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Employers "bullish" on full-time positions despite economic fallout from COVID

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Employers are keen to retain their full-time staff despite the economic headwinds caused by COVID-19 restrictions, according to a new survey of senior managers from Hudson Recruitment.

The survey found 87% of respondents believe full-time, permanent jobs will still be an important part of their employment mix when the world emerges from pandemic restrictions. A further 41% confirmed that part-time permanent positions will still play an important part in their organisation.

"These results are encouraging as they show that businesses still have confidence about the post-COVID future," says Mark Steyn, CEO and managing director at Hudson.

"They see value in having a stable workforce with the knowledge and experience needed to meet ongoing client demands."

The survey found staffing levels remained relatively consistent despite the COVID-19 crisis.

When asked about the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on their workforces, 61% of respondents said there has been no change in staffing levels while a further 13% said there have been some reduction in hours or some staff have been stood down.

When asked to nominate the roles they would be looking to fill in the near future as business activity increased, 29% nominated IT and analytics. A further 18% highlighted administrative and office support roles while 17% said their need would be for project management staff.

"It is clear that organisations have not bunkered down but are actively planning for the future," says Steyn.

"While some have had to reduce working hours in the short term, they are confident that, as conditions improve once more, they will be shifting back into growth mode."

Of the 15% of respondents who indicated they had been forced to make some staff redundant, the majority (56%) said this was due to changes in budgets and revenue forecasts. A further 32% pointed to changing market conditions as the primary reason that staffing numbers had to be reduced.

The majority (56%) of those surveyed said they were not expecting to have to enforce redundancies once government support such as JobKeeper ends. A further 36% said it was still too early to tell what steps might be required.

For those that had already or were expecting to enforce redundancies, almost two thirds (65%) said they would not consider using a career transition or outplacement service to assist staff in finding new employment. A further 21% said they were either unsure or did not know enough about how such services worked.

"This result is disappointing because career transition services can add significant value for employees when they find themselves unexpectedly having to find a new job," Steyn says.

"As well as assisting staff members, these services can take a significant burden off the HR team at a time when there are widespread changes taking place across an organisation."

Asked what primary challenges they face when seeking to fill job vacancies, 71% said it was finding candidates with the relevant skills for the vacant roles. Finding candidates with the right cultural fit for the team was nominated by 61% of respondents while 37% said it was getting budget approval for a new hire.

Steyn says this result shows that the perennial challenge of skills shortages has not disappeared, and will continue to be a challenge for employers in the months ahead.

"Investing in ongoing staff training and upskilling for existing staff will remain a valuable activity and one that will ensure workforces remain engaged and productive."

He says the survey results painted an encouraging picture of the attitudes of senior managers to retaining staff and expanding workforce numbers where possible.

"It demonstrates that organisations definitely see a light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel, Steyn said. There might still be a way to go but, promisingly, we can expect business activity to rebound."

The survey was based on responses from more than 580 organisations in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and Hong Kong. The organisations polled span a range of sectors including government and defence, banking and finance, information technology, education, and healthcare. Of those who responded, 37% work at organisations with more than 1000 employees.

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