BMJ Careers

AI in medical recruitment:

Making a bad situation worse?

AI in medical recruitment, at a glance

39%

of doctors are, or would consider, using AI for their job searches.

62%

of doctors using AI, use it to optimise their CV.

36%

of doctors using AI, use it to complete application forms on their behalf.

53%

of medical recruiters believe AI-written or AI assisted applications are very or moderately common.

61%

of medical recruiters said they would consider using AI to filter applications.

52%

of recruiters say they don't have a position on the use of AI in applications.

Source: BMJ Careers, August 2026

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Thank you to the doctors and medical recruiters who spoke to us for this white paper. Thanks also to Emma Weinbren for editorial support.

Preface

Dear recruiter,

The biggest talking point in recruitment circles is the disrupting power of artificial intelligence (AI).

In a very short period of time, AI has become embedded in the system, with some surveys showing as many as seven in 10 jobseekers globally use generative AI to research companies, draft cover letters, and prep talking points.[1]



Phil Johnson
Director of BMJ Careers

Contact me:
pjohnson@bmj.com

£1.2bn

cost of NHS England's new AI-driven recruitment and management system

A survey by CV Library earlier this year [2] suggested 83% of recruiters now use the technology in some capacity – even if that simply involves writing job descriptions.

Things move a bit slower in medical recruitment, but some have told us that they are already receiving large numbers of AI-generated applications for non-consultant roles, and there are concerns it will make screening out low-quality candidates even more difficult.

Others are fighting fire with fire and are engaging AI solutions themselves to screen candidates. The NHS in England will be purchasing a new £1.2bn recruitment and workforce management system from Infosys that will include "intuitive, AI-driven tools" to "enable data-driven decision-making", although quite when that will appear is unclear.[3]

This is a rapidly moving area, but this white paper from BMJ Careers looks into current attitudes to AI among medical recruiters and candidates, and outlines guidance from experts on what you should be doing now to tame the AI monster.

Ultimately, the only solution will be employing more targeted medical recruitment strategies, and this is where BMJ Careers can help. We offer bespoke campaigns to target specific groups of doctors, and save you time by cutting down your candidate pool to only the most talented.

Contact us today to find out more.

Ultimately, the only solution will be employing more targeted medical recruitment strategies, and this is where BMJ Careers can help.

1 Indeed (2025), Global AI Survey, December 2023: https://www.indeed.com/lead/the-indeed-ai-report
2 CV-Library survey of 500 recruiters, March 2026 https://www.cv-library.co.uk/recruitment-insight/ai-in-recruitment-survey/
3 Infosys, 2025 https://www.infosys.com/newsroom/press-releases/2025/deliver-new-workforce-management-solution.html

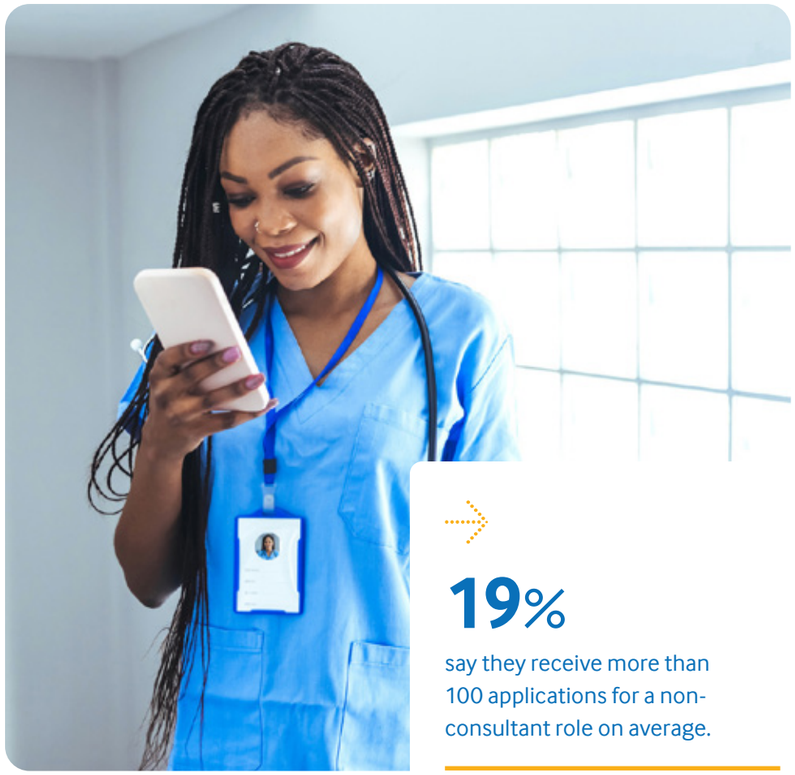
Increasing pressure on medical recruitment teams

Artificial intelligence (AI) may be adding to an already fraught relationship between NHS recruiters and candidates.

Perhaps we don't need to tell you this, but there are two wildly contrasting situations in medical recruitment. In the case of consultant vacancies, it can be difficult to get any more than a handful of applications. For other medical roles the opposite is true.

For non-consultant medical roles, competition is intense. Nearly a fifth of medical recruiters (19%) say they receive more than 100 applications for a non-consultant role on average. Four in 10 (43%) said the volume of applications for these roles had risen in the past year, nearly three times the number that said they had seen a decrease (15%).

Medical recruiters cited the number of overseas candidates and use of AI as possible reasons for this change (see Figure 1).

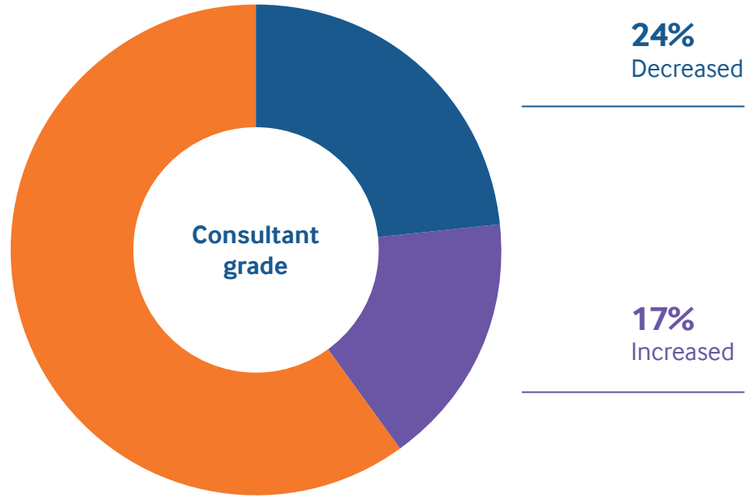


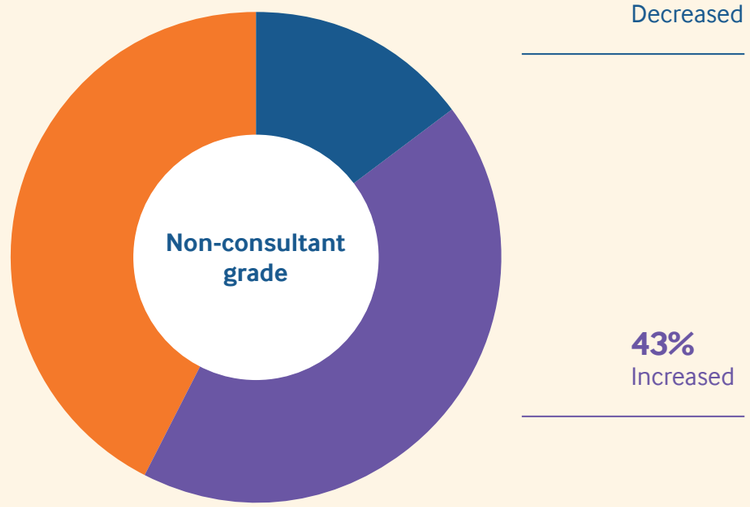
19%

say they receive more than 100 applications for a non-consultant role on average.

Figure 1:

Compared to 12 months ago, what has happened to the volume of applications you are getting on an average medical job advert?





Source: BMJ Careers survey of 229 UK recruiters, August 2026

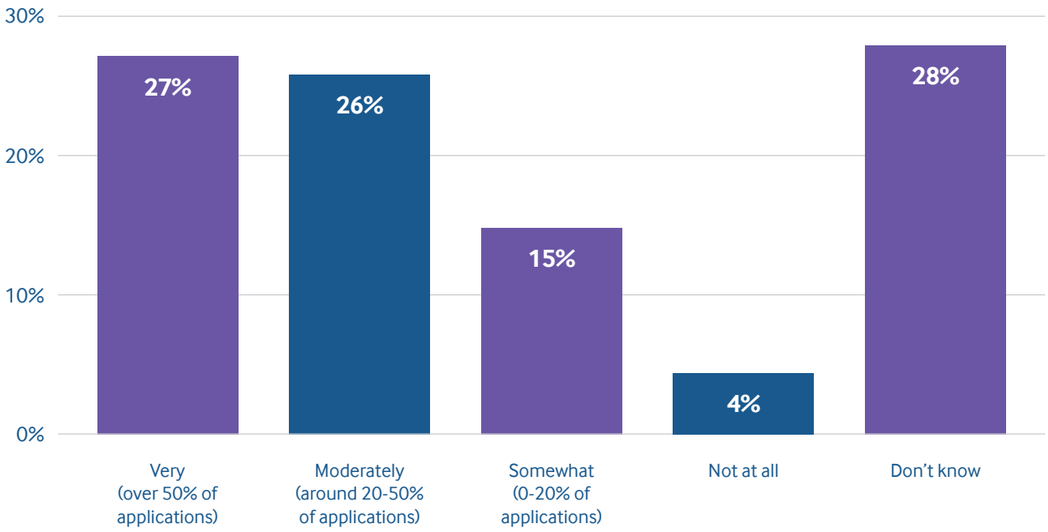
Outside of medicine, recruiters have reported being inundated with AI-generated applications[4] and the suspicion among some medical recruiters is that some doctors are also using "AI agents" to apply for multiple jobs at the same time.

Over half (53%) of medical recruiters told us that they believe that applications either written by or assisted by AI are very or moderately common (See Figure 2).



Figure 2:

In your estimation, how common are AI-written or AI-assisted applications?



Source: BMJ Careers survey of 229 UK recruiters, August 2026

4 New York Times, Employers Are Buried in A.I.-Generated Résumés, 21 June 2025 Employers Are Buried in A.I.-Generated Résumés - The New York Times

RECRUITER VIEW:

"We regularly receive AI-generated applications"



Umber Agarwal
Consultant obstetrician, Liverpool Women's Hospital

We recruit at least five or six times a year, and we can clearly see which applications are written by applicants and which are AI-generated.

For more junior roles below consultant level, we tend to see applications that have the hallmarks of AI. In a human application, the grammar and English may not be perfect, but you see a human element.

If it is an absolute perfect pitch and everything seems too good to be true, it's likely to be an AI agent.

In some cases, the candidate has set up a customised search, and if the job ad meets the criteria, it automatically fires off the application. So the person doesn't even have to open and read the job description – the AI does all of that for you.

In a human application, the grammar and English may not be perfect, but you see a human element.

We recruit at least

5 or **6**

times a year, and we can clearly see which applications are written by applicants and which are AI-generated.

"If it is an absolute perfect pitch and everything seems too good to be true, it's likely to be an AI agent."

The problem with application caps

Over a fifth (22%) of NHS recruiters told us they use limits on the number of applications or the time a post is available, with that cap set as low as five applications.

One of the responses that NHS recruiters have had is to impose caps on job adverts to help stem the tsunami of applications.

These caps are reached sometimes in minutes."Within a few hours we have had several hundred applications for a trust grade O&G post," said one recruiter. Another told us that their cap of 1,000 applications was reached "within five hours".

This is having an effect on the time that candidates have to prepare an application, and may explain the drive to use AI agents.

NHS Jobs data analysed by BMJ Careers reveals that the proportion of resident doctor roles closing within seven days had doubled from 20% in July 2023 to 40% in July 2026 (see Figure 3).

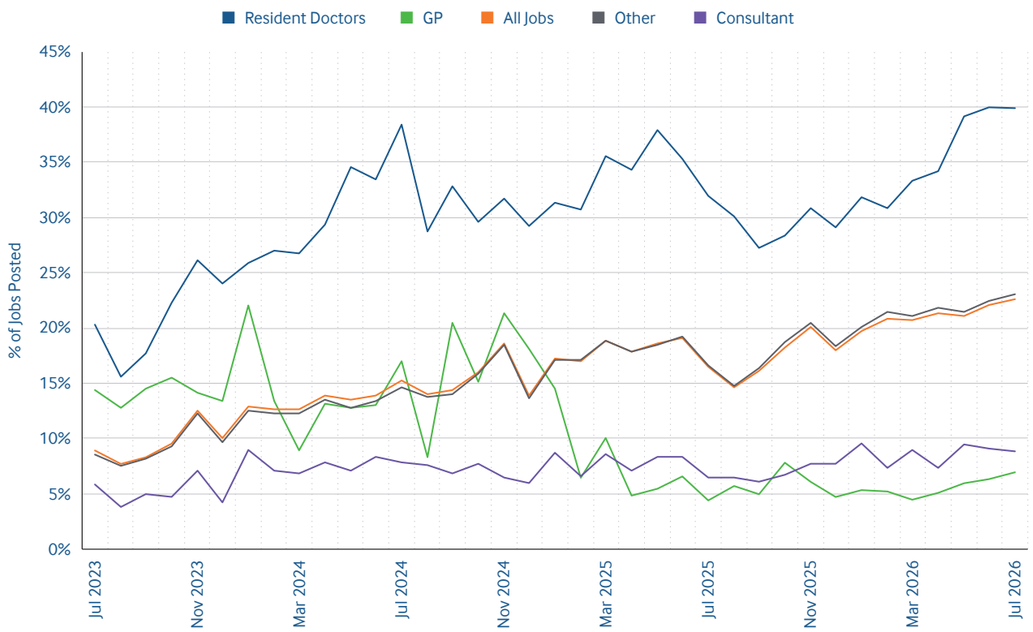
Application caps may encourage candidate use of AI agents

1,000

application cap was reached "within five hours".

Figure 3:

Proportion of medical jobs closed within seven days, 2023-2026



Source: BMJ Careers analysis of medical posts listed on NHS Jobs 2023 to 2026

If arbitrary caps are being put on the number of applications accepted, or roles are being closed early, there's a high chance that the best candidates may not even be considered, which is incredibly concerning."

Dr Shivam Sharma, Co-deputy chair, BMA London Regional Council and former deputy co-chair for resident doctors' education and training



Doctors' attitudes to AI for job searching

Many doctors would consider AI for their job searches, with international candidates and doctors seeking non-consultant roles more likely to use the technology.

There is no doubt that it is a challenging market for doctors seeking non-consultant roles. Jobs are closing earlier, application forms getting longer and competition is fierce.

For non-consultant medical roles, candidates answer an average of 142 questions, according to a BMJ Careers analysis of application forms on Trac[5]. The longest form in our analysis contained 172 questions.

If each question took two minutes to complete, that would require nearly six hours of work.

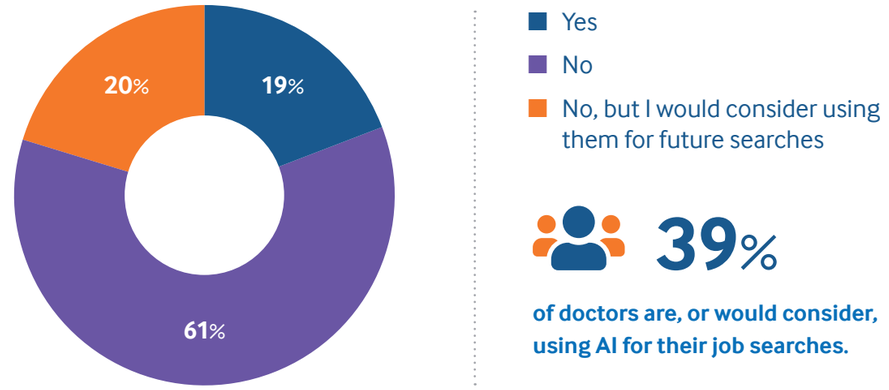
Frustration around job seeking was evident in our survey of doctors[6]. The lack of a quick or simple process to apply was the biggest gripe, named by 57%. At the same time, over a quarter of all doctors (26%) said they were frustrated by jobs closing before their published expiry date. That figure rose to 35% among resident doctors.

"Some non-consultant medical application forms could take 6 hours to complete"

5 Analysis of 52 Trac application forms for non-consultant medical roles across 47 employers
6 BMJ survey of 481 UK and international doctors: 38% consultants, 28% resident doctors, 14% GPs, 20% other doctors

Figure 4:

Have you used artificial intelligence (AI) tools to assist your job search and application process?



39%

of doctors are, or would consider, using AI for their job searches.

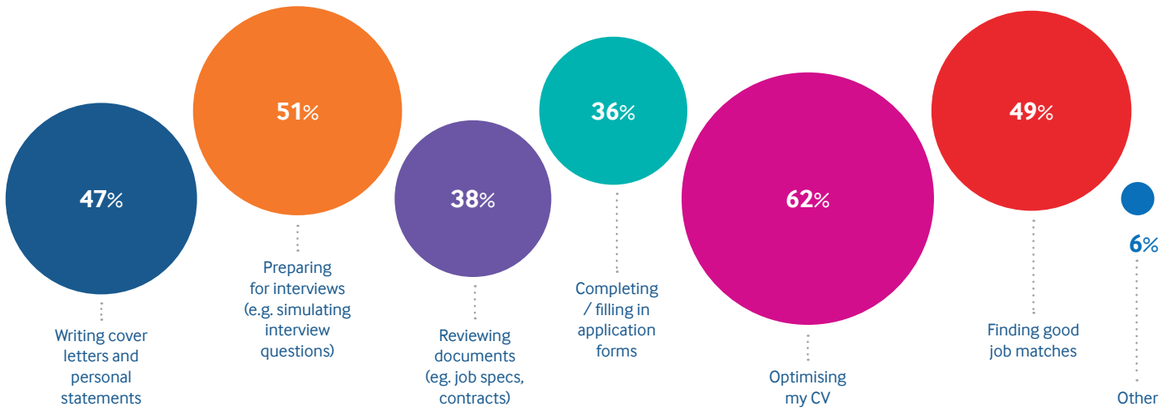
Source: BMJ Careers survey of 246 UK and international doctors, August 2026

To assist with their job search, a fifth of doctors (19%) say they are currently using AI, while another 20% would consider it (see Figure 4). International and resident doctors were more likely to be using AI (34% and 33%, respectively).

Among the doctors who used AI, the most common applications of the technology was to optimise their CV or prepare for interviews. Over a third (36%) used AI to complete application forms on their behalf (see Figure 5).

Figure 5:

How have you used artificial intelligence (AI) tools to assist your job search and application process?



Source: BMJ Careers survey of 47 UK and international doctors, August 2026

CANDIDATE VIEW:

“Everyone is using AI”

I am frustrated and fed up. I have applied for nearly 100 posts since I gained full registration with the GMC.

Most of them reject my application immediately with no feedback whatsoever, and others close very early and I’m not even able to apply.

You start to wonder if it’s my problem, if it’s something wrong with me. I’ve asked many people and they say: “No, it’s just the system”, but that is how it makes you feel.

I understand that we live in an overpopulated world at the moment and there are hundreds of applications for just a few posts, but I think NHS trusts should try to make it more clear, accessible, and transparent for everybody.

Everyone is using AI, because application forms are extremely long, with hundreds and hundreds of different questions.

I’ve used AI to tailor my answers to the specific personal specifications, but the way they ask about using AI in the application form makes you feel that it’s wrong to do that.

It is a double standard as the trusts must be using AI themselves to screen hundreds of applications. Why should I be penalised for doing the same thing?

Daniel Jaramillo,
resident doctor



It is a double standard as the trusts must be using AI themselves to screen hundreds of applications.

Most of them reject my application immediately with no feedback whatsoever

I have applied for nearly

100 posts

CANDIDATE VIEW:

“I use AI to stand out in a competitive market”

I use AI as an assistant rather than asking it to do the entire application for me.

I find it especially helpful for improving the wording and structure of my CV, customising a CV or cover letter for a specific job, identifying relevant skills and keywords, checking grammar, and preparing for interview questions. I always review the final version myself to ensure it truly reflects my experience.

AI can be particularly helpful for long applications.
A straightforward application where I can upload my CV might take 10–15 minutes, but a detailed application requiring employment history, qualifications, and supporting statements can take 30–60 minutes or even longer.
The most frustrating part is repeatedly entering information that is already on my CV.

I believe recruiters are using AI quite extensively, especially in the early stages of recruitment. With hundreds of applications for some roles, it can be overwhelming to review everything manually.

I suspect AI or automated systems help with screening and ranking CVs, identifying relevant qualifications and experience, communicating with candidates, and even supporting assessments.

However, I think important decisions like interviews and final selections still involve human judgment.

International doctor
applying for roles in UK and Ireland



I believe recruiters are using AI quite extensively, especially in the early stages of recruitment.

AI can be particularly helpful for long applications

Detailed applications can take

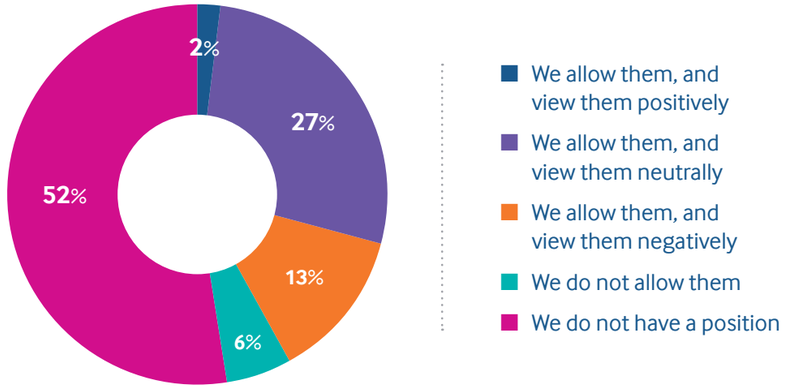
60 minutes or longer

How should medical recruiters respond?

Most medical recruiters do not have a firm position on the use of AI, but are open to using AI for their own processes. Experts say this approach comes with huge risks.

At the moment, few NHS recruiters have a firm position on candidate use of AI. Just over half (52%) told us that they have no position at all, and just over a quarter (27%) are neutral on its use (see Figure 6). This is in line with guidance from NHS Employers, which encourages a neutral stance in case that recruiters miss out on viable candidates.[7]

Figure 6:
What is your position on AI-assisted applications?



Source: BMJ Careers survey of 229 NHS recruiters, August 2026

NHS Employers recommends having a verbal discussion with candidates who seem suitable, but are suspected to have used AI in their submission.

Umber Agarwal, consultant obstetrician at Liverpool Women's Hospital says he employs this approach when they suspect AI has been used: "We tend to be a bit sceptical of those applications. We have to interview them if they meet the criteria, and then we separate the water and the oil on the day. If a candidate is shortlisted and if they don't match what has been written by AI, then it's a bit disappointing."

NHS Employers recommends recruiters add a statement or disclaimer to job descriptions and application forms advising that AI use is monitored and must be declared by candidates, or explaining that AI-generated applications can lack specificity and fail to convey individual skills and experiences.

Recruiters can also tailor job descriptions to weed out handwritten applications from the AI-generated ones. AI agents "do not cope well with context, like a specific scenario", points out Clare Walsh, a director at the Institute of Analytics. She recommends planting a message that requires decoding – for example, that your team is reviewing its approach in a certain area. "The strongest candidates will identify that there is a challenge to solve, not just a CV to be embellished", she says.

AI agents "do not cope well with context, like a specific scenario"



How to spot if an application has been AI-generated[7]

Personalisation is essential to convey individual skills, knowledge, and experiences effectively.

01

Repetition of the same answer word-for-word, or in a slightly different order.

02

Stilted, impersonal language (robotic-sounding or plain).

03

Inconsistency in the language, writing style or tone of voice throughout.

04

Overuse of semi colons.

05

Overly long or complex sentences that have a range of unusual vocabulary, patterns or phrases.

06

Answers that fail to address the key criteria outlined in the job description and person specification.

7 NHS Employers: Guidance on the use of artificial intelligence in candidate applications, August 2025 https://www.nhsemployers.org/articles/guidance-use-artificial-intelligence-candidate-applications

Should recruiters use AI to screen applications?

In 2022, only 16% of UK organisations used AI as a recruitment tool, according to the professional HR body CIPD. That figure rose to 31% in 2024[8] – and is likely to be even higher today.

A survey by CV Library earlier this year[9] suggested 83% of recruiters now use the technology in some capacity. However, experts warn of dangers of using the technology.

The NHS Staff Council Job Evaluation Group has published advice via NHS Employers stating that AI cannot replace panel processes and must not be used to make pay decisions.[10] An academic study published in March raised questions over the impact of "AI-saturated job listings" on quality and fairness.[11] The Information Commissioner's Office is concerned employers are using AI to make decisions "without meaningful human involvement" – which has legal and ethical implications.[12]

Already, legal action is being taken around the use of AI in hiring processes. In the US, a class action lawsuit has been filed against Eightfold AI, a Silicon Valley company that created hiring software used by Fortune 500 companies. The lawsuit argues candidates should be given a chance to dispute errors made by an automated system.

Discrimination has also emerged as a particular concern in AI-led recruitment. For example, there have been reports of discrimination against women, older candidates or workers who have taken medical or parental leave in the past.[13-15]



Discrimination has also emerged as a particular concern in AI-led recruitment.

A survey by CV Library earlier this year[9] suggested

83%

of recruiters use AI in some capacity

8 CIPD (2024) Resourcing and Talent Planning Report 2024
9 CV-Library survey of 500 recruiters, March 2026 https://www.cv-library.co.uk/recruitment-insight/ai-in-recruitment-survey/
10 NHS Staff Council Job Evaluation Group, July 2025: https://www.nhsemployers.org/system/files/2025-07/jegs-advice-on-using-ai-job-evaluation.pdf
11 Cameron A, Pettengell F, Makinde M. Artificial intelligence in NHS job applications: the cost to quality and fairness. British Journal of Healthcare Management. 2026. https://doi.org/10.12968/bjhc.2025.0116
12 Information Commissioners Office Recruitment rewired: an update on the ICO's work on the fair and responsible use of automation in recruitment | ICO
13 The Guardian, Why tech's gender problem is nothing new, 12 October 2018 Why tech's gender problem is nothing new | Technology | The Guardian
14 Next Up, Ageism in hiring: how AI is crushing talent over 50, 27 January 2025 Ageism in hiring: how AI is crushing talent over 50 - Next-Up
15 The Guardian, Meta used AI to tag workers who took leave to be laid off, lawsuit claims, 15 July 2026 Meta used AI to tag workers who took leave to be laid off, lawsuit claims | Technology | The Guardian

“It’s that human element of gut feeling and reading between the lines to evaluate the experience of the candidate.”

Umber Agarwal says: “I can see the advantage in making the process quicker, but I have not yet seen the evidence that AI is good enough to filter out candidates effectively.

For example, if a person doesn’t meet all the desired criteria, but is very good in other areas, you may want to give them a chance.



It’s that human element of gut feeling and reading between the lines to evaluate the experience of the candidate. And I don’t think AI is able to do that yet.”

“If recruiters start routinely using AI, we risk creating a vicious circle, says Peter Holden, treasurer for the BMA. “More candidates will feel disillusioned and will use AI to submit boilerplate CVs. Then recruiters will get higher application volumes, which means they will need the technology even more. It becomes a total lottery.”

Only 3% of recruiters told us they currently use AI technology to filter or grade job applications (see Figure 7). More than eight in 10 (81%) follow NHS advice that advises against the use of AI in this context.

However, responses suggest adoption could increase significantly. Six in 10 recruiters (61%) who do not use AI said they would consider it to filter applications in future (see Figure 8).

If recruiters start routinely using AI, we risk creating a vicious circle.”

Peter Holden, treasurer for the BMA

It’s also worth noting the NHS has awarded a £1.2bn contract to Infosys to deliver a new workforce management system that will include recruitment. According to Infosys, the system will involve using “intuitive, AI-driven tools” to “streamline workforce planning and enable data-driven decision-making”.[16]

3%

of recruiters told us they currently use AI technology to filter or grade job applications

61%

of recruiters who do not use AI said they would consider it to filter applications in future

Figure 7:

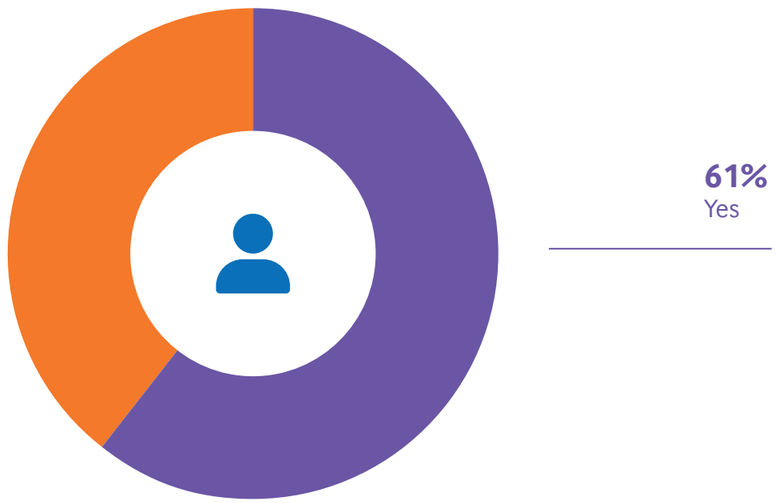
Are you using AI to assist with filtering or grading applications internally?



Note: The ‘Don’t know’ and ‘No’ categories went on to be asked the following question on Figure 8.

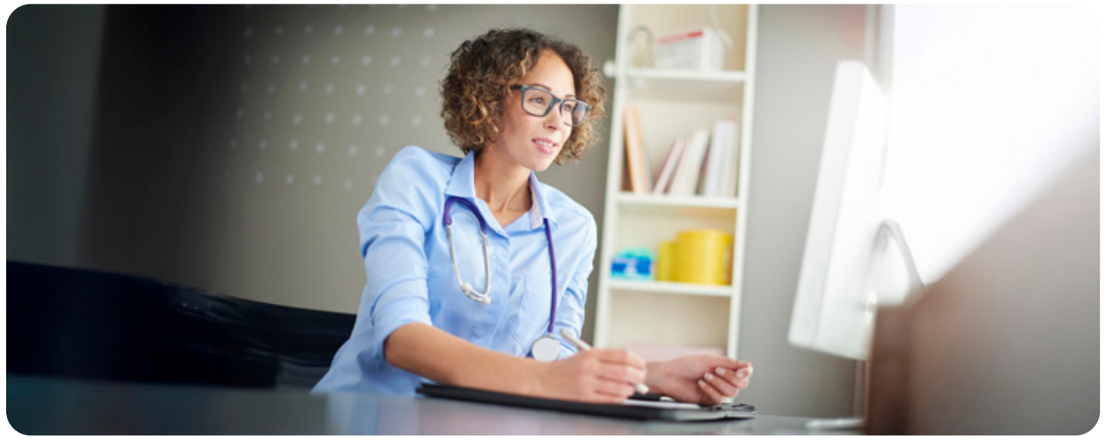
Figure 8:

Would you consider AI filtering of applications in the future?



Source: BMJ Careers survey of 229 NHS recruiters, August 2026

16 Infosys, 2025 https://www.infosys.com/newsroom/press-releases/2025/deliver-new-workforce-management-solution.html



For the foreseeable future, experts agree AI is best used for administrative tasks, rather than decision-making.

"AI is most helpful in the things that sit outside the hiring decision rather than inside it," says Will Cleare, managing director at The HR Agency. Suggested uses include "co-ordinating process, candidate comms around logistics, timelines and what decisions have been made", as well as scheduling interviews, and monitoring aspects such as right-to-work status, diversity or time-to-hire metrics.

The technology can also be used as the starting point for job descriptions, recommends Walsh. "I would suggest using the AI to craft the first draft of the job description, but then you have to come up with additional content that will allow those strong candidates to shine through."

"The pitfall is context," points out Daniel Callaghan, CEO of pre-employment screening company Veremark. "A gap in employment usually has a perfectly good reason. AI can't determine that and false positives from a name match or a formatting error slows hiring, damages the candidate's experience and, if nobody reviews it or checks the balance, it has the potential to become a discrimination claim."

The technology can also be used as the starting point for job descriptions

> **"AI is most helpful in the things that sit outside the hiring decision rather than inside it"**

> **"One small slip breaks the current law"**

GDPR risks from using AI

If recruiters are facing a deluge of applications, they could use AI to perform very simple screening tasks, but there is a risk over entering personal information into the technology.

"You could ask an AI to summarise the application for human review," says Clare Walsh, a director at the Institute of Analytics.

However, that would require recruiters to remove all personally identifying information before entering any content into an AI, to comply with GDPR legislation. "One small slip breaks the current law," Walsh warns.

Will Cleare, managing director at The HR Agency, also points to the legal pitfalls: "Under UK GDPR, Article 22 gives individuals the right not to be subject to decisions based solely on automated processing that produce legal effects or similarly significantly affect them," he says. "Clearly, it could be argued a recruitment decision clearly falls into that category.

"If your tool is making or materially influencing decisions about whether candidates progress, you need a lawful basis for that processing, and candidates have the right to know it's happening."

Julian Gage, founder of data protection service provider Engage Compliance, backs up that point. "A candidate has the right not to be subject to a decision based solely on automated processing that significantly affects them, and rejection from a job is exactly that," he says.

"The exemption most employers assume they have, a human in the loop, only holds if that person can and does overrule the machine," Gage adds. "Someone glancing at a ranked list of 400 and interviewing the top 20 is not reviewing the decision – they are accepting it."

A human in the loop, only holds if that person can and does overrule the machine



Clare Walsh, director at the Institute of Analytics

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