gerrard white



Talent Trends Report.

May 2026

Source: REC/KPMG data April 2026

Hiring's still happening, but it's more selective.

April wasn't the comeback month we'd all hoped for, but it could be seen as a wake-up call.

Momentum was starting to build, then the outside world reminded everyone who's in charge. REC/KPMG point to renewed uncertainty linked to the Middle East conflict, with employers nervous about inflation, borrowing costs and wider disruption, plus renewed domestic political uncertainty is adding to the strain. That's why the data reads the way it does: permanent hiring softened again, while temporary hiring nudged back into growth.

And here's the bit that matters: 2026 targets don't hit themselves. Businesses still need delivery, revenue protection and transformation, so they're keeping plans moving often by leaning harder on interim and contract talent.

The danger zone is when "flexible" becomes ungoverned: procurement bypassed, onboarding inconsistent, checks hard to evidence and spend spiralling because nobody has the full picture



"Specialist hiring hasn't stopped, it's just become more selective. The roles tied to risk, revenue and regulation still move, but employers are leaning more on interim and contract to keep options open. The difference-maker is having IR35 and screening nailed down, so speed doesn't create exposure."

Anthony Butler, Managing Director
anthony.butler@gerrardwhite.com
07843 625 559

2026 BUSINESS AWARDS UK
Recruitment Awards
WINNER
Gerrard White Consulting
Best Specialist Recruitment Agency

Hiring headlines | What April data tells us.

Permanent hiring softened again: placements fell more quickly in April.

Temporary hiring turned positive: temp billings moved back into growth with employers choosing flexibility over delay.

Vacancies still fell, but less sharply: demand declined again, at the softest pace in 11 months.

Pay stayed controlled: starting salaries ticked up slightly, but remain historically subdued.

The market is uneven: some skill areas stay competitive even as overall demand cools.

WHY APRIL WASN'T A TURNAROUND MONTH

Uncertainty didn't ease, it escalated.

The latest data flags disrupted momentum linked to Middle East conflict and concern about inflation, borrowing costs and supply chain impact.

What we're seeing on the ground:

- Boards want optionality
- Hiring managers still need output
- TA/Procurement get squeezed in the middle

And that's how contractor hiring surges… even in a soft market.

Our view: If contractor hiring is rising, your biggest risk isn't "finding talent." It's governance failure - IR35, employment checks, rates, onboarding and supplier control.

5 Key takeaways for regulated and complex markets.

1 “Selective yes” becomes the default

When permanent hiring softens, regulated firms don’t stop hiring, they raise the bar and become more selective. Roles that protect revenue, reduce risk or keep you compliant still get signed off. Everything else gets slowed, re-scoped or turned into interim cover.

2 Contractors/interims become the pressure valve (and the risk multiplier)

With temp activity turning positive, expect more interim demand in:

- reg change + remediation (controls testing, audit prep, MI fixes)
- operational resilience (service mapping, incident playbooks, third-party risk)
- risk & compliance capacity (FCA-facing work, SMCR support)
- tech + data delivery (platform reliability, data engineering, cyber)
- pricing + commercial performance (pricing analysts, underwriting/pricing MI, leakage analytics)

This means: the work doesn’t pause, it just gets staffed in shorter term commitments.

01892 553355 | info@gerrardwhite.com

3 Vacancies easing means fewer roles overall, but faster movement on "must-fill."

Even with overall demand still contracting, decisions move quickly when there's a clear line to:

- regulatory deadlines
- customer risk / service stability
- cyber exposure
- margin protection (pricing, leakage, claims effectiveness)
- data reliability (reporting, governance, model performance)

4 Pay stays "careful"… until you hit scarce skills.

Broad salary inflation being muted doesn't mean hiring is cheap. In regulated markets, you'll still see competition (and counteroffers) in pockets like:

- cyber + cloud security
- data engineering / governance
- pricing & actuarial/pricing analytics
- experienced risk/compliance leads

The trick is avoiding blanket pay creep while being decisive where scarcity is real.

5 Governance becomes a differentiator, not admin.

If you're leaning more on interim/contract talent, the organisations that win are the ones who can prove, instantly, that they're in control:

- IR35 decisions are consistent and evidenced
- pre-employment checks are standardised and traceable
- rates are benchmarked (no quiet drift by supplier/team)
- one onboarding process across functions/locations
- supplier discipline (no side doors)

When contractors rise, risk rises.. unless you control it.

This is the bit nobody puts on a hiring dashboard until it hurts. When interim/contract hiring increases quickly, three things usually happen:

1. IR35 gets inconsistent ("we'll decide later" becomes exposure)
2. Pre-employment checks get patchy (different standards by team/supplier)
3. Rates drift + audit readiness drops (documentation scattered, onboarding inconsistent)

If any of that sounds familiar, you don't need "more recruiters." You need a contractor operating system with governance, employment checks and visibility built in.

IR35 + CONTRACTOR GOVERNANCE (DONE PROPERLY)

If flexible hiring is carrying delivery, you need four things locked:

1. **IR35 by default:** Every role assessed, documented, stored and auditable - not "we think it's outside."
2. **One screening + onboarding standard:** Same pre-employment checks, same workflow, same evidence trail - across teams, locations and suppliers.
3. **Rate control + benchmarking:** A baseline, a rulebook and visibility of variance (so procurement isn't guessing).
4. **Supplier control:** Clear SLAs. No free-for-all. No "favourite agencies" bypassing the model.

This isn't theory - it's what stops contractor hiring turning into hidden risk.

01892 553355 | info@gerrardwhite.com

IR35 + screening readiness checklist.

A fast way to see if your contractor & interim hiring is controlled or quietly risky. If you're leaning more on contractors/interims right now, this checklist tells you whether you've got governance, compliance and audit-readiness in place… or whether things are being held together by inboxes and good intentions.

1) IR35: Status decisions you can defend

Tick if true:

☐ Every contractor role has a documented IR35 status determination (not assumed)

☐ Status decisions are consistent across teams/locations (same rules, same thresholds)

☐ You can show evidence behind the decision (role context, substitution, control, mutuality)

☐ Determinations are stored centrally and easy to retrieve (audit-ready)

☐ Contractors and suppliers receive the decision and process is transparent

2) Pre-employment checks: One standard, not ten versions

Tick if true:

☐ Every contractor/interim follows the same screening pathway (no "shortcuts")

☐ Right to Work checks are completed and recorded before start

☐ Identity verification is consistent (and evidence stored)

☐ References are captured in a repeatable way (or a clear alternative policy exists)

☐ Criminal record checks are completed where role/regulation requires

☐ Financial checks (credit/CCJ/bankruptcy) are applied where relevant

☐ Sanctions/PEP screening is in place for regulated exposure where required

☐ Data privacy/GDPR handling is documented (who stores what, for how long)

3) Onboarding & documentation: Audit-ready by default

Tick if true:

☐ You have a single onboarding workflow and "minimum required" docs list
☐ Contracts, NDAs, policies, and compliance docs are standardised
☐ You can evidence start approvals and who signed off what
☐ You can produce a complete onboarding pack quickly (not a "we'll pull it together" scramble)

4) Supplier control: No side doors

Tick if true:

☐ Suppliers operate under agreed terms, SLAs, and a consistent screening standard
☐ You have rate cards / benchmarking rules (and exceptions are visible + approved)
☐ You track supplier performance (speed, quality, compliance, attrition)
☐ Hiring managers can't bypass the process when they're under pressure

5) Visibility: Can you answer these in 60 seconds?

Tick if true:

☐ Total contractor headcount and spend is visible (by function, location or supplier)
☐ Time-to-onboard is tracked and improving
☐ IR35 compliance rate is measurable and close to 100%
☐ Audit readiness can be scored (not guessed)
☐ Risk incidents are recorded (and ideally zero)

QUICK SCORING

0–5 ticks: High risk of governance drift (cost + compliance)
6–12 ticks: Some controls in place, but inconsistent execution
13+ ticks: Strong foundation of controls, now optimise speed + cost

How Gerrard White supports your hiring.

In cautious markets, where niche and specialist skills are critical to keep things moving, Gerrard White can help you with:

1 Specialist recruitment (perm, contract & interim)

When the role is niche, you don't need more CVs, you need the right ones. Our specialist team help you:

- sharpen the brief (what matters vs what's noise)
- get to a credible shortlist fast
- move candidates through without losing them to "process drag"
- hire with context: salary reality, availability, competitor activity

Best for: pricing, legal, underwriting, risk, compliance, change, data, technology, cyber, engineering



2 Workforce planning (turn hiring into a plan, not a reaction)

When priorities shift mid-quarter, the best teams don't pause — they re-sequence.

We'll work with you to:

- decide what to commit to (perm) vs what to flex (contract/interim)
- map capability gaps: where are you exposed in the next 90 days?
- build a hiring roadmap aligned to delivery deadlines, regulatory dates and revenue goals
- bring market intel you can actually use: what's scarce, what's available, where pay pressure is real, and where speed wins

Out**put: a clear H2 hiring plan that hiring managers can follow.**

3 Contractor management + IR35 support (keep flexible hiring controlled)

If you're leaning more on contractors/interims, governance matters.

We help you tighten:

- IR35 decision support and consistency
- contractor onboarding and pre-employment screening evidence
- rate discipline and supplier control (to stop quiet drift)
- audit readiness (so documentation is there when it's needed)

Result: flexible hiring that doesn't turn into hidden risk.

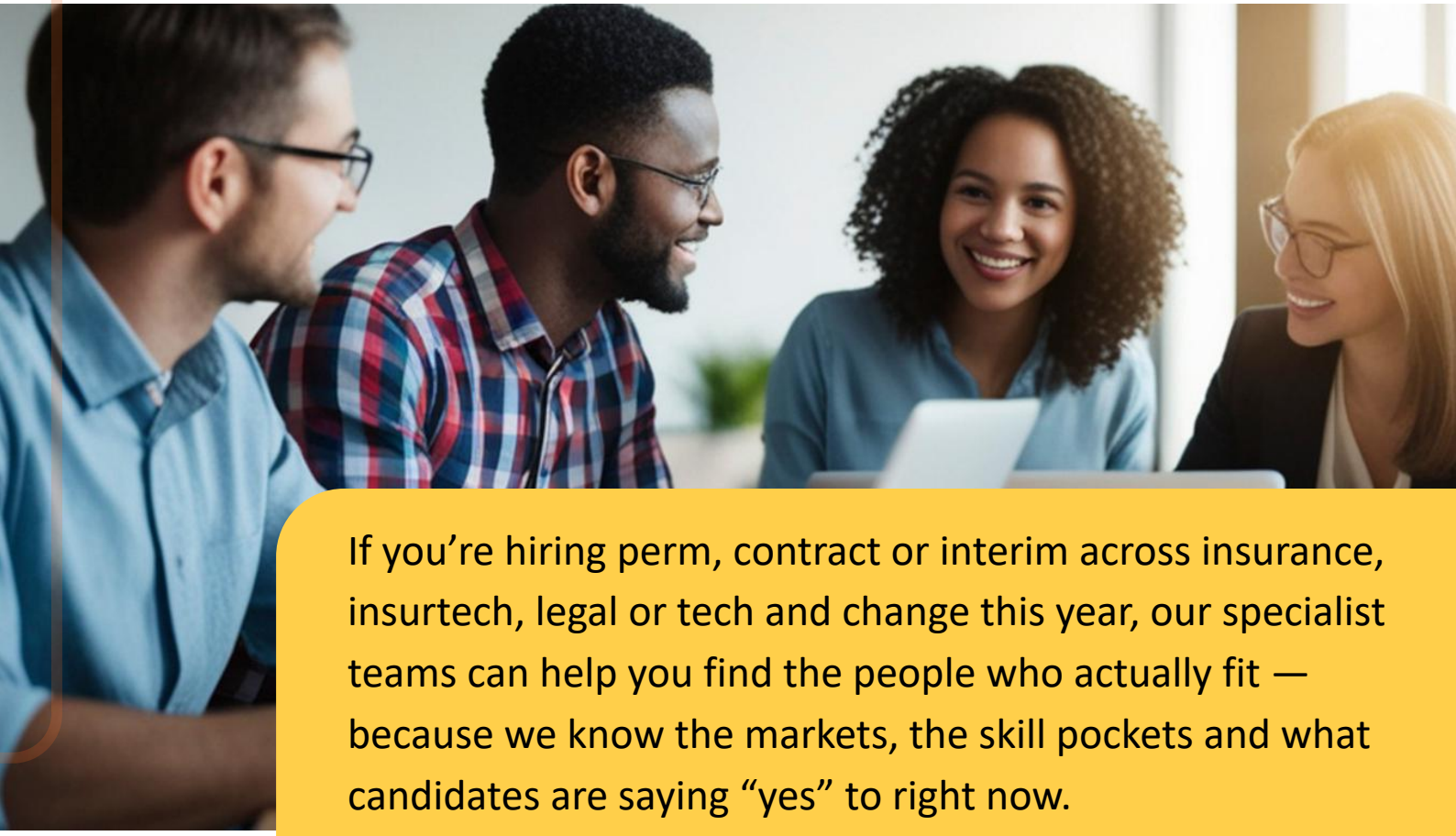


If you are leaning more on contractors, make your next step about control.

If your hiring model has shifted to more interim, more contract, more specialist roles, you don't need to "hire faster", but you do need to make your hiring deliberate.

That means:

- putting the right roles into perm (the ones you can't afford to churn)
- using contract/interim where it protects delivery (and keeps options open)
- tightening IR35 + screening so you can evidence decisions, not just explain them
- building a process that doesn't fall apart the moment urgency spikes



If you're hiring perm, contract or interim across insurance, insurtech, legal or tech and change this year, our specialist teams can help you find the people who actually fit — because we know the markets, the skill pockets and what candidates are saying "yes" to right now.

01892 553355 | info@gerrardwhite.com

Award-Winning Recruitment Specialists
Insurance | Technology & Change | Legal

gerrard white



gerrard white

Gerrard White specialist recruitment teams support organisations hiring in complex markets where specialist capability matters - across permanent, contract and interim hiring.

We combine:

- specialist delivery teams
- practical workforce planning
- contractor governance (including IR35 support and consistent screening)

So you can move plans forward, without losing control of cost, compliance or quality.

01892 553355 | info@gerrardwhite.com

www.gerrardwhite.com

Gerrard White is the trading name of GWV Talent Solutions Ltd, registered in England & Wales, No. 04486902.
Registered Address: 16, Lonsdale Gardens, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN1 1NU

ISO 9001:2015