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Devyce



INDUSTRY AWARDS 2026

AWARDS WINNERS

THE REAL AI IMPACT
SKILLING UP

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WELCOME

SIMON KENT
EDITOR

It's been a long hot summer and things are cooling down. There's a sense that business is beginning to refocus again, finding its feet for the final stretch of the year, ever hopeful, always reaching for the positive signs (REC/KPMG report, slight economic growth detected) and wondering, if this is the Burham bounce, how far will reach and for how long. Across at The Steelyard in the heart of London, The Global Recruiter UK Industry Awards demonstrated again that even when times are challenging the UK's recruitment industry responds with positivity and quality.

The winners and Highly Commended individuals and organisations were suitably celebrated and their efforts handsomely rewarded by those in the know in the recruitment industry. Going the extra mile at a time like this is impressive and important – there is always the temptation to shift to the back foot, to react rather than push forward, to accept the status quo rather than go out and change it.

Whatever the rest of the year brings this is still a good time for recruitment businesses to take the initiative, to identify and pursue opportunities, to push forward and do more. It may take strength and skill to survive the hard times, but it takes vision and commitment to still believe that there is no time like the present, and there's always an opportunity ready to be taken. ■

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SIX OUT OF TEN HR LEADERS ADMIT BRITAIN STILL HAS A TWO-TIER WORKFORCE

More than six in ten (62 per cent) of Britain's HR leaders and senior decision-makers admit their organisation recognises and rewards desk-based employees more frequently than deskless or frontline workers, according to a new [report](#) from employee recognition and benefits platform Boostworks. Yet almost eight in ten (79 per cent) also believe deskless and frontline employees have equal access to recognition opportunities.

The full report "The Deskless Disconnect" findings suggest that while many organisations believe recognition opportunities are equally available to everyone, the reality is very different for the millions of people working on shop floors, hospital wards, factory lines, warehouses and out in the field.

The independent study of 2,000 employees across Britain found deskless workers consistently experience a poorer employee experience than their office-based colleagues. They are almost three times more likely than office workers to say they have no real relationship with their manager (10 per cent vs 4 per cent of office workers), while more than a quarter (29 per cent) say they aren't rewarded in any particular way, compared with 19 per cent of office workers. Their work is also less likely to be recognised by senior leaders (26 per cent vs 36 per cent) or in team meetings (24 per cent vs 37 per cent). >

Jo Werker, CEO of Boostworks, commented: “What’s striking about this research isn’t simply that employees see a problem. It’s that HR leaders recognise the gap too.

“When the people designing recognition strategies acknowledge that desk-based employees are recognised and rewarded more often, it shows just how difficult this gap can be to close. Recognition often happens through everyday interactions – meetings, conversations with managers and company communications – which can be harder to access for employees who aren’t desk-based. The opportunity for employers is to make sure where someone works never determines how visible, valued or appreciated they feel.”

The disconnect appears particularly stark because deskless employees (27 per cent) actually place greater importance on recognition than rewards, compared with one in five office workers (20 per cent).

Despite placing greater value on recognition, deskless employees were consistently less likely to receive it – whether in team meetings, from senior leaders, through formal awards or on company communication channels. One in ten receive no recognition at all, while one in five (21 per cent) deskless employees say recognition rarely happens where they work, almost double the proportion of office-based employees (11 per cent). Recognition is also less likely to motivate deskless employees to perform better (33 per cent vs 41 per cent of office workers), while 17 per cent say they would stay but stop going above and beyond if they regularly felt undervalued,

compared with 13 per cent of office workers. Deskless employees are also less likely to raise feeling undervalued with their manager (20 per cent vs 28 per cent).

For employers, that means risking disengagement among the very employees who often represent their business to customers every day.

The report also suggests recognition gaps begin with weaker day-to-day management. Almost one in ten (9.8 per cent) deskless employees say they have virtually no relationship with their line manager, making them almost four times more likely than hybrid workers (3 per cent) and almost three times more likely than office-based workers (4 per cent) to report little or no relationship with their manager.

Only 28 per cent describe their manager relationship as offering a healthy balance of support and performance management compared with around 40 per cent of office and hybrid workers (who describe their manager relationship as a genuine balance of support and performance management). Across every measure tested, from feeling valued to receiving praise, deskless employees reported significantly weaker relationships with managers.

Werker concluded: “If organisations are serious about creating inclusive workplaces, they need to stop designing employee experience around the people who are easiest to reach. Recognition, reward and communication should be built around every employee, regardless of where they work. Being out of sight should never mean being out of mind.” ■





```
X x = getX();  
doStuff(x);  
Y y = getY();  
doMoreStuff(x, y);  
}  
  
// getX(), getY(), etc...  
  
define ASM_VMX_VMREAD_RDX_RAX    ".byte 0x0f, 0x78, 0xd0"  
  
static __always_inline unsigned long vmcs_readl(unsigned long field)  
{  
    unsigned long value;  
    asm volatile ( __ex_clear(ASM_VMX_VMREAD_RDX_RAX, "20")  
                  : "=a"(value) : "d"(field) : "cc");  
    return value;  
}  
  
{  
    lcs_solution lcs_solution; // ...  
    lcs_solution result;  
    for (size_t i = 0; i < lcs_solution.size; i++)  
    {  
        const size_t max_match = lcs_solution[i].max_match;  
        if (lcs_match < max_match)  
            break;  
        size_t match = 0;  
        while (match < max_match && lcs_solution[i].match == match)  
            ++match;  
        if (lcs_solution[i].match < max_match)  
            result = lcs_solution[i];  
    }  
}
```

ROBERT HALF: AI-GENERATED APPLICATIONS ARE SLOWING HIRING

As the use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in job applications continues to grow, many UK organisations say it's adding complexity to the hiring process. A new survey from talent solutions and business consulting firm Robert Half show that only 10 per cent of professionals say they don't use AI in any part of the job application process, while more than two-thirds of hiring managers (67 per cent) say the need to screen for AI-generated materials has increased the time it takes to hire.

According to the research, 48 per cent of UK employers say AI-generated CVs or application materials are creating notable challenges for their organisation. In many cases, the increased use of GenAI tools is resulting in a high volume of generic CVs and cover letters, and fabricated or embellished work history, making it harder for employers to assess applications and determine whether a candidate's stated experience accurately reflects their skills and capabilities.

"The growing use of AI-generated CVs and applications is creating new challenges for employers," said Matt Weston, Senior Managing Director for UK & Ireland, at Robert Half. "When large volumes of applications appear highly polished or follow near-identical formats, it

becomes harder to evaluate candidates, validate skills and experience and confidently identify the strongest fit for the role."

Many organisations have identified several factors that are making candidate validation more complex and extending hiring timelines, including:

- Managing an increased volume of applications from unqualified candidates (28 per cent)
- Distinguishing between AI-generated and authentic CVs (27 per cent)
- Needing additional in-person interviews or screening to validate candidates' skills and experience (23 per cent)
- Spending more time verifying candidate credentials (23 per cent)

"The increasing use of AI-generated applications reinforces the importance of human judgment, expertise and oversight in hiring", Weston added. "Technology can support the process, but employers still need experienced professionals to evaluate candidates, validate skills and make informed hiring decisions without unnecessary delays." ■



DEMAND FOR TALENT ACCELERATES IN NATIONAL SECURITY & DEFENCE

Forward Role Secure, have reported a stand-out year for their sector, expanding their client base, adding further headcount, and being trusted to support SMEs, specialist consultancies and scaling technology organisations operating across some of the UK's most sensitive environments.

This growth is playing out against a backdrop of real risk in the UK and volatile global situations. Recent high-profile incidents, such as the Manchester Airports Group cyber-attack and breaches hitting government and public-sector systems, have put security & defence at the top of the agenda across boardrooms. Much of the required hiring sits beyond SC clearance and into DV and eDV, where the available talent pool is considerably smaller, which presents significant challenges for employers. The hiring challenge stretches well beyond cyber security, with growing demand across software, cloud, data, AI, delivery and commercial functions supporting the wider National Security mission.

The North-West is becoming increasingly important in building the talent pool to meet hiring demands, and Forward Role Secure's growth reflects that shift. The National Cyber Force is based in Lancashire, while ecosystems including DiSH and NWRDSC are helping bring together government, industry, technology companies and the wider skills community. [Forward Role Secure](#)

is active across both regional skills initiatives, they're also using their growing network of skilled candidates and Forward Role's diversity-focused hiring solution FR Represent, to help employers from all over the UK to access a broader talent pool.

Charlie Cairoli, Principal Consultant – Defence & National Security at Forward Role Secure. Said: "It is a challenging market, but also an incredibly rewarding one. The people we speak to across National Security are often motivated by much more than the technology itself. They want to understand the mission, see the impact of their work and know that what they are doing genuinely matters. That sense of purpose is one of the sector's biggest strengths; it's a fantastic career path! Forward Role Secure want to communicate that to our markets, as we continue to attract the next generation of talent."

Brian Johnson, Managing Director at [Forward Role](#), said: "Forward Role Secure has become one of the most exciting parts of our business this year, and it's a real source of pride to see the team playing such an important role in supporting the UK's national security and defence talent pipeline." ■



CAREER DEVELOPMENT JUDGEMENT GAP EMERGES

A survey of more than 1,000 HR leaders and broader management has revealed a career development judgement gap between employer provision and employee expectations.

Outplacement and HR specialist, [INTOO UK & Ireland](#) has revealed the findings in its [Future World of Work report 2026](#), which takes an in-depth look at the relationship between HR leaders and broader management across the UK in organisations employing 250 people or more.

[Owen Morgan](#), Managing Director at INTOO, said: “Our Future World of Work report provides an important nation-wide temperature check on the heart of UK working life every year. In our latest report, a large proportion of respondents feel their business is providing visible career pathways, however there is a considerable mismatch between what HR leaders and broader management think. Leaders are far more positive and optimistic about how the organisation is deploying and instilling career development plans (CDPs) whereas broader management are more sceptical.

“With the ‘September Exodus’ looming, which is an annual trend of resignations and new starts that takes place around this time of year, now is the time for businesses to be re-aligning their values and focusing on the development of their team.”

Owen added: “September provides a time for reflection following the summer months – salary concerns, missed opportunity for career growth or promotion, feeling ‘in a rut’ or simply unrealised ambition. As normal life resumes for many following the ‘back to school’ period, it is unsurprising that September can sometimes see a slew of resignations with workers looking for a fresh challenge or a new start.

In INTOO’s Future World of Work report, HR leaders and individuals within broader management were asked who they believe is responsible for career development. Findings showed that HR leaders are most likely to believe the organisation holds primary responsibility (32 per cent), while broader management (who are often closer to the individuals in question) are most likely to say it rests with the individual. Further to this, 80 per cent of HR leaders say their organisation creates visible career pathways effectively, whereas just 64 per cent of broader management agree.

Owen continued: “While senior leaders in organisations can feel they are offering the right career development pathways for employees, ensuring this is felt across the business is a vital part of maintaining a motivated and long-standing workforce. Career development is at the heart of what we do at INTOO and we know from experience that for many organisations, September creates a difficult time with talent turnover and the focus, inevitably has to be replacing them – which is a costly and time-consuming exercise.

“These challenges can be minimised by providing employees with the support, coaching and guidance required to support their career development. Understanding what employees really want, what motivates them and where you can develop their skills to protect long term employability are all important steps for organisations as they face a challenging cross-roads.”

INTOO’s report also found that 74 per cent of all respondents’ rate externally provided career support as valuable. Both HR leaders (47 per cent) and broader management (48 per cent) believe it encourages honest conversations that employees feel unable to have internally.

Owen concluded: “While traditionally outplacement support was purely for redundant or exiting employees, in the modern workplace it can be a progressive tool to support career transition frameworks, nurturing skills of existing team members or repositioning current employees as their roles change and new technology is implemented. Instead of laying staff off, organisations can implement external outplacement coaching to redeploy workers into new departments and support their long-term position within the business. We still find there is a distinct lack of understanding about how outplacement services can support employees and organisations, but ensuring individuals feel heard and understood supports the development of long-standing staff.

“While people may often say they are moving for ‘more money’, it is rarely the sole motivator,” Owen adds. “Understanding what makes your employees tick and ensuring that your organisation has robust career-planning support in place is key to pre-empting and potentially stopping unwanted resignations.” ■

Devyce



INDUSTRY AWARDS 2026

THE GLOBAL RECRUITER UK AWARDS 2026

In a lively, exciting and packed awards party, held at The Steelyard, Cannon Street, London on Wednesday afternoon, the best of the best of the UK's recruitment industry gathered to learn who has been selected as the stand-out recruiters and businesses of the year. Hosted by The Global Recruiter's Publisher, Gary King and headline sponsored by Devyce, the event attracted the leading lights of the recruitment industry, keen to celebrate the success of the sector and the remarkable achievements of the industry and its leading lights.

At a time when the recruitment industry is worth £43 billion and over 30,000 recruitment agencies employ more than 200,000 people the industry has continued to deliver success storied for candidates, clients and consultants despite a whole host of challenges.

The beauty of The Global Recruiter's Awards is that those singled out for recognition have been identified by others from the industry – in other words the judges know what it takes to create greatness and they know what it takes to survive and thrive. They know what excellence looks like, and they also know what the standard is. For this reason, everyone listed below has supreme bragging rights as of now: this year, they got a Global Recruiter Award. Something to be proud of and something to tell everyone else about. >

Industry Winners Announced

Best In-House Training

Winner: Amoria Group

Best Innovation

Winner: SafeRec

Best Employer Brand

Winner: Oakley Recruitment

Highly Commended: Talent Locker

Best Marketing Campaign

Winner: GCE HR

Highly Commended: AJ Chambers.
& Atlas Recruitment Technology Ltd.

Best Permanent Consultant

Winner: Hannah Clarke – Addition

Highly Commended: Rosie Jenkins
– Heads Resourcing Group.

Best Temporary Consultant

Winner: Joanne Adams – Oakley
Recruitment

Best Candidate Attraction Through Social Media

Winner: Antal International

Highly Commended: Addition

Best UK-Overseas Operation

Winner: NRL

Best Recruitment Process Outsourcing Business

Winner: Globe 24-7

Best Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

Winner: Amoria Group

Highly Commended: Globe 24-7

Best Client Service

Winner: Xpertise Recruitment

Highly Commended: STR & VHR

Best Newcomer

Winner: Greenbridge Energy

Highly Commended: Invecta Group

Best Specialist Recruitment Business

Winner: Capstone Recruitment

Highly Commended: Leaders in
Care

Best Large Recruitment Business

Winner: PageGroup

Medium Recruitment Business

Winner: VHR

Best Small Recruitment Business

Winner: Fox and Cubs

 ringover



















THE REAL AI IMPACT

Matt Weston, Senior Managing Director – UK&I, BeNeLux & UAE at Robert Half, says AI is changing recruitment, but not in the way many expected.

A black clipboard with a silver clip is positioned diagonally across the frame. It holds a white resume form. The word 'Resume' is printed in large, bold, pink letters. Below it, the sections 'Education', 'Profession', 'Experience', and 'Personal statement' are visible. At the top right of the form, there are fields for 'Name:', 'Phone:', 'Email:', and 'Address:'. A black pen with a silver tip lies on the form. In the bottom left corner, a white coffee cup filled with dark coffee sits on a white saucer. The background is a solid bright yellow.

Resume

For years, the conversation around artificial intelligence revolved around the question of if AI would replace people, and which jobs would be most vulnerable. However, as AI adoption has accelerated at pace, a more nuanced picture is emerging. Rather than eliminating the need for people, many businesses are discovering that AI works best when combined with human expertise, judgement and oversight. >



This shift is influencing not only the roles employers need to fill, but also how talent is sourced, assessed and developed. The challenge for the staffing market isn't choosing between technology and people, but rather understanding how and where the two work together most effectively.

Why human judgement still matters

One of the biggest misconceptions about AI in the workplace is that it can operate independently of people. In practice, effective deployment requires significant human involvement. In fact, Robert Half research has recently revealed that more than three in 10 companies in North America that reduced roles due to AI had to hire those positions back this year, when it turned out that those roles required institutional knowledge, context, relationship management, human oversight, and quality control that AI couldn't replace, among other reasons.

Additional Robert Half data shows that 31% of UK workers are spending more time overseeing or validating AI-generated outputs, meaning that some of the time ostensibly saved through using AI goes back into the process for validation, adjustment and quality control.

This has important implications for recruitment. Employers are increasingly recognising that while AI can automate tasks, it cannot replace critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, creativity and relationship management. As a result, these innately human skills are becoming more valuable, not less, and businesses are subsequently redefining roles rather than removing them altogether. The most successful teams are using AI to handle routine processes, allowing professionals to focus on higher value strategic work that demands human insight.

Recruitment is becoming more complex

AI is not only changing jobs, though; it is also transforming the hiring process itself. The widespread availability of generative AI tools means that candidates can now create polished CVs, cover letters and applications in a matter of minutes. In fact, our recent study 1,000 UK professionals shows just how embedded these tools have become, with just 10% stating that they do not use AI at any stage of the application process. >



Among those using AI during the job application and recruitment process, 38% use it with the intention of reviewing and improving CVs. More than a third (36%) use it to prepare answers to potential interview questions or simulate interviews, 36% to feel more prepared for recruitment stages or research companies and their leadership, and 34% to identify relevant keywords for a position. A third (33%) also use it to create customised CVs or cover letters, while 22% use it to reduce insecurities about their professional background.

Used appropriately, these tools can help candidates communicate their experience more effectively but they are also adding friction for employers, as they are in many cases flattening professionals' unique experiences into generic, near-identical sounding applications that match job descriptions keyword for keyword. In other cases, AI is fabricating or embellishing skills and experiences, so that the person in the interview can't speak confidently or genuinely about what's on their CV.

A separate Robert Half survey of 500 UK hiring managers found that 67% say AI-generated application materials are increasing the time it takes to hire, while 48% say AI-generated CVs or application materials are creating challenges for their hiring process.

The most common complication is managing a higher volume of applications from unqualified candidates, cited by 28% of hiring managers. This is closely followed by the difficulty of distinguishing between AI-generated and authentic CVs (27%). Almost a quarter (23%) say they are relying on in-person interviews or additional screening to validate candidates' skills and experience, while the same proportion are spending more time verifying credentials.

This explains why recruiters are placing greater emphasis on deeper assessment methods, including evaluating practical skills, experience, judgement, and cultural fit. The ability to verify capabilities beyond what appears on a CV is becoming increasingly important. This is where specialist recruiters continue to add significant value. As AI-generated applications become more common, human insight remains critical in identifying people who possess both the technical expertise and the softer skills needed to succeed.

The growing demand for AI-enabled talent

Although concerns about job displacement continue to generate headlines, employers are increasingly focused on how AI is reshaping skills requirements. We know from our own research that 64% of UK hiring managers are shifting their focus towards hiring for different in-demand skills as a result of AI advancements, and are looking for professionals who can work alongside it. Candidates who combine AI literacy with strong business acumen, communication skills and strategic thinking are becoming highly sought after. This demand is also reflected in compensation trends. Our data indicates that 31% of UK employers are willing to pay a salary premium for professionals with generative AI skills. >

For recruiters, this creates both an opportunity and a challenge. Demand for AI-skilled talent is rising, but so too is the need to identify candidates who can balance technical capabilities with the human qualities that technology cannot replicate.

The million-dollar question: What's next?

The conversation around AI is moving beyond replacement and towards optimisation, as many businesses are learning that technology alone rarely delivers sustainable results. Success comes from understanding how AI and people complement one another.

History shows us that this is a familiar pattern. Previous waves of technological innovation transformed how work was performed, but ultimately created new opportunities, skills and career paths, we believe AI is likely to follow a similar trajectory. For recruiters, the priority will be helping employers and candidates navigate this transition. That means finding professionals who can harness AI effectively while bringing the judgement, adaptability and interpersonal skills that remain central to business success.

The future of recruitment is unlikely to be defined by humans versus machines. Instead, it will be shaped by how effectively businesses combine the strengths of both. ■



RECRUITMENT

THE STRANGE DEATH OF THE SIX-MONTH PROBATIONARY PERIOD

Duncan Lennon, Solicitor, Winckworth Sherwood, discusses the implications of changes to the unfair dismissal law.



Perhaps the most spoken about (and for some, the most controversial) change coming in as a result of the Employment Rights Act 2025 (ERA 2025) is the reform to unfair dismissal law. While this has been covered extensively in the employment space already, a brief headline explainer is that the qualifying period to bring a claim for unfair dismissal is being reduced from two years to six months. This effectively gives employees substantially more protection at a much earlier point in their career. >



For employers, expect more PIPs, expect more investigations, expect more legal challenges from employees, expect more time spent managing exits, and expect more contact from your HR and legal team. Regardless of your perspective on the merits of this reform, it is near impossible to deny that these changes will generate more in the way of procedural and administrative effort for employers. Another related change concerns the removal of the statutory cap for unfair dismissal compensation (but we will leave that story for another day).

The probationary period that isn't

One of the consequences of this is that it will make little sense to operate a six-month probationary period for obvious reasons. The employee's period of service spent on their probationary period still counts towards their continuous service. In other words, the label of this time being "probationary" does not stop the unfair dismissal clock from ticking. Therefore, a six-month probationary period is not going to be the best approach in the near future, considering that after six months, the employee will now have unfair dismissal protection.

It is also important to remember that the statutory minimum notice by law is at least one week once an employee has been continuously employed for one month or more (rising with the length of service). Consequently, employers need to be careful when dismissing employees close to the end of a six-month probationary period.

The reform to unfair dismissal begs the question though: what else can employers do now to prepare for these changes (which, as a reminder, kick in for unfair dismissal purposes on 1st January 2027)? >

1. Build a buffer: since the effective date of termination is not always the day the employer intends, decisions to dismiss employees during probation should be actioned with a healthy margin. Aim to conclude the process at least 2-4 weeks before the end of the six-month period (rather than on the final day). Or indeed, make use of a shorter probationary period instead. With this, ensure line managers are firm on this distinction between the dismissal decision date and the effective date of termination.
2. Ensure your employment contracts have a contractual right to make a payment in lieu of notice (PILON) so that employment can be brought to an end quickly. Making sure a robust and clear PILON clause is included makes things simpler and easier.
3. Consider a notice period which automatically extends after the probationary period has expired. There is nothing to prevent a shorter one week notice period during the probationary period which then automatically increases to, say, one month (or higher, provided this meets legal requirements) on completion of probation.
4. Closely monitor commencement dates and understand the implications. For example, HR professionals and in-house lawyers should be clear that an employee with a start date on or before 1 July 2026 will acquire unfair dismissal protection on 1 January 2027.

How these changes intersect with an already stretched employment tribunal (ET) system is yet to be seen. We are now regularly seeing cases listed with hearings taking place in 2029 and 2030. There will certainly be an increase in unfair dismissal claims being brought which, without other steps being taken will only further grow the backlog and push cases even more distantly into the future.

This reality may make settlement a more attractive option for employees, rather than waiting potentially years for a hearing (whilst remaining subject to a duty to mitigate their losses and seek new employment). Equally, for those employees who simply will not budge or engage in settlement discussions, they may find themselves waiting a very long time to get their day in court. ■



SKILLING UP

Gregor Black, CEO, Aureol Global Connections says the UK needs to train more workers – but what happens in the meantime?



There is little disagreement that the UK needs to develop more of its own skilled workers. More apprenticeships, stronger vocational training and better routes into industries such as manufacturing, construction and engineering are essential if we are going to address the skills shortages that have affected these sectors for years. The difficulty is that skills take time to build. >

Skills



Employers do not only need more people, they need people with the right experience and technical capabilities. Someone starting an apprenticeship today, cannot fill the vacancy for an experienced engineer, technician or skilled tradesperson tomorrow. A newly qualified worker can become an important part of the future workforce, but they will often need years of practical experience before they can replace someone who has spent decades developing specialist knowledge. And while we build the workforce we need for the future, employers still need people to manufacture products, deliver infrastructure projects and keep businesses growing today.

That creates a skills transition problem that deserves more attention.

Skills shortages have consequences beyond recruitment itself. Vacancies can delay projects, restrict the amount of work businesses are able to take on and place additional pressure on existing employees. For growing companies, a shortage of experienced people can ultimately become a constraint on growth.

Recent figures show just how significant that challenge could become. According to the [Home Office](#), Skilled Worker visa applications from main applicants fell by 39% in the year ending June 2026 compared with the previous year. At the same time, [Make UK](#) estimates there are around 55,000 unfilled vacancies in UK manufacturing, costing the economy approximately £6 billion in lost output each year. Construction faces a different but related demographic challenge. [Government figures](#) show that around 24% of the construction workforce was aged over 55 in 2023, up from approximately 13% in 2000.

None of these figures in isolation tells the whole story. Together, however, they illustrate three pressures happening simultaneously – persistent skills shortages, an ageing workforce and a contracting international recruitment pipeline.

International recruitment isn't an alternative to training

The answer cannot simply be to recruit indefinitely from overseas. Businesses have a responsibility to invest in apprenticeships, training, reskilling and better career pathways. We also need to make careers in industries such as manufacturing, engineering and construction, attractive to younger generations.

International recruitment should never become a substitute for that investment, nor should it be used as a means of accessing cheaper labour rather than paying people appropriately. But the opposite argument – that domestic training can simply replace international recruitment – also overlooks an important practical reality. >



Developing highly skilled workers takes years. Meanwhile, businesses are competing for people who already have the necessary experience, often within sectors where significant parts of the workforce are approaching retirement.

International recruitment can also support domestic skills development rather than compete with it. Experienced overseas workers can bring specialist skills into businesses while apprentices and less experienced employees develop their own capabilities. In the right circumstances, that creates opportunities for knowledge transfer, mentoring and the development of the next generation of workers.

Seen in that context, the relationship between international recruitment and domestic training does not have to be zero-sum. A business can recruit internationally to address an immediate capability gap while simultaneously investing in the people who may eventually fill those roles domestically.

Recent changes to the Skilled Worker route are designed to encourage businesses to invest more heavily in domestic skills. The standard salary threshold has increased, the general skills threshold has moved from RQF Level 3 to RQF Level 6, with some exceptions, and new applicants face higher English language requirements.

The objectives behind raising standards and increasing investment in the domestic workforce are understandable. The question is how we manage the transition.

We need a bridge between today and tomorrow

The debate is too often presented as a choice: either businesses recruit domestically or they look internationally. In reality, the UK needs both. A more sustainable approach would combine significant long-term investment in the domestic workforce with targeted international recruitment where employers can demonstrate genuine shortages and appropriately skilled workers are available overseas.

That doesn't mean every vacancy should be eligible for international recruitment, nor does it mean overseas workers provide the answer to every skills shortage. It means recognising that there is a period between identifying a structural skills problem and having enough trained people to solve it.

International recruitment can help provide that breathing room.

For employers, this also requires a change in workforce planning. That means treating skills as a longer-term business risk rather than simply a recruitment issue. If a company knows that a significant proportion of its experienced engineers, technicians or tradespeople could retire within the next decade, it can start responding now. That might involve recruiting apprentices, investing in existing employees, creating structured knowledge-transfer programmes or identifying international talent for particularly difficult-to-fill positions. >

The earlier those decisions are made, the more options employers have. Waiting until an experienced employee leaves before thinking about how to replace their skills risks turning a predictable workforce challenge into an urgent recruitment problem.

Recruitment can no longer begin when a vacancy becomes urgent. Businesses need to understand the age profile of their workforce, identify the skills they are likely to lose over the next five or ten years and determine which capabilities can be developed internally and where external recruitment may still be required.

Government, industry and education providers have a role to play too. Apprenticeships and vocational training need to align much more closely with the skills employers will actually require in the years ahead.

The real debate therefore shouldn't be about choosing between developing the domestic workforce and recruiting internationally. It should be about how we get from the workforce we have today to the workforce we need tomorrow without leaving businesses unable to build, manufacture and grow in the meantime. Used strategically, international recruitment can be the bridge that gives us time to do that. ■





**EXPAND YOUR
BUSINESS**

RECRUITMENT BUSINESS GROWTH: BE MORE LOBSTER

Anna Mosley is a multi-award-winning high-performance leadership coach, international speaker and founder of EIGHTY, which helps recruitment agencies unleash extraordinary performance through extraordinary leadership.



Growth is exciting. More people. More clients. New markets. Bigger targets. Perhaps new technology, new services or an entirely new business model. But before recruitment leaders start talking headcount, revenue and expansion strategy, I believe there's a more important question to ask: are we actually fit for growth? >

Because expansion isn't simply a commercial challenge. It's a leadership and culture challenge – and there's a gap I see repeatedly across the recruitment industry.

Having spent years working with recruitment businesses and their leadership teams through EIGHTY, the multi-award-winning leadership development company I founded, I've seen the same pattern repeatedly.

Recruitment is brilliant at developing recruiters. We teach people how to sell, negotiate, build relationships, win business and smash targets. Then someone becomes successful enough and, almost overnight, they find themselves leading people.

But who taught them how to lead?

Being an exceptional recruiter doesn't automatically make you an exceptional leader. Leading requires a different skill set: understanding personalities, adapting your communication, having difficult conversations, coaching rather than telling, creating accountability and psychological safety, and keeping people motivated when the landscape around them is changing.

When a business is growing, those skills become even more important.

Growth puts leadership under pressure

My belief is simple: capacity + capability = extraordinary leadership. And extraordinary leadership drives extraordinary results.

Capability is having the skills to lead. Capacity is being mentally fit enough to access those skills when the pressure is on.

Expansion demands both.

Growth means more people, more complexity, bigger decisions and greater uncertainty. You can teach someone every leadership framework going, but if they're permanently overwhelmed, firefighting and reacting to whatever lands next, how effectively are they going to lead through the next stage of growth?

When we're overwhelmed and operating at full capacity, we simply don't have the same headspace to think strategically, respond intentionally and lead effectively through change.

That's why mental fitness shouldn't be dismissed as simply a wellbeing conversation. It's a performance conversation.

The strongest leaders I work with have learned how to stay calm in the chaos. They're self-aware enough to recognise their autopilot behaviours, manage their energy and regulate their response. Crucially, they create enough headspace to think rather than simply react.

Because before you can lead a business through growth, you need to be able to lead yourself.

Are your leaders ready to thrive in the grey?

We've heard plenty about IQ and, rightly, spent years talking about EQ – emotional intelligence.

But there's another form of intelligence I think recruitment leaders should pay much more attention to: CQ, or Change Intelligence. >

Because expansion is change and change takes us out of the black and white and into the grey.

Black and white is comfortable. It's what we know, what's predictable and what's worked before.

The grey is messier. It's new markets, new structures, bigger teams and unfamiliar responsibilities. It's making decisions without all the information. It's accepting that what worked yesterday might not work tomorrow.

So perhaps the question isn't simply whether your team is fit for growth. Is your team fit to thrive in the grey?

That requires leaders who can create confidence without pretending there is certainty. Leaders who can say, "I don't have every answer, but we'll work it out." Leaders who create a culture where people feel safe enough to challenge, experiment, make mistakes, learn and adapt.

Your people are watching how you behave through uncertainty. I often say that leaders bring the weather.

If the person at the front is anxious, rigid and resistant to change, that weather spreads. But when leaders demonstrate resilience, curiosity, vulnerability and a growth mindset, they give everyone else permission to do the same.

Why recruitment businesses should be more lobster

There's an analogy I use constantly with leaders: be more lobster.

A lobster can't keep growing inside the same shell. Eventually, it has to shed it and become temporarily vulnerable while a bigger one forms.

Discomfort equals growth. Discomfort is so often a signal of growth. Growth requires us to move beyond what's familiar, predictable and comfortable – whether we're growing as individuals, leaders or businesses.

The structures, behaviours and leadership styles that got a recruitment business to where it is today may not be the ones that take it into a new market, double its headcount or deliver the next stage of growth.

Perhaps the founder can no longer make every decision. Perhaps managers need to stop simply managing and start genuinely leading. Perhaps the leadership team needs more challenge. Perhaps behaviours tolerated in a smaller company become damaging in a larger one.

Growth inevitably asks us to shed something and that's why discomfort isn't necessarily a warning sign that something is going wrong. Very often, it's a signal that growth is happening.

Growth will expose the cracks in your culture

You can have the most impressive expansion strategy in the world, but growth has a habit of magnifying whatever already exists beneath the surface.

If communication is poor with 20 employees, adding another 20 won't fix it. If accountability is weak, greater complexity will expose it. And if managers avoid difficult conversations, expansion simply gives them more difficult conversations to avoid.

For me, one of the foundations of a high-performing culture is trust and psychological safety. >

People need to feel able to speak up, question decisions, admit mistakes and offer a different perspective without fear. That becomes particularly important during growth because businesses need people willing to learn and solve problems, rather than protect themselves or simply tell the boss what they think they want to hear.

Psychological safety doesn't mean lowering standards. Quite the opposite.

The strongest cultures combine safety with accountability. They recognise progress, encourage honest debate and treat mistakes as opportunities to learn, while remaining clear about expectations and performance.

That's how you create teams capable of adapting as the business changes around them.

I've seen the impact first-hand. EIGHTY has worked with numerous recruitment businesses, including global recruitment company Auxo Talent, supporting leaders through significant change and growth.

Developing both the capacity and capability of its leadership team has driven greater accountability and alignment, while equipping leaders with the skills and tools to lead through change, adapt to different personality types and bring their people with them. This contributed to the business successfully navigating

significant change, including a successful rebrand.

Its CEO, Ford Gerrard, described our 12-month Extraordinary Leader Programme as "life-changing for the business".

Before you ask where to grow, ask if you're ready

Of course, strategy matters. Technology matters. Systems, sales capability, market insight and having the right people around the table all matter.

But every growth strategy ultimately has to be delivered by people.

And that's why leadership development can't be something businesses think about after they've expanded. It needs to be part of how they prepare for expansion in the first place.

Before your next growth meeting begins with "Where are we going to grow?", I'd suggest asking three different questions:

**Are our leaders fit for growth?
Are we equipped to thrive in the grey?
And is our culture strong enough for what comes next?**

If the answer to any of those is "not yet", that doesn't mean you shouldn't grow. It means you've discovered where the real work needs to begin. ■



GAME CHANGING

Adam Stolerma, COO, TritonExec says the US recruitment market hasn't slowed down, it's grown up.

A large American flag is shown waving on a tall pole against a clear blue sky. The flag is the central visual element of the page.

For anyone operating in the US executive search market over the last few years, one thing has become increasingly clear: the rules have changed. >



The hiring frenzy that followed the pandemic has gone. Companies are more measured, investors are more demanding, and leadership teams are being asked to demonstrate a clearer return on almost every dollar they spend.

But I don't believe that means the US recruitment market is weak. It means it has matured.

At TritonExec, we have been working with organisations across the US for over a decade – predominantly within technology, consulting and professional services – supporting businesses with both executive search and large-scale senior hiring programmes. What we're seeing today isn't an absence of demand. It's a fundamental shift in what businesses are prepared to hire for, how they make those decisions, and what they expect from recruitment partners. In many respects, I think that's healthy.

Hiring has become much more intentional

During periods of rapid growth, companies can afford to hire ahead of demand. Headcount becomes a proxy for growth, and recruitment teams are rewarded for speed and volume. That environment has changed significantly.

Today, particularly at senior level, the question is increasingly not simply "Do we need this person?" but "What will this person materially change?"

For executive hiring, that's an important distinction.

We're seeing much greater scrutiny of the business case for individual appointments. CEOs, CFOs, boards and private equity investors want to understand the commercial impact a new leader will have before approving the investment. As a result, hiring processes can sometimes take longer. More stakeholders become involved, and organisations are increasingly prepared to wait for the right candidate rather than compromise.

But when the business case is compelling, companies are absolutely still hiring – and the best executives remain in considerable demand.

AI is changing the talent conversation

It would be impossible to discuss the US recruitment market in 2026 without talking about artificial intelligence.

AI is obviously changing recruitment itself, but arguably the more interesting story is what it's doing to the type of leadership organisations need. >

Across our client base, we're seeing AI move rapidly from a technology conversation into a leadership and organisational one. Companies are no longer asking only "What's our AI strategy?" They're asking: "Who is actually going to deliver it?"

That creates demand for a very different profile of executive – leaders who understand technology but can also translate it into revenue growth, productivity, operating model change and ultimately enterprise value.

Luke Skinner, who leads our technology practice, has observed this shift acutely in the US.

"What struck us is how much further along American organisations are in treating AI leadership as a board-level strategy question, not an HR one," he says. "The strongest candidates we encounter in that market – the ones who are genuinely shaping how enterprises use AI – are scrutinising the mandate as rigorously as any employer assesses them. They want to know the authority behind the role, the proximity to the CEO, and whether the organisation is actually prepared to change workflows and decision-making to unlock value. That level of sophistication from candidates raises the bar for everyone involved in the search. It's changed how we have to show up as a firm."

This is particularly visible in technology and consulting, where businesses are having to rethink both what they sell and how they deliver it. The emergence of agentic AI will accelerate that change further. For executive search firms, the implication is significant. Recruiters increasingly need to understand how industries, functions and business models themselves are changing – not just who

the candidates are, but what the role needs to accomplish.

The productivity question isn't going away

AI also sits behind another major theme in the US market: productivity.

For years, growth businesses were largely rewarded for adding people. Today, many leadership teams are being challenged to grow without increasing headcount.

That changes recruitment. There will undoubtedly be roles that disappear or reduce in number as technology becomes more capable. But history suggests technology also creates entirely new categories of work and increases the value of people capable of deploying it effectively. This is currently driving a surge in some executive hiring.

The result may be fewer hires in certain areas, but a significant premium on exceptional talent. If one outstanding executive can transform a business unit, build an AI-enabled service line, or materially improve productivity across an organisation, the economics of that hire become incredibly compelling.

Volume hiring at senior level: a different kind of partnership

One of the most significant shifts we have seen over the past several years – and one that receives less attention than it deserves – is the evolution of how companies approach hiring at scale across senior levels.

Norma Gillespie, Senior Partner and Head of TritonExec's Critical Hire Outsourcing practice, has led this part of our business through a period of considerable change. >



“The model that clients increasingly want isn’t a series of individual search engagements,” she explains. “It’s a genuine partnership built around a hiring programme – whether that’s building out a new function, scaling a team ahead of a major transformation, or replacing a leadership layer as a business repositions itself.

“What makes the US market distinctive is the pace and complexity – fifteen senior appointments running at once, across different business units, with hiring managers who all have different views on what good looks like. The partner must be the connective tissue. Technology helps with research and project management, but it won’t push back when a brief is wrong or tell a hiring manager the candidate they’ve fallen for isn’t right. At volume, that judgment matters more, not less.”

The broader point Norma makes is one we hear consistently from clients who have moved to this model: when you work with a recruitment partner across a significant number of senior appointments, recruitment becomes something other than transactional. You begin to understand where the organisation is growing, where it struggles to attract talent, and where the hiring process itself may be preventing the business from accessing the best people. The recruitment partner effectively becomes a source of market intelligence – and in the current environment, that intelligence has real commercial value.

The relationship between companies and recruiters is changing

This environment also challenges the traditional recruitment model more broadly.

Clients are under pressure to demonstrate value from their suppliers. Procurement functions are more sophisticated, and recruitment spend is being examined much more carefully. Recruitment partners increasingly need to understand workforce planning, talent availability, compensation, competitor behaviour and the commercial objectives behind a hiring programme.

Technology can automate large parts of recruitment administration. AI can identify candidates, summarise profiles and dramatically improve research productivity. Those capabilities will only become better.

But identifying names was never the most valuable part of executive recruitment. The difficult part is understanding which person is genuinely right for an organisation, persuading someone successful to consider leaving their current role, assessing the fit between an individual and a business, and navigating both sides through what can be a complex decision. Those things remain profoundly human.

America remains an extraordinary talent market

Despite the uncertainty of recent years, I remain hugely positive about the US.

One of the defining characteristics of the American market is its willingness to move quickly when opportunity appears. Businesses restructure faster. Capital moves faster. New categories emerge faster and talented executives are often more prepared to take calculated career risks. >

That creates volatility – but it also creates opportunity. We’ve seen organisations move from hiring freezes to aggressive talent acquisition remarkably quickly when their strategic priorities change. For recruitment businesses operating in the US, that means market specialisation matters more than ever. When demand returns to a particular sector or capability, clients don’t want recruiters beginning their research from scratch. They want partners who already understand the ecosystem and have relationships with the people shaping it.

Over ten years of operating here, that depth of network is one of the things we value most – and it’s not something that can be replicated quickly.

What comes next?

I suspect the next phase of the US recruitment market will look very different from the post-pandemic boom. I don’t expect a return to indiscriminate hiring – and I’m not sure businesses would benefit from one.

Instead, I think we’ll see greater differentiation. Average talent will become easier to identify through technology. Exceptional talent will become more valuable. Routine recruitment activity will increasingly be automated. Complex hiring will become more advisory. And

recruitment businesses themselves will have to decide where they genuinely add value.

For TritonExec, our belief is that the opportunity lies in combining technology with deep human networks and genuine market expertise. AI should make recruiters better – removing low-value activity, improving research and giving consultants more time to do the things technology cannot easily replicate: build relationships, challenge clients, understand motivations and exercise judgement.

The recruitment companies that simply use AI to do the same thing faster may find themselves competing primarily on price. Those that use it to deliver something fundamentally better have a much more interesting opportunity.

So, is the US recruitment market challenging? Absolutely. But challenging and unattractive are very different things. The market is forcing companies to think harder about who they hire. It’s forcing recruitment businesses to demonstrate their value and it’s increasing the premium attached to genuinely exceptional people.

For an industry whose ultimate purpose is identifying and connecting great talent with great businesses, that may turn out to be a very good thing. ■



THE GROWING PAINS MISSED FROM THE ANNOUNCEMENT SLIDES

Elaine Tyler, Group CEO of Venatrix, discusses merging with NineTech, relaunching three brands under one name, and why the version of growth that gets the structure right beats the version that gets there first.



I stood in a room in Manchester a couple of weeks ago, in front of a slide with three logos on it, about to tell an audience of people what Venatrix looks like now. Half of them I'd hired myself. A few I'd met twice. And at least one of them, six weeks earlier, hadn't worked for Venatrix at all. They'd worked for NineTech, the business we'd just merged with, and were still getting used to a new email signature. ➤



That's the bit that never makes it onto the announcement slide.

On paper, the Venatrix x NineTech merger is straightforward. We've added a contract recruitment division and a Manchester & Newcastle office to a business that was already doing decent revenue in perm fees and brought in roughly £500k of contract revenue alongside it. Jack McLane, who's spent thirteen years recruiting tech contractors and currently has close to fifty people sitting on client sites, runs it as what could likely become our biggest division. Under one name, Venatrix now covers SDR, GTM and Technology, perm and contract, in a way most of the "multi-discipline" talent partners claiming the same thing genuinely can't.

That's the pitch, and it's mostly true. What I want to write about is what sits underneath it, because if you're a recruitment leader reading this mid-merger, mid-acquisition, or mid-anything that involves bolting two businesses together, the pitch is not the part that keeps you up at night.

Here's the part that does. The business moves faster than the plumbing behind it. We'd built Venatrix around a vision of three specialist arms long before NineTech came into the picture. It's the direction our investment partner, Ingenia, had been pushing us towards as it matured from what it called a "launch fund" into a "growth fund." Backing individuals had been the old model. Backing structured, high-growth businesses is the new one. Say yes to that in a boardroom, and it sounds clean. Living it is a different exercise entirely.

Two months into transferring the NineTech brand and its supplier contracts across, we still didn't have a confirmed handover date from the client at the centre of that contract book. Every week it slipped was a week of running two LinkedIn identities, two email domains, and one carefully worded set of talking points for contractors who just wanted to know who was paying them and when. Nobody plans for that. It's what happens when you're moving at the speed the opportunity demands rather than the speed your systems can currently support.

The less comfortable admission is the internal one. We hadn't been explicit enough, early enough, about what the structure would look like moving forward. People who'd been with us a while were working off an org chart that existed mostly in my head. Performance reviews had quietly become something we did as matter of course, rather than a strategic meeting to support our 'new' that held anyone, myself included, properly accountable. That has nothing to do with NineTech specifically. It's what happens when a business grows and nobody stops to rebuild the scaffolding underneath it, and I'd guess it's familiar to most people running something past the size where everyone can just ask you directly.

Can confirm: two Google Sheets and a shared understanding is not an org structure, however well it's served you up to that point. >

If you're weighing up something similar right now, here's what I'd actually do differently, or do earlier. Get the org chart out of your head and onto paper before anyone needs to ask what they are responsible for, not after. Decide, before day one, what has to stay separate for a transition period and what has to unify immediately. Systems, brand, invoicing, that can bear a slower handover. Accountability and the story you tell the room cannot. We got some of that sequencing backwards and paid for it in hours, not just money. And build the reporting and the KPI structure for the merged business before the all-hands where you announce it, not in the fortnight after, while people are still asking each other quietly who's actually in charge of what.

The genuinely useful thing from this year is the reframe underneath the confession. We'd been operating, without quite admitting it, the way most recruiters do: reducing hiring friction for clients. Useful, unremarkable, easily replaced. The unlock has been realising that a specialist partner sitting across SDR, GTM and Technology isn't really selling hiring speed at all. Every SDR we place becomes a pipeline number for that business. Every technology contractor Jack's team puts on site is capacity a client didn't have to build

themselves. Say that plainly to a client and the conversation changes shape entirely, from "can you fill this role" to "can you help me hit this number." That's a different sale, and most of August has been spent learning to make it across a bigger, newly combined team.

None of this is a complaint. Venatrix has grown into something with real range under one name, and both Jack and Louis Singleton, who's spent thirteen years placing senior sales leaders, deserve as much credit for that shape as I do. The Manchester all-hands mattered for a simple reason: it was the first time the whole group heard the same version of where we're going, in the same room, at the same time. That's a small thing to get right and an easy one to get wrong, and for a while we were getting it wrong quietly enough that nobody flagged it until we asked directly.

So, if you're mid-merger yourself: the structure catches up eventually. It's just never as fast as the ambition is, and you'll spend more hours than you'd like fixing an invoice date format or drawing a reporting line than you will popping any champagne. I'm from Blackpool. I can handle a rollercoaster. I'd just gently suggest building the track before you sell the ticket. ■



Merger