THE

Debut

Guide to

Interview Etiquette

About the guide

In the last 16 months, students and graduates have attended thousands of interviews via Debut, so we wanted to ensure they were fully equipped.

This guide has been created through conducting interviews with those responsible for hiring talent at some of the world's leading organisations, and the people that must impress them - the candidates. The guide is based on qualitative and quantitative research conducted between January - March 2017.

Introduction

Interviews
Playing the 'long game'

'Being in the public domain doesn't mean I'm public property.'

Choosing a public versus private setting on your social media channels could come between you and a dream career, but should it?

Kuldeep Jethwa
Queen Mary University

Kuldeep Jethwa thinks public means public. He admits: "I tweaked my Instagram account during a recent career search – my 'less than professional' username could have put prospective employers off, so I chose something a little more palatable."

58%

58% of people aged 18-23 think prospective employers should not look at their social media profile, even if it is in the public domain.

31%

Only 31% of people aged 18-23 said it's their responsibility to make their social media profile private during the recruitment process, to avoid discrimination.

16%

A small group (16%) said they went to the effort of creating new 'employer-facing' social media channels to make a better impression. A step ahead, or a bit sneaky? You decide.

The good news is... most employers agree!

Although many employers don't yet have official policies in place against researching a candidate's social media channels, the consensus is that these channels are personal to the candidate, and should not be considered in relation to a professional application, despite them being in the public domain.

Carrie Brodie
Employer Brand and Attraction Consultant of Rolls-Royce

"At Rolls-Royce we feel that checking a candidate's social media profiles is unfair and an impingement on their personal lives – although we may review LinkedIn. Once they've joined, we encourage our graduates to think about their online reputation and brand and make sure they have their privacy settings on!"

But wait a minute...

Even though we've established that employers should not research candidates... according to almost **half of 18-23s - it's okay for students to research the person who is due to interview them. (48%).** Huh? Is that fair? Half of the students and graduates that we spoke to don't think so.

62%

of 18-23s are playing the long game.

They consider an interview starts the moment they have an initial communication with the prospective employer. From the second an employer sees a candidate's email address or their CV – the communication has begun. The actual interview is the shortest part of the process, but this is the part that gets the most attention.

The **LoooooOong** game

Submits CV & application • Screening interview • Phone interview • Assessment centre • Interview preparation • **Face-to-face interview(s)** • Feedback after interview

Sonali Gidwani,
Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) University of Warwick

"For my graduate role, I tried to remain professional throughout the whole application process. I made sure that I responded to every email I received from my HR contact, and added my interviewer from my first interview round on LinkedIn so that I could thank him for the opportunity and for explaining to me what the firm was like. I also interacted with other applicants during the interview stages, whilst we were waiting for our interviewers. This calmed me down and also put me in a good light in case anyone from HR was monitoring my behaviour."

Big Brother is not okay.

When asked how candidates would feel if they thought employers were watching them on CCTV before an interview, most 18-23s said 'no way' – 86% would not be happy being watched before or after an interview.

86%

Would not be happy being watched before or after an interview.

Standing out.

Mohammad Habibi
The London Institute of Banking and Finance

Mohammad chose to use communication methods as his way of standing out – instead of sending his CV via email, he sent it via snail mail (post) in the hope that he'd get noticed.

And it worked...

Patrick Dolan
Junior Recruiter at E.ON

"Not the strangest or least conventional, but just being that little bit different grabbed my attention."

Michael Robbins
Student at Newcastle University

"A bog-standard CV doesn't cut it today'. Michael thinks you should present it in a different way. He mentioned seeing a guy at Waterloo station handing his CV out to people walking by. "I thought about renting a billboard and putting my face on it!"

CVs

Is the CV dead and buried?

CVs, or resumes, have been the key to getting a foot on the career ladder for as long as our parents, or grandparents can remember – so let's have a look if it's still the case. Is the CV dead and buried, or is it sticking around?

Jeffrey Lovejoy
UK and Ireland Recruitment Manager for Global IT firm FDM Group

CVs have not gone away, according to Jeffery Lovejoy.

"The CV still remains an entry point when applying for roles but now it's really important to build upon your contacts. Building a personal brand in the industry that you are wanting to work in will help you secure the role you are looking for. Also, a lot of employers look beyond your work experience and look at how you made best use of your time in education. What teams, clubs or societies did you join? What roles did you take?"

Melissa Amouzandeh
Emerging Talent Acquisition Manager at Network Rail

On the flip side, Network Rail's Melissa Amouzandeh thinks CVs are important, but not until later in your career:

"In my experience, most large employers no longer use CVs in graduate recruitment, but require candidates to fill out their information in a pre-set online format instead (certainly this is the case for Network Rail).

"Therefore, rather than spending hours perfecting their CV and worrying over the format, it would be much more beneficial to use this time to perfect other skills, such as practising for online tests, honing interview skills etc.

"Whether in free-form or online, employers who get thousands of applications will likely only check key essential criteria on a CV in the first instance, such as qualifications etc. The CV may come back into play further on in the process, for example at interview, employers often use the CV to spark discussions, e.g. I see you spent some time working at X company, can you tell me about that?"

Dress (de)code
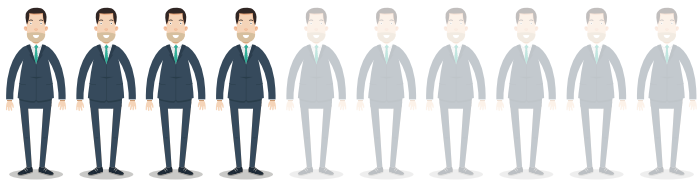
The dress codes are out of control! **72% of 18-23s were confused about what 'casual business attire' meant,** with 23% thinking it meant anything other than trainers and denim, and a quarter (25%) saying casual business attire means a two-piece suit with a shirt and tie (for men).
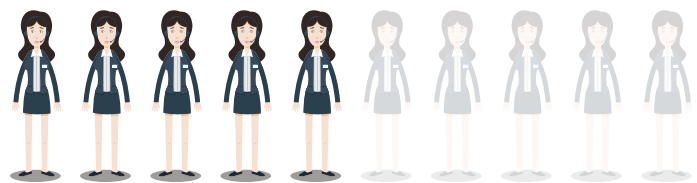
It's the females that are more confused about what to wear than males – **50% said they would over-dress to avoid embarrassment (suit with a jacket).**
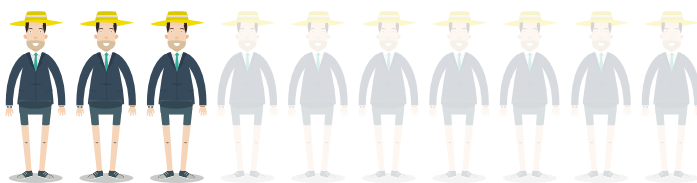
It's the 18-21 age group that may face the most embarrassment – **3 in 10 (31%) thought business casual meant business attire on top, and casual trousers / footwear on the bottom.**

The good news

The good news is, the employers aren't entirely sure about their dress codes either, so we're all in the same boat. All employers that Debut spoke with agreed that the way a candidate presents themselves is paramount today, but isn't a deal-breaker. As the dress code expectation varies wildly across sectors, it's vital that you do your research and spend time considering the right outfit to wear.

Mark Jackson
EMEIA Lead Internal Mobility & Junior Talent Acquisition at Fujitsu

"Dress code still matters in a corporate environment. Views are gradually changing, but you will mainly work with other staff who have been with the company for 20 or so years, and there is only so much you can upset the apple cart. If you're not comfortable in a traditional attire, then be yourself regardless. At least you will then end up working for a company that is right for you, not just what they want you to look like."

### Alexandra Bennett
Graduate Talent Manager at L'Oréal

Alexandra thinks preparation is key – even more so that appearance. "A candidate's dress forms part of the first impression they create, however nothing is more important than the content of their answers and the experience they have."

Technology

Technology shapes the interview process.

We're not all YouTubers, you know!

Modern technologies are being embraced head on by many employers today – mainly to reach a broader more diverse talent pool, but also to speed up the process and reduce travel expenses for candidates. Employers now use a range of quick ways to find the right talent - including assessment days, or external assessment centres, which are now the norm, and often graduates are required to complete an online psychometric test for each position too.

45%
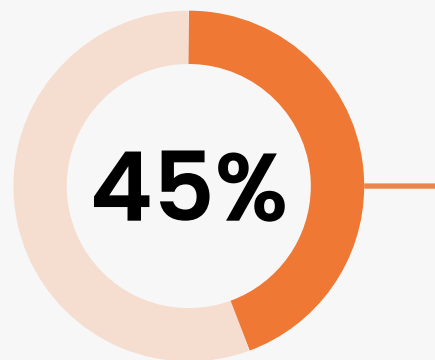
45% of all 18-23s think interviewees should be able to opt-out of video interviews and meet the interviewer in person. Why? Out of those that gave a reason for not liking video interviews, 30% said they found them off-putting.

Shaheen Khalifa
Associate Talent Acquisition Partner at CH2M.

"There are a lot more assessment tools at hand for employers: Video, telephone, assessment centres, projects, face-to-face interview, presentations etc. I would advise candidates to practice answering questions in different styles, pitch and speed. Answers for a telephone assessment should be short and snappy, for face-to-face interview more detailed, whilst video interviews shouldn't come across over-rehearsed."

Beth Hurst
University of Warwick

Beth shares her feelings about video interviews: "Though video interviews can be useful, for instance when the candidate is unable to travel to be interviewed, I do think that having the option to meet face-to-face is important if we're ever going to make the hiring process fairer for everyone. Video interviews have their place, but they can't replace meeting the candidate. Video interviews also overlook the fact that young people now want to know more about the companies they're working for, what their company culture is and what they stand for - qualities that can't easily be gauged through a computer screen."

Strong accents

"Could you repeat that, please?"

"I'm sorry, I didn't catch that!"

Mobile apps play an important role in the recruitment process today – you only need to type 'interviews' into the App or Play Store to see a long list of apps that are designed to help users prepare. They're not the only apps that people would consider using, though.

57%
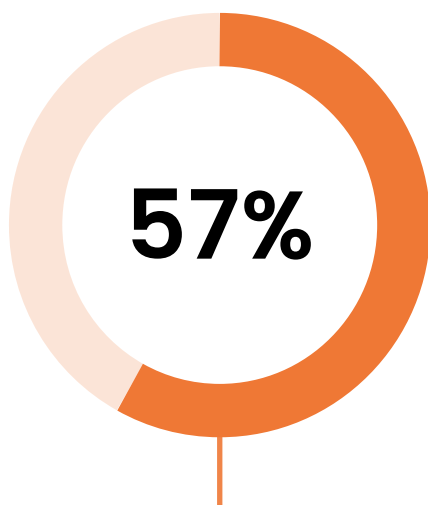
Over half (57%) of all 18-23 year olds think the use of voice distortion apps to avoid discrimination (due to strong accents) at the telephone screening stage is fair.

Mark Jackson
EMEIA Lead - Internal Mobility and Junior Talent Acquisition at Fujitsu

Mark welcomes the use of voice distortion tools, he comments: "Any tool that plays a part in improving the selection process, by removing any bias, would always be considered. Voice distortion apps still have a long way to come, but once the technology is advanced enough, we would definitely trial it.

"In the meantime, I'd urge anyone who is concerned about their accent getting in the way of their career ambitions to speak to the recruiter – they will hopefully reassure the candidate that a strong accent should never get in the way if they have all the right attributes for the role."

Talk to Me

After putting a lot of effort into preparing for an all-important interview, it can be crushing to not receive any feedback afterwards.

77%
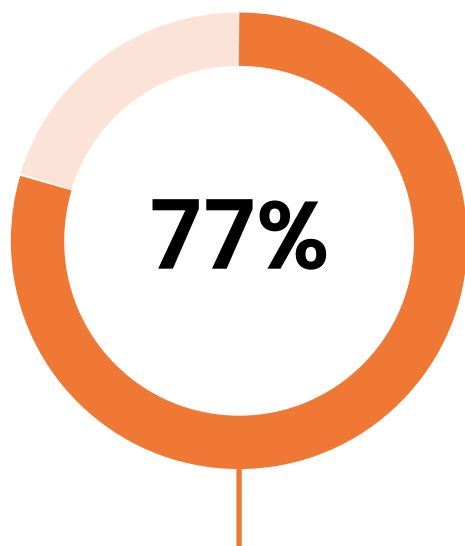
A massive 77% of 18-23s think it should be a legal requirement for an employer to provide feedback after every type of interview process.

Bronte Wright
The University of York

Bronte is extremely passionate about the right to feedback: "I think feedback is absolutely vital in recruitment processes to allow people to understand where they're falling down and improve for the future. It really aggravates me when you take so much time on your CV and cover letter for companies and they don't even give you the decency of a reply! There was one company's process I went through where I got to the final stage, unfortunately failed, and was then told feedback couldn't be provided due to the 'international nature' of their business, which working in a large international company myself, I knew was absolute rubbish!"

The employers also agree.

Cassie Nunn
Hewlett Packard's UK & Ireland University Hiring Lead

Casie is a big believer of sharing constructive feedback: "Feedback is crucial – it is always the hiring manager's responsibility to give this feedback directly to the candidate after the interview. We always tell candidates if they have been successful or not, and provide constructive feedback to enable them to improve and prepare for their next application or interview."

Emily Hack
Graduate Recruiter at BuroHappold

"It's important after candidates have invested their time in a recruitment process to show our appreciation. We call every candidate that have attended a face-to-face to interview and offer some verbal feedback, even if unsuccessful. It's also important to offer constructive feedback to show that you valued a candidate's time and for their own development."

Interview faux pas

Top 10 interview faux pas:

After spending years in education, and investing a lot of money in getting through university, the last thing a candidate wants to do is fall at the final hurdle – the big interview. Debut asked 18-23 year olds what they consider to be a real deal breaker.

1 **Swearing**, being rude, or talking about illegal activity

2 **Using a mobile phone** for something unrelated to the interview

3 Being **late**

4 **Not doing any research** about the company

5 Getting the **name of the interviewer wrong**

6 **Not having any examples** when responding to questions

7 **Forgetting** what you have said on your CV

8 **Not having any questions** to ask the interviewer

9 Misunderstanding the **dress code**

10 **Going red**/blushing

True or False?

When it comes to interviews there are quite a few myths still doing the rounds. Debut reveals all:

 True

On average, 50% of an interviewee's time during an interview is spent listening - TRUE

Life experience is as, if not more, important than work experience – TRUE

Mark Jackson
EMEIA Lead - Internal Mobility and Junior Talent Acquisition at Fujitsu

Mark is all for life experience: "Majority of the time, life experience trumps work experience. Communication skills and etiquette awareness is dependent on work experience. Giving examples of life experience, in terms of managing difficult situations and showing that you have been involved in societies, clubs, sports, and drama groups is always good. Having moved or lived in different places and making new friends always helps as it shows adaptability."

 False

Employers will always check your social media channels if they are in the public domain - FALSE

Most employers won't have time to feedback after interview - FALSE

All the employers that we spoke with think it's the candidate's right to receive feedback. It may not always be verbal feedback, and may be via email, but they should always receive some type of feedback.

Melissa Amouzandeh,
Emerging Talent Acquisition Manager at Network Rail

"Yes we will always let them know one way or the other. If they've been unsuccessful then it's likely to be an email, if successful then it will be a phone call."

The optimum preparation time for an interview, according to employers is 2 hours - FALSE - it's half a day.

Shaheen Khalifa
Associate Talent Acquisition Partner at CH2M

"I usually recommend a duration of 3-5 days to mentally prepare for an interview and make necessary arrangements. I expect candidates to spend at least 1-3 hours researching the company, and practicing questions."

Adebola Odunsi
University of Birmingham

Adebola has borrowed techniques from sports stars. "In preparation for an interview, I do what American Football players do, I head for a mirror and give myself a pep talk and psyche myself up - it really works!"

Less grilling, more BBQ with friends

Interviews have changed a lot in the last decade, shifting from a one-way grilling to a much more collaborative, two-way conversation.

Employers always want the candidate to do well, as it's in their interests to recruit them, rather than prolonging the process – it's time-consuming and expensive. They want applicants to succeed.

Carrie Brodie
Employer Brand and Attraction Consultant of Rolls-Royce

Carrie shares her thoughts on the relationship between interviewer and interviewee: "Interviews are now more relaxed, and there is an expectation for candidates to ask their own questions, rather than just be 'grilled'. There are now fewer interview stages and we use a selection of activities that can explore behaviours and knowledge within one session (e.g. an assessment day), so we aren't basing decisions on just one interview."

Olivia Ponton
Graduate Recruitment Adviser at Herbert Smith Freehills

"We always want to give candidates the opportunity to do their best. We therefore work to ensure that our interviews are more like conversations. Interviewers want to get to know candidates and their motivations in order to understand why they have applied to us and their suitability for the role. The training all of our interviewers undertake focuses on this approach."

The interview process & what to expect

Before embarking on the search for an internship or graduate position, it's important that students know what they're up against, and what to expect. Let's just call it 'managing expectations'.

Here are some top facts to consider:

- On average, one graduate position attracts a whopping 68 applications
- On average, a graduate will apply for 33 roles before landing a position
- It's common for a graduate to attend six face-to-face interviews during the recruitment process, not to mention the telephone screening interviews
- It's normal to be expected to take part in up to four rounds of interviews for a graduate position, and tests may also be part of the process
- The graduate recruitment process takes, on average, 3-4 months to complete – however some take as little as three weeks, and others can take up to 9 months
- Students and graduates have come to expect a range of interview procedures, including online applications, assessment centres, video interviews, psychometric testing and other industry-specific tests

Monique Perks
English Literature student at Warwick University

Monique describes how tough it is applying for graduate schemes while trying to complete her degree: "I thought that the recruitment process would be long-winded with an online application, psychometric tests, phone interview and then assessment centre. However, I remember the process to actually get onto a graduate scheme being so long-winded and I felt that I was being asked to jump through too many hoops whilst also trying to juggle completing my degree!"

Final thought

Charlie Taylor, CEO & Founder of student and graduate careers app Debut, shares his final thought on the interview process today:

This guide enables us to identify three major trends in student and graduate recruitment:

1. Students and graduates come first

A consistent theme that is very evident from findings presented throughout the guide is that the candidate holds a real sense of entitlement, and they expect more from employers than ever before. Students and graduates today want choice – they want to choose how they are interviewed, they feel they have a right to feedback, and they feel that their social media channels, however public they are, should not be researched.

It's interesting to see that this shift from the employer being in the ascendency to the candidate being in the ascendency has happened, and only really in the last decade. The movement towards a two-way interview, rather than a panel grilling plays a large part I think – employers are so much more interested in understanding more about the person today than ever before.
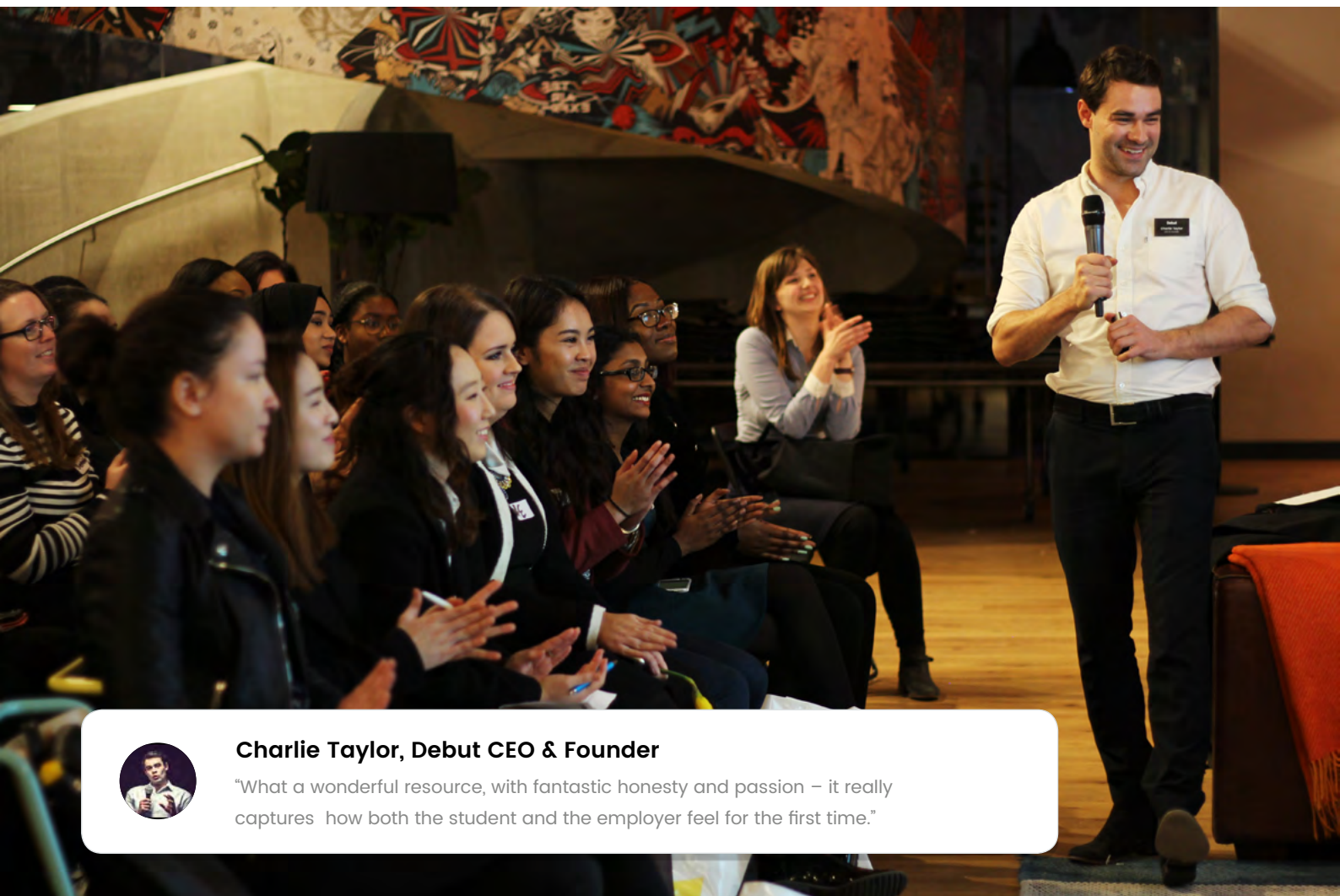
Charlie Taylor, Debut CEO & Founder

"What a wonderful resource, with fantastic honesty and passion – it really captures how both the student and the employer feel for the first time."

## 2. Technology and innovative tools must be used with caution

Being the founder of a student and graduate careers app, it might seem counter-intuitive for me to put the spotlight on the concerns with using modern technologies during the recruitment process. I believe that all technology is good, but only when it's used in the interest of the candidate. This guide has confirmed the importance of giving candidates a choice – half of all 18-23s would prefer to be interviewed in person rather than on screen – the best employers will make sure that is an option.

3. Long-term preparation

One of the key words used by all the employers that took part in creating the guide is 'preparation', mainly in regards to getting ready for the interview process. What I've taken from this guide is that a much more long-term preparation is required – starting well before university. Proof of life experience is crucial today, with many employers holding it in high regard when making decisions on hires.

By investing time in gaining life experience as early as possible – be it helping the guy at the corner shop with his social media, joining the cadets, running charity events, or managing ticket sales for the school prom – whatever it is, it will make the graduate application stage a lot easier further down the line. Paid internships are a more official way to get that work experience, and are great in helping people make major decisions about which career path to take.

The guide has also confirmed the stress that the too often gruelling and arduous application processes puts on students during their vital years of study, which could impact their academic achievements. Each application takes an average of 1.5 hours – multiply that by 33 which is the average number of applications and it amounts to 50 hours. I think it's important for all employers to look for ways in which we can reduce the time it takes to apply and be taken through the recruitment process, in the interest of the labour force of the future.
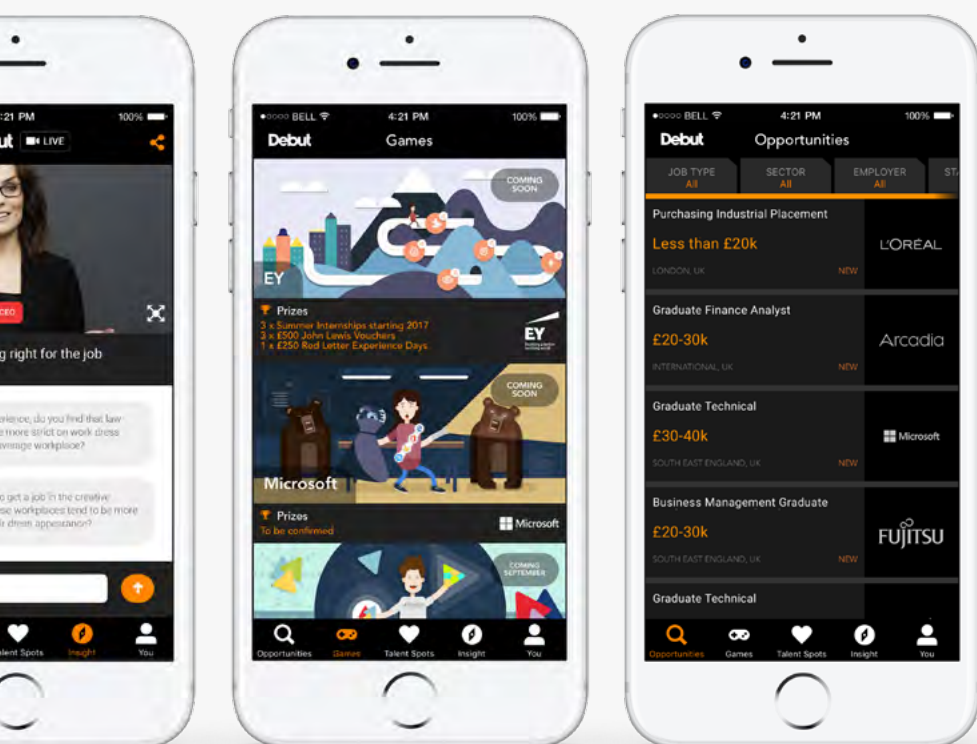
Debut app

Graduate careers and internships at the fingertips of 1.8 million

Through pushing mobile technology to its limits, Debut is putting graduate careers and internships at the fingertips of 1.8 million UK-based students and graduates.

10k Talent Spots

By gaining improved access through Debut, employers are sending an average of 10K Talent Spots to students and graduates each week, inviting them to assessment centres or to be fast-tracked through to the interview process.

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Where careers find you

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