



# Annual Report

## State of Candidate Experience

## About this report

The acceleration of AI in recruitment, shifting labour market conditions, and the evolving needs of next generation talent have reshaped how businesses attract and engage future employees.

In 2024, we saw candidates become more discerning, expecting personalised and transparent hiring experiences. Employer branding, engaging candidate content, and seamless digital interactions are no longer nice-to-haves; they are essential to securing top talent.

Employers now face a dual challenge: balancing efficiency through AI-driven recruitment processes while maintaining human-centric hiring practices. According to LinkedIn's Future of Recruiting Report 2024, 68% of talent professionals believe AI will significantly impact hiring, but many remain cautious about over-reliance on automation. Meanwhile, skills-first hiring continues to gain traction across the world, with companies prioritising competencies over traditional credentials.

As we look ahead to 2025, the question for businesses is clear: how can they adapt to these trends to build a more resilient and candidate-centric hiring strategy? To uncover the answers, we surveyed thousands of candidates, examining their experiences, behaviours, and outlooks for the coming year.

Attraction

Recruitment Marketing

Early Careers

Employer Brand

Candidate Experience

2021 respondents

Data captured between November 2024 and January 2025.

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# Key Insights

**1** Candidates are 2.15x more likely to be attracted to the culture, mission and ethics of a company, than salary and benefits.

**2** 53% of candidates said high competition for roles was their biggest challenge in today's job market.

**3** 79% of candidates would be put off applying for a role if the company had a negative public reputation.

**4** First hand experiences shared by current employees the most trusted source for candidates.

**5** 55% of under 25s and 72% of over 25s are looking for long term employment and growth with one employer.

**6** Candidates typically spend between 30 minutes to 2 hours researching a company before applying.

# Foreword



*“As we enter 2025, the world of talent acquisition is undergoing one of the most transformative shifts we’ve seen in years. We face an unprecedented clash of authenticity versus artificial intelligence in not just recruitment experiences, but everyday life.*

*Employers that adapt quickly and remain purpose-driven in their approaches will thrive, those that don’t risk losing their competitive edge.*

*I am pleased to see new generations of talent giving weight to culture, skills and professional development as they plan their careers and employers investing more into their candidate and new hire experiences. At Connectr Talent Technology we recognise that hiring is no longer just about filling vacancies. It’s about fostering meaningful candidate experiences that build trust, engagement, and long-term employer reputation. This report sheds light on the key trends shaping the future of hiring and helping businesses to build an engaged and mobile workforce.*

*I am incredibly grateful to everyone who has who shared their experiences for this research, as well as our research team who brought this report to life. The findings here serve as both a reflection of the past year and a roadmap for the future. I encourage leaders across industries to take these insights seriously and act with intention—because the future of hiring belongs to those who are prepared to evolve.”*

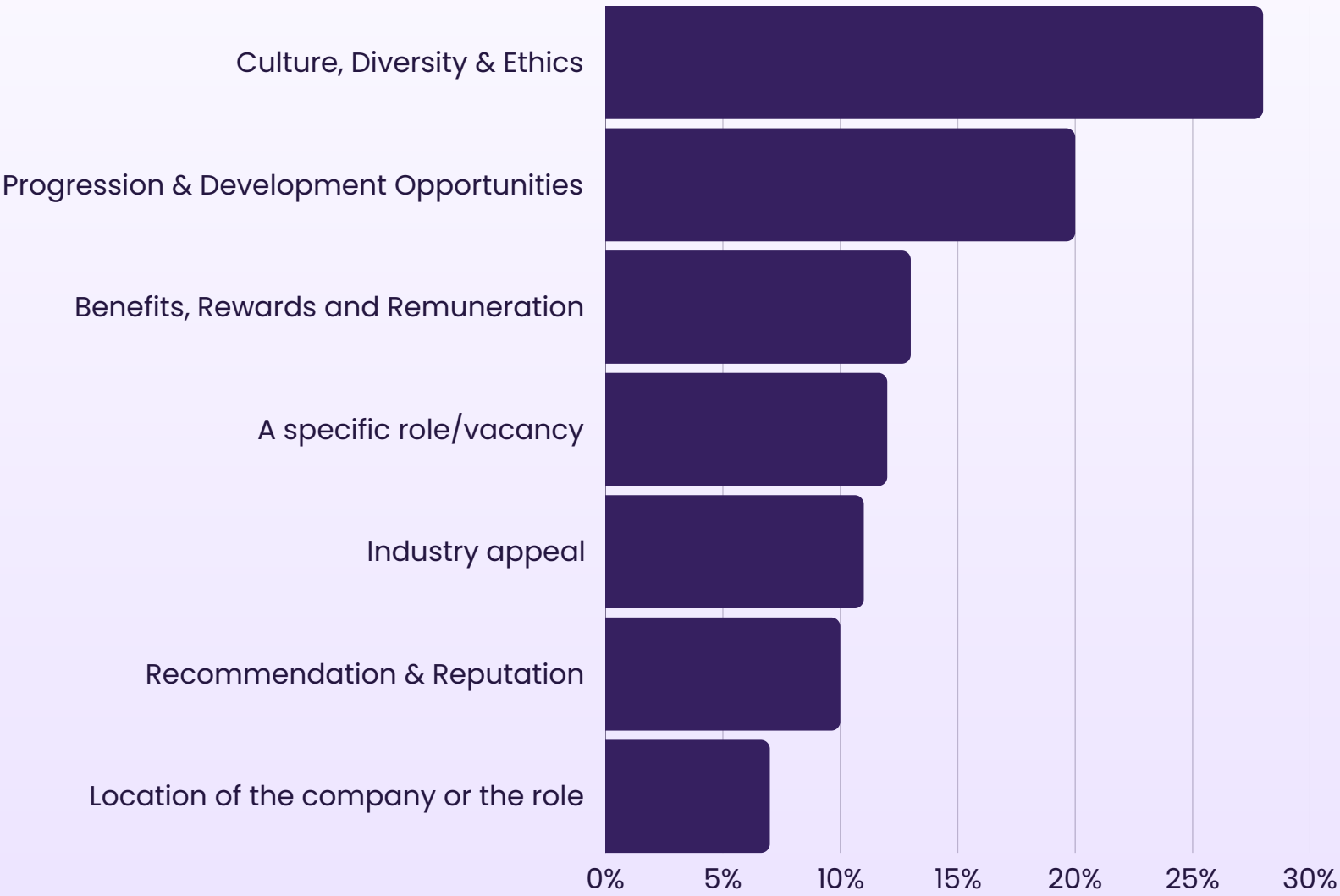
**Talia King**

Managing Director, Connectr Talent Technology



# Attraction & Applications

What most attracted candidates to employers?



Candidates are 2.15x more likely to be attracted to the culture, mission and ethics of a company, than salary and benefits.



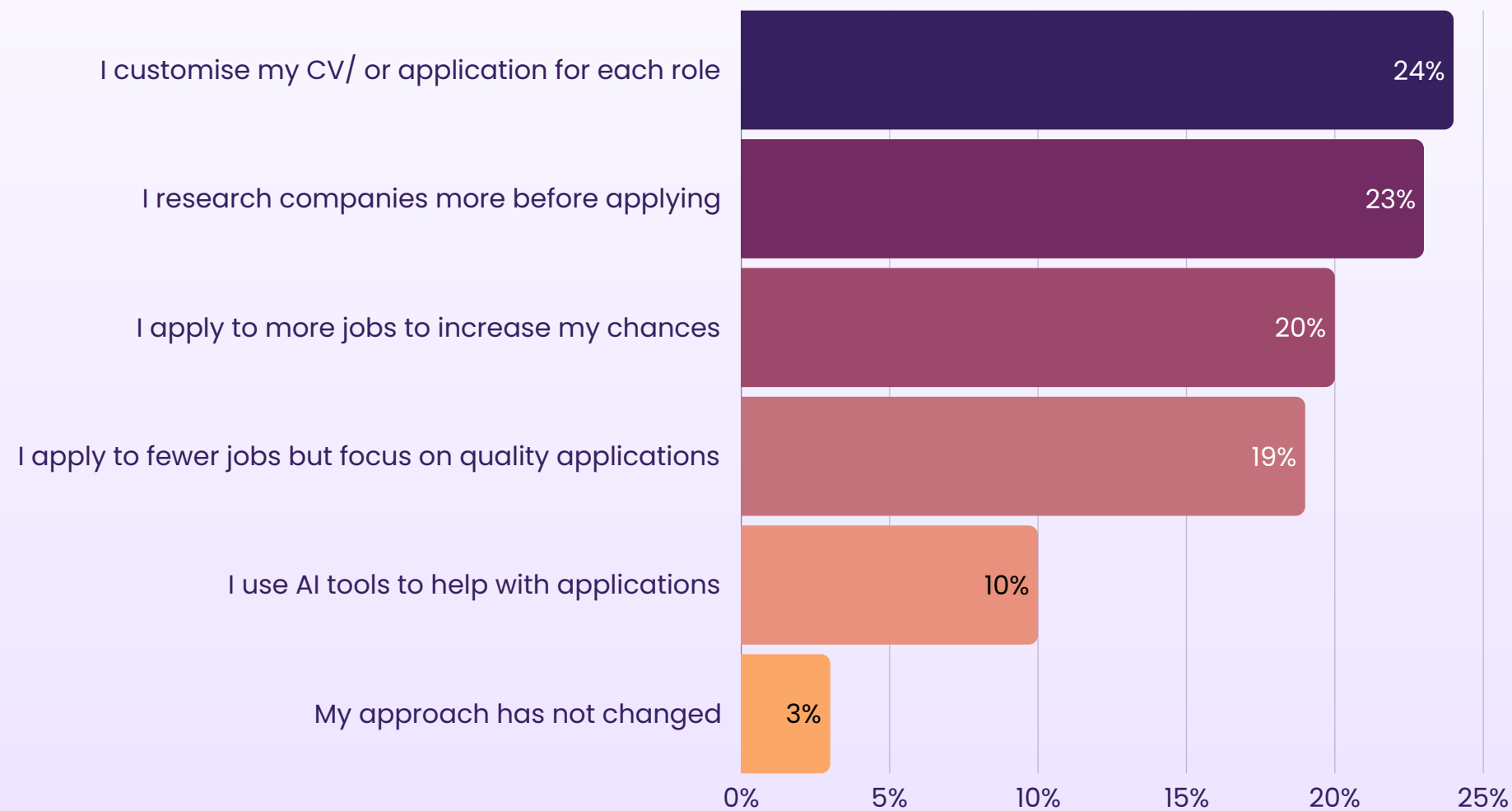
25-34 year olds were most interested in development opportunities, over 45s were most interested in company mission and values.



*"I was interested in learning more about their innovative projects and how I could contribute to the company's mission of delivering sustainable and forward thinking solutions."*

# Attraction & Applications

How has candidate's approach to job applications changed in the past year?



Use of AI tools for applications was highest amongst 19-24 year olds (5%) and under 18s (3%) but still only an emerging trend.



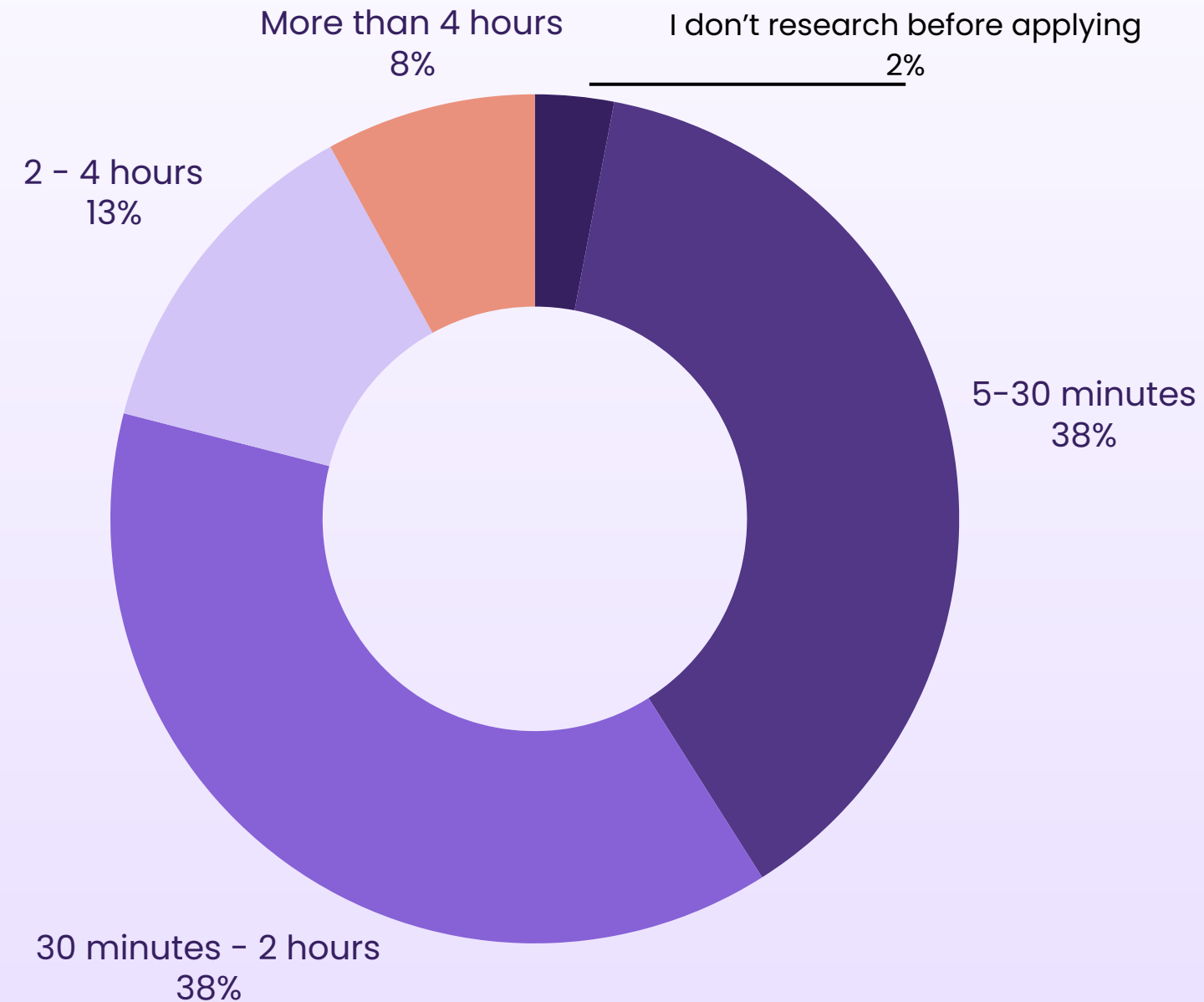
**Relevant read:**

*How could a few candidates using Gen AI to 'cheat' become 30% of who you hire?*

by Alan Bourne

# Attraction & Applications

How long do candidates spend researching a company **before** applying?



Candidates can spend on average up to 2 hours researching your company **before** deciding to apply.



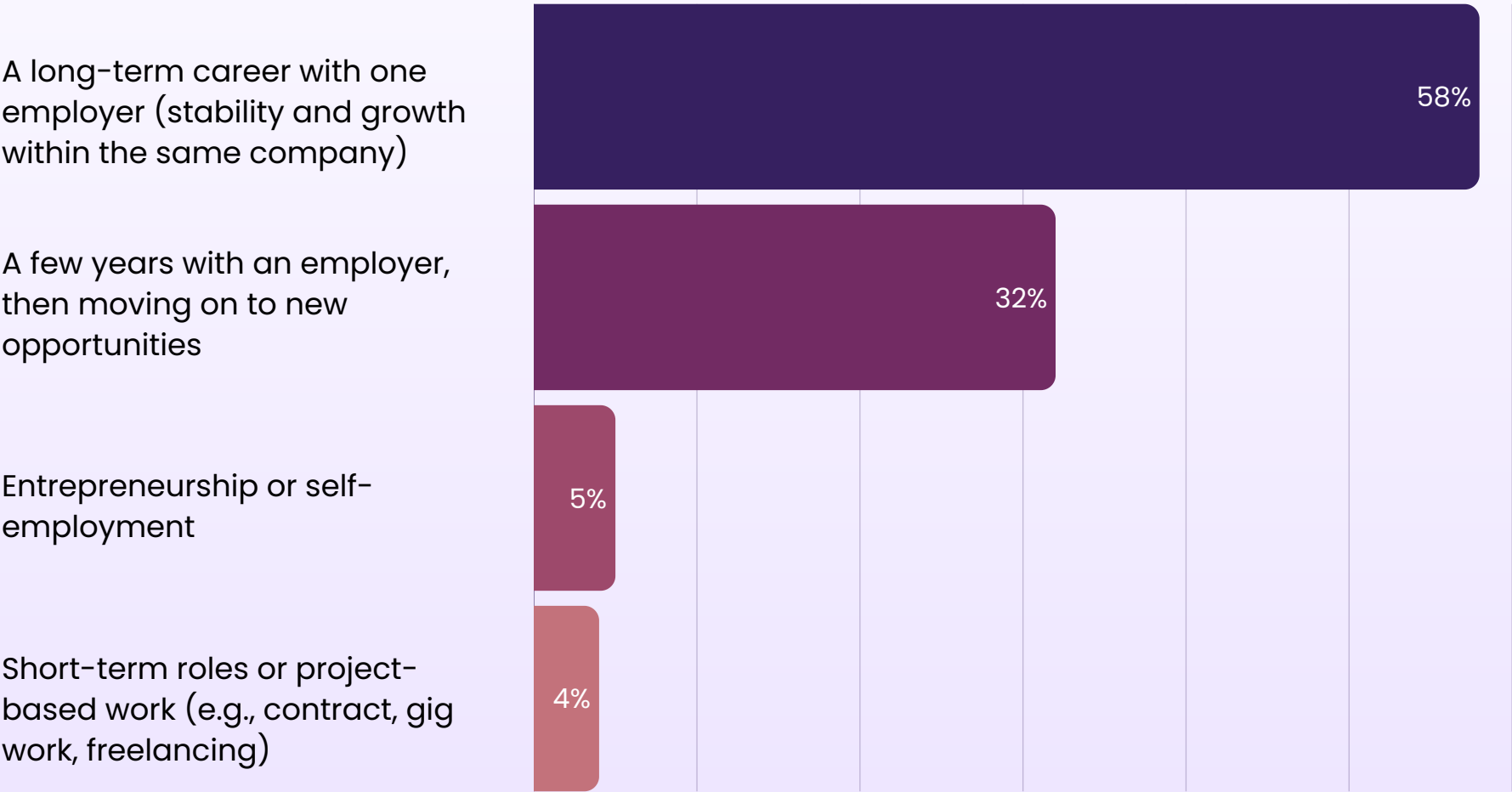
Male respondents were twice as likely to skip research entirely before applying, versus their female counterparts.



*"I am looking at wellbeing and employee support programmes before I apply, and I do even more research after applying too."*

# Attraction & Applications

What type of career most appeals to candidates in 2025?



Entrepreneurship and self-employment was least desired by all age groups, with Gen Z the least interested and Gen X the most interested.



Candidates aged between 25 – 34 were the most interested in careers with one employer, with 72% of respondents choosing this option.

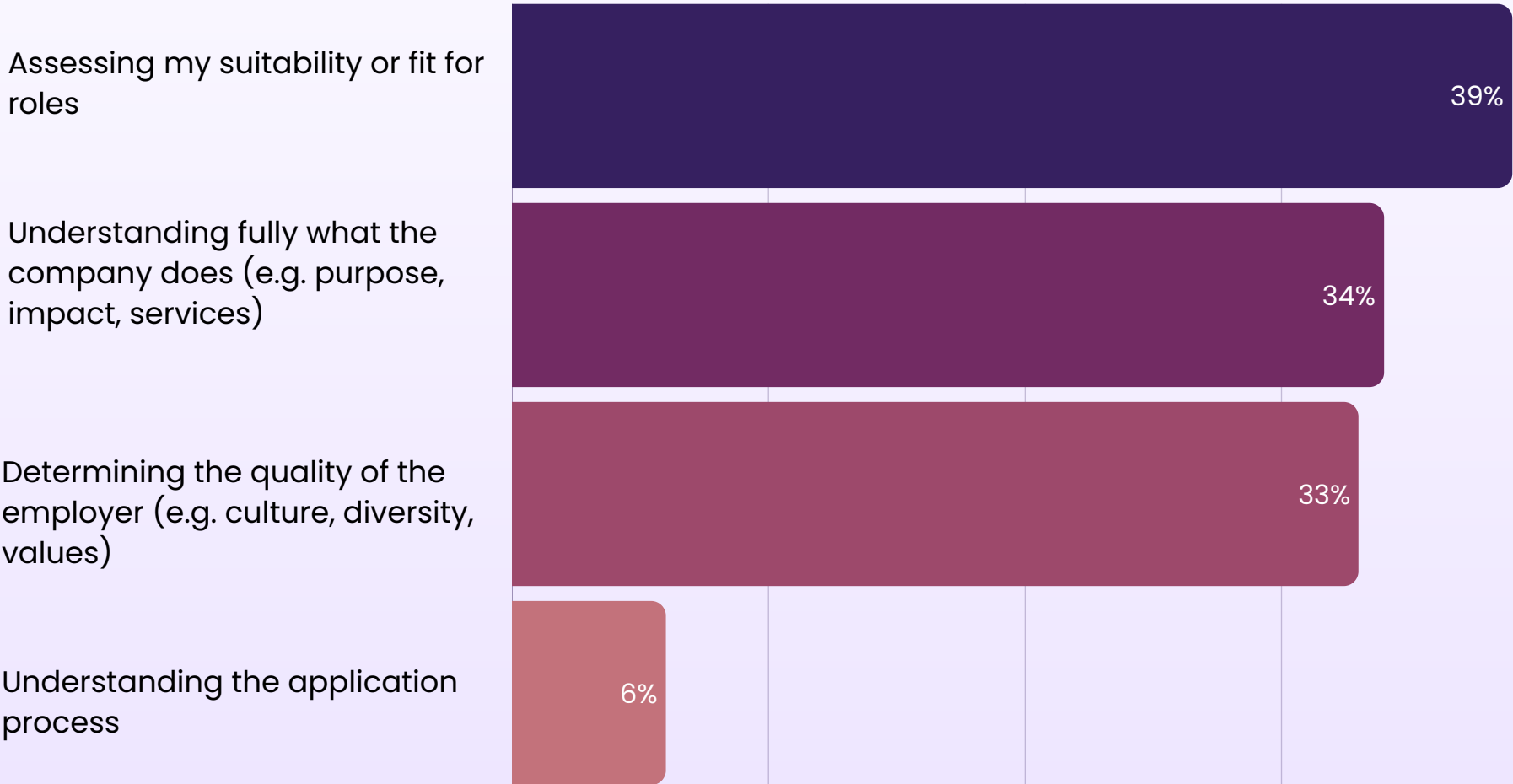


Female candidates are 1.45x more likely to seek a long-term career with one employer than their male counterparts.



# Attraction & Applications

What research activity is most challenging for candidates before applying?



## Are you giving candidates the basics?

It seems that understanding the application process is the lesser of candidates worries during the awareness and researching stage.

Their challenges go right back to learning about what a company does, the quality of the employer and crucially how well they will fit a role at the company.

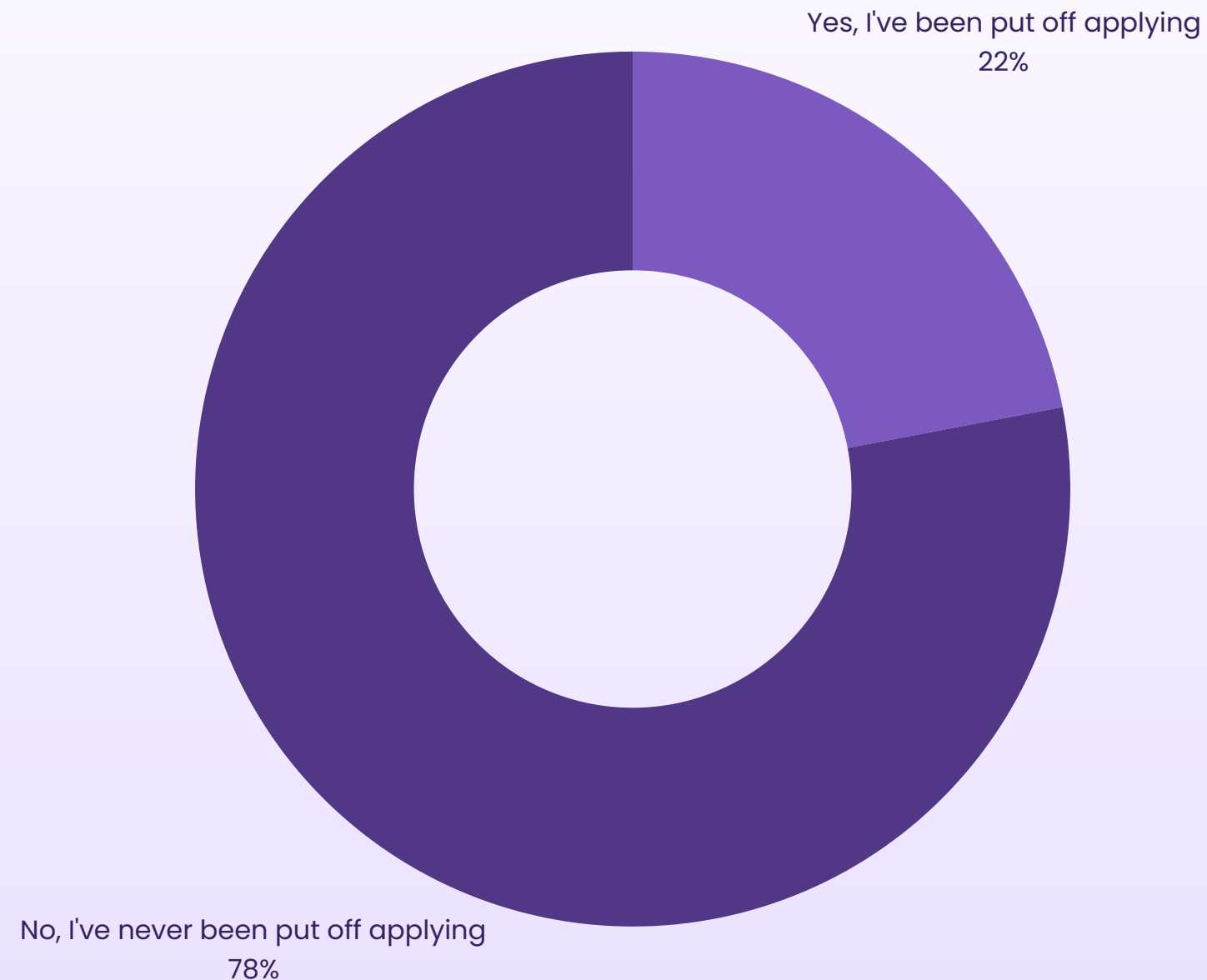
Have you ever reviewed your candidate experience with people who know nothing about your company?



Candidates also reported that assessing suitability for a role was their top priority during the research stage (only 2% more than understanding what the company does).

# Attraction & Applications

Have candidates been put off applying for roles because of bad press/reviews?



*"News articles describing a company's error, causing clients to lose large amounts of money"*



*"It can be very clear when a company has little care or consideration for employees, even to outsiders."*



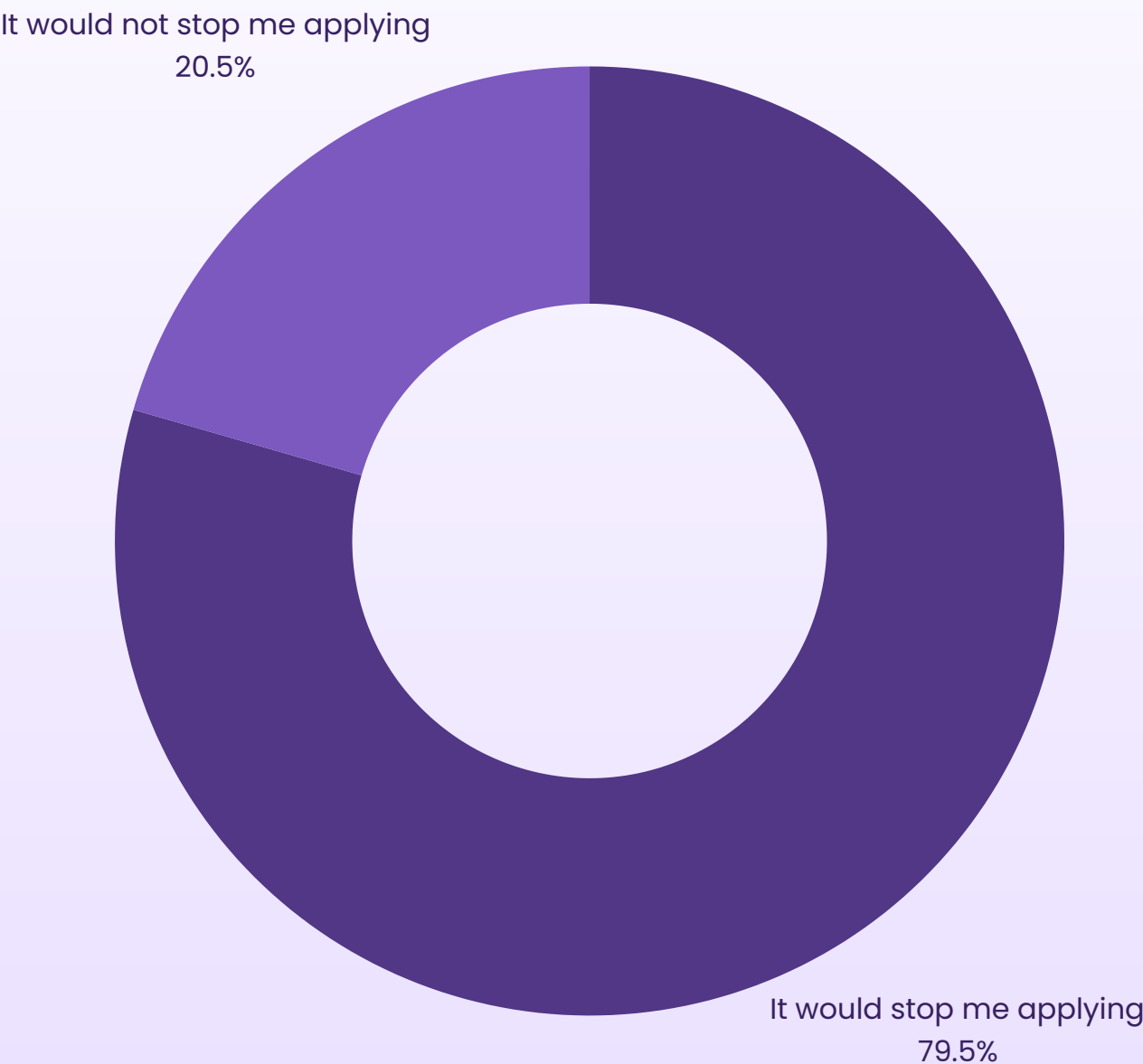
*"The job description was very unclear and reviews from former and current employees were negative."*



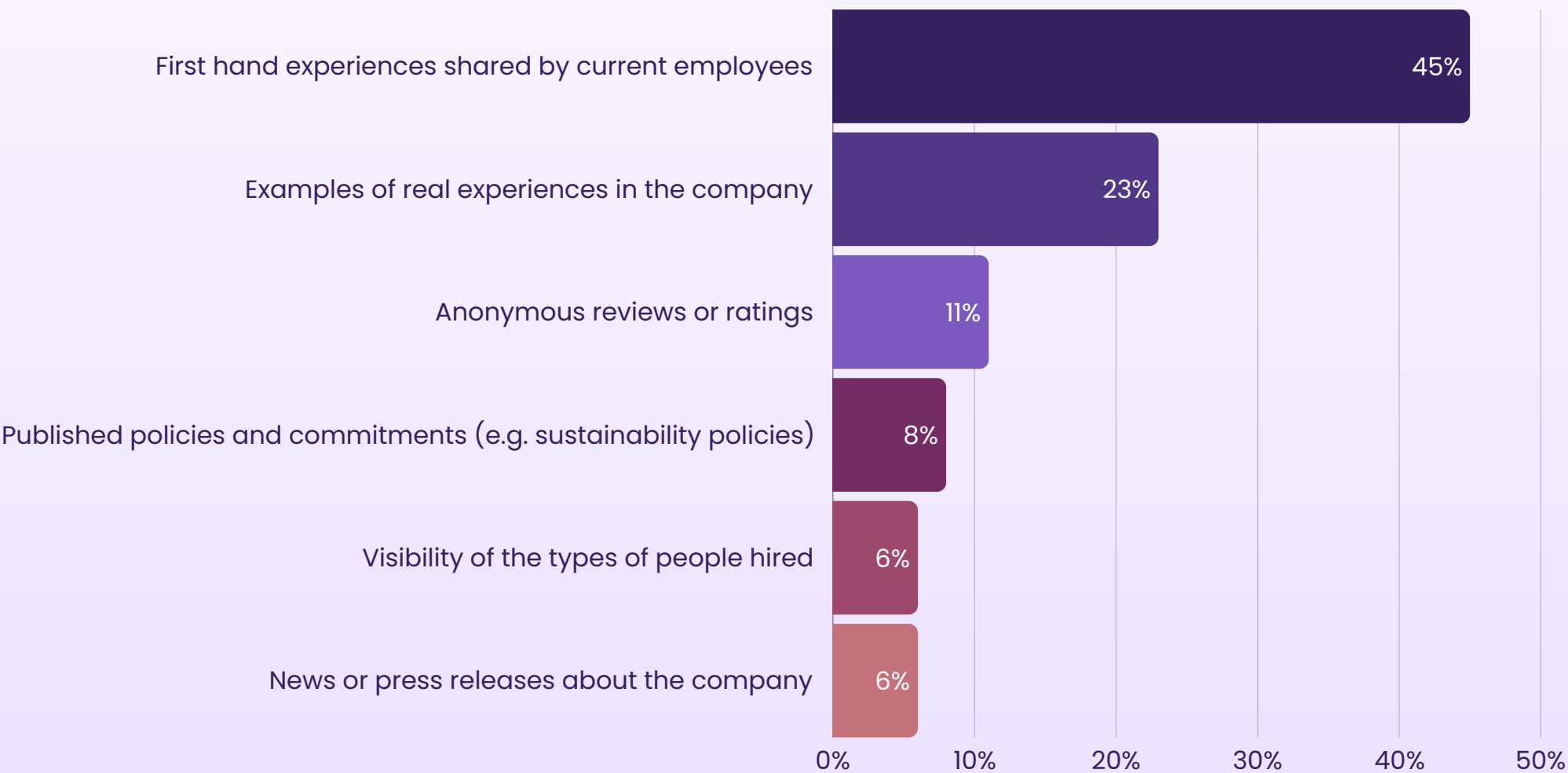
*"The culture, employee reviews, especially if there is a pattern which contradicts what the company advertises as their culture."*

# Attraction & Applications

What impact does public reputation have on applications?

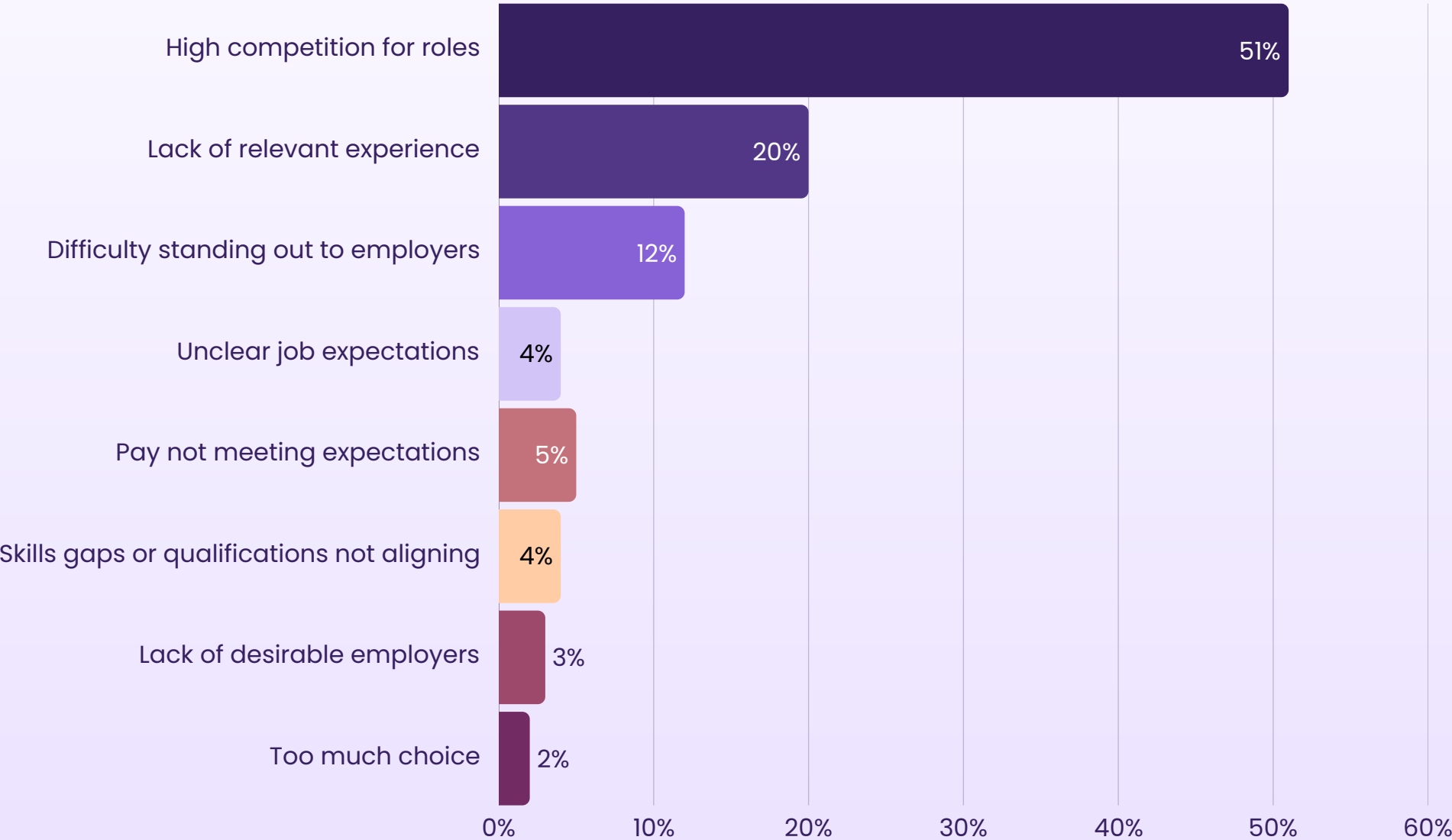


## What sources do candidates trust the most when reviewing an employer?



# Attraction & Applications

What is the biggest challenge candidates face in today's job market?





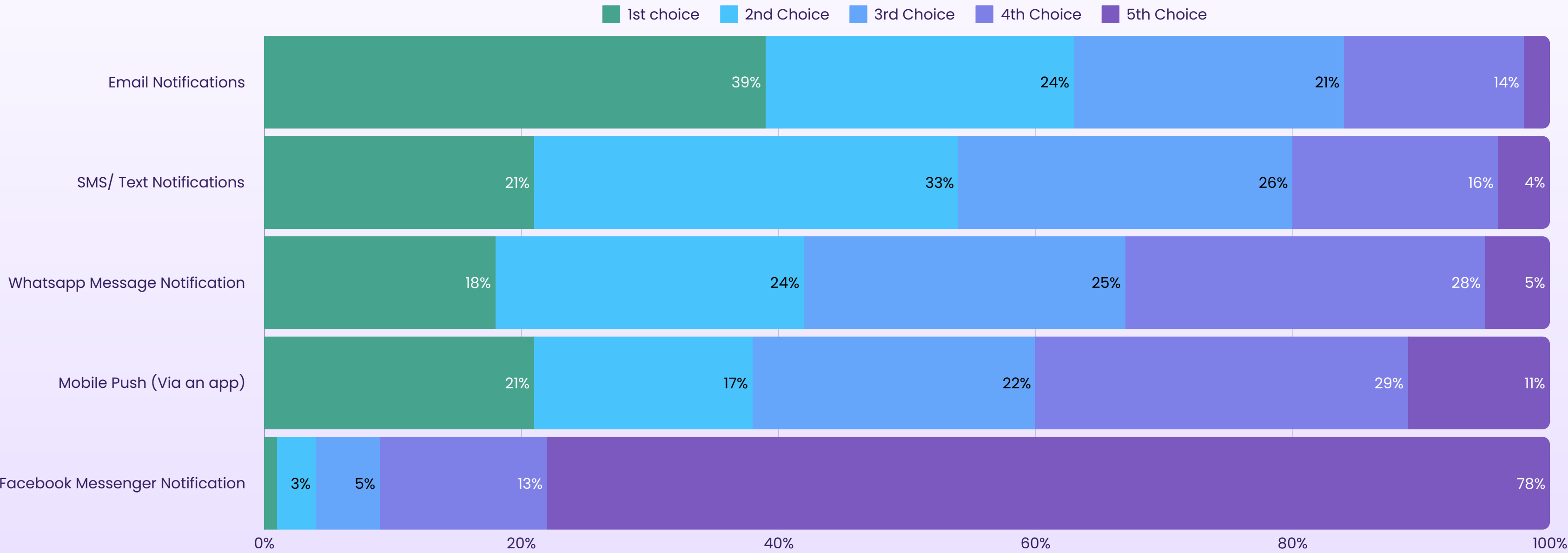
Competition dominates responses with just over half of respondents reporting this as their top challenge.



43% of under 24s reported high competition as their biggest challenge vs less than 8% for over 25s.

# Attraction & Applications

How do candidates wish to be kept up-to-date?





# Chatbots vs Human Interactions

What role do candidates see chatbots playing in the candidate experience?

Chatbots are not new technology, having been prevalent in the recruitment industry for around 9 years already. Starting as simple rule-based bots, where a question matched a pre-defined answer, the rapid advancements of generative AI (artificial intelligence) and the enhancements this has made to conversational chatbot experiences mean more employers are deploying chatbots on their careers websites and inside their ATS (applicant tracking system).

Chatbots provide a 24/7 touchpoint that supports high volumes of applications, answering common questions and delivering general advice to candidates in a semi-personalised format.

Our research has focussed on the candidate's perception of chatbots within the candidate experience, from pre-application up to day 1. Our findings centre on the themes of personalisation and placement, suggesting that chatbots are most effective when deployed early in the recruitment journey, where the highest volume of candidates and the least personalised interactions take place.

Personal interactions such as digital mentors, live chats, forums, webinars and events are most impactful further down the pipeline, to support retention of top talent in the application journey, building emotional connections and providing a competitive edge.

## **No great content? No great chatbot.**

A recruitment chatbot is only as good as the information it is trained on. Many chatbots are fed from HR documentation and careers website content. If this content isn't up-to-date, well maintained, and utilising your brands tone of voice and personality then the experience candidates receive can be more frustrating than finding the information manually.

## **Automate the start, personalise the finish.**

Candidates have suggested that they trust chatbots to answer commonly asked questions and share transactional facts such as deadlines, eligibility criteria and event dates. As the candidate progresses through the application and into the offer stage, their needs become more subjective, focusing on culture and purpose. Here, chatbots become less valuable and human interactions become critical for retaining top talent in your pipeline.

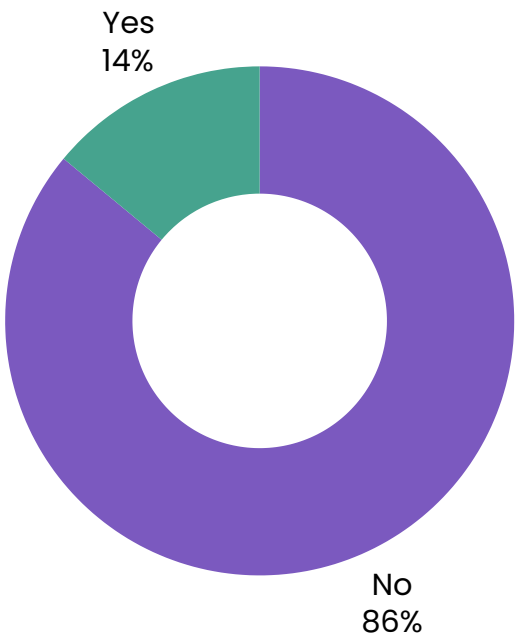
## **Chatbots share data but people shape the story.**

Our research shows that candidates do care about receiving authentic interactions with employers. Authenticity means real experiences, opinions and individualism from real people. Candidates build emotional bonds with employers who can deliver this kind of candidate experience, growing their commitment to make a great application and be successful in the role.

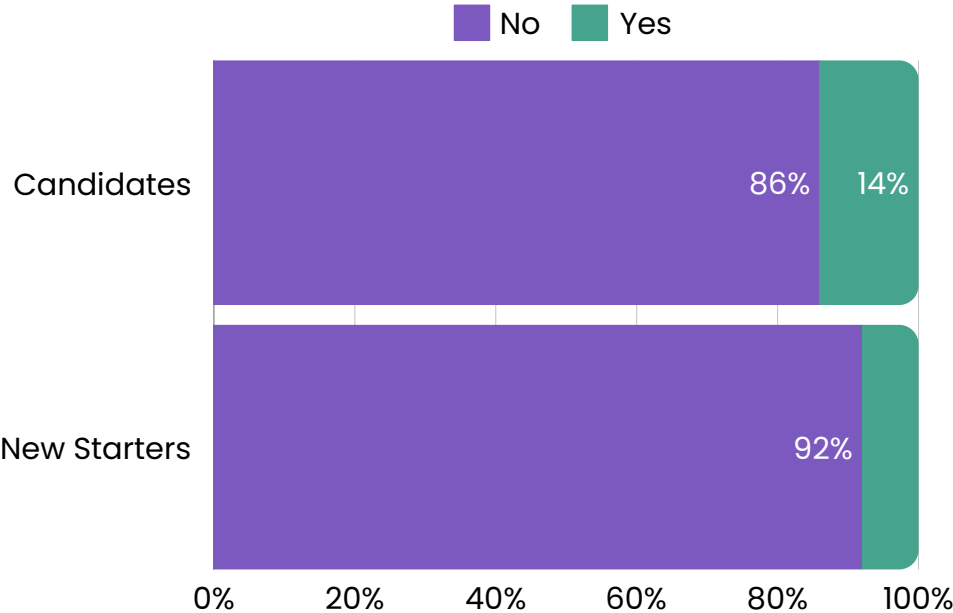
# Chatbots vs Human Interactions

Do candidates trust chatbots to answer their questions?

Do you think a chatbot could have answered your questions?



Do you think a chatbot could have answered your questions?



The vast majority of candidates **did not** think a chatbot could have answered their questions about a role or employer.



Offered candidates (in a pre-boarding window) were even less inclined to trust a chatbot with their questions, 92% saying a chatbot could not answer them.

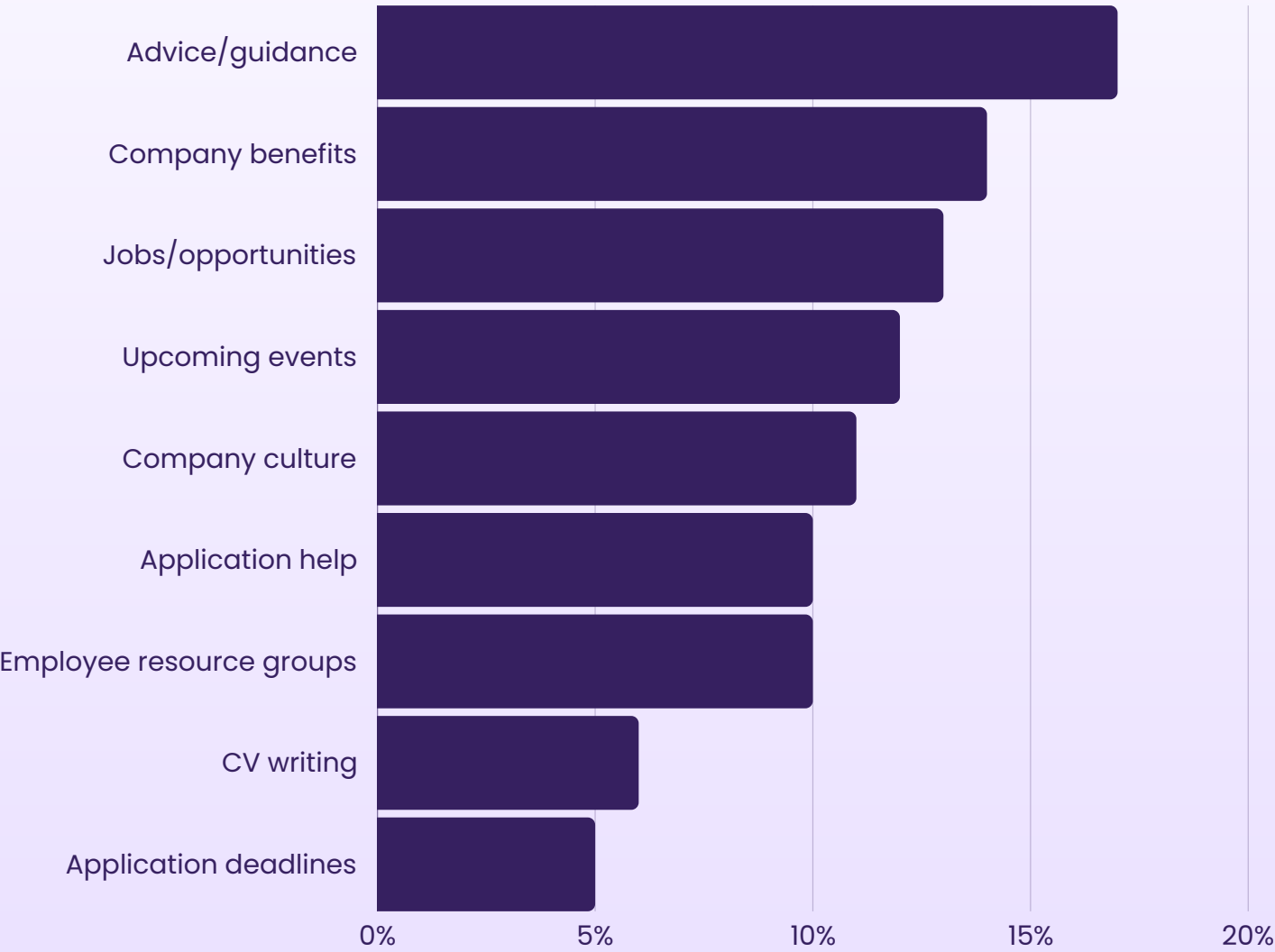


*“The question was too complex, and a chatbot couldn’t have as good of a back and forth. Plus, it feels better coming from a real person.”*

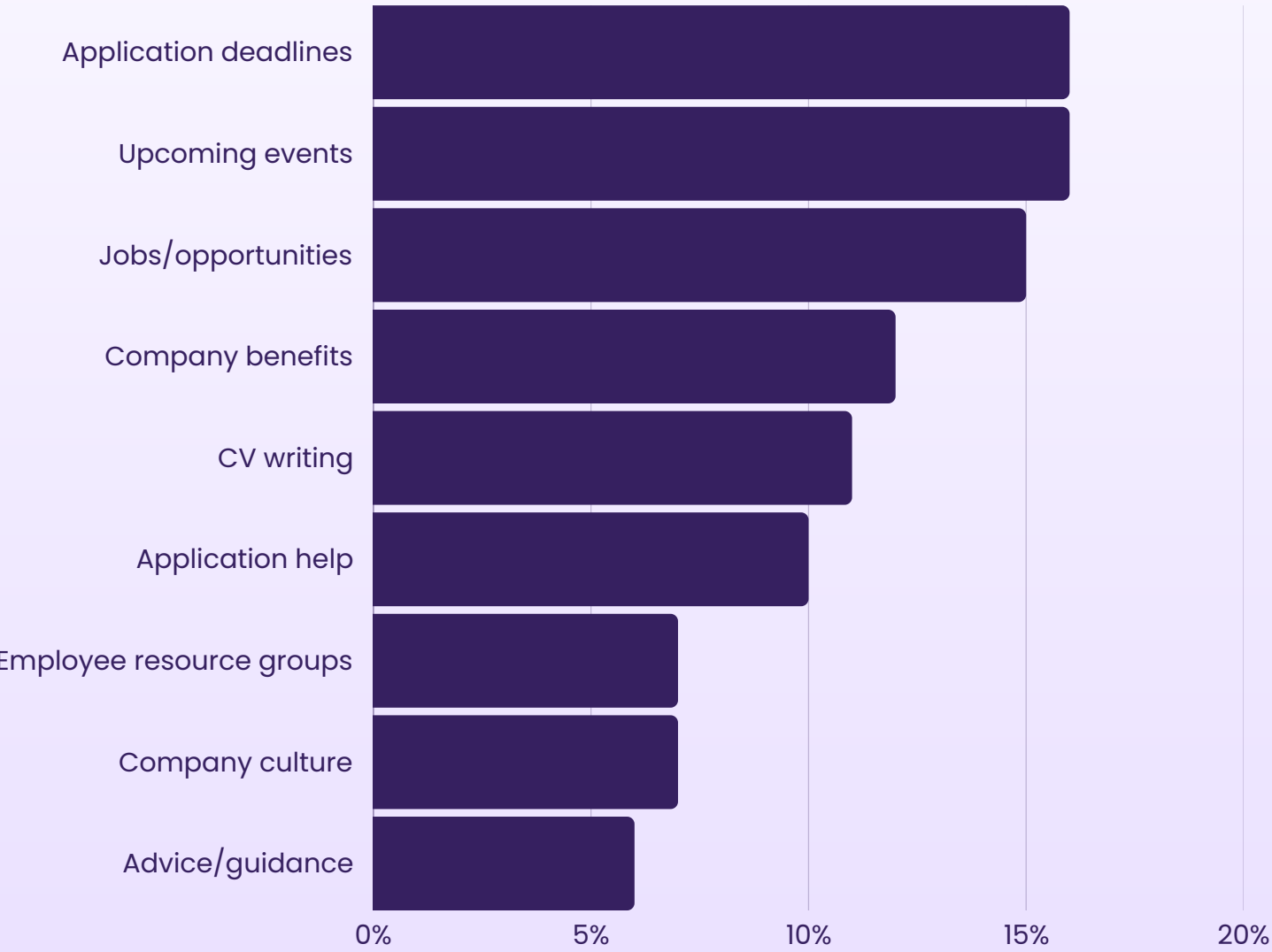
# Chatbots vs Human Interactions

What topics are candidates comfortable talking to chatbots about?

What topics would you prefer to talk to a real person about?



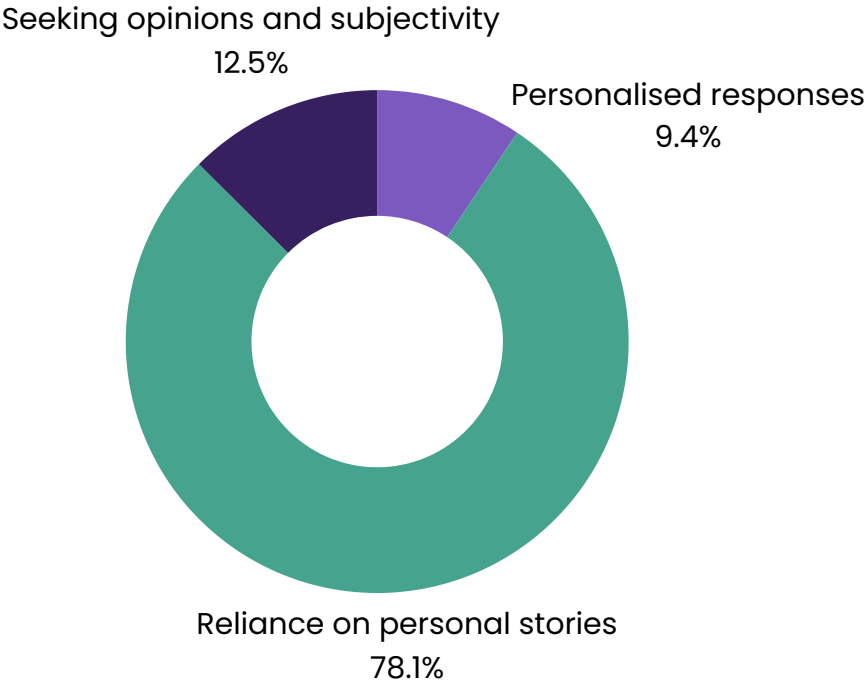
What topics would you prefer to talk to a chatbot about?



# Chatbots vs Human Interactions

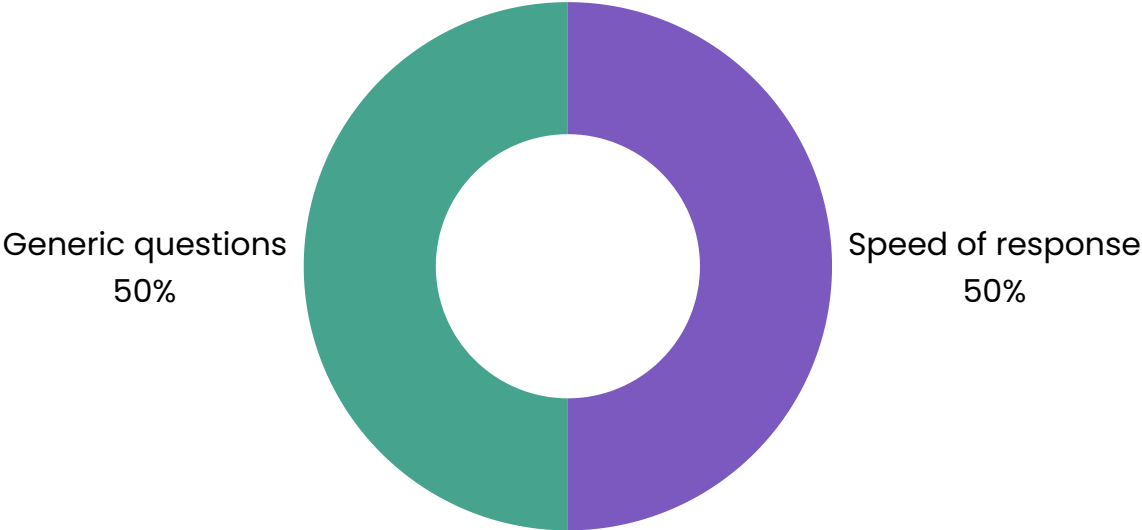
What role do candidates see chatbots playing in the candidate experience?

Why do you prefer asking career questions to a real person versus a chatbot?



*"I was interested in a personal experience and while a chatbot could have given some useful advice the response from a human made the conversation seem more personal."*

Why do you prefer asking career questions to a chatbot versus a real person?



*"I wanted to ask for quite basic application tips that are applicable to any company's interviewing process"*

# Looking ahead into 2025

## Skills are overtaking experience.

Both employers and candidates will shift towards a skills-first model. Skill finding, mapping and matching tools will grow in popularity.

## Employers will move to a 'total talent' approach.

Talent of all types will be treated holistically, and contingent works will see more equity of experience from employers.

## Next gen talent look for an employer for life.

Employees value continuous learning, career mobility, and evolving work arrangements over lifetime tenure at a single company.

## Employee advocacy will become a core attraction strategy.

More organisations will adopt candidate engagement platforms, employee generated content and brand ambassadors.

*"There will be a number of big agenda items that we will hear from employers and Government in 2025, including AI and the power (and implications of that power) it gives employers, current & future employees; job-readiness in early careers and a shift to an inclusive approach to providing opportunities for all to make the most of talent, be that to get in to work or thrive when in work, will be the focus.*

*Harnessing the right technology to provide both an inclusive and human experience for candidates and employees is the goal, as this will lead to greater productivity and crucially what the UK economy needs; meaningful and sustainable growth."*



**Simon Reichwald**

Chief Progression Officer, Connectr Talent Technology



# Recommendations for employers



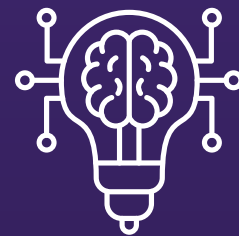
Develop a robust skill-first approach, and consider introducing means for candidates to self-assess their skills and strengths.

BPP: Demystifying the Government's skills agenda.



Encourage advocacy and influencer-ship from your current employees to help build up an authentic employer brand experience.

45% prefer first hand employee experiences as social proof.



Introduce bitesize pre-skilling material to candidates before application, to help build a job-ready talent pipeline and get in front of skills gaps.

Forbes: Why pre-skilling, not re-skilling is the secret to better employment pipelines



Are your candidates undergoing vetting and reference checks? Personal keep warm activity from employers is critical to avoid reneges during challenging recruitment phases.

AWE reduce reneges during pre-boarding by 74%



When it comes to early careers, make sure to include parents and teachers in your strategy, they have a huge influence on young people's decision making!

The power of peer-to-peer influence



Look into what your candidates value and find aligned with them to attract the talent that will stay, thrive and drive your business forward.

Candidates are 2.15x more likely to be attracted to the culture

# Connectr Talent Technology's Impact Report

74%

reduction in reneges after using Connectr to pre-board new starters.

71%

of candidates had their perception of an employers brand positively changed after using Connectr.

85%

of candidates & new starters using Connectr had their confidence & understanding increased.

THE  
**rad**  
AWARDS

Use of  
**technology**  
winners in  
partnership  
with British Airways!

*"I am incredibly proud to have seen record growth in candidates and new starters securing their futures through Connectr platforms in 2024.*

*Our human-centric approach to technology has allowed our customers to create thriving talent communities and personalised candidate journeys that level the playing field for diverse talent; all while reaping the benefits of higher quality applications, better assessment centre outputs and new hires turning up on day integrated and ready to work.*

*I can't wait to see the next developments unfold this year and connect with more employers looking to transform their talent experience."*



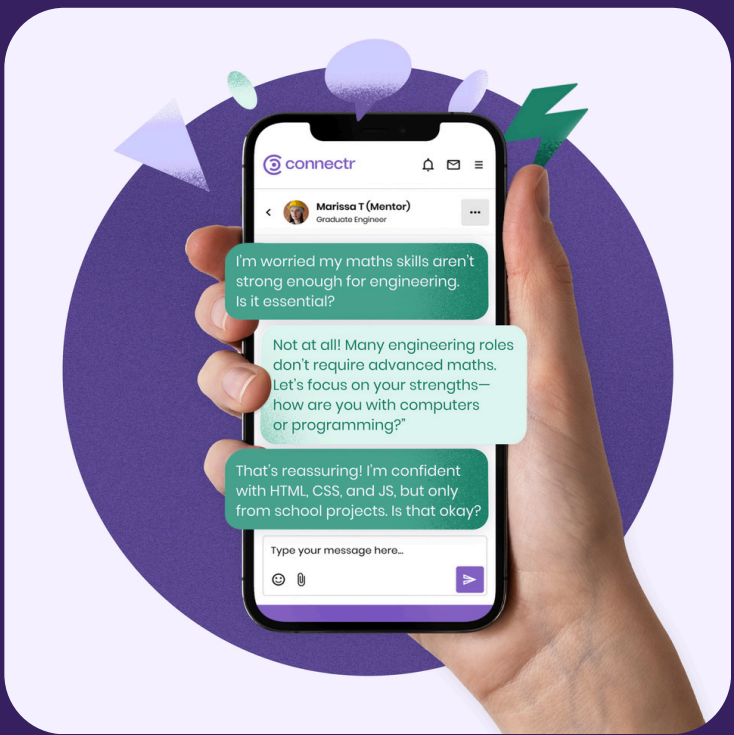
**Yasmin Howell**

Head of Customer Experience & Research,  
Connectr Talent Technology

→ Early Careers

# Turn your outreach into outcomes.

Keep talent engaged long after first contact. Effortlessly build an active early careers pipeline through a personalised candidate experience that delivers real-time insights.



→ Employer Brand

# Activate your employer brand.

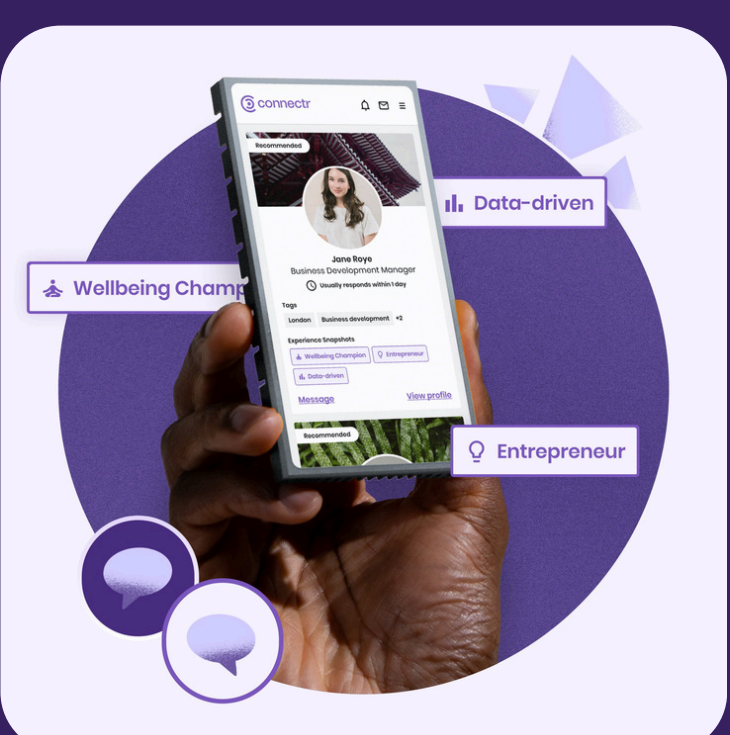
Tackle misconceptions and nurture awareness through authentic experiences, with a platform that tells you what's working and what isn't.



→ Talent Acquisition

# From strategy to a reality.

Build a best-in-class candidate experience that uncovers top talent and reduces time-to-hire without compromising on quality.



Trusted by...



The power of people with the scalability of tech; a standout experience from first look to first day.

State of Candidate Experience: 2025