

Reshaping Workplace Experiences for Equality

AUTHOR

Adam Crane, Employer Engagement Coordinator, University of Chester - Cheshire, UK



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CONTEXT

Small businesses often don't have access to or the time and resources to use the wealth of equality initiatives available, such as specific training or the use of technology to support equality in recruitment, for example through automated applicant tracking systems. Only 17% of small employers currently utilise anonymised CV's, to remove any potential for unconscious bias taking place at the application stage, compared with 35% of employers with more than 50 employees*.

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OBJECTIVE

Our objective is to increase engagement in Workplace Experiences by under-represented groups, known as Widening Participation groups or WP

These opportunities are often gateways to further opportunities and can create valuable networks for the future.

We need to help level the playing field for students and graduates from under-represented groups such as those from caregiving or leaving backgrounds to those with disabilities.

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WHAT WE DID

From 2021, all applications from students and graduates to participate in Workplace Experience opportunities will be completely anonymised. All identifying information will be removed to ensure applications are assessed purely on content and not on any personal information contained in the application itself. Employers won't have access to information such as age, gender, ethnicity, or any other protected characteristics, to ensure any potential for unconscious bias is eliminated.

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CHALLENGES

Some employers were skeptical at first, but very quickly we saw significant acceptance for anonymised applications and employers started to use our service to demonstrate their commitment to diversity.

We did also notice an early challenge with international students from very different cultures. For example, some students from Asia didn't understand the concept and were very used to sharing detailed personal information. After some time, they realised the benefits.

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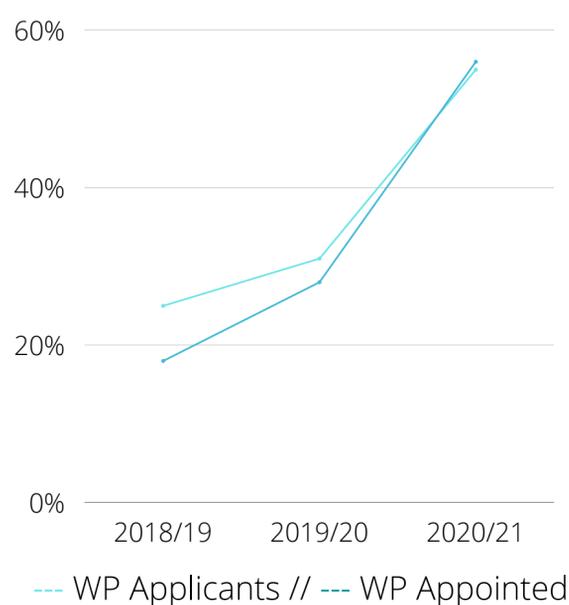
INITIAL FINDINGS

As of this academic year and since our equality and inclusivity transformation of Workplace Experiences, over HALF of all applicants and successful/appointed applicants are now from our WP cohort. This is a significant jump (Exactly 100% YoY for appointed).

This demonstrates that not only were our changes justified and having an impact, but most importantly our WP cohort is engaging with us more than ever.

It is also important to note that this trend is against a backdrop of an actual reduction in application numbers over the three years. I think this demonstrates that our WP students (and students in general) are being more targeted, focused, and selective in their engagement activities.

Specifically for BAME applicants, our engagement grew from 30% to 49% YoY with blind applications.



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NEXT STEPS

University careers services are fantastic at sharing best practices through their extensive networks such as the Association of Graduate Advisory Services and the Institute of Student Employers, however, we must also provide greater support to those small businesses we work with to help them combat unconscious bias. Using anonymised applications is one way in which we are achieving this at the University of Chester. We look forward to working even more closely in the future to share what we have learned as a university with our community of employers.

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