

Press release
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Contract workers to sustain Australian employment recovery in 2021

- 31% of Australian hiring managers are intending to grow their contract workforce in the coming year while 46% plan to maintain current contract headcount.
- Top contract roles in demand technology, finance and accounting and business support are Help-Desk Support, Project Manager, and Customer Service Support.

Sydney, 09 March 2021 – With JobKeeper still subsidising an estimated 1.3million roles¹ across several industries, it's expected that there will be a surge of new jobseekers when the scheme ends in March. Many companies will have to adjust their workforce to reflect the reduced support. Positively, however, an independent survey of Australian hiring managers commissioned by specialised recruiter [Robert Half](#) indicates that an increasing number of Australian businesses have adopted an agile approach to their staffing which may mitigate this employment gap.

According to the latest figures by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, contractors currently make up more than 8% of Australia's workforce² and this number could grow this year since almost one-third (31%) of Australian businesses are intending to grow their contract workforce in the coming year and nearly half (46%) are planning to maintain current contract headcount, providing a strong employment funnel for skilled talent as the market regains confidence.

Top reasons for engaging a contract workforce

With the Australian government hailing the employment recovery in 2021 as 'extraordinary'³, the past year has emphasised that change and unpredictability – for better or for worse – is the only real constant in the current environment.

A mix of contract and permanent staff will be key to helping companies improve their agility, quickly scale their workforces, and manage overheads in a fluctuating market. In line with this, achieving a better mix of contract and permanent employees was ranked the second biggest medium-to-long-term impact of the pandemic on Australian businesses' recruitment strategy.

The primary reasons a company utilises temporary or contracting professionals are:

We can remain nimble during changing economic conditions	53%
We can access specialised skills/subject matter expertise	51%
We can scale our team as needed without affecting full-time employees	49%
We require support for special projects	43%
We alleviate the burden on existing employees	41%
We can determine if someone is the right fit for a full-time role	38%

Source: Independent survey commissioned by Robert Half in November 2020 among 300 Australian managers.

While jobseekers in today's market prioritise permanent employment for stability purposes, the benefits of contract work are also plentiful for candidates. Some of the biggest benefits of contract work for professionals include rapidly expanding skillsets and industry-experience in a competitive market, leveraging this variety of experience into a wider pool of potential job opportunities, enriching

¹ [Australian Treasury, 2020, JobKeeper Update, Australia.](#)

² [Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020, Characteristics of Employment, Australia.](#)

³ [The New Daily, 2021, 'Scott Morrison hails extraordinary jobs recovery'.](#)

one's professional network and in turn the pathway to future opportunities, and short-term assurance and flexibility as the market stabilises.

Top contract roles in demand

The top 5 priority contract hires for the first half of 2021 spanning technology, finance and accounting, and business support are:

For CIOs/CTOs	For CFOs	For general hiring managers
Helpdesk Support Officer	Project Manager	Customer Service
Systems Engineer	Functional Business Analyst	Human Resources Support
Software Developer	Finance Manager/Controller	Administrative Support
Systems Administrator	Commercial Financial Analyst	Marketing Manager
Desktop Engineer	Financial Accountant	Logistics

“While the jobs market recovery in Australia has been quite significant, with the end of JobKeeper in sight, many companies will reassess their talent needs. ‘Caution’ will be the keyword for many organisations and their HR teams. Using a flexible staffing model which embraces a mix of contract and permanent workers can be a strategic solution to such caution as it offers companies immediate access to candidates with specialised skills who can make an immediate contribution to business-critical or project-based work with minimal training,” said **Nicole Gorton, Robert Half Director Australia** in announcing Robert Half’s latest survey results.

“Companies don’t just rely on contract staff to maintain business continuity or temporarily replace permanent employees. More and more businesses rely on experienced contractors to actively grow their business. As companies re-evaluate their strategic priorities on the road to recovery, there will be a heightened focus on new revenue building opportunities and future growth. Contract workers will be increasingly valuable to overseeing fixed-term projects or supporting business-critical initiatives which require niche skillsets.”

“Contract work also helps professional’s future-proof their careers as the market regains confidence. The outdated view that contract work it is in some way a band-aid fix while seeking permanent roles no longer applies in the market. In the current climate, the agility of contract work is as much a benefit to employees as it is to employers. The rapid evolution of industries and operations in the past 12 months has demonstrated the importance of being able to transition technical and analytical skillsets across industries in order to sustain employability in a shifting market, which contract roles enable,” **Gorton** concluded.

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Notes to editors

About the research

The annual study is developed by Robert Half and was conducted online in November 2020 by an independent research company, surveying 300 hiring managers, including 100 CFOs and 100 CIOs, from companies across Australia. This survey is part of the international workplace survey, a questionnaire about job trends, talent management, and trends in the workplace.

About Robert Half

Robert Half is the world’s first and largest specialised recruitment consultancy and member of the S&P 500. Founded in 1948, the company has more than 300 offices worldwide providing contract, interim

management, and permanent recruitment solutions for accounting and finance, financial services, technology, and business support professionals. Robert Half Australia has offices in Brisbane, Melbourne, Mount Waverley, Perth and Sydney. More information on roberthalf.com.au.

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