



**THE FUTURE OF WORK IN UK & IRELAND**  
FUTUREPROOFING CAREERS AND WORKFORCES

A Robert Walters Group Company

ROBERT WALTERS

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## Introduction

Workforces around the world have experienced more change in the past few months than they have in the past few years. The Covid-19 pandemic led to the world's largest ever workplace experiment as companies were forced to quickly mobilise their workforces from office-based working to home working with very little warning or preparation.

Employees who had never previously worked from home before began to experience the impacts on their health, family relationships and mental wellbeing. Managers discovered that their teams could remain productive and connected while working remotely. But, what have we learned and how might this shape the future of work? And which of the perceived positives of flexible working should Hiring Managers approach with caution when planning their workforces of the future?

Robert Walters surveyed more than 5,000 professionals worldwide and found 85% expect more flexibility to work from home in future. However, in a follow up survey, 60% of the more than 2,000 business leaders surveyed said concerns about employee productivity would prevent their organisation from allowing more employees to work from home.

Clearly, a balance will need to be struck. Employers and employees need to reconcile their future working preferences by reflecting on the past few months. They can then reinvent their working arrangements to match the long-term future needs of their organisations, people and customers. This rare opportunity should not be wasted.



# KEY STATISTICS: UK & IRELAND



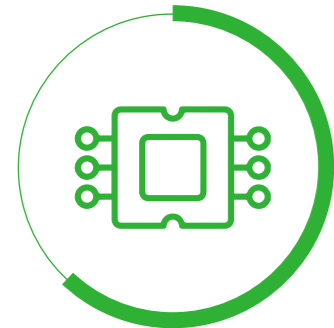
**75%**

of employees think their organisation's leaders need to be more empathetic to work-life balance and what it means for different employees



**53%**

of organisations say widespread remote working has prompted them to reduce travel budgets and plan a future with more virtual meetings



**62%**

of organisations found tech hardware the biggest challenge when relocating staff



**91%**

of employees would like to work from home more often (at least once a week)



**41%**

of organisations are considering downsizing office space



**53%**

of employees think their organisation's leaders need a better understanding of mental health and wellbeing

Source: Robert Walters Survey 2020

# The new era of flexibility

**While 2020 has brought widespread uncertainty for economies across the globe, one thing appears certain: the world of work will never be the same again.**

The question for leaders is: Should these flexible ways of working become permanent? The answer is yes for some roles – but not all roles are created equal.

Many employers are already revisiting the assumption that workforces must be concentrated in towering city headquarters. Our survey found 37% of leaders are considering downsizing their office space in future, with the obvious benefit of reducing overheads while introducing more remote working.

In future, many organisations will establish a **hub and spoke business model** for staff to ‘touchdown’ closer to where they live. This challenges the more traditional linear, point-to-point business model and could see a dramatic shift in urban work environments. CBD office buildings may be converted into residential living spaces, and city centres may rely more heavily on entertainment to attract consumers who are increasingly embracing e-commerce instead of bricks and mortar retail.

However, some organisations will be more reluctant than others. Many leaders fear that if swathes of employees permanently work remotely, organisational culture will suffer in the long term.



## 88%

of professionals said not having to commute made working from home a positive mental health experience

Others say their ‘work from home experiments’ in 2020 caused logistical difficulties, delays and dips in quality. Some leaders feel that remote working removes the ‘water cooler moments’ and serendipitous encounters where colleagues informally mix and share ideas and information.



“Arguably employers we are too early in this remote working experiment to be able to make a clear cut & final decision on working practices. More flexibility should be a given – as safety remains a concern - after that each industry and business really needs to weigh-up what works best for their long-term practices and commercial viability.”

**Habiba Khatoon, Director**

📍 UK, Midlands - Robert Walters Group

## The new era of flexibility

### Flexible working requires flexible strategy

No two organisations are the same. To thrive in the new era of work, organisations will need to tailor individual working arrangements to their strategy and their customers.

Certain roles lend themselves more naturally to flexible working. Robert Walters research suggests designers and tech professionals see more potential in permanent working from home than HR professionals and administrative staff. And it's not just specific roles which need to be considered in a flexible strategy, the stage of the employee in their career life cycle should also not be overlooked. For example the career development of younger professionals often suffers without daily face-to-face contact with more experienced colleagues.



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When assessing the suitability of a role for flexible and/or remote working, employers should ask:

- Do the responsibilities require their physical presence in the office?
- Which remote technology would be required?
- Could this expose the organisation to unnecessary data security risk?
- How important is face-to-face interaction for this role?
- Can organisational culture be sustained?

This assessment can be boosted by tools such as The Role Mapper (developed by The [Brightworks Consultancy](#)) which uses algorithms to assess flexible working patterns for every role in an organisation.

<sup>1</sup> The IWG Global Workspace Survey, International Workplace Group, 2019



“Whilst we have seen some success with remote working – it is not the golden ticket solution to the future of work. There are a number of factors at play including working parents, type of role, and technology infrastructure required.

It won't be long before we see firms undertake external audits & surveys – in the same way they do around employee satisfaction and diversity & inclusion – to help better inform working practices.”

**Suzanne Feeney - Director**

📍 Ireland - Robert Walters Group

# Tomorrow's most in-demand skills

The global pandemic has prompted employers to look at the capabilities their workforces will require in the years ahead.

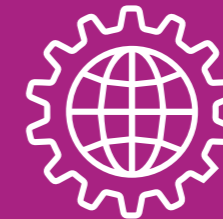
At Roberts Walters, we're seeing first-hand how employers' needs are changing worldwide. Across the 30+ countries in which we operate, there is increasing demand for an emerging set of professional qualities and skills.

## Skills in highest demand

During (and long after) the pandemic, the Fourth Industrial Revolution will deliver rapid technology disruption across markets – and organisations need people who can enable and maximise the value of this. While artificial intelligence (AI) will take care of more administrative and transactional tasks, humans will be ultimately in control.

People's critical thinking abilities will remain in high demand, which is why, in a global Robert Walters survey, hiring managers said the five most in-demand soft skills for the future are:

- 1 Communication**  
Organisations will need people who can not only see the commercial potential of technology, but also translate their vision in ways that inspire colleagues.
- 2 Business intelligence**  
Data will be the fuel that drives new products, services and innovations. Professionals who can convert data into business intelligence will be highly sought after.
- 3 Management/leadership**  
Markets will be fast moving, and organisations need leaders who can steer and motivate teams to deliver continuous change.
- 4 Collaboration**  
Many organisations will have increasingly remote workforces, requiring people who can collaborate and foster culture in virtual teams.
- 5 Crisis management**  
In a highly volatile marketplace, employers will seek professionals who can proactively mitigate risk, manage cyber security and assist organisations during challenging times.



Read more of the Fourth Industrial Revolution here.

## Tomorrow's most in-demand skills

### Emerging skills

Coupled with these soft skills, Hiring Managers should look to identify those professionals who demonstrate that they are ready to adapt, as the digitisation of the workforce continues to evolve. Those professionals who have been exposed to digital transformation and have the digital skills to play their part as technologies continue to develop and influence their role/industry will be in high demand.



# 133m

A 2018 World Economic Forum report found that **75 million** jobs may be lost to automation by 2022, but a further **133 million** new roles could be created.

### Upskilling your workforce

In January, the World Economic Forum warned: “The world is facing a reskilling emergency. We need to reskill more than one billion people by 2030.”<sup>2</sup> Employers will need a comprehensive strategy to ensure their workforce has the necessary skills for the longer term.

According to Deloitte, a “learning transformation” is required that “focuses on the connection between continuous re/up/outskilling, on the one hand, and actual work, on the other: They are two sides of the same coin.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Superlearning: Reskilling, upskilling and outskilling for a futureproof workforce, Deloitte, 2020



“The old adage ‘what gets measured gets managed’ doesn’t just apply to the technical skills that employees need to learn – it also applies to intrinsic qualities like resilience, communication and collaboration. Managers should highlight these qualities in their people’s performance development plans and agree the steps that individuals will take to practise and hone the qualities.”

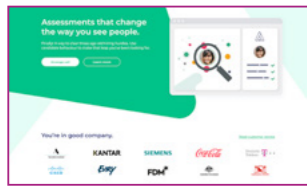
**Sam Walters, Director of Professional Services**

📍 UK London - Robert Walters Group

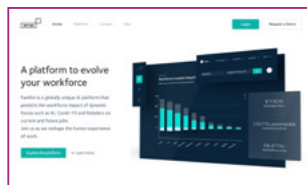
## Tomorrow's most in-demand skills

### Identifying skills gaps with assessment tech

Tools already exist for employers to identify current and future skills gaps specific to their industry and organisation.



**Arctic Shores** is a game-based assessment vendor that helps leaders understand the skills and traits of their employees and create a 'fingerprint of success' - what 'good' will look like for the organisation in future.



**Faethm** is an Australian start-up which uses an AI analytics SaaS platform to extrapolate and predict the workforce impact of dynamic forces such as AI, Covid-19 and robotics on future jobs.

Tools like these can help leaders decide where to redeploy talent, hire new recruits and upskill their current workforce.

It's important for employers to share their future skills strategy with their workforce. This provides the platform for career development conversations to find the balance between skill gaps and people's appetite and aptitude to fill these. Such discussions should include technical skills, as well as soft skills.



**3/4** of CEOs are concerned about whether they will have the talent they need for the future.



Only **18%** of CEOs have made significant progress in establishing upskilling programs



**1/10** leaders have made no progress on upskilling teams at all



**77%** of employees are willing to upskill

\* Global survey of CEOs by PwC. <sup>3</sup> PwC's 23rd Global CEO Survey: Navigating the rising tide of uncertainty, PwC, 2020





# Leading in the new era of work

During the pandemic, leaders have had a crash course in leading remote and flexible teams. This experience has been excellent practice for managing the workforce of the future, but leaders still have work to do.

In our e-book 'Redefining the future business leader', you can read interviews with eight key business leaders across the world from a range of different industries, to hear their experience and valuable lessons learnt whilst steering their companies through the pandemic and towards the 'new normal'. Four key leadership traits emerged in order to successfully lead businesses, teams, employees and business partners into a new, uncertain future:



## 62%

of employees feel leaders require better understanding of technology that enables remote working

### 1. Make swift, effective decisions

Business leaders will need to leverage data in their decision-making process when managing remote workforces. They should be transparent when communicating decisions as well as trusting and delegating decision making to empower and develop their teams.

### 2. Engage and build trust

For effective virtual collaborations business leaders need to cultivate strong relationships with their teams and stakeholders whether that be by listening, being open to feedback, storytelling or creatively engaging.

### 3. Balancing wellbeing and productivity

Employee wellbeing is paramount for leaders balancing flexible working environments with business objectives. Check in with your employees, treat everyone's circumstances as unique and adjust expectations.

### 4. Embrace change and encourage innovation

To remain competitive in the long-term, business leaders will need to embrace and invest in technology that facilitates employee collaboration. This will streamline remote working and ensures that company culture is sustained.



Leaders could show more empathy towards their people's work-life balance **(75%)**



Leaders should focus more on outcomes and less on time spent **(68%)**



## Leading in the new era of work

### Embedding empathy-first leadership strategy

Global economic volatility, coupled with rapid technology growth, will require leaders to support people in a future filled with extraordinary change.

During the pandemic, most leaders put measures in place to support the [mental health of their employees](#). For the longer term, leaders must ensure they develop (and widely communicate) comprehensive strategies for a mentally healthy workforce, including highlighting available guidance and resources for employees.

In tomorrow's dynamic marketplace, leaders must also consciously maintain their own mental health. Rather than 'putting on a brave face', top managers will role model positive day-to-day behaviours and share their own approach to mental wellness. Where they feel comfortable, leaders will speak about their own mental health challenges, setting a strong tone for openness and reducing stigma.

“

For business leaders, I think the ability to empathise with everyone's unique situations, the flexibility to allow them to integrate their work and personal lives, and the ability to communicate in a genuine, transparent manner over a screen will be key in helping employees feel connected, engaged, supported and motivated.

**John Ashley, CFO at Nestlé**

”

“



“You need to look after yourself to look after others, that oxygen mask approach. Consider developing a suite of tools for leaders, so that leaders are clear on what it means for them and their people - particularly empathy and wellbeing with a focus on mental health.”

**Louise Campbell - Managing Director**

📍 Ireland - Robert Walters Group

# Curating a workforce for the future

In the future, leaders will require a workforce strategy that enables people to rapidly learn and adapt to market demands. Employers need the agility to curate a workforce to suit fast-changing circumstances.

## Long-term hiring vision

The biggest global economic downturn in decades will have a lasting impact on international markets. Globally, we will face higher levels of unemployment and underemployment for years to come and technology disruption will continue at pace.

 **30%**

Upskilling programs lead to CEOs reporting stronger returns across the board:

Improving productivity (**30%**),

Accelerating digital transformation (**30%**)

Improving talent acquisition and retention (**28%**).<sup>7</sup>

With economic volatility becoming the norm, organisations will experience peaks and troughs in demand for talent – hiring managers will need to be agile enough to respond. Their task will be to plan, build and curate sensitively balanced workforces of:

- Permanent employees
- Contractors
- Gig-workers
- Statement-of-work-vendors
- Freelancers

In doing so hiring managers will be able to create sustainable resourcing solutions for their organisations which support business continuity and help to mitigate increasing costs. For example, if an organisation has identified a bespoke digital transformation project prompted by the acceleration of their workforces being remote, they could seek a specialist contractor for a specific term to assess and deliver the changes required to achieve effective outcomes.



“The world continues to change rapidly and often in an unpredictable way. As a result, the diversity of employees, their backgrounds, experiences, talents, knowledge, creativity, and the appreciation of all their individual differences are critical in developing a capable agile workforce.”

**Lucy Bisset - Director**

📍 UK, North West - Robert Walters Group

## Curating a workforce for the future

### Adaptive hiring

The higher prevalence of flexible working presents long-term opportunities for hiring managers to be agile. If particular roles don't need to be based in an office then diverse talent can be attracted from anywhere – locally, nationally or even overseas. Increasingly family-friendly working arrangements should boost employers' ability to hire, retain and promote more working parents.

On the flipside, the offer of flexible working will no longer give hiring managers the edge when competing for talent in the marketplace. Flexible arrangements will be commonplace for certain types of roles. Organisations must seek new ways to make their employer value propositions stand out from the crowd.

### Diversity remains vital

Now more than ever, employers need to keep their focus on creating and maintaining layers of diversity throughout their workforce. Diversity helps sustain critical thinking, creativity, innovation and problem solving – all essential qualities during market disruption. It also forms a powerful part of an organisation's brand and employer value proposition.

<sup>2</sup> *We need a global reskilling revolution – here's why*, World Economic Forum, January 2020

<sup>3</sup> *PwC's 23rd Global CEO Survey: Navigating the rising tide of uncertainty*, PwC, 2020

<sup>4</sup> *Upskilling hopes and fears survey*, PwC, 2019

<sup>5</sup> *Superlearning: Reskilling, upskilling and outskilling for a futureproof workforce*, Deloitte, 2020

<sup>6</sup> *PwC's 23rd Global CEO Survey: Navigating the rising tide of uncertainty*, PwC, 2020.



“In the future, it is likely employees will be working in more flexible work situations, from home or shared offsite locations. Yet, on the job learning will remain critical. To do this, managers need to be proactively utilising technology to engage & empower their employees to learn.”

**Janine Blacksley - Director**

📍 UK - Robert Walters Group



“If you’re seeking hard-to-find skillsets – where demand exceeds supply – your hiring process needs to be swift and seamless. Emerging technologies can expedite recruitment, allowing you to secure talent ahead of your competitors. Our tools have helped employers secure the best talent while saving them time and money in the process.”

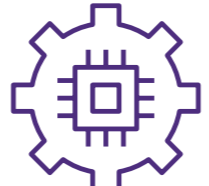
**Chris Poole, Managing Director**  
📍 UK Regions - Robert Walters Group



# Preparing your organisation for the future



No two organisations are the same. In future, flexible working arrangements will be increasingly tailored to individual organisations and individual roles. Technology will help make this process more accurate and efficient.



The Fourth Industrial Revolution will stimulate demand for uniquely human skills including management/leadership, communication, collaboration, business intelligence and crisis management.



Organisations need a clear vision of the skills they will need in the future. They can take proactive steps today to ensure their workforce will have those skills tomorrow.



Economic volatility and technology change will continue in the long term. To support their people through this, leaders must show empathy and prioritise the mental wellness of themselves and their people, as well enabling human connection and communicating consistently.



The economic aftershock of the global pandemic will have long lasting effects for employers. Demand for talent will fluctuate and hiring managers will need to be agile enough to curate a blended workforce of permanent, contractor, gig-worker, statement-of-work-vendors and freelancers.

# About the research

In April 2020, Robert Walters surveyed 5,220 professionals across 31 countries worldwide on their experience with regards to working from home during Covid-19 and their expectations for the workplace after the pandemic. Respondents work in accounting & finance (23%), IT & technology (18%), banking & financial services (10%), administration & business support (8%), marketing & advertising (6%), HR (5%), sales (5%), legal, engineering (3%) and other fields (22%). 82% of respondents were working from home at the time of taking the survey.

In research among organisational leaders, conducted in May 2020, Robert Walters surveyed 2,177 C suite professionals, directors, hiring managers, HR managers and business owners on their experiences with regards to business continuity during Covid-19, and their outlook on the near future of work. Respondents work in 31 countries worldwide, in banking & financial services (18%), manufacturing (10%), technology (9%), HR (8%), retail and FMCG (8%), health (4%), services (4%), legal (3%), engineering (3%) and other (33%). 23% of respondents work in multinational corporations, 21% in large corporations (+1000 employees), 10% in medium-sized companies (500+ employees), 44% in small companies (>500 employees) and 2% in micro-businesses and startups.



# About Robert Walters

Robert Walters is a global, specialist professional recruitment consultancy.

Over the last 35 years the business has grown and so has our ambition. We now operate across 31 countries and employ over 3,700 people. It's a powerful success story built on the strength of our people. Organisations rely on us to find high-quality professionals for a range of specialist roles. Professionals who are looking for a new role, whether it's on a permanent, interim or contract basis, trust us to find them their ideal job.

Our core recruitment disciplines are:

- Accountancy & Finance
- Banking and Financial Services
- Legal
- Supply Chain
- Procurement
- Logistics
- Technology, Projects and Change
- Interim Management
- Tax and Treasury

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