

Most UK firms worried about skills shortages, survey shows – as number of job vacancies hits another high

Almost two-thirds of UK firms say they are worried about a shortage of skilled applicants for jobs, new research has shown.

The polling from global learning and education giant comes as the number of vacancies in the UK hit another high in September.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said the number of payrolled workers rose by 207,000 between August and September to a record 29.2m.

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This was 122,000 higher than levels seen before the pandemic struck in February 2020.

The ONS figures showed the rate of unemployment fall further to 4.5% between June and August, down from 4.6% in the quarter to July and the lowest level for a year, the ONS added.

The data also showed another record leap in job vacancies, estimated to be up by nearly 1.2m in September.

Pearson has released the results of a new poll showing what firms want from their applicants. And the company has also carried out a consultation with business that is says shows local leaders and politicians need to have more say on local skills and training provision to help people to re-skill.

The Pearson survey of 2,000 UK business leaders showed 21% of those polled businesses across the UK have lost out on new customers or contracts as a result of hiring challenges.

Some 36% said they had not been able to expand because they could not find enough appropriately skilled people.

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And 62% of those polled were worried about their ability to

find recruits with the right skills for their vacancies.

Pearson commissioned former training and skills Minister Anne Milton to speak to UK employers and educators across the UK about what help is needed to help break the skills deadlock.

In a series of recommendations to be presented to the Government, she concluded:

- Extending training funding to those looking to reskill, not just upskill, will help meet the rapidly changing needs of firms in the region.
- Currently only those without a Level 3 qualification can have access to the funding entitlement to take a Level 3 course – this needs to change so that those with a Level 3 qualification already can also have the opportunity to reskill
- Giving local leaders more say over cash for training will make sure the education and training system works better for employers and jobseekers in regions across the country.
- The post-16 system needs to be more agile to respond to shifting skills and employment patterns. The level 3 reforms could exacerbate this by removing high quality qualifications that are recognised and valued by employers

David Richards, founder, CEO and chairman of Sheffield and Silicon Valley-based data software company WANdisco plc, said: “Every CEO I know says the UK has a significant shortage of tech talent. The frustrating thing is there is no shortage of aptitude – around half of the population has the natural problem-solving abilities we look for in software developers. There is just a shortage of opportunity and this is what we are trying to address.

“The WANdisco Data Academy, launched at The Sheffield College in 2019, provides the BTEC Level 3 National Extended Diploma

in Information Technology for young people aged 16 and above to learn skills relevant to our business needs. Earlier this year, I founded EyUp Skills to teach students aged 18 and above all they need to know to get their first job as a software developer.

“Equipping young people with these skills will help them to enjoy rewarding careers and enable companies to make the most of growth opportunities in the digital economy, which will ultimately help to regenerate communities in South Yorkshire and beyond.”

Jacqui Gladwin, Regional Widening Participation & Vocational Learning Lead, Health Education England: ““In the North West we need qualifications that can prepare people both practically and academically for a career in the health and social care sector.

“The biggest barriers to recruiting the right candidates currently is preparedness, we’re receiving lots of applications, but they lack the appropriate experience.

“I support the report’s calls to make retraining more flexible. Allowing people longer times to study, to allow them to complete the course around their home and work life would help make retraining more attractive.”

Donna Ford-Clarke, Product Director for BTEC, Apprenticeships and Digital Services at Pearson, said:

“Tech and business advances have accelerated as a result of the pandemic. Rather than preparing for the economy of the future in 2030, we have to get ready for it today.

“Enterprising firms across the UK are ready to make the most of global opportunities and take on new staff, we just need to make sure hardworking people have the training options they need to be match fit.

“Giving local leaders the tools and funding to provide the right training, and making it simpler for jobseekers to apply, will see the nation thrive.”

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