

Is the public sector on the brink of a major recruitment crisis?



In association with:



Recruitment & Employment Confederation

Introduction

The REC and the Smith Institute conducted a survey of 64 agencies supplying workers into public sector organisations. The survey sought to highlight the serious and worsening recruitment challenges facing the public sector.

The respondents were agencies that supply into the healthcare, social care and education sectors. A small number supplied workers for local government services.

Key findings

- 85% of agencies supplying into the public sector rated filling vacancies as moderately difficult to very difficult.
- Over half (57%) said it is most difficult to recruit roles with higher pay – i.e. more highly skilled/specialist/experienced roles.
- 4 in 5 agencies who supply into the public sector expect demand for agency staff to increase this year. Only 5% of respondents expect demand to decrease.



85%



57%



4 in 5

Answers to public sector recruitment difficulties depend on longer-term solutions

Most recruitment agencies think longer-term solutions will help public sector organisations overcome candidate shortages and other workforce challenges.

When recruiters were asked 'What is the single most important change that would help ease recruitment difficulties in public services?' the top three answers were:

- ① Train more new entrants
- ② Improve morale in public services
- ③ Improve workforce planning and procurement

Training more new entrants

The UK is suffering from a major skills crisis. Candidate shortages are currently spanning all sectors and regions of the UK. Recruiters responded that the single most important change to ease recruitment difficulties in the public sector would be to train more new entrants. This long-term solution must be combined with a more sensible approach to skilled migration to help public sector organisations source the workers they need right now. The government must also consider whether there are enough routes into jobs in the public sector.

Improving morale in public services

This was chosen as the second most important change. Low morale isn't perhaps surprising, given that the public sector has faced cuts to funding and increased pressure to deliver services more effectively with less resource. The public sector must become more reactive to the changing labour market in order to appeal to the brightest and the best. The public sector must become a more attractive place to work. Although the removal of pay freezes and the addition of more flexible working conditions were not among the top three changes for this survey, it is possible that these would contribute to improving morale and act to entice more UK graduates into the public sector.

Improving workforce planning and procurement

Improving workforce planning and procurement was chosen as the third single most important change to help ease recruitment difficulties in the public sector. Recruitment agencies know that public sector organisations must be able to plan ahead in order to function effectively and safely.

It is most difficult to recruit for vacancies with higher pay grades

Respondents to the survey cited skilled, specialist and experienced roles as the most difficult vacancies to recruit for in the public sector. At a challenging time for the public sector, organisations are struggling to attract the talent they require to help them succeed. Doctors and senior nurses in the health service, senior HR and IT professionals, lawyers and accountants in local government and senior employees in schools and universities – who have gained vast experience, knowledge and expertise in their roles – are leaving their professions before they reach director level.

Conclusions and recommendations

**KEVIN GREEN,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE REC:**

This is a solid illustration from our members of how skills shortages are affecting all kinds of organisations, not just businesses in the private sector. Our members understand that the answer to candidate shortages rests in long-term solutions and is an indication to government that recruitment difficulties in the public sector cannot just be fixed with a sticking plaster.

Government must now focus on making public sector organisations an employer of choice, improving workforce planning and upskilling the UK's future workforce.

**PAUL HACKETT,
DIRECTOR OF THE SMITH INSTITUTE:**

As demand grows for public services we will need more public sector workers, especially those with more skills. This survey highlights the urgent need to invest in the future by supporting and training public service workers. The government must act now to head off a crisis in public sector recruitment. That means investing in training, ending the paybill freeze, and improving working conditions.

The Smith Institute

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Methodology

The survey of 64 public sector recruitment agencies (from healthcare, social care, local government services and education) was conducted between June and September 2015. The survey was carried out online.

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Jobs transform lives, which is why we are building the best recruitment industry in the world. As the professional body for recruitment we're determined to make businesses more successful by helping them secure the people they need. We are absolutely passionate and totally committed in this pursuit for recruiters, employers, and the people they hire.

Find out more about the Recruitment & Employment Confederation at www.rec.uk.com

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