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**Looking to Fill an Important Position?**

### The changing face of recruitment

20/09/2007

With employers often finding themselves in a battle to recruit staff as universities struggle to catch up in the skills race, Sunil Duggal, MD of Just IT, looks at how employers and recruiters need to adapt their ways if they want to see the long-term benefits.

UK employers are suffering from a crisis of confidence when it comes to recruiting suitably qualified employees into their organisations. It wasn't so long ago that employers had a much smaller pool of graduates to select from the top jobs. However, despite having larger numbers to choose from, the problems don't seem to be getting any easier – if anything the situation is getting harder, as universities are lacking in preparing students for the world of work.

According to a survey by the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) at the beginning of the year, despite graduate numbers more than doubling over the past decade, 55 per cent of graduate employers were anticipating problems in finding enough appropriately skilled recruits.

This problem is unlikely to improve in the foreseeable future unless recruitment consultants realise they have an opportunity to make a difference. The face of recruitment is changing rapidly. The working world is becoming increasingly competitive and businesses want to be sure they are employing people in the right role. Organisations need people who can hit the ground running and have a balance of 'soft' and 'hard' skills. They can also ill-afford to waste time and resources on people, only to find that once they join the organisation they're unsuitable for the business. While we wait for academia to catch up, the demand is now there for a more personalised service from recruitment agencies to help match the requirements of the organisation and the potential employee.

Recruitment agencies have a responsibility to help steer and educate graduates regarding their expectations for the working world. Europe is losing out on billions of pounds of investment because of a shortfall in qualified tech staff. There has already been a warning that 40 per cent of European citizens suffer from digital illiteracy and the skill shortage is slowing down the implementation of new projects. These types of problems may only get worse in the long-term, unless universities in the UK start to equip students with more vocational skills, particularly with a

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great deal of skill available in developing economies such as China and India.

It is crucial that recruitment agencies work with employers to educate graduates about what they should be looking for in a career. We are constantly hearing how higher education is failing in preparing students for the world of work. The onus lies with universities to equip students with the essential skills for their future careers. However, there seems to be a lack of vocational and softer skills being taught to undergraduates, let alone even the core competencies.

While we await universities to change, and next generations to be more suitably skilled - what can be done? It's been an ongoing argument that graduates have a lack of basic skills that leave them unequipped for the office. Consequently, it is the responsibility for recruitment consultants to go a step further and offer training in key areas where gaps in knowledge remain. They need to provide a service that bridges this gap, rather than waiting for universities to change their ways.

The AGR survey found employers cited a number of recruitment challenges alongside the traditional issue of qualifications. These include: lack of applicants with the right combination of skills e.g. team - working and leadership; applicants' perceptions of the industry sector; issues with specific geographical locations and also lack of applicants with the right qualifications for specific job roles. This demonstrates that there is a need to re-align employer needs with student expectations.

Worryingly, a recent Ernst and Young survey revealed that people and culture came fifth in the poll illustrating what graduates value from an employer. Specialist recruitment agencies should consider the value in educating staff regarding what they should be looking for in a job. Employers should begin to look beyond qualifications - which are obviously important, but also evaluate additional areas such as people and project management.

It's clear that this problem isn't going to go away quickly. Employers need to consider beyond employing people on the grounds of having suitable qualifications for the appropriate job. Recruitment consultants have a big role to play in not just finding suitably qualified graduates, but to find people who fit in with a company's profile so they can begin their career with the right organisation. This will then benefit not only the employee but also the employer in the long -term in helping it build a loyal and skilled workforce, until universities step up their game.

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