



MEDIA BRIEFING · JULY 2026

# THE APPLICATION **ARMS** **RACE:** AI CVS VS AI SCREENERS

UK graduate employers now receive 140 applications for every vacancy, and half of graduates use AI to apply. Employers answer with AI screening; candidates answer back with AI-assisted interviews. Hiring is slower, colder and less honest than before the tools arrived. Regulators in Brussels and London are stepping in, and the smartest employers are quietly going back to meeting people in person. This briefing sets out the verified numbers, corrects the most commonly misreported ones, and shows what still gets people hired.

**Updated**  
10 July 2026

**Next update**  
August 2026

**Data & interviews**  
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**Data table**  
[CSV at ep-advisory.com/press/](https://ep-advisory.com/press/)

[ THE HEADLINE ]

# 140

applications per UK graduate vacancy – second consecutive record year (86 in 2022–23; 38 in 2002–03)

ISE surveys, Oct 2024 & Nov 2025

**Candidates apply with AI. Employers screen with AI. Hiring is slower, colder and less honest than before the tools arrived – and the regulators have noticed.**

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**+239%**

applications sent per candidate since ChatGPT's 2022 release

Greenhouse, via The Economist, 12 Jan 2026

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**8 weeks**

UK average time to hire, up from 4.8 weeks in 2024

Totaljobs (900 HR leaders), 31 Oct 2025

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**0.5%**

of cold online applications end in a hire, down from 1.6% in 2021

Gem 2025 benchmarks (vendor)

[ THE SPIRAL ]

# HOW BOTH SIDES AUTOMATED EACH OTHER INTO GRIDLOCK

[ 01 ]

## CANDIDATES FLOOD

**+239%**

applications per candidate since ChatGPT; 11,000 a minute on LinkedIn  
Greenhouse via The Economist; LinkedIn via NYT

[ 02 ]

## EMPLOYERS AUTOMATE

// **43%**

of organisations use AI in HR; 57% of UK graduate employers fully automate numerical tests  
SHRM 2025; ISE 2025

[ 03 ]

## QUALITY COLLAPSES

// **0.5%**

of cold applications end in a hire, down from 1.6% in 2021; recruiters see "nearly identical" CVs  
Gem 2025; ISE 2025

[ 04 ]

## TRUST BREAKS

// **61%**

of graduate employers caught undisclosed AI in interviews; only 26% of candidates trust AI to judge them  
ISE 2025; Gartner, 31 Jul 2025

[ 05 ]

## HUMANS RETURN

// **62%**

of candidates prefer roles with in-person interviews – Google, Deloitte UK and McKinsey obliged  
Gartner 2025; announcements 2024–25

**The visible cost:** UK average time to hire has stretched from 4.8 weeks to 8 (Totaljobs, 31 Oct 2025) – and 86% of UK job hunters report ignored applications, which pushes them to apply to more jobs, which deepens the pile. That is the spiral.

[ THE QUOTE – LIFT IT ]



**We got into this AI arms race that no one wins. It's mutually assured destruction.**

Jeremy Schifeling, career coach — in Fortune, “Robots screening robots”, 1 June 2026.

Volume is up 239% per candidate, conversion has collapsed to 0.5%, and time-to-hire has doubled. The response now visible on both sides of the Atlantic: bring back the in-person interview, and regulate the algorithms.

## [ THE REGULATORS ARRIVE ]

## FOUR DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

**31 MAR 2026****The ICO draws a line**

After engaging 30+ employers, the ICO finds some making “solely automated decisions” with no meaningful human involvement. Human review “cannot be a token gesture or a rubber stamp.”

ICO, Recruitment Rewired

**2 AUG 2026****Transparency duties begin**

EU AI Act Article 50 applies: candidates must be told when they are interacting with AI systems.

EU AI Act

**LATE 2026****Two verdicts land**

The ICO’s statutory code of practice is expected — and the ISE 2026 survey shows whether 140 applications per vacancy becomes a third-year norm.

ICO, ISE (Nov)

**2 DEC 2027****The high-risk regime bites**

Full EU obligations for recruitment AI — systems that filter applications or evaluate candidates. Deployer breaches: fines up to €15m or 3% of global turnover.

Digital Omnibus via Gibson Dunn, 27 May 2026

The gap to note: EU high-risk enforcement slipped 16 months (the Digital Omnibus moved it from 2 August 2026) — while the ICO says UK employers are making solely automated decisions **today**. Candidates live inside that enforcement gap.

[ WHAT STILL CONVERTS ]

# THE CHANNELS AI CANNOT FLOOD

~40%

of referred candidates reach interview — against ~12% who apply cold. Yet referrals are only ~1% of application volume.

Ashby, 38 million applications, 2021–24

43%

of UK employers say they are moving to skills-based hiring; half have dropped degree requirements.

Totaljobs, Oct 2025; TestGorilla 2025 (vendor)

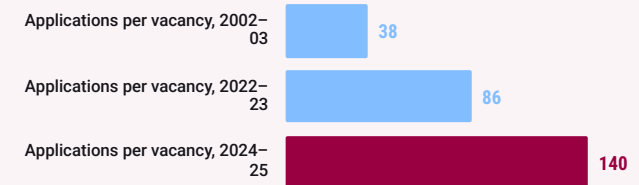
1 in 11

UK employers holds a sponsor licence — one knock-out question removes visa-dependent candidates before any human reads the CV. Mass application is the worst strategy for them.

gov.uk register, 10 Jul 2026; BPE 2025

Targeting licensed sponsors, securing referrals and proving skills directly is EP Advisory's core casework with international candidates — case studies available.

## // THE GRADUATE APPLICATION FUNNEL IS JAMMING



Source: Institute of Student Employers (ISE) survey data, Oct 2024 / Nov 2025. Unit: applications per vacancy. The all-economy UK average is ~22 per vacancy (Totaljobs, Oct 2025) — 140 is specific to graduate schemes.

[ CHECK BEFORE YOU PUBLISH ]

# IT WAS **PICHA**I, NOT **BRIN** — AND TWO MORE CHECKS

[ 01 ]

WHAT'S CIRCULATING

“Sergey Brin announced Google’s in-person interviews”

WHAT'S CORRECT

**It was CEO Sundar Pichai, Lex Fridman podcast, June 2025**

Podcast, Jun 2025

[ 02 ]

WHAT'S CIRCULATING

“Nearly 90% of companies screen with AI”

WHAT'S CORRECT

**Loose vendor-style definition. Representative survey: 43% of organisations use AI in HR at all; of those recruiting with it, 44% screen CVs**

SHRM 2025; Fortune 1 Jun 2026

[ 03 ]

WHAT'S CIRCULATING

“27% of candidates are ghosted (CIPD)”

WHAT'S CORRECT

**Direction reversed: that 27% is candidates ghosting employers. Employer-side figure: 56% of UK candidates ghosted after interview**

CIPD/Omni; Greenhouse 2025

The full corrections table — 8 claims, each with its likely origin — is in Appendix B, page 10.

## [ HOW TO USE THIS BRIEFING ]

## USEFUL IF YOU'RE WRITING ABOUT...

- [ **The graduate jobs crunch:** 140 applications per vacancy, hiring down 8%, 61% of employers catching undisclosed AI – the class of 2026 faces the worst odds since 2020, partly self-inflicted.
- [ **Regulation catching up with hiring algorithms:** EU high-risk rules slip to Dec 2027 while the ICO finds UK employers making “solely automated decisions” today – a 17-month enforcement gap candidates live inside.
- [ **Deepfake candidates and hiring fraud:** identity, not skill, is becoming the thing interviews verify.
- [ **The death (and afterlife) of the CV:** the CV survives as a formality, not a filter.
- [ **The ghosting economy:** both sides now treat each other as spam – 86% ignored, 56% ghosted post-interview, time-to-hire doubled.
- [ **International talent squeezed twice:** AI volume plus the sponsorship knock-out, with ~1 in 11 UK employers licensed to sponsor.

## // QUOTE FREELY

Every figure carries its primary source and date. Attribute the compilation to EP Advisory; no permission needed.

## // TAKE THE DATA

The reference table ships as CSV with this briefing at [ep-advisory.com/press/](https://ep-advisory.com/press/). Updated monthly and whenever official figures change.

## // TALK TO A HUMAN

Per-country data cuts, plain-English explanation of any rule, interviews and background.

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## [ APPENDIX A – THE FULL PICTURE ]

The narrative behind the headline pages, in full. Everything here is quotable; every figure is dated.

## // THE VOLUME SPIRAL

Generative AI removed the main cost of applying for a job: time. The result is volume without precedent. UK graduate employers received around 1.2 million applications for roughly 17,000 vacancies in 2023–24, a 59% jump in one year (ISE, 17 Oct 2024). The following year the ratio held at 140 applications per vacancy, with 155 employers handling about 1.8 million applications for around 31,000 hires – even as graduate hiring fell 8% (ISE 2025). The same survey series recorded 38 applications per vacancy in 2002–03.

The pattern is global. Greenhouse data reported by The Economist (12 Jan 2026) shows applications per candidate up **239%** since ChatGPT launched. LinkedIn processes around 11,000 applications a minute, up 45% year on year (via The New York Times, 21 Jun 2025). Workday's analysis of 173 million applications found applications growing four times faster than vacancies in H1 2024: +31% against +7% (Workday Global Workforce Report, 10 Sep 2024).

Candidates are open about the cause. Half of UK graduates now use AI in applications, up from 38% a year earlier (Bright Network via The Guardian, 13 Jul 2025); Gartner puts general candidate AI use at 4 in 10 (2Q25). Employers say quality has not kept pace: recruiters describe "nearly identical" CVs that are harder to rank, and roughly half of ISE employers worry AI-written applications misrepresent real skills (48% for graduates, 52% for school leavers).

And candidates feel the silence: 86% of UK job hunters report ignored applications (Robert Walters, early 2025; vendor survey) and 56% report being ghosted after an interview (Greenhouse, 2025). Silence pushes candidates to apply to more jobs, which deepens the pile. That is the spiral. The visible cost: UK average time to hire has stretched from 4.8 weeks to 8 (Totaljobs, 31 Oct 2025).

## // THE SCREENING SIDE – AND THE REGULATORS ARRIVING

Employers' answer to AI volume is AI screening, though adoption is lower than headlines suggest. SHRM's 2025 Talent Trends found **43% of organisations use AI in HR** (up from 26% in 2024); of those using it in recruiting, 44% screen CVs with it. SHRM's State of AI in HR 2026 (1,908 HR professionals, fielded Dec 2025) found recruiting is the single biggest AI use area. Vendor surveys run far higher – HireVue's 2026 report (3,100+ hiring managers) says 77% of HR teams use AI regularly while only 41% fully trust it – and Fortune's "nearly 90%" claim (1 Jun

2026) reflects that looser definition. The two families of numbers measure different things. In UK graduate hiring, automation is concentrated early: 57% of ISE employers fully automate numerical tests. Candidates do not trust the machines: only 26% believe AI will evaluate them fairly (Gartner, 31 Jul 2025).

Regulation is catching up. The EU AI Act classifies as high-risk "AI systems intended to be used for the recruitment or selection of natural persons... to analyse and filter job applications, and to evaluate candidates" (Annex III, 4a). Those obligations were due on 2 August 2026 – but the Digital Omnibus (provisional deal 7 May 2026; Parliament approval 16 Jun 2026) moves standalone high-risk compliance to **2 December 2027**, pending Official Journal publication. Deployer breaches carry fines up to €15m or 3% of global turnover. Transparency duties under Article 50 still start on 2 August 2026.

The UK moved first on enforcement tone. On 31 March 2026 the ICO published a report and draft guidance on automated decision-making in recruitment after engaging 30+ employers. Its blunt finding: some "employers were using the tools to make solely automated decisions and there was no meaningful human involvement." Human review, it said, "cannot be a token gesture or a rubber stamp." A statutory code of practice is in preparation.

## // THE COUNTERMEASURES: HIRING GOES BACK IN PERSON

The arms race has a fraud problem, and employers are responding by re-humanising the process. Gartner predicts one in four candidate profiles worldwide will be fake by 2028; in its 2Q25 survey of 3,000 candidates, 6% admitted to interview fraud – posing as someone else or having someone impersonate them. "It's getting harder for employers to evaluate candidates' true abilities, and in some cases, their identities," says Gartner's Jamie Kohn. Cisco introduced hybrid verification after discovering fraudulent hires made through video-only interviews in early 2025.

The in-person interview is returning as the verification layer of last resort. Google reintroduced at least one in-person round – announced by CEO **Sundar Pichai** (Lex Fridman podcast, June 2025; frequently misattributed to Sergey Brin). Deloitte UK reinstated in-person graduate interviews from around September 2024, citing AI-cheating concerns alongside regulatory pressure. McKinsey requires at least one in-person meeting before an offer. Teach First moved applicants to in-person

interviews as graduate AI use hit 50% (The Guardian, 13 Jul 2025). Even Anthropic, which famously banned AI use in applications, reversed that ban in July 2025 – a sign that blanket bans proved unenforceable.

Candidates appear to welcome the shift: 62% say they are more likely to apply for a role that requires in-person interviews (Gartner, 2Q25). UK graduate employers never fully let go anyway – in-person interviews, group exercises and case studies remain 94–100% human-run, and one in three ISE employers is redesigning its selection process because of generative AI. As career coach Jeremy Schifeling put it in Fortune (1 Jun 2026): "We got into this AI arms race that no one wins. It's mutually assured destruction."

## // WHAT STILL CONVERTS – AND WHAT TO WATCH

The channels that work are the ones AI cannot flood. Ashby's analysis of 38 million applications (2021–24) found referred candidates reach interview at roughly 40%, against roughly 12% for cold applicants – yet referrals make up only about 1% of applications. Gem's 2025 benchmarks put the cold-application-to-hire rate at 0.5%, down from 1.6% in 2021. Demonstrated skill also converts: 43% of UK employers say they are moving to skills-based hiring (Totaljobs, Oct 2025), and half of UK employers have dropped degree requirements (TestGorilla 2025, vendor data).

For international candidates the maths is harsher still. About 127,000 UK organisations hold a worker sponsor licence (gov.uk register, 10 Jul 2026) out of roughly 1.42 million private-sector employers (Business Population Estimates 2025) – about **one employer in eleven**. A single knock-out question – "Will you require sponsorship?" – removes most applications before any human sees them. Since 22 July 2025 the bar is higher again: £41,700 minimum salary and degree-level roles only. For visa-dependent candidates, mass application is the single worst strategy; targeting licensed sponsors, securing referrals and proving skills directly is the only game that pays. That is EP Advisory's core casework.

**What to watch:** 2 August 2026 – EU AI Act transparency obligations (Article 50) apply. Summer 2026 – Official Journal publication of the Digital Omnibus. Late 2026 – ICO statutory code of practice, and the ISE 2026 survey (expected November): the first read on whether 140 applications per vacancy becomes a third-year norm. 2 December 2027 – full high-risk obligations bite for recruitment AI across the EU.

## [ APPENDIX B – CORRECTIONS IN FULL ]

Every claim we have seen circulating on this topic, against the primary sources. The three most consequential are on page 7.

CIRCULATING CLAIM	WHAT'S ACCURATE	SOURCE
"Sergey Brin announced Google's in-person interviews"	It was CEO Sundar Pichai, Lex Fridman podcast, June 2025	Podcast, Jun 2025
"Nearly 90% of companies screen with AI"	Loose vendor-style definition. Representative survey: 43% of organisations use AI in HR at all; of those recruiting with it, 44% screen CVs	SHRM 2025; Fortune 1 Jun 2026
"27% of candidates are ghosted (CIPD)"	Direction reversed: that 27% is candidates ghosting employers. Employer-side figure: 56% of UK candidates ghosted after interview	CIPD/Omni; Greenhouse 2025
"UK jobs get 140 applications each"	140 is graduate vacancies (ISE). The all-economy UK average is ~22 per vacancy	ISE 2025; Totaljobs Oct 2025
"Anthropic bans AI in job applications"	It did – then reversed the ban in July 2025; candidates may now use Claude	Business Insider / Fortune, Jul 2025
"EU AI hiring rules bite on 2 Aug 2026"	The Digital Omnibus moves high-risk hiring-AI compliance to 2 Dec 2027. Article 50 transparency still starts 2 Aug 2026	Gibson Dunn, 27 May 2026
"1 in 4 job candidates are fake"	A Gartner prediction for 2028, not a measurement. Measured now: 6% admit interview fraud	Gartner, 31 Jul 2025
"The Economist found +239%"	The figure is Greenhouse's, reported by The Economist	The Economist, 12 Jan 2026

## [ APPENDIX C – THE REFERENCE TABLE ]

## THE ARMS RACE BY THE NUMBERS

METRIC	BEFORE	NOW	SOURCE
Applications per UK graduate vacancy	38 (2002–03); 86 (2022–23)	140 (two consecutive years)	ISE 2024 + 2025
Applications per candidate	baseline (2022)	+239%	Greenhouse via The Economist
LinkedIn applications per minute	–	11,000 (+45% YoY)	LinkedIn via NYT, Jun 2025
Application growth vs vacancy growth	–	+31% vs +7% (H1 2024, 173M apps)	Workday, Sep 2024
UK average time to hire	4.8 weeks (2024)	8 weeks (2025)	Totaljobs, Oct 2025
Cold application → hire	1.6% (2021)	0.5% (2025)	Gem 2025 (vendor)
UK graduates using AI to apply	38% (2024)	50% (2025)	Bright Network via Guardian
Employers detecting AI interview cheating	7% (2024)	15% (2025)	ISE 2025

This table ships as CSV with the briefing at [ep-advisory.com/press/](https://ep-advisory.com/press/). Updated monthly and when official figures change; next scheduled update August 2026.

# TALK TO A HUMAN

Per-country data cuts, plain-English explanation of any European visa rule, and anonymised, aggregated observations from our casework with international professionals.

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**About EP Advisory.** A London-based career consultancy for international professionals moving to and within the UK, Europe and the Gulf. 50+ consultants; 5,000+ professionals supported across 29 countries; publisher of a 16-country index of official work-visa salary thresholds and of these monthly media briefings.

### SOURCES IN THIS BRIEFING

ISE Student Recruitment Surveys (17 Oct 2024; Nov 2025) · The Economist (12 Jan 2026) · LinkedIn via NYT (21 Jun 2025) · Workday Global Workforce Report (10 Sep 2024) · Bright Network via The Guardian (13 Jul 2025) · SHRM Talent Trends 2025 + State of AI in HR 2026 · HireVue 2026 (vendor) · Fortune (1 Jun 2026) · Gartner (31 Jul 2025) · Totaljobs (31 Oct 2025) · Gem 2025 & Ashby Talent Trends (vendor) · TestGorilla 2025 (vendor) · EU AI Act Annex III + Digital Omnibus (Gibson Dunn, 27 May 2026) · ICO Recruitment Rewired (31 Mar 2026) · gov.uk sponsor register (10 Jul 2026) & Business Population Estimates 2025. Vendor figures are labelled.

### THE SERIES

Five briefings, updated monthly: AI & entry-level jobs · the application arms race · Gen Z, label vs data · international professionals in the UK · youth unemployment, UK vs Europe. All at [ep-advisory.com/press/](https://ep-advisory.com/press/) — with a threshold-change alert list for journalists on request.

