

## Mind the Gap



The headline “Deficit of 3 million highly skilled workers by 2022?” which appeared in Recruitment Grapevine in January of this year may have seemed alarmist to some at the time. The article was produced on the back of PwC’s annual report on the economy and showed that 83% of CEO’s were “somewhat” or “extremely” concerned about access to high skilled talent.

Now, nearly ten months on, we see that those employer’s concerns are very real with many of this year’s entrants to the job market seemingly not having the relevant, or sought after, qualifications to tempt hirers to take them on.

My only surprise is that, as is the case with so many of these pending difficulties, we didn’t wake up to the issue earlier. There is an entire generation doing jobs that require skills that are not in favour in today’s education system. As a result, there are no new entrants to the work force with the right skills to do those jobs when the incumbents retire. Here at ATB we have been asked to recruit a number of Planning Officers, Building Control Officers, Civil, and Highways Planners and Engineers, all of which are in high demand but short supply. These are just a few examples of jobs/careers that will still be needed post the high-tech revolution. Jobs that require a level of reasoning, advice giving and collaboration and those needing dexterity and mobility will, for the foreseeable future, need skilled humans to do them. Robots and AI, for the most part, only replace the mundane aspects of a job role.

We cannot replace Doctors, Dentists, Vets or Lawyers with technology, but plenty of people are prepared to go through the years of studies, training and exams to move into these professions. Teaching, Nursing, Fire and Police on the other hand struggle to find people, maybe it’s the relatively poor pay, more likely it is the stress-to-pay ratio that puts people off. Technology has made some of the above roles easier, in many cases it helps reduce errors, the only one in real danger of being replaced any time soon is the Teacher (see our article: will my next teacher be a bot?).

When we are advising our next generation of workers on the path they should take, shouldn’t we be discussing careers like engineering? It isn’t, nor has it ever really been, a physically

demanding dirty job, it is in fact a high tech job with as much emphasis on the use of new technology and software as any of the new emerging jobs. The lack of candidates leaving education with engineering degrees means that those that are can pick and choose from the available jobs and can command ever higher salaries. This Summer saw a higher number of girls graduating with engineering degrees than ever before. However, females still only make up around 20% of engineers in the UK.

Many of these types of roles are now included in Degree Level Apprenticeships, real on-the-job learning, real pay and a real Degree at the end of the Apprenticeship. There are other advantages too, the vast majority are offered continued employment beyond the Apprenticeship stage, they have NO debt and it has been proven that they will earn more over the term of their career than Graduates with purely academic degrees.

Employers that take part in Apprenticeship schemes get the young person's training paid for out of the Apprenticeship Levy. They also get a productive person in the business and, it is proven, end up with a far more loyal employee than those that simply hire into a role.

It's not just the highly skilled or degree level jobs that are suffering from a lack of credible candidates, Service, Sales/Telesales and plenty of trades are suffering from a lack of new blood. Here in the UK we may not be able to rely on the next influx of tradespeople from one of our neighbouring countries to fill the void. Maybe we need to rethink our strategy.

So, if you want a change of career, or you want to steer your wonderful, bright, but not so outstandingly academic kid on the path to a well-paid occupation or career, here are some things to consider which could help you decide:

- If I need something done, or a service provided, do I need to find someone or do I just have to wait for the next sales call in to me? (Supply v Demand) Trades and services that are in demand rarely need to make cold calls!
- Can a robot do this or supply this now?
- Will a robot be able to do this any time soon?
- Is this something that will be needed for the foreseeable future? (Longevity)

If demand is high and supply is low, if it is something that will take a long time to replace (if ever) it has to be a good choice.

If you are still struggling to figure out what path you should take, or what to advise your offspring, give us a call at ATB Recruit and we will be happy to discuss the options.

Phil – ATB Team