



Bright Network
**10 year
impact
report**

10 years of empowering the workforce of tomorrow

A note from our founder

Talent is everywhere, opportunity is not. This is the fundamental belief that led us to start Bright Network from a tiny office in 2013.

10 years ago, the way employers connected with emerging talent was just not working. Thousands of jobs were left vacant, whilst thousands of bright graduates struggled with understanding what careers they should go into and how to connect with the best firms. We strive every day to unlock these doors of opportunity and, at the same time, help our employer partners find the diverse talent they need for their organisations.

Our guiding principles of using data to make advice more personalised, believing in our members' potential and building a strong community have unleashed young talent across the UK to go further, aim higher and achieve more.

With 900,000 members on the network, 300+ employer partners and hundreds of thousands of connections made, the work we continue to do when it comes to increasing social mobility and building a diverse workforce has really shifted the dial for the individuals, firms and the UK.

From making badges at early events, to releasing our first AI-led matching technology, it really has been quite the journey! Personally, my five highlights have been:

- 1 Building our team from just me in 2013 to 120+ now
- 2 Raising our first round of venture capital in 2018 that allowed us to build deep proprietary technology that drives our personalised AI matching algorithms
- 3 Stepping up when the pandemic hit in 2020 and launching Internship Experience UK, which has delivered over one million hours of learning to 130,000+ of our members
- 4 Launching Bright Network Technology Academy in 2021 to solve the technology skills and diversity crisis
- 5 Going international by launching in Germany in 2022



We have always sought to be innovators, looking forward and always focusing on how we can do more for our members. By always putting our members first, it's meant that we have the very best talent for our employer partners. The one thing we know is that change is the only constant and that the landscape will continue to transform. I am certain that with the values that got us here (Will to Win, Trusted to Deliver, Growth Mindset) we are well-equipped for whatever the future may hold.

None of this can be achieved without you. If you are a client, a member or one of the Bright Network team, thank you so much. We have come a long way since 2013 and we really would not be here without you.

We are nothing but excited about the road ahead.

James Uffindell

■ **James Uffindell**
CEO & Founder, **Bright Network**



Looking back 2013 – 2023

How a start-up with a bold vision became the UK's number 1 platform for the workforce of tomorrow.

10 years of impact in early careers recruitment

A decade of delivering impact for our members and clients.

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Creating the UK's number 1 early talent platform

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Using data to power personalisation at scale

How we rejected 'Spray and Pray' and harnessed data and technology to match members with employers.

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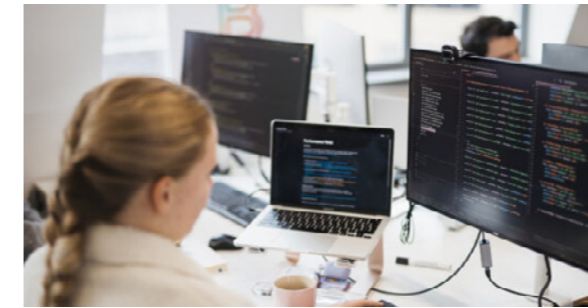
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10 years of impact in early careers recruitment

“You would often go to events and feel like you didn’t get much from them – we wouldn’t recruit anyone or make any good contacts for the future. At Bright Network events, you’d always meet really good quality students.”

Gillian Bray
Alfa



“I found this event even more personal and inspiring than others I had been to. Hearing from those who had achieved so much gave me a great sense of purpose and drive to achieve my best.”

Future Leaders 2016 attendee

2013

Bright Network launches #generationbright

1st multi-employer networking event **FESTIVAL**

From **1,500** attendees in 2013 to **4,000** attendees in 2023

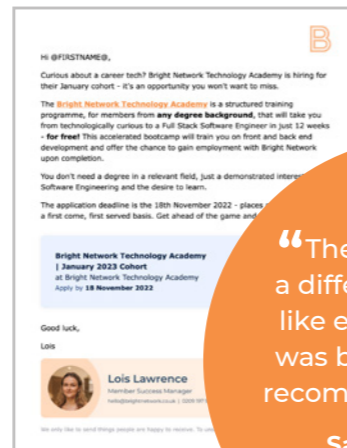


BRIGHT NETWORK FESTIVAL

2014

Bright Network **on campus**: scaling the network across the UK

Members and employers are connected through hyper-targeted emails



“These always made a difference and it felt like each opportunity was being specifically recommended to me.”

Sam Cranswick
University of Leicester Graduate

50k members



2015

Careers fairs are re-invented with the first tailored events of their kind for ambitious females, Women in Leadership and Women in Finance

2016

Connecting STEM talent: first tech-tailored event, **Technology Top 150**

Mission drives first ever social mobility-focused event: **Future Leaders**

100k members

2018

Illuminate Community brings together industry voices for first of many knowledge-sharing events



200k members

From **13** employer voices to **200+** at Illuminate Conference in 2023



2017

Black heritage members experience their first personalised event, **Black Heritage Future Leaders**

Members manage their applications with new **Deadline Tracker**

“I used Bright Network every single day when I was looking for a job, especially the deadline tracker as it made everything so digestible.”

Ajibola Olagunju
Nottingham Trent University Graduate



2019

Ambitious female members lead our **International Women's Day** event as our Student Leadership Board



Members upskill through first e-learning academy platform of its kind

124,000 Academy modules completed since 2019

300k members

2020

Pandemic hits, Bright Network responds

"With **IEUK**, they've been able to see where there's a pain point and find a solution for their students and their clients. It's commendable."
Nofi Balogun
Lloyds Banking Group

Thinking Commercially podcast launches to teach crucial commercial awareness skills to members

Investment of **£200,000** into first free virtual Internship Experience of its kind



130,000 live attendees since launch

60,000 attendees who are first gen to go to uni



2023

900k members

Host biggest ever **FESTIVAL** with over **100** employers and **4,000** members attending

Bright Network Technology Academy receives training accreditation from Tech Skills



2021

Bright Network begins turning potential into capability with our coding bootcamp, **Bright Network Technology Academy**

600k members

Members forge their careers with our new **Career Path Tests**

Employers get full transparency and insight into campaign success with our proprietary **Talent Tracker** performance analytics tool



"The tracker is an incredibly useful tool – it's given us specific information and insights into the audience demographics we're gaining traction with, the likes of which we've never had before."
Anonymous response
Client Survey 2022

800k members

2022

Employers are empowered to drive their own campaigns through **targeted email self-serve** launch

100 employers sign our **Social Mobility Manifesto** committing to improving access for students from low opportunity backgrounds

Going international: **New platform** starts connecting **German members** with leading employers

30,000 German members on the platform since launch





Creating the UK's number 1 early talent platform

If you didn't have the fortune of coming from a privileged background 10 years ago, things were very different when starting your career search. Teams in the companies you applied to looked nothing like you, your parents couldn't introduce you to the right people and there was no easily accessible quality advice. Regardless of talent, the result was often settling for less, rather than aiming for your dream career.

Employers often treated diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) as a branding exercise at best, held back by lack of knowledge, lack of practical ways to deploy a strategy and track results and sometimes even by lack of genuine dedication across the organisation. There were pioneers at the forefront of change, but year after year, early careers teams continued to recruit similar profiles and struggled to shift the dial when it came to diversity.

Our solution was to create the widest national network across all universities and backgrounds and to open doors that otherwise would have been completely missed.

Bright Network membership

 **13%**
received free school meals

 **40%**
first gen to go to university

 **79%**
attended state school

 **58%**
non-Russell group university

 **937**
degrees represented

 **178**
UK universities represented



Breaking boundaries

We went beyond the traditionally narrow university approach to create the widest national network across all universities and backgrounds. By being able to easily cast their net wider, employers have been able to meet and hire an unprecedented breadth of highly engaged, diverse talent.

Over 12 million views on advice content across our member website.

Realising equity

Without the same connections and resources, many students found themselves struggling to know what they do with their careers and how to get there. We've led the way by going beyond offering all students the same opportunities, levelling the playing field to ensure that everyone has the same starting point. Since then, the market has galvanised around this approach.

We've made this possible with features like our Career Path Test, helping students without supportive networks, struggling to figure out their futures, to forge a path. Developed with psychologists and based on a huge dataset of our members, we saw confidence in those using it increase by 20%.

Our Internship Experience UK, the world's largest online internship experience, enabled students without access to work experience the chance to connect with and complete real work for leading employers.

We've increased non-Russell Group representation from 14% in 2014 to 58% in 2023.

Member story

James' story



■ **James Akinyemi**
Economics & Business Management graduate from University of Roehampton
Now working at **J.P. Morgan Private Bank** as an Associate – Client Advisor

➔ My Bright Network story started in my penultimate year at University where I was reading Economics and Business Management BSc. At the time I understood the difference that going to a typically prestigious 'target' university would make when trying to break into high finance, so not gaining admission to one made me realise I had to do more outside of university to reach my goals.

Understanding the difference paths in high finance, how to ace assessment centres, and how to leverage my personal network to find opportunities were areas I needed support with. Other friends at target universities would tell me about the access to information and personal networks they utilised to gain relevant experience.

Fortunately for me, I was introduced to Bright Network; Bright Network became the family referral advantage I never had!

Bright Network showed me the vast amount of firms out there, helped shape which area I wanted to go into through their sector guidance and set me up for success in applications with advice. Relevant content and regular commercial awareness updates were sent directly to me in a digestible way. As well as this, I was invited to a networking event at UBS, where I learnt more about wealth management and gained valuable industry connections. Through events like this, I understood the importance of maintaining an organic network, which I now use daily in my career.

I'm so grateful for the impact Bright Network has had and, as cheesy as this may sound, it is actually life-changing. There's a lot of things I couldn't have achieved without Bright Network.

It's inspired me to want to pay it forward and mentor the next generation of young talent, providing them with the same career support and guidance I also needed.

Bridging the gap

We observed that the disparity between what students from underrepresented backgrounds thought employers expected of them, compared to what employers actually wanted, was a barrier to confidence. Our central presence between 900,000 members and 300 leading employers has powered a virtuous loop that bridges this gap. Our annual research, focusing on the wants and needs of emerging talent surveys thousands of students each year. It's shared with hundreds of employers, driving tangible change in mindsets on varied topics such as social mobility or neurodiversity.

“For our members, we have created powerful tools and actionable content such as our Academy which prepares them for employer expectations and increases their career confidence.”



■ **Ben Triggs**
International Expansion Director
8 years at Bright Network



The annual research report really helps us understand the market we're going out into and shapes a lot of our discussions. Getting that student insight more broadly, rather than just through a Shell lens, is invaluable.”



■ **Natasha Dallyn**
Resourcing Lead
Shell



I'm super grateful to Bright Network and the way they help students, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds that don't necessarily have a role model or a parent in the corporate world.”



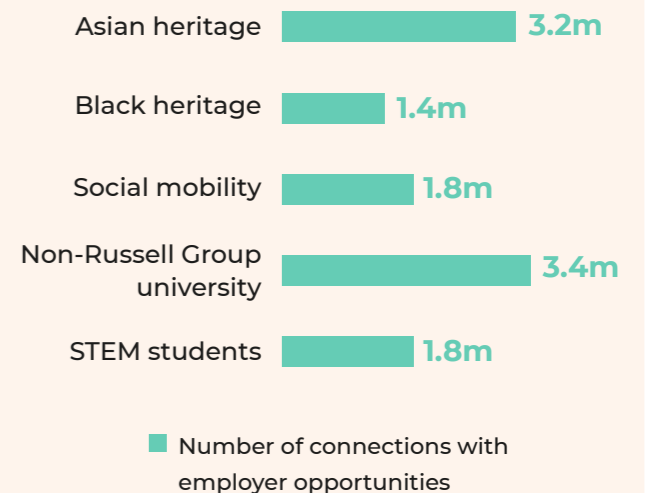
■ **Ali Ahued Herrera**
Business Consultant, **EY**
Northeastern University graduate

Shifting the dial

By opening access to members from all backgrounds and providing those powerful tools to support them, we've helped shift the dial when it comes to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.

Levelling the playing field

Over the last 10 years we've focused on supporting members who are underrepresented in graduate careers and enabled millions of connections with employer opportunities.



Illuminating ideas

The early careers industry is a competitive one and in years gone by, it felt as if employers worked in silo, trying to solve sector-wide challenges alone. Being right in the centre of the world of early careers opened the door for us to create a community of industry-leading voices and a place for employers to share their knowledge, challenges and insights.

“In 2018, we launched our Illuminate Community as an innovative homeplace for conversations, with hundreds of employers having shared best practices and novel approaches to DEIB since.”



■ **Johnson Adeyanju**
Account Director
5 years at
Bright Network 

We challenged the idea that everyone in the industry is competing – in fact, we’re all working towards the same goals. We believe that the better we work together, the faster we can build a more inclusive landscape for bright students and graduates.

Potential to capability

Feeling prepared for their career no matter their background extends to members who realise they might be interested in a future that isn’t in line with their degree choice. To support here, we created detailed career path guides and role profiles to steer members into career discovery. Specifically for members looking to jump into a career in tech, we launched Technology Academy in 2021 which takes predominantly non-Computer Science students with a passion for technology and transforms them into software developers.

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Enabling conversion

Thinking about hiring as an end-to-end process was key from the start. As some organisations drove to improve diversity at an attraction level, many weren’t set up internally to facilitate conversion of diverse candidates, which resulted in these candidates falling out at later stages.

Since 2015, we’ve used our wealth of data and close partnerships to help support employers here. We’ve advised on overcoming biases, adjusting screening and selection processes and training assessors to ensure fair and equal conversion for all backgrounds. Our coaching programmes have helped nurture diverse candidates through the assessment stages and allowed them to thrive, levelling the playing field for 25,000 members with our bespoke support and guidance.

25,000 members supported through assessment processes with bespoke coaching.



Employer story

Breaking boundaries with Police Now



■ **Clare Power**
Recruitment & Marketing Director
Police Now

⌚ How were you approaching DEIB 10 years ago?

Across the industry, work around DEIB was focused at the very front end of the talent acquisition pipeline, looking at getting more underrepresented groups interested in roles through marketing and attraction efforts. This meant thinking about things like what photography we should be using, how we could physically showcase different groups in these roles through things like case studies, and which partners we could work with to increase applications from certain groups at the beginning of the pipeline. It had good intentions, but was fairly cosmetic and light touch.

⌚ What’s changed for you since?

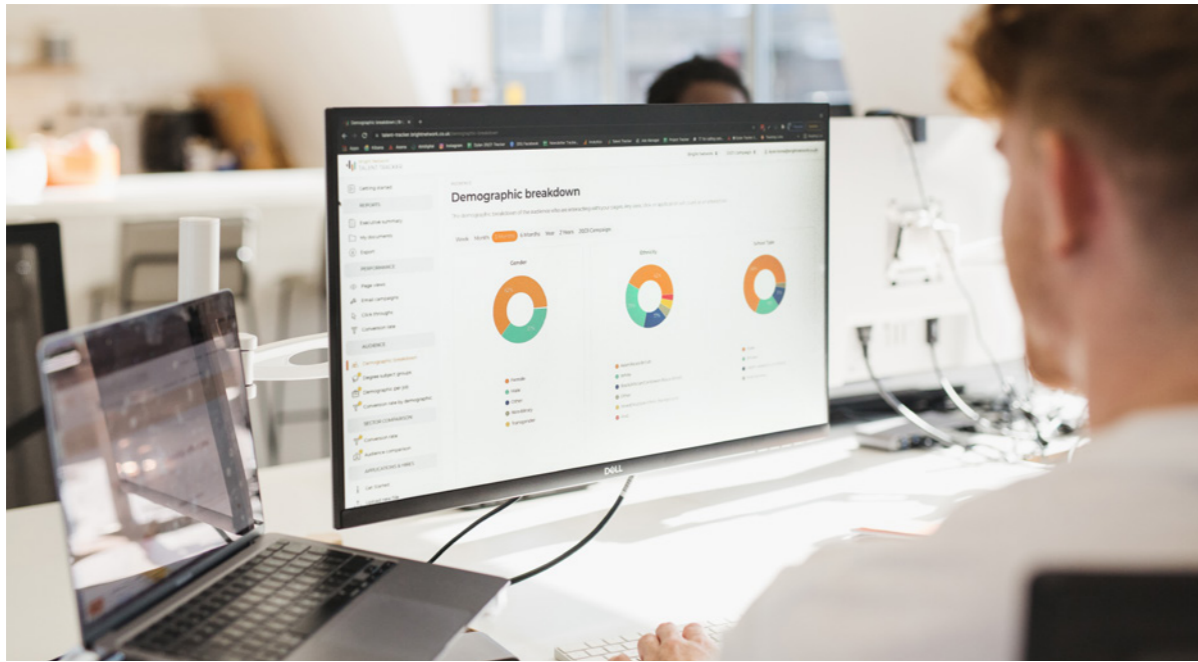
It’s become so much more holistic – it’s all about the removal of barriers, in every aspect in the candidate journey. From the point of them considering a career, submitting an application, securing an offer, starting a programme and then making sure it doesn’t stop there. We need to consider how people are supported in their learning and development. How is someone’s confidence built? How is their network being widened? How are we celebrating them and providing an inclusive environment for all to shine?

⌚ In what ways has data played an important part?

Using data is now crucial for showing where there may be problems in your process so you can address them in a timely manner and course correct. You need to be able to look at data points across the whole pipeline and identify the trends of poor conversion at different stages. Having really transparent access to how our campaigns with our partners are landing, like the Talent Tracker with Bright Network, further helps us validate what we’re seeing on our side.

⌚ How does employer access to data support in removing barriers for candidates?

Having access to strong data has also been essential for the intersectionality piece, particularly around gender and ethnicity. We now have a number of years of very rich data from recruitment through to programme performance that we can link together. We can make active changes that will support the success of everyone, irrespective of background and previous experiences, who join our programmes.



Using data to power personalisation at scale

The use of tech and data has come a long way from the bleak days for both students and employers 10 years ago. Students were inundated with untargeted spam they would rarely open and were forced to scroll through endless job boards, whilst employers would struggle with out of the box tools that couldn't track data in a way that allowed them to accurately measure success and meaningfully improve strategy. Sending mass campaigns meant trying to find a needle in a haystack and employers couldn't be confident that their efforts would be a success, even after they'd been delivered.

Our solution was to create a completely personalised experience, replacing quantity with quality and faceless job boards with a community.

Disrupting a broken market

10 years ago, it was all about mass advertising. Students combed through generic "1990's style" job boards and overly frequent, irrelevant emails to try and decipher the steps to their dream career. We were driven by what we wanted for our members and employer partners and pioneered a completely personalised experience, replacing quantity with quality and faceless job boards with a community.

Members could set up a profile to match their interests and receive only relevant opportunities, advice and content. They complete a Career Path Test and get recommended the sectors that suit them, follow the path-specific content to upskill and prepare and be served with the right jobs in those sectors immediately, by email and on their dashboard. They can attend events aligned to their interests and meet like-minded members of the community. This degree of personalisation has transformed the way emerging talent interacts with their career and set the standard of what they expect.

Member story

Sam's story



Sam Cranswick

Law graduate from University of Leicester

Now working at **Vodafone** in Strategic Partner Management

➔ I joined University of Leicester thinking I wanted to be a lawyer, but when I realised it wasn't really for me, I didn't know how to change direction. I had first come across Bright Network at my fresher's festival in 2015 and, the following summer, they reached out about an event based on my profile, so I started engaging.

My first ever Bright Network FESTIVAL was my first opportunity to explore a non-law career and after meeting lots of companies at the event, I secured an internship in a whole new industry. After this, I had various touchpoints with Bright Network, be that using the website and resources, attending wider events and more intimate workshops with guest speakers.

What stood out to me was the real personal touch to Bright Network and that I was proactively reached out to by the team. Be that one-on-one, digitally or at one of their events – you don't just feel like a number on a screen.

Their targeted emails were tailored to me and signed off by someone personally. These always made a difference and it felt like each opportunity was being specifically recommended to me.

For my graduate role, Vodafone wasn't even on my radar before, so it was amazing when the role was recommended to me by the Bright Network team.

My pathway wasn't a traditional one, but they showed me a way and made it feel possible.

Bright Network opens the doors that you otherwise wouldn't know were there.

Matching, not spamming

Sending campaigns about roles to many thousands was a typical thing for employers to do 10 years ago, but without suitable matching capabilities, students weren't getting a tailored experience and engagement was low. This resulted in digital campaigns requiring high input for low output.

“Leveraging 300 million data points across declared interests and observed behaviours, we began creating emails that members love receiving (opening them at 2x the industry average), with true personalisation like Sam enjoyed, at scale.”



■ **Ailsa Simpson**
VP Product

3 years at
Bright Network

We increased the accuracy of job recommendations on the platform too, thanks to our improved algorithm that considered member behaviours. Our weekly personalised newsletter serves a selection of relevant roles to engaged members and since applying our AI matching algorithms here, we've seen a 300% increase in click-through as members find more opportunities they like. Accurate matching instead of generic spamming meant members trusted us with their data, creating a truly virtuous circle.

300% more click-throughs for our employer partners when we applied our personalised AI matching algorithms to our newsletters

Complete transparency

Over the last 10 years, the work employers did to improve their hiring strategies were frustratingly hard to track for success. We knew that true change could only happen at scale when the impact that pioneers have become measurable and demonstrable. We've led the industry forward to a new digital age with the introduction of the first real-time, transparent set of analytics where employers can instantly see the results of their efforts in a self-serve manner. From their ability to appeal to candidates from certain backgrounds, to benchmarking themselves against their peers in their sector.

This has empowered all of our partners to test more ideas and prove the value of their actions to their management teams, empowering incrementally better approaches to diverse recruitment over the years.

“Our shift to tracking and utilising behavioural data alongside declared interests was pivotal in allowing us to drive engagement and facilitate better matches for our members and clients.”



■ **Tom Brightwell**
Co-Founder

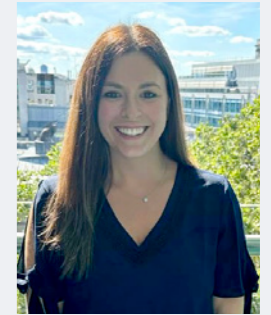
8 years at
Bright Network

“**The tracker is an incredibly useful tool – it's given us specific information and insights into the audience demographics we're gaining traction with, the likes of which we've never had before.**”

■ User survey 2021

Employer story

Matching, not spamming with Lloyds Banking Group



■ **Nofi Balogun**

■ **Natasha Tahor**

Branding & Attraction Managers
Lloyds Banking Group

⇒ How has the increased use of data improved your attraction campaigns over the years?

From the data comes personalisation. Bright Network was quite early on in thinking about how we segment students and targeting them on a more personalised basis. The increase in data has led to an increase in the knowledge we can now gather from a market perspective and from a diversity groups perspective. It allows us to produce a really good picture of how to get the right talent in the right places.

⇒ How has it benefitted students?

It means that students aren't feeling like they're being bombarded with loads of information. 10 years ago, you didn't have another option other than to go really wide on communications and promotional activities. It's made a big difference. Additionally, the progress we've made digitally has made things a lot more accessible.

⇒ How has it helped your teams?

We rely on effective market information to create targeted attraction campaigns. The level of data we have access to through partnerships like Bright Network allows us to create tailored marketing campaigns with a really robust understanding of the student market, as well as provide our business areas with high levels of data and performance information.



Bright Network was early on in thinking about how we segment students and targeting them on a more personalised basis. It's made a big difference.”

■ **Natasha Tahor**



Creating personal connections in a digital world

Campus attraction was an entirely different world 10 years ago which saw employers visiting a handful of universities often based on league table rankings and spending the key attraction season trawling across the country with their merchandise in tow. Students attended sleepy careers fairs in the autumn term, picking up leaflets and occasionally writing down their email address. Without any connections to the industry, these on-campus fairs were really the only option for many students, whilst employers spent a lot of resource on interactions that weren't guaranteed to lead to anything.

Our solution was to re-invent the careers fair. An efficient, effective and purposeful place for employers to meet pre-screened students who came to speak to them with a purpose, instead of speculatively.

Better interactions

Re-inventing the careers fair was at the top of our agenda. Although there were events already going on in the space, often they weren't set up to facilitate quality interactions.

Our event portfolio is targeted, tailored and demographic-specific so acts as an effective way for employers to replace the need to visit a list of universities across the country throughout the busiest time of year.

We pioneered first-of-their-kind events focusing on women looking for leadership roles, empowering social mobility and authentic connections with Black heritage students. These not only allowed employers to attend

events that lined up with specific objectives, but it gave space for underrepresented members to kickstart their careers.

“We introduced events that prioritised effectiveness, pre-screening candidates, providing support around how to get the most out of the event, before during and after, and creating agendas that met the needs of employers and members alike.”



■ **Vivian Wadler**
Events Director

6 years at
Bright Network 

Member story



■ **Ali Ahued Herrera**
Politics & International Relations with Law graduate from Northeastern University
Now working at **EY** as an Associate Business Consultant

Ali's story

I wasn't ready to start my career and I didn't know what to do, so I decided I would take on a Masters as my next step. At the time, I was President of the Hispanic Appreciation Society, which I founded after coming to the UK from Mexico. I attended Bright Network's Society of the Year Awards and connected with EY who were sponsoring my award – they inspired me to research their roles.

Logging onto the Bright Network platform, I found sector guides, application tips and lots of information about the relevant roles and employers within the Consulting sector.

I wanted to apply through the Bright Network and EY Empower Programme which helps people from underrepresented backgrounds like me and I found a success story from someone who had completed the programme the year before, which really helped with my application.

When your parents are abroad and you don't really know what a corporate job is like in the UK, you can feel really lost. I ended up joining EY in September 2022. A year ago I had no idea where I would end up and it all fell into place thanks to Bright Network.

Finding the right fit is not that easy when you don't know what you're getting into and I think that's where Bright Network comes in with their combination of face-to-face connections, online resources and industry knowledge.

Wider connections

Our events attracted members from all backgrounds and universities which opened up connections that employers wouldn't have made from their target university list, breaking boundaries never broken before.

We introduced the first social mobility focused event at Future Leaders 2016, inviting members from state schools for a day of networking and skills workshops. In March 2017, our first (formally known as) D&I Conference was launched to support diverse members and give employers the chance to make authentic connections outside of the application season. This led to a change in the industry's approach from 'milkround' to 'always-on' attraction, which enabled engagement with students in their first or penultimate year and those from diverse backgrounds who may not know when they needed to be ready to apply by.



Driving greater results

We disrupted the market with a unique multi-channel approach, pairing our industry-leading events with a variety of other engagement strategies.

Now the norm in the industry, we connected employers with members throughout the year with a variety of touchpoints. Employers that deployed this engagement strategy found that they saw greater ROI than their previously used, more traditional methods.



The approach we've taken with Bright Network has been bespoke, including targeted events and targeted communications that identify our more niche audience and tailor the messages towards them, both digitally and face-to-face. We've continued to invest in these strategies because we've seen high return on investment."




■ **Phil Sartain**
Early Careers TA Leader
Aon


Thriving in a virtual world


2020 brought challenges the industry could never have imagined. Students across the UK had their careers halted, with vast internship cancellations. Most employers weren't equipped to suddenly switch to a digital approach.

In July 2020 we launched what is now the largest virtual internship in the world, Internship Experience UK, as a response to this challenge.

Since 2020, IEUK has seen...

 **275,000+** applications

 **16%** attendees eligible for free school meals

 **47%** attendees first generation to attend university

This success accelerated hybrid events across the sector and greatly increased accessibility for students faced with travel costs, juggling part-time jobs and caring responsibilities.

"IEUK 2020 delivered skills sessions, work samples and networking with graduate employers across 6 sectors, attracting 60,000 attendees in its first year, 40% being the first generation to attend university in their family."



■ **Helen Condé**
Commercial Director
6 years at Bright Network 



IEUK made the future of work and post-grad life seem less daunting."

■ **Yimika, IEUK 2023 attendee**

Employer story

Widening connections with Aon



■ **Phil Sartain**
Early Careers TA Leader
Aon

What did your strategy look like 10 years ago?

It was traditional – on-campus events and careers fairs in particular were key for us. Beyond that, job boards and some wide push emails.

How has it changed?

We've developed our strategy to be focused on a lot more bespoke, targeted events and communications that identify a more specific audience and tailor the messages towards them, in both a digital and face-to-face way. For us, that's been really focused in the DEIB space, in particular increasing representation of women, people of colour and other underrepresented groups. We couldn't put our team on the ground at the number of universities we're able to target through partners like Bright Network. By pivoting to a bespoke, combined approach, we've been able to really drive DEIB as we're able to access that breadth of talent and ensure we don't miss out on strong, diverse students.

What has the result been?

We've continued to invest in these strategies because we've seen strong return-on-investment back into the business. Where we've chosen to bring a more curated group of students together to discover Aon, we've found it's worked really well for them to understand more about the career paths, the organisation, meet the role models and get under the skin of the culture. As a business-to-business brand, it can be difficult sometimes for the students to be aware of what we've got to offer, so the best way to show this is to bring them into a space together, be that virtually or in-person. This has been particularly successful for diverse students who might have ruled themselves out because they didn't feel like they'd belong. They've been able to discover that we're an inclusive place to work and hopefully change their minds.

Getting ahead — the next 10 years of emerging talent hiring

“

In a hugely competitive sector where every employer wants to attract and retain top talent, it is critical to get ahead.






Using our decade of experience in helping shape the workforce of tomorrow, we're perfectly positioned to put forward 5 key areas that employers should be focusing on as we move into the next 10 years.

Covering topics including artificial intelligence in recruitment, neurodiversity, intersectionality, mental health and the tech recruitment crisis, we explore what we expect will change and ways in which employers can start shaping strategy to maximise success and recruit the brightest, diverse talent.”



■ **Kirsten Barnes**
CEO, Bright Network Platform

B 6 years at
Bright Network

-  **1 AI: A blessing or a curse for emerging talent recruitment?**
The benefits and risks of bringing AI into your processes and how to prepare for the unknown.
-  **2 Mental health matters**
How ignoring poor mental health can impact your business and your employer brand.
-  **3 Evolving diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging strategies with intersectionality at the core**
Staying ahead of the curve and continuing to shift the dial on diversity challenges.
-  **4 Engaging Generation Alpha: The lessons from attracting Gen Z**
Changing attitudes internally to prepare for the future and what to think about for Gen A.
-  **5 The future of tech hiring and solving the talent shortage**
Creating non-traditional pathways into technology that drive diversity and meet the evolving needs of the sector.




AI: A blessing or a curse for emerging talent recruitment?

Discussions around AI and machine learning are beginning to dominate the industry and it will certainly remain an important topic over the next 10 years. Being prepared in a world of unknowns is challenging, but employers must ensure they understand how it will be used by students and how it can benefit them and their processes.

AI will help level the playing field by making the knowledge needed for strong application writing more accessible.

Increasing efficiencies

AI will be used across candidate screening to streamline processes and save hiring team time. Candidates will use it to support their applications too – **over 50% of candidates admit to using ChatGPT to complete application forms and online assessments***. Employers must decide whether or not to actively combat this with proctored assessments (which increase student anxiety during test-taking by 62%*). Using AI will undoubtedly save time for both candidates and assessors, however extra consideration will need to be factored into hiring team strategies for reducing the risks of AI and making sure the process remains fair for candidates and effective for employers.

over 50% of candidates admit to using ChatGPT during assessments* 


Levelling the playing field

The impact of social privilege in securing a role will be somewhat reduced when every candidate follows the same process with the same tools at their disposal. AI will support candidates in areas such as application writing, career advice and interview prep, making the same level of knowledge more accessible to everyone, not just those with their own pre-existing networks. On the screening side, using AI tools to assist your screening process will help you discover instances of biases, conscious or unconscious, and support the creation of a fairer process for candidates. Doing this will give you a competitive advantage when it comes to your DEIB efforts.

* Neurosight survey, 2023

Optimising job matching

A large proportion of the skills expected for a role are purely implicit, leading to a lack of job understanding on both the candidate and employer side. **Using AI to analyse job descriptions will increase job understanding, reduce the number of rejected candidates and improve the quality of matches being made.** We're doing work in this area to ensure we can assist our partners in the best way to attract the students with the skillsets they need, using a combination of data-enabled and human-interaction selection methods.

76% of HR leaders believe not adopting AI will lead to a competitive disadvantage* 

Preparing for the unknown

We can make predictions about the next few years of AI and how it may affect you, but how things will look in 10 years time is unknown. To counter the unknown, get your teams working with experts in the field, coordinating regular reviews of your AI use and processes and keeping the conversation going with partners and suppliers.

With the use of AI and machine learning potentially increasing efficiency and removing bias in screening processes, can we expect to see the traditional hiring interview become obsolete over the next 10 years?

The importance of human touch

The streamlining of application processes and stripping down to essentials like eligibility and skills may come at the cost of candidates being able to communicate what makes them unique. On top of this, once your AI model has successfully recommended a pool of matches to you, it can run the risk of learning to constantly recommend

* Gartner survey, 2023



A 'human-in-the-loop AI' approach will be necessary to allow individualism to shine through.

similar profiles, which would result in hiring increasingly similar candidates over and over again: **this can be mitigated but will require human intervention and feedback to keep improving.** A 'human-in-the-loop AI' approach will be necessary to allow individualism to shine through.

Teaching prejudice

If used incorrectly, AI can work against your DEIB efforts and apply prejudice when screening and matching candidates to roles. Ultimately, machine learning algorithms all work by learning to extract patterns from data. This means that by providing an algorithm with historical data without review, likely to contain historical biases, you could be teaching it to reproduce those biases, rather than to focus on the important attributes.

“Ensure you're not using a model that will select the right candidate based on protected characteristics. Human data is heavily prejudiced, and it can learn from this given the chance.”



■ Ben Clavié
Data Scientist
Bright Network

1 year at
Bright Network 

2 Mental health matters

98% of 18-24-year-olds are experiencing burnout at work*.

Stigma surrounding mental health issues has positively improved over the last 10 years, shedding light on the extent of people affected. For some graduate employers, a robust wellbeing support strategy is considered essential. For others, it's felt that enough is being done here already.

Failing to invest in and shout about mental health support will negatively impact your brand reputation in the future.

Valued by students

Young people in England aged 17 to 19 have been reporting higher rates of a probable mental disorder year-on-year since 2020 according to a Mental Health of Children and Young People survey**. With the issue on the minds of many, we asked Bright Network members if they consider an employers' commitment to supporting mental wellbeing before applying – 92% told us they did. We expect this to continue being of value to emerging talent – **companies who choose to prioritise what students prioritise will win over top talent.**

92% members actively research or consider employers' commitment to mental health***



Cost to employers

The cost to employers is stark. Money lost on absence and employee turnover will set companies back further than those who invest in supporting mental wellbeing. Day-to-day, reduced productivity, missed deadlines, reduced creativity and increased risk of errors will lead to additional costs too. On top of the costs based on your current cohorts, your future cohorts will be at risk too. Failing to invest in and shout about mental health support will negatively impact your brand reputation in the future.

£52bn annual cost of poor mental health to UK employers****



Impact on underrepresented groups

There's evidence to show that **certain groups, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds, are more likely to be impacted by poor mental health in the workplace**, with higher turnover rates due to mental health than white counterparts. Building tailored support within your strategy for these groups will positively impact your retention of diverse talent.

There is **9%** higher turnover due to mental health for ethnic minorities compared to white counterparts*



Future-proofing your workforce

Prioritising mental health and wellbeing needs to be demonstrated from the top down, with senior leadership genuinely on board and acting as role models for good wellbeing practice. This will take time, but it's essential for the future. Talk openly about mental health within teams so employees feel they can open up. Ensure the strategies you're putting in place authentically support good mental health – **simply put, if a 13-hour workday is normal for your junior employees, a 30-minute yoga session over lunch won't mitigate the effects of being overworked.**

Be honest. Shout about what you're doing in your attraction campaigns and where work still needs to be done. Students will appreciate the transparency.

A note on resilience

There's some opinions that say graduates today are lacking resilience, are hypersensitive and are less willing to engage with opinions that challenge theirs. Stereotyped as the 'snowflake generation', it's fair to say this is an overly simplistic outlook. But there may be some truth in it. Time and time again, our members have placed 'resilience' low when ranking the qualities they expect employers to care about, whereas employers place it at the top**. Perhaps overprotected from experiencing failure or loss by schools and universities, **there's an opportunity for employers to upskill students around what resilience is, why it's important in the workplace and how to build it.** Will applying focus here mean cohorts come better prepared into your business over the next 10 years?



* Deloitte study, 2022

** 'Bright Network What do graduates want?' survey, 2023

* Cigna International Health's 2023 survey

** Mental Health of Children and Young People survey, 2022

*** 'Bright Network What do graduates want?' survey, 2023

**** Deloitte study, 2022

3 Evolving diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging strategies with intersectionality at the core

The work done over the past 10 years to build strategies that engage and recruit diverse candidates has begun to shift the dial when it comes to representation and inclusivity in your teams. But just as your strategy 10 years ago has become outdated, soon what you're doing now won't be enough to drive further change. Employers must evolve if they want to stay ahead of the curve.



You shouldn't pigeonhole people into big homogenous groups. People have different experiences and it's important to understand these as much as possible and look at things like intersectionality."



Clare Power
Recruitment & Marketing Director
Police Now

Intersectionality

Students from more than one under-represented or disadvantaged group are still being under-supported and undervalued.

We need to see a move away from past sequential approaches to inclusivity and towards an approach focused on intersectionality.

Achieving your goals in uplifting female or Black heritage representation year-on-year can feel like good progress, but we mustn't ignore the crux of the issue. **Employers must consider all the factors and where they intersect and build tailored strategies to address them.** It's time for employers to look at the bigger picture to continue having impact when supporting diverse groups.



Defining disadvantage

Employers will need to look at how best to define disadvantage over the next 10 years. Although some organisations have built scoring systems for levels of disadvantage, interrogation of these will be required as well as the coming together of the industry to create agreed standards for measuring social mobility. These will need to be reviewed regularly. By setting these standards as an industry, it will make it easier for students to understand whether it applies to them and why employers are focusing on it.

Employers will need to look at how best to define disadvantage over the next 10 years.

Neurodiversity

1 in 7 university students report having ADHD or being autistic**. Over the next 10 years, it will become crucial to raise your team's knowledge and awareness of neurodiversity and make adjustments to allow these candidates to thrive.

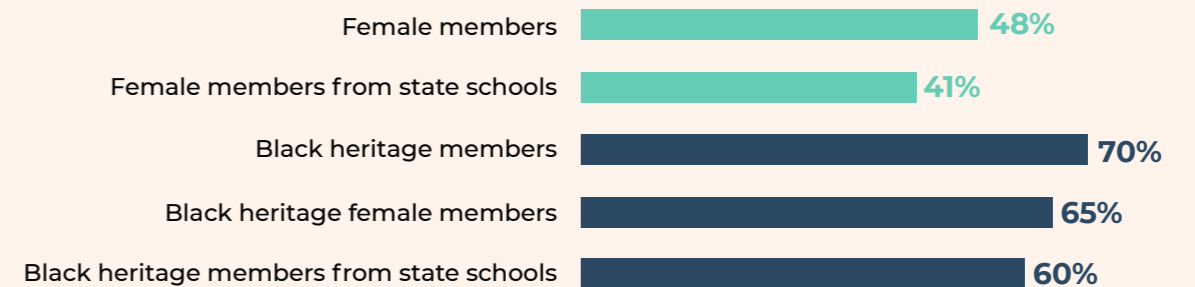
There isn't a 'one-size fits all' solution. Focus on each candidate as an individual to understand what they need to produce their best work and where their strengths lie. Organisations that combine neurotypical and neurodiverse thinking styles will improve productivity across their workforce and pioneer inclusivity within the industry.

14% of students report as being neurodiverse**

Intersectionality and career confidence

In our 2023 "What do graduates want?" survey, we asked members the question:

Q. Are you confident about securing a graduate role after university?



* HESA data, 2023

** Unite Students study, 2022

Engaging Generation Alpha: The lessons from attracting Gen Z

The next 10 years will see employers hiring graduates born between 2002 and 2011. Employers that stay close to the changing attitudes of Gen Z and start to prepare for the hiring of Gen A will see the most success.

Gen Z

The need for upskilling

70% of senior leaders say the current higher education system is not equipping students with the skills they need to succeed in the modern workplace*. Employers need to support skill building to help close the gap – including managing exposure to experienced colleagues and knowledge transfer in a hybrid working world.

The face of university degree uptake may shift. **There's a shrinking number of UK students approaching university age**** and the cost of repaying university fees to graduates in low to mid earning roles is set to increase by thousands***. With potentially fewer students graduating from university, employers need to adapt their recruitment strategies to ensure they are attracting enough eligible candidates to their roles.

Fulfilment at work

It's no secret that students have more than just money on their mind when exploring their career. **A recent study shows that 54% of Gen Z respondents would take a pay cut to work for a business that reflects their ethics******. A stark statistic but, whether candidates would act on this or not, they're certainly thinking about company integrity when exploring their careers. For the benefit of both your hiring needs and the wider world, sharing the dedication to causes that matter and the level of fulfilment in your business in your attraction campaigns will be important over the next 10 years.

* Multiverse 2023 survey

*** Gov UK Plan 5

** Population Pyramid data

**** Gen Z Bupa Study, 2022

Expectations in the workplace

The workplace is very different to how it was 10 or even 5 years ago and there's a lot employers can be doing to get expectations better aligned with students and graduates.



We're going to have to meet them in the middle somewhere. Yes, there's things we can teach students around how to adapt to the world of work, but we have a job to do to adapt our expectations to enable the untapped potential of this new workforce."



■ **Georgie Crotty**

Northern Europe Talent Acquisition Leader

P&G

Communication between you and your hires, both before and after starting at your organisation, is key as is taking a step back to identify which behaviours really matter to the business – and getting fully aligned with senior leadership on them.

1 in 3 of Gen Z would turn down roles at poor ESG companies****



Gen A

Generation Alpha will be entering your workplaces from 2030, so while you continue adapting to help Gen Z thrive, ensure to keep in mind the learnings, good and bad, to feed into your plans for the future. Here's some things we're thinking about:

The iPad generation

Generation Alpha will have grown up in a fully digital world where technology is more developed and accessible than ever before. Tech-enabled life will be the norm, so **we can expect highly digitally skilled and enabled students, who place higher reliance on technology like AI to support them.**

42% of Gen A have been speaking to smart speakers from the age of 6 or younger*



Not the 9-5

We've seen the traditional working day develop significantly, with a call for flexible hours, better work-life balance and more fulfilment. Will we see this continue and will the 9-5 job become a thing of the past in 10 years time? Or will we transform back to what once was?

* Infobip survey, 2021

66% of Gen A started using tablets by the time they were 5 years old*



Everything, all of the time

We might see the 'tech-enhanced' lifestyle lead to an expectation for all interactions to be completely instant, easy and straightforward. This could lead to an impatience and difficulty dealing with slower, more manual processes and tasks. **Attention span and ability to concentrate may well be affected by the increased time spent on devices** and existing in a world with a constant stream of on-demand content.

Hyperconnected vs. chronically online

Gen A will be hyperconnected but may lack traditionally sought after face-to-face communication skills. As a knock-on effect of the lack of socialisation during the pandemic and an increased relationship with digital devices, **might we potentially see Gen A feeling less at ease with communicating in real life?**

We can expect highly digitally skilled and enabled students, who place higher reliance on technology like AI to support them.

5 The future of tech hiring and solving the talent shortage

As we enter a new era of tech and see the volume of roles requiring tech skills skyrocket, the number of students studying computing at higher education level, especially those from diverse backgrounds, is staying static. If we don't address this issue, the UK tech skills gap will continue to grow, costing the economy billions in lost productivity. How can we take control of the tech crisis? Employers that embrace non-traditional routes and find ways to transform potential into capability will be the leading brands in the future of tech hiring.

14% of the UK workforce (4.7m people) have jobs in the broader digital tech economy*



* Tech Nation report, 2022

From potential to capability



■ **Darania Muralitharan**
Biomedical Sciences graduate from King's College London
Now working at **M&S** as a Software Engineer

Bright Network member Darania became interested in technology after studying Biomedical Science at university.

Joining Bright Network Technology Academy as a grad, she learnt the core skills she needed to be a software engineer and has now realised her potential in her role at M&S, combining her degree and programming skills everyday.

Looking beyond computer science

Computing graduate pools are hardly increasing each year, with computer science making up 6.07% of the class of 2025, growing only slightly from 5.73% for this year's class of 2023**. **Hiring from this pool is extremely competitive and shouldn't be relied upon.** It just isn't large enough to meet the growing demand for tech talent. It's essential that employers widen their entry criteria and develop new pathways to bring emerging talent into tech roles.

** UCAS accepted applications data, 2022

Employers must recognise the need to invest long term in the potential of these candidates and build training pathways.

New pathways

Hiring outside of computer science requires a new approach. Employers must recognise the need to invest long term in the potential of these candidates and build training pathways that nurture a passion for technology and develops them into tech professionals. They must build intrigue in students who haven't considered tech before and communicate how impactful their work will be on the wider world. Employers should consider an earlier intervention for these students, running initiatives to help them build the skills they will need early on. **Businesses face the challenge of getting buy in from the top to invest early in this talent, but those who do will reap the rewards of making a long-term impact on the tech crisis,** plus the bonus of filling their roles with excellent candidates with the potential for long-term retention.



As long as employers give employees the right toolkit, they will be equipped to tackle the unknowns of the future.

Lack of representation

Our tech workforce in the UK is currently just 19% female and 2% Black heritage. **Long-term this could mean a stagnation in innovation and non-inclusive tech that doesn't meet everyone's needs.** The sector's negative reputation when it comes to accessibility perpetuates the problem. Employers should create diversity networks with role models at every level and use mentoring to build a community. Stereotypes need to be actively broken down by everyone – it's a business-wide issue.

“Although we found in our research that fewer females outside of computer science degrees view tech as accessible than males, those who do find it accessible rank it as their number one industry to go into. This is hugely encouraging – if we can improve and showcase accessibility, we will drive more engagement from diverse groups.”



■ **Rachel Carvell-Spedding**
Managing Director
Bright Network
Technology Academy

8 years at
Bright Network 

The ever-changing world of tech

The tech landscape is constantly changing. What a career in tech looks like today, in 5 years and in 10 years will be completely different. **We can't predict what the tech roles of the future will be, so creating a bank of relevant tech-minded skills that can be moulded is essential.** After core tech training is complete, there should be a strong tech ecosystem in place where support is maintained and space should be allowed for mistakes, for breaking things and learning. As long as employers give employees the right toolkit, they will be equipped to tackle the unknowns of the future and will eventually become the changemakers themselves, in their business and beyond.



10 more years of Bright Network



Global expansion

Continuing to explore new markets outside of the UK and Germany



Tech and AI

Improving personalisation and our matching algorithm



Listening

Staying close to members and clients



Innovation

New products and services that our partners need



Upskilling

Even more opportunities, insights and advice members need to succeed



Thought leadership

Research and expertise to guide our employer partners



Community

Strengthening our student and employer community



Team

Investing in the Bright Network team to be the best we can be



Results

Prioritising excellent results for both employers and members



Mission

Staying true to our purpose

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NETWORK

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