



# Talent Trends Report.

March 2026

# Hiring is stabilising, not surging... yet.

Hiring continues to shift, and this time the change is as much about behaviour as it is about the numbers.

REC/KPMG points to a market that's stabilising rather than surging; permanent hiring remains soft but is easing, vacancy declines are slowing, pay pressure has cooled from January's peak and candidate availability has risen again. In short, the market isn't "back" but it's no longer moving in one direction.

At the same time, what we're hearing from our clients feels more buoyant; more roles moving from "parked" to "approved", hiring managers back in delivery mode and growing momentum in replacement and project-driven hiring.

That confidence shift often shows up first in pipeline activity and decision speed and for businesses, this creates a momentum window; a chance to hire ahead of the next wave of competition without losing cost control or compliance.

“

What we're hearing is more intent but not always more certainty. Some teams are ready to hire; others are still waiting for a clearer quarter. The difference-maker is having a plan you can activate quickly when the green light comes.”

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# Hiring headlines | What February data tells us.

**Permanent hiring is close to flat (still slightly down):** the decline eased to the weakest since March 2023

**Contract/temp softened again:** temp billings slipped back into modest decline after January's uptick

**Vacancies are still falling, but slowing:** overall demand decreased at the softest pace in nine months (index noted in the report commentary), driven by a weaker fall in permanent vacancies

**Pay pressure cooled, but hasn't vanished:** starting salary inflation slowed (softest since last October) and temp wage growth eased

**Candidate availability jumped again:** improving supply may ease some hiring friction, but not necessarily in specialist pockets



## Neil Carberry, Chief Executive, REC

“While February’s report is by no means a source of unalloyed celebration, it does suggest that the worst of the hiring slowdown has passed... the stabilising trend we have seen so far this year has continued.”

## Jon Holt, UK Senior Partner, KPMG

“Despite a marginal fall in hiring last month, the jobs market was showing its strongest signs of improvement in three years, with hiring at its closest point to turning positive... Resilience is now the new normal...”

# Getting ahead | The window of momentum.

## What to do before everyone speeds up.

When a market stabilises, the biggest advantage goes to employers who move early and move cleanly.

### 3 THINGS BUSINESSES SHOULD BE DOING NOW

1

#### Pre-approve the “roles that unlock revenue”

If hiring is becoming more buoyant in pockets, approvals will be the new bottleneck. Decide now which roles get fast-track sign-off and which can wait.

2

#### Replace “hiring activity” with “hiring velocity”

In a stabilising market, speed isn't about rushing; it's about removing friction:

- fewer interview steps
- shorter gaps between stages
- 24–48 hour feedback standards

3

#### Build a pipeline for the skills that still won't be easy

Candidate numbers are rising overall, but specialist shortages remain (and pay competition persists where skills are scarce). The companies that win are building pipeline before the vacancy becomes urgent.

# The 21-day Hiring Velocity Sprint

This is the fastest way to improve outcomes without “hiring more recruiters” or throwing spend at agencies.

## Week 1: Fix the brief (speed starts here)

- replace “nice-to-haves” with outcomes (what success looks like in 90 days)
- lock non-negotiables: salary band, location, start date, interview panel
- write one credible reason to join now (not generic EVP fluff)

## Week 2: Tighten the funnel

- drop to 2-stage interviews for priority roles where possible
- implement 24–48 hour feedback (no exceptions)
- measure stage conversion: CV > 1st stage, 1st > final, final > offer

## Week 3: Win offers

- pre-close early (don’t wait until final)
- reduce offer friction (approvals, contracts, onboarding steps)
- track reasons for “no” weekly (so your process learns fast)

## What “good” looks like in March 2026

- time-to-offer down
- offer acceptance up
- fewer “late-stage surprises”
- hiring manager responsiveness measurable



# Where the “pockets” are likely to show up.

Even with cautious hiring overall, “pockets” are forming where organisations can’t risk delivery delays or need specialist expertise to protect revenue, regulation, or transformation outcomes. Candidate availability may be rising overall, but scarcity remains in the roles that matter most.

## The pockets we’re seeing (and why they stay competitive).

### Insurance

Demand concentrates where insurers balance growth with governance, especially roles protecting margin, risk and portfolio performance:

- **Pricing & Analytics:** pricing/portfolio optimisation, technical pricing, commercial insight
- **Data & MI:** data/MI, governance, quality, underwriting & claims decision support
- **Underwriting:** technical underwriting and product expertise
- **Claims & Ops change:** efficiency, leakage control, customer outcomes
- **Risk & Compliance:** regulatory change, audit-ready governance

### Tech & Change

Pockets sit in roles that keep programmes moving:

- transformation/change delivery (often regulated)
- cyber/security for resilience and assurance
- data, cloud and engineering tied to delivery milestones

### Legal

Pockets persist where workload and risk intersect:

- teams under pressure on quality and turnaround
- areas where experience helps avoid mistakes and extra work to fix them
- hires that protect client relationships and service delivery

# AI is a hiring factor, not just a tech project.

AI is everywhere and adoption is accelerating inside organisations:

- **24.3%** of employers surveyed were already using AI to enhance business practices
- **22.3%** planned to introduce AI within the next 12 months

**The bigger implication for hiring:** many employers expect AI to reshape tasks more than eliminate roles, which means skills and workflows shift, not simply headcount.

Employers anticipate digital literacy and the ability to work with AI becoming key capabilities.

## What to do now

- **Update job design:** add “AI-enabled workflows” expectations where relevant
- **Modernise assessment:** test judgement, problem-solving, and AI literacy
- **Protect trust:** be clear where AI is used in hiring and where humans decide



# Build Capability Fast | Permanent & Contract Recruitment.

## Permanent Hiring | Win scarce talent whilst the market is still quiet

Stabilisation markets reward employers who build pipeline before roles become urgent. Gerrard White supports this through specialist recruitment across Insurance, Tech & Change and Legal.

### Best for

- Niche skill hiring (specialist, regulated, or technical roles) where the right talent isn't actively applying
- Critical permanent hires tied to delivery, risk, revenue or regulatory outcomes
- Competitive markets where employer brand alone won't win and the process needs to be sharp
- Hard-to-define briefs where you need support shaping the role, mapping the market and setting realistic expectations
- Confidential searches and replacement hires requiring discretion and careful messaging

## Contractor Hiring | Keep delivery moving when priorities shift.

Even as candidate availability improves overall, specialist delivery skills can still be hard to secure quickly. Contractor hiring gives you the agility to plug gaps as work lands. We source and mobilise contractors across Insurance, Tech & Change and Legal, focusing on short time-to-start and a process that stands up to scrutiny.

### Best for

- Urgent delivery needs (0–30 days start)
- Niche/scarce skill gaps where search-led sourcing beats job ads
- Time-critical programmes where slippage is expensive
- Regulated environments where onboarding, documentation and IR35 can slow starts
- Roles needing clarity on rate, start date and scope to reduce churn

# Need to hire specialist talent quickly?

Working with a specialist recruiter can help you focus on three areas that typically make the biggest difference.

## 1) Specialist shortlists, not CV volume

We use targeted search across Insurance, Tech & Change and Legal to surface candidates more likely to match the brief, reducing noise and improving relevance.

## 2) Better hiring momentum (without cutting corners)

We help tighten the process: **clear brief > targeted outreach > shortlist cadence > interview coordination > offer support** to reduce delays and improve candidate experience.

## 3) Flexible resourcing across permanent and contract

Whether you need a permanent hire or contractor support, we can advise on the best route and run a consistent process, particularly where governance and risk matter.

**If you're hiring for a business-critical role, it's worth starting early (even if timelines aren't fully confirmed).**

**Want to talk through your priority roles?**

Share what you're hiring for (even at a high level) and we'll set up a quick conversation to cover:

- a practical approach and indicative timeline (based on your brief and process)
- current pay ranges and candidate expectations (and where premiums may apply)
- likely attraction/acceptance risks and practical ways to reduce them

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