

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a vibrant red dress with a colorful floral pattern, is smiling broadly. She is surrounded by other people, including a man in a suit and glasses in the background and a woman in a pink hijab in the foreground. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with greenery.

Think GLOBAL PEOPLE

Relocate

CHANGING ROLE OF THE FINANCE DIRECTOR: WORKING CROSS- FUNCTIONALLY

**GLOBAL TRADE: THE UK'S
PROSPECTS FOR NEW PARTNERS**

**CLIMATE CHANGE:
REVIEWING GLOBAL MOBILITY
POLICY INITIATIVES**

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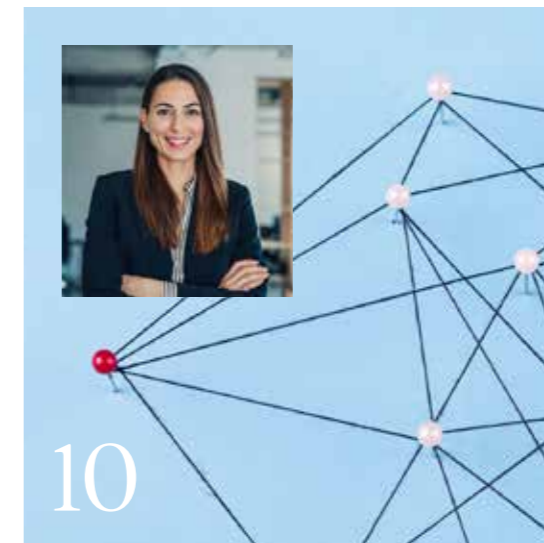
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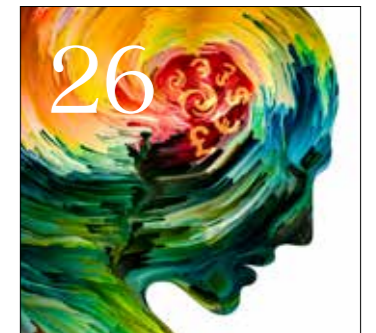
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COMMONWEALTH LEGACY:
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EDITOR'S LETTER



"Just as autumn is all about change, the unexpected weather patterns are a reminder of the fluctuating world we live in"

As autumn approaches, the leaves take on a different hue and the parched grass returns to green after the harsh summer drought, we build on the themes explored in our Future of Work Festival in June and share the insights of some of our 2022 Think Global People Relocate Award winners.

Just as autumn is all about change, the weather patterns that come with it are a reminder of the fluctuating world we live in. While the UK, Commonwealth and world mourned the loss of Queen Elizabeth II and watched the transition of power to King Charles III, political power in the UK was passed to new Prime Minister Liz Truss.

In the world of global mobility, professionals are prepared for risk. The recent Global Mobility in Times of Conflict & Crisis report from The Res Forum is timely with all that is going on in the world. Dr Sue Shortland's reflections on the role of the global mobility function, as well as her climate change policy review, are also both of the moment.

David Sapsted reviews the UK's prospects for new trade partners. This is certainly a space to watch as new markets become increasingly important amid global economic upheaval.

In our hot topic, Marianne Curphey examines the changing role of the finance director and discovers the opportunities this may open up for Global Mobility and other functions in international businesses. A new survey from KPMG also inspired Ruth Holmes's editorial on tax, tech and talent.

The energy and cost-of-living crisis have highlighted the importance of financial wellbeing for employers. Our coverage expands the discussion points that emerged from the Wellbeing Hub in the summer. We are also delighted to share how 2022 Award winners, Blick Rothenberg, aligns people, purpose and profitability to such effect. Their story offers real encouragement for companies looking to attract and retain from a wider talent pool.

Read how July's inspirational Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games recognise the importance of legacy and international cooperation. We look forward to bringing you the impact perspective of companies based in the West Midlands in our winter issue. Meanwhile, schools are back and the future rests in the hands of young people around the world. Don't miss amazing insights from schools in a host of education articles.

Fiona Murchie
Managing Editor

Winter 2022 – next issue

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GLOBAL TRADE: THE UK'S PROSPECTS FOR NEW PARTNERS

If the course of true love never runs smooth, then the route to consummating a trade deal can be distinctly rocky – at least, it is if the UK's post-Brexit experience of international courtship is anything to go by, writes **David Sapsted**.

Although it is now more than two and half years since the country's split from the European Union, only one comprehensive, free trade agreement (FTA) has been negotiated from scratch: that with Australia, and even this still awaits parliamentary approval.

True, dozens of other deals have

been done, but the bulk have been agreements that rolled over the trade arrangements that existed when Britain was still a member of the EU.

Now, the need to boost exports through FTAs is becoming pressing: official data for the second quarter of the year showed that the UK's trade deficit in goods alone had widened by £9.5 billion.

But there is a big prize on the horizon: a trade deal with India, which both sides are confident can be done by year's end or, possibly, as early as October 24 – the start of Diwali festival, which the-then Prime Minister Boris Johnson set as the target date when he formally kicked off negotiations on a trip to Delhi earlier this year.



22/04/2022. Delhi, India.
Former Prime Minister, Boris Johnson gives a press conference with Prime Minister Modi.
Picture by Andrew Parsons, No 10 Downing Street

“Whenever you have a free trade agreement, there is always a lot of give and take. The challenges are there, but there are no challenges that cannot be overcome.”

PIYUSH GOYAL, INDIA'S MINISTER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

INDIA DEAL “BY AUTUMN”

Over the summer, the Government in London was expressing confidence that an FTA was “absolutely achievable” by Diwali, as discussions focused on market access aspects of the proposed deal.

Piyush Goyal, India’s Minister of Commerce & Industry, was equally upbeat, saying almost half of the proposed deal’s 26 chapters were already “dusted and ready” and that the remainder should be finalised “within the next few months”.

In an interview with the Financial Times, Mr Goyal said: “Whenever you have a free trade agreement, there is always a lot of give and take. The challenges are there, but there are no challenges that cannot be overcome.”

Those challenges are believed to centre on mutual access for the nations’ financial services sectors and improved market access for such goods as British automobile parts and whisky, and Indian textiles and green exports, such as solar panels. Easier UK visas for Indian students and skilled workers are also believed to be on the agenda.

On the tricky issue of greater access to financial services, the Department for International Trade (DIT) in London said it had been buoyed by the Indian government’s decision last year to ease barriers to

overseas insurance firms. “India has traditionally had a protectionist economy when it comes to services,” said a DIT source. “But the fact they’re already moving in the right direction on things like the insurance industry shows there is real momentum when it comes to services and that a deal can be struck.”

Sealing a deal with India, the world’s sixth largest economy, would be seen as a major prize for the UK. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has recently shown a greater willingness to reach trade agreements, having signed a landmark deal earlier this year with Australia and another with the UAE. It is also pursuing FTAs with both the EU and Canada.

There had been fears that political turmoil in Britain, which led to Boris Johnson stepping down at the beginning of September, could derail or, at least, delay the talks. However, negotiations continued in New Delhi as scheduled over the summer.

Arpita Mukherjee, Professor at the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, said while the ousting of Boris Johnson had caused uncertainty, the two nations were being driven by the need to finalise a trade deal that would be win-win.

THE US AND AUSTRALIA

Of course, the FTA the UK would dearly love even more than one with India is with the US. But President Joe Biden is far from keen, particularly as he fears Britain’s threat to scrap the Northern Ireland protocol – agreed with the EU and covering trade across the Irish Sea – could pose a threat to peace in Ulster.

A US Government trade mission has also revived Trump-era demands for “equitable access” to the British market for its food and farm exports ahead of any possible trade deal.

Jewel Bronaugh, Deputy-Secretary at the US Department of Agriculture, has urged British officials and the food industry to “be forward-thinking” about American-sourced goods, which she claims are “the safest in the world”, despite concerns in the UK over animal welfare and chemical treatments.

Ministers in London have turned their attention to reaching agreements with individual states: Indiana in the spring and North Carolina in July, with Oklahoma, South Carolina and several others in the offing.

But these are not trade deals on goods and services, which only the US Congress can sanction. Instead, these memoranda of understanding will improve procurement processes and strengthen academic and research ties, enabling academics and businesses to collaborate more effectively, according to the DIT.

The Government in London also says agreements with individual states will promote mutual professional equivalence so workers from the UK and US can have their professional qualifications recognised on both sides of the Atlantic.

This is all a far cry from the FTA agreed with Australia, which provides tariff reductions on UK exports in exchange for greater access to the UK for Australian farmers, and which sets “new global standards in digital and services and creating new work and travel opportunities for Brits and Aussies,” according to the DIT.

The deal is expected to unlock £10.4 billion of additional trade, with Britain particularly keen on opportunities in digital and tech, along with increased access to Australia’s service sectors.

“The deal is also a gateway into the fast-growing Indo-Pacific region,” says the DIT, “and will

boost our bid to join the CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership), one of the largest free trade areas in the world, covering £8.4 trillion of GDP and 11 Pacific nations.”

A decision by those 11 nations – Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam – on whether or not to approve the UK’s membership application could be made as soon as this winter. Some, however, have questioned whether there will be any immediate gain for the UK as most of the 11 have some sort of existing deal with Britain.

But an agreement would loosen restrictions on UK services and digital trade, while, over the longer term, CPTPP membership could grow significantly and could even attract the US into the fold, although President Biden has yet to express an interest.

NEW ZEALAND, THE GCC – AND EU

In the interim, the UK is pursuing an FTA agreed in principle with New Zealand and the two nations have already signed a mutual recognition agreement to “fast-track customs processing for businesses and promote market access for exporters between each country”, according to Christine Stevenson, Chief Executive and Comptroller of New Zealand Customs Service.

Additionally, one deal already done is the UK-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement (UKSDEA), which was signed off in June. According to the Institute of Export and International Trade in London: “As well as playing to the UK’s strengths as the world’s second-largest services exporter and fifth largest digital services exporter, the UKSDEA also provides a wide range of benefits for businesses who trade in goods. It will cut costs, slash red tape and pave the way for a new era of e-signatures and e-contracts.”

This summer also saw the UK signing its first international data sharing deal when it inked an agreement with South Korea, which will allow organisations in the two countries to exchange data without restrictions.

Add to this the FTA negotiations that opened in the summer between the UK and members of the Gulf

Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) along with the continuing talks over a deal with the likes of Canada and Mexico, and you have what adds up to a busy time for British trade negotiators.

There is, however, one cloud on the horizon: the existing deal with the European Union, by far the UK’s largest trading partner. Although Mr Johnson once claimed a post-Brexit agreement with Brussels was “oven ready”, it has turned out to be half-baked with exporters lumbered with extensive bureaucracy, delays and additional costs.

A survey of almost 1,000 firms by the British Chambers of Commerce found that 45% reported difficulties adapting to changes in rules for buying or selling goods in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

Now the entirety of the deal is threatened by disagreements over the Northern Ireland protocol, proving yet again how rocky the course to a true agreement can sometimes be. ●

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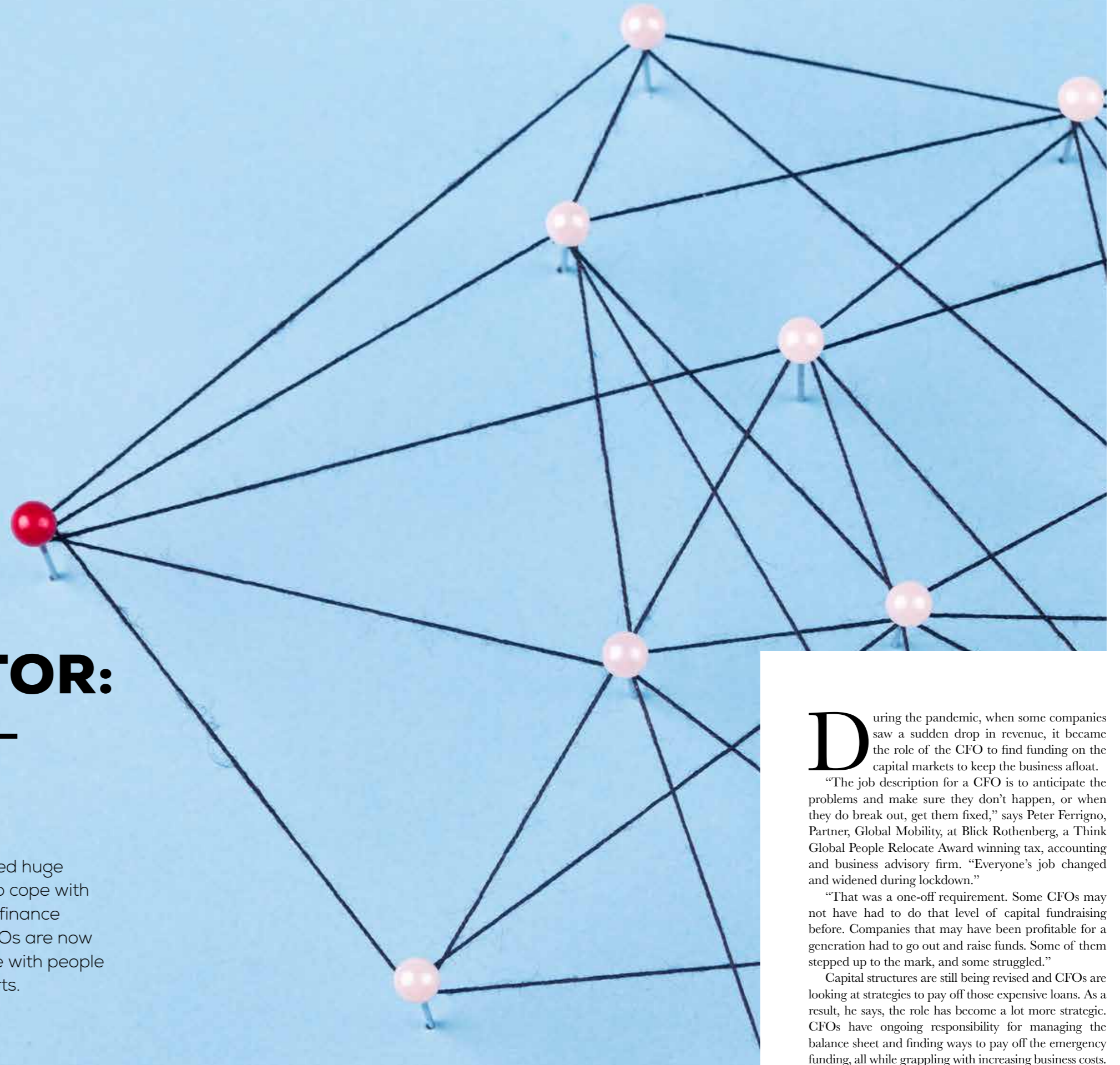
TRUSS URGED TO PRESS AHEAD WITH TRADE DEALS

The UK’s trade body for exporters has stressed the importance of “harnessing the opportunities provided through international trade” to new Prime Minister, Liz Truss. Marco Forgiione, Director-General of the Institute of Export & International Trade (IOE&IT), said the progress Ms Truss made on free trade agreements (FTAs) while Secretary of State for International Trade was significant and sent “a strong message to the world that the UK is first and foremost a trading nation, as well as a dedicated and committed ally.” It also urged the Prime Minister to implement the proposed technology-based Target Operating Model and Ecosystem of Trust export strategy, due to come into force at the end of 2023, “to create the world’s best border” in the UK.



THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE FINANCE DIRECTOR: WORKING CROSS-FUNCTIONALLY

The pandemic put a strain on company finances and created huge administrative and fiscal burdens for organisations trying to cope with furlough schemes around the world. As a result, the role of finance director became even more important to organisations. CFOs are now playing a wider and more strategic role and engaging more with people management and global mobility. **Marianne Curphey** reports.



During the pandemic, when some companies saw a sudden drop in revenue, it became the role of the CFO to find funding on the capital markets to keep the business afloat.

“The job description for a CFO is to anticipate the problems and make sure they don’t happen, or when they do break out, get them fixed,” says Peter Ferrigno, Partner, Global Mobility, at Blick Rothenberg, a Think Global People Relocate Award winning tax, accounting and business advisory firm. “Everyone’s job changed and widened during lockdown.”

“That was a one-off requirement. Some CFOs may not have had to do that level of capital fundraising before. Companies that may have been profitable for a generation had to go out and raise funds. Some of them stepped up to the mark, and some struggled.”

Capital structures are still being revised and CFOs are looking at strategies to pay off those expensive loans. As a result, he says, the role has become a lot more strategic. CFOs have ongoing responsibility for managing the balance sheet and finding ways to pay off the emergency funding, all while grappling with increasing business costs.

THE CFO EMERGES AS A STRATEGIC PARTNER TO THE CEO

In a market where the economy is challenged, sales are harder to achieve and turnover may be less than forecast, costs can sometimes be the only metric that a business can really play with.

“This all falls into the finance function’s remit, so naturally they and the CFO become more influential within organisations,” says Mark Freebairn, Head of the Board and CFO practices at global executive search firm, Odgers Berndtson.

“The finance function has a significant role to play as businesses embrace remote and hybrid working, especially when considering things like real estate footprint, office spaces and the salary weighting of employee locations,” he says.

Christian Müller, Chief Financial Officer at Moss, a new fintech specialising in finance management transformation headquartered in Berlin, says now is the time for finance leaders to embrace the evolution of their roles and assert themselves as strategic partners and digital enablers to the business.

“Finance leaders are integral to determining how businesses adapt to significant changes in how work gets done, particularly in places where digital and finance intersect,” he says. “My role as CFO is ever evolving.”

Businesses are bracing for a possible economic downturn, continued supply chain problems, higher costs and rising inflation. This means they must refocus on initiatives that can improve efficiency, strengthen cost control and enhance business agility. Finance leaders, in particular, have a critical role to play in this says Sarah Spoja, CFO at Tipalti, an accounting software financial technology business.

There are big benefits to CFOs taking on a wider leadership role. They have more nuanced insights into the strategic direction of the business, including which markets to expand into and strategy around international growth. They’re also well placed to understand the short-term potential of the business’s growth plan, while understanding changing market conditions.

“When collaboration between finance professionals and the C-suite is strong, CEOs can rely upon the fact that CFOs know how to turn abundant amounts of data into profound insights for decision-making,” says Sarah Spoja. “This is key for navigating this period of economic uncertainty and ensuring the business is agile enough to withstand any further change.”

THE CFO ROLE: ESG, CYBERSECURITY AND PEOPLE

The CEO will always be at the helm of a company, but the CFO now also sits atop the decision-making pyramid, setting and driving strategy in a global recession.

“For businesses, this means decision-making which has an impact extending well beyond the bottom line,” says Debbie Green, Vice President, Applications, at technology company Oracle UKI. “Reporting and compliance are now taking centre stage across not just the finance function but many key areas of business – including environmental, social and governance aspects, cyber security and people operations.”

She says efforts from businesses to better align with ESG initiatives highlight just how pivotal the CFO and their team are becoming to global decision-making. Companies need to demonstrate change and the CFO



has a unique position in the business to join up the dots with financial and non-financial data and make the decisions which show investors, regulators and the public that improvements are being made.

MORE THAN NUMBERS

In a post-Covid, high employment, higher inflation world, building attractive recruitment and retention strategies is becoming even more important.

“Long-term success – and by association, the value – of a business is linked to your people and the culture created for them,” says Patrick Fraser, CFO of Walt, a global research technology company with offices in multiple locations, including London, Norway and the US.

There are ever-more benefits available to attract staff such as employee options schemes or extra holidays, he says. CFOs need to be strategically clear on the return on investment of these offers, both in purely financial terms and from an operational and cultural perspective. This is no longer solely about money, but about the environment you are creating.

“The CFO needs to be involved at the outset of these discussions given their understanding of the interconnections between areas of the business, not just brought in at the end to simply sign off on the budget.”

In a company with a global presence, having a coherent overview helps to inform strategy and long-term planning decisions.

“The growth of staff outsourcing companies has made it easier to operate in an area you don’t know so well, by mitigating some of the risks – be they regulatory, HR and/or tax compliance. The CFO now has an increasing remit to help identify territories to expand into, not solely based on recognising and minimising financial risk, but focusing more on what will move the wider company strategy forward.”

The CFO will still need to look at budgets for departments and across the business, but their involvement is not a pure financial numbers game now. “People are the

heart of a business, and their wants and desires are ever more complicated. The CFO has some financial levers to use, but their role needs to be driven by planning for delivery of the overall strategy to create success,” he says.

TRUSTED C-SUITE ADVISER

“Although a CFO’s position was beginning to evolve ahead of the pandemic, the issues that businesses have had to overcome over the last two years have accelerated this process,” says Debbie Bowen Heaton, Partner at Oliver Wight EAME, a business transformation specialist, who has worked with the likes of Wrigley and Heinz.

“During the pandemic, the CFO’s role dramatically changed as they became the ‘trusted adviser’ who had to provide a mirror to the CEO, who were often in denial, and get them to see the harsh reality of the impacts of the disruption to business,” she says.

“I saw many CEOs enter into a state of denial about the business impact of the pandemic. Unwilling to accept that the business will not rebound to pre-pandemic performance, some CEOs were carrying false optimism into 2021, leading to unrealistic budgets and commitments. Where CEOs were in denial, the finance director of many companies we were advising faced the difficult task of putting a mirror up and forcing the CEO to face the brutal reality.”

Although there are still globally mobile businesses out there who see the CFO and the finance team as the ‘finance police’, more businesses are realising that financial directors play a much more fundamental and important role when shaping a company’s strategy.

While ultimately control and accountability remain with the CEO, the CFO is now the trusted adviser.

“A few years ago, teams worked in a silo with the finance team separate from other functions across the business,” she says. “Now we are seeing a much more interactive and matrix management style where teams report into multiple leaders and communication is open across the whole business and supply team. The finance

“THE FINANCE FUNCTION HAS A SIGNIFICANT ROLE TO PLAY AS BUSINESSES EMBRACE REMOTE AND HYBRID WORKING, ESPECIALLY WHEN CONSIDERING THINGS LIKE REAL ESTATE FOOTPRINT, OFFICE SPACES AND THE SALARY WEIGHTING OF EMPLOYEE LOCATIONS.”

MARK FREEBAIRN, ODGERS BERNDTSON

director is a key part in this.”

Following the financial pressures of the pandemic, finance directors and CFOs have taken on a wider strategic role in helping to guide companies through the difficult times and beyond, says Andrew Collis, CFO for Moneypenny, a global outsourced communications provider. As part of a widening of his role, he now works cross-functionally with the COO and People Officer to manage a new pay matrix and competencies, ensuring this is applied consistently at a global level.

FINANCE TEAMS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

David Woodworth, CFO of insightsoftware, a global company headquartered in North America, which operates across EMEA, APAC and India, says that the pandemic kickstarted a significant period of change for business. Some of this change has been positive, like flexible working alongside a renewed focus on the wellbeing of employees. Other examples have been more challenging, such as the financial pressures that adversely affected certain businesses and sectors – and the complete restructuring of teams and departments.

“What’s clear, across the board, is that finance teams have been under the spotlight in a way that they simply weren’t before,” he says. “The frequency of information needed from finance teams rose drastically, with reporting cadence increasing to monthly, if not weekly. The value of the CFO, along with her or his team, increased significantly overnight.”

Two years on, that critical role of the finance function still remains true. Finance teams no longer exist just to keep the books. They are an integral part of how a business operates, grows and expands into markets and industries to meet business, sales, growth, and sustainability goals. •

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TAX, TECH AND TALENT: AN EVOLVING DEPARTMENT

A new survey from KPMG shows how tax departments could take greater advantage of emerging technology. Many have embraced policies to attract a more tech-savvy and diverse workforce, but leaders need to do more to build tech-first tax departments that deliver quality insights. **Ruth Holmes** reports.

Employing global people comes with unavoidable and often-complex tax considerations. More international cross-border remote working, third-country nationals and self-managed assignees are only making this truer. This has implications for the skillset and talent pool of this vital part of the global mobility community, for companies looking to move internal tax talent and businesses operating internationally.

“Tax departments are stepping out of the past by modernising the skillsets of their talent, embracing DEI and upgrading the technology they plan to use for the future,” says Rema Serafi, KPMG’s National Managing Partner – Tax. “Those organisations that embrace this change will be the ones best positioned to compete and succeed.”

BUILDING FUTURE-READY EXPERTISE

The pandemic hastened the already significant changes to how, when and where people work across borders. Since then, a number of new global payroll and employment companies have come to the market to service these trends. Others have adapted and grown rapidly to help businesses of all sizes and sectors access global opportunities and employ people internationally. Longer established professional service companies are also moving with the times and seeking to build more agile, tech-enabled and inclusive tax departments.

KPMG’s new report, *Tax Reimagined 2022: Perspectives from the C-suite*, casts light on exactly where tax departments and professionals are going next to service their company’s and clients’ evolving needs. Based on the views of 300 executives in Fortune 500 companies with turnovers in excess of \$1bn, the key conclusion is that tax departments are at a pivotal

moment of transformation.

Mirroring trends across the wider business, leaders in taxation are embracing more inclusive recruitment and development practices (see page 32). For example, the majority of KPMG’s survey respondents (54%) are setting goals for outreach to underrepresented groups (+8 percentage points from 2021).

Over half (55%) of respondents to the KPMG survey say their organisation is recruiting from non-traditional colleges and universities (+10 percentage points from 2021). This mirrors UK news over the summer that Big Four professional service firms are dropping their demands for upper second-class and first-class degrees, broadening entry requirements and promoting other routes into the profession.

Over eight in ten (83%) are also witnessing more female candidates and hires join the profession compared with previous years. Around seven in ten (72%) are also seeing more candidates and hires from underrepresented groups. One challenge arising from this otherwise positive news is how companies can keep their staff throughout their career (see page 62). Indeed, recruitment and retention remain significant challenges this year. Around 80% of respondents agree it has been difficult to recruit (83%) and retain (79%) tax talent.

FILLING TECH SKILLS GAPS

The data suggests skills gaps are set to remain at least in the short-term; exacerbated by the adoption of technology, data and analytics in the tax realm. In response, more leaders are now looking to upskill existing staff (48%) than last year (36%), while fewer are seeking to outsource their taxation teams (43% compared to 65% in 2021) – training investments that could improve attraction and retention.

KPMG’s survey further highlights how employers still prefer to hire tax professionals who can learn technology rather than IT expertise who can learn tax. Within this, most respondents are looking to boost their tax departments’ capabilities in coding (46%), as well as scaling technologies like cloud, data and analytics and visualisation (70%). Six in ten also see emergent technologies (AI, blockchain, metaverse and quantum computing) as important, alongside spreadsheets (58%).

“Data is the next chapter for the modern tax department,” said Brad Brown, Chief Technology Officer – Tax, KPMG LLP. “But until organisations realise the predictive power that tax can bring to the entire organisation and deploy a tech-first, tax-second approach to hiring talent that supports certain aspects of the tax department, they’ll continue to leave tremendous value on the table.”

The productivity and retention benefits of investing in training and technology-first approaches could be significant. Over half of those surveyed are not leveraging tax data to scenario-plan or model for tax policy changes (56%), says KPMG. While this has improved on last year (69%), the findings are less positive for using tax data to align with ESG priorities. Here 68% say they do not do this, an increase on last year (55%).

Of pertinence to Global Mobility and its growing strategic role, over six in ten (65%) surveyed said their company did not leverage tax data to inform decision-making about mergers and acquisitions. A similar number (64%) are also yet to harness the benefits of tax data to prepare for or respond to audit enquiries, or

(56%) leverage tax data for predictive modelling.

Against the background of significant tax and climate reform, ongoing negotiations to overhaul the global tax code and regulatory complexity, “it’s clear that companies are still missing opportunities to add business value,” says the report.

“The tax and regulatory landscapes are fast evolving and increasingly complex,” comments Greg Engel, Vice-Chair – Tax, KPMG LLP. “Chief Tax Officers and Chief Financial Officers, in particular, are faced with numerous pressures to remain up to speed on all the moving parts and to offer stability even during times of great uncertainty. For these reasons, it’s imperative that C-suite leaders continue to prioritise investments in talent, D&A and technology to ensure the modern tax department continues to add maximum business impact.”

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“Tax departments are stepping out of the past by modernising the skillsets of their talent, embracing DEI and upgrading the technology they plan to use for the future. Those organisations that embrace this change will be the ones best positioned to compete and succeed.”

REMA SERAFI, KPMG’S NATIONAL MANAGING PARTNER – TAX



RISKY BUSINESS: GLOBAL MOBILITY'S GROWING ROLE IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Today, Mark Zuckerberg's comment "the biggest risk is not taking risks," sounds off-key. Global Mobility, HR and their colleagues across international business face more frequent, newly identified and 'blockbusting' risks. Instead, IBM Vice Chairman Gary Cohen's adage, "if you don't invest in risk management, it's risky business" has become much more pertinent, writes **Ruth Holmes**.

This is also an implied conclusion from the RES Forum's latest in its series of timely and insightful reports, *Global Mobility in Times of Conflict and Crisis*, published in June 2022 and written by Michael Dickmann and Benjamin Bader.

The study acknowledges there has always been inherent risks to operating businesses and assigning people across borders. These risks occupy the spectrum from political, economic, social, technological, ecological and legislative (PESTEL). Regional and national conflicts, for example, are not a surprise and certainly not new. They, like others, can be prepared for to an extent. Yet, it is the speed and frequency of 'Black Swan' events like Covid-19 and Russia's invasion of Ukraine that make risk management today different to what's gone before.

For businesses, the Global Mobility (GM) profession, supply chain, individuals and organisations, now it is about moving beyond VUCA to being resilient and agile. This means being prepared for and expecting the next unexpected event. "Where VUCA once was, resilience and agility circulate as key strengths for HR professionals," concludes David Esner, Director of the RES Forum, in the report. "Even in previous slowness to anticipate and respond we can find learnings and direction for the future."

PRACTICAL LESSONS FROM WESTERN MULTINATIONALS

Prompted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the RES Forum began research into how the war has affected Global Mobility's role. It collected data, interviewed experts and expatriates, and ran a virtual workshop to provide a picture of GM in times of crisis.

As well as a sobering picture of the human impact of war, it highlights what GM practitioners saw at the time as their organisation's biggest challenges. The responses show every area of the business was affected and the important role of GM as internal expert from the outset.

The extent of the impact includes companies affected indirectly. For example, organisations not actually operating in Ukraine, but affected elsewhere as international embargoes tightened. This includes companies with operations in Russia, where managing communication and reputational risk became particularly important. It also left big questions around 'where next?' for strategy, people management and international HR.

"While the strategic decision to leave the Russian market was made very quickly in many organisations, the operational side was often managed poorly," says the RES Forum's report. "In other words, it is now up to GM to get non-Russian

employees out of the country. Whether Russian employees will be given an opportunity to work abroad or simply laid off is another problem. Should the decision be made to retain them in the organisation, GM departments will face yet more logistical challenges."

These multifaceted challenges are detailed in the survey findings, which reveal what organisations' greatest risks are in response to the Ukraine war (see Box).

GREATEST RISKS ORGANISATIONS FACED IN RESPONSE TO THE UKRAINE WAR

1. Evacuation risks, including how to get Ukrainian men out of the country
2. Conflict escalation
3. IT security
4. Reputational risks
5. Supply chain risks
6. Workers' rights, particularly for Russians working abroad
7. Salary payment issues, including the practicalities of international money transfers
8. Decreased willingness of employees to take overseas assignments.



Above:
March 3, 2022:
Having just
disembarked a train,
people walk with their
luggage across the
tracks in Lviv, Ukraine.
Photo by Joel Carillet

RESPONDING TO RISK – THE PEOPLE PERSPECTIVE

The responses highlight both the practical aspects of disaster planning and business continuity, as well as the human and ethical angles. In today's purpose-led organisations, this reputational aspect is critical.

The authors point out that while it is necessary to think about this conflict on a professional level, "we must not forget that for the individual humans involved, this is an enormous tragedy. We are talking about severe injuries and the death of friends and family, brutal violence – both physical and emotional – and many other possible life-changing events. For international assignees in this situation, the world will never be the same again."

This is an opportunity for the Global Mobility supply chain and partners to share their knowledge and support. There are many examples of this among the Think Global People Relocate Awards this year. This included the International School of London, which offered places for children of families evacuating from Ukraine and access to its excellent transitions care.

These vital links in the Global Mobility supply chain and

partnerships are more important than ever in mitigating challenges and managing risks, with their focus on wellbeing for all the family. As conversations and best-practice sharing at the Future of Work Festival further highlighted, wellbeing continues to be a critical ingredient in building organisational and individual agility and resilience beyond simply evacuation.

Effective communication and effective risk management are at the core of the response – and indeed of every employers' duty of care. It means that organisations, and GM, need plans in place before a critical event happens.

"One of the key success ingredients for GM in such situations is intensive communication with assignees and local employees," says the RES Forum report. "This includes sharing information through a crisis response centre that can be contacted at any time. In addition, it is critical to have an effective employee tracking system, providing an overview of how developments might affect different people."

PREPARING FOR EXTENSIVE RISKS

The RES Forum has several risk-management benchmarking tools and comprehensive risk-management frameworks on its website. The membership body's previous reports also cover the issues and signpost practitioners to useful approaches. These include questions to ask partners and vendors to enable a robust approach to risk management.

This latest report on Global Mobility in Times of Conflict and Crisis is part of an ongoing cycle of risk management that defines and identifies risks, assesses the level of threat and potential impact, and determines the risk-management approach. It emphasises the importance of proactive GM strategies to guide organisations

through crises and conflicts that cover operations, as well as individuals.

The report also offers a "detailed perspective" on risk preparation from pre-crisis, acute crisis and post-crisis planning. As importantly, it speaks to the GM function's highly relevant experience in this VUCA world, and therefore GM's huge and growing value to the organisation at large.

The report recommends that, "A team comprising a cross-section of the organisation – HR, GM, operational business leaders – that can explore the broad business continuity implications and can work through a range of crisis scenarios in the aftermath of a conflict, is vital to improving future responses."

This touches on another critical aspect for GM: its ability to communicate the importance of international assignments while balancing this with their viability in the current business, political and economic climates, and in a way that promotes their value for building businesses and relationships across borders.

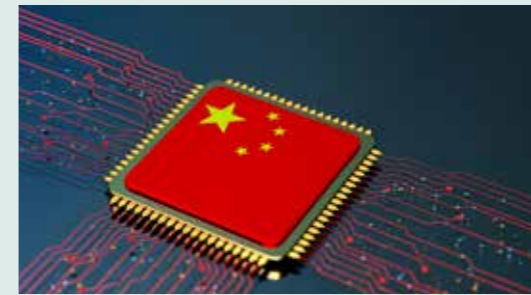
Post-pandemic and in a tight labour market, international remote working and remote working are reshaping the risk and duty of care landscape – not least around wellbeing and engagement. Research into proximity bias and the importance of face to face, in-person interactions is already underway in this emerging area.

GM as a function, as a sector and a supply chain, all have a critical input into this conversation and the opportunity to influence for good.

As one senior GM leader puts it: "We have learnt from Covid and now from Ukraine that we need more in-depth scenario planning at a much more granular level... In case the conflict spreads to Lithuania and Estonia, we already have looked at accounts, locations and countries. This would mean that we have information to relocate our large employee populations from the Baltic countries to Spain. We know specific locations in Spain, have looked at office spaces and temporary employee accommodation."

This comment clearly highlights the opportunities GM has to step up, communicate across the organisation, and be an even more critical strategic partner for resilient and agile businesses – and healthy employees and families. •

Businesses warned of Chinese state interference



MI5's Director General, Ken McCallum, and the FBI's Director, Chris Wray, took the unprecedented step of sharing a platform to publicly warn businesses of "the growing threat posed by the Chinese Communist Party to UK and US interests."

The joint speech, delivered at Thames House in July, specifically addressed business leaders and aimed "to send the clearest signal we can on a massive, shared challenge: China" and to talk about a "whole-of-system response... to protect our economies, our institutions, our democratic values."

The two organisations set out steps leaders should take to safeguard their enterprises and institutions from threats like covert theft, research exploitation, information advantage and tech transfer. It sent a robust warning to businesses that they must be alert and prepared for existential risks to their business and research.

As well as outlining individual cases of corporate espionage involving individuals, the speech gave the example of Smith's Harlow, a UK-based precision engineering firm. In 2017 Smith's Harlow entered into a deal with a Chinese firm, Futures Aerospace. The first of three agreed technology transfers saw Futures pay £3m for quality control procedures and training courses. After further sharing of valuable IP, Futures abandoned the deal. Smith's Harlow went into administration in 2020. As their chairman put it: "They've taken what they wanted and now they've got it, they didn't need the shell of Smith's".

AN UNEVEN PLAYING FIELD

"Early in his time as leader, President Xi said that in areas of core technology where it would otherwise be impossible for China to catch up with the West by 2050, they 'must research asymmetrical steps to catch up and overtake,'" explained Ken McCallum. "The scale of ambition is huge. And it's not really a secret. This means standing on your shoulders to get ahead of you.

"It means that if you are involved in cutting-edge tech, AI, advanced research or product development, the chances are your know-

how is of material interest to the Chinese Communist Party. And if you have, or are trying for, a presence in the Chinese market, you'll be subject to more attention than you might think."

The protective responsibility for hostile Foreign Direct Investment today rests with the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure, CPNI, working in close partnership with the National Cyber Security Centre. Mr McCallum encouraged businesses to reach out to its advisers who can offer expert insights into the risks and work alongside businesses to make them more resilient to interference.

"Please take advantage of the advice that's available," he said. "No set of guidance can cater with precision for each and every situation: I'm afraid I can't make this simple for you. The answers have to lie in combining our unique knowledge of the threats, with your unique knowledge of your business."

CHECKLIST

Mr McCallum was also clear and upfront that his warnings were not about Chinese people or the country, but its state interests. "First, the aim here is not to cut off from China – one fifth of humanity, with immense talent. China is central to global issues: economic growth, public health, climate change. Having, for example, almost 150,000 Chinese students in the UK's universities is, in almost all cases, good for them and good for us. The UK wants to engage with China wherever it's consistent with our national security and our values.

"My second point is we're talking today about the activities of the Chinese Communist Party and certain parts of the Chinese State. We're not talking about Chinese people – in whom there is so much to admire. We wholeheartedly welcome the Chinese diaspora's hugely positive contribution to UK life. Responding confidently to specific covert activities is just us doing our job."

Closing his address, Mr McCallum asked companies, research institutions and ventures to carefully consider:

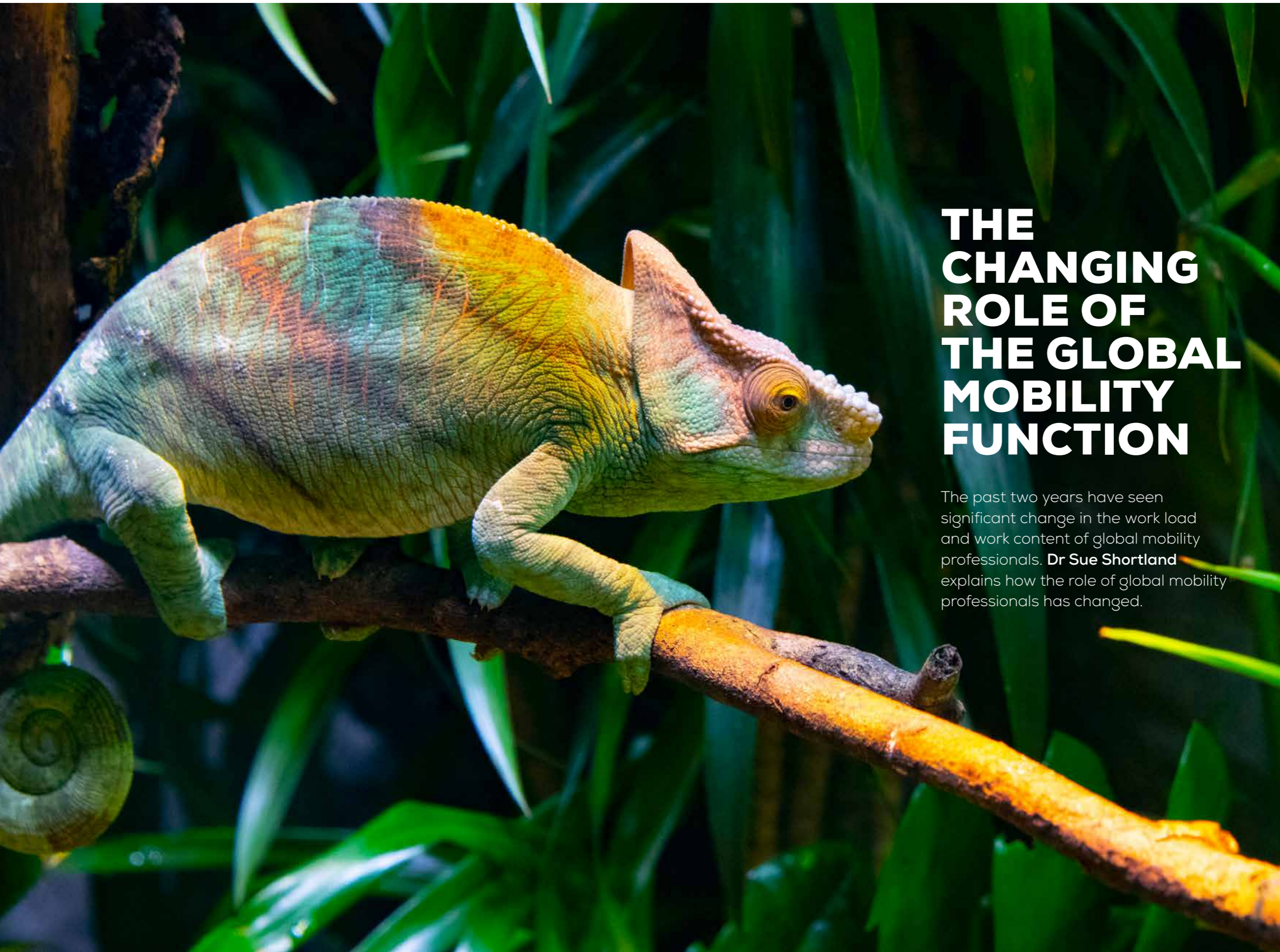
- Do you have a strategic approach to managing the risks described and discuss those risks round your board table?
- Do you have a thoughtful security culture at all levels in your organisation?
- Does your organisation know what its crown jewels are, which if stolen would compromise your future?
- Have you put in place the right controls to assess the risks attached to your funding sources and partnerships, and to protect your supply chain?

GLOBAL MOBILITY IN TIMES OF CONFLICT & CRISIS

Professor Michael F. Dickmann
& Dr Benjamin Bader

theresforum.com





THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE GLOBAL MOBILITY FUNCTION

The past two years have seen significant change in the work load and work content of global mobility professionals. **Dr Sue Shortland** explains how the role of global mobility professionals has changed.

The pandemic has resulted in a higher workload for the global mobility function as it has taken on responsibility for managing compliance issues linked to working from home/anywhere as a result of the trend towards increased virtual assignments and third country working due to restrictions on mobility. Its wider remit has also encompassed domestic mobility involving working from home or alternative locations, expanding beyond virtual assignments linked to international operations. There has also been significant change in terms of talent shortages and this has resulted in global mobility becoming involved to a far greater extent in resourcing positions both internationally and domestically.

ADVISORY INPUT

A further trend has been towards the development of an increasing range of policy types involving global mobility in policy design and implementation. It is also notable that greater flexibility has become the norm and this means that policies are no longer used as straitjackets to determine what individuals and their families can/cannot have with the exception management required; instead policy is being used as a facilitator of employee experience and meeting business needs. As a result, global mobility professionals find themselves involved to a far greater extent in advising the business and in tailoring packages to meet specific employee and family requirements. The advisory role of the mobility function has also expanded beyond traditional compliance expertise to encompass business advice and employee support.

This increased remit has resulted in greater pressure on global mobility professionals to



meet a far wider set of demands for compliance, operational and strategic understanding. This has raised the profile of global mobility such that it has attracted the attention of senior executives. Global mobility has long wished for a seat at the top table and the changes that have taken place during and post-pandemic have highlighted the added value that the function can bring to the business in terms of both practical and advisory input.

The core function of global mobility remains in the compliance

AN AGILE APPROACH IS NEEDED TO KEEP PACE WITH CURRENT TRENDS AND TO BE PROACTIVE IN ENSURING THAT BUSINESS GOALS STAY AHEAD BY ADAPTING TO CHANGING CONDITIONS OVER TIME.

area but the reality is that the role that the mobility function fulfils has expanded out into advising and planning business operations. Talent and workforce planning has been an aspiration for many years and there is no doubt that today talent shortages are driving forward global mobility's role in assisting with the identification of appropriate personnel and advising on their deployment in different locations, be these domestic or international.

THE TALENT AGENDA

As talent shortages increase, the role of global mobility in improving the employee experience has become even more important than ever before. Employees today, particularly millennials on the move, expect tailoring of support to their individual needs. Without flexibility in choice of benefits, attention being paid to the relocation of the family as well as the employee, and effective communication, the employee experience may suffer. As a result, global mobility professionals are spending an increasing proportion of their time on enhancing the employee experience. This, of course, has an operational underpinning as ensuring that

immigration and tax issues are dealt with effectively are important to ensuring the employee experience is good. In addition, aspects concerning payroll and reporting and using technology and data solutions to facilitate family moves are now expected to be both efficient and effective thereby supporting employee and family mobility.

Talent shortages have resulted in global mobility professionals participating in planning strategies, involving both international staffing and domestic resourcing. Resourcing is no longer a one-off exercise as employers are focusing to a greater extent on longer-term talent planning as this ensures business continuity. Talent planning also forms part of the employee experience because employees expect to have an idea of what their future career prospects might be within their employing organisation. As a result, the global mobility function has increased its advisory stake in the business as it must ensure that the need for mobility is both identified early on and that proactive steps are taken to ensure that cross-border moves are facilitated effectively. These rely upon effective communication and excellent technology and data solutions.

ADDING VALUE

For the global mobility professionals today, it is crucial that they know where they can add value. It is here that the function can display its skills to best advantage. In order to do this, it is important that global mobility professionals are clear as to who their customers are, that they communicate with them clearly, efficiently and effectively and that they listen to any changes that are evolving. As part of this process, policy design requires a dynamic and flexible approach such that policies are customised and tailored as appropriate to support both the business need and the employee experience.

Flexibility requires leveraging technology and data solutions and this means that the global mobility professional requires understanding of data analytics. Indeed, the data analytics field is one of the fastest-growing areas within the global mobility function. Global mobility professionals must ensure that they do not drown in data but use it selectively and wisely to identify

courses of action and support their recommendations.

In order to continue to add value, global mobility professionals need different skills today than they may have relied upon in the past. Firstly, an understanding of technology and data analytics is crucial if they are to identify trends, changes, and the necessary actions that flow from these. In addition, in order to play a more strategic role, global mobility professionals need to understand the mobility goals of the business and also those of the employees and families on the move. This requires a strong customer focus – with customers being both business managers and relocating employees and families.

Excellent communication skills are required and these include emotional intelligence, active listening, and clear presentation. In addition, global mobility professionals require relationship building skills including empathy and openness. Such communication capabilities underpin all aspects of the global mobility professionals' role – be that operational, advisory or strategic. In addition, their role now requires creative thinking. Policy design is no longer rigid and static but requires a creative approach to best meet business needs and support the employee experience.

SKILL SETS TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS

In order to ensure success in their role, global mobility professionals must meet the basic operational standards required and so must hold detailed knowledge of – or be able to outsource as appropriate – compliance aspects. Compliance is the bedrock upon which success rests and mistakes cannot be entertained here. The ability to devise and implement appropriate policies to support employee mobility also forms part of meeting basic operational standards. These underpin the employee experience and, if handled well, will ensure employee satisfaction.

Employees and their families expect flexible and tailored solutions and these will require a skill set that includes communication ability. The advisory role for the business also requires a skill set that provides a consultative as well as an advisory approach such that the business can make appropriate decisions

and take a flexible approach as necessary. Again, if global mobility professionals can do this well, it will result in business success. Turning to talent management, the skill sets required by global mobility professionals also include consultation and communication and here building employee engagement is the desired outcome.

Employee engagement flows from both employee and business success and, as such, the operational, employee experience and business advisory aspects all contribute to engagement in the round. All of these rely upon excellent use of available technologies and so the skill set of the global mobility function must include an understanding of the capabilities of the technologies that are available and the selection of the most appropriate to meet both employee experience and business needs. A sound understanding of the metrics that are produced will contribute to current business activities and future strategic decisions.

Differentiation of talent and its

contribution to the business will drive forward approaches taken to supporting employees and meeting business goals via mobility. This also requires the global mobility function to pay attention to issues such as equality, diversity and inclusion, and to integrate these within the talent attraction and retention strategy. An agile approach is needed to keep pace with current trends and to be proactive in ensuring that business goals stay ahead by adapting to changing conditions over time. This is a demanding task when considered in the global context. As such, the global mobility profession needs to ensure that its approaches to devising support for global mobility promote career growth, talent attraction, and also focus on value in the long term.

There is no doubt that the brief to which the global mobility function will operate in future is both exciting and demanding – no longer will global mobility be a business Cinderella. Rather, its future is bright and very exciting. ◦



Why now is the time to choose the Isle of Man

The Isle of Man offers amazing careers, entrepreneurial opportunities, and an incredible work-life balance.



Set in a stunning UNESCO Biosphere, the Island, which occupies a central position in the Irish Sea between the English and Irish coast, is home to a welcoming community, a vibrant food and drink scene awash with independent businesses, music and cultural venues, outdoor adventures, sporting events and more.

Finding the right opportunity is often easier than you think; the Island has an ever-growing economy and well-regarded business centre and is home to many of the world's foremost organisations. With a wide range of diverse and new sectors represented, including finance, tech, medicinal cannabis, and biomed, with chances to progress or kick-start a career in healthcare, education, hospitality, engineering and manufacturing, retail and more.

The Isle of Man is a place where entrepreneurs can find space

and support to build or relocate a business with a world-class technical infrastructure and an approachable and supportive local Government that offers a range of support schemes to relocating individuals and businesses which include relocation incentives and financial assistance.

Interested to find out more? Locate Isle of Man has shortlisted five reasons why individuals and businesses should consider a relocation to the Isle of Man.

REDISCOVER WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Isle of Man residents can go from boardroom to beach in under 15 minutes. In fact, in the Isle of Man you are only ever a short distance from the coastline. With an average commute time of 20 minutes and 86% of local employers adopting flexible working practices, Island residents would argue that the work-

life balance they benefit from in the Isle of Man is almost unparalleled, with 86% of them rating their quality of life as 'excellent'.

Daniel, an IT and Projects Risk Specialist, who relocated to the Island from Kenya has discovered just this:

"Back in Kenya I would be commuting to work for up to an hour each way. Here in the Isle of Man I can be at work within 10 minutes! This has made a huge difference to my day; it means I have more time to do the things I love and can explore the Island more now the days are longer, and the evenings are lighter. I am a keen cyclist, and there is ample opportunity here to get out on the bike and explore the country lanes, coastal roads, and off-road tracks.

"My work-life balance has drastically improved – my working days are far more structured, and I work far less overtime compared to my previous role."

FINANCIALLY REWARDING

As a financially stable and politically progressive jurisdiction, the Isle of Man appeals to both individuals and businesses thanks to its financially rewarding system and low taxation environment (the Island has some of the lowest tax rates in Europe). Residents also enjoy 0% capital gains tax, 0% inheritance tax and 0% stamp duty.

Calli and Kyle, who relocated from South Africa and work in the Island's finance district, main motivation for moving to the Island was the financial stability it could afford them and their family:

"What really appealed to us, was how safe the Isle of Man sounded, not just in terms of physical safety, but the strength of the currency and the Island's diverse and well-established economy. The average salary is certainly higher here too, and with personal taxes being lower, allows us to live a very comfortable life."

EXPERIENCE A NEW WAY OF LIVING

The Isle of Man is the only entire jurisdiction to be named a UNESCO Biosphere and with 40% of the Island inhabited, it is littered with rich green spaces including open countryside, plantations, glens, and a stunning coastline with miles of beautiful beaches.

In the Isle of Man, work-life balance means you are only minutes away from enjoying that much needed downtime after a hard day's work; with a vibrant café, bar, and restaurant scene, you can choose from a huge range of places to eat. Appreciating quality time is important to Isle of Man residents; visit the theatre or take part in an incredible range of sporting events or enjoy a paddleboarding adventure, watch whales and dolphins from your sea kayak and join one of hundreds of clubs; everything from music, dancing and painting to martial arts and yoga.

Andy who works in construction relocated to the Island in 2021 to be with his partner Louise, and was pleasantly surprised at how much there is to do in the Isle of Man:

"Everything is on your doorstep – we'll take ourselves off for mini adventures all the time – whether that's on the motorbikes, or out for a bite to eat – we love eating out and there is such a huge range of

gorgeous fresh food to be sampled all over the Island. We love music and theatre, and there's a fantastic entertainment scene here – we'll go to a gig, concert, or play most weekends, and have made many new friends as a result."

WELCOMING COMMUNITY

Ranked as one of the best places to live for expats in the British Isles, the Manx people are proud of their heritage, yet outward looking and progressive. The Island nation proudly celebrates its diversity and welcomes relocators from all backgrounds and cultures – its largest non-British populations are South African, Filipino, Polish, and Bulgarian.

Manx people are open, friendly, and often found conversing with total strangers. In fact, crime statistics in previous years have revealed the Isle of Man is one of the safest places to live in the British Isles.

For many relocators, one of the biggest benefits of moving to the Isle of Man is the welcoming community. Betty, an Urban Designer, who relocated from Sweden to the Island in 2020, agrees:

"I've lived in many countries and the first thing that really stood out to me here was how welcoming the community are, and how many opportunities there are to meet new people – from yoga classes and art and design courses to professional business networks – I've made many new friends and business connections. The Manx people are very open to 'newcomers' and I've been welcomed with open arms."

ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

Through a mixture of Government funding and support schemes, a low taxation regime and access to a secure infrastructure sufficient to house global organisations, the Isle of Man has been, and continues to be a hub for entrepreneurialism. In the last five years alone, the Isle of Man Government's Department for Enterprise has supported 469 small businesses through its Micro Business Grant Scheme – designed to give start-ups and early-stage small businesses the necessary financial support, training, and business acumen to get their business off the ground.

Businessman Nick, benefited

from Government support in the early stages of his relocation to the Island, supporting him in hiring and relocating several employees to the Island:

"I can build the company much, much faster in the Isle of Man due to the Government support and a more favourable economic climate, especially in the tech industry. Because of this, I can hire more software developers looking to relocate to the Island from all over the world who are absolutely thrilled at the idea of making the Isle of Man their home because it's so idyllic." •

Find out more about relocating to the Isle of Man at: www.locate.im or contact a member of the Locate Isle of Man team at: locate.dfe@gov.im



"My work-life balance has drastically improved – my working days are far more structured, and I work far less overtime compared to my previous role."

DANIEL, IT AND PROJECTS RISK SPECIALIST



FINANCIAL WELLBEING AT THE HEART OF EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION AND PRODUCTIVITY

How well companies support their staff in times of economic hardship can have a significant impact on employee wellbeing and productivity, and on their ability to recruit and retain the next generation of top talent, argues **Marianne Curphey**.

These are tough times for companies. The temptation to cut costs and withdraw from expensive employee benefit schemes in order to remain financially afloat is real.

It is equally challenging, however, for employees. They have also seen prices and inflation rise in many geographies and utility bills rise once again in the autumn. Increasing living costs, supply chain problems, rising inflation and an uncertain macro-economic environment are taking their toll on the standard of living for many employees.

InterNations, the world's largest expat community with more than 4 million members, reveals in its latest Expat Insider survey that many expats are struggling with their personal finances when living and working abroad.

The survey, which provides insights into expat life in 52 destinations, found that Mexico, Indonesia, Taiwan, Portugal, Spain, the UAE, Vietnam, Thailand, Australia, and Singapore are the best destinations for expats in 2022.

The worst destinations for expats are Kuwait, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Japan, South Africa, Turkey, Italy, and Malta. The United Kingdom ranks 37th out of 52: expats find it rewarding to work here, but are unhappy with their personal finances. Globally, one in five

expats (21%) is unhappy with their financial situation, and 28% feel that their disposable household income is not enough to lead a comfortable life.

This is a significant factor in employees' lives and so companies would do well to think about how they can support their staff as economic conditions get tougher. Organisations should consider how they can promote financial wellbeing among their staff – both in the UK and abroad. Being worried about finances can have a major impact on staff productivity and may even lead to them leaving their job or taking a period of sick leave.

HOW CAN EMPLOYERS SUPPORT FINANCIAL WELLBEING?

In the UK, the latest research by the Office for National Statistics shows that 77% of people are concerned about the rising cost of living.

“With the cost of living at the forefront of everyone’s minds, pay and perks are key,” says Louise Skittrall, founder of Swindon-based Robinson Grace HR Consultancy.

“Employers offering incentives such as working from home, free parking, electric charging points or subsidised staff meals, will appear considerably more attractive to prospective employees seeking a more cost-effective job choice,” she says.

While job vacancies continue to

“EMPLOYERS ARE HAVING TO LOOK AT PAY AS A MEANS OF ATTRACTING APPLICANTS, BUT THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING A STRONG EMPLOYEE PROPOSITION HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT.”

LOUISE SKITTRALL,
ROBINSON GRACE HR CONSULTANCY



outweigh the number of applicants, organisations are struggling to attract top talent.

“Employers are having to look at pay as a means of attracting applicants, but the importance of building a strong employee proposition has never been more important.”

WEALTH at work, a leading financial wellbeing and retirement specialist, has also conducted research looking at the impact of financial worries on people’s lives.

It found that nearly half of UK adults (47%) say that financial worries impact their life, with more than a quarter (26%) saying that it makes them feel depressed and anxious, rising to more than a third (35%) of 35–54-year-olds. Nearly a fifth (17%) admit they struggle to sleep worrying about money, which rises to 22% of those aged 18–34.

Jonathan Watts-Lay, Director of WEALTH at work, said financial education and guidance delivered in the workplace is key in providing much-needed support and many employers now offer this as part of their overall wellbeing objectives. This could be provided as workshops or even one-to-one

coaching sessions. Digital tools and helplines can also be a great source of support.

He says the other options employers could consider are:

- **Employee discount schemes:** discounts to save employees money on the things they want and need to buy.
- **Employee Assistance Programmes:** to help employees deal with personal problems that might impact their work performance, health and wellbeing.
- **Introduce salary sacrifice schemes:** It is very common for pension contributions to be paid this way, but they can also include payments for transport such as company cars, bikes, and bus passes, and even mobile phones, gym passes and health and dental care.
- **Promoting pensions:** 30% of UK adults say they know they should be saving more for retirement, but it can be tempting to stop or reduce pension contributions when times are tough.
- **Providing debt support:**

Nearly a quarter (23%) of UK adults say that being in debt is one of their biggest financial concerns. Many companies offer financial education seminars on debt management to help employees understand how to manage and pay off debt, and what help is available. Some companies now also offer loan consolidation through payroll to support those who need help paying off their debts.

- **Helping employees to make the most of their savings:** Savings and investment accounts offered in the workplace, including workplace ISAs, can provide a convenient way for people to save.
- **Share plan options:** Many workplaces also offer the opportunity for employees to invest into shares in the company via a workplace share plan, including Save As You Earn schemes and Share Incentive Plans.
- **Signpost external support services:** There are many support services available to make employees aware of. Citizens Advice can help work out what

benefits or grants employees may be eligible for.

- **Communicate your benefits:** No matter how good the financial wellbeing support you have in place, if it is not well communicated and understood, then it’s likely that it will be overlooked by employees.
- **Introduce financial education programmes:** Financial education and guidance in the workplace can make a huge difference, giving employees the opportunity to learn about budgeting, money saving tips, saving, debt management, and retirement planning etc.

DO ONE-OFF BONUSES HELP YOUR EMPLOYEES?

Charles Cotton, Senior Adviser on Performance and Reward to the CIPD, says that against a backdrop of soaring inflation, a number of employers are generously topping up pay packets with a cost-of-living payment, although this can potentially adversely impact benefit arrangements. Before going ahead with new schemes, it might be helpful to talk to trade unions for

additional advice and guidance.

“To make sure your well-intended generosity doesn’t inadvertently cause extra undue stress or financial hardship, it’s worth considering what other options you could offer your workforce,” he says. “People professionals in the CIPD Community have been discussing various options, including offering gift vouchers in lieu of cash payments (although even this comes with tax implications), giving a cost-of-living pay rise, or spreading a one-off payment over several months so that it acts like a temporary pay rise.”

Boosting people’s incomes is perhaps the most obvious way in which employers can support financial wellbeing, and will likely have the most immediate impact.

“It’s also worth considering what you can do to make your benefits package work harder for those that are struggling to make ends meet, and what financial wellbeing support and guidance you can direct people to,” he says. “It’s also encouraging to see some people professionals in the CIPD Community taking a longer-term view by supporting in-work progression as a means of increasing people’s future earning potential.”

PUTTING EMPLOYEES AT THE HEART OF THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

One issue which HR and mobility teams are having to grapple with is the now disparate nature of the office. Research by Towergate Health & Protection shows that on average 45% of employees are now working on a hybrid basis, splitting their time between working from home and their usual place of work.

This raises concerns for employee health and wellbeing, as without the traditional workplace there is no hub for the delivery and communication of health and wellbeing benefits.

“Ensuring that employees are well looked after and feel equally valued is a major issue,” says Debra Clark, Head of Specialist Consulting.

Hybrid working now reaches far and wide. Only 12% of companies said they have no hybrid workers and another 12% said that all their employees are now working on a hybrid basis. Perhaps surprisingly,

the phenomenon is not limited to office-based industries. Respondents from the construction industry said an average 26% of their staff are hybrid workers. In the hospitality and leisure industry, 32% of employees are hybrid workers, and in manufacturing it is 28%.

While the need for support has never been greater, employers need to adapt in how they offer it. Digital communications are often the best way to ensure that all employees are kept up to date. Being able to see their options online and manage their requirements in one place helps employees to engage with health and wellbeing support. Virtual consultations with GPs, physiotherapists, counsellors and other experts mean that employees can access support quickly and easily whether in the office, at home or travelling. •

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“IT’S ALSO WORTH CONSIDERING WHAT YOU CAN DO TO MAKE YOUR BENEFITS PACKAGE WORK HARDER FOR THOSE THAT ARE STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET, AND WHAT FINANCIAL WELLBEING SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE YOU CAN DIRECT PEOPLE TO.”

CHARLES COTTON, SENIOR ADVISER ON PERFORMANCE AND REWARD TO THE CIPD

BOOSTING BANDWIDTH: UPGRADING GLOBAL TECH TALENT STRATEGIES

The figures are brutal: by 2026, the current global shortage of software engineers will have grown by more than 545,000. How can global economies and employers fill the gap? David Sapsted reports.

The route to 2026 is clear. Even by the start of 2022, job openings in India's IT sector had more than doubled to 129,000. In the UK, vacancies topped 64,000, a 191 per cent rise over the year.

And it's not just India and the UK that are affected by a growing mismatch between the tech skills needed and the pipeline creating them. According to a report from Amazon Web Services, the number of workers requiring digital skills in six Asia-Pacific countries – Singapore, Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, and South Korea – will increase five-fold in the next two years alone.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, research by the Florida-based DevOps Institute found that only 29 per cent of tech companies across the world had sufficient IT talent, with the most acute shortages being in cognitive, technical, and process and framework skills.

It is a problem being felt by every sector from fintech to pharma. The challenge of overcoming it is not proving easy. For many years, companies in the West relied on skilled immigration. Now, with demand for talent increasing in home countries and with salaries rising, it is not the default solution it once was. The extent to which India has been the source of much of this talent is illustrated by the fact that of the 407,071 H-1B petitions – primarily, visas for techies – approved by the US by the end of last year, 301,616 of them (74.1 per cent) had gone to Indians.

Responding to this, nations such as Australia and the UK have introduced their own high-potential tech visas, specifically aimed at attracting the digital talent they so badly need. But even they appreciate that the overseas talent pool is getting harder to tap, with the result that upskilling has become the new buzzword across industries and an organisational imperative because of the “dramatic” lack of sufficient IT talent worldwide, according to DevOps' latest Upskilling IT report.

RETHINKING UPSKILLING

Research by the institute found that 52 per cent of global respondents said their organisations had adopted upskilling programmes this year. This compared to only 32 per cent in last year's survey. And research for the 2022 Talent Trends report from Dutch global recruiters Randstad Sourceright, found that two-thirds of life sciences and pharma companies regarded upskilling and re-skilling current employees as effective ways of addressing the talent shortage.

Mike Smith, Global CEO of Randstad Sourceright, said that the life sciences and pharmaceuticals sectors had succeeded in tackling “tremendous pressure to deliver life-saving innovations during the pandemic”. But he added: “Now, the need for medical innovation has only grown, forcing organisations to compete across all industries for a limited supply of in-demand tech talent.”

“Failing to win the race for those skills will be costly, but a strong focus on the talent experience; offering [a] purposeful workplace culture; maximising flexibility; and investing in diversity, equity and inclusion can help companies stand out. Re-skilling and upskilling talent will also be essential to combat talent scarcity and demonstrate how much organisations value their people.”

Yet aside from the pressing need for retraining or upskilling existing staff, there is an equally pressing need to attract young people to fill growing numbers of vacancies. And, according to a report on the Raconteur website over the summer: “While graduate entry is still the most common path into the profession, universities around the world are not producing enough graduates to meet demand.”

The sector’s focus on graduates means the industry is missing out on a huge amount of untapped talent, according to James Barrett, Regional Director at recruitment consultancy Michael Page Technology. There may have been a big shift in the number of IT apprenticeships and boot camps, he says, but they are still just scratching the surface.

“A lot of the jobs that these students will do in the future don’t even exist at this point – a lot of those will be digital jobs.”

TINA GOTSCHI, PRINCIPAL AT ADA



In a bid to encourage young people in the UK, the National College for Digital Skills in London – named ‘Ada’ after 19th century mathematician Ada King, Countess of Lovelace, famed for her work on Charles Babbage’s mechanical computer – is pioneering the teaching of important tech subjects for teenagers.

The college encourages students towards core STEM subjects – science, technology, engineering and mathematics – that form the backbone of the tech industry. However, Tina Gotschi, Principal at Ada, told the BBC in July: “A lot of the jobs that these students will do in the future don’t even exist at this point – a lot of those will be digital jobs.”

“The college was initially founded to address the skills gap, but unfortunately over time, it is just getting greater. The pipeline of students coming through is shrinking and there is a lack of computer science teachers, too.”

EMPLOYEES SEEK TECH SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Mark Watson, Chief Executive at web design agency Fat Beehive, said he believed that historical race and gender biases had dissuaded many people from pursuing a career in tech. He felt diversity of employee background, life experience and thought were vital to encourage more people to participate in the tech sector.

There are, however, some innovative programmes to get people involved in the industry. Last year, Amazon’s AWS re/Start programme doubled its presence in Europe and is now available in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK.

The free, full-time, 12-week programme is designed to prepare unemployed or under-employed individuals for careers in cloud computing and, after successfully completing the course, 90 per cent of participants are offered job interviews through the scheme.

Ronan Harris, Managing Director of Google (UK and Ireland) says that big tech companies are trying to play their part in providing people with qualifications. “We’ve trained over 800,000 people in the UK in a range of digital skills,” he told the BBC. “We want people to be excited about technology. But increasingly, what we’re seeing is all jobs that are being advertised have some form of digital requirement to them.”

Meanwhile, US multinationals have embarked on a series of major tech tuition schemes while, at the other end of the market, there are the likes of Miami’s Ruben Harris who sees an opportunity to upskill workers and unlock economic opportunities for all.

Mr Harris has created Career Karma, a start-up that enables workers to transition into the tech industry. The platform, which is free for users, helps people find a tech boot camp or education programme that is right for them. It then provides support and guidance in the form of coaches, who are a mix of peers and mentors. “We work with forward-thinking employers that want to quickly level up their frontline workers into technology roles in their companies in less than a year,” Mr Harris said.

In a blog on the techUK website, Rod Flavell, CEO of international recruitment company FDM Group, said many companies were still catching up when it came to getting talent with the right digital skills into the workplace. He said getting the right skills could be facilitated by various learning and development programmes, including skills boot camps provided by

“By making our training programmes available to a diverse pool of people, we can address the skills shortage issue at its root and create a steady pipeline of business-ready professionals who can start adding value from day one of deployment.”

ROD FLAVELL, CEO OF INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT COMPANY FDM GROUP

the Institute of Coding, with which FDM has been collaborating for many years.

“Apprenticeships are another way of upskilling staff, which ensures building a workforce personally developed to the individual business needs,” he wrote. “As an industry, we have a responsibility to support the training and development of ‘Net New Digital Talent’ into the market. This will simultaneously fill the digital skills gap, provide opportunity to under-represented parts of society and regulate cost to companies.

“FDM has highlighted over the last 30 years that it can recruit 15,000-plus people with limited or no tech experience, train them in specific areas of technology and nurture them into specialist IT careers. By making our training programmes available to a diverse pool of people, we can address the skills shortage issue at its root and create a steady pipeline of business-ready professionals who can start adding value from day one of deployment.”

Should anyone still question the importance of upskilling, this year’s report from US technology workforce development company Pluralsight, based on a survey of more than 700 technology learners and leaders in the US, Europe, Australia and India, found that 48 per cent had considered changing jobs because they were not given sufficient resources to develop tech skills. Additionally, three-quarters agreed that their organisation’s preparedness to dedicate resources to developing their tech skills was influencing their plans on whether or not to remain with their employers.

Were he alive today, Benjamin Franklin might have observed: “In this world, nothing can be said to be certain, except death, taxes and upskilling.” ●



DECISION-MAKERS LOOK OVERSEAS TO FILL SKILLS GAPS

A new report from global mobility platform Localize canvassed the views of those most often involved in important hiring decisions. The findings highlight the valuable role of global talent attraction and recruitment in the UK labour market today, as well as the opportunity for more companies to look beyond their local labour markets to fill critical jobs.

Localize’s survey confirmed that, among all professions, key tech and R&D roles were proving the hardest to fill among organisations not hiring globally.

It also identified a “definite emerging trend of companies hiring and relocating international talent from abroad,” and that companies recruiting internationally “are better positioned to hire for key tech roles.”

The report’s third key finding that “employees are more confident in their employers’ hiring strategy when it leverages global talent acquisition” also suggests that workforces today are more internationally minded and open to opportunities.

Despite the benefits of hiring internationally, the number of organisations doing so remained relatively modest. Currently, 24% of organisations in the survey were actively pursuing a relocate policy. However, 26% of remaining respondents indicated an interest in looking abroad for staff in future with 13% of them saying they were now actively pursuing the idea.

“Granted, international recruitment alone will not be able to solve the UK’s labour shortage, but it could prove to be highly effective for companies in some of the industries that have experienced the highest year-over-year increase in total job vacancies,” said the report.

Perceived costs and time to hire were cited as the biggest obstacles to companies availing to recruiting internationally. However, Localize maintained its figures showed “companies can recruit and hire foreign talent at a speed and cost that is comparable to domestic recruitment”.

WHERE PEOPLE AND PURPOSE MEAN BUSINESS

Blick Rothenberg is an award-winning tax, audit and advisory firm that prides itself on putting people first. Private equity-backed, it is successful on people, client satisfaction and financial indicators. **Ruth Holmes** caught up with **Mark Abbs**, Partner and Head of Global Mobility, to find out how Blick Rothenberg aligns people, purpose and profitability to such effect.

Winner of this year's Think Global People Relocate Award for Excellence in Talent Development, Deployment and Diversity, and making the Best Leadership, Research, Thought Leadership or Book shortlist, Blick Rothenberg is having a stellar 2022. Revenues and profitability in its Global Mobility team have typically been up 30-40% and, despite the current environment, organic growth is currently +15-20%. From a people perspective, the 40-strong Global Mobility team, which offers bespoke expatriate tax and advisory services to a wide range of companies and sectors from life sciences to fintech, has the highest retention rate across the company, which itself has higher-than-average retention in these talent-tight times.

Describing why, Mark Abbs, Partner and Head of Global Mobility, says, "We are very much a relationship-based advisory firm. We know that great relationships yield the best outcomes. We therefore put out the red carpet and try to treat everyone really well."

Looking after people well has been a key theme running throughout the company's 80-year history. Today, Blick Rothenberg recognises its uniquely diverse workforce. It is committed to creating a workplace founded on inclusion that perpetually unlocks the talent within its workforce in a nurturing culture where people and teams can flourish, and client focus is key. A fifth of the company speaks a second language and 32 languages are spoken in total. The Global Mobility team for instance is made up of people from lots of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. From a client perspective, this means the team can provide advice to clients in multiple languages and try to properly understand cultural diversity.

"The day I arrived for an interview, it was hot outside," recalls Mark. "I remember sitting in the client reception and an individual who worked in reception (and who is still here now), brought over a water bottle and a glass on a tray and made me start to feel really welcome. That's 11 years ago and I still remember that fondly.

"I also remember talking to someone who would go on to be an early Global Mobility client of the firm. We had a good meeting and when I saw him next, one of the first things he said was, 'Mark, I just want to say when I left you after our meeting, I stood on the porch looking out onto Baker Street. It was raining and I was thinking could I run to the tube, or should I get a taxi? Then I felt this tap on my shoulder and I was asked if I'd like an umbrella and this person just handed me one.'

"He remembered this. It made such an impression. What's interesting is that person had not been asked or trained to do all that. It just seemed like the right thing to do."

PEOPLE FIRST

Such trust and authenticity are vital currency as customers and employees become more conscious of social, ethical and environmental concerns. Given the company's culture, it was therefore a natural step for Blick Rothenberg's leadership team to define its purpose in relation to its people.

"We've been going through a lot of strategic conversations – I'm part of the Blick Rothenberg leadership team – and what's interesting is that we always put people up there first together with doing the right thing. If you put your people first, hopefully they become more engaged and the quality of the support they give to their clients is immense. So, I'm proud that in our 'One Company, One People'

strategy, we've got our people first. I'm convinced our clients will then get a much better and more genuine service. We think it's really important to do it this way around."

Creating psychologically safe workplaces – the ability to learn from each other at every level of the organisation, share ideas and concerns, take responsibility for and grow from mistakes if they happen – is an important aspect of putting people first, supporting wellbeing and diversity of thought, and doing the right thing.

Over the years, Blick Rothenberg has tried to build an inclusive culture where people can do their best work, be authentic, collaborative and respectful. Regular staff surveys measure the success of this approach and engagement tends to be consistently high in Global Mobility.

AUTHENTICITY AND PROGRESS

This culture is fully supported daily by the board, CEO Nimesh Shah, and Head of Diversity & Inclusion, Angela Cooke, as they try to help everyone drive positive behaviours throughout the organisation. This focus includes seeking to make further progress by tracking gender pay gaps, reporting and narratives, and transparency around job roles, salaries, bonuses and progression.

Blick Rothenberg's three employee resource groups (ERG) are also critical aspects of the company's culture. The Rainbow Network (LGBTQ+), BRave Network (Blick Rothenberg Acknowledges and Values Ethnicity, which is soon to rebrand to emBRace, to reinforce that everyone is welcome), and the Women's Network, are all open to everyone, irrespective of identity. The networks are delivering a number of successes and bringing the company together by building communication and understanding.

Mark is a lead sponsor of the Rainbow Network, a prospect which initially terrified him. "I was really worried about not saying or doing the right things until I had really helpful conversations with those in the network who said it was fine to be myself and ask questions. They encouraged me to come along and learn, which is what I wanted to do. And I've learnt so much.

"The group is there to inform and share learning. It's not necessarily to say what the firm's stance or view on anything is or should be, but it's a space for people to make their own mind up on different topics. I'd like to be involved with the other network groups too in due course so I can learn more about other groups and communities."

The Rainbow Network was named by its members to make it about more than terminology, and to be as open and inclusive as possible. The group was also instrumental in ensuring Blick Rothenberg's people have the opportunity if they wish to share their gender pronouns after their names in their email signatures.

"What also worked really well was when our Women's Network had someone from the NHS attend to talk about menopause," says Mark. "There was probably as many



Mark Abbs with some of his colleagues receiving their award at the Think Global People Relocate Future of Work Festival

men as women, which was a good thing, especially if you compare this to two years ago when the same event would probably have attracted mainly women. We are all affected by the menopause, either directly or indirectly with someone we might know. I just found the session incredibly helpful. I might not understand it all at first, but at least it's a start. Off the back of this talk, our Women's Network put together some really helpful guidance to help BR become a more menopause supportive culture.

"My view is that we have done some great things over the last two or three years around diversity and inclusion. We've got an intranet site called BRian and there have been so many incredible articles. There was a huge amount written and that was very insightful about Black Lives Matter, for example. There's been a lot around Pride and other related themes.

"This has been great, but now we are almost at a crossroads about what we do next. It's not just about writing articles or education. It's about making sure our policies, our processes – the way we do things are right too so that our people feel genuinely included and can

bring themselves to work. For me, it's critical that we are authentic. First, it's really important to do something, even if it might feel a little like tokenism at times, but if you can be authentic, that's so much better. Then once you've gone through the fundamentals the real challenge is then to really make a difference."

DEI, WELLBEING AND PERFORMANCE

Post-pandemic, where we work has become a touchpoint for an organisation's approach to its people. Whether it's the wholesale return to office working seen in some big City companies, the four-day week or a hybrid approach, how people work is a key factor in performance and retention, diversity and inclusion.

How is Blick Rothenberg balancing these pressures with its commercial needs and its One Company, People First focus? "I think this is a really, really difficult one," says Mark Abbs. "I've worked from home on a Friday for the past 20 years. It's the thing that kept me going because I worked so hard talking to people all week, but on Fridays I saw my kids go to school

and I was able to do client work without distraction.

"During lockdown, working from home for long periods I realised was not my preferred way to work. I'm lucky to have comfortable surroundings, people and family to talk to and have quite a strong independent character, but I was still finding it difficult. I am aware that it must be hard for people on their own perhaps.

"Our 'hybrid work from home' approach encourages our people to come to the office two to three days on average as we see huge value in social interactions with our colleagues and clients. It has enabled us to attract and retain from a much wider talent pool. For instance, we have a GM team member who has returned to work after a five-year career break and is able to balance being a professional and a parent. We have another individual in the team who returned to work with us after they retired – they can perform a role they really enjoy while maintaining their preferred lifestyle choice in Devon.

"We check into our desks with an app, so all of us know who's in and who isn't. We trust our people and prefer to empower them to make the

"OUR 'HYBRID WORK FROM HOME' APPROACH HAS ENABLED US TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN FROM A MUCH WIDER TALENT POOL."

right decisions when deciding where to work. We recognise that the firm also needs to provide the best working environment when we do attend the office for this to work the best."

To try to support effective team communication and opportunities to interact with colleagues more, each department has monthly team meetings, regular team days and socials tailored to team preferences. Like many employers, Blick Rothenberg is also now working on plans to redesign its office. "We set up a steering group with a cross-section of the firm and asked them if they could work with the designers to create a better environment to work, with more breakout and thinking areas, more collaborative and quiet zones, more plants, better lighting. We've now refurbished the fifth floor of the office and developing other areas to create workspaces that suit everyone's needs."

This people-first approach to a tech-enabled future is core to Blick Rothenberg. Treating its people as thoughtfully as it does its clients is what makes it special. "Our service is genuinely personal – we do have lots of the latest tech, but it's very much people first." •

"WE ARE VERY MUCH A RELATIONSHIP-BASED ADVISORY FIRM. WE KNOW THAT GREAT RELATIONSHIPS YIELD THE BEST OUTCOMES. WE THEREFORE PUT OUT THE RED CARPET AND TRY TO TREAT EVERYONE REALLY WELL."

WHERE ESG MEETS DEI: WHAT ROLE FOR HR?

Improving workplace diversity and corporate social responsibility (CSR) were seen as nice to haves, but 'too fluffy' to land on boardroom agendas. As diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and environment, social and governance (ESG), they are fundamental, writes Ruth Holmes.

Advances in the legislative landscape – particularly around the net-zero agenda and inclusion – alongside social change, the climate crisis and multi-generational workforce are changing how and why we monitor environmental and social impact and measure business performance.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has developed from philanthropic self-regulation into purpose-led environmental, social and governance (ESG) – the often-legal requirement to monitor and report facts that regulators, investors and consumers can use to understand and compare an organisation's social and internal governance practices.

With intangibles like brand value, patents, data and software – including intellectual capital and goodwill – now accounting for over 90% of S&P500 companies' value, organisations are also increasingly being weighed on these abstract measures. This makes reputation fundamental to risk management – and an important meeting place of DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) and ESG strategies.

As well as being the right thing to do, the benefits to attracting, recruiting, retaining and developing people in diverse and inclusive workplaces span every aspect of a business. These include:

- maximising individual and team talent and productivity
- better team and board decision-making and ESG outcomes
- enhanced reputation
- improved financial performance
- more innovation and resilience to recession.

A Henley Business School study found organisations that implemented practical equity measures, particularly with respect to race, reported up to 58% higher income. Research from global non-profit community Catalyst also found 35% of an employee's emotional investment to their work and 20% of their desire to stay at their organisation is linked to feelings of inclusion.

A GROWING AREA

So, what impact is the DEI agenda and the need for a multi-stakeholder perspective having on organisation development? A report by international recruiter Robert Walters, Environment, Social and Governance: Mindset over Must, offers some insight.

Published in association with Vacancysoft at the end of last year to coincide with the Glasgow COP26 meeting, the study points to a significant uptick in job roles related to CSR, Diversity & Inclusion and Corporate Governance, particularly since the pandemic, a

period which accelerated the Black Lives Matter movement.

The findings reflect how ESG practices – advising, consulting, monitoring, reporting and benchmarking – play an increasingly critical role in understanding how businesses interact with and impact wider society and the environment, now and in future.

Overall, CSR job vacancies rose 54% on pre-pandemic levels. Within this, the study found:

- a 32% increase in D&I roles compared to pre-pandemic levels
- 62% of professionals would turn down a job offer from a company with poor D&I initiatives.

“As a workforce strategy, ESG has become a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining talent,” comments Daniel O’Leary, Business Director at Robert Walters. “Numerous studies have shown that, when weighing up potential employers, millennials are hugely influenced by how a business responds to and tackles social issues. Businesses which are failing to meet the expected ESG performance standards should expect to see a knock-on impact on their reputation.”

Such impact is evidenced by the naming and shaming of companies

failing to report on gender pay gaps and the financial fallout when whistleblowers call time on bullying workplace cultures. It is therefore perhaps no surprise then that in the UK the consumer goods and services, real estate and construction, and professional services sectors account for most jobs advertised, according to the study.

Robert Walters also notes the majority of CSR related jobs are in senior roles (40%) and increasingly being advertised across a broad spectrum of departments, suggesting the seriousness – and often the centrality with which – businesses are taking ESG and DEI. These roles can sit in HR (+19%), IT (+18%), Marketing (+18%), Finance (+6%), Research (+6%), Legal (+3%) or standalone roles reporting directly to the Board and are leading to new working practices.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO BUSINESS

The latest Mercer Global Talent Trends (February 2022) survey also quantifies this shift to what it calls “the relatable organisation”. Based on the views of nearly 11,000 people representing three groups – C-suite executives, HR leaders and employees – in 16 geographies and 13 industries, the study reports that four in five C-suite executives believe

the people and business agendas have never been more enmeshed.

“Organisations now have a moment of profound opportunity to pick up the tools of empathy honed during the pandemic – balanced with economics – and carve a new way of partnering that is more relatable, and ultimately more sustainable,” said Kate Bravery, report author and Global Leader of Advisory Solutions & Insights, Mercer.

“A fundamental change in people’s values is underpinning a structural shift in the labour market. There is now increased pressure for organisations to contribute to society in a way that reflects the values of their customers, employees and investors. The challenge is making progress here, whilst grappling with inflationary pressures, pivoting to new crises and tackling differing views on the future of work.”

Organisational resilience is central to the challenge; more specifically, the ability of HR and its related functions, including Global Mobility, to apply their extensive knowledge and experience to drive the transformation agenda forward with internal and external stakeholders.

Yet while HR and Global Mobility have been at the forefront of the crisis management response to the pandemic, 65% of C-suite executives in the Mercer study believe that as HR processes have automated, they have lost valuable contact between HR and the business – again underlying the importance of people to a business.

“While ESG may be on the agenda for many executive boards, identifying appropriate leaders within organisations for specific operational elements can be a challenge,” said David Wreford, a Partner at Mercer, commenting on another Mercer report, HR in ESG. “There can be many internal and external ESG touchpoints across an organisation and recognising where particular elements have a natural ‘home’ can often be a struggle.

“This can result in ESG inertia, where an organisation is unable to identify and fully commit leaders to achieve its ESG goals. Mercer’s research shows that there is a natural home for people sustainability within HR leadership.”

This really is an opportunity for HR and GM HR professionals to

step up, make their voices heard and flex their expertise with purpose.

DEI, ESG AND GLOBAL MOBILITY

June’s Future of Work Festival showed where Global HR and HR Global Mobility practitioners are already carving out this role, linking ESG with employee wellbeing for example. Also showing the importance of both the Global Mobility sector and DEI as key strategic aspects is the announcement that Silk Relo, its Singapore office and sister company Asian Tigers Singapore, have become the first in the global relocation industry to earn certification from the Human Resource Standards InstituteSM (HRSISM), and are now HRSI certified for International Organisation for Standardisation’s (ISO) 30415:2021: Human resource management (HRM) – D&I.

By earning HRSI certification, the Asia-headquartered end-to-end relocation management services validates that their HR processes are aligned with in ISO 30415:2021. It also verifies that their commitment to offering the best in human resources (HR) and D&I practices is backed up with real action. Speaking with Think Global People as the news was announced, Kay Kutt, CEO of Silk Relo, explained what it meant for the companies and the sector.

“I think in the mobility world we’ve always had cross-cultural as an element. Unfortunately, it’s one of the areas as a service that often gets left behind or gets cut when cost-containment comes into play. We know we need to move household goods and a family or individual into a location and get them up and running as soon as possible, making sure those children get into school, immigration and tax sorted.

“Yet at the core of all of this, D&I is the heart and the heartbeat of everything we do at Silk Relo. It’s not just about it being an emotional context, but it’s everything that we are doing for and as an individual and a human being. We want to have a sense of belonging and inclusivity.

“Silk Relo’s mission is to make a difference one transferee at a time. When I look at it through the lens of D&I, our mission is to make a difference one person at a time. If we don’t do it for our team members, how are we going to do it



“SILK RELO’S MISSION IS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE ONE TRANSFEREE AT A TIME. WHEN I LOOK AT IT THROUGH THE LENS OF D&I, OUR MISSION IS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE ONE PERSON AT A TIME. IF WE DON’T DO IT FOR OUR TEAM MEMBERS, HOW ARE WE GOING TO DO IT FOR OUR CLIENTS, OUR CUSTOMERS, OUR STAKEHOLDERS, OUR TRANSFEREES?”

KAY KUTT, CEO OF SILK RELO



for our clients, our customers, our stakeholders, our transferees?”

John Lim, Managing Director of Asian Tigers Singapore, agrees that the companies’ certification shows the wider business world that D&I is a priority for the company. “Over the last few years, diversity and inclusion have taken on prime space in everything that we talk about and do as an organisation. D&I is unique because, unlike the other ISO systems, it cuts across the human factor.

“Within a country, you have different races, different beliefs and different cultures. Across different countries and different regions, we are all completely different. Our customers want to know that we recognise this and honour those differences both internally and externally.”

HRSI is a subsidiary of HRCI, the global leader in credentialing and learning for the HR profession. Explaining what HRSI organisational certification means for companies, Dr Denise Caleb, PHR, President of HRSI, says, “Earning an HRSI organisational certification allows companies to ensure that their HR processes demonstrate cultural intelligence and are aligned with business goals using consensus-based, international HR standards.

“We are changing the international business landscape and making history in the diversity and inclusion space by providing a measure for elements, including those mandated for inclusion in ESG reporting, that previously appeared daunting. Now Silk Relo and Asian Tigers Singapore can display the HRSI 30415:2021 badge and seal of excellence to demonstrate to the communities they serve that they are committed to excellence and continuous improvement.”

As well as celebrating its own unique organisational culture and team, Silk Relo’s accreditation makes it easier for client companies to identify and align with them as a supplier, and ensure their mobile talent receives services that reflect their corporate culture and values, as well as their individuality.

With DEI ever more central in ESG, international HR and Global Mobility teams are critical to enabling sustainable working practices that link with organisational and individual purpose. ●

BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Businesses play a vital role in transforming the economy to benefit people, communities, and the planet. Companies like tax, accounting and business advisory firm, Blick Rothenberg, a Think Global People Relocate Award winner, is among them. It creates and supports social cohesion by aiming to recruit a diverse body of staff, promoting interaction across the organisation at every level, and sharing ideas and learning through employee resource groups. Sponsored by senior leaders, these groups enable the people in them to challenge existing approaches and try to lead change through the firm. Read more on page 34.

Blick Rothenberg also supports its communities. Each year, its employees select a small, local charity to support through activities like sponsored walks and bakes. It raised around £30,000 for a London children’s hospice during the pandemic and this year is supporting London Air Ambulance. Environmentally, teams led by partners and directors are always looking to improve sustainability in daily practices. Sustainability was a key priority when Blick Rothenberg recently re-designed its offices.

“We are always looking at trying to be an even better organisation for our people, our clients and the communities we live in and work with – we know it’s critical to our success.”



Reputation and reward key to recruitment

Employees have high expectations of their future employers. Job seekers expect excellent staff incentives, hybrid working options, generous annual leave and robust sustainability policies, strengthening the link between ESG and DEI. This is according to analysis from CareerWallet, a recruitment and employment technology company that processes up to 10 million jobs daily.

In this heated job market, the biggest red flags for potential employees, who are doing more research now before applying, are bad reviews online (46%).

Almost a third (32%) would also not apply for a role at a firm in a morally dubious industry such as betting or tobacco/vaping. Other findings include:

- 42% of job seekers would not apply for a role at a firm that did not offer excellent staff incentives and benefits
- 44% were put off by a lack of annual leave
- one in five workers would refuse to apply for a role in a company that didn’t have a sustainability policy.

The study also shows the amount of research potential employees do before

applying, as well as what is important to them. “Our national employee survey has highlighted the detailed process employees go through before applying for roles, with many researching companies online and rightly demanding a lot from their next employer including exceptional benefits and sustainability policies,” commented Craig Bines, CEO at The CareerWallet Group.

“As the skill shortage increases, employees are in a stronger position than ever, which means employers will need to continue to offer the very best to attract the best talent.”

Climate change: reviewing global mobility policy initiatives

Climate change is having a devastating impact across the world.

Global Mobility can take action to contribute towards reducing carbon emissions by changing its approach to the types of assignments undertaken and the policy components that support them. **Dr Sue Shortland** provides some ideas on approaches that might be taken.

Over the past several years we have seen a change in the types of assignment used to deliver the resourcing of positions internationally. Prior to the pandemic, a trend began that saw the shortening of assignment lengths such that typical three year or longer long-term assignments decreased in length. There was also a trend emerging towards an increasing use of short-term, commuter and other flexible assignment types. All of these created global mobility programmes that increased the use of travel and created greater churn in take-up of housing locally in the host location. In turn, these actions increased the carbon footprint associated with global mobility.

The pandemic created conditions for a major change in the use of global mobility, resulting in a massive increase in the use of virtual assignments and remote working. With reduced travel, carbon emissions fell. As the effects of the pandemic have lessened, so we are beginning to see a return to the increasing use of physical mobility. This brings with it an increased contribution to global warming. This should raise warning flags for organisations committed to lowering their carbon footprint and increasing sustainability.

REVIEWING ASSIGNMENT TYPES

In order to help to promote a reduction in carbon emissions, organisations should consider carefully the types of assignment that are best suited both to business needs and environmental sustainability. Commuter assignments, for example, result in increased travel and the carbon emissions that flow from this. Using multiple short-term

assignments also leads to greater carbon emissions through travelling than might be emitted from a long-term assignment, which does not require the need for frequent travel to other locations.

Striking a balance between the use of virtual assignments and physical mobility can play a major role in reducing the need for global travel. Long-term assignments may prove to be more effective in reducing travel requirements than commuter and short-term mobility. One-way transfers or local resourcing might reduce travel carbon emissions even further.

The use of business travel within assignments to service different operations also needs to be considered. Is this really necessary or could such mobility be replaced through virtual working? Hybrid working abroad whereby assignees work part of the time from home rather than commuting into the office or worksite can also help to reduce emissions through local travel.

“Striking a balance between the use of virtual assignments and physical mobility can play a major role in reducing the need for global travel.”



POLICY COMPONENTS

Organisations might also consider aspects of their international mobility policies and how these might be tailored to reduce carbon emissions. The best way to do this is to look at each individual policy element and consider what steps might be taken to make it more carbon neutral.

So, for example, if we take air travel to and from the host location at the beginning and end of the assignment, the carbon footprint from economy air travel is lower than that of first or business class. Organisations might wish to review their policies on the distance or time of flights that attract either first or business class travel such that only the very longest journeys offer this benefit. Alternatively, economy class might be applied to all.

Air travel also applies to home leave. Once again the class of travel could be reviewed but, in addition, the number of home leave trips might also be reduced. For example, if an organisation grants home leave every year while an employee is on a long-term assignment, this may be reduced to, for example, two (possibly longer) trips in three years rather than a (shorter) trip every year. Organisations might also wish to review their vacation policy for international assignees. For example, some organisational policies provide travel days either side of the annual vacation period in order to enable employees and their families to fly home and then back to the host location without eroding their home leave allowance. Longer travel periods linked to annual vacation might be introduced to enable employees and their families to travel by rail rather than air.

A further area that might be considered in relation to travel concerns is local transport. If the policy provides for a car for use locally, this might be designated as an electric vehicle rather than a petrol or diesel vehicle. Organisations might also give consideration to providing an allowance to support the use of local public transport rather than the provision of a car.

Home search could be carried out virtually in the first instance rather than travelling to visit properties for the initial screenings. The initial viewing of schools for children might also be conducted online, such that the travel required to view schools in person is reduced.



These measures again help to lower the travel carbon footprint.

Eco-friendly properties can contribute hugely to reduction of carbon emissions. Housing should be both energy efficient and also enable charging of electric vehicles. Hence, with respect to housing for international assignees and their families, the accommodation allowance or the provision of company property could be linked to individuals residing in eco-friendly, carbon efficient accommodation. International assignment policies also usually make provision for temporary living. Once again, the green credentials of the accommodation available should be considered.

Organisations might also wish to consider how they support payment of utilities – utilities allowances might be tailored to encourage individuals and their families to be more efficient in their use of services within their properties. This is especially pertinent given the rising costs of energy.

A further policy area that might be considered for review concerns the transport of household goods. An analysis can be carried out to explore the benefits of shipping household goods to the new location versus providing furnishings locally.

It is important to remember that replacing household goods in the host location for each new arrival is not sustainable and consideration might therefore be given to furniture rental rather than replacement for each newly relocating family. Support for recycling household goods can also be considered.

A further area for consideration concerns a review of the cost of living allowance arrangements. Standard purchaser indices aim to provide compensation such that standards of living are replicated in the host location – this means that goods and services costs are based upon home country equivalents. This can potentially mean that assignees and their families replicate their home country consumption patterns by purchasing branded goods that they are used to at home. These are typically not only expensive but also represent considerable food miles as products need to be flown or shipped around the world to the destination location. The use of an efficient purchaser index is not only more cost-effective for the company but also encourages assignees and their families to buy local produce and non-branded goods. These, if sourced locally, reduce the food miles associated with the transport of consumables from abroad.

THIRD PARTY LINKS

Many organisations work with third parties to manage their international assignment policy implementation. A further action that organisations can take to help reduce climate change is to partner with organisations that are committed to sustainability. This also provides opportunities to learn from each other in order to exploit more sustainable and eco-friendly options. Organisations are thus encouraged to consider sustainability targets and carbon reduction activities when reviewing potential partners during the vendor selection process.

CREATING A GREEN CULTURE

It is important to remember that in order to achieve even minor changes in terms of assignment deployment options and policy review, this may well require a change of culture. Businesses are used to acting in a certain way and individuals expect particular benefits and approaches. To achieve an overall mindset of sustainability requires the development of a green culture. This may not be achievable overnight but certainly by taking action to promote sustainable approaches with explanations given of why policy elements are changing and the effects they can

have on moving towards carbon neutrality can go a long way to supporting the mindset required for a greener future.

It is also necessary to monitor actions taken and review whether they are successful. This requires a robust tracking and data analytics system whereby organisations are able to draw upon relevant data to determine whether changes made to assignment types and policy components have actually made a positive difference in terms of climate credentials, meeting business needs, and ensuring a good assignee experience. A balance has to be struck between achieving a lower carbon footprint from the global mobility programme and a successful business, employee and family outcomes. ●

We want to hear from corporates and suppliers across global mobility and international organisations about how you are addressing climate change. Email us at editorial@relocatemagazine.com

“To achieve an overall mindset of sustainability requires the development of a green culture.”



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'Second city' aims for Commonwealth gold

The Commonwealth Games, held in Birmingham from July 28–August 8, provided individuals, teams and nations with memorable moments of sporting success, writes **David Sapsted**. Now Britain's 'second city' – along with the rest of the West Midlands – is hoping the legacy of the games will provide it with memorable moments of economic success.



The 2022 Commonwealth Games mascot, Perry the Bull, is displayed in Birmingham



Above: Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery during the Commonwealth Games 2022

Boris Johnson, the former prime minister, described the games as “another fantastic opportunity to showcase the best of Britain on a global stage”.

He added: “Not only will we be celebrating sporting success, [but] we will also be strengthening the crucial ties between our 72 [Commonwealth] nations and territories – bringing businesses and governments from across the world together to encourage trade and boost economic growth that will leave a lasting legacy for years to come.”

“The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games are a brilliant launchpad for the West Midlands to establish itself as the region of choice for major events of the future and to show the world what we can do.”

ANDY STREET,
WEST MIDLANDS MAYOR

WINNING INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT

Coinciding with the athletes’ physical endeavours on land and in the water, the \$33 million Business and Tourism Programme (BTP) was launched, aimed at attracting international investment and visitors to the region.

The BTP has already notched up its first success. It has supported the expansion in Birmingham of Firstsource, a Mumbai-based company specialising in process management. The company first launched in the city at the start of the year when it created 300 jobs and has just announced plans to add 200 more.

Rajiv Malhotra, Head of Europe Business at Firstsource, said: “The West Midlands is the UK’s largest hub for regional, professional and financial services business. The unrivalled support for rapidly expanding businesses made the region and the city of Birmingham an obvious choice for our new operation.

“We are delighted with our partnerships with education and investment organisations in the region and look forward to further collaborations. The new training approach will help Firstsource access a wider talent pool and unlock tremendous potential to

build digital customer experience hubs for our clients.”

Ian Ward, Leader of Birmingham City Council, described the investment as a “true vote of confidence in the region as a global hub for businesses looking to trade, innovate and grow”.

He added: “Building on India’s strong track record of foreign direct investment into the region, these 200 new jobs are brilliant news for Birmingham and I look forward to seeing Firstsource go from strength to strength at their new UK headquarters.”

On the eve of the games, the BTP organised a Commonwealth Business Forum, which attracted heads of state as well as international business leaders.

Former Chancellor of the Exchequer Nadhim Zahawi described the forum as “a major gathering of companies from across the world” which brought with it “amazing economic opportunity”.

He told the Worcester Observer: “Some of those businesses are already investing in the West Midlands and some are considering it – many can see the potential of our region.

“The Commonwealth Games has already brought £800 million of [public sector] investment and it has unlocked billions more.”

BIRMINGHAM ON TOURISM MAP

The tourism sector also made the most of the opportunities offered by the games with the VisitBritain organisation hosting more than 40 top travel buyers, tour operators and trade media from Australia, Canada and India on visits to the area.

Those visits, arranged in partnership with the West Midlands Growth Company, included river cruises exploring Shakespeare’s Stratford-upon-Avon, culinary excursions in the heart of Birmingham’s Balti Triangle, and trips to the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley, as well as visits to the games themselves.

Commonwealth Games Minister Nigel Huddleston said: “The Commonwealth Games are an excellent opportunity to showcase Birmingham and the Midlands to the world. Our activity working with international buyers and tourism companies is a crucial part of our legacy plans to ensure the benefits of the games are felt in the region for many years to come.”

Neil Rami, CEO of the West Midlands Growth Company, added: “There is surely no better way to truly get to know a destination than by experiencing it in person. Working with our VisitBritain colleagues in the UK

and across the Commonwealth, we have created several exciting and varied multi-day West Midlands itineraries for our international trade and media visitors, which show off the very best of the region’s cultural, culinary, accommodation and sporting highlights.”

The success of the games has also prompted Birmingham to bid to become the host city for eight other international sporting and cultural events, including next year’s Eurovision Song Contest, which is to be staged in the UK.

West Midlands Mayor Andy Street said: “The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games are a brilliant launchpad for the West Midlands to establish itself as the region of choice for major events of the future and to show the world what we can do.

“We have a great group of partners here including the local councils and the West Midlands Growth Company, who have a shared ambition and determination to develop this sector of our economy and build our worldwide reputation.

“Through the Business and Tourism Programme, we are showcasing the best of the region to the world – and are already considering exciting live event opportunities. So, the coming years are full of real promise for the West Midlands.”

LEGACY AS MOST LIVEABLE CITY

John Bryson, Professor of Enterprise and Competitiveness at the University of Birmingham, says the staging of the games is only the latest phase of a programme of transformation that began in the city a decade ago.

Writing on TheConversation website, he cites examples such as HSBC’s decision in 2015 to build the national green headquarters of its UK personal and business bank in Birmingham; the 2016 decision by the city council to demolish Birmingham’s old Central Library and build a mixed office and retail development on the 17-acre site; and the allocation to the West Midlands this spring of £1.05 billion from the Government’s City-Region Sustainable Transport Settlements initiative.

“Birmingham’s role in hosting the Commonwealth Games is exciting,” says Professor Bryson. “But it should not distract from the city’s innovative and experimental approach to creating healthy neighbourhoods by achieving a new kind of balance between profitability and sustainability.

“Local planning and policy interventions are focused on making Birmingham one of the UK’s most liveable cities.”

Below: The cityscape of Birmingham. Landmarks include the Rotunda, St. Martin’s Church, and the Bullring Shopping Centre.



Commonwealth Advantage helps nations build back better after Birmingham 2022



The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games was the biggest investment that the UK has made in a sporting event since London 2012, and it certainly went big on its promises, writes **Andrew Griffith** MP, former Minister for Exports, Department for International Trade.

Above: Andrew Griffith MP, former Minister for Exports, Department for International Trade

Right: Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street – UK House Legacy Day



Alongside the sporting achievements, medals and rivalry, it has been the largest, most inclusive, most sustainable Commonwealth Games to date. Now the cheers have died down, the real triumph lies in the lasting economic benefits and global connections that the Games bring.

Major sporting events are renowned for being good for trade, good for business, and good for increasing investment within a region – just look at the halo effect of economic benefits from the London Olympics.

These games are no different: the potential is huge. The strength of the Commonwealth, however, means more than just the host region of the West Midlands standing to benefit from the new partnerships and connections made. Over 5,000 athletes from 72 nations came together for 11 days of sport, while 1,500 businesses and governments from across the Commonwealth convened at UK House – the Commonwealth Business Hub in Centenary Square, Birmingham – to connect and to discover opportunities for sustainable growth.

Part of a wider Business and Tourism Programme and the first event of its kind to run alongside a Commonwealth Games, UK House included a Commonwealth Business Forum and championed solutions across eight areas of strategic importance to the UK and our trading partners.

Hosted by the Department for International Trade, UK House built on the cooperative spirit of the Games and the UK's climate leadership at COP26. It's precisely this kind of supportive, collaborative environment we need post-pandemic. With economic recovery a key priority at the moment, we need positive solutions that enable us to build back better.



During the games, we welcomed business and Commonwealth trading partners to UK House in Birmingham, establishing new connections and opportunities for sustainable growth in the years to come.

Above: Raging Bull – Commonwealth Games Opening Ceremony

Right top: Future Mobility Day, UK House

Right bottom: Steel drum band – UK House Legacy Day

EMBRACING THE BENEFITS OF SHARED HISTORIES

A tried and tested route for the UK and our overseas partners to move towards healthier, more sustainable economies, is through international trade. The Commonwealth gives us a true advantage and our trade deals with 33 Commonwealth members are already making this easier.

The Commonwealth comprises 54 countries, encompassing a third of humanity. That's a lot of people, cultures, and beliefs. However, alongside our differences lies shared history, values, and language, as well as legal, institutional and government ties. Together, these 'invisible threads' make for a mutually collaborative, beneficial community.

The so-called 'Commonwealth Advantage' sees traders and investors benefiting from this familiarity in legal systems, business practices and legislative procedures.

Throughout the disruption of recent economic shocks, trade between Commonwealth member states has remained strong. The pandemic may have caused economic difficulties, but trading costs between members are 21%

lower. Investment has fared well too, with the advantage between members nearly tripling to 27% since 2015. That growth is set to continue with the launch of major trade and investment initiatives designed to create jobs, growth and shared prosperity across this unique group of nations.

One lesson learned from the pandemic is the importance of sharing knowledge, expertise and technology between nations for the benefit of all. From the rapid development of coronavirus vaccines and the 3D printing of medical equipment and devices to online professional services and edtech, we've seen significant leaps forward in technology that have the potential to positively impact every part of our lives.

It's no coincidence that the West Midlands offers world-class expertise in these areas and UK House provided the ideal platform for businesses, universities and public sector organisations in the region to share these capabilities and innovations with our global trading partners.

Digital technology: The latest Commonwealth Trade Review highlights how the transition to digital technologies accelerated by the pandemic has the potential to unlock growth and prosperity across the Commonwealth. From Industry 4.0 to AR and VR gaming, Birmingham and the West Midlands is the largest emerging technology cluster outside London, with an average of 7.6% growth each year (between 2014 and 2019). It is also the UK's first multi-city 5G testbed.

Data-driven healthcare: Healthcare challenges transcend nations and pay no heed to preconceptions of developed and developing systems. The West Midlands healthcare proposition is built around four areas of opportunity: digital, data, diagnostics and devices. With unparalleled access to clinical and genomic data, it has the capabilities to pioneer, test and implement new healthcare interventions and interventions unlike any other region.

Edtech: Education is key to economic development and the UK's edtech industry played a vital part in keeping the world learning throughout the pandemic. With growth of 72%

in 2020 (one of the fastest rates in Europe), the UK edtech sector is now valued at around £3.4 billion, home to more than 1,000 companies providing educational platforms and a thriving research and development scene. These innovations are now poised to help transform education systems across the globe.

BUILDING ON THE COMMONWEALTH ADVANTAGE

Of course, there's more to the Commonwealth Advantage than just economic growth. It needs to be clean growth – economic expansion that is sustainable and puts the planet first. Think green jobs, renewable energy, and strong, ethical regional and local supply chains.

Across the Commonwealth, the UK has recently announced major green investments, from £162 million invested in hydropower in Africa to a £36 million boost to sustainable growth in Small Island Developing States' maritime economies. During the games, we welcomed business and Commonwealth trading partners to UK House in Birmingham, establishing new connections and opportunities for sustainable growth in the years to come.

We also announced investments into the West Midlands made as a

result of the Commonwealth Games Business and Tourism Programme, including Firstsource, a global process management provider headquartered in Mumbai, India. Other foreign direct investment (FDI) projects included The Disposal Company, India's first plastic credit platform and Canada-based pan-African fintech company, Kora. Each of these companies is making the most of the Commonwealth advantage to expand their business and foster innovation that will benefit society in the long term.

When you're looking for ways to build back better, it's a marathon, not a sprint. ●

Register here to watch key insights from business leaders and senior policy makers at UK House and the Commonwealth Business Forum on demand:
www.ukhouse2022.co.uk

In the Winter issue we will hear from employers and suppliers across the global mobility sector on growth aspirations and legacy in the region. Email editorial@relocatemagazine.com to share your views.



BACK TO SCHOOL?

THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION



Students at Impington College celebrate receiving their IB results

This summer, exam boards and regulators sought a return to business as usual after two years of teacher-assessed A level and GCSE grading. As the new intake of freshers find their feet, **Ruth Holmes** looks ahead to what the future of secondary and higher education promises post-pandemic. And what employers can do now to secure the next generation of leaders.

Results day is an annual rite of passage for students around the world. In the UK, the calendar starts in July with the International Baccalaureate Diploma and Career-Related Programmes (IB DP/CP). It continues into August with Scottish National 5s, Highers and Advanced Highers, A levels, BTEC (level 3) and T levels, ending with GCSE and Vocational and Technical Qualifications (levels 1 and 2) as the school summer holidays close out in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

A look at attainment this year suggests that the current cohort of 16 and 18-year-olds – those starting their studies in 2020 mid-pandemic – have achieved again, despite the odds.

In 2022, the first year of a two-year plan, regulators are seeking a glide path back to pre-pandemic trends after two years of teacher-assessed grades. A House of Commons Library research briefing published in August shows the overall A-C pass rate for Scottish Highers was 78.9%. This is up from the pre-pandemic level of 74.8% in 2019. There was a similar trend in Advanced Highers. The A-C pass rate in 2022 was 81.3%, again above 2019's figure (79.4%).

A-level attainment in England,

Wales and Northern Ireland in 2022 was also up on the last year formal exams were held. The proportion of A* grades was 14.6% in 2022, compared to 7.7% in 2019. The number of A*/A grades awarded also grew from 25.4% to 36.4% and A*-C grades from 75.9% to 82.6% over the same period. The trend was broadly the same for GCSE results, while regional differences also widened on pre-pandemic levels.

For students sitting full-content final examinations in 2023 the outlook is for grading to be at pre-pandemic levels. Details will be finalised in light of the 2022 results, said Ofqual in a statement in May. For the IB DP, the average score fell slightly on 2021 to 31.98, yet this is still up on its pre-pandemic level, according to data from the IB's statistical bulletin.

MORE COMPETITION FOR PLACES AHEAD

This July and August, despite the anxious waits in school halls and constant screen refreshes, most students need not have worried. This includes students waiting for the results of the first-ever T level exams in August. Across the three newly introduced subject areas (rising to 13 in September) of science, construction and healthcare, there was a 92.2% T level pass



Student graduating from Southbank International School

“We are delighted to report very strong IB Diploma results from our 2022 graduating class. With an average point score of 34, ISL students significantly outperformed IB global figures.”

PAUL MORRIS,
DEPUTY SECONDARY PRINCIPAL/
IB DIPLOMA COORDINATOR

rate. Distinction and Distinction* accounted for 34.6% of grades and Merits 39.8%, while 71% of candidates had been accepted onto higher education courses.

Commenting on the news, Education Secretary, James Cleverly, said students should be proud of their achievements in the qualification, which is set to replace some level 3 BTECs. “Today is also a really exciting time for our pioneering T Level students, as the first ever group to take this qualification will pick up their results. I have no doubt they will be the first of many and embark on successful careers.”

Earlier in the month, data from

UCAS, the university admissions body, showed that on results day in Scotland a record 60.1% of students gained a place at their first choice university. This was up from the pre-pandemic level of 57.5% in 2019. The story was the same across the rest of the United Kingdom. By 8am on A level results day, 425,830 students (54.4%) were celebrating being accepted into university or college, the second highest on record (2021) and an increase of 16,870 compared to 2019.

However, for some it meant the stress of changing their plans due to a confluence of factors relating to a demographic bulge of 18-year-olds in the general population (set to continue to the end of the decade), university admissions officers being more cautious after two years of pandemic-related ‘over recruitment’, more student deferrals and re-applications from candidates as a result of the pandemic, as well as fewer deferrals to 2023 due to changes to student finance from 2023/24.

Around 164,000 (23.7%) students were free to be placed in clearing or had gone direct to clearing on A level results day. This was 9% higher than in 2021 and 24% higher than in 2020 according to the House of Commons Library research. The number of accepted 18-year-old home applicants also fell by more than 12% in higher-entry requirement universities. However, numbers increased by 5% in lower-entry and by 1% in medium-entry institutions, reflecting the more competitive environment for school leavers today as top grades remain at near-record levels.

Offering congratulations to school leavers this year, UCAS Chief Executive Clare Marchant recognised the higher demand for places and the challenges going forward. “Throughout this year, there has been much discussion about what the return to examinations would mean for progression to higher education. Today we have seen more students progress compared to the last time students sat exams. This year has seen a growth in the number of 18-year-olds in the population, which will continue for the remainder of the decade, and creates a more competitive environment for students in the years to come.”

MORE INCLUSIVE ACCESS?

Despite the increased competition for places, the figures overall continue to show how UK school-leavers favour routes to higher education post-18; that higher education is playing some role in improving social mobility; and better connecting the skills needed in the workplace to education.

More students (46,850) from the most disadvantaged backgrounds have been accepted into universities this year: an increase of 3,770 on 2019, according to UCAS figures. The gap between the most and least advantaged continues to narrow from 2.36 in 2019 to 2.29 in 2022. The news comes as accountant PwC announced it was removing the 2.1 minimum degree requirement for all its graduate roles, internships and placements to help improve social mobility, joining other Big Four firms EY, KPMG and Deloitte in relaxing recruitment criteria.

“Whilst academic achievement has its place, for far too many students there are other factors that influence results,” said Ian Elliott, Chief People Officer at PwC. “This move isn’t primarily about attracting more applications, but opening our roles to students from a broader range of backgrounds,” he added. “We know that competition for our graduate roles will be as tough as ever but we’re confident that our own aptitude and behavioural testing can assess a candidate’s potential.”

International student numbers have also recovered to bring them nearer pre-pandemic levels, accounting for 12.3% of the total full-time undergraduate applicants accepted via UCAS. While the overall proportion is down from a high of 14.7% in 2019, the figures for 2022 show growth from countries such as China (+35%), India (+27%), and Nigeria (+43%).

Commenting on the figures, a spokesperson for Universities UK, the collective voice of 140 universities, said: “We have seen a steady increase in the interest in UK universities from countries around the world, with growth from China, India and Nigeria in particular. UK institutions are highly regarded internationally and it is testament to this that we continue to attract students from around the world. Their presence, as part of a diverse community of students, is to be welcomed.”

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PATH?

Yet, with skills shortages still much in evidence and impacting national productivity and output, and employers reporting high levels of hard-to-fill vacancies, qualifications body City & Guilds again raises the question of whether higher education is always the right solution for school leavers.

Its research in partnership with Lightcast, a labour market dynamics analyst, suggests while 40% of young people in the UK plan to attend university, only 29% of jobs require a graduate skill level. For some, the decision to stay in education is being prompted by the cost-of-living crisis – particularly girls, who the research shows are also more preoccupied with future earnings. More than half (54%) are making their post-school choice based on what they believe is the best way to get a good job with a good salary, compared to just 44% of boys.

David Phillips, Managing Director of City & Guilds says: “It’s reassuring to see that young people are already thinking ahead about the career options available to them. However, as the UK battles against a volatile labour market, with a potential recession on the horizon and a cost-of-living crisis, it’s more important than ever that young people make informed decisions about their futures. While university is the right path for some, it’s certainly not the only option. Our recent Great Jobs research shone a light on the essential jobs that make up 50% of all UK employment opportunities – many of which rely on vocational routes such as traineeships, apprenticeships and T Levels. As young people look to invest in their future, we encourage them to consider the full breadth of options available so they can identify which path is right for them.”

This warning is particularly stark for female school-leavers planning on heading to university – but most of all their future employers. Women make up a higher proportion of university entrants and graduates. Yet data from the Institute of Student Employers published in 2020 shows not only are female graduates paid less, they are also more likely to leave graduate training schemes or

“As young people look to invest in their future, we encourage them to consider the full breadth of options available so they can identify which path is right for them.”

DAVID PHILLIPS, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF CITY & GUILDS

Students from International School of Kuala Lumpur (ISKL)



graduate jobs, saddling them with higher levels of debt.

A quarter of firms reported that women are more difficult to retain than men once they have completed their initial training and development programmes. Employers suggested this is influenced by the image and culture of their sector and a lack of role models. Not only do these factors play into the gender pay gap – where progress has stalled – but also into progression and career satisfaction. New figures show the number of women chief executives in FTSE companies remains in single figures. Employers could therefore benefit from redoubling their inclusion efforts, seeking out bias and focusing on female graduate talent development to make workplaces more appealing.

“Despite all of the investment and resource spent on tackling the gender gap, women are still underrepresented across the graduate employment market,” ISE Chief Executive Stephen Isherwood said. “We know that female students are less likely to apply for graduate roles and are therefore underrepresented on early careers programmes. This now tells us that they are also less likely to stay in an organisation. To tackle disparity, we must not only look at who gets in, but who gets on.”

MORE FOCUS ON THE FOUR CS?

The advice on studying more vocational and technical qualifications does seem to be resonating with students, schools

and parents, however. T levels, devised in conjunction with employers, have been well received and there are also calls for BTECs, which the technical qualification was set to replace, to remain. This highlights the appetite for more vocationally geared, modular studies that are accepted by universities for entrance requirements, as well as by apprenticeships and employers.

But for some, the changes are not radical enough. Just ahead of GCSE results day, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change published a report, *Ending the Big Squeeze on Skills: How to Futureproof Education in England*. This called for an education system more geared to the age of artificial intelligence and future skills needs. It recommends A levels and GCSEs to be replaced with a modern curriculum that accents collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking, where a personalised approach to learning supported by edtech becomes the norm. In an article for the *Daily Telegraph*, Sir Tony Blair said of the current approach is “analogue learning for a digital age” in “a paper-based system that revolves around snapshot judgments instead of assessing whether schools are preparing young people for the future they face.”

One thing is for sure: the next generation of business and community leaders have difficult challenges ahead. Climate change and a less certain economic and geopolitical outlook among them. Having a diverse, well-educated and inclusive talent pool better equipped to find solutions is key. ●



“Online learning has been seen by many as a second-best option, but we have seen our pupils surpass all expectations. Our results show that when ambitious students are given greater independence and flexibility in their mode of learning, they achieve to the very best of their potential.”

HEATHER RHODES,
HARROW SCHOOL ONLINE

ONLINE LEARNING YIELDS TOP MARKS

Lockdown learning not only changed where students learned, but how. Distance and remote-learning opened opportunities for children and young people around the world and online schools flourished and continue to do so.

Exam results from King’s InterHigh, an inclusive, non-selective online school that accepts year-round admissions, saw students achieve the results they need to go on to their chosen university. Among them is Thomas, who achieved four A* A levels and will take up his place at Cambridge University to study Natural Sciences and hopefully realise his ambition of becoming a researcher in sustainable agriculture.

“We are delighted to report yet another year of wonderful A Level results and academic achievements for King’s InterHigh’s Sixth Form students,” said the school. “Our Class of 2022 have shown that high-quality, flexible online learning can lead to excellent exam outcomes, a route to higher education, and a pathway towards future dreams and aspirations.”

Thirty per cent of A levels were at grades A*-A and 70% A*-C. “These are results in which the school community can take great pride,” said Ashley Harrold, Executive Head. “Students have once again demonstrated their excellence and endeavour. The outcomes our Class of 2022 students have achieved are sure to give confidence to our younger year groups as they approach their own exams. I’d like to thank the teachers and staff at our online school who have educated and supported this cohort to such a superb level.

The first cohort to undertake A level exams at Harrow School Online is also celebrating: 98% were awarded grades from A* to B, and nearly half (45%) were A* grades. Just under 70% of students achieved an A* in at least one of their subjects while a third secured A*s in every subject they took. The pioneering co-ed student body, comprising learners from the UK, Australia, Sri Lanka, Spain, India, Romania and more, studied exclusively online throughout their sixth form education.

Heather Rhodes, Founding Principal of Harrow School Online, said: “I am immensely proud of our graduating class for this year. These talented learners have demonstrated great levels of intellect, confidence, resilience and ambition throughout their time at the school. Their results are proof that at its best, online learning can achieve results that

are on par with or better than those of a physical school.

“Online learning has been seen by many as a second-best option, but we have seen our pupils surpass all expectations. Our results show that when ambitious students are given greater independence and flexibility in their mode of learning, they achieve to the very best of their potential.

“The domain of Harrow School Online is one of independence, entrepreneurship, and – above all – human connection. Through our supportive international community of learners, tough elective courses and stimulating student-led societies, and plenty more besides, our learners are blazing ahead to shape the communities and workforces of tomorrow.”

Award-winning 21K School, India’s first online-only school, offers quality, teacher-delivered education to students in a thriving community that currently represents over 54 countries and more than 40 nationalities.

Since its establishment in 2020, 21K has grown to a community of more than 6,000 students who can choose to follow the Indian, American or British curriculum wherever they are in the world. A key part of 21K School’s unparalleled success is that it helps make successful domestic and international relocation a reality for more families. This includes those with globally in-demand IT skills on consecutive assignments.

“I lived in Dubai for eight years and I have seen the cost of educating children locally,” says Santosh Kumar, Co-Founder and CEO of 21K. “A lot of Indians working in Dubai don’t even bring their family. In meeting with Yeshwanth [Raj Parasmal – Co-Founder and COO], we have created a solution to this; as well as for parents who want quality teaching and transparency in education in tier three or four cities; for others where school travels with their kids; and for those who need more time for other activities outside school.”

Watch our Webinar Replay Videos from Online Schools here:
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Student from Bavarian International School (BIS)



A pioneer in developing minds, character & community

On a mission to educate for international understanding, the International School of Amsterdam nurtures a culture of critical thinking and global citizenship. Since 1964, the international pre-K-12 IB school, which collaborates closely with Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project Zero, has supported thousands of young people achieve their goals and contribute to their local and global communities.

THE HISTORY OF ISA

In the early 1960s, Amsterdam was a very different place from what it is now. Back then, only 2% of the city's residents were non-Dutch nationals. The global economy was booming, but the lack of English-language education options in Amsterdam was a major problem for the city in catering for international families and businesses that might have considered relocating.

In 1964, the International School of Amsterdam was founded in a collaboration between the city of Amsterdam and local business leaders as a catalyst for the internationalisation of the city. ISA was the first school in the world to offer a complete International Baccalaureate curriculum from Pre-School to Grade 12.

ISA TODAY

Today, ISA has close to 1,300 enrolled students, representing over 60 different nationalities who are dedicated to the mission 'To Educate for International Understanding'. As an independent, non-profit foundation, all efforts are focused on creating a vibrant, global community of lifelong learners.

ISA is accredited by the Council of International Schools and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. International understanding was the reason for its foundation, and it is the reason why the community still comes together every day. ISA's educational philosophy is centred around "Developing Minds, Character and Communities".

WHAT MAKES ISA UNIQUE

ISA has been a pioneer in international education for decades. Teachers, parents, students and staff don't just enter a building where teaching and learning happens day-to-day, but join a tradition of international understanding and IB education that has flourished over generations.

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Although a narrow focus on academia alone is not ISA's driving vision, they are extremely proud of the excellent results achieved and the huge effort given by grade 11 and 12 students in their IB Diploma courses each year. Over the past years, ISA IB Diploma students have consistently passed their examinations and ISA's average grade is 5.6, higher than the world average of 5.0. ISA graduates feel

academically and personally prepared for post-graduation and are admitted into a wide range of higher education programmes in institutions of their choice.

A CULTURE OF THINKING

For almost 20 years, ISA has collaborated closely with the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project Zero and its Visible Thinking Network. Through this innovative, research-based approach to learning and teaching ISA seeks to develop not just students' skills, but their thinking routines and dispositions.

The Centre for Development, Learning and Technology was designed to provide educators with opportunities for professional development and collaboration across schools. Located within the International School of Amsterdam (ISA), the centre arose from ISA's longstanding commitment to professional development and reputation as a leading international school in Europe.

Every year, educators come from all over the world to join ISA's staff for professional development conferences in ISA's training centre, providing them with a forum to share ideas and network with leading experts and partners.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR OPPORTUNITIES

ISA offers a rich programme of extracurricular activities and school clubs to add diversity to the learning experience and an important social element to the lives of the students from Pre-School to grade 12. The activities and clubs encompass interests as varied as Model UN, weekend forest schools, language academies, Bollywood dancing classes, swimming lessons, drama groups and much more. The programme itself is non-competitive, meaning that the emphasis is on enjoyment, participation and improvement.

ATHLETICS WORLD

ISA is a member of the Northwest European Council of International Schools (NECIS). The organisation is made up of 11 international schools situated across seven countries, and it works to provide a structure for its member schools to participate in competitive, international sports tournaments throughout each academic year. Each year, students compete in tournaments right across Northwestern Europe, from Norway to Luxembourg to the Hague, and across a variety of both team and individual sports. While students compete to win, the main focus is to learn about sportsmanship, teamwork, dedication and leadership.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

International understanding stems from much more than what happens in classrooms alone; it also means learning, growing and experiencing life together as a diverse and vibrant community. When you join ISA, you become a member of a special group that numbers thousands: from students to teachers, from staff to board members, from parents to alumni. ISA is a place where people from a wide variety of backgrounds can come together in Amsterdam to find a home away from home; it's somewhere to make friends and to make teammates, to be inspired and to inspire, and most of all, to feel valued as an individual within a new community.

As the first accredited Eco-School first school in the Netherlands, sustainability is at the core of the ISA community. Through projects organised by the ISA

Green Team, students, parents and staff come together to contribute locally and globally to the betterment of the planet.

STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITIES

One campus, purposefully built to facilitate learning. Located in the city of Amstelveen, ISA's green and spacious campus includes many state-of-the-art facilities:

- Early Childhood-devoted Facilities
- 144m² Theatre
- 3 Gymnasias
- 3 Libraries
- Playgrounds and Outdoor Learning Spaces
- Art and Design Studios
- Subject Area Collaborative Learning Spaces
- Professional Development Centre

ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES

ISA was the first school in the world to offer a complete International Baccalaureate curriculum from Pre-School to Grade 12. ISA offers an Early Years programme (ages 2-3), the IB Primary Years Programme (ages 3-12), IB Middle Years Programme (ages 12-16) and the IB Diploma Programme (ages 16-18). •



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"ISA focuses on allowing its students to grow and find themselves through collaboration and initiative with the various community service and extracurricular activity opportunities. The strong bonds the teachers provide make this school a safe and caring environment where we can explore all possibilities on the path of becoming unique international individuals."

KARLY, GRADE 12 STUDENT



THE NEXUS LEARNER: RETHINKING LEARNING

From the 12-storey campus in Aljunied that was created through a collaboration of educators from the Apple Distinguished School and architects, to the modern way the children learn, Nexus International School (Singapore) defies expectations to be ahead of the curve.

Imagine heading into a learning space without classroom walls. The area is filled with vibrant colours and unconventional furniture choices for a school. Learners are sprawled across couches, quirky stair-like tiered seating, bean bags and recliner armchairs. You notice a few walls and shelves that offer some loose separation, but they are covered with whiteboards filled with scribbles, writings and ideas. Glance over to the windows and there are also little notes here and there in marker. Looking around, learners are huddled in small groups with their iPads as they buzz with excitement, discussing their work and thinking about new ideas. Sounds unheard of for a classroom? In fact, it was a plan designed by educators.

WHAT NEXUS DOES DIFFERENTLY

“The only constant in life is change,” says philosopher Heraclitus. With the added interconnectivity of the internet, there is a collective awareness of change in the world, and it is not always received well. However, Nexus was determined to be different by flowing with the evolving times.

“When we started Nexus, it was with the intention of making sure that what we do here is different from all other international schools,” shares President of Taylor’s

Schools, BK Gan. “We have the learner’s outcome in mind and wanted a school that has a very open and entrepreneurial way, allowing students to explore their passions and develop a real love of learning.”

As educators, Nexus strives to cultivate learners who are ready for anything they may face in the future. The school nurtures resilient and confident learners who embrace diversity and they are taught to think, respond, evaluate and take responsibility for their learning. Nexus asks not the traditional question of what the learners want to be when they grow up, but what problems they want to solve.

“What I love about our learners here is that they have a good sense of change,” comments Principal Lachlan MacKinnon. “We adults tend to be a little bit fearful of what change brings, but Nexus’ learners do not fear it.”

Nexus cultivates life skills and soft skills within its learners by challenging some of the outdated, traditional schools’ ways and reimagining them in many creative ways. When Nexus learners come to school, they are not assigned desks and chairs. Instead, they are encouraged to move around the learning spaces so that they can collaborate with their peers and teachers more easily. This set-up cultivates independence and allows learners to decide where they feel most productive and comfortable. This choice keeps them more interested and engaged,

resulting in better wellbeing, and consequently, better learning outcomes. Additionally, learners feel extra secure as they have a subliminal awareness that within Nexus, the school is their “oyster” and the staff they have around them will support them in all they do.

“I think our approach to learning is very modern,” says BK Gan. “It is based on extensive expert educational research and encompasses a distinct forward-looking, growth mindset. The idea is to have a very innovative and entrepreneurial perspective to start with, and the environment you are in drives that.”

The IB programme that Nexus uses as its core curriculum bolsters the direction of the school. The programme follows an IB learner profile, which also has a focus on developing individuals who are well-rounded and excellent beyond their academic successes. At Nexus, children around 4 years old may start in the IB Primary Years Programme and this goes up to Year 6. Learners then subsequently progress into secondary school in Year 7, studying the IB Middle Years Programme until Year 9. The learner then pursues a two-year International General Certificate of Secondary Education programme in Years 10 and 11, with the oldest learners finally taking the IB Diploma Programme in Years 12 and 13. However, while the IB programme may seem focused on instilling good values in a learner, it is also well known to be a challenging and comprehensive programme for students.

“You can argue that the IB programme is the most rigorous curriculum in the world,” says Lachlan MacKinnon, who has worked with several variations of the IB programme in Australia, the United Arab Emirates and Britain. “It certainly sets students up to be university ready. The IB curriculum is truly one that goes deeper than just knowledge and understanding. It is the application and inquiry that challenge kids to think and respond in an innovative way.”

Beyond the physical environment, Nexus also establishes an open-minded and accepting environment. “Nexus believes in the freedom to think and express oneself without the fear of mistakes,” says BK Gan. “As such, every opportunity can be a learning experience, so creativity is limitless.”

BK Gan also shares an anecdote about a kindergartener’s comment during one of Nexus’ conferences on global warming. The young learner suggested that a building be made of a giant sponge to syphon off floodwaters. While some may find the idea funny, it is actually a great example of the kind of out-of-the-box thinking that Nexus tries to cultivate in its learners. “They can mix and match their ideas, and that is where we want to challenge them.”

Nexus learners are further supported by a technology-rich curriculum. As one of the only five Apple Distinguished Schools in Singapore (amongst 689 schools across 36 countries), Nexus is recognised as a centre of innovation, leadership and educational excellence that demonstrates extraordinary commitment to best practice when exploring the potential of technology to enhance teaching and learning. Not only is technology increasingly regarded as a basic skill, but it is also an enabler to make learning more interactive and collaborating simpler. Nexus learners are equipped with iPads and MacBook Pros and are complemented by displays that are AirPlay-compatible. The campus is also filled with ViewSonic screens that allow learners to write directly on them and present their work from.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTIONS

Learners are the key focus of Nexus. The school prioritises positive and restorative environments that are welcoming and conducive to learning. Nexus believes that if learners are enjoying their learning journey, they will naturally excel in their academic performance as well.

The school is also keenly aware of the needs of children at different stages of their lives. As younger learners in Early Years and Primary tend to focus on fun, classes have a high focus on inquiry-based learning and high engagement during classes. Nexus teachers ensure that these young learners have high levels of agency during class and aim to make lessons enjoyable. However, as children hit puberty and mature, they start to have new and different needs. Nexus teachers aim to support and guide these learners as they go through confusing and tough challenges. In Secondary, there is a greater sensitivity in establishing an emotionally and physically safe environment for learners, which is key to developing independent, confident and successful learners.

Nexus’ Care Movement encourages learners to take care of themselves and others, as well as the world. It holds regular in-campus conferences on pressing global issues such as global warming and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. “A lot of times, we talk about global issues such as climate change and everyone thinks that big companies or the government should take care of such problems,” says BK Gan. “If each of us does our little part, we can make a huge difference in the world around us.”

As educators, Nexus is determined to prepare the inheritors of our world by cultivating invaluable soft skills such as critical thinking, confidence, presentation skills, innovation and initiative. Its learners come out as holistically well-developed individuals who can effectively apply their skills and knowledge in interdisciplinary settings, helping them succeed in a variety of situations. The future is vastly unclear, and no one can predict it. But rather than trying to guess, Nexus believes in shaping adaptable and versatile individuals. And who knows? Perhaps the learners of today will craft the future that we are unclear of for themselves. ◉

For further information see www.nexus.edu.sg



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