

# e-Recruitment Developments

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Published by:

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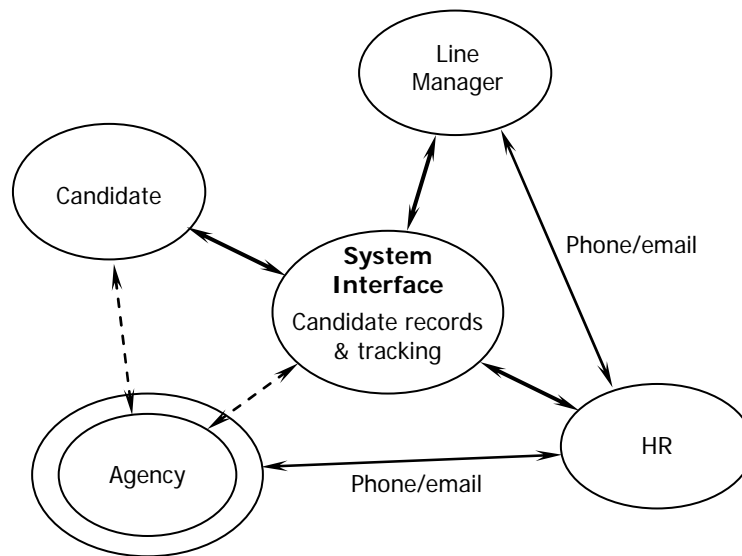
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## Introduction

The Internet has caused the largest change to the recruitment landscape in the past decade acting as a conduit between employers and job seekers. Technology has enabled corporate websites, suppliers and job seekers to become more sophisticated, interactive and to connect globally 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Landscape of e-recruitment



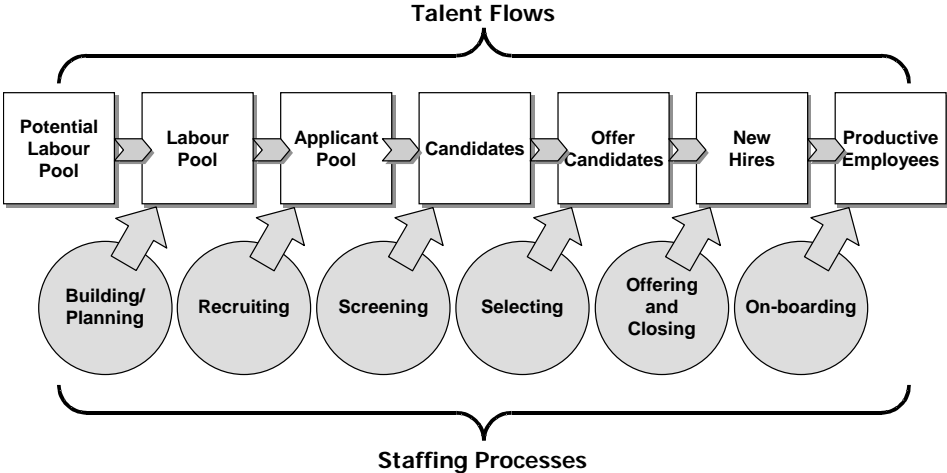
Source: IES, 2003

This briefing paper for IES members weaves together a summary of what IES knows about e-recruitment (or online recruitment, internet recruitment, web-based recruiting) based upon its own research together with collection of key literature and other published research.

Figure 2 illustrates the staffing process and talent flows involved in recruiting staff, and e-recruitment can be involved in any or all of the main processes. The remainder of this paper:

- provides the reader with a backdrop to e-recruitment: trends and key drivers
- summarises the key issues – attraction, selection and candidate management
- outlines the main benefits – costs, speed, access, and reputation and brand
- outlines the disadvantages and challenges – in the short and longer term
- discusses managing the process – roles and integration
- gives concluding thoughts and messages.

Figure 2: Staffing processes and talent flows



Source: Boudreau and Ramstad (2001)

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# The Journey: Trends and Drivers

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## Trends

There has been a steady rise in online recruitment during recent years and there have been a number of research studies that have measured employer take up and progress. Most Global 500 companies now use some form of online recruitment (1). Taleo research found that in 2003: 93 per cent of Global 500 companies were using e-recruitment; 96 per cent of those in Asia, 94 per cent in Europe and 96 per cent in America (28). Another key development (28) is the big increase in the proportion of companies that only allow applicants to apply online for jobs advertised on a corporate careers website (from 27 per cent in 2000 to 77 per cent in 2005).

In Europe, take-up of online recruitment methods substantially increased between 2001 and 2004, from just over 40 per cent of organisations to over 70 per cent (38). In the UK specifically, take-up by companies has seen the same general upward trend (2). In 2002, the percentage of organisations using their websites to advertise jobs was 72, increasing to 93 per cent by 2005.

Research conducted in the USA and Canada (7) shows that large firms are more likely to have their own websites than smaller ones. For example, by 2002, ninety per cent of large corporations in the USA were using net-based recruitment (33). However, the Canadian research indicated that – where they were aware of the Internet and had websites – small firms used their sites to advertise vacancies to the same extent as large firms. Overall, it appeared that large firms had the advantage over small firms because they were more likely to have their own websites.

A global survey of top companies in 2002 (28) identified the organisations that used corporate websites to recruit, by sector. There was a large range, from 100 per cent adoption in the healthcare sector to 84 per cent of companies in the utilities sector. Rather surprisingly, this survey reported that 98 percent of companies in the manufacturing sector used online recruitment compared with only 87 percent of companies in the financial sector.

EPSO (39) reports that online applications are widely accepted across European civil-service organisations. More than in many other sectors, it seems that complex, multi-stage recruitment processes are frequently in place, including pre-selection and/or testing electronically.

There are sectoral differences in the use of e-recruitment in the UK and Ireland. Among the manufacturing and production sector, 63 per cent of companies in a CIPD survey (4) included information about vacancies on their own websites. For the

voluntary and community sector (VCS) the percentage was 82 per cent; for the private sector it was 71 per cent and for the public sector, 85 per cent. In terms of putting vacancy information onto commercial websites, the figures were 29 per cent for the manufacturing and production sector, 42 per cent for the VCS and 43 per cent among the private and public sectors.

Recent research by the IRS (6) of FTSE 100 companies provides insight into where organisations are actually focusing their 'e-activities'. Currently FTSE-100 companies approach online recruitment in one of three ways:

1. They don't use it at all.
2. They use it to enhance the recruitment process – *eg* to provide information on the organisation, general careers or advertise job vacancies.
3. They have developed a dedicated part of their website, which is a central hub for online recruitment activities – adverts, online applications and the facility to create candidate profiles.

In addition, one in 10 FTSE-100 companies that have dedicated recruitment sites are outsourcing the process to third parties – to develop online adverts, post jobs, filter candidates and conduct pre-screening tests.

### Drivers

IES research in 2003 (30) looked at the trends and practice in e-recruitment and found the key drivers were to:

- improve corporate image and profile
- reduce recruitment costs
- reduce administrative burden
- employ better tools for the recruitment team.

A forthcoming Irish study conducted by the Public Appointments Service shows that in their context, the ability to target a wider and more diverse pool of candidates is a key driver. This is likely to reflect, in some cases, skills shortages or the shift in job seekers' search strategies and/or preferences as a result of increased access to the Internet. It may also reflect the importance employers now place on aligning and embedding diversity policies in recruitment practice. Online recruitment clearly has the potential to target a diverse range of candidates, including those from ethnic backgrounds (3).



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# Attraction, Selection and Candidate Management

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## Attraction

Attraction is now seen as a critical aspect of the recruitment process and intrinsically linked to employer branding and reputation. Research suggests that online recruitment methods are viewed as one of the most effective attraction methods along with newspaper advertising (8). There are no space constraints when advertising online, companies can develop comprehensive adverts with links to job descriptions and person specifications. Online recruitment can *'pass far more information in a much more dynamic and consistent fashion to candidates than was the case in the past'* (34). Online recruitment can be both on employers' own websites and on commercial job boards (8). Many employers favour industry-specific sites/job boards to general job boards, as they believe it enables them to identify more suitable candidates, because specialist boards tap into a self-defining market (5).

Surveys (27, 4) suggest that, at least where there is a corporate internet, posting of vacancies is usual practice. While almost all of the organisations in a 2005 IES audit of the Times Top 100 graduate employers had recruitment websites (31), not all recruitment processes were restricted to online applications, with 25 per cent of organisations accepting alternatives such as printed and posted applications, CVs with covering letters. In the UK, according to IRS (6), two-thirds of online recruiters rely on CVs and covering letters rather than use their own application forms. The IRS found the three main methods of application are:

1. application form and CV
2. CV submission, supplemented with extra information
3. online application form only.

Recent CIPD research (4) indicates that in the UK employers' use of their own websites for job posting is more than double that of commercial webs. However, their use of commercial sites also increased from 15 per cent to 40 per cent over the 12 months between 2003 and 2004. Almost three quarters of organisations accept candidates' applications – CVs and/or letters of application emailed as attachments; one half accepted application forms via email and only one third required application forms to be completed online. These findings are similar to the 2003 IES study (27) where over two thirds (67 per cent) used online application forms. Organisations are, however, beginning to recognise the benefit of using e-application forms. This enables a structured format and the use of screening software (5) to deal with the growing

volumes of applications received. Most sites now include verification statements to ensure that online applications are authentic (6).

Of occupational groups, graduates still receive the most attention in e-recruitment (6). Online recruitment is now the norm for more than two-thirds of organisations that recruit graduates (8). This is largely driven by the demand from graduates and the need to process large numbers of applications according to precise entry criteria. Employers use their corporate websites to promote their brand and themselves as an employer of choice in the war for talent through. IES research (31) looked at how major UK employers approach graduate recruitment and selection, and the research included an audit of corporate websites. The audit showed that most of the Times Top 100 employers have corporate recruitment websites, and have moved, or are moving towards, online recruitment as their main method of attracting talent.

Online recruitment in the UK is particularly strong for administrative, secretarial, technical, and services related jobs (4). It is currently the third most used recruitment method for jobs of these types.

### Selection and assessment

Online pre-screening tools enable recruiters to filter out suitable applications from the unsuitable on the basis of self-administered tests or questionnaires. This allows recruiters to focus time and attention on candidates that match the vacancy criteria (17). Recent research by the IRS (18; 6) found that only 13 per cent of FTSE 100 organisations that use online recruitment include some kinds of screening question, such as eligibility to work in the UK or education level achieved. This ensures that applicants satisfy necessary pre-conditions and incorrect answers often lead to individuals being immediately screened out of the application process. Chiumento and Effective Resources found that only two per cent of companies in the UK already had computerised CV screening in place, while 9 per cent were considering installing such software. They also found only 12.5 per cent of recruitment agencies use computerised screening, although three-quarters were considering such investment.

Only a minority of organisations are using online screening tools and even fewer administer online tests (7). There appears some reluctance and nervousness regarding issues of security and confidentiality particularly whether the 'correct' person is taking the test (6). There are other causes for concern, particularly about validity and integrity of online testing (19). The issues and challenges of supervision in psychometric testing are not restricted to online testing, as supervision is seen as a standard condition for the administration of tests generally. However, the advantage of testing using the Internet lies in its lack of geographical or temporal constraint. Furthermore, for large-scale recruitment, online testing offers the benefit of filtering out unsuitable applicants at an early stage (20). With aptitude and ability tests, supervised, standard conditions are seen as necessary. In unsupervised conditions,

candidates may confer on answers, and noise and other factors cannot be controlled for. There is the possibility of deploying an 'honesty contract' as part of the selection process (31). If the candidate fakes the selection process, there is a real risk that s/he will struggle in the job.

Research (20) using a sample of high-stake candidates indicates that only a small proportion of them faked in the unsupervised condition, but it appeared that only certain personality types did so. Furthermore, the frequency of false negatives can be kept within acceptable risk levels by careful monitoring of data and using acceptable cut-off scores. Nevertheless, many organisations still favour the requirement for the candidate to repeat the performance under supervision at a second stage of the process (30; 31).

Many personality instruments used in screening applicants can now be administered securely online with password-protected access. Recent research (21) was conducted to determine whether there was any difference between online, unsupervised and offline, supervised personality testing. Using a sample of 322 managers, the research found only small differences in mean scale score profiles, thus there was no difference between online, unsupervised and offline, supervised testing conditions. Test-takers' reactions were also measured and it was found that 96 per cent did not seek others' opinions and 96 per cent would not ask for help in the future.

Other research (22) found that applicants who completed paper-based application forms displayed higher social desirability scores than those who completed the application form on a computer. This implies that people who complete application forms on computers may fake their answers less than those who complete them on paper. In practice, recruiters are likely to use computer-based application forms if they better reflect candidates' knowledge, skills and abilities.

## Candidate Management and Onboarding

Job seekers have become more computer literate and the growth of broadband makes web surfing for jobs easier and cheaper (5). Job seekers can have more complex interactions with employers online and employers are empowered to communicate more effectively with candidates (9; 6). Employers are aware that candidates' experiences of their recruitment process have real business implications, not only in terms of recruitment, but also in relation to promoting their brand and reputation. There is a danger of receiving negative reactions from candidates if their application is rejected too soon and this in turn can risk damaging the employer brand as it may appear that their application has not been given careful consideration before being rejected. Many consider 'candidate management' a high priority and critical to the recruitment process.

Many organisations have begun to view candidates as customers and try to deliver a positive experience of their organisation through the recruitment process. E-recruitment has been embraced by job seekers and recruitment agencies. According to the UK National Online Recruitment Survey (3), 45 per cent of job seekers use the Internet as their preferred method of job searching, and 75 per cent have applied for a job online. Furthermore, contrary to the opinion that younger graduate job seekers are using the Internet, results also show more experienced candidates are using it to search for jobs. In 2005, the average online job seeker had 13.2 years experience; in 2002 they had an average of 10.2 years.

Recent advances in technology allow candidates to create and maintain a personal profile on a company's website. The applicant can access it and attach it to job positions as opportunities open. According to research by the IRS (6), two thirds of the FTSE-100 companies that use their own websites to recruit staff, now ask potential applicants to register with them and create their own candidate profile. This is the most significant change to online recruitment since 2002. Benefits to the candidate include the fact that their profile is searchable on a range of criteria and having their skill-sets easily available to employers. Although creating and maintaining profiles may be time consuming, serious job seekers should not be deterred in the short term.

Moving to recruitment online enables organisations to improve early communication via candidate management long before the application stage and to improve onboarding activities later downstream. Again, there is a danger of receiving negative reactions from candidates if their application is rejected too soon and this in turn can risk damaging the employer brand as it may appear that their application has not been given careful consideration before being rejected. However, unless organisations have integrated HR and recruitment systems the number of activities new recruits can complete online before joining will be restricted. Fully integrated systems can further reduce the administrative burden immediately before, and during, the induction process.

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## Benefits

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The Internet provides access 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and reaches a global audience (13). Employers have embraced online recruitment with considerable enthusiasm. However, evaluation of the business benefits is largely confined to input and output measures. Some benefits of moving to online recruitment are more amenable to measurement than others, typically 'hard' measures, for example, costs. However, costs also can be a driver, therefore distinguishing between the two can be difficult, as drivers and benefits are intrinsically linked. There follows summaries of key benefits, clustering around four themes.

### Reduced costs

The average job posting online costs around £250 compared with £5,000 for a quarter page in a national newspaper (9; 10). The administration burden to the HR department is also reduced (10; 11, 27). IES research (30) found 47 per cent of survey respondents used e-recruitment for streamlining recruitment and administration (27) and fifty-five per cent expected to reduce their use of other recruitment methods in the future. This finding is very similar to a Cranfield survey where 49 per cent of respondents also expected to reduce other recruitment methods in the next five years. Further cost savings can be achieved by reducing the spend on using recruitment agencies, which can be expensive.

### Faster processes

The Internet speeds up the front end of the recruitment process (37). Time to hire is reduced through immediate posting of jobs online and the ease of completing online application forms and attaching CVs to emails (9). Applications can be processed within minutes rather than weeks, saving companies and jobseekers valuable time. This is of particular value when some vacancies attract a very large volume of applications. The pre-selection process can be accelerated (and tailored to fit an organisation's needs) by sifting/filtering according to pre-determined criteria (12). Candidates can receive a quick, personal and direct response. In addition, their questions can be answered immediately and information is easily accessible to the organisation. Organisational data can also be updated quickly and efficiently in accordance with a company's changing recruiting needs (35). IES graduate research (31) also showed that case-study employers believed that online recruitment was beneficial in speeding up the front end of the process, by easing and improving the administration burden, and that graduates expected prompt attention.

## Wider access

Online advertising opens up a wider candidate pool – local, national and international – with a better chance of finding the right candidate (11). IES graduate research (31) concluded that online graduate recruitment has the potential to be fair and efficient. Major employers responded to the more diverse graduate pool by opening their doors to all graduates through the Internet and then letting their selection processes reduce the volume of applications. Another added benefit is that candidate information can be held on file for future openings (12). Having a common recruiting tool across business units allows more recruitment/applicant information, better sharing of best practice recruiting techniques, improved reporting and more line management/senior management engagement.

## Reputation and brand

The Internet has emerged as a powerful tool for promoting and reinforcing the corporate image, brand and reputation (27). Corporate websites are often used as a shop window in which to present the organisation as an employer of choice and may also give an indication of organisation's values and culture (11; 13). Increasingly, organisations are including other information on their recruitment websites, such as 'virtual tours' or 'a day in the life of' information about current employees, to give applicants a feel for what it would be like to work for the organisation. Evidence reported at an online recruitment conference in Sydney suggested that 80 per cent of those that visit a corporate website go to the careers page (29) which has real implications for how the organisation is viewed in relation to being an employer of choice. IES research (30) stated that by automating some or all aspects of the recruitment process, the brand is put to the test. As soon as a candidate applies for a job with the company, it is critical how they are treated – if they have a bad experience it will risk having a negative impact on the employer brand.

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## Disadvantages and Challenges

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### Applications: quantity versus quality

Online recruitment offers tangible business benefits. However, in such a mechanised process, particularly when a high volume of applications is received, organisations face a number of real challenges. Research (6) indicates that nearly one-third of employers surveyed have experienced significant problems with online recruitment. Of these, 74 per cent cited that it generated large numbers of unsuitable applicants; 35 per cent mentioned a difficulty reconciling online and offline processes and 32 per cent cited technical, IT-related problems. Litigation problems have also been reported in the press. For example, the Whirlpool Corporation had to pay \$65,000 to settle a claim lodged against it by the US Labor Department that the company had discriminated against a protected group. The unwanted growth of unsuitable candidates is borne out in other research (14; 15). An increased number of applications results in more time being spent screening CVs, because filtering out unsuitable candidates is very resource-intensive. Therefore receiving a higher volume of unsuitable applications risks negating some of the expected benefits (9). This screening challenge was described by Bartram (36) as needing to 'kiss even more frogs before finding the princes'.

### The personal touch

As e-recruitment becomes more of a processing factory, there is a danger that employers may lose the 'personal touch' (16) which may discourage certain applicants. IES research (31) found that employers were keen to maintain the personal touch as well as exploiting technology to attract and recruit graduates. It should also be remembered that some job seekers might not have ready access to the Internet. Others, who are less familiar with IT, may also be deterred if they encounter technical difficulties unsupported. Using the Internet to attract new recruits may therefore not suit all job seekers or be appropriate for filling all vacancies and could result in restricting the potential candidate pool (13).

### Diversity

IES research (31) found that the Times Top 100 employers invested considerable time and effort to ensure they did not discriminate against the growing number of graduates entering the wider and more diverse talent pool. However by adopting crude proxies such as degree class or UCAS points to reduce the large volumes of applications they risk excluding many graduates who enter HE via different routes.

This has particular implications for graduates from non-traditional educational backgrounds such as certain ethnic minority groups. Black students are known to be more likely to enter HE without A levels than white, Asian or other ethnic minority groups, entering via access course qualifications. Many older students also enter HE without formal qualifications (32).

The increasing take up and popularity of online recruitment can also risk discriminating against disabled candidates if employers are unaware of the implications of the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995 for online recruitment (17). Employers must ensure person with disabilities can apply for a job by another medium if online methods are not accessible (6). Little attention has been paid to general website accessibility, with few employers aware of such issues.

Recruiters may lose female candidates because of poorly designed recruitment systems, according to Barkers and City University (15). They found that 25 per cent of graduate recruiters have seen a drop in female applicants since moving to an online process. Teo and Lim (40) also found a gender bias suggesting that men may prefer to use the Internet more than women to search for jobs. Overall results indicated that females were more uncomfortable than males with all aspects of the online application process and were thus more likely to select themselves out (15). The lack of a personal touch also appeared to put females off. However contrary recent evidence comes from the Irish Civil Service (Leavy *et al.*, 41). No differences were found between a paper-based system for clerical/administrative appointments in 2001 and an online system in 2003, there was no drop off in female applicants.

## Alignment

There can also be tensions when operating online and offline systems in tandem for the same vacancies, as the speed of the Internet may not be being fully exploited because of the additional time required to receive and process paper-based applications. Other real challenges for organisations can result from a lack of HR knowledge of operating e-based recruitment and inflexible software (11). Aligning and integrating online recruitment with other HR management systems, particularly in terms of compatibility and flexibility can also be problematic. This is especially true if organisations are reliant on their supplier's flexibility to modify their offerings.



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## Concluding Thoughts and Messages

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In conclusion, organisations currently focus most of their attention and efforts at the front end of the recruitment process rather than use the Internet in more sophisticated ways or as an intelligent device. Most use it to provide and promote information about the company, advertise positions and receive CVs electronically, whereas only a few actually use it search, screen or test candidates. Many of the challenges described earlier appear to be rather less to do with technology and more to do with fully exploiting existing systems. This paper has explored key aspects of the recruitment journey for consideration by those who may be contemplating e-recruitment or those who are already further down the road and have already moved recruitment online. There follow seven key messages for employers.

### Consult with all stakeholders

- to ensure all business needs are considered – before and after
- to develop fit for purpose assessment measures – to inform the business and line
- to learn from earlier experiences – in house and external
- to understand roles and boundaries – HR, the line and external providers
- to ensure the business case is sustainable – in the short and longer term – to justify not just the cost saving but candidate enhancing measures.

### Consider the value of investing in integrated HR and recruitment systems

- To facilitate career development and internal resourcing
- To meet the challenges of talent management
- To provide an end to end process from attraction through to onboarding
- To reduce costs, speed the process and manage the relationship with candidates

### Making application easier

- Consider the application process from the users' perspective
- Offer interactive kiosks - to internal and external applicants

- Review online application forms - to ensure they are user friendly and relevant to job vacancies
- Retain the personal touch – via support lines or open days

## Improve selection

- By reducing risks of cheating – develop tests that ensure each individual receives a unique set or retest
- By ensuring criteria is robust and fit for purpose – bias free
- By understanding whether pressure points are IT or HR process limitations
- By using criteria that does not compromise other corporate policies – such as diversity
- By working in partnership with others – systems providers and those offering assessment exercises
- By encouraging candidates to de-select – provide realistic information

## Evaluate and measure

- To demonstrate the business case and to inform reviews and improvements – before during and after
- To improve evaluation by linking performance downstream with recruitment data
- To provide status reports to hiring managers
- To assess candidates' experiences - from attraction through to onboarding

## Gather candidate feedback

- To keep in touch with the diverse needs and preferences of your target recruitment pool
- To measure user friendliness and help identify basic problems and ease of navigation
- To help quantify what candidates actually think about the careers site – online 'suggestion-box'
- To determine what sorts of candidates are dropping out, at what stage and why
- To minimise missing talent as a result of being too focused on processing efficiencies and losing personal contact with applicants

## Make effective sourcing decisions

- Understand the costs of developing systems in house.
- Consider which parts of the process are suitable for outsourcing.
- Establish the cost of in-house provision and compare it with an external provider.
- Consider whether the technology offered by a supplier is necessary to have and better than you can provide internally.
- Ensure any externally provided systems are flexible enough to adapt to changing business needs before committing.

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