Okay-Somerville, B. (2023) Graduate recruitment. In: Johnstone, S., Rodriguez, J. K. and Wilkinson, A. (eds.) Encyclopedia of Human Resource Management. Edward Edgar Publishing: Cheltenham, pp. 157-159. ISBN 9781800378834.

https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/293311/

Deposited on: 7 March 2023

Graduate recruitment

Graduate recruitment refers to the process in which employers attract and select university-leavers for their vacancies. Traditionally large corporate organisations offered graduate schemes, i.e., structured training and development programmes, whereby graduates are socialised into leadership roles. Graduate schemes are highly competitive. In most industrialised nations, there is an imbalance between the number of students graduating from universities and available high-skilled jobs that require a university degree (of which graduate schemes are a proportion) (Green and Henseke, 2016).

The most common ways through which employers attract university-leavers include: engaging with candidates while still at university (e.g., campus visits, also referred to as 'milk-rounds'); early recruitment while students are in their final year; and using internships and work experience to build relationships. Company website, external job boards, social media marketing and virtual career fairs are important tools for attracting university-leavers. For large employers, attracting the right candidates is a major challenge, whereas small firms (and large firms in less attractive sectors, e.g., caring, or without a strong employer brand) struggle attracting a large enough pool of applicants.

Most employers impose minimum entry requirements based on degree achievement. Alongside this initial screening, psychometric tests and online ability tests are also used commonly in shortlisting applicants for further assessment. Assessment centres and interviews are amongst the most used methods. Situational judgment tests are also increasingly more common in assessing candidates' future potential. Other graduate selection methods include (but not limited to) gamified assessments, group presentations, case studies and role play exercises. The purpose of selection for large employers is entry into graduate trainee programmes, whereas small firms are more likely to require the candidates to be work-ready and contribute from day one (Stewart & Knowles, 2000). Selection in small employers tend to be less sophisticated as they require less standardisation amongst candidates, due to the smaller applicant pool.

Graduate recruitment is increasingly more person- rather than job-related, where emphasis is on candidates' transferable skills, as well as attitude and personality (Branine, 2008). Graduate employability, i.e., graduates' chances of attaining and maintaining employment upon graduation, is therefore contingent on a combination of hard (e.g., subject specific know-how) and soft skills (e.g., communication, teamworking and problem-solving), as well as career management skills, such as career exploration and networking (Bridgstock, 2009). Work experience, e.g., internships, placements and voluntary work, and extracurricular activities contribute positively to graduate employability.

Critics argue that graduate recruitment may serve to heighten inequalities in societies. Some employers specifically target elite institutions which attract students from more socially advantaged backgrounds. Moreover, the skills and competencies sought after in the selection process are argued to be socially constructed, mimicking the attributes of senior management in large corporations. Social networks are important for developing these competencies and access to opportunities. However, graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., first generation students) often do not have access such networks. Use of online networking, e.g., social media, and online recruitment and selection methods may contribute to levelling of inequalities.

Reference list and selected further readings

Branine, M. (2008). Graduate recruitment and selection in the UK: A study of the recent changes in methods and expectations. *Career development international*. *13*(6), 497-513. https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430810901660

Bridgstock, R. (2009). The graduate attributes we've overlooked: Enhancing graduate employability through career management skills. *Higher Education Research & Development, 28*(1), 31-44. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360802444347

Byrne, C. (2022). What determines perceived graduate employability? Exploring the effects of personal characteristics, academic achievements and graduate skills in a survey experiment, *Studies in Higher Education*, *47*(1), 159-176, doi: 10.1080/03075079.2020.1735329

Green, F., & Henseke, G. (2016). Should governments of OECD countries worry about graduate underemployment?. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, *32*(4), 514-537. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/grw024

Okay-Somerville, B., Allison, I., Luchinskaya, D., & Scholarios, D. (2020). Disentangling the impact of social disadvantage on 'becoming employable': evidence from STEM student university-to-work transitions. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1767052

Pollard, E., Hirsh, W., Williams, M., Buzzeo, J., Marvell, R., Tassinari, A., ... & Ball, C. (2015). Understanding employers' graduate recruitment and selection practices: main report. BIS Research Paper No. 231. Retrieved from: http://publications.aston.ac.uk/id/eprint/29398/1/Employers_graduate_recruitment_and _selection_practices.pdf

Suggested cross-references
Assessment centre, interviews, psychometric testing, employability, career management, social disadvantage

Belgin Okay-Somerville