

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | *October 2022*

People Profession 2022

UK and Ireland survey report



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1 Introduction

Every year, we ask the people profession, ‘What’s changed in your world of work?’

We’ve seen some extraordinary shifts since 2020, with the profession operating front and centre, dealing with the externalities that heavily impact on people. These shifts have accelerated many agendas that were already in play and resulted in some great achievements for people teams and practitioners. But with great achievement comes greater expectations, something that the profession says has remained heightened over the last two years.

In this survey report, we dig deeper to understand the sentiment of people professionals. We gather insights from practitioners on their careers and working lives, and this annual benchmark allows us to take the pulse of the people profession and acknowledge changes across it.¹

The report aims to address six key questions:

- 1 What is the current skills landscape within the profession?
- 2 How does the wellbeing of people professionals compare with the wider UK workforce?
- 3 Where do people teams offer most value and create impact?
- 4 What are the current operating models of people teams?
- 5 How is the profession using people data and analytics?
- 6 How are organisations focusing on employee experience?

About the *People Profession* survey

The fieldwork was conducted during April and May 2022 via an online survey administered by YouGov. For context, we briefly outline the wider social, economic and political context at the time of data collection within the [full report](#).

Our sample includes both in-house and independent people professionals, across a range of specialisms, within the UK and Ireland. This year, we surveyed 1,496 people professionals from the UK and 125 from Ireland. As well as survey data, we explored some of the prominent themes with senior leaders of the profession through a series of roundtables. Full details of the sample and methodology are included in the [Appendix](#).

2 What is the current skills landscape within the profession?

Key findings

- As we move out of the pandemic, the proportion of the profession reskilling or upskilling has remained stable, with a slight increase in Ireland. In 2022, 61% in the UK and 72% in Ireland said that they have either upskilled or reskilled within the last year.

¹ The *People Profession* survey data is cross-sectional, that is, we do not collect data with the same sample each year. We use these results to understand the shifts more broadly, but cannot make direct comparisons between samples as we cannot guarantee that the demographics and variance of the samples are equal.

- A third of respondents said that their upskilling was in response to an immediate business need and a smaller proportion (22% in the UK and 32% in Ireland) said their upskilling was focused on gaining longer-term skills to build future-proofing capabilities.
- The priorities for building HR capability remain consistent since 2021, showing that the same gaps persist. The priorities are supporting line managers, facilitating more flexible people operations, and organisational development and change management skills.

3 How does the wellbeing of people professionals compare with the wider UK workforce?

Key findings

- Over half (55%) of UK practitioners but less than half (42%) of Irish practitioners view their mental health to be good or very good, while this figure was 52% (UK) and 38% (Ireland) for physical health.
- In the UK, three in ten practitioners said that both their mental and physical wellbeing is negatively impacted by their work (31% and 29%). In Ireland, the negative impact of work on wellbeing was similar for both mental (14%) and physical health (15%).
- Practitioners who hold negative beliefs about their career progression were significantly more likely to say their mental and physical health was poor and that their work negatively impacted on their wellbeing.
- When comparing people professionals with the wider UK workforce, we found that people practitioners perceived their mental and physical health more negatively than the general workforce, both in terms of their general health and how their work impacts upon their wellbeing.

4 Where do people teams offer most value and create impact?

Key findings

- Generally, perceptions of the valued contribution of people teams have remained consistent or slightly increased. Belief in how the profession delivers and contributes to organisational success remains positive.
- However, in Ireland, only two-thirds of people professionals felt that their success is recognised by business leaders (67%) and that it has an important impact on the organisation (69%). In the UK, these figures were even lower at 57% and 58% respectively.
- There were significant differences in how people professionals perceive their strategic impact across business sizes and sectors.

5 What are the current operating models of people teams?

Key findings

- We found two prominent operating models adopted by UK people teams: a business partnering model with specialists and shared services (30%), and having a single HR team that includes generalists, specialists and administration all together (31%).
- In Ireland, a third prominent model was found. Nearly a fifth of respondents said that they operate from a small, centralised HR function that outsources much of its people activity (18%).
- As expected, operating models vary considerably across business sizes. Our data highlights pre- and post-pandemic shifts in the way people teams are operating.
- We found a mixed picture when it comes to where and how people professionals work. In Ireland we found more onsite working, whereas in the UK, there was little variance across working locations.

6 How is the profession using people data and analytics?

Key findings

- Nearly two-fifths of UK respondents said that people data is managed by the people function (39%) or that they provide regular people data reports for the business (39%).
- In Ireland, there has been an increase in the general use of people data reporting, the use of analytics to support decision-making and combining people data with other forms of data.
- There is a widening gap between demands and skills: while the need for data skills increases as more organisations plan to use data in decision-making (since pre-pandemic findings), capability remains a barrier to applying data in practice.
- Other barriers to applying people analytics successfully include technology and analytical systems (38% in the UK, 36% in Ireland) and access to resources (29% in the UK, 34% in Ireland). All barriers have remained consistent since 2021.

7 How are organisations focusing on employee experience?

Key findings

- To improve employee experience, half of UK organisations say they collect exit data from leavers (51% in the UK and 42% in Ireland, compared with 45% and 43% in 2021).
- A similar number of UK practitioners also said they are focusing on company culture and values to improve employee experience (50%).

- However, we found that only 33% of respondents say their organisation is focusing on both collecting exit data and embedding the organisation's culture and values. It is important that businesses gather evidence and insight throughout the employee lifecycle to appreciate workers' experiences at various stages of employment.

8 Opportunities for the profession

For the majority, skills are regularly being honed and developed. However, a significant proportion of people professionals in our survey have not upskilled or reskilled within the last year. Although the reasoning behind this is unclear, and perhaps there are several barriers at play, people professionals have a personal responsibility to set aside protected time for their own [professional development](#) and growth. Alongside this, having a [learning and development strategy](#) that clearly outlines the development needs across the entire workforce is a key part of an organisation's business strategy.

One clear challenge that practitioners found within a hybrid working environment was developing organisational culture and values. Until now, organisational culture has been largely developed in the physical workplace, but this has to change. People professionals' work is no longer predominantly office-based, so the merger of virtual and physical environments needs to be a deliberate and proactive shift. While there are some big developments in this space, we're still some way off understanding how emerging technology and virtual reality could influence and evolve the world of work. However, the role of people professionals will be critical to developing a workplace that meets the future needs of people and businesses.

9 Challenges for the profession

Without a doubt, the people profession has risen to the challenges thrown at it by external influences. However, a subsequent consequence is the raised expectations and increasing demands on practitioners. As a profession that puts people at the heart of its work, responsibility and a duty of care weighs heavily on it.

Senior leaders will need to reset expectations, and make it clear that the wellbeing of people teams needs to be a priority for organisations, especially given our findings on the impact of work on practitioners' physical and mental health.

Looking beyond the here and now, practitioners will need to keep their fingers on the pulse and look to the challenges ahead. Our [People Profession 2030 report](#) highlights five key trends that continue to be highly influential in the future world of work. With externalities driving change, the profession will need to have strategic influence and the confidence to challenge peers across the business on key issues, because at the heart of all this change is people, who have a right to good-quality work.

However the world of work evolves, the CIPD's mission will always be to support the profession to continue championing better work and working lives. Our evolving [Profession Map](#), grounded in research, aims to support professionals as the world of work changes. [Keep up to date with our latest review](#), which recognises the changing standards of people professionals' practice. CIPD members can also use our [learning hub](#) self-assessment tool to assess individual capability gaps against the Profession Map.

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