

Two thirds of UK companies no longer allow fully-remote working

2 years ago



Over two thirds (64%) of professional services firms in the UK have stated that as of this year, new job adverts will not feature the option of being ‘fully-remote.’

The decision, according to business leaders, is to encourage professionals to come back into the office – with close to half of hiring managers (42%) stating that they are ‘willing to wait’ for the right applicant who is able to commute into the office.

The findings – from a survey by international recruitment consultancy [Robert Walters](#), of 500 professional services companies in the UK – come amidst an all-time low in the number of fully-remote job adverts posted in the UK.

According to data from LinkedIn, the share of remote positions posted on the job site has plummeted in the last 12 months. In the UK, remote job postings have dipped more than 13% since February last year – higher than Germany, France and the Netherlands.

Gerrit Bouckaert – CEO of [Robert Walters](#) – comments: “Looking back to the jobs market a few years ago and employers were desperate for talent as they tried to navigate the post-pandemic bounce back. Companies were forced to meet applicants’ demands – which included accommodating remote work.

“Fast forward to 2024, and the power dynamic has shifted back in favor of employers – who have introduced a range of changes including true flexibility in hours, hybrid working, office refurbishments, enhanced digital infrastructure, as well as endless soft perks such as free lunches.

“With that, employers want some give and take – and it seems the ‘take’ is fully remote working.”

Return to Office or a Rushed Decision?

According to the survey from Robert Walters, almost a quarter of professional services (23%) firms have stated that they have increased the number of compulsory days in the office in the past 12 months – by at least one additional day.

A further fifth (19%) admit that ‘conversations are ‘on-going’ on whether they will increase in-office time to 4-5 days.

Such a move will mimic the likes of [Boots](#) – who have requested administrative staff back into the office for five days a week this month, and [Santander](#) who announced earlier this week that they intend to formalize a minimum 3-day week office attendance.

Gerrit adds: “What has been interesting to observe is the U-turn from big tech firms – such as [Meta](#) – who have typically led the way on workplace trends including being early adopters of remote working.

“Given it is too early to tell whether this method will result in increased productivity – other organizations should be mindful of jumping on the ‘bandwagon’ of a full return-to-office, without considering the impact this will have to your ability to attract and retain employees.”

Pressure Builds on Management

Robert Walters analysts note the prominence of a ‘top-down approach’ to return-to-office – where managers are being asked to do more days in the office compared to their team.

Recently, [Barclays](#) bank in London announced that it would follow its US-counterparts and push for a 5-day return to office – with a number of VPs reportedly being told to come back to the workplace full-time from 1 Jun this year to help set a precedent.

IBM informed their managers that they must be at the office, or meeting a client, for a minimum of three days a week. If not, they could leave the company.

Gerrit adds: “Whilst I am a complete advocate for management leading from the front, a ‘one size fits all approach’ to working practices does not lend itself well to diversity or inclusion.

“For example, with hybrid (or remote) working, managers who are working parents get to reap the benefits of increased time with family whilst continuing to do their job effectively. Forcing them back into the office could be a significant disruption to their family life – both personally and financially if you consider childcare.”

Tracking your Whereabouts

For large, multi-site organizations the deterrent to increasing more days in the office has been the inability to keep-track of whether policies are being followed – according to the research from Robert Walters.

Interestingly, the survey found that a fifth of company leaders (18%) would not be against linking pay and promotions to workplace attendance.

[Google](#) made a similar move – with a memo revealing it will now track how often employees badge in and

include in-person attendance in employees' performance reviews.

[PwC](#) - one of the world's biggest consulting and accounting firms - announced plans to monitor its employees locations to ensure compliance with a stricter return-to-office policy that requires staff to spend at least three days a week, or 60% of their time, in the office or with clients.

Gerrit concludes: "The desire for companies to push for a return-to-office is born from economic instability and stalling growth. Employers are looking at ways they can improve their productivity and output - one of these being to go back to ways of working when 'times were good.' However, in the increasing age of global-working and digital proficiency employers need to ensure they consider all the options available rather than returning immediately to the past for the answers."