



# Black Country Business and Labour Market Intelligence March 2021



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### 1) Introduction

This is the first edition of a new monthly report produced by Black Country Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU). It aims to provide the Black Country LEP Board, other local forums and local partners with real-time intelligence on the Black Country business environment and labour market.

Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative insight, the analysis summarises key recent challenges and opportunities for Black Country businesses, while depicting the current status of local labour markets across sectors.

The production of this report reflects a collaborative local approach on business intelligence and engagement in the local area. Insight has been collated through multiple channels, including direct Growth Hub business engagement and through conversations with business groups and trade bodies (e.g., UK Metals Council, MakeUK). The Labour Market Information aspect uses data downloaded through the EMSI platform, providing live job vacancy data locally.

The intelligence provided is intended to influence policy and decision-making across relevant Black Country forums and those at the regional and national level. By utilising real time business insight and labour market data, we can more easily navigate key challenges and opportunities without the problem of data lags. This is particularly important in the context of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the UK's exit from the EU.

Our first report, for March 2021, includes a focus on two principal areas and sources:

- 1) Black Country Business Intelligence Summary** – this collates the challenges, issues, opportunities and trends arising from engagement with Black Country businesses in the last month. Insight is collated from direct feedback from Black Country Growth Hub and in conjunction with other business group / trade body partners.
- 2) Black Country Labour Market Information** – Using the EMSI data platform, this summarises job vacancy data across the economy and within sectors. This provides a live picture of what roles Black Country businesses are looking for and the skills they require.

The March report will be built upon and extended for future months, providing a more comprehensive live picture reflective of both qualitative business insight and relevant quantitative data.

## 2) Summary of March 2021 Findings

### • Business Intelligence

- The Budget was generally welcomed by local business & business groups in the immediate term, particularly the furlough extension, continued business rates holiday and new programmes like Help to Grow.
- Businesses across the region are welcoming the opportunity of lockdown to be lifted following the PM announcement on the 22/02 as the UK continue to administer vaccines and now has some certainty in the form of the government's roadmap.
- There is inconsistent feedback on the effectiveness of the array of government COVID support grants and loans available to businesses. An increasing number of businesses are enquiring about the availability of Additional Restrictions Grants from local authorities.
- There are continued issues for businesses trading with Europe, with many suggesting currently it is much **more difficult than previously**
- There is uncertainty around **Rules of Origin** and fear that this will add time and costs and time to exporting processes. The rules are currently unclear, including differences across countries and the status of product warranties. It can also be very difficult to determine origin for some products.
- High volumes of **interest in the Kickstart programme as business see the value in the scheme**. Some concern over the length of the application process, 2 months plus.
- Despite COVID and EU Exit, some Midlands areas have reported a healthy increase in business support enquiries related to **new start-up business and entrepreneurship**.
- There has been a **large shift to digital and online activity** as a result of the pandemic with businesses looking to diversify and adapt.

### • Labour Market Intelligence

- Demand is beginning to increase across most Black Country priority sectors – with a notable rebound in both construction, advanced manufacturing and environmental technologies.
- Construction, are now back above pre-pandemic/lockdown levels with demand higher than at the same comparable point in 2019.
- Other sectors, such as retail and the visitor economy remain in lower demand compared to pre-lockdown levels.
- Unsurprisingly, given the nature of the pandemic there has been significant growth in both health and care and transport technologies; particularly around nursing and care workers and driving occupations.
- Analysis of locale shows that demand is highest (by volume) in Sandwell, followed by Wolverhampton, Dudley and Walsall.
- Across all sectors, the biggest skills gaps (i.e., most requested hard-skills compared against current workforce profiles) are for Metal Inert Gas (MIG) welding, plumbing, accounting, Auto CAD, nursing, social work, telemarketing, instructing, warehousing and restaurant operation

### 3) Black Country Business Intelligence Summary

#### Budget 2021

The Budget was generally welcomed by local business & business groups in the immediate term. Particularly:

- **Extension of furlough** to September
- Additional financial support through **grants and loans & SEISS extension**
- **100% business rates holiday** continues to end of June for hospitality, leisure and retail, and discounted for the rest of the year.

There are also some interesting new programmes / policies that businesses will be able to access and benefit from, and locally we look forward to seeing more detail about them and their support for businesses including:

- **Help to Grow: Management**
- **Help to Grow: Digital**
- **Super-deduction**

#### COVID-19

Businesses across the region are welcoming the opportunity of lockdown to be lifted following the PM announcement on the 22/02 as the UK continue to administer vaccines and now has some certainty in the form of the government's roadmap. However, with **many sectors still unable to open and trade fully for a number of additional months, they are imploring the Government to extend the various support schemes**, including furlough and business rates relief, through the summer at least in order to help protect jobs and power economic recovery.

Companies are looking to understand how the current, and latest, support measures may help them, while continuing to navigate the range of existing measures of support and easing of lockdowns. Specifically:

- There is inconsistent feedback on the effectiveness of the array of government COVID support grants and loans available to businesses. An increasing number of businesses are enquiring about the **availability of Additional Restrictions Grants from local authorities**, suggesting the availability across LEPs and local authorities is inconsistent. There is also broader concern about **business failure/closure within recipients of both CBILS and BBLs, and the effect on wider taxes to pay for this.**
- Even when firms are able to access finance, **grants are often not covering basic utility bills** for SMEs.

#### EU Exit

There are continued issues for businesses trading with Europe, with many suggesting currently it is much **more difficult than previously**. Problems differ by severity and across sectors. Major concurrent issues related to EU Exit across sectors include:

- **Delays in transport times for exports** and increase in transit time for inbound goods.
- **Decreased ease of flow** of essential components due to new **rules of origin, customs duties and paperwork and VAT** which has resulted in damaging production hold-ups and supply chain effects.
- There is uncertainty around **Rules of Origin** and fear that this will add time and costs and time to exporting processes. The rules are currently unclear, including differences across countries and

the status of product warranties. It can also be very difficult to determine origin for some products.

- According to MakeUK (Feb 2021), **8 in 10 manufacturers are experiencing some form of disruption to their supply chains** (although not all of these are EU-UK related).
- Freight forwarders locally are **setting up businesses in France and Ireland** to support easier trade with European customers.

The [latest Manufacturing Barometer](#), which is produced by the Manufacturing Growth Programme (MGP) and SWMAS (the South West Manufacturing Advisory Service), suggests that **Brexit issues are causing SME manufacturers in the West Midlands significant disruption** as they look to recover from the economic effects of Covid-19. The survey reveals that:

- 71% of companies have seen negative price changes within their supply chain since leaving the EU, with the **availability of raw materials an issue for 47% of firms**.
- Of the 49 West Midlands respondents, **more than half cited complications with exporting (53%) and 41% have had issues with importing goods** since December 31, causing potential short and long-term hits on volumes and new opportunities.
- **Only a third of SME manufacturers feel they are getting the right support** and guidance from Government on how to navigate changes caused by Brexit, underlining the need for better communication and additional tailored support.
- On a more positive note, **24% of businesses believe Brexit could deliver new reshoring opportunities** as firms look to bring their supply chains closer to home.

In the latest Business Impact of Coronavirus Survey (BICS), businesses were asked if they had made changes to supply chains due to the end of the EU transition period. **6.0%** of responding West Midlands businesses reported they had. Where businesses stated they had made changes, **49.3% of responding West Midlands businesses reported they were using more UK suppliers**. This may reflect the **reshoring opportunities of EU Exit**.

## Programmes and Business Models

- High volumes of **interest in the Kickstart programme as business see the value in the scheme**. Some concern over the length of the application process, 2 months plus.
- Despite COVID and EU Exit, some Midlands areas have reported a healthy increase in business support enquiries related to **new start-up business and entrepreneurship**.

There has been a **large shift to digital and online activity** as a result of the pandemic with businesses looking to diversify and adapt.

**NEW INVESTMENT, DEALS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

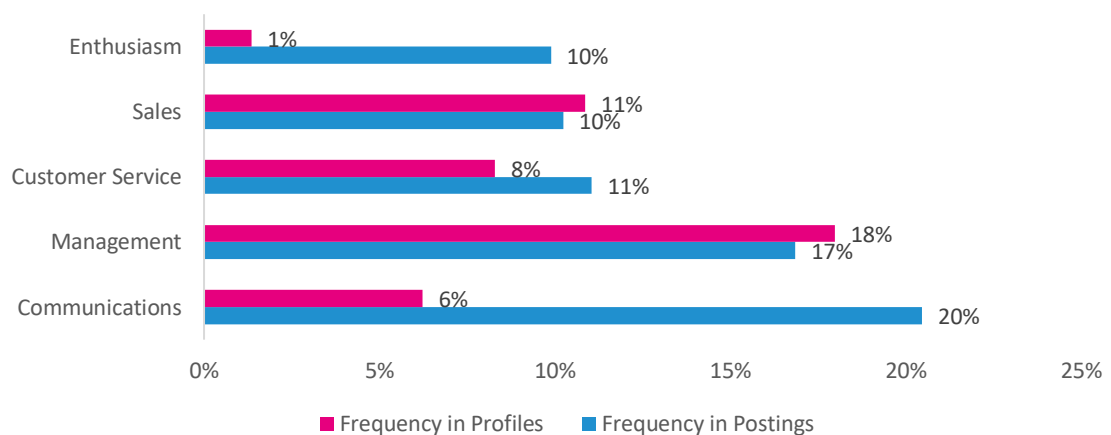
<b>COMPANY</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>SECTOR</b>	<b>DETAIL &amp; SOURCE</b>
<a href="#"><u>WMCA</u></a>	Black Country and wider regions	Public	Multi-million-pound funds to kickstart the regeneration of derelict urban land across the West Midlands have created more than 3,700 new jobs.
<a href="#"><u>West Midlands Combined Authority</u></a>	Dudley	Public	The £24.1 million Dudley Interchange linking bus and trams has been given the go-ahead by the combined authority's board.
<a href="#"><u>Kings Barbers Club</u></a>	Wolverhampton	Hair and Beauty	Sainsbury's flagship superstore in Wolverhampton city centre has been given the go-ahead to open a new barbershop, Kings Barbers, outside its premises.
<a href="#"><u>B&amp;M / Tim Hortons</u></a>	Dudley	Retail	A new B&M store and a Tim Hortons drive-thru are to be built on the site of a former Toys R Us branch in the Black Country.
<a href="#"><u>The Deritrend Group Ltd</u></a>	Wolverhampton	Engineering	Engineering solutions provider has enjoyed a great start to 2021 with two major 'framework' wins for Severn Trent Water and Hafren Dyfrdwy Cyfyngedig.
<a href="#"><u>Tipton and Coseley Building Society</u></a>	Sandwell	Building Societies	Despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic the Tipton and Coseley Building Society has reported another set of strong results for 2020.
<a href="#"><u>Sandwell Council</u></a>	Sandwell	Public	Sandwell's bids to the Government's Towns Fund have been granted in the Budget, with the borough on course to secure £67.5 million investment.

## 4) Black Country Labour Market Information

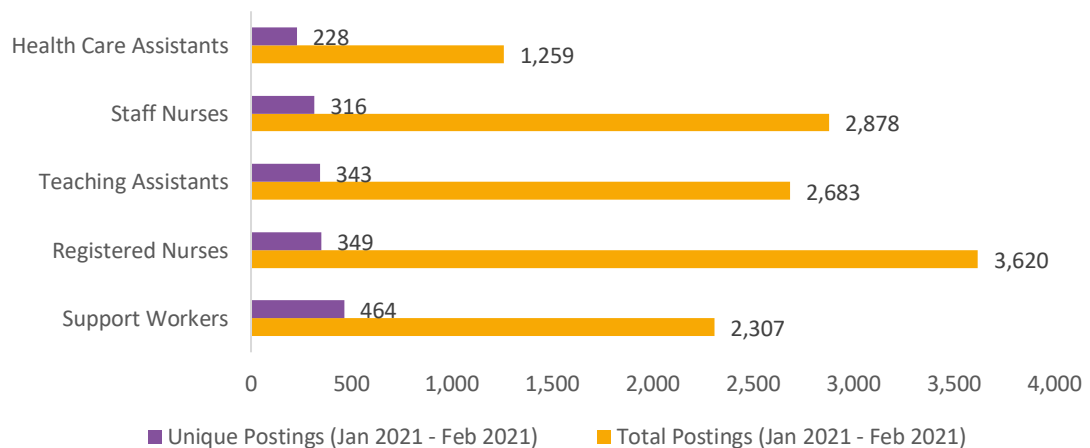
### Sector Demand (Jan 2021 – February 2021)

- Demand is beginning to increase across most Black Country priority sectors – with a notable rebound in both construction, advanced manufacturing and environmental technologies.
- Construction, are now back above pre-pandemic/lockdown levels with demand higher than at the same comparable point in 2019.
- Other sectors, such as retail and the visitor economy remain in lower demand compared to pre-lockdown levels.
- Unsurprisingly, given the nature of the pandemic there has been significant growth in both health and care and transport technologies; particularly around nursing and care workers and driving occupations.
- Analysis of locale shows that demand is highest (by volume) in Sandwell, followed by Wolverhampton, Dudley and Walsall.
- Across all sectors, the biggest skills gaps (i.e., most requested hard-skills compared against current workforce profiles) are for Metal Inert Gas (MIG) welding, plumbing, accounting, Auto CAD, nursing, social work, telemarketing, instructing, warehousing and restaurant operation.

Top common skills



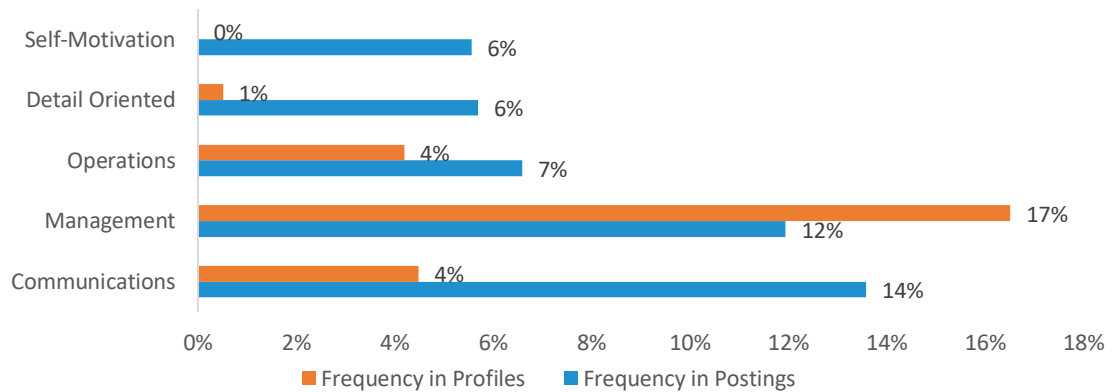
Top job titles



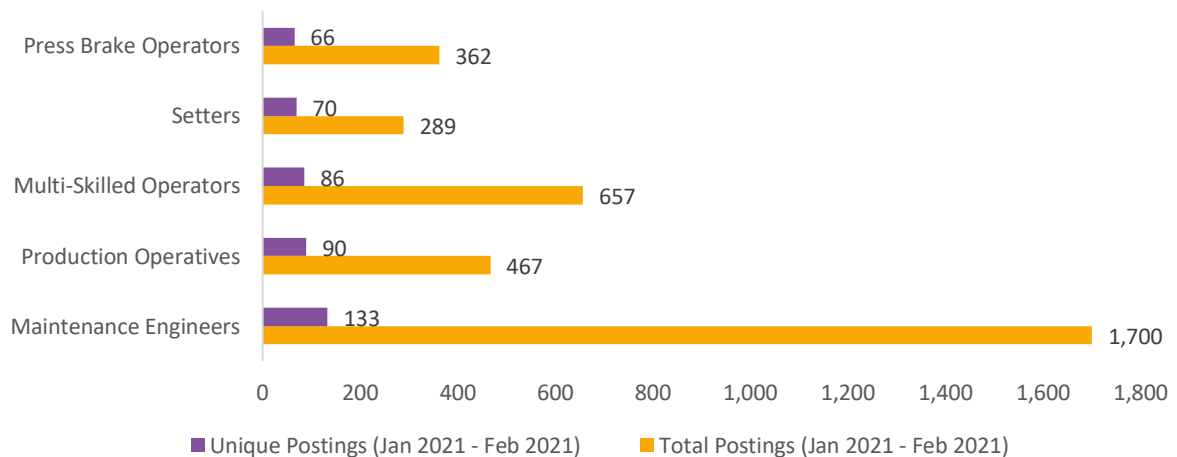
## Advanced Manufacturing:

- Demand via job postings was highest for Metal working production and maintenance fitters, Production managers and directors in manufacturing, Engineering technicians.
- The top 10 in-demand skills suggest that the biggest skills gaps for advanced manufacturing are Metal Inert Gas (MIG) welding.
- Metal Inert Gas (MIG) welding occurred in 7% of all postings but not in any workforce profiles, whilst mechanical engineering was identified in 6% of all postings but appears in 5% of profiles.
- The need for skills around mechanical engineering are also strengthened by the presence of hydraulics in the top 30 most in-demand skills and machining, AutoCAD (programming language) and systems engineering.
- There is also notable demand for Multi-Skilled Operators, Setters and Press Brake Operators, with variances of these skills appearing in the top 10 in-demand skills and long list.

### Top common skills



### Top job titles

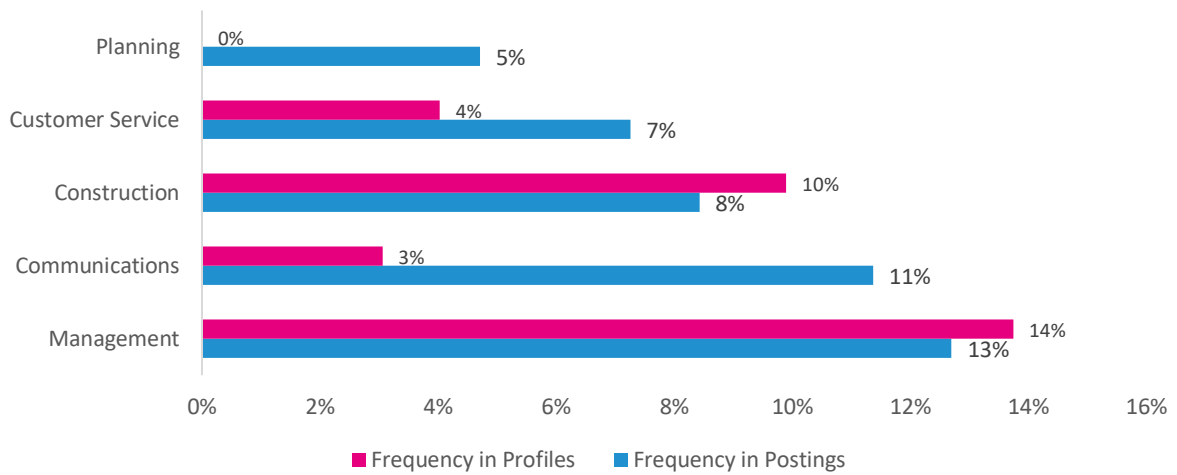




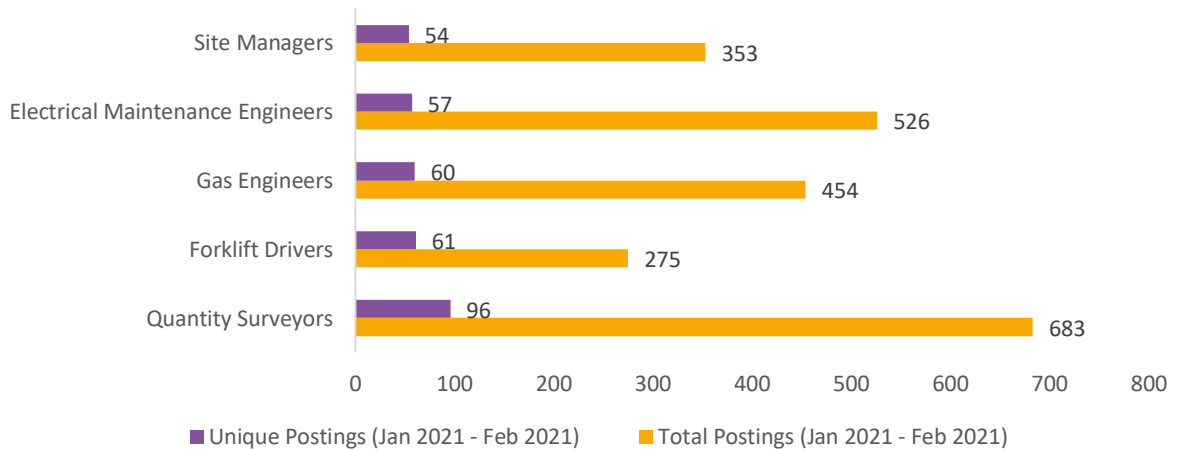
**Building Technologies:**

- The greatest demand in this sector was for Electricians and electrical fitters.
- Other notable occupations where demand was high included: Plumbers and heating and ventilating engineers, Production managers and directors in construction, Fork-lift truck drivers, Carpenters and joiners and Quantity surveyors.
- The top 10 in-demand skills suggest that the biggest skills gap for construction is plumbing, followed by carpentry.
- Reflecting the most in-demand occupations and job titles, plumbing occurred in 6% of all postings but appeared in 0% of workforce profile, whilst carpentry was identified in 6% of all postings but only appears in 2% of workforce profiles.
- Surveying is also an in-demand hard-skill, appearing in 4% of all job postings for this sector and 5% of workforce profiles.

**Top common skills**



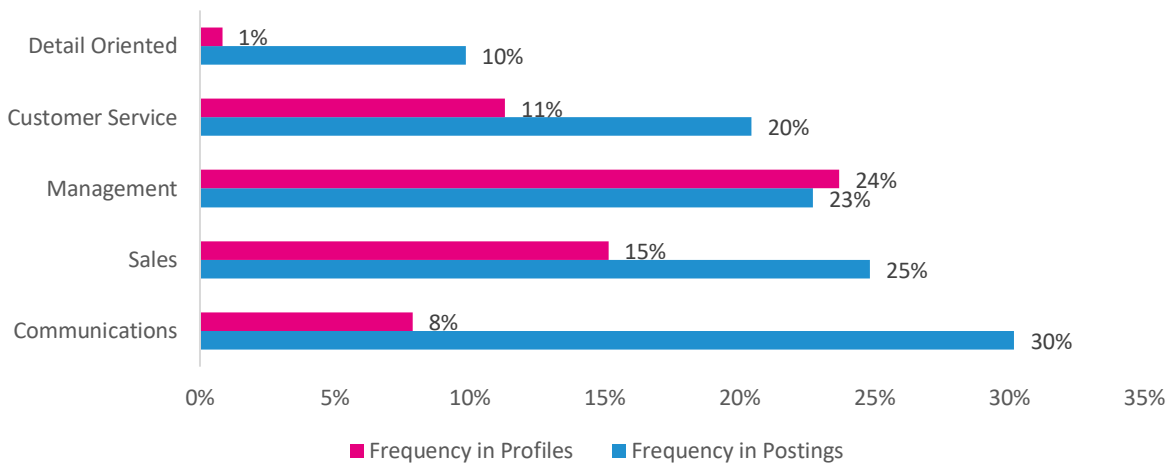
**Top job titles**



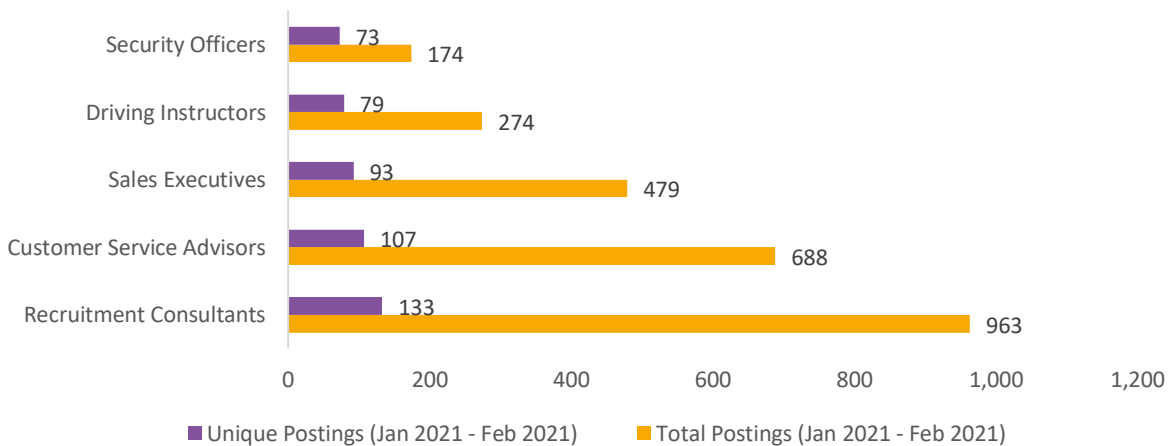
**Business Services:**

- Demand for Management professionals across sales/business development and accounts is high. This would indicate a prerequisite for higher level skills and/or experience in this sector.
- The most frequent job postings were for Sales accounts and business development managers, Other administrative occupations n.e.c., Book-keepers, payroll managers and wages clerks and Business sales executives.
- In terms of 'hard-skills', accounting was the most in demand skill occurring in 7% of job postings, but occurring in 4% of profiles. Certification of accounting (ACCA) also appears separately in the top 10 most in-demand skills.
- Analysis of job postings also suggests other important skills gaps in this sector are: auditing, selling techniques and programming languages.
- For programming languages, SQL appears in the top 10, but JavaScript and C# also make the long list alongside the more encompassing 'software development'.

**Top common skills**



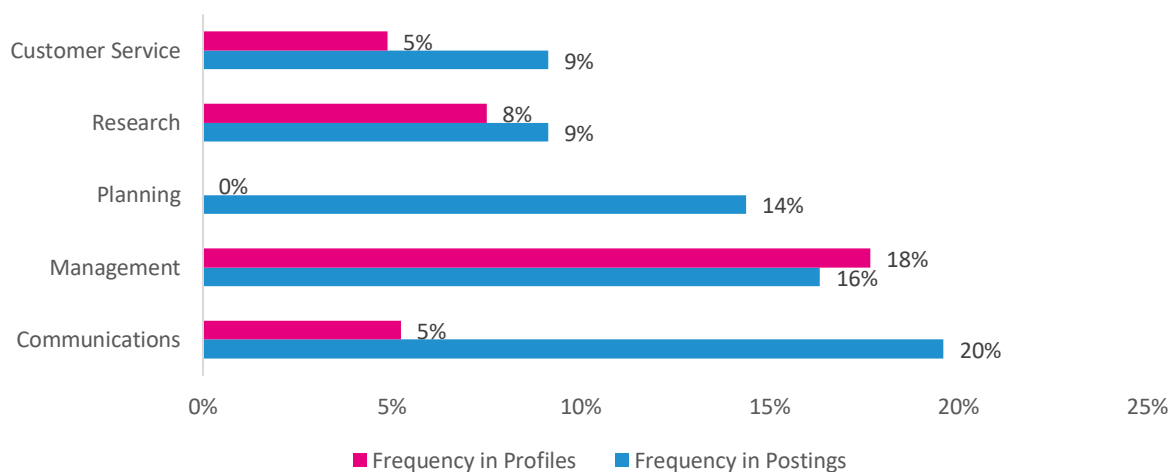
**Top job titles**



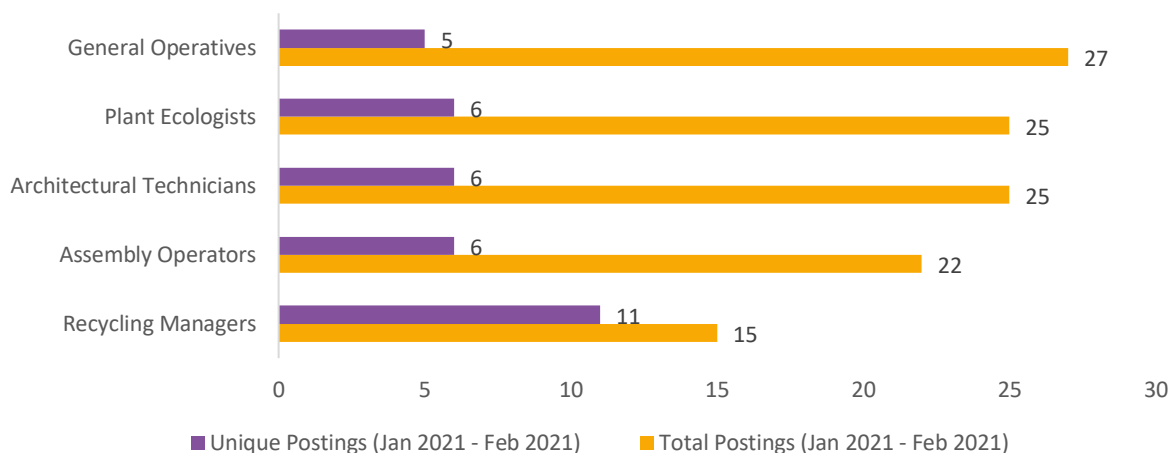
## Environmental Technologies:

- Demand via job postings was highest for Refuse and salvage occupations, Environment professionals, Architectural and town planning technicians, Conservation professionals and Water and sewerage plant operatives.
- The top 10 in-demand skills suggest that the biggest skills gaps are for AutoCAD, ecology, risk analysis, environmental health and Autodesk Revit.
- AutoCAD occurred in 7% of all postings but only 4% of workforce profiles, whilst ecology was identified in 7% of all postings but appears in 0% of profiles.
- The need for skills around Architectural and town planning technicians are strengthened by the presence of planning permission and building information modelling all appearing in the top 20 skills.
- There is also notable demand for Environmental Consultants, with variances of these skills appearing in the top 10 in-demand skills and long list.

### Top common skills



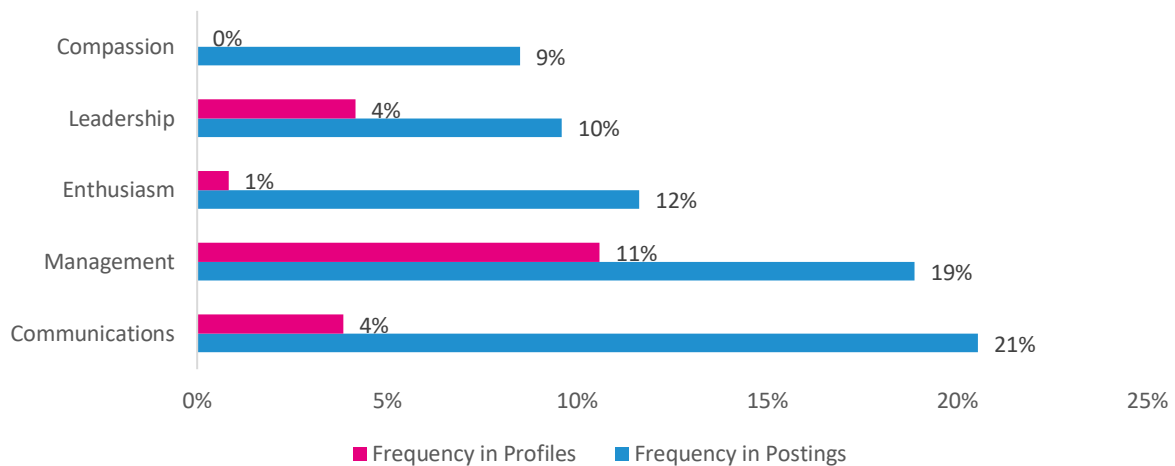
### Top job titles



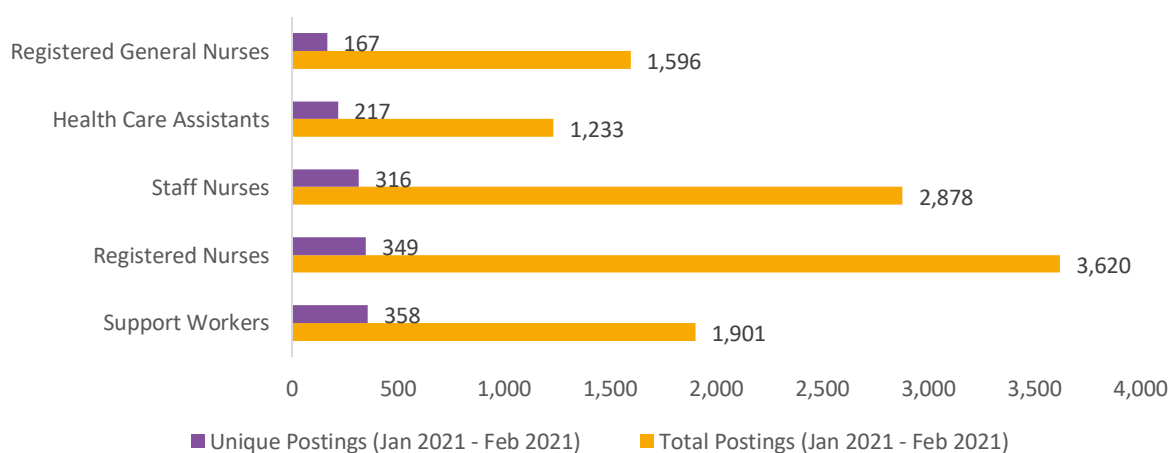
## Health and Care:

- By far and away the greatest demand in this sector (by volume) is for Nurses and Care Workers, however there is also notable demand for Occupational therapists, Psychologists, Physiotherapists, Pharmacists and Pharmaceutical technicians. Demand perhaps unsurprisingly has increased over the course of the pandemic period.
- The greatest number of postings was recorded for Support Workers, Registered Nurses, Staff Nurses, Health Care Assistants and Registered General Nurses.
- Predictably, given the number of job postings for nurses and associated titles, the top 10 in-demand skills suggest that the biggest skills gap for health and care is nursing. Nursing appeared in 24% of all job postings for this sector.
- Nursing is followed by mental health, which appeared in 14% of job postings and learning disabilities which was desired in a further 12% of job postings.

### Top common skills



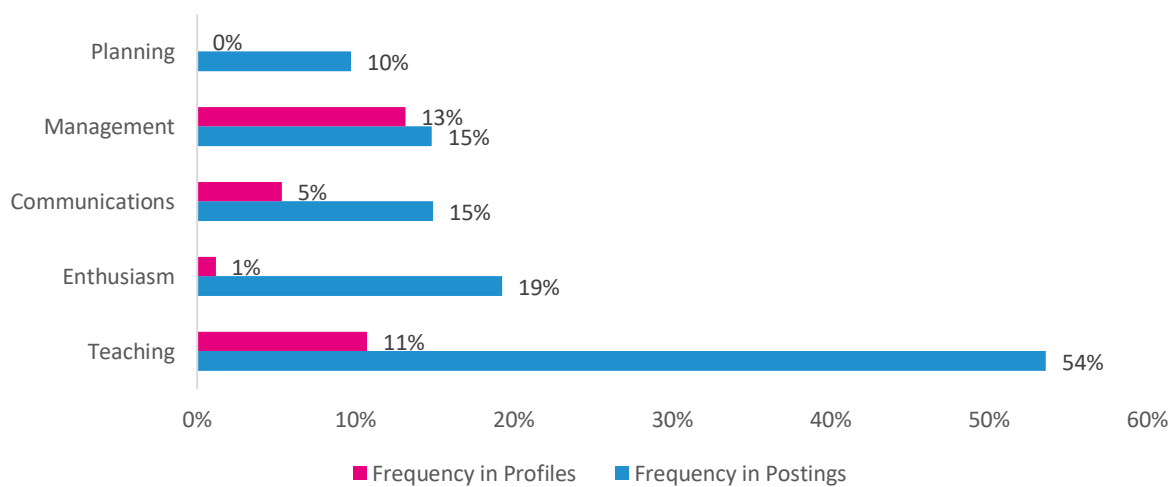
### Top job titles



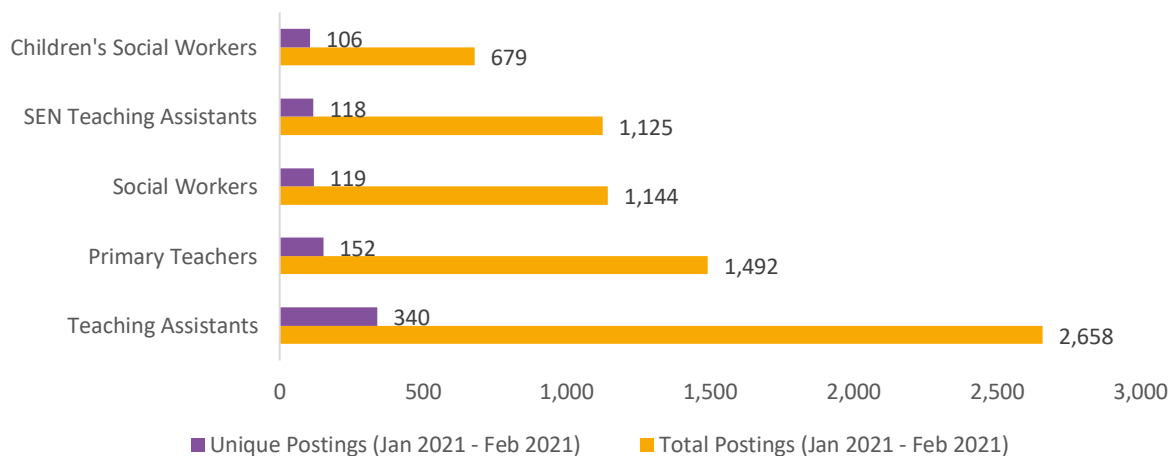
## Public Sector including Education:

- By far and away the greatest demand in this sector (by volume) is for Teachers and Teaching assistants, however there is also notable demand for Social Workers.
- The greatest number of postings was recorded for Primary and nursery education teaching professionals, Teaching assistants, Social workers, Secondary education teaching professionals, and Educational support assistants.
- Surprisingly, given the number of job postings for teachers and associated titles, the top 10 in-demand skills suggest that the biggest skills gap for the public sector is not teaching, but social work, appearing in 9% of all job postings for this sector.
- This is followed by autism spectrum disorders, which appeared in 8% of job postings and classroom management which was also in 8% of job postings.

### Top common skills



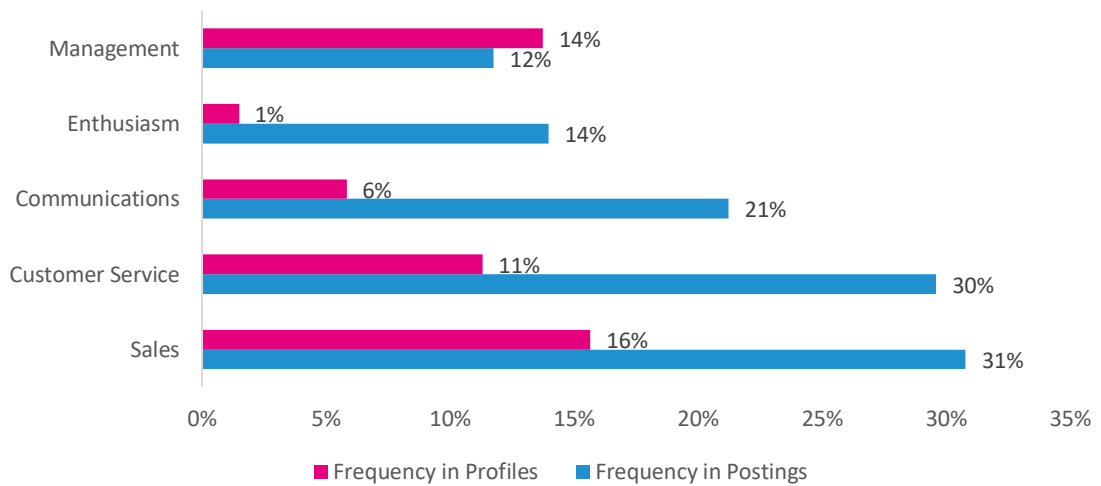
### Top job titles



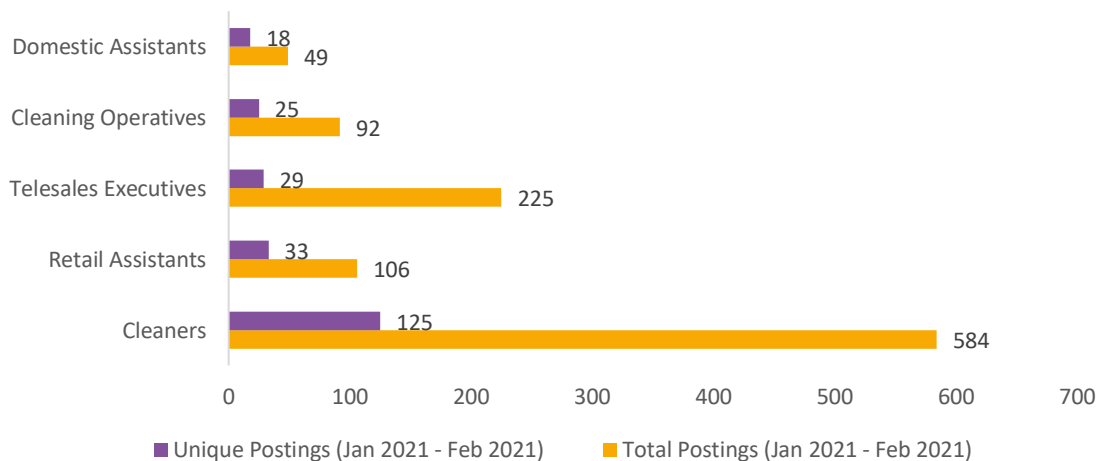
**Retail:**

- Demand for Cleaners and domestics were particularly high, perhaps due to concerns around sanitation in the ongoing pandemic.
- Sales and retail assistants were the second highest in demand occupation, followed by Stock control clerks and assistants, Managers and directors in retail and wholesale and Telephone salespersons.
- Specifically, Cleaners, Retail Assistants, Telesales Executives, Cleaning Operatives and Domestic Assistants and were the most sought-after job titles.
- The most in demand skill was telemarketing, occurring in 8% of all postings, followed by warehousing, occurring in 8% of job postings.
- The biggest skills gap in this sector was telemarketing, occurring in 8% of postings but appearing in 0% of profiles.

Top common skills



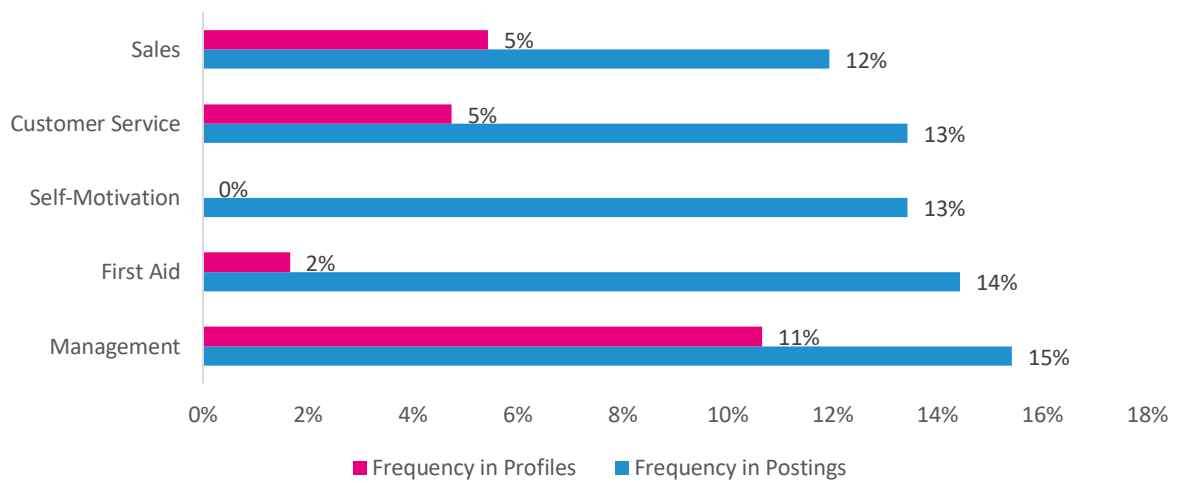
Top job titles



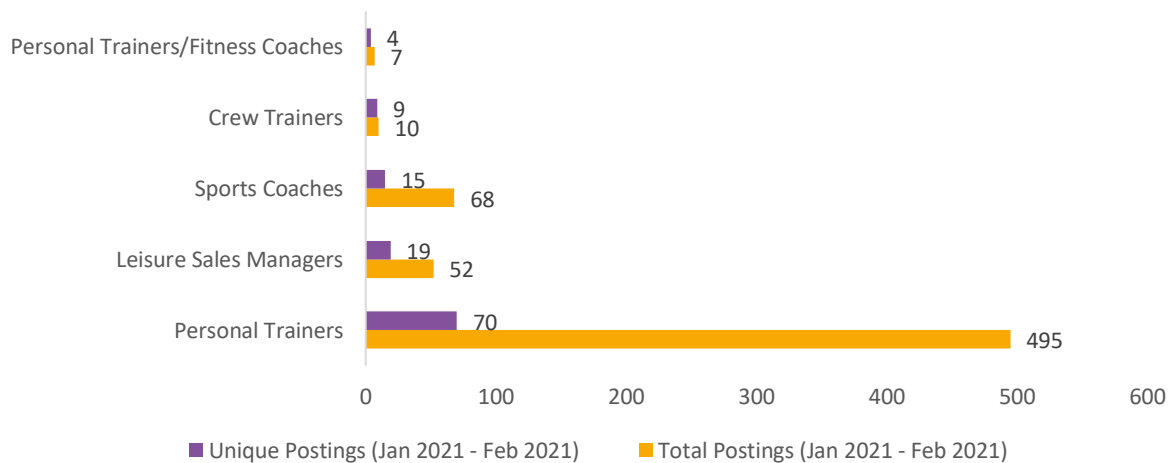
**Sports:**

- Demand via job postings was highest for Fitness instructors' occupations, such as Personal Trainers.
- The top 10 in-demand skills suggest that the biggest skills gaps are for instructing, circuit training, anatomy, physiology and business coaching.
- Instructing occurred in 25% of all postings but did not appear in any workforce profiles, whilst circuit training was identified in 21% of all postings and also did not appear in any workforce profiles.
- The need for skills around Sports coaches, instructors and officials are strengthened by the presence of science-based knowledge such as physiology, anatomy and sports nutrition.

Top common skills



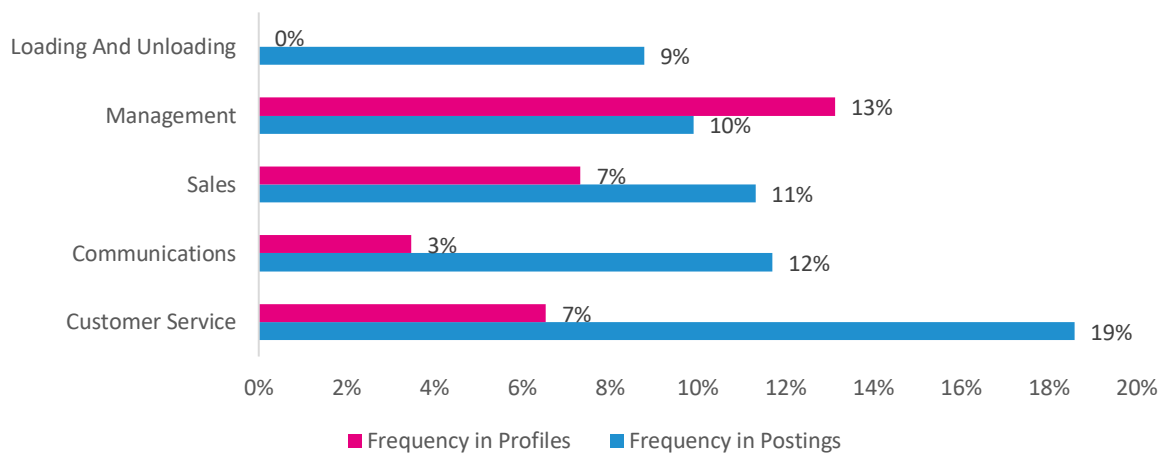
Top job titles



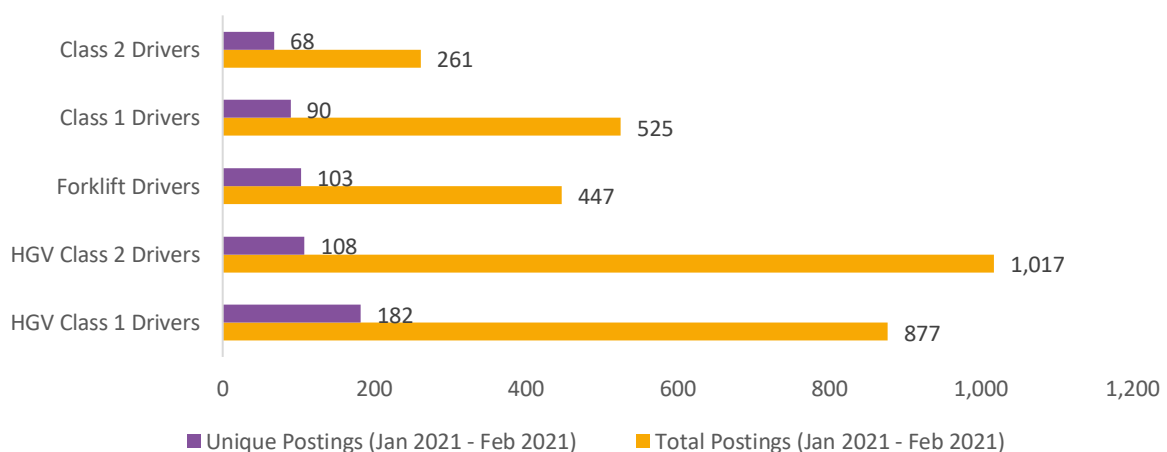
## Transport Technologies:

- Demand for Drivers, Forklift Operators and roles associated with Warehousing and Storage all feature prominently in this sector.
- The most in-demand positions include Van Drivers, Managers and directors in storage and warehousing, HGV/Large Goods Vehicle (LGV) Drivers, Vehicle technicians, mechanics and electricians and Mobile machine drivers and operatives n.e.c.
- The top 10 in-demand skills suggest that the biggest skills gaps for transport technologies are warehousing and mechanics.
- Warehousing occurred in 10% of all postings but appeared in only 3% of workforce profiles, whilst mechanics was identified in 6% of all postings but didn't appear in any profiles.
- The need for skills around warehousing are also strengthened by the presence of forklift truck, forklift operation, palletizing, manual handling, stock control and safety standards in the top 20 most in-demand skills.

### Top common skills



### Top job titles

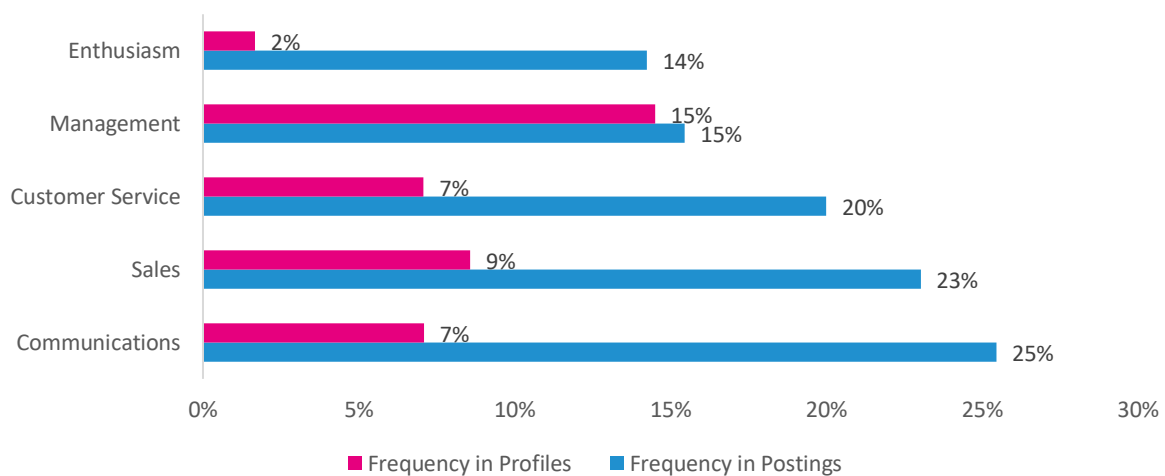




## Visitor Economy:

- Demand for Assistant Organists, Chefs, Authors, writers and translators, Product, clothing and related designers, Conference and exhibition managers and organisers and Restaurant and catering establishment managers and proprietors all feature in this sector.
- The most in-demand positions include Assistant Organists, Chefs, Interpreters, Team Leads and Cooks.
- The top 10 in-demand skills suggest that the biggest skills gaps for the visitor economy sector are in restaurant operation.
- Restaurant operation occurred in 16% of all postings but only appears in 2% of workforce profiles, whilst cooking was identified in 10% of all postings but appeared in 0% of workforce profiles.
- The need for skills around Restaurant and catering establishment managers and proprietors are also strengthened by the presence of food safety, food preparation, cash handling, food preparation and grilling in the top 20 most in-demand skills.

### Top common skills



### Top job titles

