

# Navigating public sector recruitment in 2025

Insights and strategies for  
hiring success



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# Foreword

**2024 was a tough year for the recruitment industry with a tight job market that saw national vacancies drop to a level not seen since the COVID-19 lockdowns.**

If you struggled to attract candidates in the last year, you haven't been alone. As a long-standing partner to public sector employers, we have seen our clients facing unprecedented challenges with recruitment.



Economic uncertainty, a change in government, budget cuts, and the loss of numerous Conservative councillors in the last local government elections have produced a challenging time for the public sector.

Following on from our 2024 research on candidate experience, we have been exploring how these environmental changes have affected the public sector job market in terms of job seeker trends and behaviours.

Despite initial optimism that a decrease in inflation in 2024 may produce greater job market stability, we are yet to see any marked improvement. As the first quarter of 2025 progresses public sector hiring and job seeker activity both continue to plateau.

As a result, employers with urgent hiring needs must be up to date with job search behaviour to ensure you can remain as competitive as possible during a major candidate shortage.

This whitepaper will explore current job search trends among public and not-for-profit sector employees. It is based on a survey conducted with Jobs Go Public users who are or have recently been active in the job market.

The survey covers a range of topics including job search behaviour, employer branding, and the impact of emerging technology on how job seekers apply for jobs. These insights will be used to analyse how to target candidates in our market, job seekers' motivations for working in the public sector, and emerging recruitment challenges and opportunities.

In providing these insights we aim to provide employers in the public sector with all the tools you need to combat the current adverse market conditions.

**David Marshall**  
Founder of Jobs Go Public

# Key findings



**Over 1/2**

of job seekers are seeking a more fulfilling job



**58%**

of Gen Z candidates use AI tools in their job search



**Only 1/5**

of candidates would not apply for a job advertised on social media



**1-2 days**

candidates prefer to work on-site per week



**3 weeks**

Is the maximum time candidates will wait for an update on their application status



**Over 1/2**

of job seekers have been ghosted following an interview

# Introduction

As we look ahead into the next financial year (2025–26), recruitment trends and challenges continue to evolve. The trends and challenges we have identified in this study present opportunities to tackle these challenges and turn them into recruiting strengths.

Demographic patterns in the public sector remain consistent with our previous research (see section 5), but the current economic climate poses challenges which have made working adults in the UK less mobile in the job market.

In fact, job seekers are currently prioritising job satisfaction over other considerations (section 2). In this shifting landscape, organisations must adapt their approaches to successfully attract and retain top talent.

Following a survey conducted in Autumn 2024 with 725 job seekers from the Jobs Go Public audience, we made the following findings:

- ✓ In 2025, job satisfaction, work–life balance, and career progression are primary motivators for public sector candidates.
- ✓ The public sector workforce overall is slow to embrace the trend of using AI in job searches, but the younger workforce’s adoption of this technology necessitates adaptation of recruitment processes.
- ✓ Social media is an effective assistive tool for engaging passive candidates, despite being perceived as less impactful by active job seekers.
- ✓ Candidates express concerns about traditional recruitment agencies, citing unprofessionalism, lack of transparency, and poor outcomes from headhunters.
- ✓ Clear messaging in your recruitment materials around benefits such as work–life balance, wellbeing, and career development enhances recruitment and retention.
- ✓ Most candidates in 2025 favour hybrid roles, balancing remote flexibility with in-person collaboration.
- ✓ Timely communication, constructive feedback, and professionalism are critical elements of candidate experience for employer branding and talent retention.
- ✓ Red flags for prospective candidates include vague job descriptions, unrealistic expectations, and unprofessional hiring practices.

By embracing these trends and tackling challenges head-on, public sector organisations can position themselves as employers of choice in 2025 and beyond.

# 1. How candidates currently find jobs

In an evolving job market, understanding how candidates discover and engage with opportunities is vital for shaping effective recruitment strategies. Public sector employers face increasing challenges in attracting talent, making it crucial to stay informed about the channels and methods candidates use in their job search.

These challenges have pushed many employers to target the passive job seeker market for candidate attraction. While this remains a valuable recruitment strategy, it's important to understand the behaviour of active job seekers to drill down into candidates' priorities.

In this section, we will explore key trends among active job seekers, examine where people are searching for roles, and consider the shifting relevance of traditional headhunting in today's recruitment landscape.

Additionally, we look at the growing influence of social media as a recruitment tool and whether it deserves a place in your hiring strategy. By leveraging these insights, you can meet candidates where they are, ensuring your outreach efforts remain impactful.



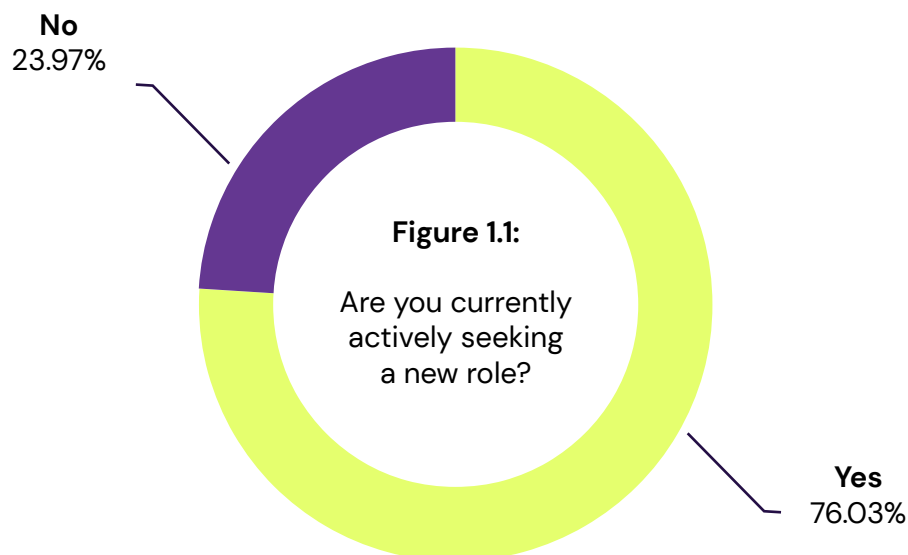
# 1.1 Active job seeker trends

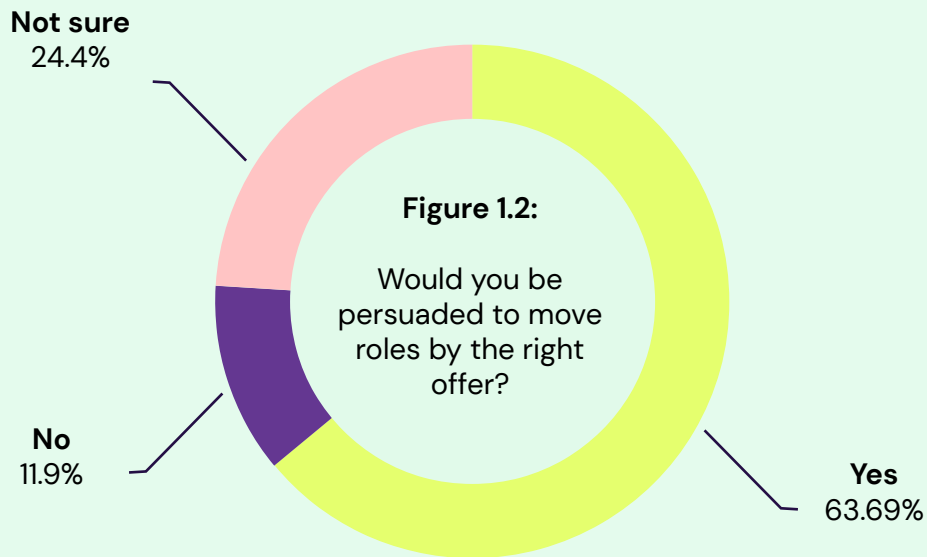
In our survey conducted in the Autumn of 2024, we asked registered users on [jobsgopublic.com](https://www.jobsgopublic.com) to tell us about their job searches.

Three-quarters of our research participants were still in the process of finding a new job at the time of the survey, allowing us to gain accurate insights into the mindset of the current public sector job market.

In addition to this, among the remaining participants who weren't currently looking for roles, just under two-thirds of respondents claimed they could be persuaded to move jobs if presented with a good offer.

This indicates that the majority of employees in the public sector maintain a level of awareness of the employment market on offer to them. Given this fact, it is crucial to build and maintain a consistently strong employer brand that is ready to attract and retain employees when you need it most.





To begin to build an employer brand and strengthen your employee value proposition (EVP), you need to understand what motivates candidates in the public sector to seek new roles.

With this in mind, we asked our active job seeking respondents why they were searching for a new role (Figure 1.3).

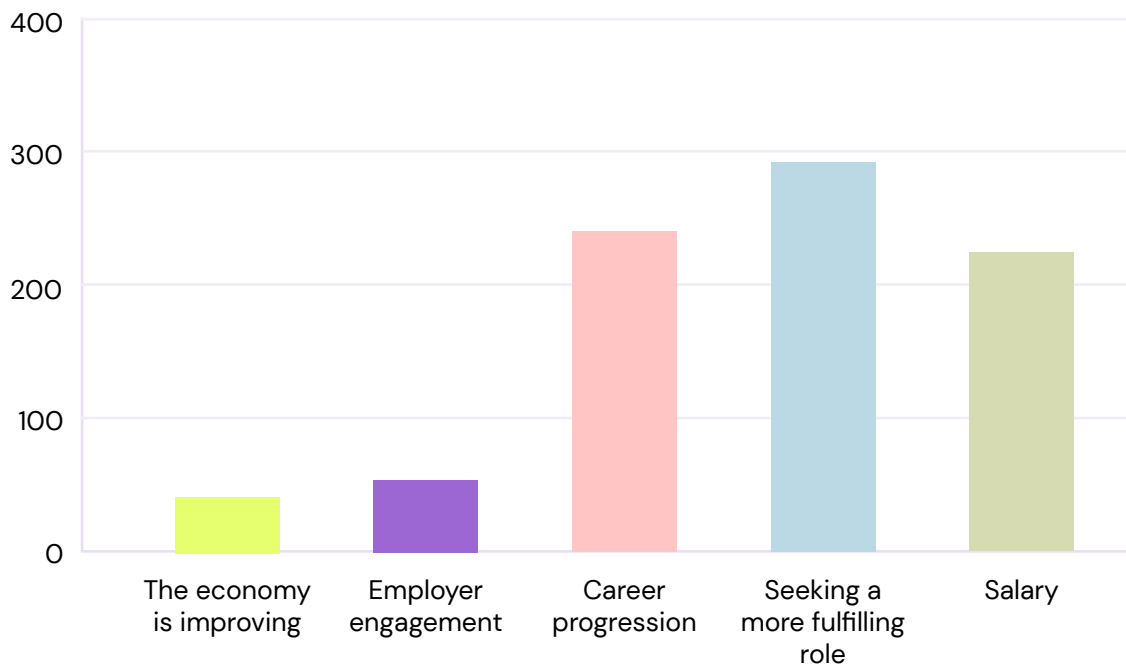
Over half of respondents stated that they were seeking a more fulfilling job, with just under half also thinking about their career progression or salary.

Only 8% of respondents indicated that small economic improvements in 2024 were providing them with the confidence to change roles. This may be due to general stagnation in wage growth across the public sector over the past decade, or because people are continuing to watch the progress of the new Labour government's economic policy before making any changes.



**Figure 1.3:**

Why are you currently looking for a new role? (Select all that apply)



It is clear that candidates prioritise the value of their work and the opportunity to develop their careers when looking at roles. We would advise our clients to consider these facts when creating employer brand content or writing job adverts, to ensure you highlight your organisation's strengths in a way that aligns with job seeker needs.

## 1.2 Where do people search for jobs?

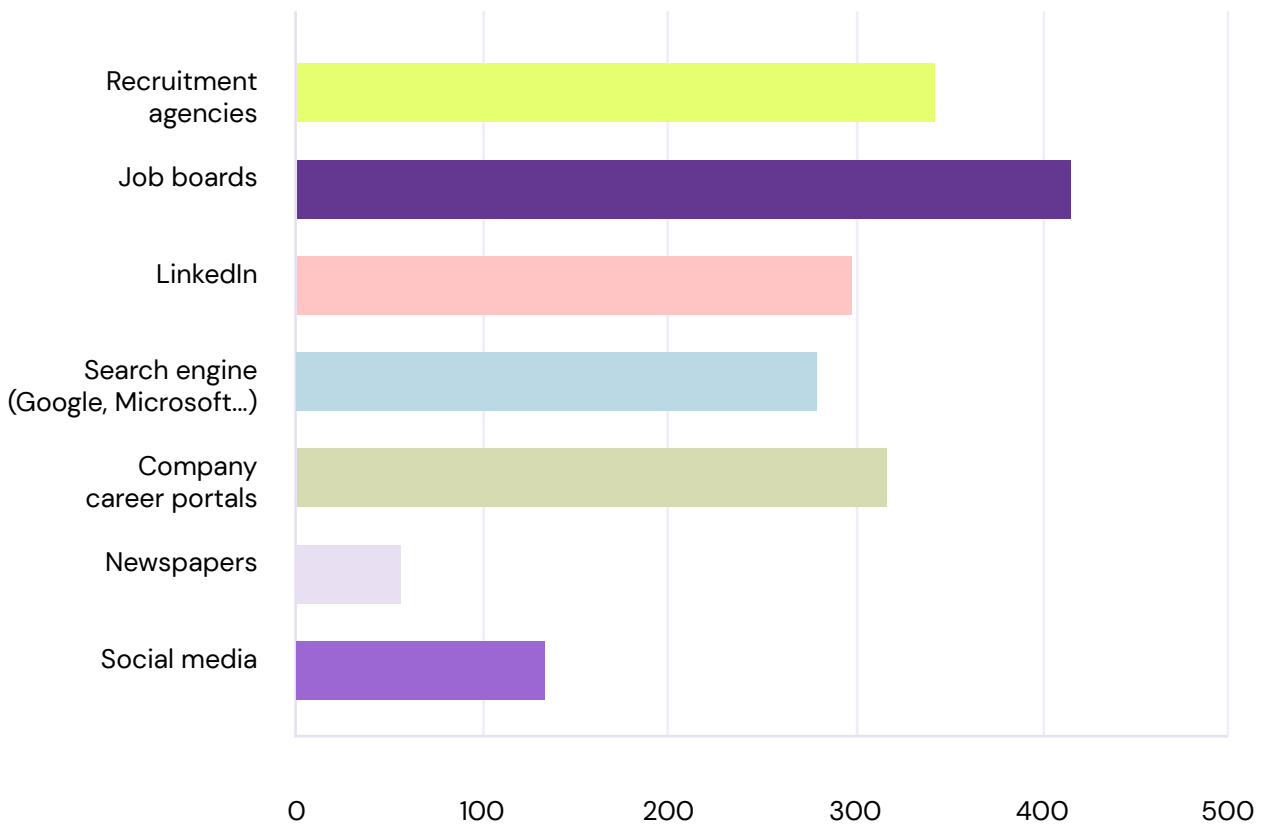
Understanding where candidates may search and apply for job opportunities is critical for tailoring recruitment strategies that compete for a shrinking pool of job seekers.

Job boards remain the most popular recruitment channel among active candidates in the public sector, with 64% of respondents indicating that they use them as a job search tool (Figure 1.4).

This trend emphasises the enduring importance of well-crafted job adverts. A compelling job advert serves not only as a key employer branding tool but also as a gateway to engaging prospective candidates who may not have seen your organisation before.

**Figure 1.4:**

Where do you normally look for jobs? (Select all that apply)



Search engines were the second most utilised source, with 42% of respondents turning to this channel. Nearly half of respondents also report going direct to specific company career portals. This underscores the importance of ensuring your EVP and relevant employment information is readily accessible on your career site.

Furthermore, one-fifth of candidates actively use social media during their job search. While this appears to be a small proportion of respondents at face value, this highlights social media's growing influence as a complementary recruitment tool.

Your organisation's social media profiles offer an easily accessible and cost-effective way to enhance your reach and employer brand.

We also drilled further into whether the demographic of respondents influenced these results. 62% of respondents over the age of 55 would turn to recruitment agencies to look for work. When comparing this to respondents under 35, only 40% use recruitment agencies.

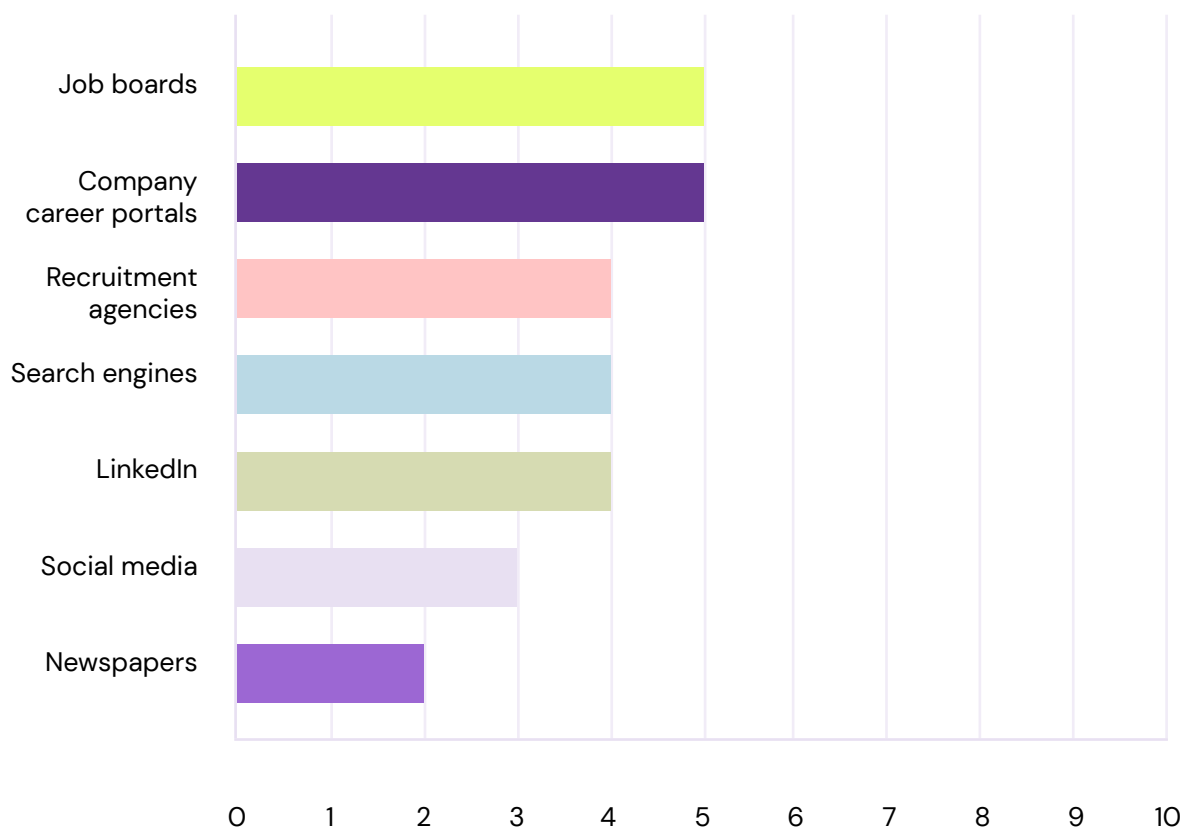
This indicates a generational difference in job search behaviour, with younger candidates leaning towards more technology-driven job searches. Conversely, candidates who have progressed further in their careers may rely more on networking and are more likely to seek out niche roles that require specialised experience.

These differences indicate the importance of establishing a multi-channel recruitment strategy which can boost your employer brand and capture a diverse group of potential candidates.

To delve deeper into which channels are more likely to attract prospective candidates, we asked our respondents to tell us which of the channels above they find most effective (Figure 1.5).

**Figure 1.5:**

From most effective to least effective, how would you rank these job search methods for their success in securing a role?



On average, job seekers still see traditional job boards and company career portals as the most effective job search methods, which share a very similar user interface environment for job applications.

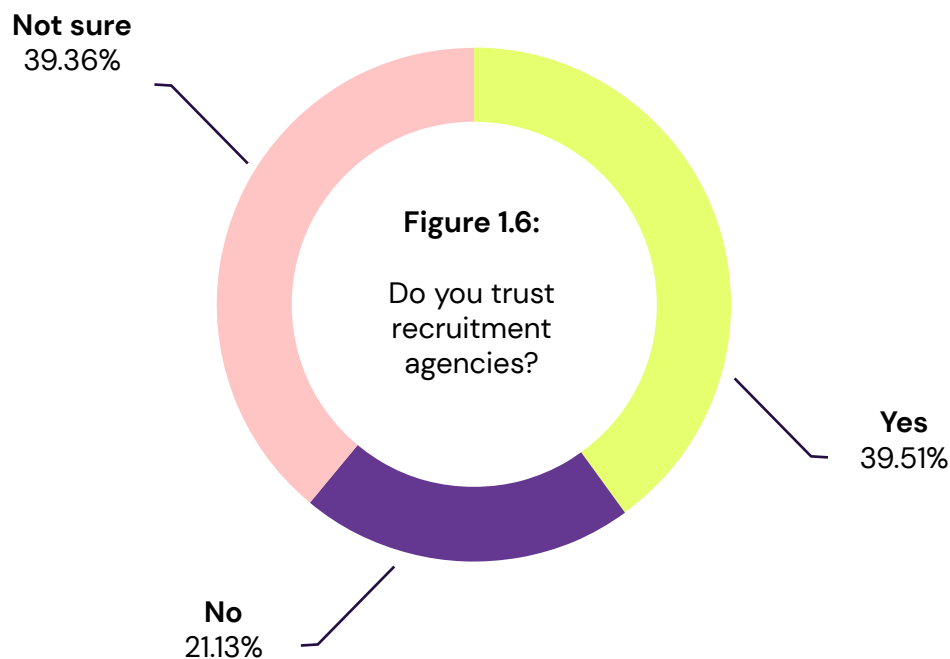
Conversely, candidates were more likely to rank news publications and social media platforms as the least effective channels for active job searching.



## 1.3 Is traditional headhunting in decline?

The majority of channels above are designed to target job seekers who are active in the market. But what about passive candidates? The tried and tested method for targeting people who may be open to work is the traditional recruitment agency.

When respondents were asked if they trusted headhunters, our audience was divided. Only 40% of candidates claimed to trust headhunting agencies as an aid to their job search (Figure 1.6).



Responses were also markedly different among generations, with almost half of 25–34 year old respondents stating that they trusted recruiters in comparison to only 33% of over 55s. This is interesting given the stronger preference for recruitment agencies as a job search tool among older candidates (section 1.2).

The reason for this may potentially be that older candidates who are more established in their careers have more reliance on recruiters to find roles that match their specialism and skills. However, this greater exposure to recruiters as a job search aid may have given older job seekers more negative experiences to draw from.

**When we asked candidates to elaborate on why they mistrusted headhunters, common themes included:**

- ✓ A generally poor candidate experience.
- ✓ Wanting to be able to speak directly to employers or someone who fully understands the job description.
- ✓ A lack of transparency around how personal data is being used.
- ✓ Seeing little to no success or interviews despite having frequent conversations with recruiters.
- ✓ Unprofessional behaviour from headhunters and ageism or bias in the shortlisting process.
- ✓ Headhunters may be inclined to lie about job offers to candidates in order to meet their agency's targets.
- ✓ Being matched with inappropriate job roles because the headhunter was not an expert in their niche.

These responses suggest that traditional resourcing is not a one-size-fits-all solution to recruitment. Many skilled candidates may avoid outreach from this source because of the reported poor candidate experience.

With budget constraints at dire levels, it's crucial to ensure that contracts with such agencies are delivering the expected ROI. With trust in headhunters decreasing, we expect reliance on this method to become an increasing challenge from 2025 and beyond.

Employers will need to diversify their attraction strategies moving forward to reach as many relevant skilled candidates as possible.

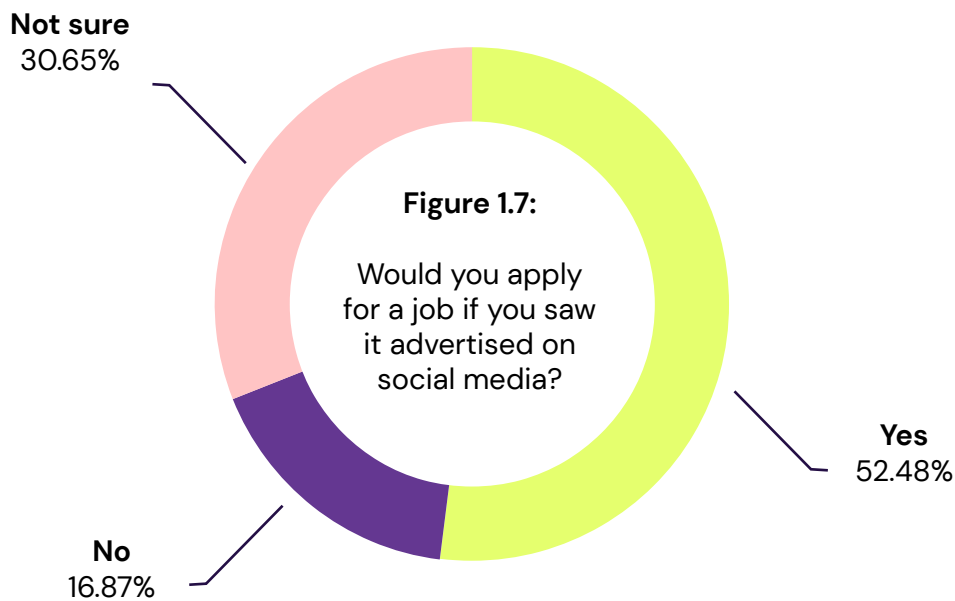
## 1.4 Should you include social media in your recruitment strategy?

The data in section 1.2 suggests that active job seekers see social media as a less effective job search tool. But what about the passive candidates?

As mentioned above, a multi-channel approach to recruitment is an effective method of targeting candidates at various stages in their application journey. What's more, almost two-thirds of candidates said they'd be tempted to move jobs by a good offer.

Therefore, we looked at social media as a tool for further targeting passive candidates, especially those who may have less trust in headhunters.

When asked if candidates would apply for jobs they see organically on social media, an average of 52% of respondents said they would, while a further 31% weren't completely sure (Figure 1.7).



The number of respondents who said “yes” jumps to 70% for candidates in the 25–34 age bracket, but drops significantly to just 40% of candidates aged 45–64. This suggests that social media can be a useful tool to include in your attraction strategy, especially when a role is geared towards candidates at earlier stages in their careers.

What’s more, the majority of public sector candidates spend a significant amount of time on social media in their day-to-day lives.



This three-hour window provides a valuable opportunity to target prospective candidates with new job opportunities, while also promoting your employer brand.

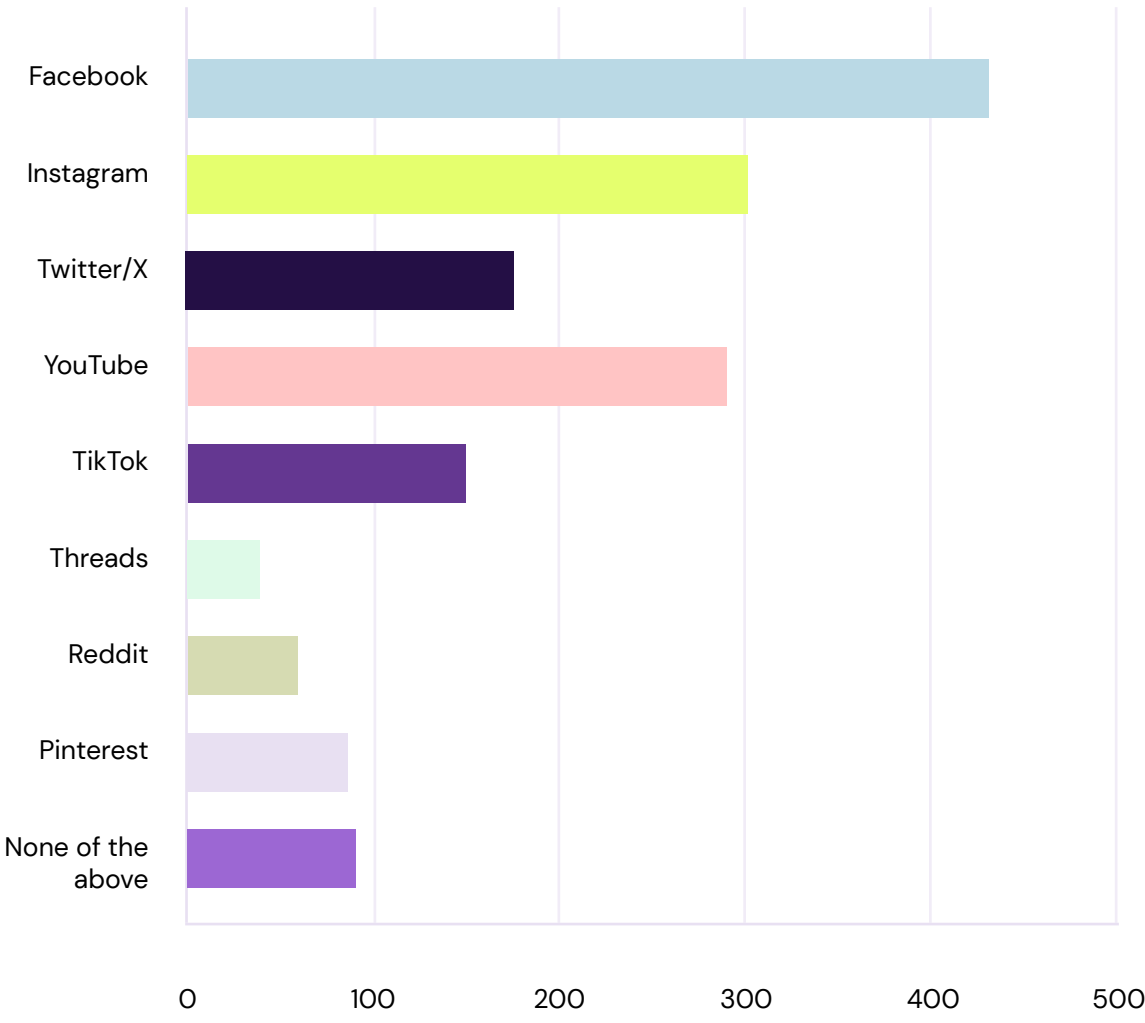


The most popular platform for candidates in our sector was Facebook, with 66% of users reporting that they use this social network (Figure 1.8). Just under half also state they regularly use the Instagram app and YouTube.

Conversely, only 31% report using X (formerly known as Twitter), and only 23% of our audience use the short-form video hosting app TikTok.

**Figure 1.8:**

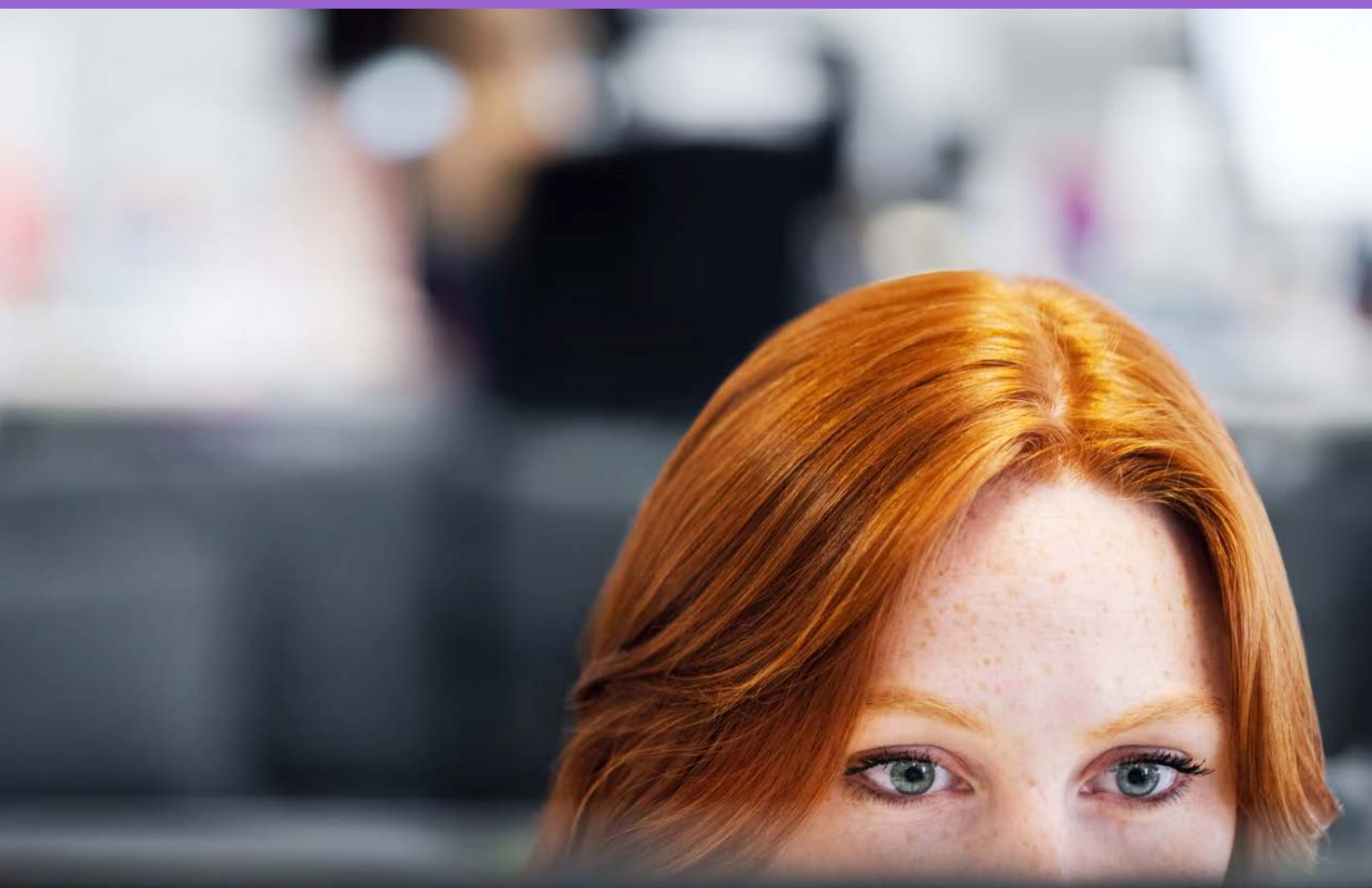
Which social media platforms do you use? (Select all that apply)



Overall, this suggests that the most effective networks for targeting the public sector demographic in general are Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Creating content on these platforms provides low-hanging fruit to boost your employer brand and promote your EVP with little to no cost involved.

Moreover, these channels also provide the opportunity for a **performance marketing solution** where payment for exposure to your ads is given for measurable results, such as clicks through to your job advert. This targeted and data-driven advertising tactic provides a more budget-friendly solution to attraction, as it is designed to provide a high return on advertising spend.

To find out how our performance marketing experts can help you get started, **get in touch** with our team.



## 2. What motivates candidates to apply for roles in the public sector

Understanding the motivations behind why individuals choose to work in the public sector and what they seek in potential employers is key to success in today's competitive recruitment landscape.

Unlike the private sector, where financial incentives are key drivers for candidate behaviour, the public sector traditionally attracts candidates driven by personal values, career aspirations, and organisational benefits.

This section delves into two key areas: the factors that inspire people to pursue careers in the public sector, and the qualities candidates prioritise when evaluating an employer's brand.

In understanding both, you can better position yourself as an employer to appeal to top talent and address the needs of candidates.

### 2.1 Why people choose the public sector

Knowing how to define and promote your employee value proposition is one of the greatest challenges hiring managers face, particularly for those with little recruitment experience.

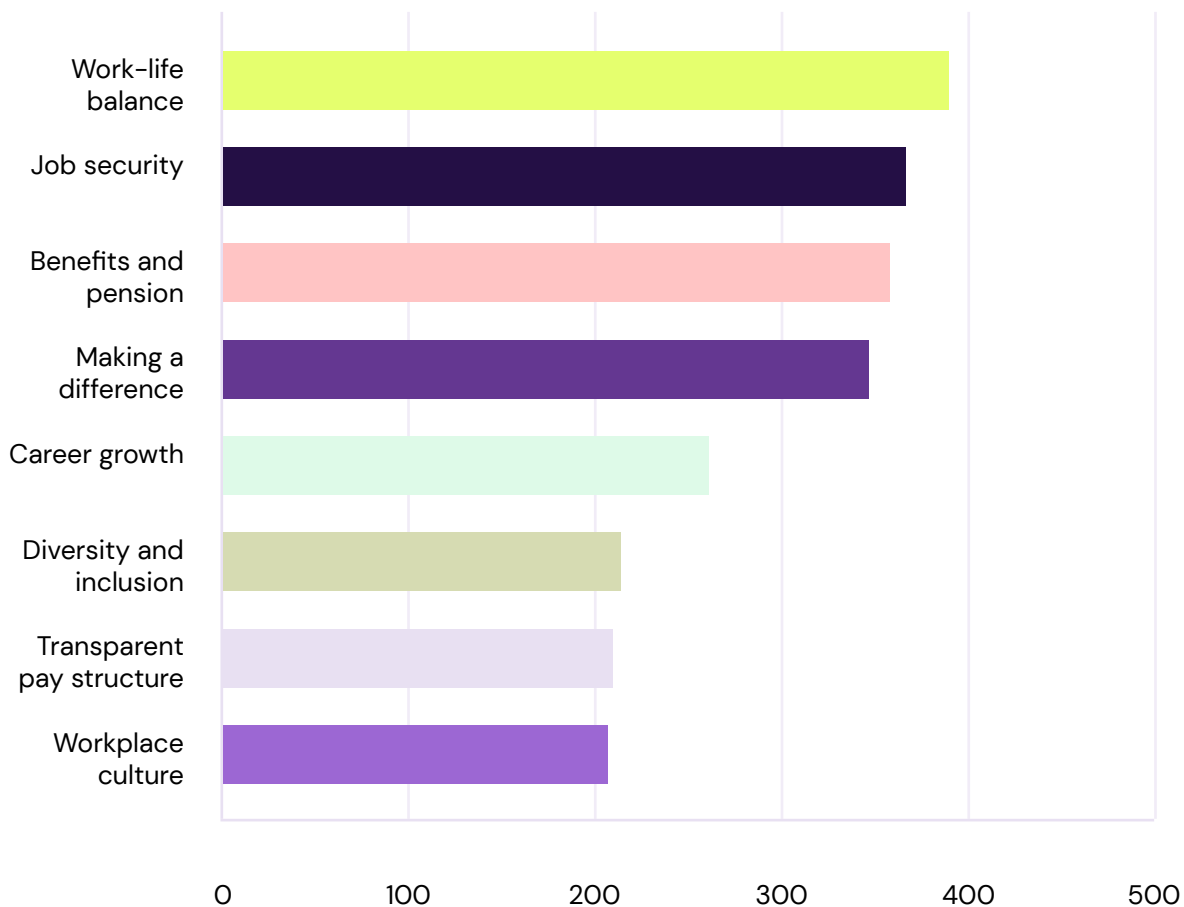
As a starting point, it is important to understand what factors motivate people to begin and stay in careers in the public sector, despite the many challenges faced for resources and staffing.

Consistent with recent quick polls on our LinkedIn page, the largest motivating factor for the majority of public sector workers is a work-life balance. 61% of respondents chose this option as a benefit of their role (Figure 2.1).

Furthermore, 58% of participants appreciated the greater job security offered in the public sector, and 57% sought out the unique benefits and pension packages on offer.

**Figure 2.1:**

Why did you decide to work in the public sector? (Select all that apply)



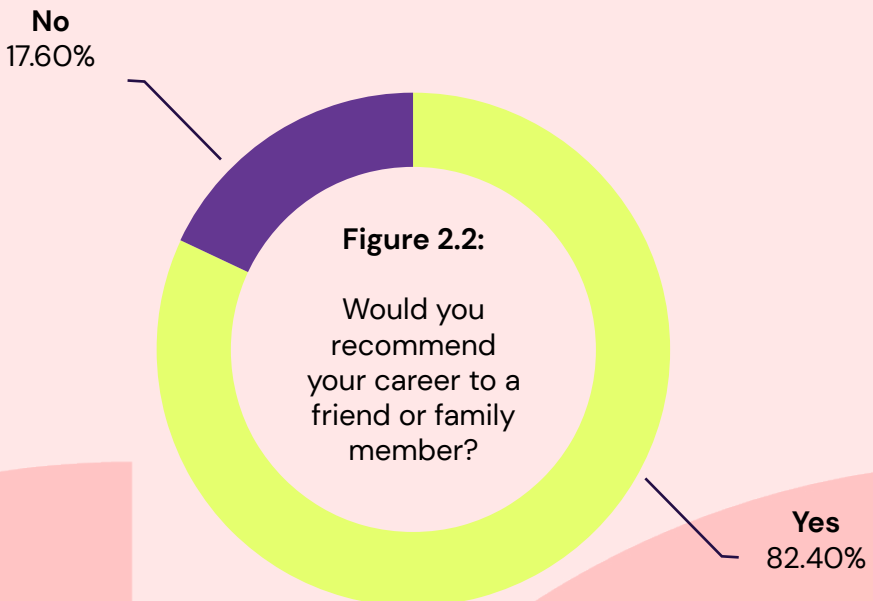
Although not showing as strong a trend as [our 2023 survey](#), making a difference was also a key driver for 55% of public sector personnel, demonstrating the sector’s community-driven spirit.

When we broke our data for this question down by age group, we found that the under 35s were more likely to favour job security, with 54% of this age group selecting this option. Respondents in the 35 to 54 prioritised work-life balance with 66% of this age group selecting this option. Conversely, the most popular option for 55s and over was making a difference, with 66% of this age group choosing this option.

This suggests there are clear differences in job priorities that depend on a candidate’s life stage. When considering the seniority of a role it is important to bear these priorities in mind so that you can emphasise benefits which suit each respective generation’s preferences.

For example, when advertising roles at a management level where candidates are more likely to be aged 35+, you may wish to emphasise benefits such as flexitime schemes which fit with promoting a good work-life balance.

Despite the challenges facing the public sector, it remains a career path that many find rewarding. Our survey revealed that around 82% of candidates would recommend a public sector career to their family or friends, with only 18% indicating they would not (Figure 2.2). This demonstrates that public sector roles still offer a significant degree of job satisfaction for most employees.



This follows similar trends to our last survey conducted in 2023, although has fallen from 89%. When looking at the reasons why candidates responded “no”, common concerns included:

### **Stress levels,**

particularly in sectors like education, where increasing demands may be taking a toll on employee wellbeing.

### **Insufficient pay**

relative to the workload and responsibilities of a role.

### **High workloads,**

which leave some employees feeling overburdened and unable to maintain their work-life balance.

### **A perceived lack of career progression,**

with some employees describing difficulty climbing the career ladder within their own organisation.

### **Monotony,**

with some roles described as lacking in variety or meaningful work.

### **Funding challenges,**

particularly in local government, where limited resources hinder employees’ ability to drive positive change.

Understanding these motivations and frustrations is critical for employers looking to attract and retain public sector talent. While many employees value the opportunity to make a difference, demonstrating to prospective candidates how you address some of these pain points can further enhance the appeal of a career in your organisation.

## 2.2 What do candidates look for from employers?

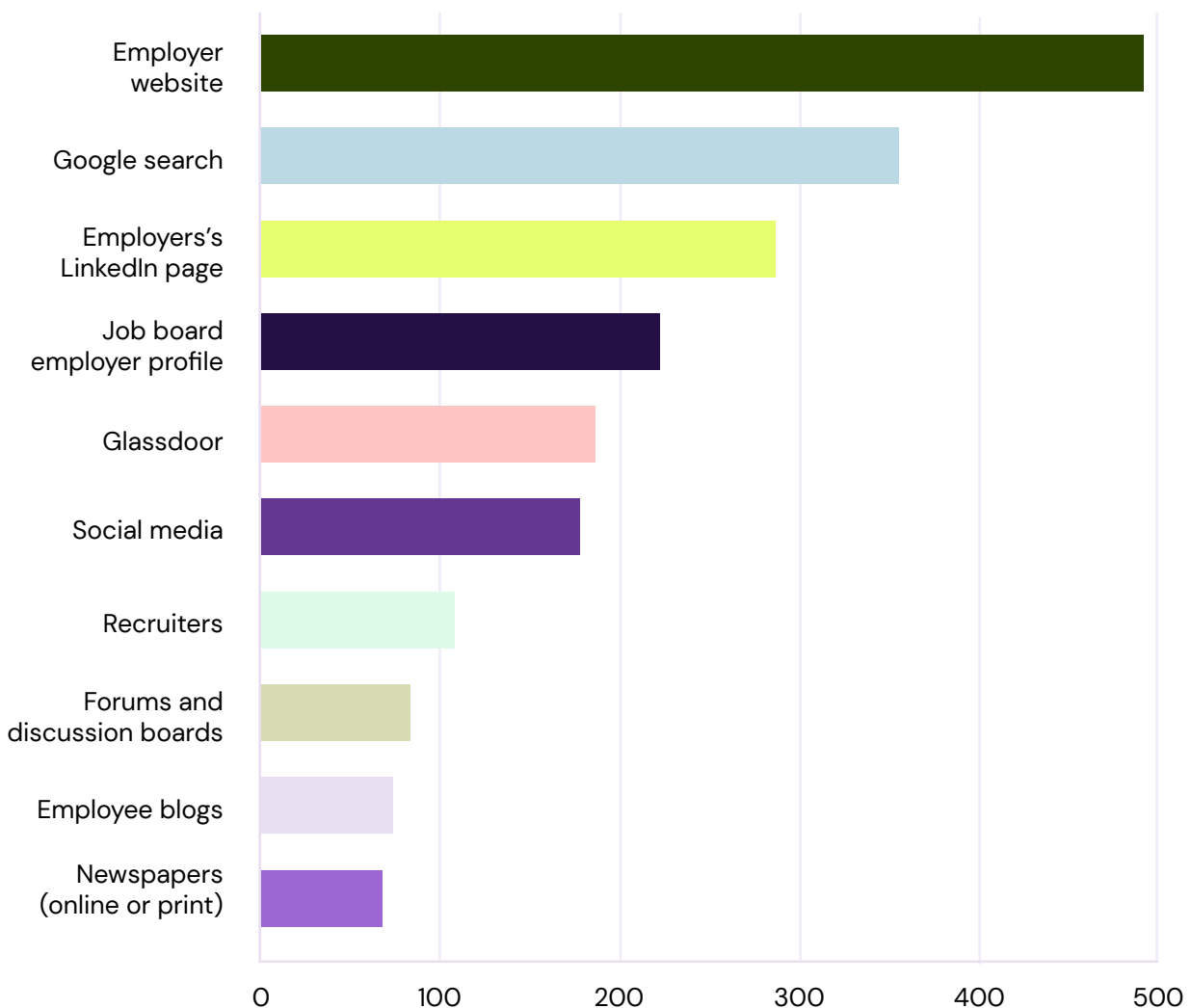
Effectively communicating your employment offer is key to attracting top talent. Candidates in the digital age are proactive in researching potential employers, and we explored this behaviour further in our survey.

80% of respondents indicated that they use an employer's website to learn about an employer's offer and 58% conduct additional research with a Google search on the organisation (Figure 2.3).

This demonstrates the importance of ensuring your employment offer is both accessible and well-presented on your website or a dedicated careers portal for your service area.

**Figure 2.3:**

Which of the following media do you use to research employers?  
(Select all that apply)



Beyond officially owned channels, nearly one-third of candidates also turn to other external platforms, such as seeking out employee reviews on Glassdoor or using social media for additional insights.

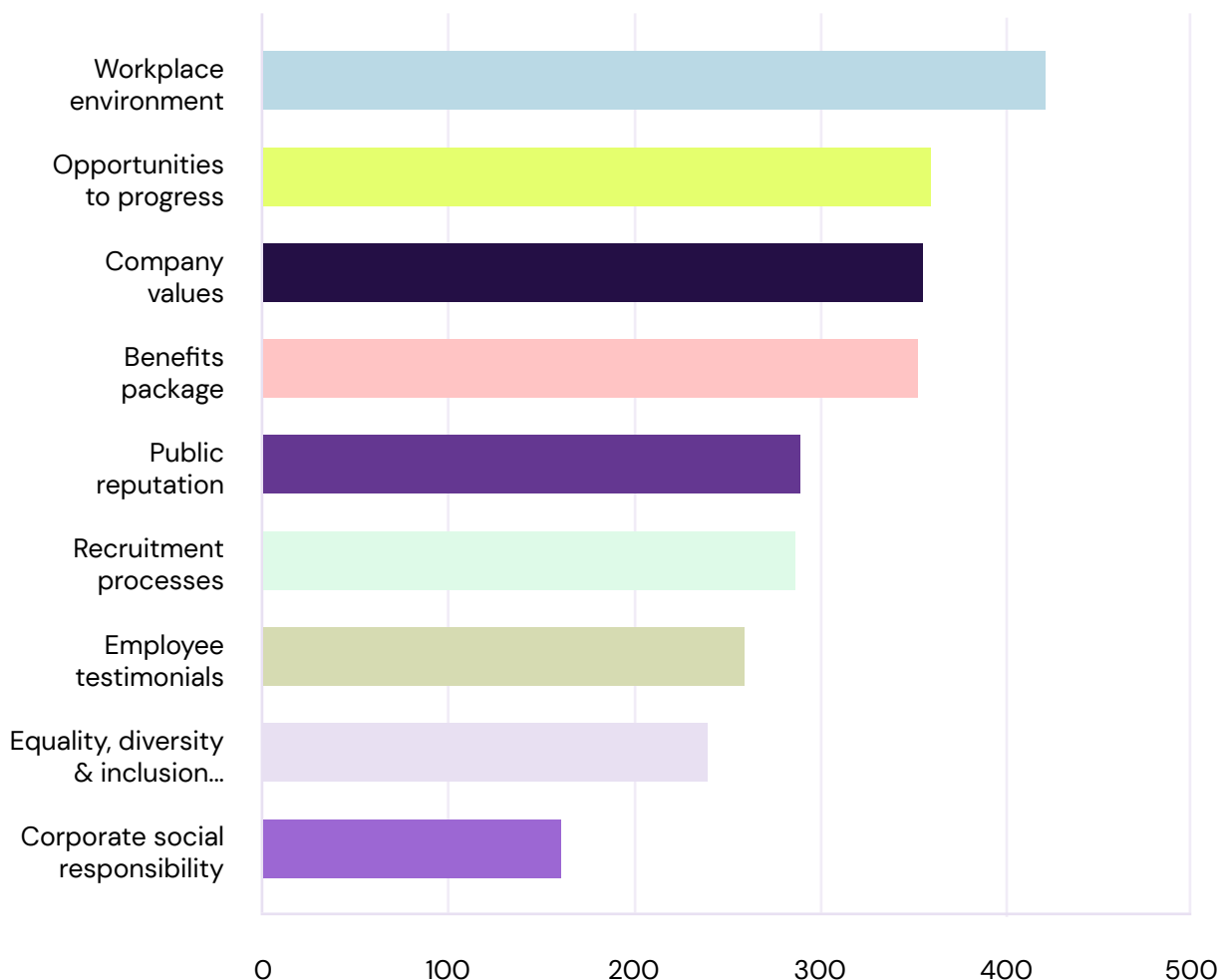
These channels play a supplementary role in shaping candidate perceptions, so it is important to monitor what employees are saying about your organisation to improve your candidate experience.

You can also enhance your employer brand by producing authentic content for social media that reflects your work culture.

We also asked our respondents what factors they consider when building awareness of an organisation's employer brand. At the top of candidates' lists was the working culture, with 69% of respondents looking for information on the workplace environment itself (Figure 2.4).

**Figure 2.4:**

What factors do you consider when weighing up an employer's brand?  
(Select all that apply)





Candidates also wanted to understand what career progression is like in an organisation, with 59% of respondents stating they look for opportunities to progress. This is unsurprising given the previously explored frustration with career progression in the public sector expressed by candidates in section 2.1.

Testimonials and transparency around the recruitment process also resonated strongly with candidates, with two-fifths of respondents rating these elements as important.

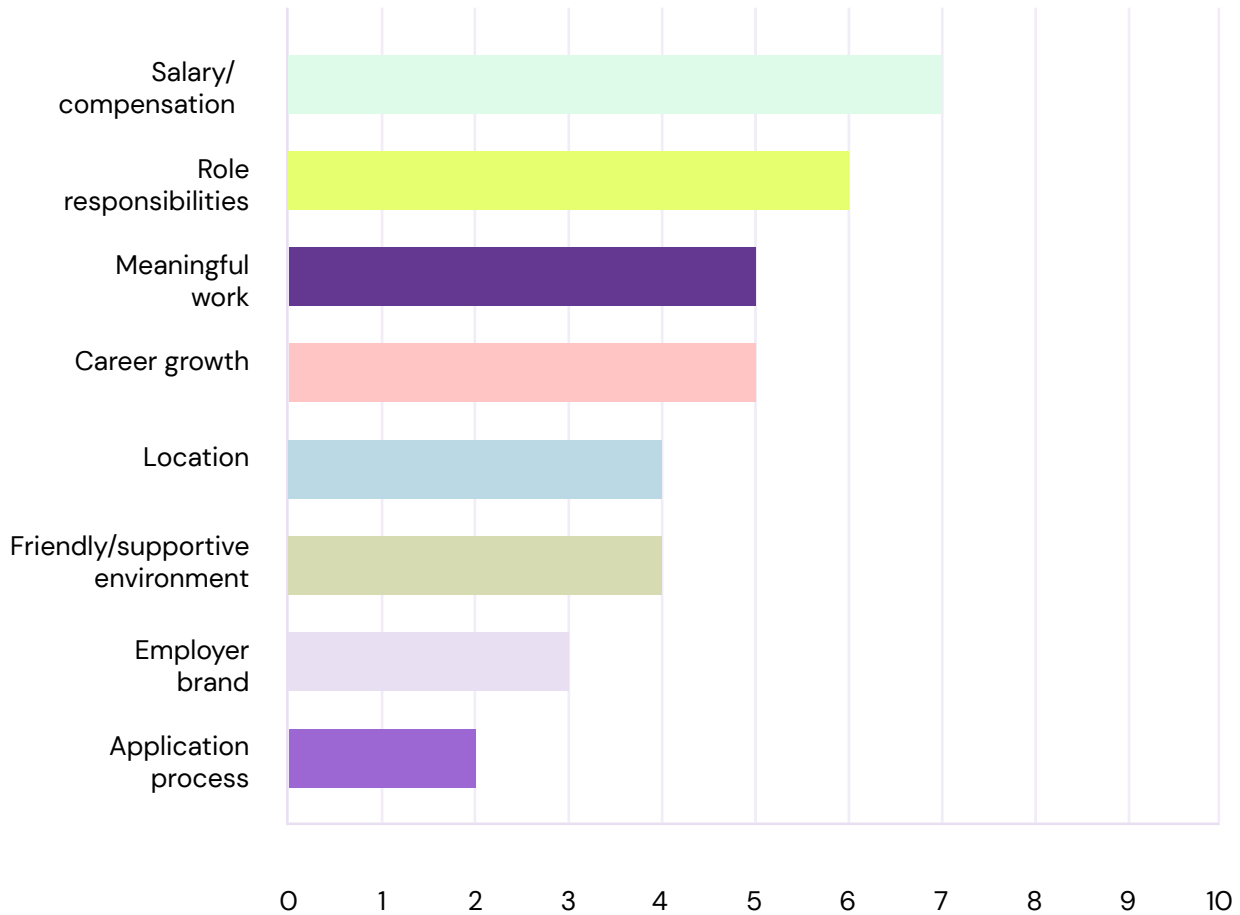
Therefore, to enhance your employer brand, you should ensure materials are available to prospective candidates which tell current employees' stories. You should also include expected dates for shortlisting and interviews in your job adverts to keep candidates informed from the very start of their application journey.

In addition to weighing in on employer brand, we also asked our survey participants to tell us about factors that influence their decision to apply for a specific vacancy. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the highest ranked were 'salary' and 'job responsibilities' (Figure 2.5). These remain the foundation of an attractive job offer and should always be communicated clearly in your job advert.



**Figure 2.5:**

From most important to least important, please rank the following factors by their importance when considering a job.



Additionally, candidates also placed significant value on roles that provide meaningful work and opportunities for growth. While aspects like the application process and broader employer brand were less immediately critical, it is still important to consider their supportive role in building trust with prospective candidates.

To succeed in today's job market, public sector employers should focus on delivering a clear and compelling message about your employment offer. By ensuring this message is readily available and backed by evidence of a positive workplace culture, employers can better connect with the values and priorities of job seekers.

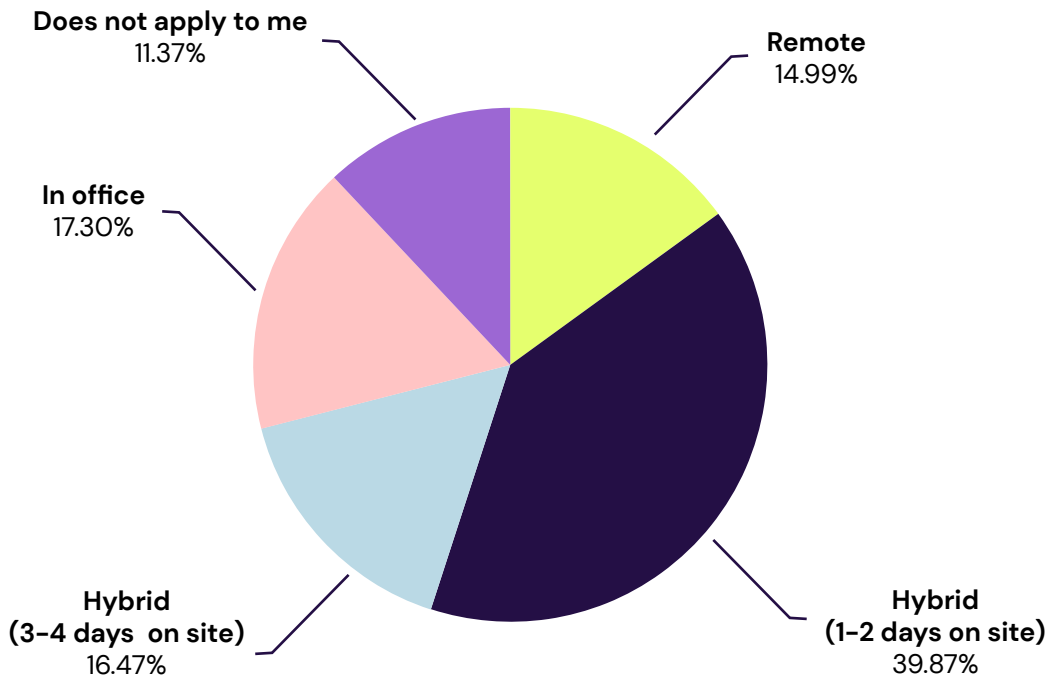
## 2.3 Preferred working arrangements in the public sector

Working arrangements have become an important consideration for job seekers, particularly in the wake of shifting workplace norms that followed the COVID-19 lockdowns. For employers, understanding employees' preferences can help refine job offers where relevant and appeal to a wider pool of candidates.

While flexibility is highly valued in the public sector, it is clear that candidates are seeking balance rather than one extreme or another when it comes to where and how they work. For example, when considering working patterns, hybrid roles emerged as the most popular choice, with the majority of candidates preferring to be on-site one to two days per week (Figure 2.6).

**Figure 2.6:**

What are your preferred working arrangements?



In contrast, fully remote roles are the least favoured option, reflecting a preference for balance between remote flexibility and in-person collaboration and social interactions. Interestingly, we did not find any significant variation in these preferences across different age groups.

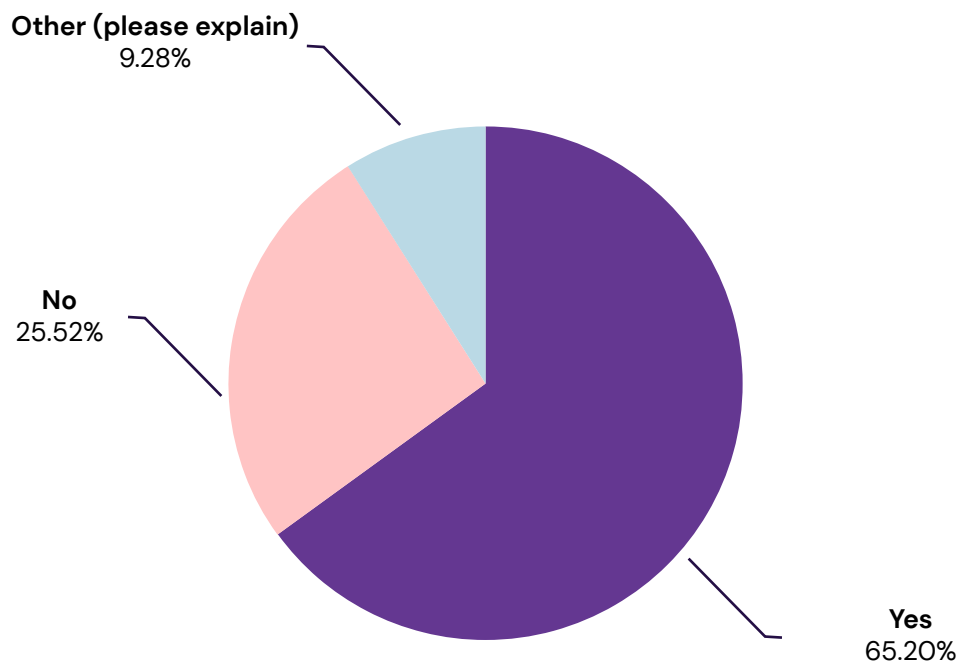
However, we did see some differences between genders. Women were more likely to favour hybrid roles, with just under two-thirds of female participants selecting this option.

Conversely, men were twice as likely to opt for full-time in-office arrangements, with 25% of male participants selecting this option compared to only 13% of women. This may hint at a continued influence of traditional family roles, where flexibility is particularly valued by working mothers.

We also asked those who favoured hybrid or remote working arrangements if they felt managers were adequately trained to lead remote staff. Among those who responded, two-thirds expressed confidence in their managers' ability to lead effectively in these settings (Figure 2.7). This is positive overall feedback, suggesting that the public sector is generally well-equipped to provide work flexibility.

**Figure 2.7:**

You selected an option that includes work from home. Do you feel that the managers in your organisation are adequately trained to lead and motivate remote staff



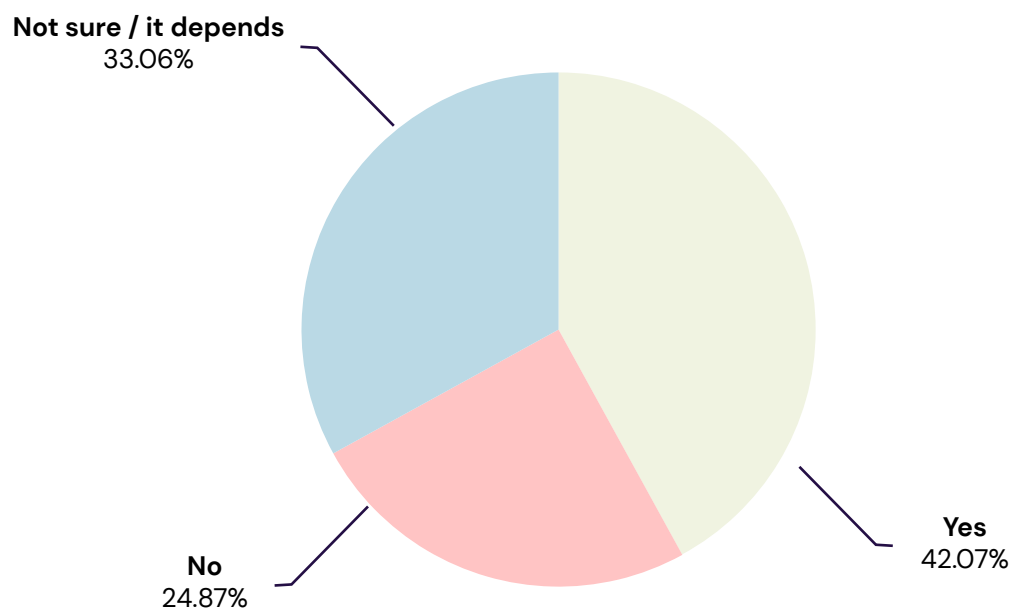
Some respondents did highlight areas for improvement, including better support for employee wellbeing, methods for addressing burnout, and fostering better coordination across teams. A few respondents also noted that remote environments can lead to micromanagement due to reduced visibility.

These insights suggest that employers offering remote working options should implement staff initiatives such as mental health resources and training for managers who oversee dispersed teams.

Interestingly, when turning to flexible work hours (often referred to as flexitime), only 25% of respondents cited this as a definite requirement for their next role (Figure 2.8). This suggests that while flexible working remains a valuable offering in an employer's EVP, it is less of a decisive factor compared to the broader preference for hybrid working arrangements.

**Figure 2.8:**

Would you apply for a role if it didn't offer flexible working?



Public sector employers who seek to remain competitive should consider the clear preference for hybrid models and ensure, wherever possible, that roles are designed to balance flexibility with the support and collaboration opportunities that candidates value.

# 3. Recruitment processes and candidate experience (CX)

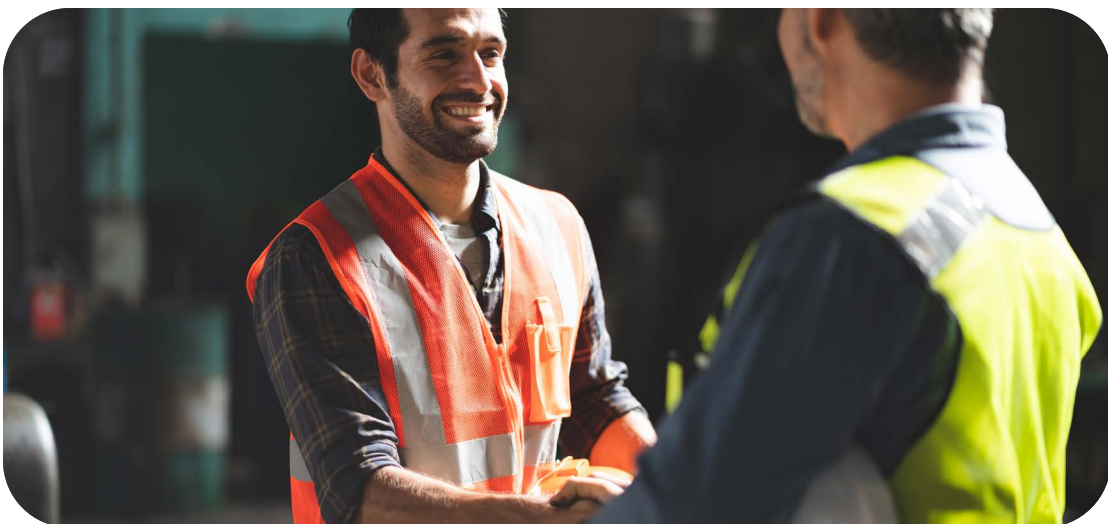
In a competitive hiring market, the candidate experience (CX) has become a defining factor in successful recruitment.

From the technologies shaping how applications and interviews are conducted to the communication standards candidates expect, every step of the recruitment process can influence a candidate's perception of an employer.

Additionally, understanding and addressing the barriers that deter candidates from applying or completing the process is crucial for refining recruitment strategies.

This section explores three key areas of CX, including the role of technology in the application process, communication with prospective candidates, and common barriers to recruitment.

By addressing these areas, public sector employers can create a more engaging, efficient, and candidate-friendly recruitment process that aligns with the evolving needs of job seekers.

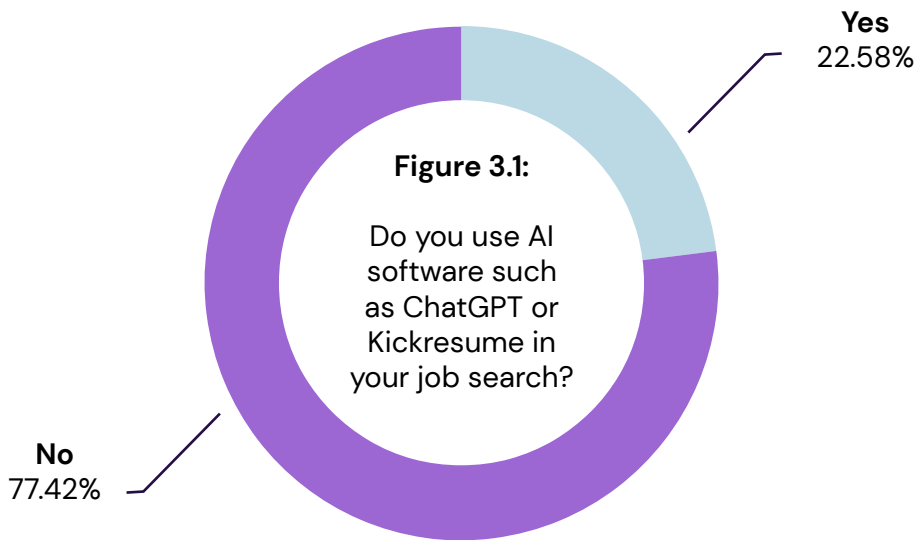


# 3.1 Technology in recruitment: The emerging threat of AI?

Perhaps one of the biggest talking points in the past two years in the employment context has been the rising popularity of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, Google’s Gemini, or the latest open source offering, DeepSeek. This rapid rise is beginning to reshape the way candidates approach job searching, presenting both challenges and opportunities for recruiters.

Throughout 2024 more of our clients have noted an increase in signs of AI use in job applications. Although AI tools can streamline recruitment processes such as writing job adverts, candidates using these tools inappropriately also poses a risk. For example, employers are increasingly receiving duplicate cover letters with little personalisation.

Among the sample of our audience, only 23% of public sector candidates claim to be using AI tools in their job search so far (Figure 3.1). While this appears to be a relatively low proportion of our market, this suggests around a quarter of applications that are coming into your candidate pipeline have been written with the assistance of AI technology.



Our findings also reveal a significant skew in age and education among these early AI adopters, with 58% of degree-educated 18–34 year olds adopting this technology compared to only 15% of 45–54 year olds.

This is unsurprising given the tech-savvy Millennial generation has grown alongside the evolution of the Web, and may be less risk-averse when experimenting with AI tools. These trends signal that AI-driven application approaches will likely grow in the coming years as this technology becomes more mainstream.

Such an evolution requires employers to adapt recruitment processes as soon as possible, to stay ahead of the AI adoption curve. Failure to do so may result in an inability to cope with accurate shortlisting in an environment where recruitment is already incredibly challenging.

Candidates who already leverage this technology are primarily using it to analyse job descriptions to draw out the skills required, as well as to prepare for potential interview questions (Figure 3.2).

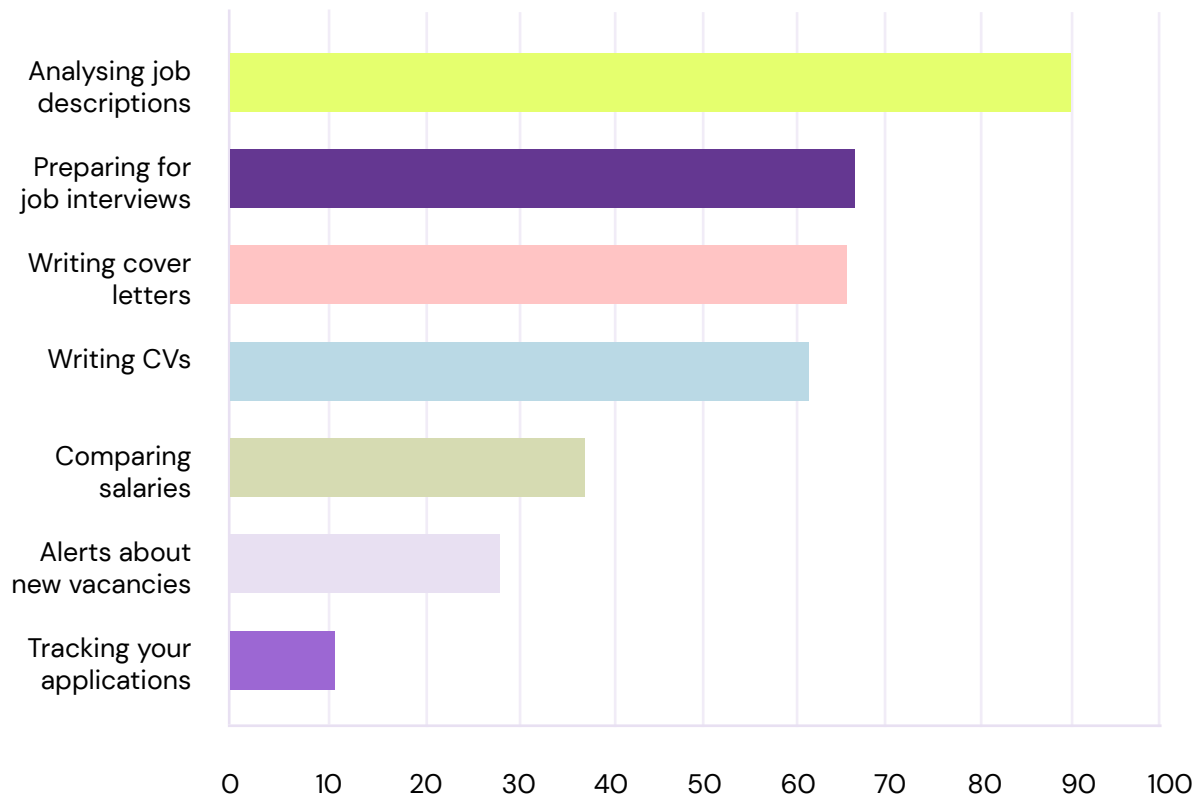
However, nearly half of AI users are also rewriting their CVs and cover letters with generative AI, which raises important considerations both for coaching candidates on appropriate usage and for application shortlisting.





Figure 3.2:

Which of the following activities do you use AI for? (Select all that apply)



For employers, these trends underscore a need to:

- ✓ **Educate candidates** on the appropriate usage of AI to ensure they are tailoring content written by AI to be personal and authentic, rather than cheating on their applications.
- ✓ **Improve shortlisting processes** to identify and assess AI-produced CVs and cover letters.
- ✓ **Adapt recruitment practices** to account for how AI may shape candidate behaviour in 2025 and beyond, such as placing greater emphasis on skill testing and interviews.

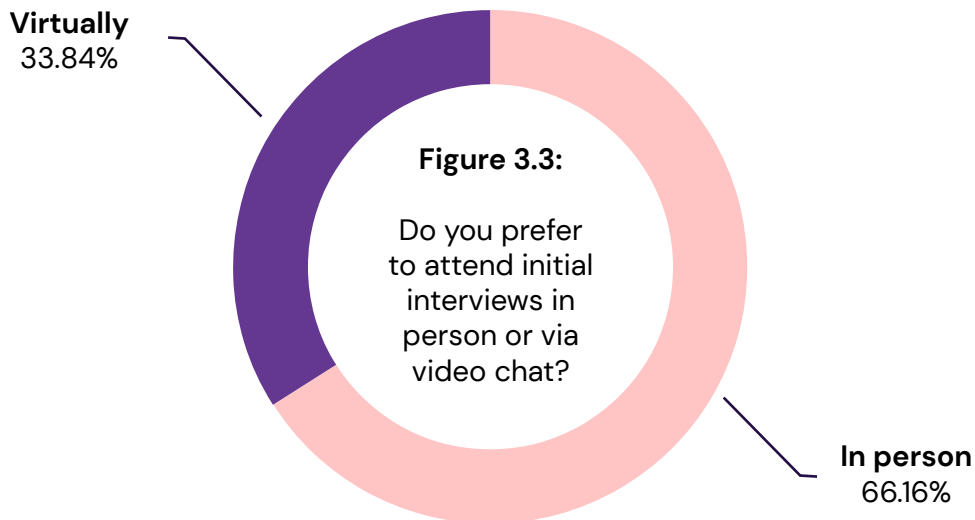
While AI tools offer opportunities for candidates to optimise their job applications, they also risk submissions becoming overly similar or impersonal. Public sector employers can position themselves among recruitment leaders by providing guidance to hiring managers that accounts for the evolving role of technology in job searching.

## 3.2 Do candidates still want virtual interviews?

Another change in CX that has emerged in the last five years is the use of video conferencing software for interviews. This was particularly popularised by its necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic, with lockdowns requiring greater use of technology to facilitate the hiring process.

Virtual interview software provides numerous advantages, from saving all parties time and money, to improved accessibility. However, the question remains as to whether candidates generally like to attend interviews virtually, or if they should be conducted in person.

Two-thirds of our survey respondents stated that they prefer to attend interviews in person, suggesting that video conferencing technology is not the expected norm in recruitment, despite trends towards hybrid working (Figure 3.3).



**When we asked people to tell us why they preferred to attend interviews in person, the most common feedback was:**

- ✓ Candidates want to experience first-hand what the work environment is like.
- ✓ This format feels more personal and natural than via a webcam.
- ✓ Candidates want to be able to easily read the interviewer's body language.
- ✓ Attending interviews in person reduces the risk of technical issues causing more stress.

**Conversely, we also sought to understand why a third of respondents wished to attend interviews virtually. Frequent answers included:**

- ✓ Virtual interviews are more convenient and flexible, saving time and money on travel. This is particularly pronounced if trying to attend interviews while still working in another role.
- ✓ Less time is wasted for both the interviewer and the candidate if the candidate is unsuccessful.
- ✓ Virtual interviews are more accessible for candidates with disabilities.
- ✓ Many respondents found virtual interviews less stressful and felt this allowed them to present themselves to the best of their ability.

It is obvious from these answers that while generally candidates expect to meet the hiring team in person, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the interview element of CX. We would urge you as an employer to consider candidates' individual needs, the nature of the role, and how strong the shortlisted candidate is.

Particularly from a point of view of providing accessibility to candidates who require it, allowing for flexibility in the interview process wherever possible will hugely improve your candidate experience, and leave prospective candidates with a positive impression.

## 3.3 Time to shortlist and communicate with candidates

Effective communication during the recruitment process is a critical yet often overlooked element of CX. Understandably, hiring managers in the public sector are often stretched for time. However, the general sentiment online among UK job seekers is that poor or unprofessional communication is all too common and often damaging to an employer's brand.

For candidates, their experience of the hiring process reflects not just on the individual hiring manager, but on the organisation as a whole, making it essential to prioritise timely and respectful communication.

Our research highlights that on average, candidates are prepared to wait no more than three weeks after applying—not the closing date itself—to hear back about their application status.

Beyond this point, most candidates will disengage and move on to other opportunities. If your team is already struggling to find that niche highly skilled candidate, such a delay could mean losing out on extremely valuable shortlisted interviewees.

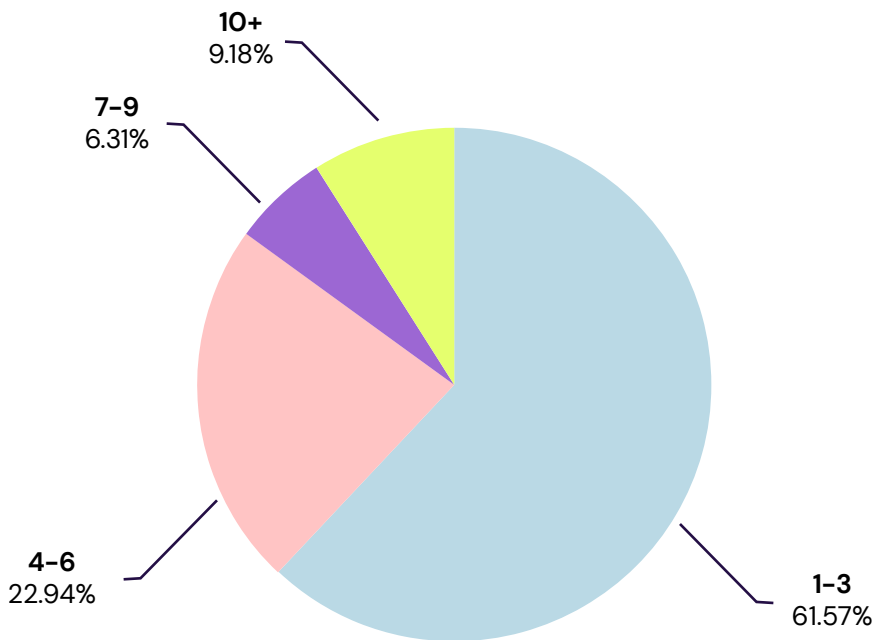
**On average, our respondents reported that they would be willing to wait a maximum of 3 weeks between their application and an invite to interview.**



This need for prompt communication is further emphasised by candidate application behaviour. 62% of candidates apply for up to three vacancies per week, while almost 40% of candidates are applying for at least four (Figure 3.4). This means that just under two-fifths of active job seekers are waiting to hear from 16 applications or more in any given month.

**Figure 3.4:**

When you are searching for jobs, how many roles would you typically apply for in a week?



This level of activity reflects a pragmatic approach to job hunting, likely fuelled by frustration with no feedback on their applications. Many candidates now expect a lack of follow-up from employers, a topic which is frequently discussed on job hunting forums such as [r/JobsUK](#). This only serves to reinforce their decision to apply for multiple roles simultaneously.

However, this also means that candidates will often have a varied pool of applications to fall back on if they decide to stop waiting for you to approach them for an interview. It is not uncommon for us to hear from clients that they have missed out on a fantastic candidate as another employer reached out to them first.

For public sector employers, this demonstrates the importance of standing out from the crowd through timely and regular shortlisting. If you are already struggling to attract skilled talent in your service area, you cannot afford to lose qualified applicants because you took too long to invite them to interview.

A positive recruitment experience not only helps to secure the best talent but also strengthens the perception of your organisation as a desirable place to work. Hiring managers should view every interaction with a candidate—whether it’s an update, interview invitation, or rejection notice—as an opportunity to leave a positive, lasting impression.

By addressing this communication gap through training hiring managers, you can differentiate yourself in a crowded employer market and mitigate risks to your employer brand reputation.

## 3.4 Barriers to recruitment: why people are deterred from accepting job offers

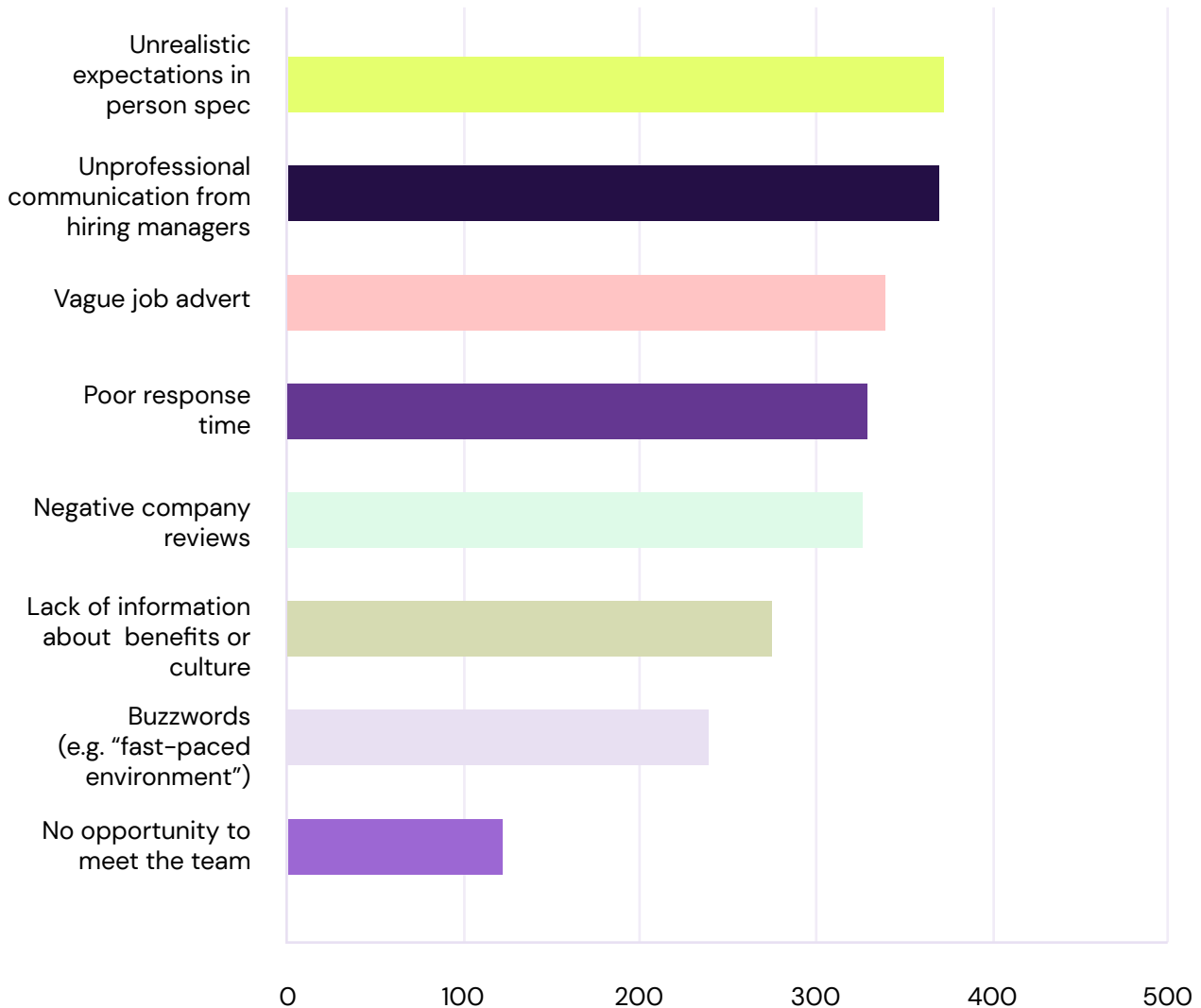
Throughout this whitepaper, we have explored a large number of factors that influence candidates to apply for roles, and what candidates are actively seeking when applying for jobs. However, there are also many factors in recruitment that job seekers regard as “red flags”.

Some of these red flags are not as easy to spot from an employer’s perspective, particularly if you are a hiring manager with little recruitment experience. Therefore, we asked our survey respondents what red flags they look for when applying for jobs.

The majority of candidates agreed that unrealistic expectations for the experience required in a job role and unprofessional communication from hiring managers were the biggest deterrents, with 62% of respondents stating that they would reject an interview offer if they noted these things (Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5:

What factors typically put you off accepting a hiring offer or invitation to interview? (Select all that apply)



More than half of respondents also noted vague job adverts, poor response times from hiring managers, and negative company reviews would also deter them from a role.

Many of these issues are low-hanging fruit to fix as an employer. To tackle the key issues that are holding back your candidate experience, you should take a proactive approach to support and train hiring managers in your organisation.

**Strategies to address these challenges could include:**

- ✓ Provide hiring managers with industry insights to ensure job specifications remain competitive and focus on the core requirements of the role.
- ✓ Set goals and communication milestones for hiring managers to meet for shortlisting CVs and communicating with candidates about their application status.
- ✓ Establish a review process for job adverts to ensure they clearly communicate information on responsibilities, qualifications, benefits and the hiring process.
- ✓ Actively monitor your employer brand on websites such as Glassdoor and use this feedback to improve your CX. You may also wish to proactively share employee testimonials and success stories in recruitment materials to provide a balanced view of your employer brand.
- ✓ Incorporate candidate experience into performance metrics as a benchmark for improvements. These metrics may include but are not limited to the average time to hire, application completion rates, and offer acceptance rates.
- ✓ Encourage candidates to provide feedback about their recruitment experience, and share these insights with hiring managers to identify areas of improvement.



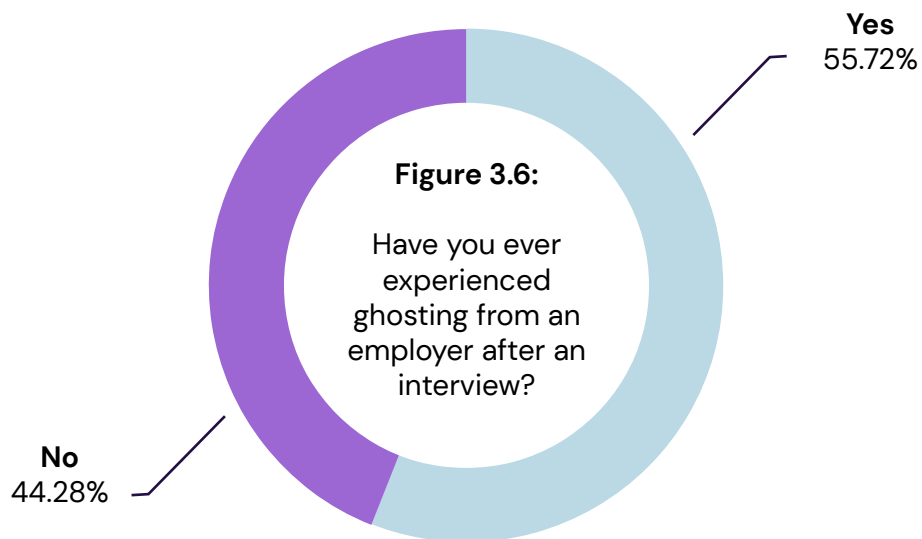


## 3.5 Feedback exchange

The feedback exchange loop is a critical component of CX, both for how employers communicate with candidates and how candidates share their experience of the recruitment process.

Our research highlights significant gaps in this area of the recruitment process, and this can have troubling consequences for employers.

Ghosting—a phenomenon where one party suddenly cuts off communication with the other without explanation—has become an alarmingly common issue in recruitment. Among our public sector candidates, over half (55%) of candidates report having experienced ghosting from employers after taking the time to attend an interview.



Hiring managers are understandably busy and often balancing the tasks of recruitment with other day-to-day responsibilities. However, this behaviour not only damages candidate relationships but also has further-reaching implications for the talent pipeline.

**When we asked candidates to elaborate on their experiences of recruitment ghosting, three common threads emerged:**

- ✔ **Ghosting reduced candidates' confidence:** Experiencing ghosting after taking a significant amount of time to submit an application or prepare for an interview leaves candidates feeling demotivated and damages their self-esteem. General sentiment analysis of our results indicates that this is a risk factor for candidate mobility, making it even more difficult to attract talent.
- ✔ **Ghosting harms an employer's reputation:** Job seekers associate ghosting with unprofessional, disorganised, or disrespectful organisations. This can damage a candidate's trust in an employer as a brand and many candidates state they would not reapply to that company in the future. This may impact an organisation's ability to build a robust talent pipeline where candidates could be reinterviewed for more appropriate opportunities in the future.
- ✔ **Delays in candidate activity:** Ghosting disrupts a job seeker's timeline, as they may wait for feedback from an interviewer that never arrives. This creates frustration, prevents the job seeker from improving themselves and produces missed opportunities for employers through competitive disadvantage.

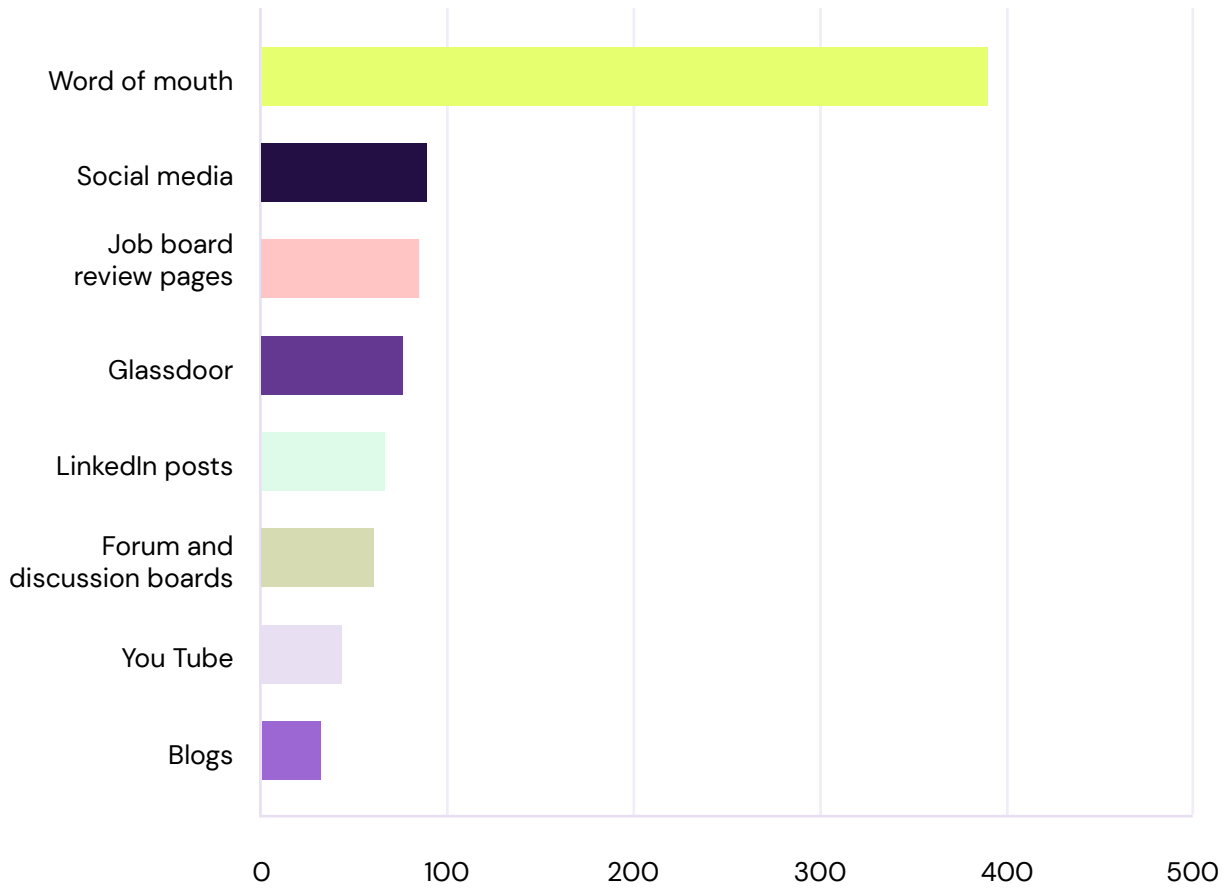
What's more, the candidate experience does not end when a hiring decision is made. It lives on through the stories candidates choose to share about their application journey. We found that at least two-thirds of candidates discuss their recruitment experiences with others, spreading impressions of your employer brand among their own networks of friends, family and colleagues (Figure 3.7).

15% of candidates also share their experiences online, including on social media or via job board review platforms. For employers, this means that the quality of communication and feedback during recruitment directly influences their employer brand, both online and within professional networks.

Poor candidate experiences can tarnish an organisation's reputation and deter potential applicants, especially in sectors where candidates may frequently cross paths at networking events or conferences.

Figure 3.7:

Do you share feedback about your recruitment experience on any of the following platforms? (Select all that apply)



To ensure that you are always leaving candidates with a positive impression, it's important to close the feedback loop (even if a candidate is unsuccessful). Organisations can provide and seek feedback by implementing the following action points:



### 1. Eliminate ghosting:

Provide candidates with transparent recruitment timelines in your job adverts or upon receipt of an application. Ensure you communicate proactively with candidates, even when conducting regret management at the shortlisting stage.



### 2. Close the loop:

Offer constructive feedback to candidates, particularly after interviews. Even brief insights can leave a positive impression, helping candidates to strengthen their applications in the future and maintaining a strong employer brand reputation.



### 3. Seek feedback from candidates:

Listen to what candidates have to say about your recruitment processes by monitoring your employer brand online with social listening tools, or implementing a post-interview survey to gather insights. Proactively use this feedback to improve your processes and overall candidate engagement. This offers the opportunity to highlight your improvements and rebuild trust with job seekers.

A transparent feedback exchange benefits both employers and candidates. By addressing communication gaps and respecting the time that candidates give you as a recruiter, you can enhance your reputation, attract stronger talent, and foster long-term trust for candidates you may wish to re-engage.

# 4. Conclusion

Recruitment in the UK public sector remains a challenging landscape, shaped by economic constraints, shifting candidate priorities, and evolving technology. While some demographics and trends remain consistent with previous research, emerging dynamics present both opportunities and risks for employers.

Public sector job seekers continue to value the sense of purpose and job satisfaction that their roles bring, but concerns around stress, salary, and career progression persist as key challenges.

Addressing these issues through HR initiatives—such as promoting wellbeing and offering clear development opportunities—is critical not only to attract talent but also to retain it. Highlighting these efforts as part of your Employee Value Proposition (EVP) is essential to stand out in a competitive market.

Technology is reshaping recruitment, albeit slowly in this sector. While headhunting remains a familiar strategy, its relevance may be waning. Social media platforms and AI tools are also rising as key influencers in how candidates find and prepare for roles. Employers must embrace these shifts by leveraging the right platforms to engage passive candidates and training hiring managers to handle AI-optimised applications.

Work-life balance and flexible working arrangements are increasingly important to candidates. Hybrid roles are still particularly desirable in 2025, but employers must guard against burnout by ensuring managers are equipped to support dispersed teams effectively. Tailoring interview processes to accommodate candidates' diverse circumstances is another way to provide a positive and inclusive candidate experience in a hybrid work environment.

The candidate journey in 2025 increasingly involves multiple touchpoints—from employer websites to social media and Glassdoor. To succeed, your EVP must be consistently present across the channels candidates use for research.

Clear, compelling communication is paramount, not only in job adverts but throughout the entire recruitment process. Delays, poor communication, and unprofessional behaviour are serious threats to your employer brand, and addressing these challenges should be a top priority.

Looking ahead, the public sector must adapt to these emerging trends while staying true to the values that make it unique. By prioritising candidate-centric recruitment strategies, embracing technology, and strengthening your EVP, your organisation can thrive in a competitive talent market, turning challenges into opportunities for growth.

# 5. Audience breakdown and methodology

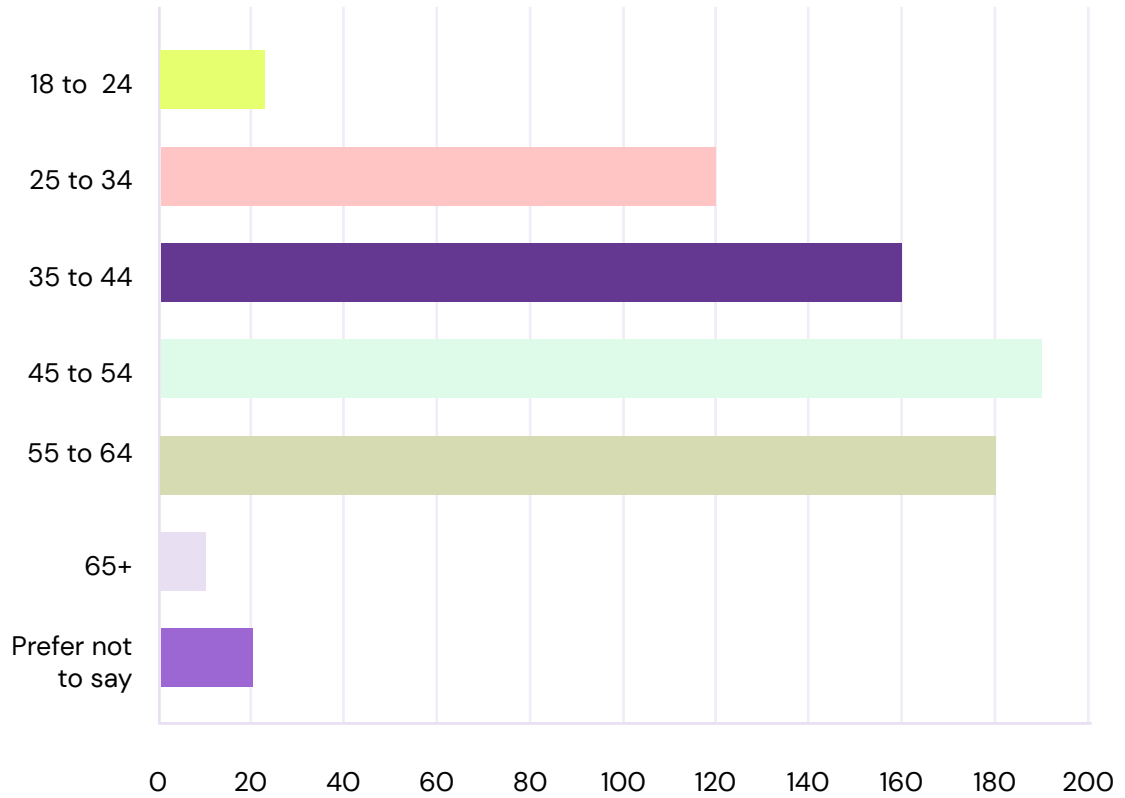
The results of this whitepaper are based on a sample of 725 public sector employees who responded to our job search trends survey in Autumn 2024.



The largest represented age group in our survey was the 45–54 age bracket, with 27% of respondents selecting this option. Only one-fifth of our audience were under the age of 35 and less than 2% were in the 65+ bracket.

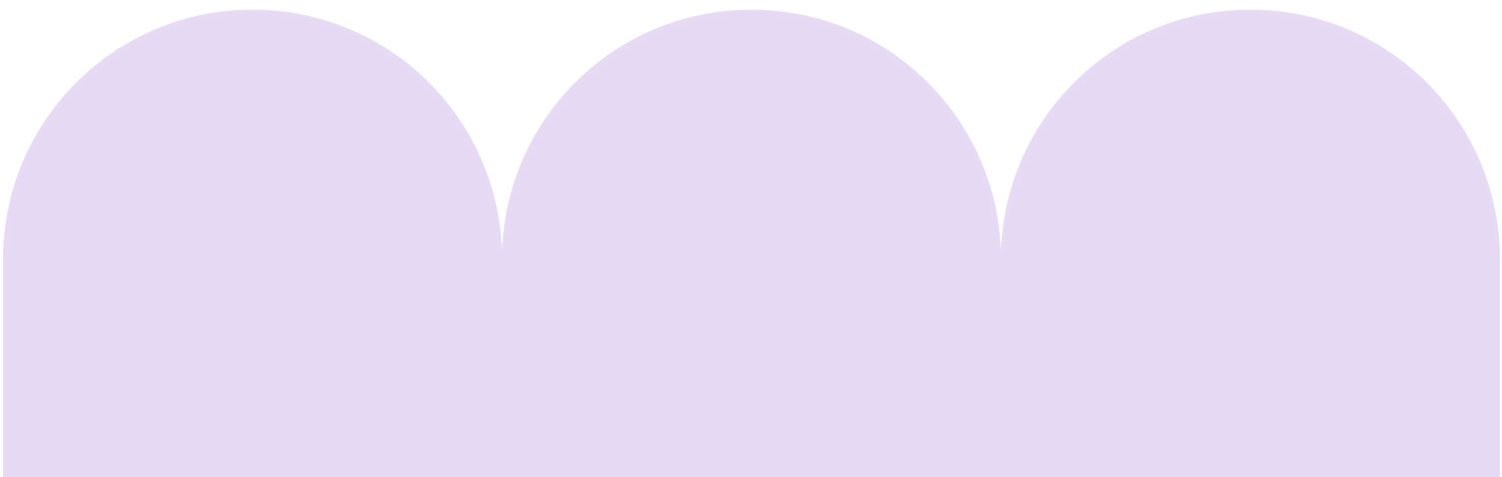
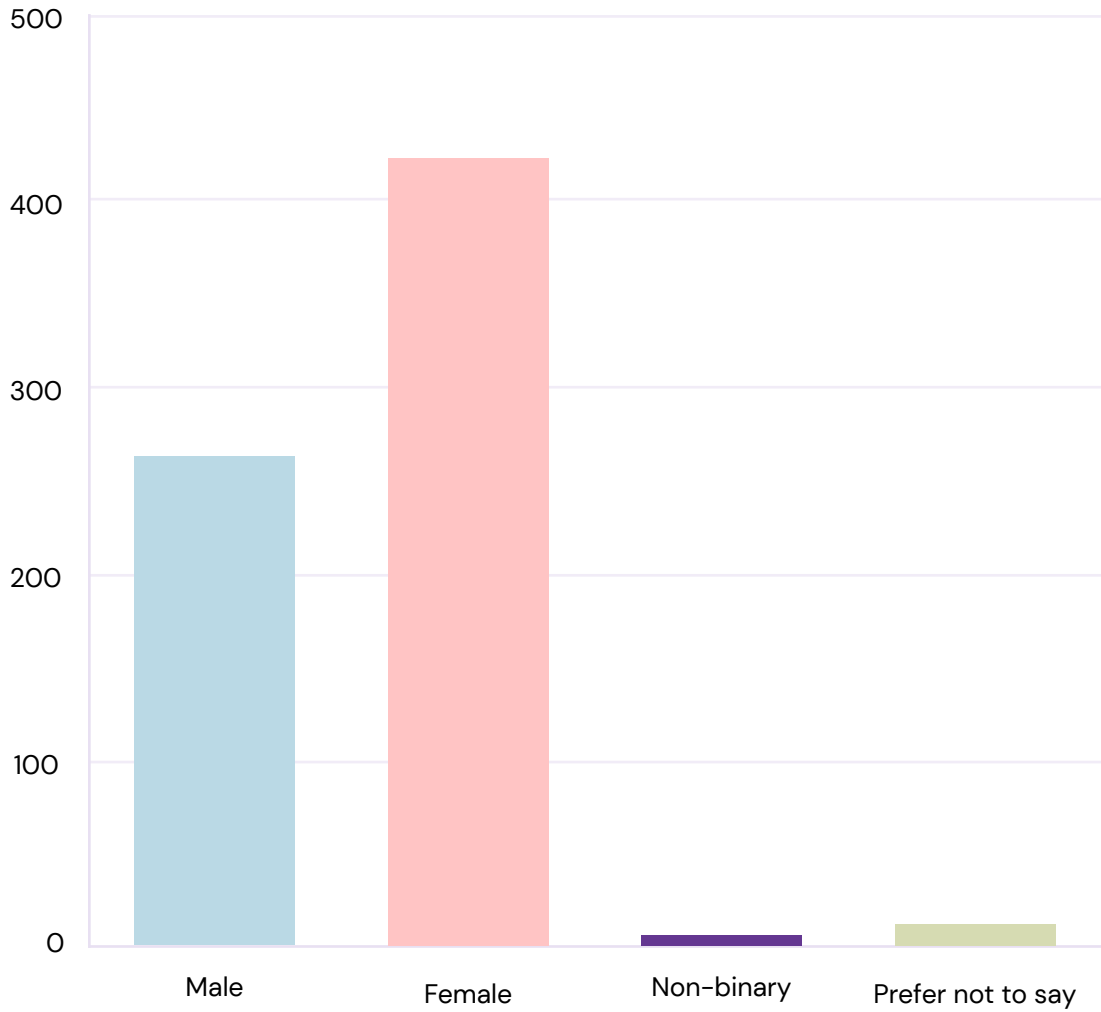
**Figure 5.1:**

Number of candidates by age group



Turning to gender, our survey data suggests a slightly larger representation of women in the public sector, with 60% of our respondents being female. Only 0.7% of our audience identified as non-binary.

**Figure 5.2:**  
Number of candidates by gender



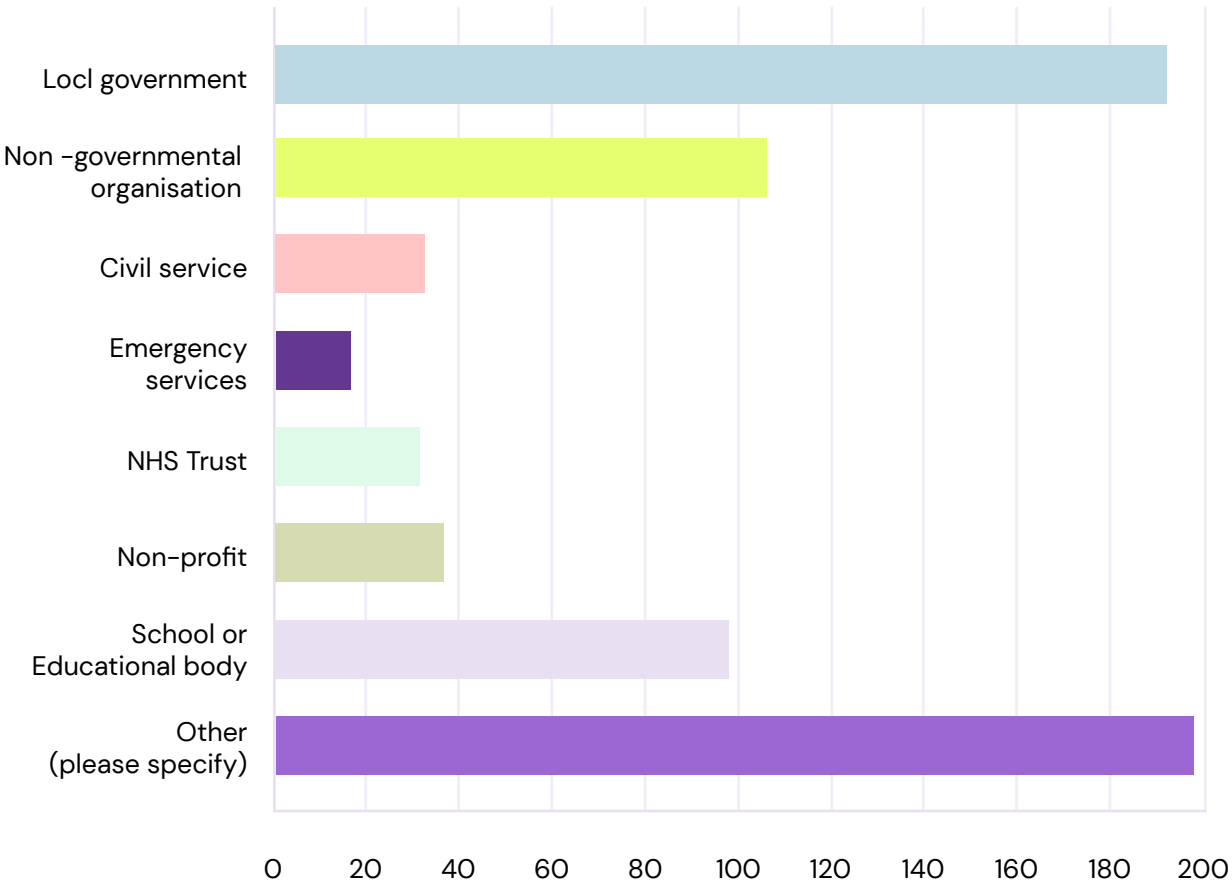


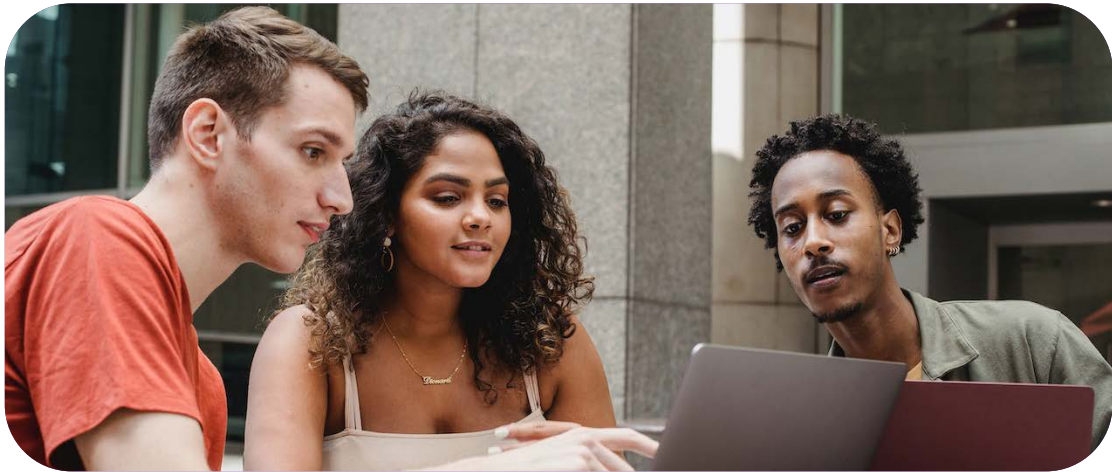
Among respondents who selected a specific public sector body, 38% of employees on our board worked in local government and just under 20% in NGOs. Staff in Education were the third most represented subsector, with around 19% of responses in this area.

The majority of respondents who selected “Other” were unemployed at the time of the survey or recently made redundant from roles and were actively looking for work.

**Figure 5.3:**

Number of respondents by current organisation type

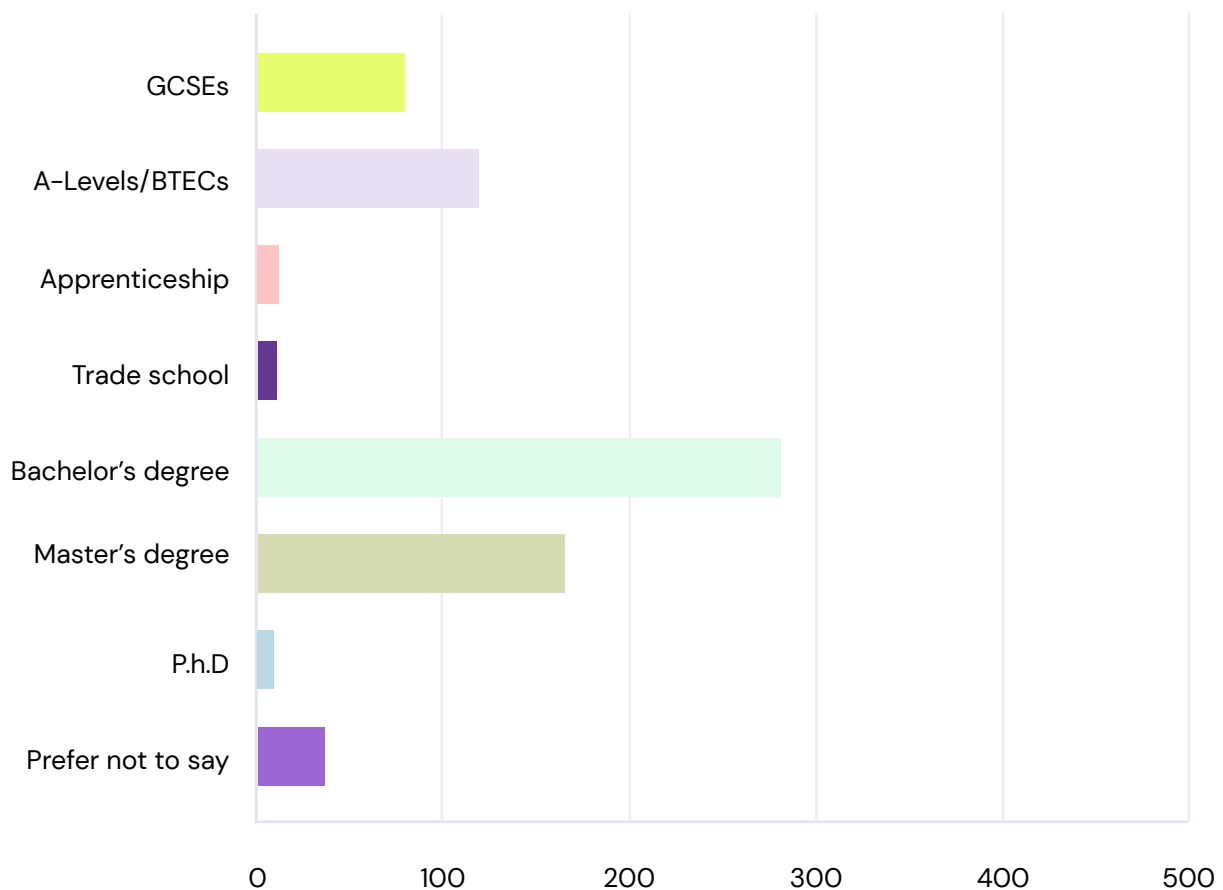




Two-fifths of respondents were educated to Bachelor's degree level, with a further 24% holding Master's degrees. This suggests that close to two-thirds of our audience are university graduates. The vast majority of the remaining audience entered the workforce after secondary school.

**Figure 5.4:**

Number of respondents by highest level of education attained



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