

**It's time  
to close  
the**

**gap**

How central government  
can level the playing field  
and compete for talent



**In the race to recruit talent, the private sector is running away with candidates while the public sector faces some hurdles. It can be tough to grab the attention of top talent – and with 73% of central government employers saying they can't access the skills they need, we know it can feel like an uphill battle.<sup>1</sup>**

Working in the public sector, specifically in central government, comes with career development and purpose. But there's a blip in its public perception as outdated views of a slow-paced bureaucracy and limited opportunities still linger.

Indeed is here to help you close the talent gap, providing an understanding of what candidates really want and helping you level the recruitment playing field.

With tips for strategic employer branding, you'll learn how to develop a compelling story that emphasises the positive impact of public sector work, career growth opportunities, and a commitment to innovation and inclusivity.

“Central government agencies need to rethink how they position themselves – especially as issues such as decentralisation and a lack of diversity become more prominent. 92% of people would consider changing jobs if offered a role with a company with an excellent corporate reputation<sup>2</sup>. So, we want to help showcase the sector's true strengths including flexibility, career growth and a commitment to the public good. This guide holds the insights and strategies that can transform public sector recruitment and close the gap between candidates and opportunities.”

- Bill Richards, Managing Director UK at Indeed

Discover how to expand your reach, meeting candidates where they are, and communicating with them in ways that really resonate with their wants and needs.

We'll also show you how public sector recruiters are overcoming their most pressing challenges with a summary of our recent public sector event with James Harding,

Public Sector Specialist and Melanie McColgan, Senior Director, Public Sector at Indeed.

So get ready to close the gap, as we show you how to win over the next generation of talent for the public sector.

Sources

1. [Government Transformation](#)

2. [Glassdoor – 40+ Stats For Companies to Keep In Mind for 2021](#)



SECTION 1

# The Public Sector has a PR problem

# 3 ways to reimagine your employer brand

**Despite offering diverse career prospects and pioneering flexible working, the public sector struggles with a PR problem. In 2023, workers across the board took its most sweeping wave of industrial action in decades – with workers in healthcare, transport and education going on strike for better pay and conditions.**

Inflation and the cost of living crisis are the root causes of this action – but this series of strikes may cause the public to lose sight of the positives and benefits that come with public sector jobs. There is an opportunity here to retell your organisation’s story, but the reality is that it needs to first strengthen its employer brand to be able to tell it.

With many people reassessing their careers and how they spend their

time, a strong employer brand is a recruiter’s secret weapon<sup>3</sup>.

Just as movie goers might watch the trailer, setting a scene that appeals to younger generations, minority groups, and private-sector workers drives candidate interest.

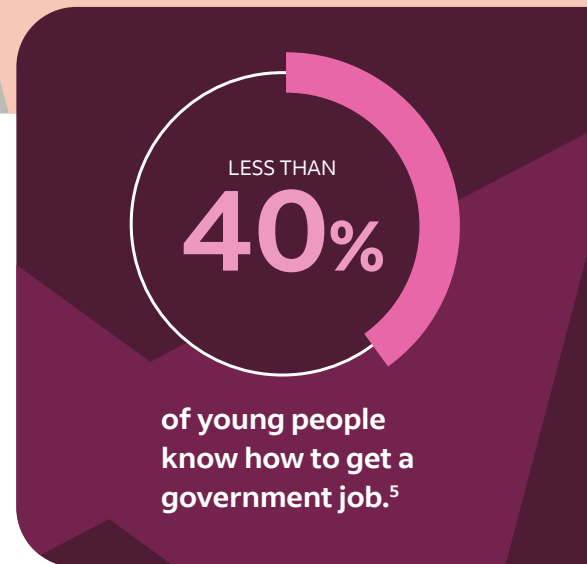
Here, we’ll show you how the central government can reimagine its employer brand – putting the sector’s most appealing attributes front and centre.

## 1. Retell your organisation’s story

75% of active job seekers are likely to apply for a job if the employer actively manages its employer brand.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the central government need to shine a light on its unique selling points such as:

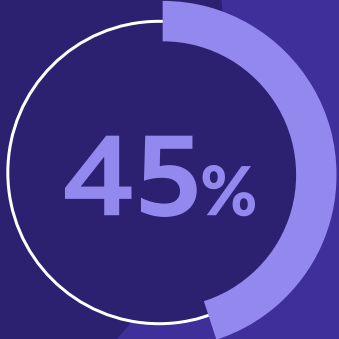
### Work-life balance

Work flexibility is more important than



ever according to our recent survey<sup>6</sup> which says “In this tight labour market, the so-called war for talent will be won or lost depending on the degree of flexibility employers offer.” The survey amongst 5,000 workers that “flexible hours” was only second to “fair pay” when it comes to jobseeker priorities.

Stagnating search trends for remote work show that these kinds of arrangements are becoming



of people say their expectations around work well-being have risen in the past year, and even more so for younger generations.<sup>11</sup>

“The public sector has to do better in terms of marketing itself”

- Karen Grave, President of the Public Services People Managers Association<sup>7</sup>

something job seekers expect or assume their employers will offer, rather than something they actively seek out<sup>8</sup>. With many public sector organisations recognising the importance of work-life balance, it’s a USP that can easily ramp up your volume of applications.

**Community impact**

97% of people we surveyed believe they can have jobs where they feel a clear sense of purpose.<sup>9</sup>

Drive home that this possibility is a reality within the public sector – providing a rewarding work experience that directly impacts and improves the lives of citizens and contributes to the public good.

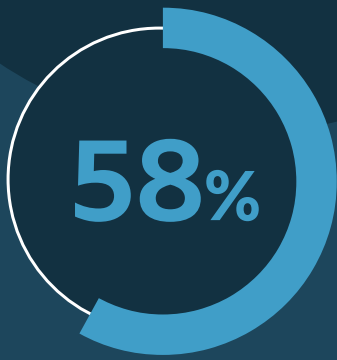
**Mobility and advancement**

Three in five of 16 to 24-year-olds have left a job because of the limited growth opportunities available to them<sup>10</sup>. Jobs in central government often come with defined career paths and

opportunities for advancement. This is a huge selling point to candidates who are looking to widen their skill set through learning and development and climb the career ladder.

**Well-being at work**

Thriving workers drive business performance – but only 23% of workers feel like they are thriving, which is costing society and public sector organisations<sup>13</sup>. A small number



**Companies that invested in employee development saw a 58% increase in retention.<sup>12</sup>**



of leading private companies are winning the hiring race by creating cultures of well-being – and central government could benefit from demonstrating a similar shift in mindset. For example, Cambridgeshire County Council have established a well-being group to run a monthly well-being hour, coordinate the organisation’s mental health first aiders, produce a weekly well-being blog and manage relationships with various support services.<sup>14</sup>

**2. Level the talent playing field**

It’s no secret that the private sector is quick to snap up fresh talent – especially among Gen Z and millennials. So, what is it that they do differently to drive successful recruitment campaigns? Let’s take a look at the key areas they leverage to attract talent and apply these strategies to the public sector.

**Elevate your work culture**

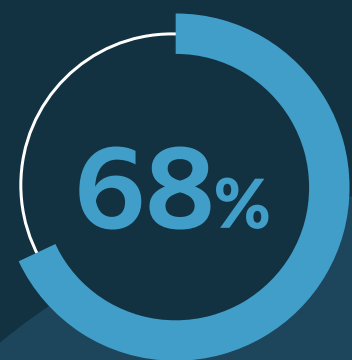
To remain competitive in a fierce talent market, many private companies (and tech companies in particular)

regularly shout about the diverse culture they’ve created. Elevating the work culture in public organisations is crucial, especially considering the values and preferences of the emerging Gen Z workforce. When people find a culture that resonates with their values, they tend to stay longer and contribute more significantly over time, increasing overall organisational value and employee ROI. It’s not just about saying you have a culture that inspires and engages people – it’s about actively creating it.

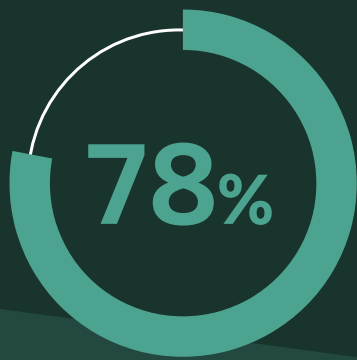
**Engage your existing talent**

Employee turnover is at an all-time high as people seek out roles with better flexibility, purpose and career growth. The best way to retain employees is by making them feel valued – and with 86% of employees saying they’d switch jobs for one with more chances to grow<sup>15</sup>, central government has a real opportunity to level the playing field. From providing resources to investing in courses, committing to your employees’ development is a simple way to keep

your existing talent engaged. **Put your energy into early careers** Not only are graduates more likely to stay with their first employer, but they are the possessors of all the skills the public sector needs in the future – including critical thinking, problem-solving, self-management and technology development. Investing in ‘early talent’ programmes



**of recent graduates and college seniors see themselves staying with an employer and/or having a long-term career path.<sup>16</sup>**



**78%**  
of job seekers are dropping out or considering dropping out of the recruitment procedure due to lengthy and complex processes.<sup>17</sup>



should be a part of the public sector’s broader talent growth and retention strategy. But, before you start looking for early career candidates to join your team, have a clear idea of what you want to achieve and what you expect from them. Having a well-defined and realistic set of goals and expectations will help you to narrow down your search, communicate your value proposition and align your recruitment process.

### Crafting engaging candidate experiences

At its very core, hiring has become somewhat of a marketing initiative. HR leaders need to sell the benefits to potential candidates – and to do that, they need to create engaging, helpful experiences. This means simplifying the candidate journey and improving transparency in the hiring process through clear job descriptions, streamlining the application process, maintaining regular communication, and leveraging technology for

efficient recruitment. By creating and sharing relevant content about life in the public sector, central government recruiters can connect with passive and active job seekers and delight candidates throughout the application process.

### 3. Rethinking your Communications

The public sector needs to clearly communicate the career opportunities it can offer in the right way, on the right channels and at the right time.

#### Write job descriptions that resonate

Shift from writing “job descriptions” that pose the question “why should we choose you to work for us?”. Instead, answer the question; “Why would I want to work here?”. Emphasise the perks that speak to different demographics<sup>18</sup> – for example, flexible working may appeal to parents while culture clubs might entice younger cohorts. In the next

chapter, we’ll look at skills-based hiring and how to create descriptions that attract candidates with a varied background of experience.

#### Show candidates that you’re listening

Reviews have become a regular part of our online search routine – especially when it comes to finding new employment. Look to your Glassdoor presence to see what people are saying about the organisation and what FAQs occur. Demonstrating that there are real people behind your employer brand who are listening and responding positively to feedback goes a long way in attracting candidates – and improving transparency.

#### Use digital to spread the word

If you’re not optimising your digital presence to communicate your employer brand then you’re hiding your light under a bushel. Take a look at your website – is the job search function user-friendly? Or your social channels – are you sharing success stories, community impact stories, and showcasing the organisation’s commitment to innovation and inclusivity? These are very quick fixes you can make before getting into the nitty-gritty of sponsored advertising.

#### Sources

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14. [MentalHealthInTheWorkplace.co.uk](#)
15. [ClearCompany.com](#)
16. [iCIMS Insights](#)
17. [Sterling - UK skills crisis: why the hiring process is broken](#)
18. [Indeed - How to Write a Job Description](#)



SECTION 2

# Dive into the talent pool

# Cast a wider talent net with skills-based hiring

**In recent years, the need for a skill-based hiring model in central government has continued to grow. With evolving work norms, job centralisation and a demand for greater inclusivity and diversity, public organisations need to find a way to cast a wider talent net.**

## 1. What is skills-based hiring?

In skills-based hiring, we look at a candidate's specific skills and how they match the job, moving away from focusing heavily on job titles or qualifications.

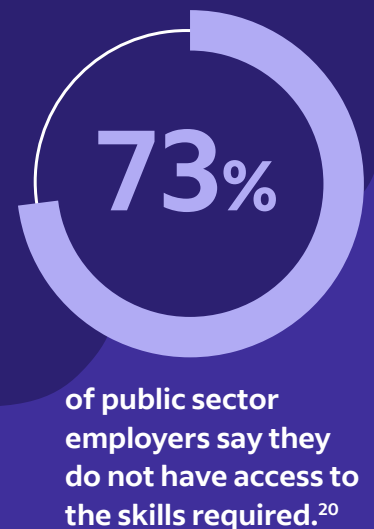
Think of it as a straightforward tweak to your hiring game plan that brings in a more diverse group – reaching out to people from various career backgrounds who have built up a

robust set of transferable skills. It's about expanding the talent pool and welcoming more people to apply – and the organisations who get on board early will be the ones scoring big in finding and snagging top talent.

## 2. Where does the central government fit into this?

In a recent survey, we found that qualified candidates aren't applying for roles they believe they can execute well because of the emphasis on higher education qualifications.

This means both prospective employers and would-be applicants miss out on what may have been a good match. And where the private sector continues to emphasise qualification, there is an opportunity to win talent over to the public sector.



## 3. Why HR leaders need to focus on a new way of hiring

### Decentralisation

As you know, the UK Government's decentralisation plan is in full swing, with hiring for public service jobs spread more evenly across the country. While this presents a great opportunity for skilled workers in rural areas, the heavy focus on credentials may cause hesitancy.

# 22K

UK Government to move 22,000 Civil Service roles out of Greater London by 2030.<sup>21</sup>



“Skills-based hiring isn’t just a trend; it’s a strategic shift that puts the focus on what really matters – actual capabilities. In a world evolving at lightning speed, it’s out with traditional credentials and in with the power of skills to build a workforce that’s ready for anything.”

- Danny Stacy, Head of Talent Intelligence UK at Indeed

This is where skills-based recruitment can connect you with the talent in new emerging locations.

#### Digital & technical skills gap

Not only are jobs being spread across locations, but the type of work is also changing. The UK government is seeking to improve public services through digital transformation but loses out on attracting technically skilled workers, namely to tech companies.<sup>22</sup> From developing smarter and faster services for citizens to introducing new technology into

the organisation, these people with digital and technical skills are the key to making sure the government keeps up with the times and serves people in the best possible way. Retelling your story and providing the culture and flexibility that techies often demand will also help in your strategy to win tech talent.

#### Diversity & Inclusion

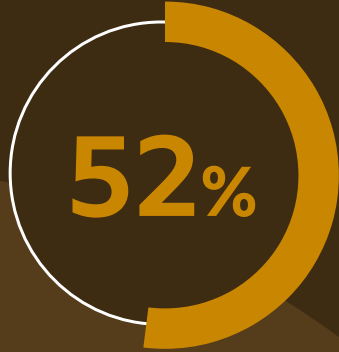
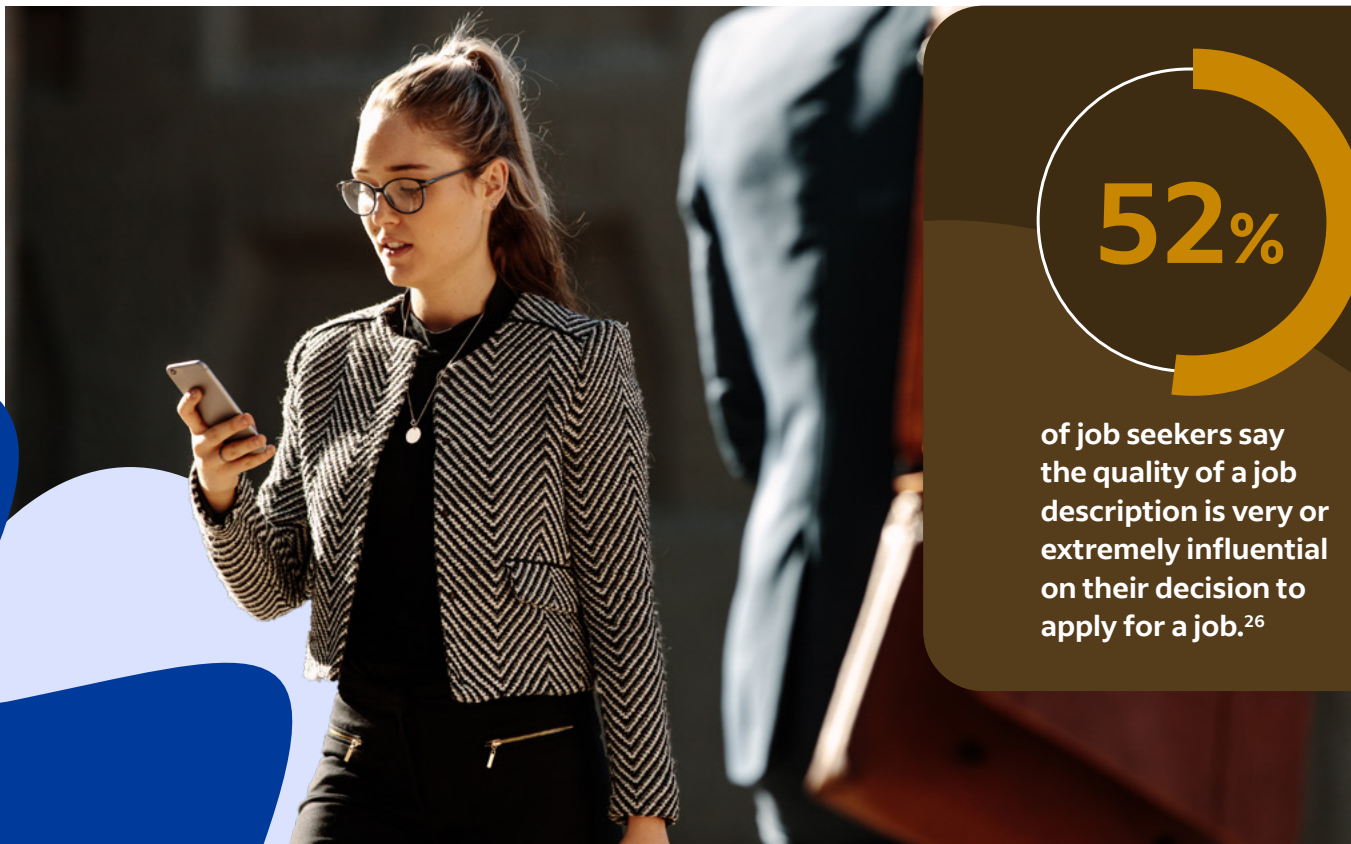
We recently found that DEI is top-of-mind for millennial and Gen Z workers, as 72% of workers aged 18-34 would consider rejecting a job offer or

leaving a company if they felt their manager didn’t support DEI initiatives (compared to 45% of workers over 65).<sup>23</sup>

While diversity and inclusion initiatives are needed internally<sup>24</sup> to ensure these needs are met, public sector recruiters need to rethink the

73%

of Central Government agencies say attracting talent is their biggest challenge.<sup>25</sup>



of job seekers say the quality of a job description is very or extremely influential on their decision to apply for a job.<sup>26</sup>

approach to hiring. The usual way of hiring can accidentally let bias sneak in. But with skills-based hiring, we can zoom in on the skills that matter for the job – making sure we’re not making judgments based on irrelevant information like gender, ethnicity, or where someone went to school. It’s about giving everyone a fair shot based on what they can do, not where they come from.

#### 4. How: Practical tips on how to get started

##### A. Adjusting job descriptions to attract skills

Job descriptions that clearly outline the specific skills and qualifications required for the role allow for a more targeted and efficient recruitment process. You can adjust your descriptions to be more skills-focused by rethinking your:

- **Language:** Make sure your descriptions are jargon-free, gender-inclusive and accessible for all.
- **Barriers to entry:** Consider if the role needs a specific university degree or remove these criteria from the spec completely if it’s not necessary.
- **Needs:** Consider the skills and work experience you want to hire for and lead with that. e.g. stakeholder management or creative direction.
- **Mindset:** Wider nets will capture heaps more in potential – be sure to hire based on a candidate’s potential and not just the boxes in front of you they tick.

##### B. Screen candidates using skills-based assessments

When you use skills-based assessments to screen candidates,

you’re really getting down to the nitty-gritty of what they can actually do. This speeds up the hiring process and helps you pick candidates who can really hit the ground running.

##### C. Change your ATS filtering

Think of it like upgrading your search engine – you want to make sure it’s bringing you the most relevant results. By tweaking the filters, you can ensure that you’re catching all those hidden gems with the right skills and experience. It’s about being more precise and getting the best possible matches for your job openings.

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- 22. [The Financial Times](#)
- 23. [Indeed & Glassdoor’s Hiring and Workplace Trends Report 2023](#)
- 24. [Indeed – A more equitable future: Diversity, inclusion and belonging in the UK workplace](#)
- 25. [BusinessPlus](#)
- 26. [Indeed - Survey: How to Improve Your Job Postings to Attract Better Candidates](#)



## SECTION 3

# Conversations with our Public Sector Specialists

# Getting the public sector out of the recruitment rut

Recently, Indeed ran a Think Tank session on the journey to better hiring, led by James Harding, Public Sector Specialist and Melanie McColgan, Senior Director at Indeed. We sat down with public sector government recruiters to identify and discuss the challenges they're having right now. Here, we'll discuss those challenges and share their best practices for overcoming them.

## Challenge 1 – What are your strategies to find the right people for these roles?

- Growing internal talent by upskilling current employees who are looking to broaden their career prospects.

- Strengthening apprenticeship programs to attract and develop early-career talent, address the skill gaps and support organisational growth plans.
- Reviewing and improving the Civil Service Graduate Scheme to specifically appeal to tech talent.
- Revising and tailoring benefits packages to boost overall attractiveness.

## Challenge 2 – How are you removing barriers for jobseekers seeking better work?

Public sector organisations are improving the application processes to keep them simple and streamlined by:

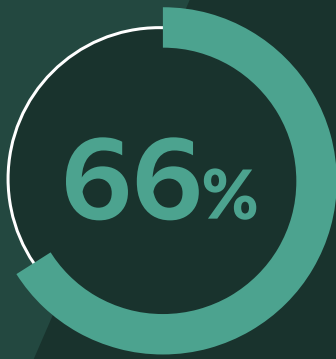
- Removing the filtering process at the beginning of the application process where possible.

- Avoiding offline documents that need to be downloaded and printed.



52%

of government recruiters have vacancies that are hard to fill – including tech, professional roles and specialist roles.<sup>27</sup>



**66%**  
of jobseekers believe there is a better job out there for them. They want to connect with opportunities that offer meaningful work, a diverse culture, growth, and recognition at work.<sup>28</sup>



- Making the application process more transparent, managing their expectations on timelines, interview set up and even potential start-dates etc.
- Providing insight into the organisation’s day-to-day by providing insightful content to further connect the candidate to the role. For example, videos or blogs on a “Day in the Life of a Worker”.
- Anonymising candidates to remove unconscious biases.
- Identifying an ATS that speaks to the long-term growth plans of the organisation, rather than a short-term focus.

**Challenge 3 – What steps are you taking to connect with jobseekers around the topics of culture, well-being, career development and recognition at work?**

**Putting well-being first**

- Prioritising employee well-being through flexible and hybrid work options and initiatives promoting mental and physical health.
- Engaging in open dialogues with staff to tailor benefits to their unique needs and concerns and developing benefits packages that allow them (and their families) to feel safe & secure.

**Showing appreciation for employees**

- Establishing recognition awards that celebrate individual and team accomplishments, reinforcing a culture of appreciation.

**Developing career paths**

- Educating staff on various career paths available in-house to foster a sense of continuous learning and career advancement.

- Investing in professional development programs, empowering employees to grow within the organisation.

**Support for Inclusion and Diversity**

- Creating an inclusive environment through initiatives that promote diversity, equity, and belonging.
- Providing support and resources for different Inclusion and Resource Groups (IRGs), such as those focused on neurodivergence and accessibility.

Public sector recruiters have the right ideas and solutions for levelling the talent playing field and attracting the right people – from simplifying the application process to nurturing talent from within and making people feel valued. They just need help making these ambitions a reality, and at Indeed, we’re committed to helping you do just that.

Sources  
27. CIPD Labour Market Report 2023  
28. Indeed Better Work, Better Lives 2.0 survey, n=1,665 (UK)  
29. PwC Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Benchmarking survey 2022 (n=6,000)



**85%**  
Diversity and inclusion is a stated priority for 85% of global organisations.<sup>29</sup>



## CONCLUSION

# Close the gap and win your unfair share of talent with Indeed



**To close the gap and win your unfair share of talent you'll need two key elements – a multifaceted approach to recruitment... and Indeed.**

**Key takeaways**

- By re-focusing your employer brand, central government can start to amplify the sector's unique story and virtues to tap into diverse talent pools that were once snapped up by the private sector.
- Leveraging data will also be crucial in this transformation. It powers targeted searches, makes engagement strategies more effective, and will help you choose the right platforms for communication – making it easier to tap into new and more diverse talent pools.

- Emphasis should not only be on attracting candidates – but on retaining them through a refreshed culture and learning and development opportunities.

**Indeed is ready to guide central government organisations through this transformative journey. Together, we can help the public sector:**

**Expand the reach of your recruitment campaign**

Indeed and Glassdoor receive over 55.9M visits each month.<sup>30</sup> With our sponsored job feature, your jobs are more likely to be promoted to the right audience.

**Meet candidates where they are**

Boost brand awareness on the UK's #1 job site<sup>31</sup> and reach the skilled workers

you need directly through our tech talent network.

**Use data to streamline how you hire**

Leverage data to help you target the right candidates and amplify the success of your campaign and recruitment efforts.

**Create an engaging candidate experience**

With 82% of respondents favouring the Indeed Hiring Events experience, you can leverage tools for job management, progress tracking, and seamless candidate communication.<sup>32</sup>

**Elevate your employer branding**

Foolproof your employer branding campaign as we align it with your Employee Value Proposition (EVP) – helping you bring it to life and roll it out to the market.

### Indeed is not just a platform; it's a strategic partner in the competition for talent

With Indeed, source, screen, and hire faster while enjoying the unwavering support of a true recruitment partner.

- With our comprehensive suite of tools and insights, you can seamlessly and efficiently plan, track and execute hiring campaigns.

- Benefit from expert teams dedicated to supporting you at every stage, from strategic planning to tactical execution.
- Engage in strategy days where we collaborate closely to align your goals with effective recruitment strategies.
- Leverage the expertise of our insights team to glean actionable data and rest assured with our commitment to dedicated customer success.

### Ready to win over the next generation of talent for the public sector?

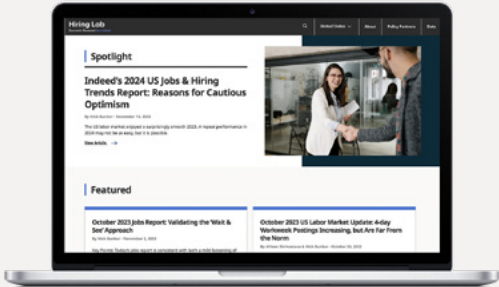
Sources  
30. SimilarWeb, Average Monthly Total Visits, Q1 2023  
31. SimilarWeb, Total Visits, September 2023  
32. Indeed Data UK, Jun 2023

# Ready to talk?

Our team of public sector specialists are on hand to get your strategy off the ground and help you win new talent. Get in touch today to see how we can support your organisation.

[ukpublicsector@indeed.com](mailto:ukpublicsector@indeed.com)

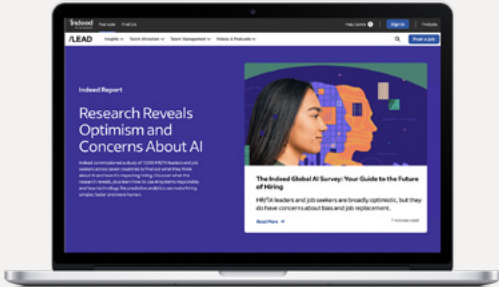
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