

# the intelligence

## Bridging the skills gap

There are plenty of roles that need filling, so why don't women fill them? **Nina Mguni** investigates

In January 2014, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) published its findings from the employer skills survey. The report identifies some valuable insight into the skill deficiencies based on data from 91,000 employers across different sectors. Within a context of the improved economic situation and with vacancies back to pre-recession levels, we could be accused of taking a 'glass half empty' attitude.

However, skills shortages are problematic. The UKCES employer skills survey states that 'economic growth and recovery may be constrained by skill shortages as the labour market responds to employer requirements'. Skill shortage vacancies account for one in five of all vacancies. In 2011, this was 91,400 but in 2013 this figure had grown to 146,200.

The average density of skill shortage vacancies for skilled trade occupations and professional roles are especially acute. Professional roles in manufacturing are particularly persistent.

Within this context, the absence of female employees in certain sectors seems surprising – this would appear to be an obvious talent pool to draw on. In the last 40 years, more women have entered the workplace. As of April to June 2013, 67% of women aged

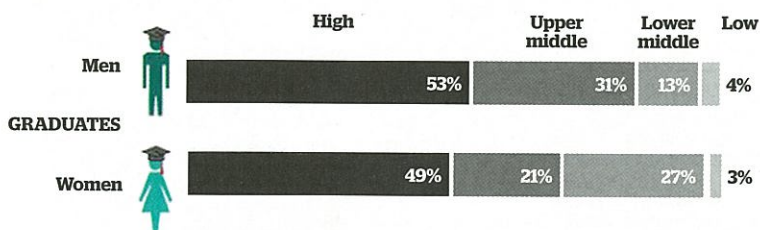
16 to 64 were in the workplace. But are employers making use of this supply of women?

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) data suggests that women are more likely to be concentrated in professions with lower rates of pay. There are a higher proportion of female graduates in lower-skilled roles (eg. teaching assistants, home carers), with 27% of women working at this skill level compared to just 13% of men. The ONS states: 'More women than men were employed in lower middle-skilled jobs, despite employed female graduates tending to achieve just as strong degree results.'

In particular sectors, for instance engineering, women are noticeably absent. There are a number of initiatives that have been established to redress the gender balance within engineering. Within the recruitment industry, recruiters like Sagent Solutions actively promote women in engineering. With only 7% of all engineers who are women, this is no easy feat. However, it would appear that if recruiters like Sagent Solutions get this right, investing time and energy in drawing women into sectors with skill shortages will eventually lead to high returns.

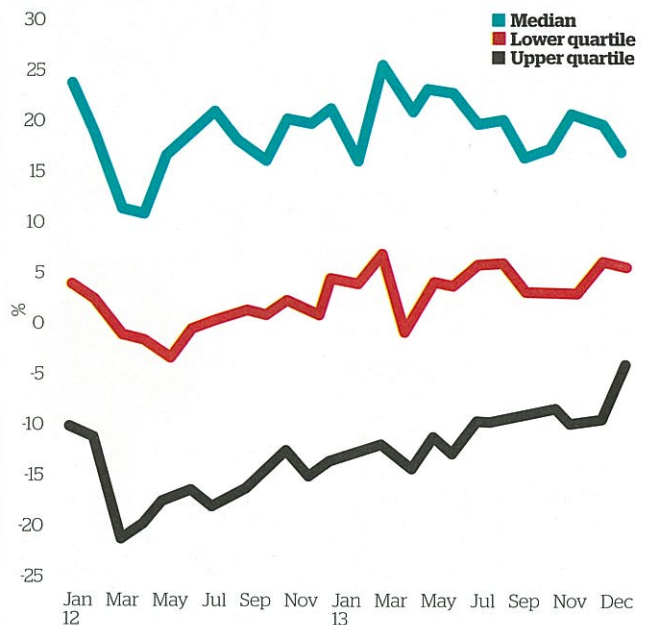
*Nina Mguni is senior researcher, REC*

### Skill level of job



While the percentage of male and female graduates in high skill jobs was fairly similar, the percentage employed in upper middle skill jobs was not

Fig 1: Turnover growth 2012/13



## Turning over a new leaf

Throughout 2013 Recruitment Industry Benchmarking (RIB) has reported a generally improving picture for recruiters, and our members now have their full reports showing year-end results for 2013.

The graph above shows 'turnover growth' compared to the previous year. A graph you will have seen in previous months but this month not only have we updated it to show year-end 2013 figures, we have also shown the 'spread' that different recruiters are reporting by showing not just the median RIB figure but also the upper and lower quartiles.

The first thing to notice is the general trend from early 2012 to December 2014 of improving turnover growth for all three measurements. This is obviously very encouraging, especially when combined with improving net profit margins, as reported last month.

However, what the graph also shows is the very different experience that a number of recruiters are having with the upper quartile finishing 2013 on a turnover growth figure of over 17%, compared to the lower quartile showing a decline of 3%. The median figure was still showing a healthy improvement of over 6%.

There are a number of reasons for this spread, including sector etc, but what is positive is that when looking at net profit margins, the upper quartile (6%), median (3%) and even the lower quartile (0.5%) are all reporting positive figures.

So 2013 was generally a positive year for most and although 2014 will no doubt have its challenges it should also provide more opportunities. It will, however, continue to be a very competitive market, and management will have to use all the tools at their disposal to optimise performance – knowledge is power.

Chris Ansell is chief financial officer at Recruitment Industry Benchmarking (RIB) [www.ribindex.com](http://www.ribindex.com)