

# BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS:

Supporting low-skilled  
employees and new starters  
to succeed in the workforce

May 2021







## CONTENTS

1

Key findings

4

Introduction

5

Our research

6

Our approach

8

What we learned

Starting a new job can be challenging.  
Doing so in a global pandemic can be even harder.

Managers are critical to low-skilled staff  
successfully starting a new job.

We need to think differently about how all managers  
connect with and support low-skilled workers  
- to ensure their ongoing success.

22

'Top Tips' for managers



# KEY FINDINGS



**The unequal impact of the crisis is becoming increasingly clear, with low-skilled workers and young people particularly hard hit, in part because they are over-represented in sectors that have been most affected by lockdown and social distancing restrictions.**

Employees in lower-level occupations and with fewer qualifications have been more likely to have been furloughed or to have lost their job. Young people account for 57% of the fall in employment despite accounting for just 12% of total employment, and youth unemployment is almost four-times higher than the rest of the working age population.

## Despite challenging economic times, low-skilled workers continue to move around the labour market

Where low-skilled workers had changed roles they were most likely to have done so by taking up a role with a new employer (41%), and less likely than their more highly qualified colleagues to have secured a promotion.

**Low-skilled workers face a range of challenges when changing roles**, and are more likely than most new starters to have challenges connecting with their manager and colleagues. Young people find it difficult too, with specific challenges around developing skills, managing work-life balance and health and well-being.

**The role of a manager is critical in supporting low-skilled staff overcome the challenges of starting a new job - and to their success in that role.**

**91%** of low-skilled employees agree its important to have a supportive manager when taking up a new role.

**93%** agree that when taking up a new role it's important to have a manager that supports you to develop technical skills.

**92%** agree it's important to have a manager that gives you feedback on your performance.

**85%** agree it's important to have a manager that helps you develop workplace networks.

**75%** of all managers say that over the last 12 months, their role in onboarding low-skilled workers has become even more important because of the additional support needed.

**In terms of support**, managers report that low-skilled workers with no previous work experience were most likely to need support to improve productivity and quality of work. For those with more significant work experience, support was needed to understand the business and what was expected from their role, in adjusting to new ways of working, and to work more flexibly.

**But this support is not easy to provide.** 60% of managers involved in onboarding low-skilled workers during the pandemic said they have found it harder to support new recruits to adjust to new ways of working, and to work more flexibly.

**And remote working makes this even more difficult.** Half of those who found it harder to manage new low-skilled workers during the pandemic spent the last year predominantly working from home.



**Managers are providing support for low-skilled employees around health and well-being, developing skills and connecting with team members**, especially for those working remotely. But this support may not always meet employees needs - for example 92% of employees said receiving feedback from their manager was important whereas only 71% of managers reported prioritising this. Similarly while 78% of managers were supporting health and well-being, under a quarter of low-skilled workers said that managing their health and well-being was a challenge when starting a new role.

In response to the current economic crisis, the UK Government has put in place an unprecedented economic package to protect businesses and to support those most affected to improve their skills and find work. **But while we are seeing considerable investment in helping people change jobs or get back into work, much less attention is being paid to the support that they will need in the workplace to make a success of their new roles** - and to the vital role that managers play in supporting new entrants and in helping existing employees develop their skills.

**Getting this support right will be key to maximising the impact and value for money of government plans to Build Back Better.**

## A NOTE ON LOW-SKILLED WORKERS

The term 'low-skilled' worker is usually used to refer to people with few formal qualifications, people working in jobs that do not require such qualifications, or people working in low-wage positions regardless of their own educational background.

Within our research, we sought to understand the experiences of those whose highest level of qualification is at level 2 or below – equivalent to GCSEs or an intermediate apprenticeship. We acknowledge however that qualifications are only a proxy for skills, and that many 'low-skilled' workers have a range of well-developed and valuable skills beyond those recognised through qualifications. Indeed, one of the key lessons of the pandemic is the essential role that many of our least well-qualified and well-paid workers play within our economy.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

In seeking to Build Back Better, we have a once in a generation opportunity to think beyond the short term need for employment and skills interventions, and to develop a long term vision for a high skill, high wage, highly productive economy - and good work. To do this, we are calling on Government, employers and managers to take action.

## Government

- 1 Build the role of the manager into employment and skills policy.** Consider mechanisms to incentivise a commitment to good management practice and development and progression for those engaged in government programmes such as via Kickstart, or Apprenticeships.  
  
For Kickstart this could mean requiring employers to declare their commitment to develop employees within the role and to demonstrate how they have made training and support available to them. For Apprenticeships this could mean establishing a commitment to the ongoing support, development and progression of apprentices. This would complement other government initiatives to support management and leadership development such as Help to Grow: Management.
- 2 Build core skills - management and leadership, digital, communication - into all skills interventions to ease the transition into employment and between employers.** These are skills employers consistently report they want and need. The Department for Education's (DfE) **2019 Employer Skills Survey** found a lack of management and leadership skills reported by employers as a factor in three-fifths (57%) of skills gaps.
- 3 Partner with us to develop a UK-wide understanding of hybrid working and its consequences - especially for young people and the low-skilled.** For example, by investigating the effectiveness of different in-work support for retention and progression - what works, what delivers the best return on investment in employment support and up- and re-skilling? CMI and L&W can help to fill the evidence gaps through our research, our networks and unique insight to the challenges.

## Employers and Managers

- 1** Prioritise the development of professional practice. Support all managers to become members of a professional body - to ensure they're constantly improving and refreshing their management skills.
- 2** Ensure all staff - including new and low-skilled recruits and managers - can access high quality continuing professional development that supports them to develop key skills - both technical and transferable. This behaviour is the best way to improve practice: to motivate staff, support progression and deliver against organisational objectives.



# INTRODUCTION

The impact of the pandemic on employment and the labour market has already been profound. Vacancies have fallen, redundancies have risen, and hours worked have declined. Employment has fallen and unemployment is predicted to increase further and remain above pre-crisis levels until 2023/24.<sup>1</sup>

4.9%



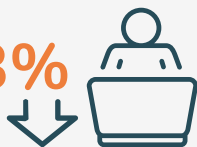
The unemployment rate now stands at 4.9%

700,000



There are nearly **700,000 fewer people in payroll employment** than at the start of the pandemic.

23%



**Job vacancies fell by nearly 23%** on the year.

The unequal impact of the crisis is becoming increasingly clear, with low-skilled workers and young people particularly hard hit, in part because they are over-represented in sectors that have been most affected by lockdown and social distancing restrictions.

- Over the last year, workers in **hospitality, leisure and non-essential retail** were most likely to have found themselves out of work, on furlough or earning less.<sup>2</sup>
- Employees in **lower-level occupations and with fewer qualifications** have also been more likely to have been furloughed or to have lost their job.<sup>3</sup>
- **Young people now account for 57% of the fall in employment** despite accounting for just 12% of total employment, and youth unemployment is almost four-times higher than the rest of the working age population.<sup>4</sup> Young people with low or no qualifications have been hit particularly hard hit.

In seeking to tackle these challenges, the UK Government has put in place an unprecedented economic package to protect businesses and to support those most affected to improve their skills and find work. As part of a wider plan to **Build Back Better**, support is also available to help those in work develop their skills, adapt to new ways of working, and progress in employment.

But while we are seeing considerable investment in helping people change jobs or get back into work, much less attention is being paid to the support that they will need in the workplace to make a success of their new roles - and to the vital role that managers play in supporting new entrants and in helping existing employees develop their skills.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/latest>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2021/02/Long-covid-in-the-labour-market.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/when-furlough-has-to-stop-next-steps-to-avert-long-term-unemployment/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://learningandwork.org.uk/what-we-do/employment-and-social-security/labour-market-analysis/april-2021/>



# OUR RESEARCH

Managers have always had an important role to play in supporting their staff to succeed. As the [Government's productivity review](#) has found: management and leadership skills are a key enabler of productive work, supporting business growth, technology adoption, skills utilisation and on-the-job learning.

However, changes to the ways in which we work, that have emerged over the past year, have created unprecedented challenges, as well as new opportunities, in providing this support.

Getting this support right will surely be key to maximising the impact and value for money of government plans to Build Back Better. It will fuel business recovery and growth, helping make the best use of talent and boost productivity. It will support employees to thrive at work and protect their well-being.



Through our previous work, CMI have sought to better understand how work and management responsibilities are changing and to identify successful approaches that managers and leaders can take in supporting their staff. You can read more about [Management Transformed](#) here.

We - [CMI](#) and [Learning and Work Institute](#) - have now come together to explore these issues further, with a focus on understanding how managers can successfully support those who have taken up new roles during the pandemic to succeed and progress. Given the scale of the economic impact of the pandemic on low-skilled workers and on young people, we have taken a particular interest in their needs and experiences.



# OUR RESEARCH APPROACH

To help us understand more about the role of managers in supporting those who have changed roles during the pandemic to succeed and progress at work...

1,000 

We surveyed 1,000 managers and senior leaders. We asked them about their experience of supporting low-skilled workers who have started work or changed roles since March 2020. We were interested in the challenges that can be faced when taking up a new role, and the ways in which managers have supported their staff to overcome these during the pandemic.

1,300 

We polled 1,300 employees, asking them about their experience of changing employer or changing roles during the past 3 years and during the last 12 months. We wanted to understand what level of support they received from their manager and how important this was in helping them make a success of their new role.



We interviewed 9 managers and 9 of the low-skilled workers that they manage, to help us better understand the challenges of changing roles during the pandemic, and how these have been overcome. Together, these stories and numbers shed light on the important role that managers can play in helping people to successfully change role, the different approaches that they use, and the skills and behaviours that help them to do this well.

In our survey of 1,300 employees, 29% were categorised as low-skilled workers, that is their highest level of qualification is at level 2 or below – equivalent to GCSEs or an intermediate apprenticeship.

Just over half (54%) of our low-skilled workers identified as male and 45% as female.

Just 8% of our low-skilled workers were aged 16-24. One third (34%) were aged 25-29, while 57% were aged 45 or over.<sup>5</sup>

There were significant regional differences too. 38% of workers in the North West and 35% of those in the South East/East of England were low-skilled, compared with just 17% in Greater London.

Around 40% of those working for businesses with 10 or fewer staff were low-skilled, compared with around 1 in 5 of those working with business with between 50-249 employees

Over half (54%) of all manual workers, one third of those in entry level roles, and one quarter of those in non-managerial or supervisory roles had a highest qualification at level 2. This compares with just 13% of those in senior or middle management.

Throughout this report, in our analysis, we make comparisons between low-skilled workers and all employees, and young people and all employees. Low-skilled workers are defined as those whose highest level of qualification is at level 2 or below – equivalent to GCSEs or an intermediate apprenticeship. Young people are defined as those aged under 25 years. The two groups are not exclusive however, only 8% of young people had low skills making them a small proportion of the overall low skills group.



# MARSHALLS PLC

Construction

## ORGANISATION CASESTUDY



Marshalls Plc is a large company in the construction industry that provides hard landscaping.

### PRE-LOCKDOWN

A few weeks before lockdown, Marshalls Plc recruited a Level 2 Business Administration apprentice to their Yorkshire office. She was placed on furlough before even starting her day release at college.

### CHALLENGES AHEAD

Working from home and receiving only virtual input from college has made it more challenging for her to develop the required knowledge, skills and experience. The more practical aspects of the apprenticeship – greeting visitors, arranging the catering for meetings – have been particularly difficult to complete.

Managing such an inexperienced staff member remotely has been challenging and required the manager to establish clear expectations about time management and task completion. This was particularly important as it was the apprentice's first job.

### SUPPORTING THE APPRENTICE

The apprentice has been allocated two different mentors who have both been very 'patient', encouraging her to ask questions and offering remote 'shadowing' using screen sharing. The company delivered some socially distanced training in a large meeting room and the manager has worked using Teams, sharing their screen to provide tips and talk through tasks. The apprentice has also been exposed to as varied a range of tasks as possible.

The apprentice feels that staff mental health is a priority in the company, appreciates the level of support she has received, and wants to stay on once her apprenticeship is complete.

I would ask questions, to the point that you'd think someone would get bored of you, but she just didn't... every question I asked was answered, and I was always being supported and given more information.

**Apprentice, Marshall Plc, Yorkshire and the Humber**

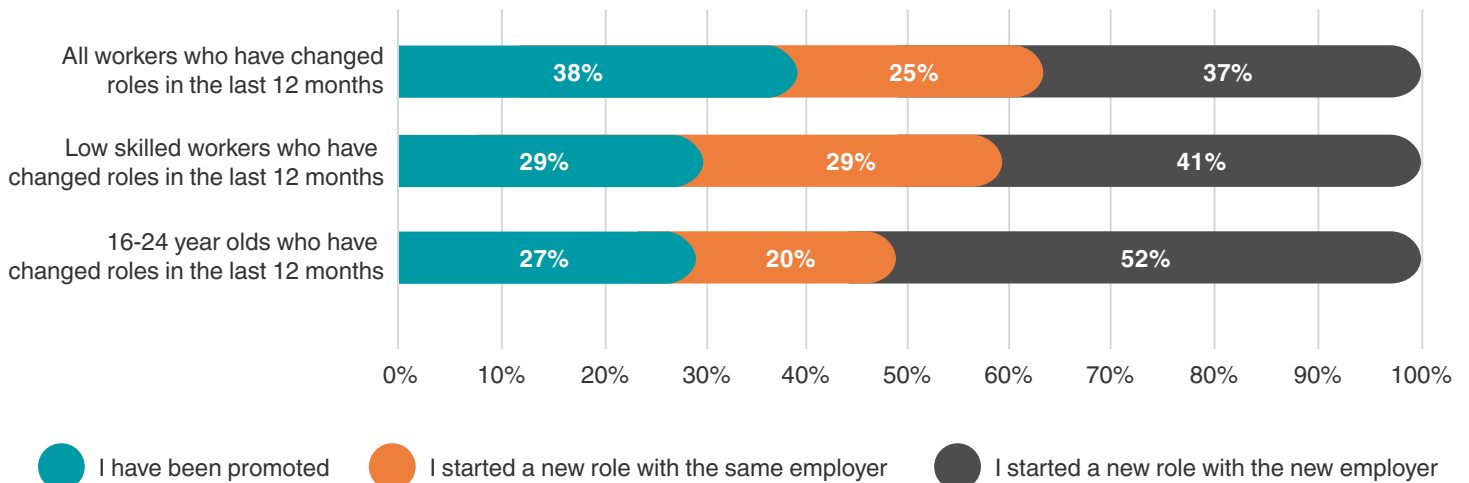
[READ THE FULL CASE STUDY >](#)

[ACCESS ALL RECOMMENDED TOP TIPS >](#)

Despite challenging economic times, people continue to move around the labour market, but with fewer low-skilled workers and young people making a change. Since March 2020, 37% of all employees and 25% of low-skilled workers have changed jobs.

Low-skilled workers were most likely to have done this by taking up a role with a new employer (41%), and less likely than their more highly qualified colleagues to have secured a promotion.

Figure 1: How workers have changed roles during the previous 12 months



Base: All employees who have changed roles during last 12 months, 481  
 All low-skilled workers who have changed roles in the last 12 months, 92  
 All 16-24 year olds who have changed roles in the last 12 months, 103

Starting a new role can be challenging at the best of times. But adjusting to new ways of working, including remote working, has been challenging for both managers and for those that they manage.

## EMPLOYEE CHALLENGES

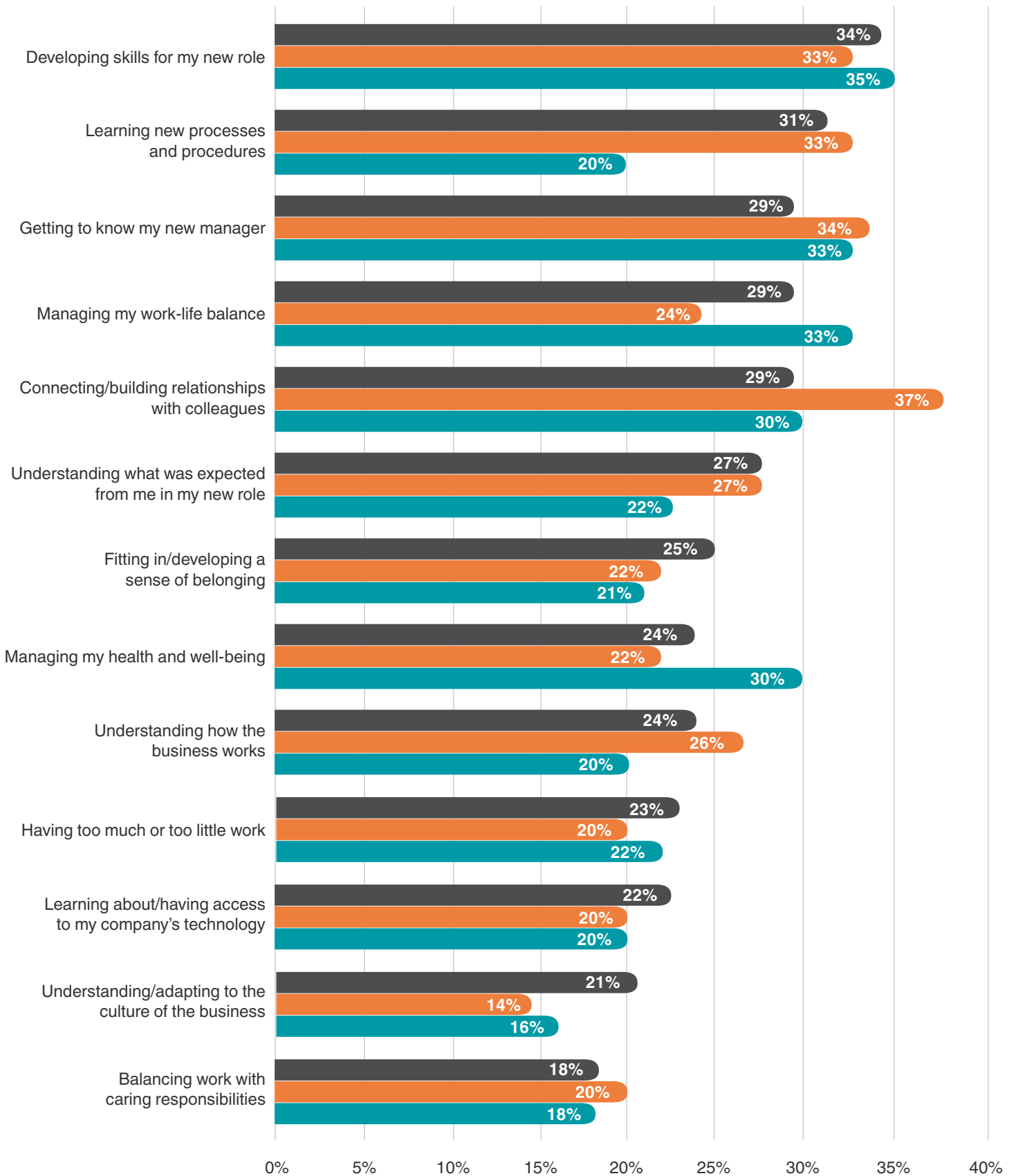
The majority (93%) of employees from our survey, who changed roles during the last 12 months had faced a broad range of challenges, including having to develop new skills (34%), learn new processes and procedures (31%), get to know their manager (29%), manage work-life balance (29%), and connect with colleagues (29%).

While any new starter can face challenges, low-skilled workers were more likely to find it difficult to connect with their new colleagues (37%) and with their manager (34%).

Young people too highlighted many of these challenges. On taking up a new role, they were most likely to see a need to develop their skills (35%), and more likely to cite challenges around managing their work-life balance (33%), and their health and well-being (30%).



Figure 2: The challenges faced when starting a new role



● Young people who changed roles (Weighted base: 103)

● Low skilled workers who changed roles (Weighted base: 92)

● All role changers (Weighted base: 481)

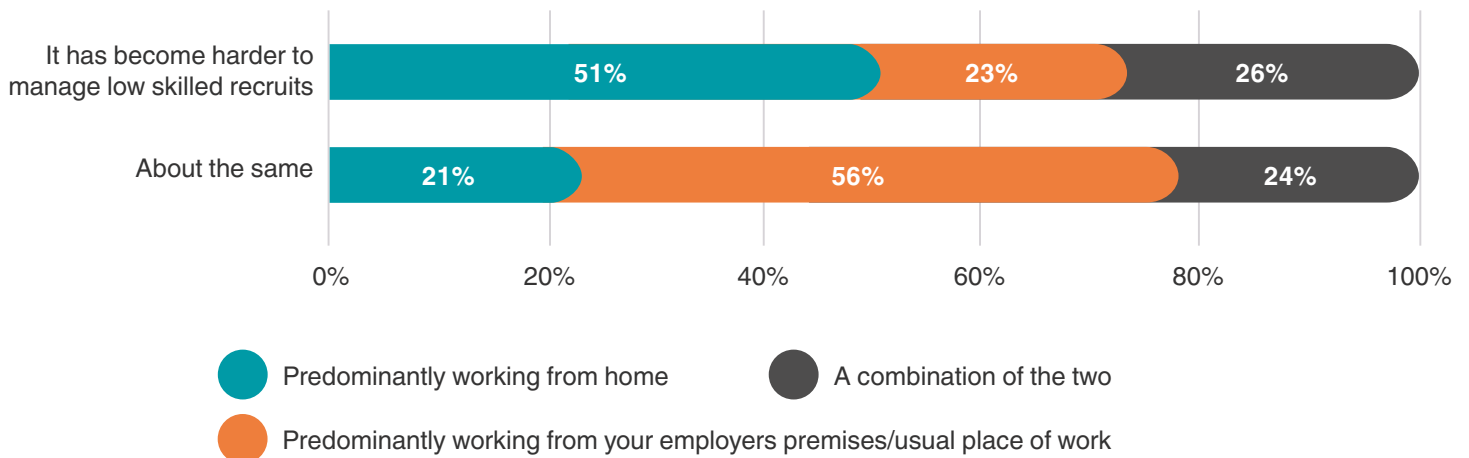
Base: All employees who have changed roles during last 12 months, 481  
 All low-skilled workers who have changed roles in the last 12 months, 92  
 All 16-24 year olds who have changed roles in the last 12 months, 103

## MANAGER CHALLENGES

We also asked managers about their experience of supporting and managing low-skilled workers who have changed roles during the pandemic. 60% of those who have been involved in onboarding low-skilled workers during the pandemic, said that since the start of the first lockdown in March 2020, they have found it harder to line manage these new recruits. Just 5% said it was now easier to manage low-skilled recruits.

It is clear that where and how you work matters. Half of those who found it harder to manage new low-skilled workers during the pandemic have spent the last year predominantly working from home. In contrast, over half of those who said the experience has been about the same, have been predominantly working from their employer's premises. Managers explained that it was much harder to do their job without face-to-face interactions or the ability to observe workers first-hand or spot when someone needed support.

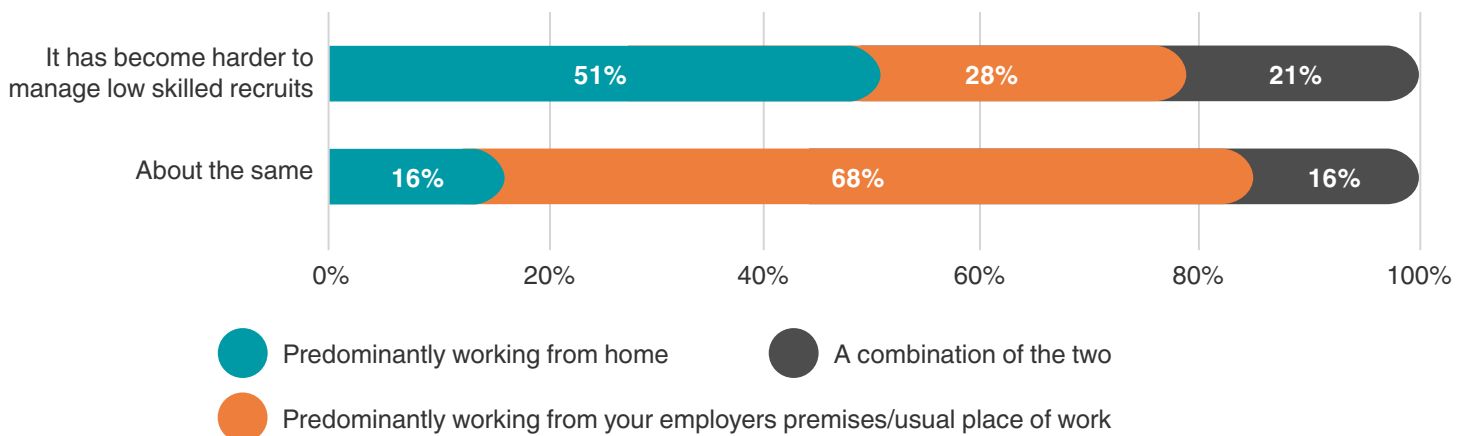
**Figure 3: Where a manager works influences how hard they have found it to manage new low-skilled workers**



**Base: All managers who onboarded low-skilled workers during last 12 months and said that it was harder, 132  
All managers who have onboarded low-skilled workers during last 12 months and said that it was about the same, 75**

Where newly recruited low-skilled workers have been working from their employer's premises, 68% of managers say that the experience of managing them has been about the same. Half of those managing low-skilled recruits who predominantly work from home said that they have found it harder to manage and support them.

**Figure 4: Where low-skilled workers work influences how hard it is to manage them**



**Base: All managers who have onboarded low-skilled workers during last 12 months and said that it was harder, 132  
All managers who have onboarded low-skilled workers during last 12 months and said that it was about the same, 75**

“

If you're in an office and you were stuck with something you could just lean over to whoever's next to you and be like, 'Oh, can you help me with this?' Whereas now it's like, you're calling someone up on Teams and it feels a bit more like you're taking them away from what they're doing. So, I think for me, that's the most challenging thing, not being able to just have those quick interactions with your team.

New starter, Housing Association, South West

”

“

For all the people who were brought in during that time it was the in-person aspect that was most difficult. You know if you're in an office and you overhear conversations, it's actually quite key. Normally they would be hooked up, listening in, that would be a massive part of the initial training. We're trying to find solutions for that but it just wasn't quite the same, actually. It's that on-the-job training which I think was really challenging.

Manager, Housing Association, South West

”

Managers in some sectors, such as in health and social care, described how pressures on their sector had affected the amount of time and support available for new starters or lower skilled workers and the pressures on them to start performing quickly. Other managers described how it had been difficult to implement effective inductions when, due to social distancing or remote working, their staff were working separately or on altered rotas, making it harder to ensure staff met everyone they needed to.

“

Covid pressure in the NHS has directly affected the time that would usually be spent on new starters. Unfortunately, new recruits are brought on board and expected to hit the ground running, it is the worst time to employ new people but is an absolute necessity to be able to effectively deal with the pandemic.

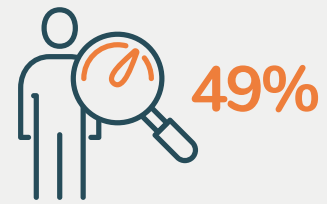
Senior manager, large public sector employer, West Midlands

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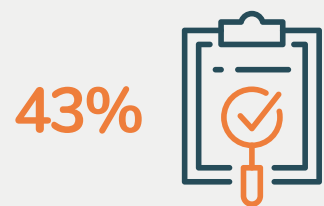
Some managers also struggled to train staff remotely. Some lower skilled staff found it difficult to process information online or in print as this did not suit their learning style. It had also been more difficult, or impossible, for many employers to offer a more effective hands-on approach through work shadowing or observation - a 'showing and doing' approach - to training. Even where this was possible, staff absence meant that there were often fewer staff available to help train new starters. Integrating new starters into teams had also become more difficult without face-to-face contact.



of managers agreed that **low-skilled workers, who have joined during the pandemic have found it more difficult to build relationships with other people in the business.**



of managers agreed that **low-skilled workers, who have joined during the pandemic have found it more difficult to undertake their role successfully.**

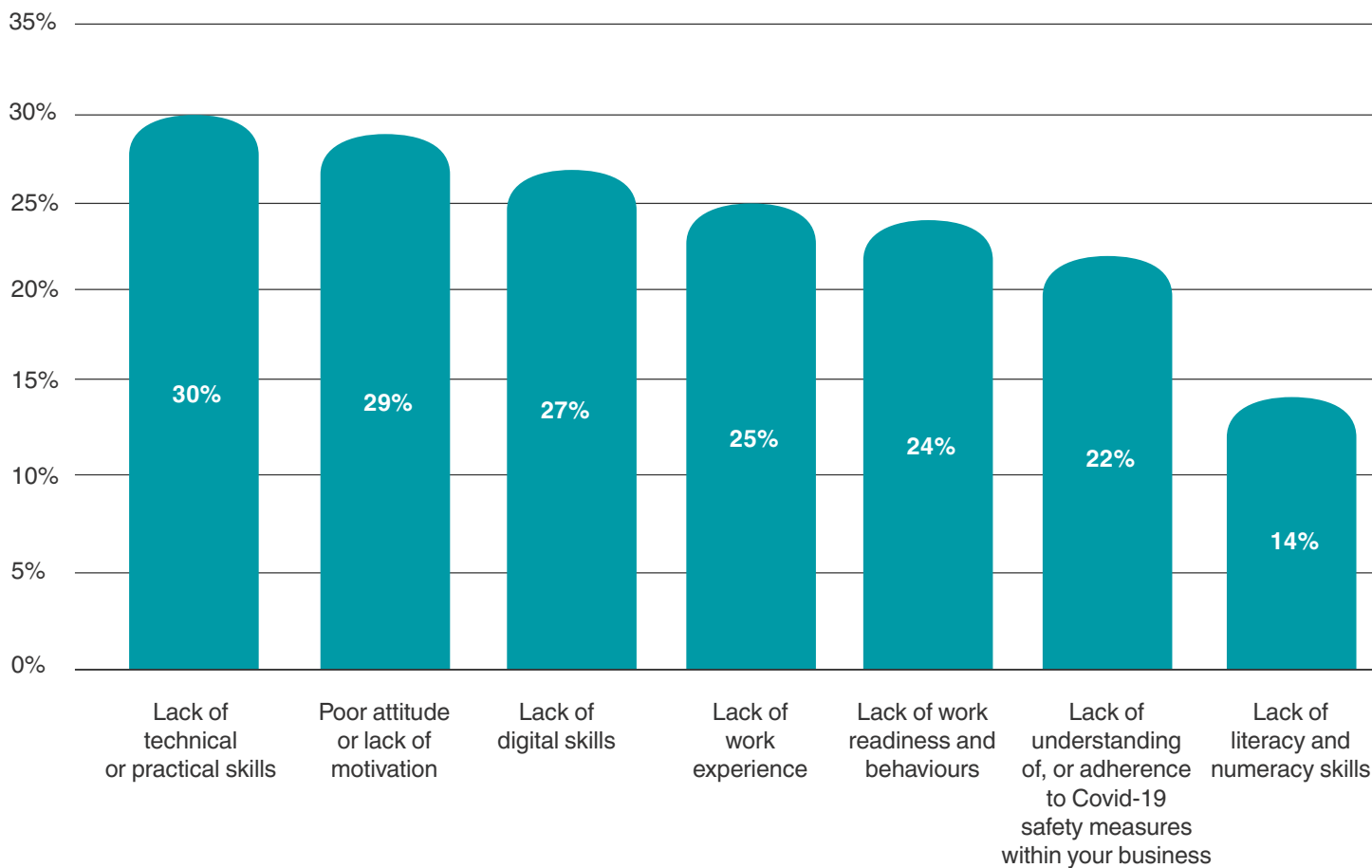


of managers agreed that **low-skilled workers, who have joined during the pandemic have found it more difficult to understand what is expected of them in their role.**



- Around 3 in 10 managers identified that low-skilled workers recruited during the pandemic have struggled with a lack of technical or practical skills, poor attitude or lack of motivation, and a lack of digital skills.
- Around one quarter of managers noted a lack of work experience or work readiness in their recruits. 22% identified that new low-skilled staff had difficulties in understanding or adhering to their Covid-19 safety measures. 1 in 7 managers said that recruits had poor literacy or numeracy skills.

**Figure 5: Challenges encountered when onboarding low-skilled staff during the pandemic**



**Base: all managers who have onboarded low-skilled workers during last 12 months, 221**



The company is a large logistics provider who have experienced unusual staff challenges over the last year, needing to temporarily cover shielding members or provide additional manpower due to Covid19 social distancing measures. The majority of new starters entered the job from sectors affected by the lockdown following redundancy or furlough, then some moved on again when they found permanent work. At least 2 members were subsequently offered permanent contracts.

One new starter joined in June 2020 having previously worked in hospitality. He has struggled most with the social aspect of the job, especially during lockdown when there was limited interpersonal interaction. From his perspective, starting a new job in a completely different sector and role during lockdown, has been 'nerve wracking'.

However, his manager has been reassuring and accommodating, providing a work taster as part of his first day's induction, after which he felt much better. On-the-job training with a supportive supervisor has made him feel trusted and given him confidence.

It is a completely different kind of work from what they're used to doing, so it's more manual and you are a very close-knit team. So, for some people, if you've not been used to working in that environment, where you're with seven or eight other people all day, every day, sometimes doing two hours overtime, it can be a very long day.

**Manager, Logistics Provider, East Midlands**

It's always a bit scary going into a new job, especially something that's completely different from what you were doing. But to do it in the middle of a pandemic, in the middle of a lockdown when you're not really seeing people anyway, made it even tougher.

**New starter, Logistics Provider, East Midlands**

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of low-skilled employees agreed that **when changing role, it is important to have a manager who gives you feedback on your performance.**



of low-skilled employees agreed that **when changing role, it is important to have a manager who supports you to develop your technical skills.**



of low-skilled employees agreed that **when changing role, it is important to have a manager who helps you develop workplace networks.**

Managers and employers that hire new staff or offer new roles to existing staff, are likely to be doing so into work environments that are different than they would have been just a year ago. In this context, managers have a critical role to play in ensuring that job moves are a success.

### EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

91% of low-skilled employees surveyed agreed that it is important to have a supportive manager when taking up a new role; 58% agree that this is very important. Employees also agreed that managers could play three important roles with new staff: providing feedback on performance, supporting development of technical skills and helping to develop workplace networks.

“

She's definitely just been a rock, really, constantly checking in with me, keeping me up-to-date with my contract. As you're a temp worker and you know you want to stay somewhere, it's daunting and very concerning, especially during the pandemic when your job goes. She's given me so much support in that sense, keeping me sane. She trusts me as well. Checking in on my mental health, having regular catchups with me, that's just really helped me get through, especially being new in the team.

New starter, central government, London

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“

I think it has been a stark realisation for them [the organisation] that without good managers, no amount of policy would have got you through this particular period.

Manager, central government, London

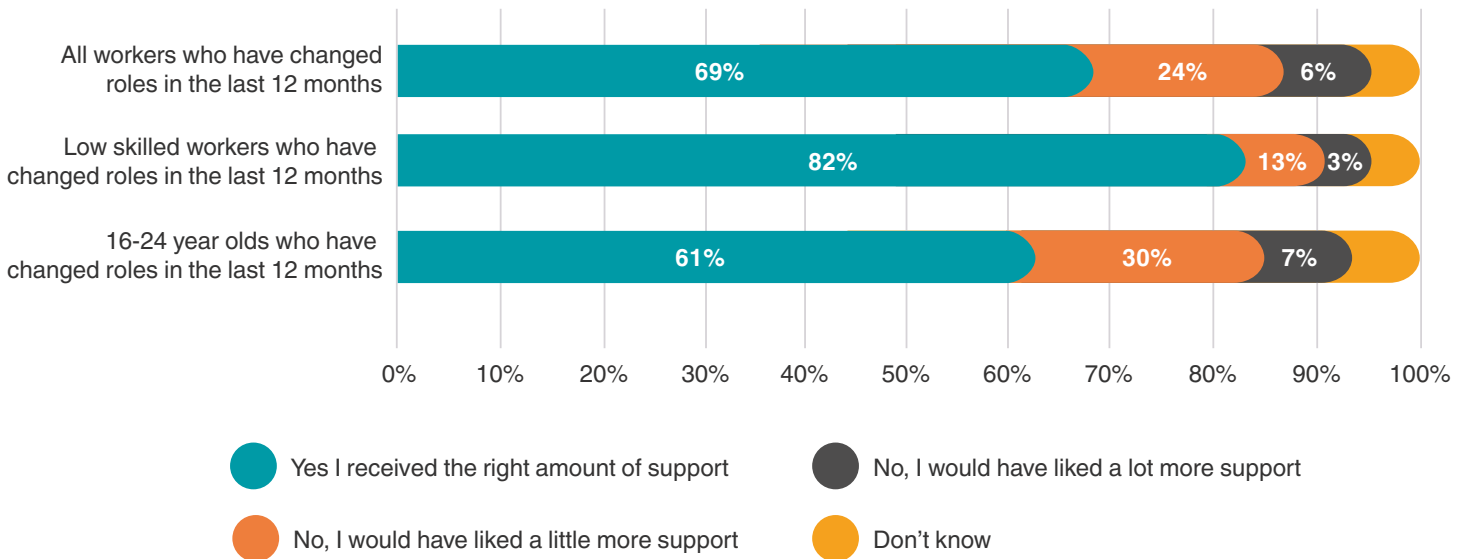
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Most employees feel they are getting the right support from their managers. Seven out of ten employees who changed roles during the last 12 months said that they received the right amount of support from their manager.



Low-skilled workers were actually more likely to feel they had received enough support: more than four-fifths of low-skilled workers who changed roles said that they were happy with the level of support received from their manager. Young people, in contrast, were less likely to feel they had received enough support: just over three-fifths-of 16-24-year-olds who changed roles were satisfied with the support provided, with 30% requiring a little more support.

**Figure 6: Whether employees felt they received enough support from their manager when changing role**

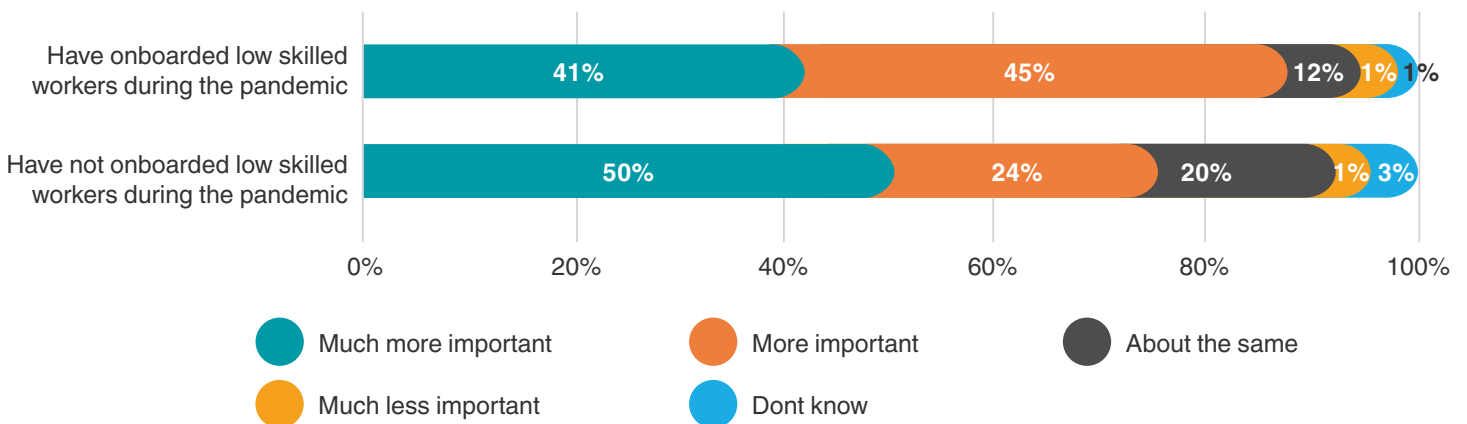


Base: All employees who have changed roles during last 12 months, 481  
 All low-skilled workers who have changed roles in the last 12 months, 92  
 All 16-24 year olds who have changed roles in the last 12 months, 103

## MANAGER EXPERIENCE

We also asked managers about their experience of supporting and managing low-skilled workers. Around three quarters of all managers believe that their role in supporting low-skilled workers to succeed in a new role has become more important since the beginning of lockdown. Those with experience of onboarding low-skilled workers during the pandemic were more likely (86%) to say that this was the case (45% more important; 41% much more important) than those without this experience (50% more important; 34% much more important).

**Figure 7: Managers views on whether their role has become more or less important during the pandemic**



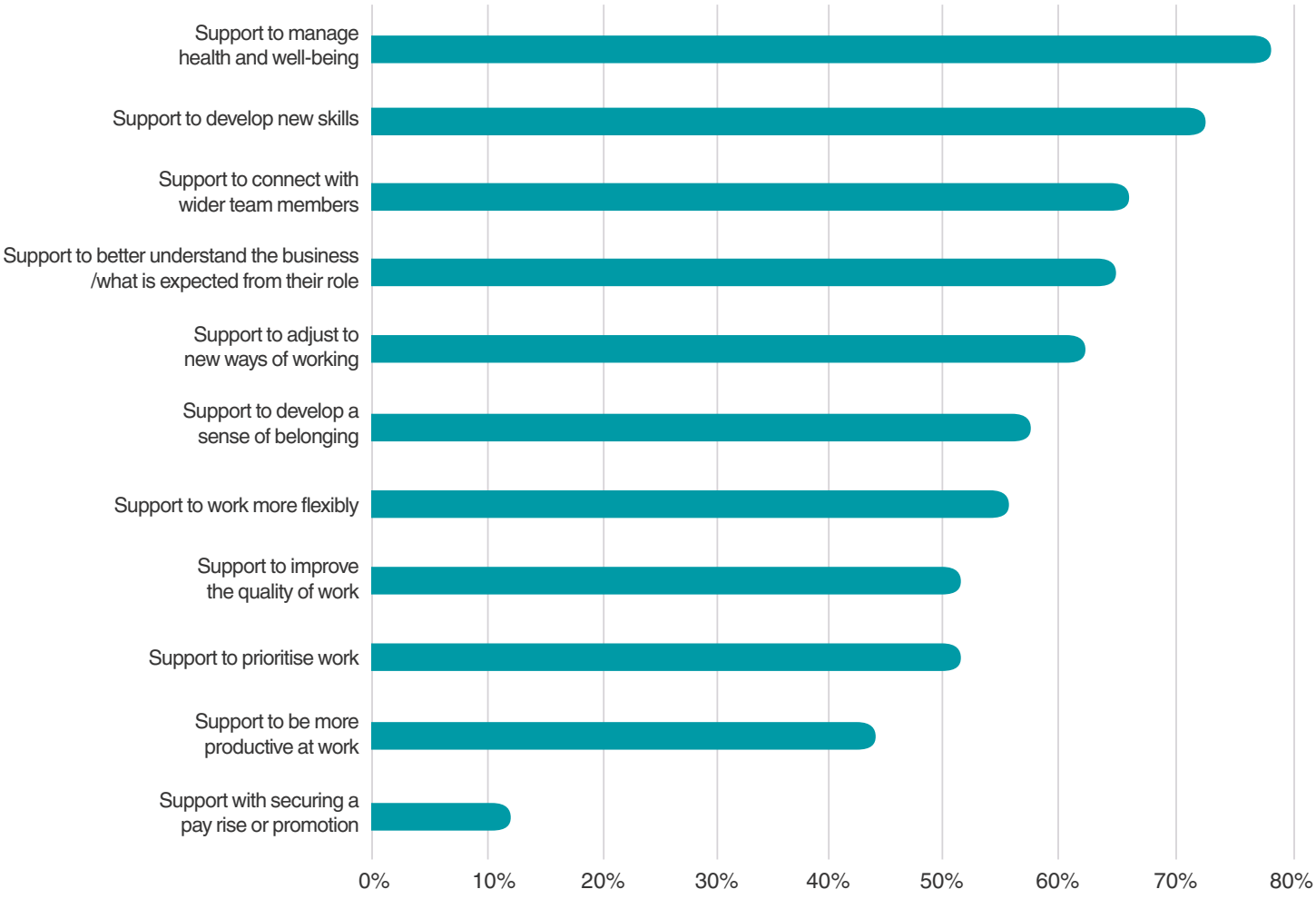
Base: Managers who have not onboarded low-skilled workers during the pandemic, 733  
 Managers who have onboarded low-skilled workers during the pandemic, 221

Managers also told us that, in their experience, they have provided a range of support to low-skilled staff who changed roles during the pandemic - from managing their health and well-being to developing new skills, from connecting with wider team members to helping them understand their role. This support provided marries with the needs of low-skilled new starters in our employee survey, although they were less likely than managers to identify a need for support around health and well-being.

In particular, managers identified that low-skilled workers without any previous work experience were most likely to have needed support to improve their productivity and quality of work. In contrast, low-skilled workers who have a substantial amount of experience were more likely to require support in understanding the business and what was expected from their role, in adjusting to new ways of working, and to work more flexibly.

Managers also told us that where low-skilled workers were operating remotely, they were much more likely than those working at their employer’s premises to have needed support to connect with wider team members, to prioritise their work, to develop a sense of belonging within the business and to prioritise their work.

**Figure 8: What support managers have given low-skilled staff who have changed role during the pandemic**



Base: Managers with experience of onboarding low-skilled staff during the last 12 months, 221

“ Managing people remotely, it's harder to understand what's going on. Trying to continue the relationships, and make sure they're happy. I think you need to be quite emotionally intelligent, to get beyond, 'They're here to do a job, they're here to work for me, they're just here to get the job done,'. That's not how the world works anymore - you need to care about people, you need to be flexible and offer people opportunities. ”

Manager, financial services, Channel Islands

“ We communicate through Microsoft Teams, and a lot of it is pinging spreadsheets to and from via Teams. That tends to work well because we can insert comments on what we've done in the actual spreadsheet, so he might be working on a fund, puts some comments on it to say, 'Could you look at this?' And then, he'll ping that to me on Teams, I can open it, see those comments, see the adjustments he's made and action accordingly. ”

New recruit, financial services, Channel Islands

# ASTER GROUP

Housing provider

## ORGANISATION CASESTUDY

Aster Group is a leading housing developer and provider with over 31,000 properties and 90,000 customers in the South West. We spoke to the leader of, and one of the officers from, a community safety specialist team that deal with anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse.

ASTER  
GROUP

### DURING THE PANDEMIC

Aster Group have received far higher call volumes and had to deal with more complex issues. Advisors have been unable to respond in-person, as they normally would, to help resolve issues early but have attended high risk incidents and attended Court in person still.

Entry level roles require staff to assess complex cases over the telephone and refer cases onto more experienced staff when required. Failure to assess cases effectively can put residents at risk. Ensuring that the training for new recruits equips them to make safe assessments is vital, even when this had to be moved online during lockdown.

### DEVELOPMENTS

Thorough induction plans have been developed to offer a 'crash course' in areas assessed as critical for the role, such as specialist safeguarding training.

The manager is highly aware that dealing with such difficult issues, particularly when working remotely, could have an impact on staff mental health. In response, team meetings have been 'mixed up' to focus on the team's successes and to bring in inspirational speakers. The manager has also instigated a charity event where the team worked out together on-line every morning in full fancy dress for a month, and the organisation has also sent out thank you gifts in recognition of their work.

On occasions when staff have struggled, they are taken off the phones for a few days giving them a break from the 'relentless' pressures of the job. Occupational health and their own in house Well-being Manager have worked tirelessly on various initiatives, and provided on-going support to the manager. The manager believes her role was vital to 'hold the team together', to take responsibility for the team as a whole and manage the risks to staff. Her approach was to maintain a consistent and reliable presence so the team felt that they could depend on her.

If you really have a good relationship with your team and they can see you're invested in them, then it makes your job easier.

Manager, Aster Group, South West

She's definitely covered everything I wanted to know about quite early on and given ongoing support as well. I speak to her quite often and, sort of, have a catch-up and see if there are any bits that I'm stuck on or anything like that.

New starter, Aster Group, South West

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Just as the pandemic has brought unprecedented changes to our economy, to our workplaces and to our wider lives, employees and managers have been required to adapt to new ways of working and to support their staff to do the same. The expectations on managers are significant, so it is vital that they have the tools and resources they need to provide effective leadership.

In our survey of managers, 78% of those who have been managing new low-skilled workers said that they have done this through regular meetings, check-ins and briefings. In building relationships with new staff members, managers have also prioritised discussions about well-being (73%) and giving regular and honest feedback (71%). They have also utilised wider organisational processes and systems around setting objectives and supporting training and development, as well as more personal measures such as making themselves more visible and modelling good behaviour.

To overcome some of the challenges of remote working, around half of managers said that they have engaged more with their staff's personal life as well as their professional life, while just over a quarter set up social engagement activities.

Of course, this support may not always meet employees needs: for example 92% of employees said receiving feedback from their manager was important whereas only 71% of managers reported prioritising this and 93% of employees cited the importance of developing skills but only 63% of managers report developing a training and development plan. Similarly while 78% of managers were supporting health and well-being, under a quarter of low skill workers said that managing their health and well-being was a challenge when starting a new role.

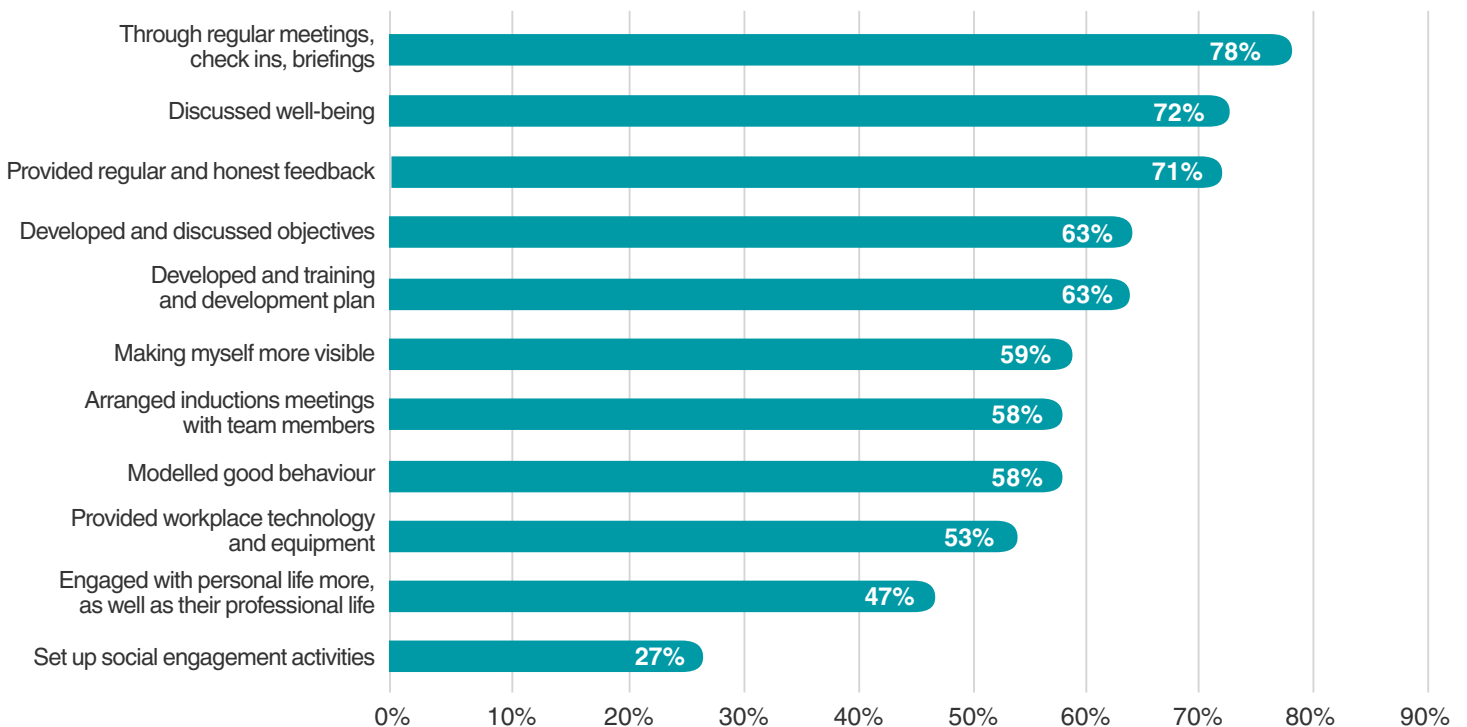
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We give them feedback no matter what, because then they're being listened to. We're making efforts to do what they require or answer their queries... Every day I will do walk arounds myself, and I'll just try and connect with people on a personal level.

Manager, Telecommunications, Yorkshire and the Humber

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**Figure 9: How managers have provided support to low-skilled staff who have changed role during the pandemic**



Base: Managers with experience of onboarding low-skilled staff during the last 12 months, 221

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To replace some of the lost sense of team working and office atmosphere due to a move to remote working, the manager of an admin team created twice weekly two-hour 'virtual office' sessions when staff are encouraged to log into Teams. This encourages interaction, 'office banter' and allows staff to ask and answer each other's queries. The sessions have particularly helped staff recruited during the pandemic to experience the more social side of office life.

Construction company, Yorkshire and the Humber

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### The difference support makes to the onboarding of low-skilled workers

Managers told us that for lower skilled staff, having a strong induction process which included introductions to other staff has been a useful way to help them settle into a new role. Managers also described the benefits of team and one-to-one meetings in helping staff understand their role and integrate more successfully with other team members, including those they would not otherwise meet. Having a training and development plan has helped to focus new staff and allow them to 'grasp their responsibilities' more quickly.

While having visible managers on hand helped lower skilled staff feel supported and part of a team. They were also able to ask questions and have them answered quickly, resulting in them gaining confidence and working more independently.

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Having a step-by-step learning process enabled them to have a clear view of the attributes required to be a key contributor to the team.

Middle manager, large private sector employer, South West

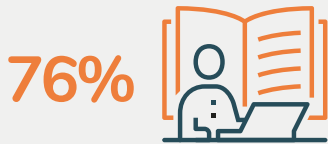
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## Challenges for managers in providing this support

Supporting new low-skilled workers in this way has not been without its challenges. Around three-quarters of managers doing so said they found it more difficult to arrange training and development opportunities for low-skilled workers during the pandemic while 62% found it harder to assess and manage their performance.



of managers agreed that **it has been more difficult to arrange training and development opportunities for low-skilled workers who have joined during the pandemic.**



of managers agreed that **it has been more difficult to assess and manage the performance of low-skilled workers who have joined during the pandemic.**

The extra investment made in supporting staff well has both tested their skills, and added to their own time pressures. When asked about what support they would have liked as managers, a common theme was the need for better IT equipment, resources and training. Some managers said that they would welcome more coaching or mentoring for them personally, or to have had more support from their own line manager during this time.

“

I would like to take on coaching and mentoring in the future and further opportunities to enable me to develop more knowledge and skills in regards to this.

Junior manager, medium sized private sector employer, South West

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Many managers said that they would appreciate just having more time so that they could manage more effectively. This would have enabled them to have more one-to-one meetings with their direct reports and to offer mentoring or counselling to those staff who needed it. Some managers would have liked more time to adapt their processes to the realities of COVID.

In addition, managers said that they would welcome better organisational policies and procedures. Similarly, greater flexibility from central functions like HR to extend contracts for staff such as apprentices, would have been helpful and would acknowledge the difficulties some new staff have faced gaining sufficient experience to fulfil their training requirements during lockdown.

“

I did my level five with the CMI and I only finished that last year, in the middle of coronavirus, I did my final assessment. And to be honest, I think if I hadn't have done that, I'd have struggled, it really did help, it taught me an awful lot. I was one of those 'promoted within' managers so I'd never really managed teams before and it's been a very sharp learning curve over the last five years or so.

Manager, Logistics Provider, East Midlands

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We also asked managers who had not had to onboard low-skilled workers during the pandemic what they expected the challenges to be. We found that they were more likely to assume that new low-skilled workers would need support to connect with team members, understand what is expected from their role, adjust to new ways of working, and develop a sense of belonging. But they were less likely to recognise that some new staff would need support to manage their health and well-being, develop new skills, be more productive and improve the quality of their work.



# VEOLIA

Business Waste Management & Recycling Services and Energy and Water solutions provider.

## ORGANISATION CASESTUDY

Veolia is a large, multinational, Business Waste Management & Recycling Services and Energy and Water solutions provider.



### CHALLENGES WE FACED

A team of 30 staff work at a specialist recycling centre in the West Midlands. The biggest challenge for the business during the pandemic has been to ensure the safety of workers. A range of adaptations have been made to the work environment (e.g. screens, hand washing stations, mask wearing). Workstations have also been repositioned and breaks reorganised to avoid close contact between staff.

Initial training for new starters is delivered by experienced staff who demonstrate various aspects of the recycling process. Prior to the pandemic these trainers would work in close physical proximity with new staff for over an hour or so before leaving them to get on with the job.

Normally they get in there and they say, 'This is how this is done,' and go stand next to someone. Whereas they've got to stand back, watch and point, almost. That can be quite difficult.

Manager, Veolia, West Midlands

This now needs to be done at a distance. To remove the need for people to share paperwork, the team has switched to using a live Google sheet to record training deliver. This is then linked to individual outputs, so that any further training needs can be identified.

They show you what needs doing then they would leave you for a while so you can crack on, get the feel of the job, know what you're doing. If you wasn't too sure you could always go back to them and say, 'I'm not too sure about this'. They're brilliant.

New starter, Veolia, West Midlands

One new starter described feeling safe at work and appreciated the safety measure in place. They also found working in a small group (due to COVID restrictions) helpful in starting with a new team. Having difficulties with reading and writing, he appreciated having experienced staff available to help him get to grips with the work and found his team very supportive.

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# TOP TIPS FOR MANAGING WORKPLACE SKILLS

We have identified a number of 'top tips' for managers on how to better support new entrants and increase existing workplace skills. These can help managers become more effective for not only these individuals, but also the wider organisation.

CMI Professional Standards have been developed in consultation with managers and leaders from across sectors. They define the key areas for professional managers at every stage of their career.

**1** Develop a **Talent Management** strategy, creating opportunities for training that supports role change and progression can encourage low-skilled workers to stay and develop within your business.

**2** Make use of programmes such as apprenticeships, traineeships, kickstart etc to attract new staff and support existing staff to develop. **Positive impact of apprenticeships.** Consider, also, formal qualifications and Professional Membership for the development of key skills to motivate staff and deliver against organisational objectives.

**3** Communicate appropriately, with clear expectations. **CMI clear communication checklist.**

**4** Be a role model - demonstrate **behaviours** your team expects to see.

**5** Adapt your **Leadership Style** to the individual, and be **authentic**.



**6** Provide opportunities for new/low-skilled workers to develop their skills and knowledge through **Coaching, Mentoring,** and **personal development.**

**7** Talk openly about **well-being,** and lead using **emotional intelligence.** In **Management Transformed** 72% of staff rated well-being as the top priority for 2021.

**8** Joining a team that is dispersed can be overwhelming. Facilitate meaningful connections with direct reports, **virtually,** encouraging the **building of relationships** through information discussions and socialising.

**9** The secret to improved productivity is trust. Where managers trust and empower their direct reports, they find that productivity rises. **Developing Trust.**

**10** Provide **constructive and honest feedback** on staff performance. Recognise when an individual has exceeded expectations and delivered. **Performance Management.**

These tips are aligned with CMI's Professional Standards. For more information, see the **CMI Website**

# SABRE

## Financial Service Consultancy

# ORGANISATION CASESTUDY

Sabre is a small start-up financial services consultancy established in 2020 in Jersey

### DURING THE PANDEMIC

The director of Sabre, a small start-up financial services consultancy established in 2020 in Jersey recruited a junior staff member during the pandemic. The new staff member is learning about a complex industry almost from scratch, having previously worked in the hospitality industry. He is also tackling an entirely new, technical, job role working from home. The manager is committed to upskilling his new staff member and believes in his potential. However, the upskilling process has been more challenging than usual during the pandemic.

Ideally a new starter in the business would work closely with a range of more experienced staff, learning by observation and able to easily draw on

their knowledge generally and in response to specific queries. Instead, the director has been very actively involved, and offered support remotely. To keep in touch the manager regularly checks in informally and has met with the new starter outside for a coffee and walks. They also meet via Teams which allows the manager and new staff member to swap documents easily and the manager to provide comments on his work. Having clear communication routes has been important for both the manager and his staff.

“ We're only a relatively small company as well so he's been my go-to for everything, it's not like we have a HR department yet or accounts, or anything like that.

**New starter, Sabre Financial Services, Channel Islands**

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“ I think you've got to be more patient. You've got to learn to listen a lot more, and you've got to listen to more to what's not being said than what is. You've got to learn that, you know, communication over e-mail and video, it can be misconstrued, or you can write something that might have a very different meaning in a message. It's trying to correct that. I think you don't have that ability to talk in-person and you need to be very aware of how you come across, how you communicate.

**Manager, Sabre Financial Services, Channel Islands**

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To support their development, the manager utilises different methods to pass on information to the recruit including links to relevant websites and training materials. They sometimes go through these sessions together and record them sessions so they can be replayed as required. The company has also supported him with an industry qualification, offering him time off to study and covering the costs of his exams, and are already working to find another course to continue his development.

[READ THE FULL CASE STUDY >](#)

[ACCESS ALL RECOMMENDED TOP TIPS >](#)



## Chartered Management Institute (CMI)

The Chartered Management Institute (CMI) works with business and education to inspire people to unleash their potential and become skilled, confident and successful managers and leaders.

With a wealth of practical qualifications, events and networking opportunities on offer throughout the UK and Asia-Pacific, CMI helps people boost their career prospects and connect them with other ambitious professionals in any industry and sector.

In fact, CMI has more than 90,000 people training to be better managers right now.

Backed by a unique Royal Charter, CMI is the only organisation allowed to award Chartered Manager status – the ultimate management accolade.

Practical insight on critical issues for a 160,000 plus membership community and anyone looking to improve their skills, nurture high-performing teams and help pave the way for the next generation of managers and leaders.

For more information, please visit [www.managers.org.uk](http://www.managers.org.uk)



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