across all competencies, and vice versa². What does this mean for you? Don’t throw out those competency models just yet! Build on them with contextual information. A context-based approach provides flexibility and improves prediction, but competencies still have a part to play.

We’re also seeing a shift towards building talent experiences. Previously organisations were focused on integrating HR Systems using the language of competencies and flowing through the whole employee lifecycle.

This emphasis, however, often neglected the individual³. An experience emphasis brings the focus to the employee and how we can make their work and life better.

Is it the end of the road for competency or strengths-based models of assessments? Not the end, but potentially the start of a new journey. Behaviours certainly still have a critical role to play but a new lens is needed. Most frameworks neglect to factor in the all-important context of the challenges and experiences that graduates encounter. Including this lens can help improve the power of assessment and agility of the solution. It also helps to connect with a generation who demand an authentic, meaningful experience.

¹ SHL *Creating Successful Leaders: The Biggest Missing Factor*, 2017

² Jackson et al 2016, Putka and Hoffman 2013

³ Josh Bersin, *From Talent Management to Talent Experience*, 2019



Build your own graduate experience

How can you build a recruiting experience to meet the needs of graduates and employers in today's world?

Based on our model of graduate challenges we've developed an agile solution enabling organisations to:

- Build a graduate experience to reflect their own brand and culture
- Select the most relevant challenges to create a realistic and meaningful assessment experience
- Provide a fair and challenging platform for candidates to showcase their capability and fit in a single, intuitive workflow
- Provide instant feedback and detailed development reports

In an era of constant change and ambiguity – of work bleeding into life, of candidates craving personal and meaningful experiences, and of graduates frequently moving roles, teams and departments – it's time for a new approach to graduate recruitment. Build your new graduate experience with SHL today.



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