

Fix the disconnect in early careers

The Bright Network Illuminate Conference is the industry wide diversity, equity, inclusivity and belonging (DEIB) event where leading early talent professionals come together to discuss the pressing topics we're all tackling. This year's theme was Fix the disconnect: Enabling Gen Z success through your recruitment strategy, as we brought the community together to bridge the gap between Gen Z and employers.

Reflections over the last year

- At Bright Network, we've seen another year of marked commitment from our employer partners to make an impact with DEIB. Bright Network Founder and CEO, **James**, reflected on both the Bright Network and client achievements over the year.
- We've seen a significant rise in the use of AI across the board, with our members seeing this as an opportunity to be more efficient both when making applications and when in the workplace.
- The disconnect between expectations from employers and students remains. For example, when interviewed our members cited communication and professionalism as the skills they needed support with, whereas our employer partners thought self-awareness and drive were the key skills for Gen Z to develop.

Panel Discussion: The Intersectional Generation

- Candidates are expecting feedback, and want it to be personalised at different stages of the candidate journey. Focusing on a strong candidate experience will help you secure top talent and will reflect positively on your employer brand with the candidates you reject.
- Being transparent with candidates about what data you're wanting to collect and why will make a huge difference in candidate's level of comfort when disclosing. They felt positive about the data being used to move the organisation's DEIB work forward.
- If data about reasonable adjustments or support needs is recorded, make sure these needs are met throughout their work at the organisation without the need for repeated disclosure.

Making your employer brand attractive to the AI-enabled generation

- Gen Z are actively using AI so regularly, with 60% using it for study and 50% saying they're more likely to apply for a role if they can use AI in the process. Therefore, it's vital to tackle the topic head on to account for this huge shift.
- Make sure your employer brand reflects the reality of your workplace. If you're talking about how candidates can use AI, ensure this is accurate. 78% of Gen Z believe employers are 'all talk' and say things they don't mean, so don't fall into this trap of inauthenticity.
- People trust people, not brands. There are many opportunities for exciting engagement through showcasing real people sharing their authentic experience.
- When striving to appeal to a digital native audience that spend so much time online and using AI, the differentiation for choosing your organisation could easily be the feeling they have when they meet recruiters and get an insight into the workplace culture.

Meeting in the middle: Are your expectations of Gen Z good for business?

- Purpose and sustainability is at the heart of Gen-Z's focus, which filters through to their career aspirations. Embed these into your offering and processes, such as doing a sustainability focused work task in the assessment centre.
- It's important to assess with hiring managers what skills are actually essential to the role and what can be trainable. British Airways have seen success when communicative why these skills are non-negotiables, instead of just listing the requirements.
- Use your current intake to understand what the hook to your brand is and how those benefits are perceived. Explain why these benefits are unique or exciting, don't just list them out, spell out specifically what that means to the candidate.

Practical steps to towards neuroinclusion in your organisation

- Prioritise clarity in the application process. Ensure you're effectively communicating what you're asking them to do and explain why you're testing different elements, particularly when it comes to Psychometric testing

- Encouraging disclosure around neurodiversity by showcase your success stories and testimonials from those who are neurodivergent in your workplace and ensuring you follow up on this disclosure. You should have processes of reasonable adjustments that can be made and sharing this with candidates
- Challenge yourself to look at the processes and structures you have in place and ask if they're disproportionately affecting neurodiverse candidates. Be curious about your hires - ask them how they like to work and how you can best work together.

The Gen Z skillset and how to make the most of it

- 59% of Gen Z are concerned about having relevant skills and 42% worry about meeting expectations at work. They're looking to employers to support them so they can perform at their best.
- To do this, be relatable by sharing stories of failure and learning, create a space where they are allowed to make mistakes and develop, and invest in their confidence by allowing them to grow through feedback.
- Gen Z are digital natives, so have strong skills in this area but can often feel that they're lacking interpersonal skills. Employers have an opportunity to capitalize on the new skills Gen Z bring to the workplace, while also creating development opportunities in like networking effectively.

The mental health crisis in 2024 and why it matters for your organisation

- Positive workplace belonging is important for business as it can drive a 56% increase in job performance, 50% drop in attrition rate and 75% fewer sick days.
- In the workplace, your commitments to employee mental health need to stretch beyond employer brand - what are you doing to really support people once they're in the workplace
- If you're using mental health champions, how are you ensuring all members of the team are comfortable approaching them for support? Look at the diversity of those taking up these positions to make sure they're representative of your team.

The STEM talent gap: Early engagement to support your STEM hiring

- When striving to address the STEM talent gap consideration must be given to the different experiences students will have, paying particular focus to ethnicity, gender and social mobility.
- Achieving success in STEM hiring requires a holistic approach with a range of activities and a multi-channel approach which could include STEM outreach committees, insight days, candidate talent pooling and empowering ERGs to publicise company initiatives.

Building a diverse workforce of tomorrow

- There's a widening disconnect between generations, fueled by not enough speaking, hearing and understanding each other. With 27% of the workforce being Gen Z by 2025 it's important to close this gap. We can avoid wasting young people's talent by meeting them where they are instead of expecting them to meet us where we are.
- Gen Z want meaning - to contribute on a daily basis. It's not necessarily this huge purpose, just knowing why they're doing what they're doing and the impact it has. Where it exists they are self-aware of their privilege and are willing to use it to advocate for one another and won't negotiate on work-life balance. To improve retention, focus on values and professional development.
- To effectively engage Gen Z and close the gap, include everyone in the conversation. For example, men in the conversations about increasing female representation and white people in the conversations about increasing ethnic diversity. Create spaces where Gen Z can have their voices heard, consider a shadow board, young people network, mentoring network, reverse mentoring.

Dive into these topics in more detail in our free guide, [**Fix the Disconnect: Enabling Gen Z success through your recruitment strategy.**](#)

