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THE GLOBAL TALENT ECONOMY

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SKILLS

Talent war: can the UK beat skills shortages?

A recession may prompt more people to return to work but experts fear the labour crisis will continue regardless

Daniel Thomas

When job vacancies soared to record levels after lockdown, many employers were taken by surprise. Companies needed more staff as the economy roared back to life, but they found many older workers had retired, younger people were flocking back to higher education and thousands with long-term sickness had opted out of the labour force.

Even the highest pay rises in a decade weren't enough to tackle the worsening skills shortages. But could the tables be about to turn as the economy hurtles towards a likely recession later this year?

So far, the signs aren't great. Vacancies have come down a bit and experts believe the post-pandemic jobs boom may have peaked. Yet the UK labour market is still as tight as a drum, with UK unemployment falling to just 3.6% in the three months to the end of July – the lowest it has been since 1974.

"I think the labour market will remain tight for the next decade and businesses need to prepare themselves for a very difficult recruiting environment," says Neil Carberry, head of the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC).

"Demand will of course wax and wane with the economy. But there are nonetheless some big and underlying long-term issues putting pressure on the market."

If Carberry is right, firms must adjust. According to the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), more than three-quarters of small UK businesses have struggled to recruit in the past 12 months, with 82% blaming a lack of candidates with the right experience, and 60% citing a low number of applicants generally.

One of the most challenging long-term issues facing the labour market is demographics, says Carberry. "They don't call it the baby-boom generation for nothing," he says. "There were 50% more babies born in 1964 than in 1977 and they have stayed in work longer. The pandemic was the moment many decided to step back, and they will have to be replaced by a much smaller group of younger workers in the coming decade."

On top of that, years of underinvestment in the UK's training system have led to a shortage of homegrown skills in key industries, and more recent efforts to tackle this are yet to remedy the situation. Employers also report finding it much



harder to source talent from abroad since freedom of movement for EU workers was ended and the rules for foreign workers coming to the UK became tougher.

The FSB says the government must do more. Tina McKenzie, the FSB's policy and advocacy chair, says she wants to see tax breaks that encourage the self-employed and small businesses to conduct more training. The government must also do more to encourage workers who might have taken early retirement during Covid or opted out on health grounds to return to the workplace.

She adds: "We would like to see the creation of skills bootcamps to help older workers learn new or improved skills, the introduction of a permanent, full statutory sick pay rebate for small firms, and a review of the mid-life MOT – an online tool for

workers in their 40s and 50s that helps them take stock of their finances – so it's accessible for small firms to use."

On immigration, the trade group is calling for a review of the shortage occupation list, so eligibility criteria for work visas is relaxed in more professions. It also wants business immigration fees to be cut.

"Nearly half of small businesses cannot afford to employ an individual on a skilled worker visa (previously tier 2) and a quarter can only afford under £1,000 in sponsorship costs," says McKenzie.

It is unclear how new prime minister Liz Truss will respond to these issues. The government has not responded to a request for comment.

Yet experts say there are measures which businesses can themselves implement to improve the situation.

The REC says firms should start to diversify their recruitment and do more to encourage applicants from underrepresented groups such as the disabled or those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Recruitment firm Reed Employment says employers should rethink the benefits and perks they offer workers at a time of rising inflation. Securing a salary increase is the top priority for 65% of workers that have recently applied or have considered applying for a new job, according to its data.

Chairman James Reed says: "Run-away inflation will also be challenging for the majority of employers to keep up with. As such, it's likely we will see workers and employers alike prioritise additional benefits and supports beyond the purely financial. For instance, enhanced flexible working options and a positive and supportive work environment."

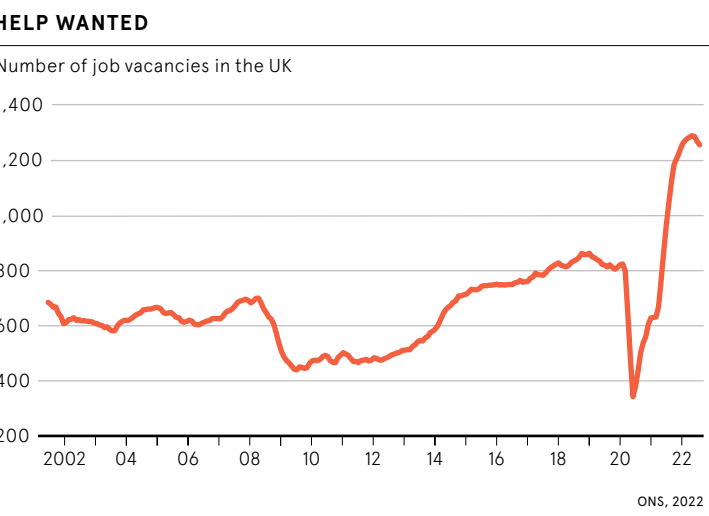
Carberry says firms need to use some "good old-fashioned employee relations" to avoid pay negotiations turning into disputes. He believes that firms that want to recruit absolutely can – if they have the right strategy. "They need to see what employees want, redesign their offers and work with a recruiter who understands their business." He gives the example of two neighbouring warehouses on an industrial estate just off the M1 motorway near Rugby. One pays less than the other but has a canteen and better managers. Its turnover is consequently much lower.

Businesses should also invest more in technology and processes that boost productivity, he says, so they can afford to pay wages that keep up with the rising cost of living. That means embracing trends such as automation and robotics.

McKenzie says it's too soon to predict how the changing economic picture will affect recruitment, given the multitude of factors. She believes, though, that a recession may discourage people from changing jobs and prompt some to re-enter the workforce.

But Reed says a recession is unlikely to lead to high unemployment, noting that the company saw a 9% month-on-month growth in vacancies between July and August.

"This highlights the current stability within the UK jobs market in the short- to mid-term," he says. "The predicted economic downturn is unlikely in the short term to eradicate the skills shortages felt by many industries still struggling to hire." ●



ONS, 2022

HEALTH CARE

Companies face Roe v Wade legal jeopardy

Any business looking to help employees who have to travel for an abortion should be aware of the potential legal and privacy concerns to protect themselves and their staff

Sam Forsdick

In the days following the Supreme Court's ruling on Roe v Wade, which overturned the constitutional right to abortion in the US, a number of corporations rushed to promise support to employees.

Disney, Google, Starbucks, Yelp, Airbnb, Netflix, Patagonia and JP Morgan were among the first companies to promise financial assistance for staff who live in states impacted by the ruling, and who will now have to travel to access reproductive care.

Australian graphic design company Canva, which has offices in San Francisco and Austin, Texas, committed to covering the costs of travel and accommodation for its US staff and a person to support them when seeking abortion care.

Texas was one of the states to have a so-called trigger law, which would be effective 30 days after the Supreme Court reached its decision and would almost entirely outlaw abortion in the state.

A spokesperson for the company says: "We are deeply concerned by the Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v Wade..."

"Canva is committed to creating an environment where our team feels safe and supported in the personal choices they make for themselves and their families."

The swift response from corporate America is admirable and both demonstrates these businesses' commitment to women's rights



One of hundreds of protests that have broken out in cities across the US since the Dobbs ruling

while providing some reassurance to their employees.

Amanda Monroe, senior labor and employment associate at US law firm Michelman & Robinson LLP, thinks that employers can provide support in myriad ways, including expanding healthcare plans and providing leave.

She adds: "Beyond that, we may see employers take on the risk of continuing to offer pre-existing travel and relocation benefits and/or expanding health benefits to include travel and lodging benefits for those seeking abortions."

But employers should be wary of the potential legal consequences of helping. Monroe says that many will "need to consider the extent to which specific state laws restricting abortion may impact leave accommodations, healthcare plans and employment practices".

Facebook parent company Meta was one of the companies to promise to reimburse out-of-state travel for those seeking an abortion. But it clarified in a statement to the New York Times that any support would only be to "the extent permitted by law". The spokesperson added: "We are in the process of assessing how best to do so given the legal complexities involved."

In some Republican states, aiding access to reproductive care has also been made illegal. In Texas and Oklahoma, for instance, anyone that is seen to be helping those get an abortion after the sixth week of pregnancy could be subject to a civil lawsuit.

Bloomberg Law states that such bounty measures "most clearly target employers"

and allows citizens to sue anyone seen to be aiding and abetting an abortion. This could include paying for or reimbursing the costs of an abortion via insurance.

Mahir Nisar, principal at employment litigation firm Nisar Law Group, considers it one of the biggest potential legal issues surrounding the changes to abortion rights that employers will have to consider.

Adding to these legal complexities is the potential for employees to challenge companies that don't extend their abortion policies to all. Nisar adds: "If employers do not apply their policy evenly, with respect to reimbursing employees

seeking an abortion, they may be engaging in discrimination against that individual and not treating them fairly."

For businesses with a presence in multiple states, offering support to staff working in states with aiding and abetting laws in place will leave them at risk of being sued. But equally, if their policies only apply to staff in certain states, they could be challenged on the grounds of discrimination.

"This makes it somewhat difficult for companies to navigate," Nisar says. The other key consideration for companies adopting these types of policies will be privacy.

Monroe says: "Employee privacy remains paramount. Companies, especially those offering travel-related reimbursements for employees now required to travel out of state to obtain family-planning care, will have to balance the need for employee privacy relative to medical decisions and treatment against internal policies requiring proper documentation for expenses."

Employers may have to revisit their healthcare provisions or vacation policies, to protect confidentiality. Monroe says companies could consider expanding the list of medical treatments eligible for travel expense reimbursement and/or time off, to "avoid the potential exposure of sensitive, private medical information".

To address this, companies can consider including all abortion-related care under their existing list of medical treatments that can incur medical-related travel expenses, such as rehabilitation or cancer treatment. This would allow staff to apply for a reimbursement, without having to specify the reason.

For those that can't offer this to staff on their healthcare plans, LaDawn Townsend, founder of CEO advisory firm VOS Group, says: "There needs to be a way for the employee to directly talk to someone senior within HR, who can then communicate with the manager if there's been an action taken or a service provided, without getting into the details."

"Organisations are really going to have to tighten up on their internal employee communications and human resource standards."

Similarly, employers may consider removing the need to provide a reason when seeking leave for medical treatment. Nisar says: "A lot of employers are saying they don't need to know the reason for the medical procedure but we're yet to see how that works in practice."

As with any new legislation, there will be a period of adaptation for businesses. Townsend says: "Leaders need to make sure that they don't put their head in the sand around this issue. The conversations around this are already happening in the workplace, so it makes for an odd work environment if we don't address the elephant in the room, especially for those that have taken a public stance on their viewpoints."

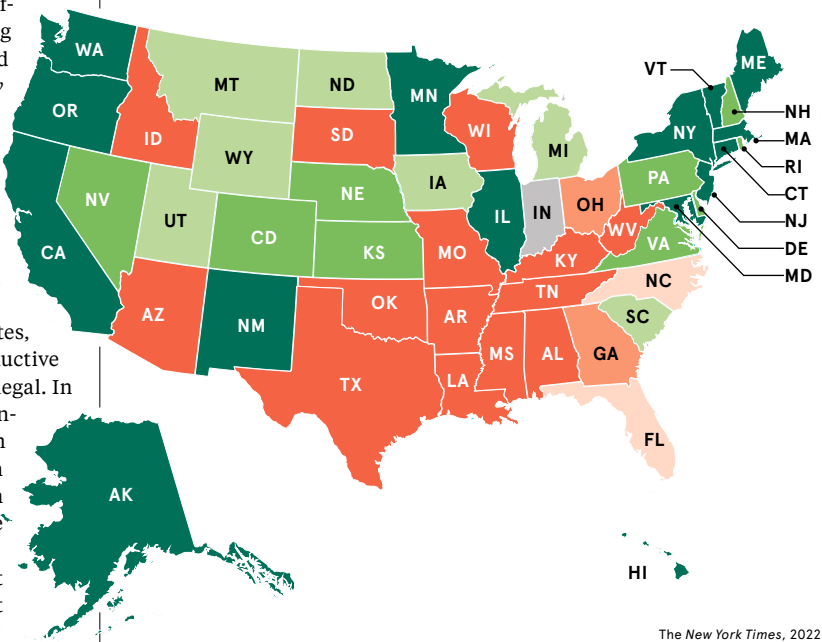
Although many companies were quick to pledge their support for employees in the wake of Roe v Wade, we are yet to see how many of the proposed relocation and reimbursement policies will work in practice.

Nisar claims that many of the responses from the corporate world could be seen as "branding" among companies that are keen to be seen to be "on the right side of history". In his opinion, it will now be down to these companies to develop the proper policies to support women in their organisations and to demonstrate that it is more than "performative allyship".

TRACKING THE STATES WHERE ABORTION IS NOW BANNED

The legal status of abortion across the US

- Full ban
- Ban after six weeks
- Ban after 15, 18 or 20 weeks
- Ban coming
- Ban blocked
- Legal but limited
- Legal



The New York Times, 2022

Q&A

Solving talent shortages through great candidate experience

Employers are facing fierce competition for talent, with high demand for skills and low availability of candidates driving wage inflation across many industries. The solution? Developing a personalised candidate experience and using data to make informed interventions argues **Lisa Skinner Källström**, chief HR officer at applicant tracking system Teamtailor



Q The great resignation, technological advances and skills gaps are creating an extremely competitive talent market. What can organisations do to become an employer of choice?

A While the importance of salaries will never go out of fashion, employees are increasingly looking beyond just compensation when it comes to an employer. There are so many things that have happened in the past few years that have changed how people view work.

For example, the impact of Covid has shown that employees have needs and desires that companies may not have known about before, such as support for mental health and wellbeing. The pandemic has offered a lot of new conditions for people to work under - such as remote or

hybrid working - but it also increases the pressure on employers.

It's important to remember that all ages want flexibility at work, not just young people. One size no longer fits all - you need to think of the wider population and be flexible on what you offer different people. This can open up your candidate base to new types of people and new competition. Consequently, it's vital that you consider your candidate experience when recruiting.

Q What does a great candidate experience look like?

A It has to be a mix. Technology is really having an impact, so there are so many tools available that can help make the application process as frictionless as possible. Candidates expect a process that is automated, without the need for manual uploading or entering lots of text. The process needs to be smooth and mobile friendly.

At the same time, you need to retain the human element of the application. Candidates don't want to feel like a number in a process that might randomly get picked for an interview. So, in the tools you choose to use, there should be room for personalisation.

Think about where in each step of the application process you can build in personalisation. This might be adding individual names into the process or thinking about where candidates can have contact with a recruiter. With Teamtailor, if a candidate sees a position they like, they'll also see a portrait image of the recruiter with contact details and option to get in touch. It helps to personalise the process and the recruiting organisation.

It's about finding that combination between a candidate experience that makes people feel individually valued, but also ensuring that the technology you use allows you to manage multiple applications at pace and gives you the data you need to analyse your recruitment process.

Q How important is employer branding to candidate experience?

A As a company, you can't just have one brand for everyone. It depends on the role you're hiring for, the state of the market and the candidate profile you desire.

If you're a value-driven organisation, then you need new team members to be motivated by working in a value-driven company. It has become fashionable to talk about diversity and inclusion, but what does it actually mean in your company? If your employer brand talks about being inclusive when it comes to, for example, different nationalities, or offer support for visa applications, then you're not setting yourself up for success.

Every company should have a mission, but you need to really understand why your values are important and connect them to your recruitment process. If your recruiters don't understand, relate to or apply your values, then candidates won't either. It makes the whole endeavour pointless.

Q How is HR technology changing recruitment?

A Technology is having a huge effect on talent acquisition, not least in that it gives you much more opportunity to handle larger volumes of applicants. It is increasing diversity

and removing bias (I'm currently hiring for a recruiter and I'm anonymising all applications) as well as opening up roles to a bigger market.

HR technology means using data and statistics to analyse your recruitment processes. You learn from the data. For example, if you have a certain number of candidates applying for a job, you shouldn't just focus on the gold and silver candidates - you should try to learn from the entire pipeline. Who is applying? What source are you getting your applicants from? How are they finding you?

Working with data has helped me a lot. It teaches you where you need to make investments, how to better understand your applicants and how to intervene. It also means that HR has become more strategic and more influential in the C-suite.

Q What advice would you give to leaders in the current talent market?

A Use data to improve your candidate experience. Ten years ago, talent acquisition was a buyer's market. Organisations were stricter about candidates fitting job roles and were more likely to reject applicants to wait for a closer fit.

Now, the market has changed. Companies need to look at candidates in a different way. How can we fit candidates with adjacent skills or experience? They might not fit the role they applied for, but can we attract them to another role? How do we engage applicants with our brand and use that talent pool?

“You need to retain the human element of the application. Candidates don't want to feel like a number in a process that might randomly get picked for an interview

Second, everyone is looking for talent that can help their business grow and achieve their goals. The market is tough. However, it's vital that you stay true to your brand and company values and try to find a match for them in the market. Be open to looking at different profiles and outside your usual talent pools. Above all, think about your candidate experience, personalise it and use technology to your advantage.

If you'd like to hear more from Lisa on candidate experience, join our webinar: teamtailor.com

Teamtailor

“Leaders need to make sure that they don't put their head in the sand around this issue. It makes for an odd work environment if we don't address the elephant in the room



ENGAGEMENT

The need to revitalise worker enthusiasm

The aftershocks of the Covid pandemic continue to shake the labour market. Quiet quitting is the latest trend to emerge – so how can employers re-engage disengaged workers?

Jonathan Evans

Each morning at the start of the working day, we face a set of questions. What tasks should I focus on today? How should I manage my time? Do I go above and beyond my manager's expectations and put extra effort into my work? Many, it seems, are answering 'no' to the last question, and the employees with this mindset are engaging in quiet quitting. First coined on TikTok, the central premise of the quiet quitting trend is that work should not be the focus of our lives. Self-identified quiet quitters resist the expectation from their employers and fellow employees to put extra time

and energy behind their work for the benefit of the business or in the hope of a promotion. While it's impossible to say how many workers have quit quietly this year, it is notable that the trend is gaining traction as productivity in the UK and the US is dipping. In August, the US Department of Labor announced that work productivity in the year's second quarter fell at its steepest pace since records began – and a recent Gallup study estimated that at least half of the US workforce have quietly quit to some degree. Dr Ashley Weinberg is an occupational psychologist at the University of Salford. He believes the

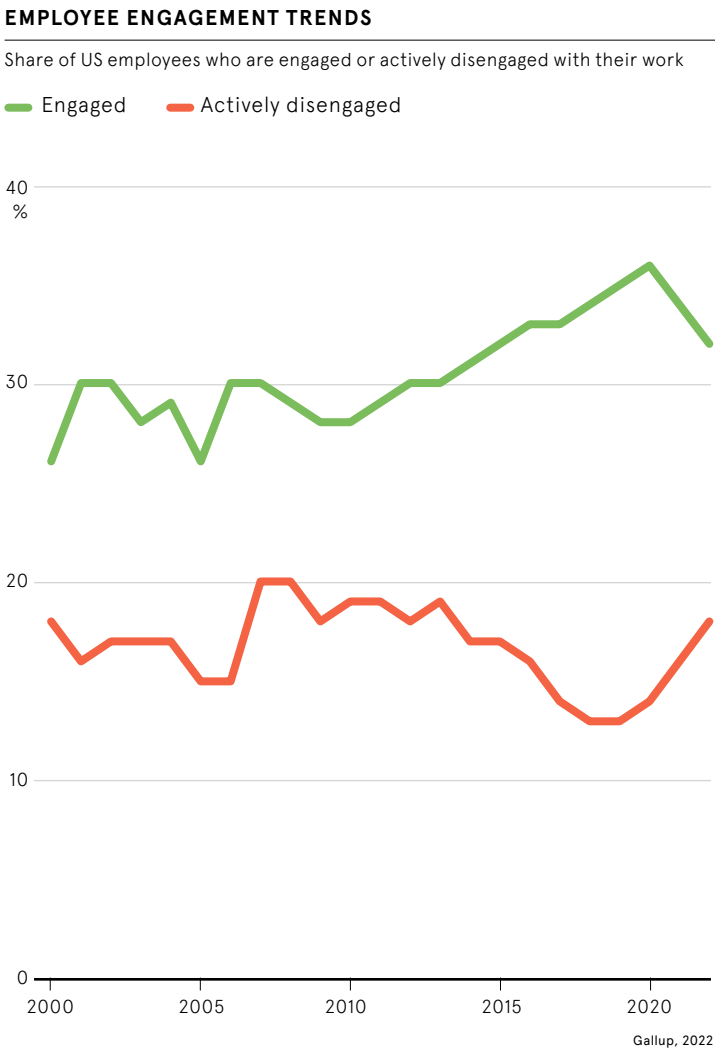
impact of the pandemic on the relationship between employees and employers partly explains the rise of the quiet quitting trend. He says: "Organisational culture is the mortar between the bricks of how businesses work and psychological contracts are an important part of it. This is the unwritten set of expectations between employees and employers – and it's how people understand the benefits of their job, be it monetary or social. "But during the pandemic, many people's psychological contracts with work were either completely shattered – because their employer had to close and their job was suddenly gone – or the medium

through which they understood their working lives changed completely. A lot of the social side of work disappeared and was replaced with online meetings where the focus was often on work or the task at hand. That's a poor substitute for what employees had, pre-pandemic." Weinberg adds that employee disengagement is one consequence of ripping up our psychological contract with work – and recent studies support this view. Gallup's global workplace report for 2022 revealed that only 9% of workers in the UK were engaged or enthusiastic about their place of work, placed 33 out of 38 European countries. Other factors, though, are at play that may be contributing to employee disengagement and feeding into the quiet quitting trend. Notably, widespread disengagement is coming at a time of once-in-a-generation extreme financial pressures, when salaries are tracking way below inflation and many workers are locked out of the housing market due to prohibitively high prices – regardless of how many additional hours they do. According to the TUC, British workers put in two and a half weeks more work per year than the average European. But this additional work isn't translating into higher incomes or a better quality of life, with many millennials and gen-Zers set to be worse off financially than their parents. In this context, quiet quitting – and the conscious disengagement from additional work beyond what is required – appears to be more of a correction to a working culture that hasn't recognised or remunerated staff – rather than an outright rejection of the work itself.

“Quiet quitting appears to be more of a correction to a working culture that hasn't recognised or remunerated staff – rather than an outright rejection of the work itself

million Americans voluntarily leaving their jobs in 2021 alone. But, given the cost-of-living crisis and rising energy bills, many workers may opt to temporarily remain secure with their current employers until the incoming financial storm is over. The benefit of this from the employer's perspective is that there is still an opportunity to re-engage workers before they leave the company. To do this, Kordowicz notes, employers need to recognise how their actions have contributed to the quiet quitting trend. "We have to move away from individualising the problem – by blaming the individual worker for disengaging. Instead, we need to seek organisational solutions. These could include appropriate workloads and non-tokenistic implementations of employee-centred wellbeing policies." Widespread remote working, though, limits an employer's ability to engage workers who have quietly quit. While before the pandemic office culture enabled employers to quickly build a rapport with their teams, many employees now work in isolation and only interact with their colleagues during the (sometimes only occasional) video call scheduled throughout their days. Jill Cotton is career trends expert at Glassdoor. He believes that employers need to put in extra effort to build a company culture that resonates with employees regardless of where they are working. "Businesses need to create an equitable experience for all employees. Meaning that, whether they work remotely or in the office full time, employees still feel an active part of the workplace community.

"In lieu of 'watercooler moments', employers need to make time for remote employees to be heard and feel that their contributions are valued. Set up regular informal group meetings to help foster personal connections beyond day-to-day work chat and encourage recognition to happen organically." Cotton's point touches on the vital role line managers play in re-engaging workers who have quietly quit. While wellbeing policies and higher wages will help employees feel more appreciated, a recent *Harvard Business Review* study found the decision of whether an employee quietly quits often rests on the quality of their relationship with their manager. If an employee felt undervalued or unappreciated, they were more likely to disengage from work. Conversely, the research found if an employee felt like their manager trusted them and cared about their wellbeing, then they were less likely to quietly quit. "The relationship you have with your manager is the most prevalent in your day-to-day. Line managers must be trained and thoroughly understand how to manage hybrid working employees," says Nicki Pritchard, managing partner at Anderson Quigley. She adds: "Many people become managers because they've simply progressed to a certain level of their career. But that's not to say they've been supported or trained to be a manager. Others might have years of face-to-face management experience, but they now need to understand how to manage remotely. Those skills contribute a lot to the company's wider culture, which is now more important than ever." ●



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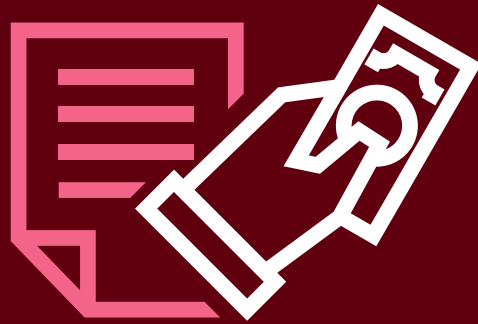
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24% of global companies lose talent due to late payment.



NASA via Unsplash

84%

of companies now take location into account when figuring compensation packages

Carta, 2022

73%

of organisations express concern that remote work will disrupt the competitive landscape for talent

Payscale, 2021

24%

of recruitment professionals cite sourcing as the top recruitment-life cycle challenge in a modern work environment

Bullhorn, 2022

COMPENSATION

Geography lessons: how to attract remote workers

In a work-from-anywhere world, how can employers ensure that the compensation packages they're offering will attract the skilled candidates they need, no matter where they're based?

Christine Horton

The rise of remote working has enabled companies to cast their recruitment nets wider than ever. It means that someone can conceivably hold down a Silicon Valley job, yet live in Salt Lake City – or even St Albans. New research into tech salaries by online job marketplace Hired indicates that employers are hiring across a growing number of territories and time zones. At the same time, there is an increasing preference among candidates for remote-only jobs. Nearly two-thirds (32%) of

all active jobseekers are open to such roles, compared with 18% at the start of the year. But this presents its own challenges. Abakar Saidov is CEO at Beamery, which handles recruitment for the likes of Accenture, Amazon, Uber and UBS. He reports that, as much as companies would like to provide work-from-anywhere policies, they are restricted by the complexities of compliance with multiple employment laws and tax regulations. "Companies may see increases in productivity

brought about by flexible working, but it is also critical to assess potential difficulties that may arise through maintaining the right infrastructure and having an oversight of the workforce to identify individuals' needs for support," Saidov stresses.

There is also the hot topic of salary expectations in relation to the cost of living. Facebook announced in 2020 that, while it would allow remote working, each employee's compensation would be adjusted according to their location. Understandably, its decision sparked much debate in the business world.

A key attraction of remote working is receiving the type of pay traditionally associated with a big-city job, yet enjoying lower living costs, says Michael Barrington-Hibbert, CEO of executive search firm Barrington Hibbert Associates. Companies are therefore having to re-evaluate their compensation plans for distributed workforces. "Organisations are also having to rethink their culture," he says. "Traditionally, on-site benefits including

gyms, doctors and catering were often used as incentives. Such perks inevitably lose their appeal when companies have distributed workforces. There must be a stronger focus on benefits that aren't location-specific yet can still draw interest. These could include more focused professional development opportunities, membership of coworking spaces or generous holiday allowances, for instance."

The shift to a distributed workforce is also having an important economic impact. It used to be that London would attract the most talented people because it tended to be where the best-rewarded jobs were on offer. The rise of remote working since Covid's arrival has meant that candidates can afford to shop around for the best jobs without having to move to London to fast-track their careers. This is

one of the key reasons for the rising popularity of Manchester, which is becoming more economically important to the country.

Sectors such as technology are burgeoning in the city. Indeed, the tech industry is forecast to add more than £2.7bn to the local economy by 2025. Yet that doesn't necessarily give Manchester the edge when it comes to recruitment, as salaries here still don't compare to those on offer in the capital.

To compete in the expanded recruitment market, employers in cities such as Manchester, Leeds and Newcastle would be well advised to introduce a range of benefits that will help to attract and retain the talent they need, according to Barrington-Hibbert.

"Renewed investment in strategic workforce planning such as hybrid working models needs to be embedded in company culture if firms wish to stay ahead of those in other cities," he says.

"Coupled with this, a renewed focus on structured career progression and employment value proposition is necessary to retain talent. If an employee feels undervalued, they have the option to seek higher salaries and fulfilment elsewhere."

The key challenge for employers, then, is to ensure that their reward packages are attractive to remote workers no matter where they're based. One way of doing this is to compensate workers fairly – and be seen to be doing so.

Adrian Adair, COO at Morson Group, a multinational recruiter based in Manchester, argues that salary benchmarking by sector is crucial to ensuring that employers are both competitive and transparent.

"Some companies set a minimum global baseline linked to cost of living and industry-standard pay rates, and a new trend has seen some global businesses set geographical pay differentials to establish compensation ranges," he says. "In this way, employers can demonstrate that they're competitive, while undertaking regular reviews to ensure that they're staying in line with market trends."

But the challenges of attracting and retaining talent go beyond expectations about pay and benefits, Adair adds. Recruiters will have to take other factors into consideration.

"Employee value propositions and the employer brand are also more critical than ever," he says. "Less social interaction in the workplace means that shared values and a common purpose are central to connecting people across the remote workspace. Companies are being challenged to demonstrate their vision and values, inspiring, motivating and engaging candidates to build employer brand value."

Yet, despite all the talk of remote working enabling British recruiters to look overseas for talent, Adair reports that we haven't quite reached that point.

"In reality," he says, "time-zone constraints and the desire from both employers and employees for some in-person working – even if it's only one day a month – means that we aren't seeing a step change to international recruitment as yet." ●

“Some companies set a minimum global baseline linked to cost of living and industry standard rates of pay, and a new trend has seen some global businesses set geographical pay differentials to establish compensation ranges

INSIGHT

‘This is a perfect storm in the talent environment. What are the solutions?’

Marc Coleman, founder and CEO of UNLEASH, discusses HR strategies to consider in the worldwide war for talent

Employers and employees across Europe are struggling with a cost-of-living crisis, in part spurred by high energy prices, which is driving society to breaking point. The outlook in the UK is especially bleak, with inflation on the year approaching 18% and recession threatening to dramatically reduce standards of living. The new government under Liz Truss is already threatened with a no-confidence vote as sterling has plummeted to a record low against the dollar. These challenges will further complicate recruiting in the coming weeks and months, and managing costs is going to be mission critical for families and businesses alike.

Acute labour shortages will ensue, and the current economic environment and realities in the labour market are combining to affect recruitment strategies globally. For the first time, there are more older workers happily retiring than younger ones entering the labour market. Increased automation and evolution in artificial intelligence has created growing concerns around the jobs that are being replaced, and is also creating near-term skill gaps. Similar to the period during the middle of the pandemic, we are seeing people move out of industries and into disciplines where they perceive more secure or lucrative job prospects – and it's becoming difficult to fill the roles they're leaving. This is a perfect storm in the talent environment. But what are the solutions?

Graduate students also want job security and great pay, but will they have the skills to get hired in the coming months? Currently there are huge holes in the employment market. Sourcing and onboarding have taken on new meaning as the skills gaps have grown wider and brain drain has created significant challenges for industries like education, healthcare, hospitality and travel.

Immigration is the new baby boom for many countries across Europe. Germany, for example, needs 5 million more immigrants of working age. If Western Europe wants to keep its social benefits, the countries of the EU are going to need more workers. Europe has an older population on average than anywhere else – and they're not making babies..

The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer. The ageing population is ballooning and fertility rates are in rapid decline. Indeed, fertility rates in Europe will hit zero in the next 10 years. The only way Europe can combat elderly poverty and expense its social benefit systems is by enabling and encouraging immigration.

The pandemic has made the case for new recruitment trends and business models – reshoring, nearshoring and employer of record.

Reshoring in the US for example has seen the reclamation of jobs from places like China, and the use of machines that are doing the jobs better, faster and cheaper, fuelling capitalist models further. Most US manufacturers are now re-evaluating their production and sourcing locations and are taking a closer look at the benefits of reshoring.

Nearshoring – a new \$80bn sub-industry in HR – is also catching on among US employers. This trend has engaged US companies with economies in Latin America, where countries like Costa Rica, Panama and Guatemala are all servicing new growth areas.

Finally, the fast-growing sector of employer of record – where firms like Globalization Partners, Oyster, Deel and Remote stand out – allows employers to hire from anywhere without the need for physical offices in that country. Employer-of-record providers take care of all the compliance aspects of employment, including payroll, taxation, health insurance, portable benefits and much more.

These trends are giving HR teams greater flexibility and are significantly expanding the pool of labour available to modern businesses. ●



Marc Coleman
Founder & CEO
UNLEASH

Fast and flexible wins: slashing time-to-hire with HR tech

Fountain's forward-thinking, high-volume hiring solution allows TA teams to hire the best people, faster

The worker shortage is palpable, knows no geographical bounds and is poised to persist through the end of the year.

Outpacing the competition requires speed, agility and a candidate-friendly process that keeps the right talent involved and engaged. The more you're able to tailor an application to your ideal candidate and the easier you can make the process—from application to onboarding—the more attractive you are to the current pool of picky job-seekers who, if unsatisfied, can apply to another job in just a few swipes.

Technology is the clear frontrunner among must-have assets in the race for talent. However, while technology translates to speed, it is often perceived to come at the cost of human interaction. The reluctance surrounding technology is enough to deter some talent-acquisition (TA) teams from making the leap and, therefore, will be detrimental to their company's growth.

But the teams that do adopt a comprehensive and powerful applicant-tracking system (ATS) will be able to source, qualify, and extend offers in just a few days, or even hours.

Here's a look at how automation, agility, and an engaging candidate experience can result in securing top talent fast.

In the race to scoop up talent, TA teams need to be persistent and proactive, which isn't always realistic when managing multiple levers of a hiring machine. Enter automation, a hiring manager's best friend when it comes to keeping prospective hires interested, engaged and keen to continue forward on the applicant journey.

Applying automation to certain steps-like text messages, emails and applicant routing—are just a few features offered by Fountain, a leading ATS that has helped organisations



around the world hire at scale and substantially reduce time-to-hire.

Fountain combines multiple stages of the hiring process to streamline recruitment, including screening, interviewing and extending an offer. Upon applying, applicants receive a message instantly that informs them of the next steps. From their phones, applicants also can upload identification, certifications and answer knockout questions, which can help deliver the most qualified candidates directly to recruiters.

The flexibility of a solution like Fountain means recruiters can configure a customised hiring funnel that can be adjusted to meet their real-time hiring needs with just a few clicks. Hiring managers can activate the aforementioned knockout questions or specific routing rules to move the right applicants to the front of the line and deliver only qualified and vetted candidates to the final stages.

Organisations around the world, like Cera Care and Flink, already have seen major hiring successes by leveraging Fountain as an all-encompassing, high-volume recruitment tool.

"Fountain is not just a recruitment system—it's also a really smart workflow tool," says Peter Heatherington, a recruitment and workforce planning expert who was tasked with implementing a new ATS at Cera Care, a digital healthcare company based in the UK. With Fountain, Cera Care

built their own workflows and replicated them for different roles. This creativity made way for efficiency, attracting workers to a simpler process that could be completed in as little as three minutes.

"We've had people apply, have their interview, receive their contract and have their first shift all in the same day," says Tonalli Arreola, head of expansion and rider operations at Flink, a Germany-based grocery delivery company. By taking advantage of Fountain's automation capabilities and easy candidate communication, Flink saw their median time-to-hire drop while applicant conversion rates increased substantially.

Job seekers are inundated with opportunities. To capture the interest of the best applicants, recruiters need to make their hiring process fast, flexible and capable of managing a large volume of candidates. In today's digital world, recruiters can either adapt and lean into the power of technology to find, qualify and hire workers, or risk falling behind in the race for the world's top talent.

For more information please visit fountain.com





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RETIREES

Championing age: how business can win back older workers

The boss of John Lewis has called on the government to find ways to encourage lost workers aged over 50 to return to the labour market to help the UK economy, but business must also play its part in enticing them back

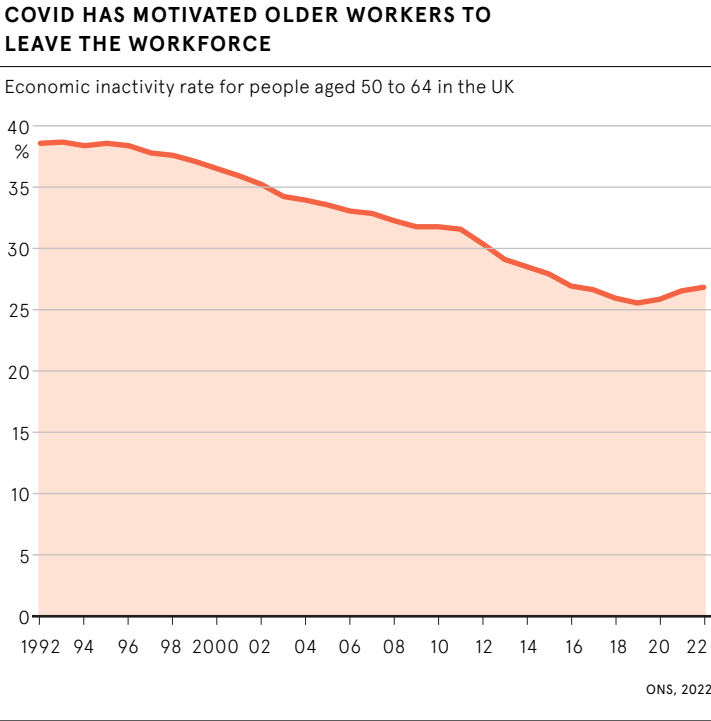
Sam Forsdick

Economic inactivity in the over-50s took an upturn during the pandemic, reversing the downward trend of the previous 10 years. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the number of people aged 50 to 70 years who moved from economic activity to inactivity between the second and third quarters of 2021 was 87,000 higher than in the same period in 2019. That is contributing to the more than 1 million drop in the size of the workforce and why unemployment is at a low of below 4% while job vacancies are at near record levels. Some 75% of the older workers who left employment did so of their own accord, citing reasons such as feeling undervalued, early retirement or just not wanting to work anymore. But there is a need for their return.

Earlier this week, John Lewis CEO Dame Sharon White linked the exodus of over-50s from the workforce to rising inflation, claiming that the competition for talent to replace them had pushed up wages. Speaking on the BBC's *Today* programme, she added: "There's not a business in the UK that's not finding it very difficult to recruit at the moment because there are so many more jobs and far fewer people looking for work. It's a big issue." As a result, White called on the government to "really think much more about how to encourage more people back into work". Figures from the ONS also reveal that two-fifths (39%) of those aged over 50 who left the workforce during the pandemic would consider returning to paid work in the future. With the UK labour market remaining

extremely tight – the number of unemployed people per vacancy is at a record low of 1.0 – there is a need to expand the workforce. Enticing back those who have left is seen as a way to bridge the gap. Yvonne Smyth, group head of equity, diversity and inclusion at recruitment firm Hays, says: "Organisations are definitely more aware of older

“There is an opportunity for all organisations to step forward and extend their diversity and inclusion strategies to focus on age



workers being an untapped and potentially overlooked talent pool." She advises, though, that many businesses will need to adapt their workplace policies in order to entice the over-50s, in particular, back. "It's very unlikely that you will be able to tempt someone who has retired back to work five days a week in an office, for example," she says. "Employers need to be offering and advertising flexibility at the point of hire – and this includes part-time working." Travel and insurance firm Saga has had particular success in this area and managed to avoid the exodus of older talent from its workforce that many other businesses witnessed during the pandemic. Its chief people officer Jane Storm attributes this to the organisation's focus on being a "champion of age in the workplace". To demonstrate this, Saga has held listening groups, introduced age training, and improved flexibility. It has also introduced new policies catered specifically to this group, including its grandparents leave policy, which gives staff one week of paid leave when a grandchild is born. Storm says: "The UK is facing one of the biggest headwinds in our history, with low unemployment and a shortage of workers. Attracting and retaining this workforce is critical. There is an opportunity for all organisations to step forward and educate their colleagues on generational differences and extend their diversity and inclusion strategies to focus on age, especially where it intersects with other protected characteristics." Victoria Tomlinson is chief executive of Next-Up, an organisation that helps employees pre-retirement. She believes the over-50s are generally overlooked by businesses and agrees that offering flexibility is key. "Employers have to take up the onus. Everyone is so focused on millennials that they've taken their eye off the ball with what's happening with the older generation," she says. "What they need to do is make work flexible, to give people purpose and to invest in their skills in exactly the same way businesses do when people start their careers."

With the cost-of-living crisis weighing heavily on people's minds, many retirees could be persuaded back into employment to pick up additional income. But it is not the only perk the over-50s look for from an employer. A survey by recruitment company Robert Walters shows that flexible hours, cited by 55%, training opportunities (34%) and bonus schemes (30%) are the most popular perks among this demographic. Tomlinson says that while some former retirees are just seeking an extra bit of money, "they need purpose and to feel valued as much as anyone. A lot of people struggle with sociable loss when they retire; they like to still feel part of something". Ageism is also an issue preventing older generations from returning to work. The Confederation of British Industry found that only 24% of HR leaders between the ages of 25 and 30 say they felt motivated to recruit workers in the 55 to 75 age bracket. David Bernard, founder and CEO of behavioural assessment firm Assess-First says: "The implications of ageist hiring practices are multi-faceted, but their effects have been felt by job-seekers within older age groups. Biased hiring practices are exacerbating the labour shortage, causing businesses to miss out on a huge portion of talented workers capable of really making a difference." He advises companies that are looking to be more inclusive to evaluate the efficacy of their recruitment practices and to focus on an individual's skills and qualities when hiring, rather than any other factors which are irrelevant to the job. He adds: "If an organisation has built teams predominantly comprising younger individuals, they should consider asking themselves whether they have – consciously or subconsciously – avoided hiring those within older age groups – and why." Although the recently retired may appear to plug a hole during current recruitment challenges, it is clear companies have work to do to tempt them back. And these changes need to be for the long term. Kickstarting a change in the way business sees the value of older workers. ●

Purposeful partnerships give companies the edge in the new world

Organisations must now align an authentic sense of purpose with the more traditional goals of business. Bupa, a company that has been purpose-led for 75 years, is leading the way with its partnership with ParalympicsGB

ESG has come to the fore in recent years, giving rise to a new expectation of business. It is no longer enough for an organisation to be financially sustainable; it must also act purposefully and responsibly for the benefit of its customers, employees, its local communities and the environment. To understand how a company's vision and purpose can be embedded in a meaningful way that delivers genuine value, we look to companies that have been purpose-led from the beginning. One example is Bupa, the 75-year-old healthcare company with no shareholders. "As a company limited by guarantee since we were established in 1947, with no stakeholders, purpose has always been our North Star," says Carlos Jaureguizar, CEO of Bupa Global & UK. "It's how we ensure we are moving in the right direction. Bupa is an international company with people around the world, and every colleague knows and understands our purpose – helping people live longer, healthier, happier lives and making a better world. It's the glue that binds us. "We know that purpose should be more than words – something that your people and customers can feel and touch. This is the tricky part – making it tangible. Partnerships, such as ours with ParalympicsGB, help to illustrate our purpose and bring it to life in the business. Partnerships are an impactful way to drive and communicate purpose. Bupa recently became the Official Healthcare Partner of ParalympicsGB, a three-year partnership through which it will provide athletes with medical expertise and support to reach their peak performance in the lead up to the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games. The partnership, which includes health assessments that offer a full overview of health and wellbeing, will help Bupa work towards evolving its products, services and customer touchpoints, supporting the diverse needs of customers. "It was important to find a partnership that underlined our purpose and allows us to offer our trusted clinical expertise to an organisation that is challenging perceptions around disability in sport," says Jaureguizar. "By working closely with ParalympicsGB, we also want to challenge perceptions around disability in business and affirm our own commitment to diversity. We're already



number three in the Inclusive Top 50 UK Employers, though we know that there's always more to do. "All partnerships should add value. For us, partnering with ParalympicsGB advances our diversity and inclusion agenda and further enables us to be a customer-centric organisation. To fully understand our customers, we need our teams to be as diverse as the customers we serve, so that society's breadth of backgrounds, cultures and views are represented. We also need

L-R: Bupa Group CEO Iñaki Ereño, Aaron Phipps, Natalie Jones, Carlos Jaureguizar

to listen to and understand each customer. The ParalympicsGB partnership makes us consider more widely how we provide products and services that fit our customers' needs. It also firms up our commitment to our people that we are inclusive, and everyone is welcome." Another important element of successfully embedding purpose is top-down buy-in. Bupa has found. It is crucial that the executive leadership team are aligned on the benefit a strong purpose can offer, and then invest in embedding it across the business. Partnerships such as Bupa's with ParalympicsGB can act as a channel through which purpose is reaffirmed. It is also essential to ensure that in a company's structures and processes, from recruitment and customer engagement, to diversity and inclusion, purpose is present. Part of this is empowering leaders and teams to make business decisions through the lens of purpose. It's not always easy, particularly balancing purpose with financial performance, but it's important to uphold this standard.

Natalie Jones, customer service representative at Bupa as well as a double Paralympic gold medalist in swimming, has already seen a tangible impact from Bupa's partnership with ParalympicsGB since its launch in July. Bupa has long sought to encourage an inclusive culture, starting with its 'Be You At Bupa' initiative, a network which provides a representative voice and peer-to-peer support for colleagues whilst continuously driving employee-led inclusion. "When I found out about the partnership, I was overwhelmed because I know how hard it has been for ParalympicsGB to even be established as an organisation and a group of athletes," says Jones. "But since London 2012 it's just been incredible. In the last ten years we have increasingly felt like we're on a par with the Olympians – which is how it should be, we're all athletes. I value a culture where people feel they can ask me about my disability. This partnership is already achieving more openness as well as fostering a sense of belonging for me and other disabled colleagues."

It's not just customers that benefit from a purpose-driven company. In a competitive employment market, purpose can give employers the edge. "As an employee, I really do feel I have a clear understanding of Bupa's purpose and it resonates with me," continues Jones. "It's one of the reasons why I joined Bupa. It's a versatile and inclusive company. As a disabled person, it's a great place to work. I enjoy going to work because it's friendly, inclusive and working in a purpose-led organisation brings out the best in me."

To find out more about the partnership between Bupa and ParalympicsGB, visit bupa.co.uk/paralympics

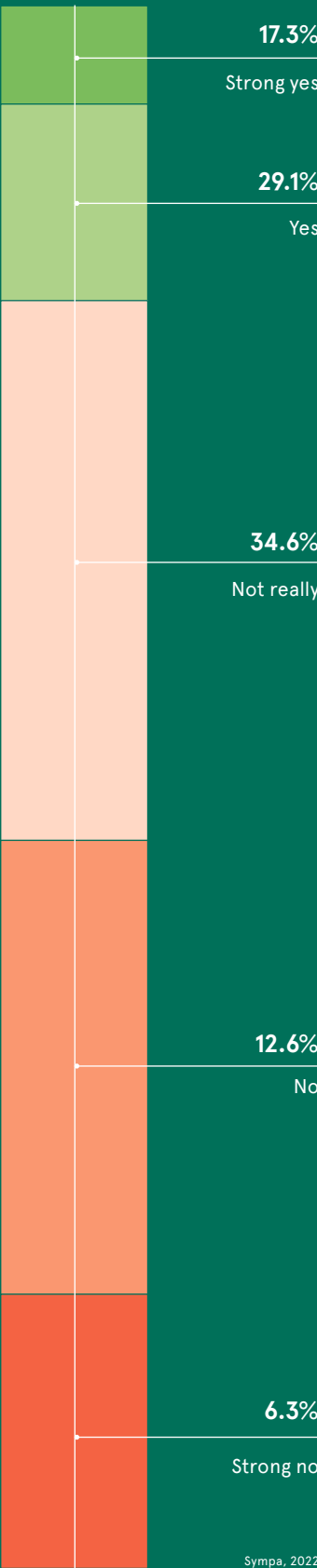


PEOPLE ANALYTICS

Businesses around the world are prioritising the adoption of tech and data-driven policies and operations. Although certain functions of the business have made tremendous progress toward digitisation and measurable metrics, there is still room for development. As for hiring and recruitment teams, only 50% of team leads feel that members of their team are data literate. In a world of remote work and online interviews, people analytics may help ensure quality hires

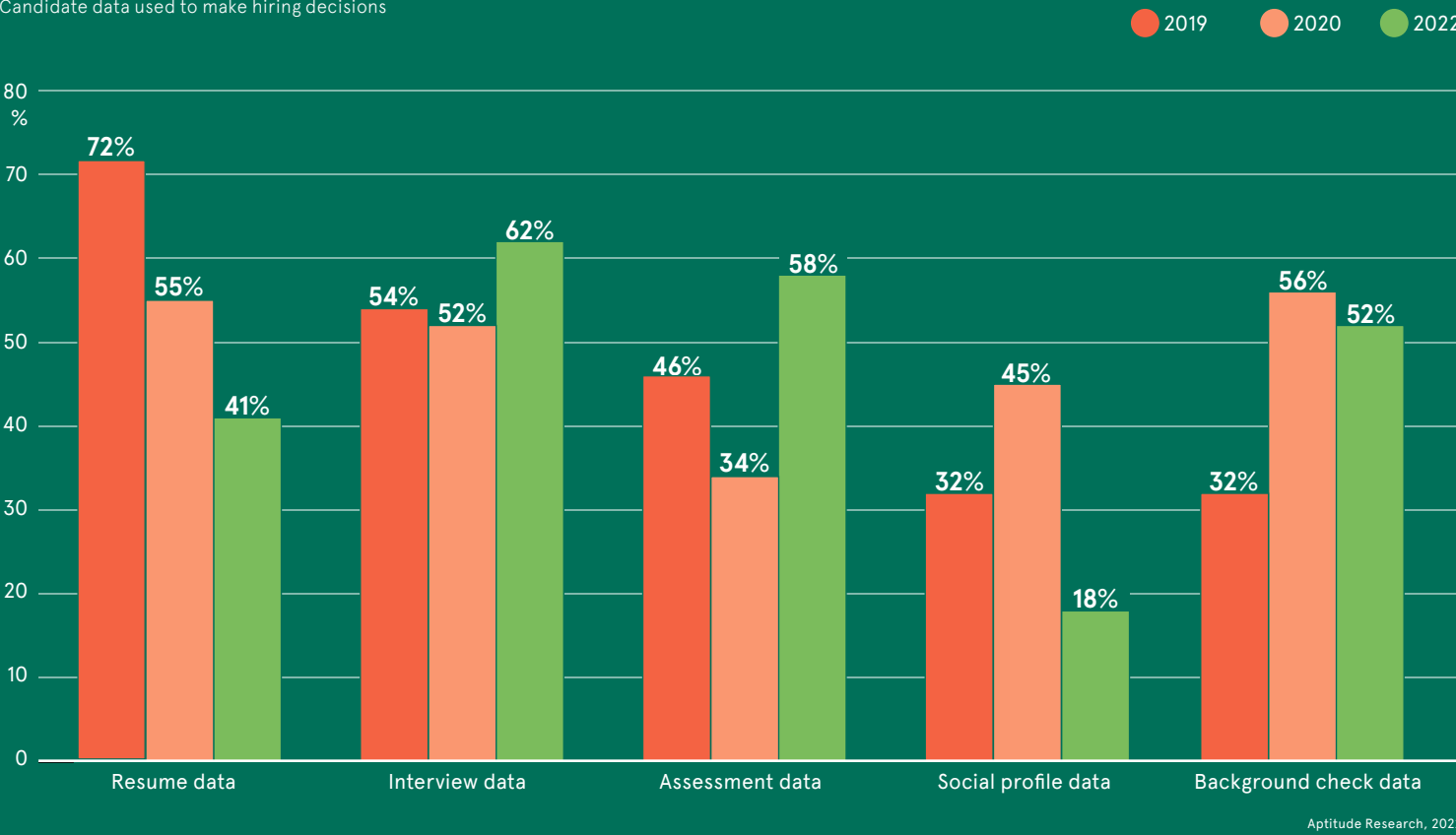
THE IMPORTANCE OF CANDIDATE ANALYTICS

Share of organisations that consider people analytics to be important



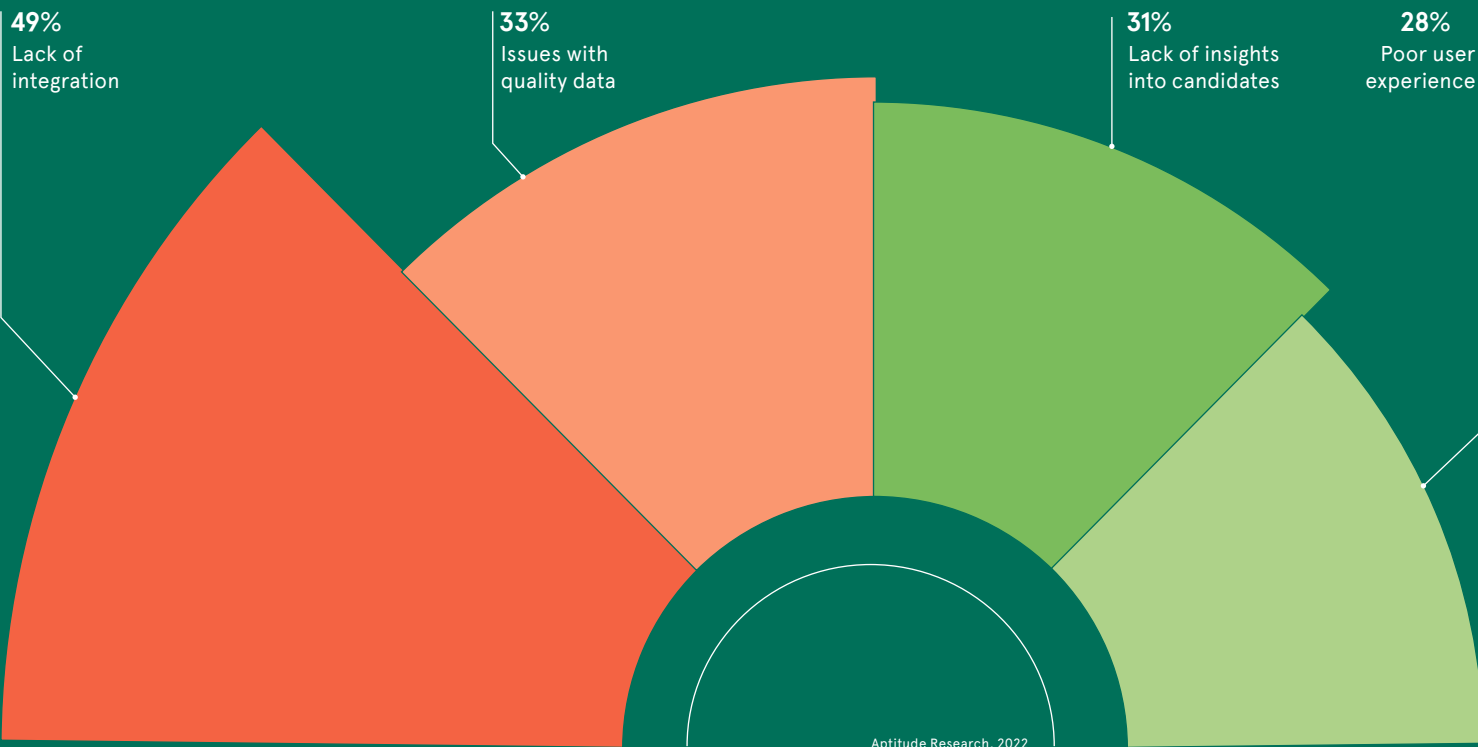
DATA SOURCES

Candidate data used to make hiring decisions



CHALLENGES WITH HIRING DATA

Top frustrations with hiring data



35%



of employers say using data more effectively is a top priority for talent acquisition

Aptitude Research, 2022

50%



of HR leaders say their team is data literate

Sympa, 2022

29%



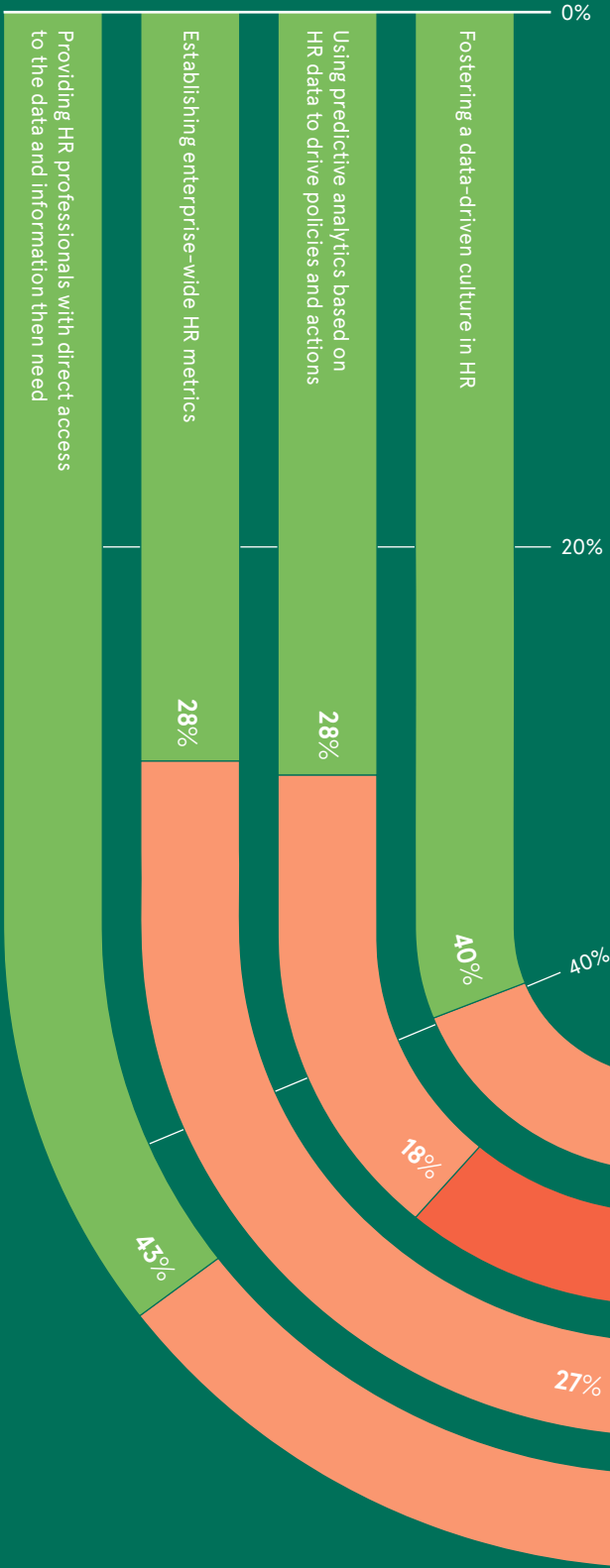
of hiring and recruitment teams list digital transformation as a top priority in 2022

Bullhorn, 2022

REPORTING AND ANALYTICS CAPABILITY

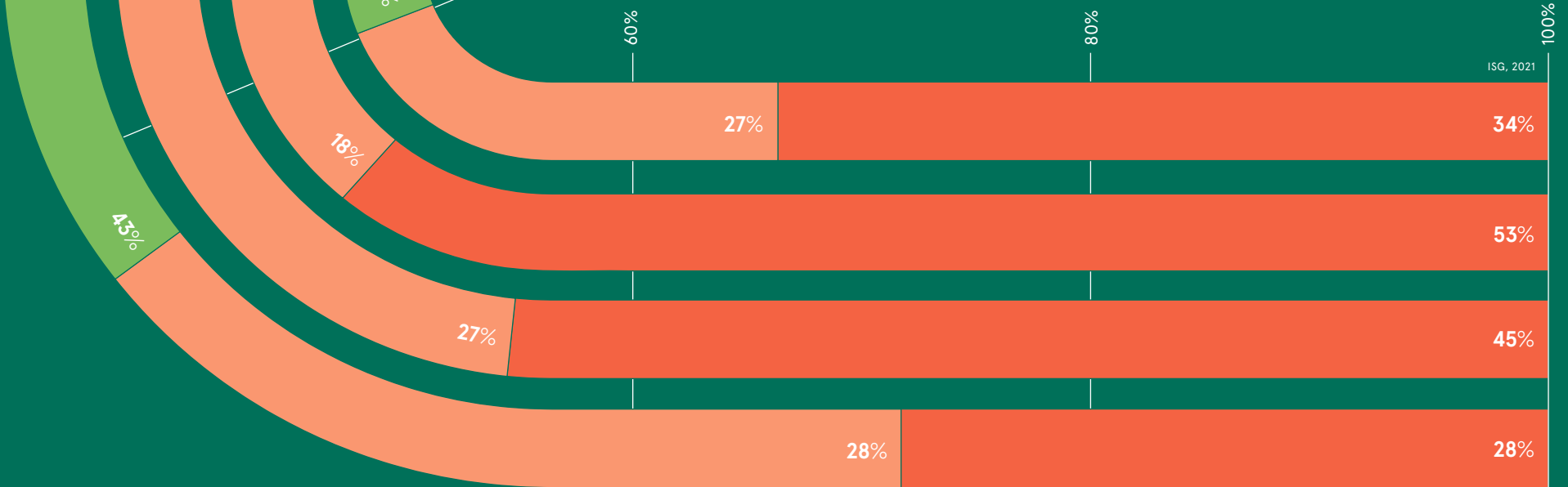
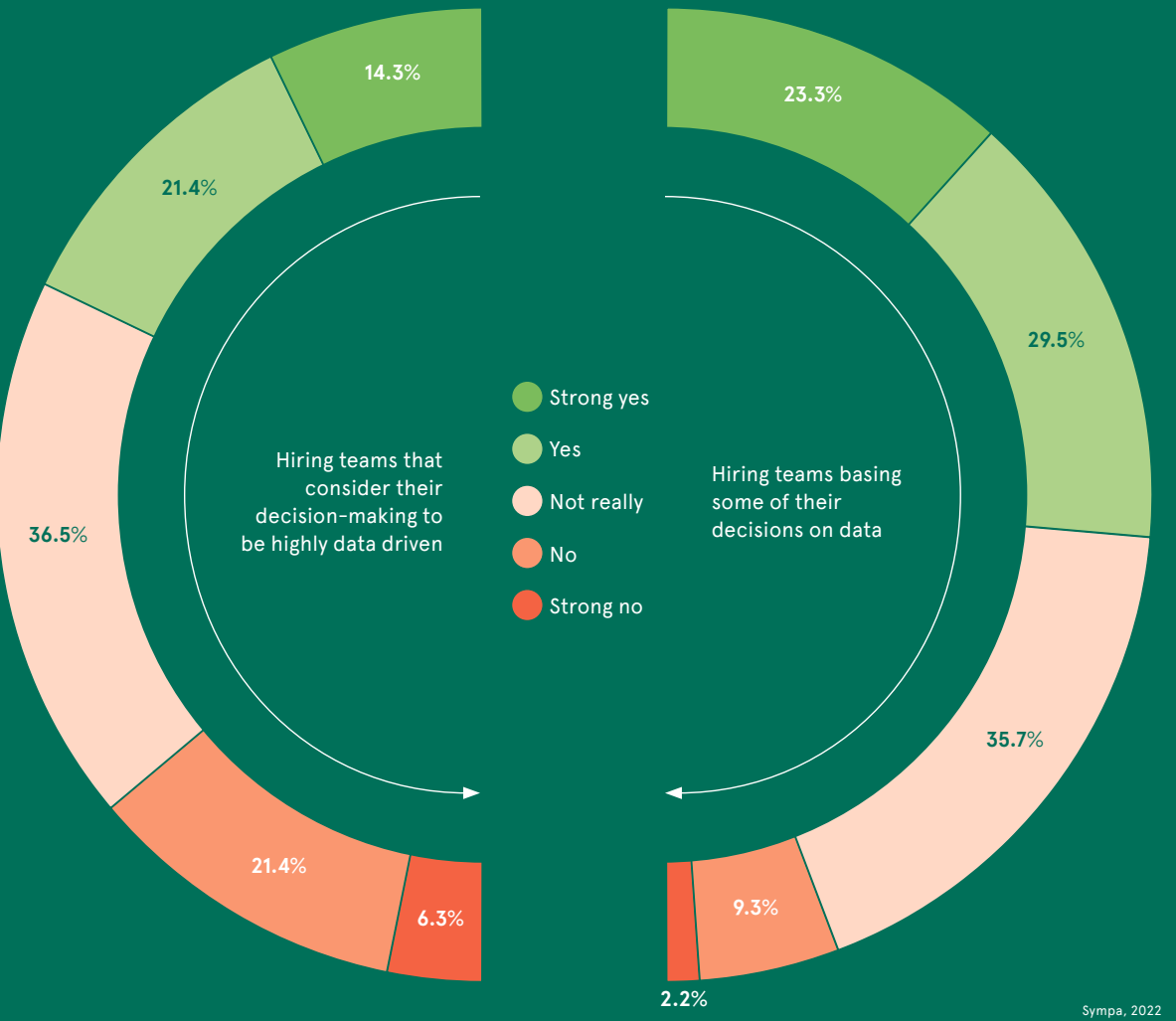
How successful has your organisation been in the following areas?

- Not successful
- Moderately successful
- Very successful



DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

Candidate data used to make hiring decisions



DISABILITY

Why business needs to get serious about disability inclusion

Although strides towards greater inclusion have been made for other protected groups, there is still much to be done when it comes to the recruitment, management and support of people with disabilities

Francesca Cassidy

In the UK alone, 14.6 million people are disabled, including 21% of working-age adults, according to the figures from the government. Yet when it comes to disability inclusion in the workplace, there is still a long way to go, according to a Raconteur panel of experts speaking in honour of Disability Pride month.

“We are the largest minority group,” says Mark Esho, founder of social enterprise The Circle Foundation. “But, to a certain extent, we’ve got the least power.”

Part of this, he says, is down to the attitude of many leaders when it comes to bringing disabled people into their organisations. A study conducted by recruitment company PageGroup in December 2021 found that almost a quarter (22%) of business leaders say they are unlikely to hire candidates with known disabilities.

It should come as little surprise, then, that barely half of disabled people are in work.

PageGroup’s research uncovered a several reasons why businesses are failing to hire disabled people. These include not having the right support in place, the costs of modifying tech and equipment, and the fear of litigation if employment is unsuccessful.

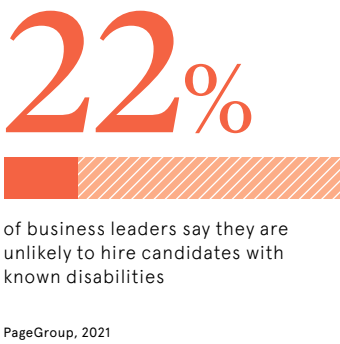
“Businesses are scared of doing the wrong thing,” says Ollie Thorn, senior manager of DE&I client solutions at Michael Page, a branch of PageGroup.

“Disability affects people in so many different ways and, because of that, the reasonable adjustments people need can be so varied. That creates an element of fear.”

The upshot of this, he explains, is that the issue of disability inclusion slips down hiring managers’ priorities. “As soon as there’s something on someone’s to-do list that they’re a little bit scared of doing, inevitably that gets ratcheted down.”

Another major barrier comes as a result of the way that many employers think of equity, diversity and inclusion, says Esho.

“A lot of employers pay lip service to inclusion. They have all these EDI policies – but they only cover certain groups, and often not disabled people. They think they’re filling their quota by hiring all the other minorities,” he comments.



But giving into fear and uncertainty, or taking a lazy box-checking approach to diversity, will harm businesses in the long run, particularly as the great resignation continues.

“Businesses are really struggling to hire people at the moment,” says Thorn. “Yet there are so many people with disabilities looking for work. The businesses that can be innovative and move in this space have a serious competitive advantage, because they are going to be able to tap into this incredible talent pool.”

Taking the first step to improve recruitment processes does not need to be costly. Working to improve the resources a business already has is a good start. PageGroup, for example, has just relaunched its UK website to make it more accessible to those with disabilities.

“The majority of businesses don’t have accessible tools within the recruitment process, which stops people from even finding the job ads,” says Thorn.

The Circle Foundation has worked to make its interviewing process by making it more flexible and individualised. This can mean something as simple as pausing the formal interview to have a cup of tea and a chat when a candidate arrives looking visibly nervous, giving them time to acclimatise. The organisation has also allowed remote working since 2012.

“Businesses are really struggling to hire people at the moment, yet there are so many people with disabilities looking for work

“The reason we introduced remote working is simply because we wanted to get more disabled people into our company,” says Esho. “If there’s a will, there’s a way.”

This will is, perhaps, the most important first step on the road to disability inclusion, says Burcu Borysik, head of policy and campaigns at Crohn’s & Colitis UK. “If there is a commitment made in the recruitment process that anyone with a disability, visible or invisible, will be supported through their employment, that recognition has been shown to have a positive impact on people’s willingness to apply for those roles.”

Recruitment is only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to disability inclusion, however, and it is just as important to tear down barriers and

stigma in the workplace. Beyond bringing disabled talent into an organisation, leaders and managers must consider how to support workers who may acquire a disability.

“Some 80% of disability is acquired between the ages of 18 and 64, which is workforce age,” explains Caroline Casey, founder of global business collective The Valuable 500. “So what do you do? Do you keep that employee? Invest in that employee? Support that employee?”

Thorn points out that disability is the only minority group that “anyone can be a part of tomorrow”. He speaks from experience having sustained an injury that led to a physical disability during his career in the military.

Borysik also acquired her disability while working. When she first experienced the sudden onset of her condition, her work life didn’t change to accommodate the shifts in her personal life. “I had to go to the loo every 15 minutes and I lost about two stone. At the time I was being asked to travel between cities and I simply couldn’t do that unless I went against medical advice.”

She was, she explains, ambitious and didn’t want to miss out on important meetings or be passed over for promotion. A simple adjustment, such as allowing her to join meetings virtually, would have cost the business nothing and could well

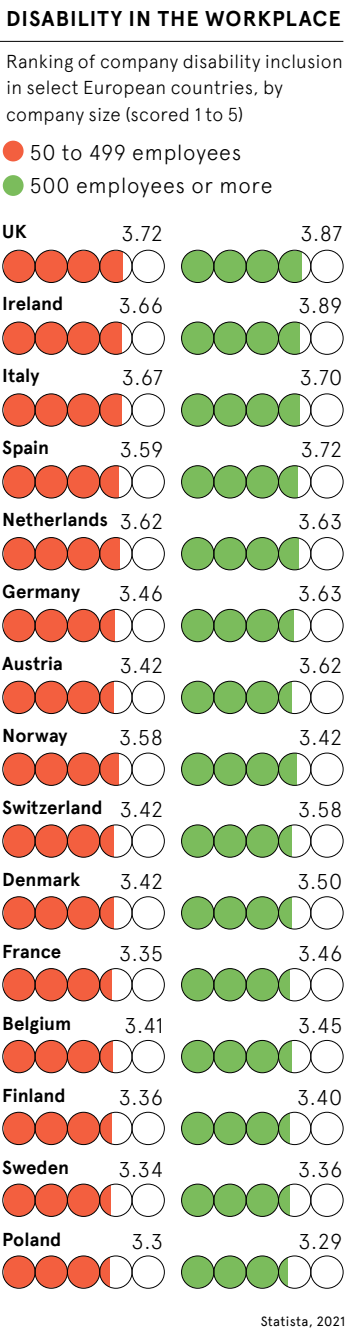
have brought benefits for people beyond Borysik herself.

“We’re all going to have a disability. I’m going to acquire more as I get older,” says Casey, who has ocular albinism. “This isn’t about ‘them’ and ‘they’, this is about future-proofing our world for us through an inclusive business system.”

Creating a culture of diversity and inclusion is more than simply a “good” thing to do, from an ethical standpoint, “it makes good business sense,” says Borysik. Crohn’s & Colitis UK has recently launched Are You IN?, a campaign to encourage companies to sign pledges showing their commitment to making the workplace more inclusive.

“Working with organisations on the campaign, we hear that making the accommodations and taking the steps to create a culture of inclusion can improve the productivity of the

“One of my favourite phrases is ‘small change is necessary for some and beneficial for all’



workforce, reduce staff turnover, drive better employee wellbeing and boost innovation,” says Borysik.

Working with people who have experience of disabilities can open up a range of opportunities for businesses. As Casey points out, the disability community represents 54% of the world’s population and is worth an estimated £13tn.

Casey says: “You get the talent into your business because that talent, with lived experience of disability, brings insight and innovation and knows how to speak to that market.”

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we all need accommodations to some degree. Embracing widespread working from home benefited thousands of people, not least many of the disabled community.

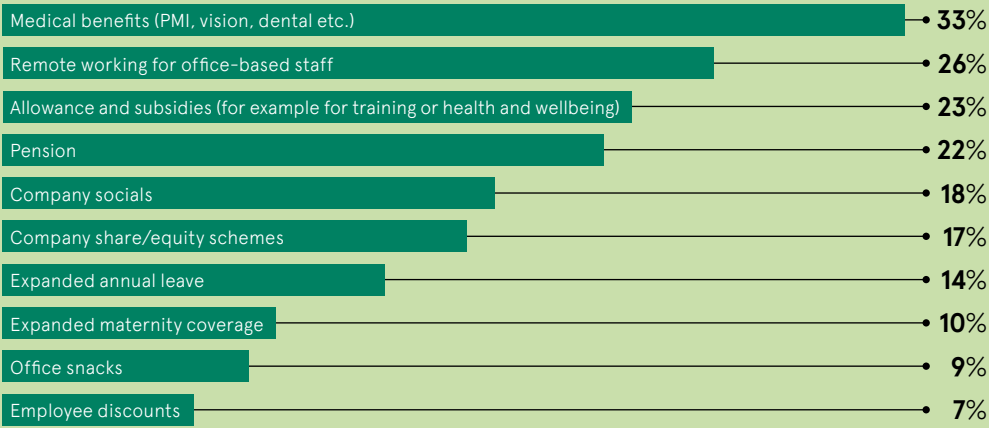
Casey points to the example of the remote control, designed to help blind people watch television and now used by TV owners everywhere. Accessibility ramps may have been created with wheelchairs in mind, but they are a lifeline for parents with prams and people with a range of mobility issues.

“One of my favourite phrases is ‘small change is necessary for some and beneficial for all,’” says Thorn. Leaders who understand this have a better chance of attracting the best talent, accessing new markets and, perhaps, even improving the business world for future workers. ●

THE MOST POPULAR WORK BENEFITS

Ben, 2022

Percentage of survey respondents who put the following benefits in the top 3 most popular with their team



Personalisation: how tailored benefits attract global talent

In a competitive global talent market, personalised and customisable benefits offerings can be the difference between success and stagnation, argues **David Duckworth**, co-founder and chief operating officer at employee benefits platform Ben

At its most basic level, a benefit is something that a company pays for on behalf of an employee. Employers provide benefits for a variety of reasons – to attract great people, to retain them, and to make them more productive – but too often, the benefits an organisation provides don’t meet the needs of the people they serve.

When my son was born in 2019, benefits I’d been offered in previous jobs – like life insurance and childcare support – all of a sudden became really important. My employers had always been paying for these even when they weren’t relevant to my lifestyle at the time.

Globally, organisations spend between 5% to 30% of payroll on benefits, but less than 20% of employees actually engage with these. Getting this right has never been more important. Especially with conflicting trends like a looming recession and inflation testing budgets at the same time as the great resignation, quiet quitting and the war for talent making recruitment and retention even more challenging.

People need personalisation

My story is a good example of how traditional benefits programmes are failing companies and people. Everyone has different needs that change throughout the seasons of their life, but traditionally the benefits they’re offered stay the same. This disconnect is reducing the effectiveness of benefits programmes. ●

The solution? Flexible benefits. Offering a flexible programme communicates that, as a company, you believe in autonomy and personalisation. This might be childcare offerings for new parents or discounted commuting for those returning to the office. It could be ensuring that employees in different geographies have access to locally relevant benefits: what an employee needs in the US will differ from one in Australia.

Flexible benefits as a concept isn’t new, but the flexibility of existing programmes is still limited given the complexity and administrative burden of communicating and managing more providers.

Companies are reluctant to roll out niche benefits products like mental health support, fertility treatment, or parenthood support. They may be very valuable to some employees but irrelevant to others, making it difficult to justify the additional administration cost. To add to this, innovation in the market has stalled leading companies to default to the same, safe offerings that aren’t providing the engagement they want.

This is part of what we think is wrong and why we’re trying to change what it means to offer flexible benefits. It’s not enough to just increase health insurance or change a pension – we need benefits to be truly flexible.

Employee needs are changing

The increasing globalisation of the workforce has placed significantly more

importance on flexibility. International reward managers are now faced with navigating benefits programs that span different time zones. Ensuring employees have access to the same benefits – be that insurance, mental health support, or even cycle-to-work schemes – no matter where they’re based, is becoming a huge challenge.

It’s no secret that recruitment is another major challenge for hiring teams at the moment. Given that 32% of applicants say benefits are as important as salary, we may start to include them in conversations about recruitment strategy. Similarly, when it comes to retaining talent, benefits can be the difference between retaining great employees and losing them. A third of employees cite benefits as a top reason to look for a new job.

Every benefit has its moment. Our Benefits Benchmarking Survey has shown how the most popular benefits can change over time, with the accompanying graph showing the most recent results. We can’t predict what will come next, but we do know that focusing on flexibility allows you to rise above market trends to satisfy the changing needs of your workforce.

For more information visit thanksben.com





Oliver Wong via Getty

Flexibility is the key benefit for distributed workforces

Our working lives have changed but have employee perks followed suit? In the era of distributed teams, how do you build a package of benefits your talent actually wants?

Tom Ritchie

After the widespread uptake of remote working during the Covid-19 pandemic, the majority of businesses in the knowledge economy have continued with at least a hybrid model. This has led to distributed teams that are patched together with different working arrangements – and with different needs. This has changed the benefits that employees want from their employer. The previously sought-after perks such as subsidised travel costs or company cars are less necessary for remote staff. The suitability of employee perks can have a profound effect on performance and morale. A study of 1,000 remote workers by HR company Paychex found that the 65% of

employees whose benefits package had changed since switching to working exclusively from home reported higher satisfaction. Some 73% of those workers also reported higher productivity. What do employees want? Paychex's report found that 31% of remote staff want a stipend for home office set-up, while 30% prioritised reimbursement for internet costs. A study of more than 10,000 employees across Europe revealed that many simply want greater flexibility in their working arrangements, be that in the form of adjustable hours (37%), a four-day week (37%), unlimited holiday (27%), or flexible working location (25%). HR teams should conduct thorough research to understand what

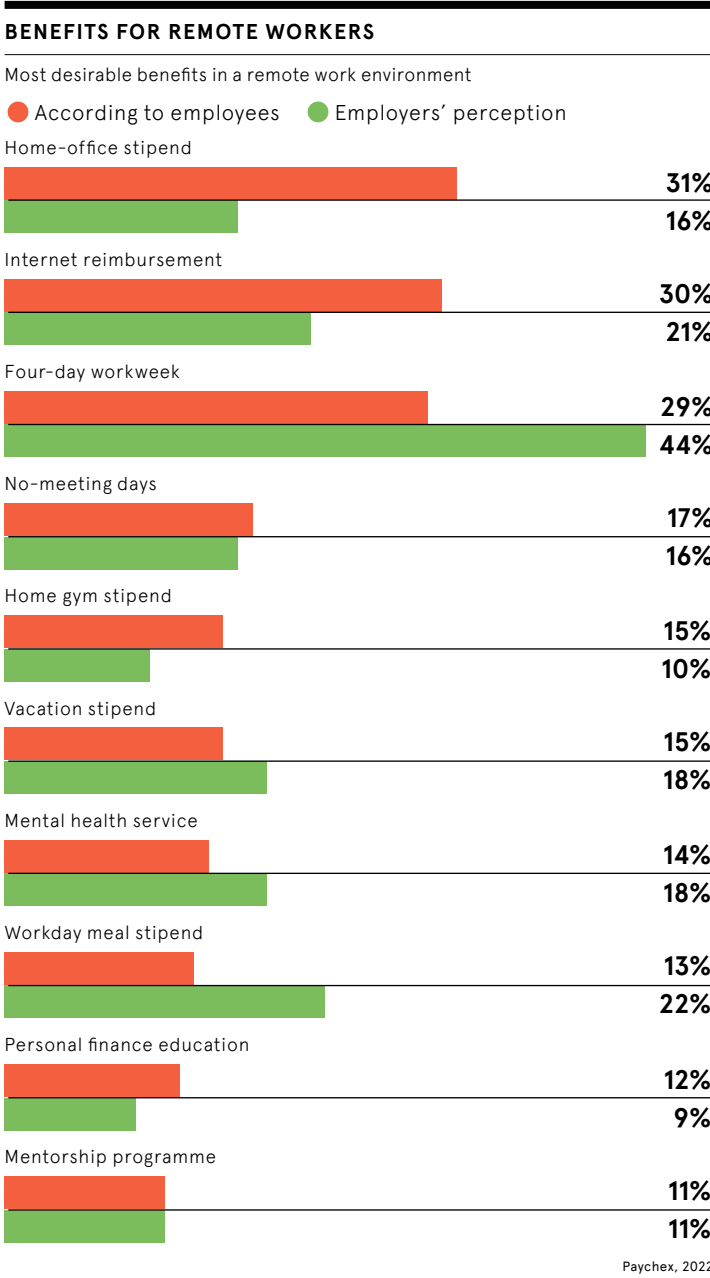
their employees want or risk implementing expensive packages that don't help with employee satisfaction or retention. "Involve employees in designing the benefits package. Benefits create absolutely no value unless employees make use of them," says Dr Rebecca Hewett, an associate professor at Rotterdam School of Management Erasmus University. "Employees are far more likely to use and value the benefits available to them if they were actively involved in designing them. So start from the perspective that you don't know what your employees want." Following a few months of remote working during the first Covid lockdown, Dropbox undertook a wide-ranging survey to discover the

wants and needs of its workforce. "The office was the daily workplace for our employees – and with this, we had great in-office perks. But that was then and with the sudden shift to remote work, we knew we had a unique opportunity to reimagine the way we work for the better," says Laura Ryan, director of international HR at Dropbox. "We did a lot of deep thinking and research, including several internal surveys in which we tested the pulse among our employees on their attitudes about different work models." Dropbox has adopted a working arrangement described internally as "virtual first", after 72% of their employees reported they wanted to work remotely on at least "a regular, or partial basis". Its 2,700 employees across 11 countries are allowed to work wherever they choose. Their offices remain open but have been adapted into flexible open-working areas that are primarily used for collaborative work. There are no longer limits on the number of days employees can take as paid leave. A perks allowance allows staff to adjust where they attribute their benefits across different categories, which include wellbeing, caregiver support, productivity, ergonomics or learning. All of the company's new policies have greater than 75% satisfaction within the workforce. "Any benefits package should be authentically tailored to your people. In other words, benefits are not true benefits unless your people deem them to be so too," says Ryan. "We made sure that flexibility sat at the core of our remote working experience – and everything around it, so that we could create a culture that

people would want to join – and stay in. If a company can't do this in combination with one another, losing talent is inevitable." This adjustable package is similar to a suggestion made by Hewett: a marketplace of benefits that employees can pick and choose from, giving them an allowance to create a unique blend of perks. "Offer a suite of benefits which employees can buy and sell to tailor to their individual needs but involve a range of employees in the design of what's available," explains Hewett. "It doesn't necessarily cost the company any more and, if you carefully select those which are most valued by employees, they are more likely to create the positive outcomes you're hoping for." Hewett suggests an almost intersectional approach to benefits, one that factors in location and experience but also takes into account an employee's needs outside work. "Think beyond categories. A working parent in the UK might have more in common with a working parent in Japan than they do with their single British colleague. It's much better to recognise that everyone is an individual with a different

“Any benefits package should be authentically tailored to your people. In other words, benefits are not true benefits unless your people deem them to be so too

combination of circumstances that are likely to drive their benefit needs," says Hewett. There are still considerations when it comes to location. Some perks will be crucial in attracting talent in some areas – Hewett cites health insurance in the US as an example – that will have less importance in other countries. Keeping abreast of regulation and working norms in each market is crucial to implementing a good policy. "It's important to seek advice from experienced HR and/or legal professionals in territories where you have employees," says Wendy Christie, chief people officer at global social media agency, The Social Element. Christie cites statutory requirements such as minimum wage laws, minimum and maximum vacation allowances and state bank holidays as important details to be across. The Social Element employs more than 250 people in 46 countries. It has been fully remote since its inception in 2002 and, says Christie, has the "flexibility of remote working baked into the culture and ethos of the business". This is reflected in the business's perks. Employees have recently seen their holiday allowance increased by five days per year and are allowed additional leave for life events such as moving house, as well as pursuing charitable work and volunteering. Wellbeing initiatives include leave for women going through menopause, discounted gym memberships and health plans. So far in 2022, the team has had two big get-togethers in New York and London. When travel allows it, employees are encouraged to meet up and collaborate as much as possible. This supplements regular team activities held virtually over Zoom. "Perks that build and encourage a sense of community are integral for maintaining culture when we don't get to see each other all the time," says Christie. "Perks aren't the pinnacle of company culture but they do enable us to engage in ways that we would never have done in person, and ensure that every employee is empowered to live and work in a way that sets them up to succeed." Ryan shares that view. She suggests that while distributed teams can be closely knit operations with the right culture, a team that is masking a faulty culture with shiny perks is doomed to failure. "Remote working is like a tipping scale – it's all about balance. It can both provide the opportunity to make employees happier and at the same time, it can reveal the cracks in an organisation's culture, communication and technology," she says. "Without the right environment and tech to support remote working, employees will not be able to unlock its true benefits. So, your benefits package is nothing without having truly established these core elements across the business." ●



Ride the recession with an agile strategy

A workforce contingency strategy can be the difference between thriving and barely surviving a recession. Is your business ready?

Despite fears that major economies are either sliding into or are already in a recession no one seems to have told the recruitment market. The UK marked its lowest unemployment rate since 1974 in July whilst the US recorded an above-forecast increase in nonfarm payrolls in August. However, according to Brian Salkowski, chief operating officer of talent management provider Guidant Global, there are signs that such hiring confidence is beginning to buckle. "There is nervousness around when and if rising inflation will reduce demand," he says. "In the talent market we are seeing some companies laying off thousands of workers and others installing hiring freezes. These could be the 'canaries in the coal mine'."



Salkowski is a veteran of several economic crises from the dotcom crash to Covid. He sees a usual pattern. "We tend to see a pullback in hiring as we enter these periods," he explains. "It is a painful cycle of firing and then rehiring as firms try to ramp up for the recovery. There is a lot of cost and emotional duress which wears on teams and business culture." But increasingly from downturn to downturn, he has noticed more savvy organisations either look towards expanding and evolving their contingent workforce at the same time to fill in any operational gaps. These are non-permanent staff members including contractors and service providers. "When there is uncertainty there is a need for heightened agility and the contingent workforce is the prescription," says Salkowski. "It offers the flexibility and the nimbleness needed to move with economic ebbs and flows. The balance is to lessen the negative impact of the recessionary cycle by buying in labour, services, knowledge and expertise to add to your existing core workforce aligned to the essential nature of your business. Those organisations with an established contingent workforce programme know exactly who their contingent workers are and where they are working from to see who is critical or not. Total talent management takes this to the next level, looking at your workforce as a much broader ecosystem than the people you employ directly." Salkowski provides an example of a US company which did a large amount of government work before the pandemic. Given the need to inform and educate the public about the dangers of Covid when it arrived the firm saw an opportunity to rapidly expand their contingent workforce by hiring experienced and knowledgeable contractors and service providers. They did this by partnering with Guidant, which as a managed services provider (MSP) manages the entire recruitment process for mainly larger enterprises seeking both contingent and permanent staff. "We helped ramp up its new business team. Over a period of between 12 to 18 months the business we had with the company tripled," he recalls. "They used contingent workers very strategically to win those new business opportunities. There were many others who came to us later in the pandemic when the market started to recover looking for contingent solutions. But these late-comers had been caught completely flat-footed, not even fully knowing how many staff – permanent or contingent – they had. Our customers could literally press a button and we were there ready to deploy staff. It laid

bare who was prepared for a crisis and who wasn't." Salkowski urges businesses to ensure that they put a plan in place with their MSPs right now to avoid being a 'laggard' in the looming downturn and subsequent recovery. "This is a C-suite issue and the leading companies are already having these conversations. They are looking at getting the right partner in place to help assess projections of talent supply and how that matches with business forecasting. What are our competitors doing with their resources and what is the right level of workforce mix?" he explains. "We look at whether contingent will be a sustained need or more durational and do a cost analysis on areas such as salary and onboarding. Can we engage the right resources at the right time? You need to be having these conversations with your MSP today."

Salkowski says the acceptance of contingent work arrangements has grown exponentially for both employees and employers. "Having been through these multiple recessions it has been amazing to see how the criticality of the extended workforce has grown both during and after," he states. "It is the golden age of contingent and if employers don't have a game plan, then it's not a fair fight against those that do."

“When there is uncertainty there is a need for heightened agility and the contingent workforce is the prescription

For more information please visit guidantglobal.com



Fixing the broken model of graduate recruitment

Graduate recruitment is key to building a strong workforce, yet many employers face barriers when searching for the most talented and diverse range of candidates. The early career network platform Handshake explains how it is using its network and data to transform the market

Recruiting the best and brightest graduates is vital to building a sustainable talent pipeline. Hiring digital natives from the most diverse generation yet is also key to helping companies tackle the skills gap and build a more inclusive workforce.

Yet in many ways the traditional graduate recruitment model is broken. Too often companies are bound by geography, establishing relationships with only a handful of universities in their local area which limits the talent pool available to them.

Most companies also lack the data they need to reach the right candidates. This is apparent both in terms of skills—particularly when it comes to jobs that don’t have a strong pipeline from vocational courses, or for SMEs with fewer resources to recruit at scale—and in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion criteria. The result leaves companies reliant upon one-size-fits-all marketing approaches that rarely yield the best results.

But what if companies could vastly widen the graduate talent pool available to them? What if the data they needed to screen candidates properly was available at the touch of a button?

War for talent

Since 2013, Handshake has been working to solve these problems by building the world’s biggest early career network, helping millions of students from all backgrounds to get hired and launch their careers.

The platform offers a unique three-way-marketplace, which currently connects more than 1,400 universities, 650,000 employers and 20,000 students and alumni across the world. The firm works with graduate employers from top Fortune 500 and FTSE 100 companies as well as thousands of small businesses, charities and startups across the US, UK and rest of Europe.

“The war for talent is hotter than ever, with the labour market currently challenging for many employers,” says Jonathan Lu, the company’s general manager for EMEA. “Reaching gen-Z graduate recruits is therefore critical, conferring a real competitive advantage, and this is where Handshake comes in.”

A key benefit of the platform is that it helps employers to reach gen-Z audiences, which can be notoriously difficult.

Students in this cohort view career progression differently, with higher expectations around promotions, salaries and job moves. They care deeply about a company’s values on issues such as diversity and the environment and expect a ‘digital-first’ approach when it comes to marketing communications. In fact, Handshake research shows that two-thirds of early-career job seekers believe they do not need to meet in-person at all to forge a meaningful connection.

Breaking down the barriers

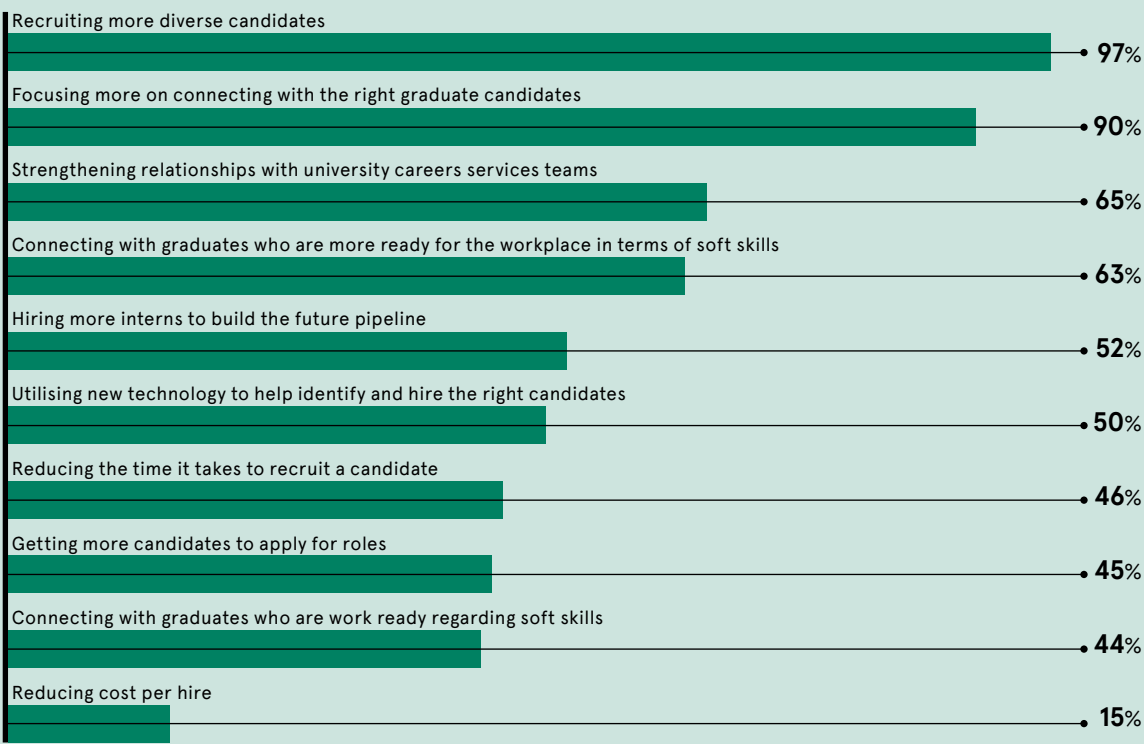
To break down these barriers, Handshake’s platform offers companies a seamless way to communicate and build relationships with gen-Z students. It also facilitates these relationships right from the start of their degrees, not just from year three.

Companies can build their own branded landing page on the platform, manage event registrations and publicise mentoring, career advice and job opportunities. Students access this information through the Handshake app, while also being able to message employers and university careers offices directly.

“There is still significant work to be done in terms of improving student confidence in their career goals during their studies,” Lu says. “Our research shows that a third of students feel very confident about their career prospects during the first year of their course, dropping to 31%

GRADUATE EMPLOYER PRIORITIES 2023

Top employer priorities for 2023 when hiring students / graduates



97%

of graduate employers say they see recruiting a diverse workforce as a top priority over the next year

45%

of employers report that they are now opting for more continuous recruitment processes... as opposed to more sporadic engagement or the ‘milkround’

65%

of employers say that strengthening relationships with university careers services teams is a high priority in the year ahead

Handshake and ISE research: Graduate Employer Priorities 2023

in year two and falling dramatically again to just 17% in year three.

“Using technology to facilitate connections with employers sooner and to enable more continuous recruitment can play a big role here.”

Handshake’s platform links employers to a much wider range of university careers services teams and students than was previously possible, widening the available talent pool. In the UK, where it launched in 2020, some 14,000 employers and over 220,000 students already use the service. And that number is growing every week.

Employers can also unlock new data insights on prospective candidates. Among other things, Handshake enables companies to search for students based on their degree, languages spoken, societies they have joined and their achievements, as

well as their ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic background.

“We offer a ‘positive screening model’ where you can’t filter people out based on EDI criteria but you can filter them in,” says Lu. “The idea is that more candidates from different backgrounds get recognised and employers get access to previously hard-to-reach pools of talent.”

Building a more diverse workforce

These data insights enable employers to actively target priority groups and engage the people they want to hire, allowing them to optimise their graduate recruitment events. It also helps them build a more diverse workforce, which is self-reinforcing because gen-Z candidates find this attractive. The tech recruitment company FDM turned to Handshake to help it build relationships with top talent around the world. The London-based firm, which has 5,000 employees, was struggling to compete for young workers with the world’s biggest tech brands, leading to long hiring cycles and a lack of high-quality candidates.

With Handshake it was able to identify almost 1,400 candidates in a single year, promote 70 virtual events and achieve a 50% uplift in graduate job postings.

By tapping into Handshake’s network of students in the UK, FDM instantly

broadened its options and boosted its recruitment rate, saving time in the process. It was able to understand its candidates at a more granular level and move beyond blanket marketing campaigns towards more personalised messaging that built trust.

Lu says another big benefit of using the platform is achieving greater cost efficiency. Employers that use Handshake typically see a lower cost per hire and faster time to hire, meaning better value for money over all.

“Technology can help facilitate a shift in acquisition practices that employers are telling us they want,” says Lu. “Companies are looking to build meaningful relationships with graduates that boost their talent pipelines. That means communicating with those candidates through a more seamless and continuous recruitment process, making earlier connections with quality candidates.”

For practical advice on tackling your priorities in the year ahead, download our Graduate Employer Priorities 2023 report at joinhandshake.co.uk/gep



POLICY

New visa seeks to close the skills gap

The UK’s new visa scheme for high-potential candidates marks progress for businesses facing skills shortages. But it’s unlikely to make an impact in the long term

Jack George

Britain is working. Unemployment is at a historic low. But employers are finding it difficult to fill key positions up and down the country.

In an attempt to fill those open roles and upskill the economy, the UK government has unveiled a High Potential Individual (HPI) visa. This aims to attract graduates of the

world’s leading universities to start their careers here in the UK. Unlike previous immigration schemes aimed at highly skilled workers, the new HPI visa does not require any endorsement from potential employers. This means that applicants can first come to the UK and then search for a job or start their own business. Critically, applicants will be able to

apply to this programme based on their educational background and not on where they were born.

As former chancellor Rishi Sunak said at the time of the new visa’s announcement: “The UK will grow as a leading international hub for innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship. We want the businesses of tomorrow to be built here today, which is why I call on students to take advantage of this incredible opportunity to forge their careers here.”

Recent graduates are allowed to apply to the HPI programme if their alma mater was listed as one of the world’s leading 50 universities (the relevant lists are on the government website) at the time of their graduation – regardless of their actual skills or expertise. Many university rankings are often weighted towards large, predominantly Western research institutions; especially US ones. On the government’s 2022 list there were two institutions from Singapore, two from China, two from Japan, two from Hong Kong and one from Australia. The rest were from Europe and North America.

Applicants must prove that they have both the English language skills and funds to support themselves and any family members who may travel to the UK with them. The visa itself lasts for two years (three for those with doctorates) and HPI visa-holders are not allowed to plan to apply to stay in the UK while on the visa. Though it will increase the availability of early-career talent, the new visa still strikes many as an imperfect solution.

“Initiatives such as the HPI visa are attractive in the short run but they can be damaging for businesses looking to grow and innovate in the longer term

“Initiatives such as the HPI visa are attractive in the short run, with a flock of new skills, especially digital skills, coming available to UK businesses to plug the gap,” says Stuart Munton, chief for delivery at AND Digital. “However, without proper consideration, they can be damaging for businesses looking to grow and innovate in the longer term.”

Similarly, Callum Adamson is co-founder and CEO of Distributed, a provider of on-demand engineering teams. He observes that “like many of the visas offered by the government, the HPI visa represents yesterday’s solution to today’s problem. A solution that is by definition, temporary and cannot be extended, will do nothing to solve a systematic shortage of talent.”

This is because although the visa will open the UK to more international talent, it risks perpetuating what Munton refers to as a “complacent” corporate “monoculture”.

“Across organisations, diversity fosters innovation – with different life experiences leading people to different ideas, conclusions and decisions,” says Munton. “Long-term closure of the skills gap will also require the UK to turn its attention to the potential of those with untraditional backgrounds, such as ex-armed forces, refugees and minority communities, and put in place concrete initiatives to continuously upskill and support them.”

The introduction of the visa can also lead to confusing situations: having a degree from a celebrated international institution can make it easier to apply for jobs in the UK than being an actual UK graduate.

A student on a leading UK master’s programme notes that a lawyer advised her that it would be just as easy and likely quicker to apply for an HPI (given her undergraduate degree) than to get a job in the UK via the traditional route as a UK-degree holder. “You either have to accept an offer and hope they’ll be ok with an unconfirmed visa status,” she says of the traditional graduate route. “Or wait potentially months until you have officially graduated and can apply directly.”

Another international student is simply returning home to the US, knowing that the HPI will allow him to reapply at any point in the next five years given his previous education. “The HPI visa makes you wonder why the graduate visa makes you jump through so many hoops,” says John Gearig, a holder of master’s degrees from both the LSE and the University of Michigan. “If it could be done with a single application from anywhere in the world, then why make UK graduates stay in the country while it processes?”

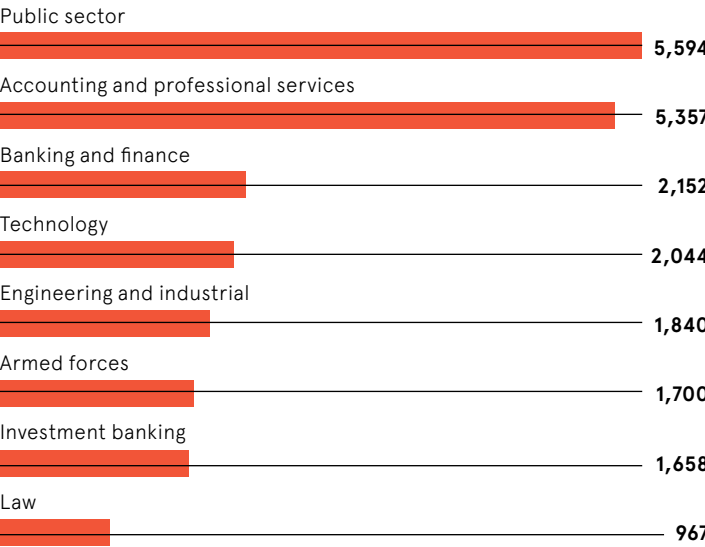
James Callander is managing director at Freshminds, a provider of on-demand consultants. He agrees that the new visa is simply a better system. “We welcome any initiatives to bring the brightest talent to the UK. The current sponsorship route is time-consuming, expensive and very admin-heavy for small businesses – so we would urge improvements to this process, especially as much of our work is highly time-sensitive,” he says.

Indeed, the new visa should open up UK employers to a small but well-educated new cohort of potential workers and plug some of the existing skills gaps. Nonetheless, it’s unlikely that a single, hyper-targeted visa will begin to solve the wider recruitment issues at play.

For some businesses, the solution is virtual rather than in person. “Unless the government wants to build entire cities to house the skilled workers required to meet this demand,” says Adamson, “it should instead consider how to help businesses facilitate connections and networks of employees right across the globe.” ●

GRADUATE VACANCIES

Graduate vacancies in the UK as of 2020, by select industry/sector



Managing the new remote workforce

Employers are increasingly aware of the vital role that line managers play in hybrid and remote-working contexts

Cath Everett

While line managers used to be considered “the frozen middle”, they have now become “pivotal” to organisational success in a world that is moving increasingly towards hybrid working, believes HR guru Lynda Gratton. The reason for this shift in perception, which had started before but accelerated during the pandemic, is that managers are now recognised as “critical catalysts for change”. They are also understood to be “carriers of culture, the glue, drivers of performance and engagement, and connectors”, adds Gratton, professor of management practice at the London Business School and co-founder of HSM Advisory. Put another way, managers play a crucial role in creating a positive employee experience, which includes becoming effective coaches who proactively support and develop their teams. Also vital is becoming a skilful storyteller – because “crafting narratives to win buy-in and support purpose” is the “glue” that binds everything else together, says Gratton.

Mary Beighton is director of people and culture at car finance specialist Zuto, and agrees with this view. “This layer is critical as middle managers are ultimately responsible for engaging and motivating teams on a daily basis – they’re the first point of contact, whether virtually or in person,” she says. But the managerial role has also evolved “incredibly”, particularly over the past few years since new ways of working came into play, Beighton acknowledges. This means a lot more is now expected of them, which includes the need to be more intentional and deliberate in how they manage others. “Line managers are trying to balance traditional responsibilities, such as managing and motivating performance, with representing the business from a values perspective and translating that vision to the workforce,” she points out. “There is also the additional challenge of supporting employee well-being and amplifying employee voice, so they have a huge amount of responsibility.”



SDI Production via iStock

“Managers need to become connectors. This means facilitating connection-focused conversations to ensure employees are highly engaged

What this means in practice is that managers operating in a hybrid or remote-working context are now required to demonstrate higher levels of proficiency in soft skills. Mike Thackray is principal consultant at organisational development consultancy OE Cam. “Managers need to be able to dial up all of the skills that were always

necessary before but now it’s to a whole new level,” he explains. “This includes emotional intelligence because the need to understand individual situations, circumstances and needs has become so much more important.” Other key skills include effective decision-making, particularly in relation to hybrid-working practices and especially if clear organisational guidelines do not exist. A key problem here, though, Thackray says, is that “some managers just haven’t got the skills or confidence to make those kinds of calls. Not least because as soon as you make a decision for one person and it’s different for another, you lay yourself open to challenge.” This situation is also not helped at times by a lack of consensus among senior executives regarding the hybrid working approach they should take – or even whether they should go down this route at all.

Debbie Bayntun-Lees is professor of organisational development, DEIB and change at the Hult International Business School (Ashridge). “There are organisations where leaders are in conflict, with some wanting to go hybrid and some not, but this creates paralysis, and causes tension and delayed decision-making,” she says. “Managers tend to go to HR for help but are often in the dark too, because it’s all so new and everything’s still in the experimental phase.” Little thought has traditionally been given to how managers are affected by this kind of scenario. But it can result in them feeling caught in the middle between senior executives and their employees, who are often keen to work more flexibly and have in some instances taken advantage of today’s competitive jobs market to vote with their feet. The upshot of these pressures is line managers who can feel “disem-

powered and demoralised”, a scenario that frequently has a negative impact on staff morale too. As a result, Bayntun-Lees points to the importance of both leaders and managers learning to interact with their teams in what she describes as an “intentional relational” fashion. One of the aims here is to find ways of developing “quality relationships and interactions” so that both staff (and their managers) feel “known, valued and involved”. “Leaders and managers need to become connectors,” she explains. “This means facilitating connection-focused conversations to ensure employees are highly engaged with the organisational mission and work expectations but also that leaders are connected to employees’ aspirations and wellbeing.” To do so requires a managerial mindset that is “able to learn, share power and responsibility and to collaborate with people. But it

“Managers play a crucial role in creating a positive employee experience, which includes becoming effective coaches who proactively support and develop their teams

additionally requires leaders to be visible, to develop rapport, build trust and create psychological safety”, observes Bayntun-Lees. A key skill in this context is facilitating discussion both among teams and with individuals. This includes learning how to hold difficult conversations and managing employee expectations on issues, such as flexible working options or pay rises during today’s cost-of-living crisis. But it also involves enabling an inclusive dialogue, in which everyone is given a voice, not least on how hybrid working might work for their team. Addressing power imbalances and potential conflict are other important considerations. “It’s about injecting more humanity into the world of work and ensuring that managers understand the power they have both in terms of their own role and in managing the power differentials of their team to help create more of a level playing field. And that is a new set of skills for many,” says Bayntun-Lees. Another set of vital but all too frequently overlooked skills that managers likewise need to develop, meanwhile, are what Gratton calls hybrid-enabled practical skills. While they may appear to be basic,

administrative activities such as jointly developing team agreements on acceptable behaviour and planning for more effective workflows can make a significant difference in helping teams manage their time more effectively to sustain high performance levels. As to how managers can best go about learning new skills and enhancing old ones, there are various possible approaches. Management training and upskilling courses that have been revised to support hybrid and remote working will undoubtedly help. Zuto, for example, updated its management development programme to include new modules on resilience and holding difficult conversations. It also opened up participation in both areas to any interested employees, to help them “feel more equipped to deal with any challenges”, Beighton says. But beyond more formal training, role models and mentors also have a vital role to play. “There’s a level of self-awareness required for all this and it’s difficult to develop without focused help,” says Bayntun-Lees. “A lot of managers feel pulled in all directions and need guidance, so support from role models is key.” Peer-to-peer learning is another useful strategy. Here, line managers across the business get together regularly to discuss any issues, challenges or innovations to learn from shared experiences. Zuto has been careful to introduce several support mechanisms, such as standardised talent management frameworks, to provide clear career pathways for both employees and managers going forward. “It’s been a challenging transition for line managers over the last few years, with a lot of new things expected of them so we wanted to provide processes, structure and consistency. There’s a huge amount of responsibility in the line manager position these days so it’s important to focus on heightening skills to help them adapt, manage expectations and inspire the troops,” Beighton concludes. ●

Ethical Angel, 2021



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WELLBEING

Has hybrid working triggered a loneliness epidemic?

This year, the theme for Mental Health Awareness Week was loneliness, something the current generation of hybrid workers is all too familiar with

Francesca Cassidy

The theme of this year’s Mental Health Awareness Week was loneliness, which is important for two reasons. One, because instances of loneliness rose sharply during the pandemic and, two, because we find it so difficult to talk about.

“Loneliness is a taboo subject,” says Petra Velzeboer, founder and CEO of mental health consultancy PVL. “We’re happy to say if we aren’t sleeping well or eating badly or are upset. But we won’t say, ‘I’m lonely.’ Even among friends or family – it’s just not something we say.”

This is all the more true in our working lives. Where, when and how we work is changing and has made it even more important for employers to prioritise their people’s wellbeing, in all its forms. But this loneliness is not hitting the whole workforce equally. The data indicates that it is younger workers – millennials and generation Z – who are suffering the most in a hybrid world.

So why is this, and what can employers do to help?

There are several reasons that loneliness is prevalent in younger age groups. Many have left university and started jobs remotely, missing out on crucial social milestones. They have been subject to multiple ‘once-in-a-lifetime’

crises – a pandemic, economic downturn, a war in Europe. But most experts agree that the biggest driver of loneliness among the young is social media.

Velzeboer believes that comparison – truly, the thief of joy – is what makes social media so detrimental to young people’s wellbeing. “There’s a big comparative going on between our ‘Instagram outsides’ versus the reality of our ‘insides,’” she says. “We compare our insides to other people’s outsides. We have our insecurities, our flaws, our sadness, our traumas, and then we see the filtered version of somebody who has a fabulous life, but just because you’re at a party, doesn’t mean that you feel connected.”

Beyond this, there is an argument that growing up with social media has fundamentally impacted how younger people deal with their feelings, says Teresa Clark, founder and CEO of employee happiness company The Wellness Revolution. Clark believes that social media has become an unwelcome distraction to process emotions, trapping people in a cycle of scroll and reward.

“We live in a culture of instant gratification, so if we feel bad we think ‘I don’t want to feel bad, so I’m going to do this,’” she explains. “There’s so much pressure to be on

social media all the time and our brains get a lot of dopamine from the instant gratification – so the cycle continues.”

Now, for some workers, the time spent online has doubled as companies embrace hybrid and remote working. Evidence suggests that as our screen time increases and our face time dwindles, workers around the world are feeling lonelier than ever before.

“As humans, we’re social animals, we crave interaction. When you’re in the office – which is often referred to as the ‘palace of culture’ – you’re getting that social interaction, that joint sense of purpose.” So says Gian Power, who is the founder and CEO of workplace transformation company TLC Lions.

This lack of connection with colleagues is a major reason why hybrid

working appears to be fuelling loneliness. Buffer’s *State of Remote Work 2022* survey found that 52% of global employees feel less connected to their co-workers since they shifted to remote working.

But many believe hybrid working has changed the nature of work itself too. While video conferencing means we routinely see into our colleague’s personal spaces, remote working has made things more formal. So says mental health campaigner Rob Stephenson, who founded InsideOut Leaderboard, which lists the senior business leaders who have pledged to be open about mental health. He is also founder and CEO of the mental health measuring app FormScore.

“Work has become transactional,” he observes. “We join a Zoom or Teams call, get on with an agenda, and move on to the next item – with very little break in the day. We’re not having impromptu social interactions, which is eroding the social connection we get in the physical workplace.

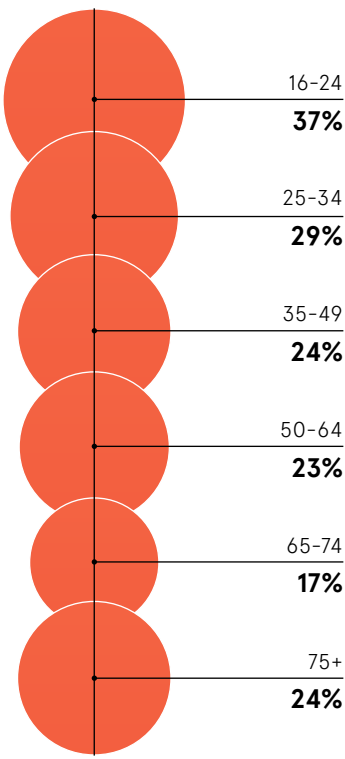
“If we’re going to be working remotely, we need to be intentional about creating space for the human – as well as for the business,” says Stephenson.

A hefty majority of people believe it is now part of an employer’s duty of care to encourage wellbeing in the workplace. A recent survey by workplace technology firm Silicon Reef

“We’re happy to say if we aren’t sleeping well or eating badly or are upset. But we won’t say, ‘I’m lonely’

LONELINESS IS PARTICULARLY PREVALENT AMONG YOUNGER WORKERS

Share of respondents reporting loneliness in their jobs, by age group



Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2021

meetings all day,” says Power. “Or, if you’re going to do that, carve out lunch for the team on those days. Make it intentional as a leader to have one-to-ones. Certain things need creativity and a strong sense of purpose, so don’t plan those when you know fewer people will be in the office – be smart about it.”

Work is often seen primarily as a serious pursuit but embracing playfulness can be a strong tool against loneliness in the hybrid world, says Clark. “Playing more games together is crucial, but we don’t do it a lot.” At The Wellness Revolution, she continues, the team play Joy Tennis on calls, a game which involves colleagues battling the question “What brings you joy?” to one another. “We just play that for a couple of minutes and it makes such a difference. I get to find out what brings you joy, other than what you like doing at work. It brings that human connection.”

Data from the aforementioned Silicon Reef study bears this out, with 41% of employees saying that more interaction with employees online socially would most help to improve the remote and hybrid-working experience. Around a third (32%) also said that better ways to share work and get feedback would also help. Clark agrees with this and says a culture of celebrating each other’s good work is crucial.

“There is a lot of pressure to work and our jobs are quite hard,” she says. “So the more we can value and recognise each other, the more that supports us in not feeling as lonely or disconnected because, organically, it creates a culture of sharing.”

“Look at this as an opportunity for a new world of work, where we can enhance performance and connection. It’s time to get creative,” recommends Velzeboer. ●



Hiring and paying global teams – without hassle

Technology can help companies hire, manage and pay teams internationally without worrying about compliance or payment issues, according to Lano CEO Aurel Albrecht

As companies face an ongoing struggle to find talent, many are casting their nets wider and searching for candidates overseas. This is a trend that has accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic amid the growing acceptance of remote working.

“We’ve been thrown into the year 2030 from a mindset perspective,” says Aurel Albrecht, founder and CEO of Lano, a global hiring and payments platform. “Before, when speaking to business leaders from different industries, the overall attitude towards remote work was dismissive. But Covid forced them to adapt and we all learned that remote working can work.”

Companies are also increasingly global in their focus. Digital and tech businesses, for instance, are often global from day one, which is driving businesses to frequently seek employees from outside their domestic markets.

“You are not limited to finding the talent in your area anymore, you can really look for talent anywhere,” adds Albrecht.

Once companies have found the right talent, the next challenge is how to employ them. That covers everything from hiring them as a contractor, setting up a new entity to hire them full-time, or engaging an employer of record, all of which have different legal implications.

“Hiring employees abroad brings a lot of challenges. There’s a maze of different topics around compliance, but then you also have to think about how you are going to pay their salaries,” says Albrecht.

That can be a challenge given that traditional banks typically charge high fees for transferring money across borders. Take an example where an employee is paid £2,000 a month. If the bank charges 5% in foreign

exchange (FX) fees, that means companies would be paying an additional £100 every month.

“This can be expensive, especially once you start to scale. If you have a lot of overseas staff, the size of FX fees can be significant,” Albrecht says.

Lano is seeking to solve these challenges by providing tech that combines an employer-of-record service with an international payments platform.

“We’ve built the world’s largest compliance network that covers 160-plus countries, allowing any business to hire any talent anywhere, whether it is a freelancer or a full-time employee,” says Albrecht. “The second thing we have tried to do is improve the entire payroll system, so we work closely with a range of different payment providers that allow businesses to transfer money around the globe much faster and at a much lower cost.”

“The future of work is default global

It is not just businesses that benefit. This also unlocks the possibility for workers to do their job from anywhere, supporting the growing trend of remote workers and enabling people to live and work with more flexibility.

Companies starting to scale with employees in different locations can also manage and run payroll in multiple countries and currencies, giving users more options and convenience than traditional bank accounts.

“If you are expanding as a company, you can have employees anywhere in the world that get paid in local currencies. Plus, as a user, they get to choose between continuing to work with your payroll providers or gaining access to our global network of local experts,” adds Albrecht.

For companies that have already expanded their global footprints, Lano’s technology can also enable them to consolidate their existing payroll providers. This allows HR and finance teams to centralise, standardise and automate their global payroll data and workflows, something that can be quite cumbersome when considering the siloed processes different payroll providers follow.

This also allows companies to have instant access to payroll reporting and analytics to enable better workforce planning and forecasting, an otherwise time consuming and manual process.

“You can easily monitor gender pay gaps or compare payroll costs in country X versus country Y, so it really gives companies more visibility into everything payroll related,” mentions Albrecht.

The technology also enables companies to test the operating environment in different markets first by hiring staff without setting up an official entity. Once a company is ready to formally establish itself in a new market, it can then seamlessly migrate to Lano’s payroll service.

“We help companies with compliance and payments at every step along their expansion journey,” Albrecht says.

For more information please visit [lano.io](#)





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