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COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANTS

Covering The Maternity/Paternity Leave Gap 2013/14

A study of what interim managers, freelancers and employers working in marketing, corporate communications and PR think about maternity and paternity leave.





Introduction

Statutory rights for both maternity/paternity pay and leave are now very much a reality, but does this place an unfair burden on business? The Government is considering extending paternity leave rights so that fathers can share leave with their partner in an allowance called 'flexible parental leave'.

Where does this leave the employer and how do they fill the gap when a key player takes maternity/paternity leave? This study, which polled the opinions of employers, freelancers and interim managers, set out to investigate this.

We also wanted to look at the commercial opportunity maternity and paternity leave presents to the interim management and freelance community. Do interims gain useful and worthwhile assignments by providing cover for senior managers taking leave and do employers look favourably on the interim option for solving maternity/paternity leave cover?

The study was carried out jointly by VMA Group and The Counsel House. We hope you find it an interesting and informative read.

Robin Swinbank
Managing Partner and Owner
The Counsel House

Report Authors



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VMA Group



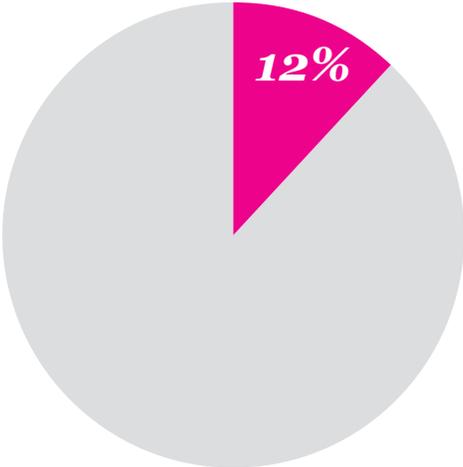
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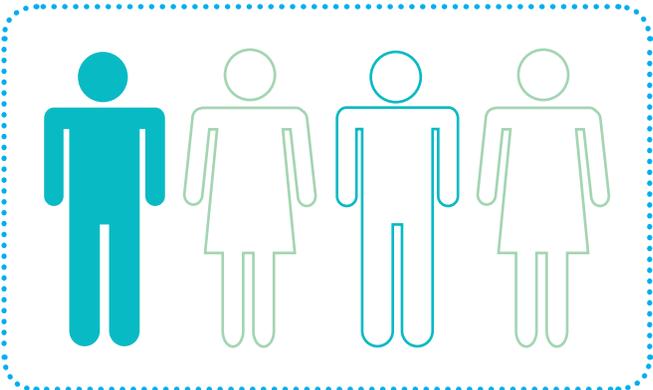
Executive summary

- » Over 95% of interim managers and freelancers think that people taking maternity or paternity leave represents a commercial opportunity for them to provide cover and 55% of those polled said that they had already undertaken an assignment as cover for someone taking maternity or paternity leave.
- » 81% of those polled described this as a successful solution for their client and 85% described it as an enjoyable and rewarding work experience.
- » The typical length of a maternity leave cover assignment was between six and nine months, which was the period of cover provided by 38% of respondents. 21% said the cover they provided lasted longer than a year, 18% said three to six months, 15% said nine months to a year and 8% said less than three months.
- » A third of interim managers and freelancers said they regretted not having access to the maternity or paternity leave rights of a fulltime employee.
- » 74% agreed with Nick Clegg's recent proposal for reforms which allow both parents to share leave to look after a new-born child, so-called 'shared parental leave'. 49% said they would consider taking shared parental leave if they were in employment, but 24% said the proposals represented an unfair burden on business.
- » Only 12% said they agreed with Kirstie Allsopp's well-publicised comment that paternity leave was 'pointless' whilst 80% said they did not agree with the comment.
- » Nine out of ten of the employers taking part in the study said they would consider using an interim manager to solve the cover problem created by a maternity/paternity leave and two-thirds said they had already used this option.
- » Seven out of every ten employers who had used an interim manager or freelancer to provide cover for maternity/paternity leave said this was a successful solution.
- » Employers were divided on extending maternity/paternity leave and pay rights, with just under a quarter saying this would place an unfair burden on business and three quarters saying it would not.

Seven out of every ten employers who had used an interim manager or freelancer to provide cover for maternity/paternity leave said this was a successful solution.



12% of survey respondents said that paternity leave was 'pointless'

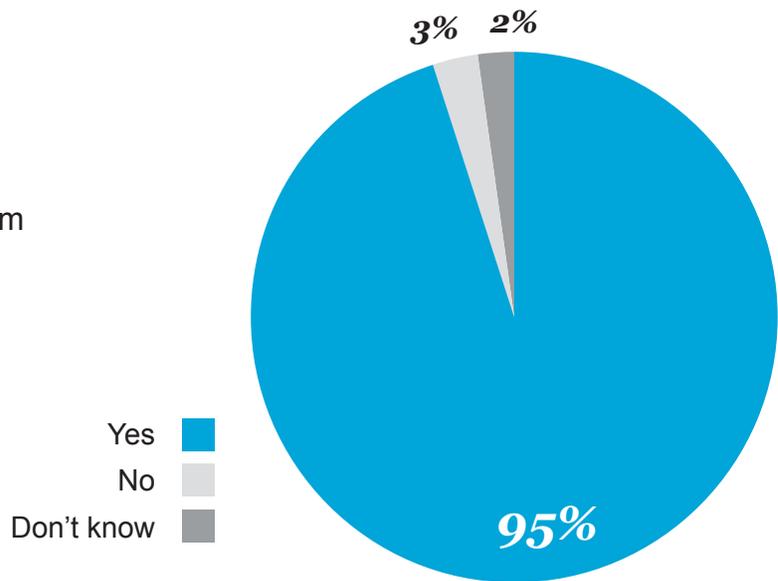


A quarter of employers said extended maternity/paternity leave rights would place an unfair burden on business.

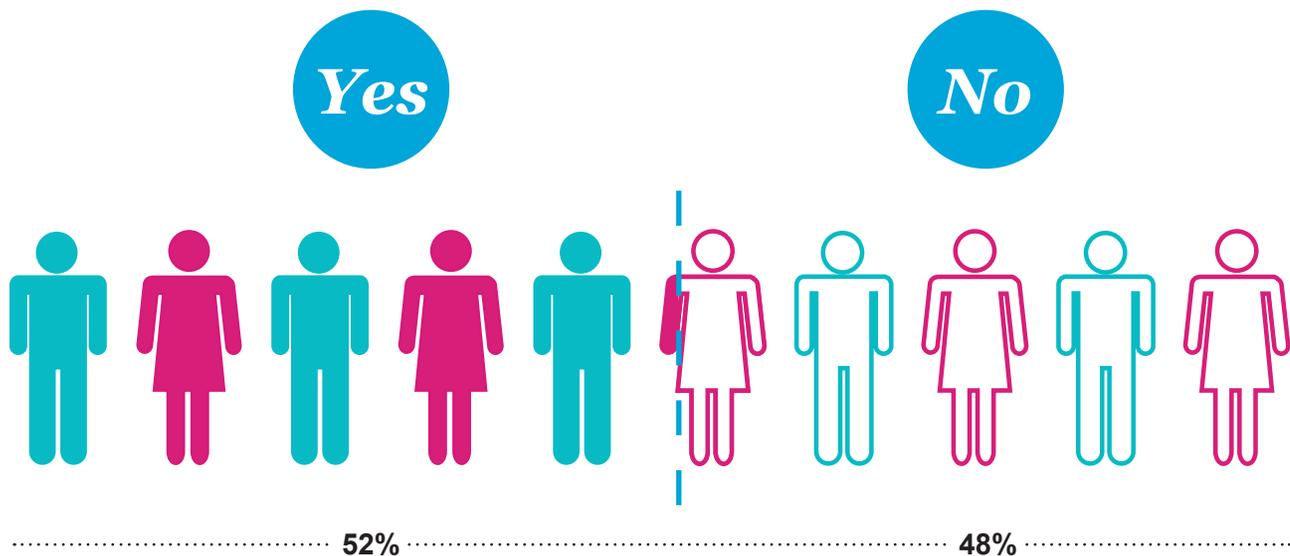
The survey findings

Part **1** : EXPERIENCE

Q As an interim manager/freelance consultant, do you think that people taking maternity/paternity leave presents a commercial opportunity for you to provide cover on an interim basis?



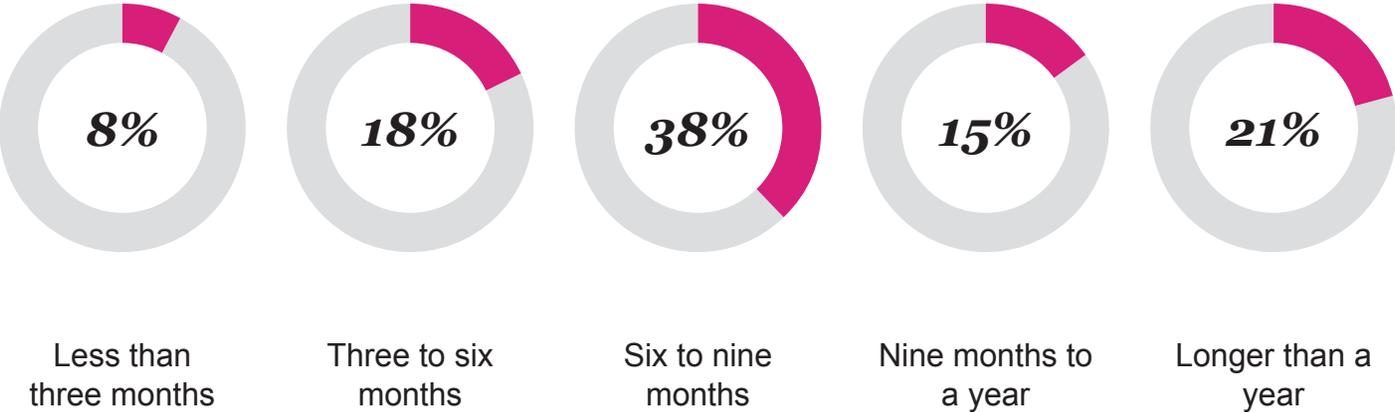
Q Have you ever provided cover for someone taking maternity/paternity leave?



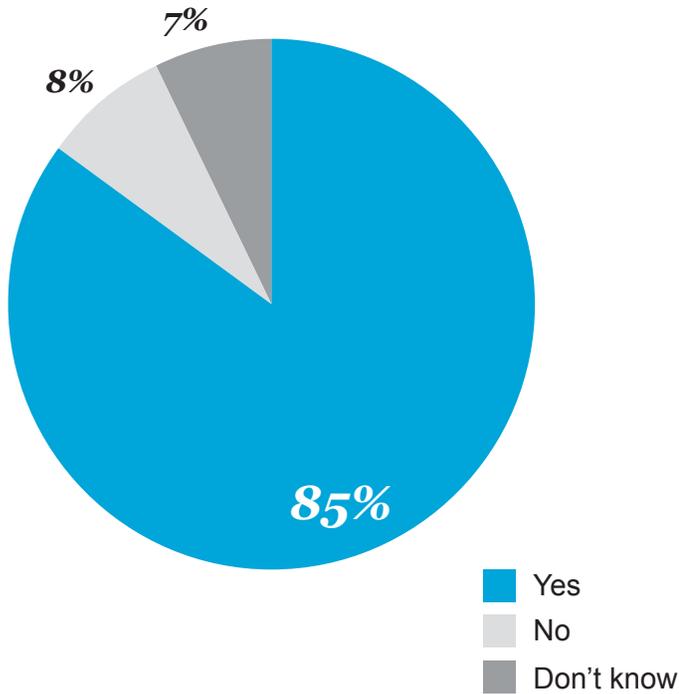
Q If yes, was this a successful solution for the client?



Q What was the length of contract?



Q Was this an enjoyable and rewarding work experience?

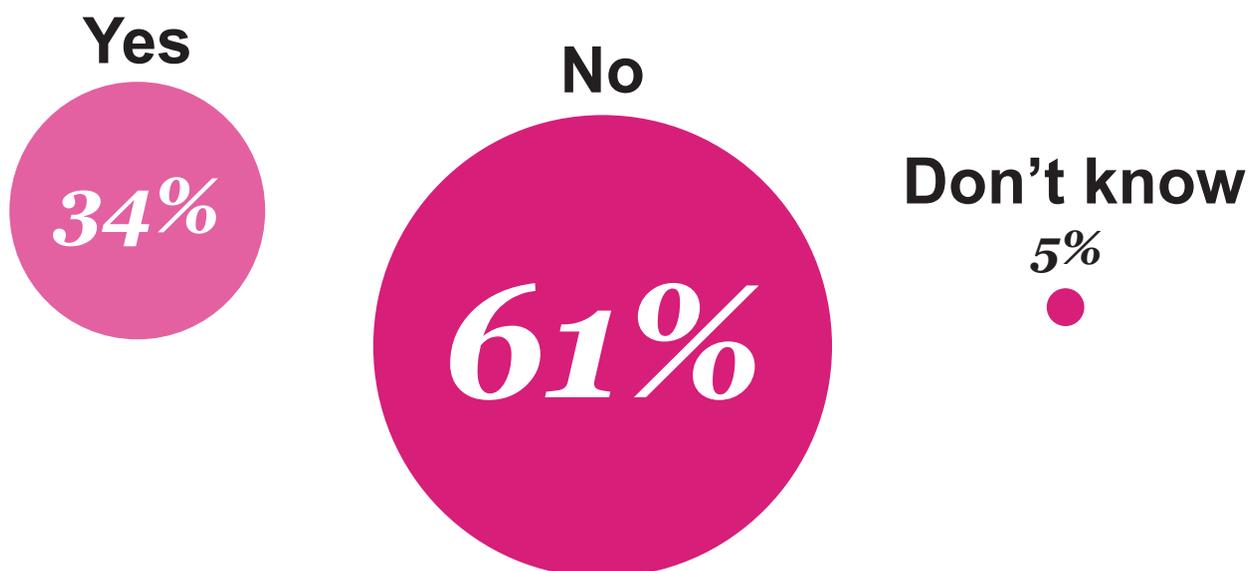


“At VMA Group we find our most successful interims to be extremely flexible and business savvy, and it comes as no surprise that interim managers see contract work as an enjoyable and rewarding experience both for themselves and the client.”

Vicki Jay
Head of Interim Management Practice
VMA Group

Part **2**: RIGHTS

Q As a self-employed interim manager/freelance consultant, do you regret not having access to the maternity/paternity leave rights of a fulltime employee?



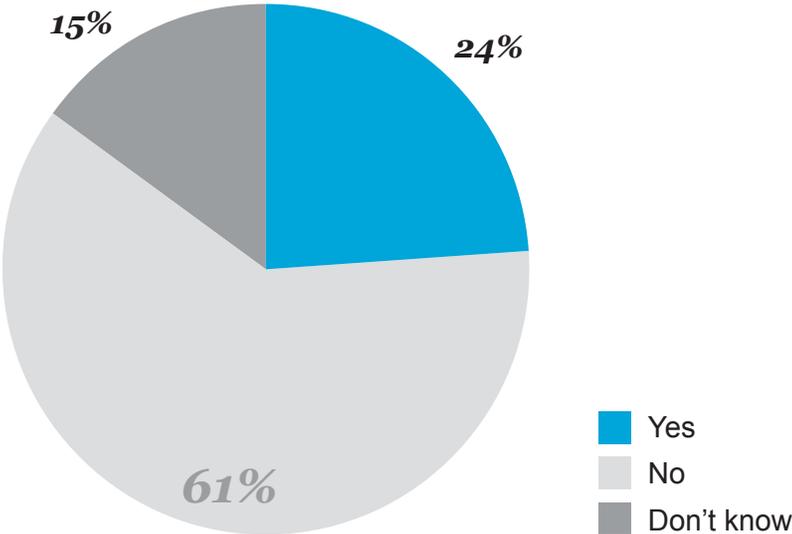
Q In November 2012, the Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg announced radical reforms which will allow both parents to share up to a year's leave to look after their new-born children. Do you think this is a good idea?



“Under the new system of flexible parental leave, parents will be able to choose how they share care of their child in the first year after birth. Mothers will have to take at least the initial two weeks of leave after birth as a recovery period, but following that they can choose to end the maternity leave and the parents can opt to share the remaining leave as flexible parental leave.”

Q Do you think extending paternity leave rights in this way will place an unfair burden on business and employers?

Robin Swinbank
Managing Partner
The Counsel House



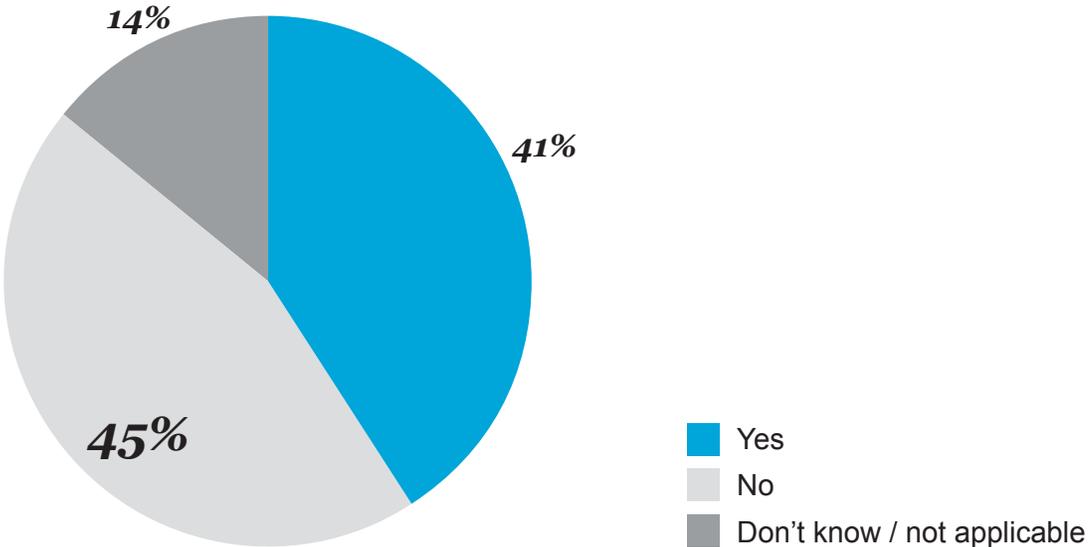
Q If in employment, would you consider taking advantage of shared parental leave?



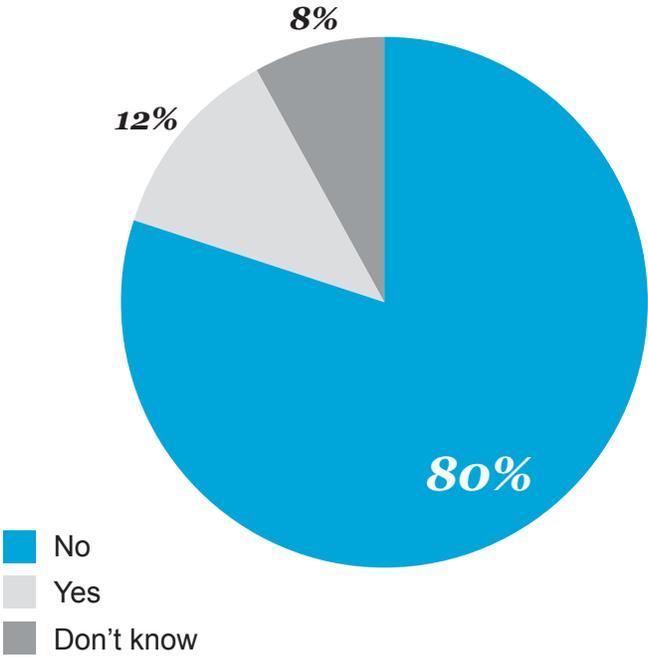
“Interestingly only 41% of respondents actually knew what their rights were when it came to paternity and maternity leave. As a specialist in interim recruitment, we are able to advise our interim managers on such matters, and this is just one example of the extra services that VMA Group is able to offer.”

Q Do you know what the current statutory maternity/paternity pay and leave rights are for an employee?

Lucinda Moores
Head of External Communications Practice
VMA Group



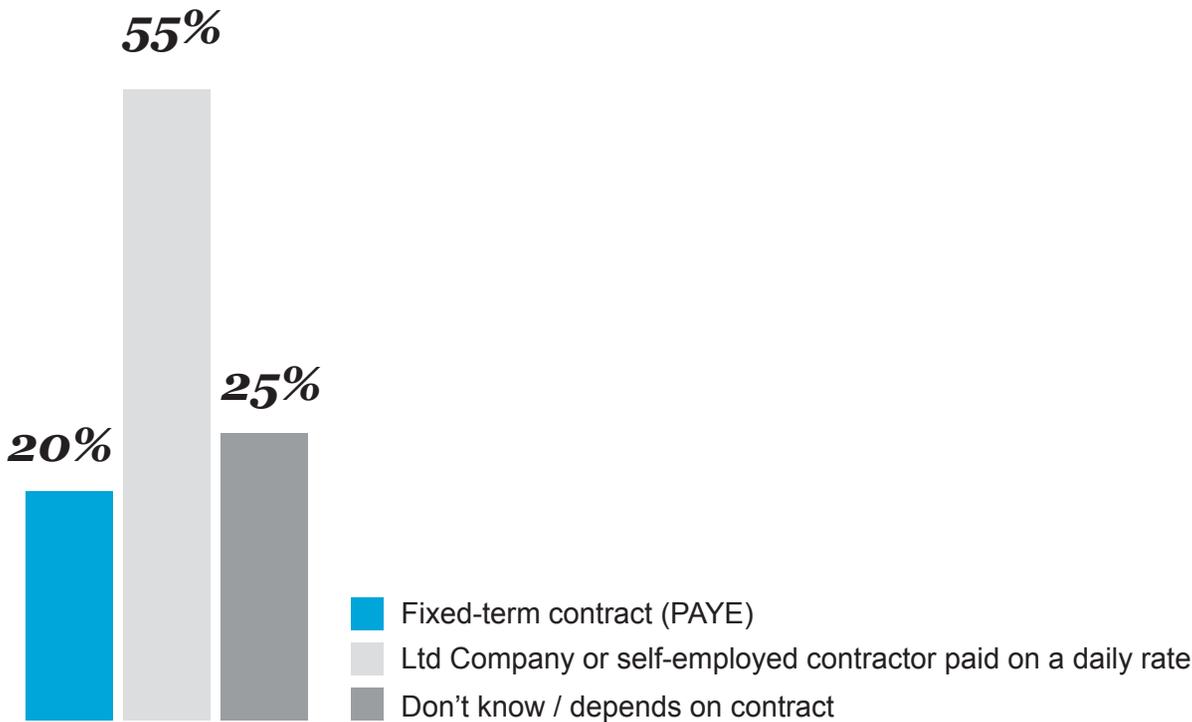
Q The TV presenter and property expert, Kirstie Allsopp, was in the news recently when she said in an interview that paternity leave was ‘a bit pointless’. Do you agree?



What the employers said:

- 1** Nine out of ten of the employers taking part in the study said they would consider using an interim manager to solve the cover problem created by a maternity/paternity leave and two thirds said they had already used this option.
- 2** Seven out of every ten employers who had used an interim manager or freelancer to provide cover for maternity/paternity leave said this was a successful solution.
- 3** Three quarters of employers responding to the survey said that they did NOT think maternity/paternity leave and pay rights present an unfair burden to business, but one in four employers said that they DID think it presented an unfair burden.

Q On what employment basis would you expect to undertake a maternity cover contract?



Case studies

Some stories from the coalface about how interim management works as a solution for maternity/paternity cover

“Handover briefs are essential”

Glynn Yarnall has spent the last 15 years as an interim manager in marketing and communications and has provided cover for maternity leave for clients such as IBM's former disk array division, Xyratex, and the National Science Learning Centre. He says that 'maternity cover suggests just ticking over, but this certainly isn't the case'. He thinks getting a handover brief 'warts and all' before starting the assignment is essential, both from the person in post taking the leave and from the senior management team. 'If you are lucky, you get to sit down with the person, one-to-one, away from everyone else, but this is not always the case.' He likes to use the briefing to get the inside track on the senior management team and the issues facing the business.



He says that experiences and the length of the projects vary and are often unpredictable. One role he took on was supposed to last three months but ran on for two years as the incumbent decided not to return from maternity leave. In another role, he said he received a five-week 'chapter and verse' handover and the incumbent came back from leave within 10 months exactly as predicted.

“Don’t be a wallflower”

Tim Smith, owner manager at his own consultancy, Blue Heron, has undertaken a number of interim assignments in a senior communications role for blue-chip organisations like the RAC, British Nuclear Group and OFSTED. He has undertaken two ‘maternity cover’ assignments in the public sector, one for Eastleigh Borough Council and one for Croydon Council.



He says the key to a successful assignment is to win the trust and confidence both of the senior management team and the marketing or comms team you will have to manage. He also points to the handover briefing as being crucial to success, but this is not always possible. With one assignment, he met with the head of communications he was going to stand in for and during the handover meeting asked ‘when are you finishing work and taking leave?’ only to be given the rather alarming response ‘tomorrow’.

Tim feels it is important to get a ‘defined message’ from the management team that the interim is empowered and in charge whilst in situ, but also for the interim to give the message that it’s ‘your show again’ to the person returning to the role from leave. He does not believe that the interim should be a ‘wallflower’ whilst in post just because they are holding down someone else’s job. His experience, especially in change management, means that he feels he can drive improvements and manage the team effectively whilst on assignment and this benefits both the business and the incumbent.

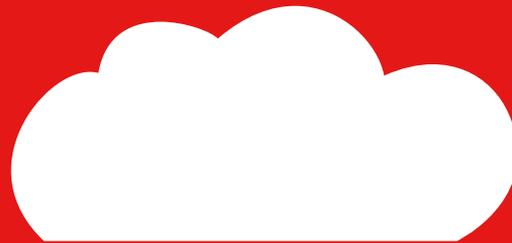
“The client found the concept of part-time odd”

Cath Shuttlewood, herself a working mother, left the PR agency world nearly two years ago to go freelance in search of a better work/life balance. She has since taken on two interim assignments providing cover for maternity leave, one for her old PR agency, Grayling, and the other for a major blue-chip industrial company based in the Midlands. Because of her own childcare needs, Cath did these assignments on what she describes as an ‘abbreviated working day’ two and an half days a week.



The corporate client, in particular, found the concept of part-time working ‘odd’ and had to be persuaded that this would work. ‘They needed massive reassurance on this point. I told them you can have access to me via my mobile and email when I’m not there and joining the weekly senior management conference call would be no problem, but to be honest, once I was in post they soon realised this was a very workable solution and there would be no dip in the level of the department’s workload or performance’.





“Find someone who will shake things up”

Emma Harvey, PR Director at Homeserve plc, has the client-side view of what it is like trying to find cover for maternity leave. Emma recruited two different interims for her own role when she took nine months' maternity leave in May 2009 and eight months in May 2011 when pregnant with her two daughters, Amelia and Mia. Emma describes the two experiences as being quite different and that 'it's odd to be recruiting for your own job'. Emma learnt from the first assignment, by deliberately appointing someone she felt could do the job but would 'not shake up the world'. When it came to recruiting an interim for the second assignment, she said 'I asked myself, who would I like to work with? It's actually not a bad idea to find someone who will shake things up. I realised it's best to bring in someone who is brilliant as they will do a good job and this reinforces the role'. Emma says 'it is a strange position to be reclaiming your own job' but that her replacement, Lucy, 'played a different role to me' and that she now feels rejuvenated being back in the role. She still speaks to Lucy and sometimes uses her as a 'sounding board' to help solve tricky issues because Lucy is familiar with the team, the management and the issues the business faces.

“Pitch yourself in a different way”

Lucy Thomas, the interim who provided the cover for Emma Harvey’s maternity leave at Homeserve, said that a surprising aspect of taking on the role was the ‘confidence boost’ it gave her considering her experience and the fact she had run, and sold, her own successful PR business for six years. But as Lucy explained, coming to the role from a predominantly agency-based career background meant a different approach to work.



‘There is a big divide between the consultancy world and the in-house culture of a large corporate,’ Lucy added. ‘Working at that level meant I found I had to pitch myself in a different way and get back into the corporate groove. It was a multi-disciplined role with a number of activities that I was less involved with in the agency world such as internal communications, CSR, employee fundraising for the Marie Curie Cancer Charity and even some aspects of Health & Safety.’

Lucy said that a key aspect of the success of the assignment came from within the team she was tasked to manage, one of whom she described as being ‘exceptionally well networked within the business.’

‘She really understood the business and its culture. It was like having my own personal pilot who could lead me through the corporate maze. Someone who gave me pointers and knew the ropes in the business, who knew about who should be copied on certain emails and who should not. I think it became a fair exchange in terms of what I gave back in the direction I gave, but I wouldn’t have been able to get as stuck into my own role as quickly as I did without that person.’

For Lucy, Homeserve was a nine-month contract (extended to 12 months) undertaken as a fulltime PAYE employee. Lucy is currently on an interim assignment with BG Group where she is the global comms lead for the IT division of the oil and gas business, but is still regularly in touch with Emma. As she explains: “I know from my experience that it can be a lonely role being the only comms person based in London working with the senior management team when the rest of the comms team is based in Walsall, so it’s a bonus to be able to talk to someone who has also done the job. I’d love to work with Emma again someday.”

“What if you come back and he/she was better?”

A Comms Manager in a FTSE-listed company, another client who took maternity leave, explained that finding an interim as cover can sometimes be a hard internal sell, especially if they are coming in on a freelance contract basis rather than as a fulltime employee. ‘In the end it came down to senior management having to trust my judgement that I had found the right person with the right experience to do the job and to manage the team. It would be up to me to build the future again and my knowledge of what was needed was greater than my MD’s and he recognised that and bought into the recommendation. I knew what the interim’s background was and knew which parts of my job she could do standing on her head and which parts may be more nuanced.’

“That said, there is a fear that you want someone to do a good job, but what if you come back and they say she was better than you? In the end, such a fear proved groundless. The interim did a great job and was the right choice. She plugged the resource as needed even though some things needed putting on the back burner. The interim’s job is to hold your job down and the only way they can do that is if they do it well.”

“The key to success for an interim is to bring the communications skills they have and apply them to a brand new sector”

Ipek Yigit is Director of Global Communications at Gazprom Marketing & Trading, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Gazprom, the world's largest gas producer and one of the world's largest energy companies. Ipek leads a team of eight communications executives based in London and the company's other communications departments in Paris and Singapore.

It is a young, tight-knit executive group bilingual in Russian and English, so when one of her London-based department, Ewa, was about to take maternity leave, Ipek knew it was going to be uniquely a challenging task to find someone who would fit in, learn and adapt quickly to the Russian business culture. "I wanted someone who was personable, experienced and 'tried and tested' but could also bring a young mentality to fit into the team", Ipek explained.

A shortlist of potential candidates included Allyson Andrews, an interim who had taken on a couple of similar high-profile assignments in blue-chip companies. Ipek already knew Allyson personally as they had previously worked together at British Airways. 'I felt her capabilities and personality would suit the job. Allyson had worked at Eurotunnel, a dual-national business, which I believed would help her adapt to the Russian/English nature of Gazprom in London. However, I didn't want my choice of candidate imposed on a team which has a flat structure and a collegiate approach to the way we work, so I asked them to select the candidate shortlist and do the interviews. The final vote was for Allyson.'

'I think it's worked well because Allyson's personality won the day and she has proved to be very supportive of the younger members of the team, who in turn really feel that Allyson was their choice. Her background, as well as her perspective on life, meant that Allyson could get to understand the genetic makeup of the business quite quickly. The key to success for an interim is to bring the communications skills they have, and apply them to a brand new sector within a very steep learning curve. Allyson has been able to do this, so much so that we extended her year-long contract beyond Ewa's return from maternity leave, which is quite fortuitous as it turns out that Ewa is now pregnant again and we already have ready-made cover in place with Allyson.'

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Ipek Yigit (left), Allyson Andrews (right)

Do's and Don'ts

From these interviews, we also asked both the interims and the employers for some '**dos and don'ts**' to form guidelines for what they believe would make a successful assignment for maternity/paternity cover. The comments provided included:

For the employee taking maternity/paternity leave:

DO

"Meet and brief the interim and introduce them to the team personally."

"Have a full and detailed handover both at the beginning and the end of the leave."

"Give them an honest overview of the issues they will face and a 'strengths and weaknesses overview' of the management team they will have to report to and of the team they will have to manage."

DON'T

"Don't keep ringing or emailing the interim whilst you are on leave to find out how things are going and likewise don't keep ringing or emailing your staff to find out what the interim is like or to talk about them behind their back."

"Don't expect them to exactly fit the mould and don't get upset if they introduce new initiatives, if it's in your job remit then it's in their job remit too."

"Don't criticise the interim's work or the initiatives started in your absence once the assignment is finished and you are back in post, it just looks like you were worried they did a better job than you."

For the employer:

DO

"Be flexible, this is only ever going to be a 'patchwork' solution, so be open to ideas such as the interim working three or four days a week. The best interim managers and freelancers will often have their own business and clients, so may not be able to give more time. You will still be able to reach them by mobile and email on the days they are not in anyway."

"Make it clear to the existing in-house team that the interim is really in charge for the time being. They need to be empowered to do the job and not just seen as someone who is filling in."

"Give a clear brief of what the expectations for the interim role are and their remit within the business."

"Give them all the facts and figures about the business. Be totally honest about the issues they may face, both internally and externally, and which they may need to manage when in post."

DON'T

"Don't insist on the interim taking the job on a fulltime PAYE basis. Why take on the employment risk when they will be gone in nine months to a year anyway?"

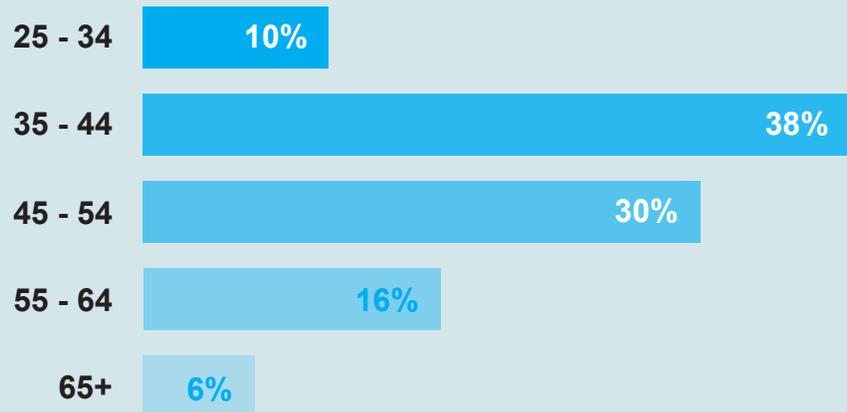
"Don't lose touch with freelancers at the end of the contract, they may be a useful sounding board or hands-on help for a crisis. After all, you may need them again for the next maternity leave cover."

Research and Methodology

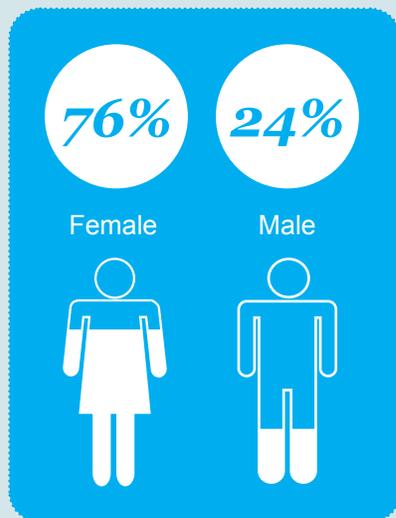
The quantitative research for this study was carried out via an internet questionnaire placed on SurveyMonkey between January and March 2013. The research sample was made up of 143 respondents, of which 26 were employers and 117 were interim managers or freelancers.

The qualitative element of this research involved telephone and face-to-face interviews with a number of employers and interim managers. Some interviewees requested anonymity as a condition of the interview, which has been respected.

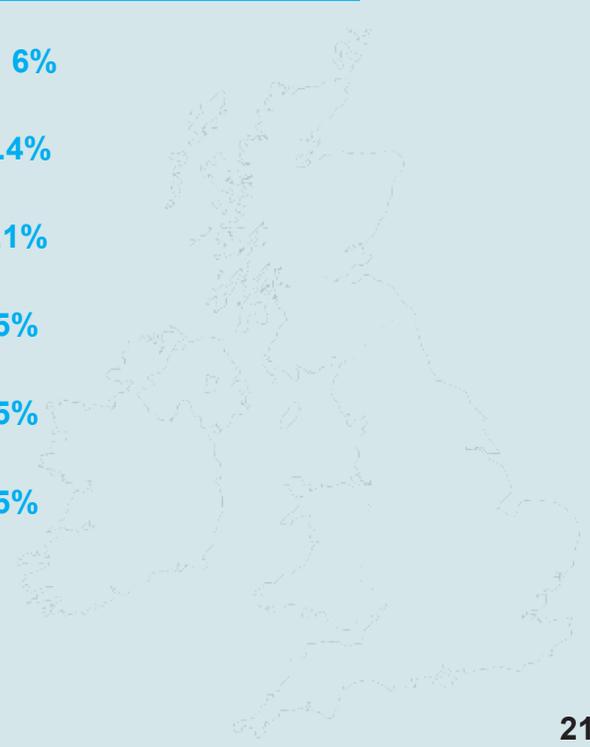
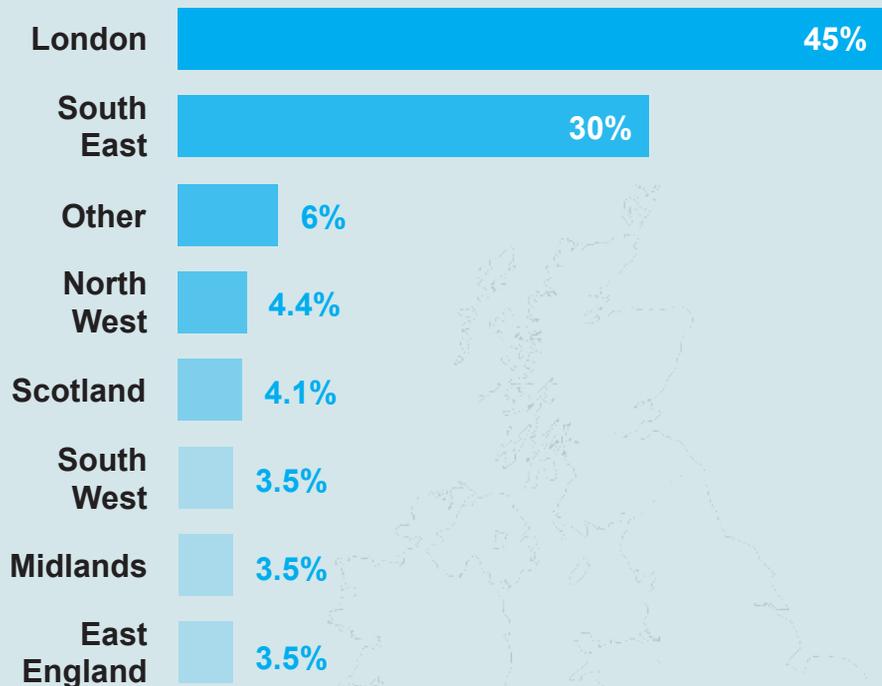
Respondents' Age



Respondents' Gender



Respondents' Location



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The importance of specialist recruitment agencies

Data featured in this summary are from VMA Group's 2013 study, "Understanding the Communications Labour Market: A Perspective for Hiring Managers" in which 239 communications professionals were surveyed.

It is clear that communications professionals pay a lot of attention to how companies operate throughout the recruitment process. A good recruitment agency is highly valued and should be able to notify candidates of opportunities they would not necessarily think of themselves. They must also be able to act as a consultant and trusted advisor to the candidate.

Most importantly, a large number of our respondents (44%) were not actively looking at new opportunities, but were willing to consider a move if the right opportunity came along. This is where a good recruitment partner is invaluable.

83% of respondents think that a good recruitment process will make a company more attractive to work for, as illustrated on the right.

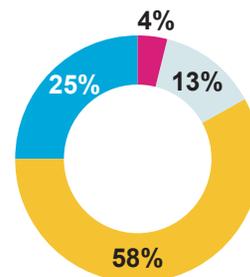


Over two-thirds of respondents believe that a company's reputation is directly affected by the actions of the recruitment agency.

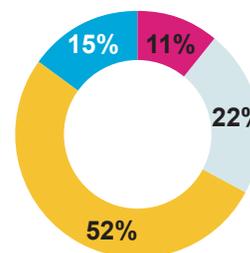
Two-thirds of respondents agree or strongly agree that specialist agencies are "more effective than generalist recruitment agencies", whereas only a very small minority disagree.

For more information, please contact:

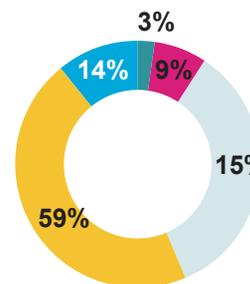
Claire Tuffin
Group Managing Director
VMA Group



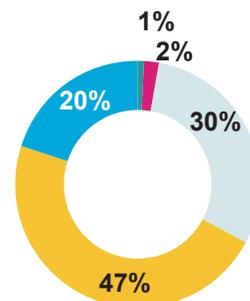
'A good recruitment process makes a company more attractive to work for'



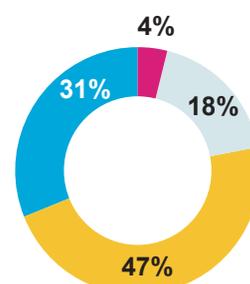
'The reputation of the client is directly affected by the actions of the recruitment agency'



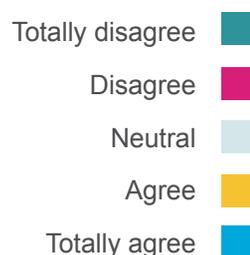
'Executive search and recruitment agencies make you aware of vacancies and companies you would not think of yourself'



'Specialist recruitment agencies are more effective than generalist recruitment agencies'



'A good recruitment agency puts my interests first and places me where I am best suited'





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