gerrard white



Talent Trends Report.

October 2026

Source: REC/KPMG data September 2026

September has settled it.

Last month we said the restart window was open, and that the next REC/KPMG data would land in early October and tell us whether it was real. It has, and it settled the question. Permanent placements rose for a second consecutive month, faster than in August, taking the index to its highest reading in four years. Private sector demand for permanent staff grew for the first time in over two years. Vacancies fell at their gentlest rate since 2024, and KPMG's Jon Holt described a jobs market "starting to flicker back to life". One good month can be noise. Two in a row, moving the same way, is a pattern.

So the question changes. Not *"is the recovery real?"* but *"which market am I actually hiring in?"* Because September's most striking finding isn't the headline number, it's the split underneath it. The same survey that puts generalist developers, project managers and marketing professionals in surplus, puts security engineers, accountants, insurance specialists and lawyers in shortage. An employer's market and a talent shortage are both true this month. Which one you get depends entirely on the role you're hiring.

That split runs through everything that follows in this report: the roles in surplus and the roles that never stopped being scarce, where the recovery is strongest by region and sector, what it means in insurance, technology and legal, and why the next quarter is likely to be the cheapest time this cycle to hire well. If you only take one page into your next hiring conversation, make it the next page.



"The mistake we're seeing isn't hesitation, it's averages. Clients read that pay growth is cooling and candidates are plentiful, then brief a security engineer or a pricing analyst as if that applies to them. It doesn't. For the roles we're asked to fill most often, the market never loosened. Treat every brief as its own market, and move the scarce ones first."

Anthony Butler, Managing Director
anthony.butler@gerrardwhite.com
+44 (0) 7843 625 559

One market, two speeds.

September's most striking finding is the split inside the same survey.

In surplus, and easier to hire than the averages suggest: generalist software developers, business analysts, project managers, IT support at all levels, marketing and HR.

In short supply, where the queue never went away: security, data and full-stack engineers, accountants, auditors and ACCA-qualified finance, insurance specialists, legal counsel and lawyers, engineers and construction professionals.

Both lists come from the same month of the same survey. 'Employer's market' and 'talent shortage' are both true right now; the only thing that decides which one you get is the role you're hiring.

Our view: The split is no surprise; it's what our desks have seen all year, and it's structural, not seasonal.

The **surplus side** is where four years of cautious hiring built a backlog of good, available people: briefs draw applications in volume, and the job is reaching the best ones fast. The **shortage side** never had a downturn. Pricing and actuarial, security and data engineering, qualified finance and legal professionals stayed scarce through the whole slowdown, because the work is regulated, technical or both, and it doesn't pause when budgets do. Those candidates rarely apply; they get approached, usually by more than one firm.

So the playbook splits too: move confidently on price on one side, early on people on the other, because cooling average pay growth hasn't reached them and we don't expect it to.



+44 (0) 1892 553355 | info@gerrardwhite.com

What changed in the last month.

- **Permanent placements: 50.5 to 50.9.** Growth again, and quicker: the strongest reading since September 2022.
- **Temp billings: 52.4 to 50.9.** A sixth month of growth, slowed partly by employers converting temp budgets into permanent hires.
- **Vacancies: 47.0 to 48.5.** The gentlest fall in over two years, with private sector permanent demand growing for the first time since 2024.
- **Starting salaries: 54.1 to 53.4.** Pay growth eased for the first time in four months. Offers priced on last quarter's panic are now overpriced.
- **Candidate availability: 60.6 to 57.2.** The slowest rise in three years, and in London the pool barely grew. This is the line that puts a clock on the other four.

Four of those five lines are good news for hiring managers. The fifth is a deadline.



RECOVERY IS NO LONGER A LONDON STORY

- The North of England led September for both permanent placements (53.6) and pay growth, with the Midlands (52.1) close behind.
- London (50.4) is still growing but catching its breath after leading the restart, and it's the one region where candidate supply has nearly stopped rising.
- The South (47.9) was the only region where placements slipped, yet pay is still rising and candidates are still coming to market.

Benchmark each market on its own terms: a national salary band is now wrong everywhere, just in different directions. Our Insurance Pricing and Legal Private Practice salary guides are current, and we can benchmark any role, any region, on request.

Two readings of the same month.

Jon Holt, Group Chief Executive and UK Senior Partner, KPMG

“For the second month in a row we are seeing the jobs market starting to flicker back to life, with businesses increasing their hiring across both permanent and temporary roles, and for the first time in over two years vacancies grew in the private sector.”

Reading between the lines:
'Flicker' is doing careful work in that sentence. Holt also flags energy prices and borrowing costs as headwinds, and he's right to.

In a flickering market, the best protection is a fast process: the quicker you get from brief to offer, the less time conditions have to move against you.

Maxine Bligh, Interim Chief Executive, REC

“The permanent jobs market is revving its engine... The signal from the private sector is that it is ready to invest, with permanent vacancies rising for the first time in more than two years across the sector.”

Reading between the lines
The last sustained run of permanent placement growth ran from March 2021 to September 2022, and anyone hiring through it remembers the back end: bidding wars, counter-offers, vanishing shortlists.

Nobody is predicting a repeat, but every condition that made 2021 expensive builds quietly in months like this one. The cheap seats are at the start.



Our view

Windows this balanced are rare. Supply is still high, competition is only starting to build, and pay pressure has paused. All three move against you from here, and none of them will close politely.

+44 (0) 1892 553355 | info@gerrardwhite.com

Sixty seconds on each of our markets.

UK-wide numbers hide what's happening inside specialist markets. Permanent demand rose in half of the ten sectors the REC monitors in September, led by IT and computing and engineering, with construction and accounting and financial close behind. Here's what that means in the three we work in:

INSURANCE

Accounting and financial skills top the national shortage lists, and insurance specialists are named on them directly. On our own desks, pricing and actuarial demand has not paused once this cycle. **The move this month:** brief your critical pricing, actuarial and technical roles while the wider market is still converting from temp to perm, so your shortlist is built before the restart reaches full volume.

TECHNOLOGY & CHANGE

IT and computing led all sectors for permanent vacancy growth in September, yet generalist developers sit in surplus. The market is paying for specialists: security, data and full-stack engineering, and the people who deliver funded transformation. **The move:** separate your 'hard to find' roles from your 'hard to choose' roles. The first needs speed, the second needs judgment.

LEGAL

Legal roles remain on the shortage lists while London, the centre of gravity for our legal market, is the region where candidate supply has all but stopped rising. **The move:** if there's an associate or specialist you'll need in 2027, meet them this quarter. In a tightening pool, relationships beat response times.



The common thread: this recovery is arriving first in skilled, technical and regulated work. That’s no accident. When budgets loosen, the roles that were never optional get signed off first, and they’re the same roles where the talent pool is smallest and the process takes longest. Which is why moving a month early is worth most here: the firms briefing now are meeting candidates while their competitors are still waiting on sign-off. In a thin market, the first conversation usually wins.

The bridge is still open.

1

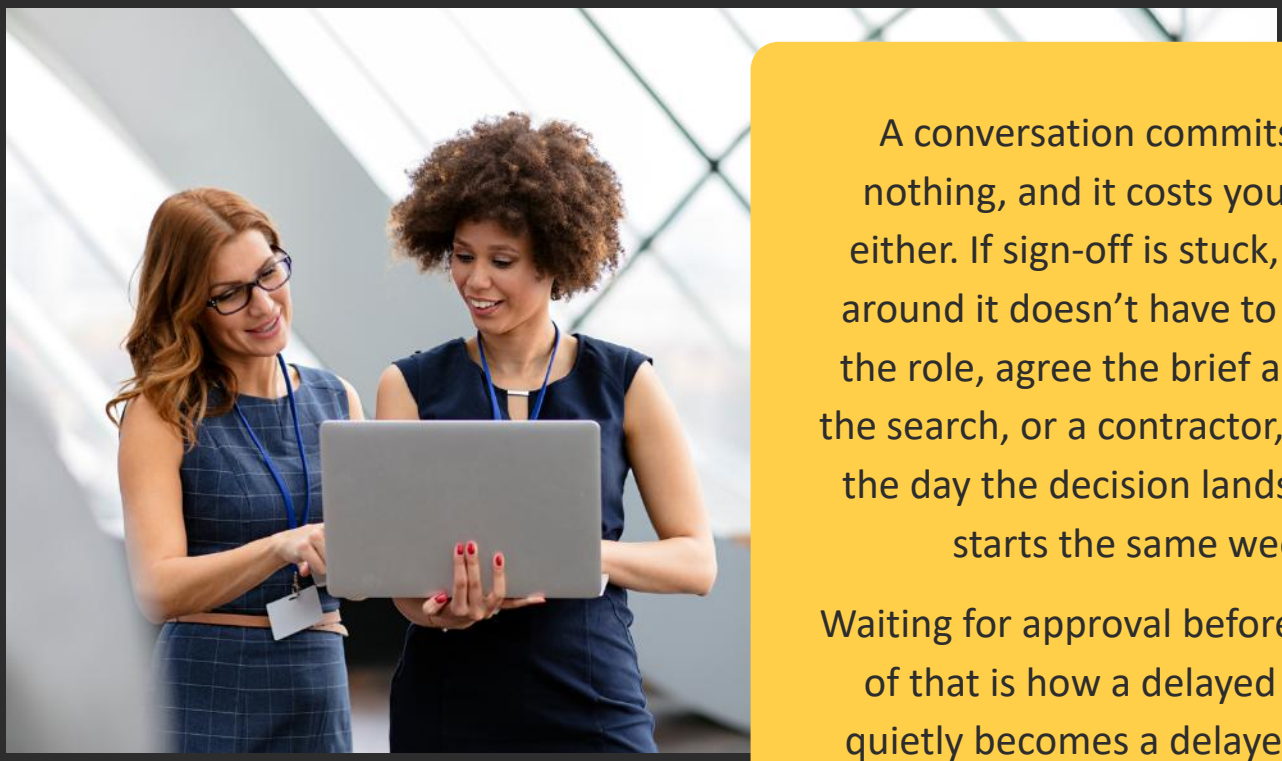
If approvals are still catching up with your plans.
Specialist contractors keep a project honest: day-one impact, properly scoped, IR35-aware. With temp pay growth at a four-month low, bridging is better value than it's been all year.

2

If you're converting a contract-covered role to permanent.
You're in good company: September's temp slowdown came partly from employers switching budgets to permanent hires. The timing works too, with pay growth cooling and competition only starting to build.

3

If you're planning 2027 delivery.
The mix deserves a deliberate answer: permanent where the capability compounds, contract where the demand spikes. We work both sides of that line every day, which is exactly why we don't pretend one answer fits everything.



A conversation commits you to nothing, and it costs you nothing either. If sign-off is stuck, the work around it doesn't have to be: scope the role, agree the brief and line up the search, or a contractor, now. Then the day the decision lands, delivery starts the same week.

Waiting for approval before doing any of that is how a delayed decision quietly becomes a delayed project.

+44 (0) 1892 553355 | info@gerrardwhite.com

A useful next step.

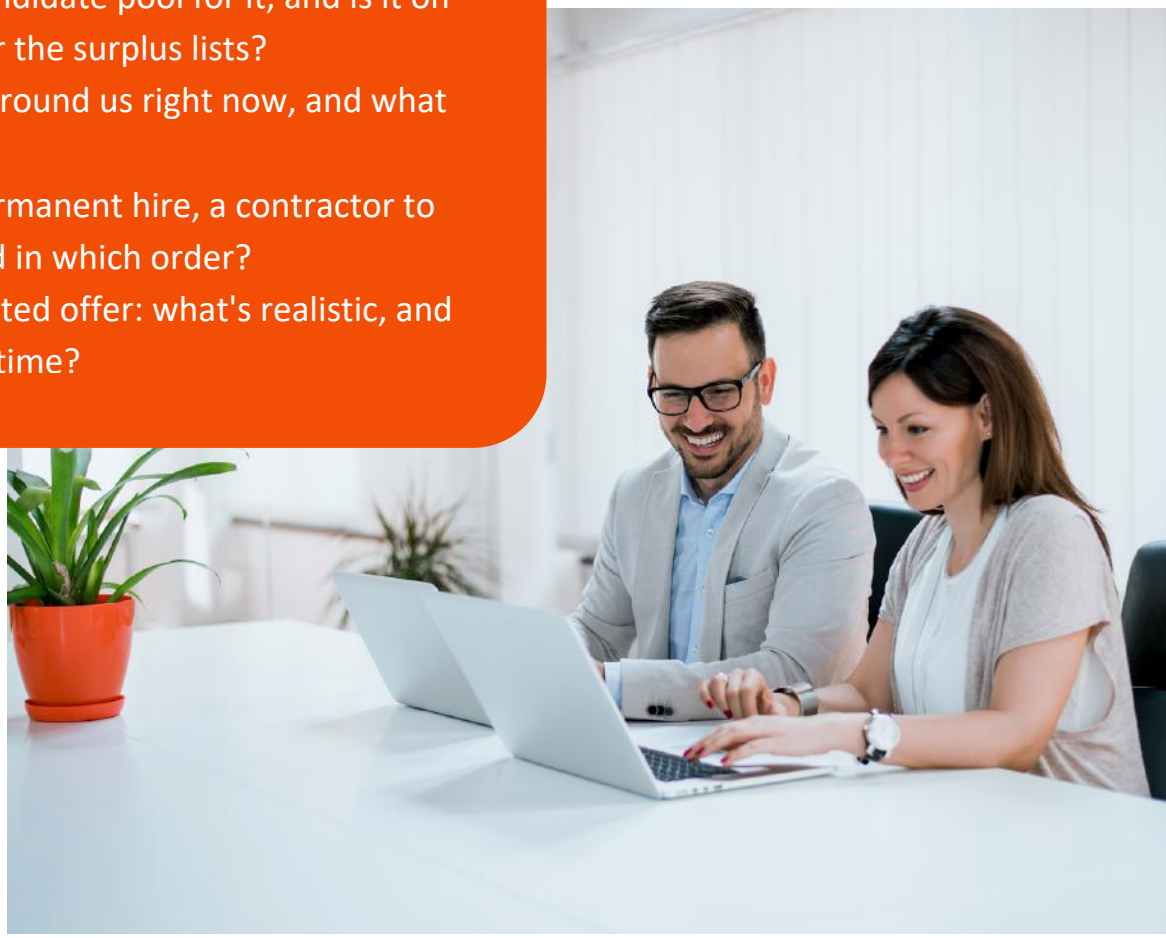
As an award-winning specialist recruiter across Insurance, Technology & Change and Legal, we spent four years waiting for data like this. Now it's here, the most useful thing we can offer (other than the hire itself) is perspective: what the market for your role looks like right now, which list it sits on, the going rate, and how quickly it will tighten as competition returns.

Fifteen minutes with our specialist team will tell you exactly where you stand.

Get in touch:
01892 553355 | info@gerrardwhite.com | www.gerrardwhite.com

FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR RECRUITER

1. What's the live market rate for this role, this region, this quarter? (Not a salary survey from spring.)
2. How deep is the candidate pool for it, and is it on the shortage lists or the surplus lists?
3. Who else is hiring around us right now, and what are they offering?
4. Should this be a permanent hire, a contractor to bridge, or both, and in which order?
5. From brief to accepted offer: what's realistic, and where will we lose time?



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

gerrard white



gerrard white

Specialist Recruitment across Insurance, Technology & Change & Legal UK, Europe & US

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