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MAKING TECHNOLOGY WORK

DON'T STOP LEARNING
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WELCOME

SIMON KENT
EDITOR

There are positive signs in the recent KPMG/REC UK Report on Jobs of which every recruiter should take note. Based on recent figures the report has found the recruitment landscape to be improving with permanent placements stabilising and temp billings continuing to rise. Indeed, right now temp billings are growing the quickest they have since early 2023 while temporary vacancies are on the rise for the first time in two years.

Callum Licence, Group Head of Advisory at KPMG UK and Switzerland noted: "Over the past 45 months we have seen the longest recorded period of contraction in the permanent placements index, so to finally have it stable is a big milestone," while Maxine Blight, REC's Membership and Information Officer described 'rays of light' breaking through for the job market.

Of course, these are still only rays of light rather than a full blown recovery, but recruiters can still justifiably take heart. Resilience and dedication pay off for many in this industry – it is not a case of just being around for the good times, recruitment always happens and the successful companies are the ones that recognise the importance of delivering value to every employer and candidate no matter what the general market conditions might be.

But perhaps, as we head out of summer and into the last part of the year, there is at last some reward for persistence, perseverance and professionalism. If the opportunities are there, be ready to take the initiative. ■

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EMPLOYMENT COSTS RISE AS FREEDOMS FALL

The REC has responded to a package of evidence published by the government today relating to reforms of zero hours and similar contracts. Taken together it appears a cost of around £8 million a day could hit businesses through increasing employment costs as the government places curbs on work freedoms.

"We believe this assessment by the government of its reforms around flexible work undercounts the compliance and process costs businesses will face," says Neil Carberry, Chief Executive of the Recruitment and Employment Confederation. "Even so, a potential £2.9bn addition to the rapidly rising cost of employment will only make our youth unemployment issues worse. The government's own data suggests the guaranteed hours gamble with the job market will cost employers up to £8 million every day, or roughly the annual wage bill for 137,000 full-time workers between 18 and 20 years old on national minimum wage. This is why concessions that keep agency workers outside the scope of these proposals would mean a multi-million-pound bonus for business growth and will help ensure the job market can deliver more for young people."

Carberry believe the reforms fail to reflect fluctuating demand, short-term assignments and the real-life relationships between workers, employment businesses and hirers. In this way the reforms undermine the modern demand from people to work flexible hours and for different employers. There is also a risk that burdensome cancellation requirements could reduce the willingness of hirers to engage temporary workers at all.

"Rather than increasing job security, the proposals risk weakening a vital and successful part of the labour market that supports workforce participation, especially in sectors such as hospitality, retail and healthcare, and delivers economic growth," says Carberry. "We are calling for more talks with government to ensure that any final policy is coherent, proportionate and capable of operating effectively within the realities of the agency labour market." ■

AI CORRECTION RECRUITMENT BEGINS

Robert Half have suggested that the UK could be on track for a wave of AI correction recruitment as employers reassess workforce decisions made in response to artificial intelligence. The consultancy believes employers may start rehiring for roles where human expertise actually remains essential.

The trend is already emerging in North America, highlighted by high-profile examples across various industries. Robert Half research found 32 per cent of US hiring managers and 34 per cent of Canadian hiring managers who eliminated a role primarily because of AI later rehired for the same or a similar position. The top factors influencing rehiring were that AI required more human oversight and quality control than expected, the need for relationship management skills and institutional knowledge or context AI can't replace, and risk or compliance concerns without human expertise.

With North American workforce trends often serving as a bellwether for the UK labour market, employers on this side of the Atlantic could soon face similar correction recruitment activity as businesses refine how AI and people work together.

There are already signs this shift may be taking shape. New Robert Half research found that UK professionals spend nearly one-third (31 per cent) of the time they use generative AI checking accuracy and refining the final deliverables, underscoring the continued importance of human judgement when implementing AI into workflows.

At the same time, the UK labour market is showing signs of renewed momentum. Recent analysis of third-party jobs data by Robert Half found job postings increased between the first and second quarters of 2026 across several sectors, with job postings up 42 per cent in IT between Q1 and Q2, 25 per cent in Logistics, 21 per cent in Utilities and 18 per cent in Manufacturing.

As recruitment activity accelerates, employers that moved too aggressively towards AI-led workforce strategies could find themselves at a disadvantage. The challenge is no longer choosing between technology and talent, but determining the right balance between them.

"The businesses seeing the greatest success with AI are not replacing people but are combining technology with human expertise, judgement, and relationship-building," commented **Greg Scileppi, President, International Talent Solutions, Robert Half**. "While AI is creating significant efficiencies, our research shows that human oversight remains essential to ensure accuracy, quality and context.

"The UK recruitment market is showing signs of recovery," he added. "As confidence returns to the labour market, employers that take a thoughtful approach to integrating AI with human talent will be best positioned to avoid costly hiring corrections and attract and retain the specialist skills they need to gain a competitive edge." ■

SCOTTISH RECRUITER SAYS THE 'NO-PHONE GENERATION' IS RESHAPING HIRING

A leading Scottish construction recruiter says the rise of the 'no-phone generation' is forcing employers to rethink how they hire, with many young candidates refusing to answer calls, relying on AI-written CVs and, in some cases, bringing a parent to interview.

Donald Wynn, Managing Director of C&P Recruitment, says the recruitment process is becoming increasingly challenging as employers struggle to get to know candidates before they even reach an interview.

His comments follow Prime Minister Andy Burnham's call for employers to rethink their reliance on video interviews, arguing they make it harder for young people to show their personality. He also criticised the growing use of AI to filter CVs. Wynn says the challenge starts even earlier, with many candidates reluctant to speak on the phone at all.

Across Scotland, C&P Recruitment consultants are increasingly seeing candidates who communicate only by text, ignore voicemail messages and, in some cases, arrive at interviews accompanied by a parent. Wynn describes it as the rise of the 'no-phone generation'.

The trend is backed up by recent research. A study published in May by iD Mobile and Mental Health UK found that 51 per cent of Brits admit to feeling some level of anxiety when making or receiving calls.

Artificial intelligence is adding another challenge. Wynn, who has worked in construction recruitment for more than 22 years, says AI-generated CVs often read well but reveal little about a candidate's personality, motivation or communication skills. Combined with a reluctance to speak on the phone, it leaves employers with very little insight before an interview.

C&P Recruitment says its consultants are increasingly seeing:

- Candidates who communicate exclusively by text and will not take or return calls
- Parents contacting recruiters about vacancies on behalf of adult children, and occasionally attending interviews with them
- AI-written CVs that read well but reveal little about a candidate's personality, motivation or confidence
- Employers struggling to assess reliability and suitability when candidates will not engage directly

"We've reached a pointwhere some young candidates simply won't answer the phone," said Wynn. "Andy Burnham is right that a young person can't show you much through a screen, and he's right about AI-written CVs. But from our perspective, the challenge starts even earlier. When a CV has been written by AI and the candidate won't take a call, you're left with very little to go on. You can't hear how someone talks about their work or what they're interested in.

"I want to be clear that this isn't a criticism of younger people," he continued. "They've grown up messaging, sending voice notes and posting online, so a cold call from a stranger is naturally going to feel daunting.

"The responsibility is on employers too. If we want the next generation in this industry, we need to prepare and support them rather than write them off at the first missed call. That means being clearer about what the job actually involves day to day and giving people the chance to build that confidence."

C&P Recruitment works with employers across construction, engineering and property throughout Scotland. Earlier this year the business reported 21 per cent growth and expanded through the acquisition of Clarke Bridges Resourcing. ■

UK JOB SEEKERS RISE FOR 41ST CONSECUTIVE MONTH

The number of people looking for work in the UK has increased for the 41st consecutive month, while available vacancies have fallen for 22 months in a row, highlighting growing pressure on the jobs market.

New data from KPMG and the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) shows the pool of job seekers has continued to grow for nearly three and a half years, as businesses remain cautious about hiring. The unemployment rate currently stands at 4.9 per cent, with economists forecasting it could rise to around 5.3 per cent this year.

Against this backdrop, industry leaders are calling on the Government to reduce the costs and red tape surrounding employment to encourage businesses to hire, particularly young people entering the workforce.

While permanent placements stabilised, temporary placements increased for a fourth consecutive month, suggesting some employers may be beginning to revive hiring plans. Starting salaries also rose at their fastest pace in six months.

“Underemployment is becoming a growing concern for the UK economy,” commented Sheila Flavell, CBE, COO of FDM Group. “We’re seeing highly capable graduates entering roles that don’t fully utilise their skills, which ultimately slows productivity and limits long-term growth. This reveals a misalignment between academic curriculum and what employers actually need.”

Maxine Bligh, REC’s chief membership and innovation officer, said the rise in vacancies for temporary jobs, the first in two years, showed that employers were set to “revive hiring plans”.

She called on the government to build “momentum in hiring” and prioritise the jobs market as ministers begin to layout policy in the coming months.

“If the government is serious about getting more young people their first vital opportunities of work they must think carefully about the balance of their ‘make work pay’ agenda by easing mounting costs and red tape around employment,” the industry chief said.

With youth employment a key priority for Andy Burnham, the latest figures underline the challenge facing policymakers as the number of people seeking work continues to rise while opportunities decline. ■

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THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

Andy Dunne, Managing Director, TEAM highlights an untapped competitive advantage for recruiters.

Recruitment has always been a people business, yet for an industry built on relationships we've spent decades treating one another as competitors rather than collaborators. Many recruiters, myself included, entered the profession believing every agency down the road was the enemy, every vacancy had to be filled alone and every candidate should remain firmly under lock and key. It was simply the culture many of us grew up in, and for a long time very few questioned it. >

The market has changed dramatically since then. Clients expect specialist expertise, candidates expect genuine market knowledge and recruitment businesses have become increasingly niche. Whether it's executive search, engineering, healthcare, technology, contract recruitment, RPO, MSP or international hiring, no individual recruiter or agency can credibly claim to be an expert in everything. Yet many still try.

After 24 years in recruitment, first as a consultant, then as a business owner and now leading the UK's largest network of independent recruitment businesses, I've become convinced that collaboration isn't simply good for the industry. It's one of the strongest commercial advantages a recruiter can have. In fact, I'd go as far as saying collaboration is the modern recruiter's superpower.

A question of trust

While researching this article, I asked my LinkedIn network a simple question: "What conditions need to exist before recruiters are prepared to collaborate?" The response was fascinating. Sixty-one per cent said they would collaborate if they knew and trusted the other recruiter, with specialist expertise (22 per cent) and agreeing the commercial terms upfront (17 per cent) trailing behind. Perhaps most interesting of all, not a single respondent selected the option saying they would never collaborate.

That tells its own story.

The challenge isn't convincing recruiters that collaboration has value. The challenge is creating the environment of 'trust' that allows it to happen.

What struck me most wasn't the poll itself but the conversation underneath it. Ruth Forster, Founder of Wagstaff Recruitment & Careers Coaching, admitted that when she was first invited to sit in a room with other recruiters, many of whom were competitors, she thought it was "crazy". Over time, however, she got to know them, understood how they worked and realised trust was built through shared values and consistent behaviour rather than simply agreeing a fee split. Her conclusion was simple: trust, and the time invested in building relationships, were what made collaboration possible.

Those comments resonated because they mirror my own experience. The strongest collaborative partnerships I've seen weren't formed because someone suddenly needed help filling a vacancy. They were built over months and years through conversations, networking events, referrals and simply doing what each party said they would do. When trust exists first, collaboration feels less like a risk and more like an obvious business decision.

The word collaboration itself is often misunderstood. Mention it to most recruiters and they'll immediately think of split-fee deals. While sharing placements remains one of the best examples of agencies working together commercially, it's only one piece of a much bigger picture. >

Collaboration for more

Collaboration can mean partnering with another recruiter to deliver a client project that neither business could fulfil alone. It might involve combining sector expertise, geographic coverage or service lines to win larger accounts that would otherwise be out of reach. It can mean introducing a trusted specialist into a client relationship because they're better placed to solve part of the hiring challenge than you are.

Sometimes collaboration has nothing to do with live vacancies at all. Recruiters share salary benchmarking data, market intelligence and candidate insights. They exchange ideas on business development, compare experiences of new legislation and recommend trusted suppliers. Increasingly, agencies are testing new technology on behalf of one another, sharing honest feedback on AI tools and recruitment platforms before anyone commits their budget.

Some collaborate on marketing by pooling industry data, creating joint reports or contributing content that benefits everyone involved. Others share the cost of exhibiting at trade shows or industry events, making opportunities viable that may have been too expensive independently. Some even provide cover while another recruiter is on annual leave, ensuring clients and candidates continue to receive the service they've come to expect.

Perhaps the most underestimated form of collaboration, however, has nothing to do with fees, technology or clients.

Recruitment can be a lonely profession.

Whether you're running a solo agency or leading a growing team, there are moments when you simply need another recruiter who understands the pressures you're facing. Someone to challenge an idea, sense-check a difficult client situation, recommend a piece of technology they've already tested or simply reassure you that they've faced exactly the same challenge. Some of the most valuable collaborations I've witnessed have happened over a coffee, a phone call or an introduction rather than around a placement fee.

None of these examples weaken a recruitment business. They strengthen it. Every shared experience, every trusted introduction and every lesson learned expands the capability of everyone involved.

There also remains a misconception within recruitment that collaborating somehow means giving work away. In reality, it often means winning work that would otherwise be lost. Jim Roach, Managing Director of ARV Solutions, recently shared how bringing another trusted specialist into an assignment outside his own expertise produced what he described as "four wins": the client, the candidate and both recruitment businesses all benefited. It's difficult to argue with that logic. Clients rarely care whether one recruiter or two recruiters fill their vacancy. They simply care about finding the right person. >

Several contributors also reflected on how their thinking had evolved during their careers. John Docherty of ATP Technical explained that working within larger recruitment businesses had taught him competitors were the enemy. It wasn't until joining a collaborative network that he realised many recruiters were simply honest professionals with complementary expertise. Michelle Theuma, recruiter, careers coach and business growth specialist, shared a similar journey. She described an industry where candidates were once hidden away in "top drawers" before discovering the commercial value of genuine partnerships, including one split-fee placement worth £37,400. Those stories aren't exceptions. They simply don't get told often enough.

The value of trust

Technology will undoubtedly reshape recruitment over the coming years. Artificial intelligence will improve productivity, automation will remove administrative tasks and new platforms will continue changing how recruiters source and engage talent. None of that alters the one thing clients and candidates continue to value most: trust.

Clients don't buy access to a database. They buy confidence that the recruiter advising them has the expertise, judgement and relationships needed to solve their hiring challenges. Candidates don't choose recruiters because they own the largest CRM. They choose people they believe will represent them professionally and honestly.

Perhaps that's why collaboration has become such an important differentiator. The best recruiters aren't those who pretend to know everything. They're the ones confident enough to recognise when someone else can add value. They understand that introducing another specialist doesn't weaken the client relationship. It strengthens it.

One comment during the LinkedIn discussion summed it up perfectly: "I'd rather have 50 per cent of something than 100 per cent of nothing."

It's a simple sentence, but it represents a significant shift in mindset.

The future of recruitment won't be defined by who builds the biggest database, sends the most CVs or adopts AI the fastest. It will belong to recruiters who build the strongest relationships, with clients, candidates and, increasingly, with each other.

Perhaps it's time we stopped asking how to beat our competitors and started asking which of them could become trusted partners.

In an industry founded on relationships, collaboration may prove to be the greatest competitive advantage we've been overlooking all along. ■

DON'T STOP LEARNING

Kirsty McManus, Director for Professional Development Services at the Institute of Directors discusses why learning agility is becoming the boardroom's defining skill.

The role of the director is being rewritten in real time. Artificial intelligence, cyber risk, shifting regulation, intensifying ESG scrutiny and changing workforce expectations are expanding what boards and senior leaders are expected to understand, and how quickly they need to adapt. >

The result is a quiet but significant shift in what makes a director effective. Practical experience and sound financial judgement remain the foundations of good governance, but they're no longer enough on their own.

A widening remit

For years, the director role has centred around governance, risk oversight and financial stewardship. Those responsibilities remain important, but they now sit alongside a much wider set of demands. Today's boards are also expected to be able to interrogate AI adoption and its ethical implications, understand cyber exposure well enough to challenge management's assurances, respond to fast-moving regulatory change across multiple jurisdictions, and demonstrate credible oversight of increasingly scrutinised ESG commitments.

These areas don't require directors to become technical specialists, but they do require enough fluency to ask the right questions, spot the right risks and hold executive teams to account. With the rapid pace of change, however, that fluency has a shelf life. A director's knowledge of AI governance, cyber threat patterns or ESG reporting standards from even two or three years ago is unlikely to be current today. This is why continuous learning is moving from a personal development 'nice to have' into a genuine governance requirement.

Continuous learning as a boardroom priority

In today's business landscape, many boards are being asked to invest more heavily in areas they aren't experts in. The answer isn't to hire one AI-literate board member, for example. A more durable response is to focus on building capability across the existing board through structured education, specialist advisers and reverse mentoring from within the organisation. Boards that treat learning as episodic, solved once through a single hire or a one-off training session, quickly fall behind again as the landscape shifts.

This reframes professional development for directors. It's not a box to tick before appointment or a certificate earned early in a career, it's an ongoing discipline that needs to be built into how boards operate: regular briefings, external expert input, structured self-study and honest peer challenge, sustained for as long as someone holds a board seat. >

Beyond technical knowledge

Technical fluency is only part of the picture, however. As routine analysis becomes increasingly automated, the qualities that differentiate strong directors are those that are hardest to automate: judgement under uncertainty, the ability to read a room, empathy, and the confidence to hold a considered line when data alone doesn't provide a clear answer.

A such, emotional intelligence has shifted from a desirable 'soft skill' to a core governance capability. Directors with strong emotional intelligence are better placed to build psychological safety within the boardroom itself, engage constructively with employees and stakeholders during periods of disruption, and ensure that inclusion is embedded in decision-making, rather than treated as a standalone initiative. In a climate of heightened workforce expectations and stakeholder scrutiny, this ability to build and sustain trust is becoming just as commercially important as technical or financial expertise.

Confidence matters here too, but not in the sense of certainty. The directors who add the most value are often also those who are comfortable admitting the limits of their own knowledge, asking questions without embarrassment and adapting their view as new evidence emerges. That kind of intellectual humility, paired with genuine curiosity, is a natural by-product of a sustained learning habit.

Building the next generation of directors

If director capability is now a constantly evolving asset, rather than a fixed qualification, organisations need to rethink how they identify, support and upskill both current board members and the executives being lined up for future board roles. >

There are some practical steps that can be taken here:

- Treat board and executive development as continuous, not a one-off induction or annual away day.
- Build structured exposure to AI, cyber and regulatory topics into leadership development programmes, well before individuals reach board level.
- Use reverse mentoring and cross-generational pairing to transfer digital fluency into experienced leadership teams.
- Assess potential directors on curiosity and adaptability, alongside technical track record.
- Create governance-specific learning pathways, rather than assuming general management training is sufficient preparation for board responsibilities.

Organisations that build this kind of culture do more than prepare individual directors. They also send a clear signal through the wider talent pool that development doesn't stop when someone reaches a senior title, which, in turn, helps attract and retain the ambitious, multidisciplinary talent that increasingly complex governance now demands.

The advantage of staying curious

Governance structures will continue to evolve in the coming years, with some boards already experimenting with dedicated committees for areas such as AI oversight, culture or geopolitical risk. But regardless of how formal structures develop, the directors who add the most value will be those who keep learning at the same pace as the environment around them. ■

MAKING TECHNOLOGY WORK

Simon Kent hosts a virtual round table discussion that gets to the heart of making the right technology choice for recruitment companies.

JobAdder

The importance of technology for the recruitment industry is unquestionable. Technology forms the backbone for many consultancies, offering an efficient way to manage and secure contacts, to maintain important relationships and to ensure consultants have access to the widest and best range of candidates. However, technology can also be a thorn in the side of many recruitment businesses. It can be inefficient, it can be stand alone, refusing to talk to other parts of the business. It can be full of out of date, irrelevant data, consequently serving up misleading information, and driving time consuming and inefficient processes. All of which may ultimately slow down and compromise the work of good consultants. >

As AI makes further in-roads into the sector, what is the key to making technology work? This was the central discussion point at a virtual discussion held as part of The Global Recruiter's Recruitment Live round tables and sponsored by JobAddder.

Logging on were:

Simon Topps, Founder, Addition
Hayley Pugh, Director, Oakley Recruitment
David Edwards, Group Commercial Director, La Fosse
Richard Bradley, Commercial Director, Omni RMS
Zak Harper, Group Marketing and Communications Director, Gi Group
Harry Elkington, COO, H&P Executive
Joe Bungey, Director, Operations and Client Experience, Mustard
Laura Raven, MD, Zitko Group
Dave Rose, Head of Growth and Automation, LHi Group
Tray Durrant, Managing Director, Bain and Gray
Nick Croucher, Group Managing Director, Frazer Jones
Alex Onoufriou, Group HR and Talent Director, G&P Talent
Sabina Filipplone, Operations Specialist, Thor Company
Ankur Anand, Group CIO, Nash Squared
Matt Holmes, Managing Director, UK&I, Harvey Nash
Kloe Mitchell, Managing Consultant Learning, Training and Development, Hales Group
Paul Sangster, Head of Sales, EMEA, JobAdder
Simon Kent, Editor, The Global Recruiter

With a wide variety of recruitment firms coming in to join in the conversation ranged over diverse experiences and comfort with recruitment technology.

There was a sense from the initial discussion of trying to work out where recruiters should start when approaching technology. The market is currently so full of possibilities, opportunities and solutions that it can be difficult to know what would make a real difference for any particular recruitment company and what might simply be the latest shiny new thing – impressive perhaps, but not necessarily good for business.

What emerged instead was the idea of starting from the point of view of what might be an issue technology could solve – what was the reason for investment in the first place? Participants raised issues such as conversion issues, enriching data, the identification of bottlenecks in processes that technology could ease, and started from there. By understanding how consultants work with technology and what they may be finding difficult it is possible to identify what technology can do to help.

Harvey Nash's Ankur Anand felt that conversations around technology must start with a discussion of processes rather than available tools. He added that he would always look for one of three impacts from any investment: freeing up capacity for consultants, improving the conversions consultants have with their clients and customers or doing something that directly increases yield per consultant. >

Other smaller recruitment companies raised the question of whether overall productivity and results could be enhanced by increasing technology use or by increasing headcount, demonstrating the significance that technology considerations can have for a business in terms of direction and strategy.

As forAI it is clear that some recruiters are finding better value from building their own capabilities with the technology rather than relying on off-the-shelf solutions. AI offers users a unique way of making changes within their organisation, it offers the potential for individual solutions that match businesses and even individual consultant ways of working and therefore investment in these technologies may offer promise for recruitment businesses.

But it has to be done with check and balances along the way. According to Dave Rose at LHi, his company is in the process of developing an AI platform which will allow consultants to interact with their recruitment database using natural language. This solution reflected the fact that individuals are now interacting with AI as part of their everyday lives, and it is important that they enable their staff to do so in a responsible and secure environment within the workplace. However, he also explained that the workflow they are creating will hopefully reduce dependance on multiple SaaS subscription services, delivering a clear business win and helping to pave the way for future development in this area.

Richard Bradley said his business had combined a number of different technologies and apps to create an automated processes within their facilities management recruitment service. As a result, candidates are being sourced, screened, interviewed through voice-based AI, communicated with through WhatsApp and email, and presented to hiring managers with minimal human involvement. He also noted that these roles rely largely on objective criteria rather than nuanced judgement, so automation works extremely well. Bradley stressed, however, that this model would not be appropriate for higher-value white-collar recruitment, where relationship building, judgement, and specialist expertise continue to provide significant competitive advantage.

This example was just one scenario where the discussion highlighted how technology can improve operational efficiency but must do so while recognising the areas where human interaction is important and needed. Throughout the discussion the participants returned to the importance of the people within the recruitment process. Candidates and clients benefit from human interaction as much as they do from increased efficiency.

Getting the best from any technology requires good data and many participants detailed measures they had taken to ensure their data was both clean and accurate. Indeed the time, money and resources required to secure good data can be as significant as investment in the technology itself.

The conversation also questioned whether organisations are focusing on internal efficiency or customer outcomes when considering technology. A lot of the time technology promises efficiency and productivity gains but can be less concerned for the experience of clients and candidates. Again one answer to this is to consider the value that is intended to be derived from technology investment. By ensuring the organisation is clear about the impact of any change it is possible to introduce technology without compromising the customer experience. Simply automating existing processes, however, will not create lasting competitive advantage if recruiters continue to operate in fundamentally the same way. >

Another important topic concerned consultant adoption of AI. Joe Bungey highlighted a common challenge facing smaller recruitment businesses where consultants often become overwhelmed by the growing number of digital tools available. Even with a relatively modest database and team size, encouraging consistent adoption across the board can be more difficult than selecting the technology itself.

Later in the discussion, the participants addressed concerns about AI replacing jobs and what training approaches had proven effective. Tray Durrant observed that adoption patterns had not always followed expected age demographics. In her business, some of the older consultants had embraced AI more enthusiastically than younger ones. The company had initially focused on straightforward use cases such as meeting summaries, note taking, client briefing documentation, and presentation preparation. This meant that over time AI was becoming a normal part of everyday work rather than a special consideration.

Overall, the discussion reinforced that any effective technology adoption depends less on choosing tools and instead concentrating on establishing clear business objectives and aiming for those. Along the way recruitment companies must ensure their AI usage is properly governed, invest in high-quality data, and build technology around existing workflows rather than forcing workflows to fit.

Paul Sangster, Head of Sales EMEA, JobAdder responded to the discussion saying: ”The recruitment industry isn’t short of AI solutions, it’s short of clarity. Most agencies don’t want another tool; they want confidence that the technology they choose will genuinely improve productivity and deliver measurable business outcomes.

“The businesses that succeed won’t be those adopting AI the fastest, but those applying it with the clearest purpose, underpinned by quality data, strong processes and the expertise of their people,” he concluded.

Check Out JobAdder’s 2026 Recruiter’s Guide to AI by clicking here. ■

EXPAND YOUR BUSINESS

BUILDING FOR EVERYONE

Marc Jones, Director of Operations for Technical at Acorn by Synergie describes his business' positive growth.

For many recruitment businesses, expansion is measured by the number of offices opened or consultants hired. While those are important milestones, I've always believed the real measure of growth is whether you're creating more opportunities for clients, candidates and the communities you work in. >

That's exactly what has driven the latest expansion of Acorn by Synergie's construction recruitment division.

We've recently launched a dedicated construction recruitment team in Exeter while doubling the size of our Bristol operation. On paper, that looks like a straightforward geographical expansion, but the reality is that it's the result of years of relationship building, delivering on our promises and proving that recruitment can add value far beyond simply filling vacancies.

Strong foundations

Our construction recruitment business has its roots in South Wales, where we've been supporting contractors and developers for more than 20 years. Over that time, we've built long-standing partnerships by understanding the sector, investing in specialist knowledge and developing a reputation for delivering quality people on projects of every size.

As our clients increasingly operated on both sides of the Severn Bridge, it became clear that we needed to evolve alongside them. Four years ago, we established our Bristol construction operation to mirror the successful model we'd developed in South Wales. Rather than simply opening another office, we wanted to replicate the same specialist approach and local expertise that had made the business successful.

That decision has proved to be the right one.

The South West construction market continues to present significant opportunities, and our clients increasingly want recruitment partners that can support them across multiple locations while still maintaining a local presence. Having established ourselves in Bristol, expanding further into Exeter became the natural next step.

One of the biggest drivers behind that growth has been our partnership with Bouygues UK, which demonstrates how recruitment businesses can become genuine strategic partners rather than transactional suppliers.

Working together on the Canolfan Pentre Awel development in Llanelli allowed us to showcase a different side of recruitment. Alongside supplying construction workers, we established an employment hub that connected local unemployed people with opportunities throughout the project's supply chain.

For me, that project perfectly illustrated what modern recruitment should be about. Yes, we successfully filled vacancies, but we also helped people access employment who may otherwise have struggled to enter the industry. We worked closely with local stakeholders, supported the contractor's social value commitments and created positive outcomes that extended well beyond the construction site itself. >

That experience reinforced something we've believed for a long time – recruitment businesses have an important role to play in supporting local communities as well as local employers.

It's also why social value now sits at the heart of many conversations with clients.

Focus on impact

Construction companies increasingly recognise that successful projects aren't judged solely on whether they're delivered on time and within budget. They're also measured by the lasting impact they leave behind, whether that's creating employment, supporting local businesses or developing future skills.

As recruitment specialists, we're in a unique position to help deliver those objectives.

The success of the employment hub in Llanelli has now led to further opportunities. We're continuing to support Bouygues UK on education projects in Barry and Rhoose, while our relationship has also expanded into the South West through its work at the University of Exeter.

As demolition work begins on that project, Bouygues UK wanted to recreate the employment hub model that had delivered such positive results in Wales. For us, that meant establishing a permanent presence in Exeter, enabling our team to work closely with the client both from our local office and directly on site.

It's an exciting development because it allows us to combine regional expertise with hands-on project delivery, ensuring we remain close to both our clients and candidates throughout every stage of the recruitment process.

The right team

Of course, expansion is only possible if you have the right people to lead it.

We're fortunate to have an experienced team that understands both the construction industry and the importance of building long-term relationships. Harry Lambert, who has successfully managed our Bristol construction operation, now divides his time between Bristol and Exeter, helping us maintain continuity while driving further growth across both regions. >

At the same time, we've strengthened Bristol with the appointments of Ben Thompson as Housing Recruitment Consultant and Mark Shepherd as White Collar Principal Consultant. Mark's return to Acorn by Synergie more than 20 years after first joining the business demonstrates something I'm particularly proud of – people want to come back because of our culture and the opportunities available here.

Alongside Harry, we're also delighted to welcome Jipsy Quinn into the Exeter team, giving us an excellent platform from which to continue growing our presence in Devon and the wider South West.

For me, this expansion isn't simply about increasing our footprint. It's about ensuring we're positioned where our clients need us while continuing to invest in specialist expertise and local knowledge.

The construction industry continues to evolve, facing challenges around skills shortages, changing workforce expectations and increasingly complex project requirements. Recruitment businesses need to evolve alongside it, offering consultative support rather than simply responding to vacancies.

That's the approach we've taken throughout our growth journey, and it's one we'll continue to build on.

Looking ahead, I see significant opportunities across both South Wales and the South West. Infrastructure investment, education developments and commercial construction projects continue to generate demand for skilled workers, while clients increasingly value recruitment partners who understand not only the labour market but also the wider social and economic impact of the projects they're supporting.

Ultimately, our expansion into Exeter and the continued growth of Bristol reflect our confidence in the future of the construction sector and our commitment to growing alongside our clients. More importantly, they reinforce our belief that successful recruitment is about far more than placing people into jobs. It's about creating lasting partnerships, strengthening communities and delivering positive outcomes for everyone involved. ■

PLANNING FOR GROWTH

Becky Owen, Head of Funding, Leonard Curtis on how recruitment firms can secure the right funding to expand.

Recruitment businesses have long played a vital role in the labour market, and their contribution is significant; they solve real problems for everyone involved in the hiring process. >

In recent times, the sector has faced a series of challenges, including holiday pay rulings, HMRC shifting PAYE risk in umbrella companies (potentially making end-clients financially responsible for unpaid tax), and the creation of the Employment Rights Act 2025 which introduced guaranteed hours and cancellation pay for agency workers. Combined with the growing compliance load and rising National Insurance contributions, things have been tough.

However, the challenges facing recruitment businesses are not limited to regulation and law. Many firms must also navigate the financial pressures associated with growth, particularly in a sector where cash flow is closely tied to contractor payroll and client payment terms.

A question of timing

Operationally, the cash flow timing gap often widens as a business grows, meaning revenue growth can actually increase cash strain rather than ease it. And whilst winning a major new contract, securing a preferred supplier agreement or expanding into a new region may be positive, without adequate funding in place businesses can find themselves constrained by their own success.

The good news is that there are a wide range of funding solutions available to support recruitment businesses throughout their growth journey. Understanding how these facilities work, what lenders are looking for, how to prepare for funding discussions and having the right advisor on board will help management teams to secure the right solution to suit their requirements.

One of the most commonly used forms of funding solutions within the recruitment sector is invoice finance. At its simplest, invoice finance allows businesses to release cash tied up in unpaid invoices by receiving an advance from a lender against the value of those invoices. Rather than waiting weeks or months for payment, businesses can access working capital almost immediately.

This type of facility is particularly attractive to recruitment companies because it is closely aligned to the way they operate. As turnover increases and more invoices are raised, the amount of funding available typically increases too. This creates a scalable funding solution that can support growth without the need for repeated funding applications every time the business reaches a new milestone. >

Beyond the invoice

However, invoice finance is only one part of the picture. Depending on the circumstances, recruitment businesses may also benefit from asset-based lending, property-backed facilities or specialist growth funding. Utilising multiple finance options can help meet immediate working capital requirements while also supporting longer-term strategic objectives such as acquisition, succession or investment.

Being appropriately prepared when it comes to securing finance is key. Lenders are looking for confidence in the business and its management team, with a strong track record, clear strategy and robust financial information. They want to understand how the business operates, what makes it successful and how funding will support the business.

Operational controls, strong systems and processes are equally important – recruitment firms operate within a complex regulatory environment, particularly when engaging temporary workers and contractors. Businesses must be able to demonstrate robust payroll processes and reliable management information, while giving lenders confidence that policy obligations are being met.

Don’t wait

One of the most common mistakes businesses make is waiting until funding becomes urgent before exploring options. The strongest funding outcomes are usually achieved when management teams start planning well in advance of their requirements. This provides time to assess different funding structures, engage with potential lenders and identify solutions that align with long-term business objectives rather than short-term pressures.

Regularly reviewing funding arrangements is particularly important in a growing business. A facility that was appropriate when turnover was £5 million may not provide the flexibility required when turnover reaches £15 million or £20 million. Similarly, businesses that have evolved through acquisition or expanded into new service areas may find that alternative funding structures are better suited to their current needs.

The value of specialist advice should also not be underestimated. The funding market has become increasingly diverse, with traditional banks now operating alongside challenger banks, specialist finance providers, alternative lenders and regional funding organisations. While this creates greater choice, it can also make the process more complex.

Working with an adviser who understands both the funding landscape and the recruitment sector can help businesses identify the most appropriate solutions and engage with lenders that are aligned with their requirements. This will result in more flexible structures and better long-term outcomes. >

Taking a holistic view

We recently supported a recruitment and staffing business in securing a £3.3 million funding package designed to strengthen its working capital position and support future growth. The transaction involved refinancing existing facilities while introducing new funding partners, creating a more flexible funding structure aligned with its long-term objectives. The deal included invoice finance, property finance and an unsecured facility, which illustrates the importance of tailoring funding solutions to the specific operating model and growth plans of each recruitment business, rather than relying on a standardised approach.

Ultimately, securing finance is about more than simply accessing capital. It is about creating a financial platform that enables businesses to operate confidently, invest strategically and take advantage of growth opportunities when they arise. In a sector where cash flow management can be just as important as sales performance, having the right funding strategy in place can provide a significant competitive advantage.

Recruitment businesses that plan ahead, maintain strong financial disciplines and engage with funding partners early are often best placed to convert growth ambitions into sustainable long-term success. By understanding the options available and preparing for funding before it becomes a necessity, management teams can ensure they have the flexibility and resilience needed to support the next stage of their growth journey. ■

EYES ON IRELAND

Siobhán Kinsella, President of the Employment and Recruitment Federation on why Ireland is the next obvious market for recruiters – if they read it right.

Ireland's unemployment rate reached 5 per cent in June, its highest level in three months. In the very same week, our members were reporting that permanent roles are taking longer to fill than at any point in the past year, with almost two thirds seeing time to hire lengthen and just 3 per cent seeing it shorten. If those two facts seem to point in opposite directions, you have just learned the first lesson about the Irish market. The headline numbers and the hiring reality are rarely the same thing, and the firms that succeed here are the ones that understand why. >

Start with the scale of the opportunity. The Irish recruitment industry generated an estimated €4.14 billion in revenue in 2025, up 5 per cent on the previous year, serving an economy with around 2.8 million people at work. For a UK recruitment business, no other European market offers a shorter distance to travel, in every sense. Same language, a familiar common law system, a flight time of about an hour, and, crucially since Brexit, full membership of both the European Union and the eurozone. An Irish entity puts you inside the single market with the lowest cultural and operational friction available anywhere in Europe. The timing argument makes itself. Ireland holds the EU Presidency for the second half of 2026, which means European labour market policy is currently being shaped from Dublin.

High demand

There is also a structural reason the market rewards recruiters. Ireland runs short of people in exactly the places that matter. 7 in 10 of our member agencies cite skills availability as their single biggest challenge, and that shortage is concentrated in a handful of sectors any expanding firm should study closely.

Healthcare leads as health and social care is Ireland's largest employing sector and demand there is structural rather than cyclical, driven by an ageing population, expanding homecare provision and persistent shortages in nursing and allied health professions. Construction and engineering form the second pillar. National housing targets, water and grid infrastructure and the push into modern methods of construction have created sustained demand for engineers, quantity surveyors, planners and skilled trades. Accountancy and finance remain reliably strong, supported by Dublin's growth as a financial services location since Brexit, while the life sciences clusters around Cork, Galway and Limerick continue to absorb specialist talent faster than the domestic market can supply it.

Technology deserves honesty rather than a sales pitch. ICT employment fell by more than 10 per cent in the first quarter of this year as computer programming and consultancy roles contracted. The generalist tech desk that thrived in Dublin in 2021 will struggle in 2026. Specialist desks in AI, data, cybersecurity and cloud will not, because those skills remain genuinely scarce. Read the sector at that level of detail or not at all. >

The realistic picture

Which brings me to the caveats, because a candid view of the challenges is worth more to an expanding firm than any amount of encouragement.

First, the cycle. The market has cooled. Our Irish Labour Market Monitor, which tracks recruitment activity across more than 600 recruitment businesses each month, found the share of recruiters reporting an increase in permanent vacancies fell from 52 per cent in January to 28 per cent by March, while employers shifted noticeably toward temporary and contract staffing. Our reading is that this is a market on hold rather than a market in retreat, but it is not 2022 either. A firm entering now should plan for conditions that reward depth, specialism and patience rather than a land grab. There is a flip side worth naming, though. The same shift toward flexible labour that is squeezing permanent desks is an opening for firms with genuine strength in temporary and contract recruitment. If that is your model, the current Irish cycle may suit you better than the boom years would have.

Second, regulation. Recruitment agencies operating in Ireland require an employment agency licence, and the employment rights environment is enforced through the Workplace Relations Commission. Agency workers here are entitled to equal treatment on basic pay and conditions from day one, not after twelve weeks as in the UK, which changes the economics of a temp desk and needs to be priced in from the start. Roles involving children or vulnerable adults require Garda vetting, the Irish equivalent of a DBS check, and the volumes involved are significant. The ERF processes more than 40,000 vetting applications a year on behalf of members, most of them in healthcare and social care recruitment. International sourcing has its own machinery too. Hiring from outside the European Economic Area runs through Ireland's employment permits system, with a critical skills route covering many of the shortage occupations in healthcare, engineering and technology, and any firm placing internationally will need to know that system well. And while Ireland has not yet transposed the EU Pay Transparency Directive, it is coming. Firms that build salary transparency into their processes now will be ahead of the market when it lands.

Third, housing. Ireland's housing shortage is not a background news story. It is an operational constraint. It affects candidate mobility, complicates international relocation offers and shapes where your own consultants can afford to live. Factor it into every conversation about bringing talent into Dublin in particular, and look seriously at Cork, Limerick and Galway, where strong regional economies come with somewhat less pressure.

Fourth, the nature of the market itself. Ireland is small and relationship driven. Reputation travels quickly in both directions, clients expect senior people in the room, and the firms that have struggled here are, almost without exception, the ones that tried to run Ireland as a satellite of a London desk. If you are not prepared to put credible leadership on the ground, wait until you are. >

A positive path into Europe

On the wider European question, Ireland earns its place as the bridgehead. Operating here means learning to work under EU employment directives in an English speaking, common law environment, which is the gentlest possible rehearsal for the Netherlands, Germany or the Nordics, where the same directives apply with the added complexity of language and local labour law tradition. In our experience, the firms that treat Ireland as a genuine market rather than a stepping stone tend, somewhat paradoxically, to make the better European expansions, because they have already learned the discipline of localising properly.

The Employment and Recruitment Federation has represented the industry here since 1970 and today counts more than 200 member firms operating under a shared code of conduct, with monthly market intelligence through the Irish Labour Market Monitor and member services spanning compliance, education and Garda vetting. Last year we also agreed a reciprocal partnership with The Recruitment Network, giving TRN's international membership a structured route into Irish market data, compliance support and our member network. If Ireland is on your map, we would be glad to talk before you commit the capital. The market is real. It simply rewards those who arrive prepared. ■