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Current trends in graduate assessment

Our observations from working with corporate graduate recruiters and those organisations which support graduates as they embark on their careers

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Trends in graduate assessment

This article has been written with input from Howard Grosvenor, Director of Professional Services at *cut-e* UK.

As HCPC-registered Chartered Occupational Psychologist with over fourteen years industry experience designing, implementing and leading talent management and assessment projects for clients large and small, Howard is able to draw on his experience and knowledge to summarise the trends he sees in the assessment of graduates.

He has witnessed through his work at *cut-e* and previously at CEB SHL, the changes in the characteristics and skills sought by recruiters of graduates, the developments in how they seek to identify talent and the strategies now adopted to engage with graduate applicants. He understands the practicalities of such intake programes as well as the strategic agenda of organisations.

Ability. Values. Behaviour.

We've seen a shift in recent years towards making use of the client's own behavioural and values models. No longer are organisations looking for general more universal competencies, but are linking their assessments and selection criteria to the competencies and values of their own business. We see this in the use of pre-application job and culture fit questionnaires and also the increased use of role specific situational judgement questionnaires.

The *cut-e* Assessment Barometer survey carried out every two years, tells us that organisations would like to assess for potential for leadership, motivation and integrity and ethical behaviour. Degree classification seems to be important for a diminishing number of graduate recruiters. This may be because, with the draw from a broader geographical talent pool, degree equivalence across awarding institutions is harder to calculate.

Degree type remains a key criterion for certain roles such as engineering or where languages are crucial to job success.

Cognitive ability is still important when looking at the graduate population and this is assessed through testing in the early stages – especially where functional knowledge is not a requirement. Even where functional knowledge is important (e.g. IT) ability testing is used to predict trainability.

Adaptive testing – becoming popular across many target test taker audiences – seems to be, in our experience, less widely used with the graduate population.

Across all graduate schemes that we have experienced, the constructs that graduates are assessed for can typically be placed into one of four categories:

- **People skills** – communication, teamwork, influencing
- **Thinking skills** – innovation, problem solving
- **Drive** – including achievement orientation, resilience
- **Customer** – including service orientation, execution

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A candidate-centric approach

We have witnessed a growth in candidate-centric models which put the student at the heart of the hiring process. This may be demonstrated through the creation of a personal profile and range of potential job-fit scores which can be then searched for by employers via a database, or form the basis of career coaching and application support. In our experience, the profile of the Generation Y applicant represents a change in expectations of the recruitment process. They tend to be avid users of social media, source jobs in this way, demand convenience and to be valued by prospective employers. In response we have noticed that practices have changed: the initial application is shorter drawing on ways to pre-populate certain fields; processes are automated to fast track exceptional candidates; applicants are engaged and incentivised through feedback and information about subsequent stages and assessment tools are re-skinned to make them more visually engaging while retain their measurement properties.

From Internship to Graduate programme

The growth of the internship programme in many organisations has created a new pool of applicants and, in some instances, an indirect screening criterion. High tech firms can hire 70% of their graduate intake from their internal internship population.

Utilising the technology

We have witnessed a real shift in the how organisations use the technology available. Successful graduate recruiters look to integrate the early stages of their screening and selection process with their own technology, therefore looking for suppliers which can provide a seamless interface which projects a client's own branding and process.

Couple the increased sophistication of graduate recruiters in their use of psychometric assessments and the reports generated with the more tailored competencies being assessed, there has become a demand for custom reports to be developed alongside tailored interview guides.

We have noticed the trend for shorter graduate assessment and the introduction of remote assessments including case studies, role plays, competency-based interviews over Skype, and online assessment. Video technology for interviews is either under consideration or already implemented in many graduate recruiters. This not only reduces travel time, but acts as a good preview for hiring managers over and above the more traditional telephone interview. Paperless and Virtual Assessment Centres are not new but have grown in use more recently. Systems and processes have been streamlined to make use of tablet devices and notes and scores are instantly collated at a central point.

Engagement early on...

Demand for good graduate applicants is strong and recruiters realise that they need to attract, engage with and retain candidates early in the selection process – and keep their competitors out. Situational Judgement Questionnaires, Realistic Job Previews and utilising social media and gamification helps to present an accurate view of the job, develop enthusiasm and act as a differentiator from other organisations.

A strong presence in social media has become increasingly important for organisations to position themselves and the opportunities offered to graduates: social media offers far more than the traditional 'Careers' page of a website. However, research shows that social media also impacts graduate selection with 35% of hiring managers reportedly using information from social networking sites to inform decisions about candidates. This is questionable from a privacy perspective and perhaps future developments will see a profiling, with permission, the 'likes' on Facebook and 'follows' on Twitter.

Post acceptance of an offer, and pre-start date, on-boarding receives more of a focus than it used to. Many continue to liaise with successful candidates so that they may complete key functional learning before joining formally.

… and assessing throughout the graduate development programme
We see that assessment continues beyond post hire of graduates and through all stages of the graduate development programme. After profiling its talent at selection, L&D professionals then look to check progress against goals and potential areas for development against the organisation's behavioural model. If a placement or promotion decision is to be made there is often an accompanying assessment which is then shared with the new manager to aid transition.

"The process certainly brought out in graduates all of those elements that are so hard to pick up in a standard interview process - there were some absolute stars, and obviously some extreme examples at the other end of the scale which is amazing when you consider this is the top 7% of applicants, I really think this will help us pick the best fit for the program."

Graduate recruiter in Australia

For more information and related documents about how to get the most out of Online Assessment, validity, and other related information, please refer to www.cut-e.com

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