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Stop the
Bias Report

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It's time for **employers to listen to candidates' concerns** and bring about real change in ED&I

The Equality Act of 2010 was a landmark moment for employers. One of the most significant pieces of legislation in our lifetime, it promised an end to discrimination on the grounds of sex, race or disability.

Today we're still talking about Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. In fact, the conversation has never been more prominent with issues like Black Lives Matter forcing society as a whole to examine its biases.

So after more than a decade in the spotlight, do candidates feel like they are protected from discrimination when applying for their next role? The answer, sadly, is a resounding "no" according to our research, which paints a disturbing picture of the state of ED&I within our industry.

The statistics make for worrying reading. As a company, Tribepad was born of a desire to better serve both recruiters and job seekers. We genuinely care about people, and when so many of them are telling us that something is wrong we have to sit up and take notice.

That's why our new report takes a deep dive into the issue of bias, exploring the root of the problem as well as its impact on candidates. Our goal isn't just to highlight the flaws in the current system but to empower employers to bring about real change, a fundamental shift in the way we approach discrimination that will benefit everyone.

We know that it's possible to make this kind of tangible impact on ED&I because we've experienced it firsthand. In 2021, we worked closely with Coventry City Council to help improve diversity in their recruitment process. They saw a 117% increase in the number of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic candidates from a number of measures.

We found that the key to this success was the introduction of anonymous applications to reduce unconscious bias in the recruiting process. But that's just one example of the techniques that organisations can use to increase confidence among applicants and reduce fear of discrimination and prejudice.

In our Stop the Bias Report, you'll get an insight into the experience that job seekers are facing in the market and the discrimination they still believe they face.

Above all, however, what you'll find in our report is hope. Our goal isn't to chastise the industry, it's to inspire it. We need to find the answers to this problem once and for all.

Dean Sadler, CEO, Tribepad

The biases Britons believe are **impacting their employment opportunities**

While Equality, Diversity and Inclusion efforts have long focussed on eliminating bias on the basis of people's race, gender or sexual orientation; today's candidates are just as worried about being discriminated against because of their accents, their age and even their appearance.

In a perfect world, people would get hired based strictly on their work experience, their attitude and the skills they bring to the table. Our analysis shows that candidates have real concerns that biases, whether conscious or otherwise, might seriously impact their chances of getting their next role.
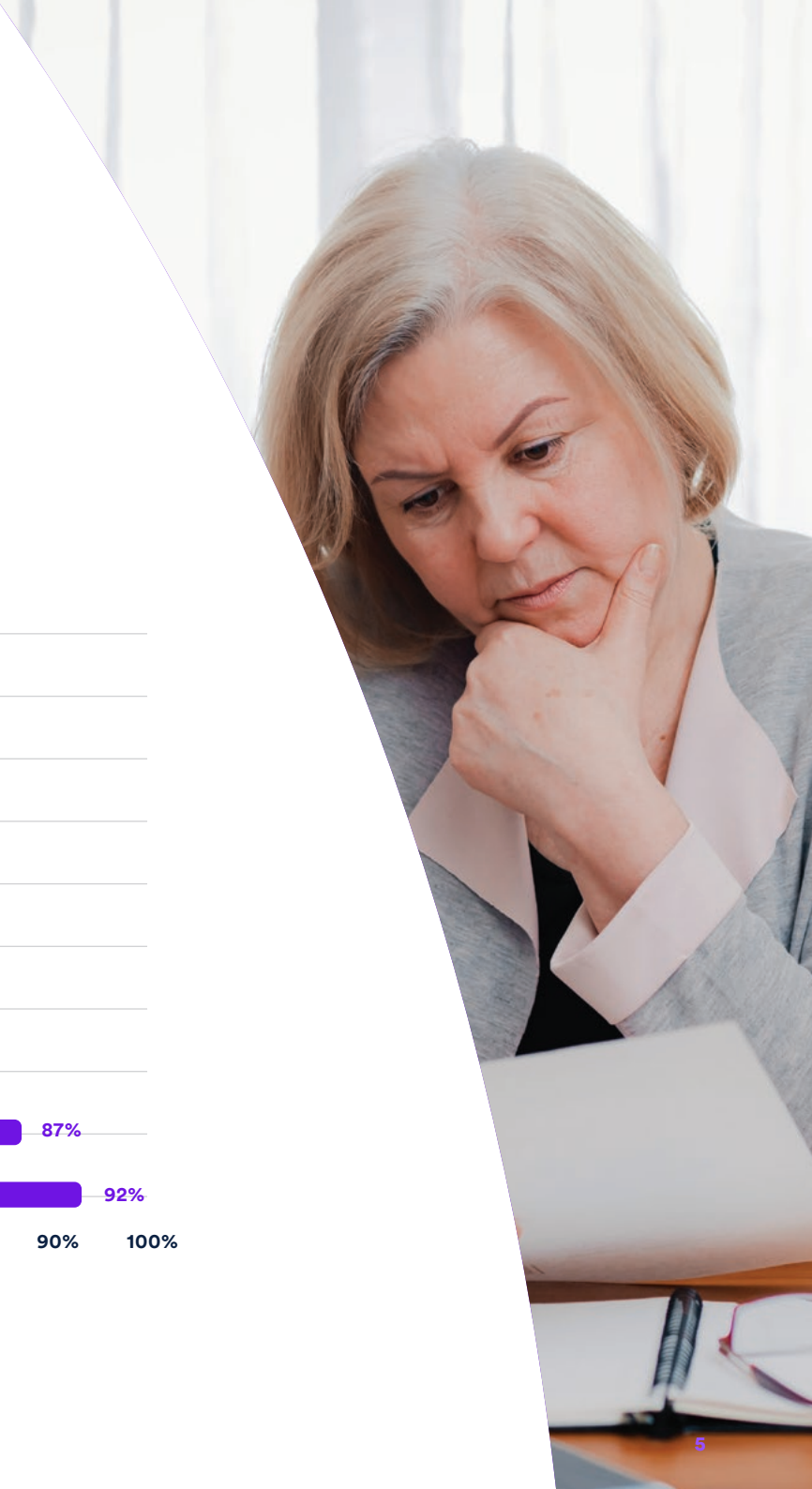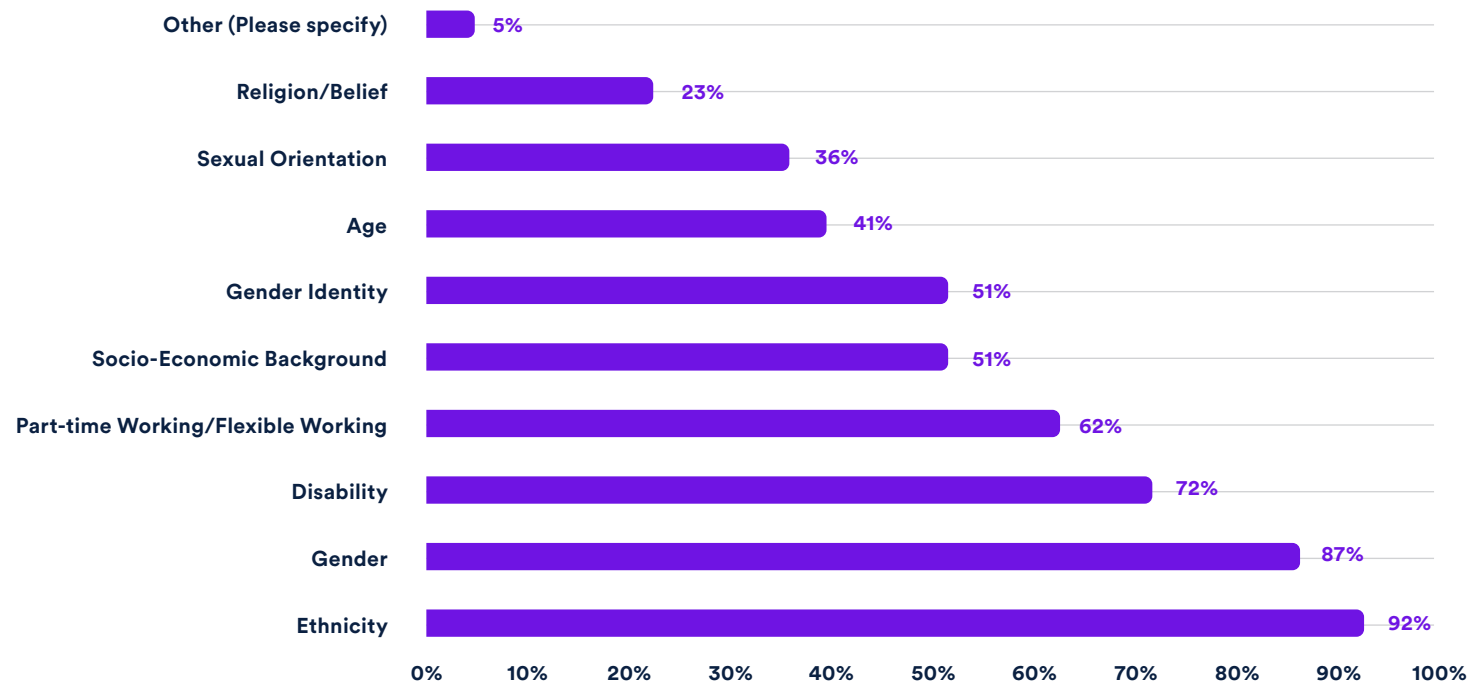
Our findings reveal that candidates' biggest concerns are being discriminated against due to age, personal appearance and disability. Meanwhile issues such as mental health, accents and simply being a parent were also common.

The 10 biggest biases according to applicants

1. Age (too old) - 64.4%
2. Personal appearance - 19.6%
3. Disability or learning needs - 17.6%
4. Gender or gender identity - 17.4%
5. Race or ethnicity - 15.5%
6. Weight - 14.6%
7. Age (too young) - 13.5%
8. Accent - 13.3%
9. Mental Health - 12.6%
10. Being a parent - 12.6%

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However, these concerns don't match the focus of equality issues being addressed by HR leaders in ED&I policies, as discovered in our 2022 research with The FIRM, which are shown below. The report found that ED&I is a key focus area for 95% of companies, but almost half (46%) don't set any KPIs around ED&I for anyone. This suggests that companies are keen on improving ED&I but perhaps don't really know how to go about making concrete improvements.

Which of the following areas are of focus in order of priority?

Category	Percentage
Other (Please specify)	5%
Religion/Belief	23%
Sexual Orientation	36%
Age	41%
Gender Identity	51%
Socio-Economic Background	51%
Part-time Working/Flexible Working	62%
Disability	72%
Gender	87%
Ethnicity	92%

Unequal opportunities

These are the factors that British jobseekers believe are negatively impacting their prospects.

Thanks to the ubiquitous diversity, equality and inclusion policies that form part of modern applications, today's candidates are as used to sharing information on their race and sexual orientation with prospective employers as they are salary expectations and start dates.

But what is this information being used for and does it actually protect candidates from discrimination?

The answer from candidates is a resounding "no", according to our Tribepad Stop The Bias Report, which found that **less than a quarter of candidates (23.4%) trust that diversity information is actually being used to benefit their applications.**

It's just one revelation from an eye-opening analysis, which shows that British jobseekers fear their prospects are being actively harmed by a range of biases.

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Diversity data uncertainty

Our findings reveal a culture of uncertainty among applicants who feel that diversity data is fuelling bias rather than combating it. Indeed, the majority of people we questioned (76.6%) either don't trust or don't know if they trust employers to use this data for their benefit.

While people from all ages are sceptical of employers' data gathering, the highest levels of mistrust stemmed from older demographics, particularly those aged 55-64 (44%) and 65+ (41.5%). Meanwhile, younger applicants, including those aged 18-24 (36.7%) and 25-34 (35.9%) were more likely to trust that their data was being used for good.

Given the levels of applicant scepticism, it's perhaps no surprise that almost 8 out of 10 respondents (76.6%) feel that processes would be fairer if recruitment remained anonymous.

And they may be right. Despite the massive amounts of ED&I data collected by employers we know the current approach to bias simply isn't working. All too often it is seen as nothing more than a tick box exercise, where vital information is either ignored entirely or used for the company's benefit.

76.6% either don't trust or don't know if they trust employers to use this data for their benefit.

Do you trust that employers use your diversity data in a positive way that benefits applicants?

Legend: Yes, No, Don't Know — Age Range: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64
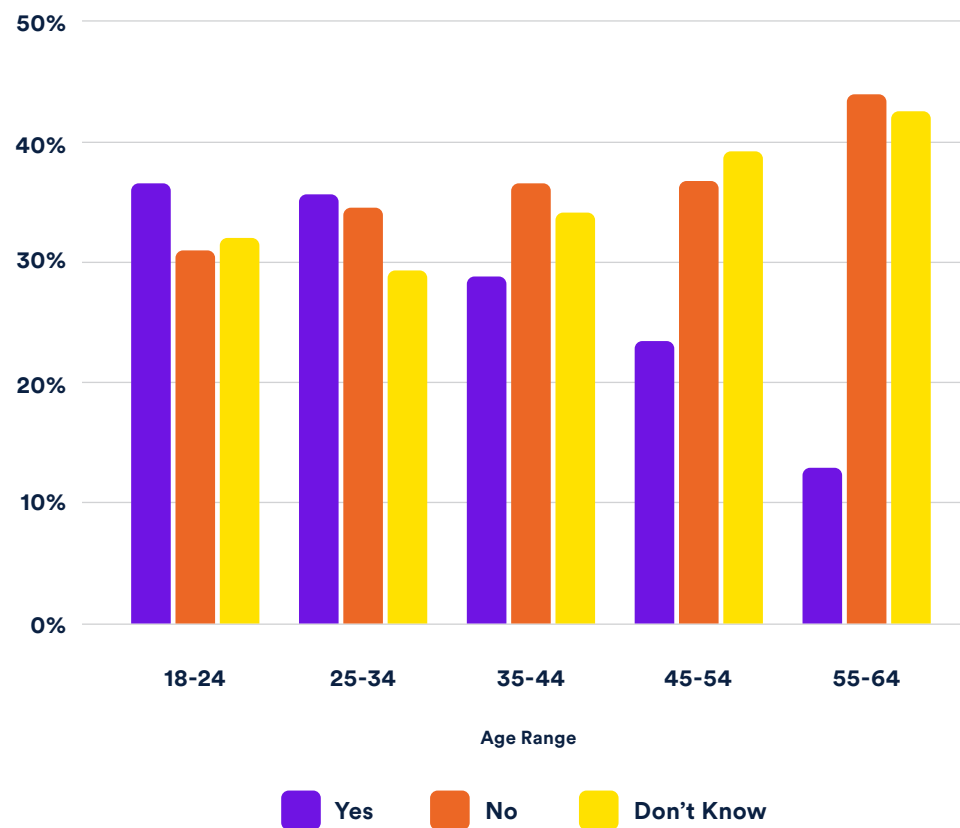
Can **blind recruitment** remove bias from the **hiring process?**

In a perfect world, people would get hired based strictly on their work experience and the skills they bring to the table. However, our analysis shows that candidates have real concerns that biases, whether conscious or otherwise, might seriously impact their chances of getting their next role.

Blind recruitment, where candidates remain anonymous throughout the process is favoured among applicants, with 76.6% of people questioned feeling this would make things fairer. Another possible solution might be to delay when identifying information is revealed to potential employers until later. Indeed 28.7% of people we spoke to thought this information should be withheld until just before face-to-face interviews begin, while a further 23.9% felt it should only be made available once an offer has been made.

However, interestingly, just 18.8% of people we surveyed believed that this information should be completely removed from applications.

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> **Anonymous applications might sound like the answer to candidates' concerns, but how do you put them into practice? And when is the right moment for the big reveal? What aspects of blind recruitment can companies include in their recruitment process to make things fairer?**
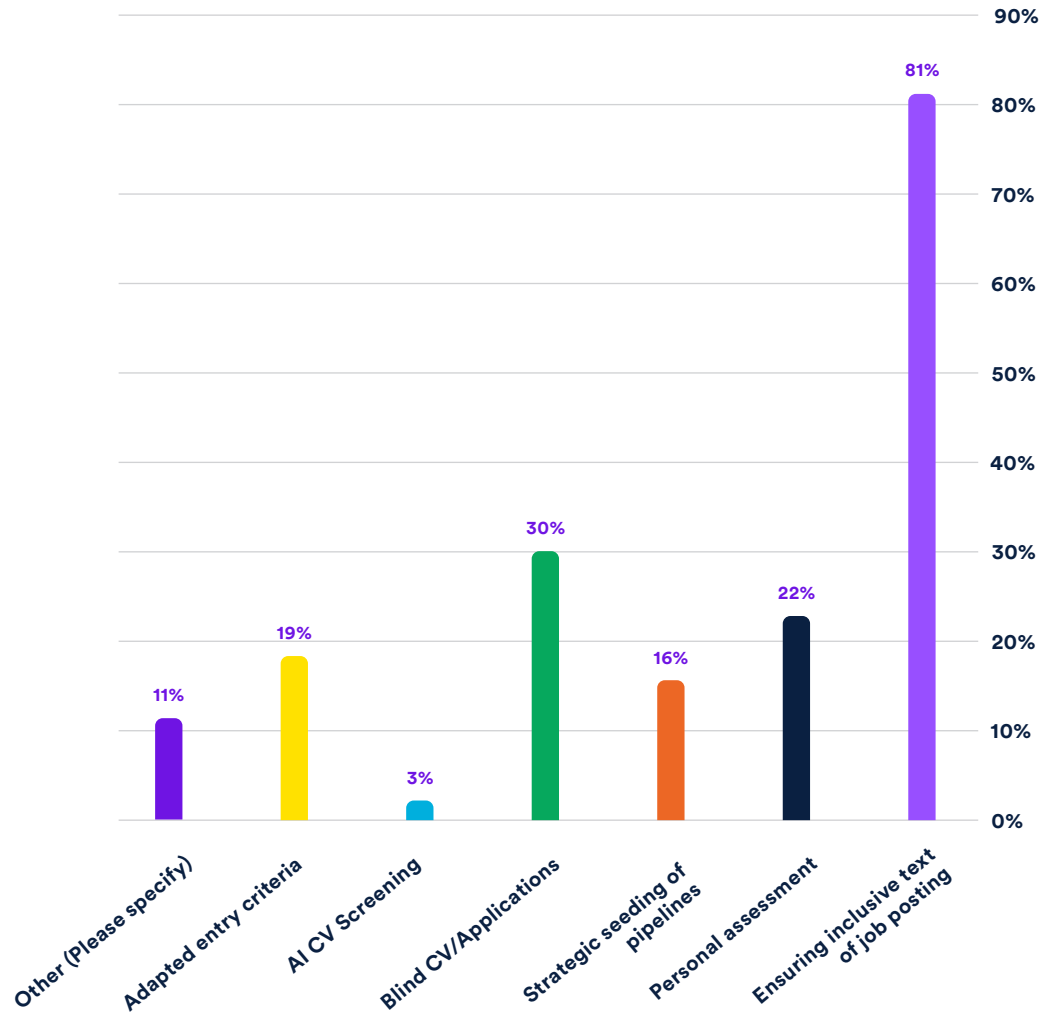
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When do you think diversity data information should be shared with a recruiter? (Identifying information such as name, age, gender and other characteristics)

11.3% Before the telephone interview stage

28.7% Before the face to face or video stage

17.3% Just before a job offer is made

23.9% After a job offer is made

18.8% Removed completely until you decide whether or not to share that information

11.3%

18.8%

28.7%

23.9%

17.3%
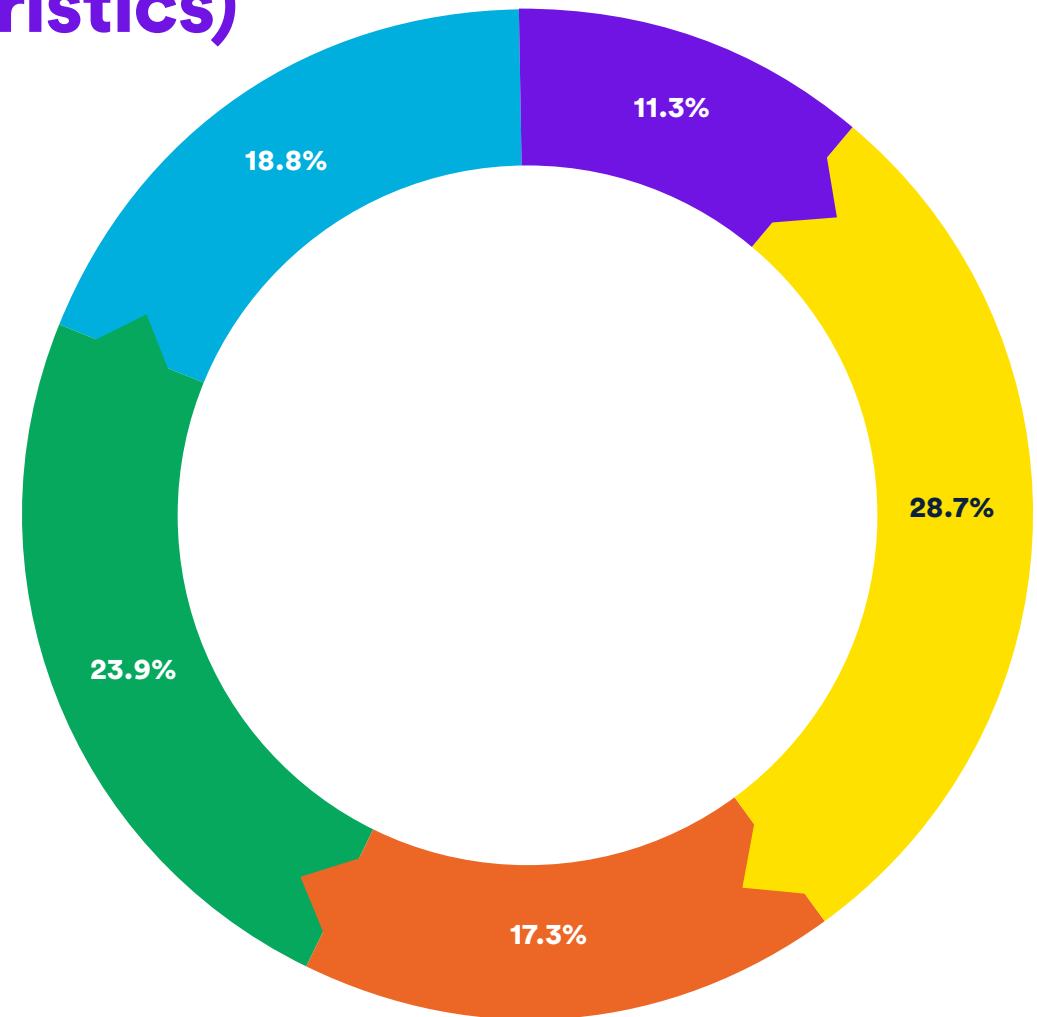
It's clear that candidates are keen for more anonymity in the recruitment process. But this doesn't match what companies are doing to improve diversity. In our 2022 research with The FIRM, we asked HR leaders "What have you done to mitigate against bias in your recruitment process?" Only 30% are even considering piloting blind applications, with the majority looking to address bias in recruitment by ensuring that job advert text promotes inclusivity.

Category	Percentage
Other (Please specify)	11%
Adapted entry criteria	19%
AI CV Screening	3%
Blind CV/Applications	30%
Strategic seeding of pipelines	16%
Personal assessment	22%
Ensuring inclusive text of job posting	81%

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Accent anxiety

What does your accent say about you?

For such a small country Britain has a wealth of regional twangs, but according to our research "Accent Anxiety" is becoming a growing concern for jobseekers who fear that the way they speak is harming their chances of landing their next role.

Overall, accents ranked 8th on our list of candidate concerns; sitting alongside issues such as race, religion and gender among the factors Britons fear will have a negative impact on their prospects.

Interestingly, our data revealed a clear North-South divide with people in cities like Liverpool (17.2%), Leeds (16.5%), Newcastle (15.1%) and Birmingham (14%) among the most likely to believe that their accent would be a barrier to them getting a job or promotion.
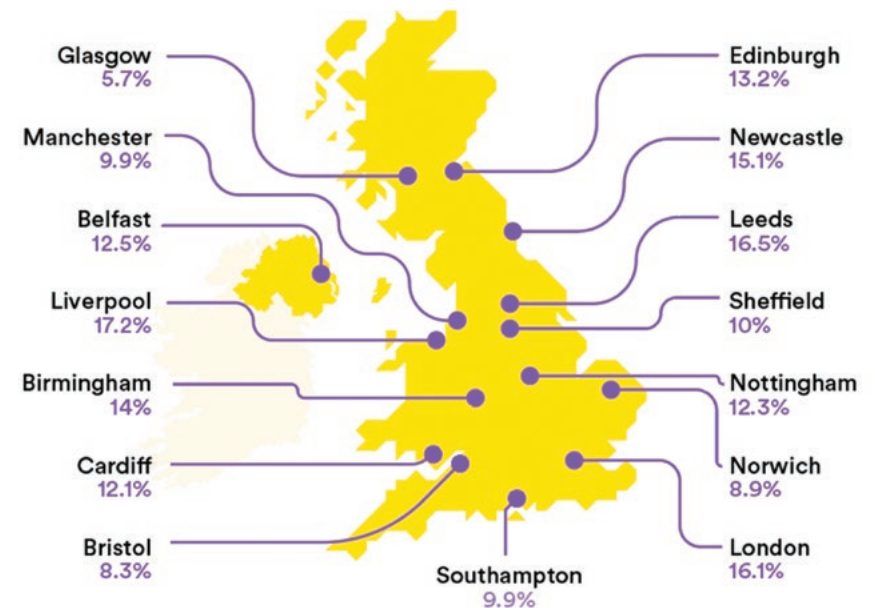
Indeed Liverpudlians are twice as likely to be concerned about the stigma associated with their accents than those with softer inflections in cities such as Southampton (9.9%), suggesting that stereotypes that have been built over centuries are still leading to bias in modern Britain today.

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I had a producer literally tell me he'd never put me on the main show until I 'softened my accent'. He genuinely said non-welsh audiences wouldn't understand me. I was too young and stupid to tell him what I thought. It's why my accent is so mad now. I've started going back to my authentic accent now but it's a conscious thing I've had to do. He basically broke my brain.

Gavin, 37, Podcaster and Video Producer, East London, originally from Wales

Percentage of people who feel their accent could be hindering their career.

Glasgow 5.7%
Manchester 9.9%
Belfast 12.5%
Liverpool 17.2%
Birmingham 14%
Cardiff 12.1%
Bristol 8.3%
Edinburgh 13.2%
Newcastle 15.1%
Leeds 16.5%
Sheffield 10%
Nottingham 12.3%
Norwich 8.9%
London 16.1%
Southampton 9.9%

Age concern

They say that age is just a number, but according to our Tribepad Stop The Bias Report it's also one of the biggest factors candidates feel are holding them back from landing their next role.

When applicants were asked if they felt they had less chance of landing a role because of their age; more than two thirds (64.4%) admitted that they were worried about being too old. Those numbers were particularly pronounced among older age groups including 45-54 year-olds (71%) and 55-64 year-olds (88.6%), while a staggering 94.4% of those aged 65+ believed they would be the victims of ageism.

It's not just more experienced candidates who fear their age might impact their prospects, however. Shockingly a third (33.3%) of Gen Z applicants (16-25 year-olds) also revealed that they would be too old for some positions, a number that is greater than those who felt that they would be discriminated against for being too young (31.1%).

"The number of people over the age of 50 in employment has risen in recent years. This is great progress, but there is clearly still concern among candidates that they're at risk of being aged out of opportunities. How can we reduce bias against older workers during the recruitment process?"

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I'd been working as a policy advisor since I was 16. When I turned 18, they said they were looking for people who were younger to talk about their experiences, someone going through it now. I thought, well I'm still a young person and I have been through it and can talk about it. Just before turning 19, the opportunities were completely cut off. I now work as an outdoor activity instructor but worry about when I will be seen as too old."

Alicia, 19, Youth Policy Advisor, Essex

People who think they are too old/young

■ 18-24	■ 25-34	■ 35-44
■ 45-54	■ 55-64	■ 65+

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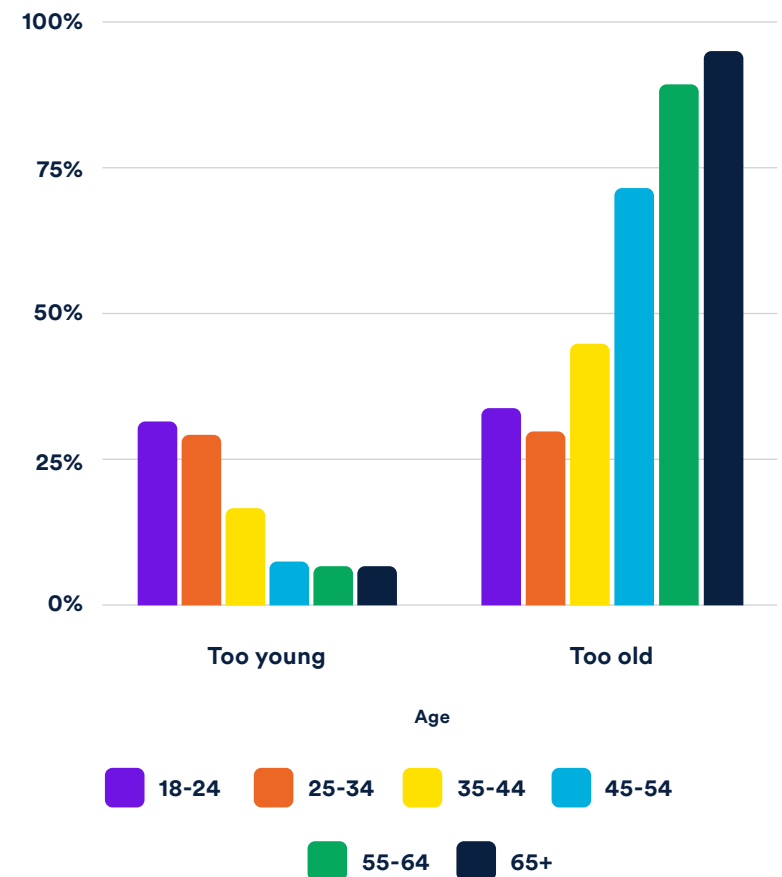
The **parent trap**

The onset of COVID-19 and the restrictions that have been introduced to stop its spread have turned the world upside down. But while employers have adapted to Zoom meetings and remote working, it seems that concern over the potential impact of childcare continues to linger.

According to our research, an increasing number of candidates are worried about paying the penalty for becoming parents.

More than a quarter (25.2%) of people we questioned were worried that being a parent, or being pregnant, would negatively impact their employment prospects.

Women are almost twice as likely (15.9%) to be concerned about the impact of parenthood on their careers than their male counterparts (8.5%), suggesting that Britain still has a long way to go to eliminate traditional biases.

Worryingly our data shows that Millennials were most concerned about the impact that being a parent (14.3%) or being pregnant (16.1%) may have on their ability to secure a job or a promotion. They were also more than twice as likely as those from other age groups to believe that getting married would negatively impact their career prospects, suggesting that a generation of candidates are at risk of putting their careers ahead of their personal lives.

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"I had an interview recently where I mentioned I have two kids and one of them is a one year old. It seemed like they were a bit put off by that fact, as they asked lots of questions on how it would affect my performance. The interview was for a law firm. In the future I don't really want to mention that I'm a parent during the recruitment process unless it comes up in conversation, other than that I try to avoid it."

Charlie, 23, Legal Assistant, Portsmouth

First impressions

Despite concerted efforts to level the playing field, many of those questioned as part of our Tribepad Stop The Bias Report still believe that first impressions count when it comes to their careers.

Candidates believe issues such as weight (14.6%) and personal appearance (19.6%) are more likely to impact their employment opportunities than factors including religion (8.5%), sexual orientation (7.6%) and where they went to school (9.2%).

Our research shows that people in Leeds were overwhelmingly the UK's most image-conscious, with almost a third (31.6%) believing that their personal appearance - including their hair, skin and clothes - would mean they have less chance of landing a job or promotion.

The Northern powerhouse was followed by Sheffield (22.9%), Cardiff (22.7%), Belfast (22.5%), and London (21.2%).

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Mental health

Young people are more likely to worry about their mental health affecting their job prospects than older candidates.

Our research found that Millennial and Gen Z candidates were 50% more likely to be concerned about the impact of their psychological wellbeing than older applicants. 14.4% of 18 to 24-year-olds said they were worried about finding a job in the coming months because of their mental health, compared with just 10.6% of 55 to 64-year-olds.

The data reflects widespread concern that younger people have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and the subsequent restrictions it has placed on society, and that despite the opening up of society the pandemic is still taking a toll on their professional lives.

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There have been a few occasions that my mental and physical health have had an impact on my career, and bias against me has been very obvious. I went for a job interview which was scheduled to last an hour. I was suffering from anorexia, and noticeably emaciated. It lasted ten minutes before they said that it wasn't a good fit, and asked me to leave. When I emailed and asked if this was due to my appearance, they did not reply.

Francesca, 35, Marketing Manager, London
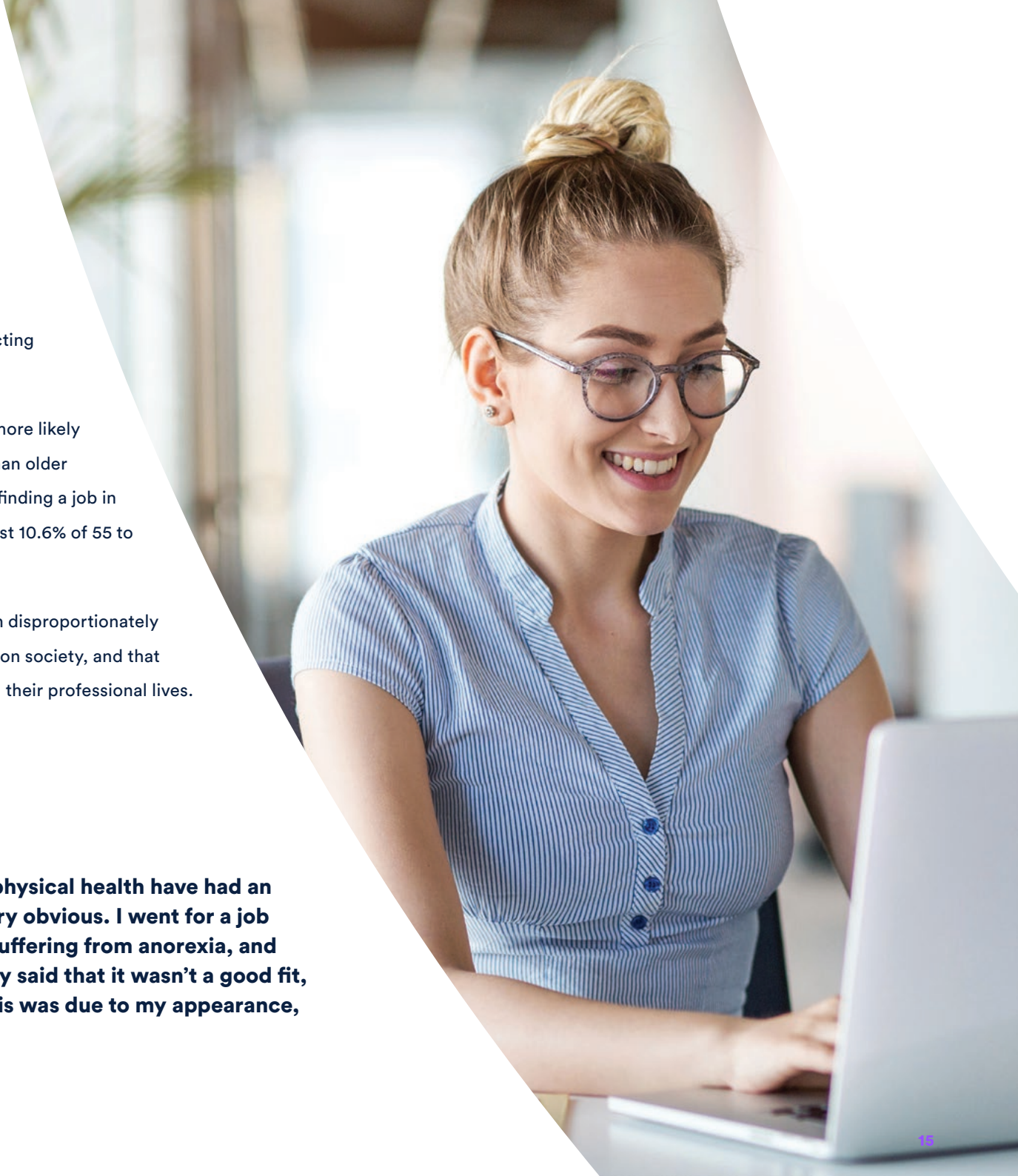
Disability discrimination

Brought into law in 2010, The Equality Act is designed to protect applicants from being discriminated against or treated less favourably on the grounds of disability.

But on the basis of our survey Britons still feel their disabilities are negatively impacting their job prospects. A staggering 17.6% of people we spoke to felt that a disability or learning need was negatively impacting their prospects.

Older respondents, those aged 55-64 (21.2%) and 65+ (21.8%) were more than twice as likely to express concern over a disability than younger applicants in the job market (7.8%).

Our research also showed a clear imbalance across the United Kingdom with residents of Scottish cities Glasgow (27.1%) and Edinburgh (17.1%) outnumbering their counterparts in London (15.9%), Belfast (12.5%) and Cardiff (16.3%).

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The findings of this research are shocking, but sadly, not surprising. We know that conscious and unconscious bias still adversely impacts the chances of success in the job market for many sectors of the community. Candidates know that too. Some employers are genuinely inclusive and do understand the benefits of a diverse workforce, but it can be difficult for candidates to know which employers to trust.

Jane Hatton, Director, Evenbreak

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Weight and see

Personal appearance has absolutely no impact on a candidate's ability to do their jobs. Yet shockingly, 14.6% of the people questioned as part of the report believed their weight would negatively impact their employment prospects.

Women (16.2%) were more likely than their male counterparts (12.7%) to flag weight as a concern. Meanwhile, older applicants were also far more likely to worry about their weight when applying for a new role than Millennials and those from Gen Z.

The anecdotal evidence certainly backs up the statistics. Indeed one respondent suggested that they hadn't been put forward for opportunities because they were too thin, while another believed they'd had an offer withdrawn after informing a potential employer about medical issues around their weight.

It points to a worrying culture of discrimination where people are being judged not for their ability to perform a role but by their appearance.

Political bias

The UK has been through an unprecedented period of political division with debate over issues like BREXIT and the COVID-19 response fuelling divisions among friends, families and coworkers.

It's no surprise that during this time of division that candidates fear their political leanings might impact their opportunity to secure their next role. Indeed, 1-in-10 people we spoke to felt their political views would hold them back.

The problem was particularly pronounced in Northern Ireland where historic tensions perhaps account for the 17.5% of people who were worried about the impact of their views, a figure that eclipses our findings in areas including Central England (6.1%), Scotland (4.3%) and Wales (9.9%)

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The time for **action is now**

Both the results of our report and anecdotal evidence from recruiters themselves, show us that the current approach to ED&I data simply isn't working. The time has come for us to bring our industry together to discuss candidate concerns and develop new solutions to eliminate bias from the recruitment process - for good.

Check out our upcoming webinars at www.tribepad.com/stop-the-bias to find out how you can become part of the conversation to address the big unanswered questions.

As gatekeepers of diversity, what can recruiters do to minimize the impact that appearance has on applicants' opportunities?

The time has never been riper for real progress on workplace diversity, but given candidates' concerns, how can we deliver programs that people trust to deliver real change?

Can workplace well-being play a role in easing candidates' concerns over mental health?

Is it time for us to tackle accentism in the same way we would racism or sexism?

We like to think that industry has evolved and bias is being weeded out of recruitment. But do our findings show that we need to work harder to eliminate some traditional barriers to opportunity?

Methodology

Information for the **Tribepad Stop The Bias Report** was gathered through an independent online survey of 2011 adults from across the UK. Fieldwork took place in December 2021, the results were then indexed and compared to produce the final report.

tribepad.com/stop-the-bias/