

Power shifts towards applicants in the pursuit for the best talent

The job market is recovering post-Covid with the number of employees on payroll now well exceeding pre-pandemic numbers.

Conversely, acute skills shortages have pushed vacancies to record levels with the number of unfilled roles in the UK currently sitting above 1.1 million.

Considering this mixed picture, we are asking our contributors this month: 'Is the skills issue improving or worsening?'



DAVID GISBORNE
WAVENET

"The IT and telecoms industry, by its very nature, is fast-moving. New technologies are quick to appear and advancing the skills of employees is key to keeping ahead of the exponential technology curve. We focus on preventing a skill gap before one appears. Wavenet is committed to providing opportunities for the next generation whilst also ensuring that we do not experience a gap in skills for our longer-term colleagues. We have invested heavily in a new graduate programme that launched in 2021 and have also taken on apprenticeships for many years. By investing in internal training at all levels, but particularly at a grassroots level, we can ensure that skills are not only present but are nurtured and grow over time. This way, as people become more experienced in their roles, they are encouraged to pass this knowledge on to others."



JEFF MAY
KONTEL

"The jobs market is becoming much more competitive for employers with record numbers of unfilled vacancies due to a combination of factors. Brexit has had an impact in certain sectors but equally the pandemic has made a lot of people re-evaluate their work-life balance. Some have made lifestyle choices of retiring earlier or changing careers for example. There's now a supply and demand market imbalance, with individuals in a much stronger position to demand higher salaries. This means the whole recruitment process can take longer with many companies initially unwilling to pay more than their original expectations. But to attract the best talent they are finding they might now have to. Recruitment and retention are two of the biggest challenges facing the channel. Long-term success rests on nurturing the next generation of leaders and skills. It's important to strike the right balance between experience and youth."



DUNCAN WARD
ENREACH

"We need action from businesses and the government now more than ever to reskill and upskill prospective workers, as the growing skills gap in the workforce has the potential to slow the UK's economic recovery post Covid-19. Most of a company's investment in its people is in rewards, but it's important for employers to train employees in tech and digital to reduce the skills gap which will contribute more value to the company. Of course, employment incentives are successful, and since 2020 a hybrid approach seems to be deemed as one of the most important in recruiting staff. However, we know from a large body of research on organisational behaviour that most people want some level of choice and voice in what they do at work, and individual personal development which leads to greater commitment and increased performance. As leaders, we will continue to take opportunities for training and talent innovation by investing in our team."



DAVE REYNOLDS
XELION

"There are a variety of roles in the ICT channel and the skills set for sales is very different from IT support or development. The differing roles require different remuneration packages and incentives. Salespeople expect to be rewarded on a results basis so it's best to offer a reasonable basic package with big rewards for exceeding on target earning goals. Tech staff do not respond well to results based remuneration packages and need to feel valued in different ways to remain motivated. An important part of senior management responsibility is to provide the appropriate rewards package for everyone. We don't see the workforce becoming significantly younger. Experience is required to become fully effective in most ICT roles. If anything, the move to WFH is encouraging more older people to stay in the ICT employment market. We have had no recruitment issues and it has not inhibited our growth, which has been spectacular in recent years."



CHERIE HOWLETT
JOLA

"There is more competition for the very best people in our industry and companies that have already set their sights high will fare better. This requires a well thought-out and meticulous recruitment process. The company must be 90% sure they have the right person and new candidates must feel they have earned their position and that they will be joining a high performing team that is enjoyable to work in. At Jola we pay market rate salaries, benchmarked regularly by an independent agency. To reward overachievement and loyalty we pay meaningful annual bonuses to all staff against agreed KPIs and every member of staff is invited to share in the increased value of Jola through an EMI share option scheme. We endeavour to keep our team as healthy and motivated as possible with a comprehensive Private Health Plan, Pension, Perkbox, Life Insurance, flexible working practices and generous holidays."



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LEE SUTCH
VERASTAR

"The skills are out there if you understand what candidates want from a role. If you can offer them a bigger picture and a vision for their role within the business, showing them that in the long term they'll have the opportunity to learn and develop and progress, then you're on the right track.

The package and commission opportunities will always be the bread and butter, and if you aren't competitive, you'll soon find yourself losing good people. But more and more we see candidates looking for roles where they feel they can make a difference and see the purpose of what they're doing. Our mission is to make a difference for small business owners, so that gives them a sense of purpose. We've been looking for account manager roles in recent times and see skill requirements shifting away from the harder selling skills towards softer skills and relationship building."



AYSHEA ROBERTSON
ZEN

"Some of our roles at Zen require a certain skillset and these are more challenging to fill. If a candidate is the right fit culturally however, a lack of industry experience should not be overlooked as they can bring new perspectives. Having a solid D&I strategy and being flexible are essential in retaining and recruiting staff. We've evolved the wording of our recruitment ads, for example, to appeal to a wider audience that may not have thought of a career in tech. Employees are becoming more circumspect – 'why should I work for you if you don't let me share in the success of the business, if you're not paying me appropriately, appreciating me, recognising me?'. Those channel partners that are ready to embrace these changes with a focus on people as a top priority, will find they have an engaged workforce and that will be an essential driver of success."



KATIE GIBSON
FOCUS GROUP

"We are seeing fewer employees moving into vertical jobs as significant levels of uncertainty have led to people being risk averse. Length of service and reputation within their current company provides security against a redundancy wave. We're experiencing recruitment issues in technology as a result. Our industry requires specific skills set, so competition is high for candidates with the right expertise. Salaries are increasing in a bid to secure those vital skills. On a more positive note, we're witnessing more interest in the technology sector from younger generations and females in particular. As such, the level of available graduates and apprentices is a focus for the future. Flexibility is key. Candidates are shunning the traditional 9-5 structure and looking for work-life balance and autonomy. Social media is also more important than ever; building a positive brand presence to demonstrate to potential employees that you are the company for them."



OLLIE BENN
NEOCI

"The demand for the right talent has never been higher, but there is not a shortage of skills or experience, the talent exists, it's just more expensive. Employers have previously been used to a candidate rich market. It was easier to attract candidates that exactly match their job requirement. This is no longer the case. Businesses that made redundancies in 2020 do not want to let go of the staff they've retained and are prepared to fight for them. Employers have inadvertently created a candidate driven market. Some are prepared to offer generous salaries to entice the talent they need. Most don't have deep enough pockets to compete, but their expectations remain the same.

Candidates with the right skills are now able to almost dictate their worth, causing many a bidding war. There isn't a shortage of talent, but more a shortage of willingness to pay for it."



CRISSI WILLIAMS
ITP

"We all know that the skills gap is old news in our industry. Over the past 12 months we've had to re-think the way we recruit. Lack of industry experience amongst candidates is certainly an issue, but we've found that hiring based on attitude is becoming more important. Certainly, many apprentices we've recruited throughout the pandemic have had no industry experience at all. However, we're seeing high retention rates among this cohort. Ultimately, it's a candidate's market and all employers will need to adapt. They need to look at transferrable skills as opposed to industry experience and consider how they will stay head of the competition when it comes to attracting their future workforce."



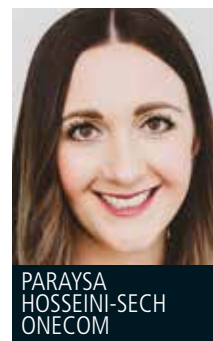
IOAN MCRAE
MAINTel

"Recruitment issues are not due to lack of skills in the main but are driven by a lack of candidate availability due to multiple similar roles on the market currently. It's a very competitive market right now! The people we are bringing in are generally of high quality, they're just harder to find and in greater demand. Our workforces are also becoming younger, especially as we recruit people to work on new technologies that we are bringing to market. Aside from competitive salaries, car allowances and variable commission or bonuses, then flexible working, private medical insurance and a decent pension scheme are successful in retaining and recruiting staff. PMI has become more important and seen a significant rise in candidate expectation since Covid, as has the ability to work from home. A great culture and social events are also key!"



LAUREN MCMANUS
GAMMA

"Recruiting following the pandemic was always going to be a grey area. Nobody knew how quickly businesses would recover, or how soon positions could be filled. On top of that, there has been a power shift in favour of the job seeker. The 'Great Resignation' phenomenon has seen employees reconsidering their options and leaving roles for greener pastures. Pastures that embed wellbeing and benefits into their culture and at the forefront of their strategies. Applicants now demand the option for hybrid working – offering them flexibility and a better work/life balance – and why shouldn't they? Flexible working is fast becoming the job seeker's prerequisite. The onus is on us as businesses to fulfil these needs and consider our workforces a priority. That's certainly our focus at Gamma. Catering to these very achievable needs is producing happier, loyal, and more efficient staff and in turn supporting growth."



PARAYSA
HOSSEINI-SECH
ONECOM

"Vacancies are at an all-time high. While there's plenty of opportunity, there are candidate shortages. And as demand for digital skillsets is increasing, employers are reevaluating. By recruiting across a range of ages, backgrounds and nationalities, employers benefit from fresh skills and a breadth of perspectives. Valuing diversity isn't just the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do. Developing existing talent can deliver new skills. Help people to grow in their role and provide the training and support they need. Employers need to provide value to attract the best talent. Packages should address expectations around work life balance, flexible working and holiday allowances. Wellbeing is topical too, from both a physical and mental health perspective. Our advice to address the skills gap is to be agile; if the past two years have demonstrated anything, it's the importance of being prepared to adapt to change."

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