Bright apply

# A practical buyer's guide to chat-based screening for high-volume hiring

## What to consider, who to involve, and how to buy with confidence

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**How to use this guide**

- Read pages 4 to 5 to confirm if this type of solution fits your needs
- Use pages 6 to 17 to evaluate tools and suppliers
- Use pages 19 onwards to align key stakeholders including legal, procurement, compliance, and employer brand

This guide was produced by Bright Apply based on our experience in the market. While we're a vendor in this space, we've designed this resource to help you evaluate any chat-based screening solution systematically using industry best practices.

Where our own product appears, we've clearly marked it. The evaluation frameworks, stakeholder guidance, and vendor scorecard apply to any provider you're considering.

# Why this matters now

**Your hiring team hasn't grown. Your application volumes have.**

Many candidate answers now look generic, and AI is making that worse. Cheating and impersonation are becoming more common too. That means more applications, less signal, and more risk to manage.

**45%**
rise in applications
(LinkedIn 2025)

**53%**
of UK jobseekers using AI tools in a job search
(Capterra)

**44%**
of AI users are making more applications than they were before using AI
(Bright Network 2026)

**25%**
of candidate profiles predicted to be fake by 2028
(Gartner survey 2025)

Hiring teams are good at spotting strong talent once they get to a real conversation. The hard part is reaching that point quickly, consistently, and fairly.

Chat-based screening brings structured conversation earlier in the process, so teams can get deeper insight early and spend human time on the candidates who look strongest.

We built this guide because buying a screening tool is harder than it should be, and a bad decision is worse than no decision.

The gap between teams that have structured this and those still sifting manually is already showing up - in shortlist quality, in candidate feedback, and in how long it takes to fill roles.

# Is chat-based screening right for you?

### Quick fit check

If you tick three or more, chat-based screening is worth a closer look.

- ✓ We receive **more applications** than our recruiters can properly review
- ✓ We're not confident we're giving every single applicant a **fair chance**
- ✓ Hiring managers do not **trust** early-stage shortlists
- ✓ We see lots of **generic** answers that are hard to distinguish between
- ✓ We need better **evidence** than CVs and application forms can provide
- ✓ We want a clearer **audit trail** for screening decisions
- ✓ We want to protect the candidate's **experience** while moving faster
- ✓ We want to reduce the risk of candidate **impersonation** without adding heavy friction
- ✓ We want to know who is **eligible** for the role up front
- ✓ We want to spend more recruiting team **time** on high value-add tasks

# When chat-based screening works best (and when it doesn't)

## Usually a good fit

- High volume roles where you're dealing with hundreds of applications per vacancy
- Roles with clear criteria and consistent scoring attributes
- Roles where a CV tells you very little and you're largely going on gut or a quick phone screen
- Processes where candidate experience matters
- Teams where consistency matters – the same standard applied to every candidate, every time
- Processes where you'd struggle to justify a screening decision if it were ever challenged

## Usually not a good fit

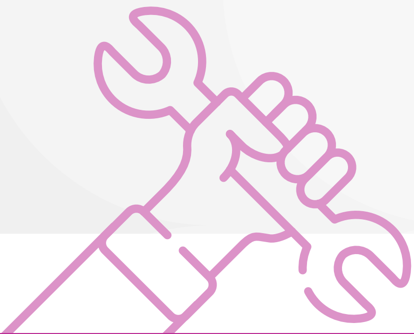
- Very low volume roles
- Highly specialised roles or senior roles where CV and credentials tell you most of what you need
- Roles where cultural fit or interpersonal dynamics are the primary screening criteria
- Main issue is later stage interview quality rather than screening

## In our experience, most teams try a few quick fixes first

- **Extra form questions:** more text does not always mean more signal
- **Spreadsheets:** hard to keep consistent across recruiters and roles
- **More assessments:** can increase candidate drop off
- **More people:** cost increases and consistency varies
- **ATS workarounds:** messy data and reporting
- **AI keyword filtering:** quick to set up, but misses context and risks filtering out strong candidates for the wrong reasons

Most teams start with these fixes because they are fast, familiar, and easy to try. They can help for a while, but they rarely solve the underlying issue of low signals at scale.

**If you're still feeling the strain, it may be time to evaluate a tool and try chat-based screening for the first time.**



# Ready to start evaluating tools?

Buying a screening tool is rarely blocked by the product. It is usually blocked or significantly slowed down by missing internal alignment. Use this checklist to confirm you have a clear pilot role, clear success criteria, and the right stakeholders lined up.

**You're ready to start evaluating when:**

- You have at least one role in mind that you're experiencing screening issues with
- You can define what good looks like in plain language
- You know what decisions the tool needs to support and what needs to stay human
- You can baseline screening time and drop off

**If you don't make a change:**

- Recruiter time drifts towards manual sifting
- Shortlists get noisier and trust in the process drops
- Generic and AI-generated responses continue to reduce signal
- Fraud risk rises, and manual checking increases
- Evidence for decisions is fragmented and hard to follow
- You end up asking for emergency budget at exactly the wrong time

# How to compare tools and suppliers

This section gives you a consistent way to compare suppliers. Use the same questions with every vendor so you can separate real differences from just a good demo.

**A confident vendor will always offer to show, not just tell. Here's what to ask for...**

### Candidate experience

- Can you show what a candidate sees from start to finish?
- Can you show how reasonable adjustments work?

### Recruiter workflow and screening quality

- Can you show how configurable it is?
- Can you show what a recruiter sees for a real candidate, including the transcript or summary and any scoring?
- Can you show how follow up questions work?
- Can you show how the tool handles vague, low effort, or copied responses in practice?

### Trust, fraud, and control

- Can you show how you detect and surface AI use or suspicious behaviour?
- Can you show candidate verification in practice, and what happens when something looks suspicious?
- Can you explain what the AI does and does not do and how we can control this?

### Delivery and support

- Can you show how our current ATS will integrate with the screening tool?
- Can you show the timelines for ATS integration and interview configuration?
- Can you show what support looks like pre and post onboarding?

### Fairness and auditability

- Can you explain how you independently verify that the tool is not biased?
- Can you show the audit trail you create?

# How to judge what you see

Vendor demos are polished. What matters is what happens with a real role, real candidates, and real stakeholders watching the outputs.

Use this section to assess what you see in demos and pilots.

## Candidate experience

### What good looks like

- ✓ The flow is clear with realistic time expectations upfront
- ✓ Questions feel role relevant, not generic
- ✓ Candidates can complete the interview at their own pace with the option to pause and return where the employer has enabled this
- ✓ Support is obvious and fast
- ✓ Candidates understand what happens next

### Warning signs

- △ The experience feels like a vendor tool bolted onto your brand
- △ Candidates get stuck without a clear support route
- △ The flow is long, repetitive, or full of unclear instructions
- △ The candidate messaging overpromises or feels vague
- △ The conversation reads like a chatbot script rather than a thoughtful interview - generic prompts, no follow-up, no context

### Deal breakers

- ✕ No credible approach to accessibility and reasonable adjustments
- ✕ No support route or slow support during peak hiring
- ✕ Candidate comms that you cannot control or review

# How to judge what you see

## Recruiter workflow and decision quality

### What good looks like

- ✓ Recruiters see a clear transcript or structured summary, with reasoning behind every score or recommendation, not just a number
- ✓ The interview is configurable and can replicate existing screening questions and rubric
- ✓ Outputs map cleanly to your role rubric, with consistent scoring
- ✓ Follow up questions appear for genuinely unclear answers, not at random
- ✓ Recruiters can quickly explain why a candidate looks strong or weak
- ✓ Hiring managers get a view that supports decision making, not extra admin
- ✓ Outputs write back into the ATS in a useful, searchable format

### Warning signs

- △ Scores exist, but the logic cannot be explained in plain language
- △ The tool produces confident sounding summaries that do not match the underlying answers
- △ There is no functionality for follow up questions

### Deal breakers

- ✕ You cannot audit or explain why a candidate received a given outcome
- ✕ The tool encourages decisions without clear evidence

# How to judge what you see

## Trust, fairness and governance

### What good looks like

- ✓ The vendor can explain what the AI does and does not do, in plain language. You can control the bits that need human input - question sets, rubrics, thresholds, and decision points
- ✓ There is a clear, exportable record of what was asked, what was answered, and what outputs were created
- ✓ The vendor can explain their fairness testing approach and what happens if something looks off.
- ✓ The vendor holds ISO 27001 accreditation. For AI-specific governance, look for ISO 42001 accreditation or a credible roadmap towards it

### Warning signs

- △ "Trust us" answers, with little documentation or breakdown
- △ Fairness described as intent rather than a repeatable process
- △ Monitoring is undefined

### Deal breakers

- ✕ No clear audit trail
- ✕ No credible ability to evidence fairness checks and monitoring
- ✕ Scores do not align with what you or your team would award
- ✕ No recognised compliance accreditation and no credible pathway towards one

# How to judge what you see

## Delivery, support and fit

### What good looks like

- ✓ The vendor can show how it works with your ATS fields and workflows
- ✓ The vendor can explain what happens during downtime and how you keep hiring moving
- ✓ Support response times and escalation routes are clear
- ✓ Commercials are transparent, including volume tiers and overages
- ✓ Implementation timelines meet your requirements and there's evidence to show it's possible and not just a bold claim to win you as a client
- ✓ They can clearly explain what support looks like pre and post onboarding

### Warning signs

- △ Integration is claimed by showing your ATS logo on a slide, but the vendor can't explain how data actually flows, which fields map, or what doesn't work out of the box
- △ Support is vague, limited, or hard to access
- △ Pricing triggers are unclear

### Deal breakers

- ✕ Cannot support your ATS or your workflow requirements
- ✕ Contract terms that block data return or deletion on exit

# How to judge what you see

## Fraud and suspicious behaviour

### What good looks like

- ✓ The vendor is clear about what they can and cannot detect
- ✓ Flags are treated as prompts for review, not automatic guilt
- ✓ There is a defined workflow for what happens next
- ✓ The candidate experience stays fair and consistent

### Warning signs

- △ Overconfident fraud claims without clear limitations
- △ Flags that cannot be explained
- △ A high risk of false positives with no mitigation

### Deal breakers

- ✕ Automatic rejection based on vague or unexplainable signals
- ✕ No documentation you could defend if challenged

## A simple rule when you leave a demo

If you cannot answer these three questions after a walkthrough, do not progress.

- Do we understand what the candidate experience will feel like?
- Do recruiters and hiring managers understand the outputs and how to use them?
- Can we evidence and defend decisions, with an audit trail we can export?

**Red flags to watch out for**

- They avoid questions about the candidate experience and the steps they've taken to optimise it
- They cannot show real outputs and exports
- They blur decision support and automated decisions
- They cannot explain how they ensure any AI used is not biased
- They cannot support your ATS workflow

# Vendor scorecard 1

Use these scorecards to compare vendors after demos.

Review these critical requirements. If a vendor cannot meet any of these, we recommend pausing evaluation until they can address the gap.

- No credible audit trail
- Automatic rejection based on unexplained signals
- Cannot support your ATS
- No accessibility or reasonable adjustments approach
- Contract blocks data return on exit

Score each sub-criterion **1 to 5** and note the evidence. A total of **75** or above out of **100** is the threshold to progress to a pilot. Any single area scoring **4** or below out of **20** warrants a direct conversation with the vendor before moving forward.

| Sub-criterion | Vendor A | Vendor B | Vendor C |
|---|---|---|---|
| Score each criterion 1–5. 1–2 = Not addressed or a concern raised, 3 = Claimed but not shown, or only partial, 4–5 = Demonstrated clearly with evidence | | | |
| **Candidate experience** (TOTALS) | __ / 20 | __ / 20 | __ / 20 |
| Flow is clear with realistic time expectations upfront | | | |
| Questions feel role-relevant, not generic | | | |
| Support route is obvious, fast, and accessible | | | |
| Candidate comms are fully controllable by your team | | | |

**Evidence: what did they show you?**

Vendor A

Vendor B

Vendor C

# Vendor scorecard 2

| Sub-criterion | Vendor A | Vendor B | Vendor C |
|---|---|---|---|
| Score each criterion 1–5. 1–2 = Not addressed or a concern raised, 3 = Claimed but not shown, or only partial, 4–5 = Demonstrated clearly with evidence | | | |
| **Recruiter workflow and decision quality** | __ / 20 | __ / 20 | __ / 20 |
| Transcript or summary clearly explains the reasoning behind every score | | | |
| Interview is configurable to match your existing rubric and criteria | | | |
| Follow-up questions appear for genuinely unclear answers, not at random | | | |
| Outputs write back to your ATS in a useful, searchable format | | | |

TOTALS

**Evidence: what did they show you?**

Vendor A

Vendor B

Vendor C

# Vendor scorecard 3

| Sub-criterion | Vendor A | Vendor B | Vendor C |
|---|---|---|---|
| Score each criterion 1–5. 1–2 = Not addressed or a concern raised, 3 = Claimed but not shown, or only partial, 4–5 = Demonstrated clearly with evidence | | | |
| **Trust, fairness and governance** | __ / 20 | __ / 20 | __ / 20 |
| Vendor explains what the AI does and does not do in plain language | | | |
| Fairness testing is a documented process, not just a stated intention | | | |
| Audit trail is time-stamped, exportable, and covers the full decision | | | |
| ISO 27001 held; ISO 42001 held or a credible roadmap evidenced | | | |

TOTALS

**Evidence: what did they show you?**

Vendor A

Vendor B

Vendor C

# Vendor scorecard 4

| Sub-criterion | Vendor A | Vendor B | Vendor C |
|---|---|---|---|
| Score each criterion 1–5. 1–2 = Not addressed or a concern raised, 3 = Claimed but not shown, or only partial, 4–5 = Demonstrated clearly with evidence | | | |
| **Fraud detection and suspicious behaviour** | __ / 20 | __ / 20 | __ / 20 (TOTALS) |
| Clear about what can and cannot be detected — no overconfident claims | | | |
| Flags are prompts for human review, not triggers for automatic rejection | | | |
| Defined workflow exists for what happens after a flag fires | | | |
| False positive risk is acknowledged with documented mitigation | | | |

**Evidence: what did they show you?**

Vendor A

Vendor B

Vendor C

# Vendor scorecard 5

| Sub-criterion | Vendor A | Vendor B | Vendor C |
|---|---|---|---|
| Score each criterion 1–5. 1–2 = Not addressed or a concern raised, 3 = Claimed but not shown, or only partial, 4–5 = Demonstrated clearly with evidence | | | |
| **Delivery, support, and fit** | __ / 20 | __ / 20 | __ / 20 |
| ATS integration shown working in practice, not just a logo on a slide | | | |
| Support response times and escalation routes are specific and evidenced | | | |
| Implementation timeline is backed by comparable case evidence | | | |
| Pricing model is fully transparent including volume tiers and overages | | | |

TOTALS

**Evidence: what did they show you?**

Vendor A

Vendor B

Vendor C

# Running a pilot

A pilot is the best way to turn assumptions into evidence. It lets you test the tool with your roles, your volumes, and your actual workflow and gives you something concrete to bring back to stakeholders. It shows what changes for recruiters, how candidates respond, and whether it solves the problems you are seeing.

It also helps you bring your internal stakeholders with you, because you can agree success criteria up front and review results together.

A pilot should answer two key questions: does it improve screening decisions, and does it reduce time spent.

### Pilot setup

- Pick one role family with real volume
- Run for the hiring window for the role. In practice, most pilots run for the length of the relevant hiring window
- Identify a recruiter champion who will co-own the configuration and give candid feedback throughout the pilot
- Baseline recruiter screening time and current drop off
- Define success thresholds before launch
- Parallel human spot checks for a defined subset at the start
- Hold weekly reviews

### Pilot success template

- Time to shortlist improves by ___%
- Recruiter hours spent screening per vacancy drop by ___
- Hiring managers rate shortlist quality at ___ or above
- Candidate completion stays above ___%
- Complaints and escalations stay below ___ per ___ candidates
- Adverse impact checks show no material worsening, or there is a mitigation plan

### Common reasons pilots stall and how to avoid them:

- **No defined success criteria upfront.** If you haven't agreed what good looks like before you start, it's almost impossible to get sign-off at the end. Use the success template before launch, not after.
- **The wrong role.** A highly specialised or very low-volume role won't generate enough data to draw conclusions. Pick a role with real volume and clear criteria.
- **Legal or IT pulled in too late.** If they're not involved from the start, they can pause or block the pilot mid-run. Use the stakeholder map on the next page to get them in early.
- **Recruiters aren't brought in as designers, only as users.** If the people running the screening have no input into how the tool is configured (the questions, the rubric, the scoring logic) they won't trust what comes out. You can't parachute a tool onto a recruiter's desk and expect adoption. Involve at least one recruiter in the setup, have them review the first outputs critically, and create a clear channel for them to flag when something feels wrong. A pilot that generates good data but changes nobody's behaviour hasn't worked.

# Stakeholder mapping

Buying a tool like this is rarely blocked by the tech. It is blocked when the right people are not involved early enough. Use this map to bring stakeholders in at the right moment and avoid last-minute surprises and delays.

| Stakeholder | What they care about | Best time to involve them |
|---|---|---|
| TA lead | Use case, adoption, success measures, workflow, budget | Discovery |
| Hiring Manager lead | What good looks like, rubric inputs, decision points | Discovery |
| HR Ops or HR Tech | Process design, reporting, operating model | Discovery |
| Legal and DPO | Data protection position and documentation | Shortlist |
| Compliance | Controls, audit readiness, exceptions | Shortlist |
| InfoSec and IT | Security review, access controls, integration approval | Shortlist |
| Procurement | Commercials, contract terms, supplier risk | Shortlist |
| Employer brand | Candidate messaging, experience and escalations | Discovery |

# Working with legal

Getting legal buy-in on a new tool is no different from any other significant business decision. The good news: with the right framing, even cautious legal teams tend to come around. Here's what we've learned for success with legal teams.

### 1. Frame it as a solution to your current risk, not a new one

Your legal team's primary role is to manage and mitigate risk. Instead of presenting this as a novel piece of AI technology, frame it as the solution to the very real, existing risks in your manual screening process. High-volume hiring often relies on inconsistent, ad-hoc human judgments, which can be a breeding ground for bias. Explain that a structured, chat-based tool replaces that ambiguity with a consistent and fully auditable process.

### 2. Prove fairness, then document it

The biggest challenge with high-volume hiring is that it sets off every fairness alarm at once. Come armed with evidence that the tool applies consistent questions, scoring logic, decision thresholds and the right level of human input for each role. Bonus points if you can show bias testing, accessibility considerations, and how reasonable adjustments are handled.

### 3. Make data protection boring (in a good way)

Be crystal clear on what data is collected, why it's necessary, where it's stored, who can access it, and how long it is retained before deletion. Show GDPR compliance by design, not as an afterthought.

Legal teams prioritise clarity. When data practices are fully documented with no ambiguity, sign-off becomes more straightforward.

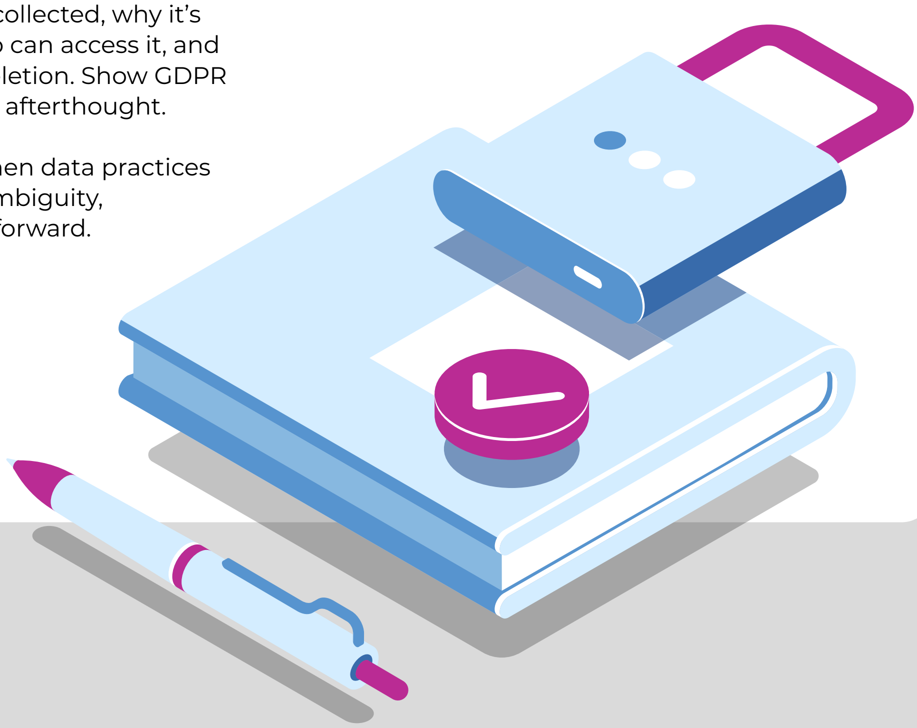
### 4. Keep humans visibly in the loop

Emphasise that the chat-based screen is decision-support, not decision-making. Spell out where human review happens, how edge cases are handled, and how candidates can be reconsidered or given reasonable adjustments.

The question legal teams usually ask is: 'Who made this decision?' Make sure the answer is never 'the algorithm'.

### 5. Involve legal early

Don't wait until the final stages to bring in your legal and data protection teams. Presenting them with a finished solution under a tight deadline almost guarantees delays, as their job is to scrutinise every detail you've already settled on. A far better approach is to invite them to an early-stage discussion. Treat it as a consultation where you can understand their primary concerns from the outset. This allows you to build their requirements directly into your evaluation process, ensuring the vendors you shortlist are already aligned with legal's needs.



# Working with procurement

Procurement sign-off is usually about predictability. Show how pricing scales, what triggers extra cost, what support you get, and how implementation will run. That creates confidence and speeds up approval.

Here's what we've learned for success with procurement teams.

### 1. Lead with total cost

Procurement teams care about cost predictability above all else. Give them a clear pricing model that includes volume tiers, implementation effort, support costs, and what triggers overages. Frame it as reducing cost and removing unpredictability, not as a technology investment.

### 2. Prove its resilience at scale, not just its performance in a pilot

A tool that works for a 100-candidate pilot is the bare minimum; what your procurement team needs to underwrite is its performance at 10,000 candidates during your busiest week of the year. They've seen tools fail under pressure, so you need to proactively address their concerns about both technical and commercial scalability. Be ready to discuss how the pricing model adapts to seasonal spikes without generating unpredictable overage costs, and ask the vendor for specific evidence of their system's resilience during peak loads. This shifts the conversation from "Does it work?" to "Can we rely on it when it matters most?"

### 3. Prove speed without trade-offs

Show how the tool shortens screening cycles, clears bottlenecks, and helps hiring teams move faster without adding headcount. Hard numbers win here.

### 4. De-risk the vendor relationship

The vendor you choose isn't just selling software. They're taking on operational risk with you. SLAs, support models, uptime history, and security certifications are how you assess whether they can be held to account.

Solid documentation and clear controls build confidence. Gaps will slow sign-off.

### 5. Provide a clear implementation roadmap

Detail the full integration timeline, including internal resource requirements and change management support. Show what the vendor will deliver at each stage and what your team needs to provide.

Bring procurement in early and make the commercial model and delivery plan easy to assess.

# Working with compliance

Compliance teams want clear controls and clear accountability. If you can show how the tool is governed, monitored, and audited, sign-off becomes much easier.

### 1. Anchor everything to known frameworks

Compliance teams don't want novelty, they want familiarity. Map the tool explicitly to recognised standards and regulations like GDPR, ISO guidance, and internal governance policies. Show where responsibilities sit and how accountability is maintained. Link your approach to the standards and policies they already use.

### 2. Show controls, not intentions

Compliance teams evaluate systems based on verifiable controls, not assurances. If it can be monitored, restricted, and reviewed, compliance confidence follows.

### 3. Demonstrate comprehensive audit trails

High-volume hiring attracts scrutiny. Show how the tool produces time-stamped records of questions asked, responses given, scoring logic used, and decisions made. When audits are a matter of exporting evidence rather than reconstructing history, compliance teams find it easier to support.

### 4. Plan for exceptions, not just the standard case

Compliance lives in edge cases. Be clear on how the tool handles reasonable adjustments, accessibility needs, candidate complaints, data subject access requests, and system failures. A documented response plan matters more than a perfect flowchart.

### 5. Position compliance as an ongoing practice

Compliance teams have seen what happens when nobody owns ongoing monitoring. Have an answer for who reviews outputs quarterly and what triggers a re-assessment. Explain how policies are reviewed, models updated, risks re-assessed, and controls tested over time. Regular reviews, internal reporting, and clear escalation routes demonstrate that the tool will be actively governed over time, not just approved once and forgotten.

# Working with employer brand

Employer brand sign off is about candidate experience and perception. If candidates understand why the step exists, feel supported, and see your brand throughout, rollout is much easier.

### 1. Lead with the candidate story

Employer brand teams need a simple explanation they can stand behind. Be clear on why this step exists, what it replaces, and what candidates get out of it.

### 2. Keep tone consistent

Ask for control over the welcome message, question wording, help text, and completion messaging. A tool that sounds like a vendor will feel out of place on your candidate journey.

### 3. Make trust signals obvious

Candidates decide quickly whether something feels legitimate. Use clear language, realistic time expectations, progress cues, and an easy support route.

### 4. Treat accessibility as non-negotiable

Confirm reasonable adjustments and accessibility support. Make the adjustments route easy to find and easy to use.

### 5. Agree complaints and escalation handling

Decide what happens when a candidate challenges fairness, asks to be reconsidered, or reports a technical issue. Agree who responds, in what timeframe, and what evidence you can share.

### 6. Measure experience, not just completion

Track where candidates drop off, time to complete, support ticket themes, and complaints. Use the pilot to tune the experience before rollout.

Appendix A
# Bright Apply at a glance

Bright Apply is a chat-based screening interview you place early in your hiring process. It asks role relevant questions, follows up when answers are unclear, and turns responses into structured outputs your team can review.

### Candidate experience

- Chat interview designed to feel conversational
- Voice first, with the option to switch to typed responses
- Contextual follow-ups when answers are unclear
- Non-assessed Q&A option for practical questions

### Outputs for review

- Transcript or structured summary of responses
- Screening scores aligned to your criteria with reasoning for every recommendation
- Interviewer guide to inform hiring managers
- Signals designed to discourage misuse and support review

## Our promise

**Deeper insight early, so you can spot unsuitable candidates faster and spend human time on the candidates who show the strongest potential**

Bright apply

**Bright Apply** is an AI-powered screening tool that helps recruiters review more candidates, more fairly, without adding resource. It's a faster, more consistent way to screen at scale and is loved by candidates who use it.

**To find out more**
**email employers@brightapply.co.uk**
**or visit brightapply.co.uk**