



Healthcare workforce insights 2023: Attracting and maximising talent in tight labour markets

At a time when competition for talent is fierce, our understanding of workforce trends is providing useful angles of differentiation, writes Paula McDonnell.

Covid has thankfully been downgraded, but its effects are still widely felt. The backlog in hospital treatments is expected to take years to clear, with bed capacity and medical expertise in short supply. For the healthcare talent management sector, this is playing out in the form of a tight labour market; the availability of skilled workers is short, and the reasons for this are well documented – many Eastern European workers left due to the impacts of Covid; the number of people retiring from our aging industry have not been replaced on a like-for-like basis with incoming talent.

All of this has resulted in a fierce war for talent. At TTM, we've seen this move to the next level, as organisations balance the core challenges of a lack of available skills and shortages of healthcare professionals. **Employers are catching on quickly, recognising the commercial imperative of devising more engaging and intelligent ways to appeal to candidates.**

"Within this report, we set out how Technology is helping us tackle the fierce war for talent, by speeding up candidate attraction and delivering a seamless experience."

Paula McDonnell

It's a buyers' market though, and control is firmly with the candidates.

To compete, employers and talent agencies need to think beyond advertising to the fundamental motivators for joining a company. And in this vein, we've also taken time to explore what the data is telling us about the preferences of our workforce. It might surprise some to know the extent to which locum workers value the choice to work unsociable shifts, that there is a strong continuity of work amongst locums, and that many prefer to work at a single location where possible.

It's the prerogative of talented candidates to be selective, and so we're also seeing an increasing number vote with their feet, towards organisations who promote a positive working culture. They don't see why they should sacrifice values, wellbeing or sustainability for the sake of salary – and fortunately, neither do we. **Our focus on putting flexibility, balance and positive mental health at the forefront of our culture has enabled us to stay competitive.**

But ultimately, it's not about competing; we are an industry built around people, acting for the common good. The sector is Ireland's largest employer and our collective influence touches each community, like a neural circuit of support.

Every day, I witness small acts of heroism by unassuming people who believe passionately in providing outstanding care. And every day, partners from all sectors and disciplines unite for the common good – making a huge impact to the health, wellbeing and lives of families. **To survive –**



Paula McDonnell

and thrive – we must care for our people as our greatest asset.

The coming months will bring more solutions but also more challenges – the opportunities presented by digital transformation, a growing housing crisis and more. Supporting our sector will take all our collective cross-industry insights, a collaborative approach and a willingness to adapt. We're looking forward to the challenge.

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About TTM Healthcare Solutions and this report

TTM Healthcare Solutions (TTM) is globally recognised as a leading healthcare solutions specialist serving the public, private and voluntary sectors, across Ireland and the UK.

Each week the company places healthcare professionals to work in flexible frontline and support service roles. Covering all grades and specialties, including doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, healthcare assistants, social care workers; as well as non-medical support staff into medical settings. Healthcare is TTM's sole focus; its deep sectoral knowledge

of recruiting across a wide variety of healthcare professions and environments enables it to understand the challenges its customers face beyond talent management. TTM's holistic approach to total talent management allows the company to comfortably source staff for the frontline, those behind the scenes and everyone in-between.

Through its Healthcare Process Outsourcing division TTM stand ready to help organisations realise time, cost and process efficiencies that translate to their bottom line. Their expert teams slot in with seamless support, as and when it's needed.

Unsocial hours are in consistent high demand

The demand among locums for unsocial working hours – including evenings, nights and weekends – is consistently high. Across a 24-month period (2021 and 2022), over a third of all hours worked were classed as 'unsocial', rising slightly from 33% in Q1, 2021 to a high of 37% by Q4, 2022.

While working patterns remain broadly consistent across divisions such as Nursing and Support Services; analysis of TTM's Healthcare Assistants showed a particular shift in demand for unsocial hours. Night and weekend work accounted for 60% of the total hours worked among HCAs in 2021, rising to 66% in 2022

Tommy Lees, TTM's Commercial Director, believes this is reflective of the wider trend towards flexible and unsocial hours.

He says, **"We know that our candidates value flexitime working for a variety of reasons.** Work/life balance and the ability to juggle family life is a major factor. Parents want shifts that enable them to spend time with young children during the day".

"During Covid, we were seeing many full-time workers taken out of action during the daytime 'social' hours - the shifts traditionally favoured by permanent staff. This provided greater opportunity for locums to fill daytime shifts. Now we are seeing a 'levelling back', with a greater requirement for temp staff to fill the unsocial hours again."

Tommy also points to the need for families to balance their household budgets. "The drive to earn more has been exacerbated by the increased costs of living," he concludes. **"We expect to see high demand for more hours in this area for the foreseeable future."**



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Clever candidate utilisation saves time and cost

TTM is urging healthcare providers to look closely at their candidate utilisation, saying there are tangible benefits to be gained through consistent engagement of the same locum pool.

Across all TTM divisions (Allied Health Professionals, Healthcare Assistants, Medical, Nursing, Office Support, Social Care & Support Services), TTM's healthcare talent worked an average of 31 hours per week. **The data demonstrates a strong continuity of work among locums, challenging industry perceptions about the nature of a temporary workforce.**

Tommy says, "Due to the effective deployment of our workforce, TTM are able to provide consistent work, a core reason why our agency workers stay with us longer. In turn ensuring we demonstrate a strong track record of continuity of personnel for our clients, allowing for the provision of consistent care".

Locums show single site preference

Insights also reveal a preference amongst locums to work at one site, rather than multiple sites. Candidates say they value the opportunity to build deeper relationships and knowledge within a specific setting.

TTM findings reveal this is especially true for those staff providing support in aged care and disability services. In these instances, consistency of deployment of the same staff to the same units (which could be a day, residential or respite service) is a key component to ensuring the stability of the service. Trust, empathy and the 'personal touch' matter, and these take time to build.

"Our locums will always have the flexibility to work where they're most needed", adds Tommy. "However, where we are able to offer continuity of work at one site, this is often a win-win. Our staff are highly motivated to build connections".

"For clients this is a definite benefit in terms of having consistent staff who

understand their needs, while reducing the administrative costs and burden associated with onboarding."



Technology is transforming the candidate experience

Use of technology offers compelling benefits in terms of how candidates interact with opportunities and progress through onboarding. TTM says tech is helping to accelerate the experience and boost applications – but will not replace the need for skilled talent managers. Instead, the successful recruiters of the future will blend the efficiency benefits of technology with soft skills and a human touch.

Take candidate attraction campaigns, for example. Rich content – such as video or animation – is succeeding in appealing to candidates where other channels lack cut-through. Recruiters often have just seconds to make an impact in a flooded social media landscape, but TTM's experience shows that engaging content can transform candidate attraction.

Analysis of recent candidate attraction campaigns shows that incorporating video can lead to a job application rate of 2.5 times higher, versus a campaign held over a comparable period but lacking dynamic content.

"Advertising has always been about meeting

the audience on their terms," explains Tommy. "This shows the importance to recruiters of keeping pace with the changing online world, meeting our candidates on their devices wherever they are, with high impact content."

TTM is also harnessing technology to deliver an increasingly seamless candidate experience, removing friction from the application, interview and onboarding process. Their App allows candidates to regularly upload and update their availability and accept shifts at the touch of a button. Tech is also speeding up compliance checks and assessment.

Tommy continues, "It's widely known that our industry is undergoing digital transformation. We are now seeing the benefits in terms of speed, efficiency and candidate engagement.

"The user experience facilitated by our workforce management platform is a core reason our agency staff stay with us. We match their availability to work in their preferred locations in a fast and frictionless way – through just a few clicks on their

mobile they get to choose where and how often they work, on their terms."

However, TTM also stresses the importance of the human touch, positing that while technology can improve processes, it takes skilled and passionate specialists to source the best healthcare talent. They also recommend taking time to respond to each application (even if unsuccessful) and providing feedback where possible – small but important actions that ensure candidates take away an overall positive experience.

Tommy concludes, "Talent management will always be a 'people first' industry, requiring essential soft skills coupled with the curiosity to ask the right questions and deep interest in assessing needs to find the perfect match. Our people are our greatest asset".

"We advise healthcare providers to work with a healthcare-specific talent management partner that combines specialist expertise with workforce management solutions. Technology is just one important part of the overall offering."

Talented jobseekers expect a positive work culture

Talented jobseekers are increasingly seeking employers with a good reputation for investing in their staff. TTM's experience shows that providing good working conditions, together with support for health and wellbeing, are vital factors when it comes to attracting and retaining talent.

Uncompetitive pay and burnout are often cited as two of the top reasons for people leaving the industry.

Paula says: "We are increasingly seeing candidates who want to see a better approach... a culture change. Especially among the top talent, they expect to see initiatives like wellbeing programmes, mental health support and a genuine commitment to fair pay and flexible working conditions."

"This is becoming increasingly important as living costs rise. Candidates are becoming more demanding when looking at their

current or new position - fuelling more competition amongst employers for the same finite pool of talent."

TTM point to their own initiatives as examples of how organisations can better support their workforces. These include a 24/7 Employee Assistance programme, their healthcare talent recognition programme 'TTM Heroes', 'cost of living' perks through the company's reward & discounts platform, wellbeing classes, and extra support to employees relocating from overseas.

Paula adds that candidates are also seeking

companies with a reputation for creating positive impact for communities and the environment.

"Research shows that over half of Irish job seekers will not apply for a job at a company that does not share their values – even for a hike in wages," she says. It is one of the reasons we sought out Social Value Quality Mark accreditation last year – we are proud to be the first healthcare recruiter to acquire the Mark and are currently on a journey to B-Corp Certification."

Parameters for data analysed in this report

- Divisions: Ireland Locum (Healthcare Assistant, Allied Health Professional, Medical, Support Services, Social Care, Nursing and Business Support)
- Years: 2021 and 2022 (24 Months)



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