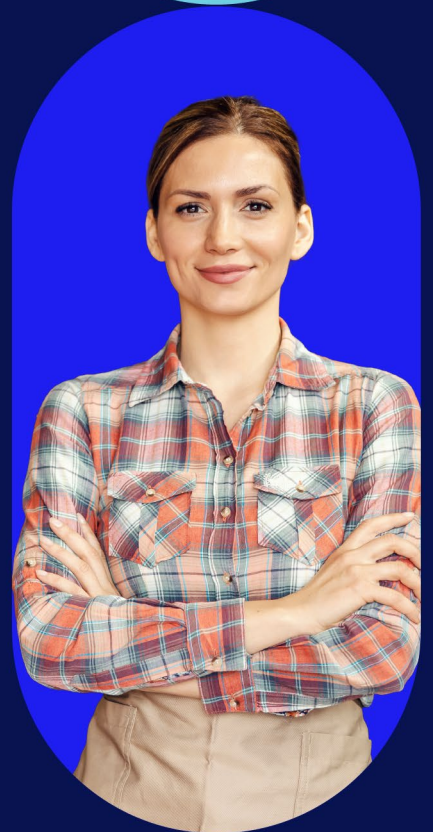
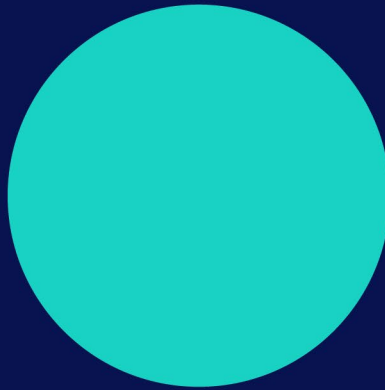
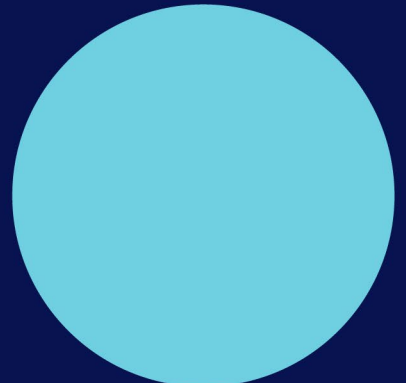
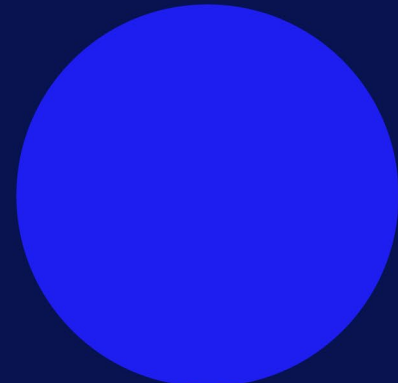


# Reed



## Salary guide 2026

Food & FMCG

# Navigating the new jobs landscape



**James Reed CBE**  
Chairman and CEO, Reed

Welcome to our 2026 salary guides. As we look ahead, it is clear that the UK labour market is navigating one of the most profound transformations in living memory. In my four decades in recruitment, I have never witnessed a period of such rapid and fundamental change.

Our economic landscape has defied traditional expectations. Historically, periods of economic growth have aligned with rising job vacancies, but that relationship is no longer guaranteed. Recent trends suggest a structural shift in the labour market, where vacancy levels can decline even as the economy expands. This disconnect signals deeper changes in how businesses approach hiring and workforce planning. For employers and jobseekers alike, understanding these dynamics is critical - because the old assumption that growth equals more jobs is increasingly outdated.

## The AI revolution: A white-collar recession

One of the primary drivers behind this permanent change to the jobs market, alongside policy, regulation, changing worker expectations, globalisation and supply chain pressures, I believe is artificial intelligence. The advancement and adoption of AI technologies have been breathtakingly fast, and its appetite for consuming tasks, particularly in white-collar professions, is the biggest story of our time.

AI is incredibly effective at reducing costs for employers, and it achieves this primarily by reducing the number of employees required. This is not a distant, future threat; it is happening right now. A recent survey we conducted of 500 companies revealed that 15%

were already reducing their hiring plans specifically because of the arrival of AI. Combined with other pressures, such as National Insurance increases and general hiring freezes, the overall impact on job creation has been noticeable.

We are witnessing what I term a 'white-collar recession,' which mirrors the blue-collar recession of the 1980s when automation hollowed out many industrial and manufacturing jobs. Today, it is entry-level and process-driven roles in sectors like administration, finance, and even law that are being consumed. These are the traditional gateways for many professionals starting their careers, and their rapid decline poses a significant threat to social mobility and future workforce development. The very nature of what constitutes a 'good job' is being redefined before our eyes. Roles that once seemed secure and promised a stable career path are now vulnerable to automation. This forces us, as employers and as a society, to rethink our approach to education, skills, and career progression.



The advancement and adoption of AI technologies have been breathtakingly fast, and its appetite for consuming tasks, particularly in white-collar professions, is the biggest story of our time.



## The graduate dilemma: A shrinking horizon

Nowhere is this shift more acutely felt than among our young people and recent graduates. The data is deeply concerning. Our own figures at Reed show that the number of graduate jobs advertised on Reed.co.uk has plummeted from around 180,000 just a few years ago to a mere 50,000 at the end of 2025. This represents a staggering two-thirds reduction in opportunities for those leaving higher education. Other job sites are reporting similar, sobering figures. This is not just a dip; it is a collapse in the entry-level market.

This 'graduate crunch' is creating a generation of highly educated individuals who are struggling to find a foothold in the professional world. Nearly half of all jobs lost since mid-2024 have been among those under 25, and youth unemployment has soared to its highest level in a decade, excluding the pandemic period standing at 15.3%. The UK's top 100 employers reduced their graduate hiring by 14.6% in 2024, the steepest fall since the 2009 recession.

For those who do manage to secure a role, the rewards are often diminished. We are seeing entry-level graduate jobs offering salaries that are perilously close to the minimum wage, especially when factoring in the long hours often expected of new recruits. This situation challenges the long-held assumption that a university degree is a guaranteed ticket to a prosperous career. We must encourage aspiring families and young people to broaden their horizons. While a degree remains valuable, it is no longer the only path.

The jobs that are proving most resilient to the AI wave are those that require a human touch, creativity, and manual dexterity. Roles in skilled trades, hospitality, and healthcare, for example, involve a level of nuanced interaction and physical skill that AI is far from replicating. We must guide the next generation towards developing practical, hands-on skills. Learning to do things with your hands, whether in a highly educated field like osteopathy or a skilled trade, is becoming an increasingly wise career strategy.

## Thriving through purpose: The PhilCo advantage

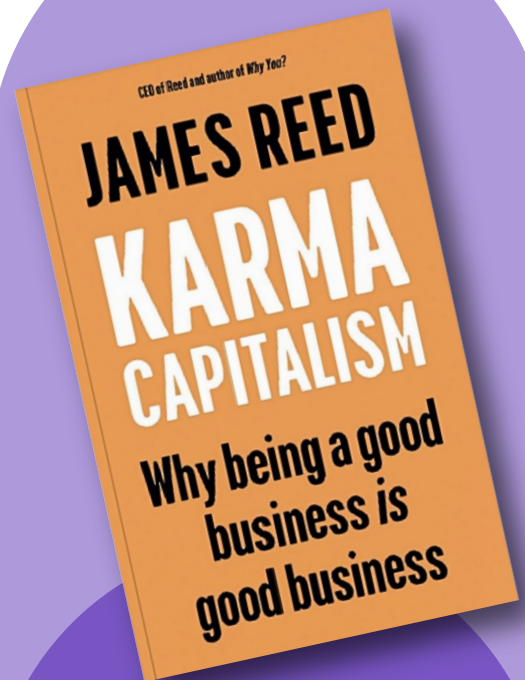
In this challenging environment, how can businesses not only survive but thrive? How can you attract and retain the talent you need when the market is so volatile? The answer, I believe, lies in purpose. Today's employees, especially the younger generation, are not just looking for a salary; they are seeking meaning and a sense of contribution from their work. This is where the concept of a philanthropic company, or PhilCo, becomes a powerful competitive advantage.

A **PhilCo** is a business that has committed a significant portion of its ownership - typically 10% or more - to a charitable foundation. At Reed, we are proud to be a PhilCo, with 18% of our company owned by the Reed Foundation. This is not just a footnote in our corporate structure; it is a

fundamental part of our identity. It means that a portion of our success is directly channelled back into the community. Our dividends help fund a wide array of good causes, many through our partnership with the Big Give, which has raised hundreds of millions for thousands of charities.

Being a PhilCo has a tangible and profound impact on our business. It is a cornerstone of our employee engagement strategy. Our team members - known as co-members - know that their hard work contributes to something larger than the bottom line. This shared purpose fosters a culture of responsibility, collaboration, and pride. It creates a powerful reason for people to join us and, just as importantly, to stay with us.

As hyper-capitalism has created vast inequalities - with the top one per cent in the UK holding more wealth than the bottom 70% - models like the PhilCo movement offer a way to transform business for good. It aligns profit with people and the planet, ensuring that corporate success contributes to societal wellbeing. This is not just corporate social responsibility; it is a sustainable and highly impactful business model for the 21st century.



Find out more about being a PhilCo in James' book 'Karma Capitalism, Why being a good business is good business'

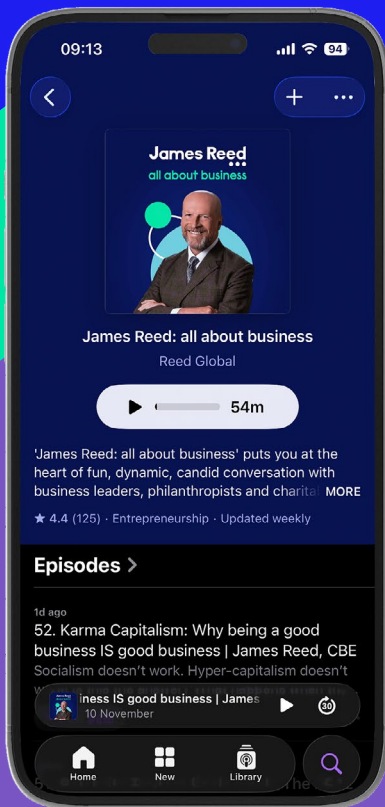
## A look to the future

The road ahead is undoubtedly challenging. The forces of AI, economic uncertainty, and shifting market dynamics require us all to be more agile, more innovative, and more people centric than ever before. For employers, this means rethinking recruitment strategies. You must look beyond traditional qualifications and focus on skills, adaptability, resilience and potential. It means investing in upskilling and reskilling your existing workforce to meet the demands of the new economy. And it means building a strong employer brand rooted in a genuine purpose that will attract the best people.

For individuals, the message is clear: continuous learning is no longer optional. Developing a diverse skill set, particularly one that blends technical knowledge with people-centric abilities like communication, empathy, and critical thinking, will be crucial. We must all become lifelong learners to stay relevant and valuable in this evolving landscape.

These salary guides are designed to provide you with the data and insights you need to navigate this complex environment. They offer a benchmark for compensation in a time of great flux, helping you make informed decisions to attract and retain the talent that will drive your organisation forward. While the headlines may be daunting, there is always opportunity in disruption. By understanding these trends and adapting proactively, we can build a more resilient, skilled, and purposeful workforce for the future.

**James Reed CBE**  
Chairman and CEO, Reed



## Listen to James Reed's podcast 'all about business'.

Hosted by **James Reed CBE**, the Chairman and CEO of Reed Group, you'll hear the highs and lows of what it means to be a true business leader to empower you to implement smarter, more meaningful strategy in your business or career.

[Listen here](#)

# Why use Reed's food & FMCG salary guide?

For both jobseekers and employers alike, Reed's salary guide stands as an invaluable resource, offering unparalleled insights to keep you well-informed and ahead of the curve in 2026.



## Extensive view

This guide covers a wide range of jobs at all seniorities across the food and FMCG sector. Whether you're a seasoned professional or just starting out, you'll find valuable insights to help you succeed.



## Superior insight

Our food and FMCG expert provides key insight into the sector, with Reed's local recruitment specialists discussing the job landscape at a deeper regional level. This means you'll get a unique perspective on the job market that is not available elsewhere.



## Stay well informed

The data in this guide is based on salaries expected today, so you can use the information to steer your decisions and make informed choices on the salaries you offer your employees or accept yourself. You'll be able to stay up to date on the latest trends and developments in the sector.

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# Food & FMCG: a new recipe for success

## Adam Buckland

Food & FMCG Expert and  
Regional Director, Reed



**Faced with rising costs, global supply chain instability, and rapidly shifting consumer preferences, businesses in the food and FMCG sector are being pushed to rethink how they operate. But amid the disruption lies a powerful opportunity: those who innovate and adapt can gain a competitive edge in the war for talent.**

### Hiring strategies in a cautious market

Economic uncertainty has led many food & FMCG businesses to adopt a more measured approach to hiring. Larger companies are taking longer to make decisions, ensuring they find the right person for the role the first time. This caution, while understandable, can frustrate jobseekers who may accept other offers in the meantime.

Smaller businesses have also shown some hesitation, sometimes delaying planned headcount increases due to budgetary constraints. Despite this cautious atmosphere, the market remains buoyant with plenty of jobs and professionals actively looking for new opportunities.

Towards the end of 2025, and into 2026, we've seen a notable increase in the temporary workforce. Businesses are using temporary or temp-to-permanent arrangements to fill gaps without committing to permanent headcount immediately. This strategy provides flexibility but can limit the talent pool, as it's difficult to persuade someone in a secure, permanent role to move for a temporary opportunity.

### High demand in quality assurance and technical roles

As we enter 2026, quality assurance (QA) and technical roles are experiencing the highest demand, but this is also where the most significant candidate shortage lies. This 'perfect storm' is particularly acute at the junior end, with roles like QA technician, technical assistant, and quality auditor being difficult to fill. This shortage may stem from a lack of awareness about careers in the food industry among new graduates.

At the middle-management level, such as QA and technical managers, there is a good supply of experienced professionals. However, this talent pool is largely passive. They aren't actively applying for jobs but are open to conversations about compelling opportunities. To attract these individuals, employers need to be proactive, highlighting clear paths for progression or new challenges, and engage with specialist recruiters who have access to this passive market.

### The challenge of junior talent and a resurgent senior market

The junior market for new product development (NPD) and innovation also faces difficulties. Many talented international graduates struggle to secure visas due to salary sponsorship restrictions, leading to a constant churn of junior staff in technical teams.

Conversely, the senior market is beginning to show signs of life after a stagnant period. For the last year, opportunities at the head of, director, and c-suite levels have been scarce. But now, we are seeing this market slowly awaken, with more executive-level positions becoming available. Essentially, the talent market is tightest at its poles - the junior and senior ends - while the middle is stable but requires proactive engagement.

### Technology and automation: evolution, not revolution

Automation and digital tools continue to shape the food & FMCG landscape, but perhaps not in the revolutionary way one might expect. Technology is enhancing existing processes rather than replacing workers.

## Essential skills for the modern professional

The most crucial skill for professionals in this sector isn't proficiency with a specific piece of software but rather agility and adaptability. The industry is in a state of continuous improvement. Professionals must stay current with software updates, evolving audit requirements like BRC accreditations, and new traceability systems.

Digital advancements are also improving processes around labelling and specifications. New software is making it easier for teams to manage the complex requirements of packaging information. The key takeaway is that while technology is a powerful enabler, the focus is on people's ability to adapt and embrace change, not on a specific, drastic technological shift.

## The power of reputation and sustainability

Today's jobseekers are far more discerning. They research potential employers extensively, looking at everything from Glassdoor reviews to sustainability credentials. A company's environmental impact, how it treats its staff, and its overall public perception are major factors in someone's decision-making process.

This shift is so profound that some professionals will now prioritise a company with a strong ethical compass over one offering a slightly higher salary. A business with a gold-standard reputation for sustainability and employee wellbeing can successfully compete with a higher-paying offer from a less reputable competitor. The entire package - company values, ethos, and reputation - is now under scrutiny.

## Evolving benefits and incentives

While salary, pension, and holiday allowance remain the cornerstones of any competitive offer, employers are getting more creative with their benefits. We're seeing more flexibility around holidays, with additional days for moving house or volunteering.

One of the most significant trends is the rise of health-related benefits. In an era of long waiting times for public health services, private healthcare plans are highly valued. Even affordable cash plans that help with dental or optician costs can be a major differentiator. These benefits demonstrate a company's commitment to employee wellbeing and can have a direct impact on reducing absenteeism and improving productivity. For a relatively small monthly investment per employee, businesses can offer a benefit that is genuinely impactful and highly appreciated.

## Remote and hybrid working in the sector

When it comes to remote and hybrid working, the food & FMCG sector presents a unique landscape shaped by its operational realities. Most roles in production and technical functions are fundamentally site-based, after all, you can't run a packing machine or manage a food processing line from home. As a result, there is a broad acceptance within the sector that onsite presence is non-negotiable for many positions, especially at the junior and operations level.

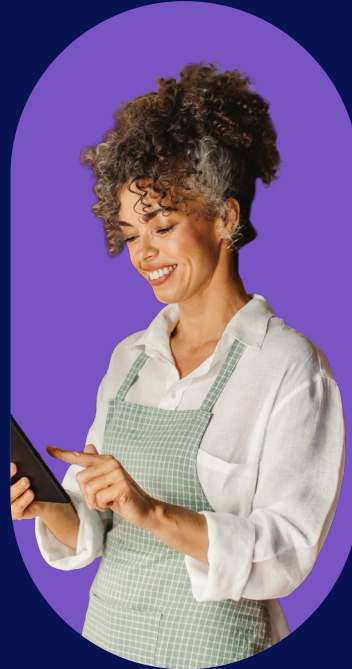
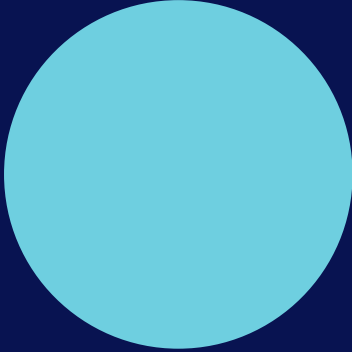
Some flexibility does exist in middle management roles, where employees with significant paperwork or audit responsibilities may be given one or two days a week to work remotely. However, even this is limited by the unpredictability of audits or the need for quick, in-person decisions. Support functions such as sales, account management, HR, IT, and especially specification and labelling experts - whose tasks can often be done digitally - tend to have more scope for remote or hybrid arrangements. Still, these allowances can vary significantly between companies.

At the senior end (director and c-suite level) there may be some leniency, but the prevailing culture values visible leadership and hands-on engagement onsite. Across the sector, expectations tend to align with these practical constraints, and most employees in operational roles readily accept onsite requirements as part of the job.

## Final thoughts

The food & FMCG sector is navigating a period of cautious optimism. While hiring processes may be slower, opportunities abound for businesses that are agile and strategic. The key to success lies not just in adopting new technologies but in understanding what truly motivates today's workforce.

To attract and retain good employees, companies must look beyond salary. A strong employer brand, a clear commitment to sustainability, and a thoughtful benefits package are essential. Furthermore, businesses must not forget the quiet performers - the reliable, consistent employees who form the backbone of the organisation. By investing in their development and showing appreciation, you can prevent them from being lured away by competitors. In a market where talent is everything, a people-first approach is the ultimate competitive advantage.



# Our survey says...

At the end of 2025, Reed conducted its annual snap survey of 5,000 professionals. The research asked UK workers about their current and preferred salary and benefits, their organisation's performance and priorities, how they rated their job satisfaction and career prospects, as well as the key recruitment and skills trends they're witnessing.

Here are the top trends that the survey revealed:

## 1. Financial strain is widespread

The overwhelming reason for salary dissatisfaction (52% of unhappy respondents) is that pay hasn't kept pace with the cost of living. This far outweighs other factors, such as workload or industry pay.

- **Declining affordability:** Only a quarter of the population (25%) feels they're earning more in terms of what they can afford compared to four years ago, before the cost-of-living crisis.

- **Limited disposable income:** A concerning 26% of respondents have **£100 or less leftover** each month after essential bills, with seven per cent stating their entire salary goes to essentials. This highlights a struggle for many to save or enjoy non-essential spending.

## 2. The growing 'comfort gap'

There is a stark **£11,110.38 gap** between what people are currently earning and what they say is their comfortable living wage.

- **Desired vs. current earnings:** Our research found the average current annual salary is **£40,638.35**. However, the average income people believe they need to live comfortably is **£51,748.73**.

## 3. Salary remains the dominant job motivator

To switch jobs, individuals expect a substantial average pay increase of **£12,139.55**. This is significantly higher than the average **£3,923.62** pay rise that would satisfy them at their current employer, indicating a clear financial incentive is needed to overcome the inertia of changing roles.

- **Increased importance:** A vast majority (73%) report that salary is more important now when considering new job opportunities than it was before the cost-of-living crisis - 40% even say it's "significantly more important".
- **Higher progression expectations:** Nearly half of the 5,000 people surveyed (44%) have increased their expectations for salary progression within their current role over the last four years.

#### 4. Benefits are secondary to cash

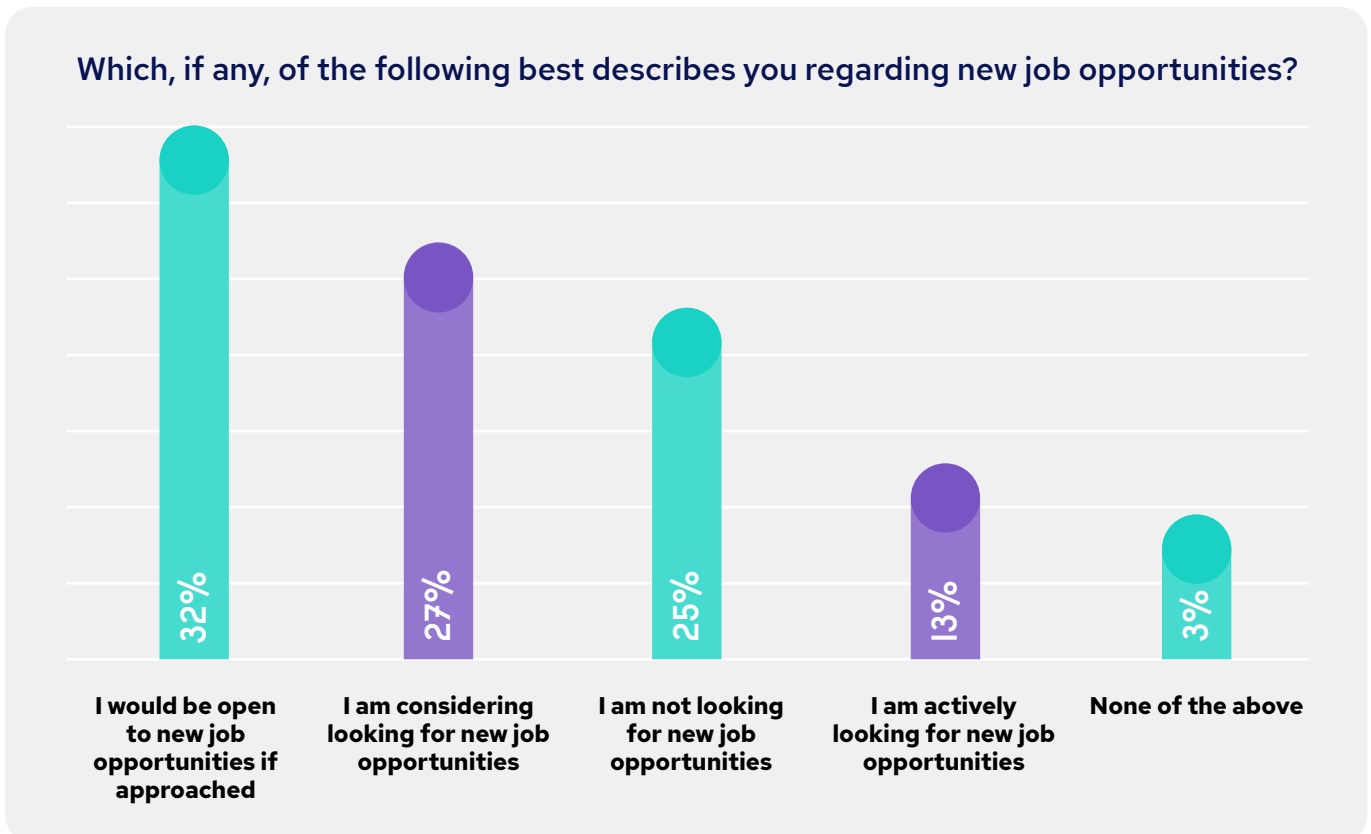
Many employees are willing to sacrifice 'soft' benefits like free refreshments (11%), cycle-to-work schemes (11%), onsite parking (eight per cent), and wellness programmes (seven per cent) for higher pay. Even some 'harder' benefits like health insurance are on the table for six per cent of those who took part.

- **Underutilised benefits:** Some commonly offered benefits, such as cycle-to-work schemes (11% unused) and the ability to purchase additional annual leave (seven per cent unused), are not being fully utilised by employees. This suggests that while benefits are appreciated, their perceived value can be lower than direct cash compensation, especially in the current financial climate.
- **Prevalence of benefits:** Common benefits include onsite parking (27%), hybrid working (23%), and Christmas shutdown (21%). However, 15% of respondents receive no benefits at all.

#### 5. A highly mobile workforce

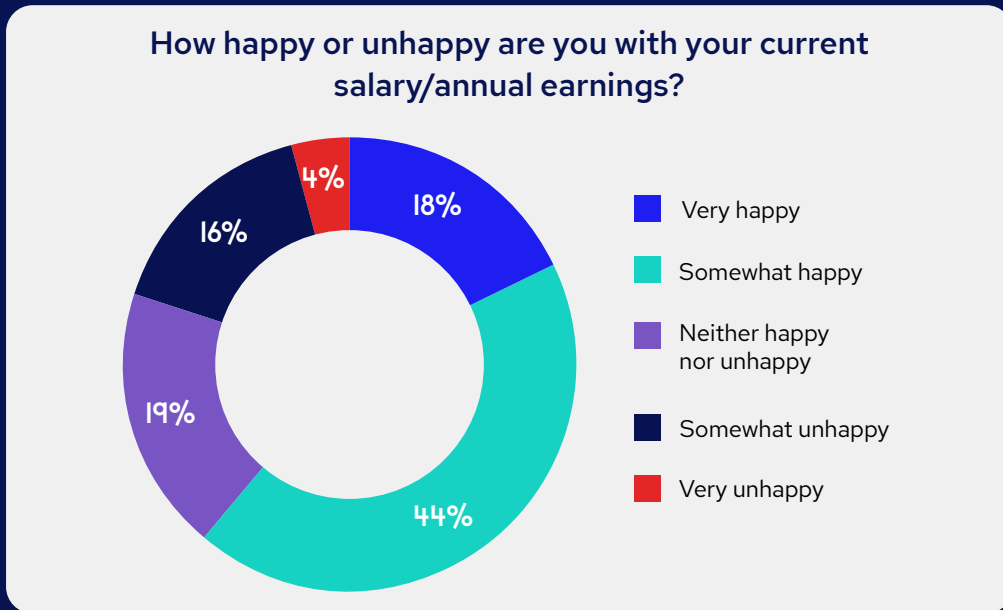
While the **average tenure is 8.54 years**, the high openness to new roles suggests that even long-serving employees are not immune to the pull of better compensation.

- **Open to new opportunities:** A significant majority (72%) of the workforce is considering a new role. A third (32%) are open to new job opportunities if approached, 27% are considering looking and 13% are actively looking. Only a quarter of employees (25%) are not looking for a new job opportunity at all.



# Money, money, money

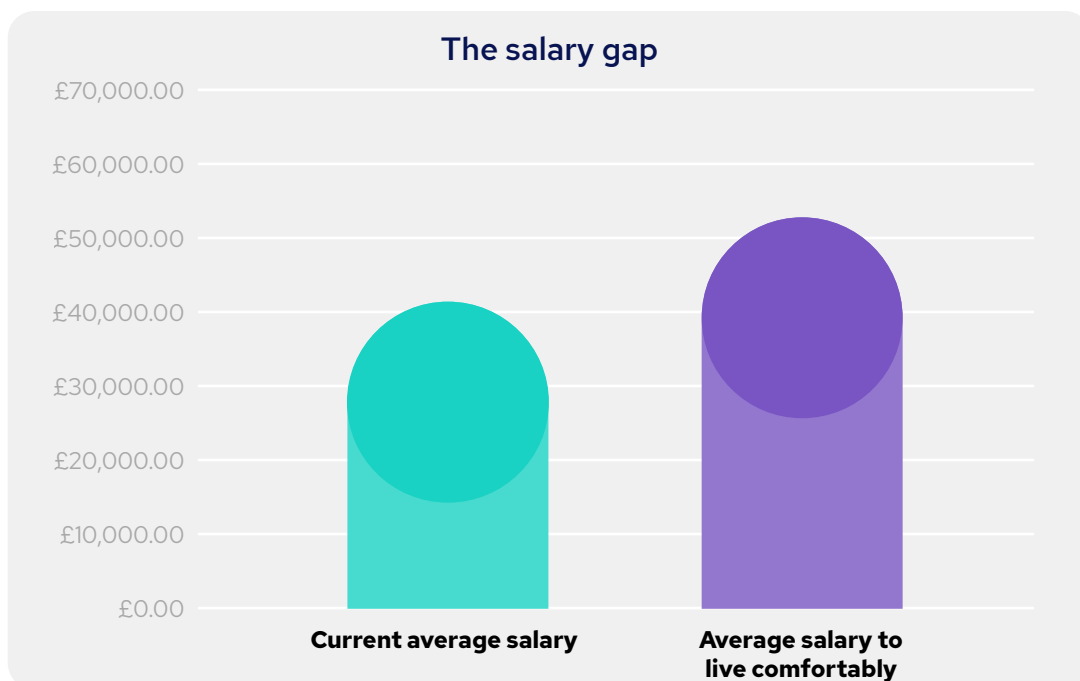
With ongoing cost-of-living challenges, salaries continue to be a huge area of discussion in the employment market, for both professionals and businesses. The data reveals the UK workforce is under significant financial pressure, with a clear and growing emphasis on salary as a primary driver of job satisfaction and career decisions.



Currently, over half (61%) of workers are happy with the pay they receive. However, that leaves a significant 20% of professionals feeling unhappy with their current salary, and another 19% feeling ambivalent (“neither happy nor unhappy”).

Of those who are unhappy, the overwhelming reason, cited by over half (52%), is that their pay hasn’t risen with the cost of living. Other key reasons include feeling they “do so much more than my job role” (39%), being “unable to save enough to meet my financial goals” (37%), and their salary “not being enough to live the lifestyle I want” (35%).

The disparity between the average current wage and the salary people would be comfortable with remains substantial. This year, the average current salary for survey respondents stands at **£40,638.35**. However, the average income people believe they need to live comfortably is **£51,748.73**, representing an average **£11,110.38 gap**. This ‘comfort gap’ indicates a widespread desire for higher earnings.



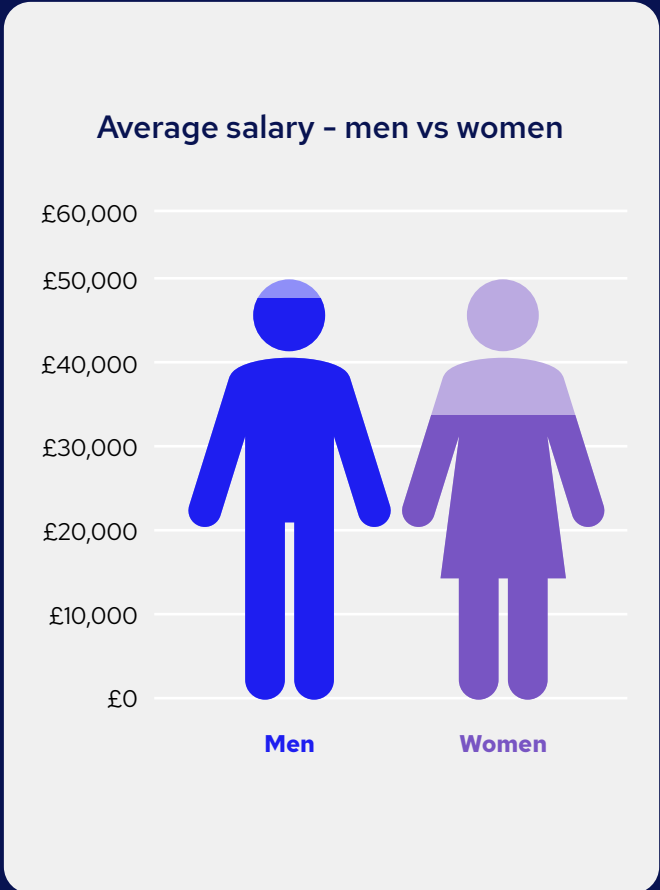
The financial strain is evident in monthly disposable income. A concerning **seven per cent of respondents have £0 leftover** each month after essential bills, with their entire salary going towards necessities. Overall, **26% have £100 or less remaining** for non-essential spending, savings, or leisure.



As a direct consequence of the financial climate as we enter 2026, 73% of professionals state that salary is more important now than it was before the cost-of-living crisis began in 2021, with 40% saying it is "significantly more important." Expectations for salary progression within the same role have also increased for 44% of workers. **To switch jobs, individuals expect a substantial average pay increase of £12,139.55.**

## A deeper dive...

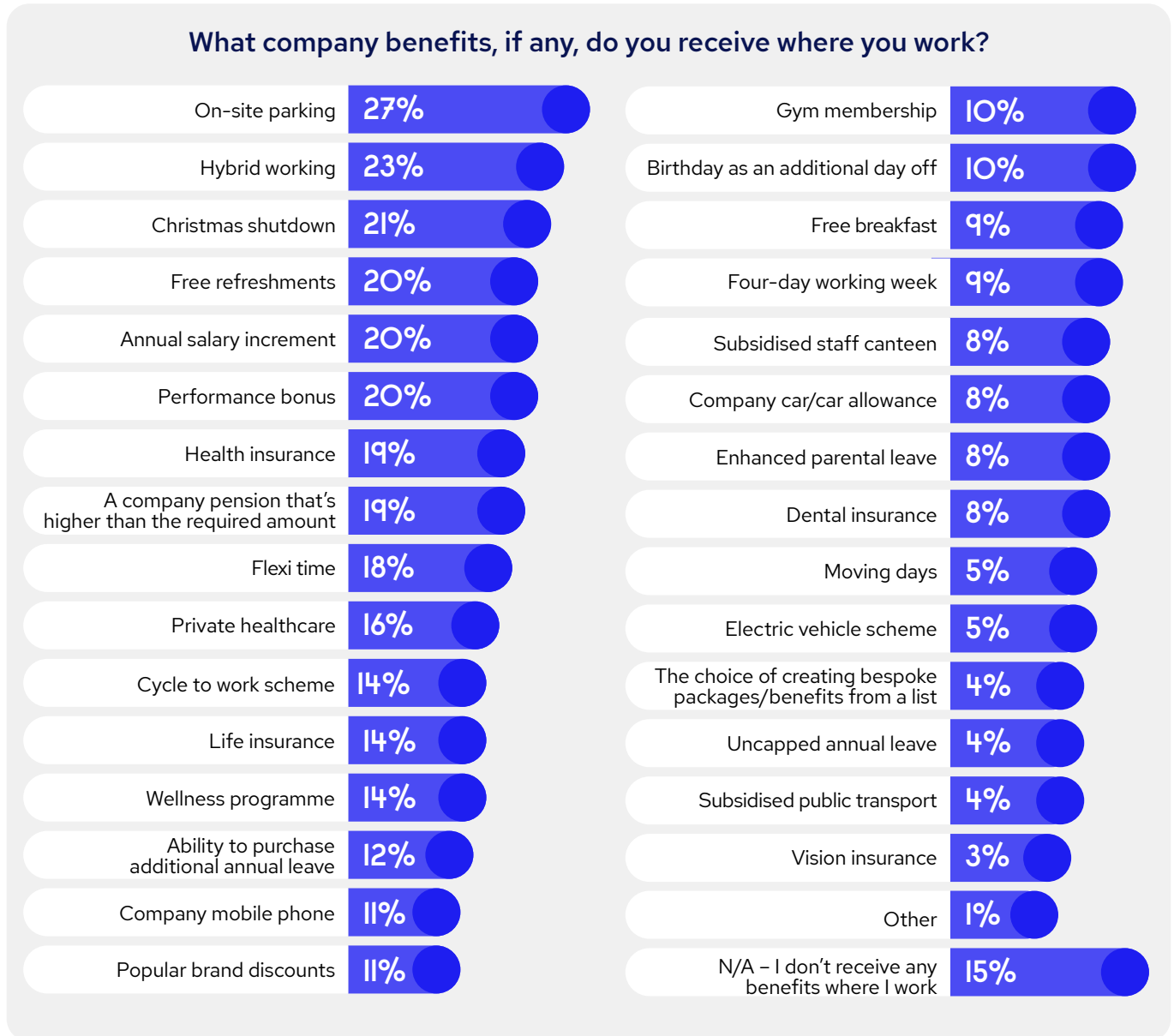
- Gender pay gap:** There remains a significant gender pay gap. The survey found that on average, men earn £48,367.15, while women earn £33,852.12, **a difference of over £14,500.** This disparity extends to satisfaction: 66% of men are happy with their salary compared to 57% of women, and women are more unhappy (24%) than men (16%). Men also perceive a higher comfortable salary (£59,688.07) than women (£44,707.25).
- Disposable income gap:** Women have significantly less disposable income, with an average of £626.61 left over monthly compared to £983.38 for men. Women are also twice as likely to have £0 leftover.
- Age and earnings:** Current salaries peak in the 25-34 age group (£49,853.43), while the desired comfortable income peaks in the 25-34 age group (£65,341.10). Salary satisfaction is highest for younger workers (18-34) and lowest for the 45-54 age group, where only 51% are happy with their pay. This 45-54 age group also reports the highest percentage (nine per cent) with £0 leftover monthly.
- Job mobility:** Younger workers (18-34) are most willing to change jobs for salary increases, while older workers (55+) are significantly less likely to change jobs for more money, indicating that other factors become more important with age.



# All about the benefits

While offering a higher salary remains the most direct way to attract and retain employees, the benefits package also plays a role, especially for businesses unable to match top-tier salaries. **However, 15% of respondents currently say they receive no workplace benefits at all.**

Commonly offered benefits include onsite parking (27%), hybrid working (23%), and Christmas shutdown (21%). However, there's a noticeable disconnect between offered and desired benefits, and also a willingness to sacrifice many perks for higher pay.



## A deeper dive...

- **Sacrificing perks for pay:** Many employees are willing to sacrifice 'soft' benefits for higher pay. Free refreshments (11%) and cycle to work schemes (11%) are the benefits most employees would be willing to give up.
- **Age and benefits:** Younger workers (25-34) are most willing to sacrifice benefits for higher pay, while older workers (55+) are significantly less willing to do so, suggesting they value their existing benefits more.
- **Gender benefit gap:** Women are more likely to receive no benefits (17% vs. 12% for men) and, on average, men report receiving more benefits overall.

# Key takeaways for businesses:

Over two-thirds of professionals (72%) are currently looking or open to looking for a new job – highlighting a critical need for businesses to audit what they are offering their current and future talent. The primary drivers for this job market engagement are financial, with the cost-of-living crisis acting as a significant catalyst.



**Address the 'comfort gap':** The £11,110.38 gap between current and desired comfortable income is a major source of dissatisfaction and a driver of job mobility. Competitive salaries are no longer just about attracting talent but retaining it.



**Targeted retention:** Mid-career professionals (25-44) are a high-risk group, demanding the largest pay increases to switch jobs and showing the highest increase in salary progression expectations. Retention strategies must be robust for this segment.



**Acknowledge gender disparities:** The significant gender pay gap, lower salary satisfaction, and reduced financial flexibility for women are critical issues. Businesses must address these disparities to foster equity and retain female talent.

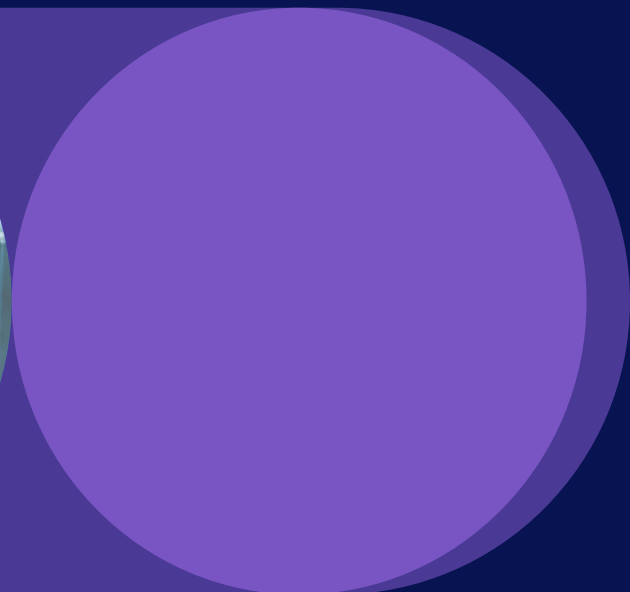


**Strategic benefits offerings:** While salary is king, benefits can still make a difference. However, businesses should evaluate the relevance and perceived value of their benefits packages. Many employees are willing to sacrifice less-valued benefits for higher pay, suggesting that resources might be better allocated to more impactful perks or direct compensation.



**Prioritise financial wellbeing:** The struggle to meet financial obligations and save for goals is widespread. Benefits that directly support financial wellbeing (e.g., better pensions, performance bonuses) are likely to be highly valued, especially when employees are willing to trade other perks for them.

The current economic climate has made salary a paramount concern for the majority of the UK workforce. Businesses that fail to recognise and adapt to these heightened financial expectations and disparities risk losing valuable talent in a highly mobile job market.





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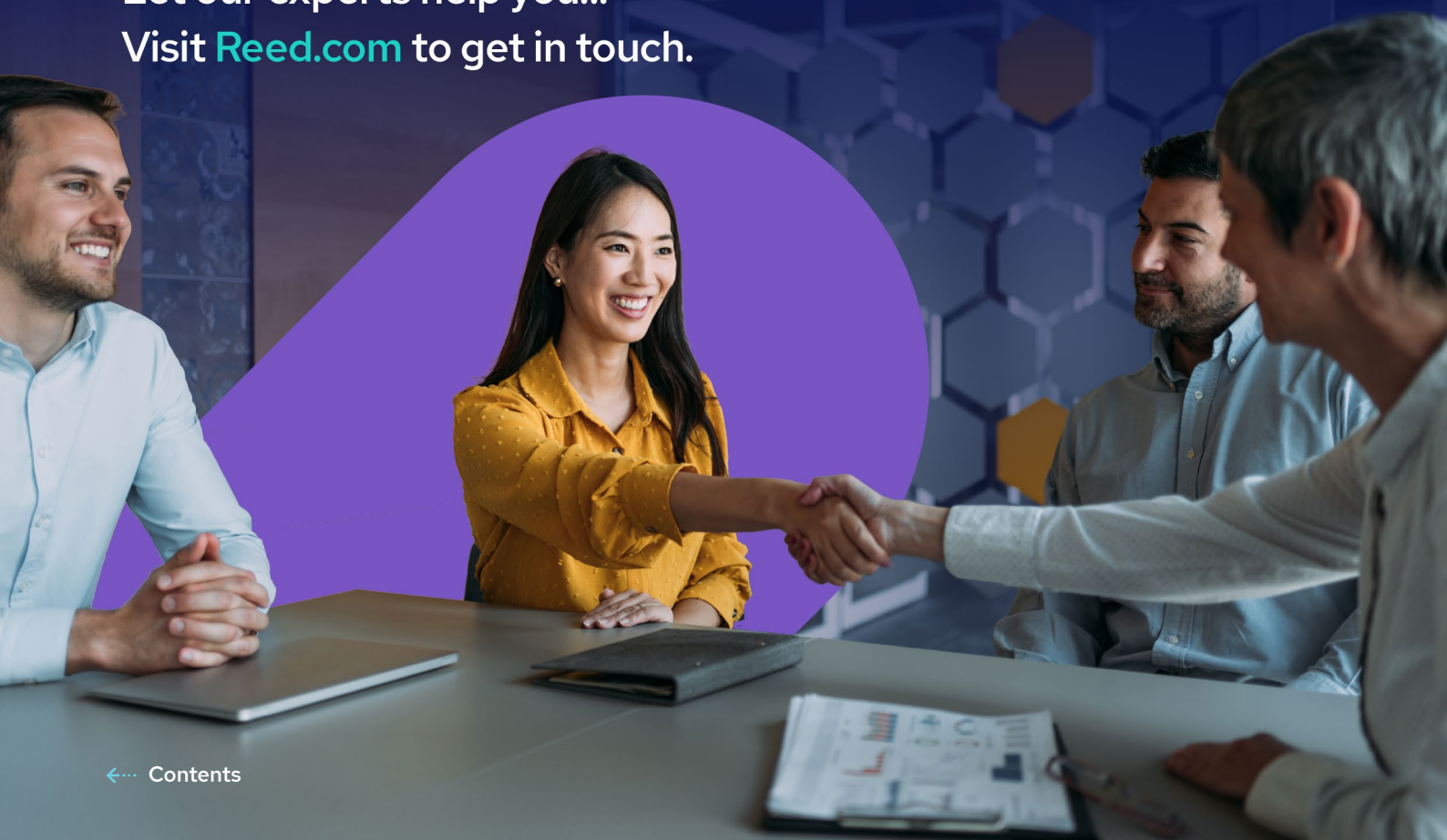


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# Leadership



Company size: <1,000 employees

## Chief Operating Officer (COO)

Region	Base salary	Annual bonus	Total compensation
London	£120,000 – £180,000	£20,000 – £60,000	£140,000 – £240,000
South England	£115,000 – £170,000	£15,000 – £40,000	£130,000 – £210,000
Midlands	£110,000 – £160,000	£10,000 – £40,000	£120,000 – £200,000
North England	£100,000 – £150,000	£10,000 – £30,000	£120,000 – £180,000
Scotland	£95,000 – £145,000	£10,000 – £30,000	105,000 – £175,000
Wales	£90,000 – £140,000	£10,000 – £25,000	£100,000 – £165,000

## Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Region	Base salary	Annual bonus	Total compensation
London	£150,000 – £220,000	£30,000 – £80,000	£180,000 – £300,000
South England	£140,000 – £200,000	£25,000 – £70,000	£165,000 – £270,000
Midlands	£130,000 – £190,000	£20,000 – £60,000	£150,000 – £250,000
North England	£120,000 – £180,000	£15,000 – £50,000	£135,000 – £230,000
Scotland	£110,000 – £170,000	£15,000 – £45,000	£125,000 – £215,000
Wales	£105,000 – £160,000	£10,000 – £40,000	£115,000 – £200,000

## Managing Director (MD)

Region	Base salary	Annual bonus	Total compensation
London	£140,000 – £200,000	£25,000 – £70,000	£165,000 – £270,000
South England	£130,000 – £190,000	£20,000 – £60,000	£150,000 – £250,000
Midlands	£120,000 – £180,000	£15,000 – £50,000	£135,000 – £230,000
North England	£110,000 – £170,000	£15,000 – £45,000	£125,000 – £215,000
Scotland	£105,000 – £160,000	£10,000 – £40,000	£115,000 – £200,000
Wales	£100,000 – £150,000	£10,000 – £35,000	£110,000 – £185,000

# Leadership



Company size: 1,000–9,999 employees

## Chief Operating Officer (COO)

Region	Base salary	Annual bonus	Total compensation
UK average	£160,000 – £240,000	£30,000 – £80,000	£190,000 – £320,000

## Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Region	Base salary	Annual bonus	Total compensation
UK average	£200,000 – £300,000	£50,000 – £120,000	£250,000 – £420,000

## Managing Director (MD)

Region	Base salary	Annual bonus	Total compensation
UK average	£180,000 – £260,000	£40,000 – £100,000	£220,000 – £360,000

Company size: 10,000+ employees

## Chief Operating Officer (COO)

Region	Base salary	Annual bonus	Total compensation
UK average	£220,000 – £320,000	£60,000 – £120,000	£280,000 – £440,000

## Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Region	Base salary	Annual bonus	Total compensation
UK average	£300,000 – £500,000	£100,000 – £300,000	£400,000 – £800,000

## Managing Director (MD)

Region	Base salary	Annual bonus	Total compensation
UK average	£250,000 – £400,000	£80,000 – £200,000	£330,000 – £600,000

# Leadership insight

**Adam Buckland**

Regional Director, Reed



// Over the past twelve months, the market for senior executive roles such as CEO, COO, and MD, has remained largely static, creating a challenging environment for seasoned professionals seeking new opportunities. However, the freeze is beginning to thaw and a gradual uptick in c-suite and director-level vacancies suggests a renewed sense of confidence among businesses. This shift represents a pivotal moment for organisations to secure transformative leadership talent capable of driving strategic growth.

One of the most notable developments towards the end of 2025, was the increased caution businesses were exercising in their hiring decisions. While this trend spans all levels, its impact is particularly pronounced at the top. When companies take longer to appoint senior leaders, it creates a strategic opening for more agile challenger brands.

These organisations are moving decisively, capitalising on the hesitation of larger corporations to attract the best executives who can deliver bold, accelerated growth.

Senior leaders are motivated by impact. They seek roles where they can shape strategy, influence direction, and lead meaningful transformation. As more opportunities begin to surface, organisations that can articulate a compelling vision, present complex strategic challenges, and empower leaders to make a difference will be best positioned to attract and retain this calibre of talent.

Ultimately, when it comes to securing high-performing leadership, timing is critical. Employers who act decisively and move swiftly will be best placed to secure the executive talent needed to navigate the next phase of growth. //

# East Anglia



Role	Min	Average	Max
Technical Director	£71,340	£78,775	£94,130
Technical Manager	£51,520	£58,465	£69,360
Manufacturing Manager	£41,365	£52,275	£62,430
Health & Safety Manager	£46,320	£50,780	£61,935
Specifications Manager	£38,150	£45,135	£56,475
Production Manager	£36,165	£43,105	£55,185
NPD Manager	£41,610	£48,060	£61,430
QA Manager	£35,670	£43,405	£50,780

Role	Min	Average	Max
Hygiene Manager	£33,690	£41,910	£48,255
Packaging Technologist	£30,220	£35,175	£42,560
QA/QC Technician	£24,800	£28,245	£38,150
NPD Technologist	£26,255	£30,910	£35,245
Food/Beverage Technologist	£26,555	£30,960	£35,175
Specifications Technologist	£25,020	£28,490	£32,455
Quality Auditor	£24,800	£28,245	£32,210

## Regional insight

**Dominic Watts**  
Area Manager, Reed



“ The region’s vast, affordable land makes it an attractive location for building large, modern factories. However, this advantage is countered by significant hiring difficulties, particularly in more remote areas where the local talent pool has been exhausted. This paints East Anglia’s food and FMCG sector in a complex picture of challenge and adaptation.

For many companies, the primary struggle is attracting and retaining employees. Salaries in the region have remained relatively static, and with increased living costs, professionals are less willing to travel for roles that do not offer a substantial financial incentive. This has created a highly competitive environment where businesses are vying for a limited number of skilled individuals, especially for ‘feet on the ground’ roles like quality assurance, hygiene, and production operatives.

In response, a positive shift is emerging as we enter 2026. For the first time in years, employers are actively listening to employees and jobseekers’ feedback and adapting their strategies. This includes rethinking traditional working patterns, such as the four-on-four-off 12-hour shifts, which can be unsociable and difficult to balance with family life. By considering more flexible hours, companies are looking for new ways to make roles more appealing and secure the workforce needed to keep production lines moving. This willingness to evolve signals a proactive approach to overcoming the region’s unique geographical and demographic hurdles, turning recruitment challenges into opportunities for innovation. ”

# London



Role	Min	Average	Max
Technical Director	£77,125	£85,160	£101,765
Technical Manager	£55,700	£63,200	£74,985
Manufacturing Manager	£44,725	£56,505	£67,485
Health & Safety Manager	£50,080	£54,900	£66,950
Specifications Manager	£41,240	£48,790	£61,060
Production Manager	£39,100	£46,595	£59,670
NPD Manager	£44,990	£51,955	£66,415
QA Manager	£38,565	£46,915	£54,900

Role	Min	Average	Max
Hygiene Manager	£36,420	£45,310	£52,170
Packaging Technologist	£32,670	£38,030	£46,010
QA/QC Technician	£24,855	£30,530	£41,240
NPD Technologist	£28,385	£33,425	£38,100
Food/Beverage Technologist	£28,705	£33,475	£38,030
Specifications Technologist	£27,050	£30,795	£35,080
Quality Auditor	£26,510	£30,530	£34,815

## Regional insight

**Adam Buckland**  
Regional Director, Reed



“ In London’s competitive food and FMCG market, the race for the best talent is intensifying. While many employers are extending their recruitment processes to secure the perfect long-term fit, this cautious approach risks losing sought-after professionals to more agile competitors. Challenger brands, many of which are exciting startups and scale-ups, are capitalising on this, swiftly snapping up skilled individuals with decisive hiring strategies.

Talent shortages are particularly pronounced in quality assurance (QA) and technical roles, especially at the junior level, where fewer graduates are entering the field and visa restrictions limit access to international talent. Middle-management professionals, such as QA managers, are available but largely passive, requiring compelling offers and clear career progression pathways. Meanwhile, the senior leadership market, including director and c-suite roles, is rebounding after a slow period, presenting London businesses with a timely opportunity to attract transformative leaders.

Skills demands are evolving, too. While automation is boosting efficiency in quality control, human oversight remains critical. Agility, adaptability, and a commitment to continuous learning are now essential traits for professionals in London, as new technologies and audit requirements will continue to reshape the industry over the coming years.

Today, employees are looking beyond salary, prioritising employer reputation, sustainability, and comprehensive benefits packages. In response, employers are stepping up with creative perks and enhanced healthcare support to stand out in the market. Ultimately, success in London’s food & FMCG sector will belong to businesses that combine operational agility with a compelling employer brand and a genuine investment in their people. ”

# Midlands



Role	Min	Average	Max
Technical Director	£72,885	£80,475	£96,170
Technical Manager	£52,645	£59,730	£70,865
Manufacturing Manager	£42,260	£53,395	£63,780
Health & Safety Manager	£47,330	£51,880	£63,275
Specifications Manager	£38,975	£46,115	£57,700
Production Manager	£36,945	£44,035	£56,380
NPD Manager	£42,520	£49,100	£62,760
QA Manager	£36,440	£44,340	£51,880

Role	Min	Average	Max
Hygiene Manager	£34,425	£42,815	£49,295
Packaging Technologist	£30,880	£35,935	£43,475
QA/QC Technician	£24,800	£28,850	£38,975
NPD Technologist	£26,830	£31,580	£36,010
Food/Beverage Technologist	£27,130	£31,630	£35,935
Specifications Technologist	£25,565	£29,110	£33,155
Quality Auditor	£25,060	£28,850	£32,900

## Regional insight

**Dominic Watts**  
Area Manager, Reed



“ In the Midlands, the usual steady pipeline of professionals on the job market has become leaner, challenging businesses to rethink their approach to recruitment. As we enter 2026, we’re seeing roles being filled after receiving just one or two strong applicants, a stark contrast to the traditional five or more. This scarcity highlights a more competitive landscape for employers. As a result, I would strongly recommend that hiring managers are more flexible and consider those individuals who meet the most critical, rather than all, of their desired criteria.

Specific skills gaps are making the situation more acute. Experienced specifications technologists and skilled hygiene managers are particularly hard to find. The demand for these professionals is so high that they often have their pick of roles and can command greater flexibility.

Salaries are rising, partly in response to the increased cost of living, but the focus is also on comprehensive benefits. Even a modest increase in pension contributions - just one or two per cent - can make a significant difference for senior professionals. For some, it could mean retiring a year earlier.

Furthermore, for roles that can be performed remotely, some employers are offering flexibility which is not often seen in this sector. They are looking beyond geographical boundaries, hiring talent from across the country who may only need to visit the office once a quarter. This adaptability is proving essential for companies wanting to secure the specialist skills they need to thrive.

Overall, I see a positive year ahead for both professionals and businesses willing to adapt to these evolving trends. By embracing flexibility and offering comprehensive benefits packages, employers can stay competitive and innovative. Similarly, professionals can benefit from greater work-life balance and career opportunities that may have previously been out of reach. ”

# North East



Role	Min	Average	Max
Technical Director	£71,535	£78,990	£94,390
Technical Manager	£51,665	£58,615	£69,545
Manufacturing Manager	£41,480	£52,405	£62,595
Health & Safety Manager	£46,455	£50,925	£62,100
Specifications Manager	£38,255	£45,260	£56,630
Production Manager	£36,265	£43,220	£55,340
NPD Manager	£41,725	£48,185	£61,605
QA Manager	£35,770	£43,520	£50,925

Role	Min	Average	Max
Hygiene Manager	£33,785	£42,025	£48,390
Packaging Technologist	£30,305	£35,265	£42,675
QA/QC Technician	£24,800	£28,315	£38,255
NPD Technologist	£26,325	£31,005	£35,340
Food/Beverage Technologist	£26,625	£31,045	£35,265
Specifications Technologist	£25,090	£28,560	£32,540
Quality Auditor	£24,800	£28,315	£32,290

## Regional insight

**Lewis Jackson**  
Recruitment Consultant, Reed



“ The North East has emerged as a standout success story for the food and FMCG industry in 2025, marking itself as one of the UK’s most active regions. As we enter 2026, this proactive market continues to thrive, driven by both business growth and a readily available pool of talent.

The packaging industry, particularly around Leeds and Bradford, is crying out for professionals. This demand extends to related roles in labelling and specifications, creating a hub of opportunity. Similarly, the region’s strong seafood market, centred around Grimsby and Hull, continues to be a significant source of employment and growth. Beyond these traditional powerhouses, the North East is fostering innovation, with emerging businesses exploring renewables and new uses for waste products, adding another layer of dynamism to the local economy.

What truly sets the region apart is the proactive nature of its workforce. We have found a significant number of professionals, both active and passive, who are open to new opportunities. This has enabled businesses to access high-quality talent, making it an ideal time for companies to hire and expand their teams in cities like Newcastle and Leeds.





The combination of a vibrant market, flourishing key sectors, and an engaged talent pool made the North East a beacon of growth in 2025. The outlook is overwhelmingly positive, with every indication that this momentum will carry forward, presenting continued opportunities for businesses and professionals in the year ahead. ”

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# North West



Role	Min	Average	Max
Technical Director	£70,575	£77,920	£93,110
Technical Manager	£50,965	£57,825	£68,610
Manufacturing Manager	£40,920	£51,705	£61,750
Health & Safety Manager	£45,825	£50,235	£61,265
Specifications Manager	£37,740	£44,650	£55,865
Production Manager	£35,770	£42,640	£54,600
NPD Manager	£41,170	£47,535	£60,770
QA Manager	£35,290	£42,930	£50,235

Role	Min	Average	Max
Hygiene Manager	£33,320	£41,460	£47,730
Packaging Technologist	£29,890	£34,795	£42,095
QA/QC Technician	£24,800	£27,935	£37,740
NPD Technologist	£25,975	£30,580	£34,865
Food/Beverage Technologist	£26,265	£30,630	£34,795
Specifications Technologist	£24,800	£28,180	£32,105
Quality Auditor	£24,800	£27,935	£31,860

## Regional insight

**Stuart Goble**  
Business Manager, Reed



“ Towards the end of 2025, there was an increase in both available roles and active jobseekers. Notably, there was demand for technical specialists such as specifications technologists and quality control (QC) professionals, especially within product areas like confectionery and food chemistry. Regulatory and compliance-focused roles, such as systems auditors and those responsible for labelling and food safety, have also seen heightened recruitment activity as businesses prioritise operational integrity.

A key theme throughout last year, was a reluctance to move among mid-tier professionals. Many adopted a ‘better the devil you know’ mindset, choosing stability over the risk of a new role unless a significant incentive was offered. For this group, loyalty to their current employer is often underpinned by accrued benefits and job security, making them selective about new opportunities. As a result, employers looking to attract this talent pool have found success with tailored incentives - offering not just higher salaries, but also enhanced benefits packages, opportunities for rapid career advancement, increased flexibility in working hours, and meaningful investments in personal development and upskilling. Additionally, some businesses have enticed people by emphasising innovative projects, company culture, and a clear vision for growth, providing the reassurance and excitement needed for potential movers to take the leap.

The region’s geography presents a unique challenge. While urban centres like Manchester and Warrington boast fluid talent pools, the more rural and spread-out areas struggle to attract people. Commutes can be long, and businesses in these locations must offer a truly exceptional package to entice people away from established roles.

Looking ahead to 2026, the North West’s food and FMCG market appears well-positioned for continued growth, but not without its challenges. The strong momentum from the end of 2025 is likely to carry forward, with expanding demand for technical experts and compliance professionals as businesses adapt to evolving regulations. ”

# Scotland



Role	Min	Average	Max
Technical Director	£70,955	£78,350	£93,625
Technical Manager	£51,245	£58,145	£68,990
Manufacturing Manager	£41,150	£51,985	£62,090
Health & Safety Manager	£46,070	£50,510	£61,595
Specifications Manager	£37,945	£44,885	£56,175
Production Manager	£35,970	£42,870	£54,890
NPD Manager	£41,395	£47,800	£61,100
QA Manager	£35,485	£43,165	£50,510

Role	Min	Average	Max
Hygiene Manager	£33,505	£41,685	£48,000
Packaging Technologist	£30,055	£34,990	£42,335
QA/QC Technician	£24,800	£28,090	£37,945
NPD Technologist	£26,120	£30,745	£35,050
Food/Beverage Technologist	£26,410	£30,795	£34,990
Specifications Technologist	£24,885	£28,335	£32,280
Quality Auditor	£24,800	£28,090	£32,035

## Regional insight

**Adam Buckland**  
Regional Director, Reed



// Scotland's food and FMCG sector stands out for its strong sense of community, resilient workforce, and enviable work-life balance. Unlike some regions of the UK, the hiring landscape here benefits from dedicated local talent, where many professionals choose to build long-term careers within their hometowns. The close-knit nature of these communities encourages loyalty and stability, reducing workforce turnover and creating an environment where employers and employees truly understand and support each other.

Attracting talent to the region requires a focus on showcasing its unique advantages, including the high quality of life and opportunities for professional growth. Employers can emphasise the rewarding career paths available within the food and FMCG sector, alongside the community-oriented work culture that prioritises employee wellbeing. Offering flexible working options, continuous training programmes, and clear progression paths also plays a crucial role in drawing both experienced professionals and ambitious newcomers to the area. By aligning recruitment strategies with the values and aspirations of potential employees, businesses can strengthen their appeal and secure a thriving, dedicated workforce.

While salaries in Scotland may be slightly lower than elsewhere, this is often offset by the lower costs associated with commuting and the value placed on work-life balance.

Addressing the few challenges in attracting specialist talent - particularly in quality assurance - can open up avenues for growth. By embracing sponsorship opportunities, building stronger links with universities, and tailoring benefits to local needs, employers can futureproof their operations and continue to attract the next generation of skilled professionals. //

# South East



Role	Min	Average	Max
Technical Director	£74,430	£82,185	£98,200
Technical Manager	£53,755	£60,985	£72,360
Manufacturing Manager	£43,155	£54,530	£65,125
Health & Safety Manager	£48,330	£52,975	£64,610
Specifications Manager	£39,800	£47,080	£58,925
Production Manager	£37,730	£44,970	£57,575
NPD Manager	£43,415	£50,140	£64,085
QA Manager	£37,215	£45,280	£52,975

Role	Min	Average	Max
Hygiene Manager	£35,145	£43,725	£50,345
Packaging Technologist	£31,530	£36,700	£44,405
QA/QC Technician	£24,800	£29,460	£39,800
NPD Technologist	£27,400	£32,250	£36,770
Food/Beverage Technologist	£27,705	£32,300	£36,700
Specifications Technologist	£26,100	£29,715	£33,855
Quality Auditor	£25,585	£29,460	£33,600

## Regional insight

**Dominic Watts**  
Area Manager, Reed



“ The South East’s food and FMCG sector is evolving, but remains a hub of opportunity, particularly around Norwich, where businesses are innovating to attract and retain talent in a changing landscape.

One of the biggest shifts has been in workforce dynamics. Historically supported by a strong European talent pool, post-Brexit the sector had to adapt by embracing the government’s seasonal worker scheme, which brings skilled individuals from around the world to local farms. This approach underscores the need for creative strategies to engage local talent, especially for roles in more remote areas where transport links can be limited. In response, companies are having to look at their offerings. For specialist hard-to-fill roles such as technical managers, hiring beyond the region - and offering attractive relocation packages - has become a key tactic. The South East’s stunning coastline and enviable lifestyle make it an appealing destination for professionals seeking a fresh start, particularly later in their careers. Hiring success is driven by flexibility, competitive incentives, and showcasing the unique quality of life the region offers.

Beyond workforce shifts, environmental factors are playing a larger role. Extreme weather has disrupted production and stability over the past few years, and I anticipate that climate change will continue to be a defining force in the sector well into the future.

Expect growth in agri-tech, climate risk analysis, and sustainability roles, alongside traditional jobs evolving to include digital and data skills. Technologies like precision farming, vertical agriculture, and AI-driven forecasting will become standard, while food scientists focus on resilient crops and alternative proteins.

The future belongs to businesses that embrace flexibility, invest in green innovation, and position themselves as leaders in sustainability. Those who adapt will not only protect their operations but help shape a more resilient food system. ”

# South West & Wales



Role	Min	Average	Max
Technical Director	£72,110	£79,630	£95,150
Technical Manager	£52,085	£59,090	£70,110
Manufacturing Manager	£41,820	£52,830	£63,100
Health & Safety Manager	£46,825	£51,335	£62,605
Specifications Manager	£38,565	£45,620	£57,095
Production Manager	£36,555	£43,570	£55,785
NPD Manager	£42,065	£48,575	£62,100
QA Manager	£36,060	£43,870	£51,335

Role	Min	Average	Max
Hygiene Manager	£34,050	£42,365	£48,780
Packaging Technologist	£30,550	£35,555	£43,015
QA/QC Technician	£24,800	£28,540	£38,565
NPD Technologist	£26,545	£31,250	£35,630
Food/Beverage Technologist	£26,840	£31,300	£35,555
Specifications Technologist	£25,285	£28,800	£32,805
Quality Auditor	£24,800	£28,540	£32,550

## Regional insight

**Will Larolliere**

Recruitment Consultant, Reed



“ In the South West and Wales, the landscape of food and FMCG is shaped by tradition, geography, and innovation. Here, centuries-old agricultural roots intersect with modern food manufacturing, creating a setting where the region’s natural resources and industry expertise fuel a thriving market. This area is a powerhouse for the dairy and meat industries, home to major players like Yeo Valley and Müller, alongside large-scale meat producers. The close proximity of farms to processing lines, facilitated by strong transport links like the M4 corridor, makes it a strategic location for food manufacturing.

Despite recent site closures from some bigger companies, the hiring climate remains buoyant. However, finding talent with specific skill sets, such as specifications technologists, continues to be a challenge. To counter this, strong connections with institutions like Cardiff Met University are proving invaluable. The university provides a steady stream of skilled graduates, including a significant number of international students on post-study work visas, who bring high standards and fresh perspectives to the industry.

The market is also being shaped by evolving consumer demands. The rising popularity of vegan, free-from, and health-conscious products is directly influencing new product development (NPD). Manufacturers are adapting their processes and ingredients, for instance, by using more plant-based proteins to meet the changing British palate. While NPD teams are designing these products six-to-18 months in advance, the entire production chain must respond to these trends. This blend of traditional industry strength and forward-thinking innovation ensures the South West and Wales will remain a key region for the UK’s food manufacturing sector. ”

# Commercial sales



	Min	Average	Max
Chief Commercial Officer	£114,330	£128,750	£169,950
Commercial Director	£77,765	£87,550	£123,600
Head of Commercial	£64,890	£75,705	£113,300
Commercial Manager	£46,350	£65,405	£97,850
Sales Director	£56,650	£72,100	£108,150
Sales Manager	£43,260	£59,740	£79,310

	Min	Average	Max
Sales Executive	£28,840	£35,020	£43,775
Account Director	£47,380	£55,105	£63,860
National Account Manager	£35,020	£39,140	£51,500
Account Manager	£30,900	£38,625	£44,290
Account Executive	£27,810	£32,445	£38,110

## Commercial sales insight

**Adam Buckland**  
Regional Director, Reed



Commercial sales offers a wide array of career paths for ambitious professionals, ranging from business development executives to regional sales managers and national account managers. These roles are increasingly critical as manufacturers fight to secure shelf space, strengthen retailer relationships, and navigate a rapidly changing consumer environment.

Entering 2026, the sector faces several significant hurdles. Intense competition is the norm, with brands under constant pressure to protect their profit margins while satisfying the pricing demands of major retailers. Economic factors, including inflation and supply chain disruptions, have made negotiation harder and profitability more precarious. Additionally, a shortage of skilled labour across commercial functions has forced companies to rethink their recruitment and retention strategies to retain their best employees.

But, these challenges are matched by exciting emerging trends. The most notable, is the explosion of digital and eCommerce channels – which has created a surge in demand for professionals who are not only great salespeople but also possess strong data analytics skills and digital fluency. Sustainability is another trend, with commercial teams now expected to champion eco-friendly packaging and ethical sourcing to meet the values of modern shoppers. Finally, the workplace is evolving, with hybrid and flexible working models now standard for many sales roles.

This year, success will depend on more than just traditional sales techniques; it demands adaptability, a grasp of digital tools, and the ability to pivot strategies quickly in response to health trends and sustainability goals. //

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