The Good to Great Employer Report

Data, Trends and Advice for Building Exceptional Teams

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Introduction

Welcome to The Good to Great Employer Report on the people agenda across Yorkshire (including the Humber) and the East Midlands (including Lincolnshire). Our report brings together insights, benchmarking and ideas to help leaders, HR professionals and candidates alike strengthen that momentum - to go from Good to Great in the way they attract, develop and retain their people.

Our objective is for this report to be a valuable tool for investors, employers and individual people leaders. Every tool and resource available has been used to provide what we believe is the most comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of the people agenda in the region.



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WHY THIS MATTERS

The market has moved. Expectations have shifted.

Most organisations have not kept pace.

Hiring, leadership and retention are being redefined in real time.

WHO THIS IS FOR

Leaders building teams that perform.

CEOs, CFOs and People Leaders across Yorkshire and the East Midlands.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND

Clear insight. Practical direction.

- Salary trends and hiring realities
- Where businesses win and lose talent
- How leadership expectations are evolving
- What great employers are doing differently

THE OPPORTUNITY AHEAD

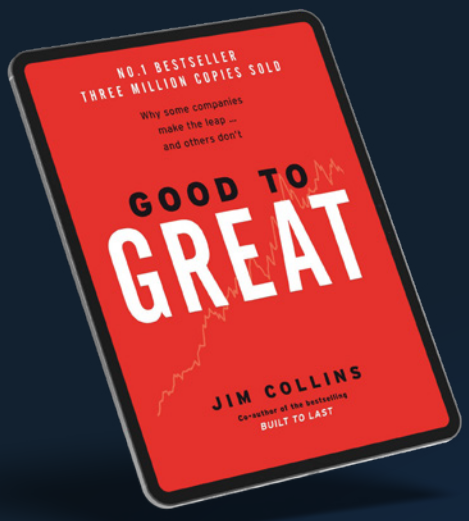
Better decisions. Stronger teams. Faster progress.

A clearer view of your market, your people strategy and where to focus next.

The Good to Great Employer Report

Building Exceptional Teams Across Yorkshire and the East Midlands

Great organisations are built on great people. But truly exceptional teams are never built by chance - they are shaped with intent, clarity and consistency.



The pace of change across our markets means that people strategies can no longer stand still. Whether yours is well-developed or overdue a refresh, the real measure of success is momentum. It should be stronger today than it was a year ago and better still by this time next year.

There is a belief that employers across Yorkshire and the East Midlands have an extraordinary opportunity right now. The landscape is shifting: salaries are evolving, generations are blending, automation is redefining roles, and expectations around inclusion, flexibility and purpose have never been higher. For every organisation, from established market leaders to growing businesses, the challenge and the opportunity lie in building teams that thrive through this change.

The title *Good to Great* is a deliberate echo of the Jim Collins' classic book, a reminder that greatness is not a matter of circumstance, but of choice and discipline. Some of the companies held up as examples of greatness have changed since the book was published in 2001, but almost all of the key messages still resonate today, perhaps even more strongly.

THREE OF THE CLASSIC 'GOOD TO GREAT' MESSAGES FOR EMPLOYERS ARE:

01 Get the **right people** on the bus and in the **right seats**.

02 The importance of the **critical non-essentials** – the cultural habits, leadership behaviours and everyday interactions that may not appear on a strategy plan but define how people feel, perform and stay connected to the organisation.

03 **"Level Five Leadership"** – individuals who blend personal humility with professional will, who channel ambition into the success of their teams rather than themselves.

These ideas resonate deeply with how we see progress in people strategies today. Being a great employer is not about a single decision, a big investment or a headline initiative. It is about doing the right things, consistently, and keeping your approach to people moving forward with purpose.

Employer Value Proposition - What Really Counts

The employers who attract the best people outperform the rest



The Code to Unlocking People Potential

Great people drive growth. As organisations evolve, they need a broader mix of skills, perspectives and motivations to maintain momentum and unlock new opportunities. A strong Employer Value Proposition (EVP) helps employers stand out in a competitive market by clarifying who they are, what they offer and why people should join and stay with them.

Creating an EVP starts with understanding your identity as an employer: your purpose, culture, strengths and ambitions. It then needs to connect with the external world - what your competitors offer, what people expect and what differentiates you. When these perspectives align, an EVP becomes a powerful lever for recruitment, retention and productivity.

Why a Modern EVP Matters

A sharper EVP helps businesses attract the right people, motivate them and enable them to do their best work. When it is lived consistently, it becomes more than a hiring tool. It becomes a cultural anchor that builds loyalty, advocacy and performance from within.

In today's market, where people have more choice and expectations continue to diversify, a strong EVP helps employers cut through the noise and build a workplace where people want to contribute and stay.

A Modern EVP Optimises

1. Recruitment
2. Retention
3. Productivity

The Three Pillars of a Modern EVP

1 Compensation and Benefits



These are the essentials - the elements every candidate expects to see and the first things they compare. Salary, pensions, bonuses, holiday, healthcare and policies such as parental leave or sick pay all signal fairness, value and respect. They set the foundation of trust.

Valuable EVPs do not need to be expensive, but they do need to be competitive, relevant and well-managed. Employers who benchmark regularly and communicate clearly build confidence from the outset.

2 Beyond the Salary



The most memorable parts of an EVP are often the elements that reflect your identity and culture. These vary from person to person but can make the difference between securing top talent and losing them to a competitor.

Examples include learning and development, progression, office environment, flexibility, team experiences, recognition schemes, wellbeing offers and small but meaningful everyday moments. These reinforce what it feels like to work in your organisation.

3 Strategy, Culture and Values



Many EVPs were historically built around the priorities of Generation X. Today, five generations work side by side, each with different expectations and communication styles. The most effective EVPs speak to all of them without losing authenticity.

This pillar covers clarity of purpose, leadership expectations, inclusion, wellbeing, communication, technology, social connection and the stories that shape your culture. A strong EVP should mirror who you are today and offer a window into how you are evolving.

Candidate Motivators

The full list of factors influencing candidate acceptance decisions is set out below. Some have acted as the primary reason for choosing a role, while others form part of the collective critical non essentials that increasingly guide how candidates weigh up opportunities.



Compensation & Benefits

Salary	Holiday Buy Back	Death In Service
Salary Review	Equity	Car Policy
Bonus	Parental Leave	Overtime
Spot Bonuses	Study Support	4 Day Working Week
Pension	Healthcare Plans	Income Protection Scheme
Holiday Allocation	Sick Pay	



Going Beyond The Salary

Learning & Development	Internal Awards	Work-From-Home Allowance (Furniture)
Progression & Promotions	Interest-free Loans	Financial Planning Sessions
Office Location	Public Holidays Off	Student Loan Repayment Assistance
Cycle-To-Work	Religious Holiday Swaps	Pet Insurance or Pet-Care Support
Sabbaticals	Mental Health Days	Fertility Support
Professional Subscriptions	Work Anniversaries Off	Adoption Assistance
Charity Days	Staff Canteen	Elder-Care Support
Summer Fridays	Staff Shop	Digital Wellness Platforms
Team Away Days	Employee Assistance Programmes	Health Screenings
Financial Stability of Company	Employee Discount Schemes	Anniversary Gifts
Long Service Awards	Profit-Sharing Plans	
Annual Family Events	Mobile Phone Allowance	



Strategy, Culture & Values

Company Values	Technology	Subsidised Yoga / Massages
Purpose	Parking Availability	Performance Coach
ESG	Ease of Commute	Menopause Policy
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion	Car Charging Points	Wellbeing Policy
Leadership Team	Gym	Wellbeing Allowance
Colleagues	Show / Changing Facilities	Onsite Nursery
Social Calendar	Fresh Fruit	

From EVP to Employer Branding



Pratap Partnership and Pratap Executive can audit your EVP, benchmark it and provide advice on your branding.

We can then help you to turn up the value.

Some employers have great EVPs - they offer meaningful careers, strong values, and valuable benefits. But if their target candidates and current people do not *see it*, they will not *value it*.

That's where employer branding comes in.

An effective employer brand is how your EVP shows up in the world. It needs to be **authentic** (true to who you are), **evidenced** (backed by real experiences), and **engaging** (clear, human and memorable).

This is not about a one-off campaign or a big launch moment. The strongest employer brands are built over time-through every job ad, interview, onboarding email, team meeting, Glassdoor review and social post. It is about **consistency, not perfection**.

Get it right, and your employer brand becomes one of your biggest advantages - helping you attract the right people, build loyalty from the inside out, and tell a story your team is proud to share.

Our View

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The Reality

Expectations of employers have broadened. Salary still matters, but it now sits alongside flexibility, development, culture and purpose in how candidates make decisions.

What We See

Most organisations can describe their EVP. Far fewer consistently deliver it. The gap between promise and experience is where attraction weakens and retention is lost.

What Great Looks Like

Leading employers are deliberate about their EVP. They are clear on what they stand for, consistent in how they communicate it and disciplined in how they deliver it day to day. Those who get this right build stronger engagement, improve retention and create a reputation that attracts the right talent over the long term.

Employer Accreditations

Why they matter is today's talent market

Employer Accreditations

Why They Matter in Today's Talent Market

Employer accreditations are playing a growing role in how organisations position themselves in an increasingly transparent and competitive talent market. They provide independent validation of culture, values and people practices, offering assurance that an organisation is living the experience it promotes to candidates and employees. Accreditations also strengthen employer branding, build trust and provide a structured framework to measure the maturity and effectiveness of people strategies.

The following section summarises some of the most recognised accreditations that employers across Yorkshire and the East Midlands are pursuing today, each offering a distinct lens on organisational excellence.



A Closer Look at Key Accreditations

Great Place to Work

Great Place to Work is one of the worlds most established authorities on workplace culture. It measures culture through the lived experiences of employees and evaluates trust, leadership behaviours and organisational consistency.

Why this accreditation matters:

- Provides credible, employee-driven validation of culture.
- Strengthens employer brand across all career stages.
- Identifies strengths and gaps within the employee experience.
- Reinforces messages around wellbeing and inclusive leadership.

Investors in People

Investors in People is a well-established accreditation that assesses how organisations lead, support and develop their workforce. It is valued for its structured and evidence-based approach.

Why this accreditation matters:

- Demonstrates a mature approach to people development.
- Highlights leadership strength and development pathways.
- Supports retention through visible investment in employees.
- Offers benchmarking against high-performing organisations.

Certified B Corporation

B Corp Certification

B Corp is one of the most rigorous and globally recognised certifications for purpose-led organisations. It measures social and environmental impact, governance and long-term responsibility.

Why this accreditation matters:

- Sends a powerful signal about values, ethics and sustainability.
- Resonates strongly with candidates who prioritise purpose.
- Enhances employer brand with clients and partners.
- Embeds responsible decision-making in long-term strategy.

THE SUNDAY TIMES Best Places

The Sunday Times Best Employers

This high-profile annual list recognises outstanding workplace cultures based on employee feedback and independent assessment.

Why this accreditation matters:

- Delivers strong national visibility and credibility.
- Positively shapes early candidate perceptions.
- Boosts pride and engagement within the organisation.
- Provides competitive benchmarking by sector.



The Strategic Value for Employers

Across these accreditations, several themes consistently emerge as key organisational benefits:

1 Attraction of High-Quality Talent

Accreditations act as trust indicators, helping organisations stand out in a crowded market and reinforcing that culture and values are more than just words.

2 Improved Retention and Engagement

Recognitions increase employee pride and strengthen emotional connection to the organisation, key drivers of long-term retention.

3 Credibility and External Validation

Independent assessment provides confidence to employees, candidates, clients and stakeholders that the organisation meets recognised best-practice standards.

4 Benchmarking and Continuous Improvement

Accreditations reveal areas of strength and development, supporting strategic planning and helping HR leaders prioritise the initiatives that matter most.

5 Commercial and Reputational Impact

A strong employer brand contributes to stronger customer trust, better partnerships and an enhanced corporate reputation.

Additional Accreditations Strengthening Employer Brand and People Strategy

Alongside the major awards highlighted above, there are several other established accreditations that help employers enhance their people strategies and strengthen their position in the talent market. These frameworks support improvements in inclusion, wellbeing, community impact and responsible business practices, all of which are increasingly important to todays workforce.

For employers in our region, they offer practical ways to demonstrate commitment, build trust and create a more compelling and differentiated employer brand.



Armed Forces Covenant & Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS)

Recognises organisations that support veterans, reservists and military families through Bronze, Silver and Gold levels.



Disability Confident

Formerly Positive About Disability / Two Ticks Scheme)

A government-backed scheme with three levels (Committed, Employer, Leader) demonstrating a strong commitment to attracting, hiring and supporting disabled employees.



Real Living Wage Accreditation

Awarded to employers who voluntarily pay the independently calculated Real Living Wage. Strongly signals fairness and social responsibility.



Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index

Assesses and recognises employer practices that support mental health, wellbeing and psychological safety.



Stonewall Diversity Champions / Workplace Equality Index

A major UK accreditation for inclusive practices supporting LGBTQ+ employees.



Social Mobility Employers Index

Recognises organisations taking meaningful steps to recruit.

Our View

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The Reality

Accreditations are a more visible part of the talent market. Candidates look for independent signals that an employer's culture, values and people practices are credible and consistently delivered.

What We See

Many organisations pursue accreditations for recognition, but do not fully embed the standards behind them. The real value sits in the process, not just the badge. Where accreditations are treated as a one-off exercise, their impact is limited.

What Great Looks Like

Leading employers use accreditations as a tool for continuous improvement. They embrace the challenge and reflection the process brings, and embed the outcomes into how they lead, hire and develop their people. The result is not just stronger accreditation outcomes, but a more authentic employer brand that builds trust, attracts the right talent and supports long-term performance.

Generational Change & the Future Workforce

Implications for hiring, retention and leadership

Generations in the Workplace

Regional Context

Understanding the motivations, expectations and behaviours of different generations in the workforce has become essential for employers across Yorkshire and the East Midlands. With five generations now active in the labour market, the dynamics shaping talent attraction, retention and leadership development are evolving at pace.

Our objective is to provide a clear, evidence-led view of how generational expectations are changing - and what this means for organisations across our region as we draw on national insight, regional labour trends and our own observations from across Yorkshire and the East Midlands employer landscape.

The Yorkshire and the East Midlands economy has always been defined by variety: manufacturing and engineering remainits backbone; education, healthcare and public services continue to scale; and technology, professional services and life sciences have grown rapidly across Leeds, Sheffield, Nottingham, Derby, Birmingham and Leicester. This diversity brings a wide mix of talent, capability and leadership experience - but it also means employers must adapt to the shifting needs of younger generations who expect different things from their careers compared to the leadership cohorts that precede them.

Against this backdrop, several factors make generational insight particularly important for our region:

- **A high concentration of SMEs** - many without formal succession plans or structured career pathways.
- **A maturing Gen X leadership cohort** - with increasing numbers approaching later career stages.
- **Intense competition for early-career** and mid-career talent across technology, healthcare, logistics and services.
- A growing demand for flexibility across organisations not traditionally **set up for hybrid work.**
- **Stronger regional expectations around values**, culture, community and well-being, especially among Millennials and Gen Z.

Employers who understand and act on these shifts now are better placed to attract, retain and develop the talent that will shape the region's next decade of growth.



Generational Findings & Implications for Employers

Younger generations are placing equal emphasis on **financial security, a sense of purpose, and good mental health**. In Yorkshire and the East Midlands, where salaries often sit below London averages, this creates a clear opportunity for regional employers to differentiate themselves through:

- More transparent pay frameworks
- Clear development pathways
- Investment in mental health and well-being
- Stronger organisational purpose connected to local communities

This is particularly resonant across sectors facing acute skills shortages (manufacturing, healthcare, education and professional services) where wage inflation alone cannot close the gap.

Leaders Who Listen Will Win

Gen Z and Millennials rank feeling heard, trusted and developed above job title or hierarchy. Coaching-based leadership is becoming a critical differentiator. Many organisations across the region still operate through traditional, directive management models. Those who invest in developing their first-line and mid-level managers (particularly in engineering, logistics and manufacturing) are seeing material improvements in engagement and retention.

Values Are The Deal-Breaker

Around four in ten younger workers have turned down roles due to values misalignment. The most relevant themes for our region include:

- Ethical business conduct
- Environmental sustainability
- Diversity, representation and inclusion
- Authentic links to local communities

Businesses with visibly embedded ESG practices are increasingly advantaged in the Yorkshire and the East Midlands talent market.

Flexibility Is Baseline, Not A Benefit

Hybrid and flexible working expectations remain strong. While not all roles can be performed remotely, employers across manufacturing, healthcare and logistics are successfully implementing:

- Predictable shift patterns
- Shift autonomy and self-rostering
- Flexibility for non-operational roles
- "Hybrid by design" principles for corporate teams

These practices are quickly becoming minimum expectations.



Leadership Ambition Has Shifted

Only a small proportion of Gen Z and Millennials aspire to senior leadership in its traditional form. Instead, they prioritise:

- Work-life balance
- Personal growth
- Purpose and impact
- Mobility and variety

This shift poses a significant succession challenge for our region, where many organisations remain reliant on stable, long-serving Gen X leaders. Developing future leaders will require reframing leadership roles to appear more sustainable, developmental and human.

Development Drives Loyalty

Organisations with clear, structured learning and development pathways see markedly higher retention among under-40s. For Yorkshire and the East Midlands SMEs (where formal L&D structures are often limited), there is a significant opportunity to compete more effectively through:

- Modular or task-based learning
- Cross-functional projects and secondments
- Apprenticeships and early-career schemes
- Mentoring, reverse mentoring and peer coaching
- Clear progression routes

Development, not perks, retains talent.

Motivators, Working Styles & The Regional Employer Roadmap

Motivators by Generation (Regional Lens)

GENERATION X
1965 – 1980

Motivated by stability, autonomy and results. Values trust, influence and independence.

Frustrations: bureaucracy, over-management, unclear decision-making.

MILLENNIALS
1981 – 1996

Motivated by purpose, growth and flexibility. Expects transparency and regular feedback.

Frustrations: slow decisions, limited progression visibility, lack of communication.

GENERATION Z
1997 – 2012

Motivated by development, values alignment and well-being. Expects authenticity and real-time coaching.

Frustrations: tokenistic culture, poor communication, lack of inclusion.

These motivators manifest differently across our regions. In technology and services, younger employees expect faster progression and hybrid working. In manufacturing and engineering, values, well-being and development are becoming central to attraction and retention, particularly among apprenticeship and early-career cohorts.

FIVE GENERATIONS AT WORK

In developing this section, we have drawn on a range of sources, including Five Generations at Work by Rebecca Robins and Patrick Dunne. Their research aligns closely with what we see in the market: generational expectations are becoming a defining factor in how organisations attract, engage and retain talent.



Regional Employer Roadmap: What Comes Next

Employers across Yorkshire and the East Midlands are already adapting, but the pace of change needs to accelerate. The organisations performing best in attraction and retention are focusing on the following priorities:

1. **Representation & Voice**
   Ensure all generations are represented in decision-making, mentoring and project work. Cross-generational dialogue builds trust and deepens organisational culture.

2. **Succession Design**
   With a significant proportion of Gen X leaders approaching later career stages, proactive succession planning is essential. Future leaders must be developed earlier, with clearer pathways into middle and senior management.

3. **EVP Alignment**
   Review the Employer Value Proposition regularly. Younger generations expect clarity around pay, flexibility, well-being, development and organisational purpose.

4. **Communication Fluency**
   Adapt communication approaches, as what resonates with Gen Z may not engage Gen X. Leaders who communicate well across all cohorts will build more resilient teams.

5. **Knowledge Transfer**
   Structured cross-generational learning is one of the most effective tools available. This can include reverse mentoring, digital skills from younger employees, and strategic mentoring from senior leaders.

6. **Data and Listening**
   Track engagement, retention and satisfaction by generation. Identify gaps early and respond with targeted interventions.

Yorkshire and the East Midlands have always been regions defined by resilience, ambition and strong community values. As generational expectations shift, employers have an opportunity to build workplaces that reflect the best of these characteristics while meeting the needs of a changing workforce.

The organisations that thrive over the next decade will be those that listen closely, lead authentically and invest meaningfully in the development of their people – at every stage of their career.

Our View

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The Reality

Workforce expectations are shifting quickly. With five generations now active, differences in motivation, communication and career expectations are more pronounced than ever.

What We See

Many organisations are still managing generational change rather than leading it. Traditional leadership styles, unclear development pathways and inflexible structures are creating friction, particularly with younger talent.

What Great Looks Like

Leading employers are adapting their approach. They are investing in coaching-based leadership, clearer progression and flexible working models that reflect modern expectations. They are also creating environments where different generations can learn from each other. Those who respond early will build stronger engagement, deeper talent pipelines and more resilient organisations.

Gender Diversity and the Progression Challenge

Gender representation in Yorkshire and the East Midlands

Gender Diversity

The landscape for gender diversity has shifted in the past year. US policy on ED&I has changed, and that has had an impact on employers across the globe. At the same time, labour shortages, changing workforce expectations and rapid organisational transformation have increased the cost of getting ED&I wrong.

For employers in Yorkshire and the East Midlands, this creates both pressure and opportunity. Those that lead with fairness, transparency and inclusive progression will not only safeguard their reputation but gain a competitive advantage in talent attraction and retention. The need to stay aligned with global expectations has never been greater.

Introduction

Gender diversity is not only a fairness measure. It is a strategic driver of organisational performance. Employers across our region face fast-moving expectations around inclusion, transparency, leadership behaviours and equitable progression. To build exceptional teams, organisations must move beyond compliance and embed practices that support representation, career pathways and a sense of belonging for all genders.

Yorkshire and the East Midlands broadly reflect national patterns of gender representation, but with deeper progression gaps and more pronounced sector imbalance. The insights across these next pages highlight where the opportunities sit and what great employers are already doing to improve outcomes.

We recognise and respect all gender identities; however, the data available for this report only included male and female classifications. As a result, the insights presented reflect this limitation rather than the full diversity of gender identities and should be considered in that context.



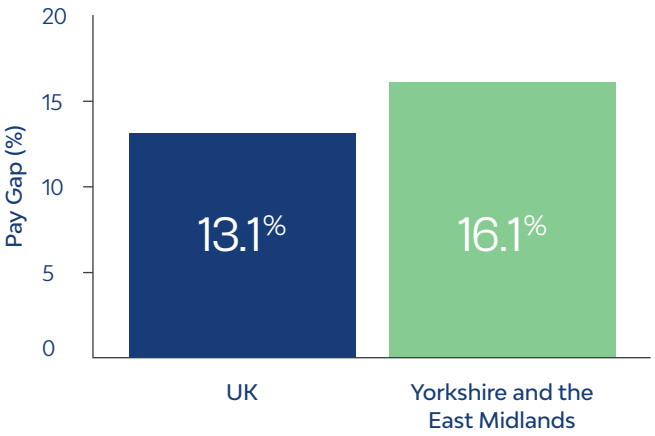
National Context; How Yorkshire and the East Midlands Compare

Across the UK, 16.4m women are in employment, with a female employment rate of 71.8% compared with 78.2% for men. Women have entered the labour market at scale over the last five decades, increasing participation from around 55% in the 1970s to around 70% in recent years.

Despite this progress, the labour market remains strongly gendered. 36% of employed women work part-time compared with 14% of men, and women remain highly concentrated in health and social care, education and retail. The median full-time gender pay gap stands at 7%, and the overall gender pay gap is 13.1%, driven by women being more likely to work part-time and in lower-paid sectors. Regional pay gaps in Yorkshire (16.2%) and the East Midlands (15.9%) exceed the national average.

Leadership data presents a mixed picture. Women hold 42.8% of FTSE 100 directorships and over half of new FTSE board appointments, but only 15% of SMEs are women-led. With both regions dominated by SMEs, this gap limits the pace of leadership diversity.

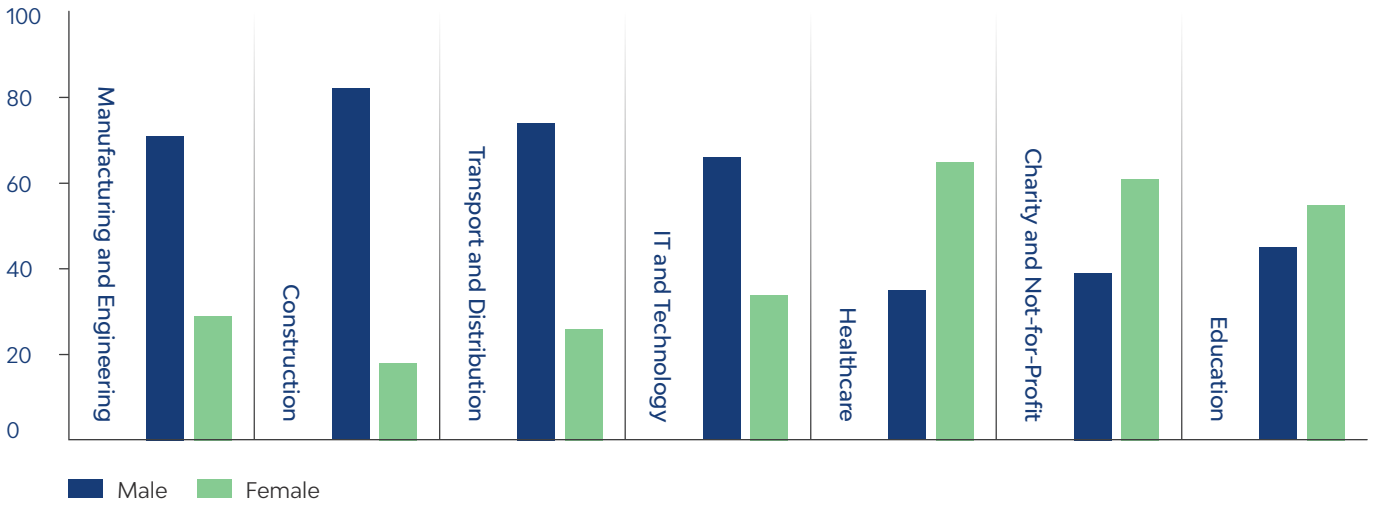
Gender Pay Gap Comparison (UK vs Yorkshire and the East Midlands)



Gender Representation in Yorkshire and the East Midlands

The most male-dominated sectors nationally are also among the largest and most economically influential sectors within Yorkshire and the East Midlands. Manufacturing and engineering, construction, logistics, energy and IT remain structurally male-heavy. Conversely, women are highly represented in healthcare, charity and education; all important but typically lower-paid and with fewer senior leadership pathways.

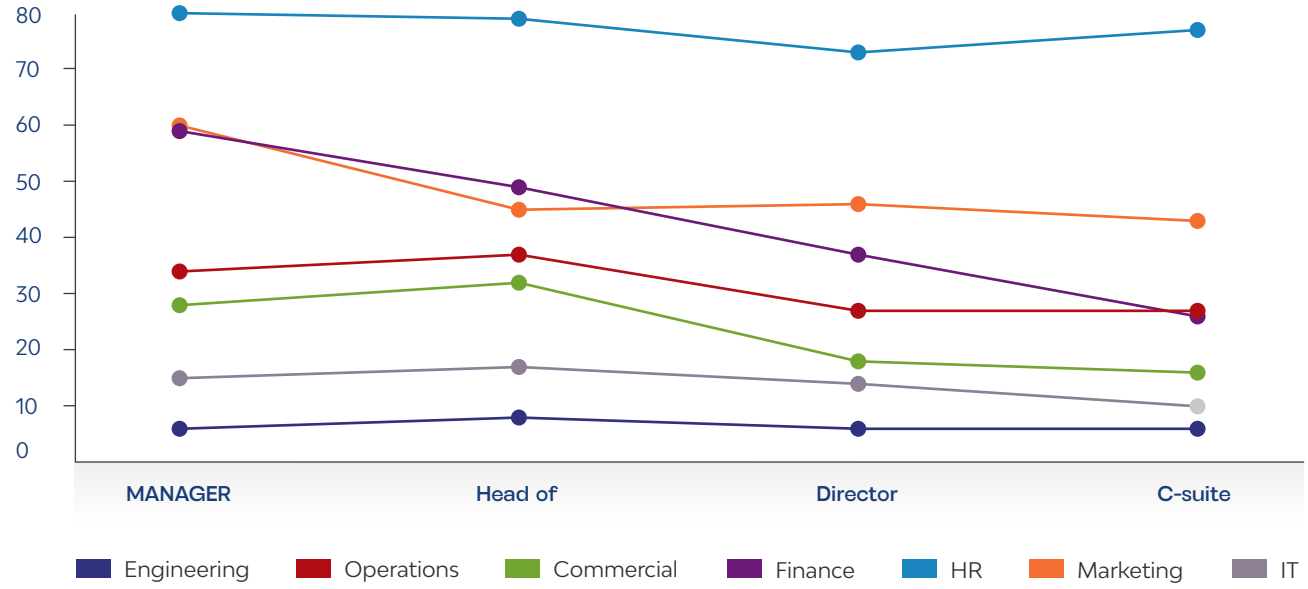
Sector Distribution Summary



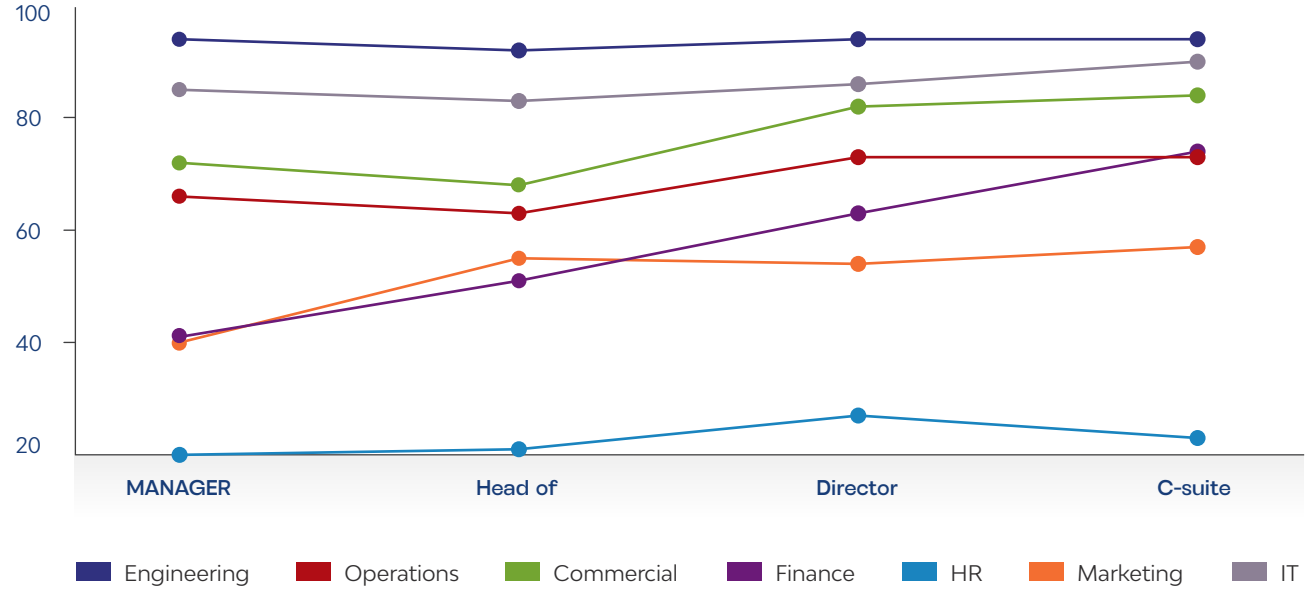
The Progression Gap

The defining challenge for the region is not entry-level representation. It is progression. Women enter most functions in strong numbers but remain significantly underrepresented at every seniority level. This pattern appears in engineering, commercial, finance and IT. HR is the only function where high representation of women continues into senior roles.

Female Representation by Seniority



Male Representation by Seniority

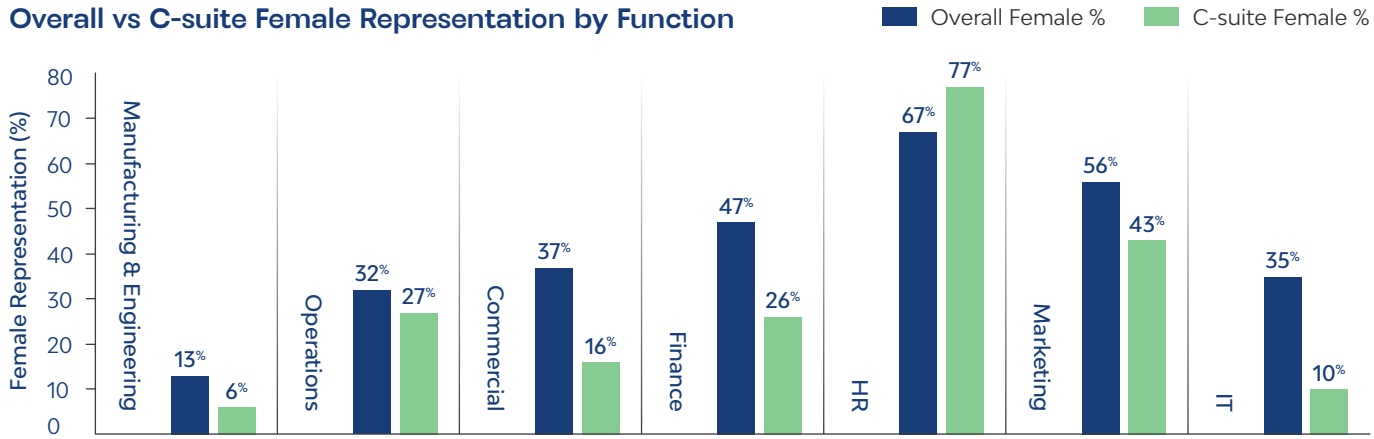


Key Progression Insights

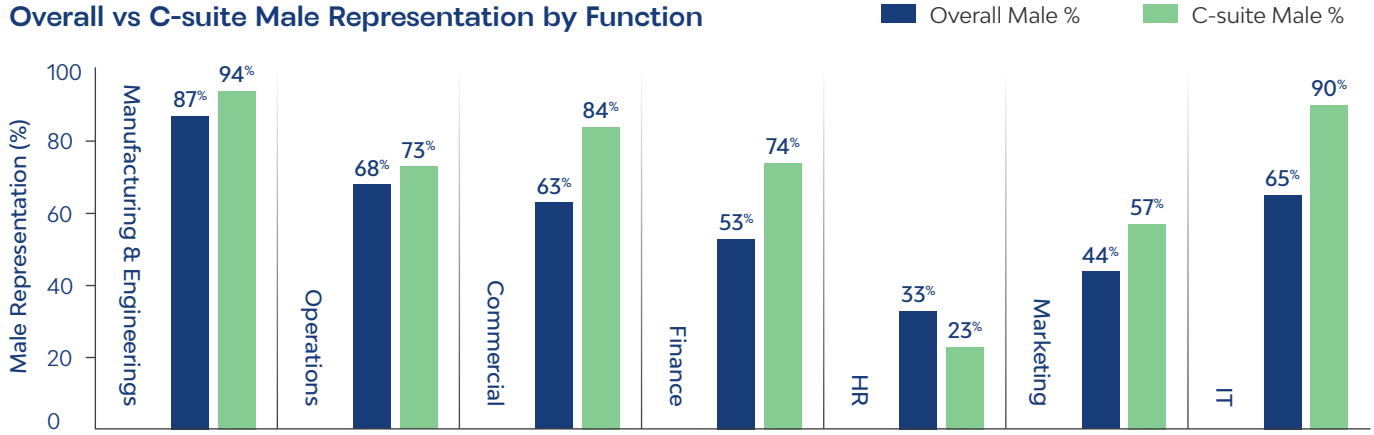
- **Manufacturing & Engineering roles** - female representation remains below 10% across seniority levels.
- **Finance roles** - women represent 59% of Managers but only 26% of C-suite roles.
- **Commercial functions** - strong early-career participation but steep drop-offs at Head of and Director levels.
- **IT roles** - women represent around one-third of the workforce but only 10% of C-suite roles.

The evidence is clear. Attraction is not the main barrier – obstacles for progression represents a far more significant issue.

Overall vs C-suite Female Representation by Function



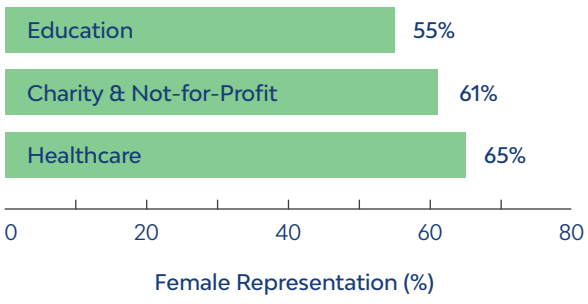
Overall vs C-suite Male Representation by Function



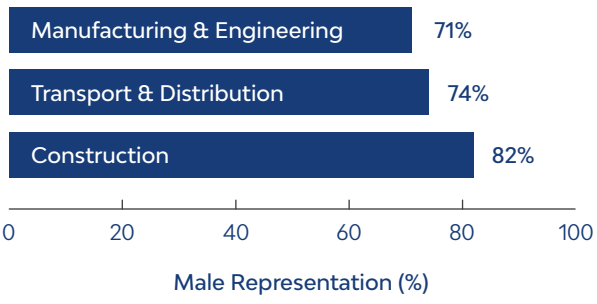
The Most Gender-Skewed Industries

To understand where interventions will create the highest impact, it is useful to identify the most male-dominated and most female-dominated sectors in the region.

Top 3 Female-Dominated Industries



Top 3 Male-Dominated Industries



Career Returners; An Underused Route to Improving Gender Diversity

A career returner (returner) is an experienced professional who has taken a career break of more than one year. While returners can be of any gender, the majority are women, reflecting the disproportionate share of childcare and caring responsibilities. This makes returners one of the most important and most overlooked levers for improving gender diversity at mid-to-senior levels.

Returners directly address the region's biggest challenge: the progression gap. Yorkshire and the East Midlands do not lack early-career female talent; they lack women progressing into senior roles. Returners offer a ready-made pool of experienced talent that traditional recruitment processes often miss.



The Returner Talent Pool

Insights from the Career Returners Community (10,000 members, 2024) show that returners are:

Highly Qualified

Around 90% hold a degree and 60% hold postgraduate or professional qualifications

Highly Experienced

Around 80% have five or more years of experience, and around 50% have ten or more

Diverse

Around 50% come from minority ethnic backgrounds, with ages ranging from late 20s to early 60s

These are exactly the profiles underrepresented in senior roles across the region.

Why Returners Matter for Gender Diversity

Because most career breaks are taken by women, traditional hiring practices that screen out CV gaps disproportionately exclude senior female talent. At the same time, sectors critical to regional growth face persistent skill shortages at mid-to-senior levels. Returner hiring offers a fast, practical way to strengthen leadership pipelines and improve gender representation.

Inclusive Recruitment; What Great Looks Like

Research from the Recruitment and Employment Confederation highlights that that inclusive recruitment is no longer optional; it is a strategic advantage. Employers and recruiters who embed these practices benefit from improved candidate attraction, stronger retention and more equitable outcomes across their workforce.

Inclusive Attraction

- Use inclusive, plain-English job adverts; avoid gender-coded language.

The example on the right illustrates how wording alone can change who feels 'invited' to apply - even when the job is exactly the same.

- Publish salary ranges as transparency boosts applications from women.
- Advertise roles beyond traditional platforms to reach underrepresented groups.
- Promote flexible and hybrid working as standard.

Fair and Accessible Applications

- Use anonymised CV screening to reduce unconscious bias.
- Ask all candidates proactively about adjustments.
- Provide application guidance for career returners, those with disabilities, and neurodivergent candidates.

Structured and Bias-Resistant Selection

- Standardise interview questions; share them in advance where appropriate.
- Train hiring managers; only 28% currently receive inclusive interviewing training.
- Use diverse interview panels and alternative assessments such as work samples.

Inclusive Onboarding and Retention

- Extend adjustments into onboarding and early employment.
- Support career returners with mentoring, phased re-entry and confidence-building programmes.

Job Advert Language

Male-Coded Advert

These words tend to signal a competitive, high-pressure, masculine-norm environment and can reduce female application rates.

- Lead aggressive growth strategy.
- Drive high-performance team.
- Own ambitious revenue targets.
- Fast-paced, competitive environment.
- Deliver results under pressure.

Female Coded Advert

These words emphasise care, collaboration and nurturing but can unintentionally signal lower status or a less commercial environment. Additionally, this language may deter male applicants.

- Join a supportive leadership team.
- Nurture and guide a creative function.
- Build strong organisational relationships.
- Foster a positive team culture.
- Develop a caring environment.

Balanced Advert Language

Neutral, outcome-focused, inclusive language that consistently attracts a more diverse applicant pool.

- Lead the marketing strategy to deliver clear outcomes.
- Develop and mentor a high-performing and inclusive team.
- Collaborate across the organisation to align brand and commercial goals.
- Use data to inform decisions and continuous improvement.
- Shape a culture of accountability, creativity and learning.

Our View

PRATAP PARTNERSHIP

PRATAP EXECUTIVE

The Reality

Progress on gender diversity is real, but uneven. Entry-level representation is strong across most sectors, yet the progression gap remains significant, particularly at senior and C-suite levels.

What We See

Most organisations are still focused on attraction. The bigger issue is progression. Structural barriers, unclear pathways and traditional leadership models are limiting the flow of female talent into senior roles across Yorkshire and the East Midlands.

What Great Looks Like

Leading employers are shifting their focus. They are investing in progression, not just hiring.
This includes transparent career pathways, inclusive leadership behaviours and targeted approaches such as returner programmes. Those who act with intent are not only improving representation, they are strengthening leadership teams and gaining a clear competitive advantage in the talent market.

The Rise of Fractional Leadership

The future landscape of senior talent

Fractional Leadership

The Future Landscape of Senior Talent

2025 has seen a clear acceleration in the adoption of fractional leadership.

Employers are turning to flexible, high-impact senior talent as they scale, transform or prepare for investment.

Fractional Leadership appointments increased by between **25 and 35%** in 2025.

The number of candidates choosing fractional career paths **rose by 12%**.

Fractional leaders bring strategic insight, commercial focus and the ability to create value quickly, without the commitment or cost of a full time role. The model is now established across several functions, with strong growth in:

- **Fractional CFOs** – specialists in start-ups, growth, change and exit planning.
- **Fractional HR Directors** – widely used in scaling SMEs and post investment environments.
- **Fractional CTOs and CIOs** – driven by cyber priorities, digital change and system upgrades.
- **Fractional Marketing Directors and Chief Commercial Officers** – in demand across brand heavy and consumer sectors.
- **Fractional Operations Directors** – increasingly important in manufacturing, logistics and healthcare.

The growth of this model is being driven by several converging factors

- The region's expanding SME ecosystem, particularly in sectors backed by private equity and venture capital.
- Greater availability of cloud-based tools that make remote oversight more viable.
- A new generation of professionals who are opting into fractional work earlier in their careers, drawn by the autonomy, variety and impact it offers.
- The clear preference of many investors to bring in experienced leadership without the overhead or permanence of a full-time appointment.

Top Sectors Adopting the Fractional Leadership Model

- Technology and SaaS
- Healthcare and Life Sciences
- Professional and Business Services
- Manufacturing and Engineering
- Retail and Consumer
- Not-for-Profit and Education
- Energy and Renewables (emerging, but increasing)

Most Common Leadership Disciplines (From most to least prolific)

- Finance - CFO
- HR - CPO
- Marketing and Commercial - CCO
- Technology - CTO
- Operations - COO
- Transformation - CTrO
- Product / Data / ESG - CPrO

Ownership Structure

	WHY?	DISCIPLNES
PE & VC	■ Intense focus on pace, value creation, reporting and systemisation ■ High pressure on cash efficiency ■ Need for senior capability without adding full-time cost ■ Frequent episodes of M&A, refinancing, integration, restructuring	■ Finance ■ HR ■ Technology ■ Commercial / Marketing ■ Operations (post-acquisition integration)
High-Growth Privately Owned SMEs	■ Need senior leadership before they can justify a full-time appointment ■ Rapid scaling of teams, systems, markets and customer bases ■ Founder-led businesses needing specialist capability to professionalise ■ Lower risk appetite for fixed headcount	■ HR ■ Marketing ■ Technology ■ Finance ■ Operations (especially manufacturing and logistics)
Family-Owned and Entrepreneurial Businesses	■ Desire to retain control while still accessing specialist expertise ■ Need for objective senior leadership input without cultural disruption ■ Useful during modernisation or succession planning phases	■ Finance ■ HR ■ Operations
Not-for-Profit and Charity Sector SMEs	■ Restricted budgets ■ Need to flex senior expertise around major programmes or funding cycles ■ Increasing professionalisation in finance, HR, digital, and governance	■ HR ■ Finance ■ Digital / Technology ■ Marketing (campaign specific)
EOTs	■ Budget constraint & need for experienced leadership ■ Strong appetite for governance, culture building, and people strategy ■ Often undergoing a shift in management structure after transition	■ HR ■ Finance ■ Governance roles

Fractional Day Rates



RANGE

£1,250

£1,200

£1,100

£1,000

£900

£800

£700

£600

£500
PER DAY

Complex Financial, Digital or Transformational Transactions and Change

HIGH

People, Commerical and Operational Maturity

AVG

Advisory

LOW

STRUCTURE

Fractional leaders operate through flexible commercial arrangements that allow organisations to access senior capability in a way that matches their stage of growth and the complexity of their challenges. The most common models include:

Fixed Day-rate Engagements

Typically used when leaders are embedded within the organisation for part of the week or month.

Monthly or Quarterly Retainers

Providing consistent oversight, strategic direction and governance without the structure of a full-time role.

Project-based Fees

Used for programmes such as digital transformation, system changes, workforce planning, investment readiness or integration.

Outcome-linked Models

Increasingly used in commercial, marketing and growth roles where value creation can be clearly measured.

These models give organisations the ability to scale leadership involvement up or down and to focus senior expertise where it has the most immediate impact.

Our View

PRATAP PARTNERSHIP

PRATAP EXECUTIVE

This is no longer a niche model. It is becoming a core part of how growing businesses access leadership capability.

The Reality

Fractional leadership is growing rapidly. More organisations are using flexible, high-impact senior talent to support growth, transformation and investment without committing to full-time appointments.

What We See

This is no longer a niche model. Across Yorkshire and the East Midlands, we are seeing increasing demand from private equity-backed, scaling and founder-led businesses. At the same time, more experienced leaders are choosing fractional careers earlier, increasing both the quality and availability of talent.

What Great Looks Like

Growing organisations are using fractional leadership strategically, not reactively. They are deploying experienced leaders to accelerate change, strengthen capability and bridge critical gaps at key moments. Used well, this model delivers pace, flexibility and commercial impact, giving businesses access to capability that would otherwise be out of reach.

Growth Leadership Competencies

Leadership, technology and operational strategies

Growth Leadership Competencies for 2026

Leadership expectations have evolved, and the most effective boards now prioritise competencies suited to a fast-moving, unpredictable world.

Evolutions in technology, marketing and operational strategies, together with office infrastructures that no longer rely on constant physical presence but support hybrid working and a healthier work / life balance, have been major forces in reshaping modern leadership expectations.

MODERN COMPETENCIES FOR GROWTH LEADERSHIP

- Resilience
- Authenticty
- Curiosity
- Courage
- Empathy
- Purpose

THE MOST PROLIFIC LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES FROM ***20 YEARS AGO***

Strategic Thinking
Anticipating future trends and setting a plan.

Technical Expertise
Deep subject matter knowledge, especially in your functional area.

Decision Making
With confidence and speed.

Communication
Clear, persuasive verbal and oral communication.

Results Orientation
Focus on KPIs, performance targets and results.

Attention To Detail
Perfectionism through processes and review.

These 6 areas have not been replaced or gone away. They have evolved and re-prioritised.

A new set of competencies has emerged for the modern era.

- Some companies have naturally evolved with modern competencies as they constantly face the outside world.
- Others have recognised the value and have brought in new talent to their leadership teams.
- New companies across almost every sector are recognisable for having these competencies dominate their boards and SLTs.

Resilience

"Resilience" the most prolific competency on person specifications for leadership roles and on search briefs that we have seen over the past two years.... By some margin!

This is no surprise when you consider what the business sector has been through in recent years: Covid-19, energy crisis, wars, supply chain challenges, interest rates and geopolitical turbulence. 'Permacrisis', defined as 'an extended period of instability and insecurity', was the Collins Word of the year for 2022. We have hardly been walking a steady and consistent path since then.

For a word that is so regularly used, it is no surprise that the word "**resilience**" is so often misunderstood.

"Resilience is more than simplystanding after a crisis" is a phrase often thrown around. Some people are still standing up because they have to. This does not always mean that they are resilient.

Below are the top 5 factors of resilient people:*

1. **They are resourceful.** They can find ways of overcoming problems.
2. **They ask for help.**
3. **They believe** that they can always do something to help them cope.
4. They have built up a **support infrastructure around themselves**.
5. They are **connected with others**.

Resilience is not about being a hero or "toughing it out", it is about managing emotions (whether that is setting some to one side or channelling them effectively), not being controlled by them and following the values and the goal of your board. It is closely linked to "momentum" – taking regular, small steps forward rather than planning gigantic leaps and then falling backwards.

Recruitment Processes to assess **Resilience**

How can businesses evaluate candidate **RESILIENCE** in their recruitment processes?

Resilience is rarely evident in CVs. Candidates can create a mask of resilience to wear in interviews as well. Evaluation and assessment of resilience needs to go deeper:

Behavioural Interviewing Questions

Traditional STAR questions can be rehearsed by experienced candidates. Our advice is to go beyond a specific situation and interrogate a period of time:

"Tell me about the most challenging period you have faced in work. How did you maintain momentum at this time?"

Panoramic Referencing

Speaking to as many people as possible – peers, subordinates and in lines above, advisors, investors and lenders – understanding what the candidate was like when the heat was turned up.

Personality Profiling

Quality assessments like Hogan – specifically, their HDS resource that looks at "the dark side of the personality" – qualities that emerge in times of increased strain.

*Credit: Brene Brown in "The Gifts of Imperfection"

Curiosity

"Curiosity" is becoming one of the most critical competencies for businesses navigating rapid change - in technology, human behaviour, and geopolitics.

The growth curve for innovation and technology is steepening. Access to information through social media and AI is vast and quick to access. It is almost impossible to be ahead of everyone else and maintain the same gap for a sustained period – even for the most ambitious leaders out there.

The five features that stand out to us in the most effective leaders with strong curiosity:

1. **Asking thoughtful questions** – not a bombardment of trivial questions, but those that provoke thought.
2. **Seeking feedback and challenge** – when things go wrong and when they have gone well.
3. **Actively experiment and innovate.**
4. **Exploring beyond their domain** – not restricted by the sector or specialism in which they sit.
5. **Listening deeply** – They listen to learn, not to lead the conversation.

It was once seen as a passive trait, even confused with procrastination. Today, it's a core driver of performance and progress. Curiosity provides context for a better perspective, a healthy tolerance for ambiguity and values continuous learning.

Recruitment Processes to assess **Curiosity**

How can businesses evaluate candidate **CURIOSITY** in their recruitment processes?

Curiosity is a mindset. It is only revealed in behaviours and buzzwords. No CV screening technology can assess curiosity (and we do not believe that there ever will be).

Scene-Setting Questions

Those traditional interview questions...

- "What do you know about us?"
- "How do you see our market evolving?"

...will give an insight into how they have researched and understood subjects to discuss with people who are probably better informed than they are.

Behavioural Interviewing Questions

Specifically asking about how they have explored, questioned or challenged in the past.

"Describe a situation where you didn't know the answer - how did you go about learning more?"

Look for the energy and the language in their explanation. It is as much about how they answer this as it is in the transcript.

Panoramic Referencing

Speak to as many people as possible to understand what the candidate was like when the heat was turned up. This can include peers, subordinates and in lines above, advisors, investors and lenders.

Task-Based Exercise - Strategic Planning in Ambiguity

Sending a pack of information at least 2-3 days before their final interview. The information contains incomplete and unverified data. The objective in the interview is to present on:

- What the business should focus on
- Key areas that require further investigation
- A 90-day plan to deliver

Empathy

"Empathy" has evolved from being seen as a "nice-to-have" to being recognised as a core leadership competency - one that drives engagement, culture, and business performance.

In a world shaped by hybrid working, growing mental health awareness, neurodiversity, and generational change, empathy has become essential in modern leadership.

And just as this deeply human skill becomes more critical, artificial intelligence is expanding into every corner of our business processes. While AI can simulate empathy in tone or language, it cannot truly feel it. Empathy is fundamentally human.

Most of us have received a clumsy automated sales message - one that attempts to connect by referencing our social media and usually gets it wrong. These impersonal moments only widen the opportunity to build relationships through genuine, human empathy - led by people, not algorithms.

Leaders with strong empathy demonstrate:

1. **Active listening** – They create connection by listening to understand, not just respond. Their presence builds trust and unlocks creativity.
2. **Emotional Intelligence** – They manage their own emotions and remain composed under pressure. This calm steadiness creates psychologically safe environments.
3. **People-centric decisions** – They balance logic and intuition - weighing commercial outcomes alongside cultural and emotional impact.
4. **Inclusive mindset** – They value and seek out different perspectives - not to tick boxes, but because it strengthens decisions and team cohesion.
5. **Embracing vulnerability** – They lead with honesty, not perfection. "Imperfections are not inadequacies; they are reminders that we're all in this together."

Empathy strengthens internal culture, deepens external relationships, and helps leaders bring the best out of their people. It is often the catalyst for start-up growth and a vital ingredient in successful strategic change.

Recruitment Processes to assess **Empathy**

How can businesses evaluate candidate **Empathy** in their recruitment processes?

Empathy is rarely visible on a CV, and when it is, it needs to be tested through behaviour. Here's how:

Panoramic Referencing

Speak to as many people as possible to understand what the candidate was like when the heat was turned up. This can include peers, subordinates and in lines above, advisors, investors and lenders.

Empathy is often most visible to peers.

Behavioural Interviewing Questions

Empathy is best revealed through lived experience. Ask questions that require candidates to reflect on how they supported others or navigated emotionally complex situations.

- "Tell me about a time you had to deliver difficult news to a colleague or team. How did you approach it?"

Listen for emotional awareness, active listening and perspective taking. Do their answers for the result in their scenario consider a wide range of factors?

Assessing the Questions they ask you

Genuinely empathetic candidates often ask thoughtful, people-focused questions:

- "How has the team handled the recent changes?"

Curiosity about people, not just strategy, is often a clue to emotional intelligence.

Authenticity

"Authenticity" is one of the most misunderstood (and most powerful) leadership competencies. It goes far beyond simply "being yourself"; it is about leading with consistency, self-awareness, and integrity.

Authenticity has become a defining trait of trusted leadership in today's business world, defined by rapid change, public scrutiny, and uncertainty.

For growing businesses, where pressure points emerge constantly, people want to follow leaders they can believe in, not just for their competence, but for their clarity, consistency, and humanity.

The Top 5 Traits of Authentic Leaders:

1. **Self-Aware**
2. **Consistent**
3. **Integrity**
4. **Transparency**
5. **Relatability**

In the age of AI, personal branding, and LinkedIn, it has never been easier to create the illusion of authenticity. Generative AI can write polished emails, chatbots handle customer queries, and social feeds promote carefully crafted personas.

Our LinkedIn feeds are often populated by virtue signalling and greenwashing. "Influencers" are not just affecting our children, they are there in our world of business.

The problem begins when there's a clear gap between perception and reality. When what someone presents doesn't match who they are or how they lead, trust erodes quickly - especially in commercial, client-facing, or partnership roles.

Authentic leaders create real and lasting impact. They earn trust that leads to deeper relationships, stronger networks, and repeat business.

Recruitment Processes to assess **Authenticity**

How can businesses evaluate candidate **Authenticity** in their recruitment processes?

Selection processes need to look beyond the charm and confidence of the interviewee. The challenge is to assess whether what they say reflects who they are and how they operate.

Observe for Consistency

- Have they treated everyone – from the security guard to the Chair – with the same tone and respect?
- Does their written communication in the recruitment process match their interview style?
- Does a review of their social media accounts appear to be consistent?

Behavioural Interviewing Questions

Ask candidates to reflect on tough decisions, moral dilemmas, or moments of pressure - and listen closely to what shaped their choices.

- "When have you pushed back on something that didn't feel right?"

Look for honest reflection, personal accountability, and value-led thinking; not rehearsed responses.

Panoramic Referencing

Speaking to as many people as possible – peers, subordinates and in lines above, advisors, investors and lenders.

Are the collection of views similar? Do the candidate's values come over consistently?

Courage

"Courage" goes beyond confidence and control. Courageous leaders speak their mind when it needs to be heard, admit when they are wrong and have a positive influence around them.

Courage is a core requirement for growing businesses - in the modern world of pace and dynamic shifts, courage is the stabilising force. It helps businesses to be solution-oriented, to be positive and to encourage their people to face risk.

The five features that stand out to us in the most effective leaders with courage:

1. **Stepping up in the uncomfortable moments** – speaking out with purpose, not ego.
2. **Comfortable with ambiguity** – acting with intent, not impulse.
3. **Accountable** – admitting to mistakes and owning them.
4. **Emotionally composed** – they do not detach from empathy; they detach from reactivity.
5. **Driven by values** – the right action over the easy option.

Every growth story is supported by courage. It is a prerequisite for every business. Growth brings constant change: new markets, new structures, new risks. Things will go wrong. People will be uncomfortable. Decisions will have to be made with imperfect ambiguities and high stakes.

Recruitment Processes to assess **Courage**

How can businesses evaluate candidate **Courage** in their recruitment processes?

Assessing courage is a challenge for any recruitment process. Every candidate will present their CV and themselves at interview in their most courageous light. The key is to dig beyond that and evaluate the person behind the candidate.

Profiling Tools

Most psychometric tools do not measure courage directly, but they provide insight into behaviours and traits that often support courageous leadership.

- **Hogan Personality Inventory** (HPI) assesses social confidence and comfort with visibility, which can indicate a leader's willingness to speak up or take initiative.
- **SHL OPQ** provide indicators of resilience under pressure, risk appetite, and openness to challenge.
- **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator** (MBTI) is not a direct measure of courage but can highlight how someone is likely to approach uncertainty, conflict, and principled decision-making.

Use these tools as part of a broader assessment and always combine with behavioural evidence.

Behavioural Interviewing Questions

- Ask candidates to talk about times when the pressure levels have been high.

Look for independent thinking and their decision-making process.

Panoramic Referencing

Speaking to as many people as possible – peers, subordinates and in lines above, advisors, investors and lenders.

How do they behave when they are not in control?

Purpose

"Purpose" is intentionally the last of our six competencies for growth. It connects and adds depth to all the others - authenticity, empathy, courage, curiosity, and resilience.

Every business plan has a purpose. But at its best, purpose does more than define an idea, it helps start-ups prioritise, scale, and galvanise. It builds momentum and becomes the pathfinder when things become more complex.

The Simon Sinek 'Start with Why' concept is built on the idea that customers don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it. Many brand and marketing teams have adopted this thinking, but in leadership, it runs far deeper. A strong purpose helps leaders make faster decisions, energise their teams, and stand apart from competitors in a way that product alone cannot.

Leaders create purpose for a business. That purpose shapes the strategy, anchors the culture, and becomes the reason people want to follow.

Leaders with a strong purpose exhibit:

1. **Clarity of Vision** – they lead tasks with meaning, not just metrics.
2. **Strategically oriented** – they prioritise what matters most, not just what is urgent.
3. **Motivational** – they create belief, not just action.
4. **Long-term focus** – they stay committed to the destination, even when the path changes.
5. **Personal alignment** – their values are visible in their leadership.

Leaders with purpose go beyond results - they build belief, direction and legacy.

Recruitment Processes to assess **Purpose**

How can businesses evaluate candidate **Purpose** in their recruitment processes?

Profiling Tools

- **Hogan** – Motives, Values & Preferences Inventory. This assesses core drivers such as altruism and recognition
- **Strengthscope** – A process which extracts 24 work-based strengths, several of which are linked to purpose ('Mission & Critical Thinking' in particular).

Purpose Focussed Interview Questions

Ask questions that explore **motivation, mission and long-term thinking**:

- "Tell me about a time when you had to choose between what was easy and what was right."

Look for alignment between their personal drivers and the culture you are trying to build.

90-day Plan Presentation

As a part of a later stage in the interview process, a presentation can give an insight into presentation skills and an understanding of the business.

Ask them to align it with the purpose / the why of your business. This will allow you to see beyond the list of projects and see if they understand the bigger picture.

Our View

PRATAP PARTNERSHIP

PRATAP EXECUTIVE

The Reality

Leadership expectations have shifted. Technical expertise and delivery remain important, but they are no longer enough on their own in a more complex and unpredictable environment.

What We See

Many organisations are still hiring and developing leaders for the world that has passed, not the one they are operating in today. As a result, there is often a gap between what businesses need and the behaviours leaders demonstrate, particularly in areas such as resilience, curiosity and empathy.

What Great Looks Like

Leading organisations are redefining leadership. They are prioritising human and adaptive competencies alongside technical capability and embedding these into hiring, assessment and development. Those who get this right are building leadership teams that are more resilient, more aligned and better equipped to drive sustained growth.

AI in Recruitment and People Strategy

Pay growth, hiring trends and sector benchmarks

AI and Technology in Recruitment and People Strategy

Yorkshire and the East Midlands Perspective



AI adoption by UK businesses has surged by 33% in the past year.

Introduction

Artificial intelligence is no longer a future concept. It is now part of day to day business infrastructure. More than half of UK organisations report using some form of AI, and adoption has grown sharply in the last year. Early adopters are already seeing gains in revenue, efficiency and speed of decision making.

For employers across Yorkshire and the East Midlands, this shift is relevant. Not many employers are shouting about the use of their AI adoption in their people strategies – but the pace of adoption is rapidly rising. Our region depends on effective recruitment and strong people strategies to compete with national and global businesses. AI has the potential to ease skills pressures, improve hiring decisions and create better experiences for candidates and employees. It also brings risks if adoption is poorly planned or left only to technical teams.

> The central question is no longer whether AI will shape recruitment and people strategy. **It is how employers in our region choose to use it.**



The AI Adoption Landscape

Across the UK, AI adoption has moved from experimentation to mainstream use. Larger organisations are using AI to drive efficiency and reduce administrative workload. Smaller and scaling businesses are using it to innovate, build new services and compete with bigger brands.

At the same time, many organisations still feel unsure. Concerns centre on skills gaps, lack of trust in AI decision-making and uncertainty about legal and ethical boundaries. This creates a risk of a two-tier economy, where a group of confident adopters moves quickly while many others miss out on the full benefit.

For Yorkshire and the East Midlands, with a high presence of SMEs and sectors such as manufacturing, engineering, logistics and health, this gap matters. The organisations that lean into AI with a clear purpose and strong governance will set the pace.



How AI is Changing Recruitment and People Strategy

1 Automating Administration so humans can focus on relationships

Talent teams can spend a large share of time on repeatable tasks. AI tools can already:

- Scan and score CVs against agreed criteria (still to be used with caution from our experience)
- Organise and schedule interviews
- Send reminders and follow up emails

Used well, this frees up time for higher value work, including understanding business needs, advising hiring managers and strengthening relationships with candidates.

2 Smarter Candidate Sourcing and Talent Pool Insights

AI systems can search multiple job boards, internal databases and social platforms at once. They can match job descriptions to profiles, identify candidates who are not actively looking and highlight where particular skills are in short supply.

For Yorkshire and the East Midlands employers, this means:

- A wider reach beyond local networks
- Stronger use of internal and external talent pools
- More accurate workforce planning

Over time, AI can reveal patterns in regional and national labour markets that guide attraction strategies.

3 Screening, Matching and Assessment

AI supported tools are used to:

- Screen CVs and applications at scale
- Search existing databases beyond simple keyword matching
- Run problem solving and judgement based assessments

These tools can standardise parts of the process and help to focus human attention on the highest potential candidates. When governed well, they can also support fairer hiring by making criteria more consistent.

However:

- AI models can replicate bias if historic data is unbalanced
- Automated scoring must never be the sole determinant
- Compliance with equality and data protection law is essential

These tools should strengthen the human input into the process, not replace meaningful engagement and assessment.

4 Job Description and Content Creation

Generative AI now plays a major role in content creation. Many organisations use AI to:

- Draft job descriptions and interview questions
- Flag and correct biased language
- Align wording with organisational tone of voice
- Optimise content for search visibility

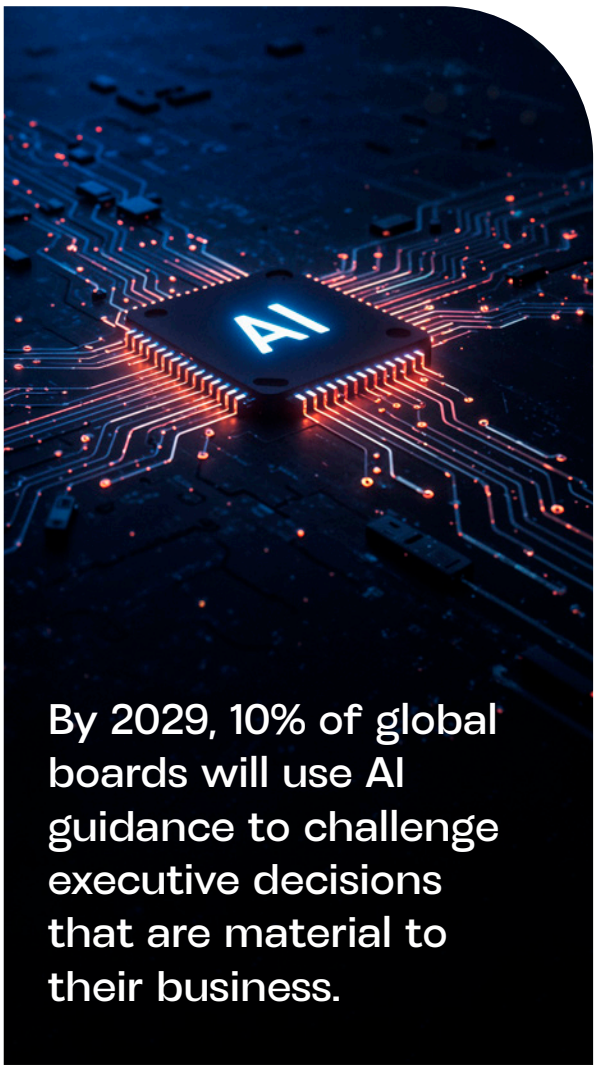
The opportunity is speed and consistency. The risk is generic or inaccurate output if prompts and review processes are weak. AI generated documents will lack the tailoring and unique features of the role and employer if used in isolation.

5 Interviews, Onboarding and Compliance

AI is increasingly used for:

- Early stage video or text based pre screening
- Automated interview scheduling
- Onboarding tasks and compliance documentation

Adoption in these areas is still low because they touch parts of the process where human judgement matters most. A balanced approach is to use AI for logistics and documentation while keeping core interactions human led.



By 2029, 10% of global boards will use AI guidance to challenge executive decisions that are material to their business.

AI in People Strategy and Workforce Planning

AI is transforming the broader role of talent and people leaders. It supports:

- More accurate forecasting of skills needs
- Scenario modelling for workforce planning
- Early identification of potential retention risks
- Personalised learning and development pathways

For sectors in our region with persistent skills shortages, these insights support earlier, more informed decisions about retraining, recruitment and role design.

Opportunities and Risks

Opportunities

Levelling the playing field; AI gives SMEs capabilities once limited to large in house teams.

Improved access to regional talent; AI helps uncover underused groups, including returners and sector switchers.

Stronger diversity outcomes; consistent frameworks supported by AI can improve fairness and highlight gaps.

Risks

Data Security and Privacy

Recruitment processes handle high volumes of personal and confidential information. Without strong controls, there is a real risk of:

- Unintentionally uploading candidate data into public AI models.
- Exposing confidential job briefing content.
- Breaches caused by unsecured third party tools.

Both internal talent teams and external recruitment partners need clear data protocols. Confidential information must never be submitted into unsecured systems, and all tools must meet strong security and privacy standards.

Trust and Understanding

The pace of technology evolution is more rapid than the pace of mental adoption for candidates and hiring managers. The optimal pace must balance both to ensure trust and understanding continue to progress.

Practical Steps for Employers

Keep Humans in Control

AI should support and inform decisions, not make them. Humans should:

- Set the strategy and success criteria.
- Review and challenge AI outputs.
- Remain accountable for final decisions.

Digital where it matters, Human where it counts.

Be Curious

There are few commercial rewards in being the earliest adopters, but significant risks in being the last to begin. Curiosity helps leaders stay aware of what is possible and avoid being left behind as AI becomes normalised across recruitment and people strategy.

Involve Talent, IT and Governance Together

AI cuts across all functions. The three domains combine to optimise effectiveness, ethics and alignment.

Strengthen Governance and Communication

Governance should cover:

- Permitted and prohibited uses of AI.
- Data handling and privacy.
- Fairness monitoring and oversight.
- Transparency with candidates and employees.

Openness builds trust.

Our View

PRATAP PARTNERSHIP

PRATAP EXECUTIVE

The Reality

AI is becoming embedded in recruitment and people strategy. From sourcing and screening to workforce planning and development, its use is increasing quickly across the market.

What We See

Most organisations are using AI to improve efficiency in recruitment processes, such as CV screening and interview scheduling. Far fewer are using it to enhance decision-making, talent insight and long-term workforce planning.

What Great Looks Like

Leading organisations are applying AI more strategically across the full people lifecycle. They are using it to strengthen hiring decisions, identify talent trends and support workforce planning, while maintaining strong human oversight. Those who get this balance right are improving quality of hire, creating better candidate experiences and building more informed, forward-looking people strategies.

Salary Trends and the Shifting Talent Market

Pay growth, hiring trends and sector benchmarks

An Overview of the Latest Salary Trends

Pay growth remained positive through 2025, although it slowed towards the end of the year with annual growth easing to **4.6%**.



Headline figures can be misleading as pay trends vary widely by sector, job family and seniority level, from entry-level roles to the boardroom.

We have broken down the most relevant salary trends for employers across Yorkshire and the East Midlands.

1 Pay Growth and Real Earnings

5.3% Median weekly earnings rose 5.3% over the past year.

Real earnings growth after inflation is around 1%.

Pay growth is steady, but real terms improvement is marginal. Lower pay bands remain under pressure, while competition for skilled talent stays strong.

2 Hiring Trends and Market Dynamics

Growth in starting salaries for permanent roles have declined and are at the lowest levels since 2021.

Temp and contract pay is broadly flat as candidate availability increases.

Salary inflation is easing, which gives employers short-term leverage. However, critical skills still demand premium rates despite the softer market.

3 Candidate Expectations and Benefits

4.5% is the average expected pay rise.

72% of workers now rank salary as their top priority.

66% value flexibility very highly.

Flexibility and broader benefits now sit alongside pay as essential levers for attraction. Employers must benchmark by both sector and region to remain competitive.

Ongoing Market Changes

1 Upward Pressure on Lower and Mid-Tier Salaries

Driven primarily by the **4.1% National Living Wage** increase, inflation normalising, and continued competition for operational and early-career talent.

- Pay compression will force increases further up the structure.
- Employers with large frontline or support workforces will feel the strongest impact.
- Expect knock-on effects in administrative, customer-focused, logistics, and technical roles.



2 Strong Premiums for Specialist and Technical Skills

Despite softer general hiring, roles in **finance transformation**, **data**, **digital**, **engineering** and **compliance** will continue to attract premium salaries.

- Organisations still prioritise digital, automation and efficiency.
- Skills shortages at mid-senior level remain acute outside London.
- Expect widening salary gaps between generalist business roles and technical disciplines.

3 Greater Pay Transparency and Formal Pay Structures

More organisations will formalise **pay bands**, **job families**, **progression frameworks** and **transparency policies**, partly driven by retention challenges and upcoming regulatory scrutiny.

Why it matters:

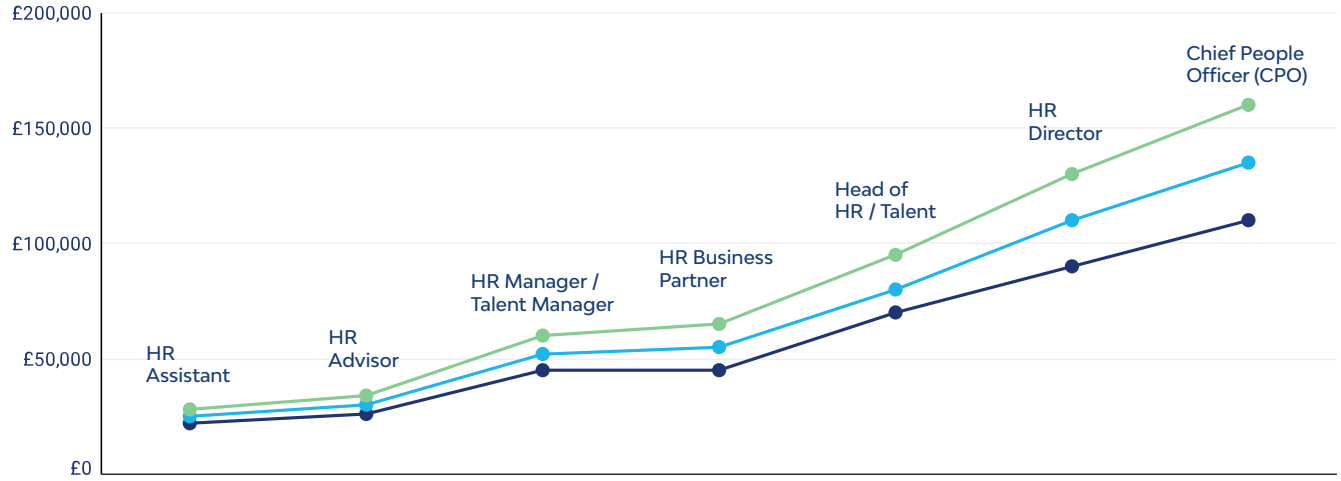
- Employees expect clearer pay rationale in a cooling labour market.
- Transparency is emerging as a core retention lever, especially where pay rises fall below expectations.
- Structured pay frameworks will become the norm for employers seeking to remain competitive.

HR

Lower Quartile | Average | Upper Quartile

SIMPLE

30–100 Employees | Mature & Steady Business



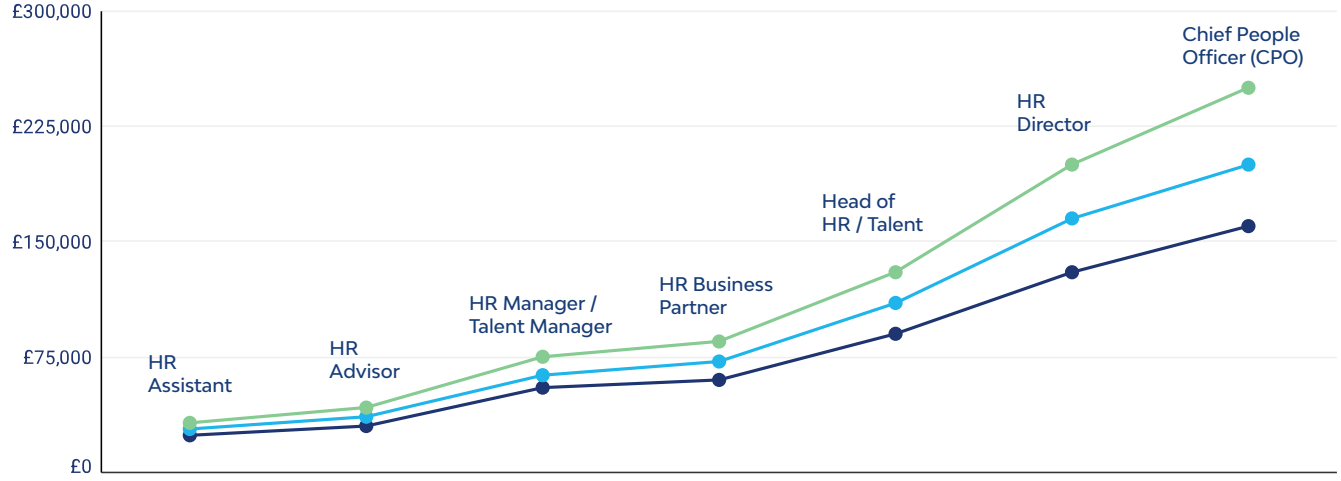
ADVANCING

100–500 employees | Growing, M&A, Change



COMPLEX

500+ Employees | Transformation, Exit Planning, Listed

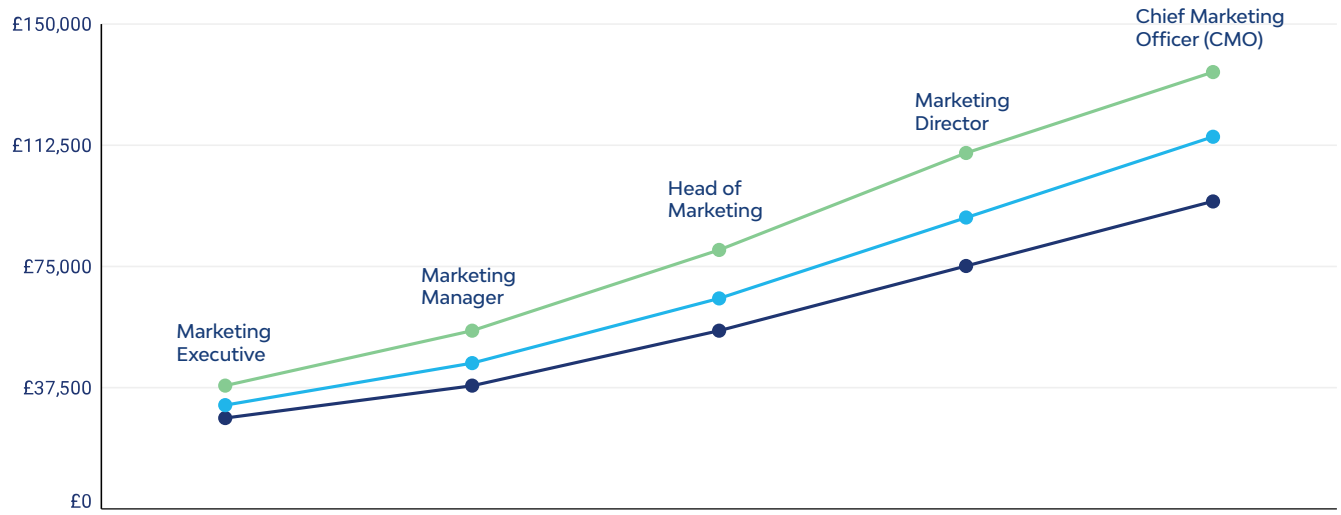


Marketing

Lower Quartile | Average | Upper Quartile

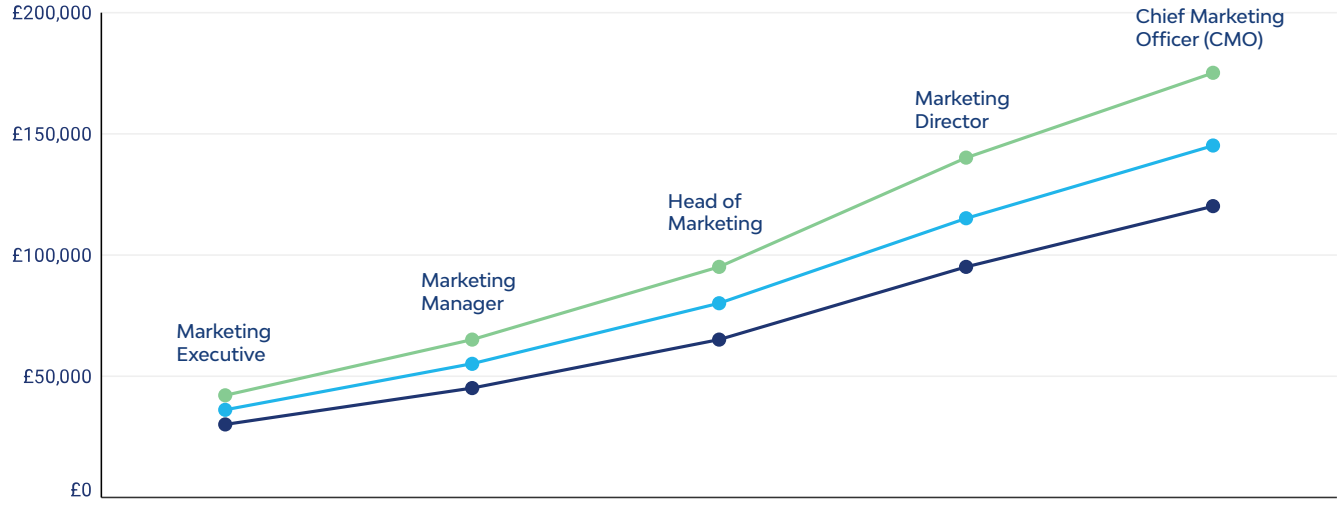
SIMPLE

30–100 Employees | Mature & Steady Business



ADVANCING

100–500 employees | Growing, M&A, Change



COMPLEX

500+ Employees | Transformation, Exit Planning, Listed



Sales

Lower Quartile | Average | Upper Quartile

SIMPLE

30–100 Employees | Mature & Steady Business



ADVANCING

100–500 employees | Growing, M&A, Change



COMPLEX

500+ Employees | Transformation, Exit Planning, Listed



IT

Lower Quartile | Average | Upper Quartile

SIMPLE

30–100 Employees | Mature & Steady Business



ADVANCING

100–500 employees | Growing, M&A, Change



COMPLEX

500+ Employees | Transformation, Exit Planning, Listed

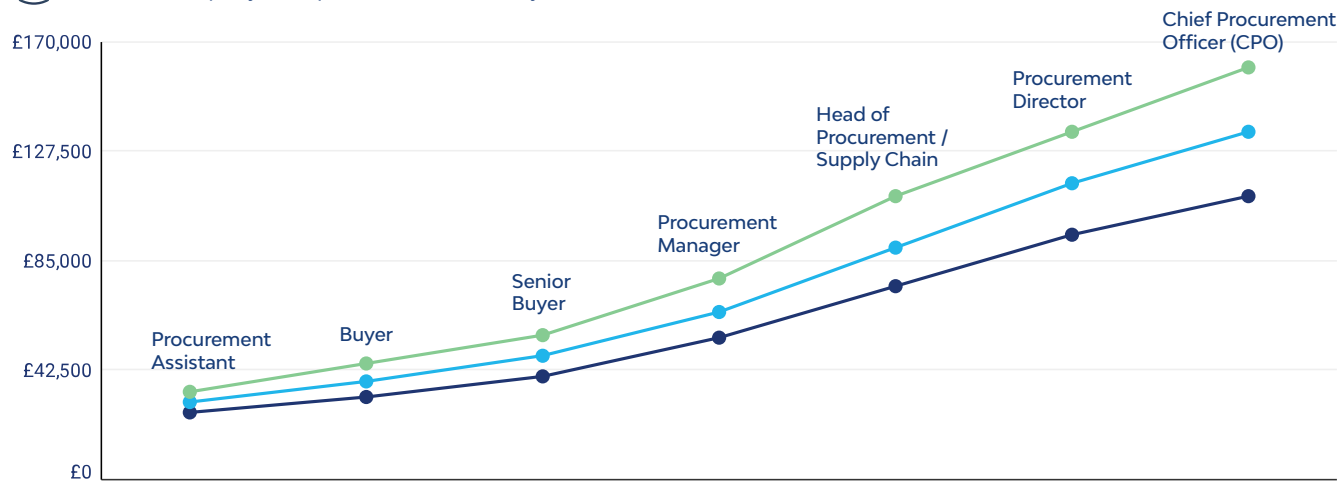


Procurement & Supply Chain

SIMPLE

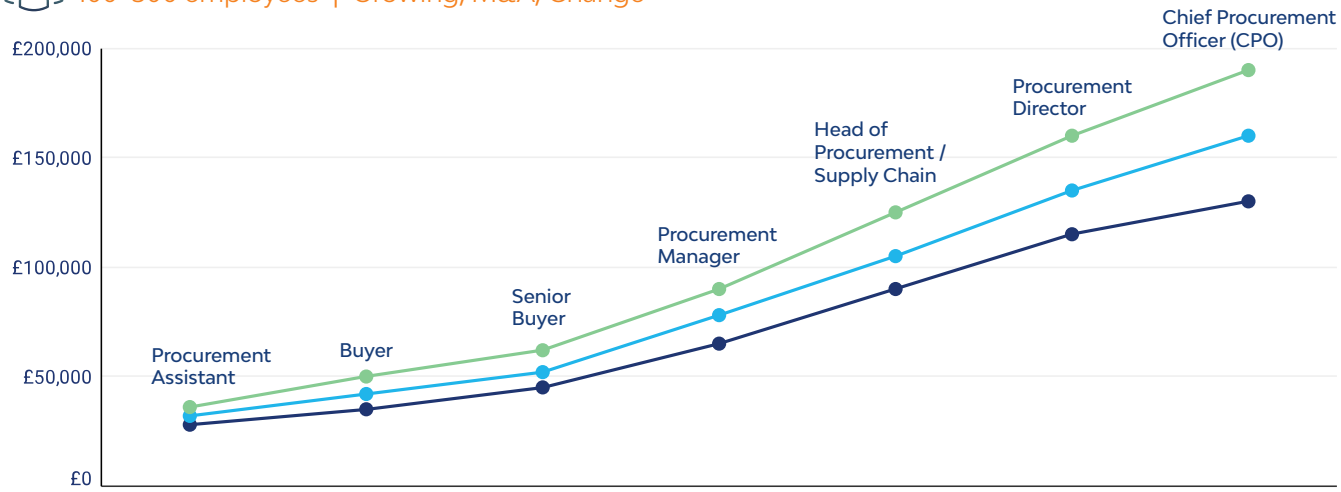
Lower Quartile | Average | Upper Quartile

30–100 Employees | Mature & Steady Business



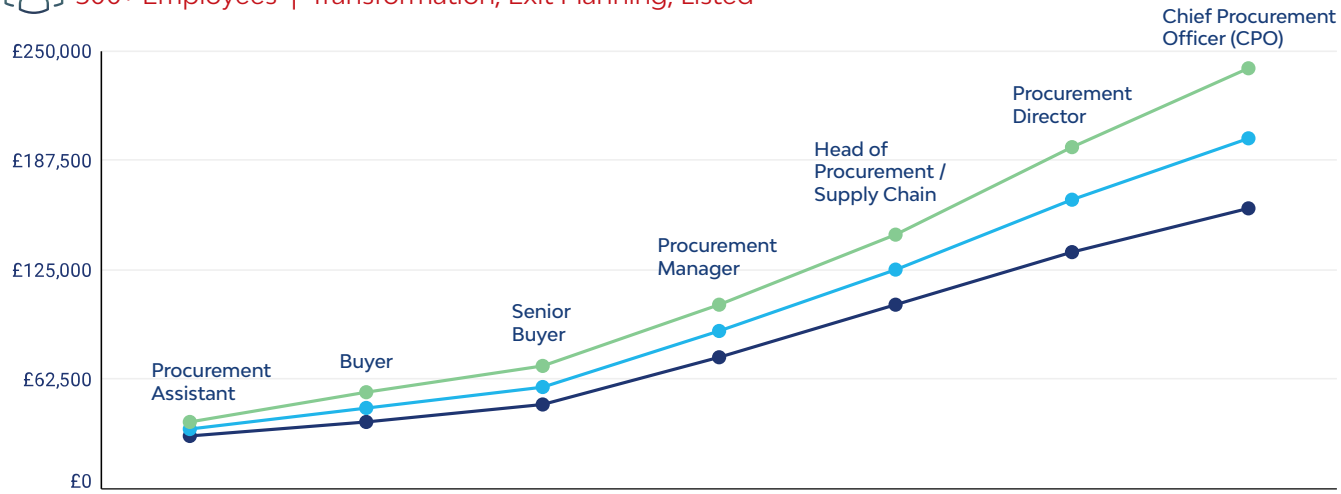
ADVANCING

100–500 employees | Growing, M&A, Change



COMPLEX

500+ Employees | Transformation, Exit Planning, Listed



Operations

Lower Quartile | Average | Upper Quartile

SIMPLE

30–100 Employees | Mature & Steady Business



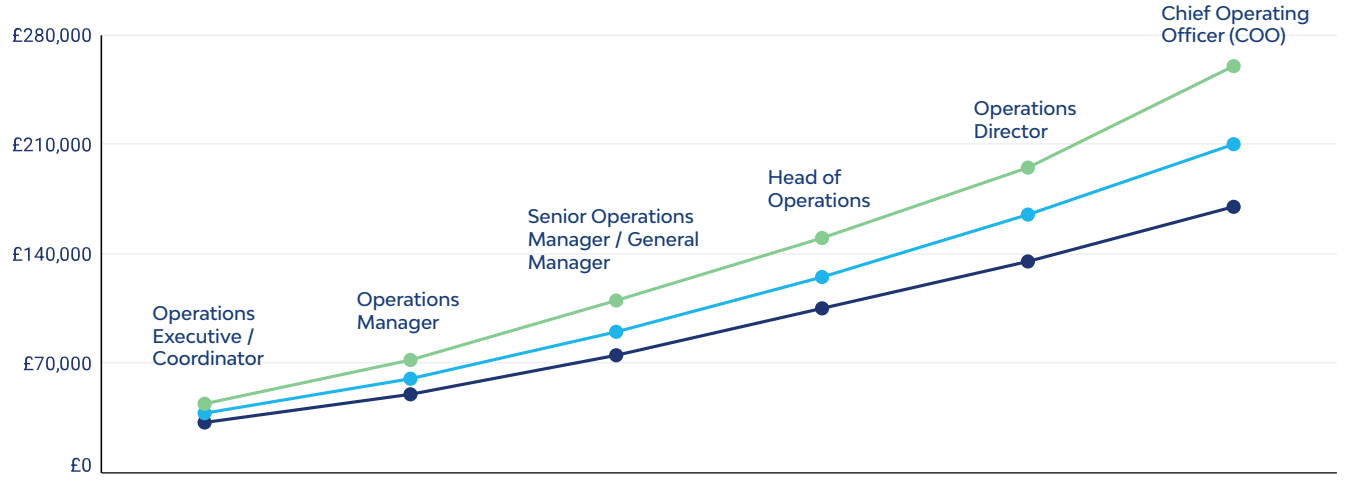
ADVANCING

100–500 employees | Growing, M&A, Change



COMPLEX

500+ Employees | Transformation, Exit Planning, Listed

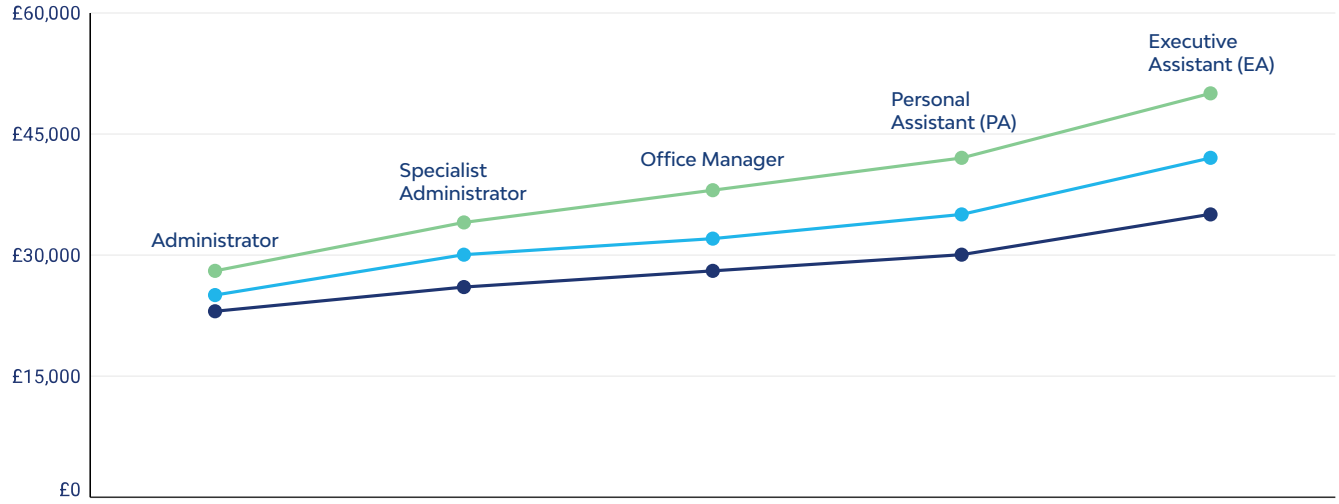


Business Support

Lower Quartile | Average | Upper Quartile

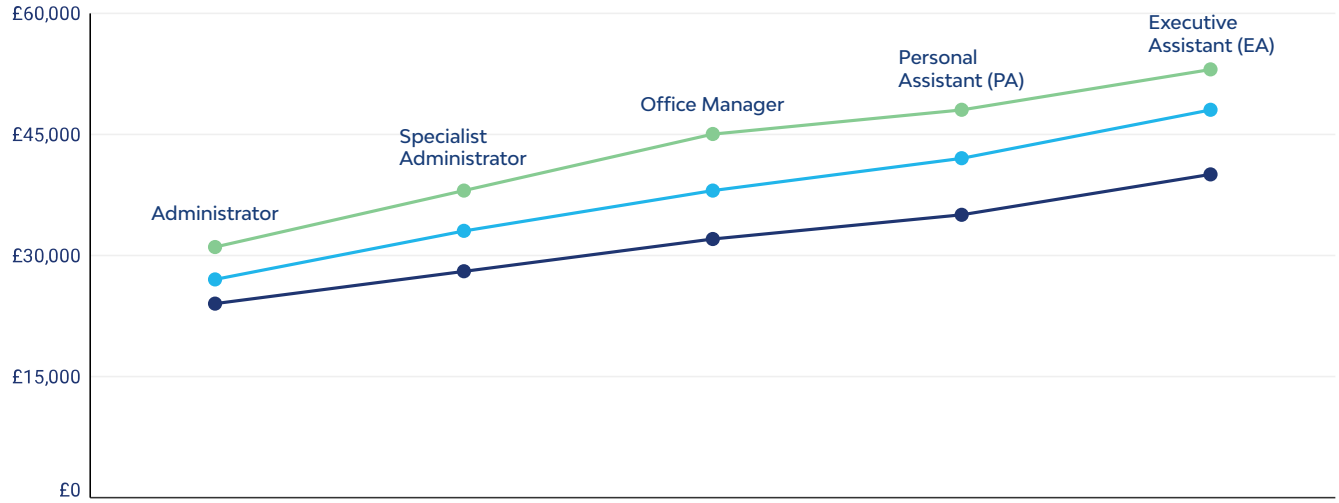
SIMPLE

30–100 Employees | Mature & Steady Business



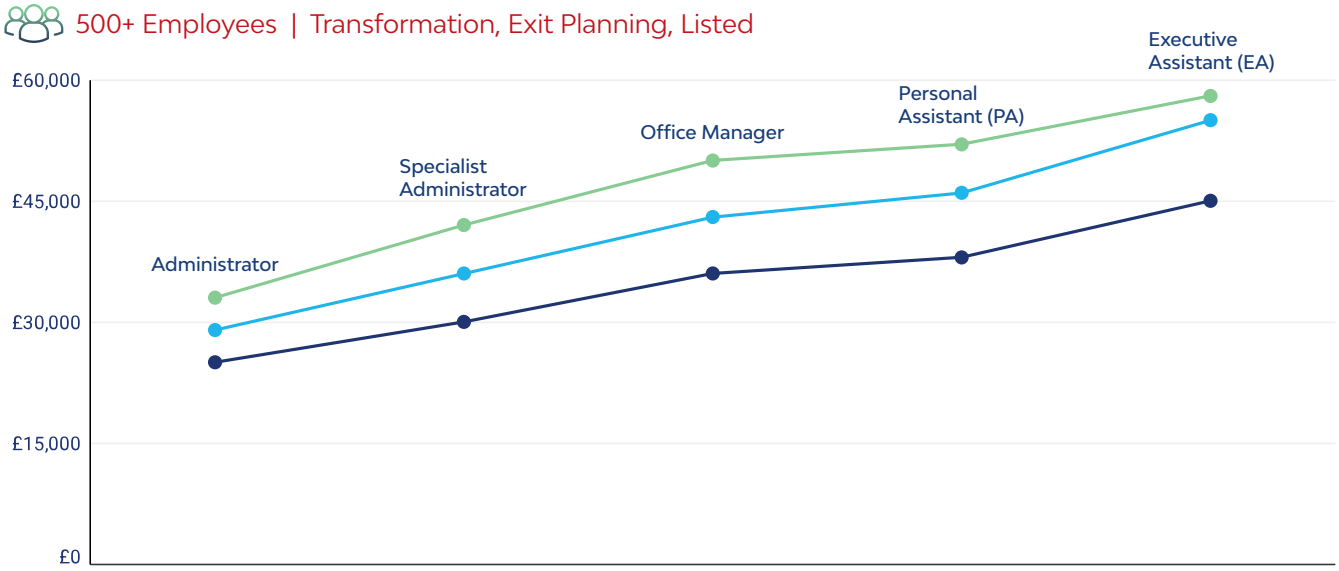
ADVANCING

100–500 employees | Growing, M&A, Change



COMPLEX

500+ Employees | Transformation, Exit Planning, Listed

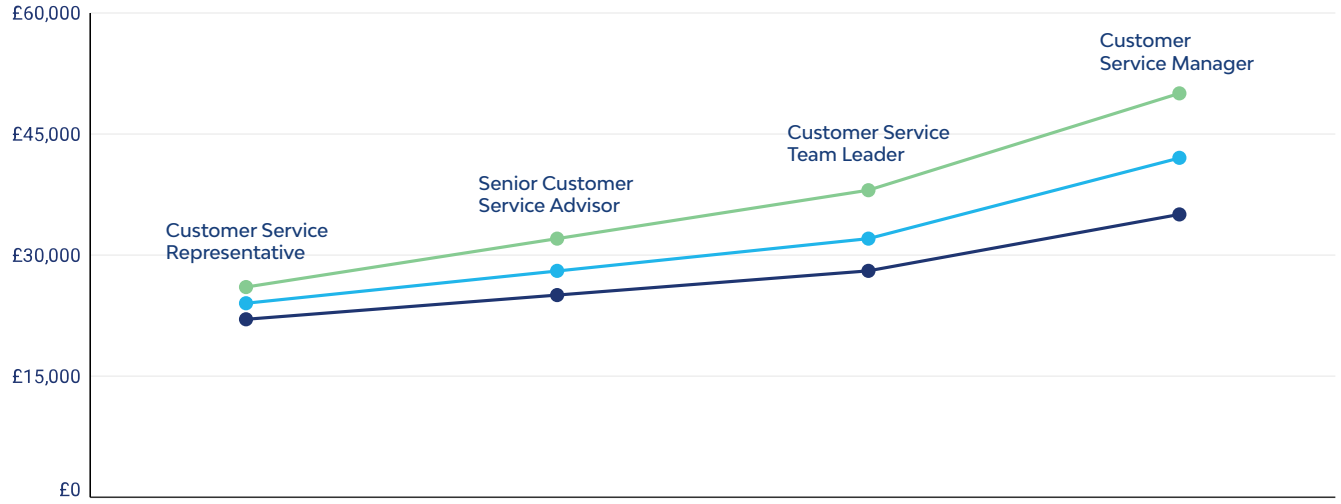


Customer Services

Lower Quartile | Average | Upper Quartile

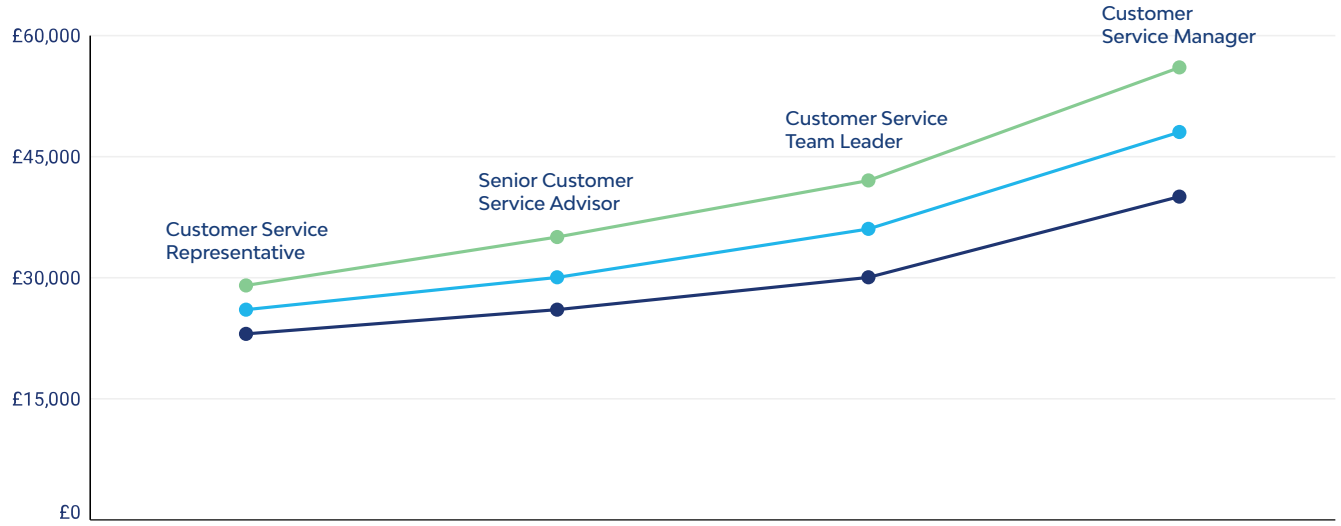
SIMPLE

30–100 Employees | Mature & Steady Business



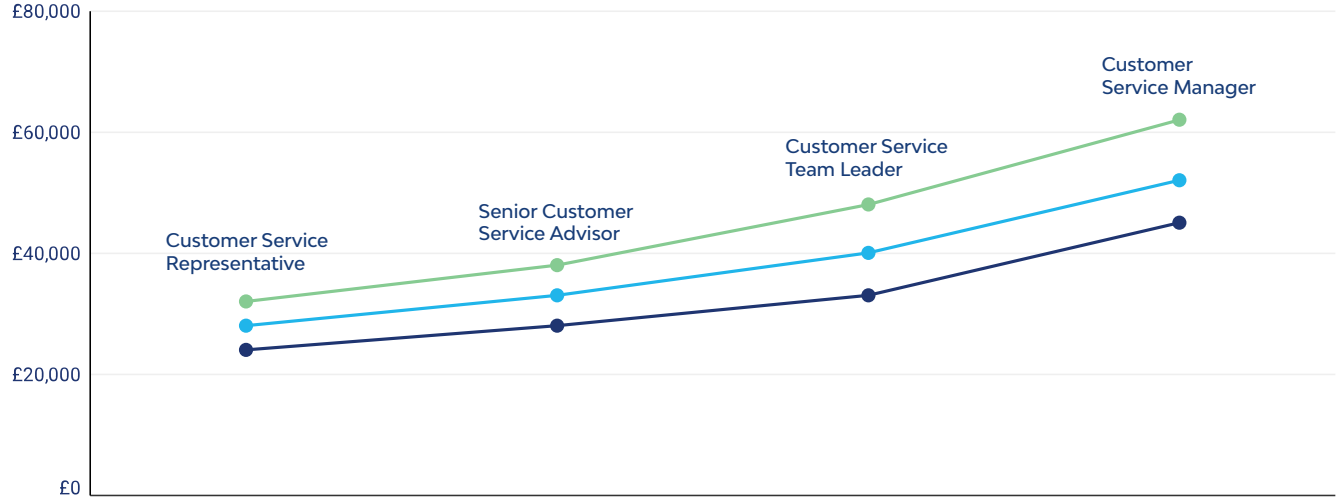
ADVANCING

100–500 employees | Growing, M&A, Change



COMPLEX

500+ Employees | Transformation, Exit Planning, Listed



Finance

Lower Quartile | Average | Upper Quartile

SIMPLE

30–100 Employees | Mature & Steady Business



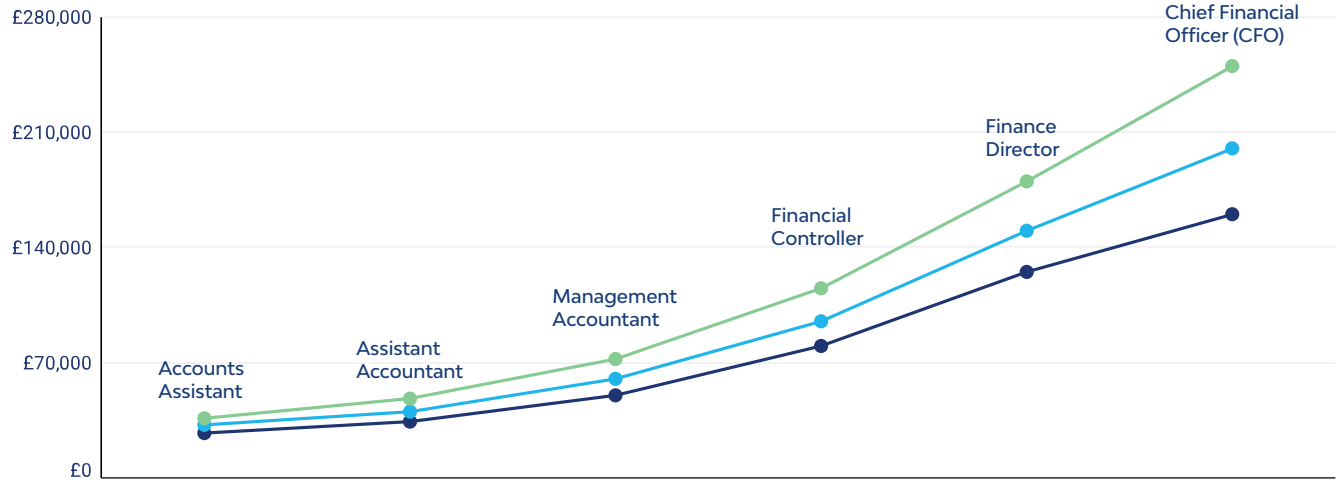
ADVANCING

100–500 employees | Growing, M&A, Change



COMPLEX

500+ Employees | Transformation, Exit Planning, Listed

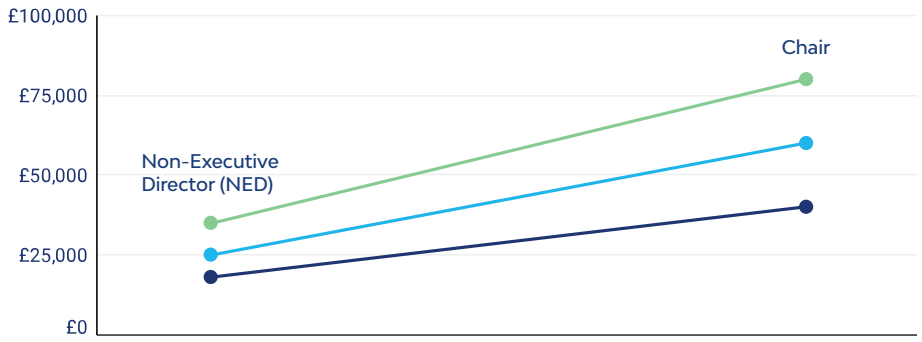


NEDS & Chairs

Lower Quartile | Average | Upper Quartile

SIMPLE

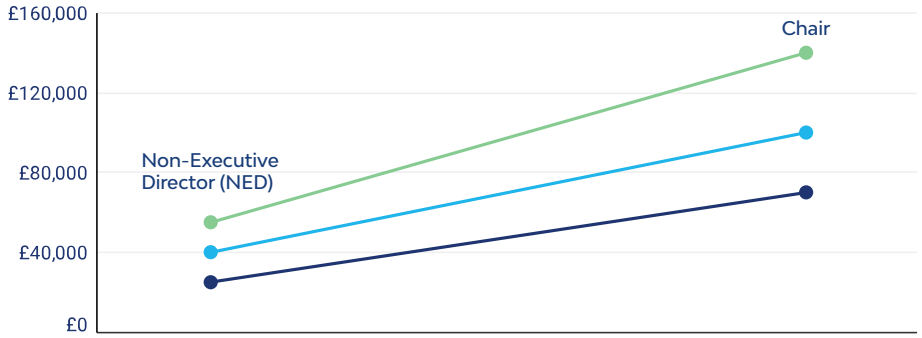
30–100 Employees | Mature & Steady Business (private/owner-managed, single site)



DAY RATE
£1,250-£2,000
£2,000-£3,000

ADVANCING

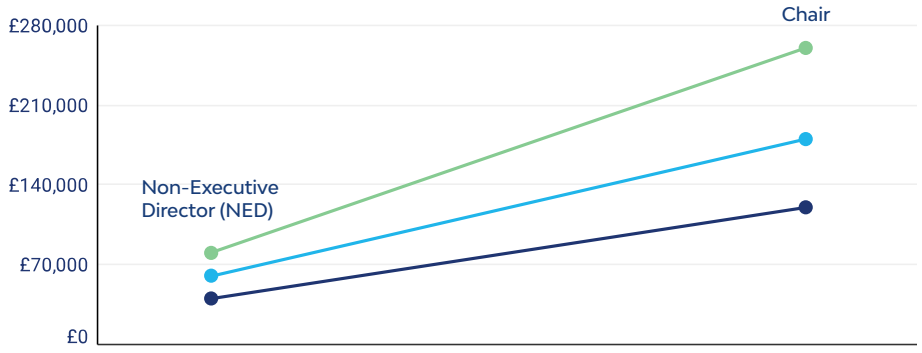
100–500 employees | Growing, M&A, Change (PE-backed or multi-site private; some AIM/SmallCap)



DAY RATE
£1,400-£2,500
£2,500-£4,000

COMPLEX

500+ Employees | Transformation, Exit Planning, Listed (AIM 100 / SmallCap / select FTSE 250 regionals)



DAY RATE
£1,800-£3,000
£2,500-£4,500

Additional Notes

Outliers: FTSE 100 Chairs can exceed £350–£450k; not typical for regional portfolios, but worth flagging if a listed HQ is in scope.

Private vs Listed: In smaller, private settings, Chairs often deliver more hands-on advisory value at similar day rates but on lower annual totals.

Equity & Variable Pay: PE-backed and listed businesses may supplement cash fees with share options or transaction bonuses, especially for Chairs steering exits.

Our View

PRATAP PARTNERSHIP

PRATAP EXECUTIVE

The Reality

Pay growth remains positive but is slowing, and real earnings improvement is marginal. Hiring activity has softened overall, but competition for critical skills remains strong.

What We See

Many organisations are interpreting this as a return to employer control. In reality, the picture is more nuanced. While there is short-term leverage in parts of the market, skills shortages at mid-to-senior level continue to drive competition, particularly in technical and specialist roles.

What Great Looks Like

Leading employers are taking a balanced approach. They are using current market conditions to make strategic hires, while strengthening pay structures, transparency and broader benefits to retain talent. Those who act with clarity now will be better positioned when market conditions tighten again.

Thank you for reading our Good to Great Employer Report

Through **Pratap Partnership** and **Pratap Executive**, we partner with employers to build and evolve high-performing teams.

PRATAP PARTNERSHIP

Pratap Partnership builds the teams that enable growth day-to-day. Our approach to recruitment is intentional, consultative and tailored to your business needs. We are a full-service recruitment partner built for delivering growth and driven by people - with a process that breaks away from the traditional mould.

We recruit critical hires across the organisation, including but not limited to the following teams: HR, finance, operations, marketing, PA's/EA's and business support.

PRATAP EXECUTIVE

Pratap Executive partners with shareholders, founders and boards to deliver growth through leadership. We maintain a trusted network of high-impact leaders, including CPOs, COOs, CFOs, Non-Executive Directors and fractional specialists, delivering recruitment solutions aligned to each organisation's strategic ambitions.

Through deep consultation, we identify where value can be created, define the leadership capability required, and secure the talent needed to future-proof the business.

Together, we act as catalysts for growth and agents of change. We help businesses build leadership strength, reach and engage markets, create efficient supply chains, strengthen governance, innovate through technology and continuously evolve their people strategy.

We hope you enjoyed reading the report and would welcome any suggestions or opportunities to discuss the data in more detail.

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