

# Youth employment accessibility research



ACCESS  
GENERATION.



  
workvine

# Executive Summary

**This research demonstrates that a company needs someone to take ownership of their online identity and ensure recruitment processes don't impede their ability to attract young people and recruit candidates.**

Only 7% of businesses across six market sectors exceeded young people's expectation when it came to talking about their business and its culture. Most failed to effectively promote themselves (remember young people have a criteria in mind when reviewing a company's website).

When it came to providing support during the application process, only 36% achieved an adequate level. This included the use of plain English and a clear explanation of skills required. However, no company excelled in this area and many failed to make commitments with regards to application timescales and the availability of feedback.

We believe that a strategic approach to recruitment is required, looking at attraction, employee engagement and retention.

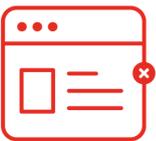
# Access Generation is a social enterprise that was established in September 2016.

Our primary purpose is to encourage businesses to employ inexperienced young people (16 to 24 year olds) by providing straightforward free practical guidance online at [www.accessgeneration.co.uk](http://www.accessgeneration.co.uk)

We want to help small to medium businesses build their own pool of talent and become an employer of choice for young people.



2 in 3 businesses did not have any entry point for young people to gain employment



1 in 6 businesses had a very poor or no job section on their website



78% of businesses failed to promote themselves as an employer

The headlines above reflect the results of the latest round of research, which assessed the job section on 150 companies.

# Background

Hinckley based HR tech company, Workvine, sponsored us to assess 150 job sections on company websites through our youth employment accessibility research. Our young peer researchers assessed the job sections on company websites against young people's expectations in a bid to show employers the problems young people have in gaining work.

We had previously identified that the biggest barrier to employment for young people is the job application process with 80% of young people reviewing a companies website before applying regardless of where they first see a job advertised.

This research, which is an external assessment of job sections on company websites, was then designed by young people based on their experience and expectations of applying for jobs online.

We had young peer researchers assessing the job section on an initial sample of 50 company websites.

This identified valuable insights into the accessibility of the job or careers section on company websites. We have since validated the assessment further with groups of young people at Loughborough University, De Montfort University, Twenty Twenty and Talent Match Leicester.

Our young peer researchers have since assessed 400 companies to date and this has allowed us to provide feedback to companies who are struggling to attract and recruit.

The latest results from the **Quarterly Economic Survey** by the East Midlands Chamber of Commerce stated that over half the businesses who responded were attempting to recruit and 59% of those had difficulties with their recruitment.

## Youth employment

The number of young people excluded from the world of work stays stubbornly high. According to the **Office of National Statistics**, 788,000 people aged 16-24 were not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the final quarter of 2018. That's 11.3% of all people in this age group (this was a slight increase from the previous quarter and down 8,000 from the final quarter of 2017). Based on recent research by London Youth, Talent Match and Sheffield Hallam University, it is possible there is a further 52%, up to 480,000 young people, that are not included in the government statistics nationally. Due to other circumstances such as caring responsibilities or mental health, this group is often not captured by employability initiatives. 42% of young people supported by Talent Match Leicester are not recognised by government statistics either. All this shows that there is a hidden youth employment problem.

## Fact finding

Since launching, we have spoken, either directly or through events, to over 600 businesses and ran workshops with over 100 young people. Most recently, we had two interns who ran a student forum and survey with young people at De Montfort University.

## Workshops with young people

We have engaged with over 100 young people including students at De Montfort University, Loughborough University and young people through the following youth employment initiatives, Talent Match Leicester and Twenty Twenty.



of young people will look at the job section on a company website to find out more about the company regardless of where they first saw the job posting.



of all job seekers surveyed said they would research a company before applying (source: **Indeed**).



of job seekers of all ages would apply for a job on a mobile device (source: **REED**).

**Companies need to be clear about what they say about themselves and the application process needs to be mobile-friendly.**

# What young people told us...

“After I send my application online I never hear anything back and I didn’t know who I could talk to about it at the company.”

“It sometimes feels like you’re submitting your application into a black hole and there’s no information about next steps.”

“Businesses all say the same thing, like they all invest in their people. But I want to know what that means and how it will help me get to the next level in my career.”

“When a local business is also part of a global brand we found it difficult to access the job section and when we did find it we were taken off to a foreign website with only global jobs listed.”

“Some companies expect you to register before you even see any information about working for them. I wouldn’t register to shop online before browsing what was available to buy.”

“Companies either use jargon or are too generic and not specific.”

## “What did I do wrong?”

This last statement is what a final year university student said after applying for a job only to be rejected without any feedback.

“Did I do something wrong, do you think?” she asks, ruminating on what she did in the application process.

It's no surprise that young people's resilience and mental health start to be impacted when it comes to applying for jobs.

Companies should state when feedback is available and where possible, provide feedback for inexperienced candidates who have no experience and need support to make a good application.



# What businesses told us before...

“We have never had a problem with attraction and recruitment and never used agencies, but we are now struggling”

“Young people don’t want to work in our industry”

“We can’t find people with the right skills”

“Where can we find young people?” “We have used agencies, but they don’t really work for us”

# What businesses told us after...

This is what businesses told us after they had attended our training workshop, received an assessment report or took our guidance...

“We will be thinking more like the ‘buyer’”

“We will promote our sector more and make it appealing to young people”

“We will review our website and create case studies”

“We will create a simplified application process for entry level roles”

“I will take ownership of the careers page on our website and review the length of our application recruitment and selection process”



# Assessment Matrix Development

The questions and criteria remained the same for the main body of research as for the pilot, which means we were able to build on our original data set. We reviewed the matrix, using the pilot, and further validated it with workshops with young people and found no further changes were required.

The following explains how the assessment matrix was developed:

On the basis of collating the feedback from young people on what they want from an employer and the obstacles faced, Access Generation used this information to create and structure draft questions. Access Generation then engaged with Dr Rebecca Steer and a young person and peer researcher, Peter Colley, from Talent Match, to further develop and refine this assessment tool. Collectively, this research team completed this process for developing and refining the criteria, questions and scoring over four phases.

1. The research team reviewed the draft questions and removed any duplicate questions and amended the questions and criteria/theme headings. For each question we created a scoring matrix and agreed specific examples for each level of the scoring matrix. Each member of the research team then independently carried out an initial assessment of the same 10 companies to test the scoring.

2. The research team met to discuss any variance in question, criteria or scoring interpretation, clarifying and adjusting scoring and criteria examples and reaching agreement where there were differences in scores given. Peter then repeated the assessment of the initial 10 companies and an additional 10 (20 in total) with the refined scoring matrix. The scoring of these 20 companies was sample checked to assess consistency and agreement of scoring using the refined scoring matrix.

3. Once again, the research team met to discuss the refined scoring matrix and resolve any scoring discrepancies. With this sample of 20 companies we discovered that the scoring created an unrealistic result for some and gave a disproportionate scoring on other sections, particularly for companies who did not have a jobs/vacancies page, or no available positions to assess. We therefore introduced four 'key entry criteria' questions to establish if a company had a youth entry point. In addition, we made some scoring criteria adjustments, and further clarification of examples. Specific scoring examples and discrepancies were discussed and resolved. Peter then repeated the analysis of the 20 companies whilst a small number were sample checked.

4. The research team met a final time and agreed that the scoring matrix was now consistent between raters, appropriate and proportionate for use. A total sample of the 50 pilot company websites (including the initial 20) were then surveyed against the now refined scoring matrix and questions. This process aimed to ensure that the survey questions and scoring was reliable and robust.

For the main body of research, we followed the same process as above with the addition of three other young researchers; Alex, Chris and Lisa. We went through the same process of sample checking, levelling and discussion around the criteria and scoring. In this latest round of research, we had two young peer researchers, Peter and Liam, and carried out a levelling exercise too.

## Matrix themes

Questions were grouped into five category headings, Key Entry Criteria, Candidate Journey, Support, Employer Brand and Overall Quality.

### Key Entry Criteria

The purpose of the Key Entry Criteria was to better assess whether companies are immediately accessible for young people. For example, a company has at least one entry point for young people or has a mobile friendly website. In addition, if the key entry point of a jobs/careers page did not exist, or if no vacancies were currently available, companies would subsequently score zero for questions pertaining to the quality and clarity of job descriptions and the application process, as it was not possible to assess this. In this case, an organisation may still be scored on these key entry criteria which would provide an indication of their accessibility for young people.

For this category, where the questions relate to a simple presence or absence of a capability or feature then a score of 5 was applied to 'Yes' and 0 to 'No'. For example: Was the job section mobile friendly? This category contained 4 items and a maximum total score of 20. Scores for Key Entry Criteria were assessed separately to the total score obtained across the subsequent four categories.

For each question under the remaining four categories assessed, scoring ranged from 0 – not evident or missing to 5 – evident and well presented with examples. As previously described, each question had specific scoring criteria and examples against which it was assessed. For example, the question 'Is the application process and key stages clearly identified?' where 0 = No job section and/or no job adverts to 5 = Step by step, timings, next steps and opportunities for feedback. The maximum total score for the four categories was 95.

### Candidate Journey

This category contained four items and was concerned with a young person's experience of the process of finding, identifying and applying for jobs online. The maximum total score for this category was 20.

### Support

This category contained seven items and was concerned with the availability, clarity and accessibility of content and information regarding the role, stages of the application process, guidance for applicants, and potential progression opportunities. The maximum total score for this category was 35.

### Employer Brand

This category contained six items and was concerned with content that provides information to the candidate about the organisations' mission, purpose and values, their attitude towards equality and diversity, and the experiences of employees and customers. The maximum total score for this category was 30.

### Overall Quality

This category contained two items and was concerned with the overall quality of the website and consistency of the organisations' brand across all parts of their website, including their main site and vacancy and application pages. The maximum total score for this category was 10.

## The results

The table below shows where an adequate score (an average score of 2 for Candidate Journey and 3 or more for Support and Employer Brand) has been achieved and would meet the minimum standard expected by young people (not necessarily attractive and generally using generic statements).

	Candidate Journey	Support	Employer Brand
Retail	78%	52%	13%
Manufacturing and Engineering	78%	27%	15%
Transport and Logistics	73%	36%	15%
Leisure and Hospitality	69%	56%	26%
Care	68%	48%	36%
Construction	70%	0%	29%

### The biggest areas for improvement are Support content and Employer Brand.

The table below shows where a company excelled (an average score of 4 or above for each question) and typically exceeding a young person's expectations (giving specific examples and evidence of how to make a good application and evidence that the company lives its values).

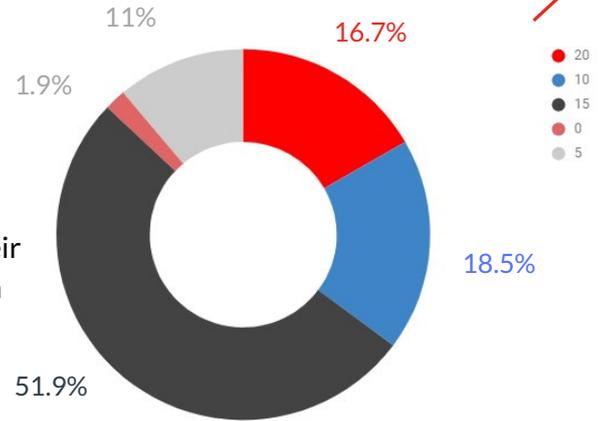
	Candidate Journey	Support	Employer Brand
Retail	4%	0%	0%
Manufacturing and Engineering	3%	0%	3%
Transport and Logistics	0%	0%	10%
Leisure and Hospitality	4%	0%	13%
Care	4%	0%	4%
Construction	8%	0%	8%

**These results show that businesses do not support inexperienced young people in the job application process. There are very few companies that have a recruitment process that meets or exceeds a young person's expectations and very few that promote themselves as an employer of choice.**

**This represents an opportunity for those that choose to get it right.**

### Total scores and key entry criteria

8 companies scored zero on Key Entry Criteria, indicating that they did not fulfill any of the key criteria for young people to attract them to apply for employment opportunities, such as being mobile friendly or having obvious youth employment opportunities displayed on their website. Conversely, 31 companies received the maximum score of 20 for this section, indicating that they are open, available and accessible to young people.



This diagram shows the key entry criteria results.

**To effectively attract young people a score in the upper quartile, 70 or above, would be required. Only 7 companies achieved this.**

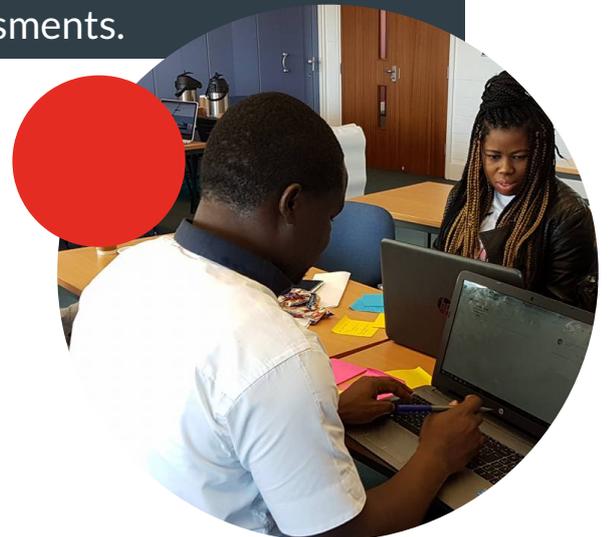
Total scores for the remaining four themes ranged from 0 to 74 out of 95. Only seven companies achieved scores greater than 70, whilst just under a third (49) of the companies assessed scored between 50 and 69. Conversely, 17% companies achieved a score less than 25, indicating that they are performing poorly in meeting the key themes identified as important to young people during their job search. While fifty-six (37%) of the companies assessed performed moderately well to very well across these key themes, scoring 50 or more out of 95. 95 companies (63%) did not sufficiently demonstrate overall that they were open to or currently offer employment opportunities specifically for young people.

Conversely, 53 companies (35%) scored 2 or less for every question in this section. Of these, 16 companies (11%) scored zero. These companies therefore failed to meet young people's expectations for their journey as potential applicants.

A website only has seconds to capture the interest of its visitors so the application process needs to be accessible in minutes. Our peer researchers spent a minimum of 20 minutes per website when completing the assessments.

### Candidate Journey

Overall, the 150 companies assessed performed very poorly for Candidate Journey, with a 'average' mean score of 9 out of 20 (Mode = 11). Only six companies (4%) scored 4 or 5 for every question, indicating that their Candidate Journey was very good or excellent. These companies would meet a young person's expectations for the use of technology, functionality and ease of use.



## Support

Overall, more companies performed poorly on the Support category than any other (Mean = 15, Mode = 0). Only 54 companies (36%) scored 3 or above for all the Support questions, with no companies scoring 4 or 5 on every question representing good or excellent scores. 42 companies (28%) scored 2 or less for every question, while 22 companies (15%) scored zero, indicating that overall, Support for young people as potential candidates was poor or missing.

This is a shocking revelation and reflects poorly on the business community; this lack of information and clarity is likely to have a negative impact on an experienced, older candidate let alone a young person.

In recent research done by the **Prince's Trust** the topic of wellbeing on applying for jobs was explored.

Based on feedback from our workshops it was clear that there are problems with:

- Lack of clear statements and explanation of what skills and attributes are being looked for
- Lack of explanation of the application process and timescales
- A lack of commitment to provide feedback or communicate during the process.

The negative consequences of this represents a reputational risk for the company and contributes to the loss of confidence and self-esteem as candidates apply for jobs with no feedback.

Further investigation showed that there is a problem with ownership, with responsibility falling typically between HR, Marketing and IT with no one accountable. See our blog on '**who owns the job section?**'

**The best companies recognise that inexperienced young people need to be supported to make a good application rather than apply the hurdles and obstacles used to test or filter out experienced candidates.**

## Employer Brand

Overall, only 7% performed strongly on Employer Brand (Mean = 11.6, Mode = 13). Interestingly, the scores were pretty evenly spread across the middle ground with few excelling.

It was clear that employers are not fully aware of the criteria that young people apply when choosing an employer that they might wish to work for, particularly with regard to equality and diversity. This is crucially important when we consider the results of the earlier focus groups, during which young people rated diversity and equal opportunities in the top three things that they look for in an employer.

**Put simply a business should ask themselves - “Am I confident that my company is represented online the way I would want?”**

## Quality

Although this final theme was only comprised of two items, it provides an indication of the overall quality of the website with regard to spelling, grammar, formatting, updates and functionality; and the consistency of the company’s job pages with the rest of the site. Overall the companies assessed were split on overall quality scores, one hundred and nine companies (73%) scored 4 or 5 for both items while twenty-nine companies (19%) scored 2 or less for both items.

It was noted that often job pages and/or the online application pages are somewhat neglected, such that, in the worst cases, they appear to be a different website. Common problems include: branding that is not present, old, or inconsistent with the rest of the site, a greater frequency of spelling, grammatical and formatting errors and problems, overuse of jargon and complicated language, and links or pages that are broken, missing or not recently updated.

These seemingly innocuous factors such as formatting and consistency with the main site may appear to not hold much weight for a young person searching for employment opportunities. However, young people will automatically assess these pages in reference to their expectations for ease of use, functionality and clarity of both the company and the application process. If these initial impressions are negative and expectations are not met, young people may judge that this is a company they do not want to work for, and will quickly move on elsewhere. Businesses may inadvertently be missing out on young talent if they do not pay attention to these details.

## Conclusion

Only seven companies achieved scores greater than 70, whilst just under a third (49) of the companies assessed scored between 50 and 69. A website only has seconds to capture the interest of its visitors so the application process needs to be accessible in minutes. Anyone scoring less than 70 is likely to be providing multiple opportunities for candidates to lose interest or bounce out.

Only 7% of businesses across six market sectors exceeded young people's expectation when it came to talking about their business and its culture. Most failed to effectively promote themselves (remember young people have a criteria in mind when reviewing a company's website).

When it came to providing support during the application process, only 36% achieved an adequate level. This included the use of plain English and a clear explanation of skills required. However, no company excelled in this area and many failed to make commitments with regards to application timescales and the availability of feedback.

## Summary

- Promoting a company's culture and purpose online supports the value proposition to customers and engagement with existing employees
- There was a correlation that companies who had a youth entry point generally had a better job section overall
- It is worth noting that it would not be unreasonable to assume the results apply to all discerning candidates not just young people
- There are so few companies who are meeting young people's expectations that to get it right represents a unique opportunity to differentiate in a tightening labour market

**We believe that if a business wants to successfully attract a potential employee then they need to consider the candidate as a customer.**

## What next?

The research is well placed to bridge the gap, between initiatives working with young people and business.

Access Generation are currently engaging with businesses and providing support to help businesses benefit from recruiting from a diverse range of young people.

We are currently focussed on the following;

- Further educate and support businesses through events and training workshops
- Continue to produce content online to share guidance and insights with businesses
- Explore opportunities to collaborate and work with young people to disseminate our support through third parties
- Continue to signpost initiatives with businesses to bridge the gap between the world of work and young people.

### Acknowledgement

Thank you to our sponsor, Workvine, and our young peer researchers, Peter Colley, and Liam Tarry.



*"If companies have opportunities for young people to gain work they need to make them more visible."*

**Liam, young peer researcher**



# Our Sponsors commentary

With circa 1m young adults not in work, education, employment or training, or just simply off the statistical radar, you begin to wonder what the noise is about when you hear of staff shortages in business.

What are the barriers to employment for young people? The reasons are complex linking back to education, housing and social change but there is another softer reason that can so easily be changed.

In our research with Access Generation we got young people to get involved to look at companies job adverts, websites and application processes and measure them against each other and by industry sector.

The results are clear to see....

Companies are putting up barriers that stop young people from applying for jobs, they assume young people have the experience and know how to work out how to apply and often use old fashioned processes from the analogue days.

We forget that these youngsters are digitally experienced by the age of 10 and experts by the age of 16. They want mobile-friendly application processes, one click forms, a progress monitor and they also want to be communicated with during and after they have applied. If they are lucky the 'Dear John' email might come several weeks later but they really want some meaningful feedback whether they are suitable for the job.

The findings in the report clearly show there is room for improvement on all fronts and it doesn't take much or cost too much to remedy the situation. Hopefully if we can share this information with you via the webinars and workshops you can help bring these young people onboard and into your business because they want to come in if you will let them.

**Adrian Hobbs**  
Executive Director, Workvine



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## Get involved

If you want to be included in the research, attend a workshop seminar or speak to us further please call Chris Tarry on 07976403301 or email [chris.tarry@accessgeneration.co.uk](mailto:chris.tarry@accessgeneration.co.uk)

For more information visit  
[www.accessgeneration.co.uk](http://www.accessgeneration.co.uk)

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