



TURNING TO TECH

Why are career changers the tech industry's big opportunity to bridge the skills gap?

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FOREWORD

Covid-19 has unquestionably shaken, disrupted and reimagined how we go about our daily working lives, the concept of the traditional 'office' and, in some cases, whether we work at all. As a result, the UK has seen dramatic fluctuations in its job market over the last six months.

With the introduction of the Government's Job Retentionⁱ and Kickstartⁱⁱ schemes to maintain current internships, apprenticeships and job levels, the continuing ramifications from the Covid-19 outbreak have culminated in unforeseen measures both to protect and preserve jobs. The longer-lasting effects are sure to be felt widely though with the numbers of furlough, redundancies and closuresⁱⁱⁱ being announced.

However, it is not all doom and gloom. Technology has been attributed to supporting and enabling the survival of organisations, long before Covid-19^{iv}. The pandemic has taken this to another level and, despite an increasing skills gap within the UK, discussions around the importance of tech continue to increase. As these conversations rebolster an increased focus on improving retraining and reskilling initiatives in the sector, individuals now want to future-proof their careers.

The tech sector has already demonstrated its worth as a solution in a moment of need, primarily through its enablement of remote working that has kept many businesses going. As this continues, the skills that support these innovations and services are pivotal to ensuring a more stable career. With this in mind, at CWJobs we wanted to highlight the importance of these specialisms and look further into the opportunities for workers outside of the sector turning to tech and within the industry, to tap into a new fountain of talent.

Surveying over 2,000 UK professionals, comprising of tech workers and non-tech workers, we can reveal that the future talent supply chain looks bright. Of those that have considered changing careers since Covid-19, over half (**55%**) of non-tech workers have thought about actually starting a move into tech and a further **4%** of non-tech workers have already completed the move. With **49%** of IT decision makers revealing in our Confidence Index 2020^v that they expect tech budgets to increase as a result of Covid-19 learnings, it is clear this extra potential talent is needed and welcomed.

We are pleased to present the CWJobs Turning to Tech report and reveal our findings to help UK workers and employers across all industries understand the opportunity to finally close the long-talked-about tech skills gap. We are committed to ensuring the tech industry is future-proofed, now more than ever, and wish to support employers and tech talent alike.



Dominic Harvey,
Director at CWJobs



STATE OF PLAY

KEY FINDINGS

- ✓ Almost three in 10 (**28%**) respondents have considered a career change into a tech role following the outbreak of Covid-19
- ✓ When thinking about how Covid-19 has impacted the way they see their career, a third (**33%**) of respondents wished to prioritise a better work-life balance, whilst a quarter (**25%**) of respondents said they now put stability and security over salary
- ✓ Three in 10 (**29%**) respondents agreed with the statement ‘The more tech/IT skills I develop, the better future-proofed my career will be’
- ✓ Nearly a third (**30%**) of respondents in Scotland said they have considered or already undertaken a career change because they want to develop their skills further, followed by over a quarter (**27%**) in the North West and (**26%**) in Greater London

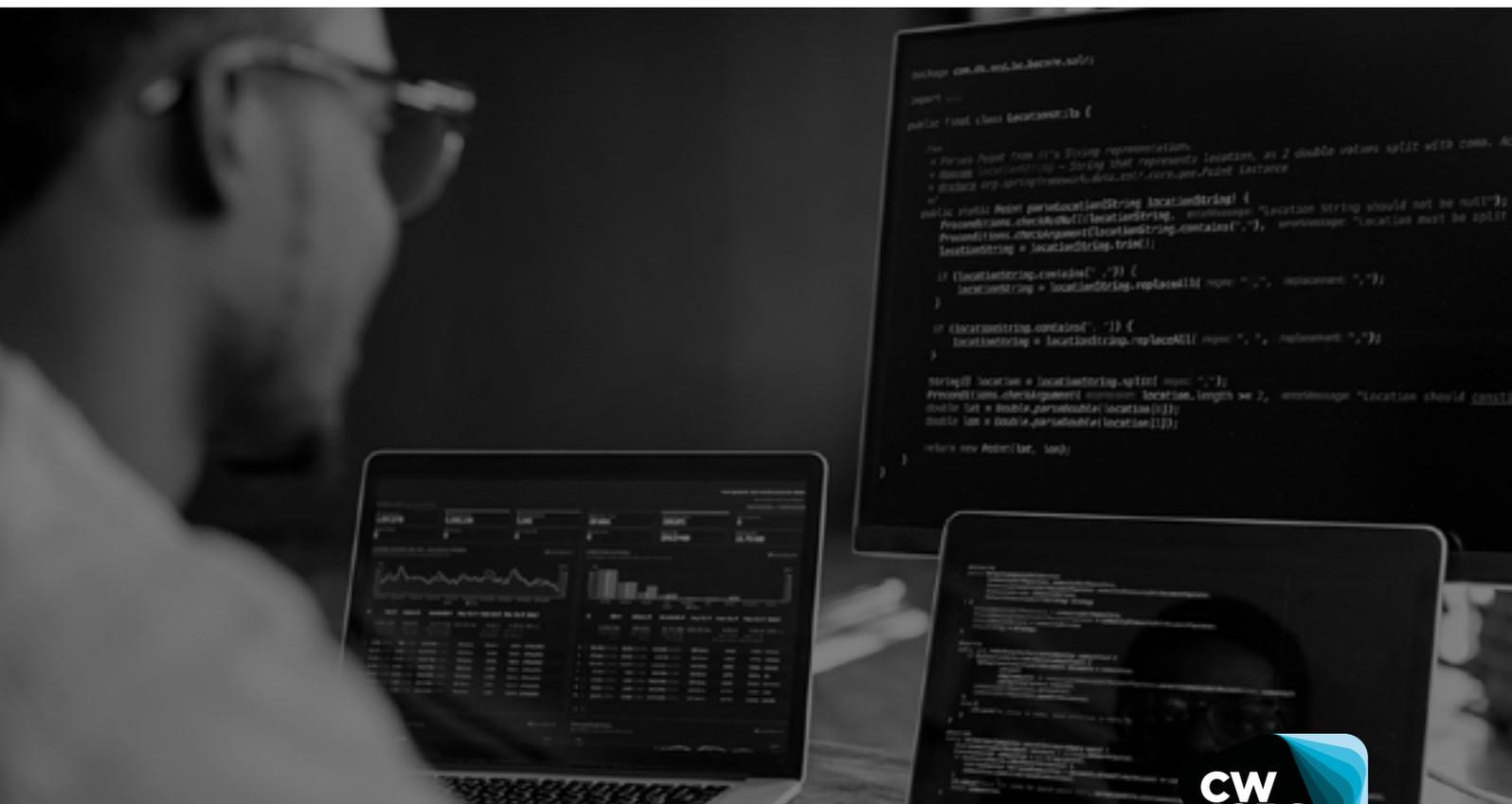
ⁱ<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

ⁱⁱ<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/kickstart-scheme>

ⁱⁱⁱ<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/earlyinsightsofhowthecoronaviruscovid19pandemicimpactedthelabourmarket/july2020>

^{iv}<https://www.consultancy.uk/news/13359/innovation-increasingly-important-for-long-term-business-survival>

^v<https://www.cwjobs.co.uk/recruiters/confidence-index-2020>



Covid-19 started out as a health pandemic, but as the outbreak developed it has created numerous ramifications to the way we live and work. Whilst the weakened economy has presented challenges for jobs generally, as the market slowly returns to normal, the tech sector is continuing to offer unique opportunities for people who want to pivot their careers.

Across the UK, many have been forced to consider a career change due to being furloughed or made redundant. As a result, workers have utilised the downtime to reevaluate their future job prospects and what matters most to them. For individuals from various sectors looking to make their next career move, reskilling and retraining specifically in tech will give them the base to succeed in any industry. It will do this by enhancing their employability skill set and ensuring that they are adaptable and more rounded applicants for the world of work.

Earlier this year, CWJobs' annual Confidence Index 2020^{vi} revealed that the need for tech workers and their skills is now greater than ever, with nearly half (49%) of IT leaders surveyed declaring they believed their business would increase tech budgets because of learnings from Covid-19. Three quarters (75%) even agreed that tech has been vital to keeping companies afloat during the outbreak. With significant numbers of the UK workforce encouraged to work from home, businesses are now searching for workers with those valuable skills to help them thrive securely throughout this period of uncertainty. With IT set to receive a boost in investment, this means that due to the symbiotic relationship between job openings and budgets, the demand for tech skills is likely to also rise. As such, there is a growing opportunity for those looking to make a career change.

Fortunately, there is considerable proactivity within the tech industry and it is currently preparing for an increase in demand and looking to ensure that the talent pipeline will be in place to meet it. For example, Microsoft^{vii} launched a global reskilling initiative to educate over 25 million people in new and emerging digital disciplines, in order to help them upskill or train for an entirely different career. This comes as they believe Covid-19 will affect the jobs of a quarter of a billion people globally, and they attempt to help mitigate the impact. This is echoed by workers; in fact, over half (55%) of workers outside of tech thinking of changing career have already considered or began the process of moving into a tech job. Therefore, tech skills and roles are increasingly attractive for non-tech workers.

Alongside the industry's efforts, the Government has also stepped up. The opening of a Virtual Cyber School^{viii}, providing millions of teenagers the opportunity to keep their minds active whilst schools were closed, illustrates this. These free online courses are designed to expand knowledge and existing skill sets during Covid-19 and are welcomed as a move that will boost cyber security skills in the future. With cyber-attacks continuing to make headlines too, it is no surprise that nearly a quarter (24%) of all workers who have undertaken an online tech course in the past 12 months focused on cyber security.

These efforts by both industry and government show the willingness and necessity to improve the UK's tech sector at a time when it is needed more than ever. Recent developments such as the Government's announcement that adults in England without an A-level or equivalent qualification will be offered a fully funded college course^x, valued by employers, continue to further this. It is important to maintain this momentum and identify the opportunities available for the industry to attract that much needed talent. Workers outside of tech must be made aware of the security, importance and wider benefits of tech, which is reaffirmed by a fifth (20%) of IT workers surveyed who explain an advantage of tech roles, at present, over other roles is better career stability.

^{vi}<https://www.cwjobs.co.uk/recruiters/confidence-index-2020>

^{vii}<https://www.itproportal.com/news/microsoft-launches-global-initiative-to-help-workers-expand-their-digital-skillset/>



NATIONWIDE CASE STUDY



In partnership with QA, the UK's leading tech skills organisation, Nationwide recently launched its own tech training programme to reskill employees from across the Society. By focusing on potential rather than proven tech skills, Nationwide was able to attract a large and diverse number of applicants. The intensive 12-week training programme was then designed to meet the needs of Nationwide's future vision while factoring in the diverse background of participants from early-career with IT qualifications to career-changers with no previous IT experience at all.

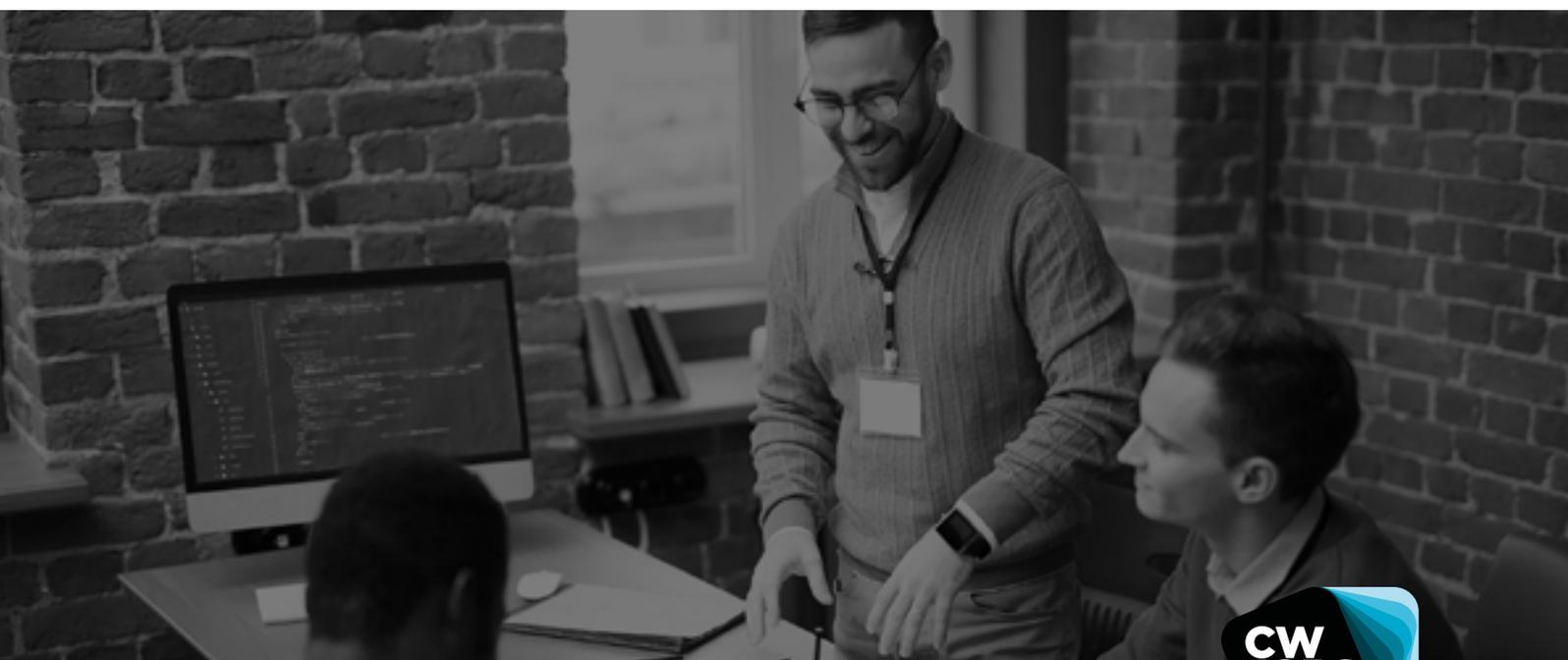
Through a blended approach of instructor-led training, group work and digital content, the training programme allowed everybody to progress, setting a great example of what companies can currently do to attract, foster and nurture the next generation of top talent.

LESSONS LEARNT

- Businesses must be open to welcoming individuals into the industry, considering various job backgrounds, levels of experience and transferable skills that new candidates can bring to the role and their company
- Tapping into this new pipeline of future talent will help alleviate the skills gap, but HR teams must support and offer training or retraining to those willing to learn and upskill into these critical roles
- In doing so, the tech job market will remain agile and robust, offering unique opportunities for all

^{viii} <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-virtual-cyber-school-gives-teens-chance-to-try-out-as-cyber-security-agents-from-home>

^{ix} <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-54330880>



OPPORTUNITIES ON THE HORIZON

KEY FINDINGS

- ✓ **26%** of workers surveyed who have considered or have already undertaken a career change have done so to work in a career with a better work-life balance
- ✓ This is a shared priority for all workers, with over a quarter (**27%**) of male respondents and over a fifth (**24%**) of female respondents wanting a better work-life balance
- ✓ Just under a fifth (**19%**) of IT workers surveyed said one of the advantages, at present, of working in a tech role over other roles is that companies are prioritising tech as a result of Covid-19

Covid 19 has prompted greater consideration as to people's longer-term priorities. For some, a better work-life balance is seen as vital moving forward (**33%**), while others (**24%**) are less prepared to commute. In fact, just **20%** said that the pandemic had not affected the way they view their career. This presents an entirely new situation, as people have never been so fluid with where they see themselves in the future.

With over half (**56%**) of non-tech workers planning to change careers, tech could prove a beneficial alternative for some of that talent. As Covid-19 has created the era of remote working, attracting talent from further afield is now a viable option. Looking into the regional data, the Northern Powerhouse^x seems to benefit the most. Nearly two-thirds of non-tech respondents considering a career change in the North West (**64%**) and North East (**64%**) are considering careers in tech, with nearly three-quarters in Yorkshire and Humber (**72%**) also looking to tech roles. As the traditional notion of the office becomes a distant memory and flexible working is encouraged in today's new norm, companies are able to look further afield to source top talent throughout the country.

QA'S DIGITAL BOOTCAMPS

In partnership with several leading organisations, training provider QA^{xi} delivered a specialist DevOps training programme. Funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, the Fastrack Digital Workforce Fund programme aims to help employers in the Greater Manchester and Lancashire areas recruit hard-to-fill digital roles and move local people into better quality employment. This is particularly necessary as general and specialist digital skills are crucial in almost all jobs and sectors and continue to grow in importance for employers, especially with the increase in digital transformation projects post-Covid-19. Through its specialist DevOps bootcamp^{xii}, QA helped to upskill a diverse pool of talent and address the region's employer-verified skills gap, supporting the wider regional economic and skills strategy.

^x<https://www.cwjobs.co.uk/recruiters/northern-powerhouse-report>

^{xi}<https://www.qa.com/>

^{xii}<https://www.qa.com/about-qa/our-thinking/case-study-qas-fast-track-digital-workforce-fund>





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The UK faced a tech skills gap before the pandemic. Now, with so many organisations accelerating their digital transformation programmes, the gap is in danger of becoming a drought. As organisations look to differentiate through the quality of the tech talent in their business, this widespread shift towards digital transformation has triggered a clear impetus for organisations to upskill and reskill existing employees, as well as hire-in from more diverse talent pools.

Having supported more than 270,000 people last year, QA continues to help tackle this demand through apprenticeships, bootcamps and training courses. At present we are working with more than 6,000 corporate clients alongside a wide number of public sector organisations to help identify and provide much-needed tech talent through skills programmes. We are committed to helping organisations find this talent, as well as provide valuable assistance to people so they can emerge stronger with new skills and the confidence that they have a future in the digital economy.

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– Stuart Martin
Director, QA Ltd



The extent of furlough and lay-offs across the UK has also strengthened the attraction to tech for many, due to its resilience throughout Covid-19. This seems pivotal for non-tech workers currently considering a role in tech. The most significant reasons for those outside the sector to consider a career in tech revolve around how tech is home to more interesting work (18%), the industry's important role within the economy (17%), and how it can offer greater security (14%) than their current roles.

Nearly half (44%) of tech workers believe that learning tech skills will better future-proof their careers. Moreover, with a third (33%) of tech workers looking to further their specialisms, recruiters and employers must promote the advantages of upskilling in tech to new and existing talent, given there is a clear consensus that tech skills will be valuable moving forward. Our research also revealed that half (50%) of all workers have taken an online tech course in the past 12 months, with 12% stating the pandemic proved a catalyst for them taking action. This suggests that the trend of workers looking to expand their skills and knowledge as a result of the pandemic is becoming increasingly common.

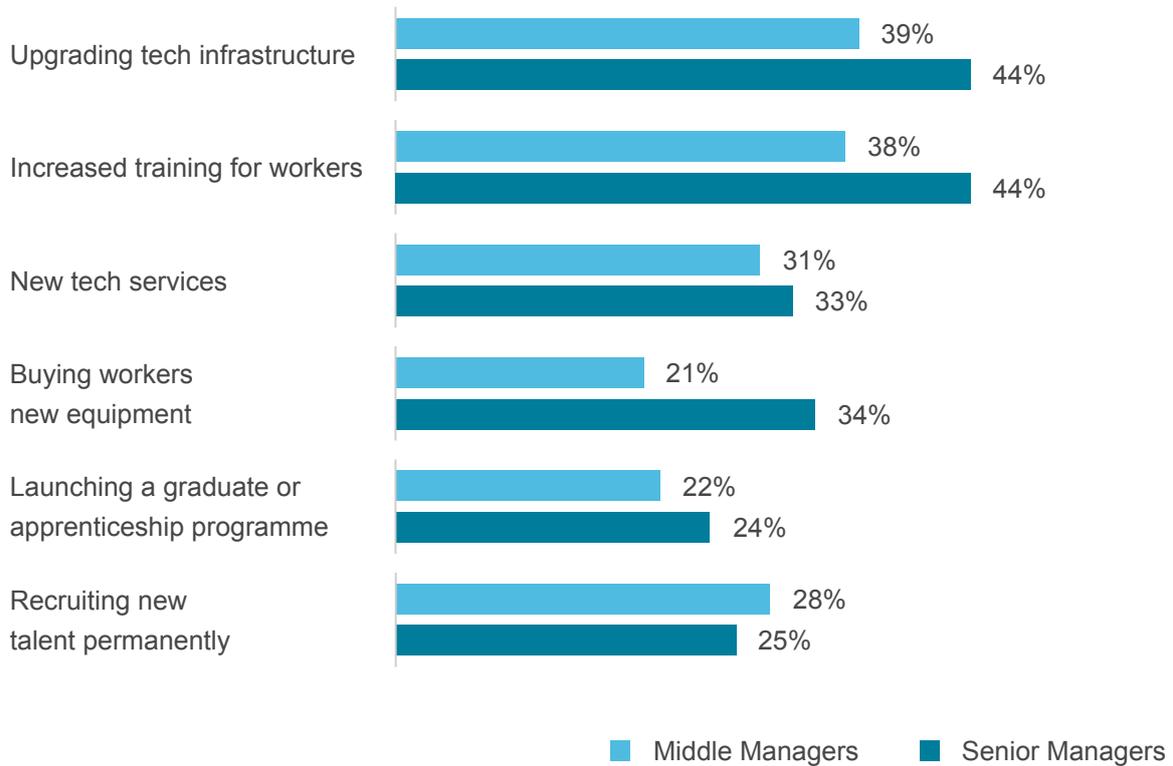
Despite workers actively improving their skills, tech employers must help too. By preparing and ensuring workers are knowledgeable and correctly skilled, employers will benefit down the line from the expected growth in the reliance on tech from other industries. When asked where they would invest additional tech budgets, 39% of IT workers surveyed would upgrade their tech infrastructure, as well as invest in new technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Quantum Computing (29%). This is shared by those managing on a day-to-day basis, as well as senior management who form the executive team, as per the graph below. It is also interesting to note that nearly a third of middle managers (28%) and a quarter of senior managers (25%) are aligned on wanting to invest in recruiting new talent permanently going forward.

As services are upgraded and increased, it is vital employers ensure workers have the necessary skills to handle them. If not, they face investing in technology their workers are unable to operate. Fortunately, training is high on the spending agenda for tech in order to help workers' efficiency; nearly half of senior managers (44%) see this as a crucial area to be addressed if their budget is increased, shared by over a third (36%) of tech workers. This is a necessary step to future-proof the industry, bolstering and improving the talent available, alongside investment.

Despite talent understanding the need to constantly upgrade their skill set, employers may fall short if they focus on offering training as a standalone ploy when recruiting, as salary and benefits still remain a high attraction for workers surveyed (44%). This is certainly the case for older age groups, with over half (52%) of 45-54 year olds selecting salary and benefits as the most important factor. In comparison, just over a third (36%) of 16-24 year olds said the same. However, training is more likely to appeal to 16-24 year olds (28%), showing its importance is still high. Interestingly 17% of 45-54 year olds consider training important as well, which may be the result of those wishing to reskill once they were certain in the career they wanted to specialise in, or even due to external factors outside of their career progression, such as wider family commitments.



Tech budgets based on seniority, in IT:



LESSONS LEARNT

- With extended remote and flexible working looking like it is here to stay, companies and candidates alike are no longer restricted by location and commutability. The Northern Powerhouse has only grown its tech offering in recent years and it is clear now non-tech workers in these regions are noticing the benefits. Therefore, it is important that HR managers are open to considering candidates from far and wide, especially if their skill set is the best match for the role
- Additionally, the spotlight on better work-life balance has been made more apparent since the start of the pandemic, with many now prioritising it going forward. Whilst tech has been known typically in the past to consist of long hours, it is crucial going forward companies break this stigma and promote internal initiatives that help support employees' work-loads and priorities
- Employers need to carefully consider the best incentives package for a range of age-groups and demographics, looking at the relationship between prioritising salary and benefits or training and upskilling. Employers could miss out on talent if they are not in tune with what talent really wants, specifically offering continuous training throughout individuals' careers, as it is clear from the research that older age groups are still keen and willing to learn and develop their skills



THE TECH APPEAL

KEY FINDINGS

- ✓ **45%** of IT workers surveyed said their companies are actively recruiting currently
- ✓ The top specialisms IT workers feel their company needs to recruit the most are IT support (**33%**) and cyber security (**23%**)
- ✓ Over eight in 10 (**81%**) IT workers would welcome talent from outside the tech industry, with almost three in 10 (**28%**) supporting this as it would help close the skills gap

As tech continues to act as the economy's life support, the opportunities for non-tech workers in the industry are set to multiply. We've witnessed significant successes which have enabled businesses to keep operating where they could have stumbled, as well as supporting a vast eCommerce boom^{xiii} that has provided vital stimulus to the economy. Despite this, it is not without its challenges.

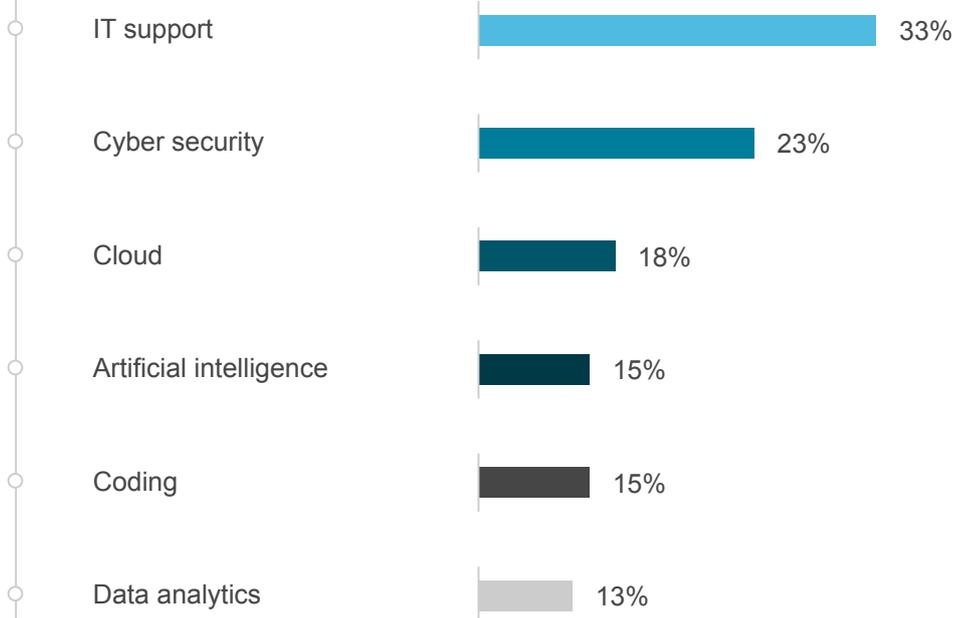
Over recent months, businesses have needed to invest time and money into preventative measures and skills amongst teams to adjust to the new way of working, now placing a greater focus on their tech functions. Nearly half of IT workers (**45%**) shared that their employer is actively recruiting for tech roles (slightly or very actively), with nearly a third (**28%**) thinking that new talent needs to be recruited due to the increased demand of remote working, over a fifth (**23%**) for the increased need for talent due to Covid-19 and over a fifth (**22%**) because of new roles that have emerged which require specialists to fill.

This suggests that IT leaders and workers are aligned with the priority to find new talent, building teams with the required skills and expertise for the future. Tech workers surveyed believe that in order to overcome the increasing demand remote working has placed on tech infrastructures, their company must recruit additional IT support (**33%**) and cyber security (**23%**) expertise. The demand is currently there for more workers in the sector.

^{xiii} <https://econsultancy.com/stats-roundup-coronavirus-impact-on-marketing-e-commerce-advertising/>



The expertise tech workers believe their company currently requires:

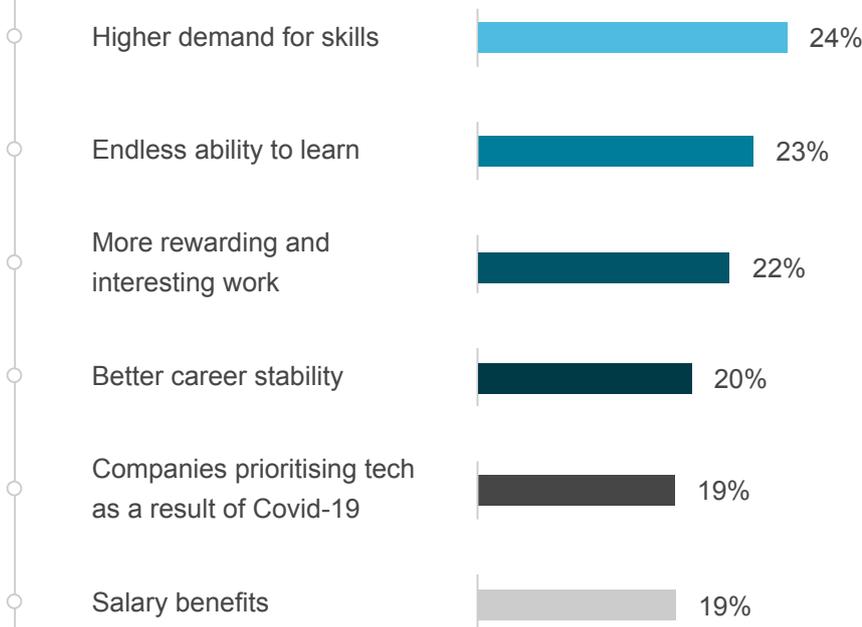


At present, there is an opportunity that is being recognised far beyond just tech workers, with **51%** of non-tech workers contemplating a career change to consider a tech-based role. Additionally, three in 10 (**28%**) respondents who considered the change to tech said they have considered it following the outbreak in March. The fact that Covid-19 has undoubtedly accelerated the decision for people to retrain is bolstered as well, with over a fifth (**22%**) of all workers confirming they had taken online tech training courses since the current pandemic.

Whilst the motivations for a role in tech include greater career stability, there are many other advantages to a career in tech. One of the prominent advantages of working in a tech role over other roles at present is that the ability to learn is endless. Interestingly, this is shared with **30%** of workers in the South (South East and South West), whilst only a fifth (**21%**) in the North (North East and North West) value this advantage.



The top advantages of a tech role, according to IT workers:



Our research identified several other reasons behind a move into tech, with nearly a fifth of tech workers acknowledging companies are prioritising tech as a result of Covid-19 (19%) and that tech roles provide better pay (19%). With 18% of respondents considering a career change to tech being attractive due to the work in the tech industry being more interesting, it appears the realisation is that their current role is not consistent with their interests and ambitions.

In fact, many IT workers surveyed welcome new talent entering tech, with 28% supporting it will help close the current skills gap in the industry and over a fifth (21%) believing it will help improve the technologies and innovations in the sector. In contrast, only 18% would not welcome new talent from outside of tech. This is as a result of it threatening their jobs (7%), new talent not being needed (6%) and that it may be time-consuming to train new workers (5%).

With the majority of tech workers supporting new talent from different industries, we wanted to look at the skills required for this change in addition to the motivations, roles needed and clear benefits. The majority of respondents are looking to enhance their career prospects, as over half (57%) have undertaken an online tech training course over the past year. Of which, 22% have undertaken these courses since the pandemic started, and 12% directly starting as a result of the pandemic. Additionally, less than a third (29%) of respondents told us they are not actively looking to improve their individual careers prospects.

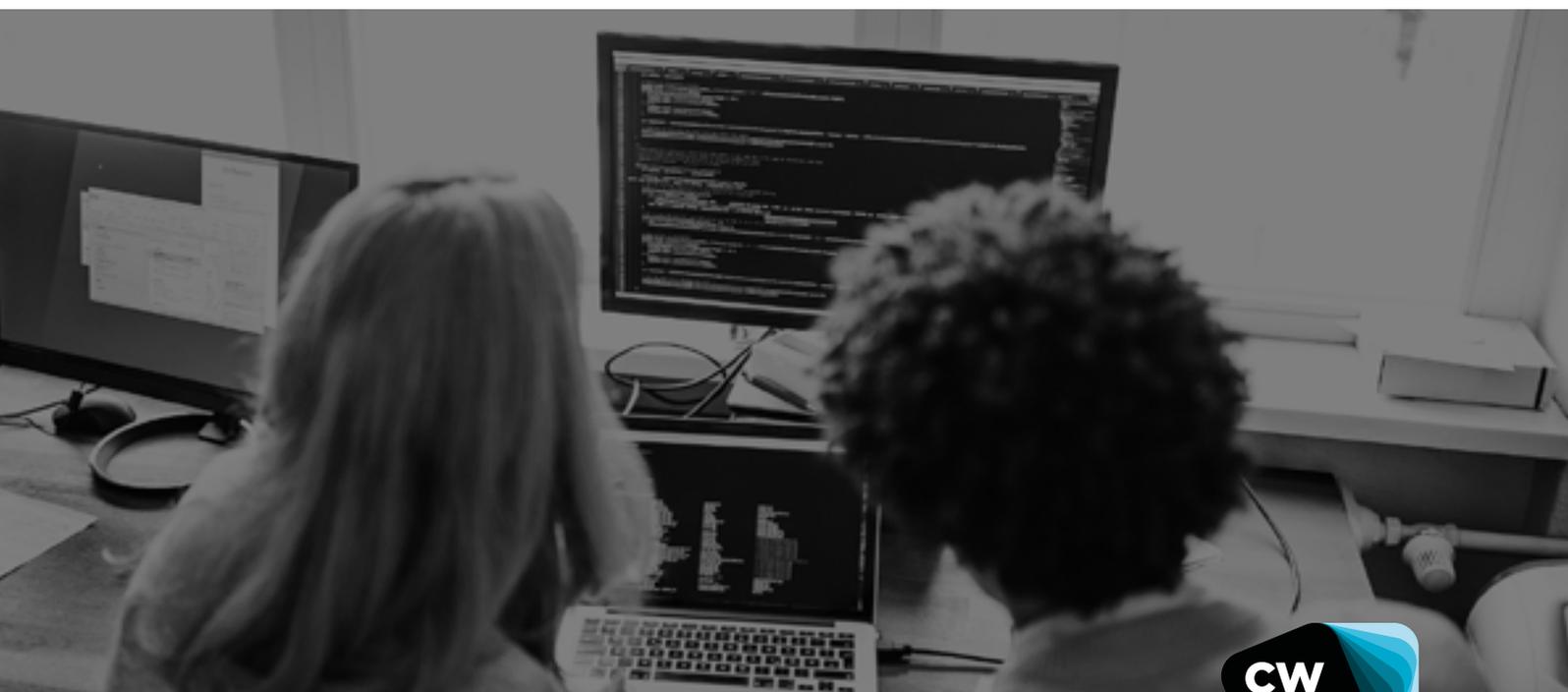


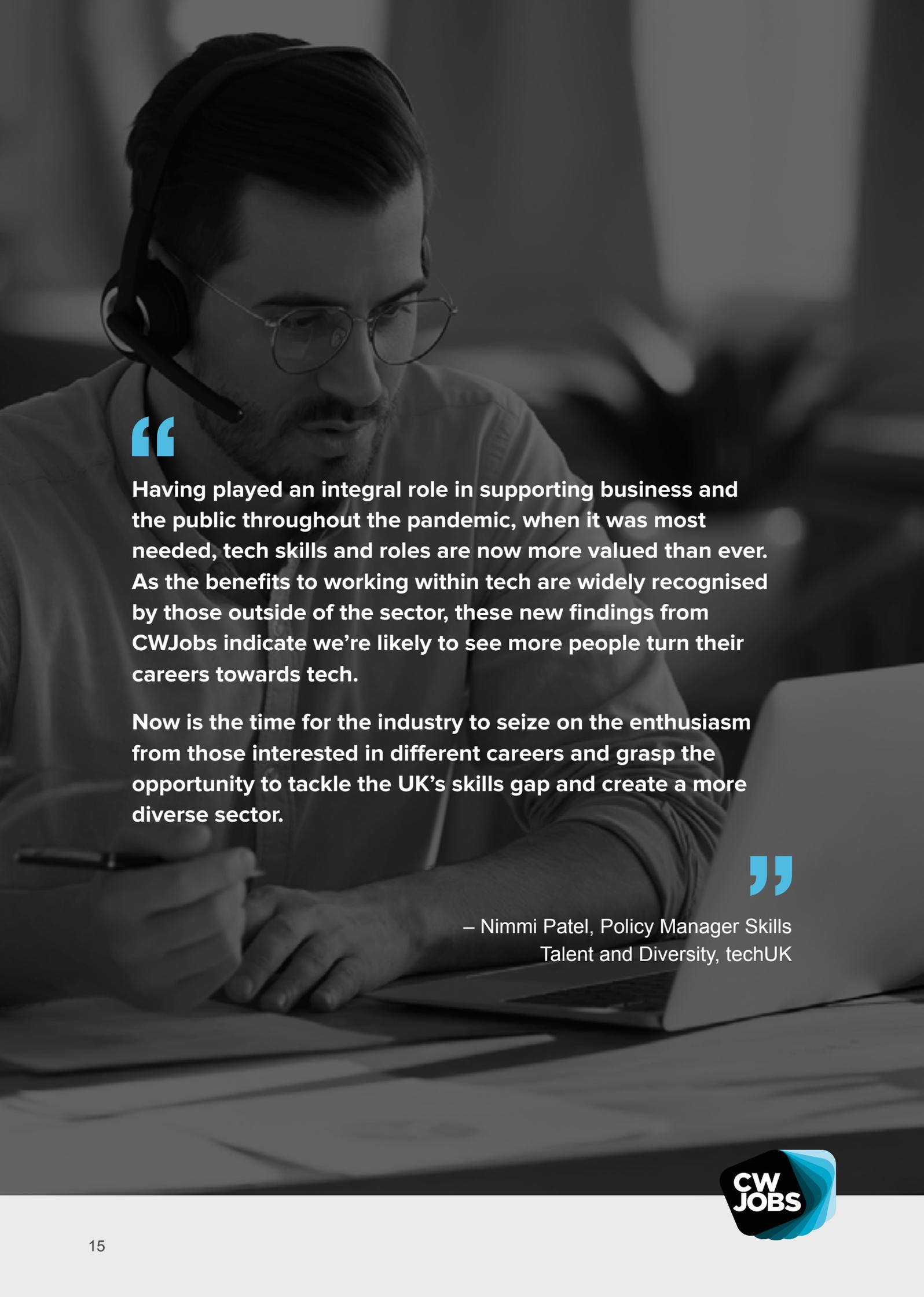
Looking into The Future Tech Workforce, CWJobs teamed up with its sister brand Milkround, graduate recruitment experts, to discover the top tech specialisms that young tech workers and graduates are looking to acquire. CWJobs found that cyber security (29%), cloud (27%) and coding (24%) are top skills for young tech workers looking to make a career within the industry, whereas Milkround's findings show data analytics (37%), coding (34%) and business intelligence (26%) are being prioritised by students and graduates.

These findings reaffirm that there is a distinctive trend of people proactively furthering their skills, especially amongst younger generations who will be the future of the UK's tech sector for many years to come. In addition to this, our survey wished to cover if non-tech workers, without tech skills, may already have skills relevant to the industry. Our research found the best transferable skills for tech are problem solving (31%), teamwork (22%), analytical skills (21%), communication (20%) and attention to detail (19%), which proves that many may already be suited to tech regardless of the level of their current tech skills.

LESSONS LEARNT

- We have the potential to be on the cusp of a 'reskilling revolution' for the UK, with the possibilities in tech proving the significant driver in addressing the current skills gap. The uptake in online learning demonstrates a real appetite from prospective employees to take training into their own hands. However, these workers will expect it to be a two-way street, with their employers needing to actively support their development as well. The fact almost a fifth (18%) of all workers surveyed believe training offered by a prospective or current employer is the most important factor when considering a role with a new employer goes to show this
- Therefore, employers need to demonstrate this actively with clarity in their job advertisements, across their wider employer branding and through any stage of communication with candidates
- Recruiters must be prepared for the demand and supply for jobs to balance in time, acknowledging workers' concerns and preferences, as well as what the industry requires from the wider talent pool





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Having played an integral role in supporting business and the public throughout the pandemic, when it was most needed, tech skills and roles are now more valued than ever. As the benefits to working within tech are widely recognised by those outside of the sector, these new findings from CWJobs indicate we're likely to see more people turn their careers towards tech.

Now is the time for the industry to seize on the enthusiasm from those interested in different careers and grasp the opportunity to tackle the UK's skills gap and create a more diverse sector.

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– Nimmi Patel, Policy Manager Skills
Talent and Diversity, techUK



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Given the size and scale of Covid-19's impact, it is not massively surprising that the role technology has played throughout the pandemic now propels the industry as a solution for possible career changes. Understandably, with the uncertainty in the job market after the end of the furlough scheme alongside the Chancellor's recent unveiling of a Winter Economic Plan^{xiv} to support workers, 2020 has witnessed mass disruption, from career plans and individual progression to destroying entire business sectors at a more macro level.

Tech's vital role in fighting the pandemic, supporting businesses in the UK and around the world, will only continue. As it has become the backbone of today's modern economy, workers are beginning to realise the advantages of turning to tech. By broadening and specialising their skills, workers can better showcase their proactiveness to future-proof their careers, as well as consider perhaps more rewarding and interesting career paths.

By ensuring there is steady and stable investment, the new talent in technology will be set to follow, and as the sector realises the advantages and methods of approaching talent from outside tech, the UK will witness a natural growth and stability. There is the opportunity for tech to help strengthen the UK's status as a global tech leader and ensure its organisations and workers leave the Covid-19 pandemic in the best place possible.

^{xiv}<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/winter-economic-plan>



ABOUT US

For the last 20 years, CWJobs has been the home for tech jobs. We match employers from all industries with the most relevant tech talent through our innovative product technology and unique candidate audience.

Our CV Database of over 1.2 million skilled candidates combined with our expert understanding of tech recruitment means that our clients can find the right talent, quickly and efficiently.

For more information about CWJobs, get in touch on 0333 0145 111.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This research was conducted by Censuswide on behalf of CWJobs, with 2,146 UK workers in total including 1,026 general workers and 1,120 tech workers between 9th September 2020 and 16th September 2020. Censuswide abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles.

To find out more about our research, please visit: www.cwjobs.co.uk/recruiters/turning-to-tech





For more information on CWJobs,
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