

# The Employer Branding landscape in early 2017

– organisational threats and opportunities

*“Today’s employer brands have to reach out successfully to an increasingly diverse set of talent pools. If your EVP was predicated around yesterday’s target audiences, not today’s, don’t be surprised if tomorrow’s resourcing isn’t working”*



# Executive summary

- If you are thinking of reducing your employer brand spend in 2017, you are amongst just 17% of UK employers doing so
- Framing the business case for employer branding investment remains a key challenge
- The EVP can still feel as though it occupies an HR ghetto
- Perhaps the key challenge facing employer branding owners is fierce competitor activity
- Doubt remains as to who owns the employer brand internally and how aligned internal people messages are with external recruitment communications
- If you don't measure your employer brand, you'll struggle to manage it (with apologies to Peter Drucker)
- Employer brands need to be capable of reaching out to much broader talent audiences than ever before
- The idea of a series of seamless employee touchpoints from candidate through to employee falters as the journey progresses
- An EVP has a finite shelf life, as does the research that informs it
- There is a clear correlation between those organisations wishing to increase direct sourcing and their focus on their employer brand
- If you're an organisation emphasising change and continuous improvement, this should apply equally to your EVP
- Perhaps the key attribute an employer brand should possess is authenticity – it's hard to achieve this in the absence of authentic research
- Brexit means that employers have to reach out and reassure talent audiences more than ever
- An organisation going through change should not see this as a reason to avoid an EVP, rather it should wrap its EVP around such change
- Short term hiring should not battle against long term strategic resourcing. Getting the second part of this right will help drive the first part, but the opposite is not the case.



# Key research take-outs

As with every piece of research, a certain element of the findings will confirm perhaps what is already known, and that indeed is the case here. However, the research also points to some new and fascinating learnings.

- i. The breadth and diversity of today's – and tomorrow's – employer brand audiences.** This feels hugely important. As a result of skill shortages, diversity, the growing importance of digital skills and greater labour mobility, your employer brand will be considered, perceived and viewed by a much broader set of talent pools than ever before. Certainly than the ones your employer brand communications were designed around. If you're not aware of such audiences and understand their drivers, then you may struggle to reach out successfully to them;
- ii. Authenticity and research.** Our participants quite rightly admire the likes of John Lewis and Unilever from an employer branding perspective and particularly because of the authenticity of their brand. For so many employer brand professionals they face demonstrating their own authenticity armed with research that is three and more years old or indeed non-existent.
- iii. Making the case in the face of mounting competition.** Professionals with responsibility for the employer brand face two related challenges – the capacity to make the case for investment in their employer brand with the very apparent concern they have over the sense that the competition will eat their lunch.
- iv. Pig and the chicken.** The employer brand is attracting more and more focus from non-recruitment professionals such as marketing and comms. Whilst this has its advantages, employer branding professionals feel they are the ones who are committed and their colleagues merely involved.
- v. Purpose.** This is a major and growing example of what an employer brand should communicate. Millennials, in growing numbers, want to see the purpose of an organisation. The employer brand should be closely aligned to its consumer brand in order that employees understand and buy into how they can contribute to where the organisation is going and how they are delivering the consumer promise.



# Methodology

Sam and I have been delighted to work on the research project outlined here. Reaching out to the, largely, domestic employer branding community, we have been able to construct a highly topical and equally insightful perspective on the sorts of tactics, opportunities and challenges facing practitioners in early 2017.

*And why such research  
and why now?*

It is hard to imagine a business climate more impacted by upheaval, doubt and uncertainty. The Brexit referendum followed by not only Donald Trump's election victory but also his subsequent post-inauguration actions have only served to fuel such opaqueness.

Talk of walls – literal ones across the US' southern border and figurative ones around flying bans and protectionism – as well as the very real possibility of UK organisations (with banks to the forefront) taking activities out of the country, are likely to have a major impact on how they are perceived as potential career destinations.

In the face of such uncertainty, we seek to apply a little more insight and clarity.

The following thoughts, findings and recommendations come off the back of completed surveys by 92 senior figures within employer branding. We cannot be more grateful to them.

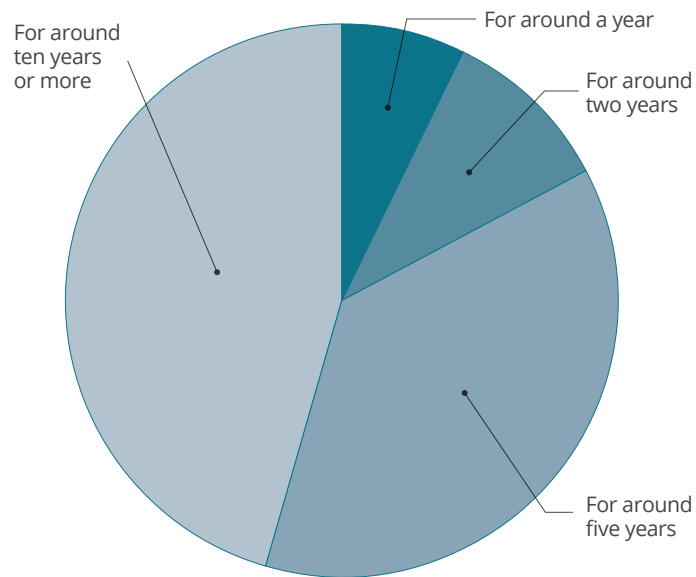
The survey was launched through both professional employer branding networks and via LinkedIn.



# Who took part?

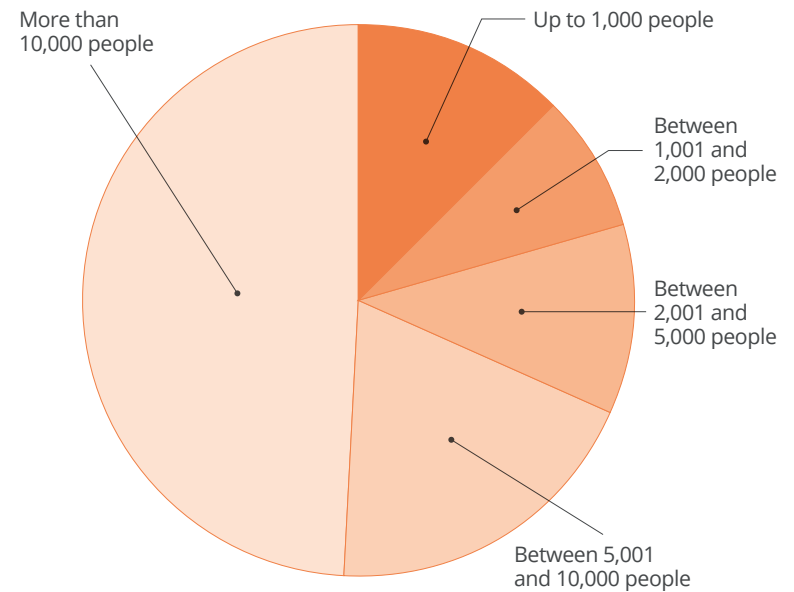
Let's see how our participating employer branding professionals can be broken down as regards experience and the size of their organisations.

## I have been involved in employer branding



*Pleasingly, this is a cohort with significant amounts of experience and knowledge of the sector, with nearly 80% having a minimum of five years' exposure to employer branding.*

## The organisation I work for employs



*Whilst the research touches organisations large and small – and involved employers from both the private and public sectors – there is a bias towards larger organisations with just over half having an international element to their activities and resourcing.*



# Investment in the Employer Brand

*44% of all organisations will be spending more this year than in 2016 on their employer branding activities, whilst another 21% will keep spend steady*

*So two-thirds will spend the same or more next year*

*By contrast, only 17% will spend less in the next 12 months*

*And 19% are not sure of their spend*

This is a key finding and one which points to perhaps more buoyancy than we might have expected. The UK economy ended 2016 by posting an above expectation GDP reading of 0.6% and the Bank of England has increased expectations about the current year to 2.0%, there clearly remain doubts around the longer term implications of Brexit.

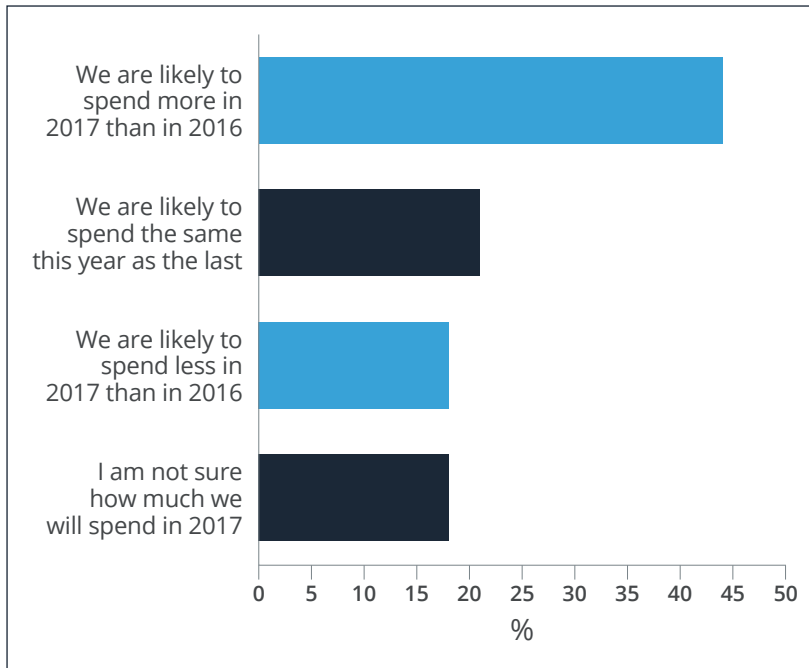
However, this is not what our research points to.

This points to a hugely positive year for employer branding – as well as an equally competitive one. 44% of all organisations will be spending more this year than in 2016 on their employer branding activities, whilst another 21% will keep their spend steady. Just 17% feel their spend will decrease on a year by year comparison.

Perhaps surprisingly, just short of 20% of our participants were unsure as to what sort of investment their organisation would be making in the current year. This may be down to a number of factors – and the uncertainty we referenced earlier as to which way the economy will go and the longer term Brexit effect may be playing a part too. There is also likely to be an element of the business not informing resourcing of their needs and employer branding having to respond at short notice to unclear or changing business needs. As we see later in the research, there can be a constant dilemma between immediate recruitment needs and longer term planning.



# In terms of your organisation's investment in employer branding



Many organisations, we would suggest, are focusing their spend on the vacancy and not their employer brand. One is a cost, one an investment.

This remains, however, a hugely important table. Less than 20% of employers are reducing their focus and investment on their employer brand.

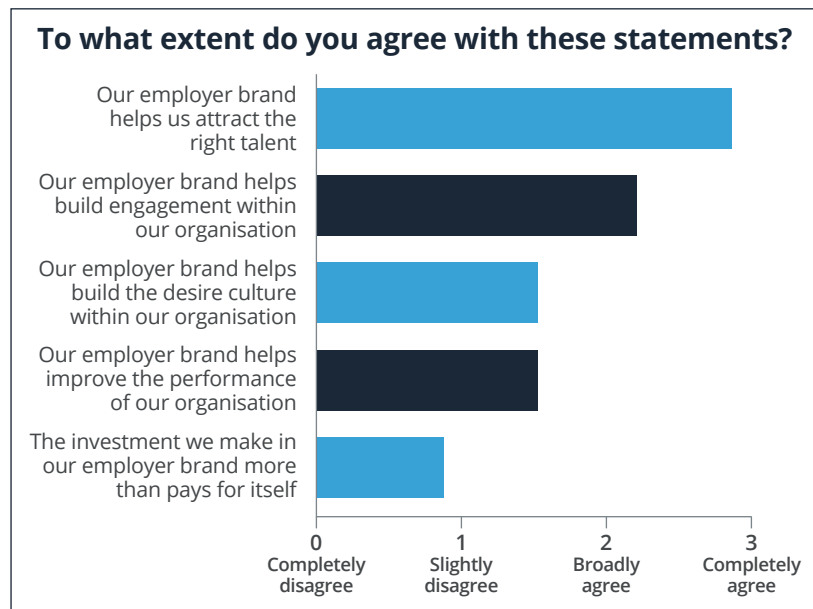
As we touch on throughout this research, one of the challenges that many within the profession encounter is down to making the business case successfully for additional spend and freeing up sufficient funding for employer branding activities. The evidence, for us, is clear. If you are not seeing employer branding as a priority for investment, your organisation is likely to get left behind, because others definitely are.

**“There is a lot to do if I can persuade others of the value!”**

# The role of the employer brand

Our survey then began to probe employers as to how they currently use their employer brand. Do organisations use the employer brand purely for attraction purposes or does it have application throughout the employee life cycle?

We posted a number of questions asking participants the extent to which they agreed with a set statement. In terms of ranking the statement, those answering with complete agreement scored 3, down to 0 for complete disagreement. The higher the score, then, the greater the agreement with the statement.



Generally, this is a very positive set of results. The employer brand, and the Employee Value Proposition that predicated it, have evolved significantly over the last two decades. No longer is it seen as purely a device to burnish recruitment communications. Applied appropriately, the employer brand should have a galvanising effect on internal morale, purpose, alignment and culture. And the great majority of our participating professionals clearly grasp this.

If there are any minor concerns around this table, the return on investment of the employer brand could be more obviously felt. If, indeed, the employer brand is driving successful attraction, enhancing levels of engagement and helping to shape culture, then this suggests it is more than paying for itself.

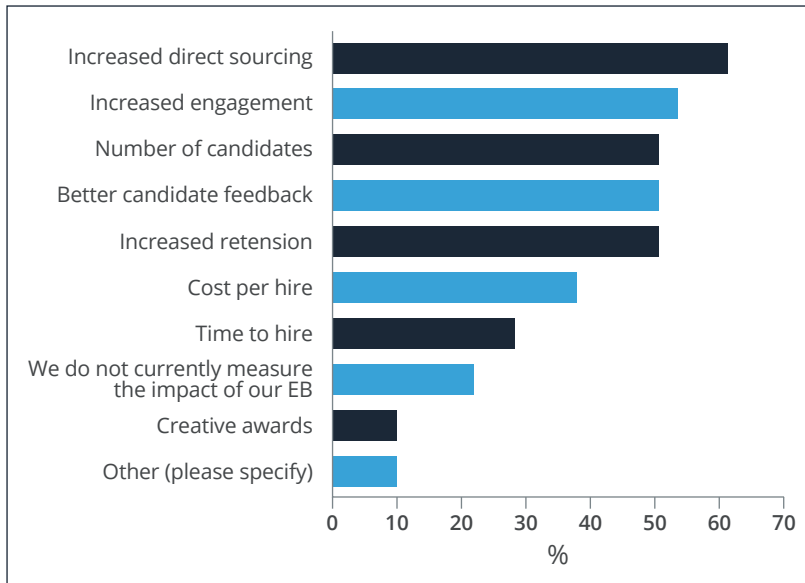
As the later research findings suggest, the employer brand can occupy something of an HR ghetto and struggle to have resonance and impact throughout the broader organisation. That there is least confidence around questions as to how the employer brand is playing a role in enhancing the overall performance of the organisation and in creating a positive return on investment, is of concern.

Let us then probe the issue of metrics in more detail.





# Which are the key metrics you use to measure the impact of your employer brand?



Such metrics reflect, we would suggest, the tangible move towards internal sourcing that an enhanced employer brand has helped enable. Many organisations are seeking both to reduce costs around as well as create more ownership of their resourcing by taking much of this activity in house.

There are some other pleasing metrics being applied to the impact of the employer brand. The advent of social media means that the candidate experience – through such channels as Glassdoor – does not go unnoticed. Candidates want a swift, intuitive and respectful experience – and they will not be slow to let a recruiting organisation (as well as any other stakeholders) know if this is not happening.

Advocacy is an increasingly powerful tool. Positive advocacy communicates trust and empowerment – and equally the opposite applies.

The high ranking of *Increased number of candidates* is interesting and potentially counter intuitive. A strong, differentiated employer brand should both attract the right candidates and communicate to those with less relevant competencies that they should look elsewhere. Most employers generally do not want more applicants, rather better applicants.



However, we feel this touches on a key theme from this research. The greater fragmentation of candidate pools – through age, ethnicity, geography, etc – and the growing challenge that impacts on an employer's ability to reach out to such a broadening church.

The answers to this question point to another interesting implication. This was not a section that limited respondents' options. They could tick all the boxes on this question. However, given that the most popular choice scored just over 60%, then this suggests that employers' talent acquisition priorities are not homogenous and vary significantly from organisation to organisation.

Employers need to consider carefully which metrics are important to their organisation and apply them rigorously.

It nearly goes without saying that those 20% of employers who do not measure the impact of their employer branding investment risk having such investment removed or reduced.

*For 60% of our audience, the key metric against which they measure their employer brand is its ability to drive increased direct sourcing*

*At 53%, increased engagement features as a slightly more important metric than both the number of candidates an employer brand attracts and the feedback candidates deliver*

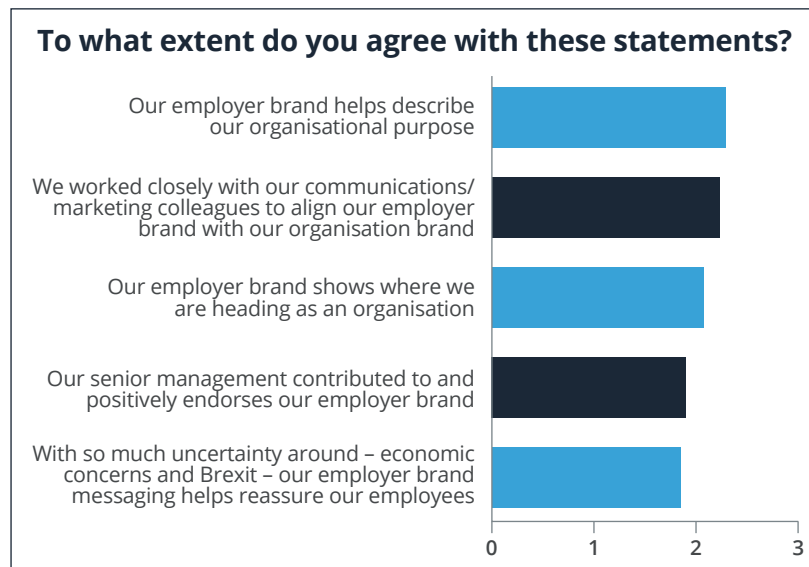
*20% of organisations do not measure the impact of their employer brand*



# The function of your employer brand

Over and above the recruitment and retention deliverables of an employer, we then asked our research participants around the more macro contribution of their employer brand.

The results of which feel instinctively positive. We see more and more liaison between marketing and human resources/recruitment. This aligns too with more anecdotal feedback when in front of client project teams. There is far less suspicion from marketing around what HR might be doing with anything termed brand. My increasing experience suggests that marketing realise what a great employer brand can deliver and want to enable this whilst ensuring the outputs complement their own organisational brand initiatives.



The very positive readings around the sense of organisational purpose and direction that an employer brand can and should help facilitate are also warming. Recruitment by definition is a forward facing activity. People do not join immediately, but know they will be joining your organisation in a month, three months and, in many cases, more. They want to know the direction of travel of the organisation and how they might ultimately help enable such a journey.

Increasingly we see a construct such as purpose being referenced by entry level talent audiences. Recent research amongst graduate recruiters suggests purpose has evolved from something people felt they ought to mention into a real differentiator. If an employer cannot point credibly and authentically to its sense of purpose, Millennial audiences will judge it accordingly today.

Fundamentally, however, the alignment of consumer/organisational brands with the employer brand in order to communicate the purpose of the organisation – and how great people can contribute to where the organisation is going and how it is processed by consumers – is a standout point.

Our later research touches again on Brexit. The relatively low rating of how an employer brand can create a sense of reassurance plays, we would suggest, both to the sense that any Brexit employment implications are yet to fully manifest themselves, as well as the view that reassurance is perhaps in short order today.



# Around which employer brand touchpoint do you focus most attention and investment?

*90% felt that their recruitment communications were their key touchpoint with candidates*

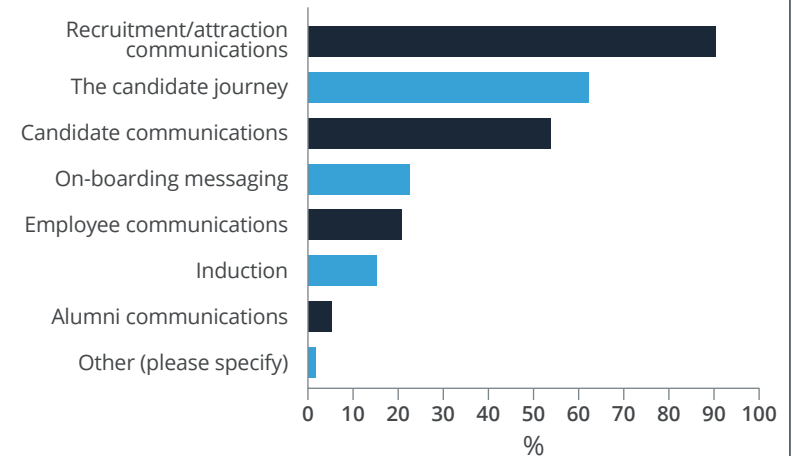
*Just 16% felt that communications around the induction was any area of focus*

This was a question where we sought to understand the key priorities for the outputs of an employer brand.

The results feel perhaps inevitable and equally perhaps disappointing. The results also appear to contradict what we have heard earlier, that retention and engagement are of similar weight to attraction. The results point clearly to a focus on the front end of the attraction process with around 90% of our research participants selecting this option. There is a broadly even falling off as the hypothetical candidate proceeds through the applicant journey.

Perhaps we might assume that areas such as employee communications are owned by other stakeholders, however, it is potentially surprising to see important parts of the candidate validation process ranking so lowly, in terms of on-boarding and induction. We might also assume that were this research taking place in the US, that alumni reach-out communications might be a higher priority.

## Which employer brand touchpoints do you focus most attention and investment on?



With many organisations faced with premature turnover challenges, perhaps it is no major surprise if a candidate gets the impression that their new employer invests much more to get them on board, rather than to communicate with them once they become an employee.



# Diversity and the employer brand

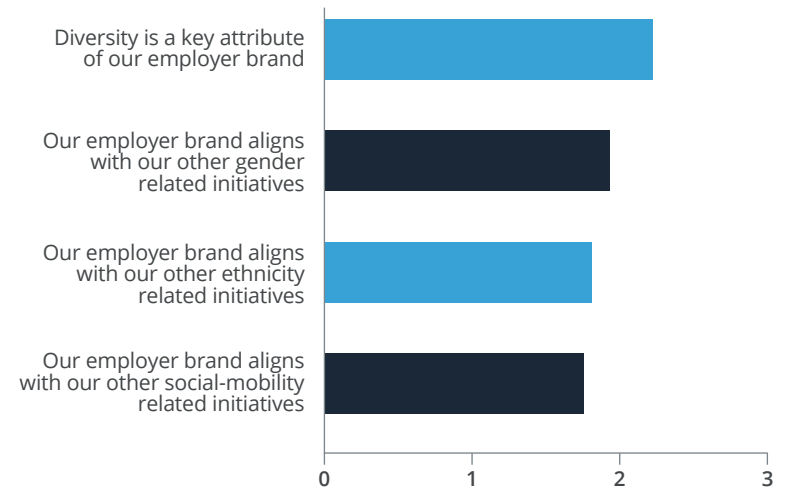
We asked a number of questions to our audience around the relationship between diversity and their employer brand.

It is pleasingly clear that diversity is a core DNA strand running through the thought processes and activations of an employer brand. Diversity today feels like a constituent element of an employer brand, rather than a box to tick or an after-thought.

What is potentially of interest is the slight imbalance between the various answers touching on diversity. Whereas nearly all our participants feel diversity is a key attribute of their employer brand, fewer feel their employer brand aligns with their other gender-related activities and fewer still that it aligns with their other ethnicity related initiatives.

Falling off to an even greater extent is an organisation's ability or enthusiasm to create cohesion between its employer brand and its work in the social mobility space. This is perhaps an area of focus more for volume/early career employers, where social mobility receives a lot of attention, than those with less of a graduate/apprentice intake.

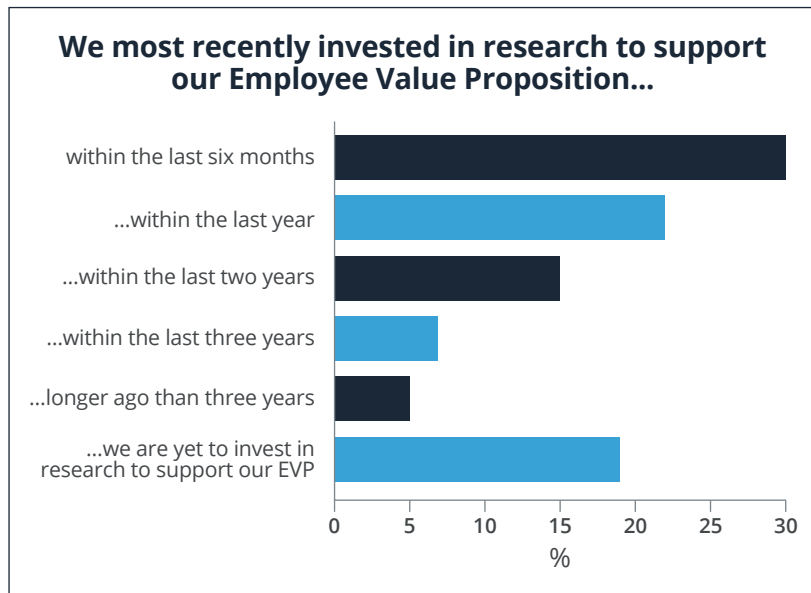
## To what extent do you agree with these statements?



If diversity is pleasingly and increasingly seen as a core strand of an employer brand, what about its central foundation? The Employee Value Proposition.



# Investment in the Employee Value Proposition



*31% of employer brand professionals have invested in research to support and guide their EVP in the last six months*

*For 12%, the most recent time this happened was three years ago*

*And for nearly a fifth of our group, research has not played a part in shaping their employer brand*

This is a fascinating table and tends to divide the participants down the middle. For a little over 50% of the group, the EVP is something to invest in via research. They realise that an Employee Value Proposition is not something set in stone. If it is to reflect where their organisation is going, how it is perceived, how the market is performing and how the organisation is processed in a competitive context, this research has to be topical.



Perhaps no surprise given our backgrounds, however, this remains a fundamental point. An Employee Value Proposition – the central foundation of an organisation's employer brand – predicated on either research two, three and more years ago (or even non-existent research!) is unlikely to provide the insights and stories that represent your organisation today as well as its direction of travel.

There is little employee audiences crave more than authenticity. They want to understand the genuine employment experience you provide – the one you provide today, not the one you may or may not have provided two or three years ago.

Not to reflect where your organisation is today in terms of purpose, culture, behaviours, values and ambition is to ignore the huge strides your organisation has doubtless made over the last two to three years.

When I look back on my corporate experience, such timeframes usually encompassed mergers and acquisitions, new products, new offices and locations, big wins and equally big losses.

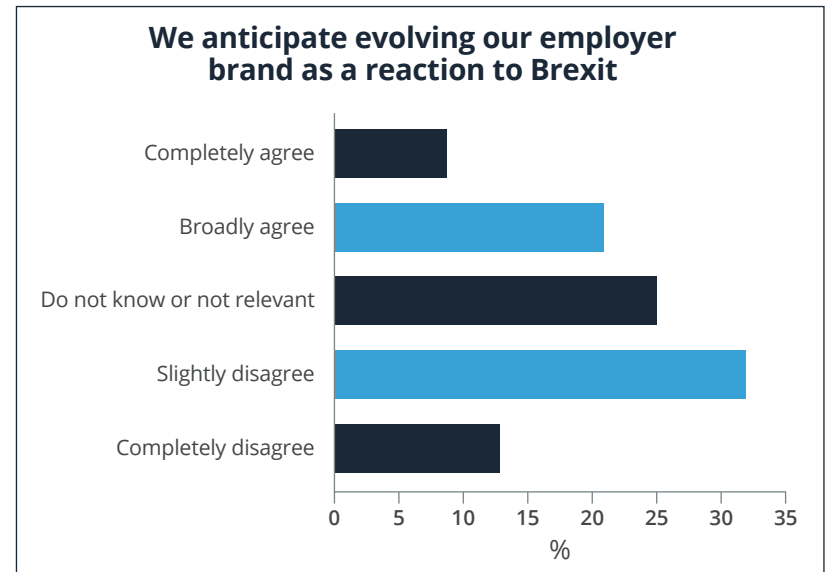
If the proposition you make to people during the candidate process feels anything but the experience they encounter on joining, perhaps it is no major surprise if you are challenged by either premature turnover or declining engagement.

***“It is something that  
needs involvement from  
many people but is never  
a priority for anyone  
outside of resourcing”***

# Brexit and your Employer Brand

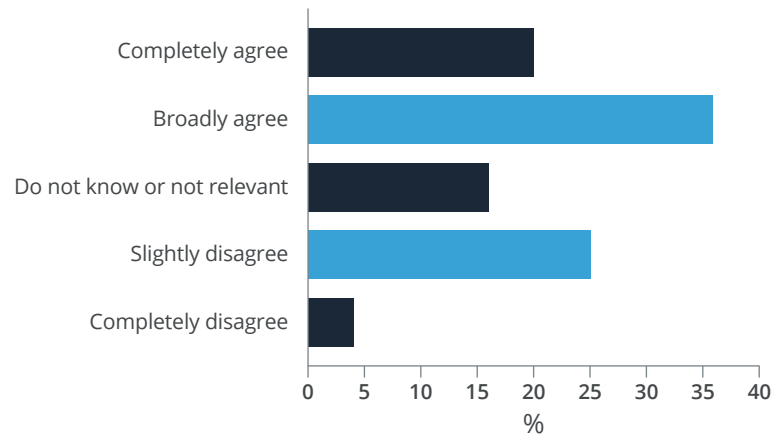
There can be few events more momentous from a cultural and economic standpoint to impact on UK society than last year's EU referendum. Initial economic robustness has been strong, perhaps surprisingly so and the UK retains the G7's strongest GDP growth. But to what extent do employers feel Brexit and its evolving implications will start to affect how their people will feel about working for them? Do they fear jobs will start to move overseas – and clearly this is a very real threat particularly across the banking sector? Or do they feel their organisation will be compromised if it is unable to either recruit from overseas talent pools (or recruit students in from such markets in the case of the HE sector)?

Again, we asked our participants the extent to which they agreed with a number of statements around the likely implications of Brexit.





**We anticipate that our employer brand will have to work harder to reassure target audiences in the light of Brexit**



Perhaps not surprisingly, there does not appear to be a significant consensus coming out of these two tables. Brexit, we would argue, has caught many corporates by surprise. Much about their business and customers are likely to change – but there exists little real clarity around the nature of this change.

And the same challenges face both internal and external talent pools.

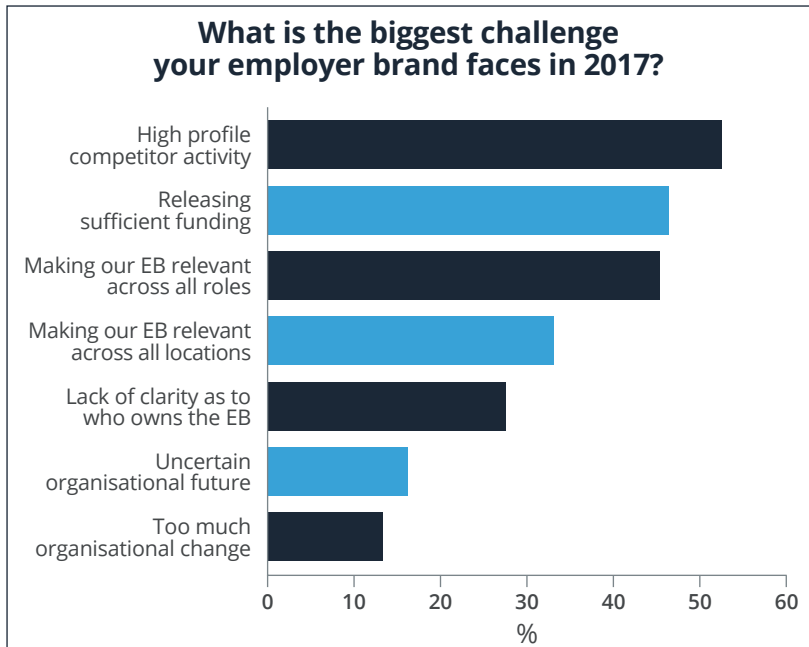
Do those banks who are already speaking with Paris, Frankfurt and Dublin (and, at the very least, weighing up the possibilities of a move) make themselves less attractive or more attractive as an employer to people currently working there or indeed considering working there?

It is perhaps no wonder that *Don't know* tends to feature with some regularity across these tables. However, 55% of our group agree (and another 16% have yet to form a definitive position) that they will have to reach out with a greater sense of reassurance to external talent pools around what Brexit will mean to their organisation and the careers they offer.

I think the way an organisation responds to Brexit and how it communicates this approach, this confidence, this purpose will be a source for employer branding differentiation moving forward. Those organisations choosing to pretend it has not or is not happening may struggle to convince audiences of their authenticity and transparency.



# What are the biggest challenges your employer brand faces in 2017?



This was a particularly interesting question and one that produced some clear areas of concern for employer brand owners and managers in 2017.

This is an important table and one that takes us back to some earlier findings. Employers are faced with significant competitor activity – they are not hiring in isolation.

Ironically, the two most popular answers represent cause and effect. Because organisations are unable to persuade the business to invest appropriately in their employer brand, they are inevitably going to find themselves up against it in the face of leaders who do see such investment as important and capable of delivering tangible returns.

There exists a lot of credible and objective return on investment data which points to what an investment in an employer brand can deliver. (Later we will touch on the likes of Unilever and John Lewis, two brands that have created a halo effect around the employment proposition they offer).

The second clear theme to emerge from this table is around the struggles organisations face in constructing an employer brand which is capable of reaching out to all locations and all job families. Again, this touches on the greater diversity of not only employees – certainly from an age, cultural, ethnicity diversity and also geographic background perspective – but also role types. It is hard to spend any time on the likes of LinkedIn and not come across articles discussing which roles are likely to die out and which wholly new roles people will be doing in the future.



At the same time, with more and more globalisation, organisations will have greater numbers of people both working and based abroad. And whilst different locations are likely to face varying labour competition, culture, language and communication challenges, greater globalisation makes the creation and landing of a cohesive and unifying employer brand more important. In order to facilitate alignment and to encourage greater people mobility, people, wherever they are based, need to feel as though they are working for the same organisation and the same Employee Value Proposition.

Finally, there is also an interesting point emerging around change and uncertainty. Our departure from the EU and the arrival of Mr Trump in the White House suggest that there has never been more change around us. Those organisations suggesting that they face too much change or too much of an uncertain future, are perhaps missing the point.

This should be an integral part of their EVP. They should reach out to those individuals who are inspired by change and make it clear what they might look forward to. In doing so, they are likely to create distance between themselves and talent pools who crave certainty and the status quo.

*When life gives you lemons...*

*53% of our audience feel intimidated by the competitor presence of talent rivals*

*46% and 33% respectively are struggling to adapt their employer brand to make it relevant for all roles and all locations*

*Change and uncertainty are impacting on just under a fifth of our audience*



# Which people challenges do you most need your Employer Brand to address in 2017?

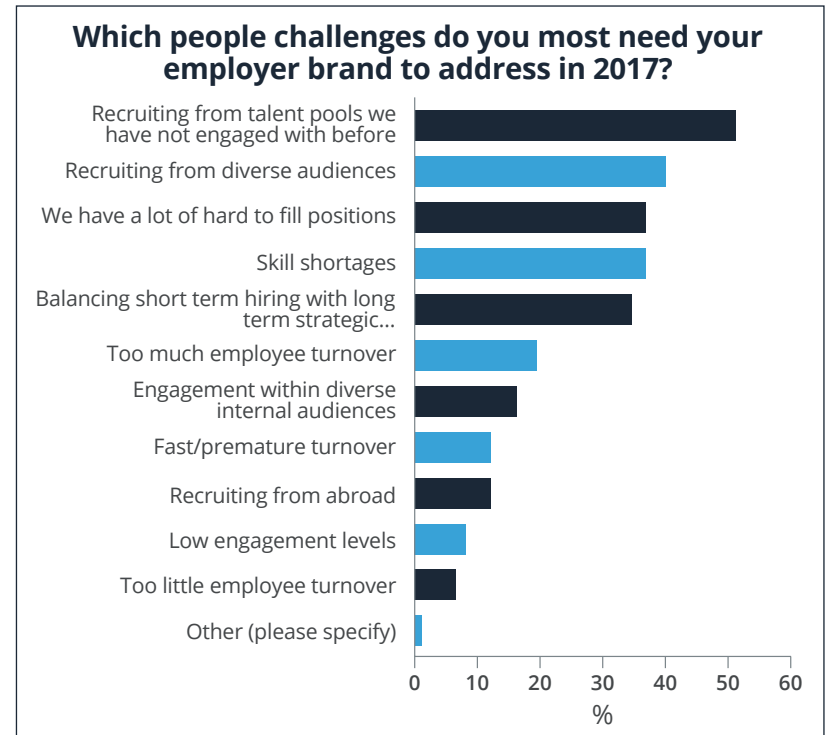
Interestingly from this particular question, the pressures of recruiting appear more of a challenge than retention to employer branding audiences in 2017. And many of the responses around this particular question have a similar theme.

Talent pools are multiplying and become more diverse, more segmented and much harder, it would appear, to reach.

In many cases, these are talent pools that organisations have simply not engaged with before. We would suggest that other than blunt tool personas, such organisations have not created the insights around what such audiences feel about their organisation and what sorts of hurdles and issues they need to address through their employer brand.

Interestingly, just over half our participants suggest that the biggest people challenge facing their employer brand is trying to reach out and recruit from talent pools they have simply not engaged with before.

Whether this relates to digital audiences, overseas talent pools, diversity related groups, social mobility communities, mature audiences, apprentices, a combination of some or all of the above and others, recruitment professionals (and remember, this is an experienced group) face challenges they have simply not come across before. This means too that the employer brands they are using have been shaped around more homogenous and traditional audiences. How will more diverse, more hard to reach audiences process an employer brand shaped around different talent pools?



How many employer brands have been constructed to hire from yesterday's talent pools and not today's?

What feels perhaps disappointing is the 35% of our audience who continue to struggle with old recruitment chestnut. The need to balance the demands of short term hiring needs with the desire to establish a strategic employer brand position. It is perhaps not a stretch to imagine organisations with line managers who would rather engage with third party recruiters than contribute to a cohesive and robust employer brand which should negate the need, largely, to use such expensive channels.

Given that employer branding professionals face such challenges, we then asked our group as to what would most benefit their employer brand this year.

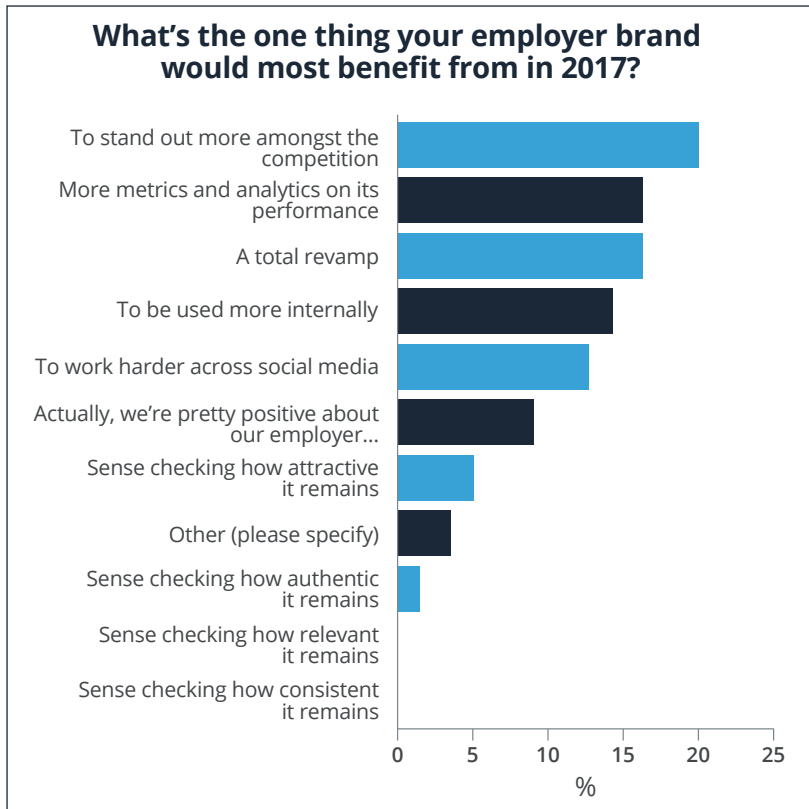
*51% of our audience find their employer brand challenged with having to recruit from talent pools they have not engaged with before*

*36% are faced with both skill shortages and hard-to-fill roles*

*And 35% face the dilemma of short term hiring needs against building a long term resourcing strategy*



# What's the one thing your employer brand would most benefit from in 2017?



*20% - the highest reading - of our group want to stand out more against their competitor set*

*Just 9% feel entirely happy with their employer brand.*

*More than 16% want greater application of metrics to their employer brand*

Once again, the concept of competition and the challenge this brings to successful resourcing is front and centre here. For around 20% of our audience, this is the key challenge their employer brand faces in early 2017.



For us, this is about identifying the competition (and given the ever diversifying talent pools we have already observed, this competition is likely to be diverse too), understanding the nature of their Employee Value Proposition and how it is brought to market, then constructing messaging that is differentiated and capable of standing out.

Pleasingly, the importance of applying relevant metrics to measure the impact and performance of an employer brand is second on the Christmas list of our audience. Clearly, this is both about having the capacity to make the business case throughout the organisation as well as having the real time information in order to adjust elements such as tactical messaging and channel selection around the employer brand.

It is fascinating too that the percentage of those employer branding professionals who feel their organisation requires a total revamp in this space is nearly exactly double that of organisations who are pretty confident of their employer brand. By the same token, it does not feel entirely reassuring that just 9% of our group feel they are entirely happy with their employer brand in early 2017.

However, understanding that an employer brand has its challenges and being able to action change are not the same thing.



# What is the greatest blocker to your ability to get the most out of your employer brand?

This feels very much like a negative area of our findings. For a little under a third of our audience, the construct of the employer brand feels trapped within HR. This, we would suggest, leads to the second major blocker experienced by employer branding professionals – that the successful promotion and articulation of an employer brand is limited by financial constraints.

If the employer brand continues to have little or no traction outside HR – despite the ROI metrics which point to its enterprise wide deliverables – then it is doomed to struggle with financial limitations, a lack of senior stakeholder endorsement and an inability to communicate the brand and value proposition internally.

Given the internal deliverables of an Employee Value Proposition – and the likes of the CEB and LinkedIn have some excellent analytics making this case – it seems such a missed opportunity that it, in many cases, remains trapped within HR.

This table speaks to the communication of value.

*For more than 27%, the key blocker to their ability to extract value from their employer brand is the view that it exists purely within HR*

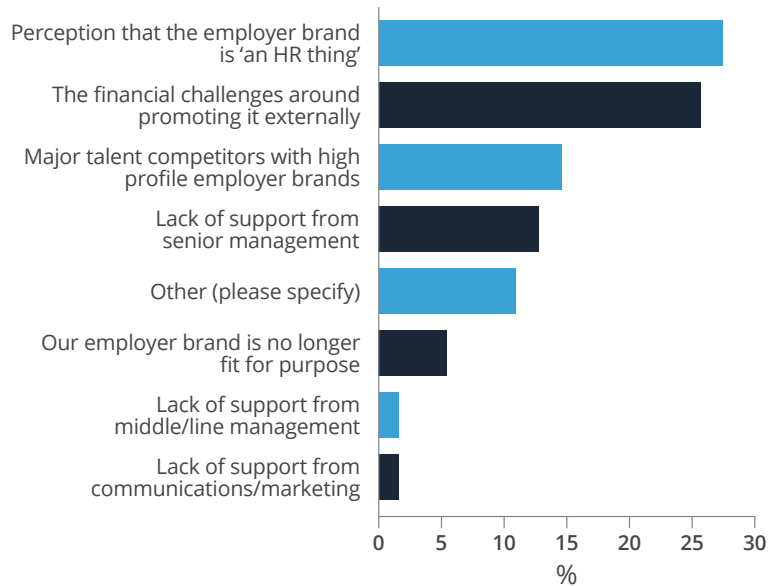
*This is closely linked to the 26% who feel that financial pressures inhibit the extent to which they can promote it externally*

*Consistently, nearly 15% find their employer brand up against some tough competition*





### What is the greatest blocker to your ability to get the most out of your employer brand?



There should be little doubt that a consistently communicated and applied Employee Value Proposition enables organisations to stand out in fierce talent acquisition communities and enhance internal cohesion and alignment. Both the quantitative and qualitative data from this survey points to the blockers largely being inside an organisation.

Many senior organisational decision makers appear unaware of either the Employee Value Proposition or its benefits. Without such awareness, the owners of an employer brand struggle to release sufficient funds to create and promote it externally and to land it internally.

Once again, it is clear that many employer branding professionals are aware of the competition that exists around them. And just as recruitment audiences and talent pools grow ever more broad and diverse, the same thing applies to the organisations an employer will compete with for such talent.



Fascinatingly, around 5% of our group felt that their employer brand required a complete revamp – and this is consistent with what we have heard earlier in the survey. Which tends to beg the question, when should an employer brand or EVP be revisited or revamped? By the time it ceases to be fit for purpose feels too late. The damage to hiring and engagement has already been done (and, indeed, continues to be done). This suggests too that insufficient or irrelevant metrics are being applied to measure the brand and its impact. If it is in need of a complete revamp, analytics should have pointed to this, months if not years previously.

***“The business doesn’t understand it. We have lots of young leaders with no real understanding of EVP and its benefits”***

# Which organisation's employer brand do you most admire?

In this our final section, we wanted to understand which organisations had succeeded in creating aspirational and inspirational employer brands.

We also probed our audience as to the reasons for their choice. How had such organisations managed to create employer brands which both stood out and reached out? What were the reasons behind their choices?

Whilst some organisations featured strongly – Virgin, EY, Nike and LinkedIn – two organisations stood out from the crowd: Unilever and John Lewis. And the reasons for their popularity?

For John Lewis, there is a feeling of authenticity. People are exposed to the shopping environment and feel the employer brand they see aligns with what they come across in their stores. The retailer is so successful around employee advocacy that this drives both effective recruitment and retention. Unilever does not have such brand legacy to fall back on. Until recently, the Unilever brand was far less prominent than its constituent sub-brands. This has changed – and not by accident. For our audience, Unilever's employer brand has a purpose and speaks to organisational direction. Relevant to this study, the brand works effectively across different audiences and different global locations. This is a brand that does combine authenticity with aspiration.

Interestingly, John Lewis has huge brand equity to fall back (without feeling and behaving like a heritage brand), whilst Unilever has emerged from sitting behind its customer brands to have a brand identity of its own. One is, therefore an inherent employer brand, the other developed. Or to mis-quote Rupert Murdoch, whilst Unilever is an employer brand immigrant, John Lewis is an employer brand native.





## So what makes some great employer brands stand out?

There is no mistaking authenticity. A brand has to deliver what it is promising. It has to be credible and believable. Candidates have to walk in to the new employer they think they are walking into. There should be too a clarity, even simplicity to what an employer brand is all about. If it is indeed natural and authentic, it shouldn't require explaining.

One of the other key themes from our research is exemplified here (and through the choice of Unilever). Employer brands have to be effective in front of a much broader and more diverse series of talent pools than ever before – whether such talent pools differ in terms of geography, ethnicity, culture or age. So the challenge of launching an employer brand which demonstrates both flexibility and consistency is very real.

Finally, it is hugely positive to see how important the attribute of alignment is for employer branding professionals. The need for an employer brand to work effectively with an organisational and/or consumer brand is critical from the start of a new employer branding project.



# Key recommended actions

Whilst it is clear that some people are much, much happier with their current employer branding than others, there are some clear conclusions and recommendations emerging from this research. Some remain challenges that employer branding has long suffered from, others are just emerging.

- Perhaps one of the key points to emerge from this research is that, although more and more people want to get involved across a business in the employer brand, no one has as much riding on its development and its outcomes than resourcing. Owning and leading employer branding within your organisation has never been so important.
- There exists a number of sources of information touching on what an employer brand can deliver – it is so important that an employer branding professional is able to articulate such ROI – and ROI that makes a difference to their organisation.
- As much as marketing is increasingly involved in the gestation of an employer brand, it is far less prevalent that colleagues in internal communications will be on such project teams. One of the key failings identified by our study is that the messages and promises made through an EVP tend to peter out when the individual joins an organisation. There should be a clearly defined shared DNA linking employer branding and internal comms messages.
- Employer branding efforts are judged in the context of competitor activity. It is so important that employer brand leaders understand what the competition is saying, how it is saying it and where it is saying it. A competitor audit will help an organisation create real differentiation within often hugely crowded people markets.
- Very simply, if you haven't invested in research to update or validate your EVP, you are guessing. And if you are guessing around your EVP, it's hard and ill-advised to make the sort of business case which will hold water and attention spans with senior leaders.
- Brexit is a time bomb. Take the time to understand how your people and your target audiences feel about Brexit and the way they perceive it will affect your business. Does Brexit mean that external labour pools will be more or less likely to respond positively to an offer from you?
- Today's employer brands have to reach out successfully to a growingly diverse set of talent pools. If your EVP was predicated around yesterday's target audiences, not today's, don't be surprised if tomorrow's resourcing isn't working. Validate your EVP with new and emerging audiences.

