

What will 2022 bring for those in the security sector looking to move roles, develop skills, achieve a pay rise or promotion or recruit others?

Vacancies pre-and post-Pandemic

Prior to November 2019, open vacancies in the security technical installation services were around 5% with most of the shortfall taken up by contracted or labour hire services available across the UK. The number of non-UK passport holders employed in the security sector workforces, both permanent and contractors, was anecdotally up to 20% of some companies' workforce.

During the pandemic, the non-technical service sector grew through the extra requirements met by workers double shifting between their normal day work and additional requirements. With the hospitality sector closed, there was an abundance of front-of-house labour, outwardly motivated, good communication skills and easily trained. Home working increased the need for cyber teams, with more than 50,000 vacancies currently.

The impact of Brexit

Despite the myth that skills shortages are due to Brexit, when we worked with our European workforce to secure those that could apply for settled status by 1st July 2021 across all our areas of technical specialisation, we did not experience many European citizens returning home if they could qualify for UK settlement, as they were invested in the UK through family or employment status. The ONS reported 1.3m Europeans returned to countries of origin and at least 5.5m Europeans remained in the UK.

Security sector – skills required

The Government's stated aim of making the UK a high-wage, high-output economy sits well with the needs of the security sector, where technical skills are required.

Some parts of the UK economy have reallocated time, reduced customer interaction and increased lead times for projects, but for the security sector this is not possible. Front-of-house services are under duress through staff shortages caused through self-isolation and a reluctance by some to be vaccinated. Many clients would consider only deploying double-jabbed employees, but are afraid to implement if their non-vaccinated workforce is 15%, which would cause widespread service failure.

Providers of door supervisors speak of a labour shortage. This is mainly due to those who were previously employed in a part-time job – by nature of the requirements of the job, and with many not protected by their employers through the furlough scheme – having by necessity found other employment which they are reluctant to leave.

Challenging times ahead for security recruitment

Vacancies

Our latest monthly CBI salary will show that over 1 million vacancies were created in the UK in Q4. ONS data figures show continued signs of recovery in the labour market, with employment increasing. Pay-As-You-Earn data shows that the number of payrolled employees increased above the pre-pandemic level. This is partly flattered by changes in employment status from self-employed to employee status, possibly due to IR 35 rule changes.

The number of unemployed people stands at 1.4 million; however, the true extent of labour market slack remains uncertain. With more than 1 million employees returning from furlough this still points to a risk that labour shortages could prove persistent, which, along with wider supply chain disruption, risks impeding the economic recovery.

Increasing your outreach for staff

A post-pandemic outcome is that few workers are seeking to move on from employers that have looked after them, offering hybrid working practices that were never previously envisaged. Prior to January 2020, our surveys showed that 45% of the working population were actively considering changing employment; this has dramatically reduced. Hiring the right skills has become increasingly challenging.

Talent attraction is yesterday's statement – today it's all about Talent Discovery, where recruitment agility is essential to identify niche groups to promote your opportunities. Examples include groups for ethnic minorities, gender-based, Gen Z tech, networks for specific age generations and platforms for LGBTQ. The real takeaway is that this form of attraction route brings balance to diversity in the workforce. Companies will have to facilitate training for roles that are difficult to recruit to establish go-to talent pools.

Incorporating Diversity and Inclusion values within this widens the net further and makes a strong statement that the organisation is taking POSITIVE ACTION (NOT positive discrimination) to address the imbalance. For the first time, we are managing a cross-generational workforce as many choose to remain in the workforce post-retirement age. You may be attracting Millennials who are 'tech savvy' but the leap in tech innovations means your Gen Zs who are 'tech native' are probably the most adept, with the skills many seek to attract.

Women are under-represented in most sectors but hybrid working will enable greater participation for working mothers, allowing companies to upskill a growing and perhaps more erudite worker group, who traditionally are less likely to apply for a job unless they meet close to 100% of the criteria.

Wage inflation

At midway 2021 we predicted increases of up to 5% for skilled labour, defining that skill being the most relevant criterion. In security technology, an explosion in skills demands from installers and their clients, who have decided that they want and can mentor skills development better in house, has pushed the difference in salaries up to 50%.

Security, risk and resilience professionals' response has been mainly positive with third of applicants reporting to have increased their total compensation above nominal salary awards. This is a global predicament; having surveyed 45 countries in 12 months, we find there is not one region immune from skills inflation in the near future.

Peter French

Managing Director, SSR Personnel

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