

Only a Fifth of UK Professionals Stick to Core Office Hours

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With cost-saving still top of the agenda, and hiring plans remaining curtailed, new [Robert Walters'](#) data reveals how professionals are working extra hours just to keep up.

The research found that only 20% of professionals now say they adhere to the core hours at work, instead over a third (37%) are starting early or finishing late every day, while 43% report their hours being workload dependent.

The main reasons professionals cited for working beyond their usual office hours were catching up on work or meeting deadlines (56%). A further quarter of them reported working late to communicate with teams in different time zones.

As a general standard, many UK offices operate within the 8:00 am to 6:00 pm window. With a one-hour break for lunch, the average workweek sits at 37.5 hours.

Yet research from [TUC](#) found that in 2024 alone, 3.8 million UK professionals completed £31 billion worth of unpaid overtime. With professionals working an average of 7.2 unpaid hours every week.

Lucy Bisset, Director of Robert Walters North, comments: "Despite rising costs affecting hiring plans, many employers still expect the same productivity and output, putting pressure on existing staff. Our research indicates that many UK workers are working longer hours to meet demands or connect with colleagues in different time zones."

Pressure to be Always-On

Professionals are even continuing to connect with work on holiday. Further Robert Walters' [research](#) found that 51% of UK professionals admit to checking emails whilst on annual leave as a way of reducing the backlog they'll return to.

Microsoft's Work Trend Index recently highlighted the evolving trend of the "[infinite workday](#)". The research showed that 40% of professionals worldwide start checking their emails from 6 a.m to manage busy inboxes. While 29% of professionals log back into their work emails by 10 p.m., and 20% do so on weekends as well. The study also found that the number of meetings held after 8 p.m. has increased by 16% year-on-year.

Lucy advises: "To avoid professionals feeling pressured to clock-in at all hours, response times must be clarified through things like time-zone tagging in correspondence, implementing delayed sends and allocating specific, pre-agreed time slots for international calls."

Employers doing 'More with Less'

Many UK employers' frugal approaches to headcounts is causing the issue to snowball. When Robert Walters asked employers how they were approaching skilled talent shortages, 42% replied with redistributing the work among staff, while 24% stated they were hiring less skilled professionals to help fill the gaps.

Indeed, these shortcuts are clearly being felt by existing staff, with 66% now describing their workload as 'heavy' and 'demanding'.

Lucy reflects: "As AI tools streamline certain job roles, higher costs create less disposable income to increase salaries and sustained global volatility leaves them cautious to compete for and commit to top talent."

Additionally, UK employers are seeking low-cost alternatives such as offshoring certain roles or responsibilities. Earlier this year, [Robert Walters Africa](#) surveyed 500 global business leaders on the topic and found that access to skilled talent (41%) and retained earnings (39%) were some of the top reasons for doing so.

Lucy explains: "New legislation around employment rights, increased tax bills and weaker demand have already driven many UK leaders to scope out talent based in areas like Eastern Europe and South Africa. While resulting in important cost and productivity savings this can disrupt domestic offices, as coordinating communications for teams spread out across different time zones becomes difficult."

Reclaiming the Working Day

When asked about different strategies employers could implement to help staff avoid overworking, 44% of UK workers agreed that they'd like their workplace to trial 'power hours' – allocating specific blocks of time for quiet, interruption-free working to promote concentration and help boost productivity in the office.

Lucy concludes: "Implementing 'power hours' may not fit every workplace, but it does underscore the importance of optimising the working day. If employers continue to tolerate a culture of silent overwork within their organisations – especially in the wake of hiring freezes – they risk not only burnout and attrition but also a collapse in morale and productivity."

"Addressing this means resetting expectations on working hours from the top. Not only should leaders openly acknowledge when responsibilities and remits are increased; clear protocols and expectations should be put in place to ensure staff are supported in prioritising tasks, setting expectations for deadlines and being transparent on their capacity."