THE FUTURE OF WORK

Xpertise Recruitment

November 2021

Contents

The pandemic that changed our working lives

According to a recent study (Gallup), 66% of people are ready to return to the office after working from home for the last year, yet 84% of people said they enjoyed remote work.

This has left employers wondering how they attract and retain talent and improve employee engagement. Topics of discussion include support and wellbeing, number of days in the office, safety precautions, remote recruitment and much more.
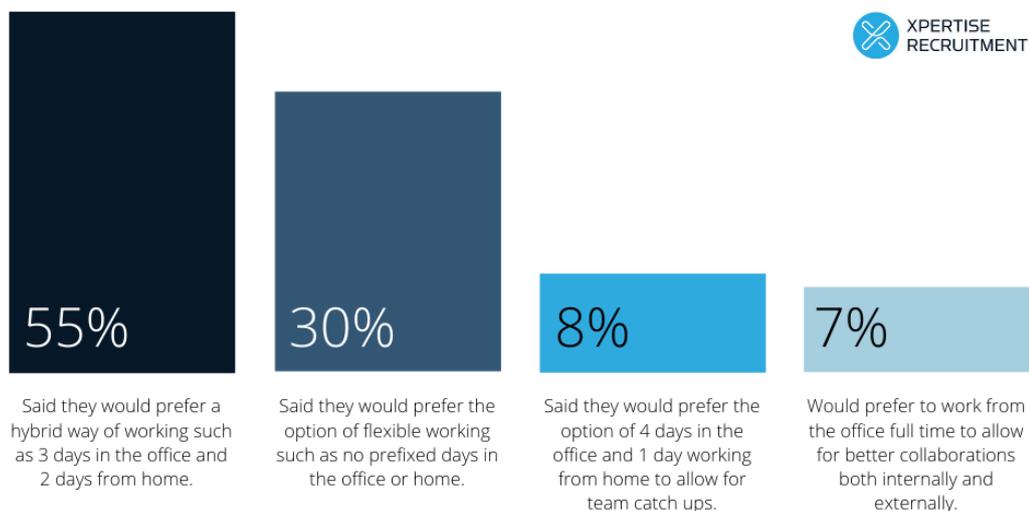
Xpertise ran a series of polls with employees to gather their views on the 'future of work'. Alongside this, we asked 2,500+ HRD's to participate in our Future of Work Survey.

Is remote working here to stay?

Across the UK and US, leaders at large tech companies like Apple, Google, and Facebook are engaged in a delicate dance with thousands of employees who have recently become convinced that physically commuting to an office every day is an empty and unacceptable demand from their employers.

COVID-19 forced the majority of companies to adapt and move to remote working at the start of the pandemic. From mid-2021 we have seen more companies taking on a hybrid approach to working or even considering the option of fully remote working.

Xpertise Employee Polls: *Preferred work location*

55%	30%	8%	7%
Said they would prefer a hybrid way of working such as 3 days in the office and 2 days from home.	Said they would prefer the option of flexible working such as no prefixed days in the office or home.	Said they would prefer the option of 4 days in the office and 1 day working from home to allow for team catch ups.	Would prefer to work from the office full time to allow for better collaborations both internally and externally.

The Xpertise poll shows 93% of employees would prefer some form of hybrid approach, with only 7% preferring to work in the office full-time.

This aligns with other studies from the BBC, Forbes and Finder UK where 83% of workers said that they are happier to work from home, avoid the commute and are more relaxed without the pressure of the office environment.

Are companies recruiting more individuals based remotely?

Companies initially struggled with the idea of operating entirely remotely when COVID-19 forced workplaces to shut.

However, many HRD's have welcomed working from home as they have seen a greater access to talent through recruiting from any location. Considering the future of recruitment, we asked HRD's the following questions.

Xpertise HR Survey: *Remote recruitment*

Have companies recruited any individuals based remotely in locations too far to feasibly travel to the offices (either UK or overseas)?

Yes - 64% No - 36%
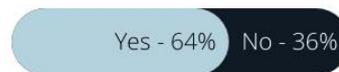
Over the next 12 months are companies planning to include individuals in the recruitment process that are based remotely in locations too far to feasibly travel to the offices (either UK or overseas)?

Unsure
35.7%

Yes
50%

No
14.3%

XPERTISE
RECRUITMENT
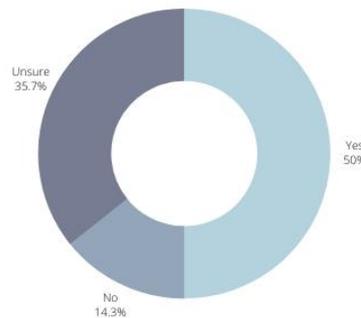
Looking at those that plan to include individuals that are based remotely when recruiting, we explored the functions where this is most likely to be the case. Common functions were Sales, Digital and Legal. This aligns with research showing that remote work leads to increased productivity, as well as job satisfaction, particularly for those working in technical jobs that require minimal teamwork.
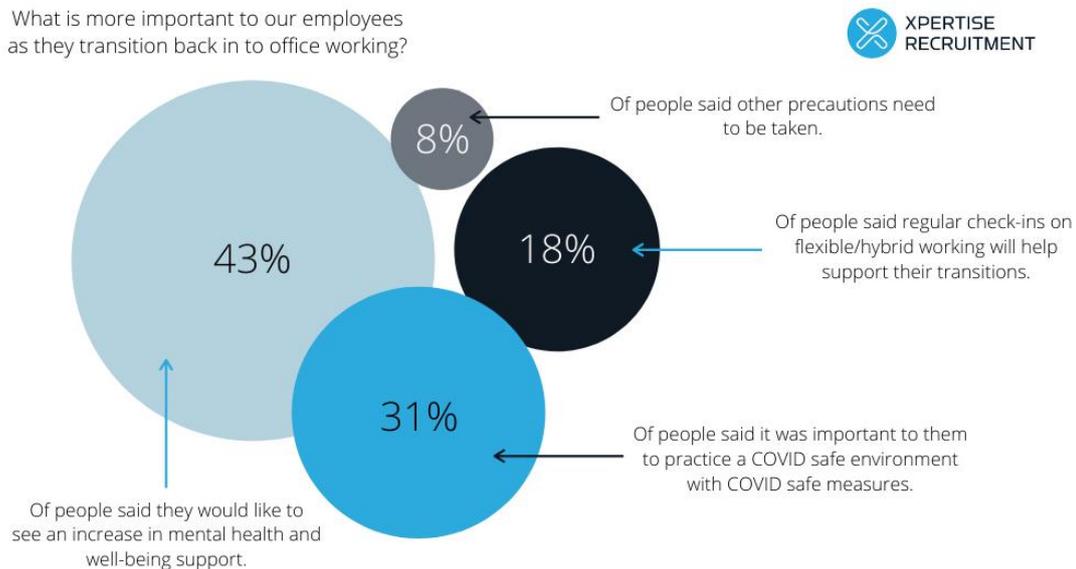
> *We are remote-friendly, but not remote-first. This means that we like to ensure all employees have the opportunity to access and benefit from our collaborative office space when they want to. We therefore look to hire within a reasonable commutable distance of one of our hubs. For some roles this might mean a longer journey once a month. For others it's a 2 or 3 day per week in the office setup. We would only hire a fully remote role (regardless of distance to an office hub) if the nature of the work means that 100% asynchronous operating is effectively enabled and supported and would not have a negative impact on other teams or projects when it comes to our highly collaborative culture.*
>
> **- HRD**

A note of caution however: we know some people may feel lonely working at home, therefore companies need to consider how they will support remotely based individuals.

What are employees looking for from their employers on returning to the office?

Xpertise Employee Poll: *What is important on return to the office*

What is more important to our employees as they transition back in to office working?

XPERTISE RECRUITMENT

8% — Of people said other precautions need to be taken.

43%

18% — Of people said regular check-ins on flexible/hybrid working will help support their transitions.

31%

Of people said it was important to them to practice a COVID safe environment with COVID safe measures.

Of people said they would like to see an increase in mental health and well-being support.

The harsh impact of the pandemic can be seen here.

From the Xpertise employee survey, 43% of people said they would like to receive greater Mental Health and Wellbeing support as they transition back to the office. Safety measures to protect against the risk of COVID-19 infections was important to 31% of employees.

 The CIPD recommends that employers consider the following:

- Brief managers on the potential mental health implications of COVID-19 and their specific roles and responsibilities in relation to supporting staff.

- Communicate regularly on wellbeing and mental health support, wherever possible supported by activities that encourage physical, mental, financial and social wellbeing.

- Provide mental health awareness-raising activities – work towards a culture where is acceptable to talk about and seek support for poor mental health.

- When employees who have been working from home begin to return to the workplace, consider if a re-induction into the workplace will help them feel connected and engaged, as well as reassuring them about measures you are choosing to put in place. This could also help cover any health and safety changes in line with the government's COVID-secure workplace guidelines and good practice.

Although companies haven't seen a huge loss in staff yet due to lack of flexible working policies, research shows that candidates seeking employment will consider fewer jobs if they do not offer remote or hybrid working.

How will meetings and workshops be managed?

Pre-pandemic, most companies had set times for meetings and attendees would be expected to attend face-to-face. However, more than 18 months on with some meetings still taking place online, will we go back to a time of face-to-face meetings being the norm?

We asked HRD's how they will manage meetings and workshops in a hybrid-working environment. As you can see from the graph below, 50% of HRDs said they will be setting days in the office for meetings to occur with face-to-face attendees. Employees take a different view with 56% of employees selecting hybrid meetings as their preferred option.

Xpertise HRD Survey & Employee Polls: *how meetings & workshops will be managed in a hybrid working environment*
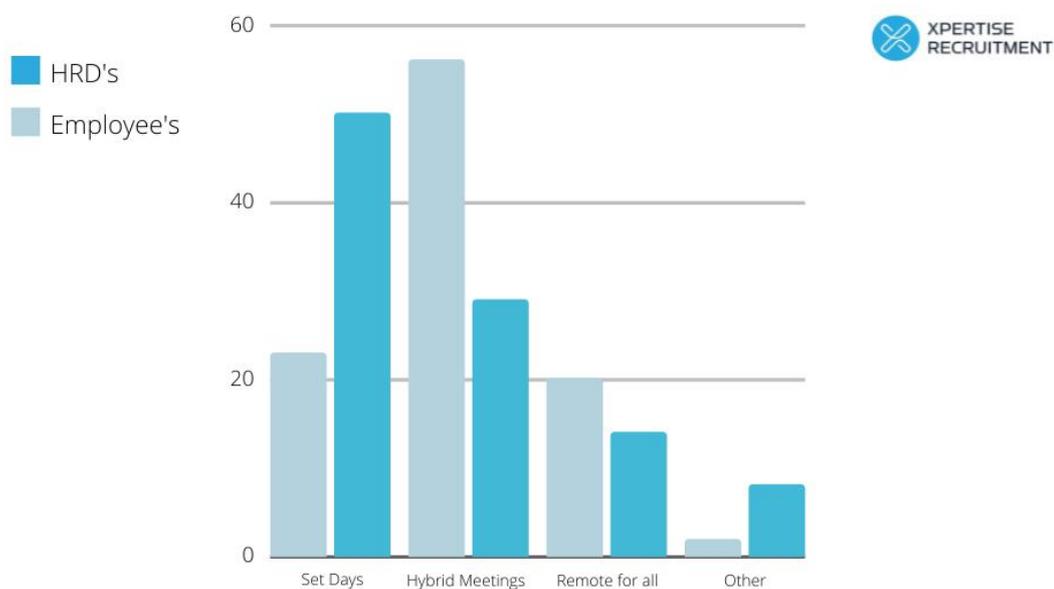
> *It's a blend of all of these. We're an international business so we're used to running our monthly company meeting from one of our office hubs, with some people in the office and others joining virtually. Teams will likely be planning their days in the office around workshopping and collaboration and will be setting their own days - but there is currently no centrally designed 'Rota' for office attendance.'*

- HRD

What are the top concerns from Leadership Teams about working at home?

As more candidates and employees work from home and express a desire to continue their arrangements, workplaces have become more flexible to meet that demand. Early in 2021, it was expected that remote working would increase by 34% to match employee demand. This is exactly what we have seen happen in the last few months.

So, what are the top concerns from Leadership Teams about working at home vs working in the office?

The Xpertise survey with HRDs reported the top three concerns of Leadership Teams regarding working from home are:

1. Lack of productivity: people can be distracted by their surroundings, getting caught up with their everyday lives. Additionally, meetings tend to run longer online which may have effect on productivity levels.

2. Reduction in collaboration a study by 'Nature Human Behavior' on the effects of remote working found that collaboration hours spent with cross-group ties, bridging ties, weak ties and added ties all decreased precipitously between February and June. There is concern that employees may not spend the time together to benefit from the additional bonds and effective working relationships that being in-person enables, which in turn may lead to a decrease in mental well-being and employee attrition.

3. Loss of culture developing a company culture isn't just something to be done for its own sake; it has meaningful effects on employee retention, satisfaction, and productivity.

> *We have become stalled. We are creatures of habit and we've got used to being at home, for better or worse, and it's very hard for people to get out of their comfort zone.*

- Jo Meunier, News and Features Editor, Allwork.Space

Many believe that use of Zoom and Teams has stunted creativity and created one-way conversations. Relying entirely on this form of communication is also thought to hamper personal growth opportunities.

What are the top concerns from Leadership Teams about working in the office?

1. COVID outbreak - causing loss of productivity due to potential closure of the offices and sickness.

2. Loss of staff - due to reluctance to come back into the office.

3. Health and well-being – are employers offering enough support to their employees?

As COVID-19 isn't going anywhere, Leadership Teams are continuing to follow government advice to create a safe environment for their employees. They have found that hybrid working reduces risks and creates benefits to their employees' health and well-being.

What are the top concerns from employees about working in the office?

We asked employees for their top concerns about working in the office:

1. Commute time – employees lose time working through travel itself as well as the additional tiredness and stress the commute creates.

2. Financial impacts – concerns regarding the increase in travel costs along with the risk of catching COVID-19 on public transport.

3. Flexibility – since the beginning of the pandemic, many employees have experienced changes in their personal circumstances which means working in an office full-time may be challenging.

What are the top concerns from employees about working from home?

We explored the top three employee concerns of working from home:

1. Loss of social interaction – studies show working from home creates a sense of feeling isolated due to the loss of social interaction.

2. Lack of learning opportunities – although we have seen a 13% increase in productivity across businesses throughout the pandemic, employees have found the opportunities to learn new skills have lessened as it is not as easy to ask questions or train through software such as Teams.

3. Longer hours - employees who work from home are spending longer at their desks and facing bigger workloads than before the COVID-19 pandemic, research has suggested. The average length of time an employee working from home in the UK is logged on at their computer has increased by more than two hours per day since the pandemic began, according to data from the business support company NordVPN.

How do employees believe their employers can best support their development if based at home part or full-time?

Results from the Xpertise survey showed 56% of employees would prefer specific development days in the office to allow a focus on development. HR professionals commented on the importance of open lines of communications.

❝ *The best way to support people development is to have open lines of communication. I like knowing who the subject matter expert is on everything, so I can give them a call to solve a problem or to just learn about a particular item. This doesn't take the place of your own research; it just makes it quicker to find some critical answer that you may not be getting or answers you need in a hurry!* ❞

- HRD

❝ *I have noticed a distinct increase recently in people reaching out for tailored development via coaching, which can be delivered extremely effectively online, so is time efficient, and can be focused on development needs.* ❞

- Executive & Leadership Coach

How might personal development be managed in a remote environment?

We asked HRD's and employees how might personal development be managed in a remote environment.

According to the Xpertise surveys, what employees are looking for matches well with company plans.

Xpertise HRD Survey & Employee Poll: *how to best support people development where there is hybrid working*
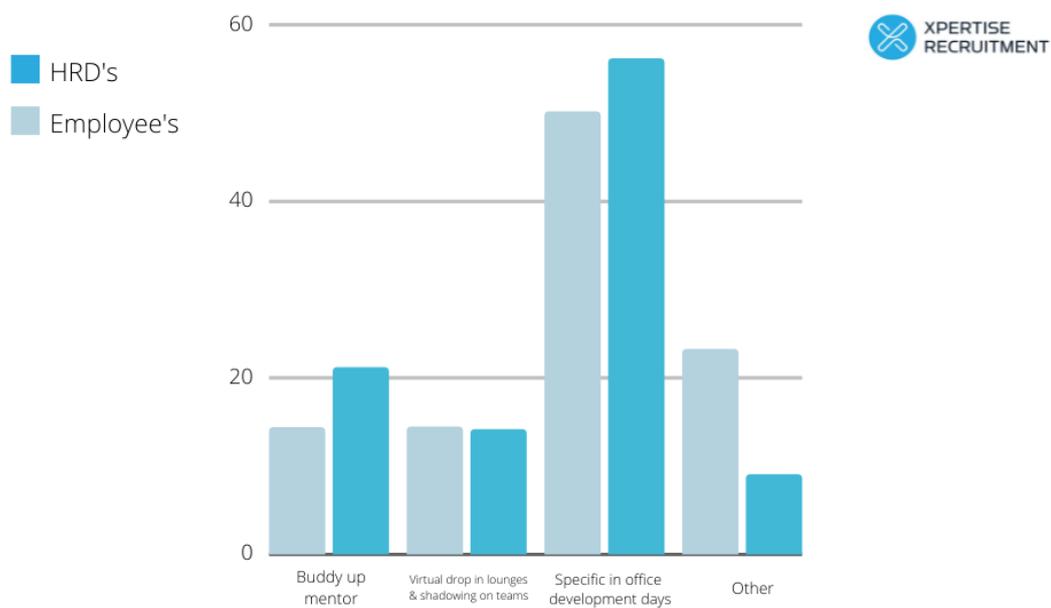
> *My People team have been rolling out virtual internal training courses and facilitating those successfully through ways of remote learning, coaching clinics, certain classroom learning and buddy systems.*

- HRD

According to our survey with HRDs, employees will be supported through management observations and feedback, L&D budgets and an approach to 'career conversations' that means all employees are actively engaged in discussing their development with their managers. Many believe development, learning and growth are not dependent on physical location.

Should we be thinking about changing our office space?

We asked HR Directors what proportion of employees were working remotely. Results show 50% of companies still had all their employees working from home in Summer 2021 with only 21% having the majority of their employees in the office. Although these numbers may have changed more recently, some companies were planning a reduction in office space and/or consolidatation of their offices.

How flexible are the working from home policies now?

It is obvious to even the most casual observer of working patterns that technology has revolutionized our ability to perform a whole variety of tasks. We can access our emails, Teams, Zoom, Slack, social media platforms wherever we are. Everything is accessible and COVID-19 accelerated this movement within the workplace.

We asked HR Directors about their future policies regarding working from home.

Xpertise HR Survey: *what are your policies on working from home*?
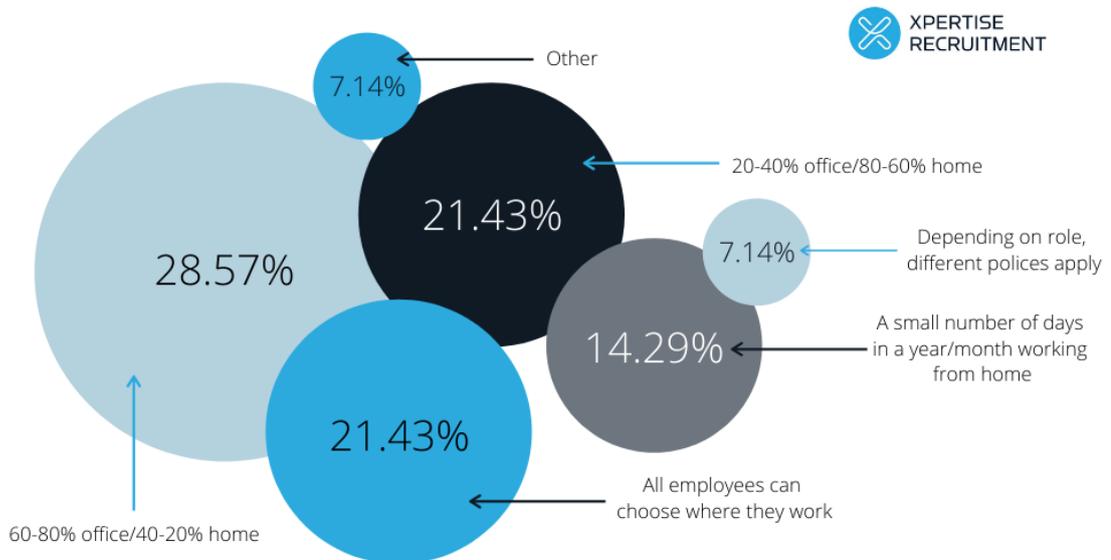

> *Hybrid becomes the defualt when considering working from home policies, we should allow employees to choose their attendance, expecting them to choose 80% home and 20% office.*

- HRD

What sources of information are HRD's using in considering the future of work?

We asked HRD's how they are gathering information to consider and inform their future working policies. Results showed more than 75% had conducted staff surveys.

Xpertise HR Survey: *information sought in considering future working policies*
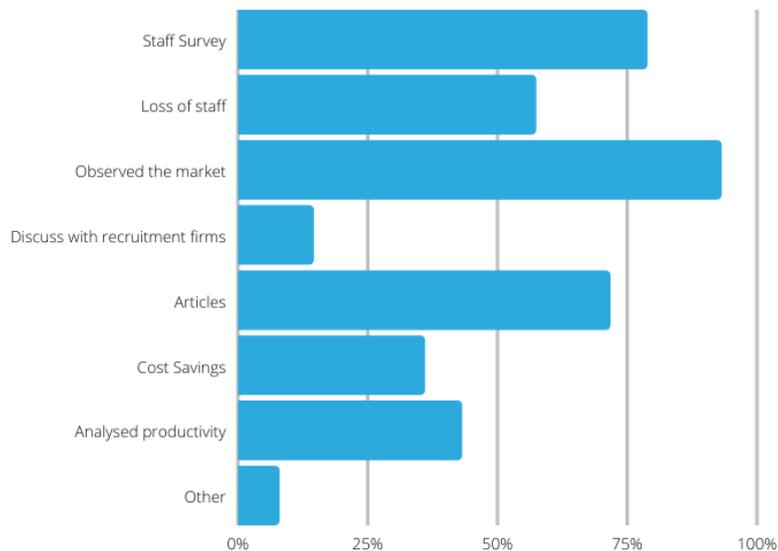
Organisations have found that staff surveys are highly effective as it provides employees with a voice, and they know that they are being involved in the decision-making process. Alongside this, 93% of HRD's said they were observing the market and 71% reading articles. Analysing productivity from working at home vs the office is a method that has been adopted by 43% of our surveyed HRD's.

So, what does the future hold for 2022?

As companies emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, they are realising that authentic talent management and a focus on employee well-being have become even more urgent. The pandemic has caused disruptions to company business models, targets and strategies and we have all learnt how to adapt. It has caused companies to look at their future plans and adopt new working strategies, becoming more flexible and putting their trust in their people.

Research shows that hybrid working reduces fatigue by 44%, improves intent to stay by 45%, and improves performance by 28%. With these benefits, along with costs savings and access to a wider talent pool, it would seem that hybrid working is here to stay. There is increasingly a movement to adopt a 'human-centric, rather than 'location-centric' approach to work.

Recently we have seen the 'great resignation', employees have had a taste of greater flexibility and autonomy and are resigning rather than working with an organisation that forces them to give it up.

So, to the future. There is no "one-size-fits-all" model. Key is to build a unique employee value proposition based on company values and employee feedback to develop a resilient and talented team of engaged employees.

About Xpertise

Xpertise Recruitment are an award-winning specialist IT & Technology recruitment partner with three core offerings: IT & Technology recruitment, Workforce Solutions, IT Outsourcing.

Our purpose is to help people follow their career aspirations, so that businesses and individuals achieve more, today and tomorrow.

Through our people, we build long-term relationships with clients and candidates built on knowledge and trust. We care about people. We pride ourselves as a great place to work. We build long-term relationships. We know our markets inside-out and upside-down. We make recruitment easier. We provide ways for sharing knowledge and emerging ideas in our field. We source the right candidates for the right clients – right in both technical fit and cultural fit.

Xpertise recruit talent from across the UK, with 3 regional offices located in Derby, Manchester and London. Our consultants specialise in recruiting hard to find IT and technology talent on a permanent, contract and interim basis.

The Xpertise approach is to have consultants specialising in each of the following areas of digital & technology:

- o Data Analytics, Data Science & Data Engineering
- o Cloud Infrastructure & DevOps
- o IT Architecture
- o Central Government & Public Sector
- o Project Delivery & Product
- o QA & Testing
- o Senior IT Appointments
- o Software Engineering
- o IT Security

Xpertise Awards

- ✓ Investors in People Platinum Accredited
- ✓ Winner of Best Specialist Agency of the Year 2021 - Global Recruiter Awards
- ✓ Winner of the Best Recruitment Company to work for - 2017 TIARA Awards (Finalist in 2019, 2021)
- ✓ Finalist Best Specialist Recruitment Agency in the UK - 2018, 2019 - Global Recruiter Awards

  Shortlisted for:
- ✓ Best IT / Tech Recruitment Agency - Recruiter Awards 2019, 2021
- ✓ Recruitment Agency of the year Recruiter Awards 2019, 2021 (Highly Commended)
- ✓ Best in house training – Global Recruiter Awards 2021
- ✓ Odro innovation award – TIARA Awards 2021

To find out more head over to our website: https://www.xpertise-recruitment.com/