

Contract Work Among White-collar Professionals Jumps 52% Year on Year

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The number of white-collar professionals reporting that they are in fixed term contracts (FTC) has increased by 52% year-on-year, according to new research by global talent solutions partner [Robert Walters](#).

This spike marks the continuation of a sustained upward trend, with the number of professionals working in FTCs increasing by 19% in 2025 compared to 2024.

On Monday (April 6), several reforms came into effect including Joint & Several Liability (JSL) rules and IR35 expansions.

Despite these changes, the findings from Robert Walters' annual survey of over 2,000 professionals reveal over a third (36%) of UK employers say they plan to increase contractor hiring in 2026, amid a backdrop of regulatory shifts, geopolitical conflict, and rising operational costs.

Daniel Harris, Managing Director - UK & Ireland at Robert Walters says, "Key changes came into effect this week, the full impact of which remains to be seen. What is clear is that more professionals are moving into temporary roles, as businesses continue to adopt 'wait and see' approaches - relying on shorter 6-12-month contracts to stay agile in the shifting macro-economic environment."

Pockets of growth

Further data from labour market data provider Vacancysoft and Robert Walters indicates that between January - March 2026, FTC roles grew across multiple sectors, with sales professionals (30%) seeing the biggest increases compared to the same period in 2025.

Vacancies for HR professionals (18%), IT professionals (17%), Bankers (16%), and Accountants (7%) also experienced notable growth as companies sought specialists to drive critical projects.

Daniel comments, “Many employers across professional services are engaging with contract professionals to onboard key skills without the long-term commitment. In addition to increased fixed-term contracts, we are also noting demand for day-rate specialists operating within transformation, systems upgrades, and financial optimisation to facilitate the projects and change initiatives that keep business operations efficient.”

Contract roles as tactical career stages

It’s not just employers driving this shift, one in five UK professionals state they are applying for contract positions over permanent ones this year.

They report doing so to secure better pay (51%), stimulate career growth (22%), and improve flexibility (20%).

Daniel remarks, “In the current market, more professionals view temporary positions as strategic career levers to boost pay and secure exposure to leading firms and crucial skills that facilitates faster progression.

“This is particularly pronounced amongst junior and mid-level professionals, many of whom saw their career disrupted by Covid and ongoing economic uncertainty. Fixed term contracts offer a ‘foot-in-the-door’ – providing access to a key company or within a preferred field, as well as the opportunity to demonstrate value and transition into a permanent role.”

Indeed, further Robert Walters findings show that contract professionals have a higher degree of satisfaction with their current rate of progression compared to permanent employees (48% vs. 44%).

Sticking points

However, hiring contractors comes with its own set of tensions. Over two-fifths (46%) of UK employers cite knowledge and skills continuity as a major challenge when hiring contract workers, while 31% point to difficulties around culture fit and team integration.

Daniel adds “Successful contractor hiring relies on effective integration. Screening processes should assess cultural fit and values alongside technical capabilities, while onboarding must support smooth transitions into permanent teams. Ongoing touchpoints are essential to ensure knowledge is effectively transferred throughout assignments.”

Policy changes

The new policy reforms including Joint & Several Liability (JSL) rules and IR35 threshold expansions for small companies could impact contractor hiring practices in the UK.

“These changes should no longer come as an overnight shock to UK employers. With the right support from employment agencies, businesses can understand the adjustments required, from aligning with new regulations to identifying the most suitable contract roles,” explains Daniel.

These changes shift greater responsibility onto employers during the contractor hiring process, requiring companies to assess their labour supply chains carefully, compile preferred supplier lists, as well as update contracts and compliance procedures accordingly.

Daniel concludes: “The contract market shows signs of growth, but it is not a frictionless transition.

“Cost pressures are one of the biggest factors impacting employers right now – and one of the few within their control. As new regulations introduce the risk of additional hidden costs, a flexible workforce can offer the agility needed to mitigate these pressures, but only if hiring, onboarding, and day-to-day processes are structured to support them.”

Robert Walters’ specialist [contract recruitment teams](#) provide the expert support to help employers navigate finding the key people they need seamlessly, and at pace.