



YOUNG ADVISORY COMMITTEE FUTURE OF WORK SPRING 2022 SURVEY AND ROUNDTABLE

During Spring 2022, the Cambridge Ahead Young Advisory Committee (YAC) conducted a survey of young professionals and hosted a roundtable discussion on the future of work. This brought together younger workers with organisational leaders and representatives from the worlds of recruitment and workspace provision. It took place in the context of huge behavioural shifts to ways of working caused by the pandemic, as well as an increasingly competitive labour market and a growing cost of living crisis.

Headline findings

1) Overall, flexible working has benefitted quality of life, but the situation in workplaces is turbulent rather than settled

87% of survey respondents saw more flexible working arrangements as having made a positive change for them. However, the survey results and roundtable discussion also revealed that discussion around new ways of operating for the future are far from settled. Younger employees suggested that there remains a pressure to work in a certain way. Specifically, a feeling that credit is given for being physically in the office and a sense of anxiety that if you are working from home there is a need to go out of the way to be immediately responsive in case it is seen that you are not working. This was captured by one younger attendee as a sense that senior leaders have the view that “if you’re not working like I work then you’re not doing your job”.

Recommendation: Better communication across business leaders, middle managers, and younger people could help to resolve these challenges, which are exacerbated by miscommunication.

2) The recruitment and retention environment has changed dramatically

A striking 63.5% of survey respondents reported having moved jobs during the pandemic. This was in line with national data which shows that 2021 was a year when workers left their jobs in record numbers and that vacancies have reached record highs. At the roundtable discussion it was felt that turnover rates increased significantly in the second part of the pandemic – in 2021. There was a pent-up desire to move with a range of factors driving people to change jobs from a desire to lifestyle change, a wider variety of opportunities becoming available (due to greater geographic reach) and an increased number of remote-only opportunities. Employees are now in a strong position to set requirements, especially in high demand roles and young people have got better at articulating and justifying their expectations out of work. A recruitment consultant present at the roundtable said that “companies are becoming increasingly flexible in offering personalised packages to attract top talent”.

Recommendation: Organisations need to communicate clearly and honestly their plans and expectations for the future of work so that employees can find the right fit for them.

3) There is a generational gap (including within the 18-35) in the way that people interact, collaborate, and share information

An overwhelming majority of survey respondents (83%) indicated that the biggest benefit from being in the workplace is collaboration. Roundtable attendees broadly agreed on the value of face-to-face meeting to build relationships, to see and understand body language, and train new starters. However, there was also significant discussion about the very different ways that young people communicate

with one another and build relationships, especially Gen Z / those now in their early 20s, for many of whom social media and gaming culture has been an embedded as part of their lives.

Recommendation: Especially as increasingly sophisticated software emerges, we should not underestimate the ability of people to collaborate and build relationships in an increasingly digital world.

4) We are at the start of a journey of transformation that could go on for 5 to 10 years

It was clear from the discussion that this remains a live discussion within organisations. Challenges around establishing transparent and trusting relationships between organisations and their younger employees and maximising productive working in different spaces remain unresolved. This is the latest in a series of surveys and roundtable discussions that have been conducted throughout the pandemic period and are providing a regular forum for discussion between business leaders and younger workers in the city.

Recommendation: We have now established a process by which organisations can contribute to and continue to discuss these issues with young people on an ongoing basis.

