



NZ Employment Market Report 2020

Business Support

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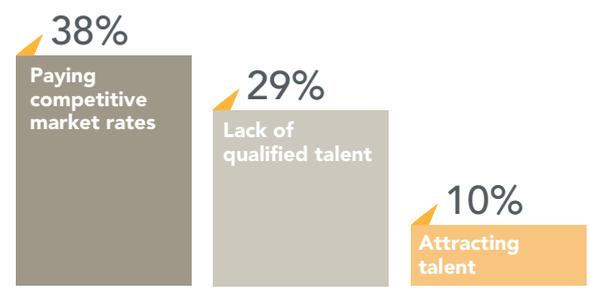
The business support sector is where we saw the magnified impact of economic and societal shifts in New Zealand. Mindful of slowing economic growth here in New Zealand, and the negative impacts of global issues, many organisations recruited cautiously with a focus on cost-savings and efficiency. This often meant handling things internally to avoid spending with suppliers, or bundling tasks and responsibilities into one giant support role.

While there was steady hiring activity throughout the year—with seasonal ebbs and flows—there was a noteworthy lean towards temporary solutions over adding permanent headcount.

In Auckland, supply did not meet demand. Our consultants managed many instances of candidates receiving multiple job offers, which tend to be uncommon in the business support sector. The growth of the construction market, previously forecasted to peak at a maximum annual value of \$43 billion in 2021, has meant ongoing, high demand for support roles in this sector.



BIGGEST BARRIER TO HIRING GREAT TALENT / Business Support Employers



Roles & Salaries

Continuing the patterns we described in last year's report, we saw an ongoing shift from support roles with a specialised focus, towards support roles with multiple responsibilities and tasks. For example, over the last 12 months there has been a sharp drop in demand for Receptionist roles (typically with a singular focus), while Office Administrator, Team Administrator, and Project Coordinator positions were in high demand. This trend was very evident in the Waikato, where the majority of administrative roles had a multifaceted focus.

The market, however, was not consistent across New Zealand. In Auckland, there was a drop in demand for Executive Assistants (EA). In contrast, in Wellington, with its high concentration of public sector departments, we noticed the demand for EAs skyrocketed. Experienced EAs in the capital were in scarce supply, and employers were prepared to pay the dollars required to secure quality candidates – particularly for temporary positions. In the Canterbury region, we saw a uniquely high demand for Data Entry candidates (predominantly temporary positions), as organisations sought to free up their permanent employees to concentrate on core business.

There is still a consistently high demand for candidates with specific industry experience. The most popular profiles were candidates with backgrounds in Construction, Human Resources, Health & Safety, and Finance.

Business Support Salary Guide

2019/20 RANGE IN NZD \$'000s

role	AUCKLAND		WAIKATO / BoP		WELLINGTON		CHRISTCHURCH	
	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Executive Assistant	80	110	70	85	65	110	60	90
Personal Assistant	70	85	65	75	55	80	50	65
Office Manager	65	80	65	75	65	90	55	80
Project Coordinator	65	100	65	75	65	85	60	75
Corporate Receptionist	50	55	45	55	43	58	45	55
Events Coordinator	55	75	55	60	50	65	50	60
Facilities Coordinator	55	65	55	60	50	65	45	60
Sales Support	55	65	50	60	50	60	45	60
Team Administrator	55	65	50	55	55	65	45	55
Office Administrator	50	60	50	55	48	58	42	60
Receptionist	45	55	45	50	43	58	40	45
Data Entry / Database Admin	40	45	40	42	43	55	44	47

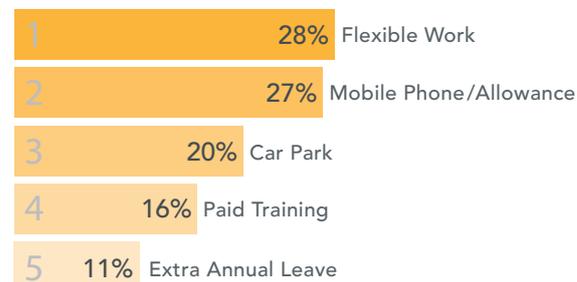
TYPES OF EMPLOYMENT

The temporary recruitment market was particularly active in Wellington, Christchurch and the Waikato with high levels of demand for experienced temps. Sourcing issues were experienced in some regions, but this was not a notable issue in Wellington. We believe this was due to the large population of Working Holiday Visa (WHV) holders who chose Wellington as a base because of the ease of travel to both North and South Islands.

There are always resourcing-related reasons for choosing temporary recruitment. However, this was the first year that we noticed frequent instances of temp employees hired to backfill support positions for more significant periods. This occurred in response to issues such as a favoured candidate dropping out late in the process, and where the recruitment process took longer than normal to complete because of scheduling challenges and approvals bottlenecks.

TOP 5 BENEFITS RECEIVED

Business Support Professionals



Business Support

Employers

There was a lot more fluidity and less certainty in role scoping in 2019. This was likely due to a focus on cost saving, along with the ever-shifting support requirements of the business. This can prove problematic when it comes to refining a job description, and subsequent job brief for recruitment, which makes sourcing and recruiting more difficult. While there are many great business support professionals who are willing to be flexible and grow within a role, a clear job description is vital for the role to appeal to talented job seekers, who have their pick of roles.

Once again, employers sought to find candidates with team fit and culture match, with this requirement prevailing frequently over specific experience. Many times, the 'right' attitude would trump skill set, with employers being more open to train on systems and processes. Bad hiring experiences in the past, and an understanding of the positive, long-term impact of culture alignment, have led organisations to this point. On the subject of skills, "we need a multi-tasking, flexible all-rounder" was a common sentiment.

Candidate reliability has been a big talking point, with many employers who were well aware of the cost of a wrong hire to the business, seeking to avoid this. Over the past 12 months, reference checks designed with questions focused on integrity and reliability were frequently and successfully used to address this problem.



Candidates

Overall, the candidate market in the business support sector was stable, with a consistent supply of experienced talent. Because a decent tenure in a business support position is viewed as two years, sometimes capping out at three years, we do tend to see plenty of movement, regardless of external forces. There were regional differences. For example, in our Christchurch branch we normally have a steady influx of applications from British Working Holiday Visa holders, looking for a South Island experience, but following government changes, Brexit, and now COVID-19, we observed that the numbers of these candidates dwindled. In Auckland, our data reveals fewer new graduates applying for roles, and anecdotally there seemed to be a big shift within our candidate pool, with many travelling, or moving away. Similarly, the shifts between regions that we saw in previous years, such as Auckland candidates relocating to the Waikato for better housing prices, seems to have eased since the peaks of 2018/19.

Roles in this sector do not attract a wide range of benefits in addition to base remuneration, so naturally, the primary focus for most candidates is achieving the highest possible salary. Ambitious candidates are unwilling to spend a long stretch of time in a business support role, and are looking for a step up, or increase their income. We found that on the whole, candidates were realistic about salary (although they were confident about asking for more). Or, if entry-level candidates had unrealistic expectations, we found that they were open to being educated about market rates.

That said, there are several items on the typical business support 'wish-list' that made an advertised role more, or less, attractive. Location is important, with roles closer to home being sought after with the goal of reducing travelling costs and time. In Christchurch, with construction in full swing at the time of writing, and many gravel parking lots absorbed into building sites, onsite parking is a commonly requested benefit. Flexible working is sought after, though less frequently provided, in this sector. Candidates possessing fast typing speeds and high accuracy are becoming a smaller and smaller pool, but this competency is not as big of a requirement as it used to be.

SOUGHT-AFTER SOFT SKILLS

Business Support Professionals



Madison recommends:

- Roles with market-rate salary levels AND flexibility continue to be the most sought-after, so if your organisation can find a way to offer some form of flexible working, then you have the best chance of securing top-level business support talent.
- Losing great candidates due to a lengthy recruitment process is a fixable problem. Candidates in these types of positions are used to life moving at a fast pace, and the recruitment experience needs to match this. Removing potential bottlenecks ahead of time, such as identifying more than one decision maker for faster approvals, offering multiple interview formats and providing a good overall candidate experience, can help reduce attrition during the recruitment process.
- Make sure your job offering is clear, even if the role may have a variety of responsibilities, or things could change. An ambiguous job description is off-putting for talented candidates.



AUCKLAND

ph +64 9 303 4455
Level 6, 51 Shortland St
Auckland CBD
auckland@madison.co.nz

AUCKLAND SOUTH EAST

ph +64 9 271 1152
Level 1, Building 5, The Crossing
60 Highbrook Drive
East Tamaki
aucklandsoutheast@madison.co.nz

HAMILTON

ph +64 7 839 5660
Level 5, 127 Alexandra St
Hamilton
hamilton@madison.co.nz

WELLINGTON

ph +64 4 499 8055
Level 9, Cnr Customhouse Quay &
Johnston Street, Wellington
wellington@madison.co.nz

CHRISTCHURCH

ph +64 3 366 6226
Level 1, Building 3
1 Show Place, Addington
christchurch@madison.co.nz

madison.co.nz