



UK skills report

Are employers helping their employees acquire the skills they need to be successful in their role?

The short answer? No.

The long answer? We surveyed 1,000 professionals from across the UK to discover that employees are feeling left behind. COVID-19 destabilised the market and exacerbated a host of issues – women, diverse and marginalised groups left the workforce in droves and existing employees – overnight – had to adapt to continue working in a digital space, heightening concerns of automation taking away jobs.

COVID-19 fundamentally changed the market. A huge portion of talent are now rethinking their future – whether that's doing their job differently, shifting roles, looking at new jobs or reassessing their current roles and responsibilities – COVID-19 awoken skills that employees didn't have or had to use before.

If employers want to win the war on talent, they have to be:

- Hyper-focused on skills development
- Be cognisant of the skills they'll need to stay competitive
- Look at their employees and ensure they're meeting their objectives of future-proofing their roles, and in parallel, provide growth opportunities tied to their skills growth



Why employers need to invest in their people's future skills



97%
of all UK professionals surveyed indicated their desire to upskill in order to stay relevant in their roles.

Incredibly, only 6% of respondents feel their current employer view the upskilling of their employees as a high priority or essential. Whether it's perception or reality, it's clear that employers need to reprioritise their employee skills development agenda, and ensure that employees of all levels of the organisation have access the skills needed to meet the workforce capability of the future.

19% cite that upskilling opportunities are only offered to the Manager level or above. Only 39% of UK professionals cite that upskilling opportunities are offered to all employees

“Businesses are struggling with future-proofing their talent pipeline. It's becoming increasingly apparent how critical the skills gap is widening and – still – how far organisations are from recognising a viable solution can be found within by upskilling and training their own employees”

– Kristen Buckheit, Senior Operations Director, Resource Solutions

It's vital that organisations identify the skills required and the skills transferable within their employees and invest heavily in reskilling and upskilling strategies. There's no better way to meet future talent needs during a global skills shortage by investing in your people – especially when it is – as established above – top-of-mind for nearly all employees.

Employees are feeling left behind

4% of employees feel their employer sees upskilling as a high priority or essential, with 40% citing their employer puts this low on the agenda or simply does not prioritise upskilling within their organisation.

As we navigate the new world of work, employers must recognise that employee priorities have drastically changed. Employers who are able to provide education and training and make it a cornerstone of their recruitment can expect a strengthened and engaged workforce, more accessibility, diversity and inclusion for those who may have faced barriers to higher education.

Has this changed over the past 12 months?

While respondents of our Annual Skills Survey have noted some progress from their employers, nearly half of surveyed professionals haven't seen any change in upskilling opportunities and a smaller segment have even noted a decrease in upskilling opportunities. It's clear that training and development opportunities must be made available to all employees in order to address the skills shortage and improve the bottom line – by increasing employee retention, morale, and attracting new talent who'll see an employer's willingness to invest in their employees.

38% of professionals feel their employers has increased the number of upskilling opportunities for employees, 46% cite no change and 14% have seen a decrease in upskilling opportunities offered by their employer.

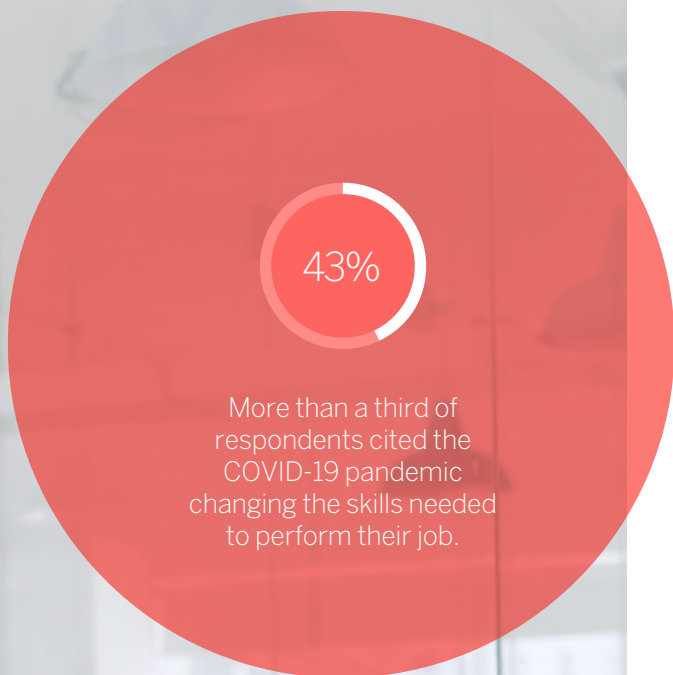
PwC investing in the digital fitness of their workforce

In 2019, PwC announced a \$3 billion investment in job training for all employees. The Digital Fitness app allows PwC employees to assess their digital knowledge and create customised learning plans. The Digital Lab allows employees to collaborate and share innovative solutions.



“When an employee sees a company investing in their development – whether retraining, upskilling or reskilling – it's a clear indicator that their employer investing in their future. In this market, every differentiating factor can be an advantage in the war for talent, so make sure it's communicated.”

- Sally Martin, Global Head of Talent Acquisition, Resource Solutions



Generational differences to upskilling

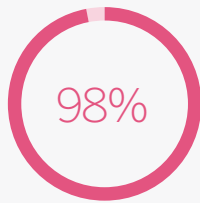
Over the past 12 months there has been a shift in how employees perceive the relevancy of their skills to their role, with more than a third of respondents (34%) citing the COVID-19 pandemic changing the skills needed to perform their job.

But how does generation play a part in the skills development conversation?

Research uncovered a wide generational difference: 43% of Gen Z and 40% of Millennials feel the pandemic has changed the skills needed to perform their job, whilst only 26% of Gen X (and 17% of baby boomers feel this way.

	Yes	No
Gen Z (born between 1997 – 2015)	43%	50%
Millennials (born between 1981 – 1997)	40%	50%
Gen X (born between 1965 – 1980)	26%	66%
Baby Boomers (born between 1946 – 1964)	17%	77%

Ambitious Gen Z and Millennial professionals want to future-proof their careers



The generation most willing to upskill are Millennials, with 98% wanting to learn new skills.

More than a third of Gen Z and Millennials cite career progression as their main motivation for upskilling (33%). Millennials currently occupy the midweight-to-senior roles and are well-positioned to grow in their roles as they advance their careers, whilst Gen Z are just beginning to enter the early stages of their career.

What skills are important?

When asked what types of skills should take priority in an upskilling programme, Gen X (41%) and Baby Boomers (47%) favour digital skills over all others. As workplaces becoming more reliant on technology and automation, Baby Boomers and Gen X'ers may find it difficult to continue in their current roles – hence the desire to sharpen their digital skill sets.

On the other side, Gen Z (25%) and Millennials (22%) cite interpersonal skills, like persuasion and negotiation as key skills they'd like to develop. Leadership qualities – soft skills like empathy, emotional intelligence, and communication are key traits to acquire and foster in order to move into managerial roles that'll be available to them in the near future.

Accenture's Connect Learning Platform

Accenture has invested nearly \$1 billion in 2021 on millions of hours of training to reskill its workforce. Central to the initiative is the company's Connected Learning Platform which is a blend of classroom and digital learning opportunities with content from internal and external subject matter experts.

“Bar none, creating an accessible, multi-generational learning environment will allow businesses to outpace their competitors. However, it's important to understand your employee groups – a one-size-fits-all approach won't provide the same outcomes as an upskilling programme that recognises the nuances between them”

Kirsty Adams, Chief People & Culture Officer, Resource Solutions

AT&T investing in future skills

Telecom giant AT&T found that only half of its employees had the STEM skills the company would require of its workers in the future. It's a billion-dollar, multi-year investment focusing on collaborations with online education platforms to offer employees personalised online learning opportunities in a career portal that helps employees identify new skills.

Employers need to break down barriers to upskill will win the war on talent

42% Lack of time outside of work is preventing people from learning new skills, with 42% of professionals citing this as the biggest challenge when learning new skills, despite wanting to do so.

Generationally, there are more barriers to upskilling for younger generations than older ones. 32% of Baby Boomers cite that nothing is preventing them from learning a new skill, compared to just 16% of Millennials. Moreover, Millennials cite that the biggest barriers to upskilling are lack of time outside of work (44%), current workload (38%) and lack of opportunities provided by employer (32%).

Employers need to offer more accommodations to facilitate the uptake of upskilling programmes or risk losing their employees to other companies that do. Consider providing flexible working arrangements, giving employees the time to attend classes and training during their work hours, rebalancing an employee's workload if they're enrolled in a programme, or build it into an employees' succession plan by making upskilling a part of an employees' milestone in order to be considered for a promotion.

“Employers must understand that people are generally busy. It's hard for anyone to find the motivation to take a class – be it online or in-person – especially after a long day's work. Offer flexible and convenient accommodations, and empower your managers to prioritise skills and training rather than waiting for the appraisal period.”

Kirsty Adams, Chief People & Culture Officer

Employees are worried about being replaced by automation

COVID-19 sped up the digital agenda, along with economic uncertainty, which drove greater automation concerns among employees. More than half of professionals surveyed indicated their concern of automation replacing all or parts of their current job.

Concerns about automation seem to grow with seniority. 40% of graduate/early careers respondents are concerned about automation, however this rises to 48% for Mid-Managers, 58% for Senior Managers and 63% for Directors and C-suite respectively.

Employees in the industries most concerned about automation:



Banking



Media



Technology

To quell concerns amongst employees, businesses should be publicising their automation technology plans and the place more emphasis on the resulting upskilling and retention efforts to train employees to manage automation. It's not one or the other – automation requires a counterbalance – and retraining can bring new opportunities for your existing staff.



Case study
Evolving Careers –
Training recruiters
to use Chatbots,
Dot the Bot

A Contractor Care team with one of our financial services clients was being inundated with HR-related questions that limited their time to concentrate on higher-value, revenue-generating tasks. As a solution, we developed and introduced a chatbot and AI virtual assistant, Dot to help provide prompt responses that'd address and automate time-consuming tasks, reduce costs and increase employee productivity. Automation – in this instance – was employed to support employees to be more productive and it allowed their HR-team to acquire new skills operating, training and developing an AI-assistant.

“Employers can alleviate their employees' fears surrounding automation by providing support and upskilling around technologies that will improve their day-to-day roles, expand their skillset and ultimately demonstrate to their people their investment in future proofing their careers.”

Tom Lakin, Director of Innovation, Resource Solutions

What skills do employees want: hard vs. soft skills

With the looming sense of automation replacing jobs and the sudden influx of digital platforms and tools being introduced as a response to COVID-19 – the assumption is that employees would want to upskill and train their hard skills to stay relevant and competitive.

However, respondents still picked more soft skills over the hard skills when given the choice. When selecting from a list of over 40 skillsets professionals would like to develop in the future, the majority selected **management** as their priority, which was followed by **technology use, critical thinking, analytical thinking then creativity**.

When asked what hard skills would be of interest to professionals, analytical and data-centric skills topped the list. In a market where businesses need to make data-led decisions to remain competitive, it's no surprise that IT, data, and digital hard skills remain top-of-mind for employees.

Soft skills are essential attributes and interpersonal skills that help gel a team together. Moreover, they're often key skills that those entering or are in managerial positions need to have in order to lead effectively, collaborate well and problem solve quickly.

Top 5 skills employees want

	Hard skills	Soft skills
1	Project Management	Management
2	Software Development	Technology use
3	Information Security	Critical thinking
4	Data Analysis	Analytical thinking
5	Digital Marketing	Creativity

Most wanted skills by industry


	Technology/Telecommunications Software Development
	Hospitality/Retail Digital Marketing
	Transportation/Supply Chain Technology use
	Engineering/Utilities/Energy Project Management
	Construction/Real Estate Project Management
	FMCG/Consumer Goods Technology Design

	Health Care/Pharmaceutical Management
	Manufacturing Management
	Consulting/Professional Services Technology use
	Media/Communications Critical Thinking
	Banking/Finance Analytical Thinking

Case study

Reskilling during a crisis

At the height of the COVID-19 crisis, one of our healthcare clients needed to recruit and onboard thousands of people to fill various administrative and medical positions in temporary field hospitals, vaccine distribution, customer service and more. To support the recruitment team assigned to the project Resource Solutions upskilled and redeployed a large team back-office staff to support the effort activating furloughed employees to help fill 600,000 shifts and employ 17,500 healthcare professionals. The project was a resounding success – both supporting the fight against COVID-19 as well as marshalling internal resources and meet surge in business on short notice within a tight time frame.



“For companies finding it hard to recruit the skills needed to meet future business goals, start focusing on identifying cross-functional skill-sets, and start reviewing your skills gaps matrix at a more holistic level within your organisation.”

- Duncan Ward, Senior Operations Director, Resource Solutions

Skills solutions

accelerate

BY RESOURCE SOLUTIONS

The rapid digitisation of businesses – more access to data and the analytical tools required to decipher and mine insights – has created a bigger demand for business analysts capable of balancing both the soft and hard skills required. We partnered with InfinityGlobal.io to launch Accelerate, a unique Employed Consultant service and academy programme that identifies and trains diverse and marginalised groups – often undiscovered talent who've may have traditionally been shut out of these opportunities – to develop future-ready talent

rejoin

by Resource Solutions

Resource Solutions launched Rejoin, a return-to-work programme aimed at supporting and encouraging professionals who've had an extended break in their career – such as starting a family, caring for others, recovering from personal sickness or a redundancy – and provide them with a community, training, and a pathway back into the workforce, whilst enabling clients access experienced, high-calibre professionals within an untapped skills pool.



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