

xcede

2025 UK SALARY GUIDE

AWARD WINNING RECRUITMENT AGENCY



Technology Recruitment
Agency of the Year
Highly Commended 2024



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ABOUT XCEDE

We connect companies with exceptional professionals who empower growth.

Founded in 2003, our specialists provide global transformational talent in Data, AI & Machine Learning, Product, Software, Cloud and Cyber. We work with businesses, from pioneering start-ups to global brands, to find project-based or permanent talent that enables innovation in line with their vision and goals.

Across our key areas, our experts operate with a keen focus on delivering excellence and expertise for our clients, candidates and colleagues.



Explore Xcede on YouTube [here!](#)

Catch the latest episodes of the **Xcede Sofa Series**, our engaging podcast featuring insights from industry leaders across our verticals.

Also, check out the highlight videos from our incredible networking events!

ii INTRODUCTION

2024 was a year of caution in the UK job market. Last year, national elections took place in over 70 countries, affecting nearly half of the global population—more than any other year. Political unrest surged by an estimated 25% compared to 2023, with conflicts continuing in around 50 countries worldwide. In the UK, interest rates hit a peak of 5.25%, the highest in 16 years.

However, despite this, the UK's rising inflation and cost of living put further pressure on household incomes, feeding the desire for employees to negotiate higher salaries either in their current roles or during their job search. All of these factors combined have seen salary levels remain fairly flat year-on-year.

Looking ahead to 2025, there is a lot more optimism. Most elections have come and gone, inflation and interest rates are showing signs of decline, and tech layoffs have been at the lowest levels for several years, whilst the appetite for Venture Capital (VC) funding and mergers and acquisitions (M&As) in the UK is also on the rise.

One notable trend from this year's report is the rising demand for AI talent, whether that be across Product, Research, or Engineering. Despite the stagnation in salaries across most skill sets in 2024, AI-related skills saw an increase in wages, particularly those focused on deployment and productisation.

We are not yet seeing the intense "fight for talent" that we experienced in 2021/22, but there are still areas where demand for candidates with specific skills outpaces supply.

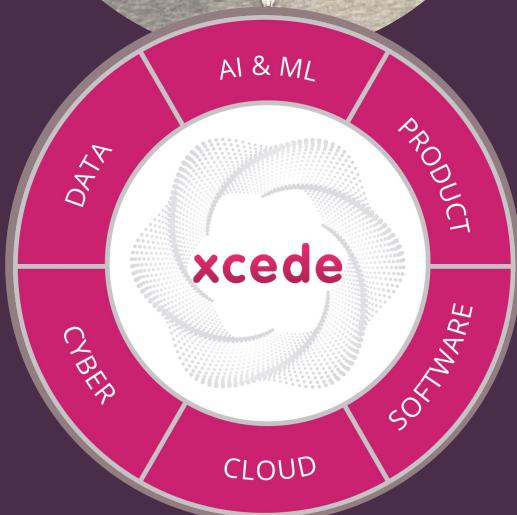
INDUSTRY VIEW

"We now face perhaps the most dynamic of times in the industry. With geopolitical unpredictability, stress on the economy and AI proving to be practical and scalable in 2024, there is pressure on businesses to optimise with the help of technology within growing regulatory constraints in 2025. Cautious investment from industry and a growing talent pool in 2025 suggest the more attractive salaries will be exclusive to those with deep domain expertise."

Niranjan Umashanker - Global Head of Analytics and Insights - Aesop



MATTHEW JONES
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OUR COMMITMENT STATEMENT



OUR DE&I APPROACH

At Xcede, we have created an environment that is accessible, inclusive and open to different perspectives. Through our journey, we aim to address barriers to equality and promote diversity and inclusion so that each of our offices reflects its diverse local communities.

Internally, our 'Women of Xcede Group' provides a platform for discussing current matters, celebrating success, collaborating, and inspiring change across our global offices. We aim to build a more diverse team across a predominantly male industry.

Externally, we use the following practices:

Inclusive Hiring Practices: We work closely with our clients to ensure that their hiring processes are unbiased and inclusive. This involves providing training on fair and equal interviewing techniques, implementing blind recruitment strategies, and promoting diverse candidate pools.

Partnerships with Diverse Networks: We actively collaborate with diverse professional networks, organisations, and affinity groups to expand our reach and connect with a broader range of talent. To support this, we regularly host networking events, roundtables, podcasts, and webinars. By fostering these partnerships, we contribute to creating a more inclusive ecosystem within the industries we serve.

Regular Training and Education: We prioritise continuous learning within our team and offer regular training sessions on DE&I topics. This includes compulsory training for all of our Consultants on 'Allyship', 'Unconscious Bias' and 'Neurodiversity'. This ensures that our consultants stay informed about best practices and emerging trends, enabling them to better support our clients in building diverse and equitable teams.



CSR

We have been committed to making a difference since the formation of our CSR Strategy in 2015. Being socially responsible is an integral part of our business ethos. We listen to our employees who actively drive initiatives to support our CSR goals, including:

CSR Days:

These days enable our team members to take time off during the workday to volunteer in their local communities. This initiative aligns with our CSR strategy, which is rooted in bettering the communities in which we work. Since 2022, we have raised over £20,000, and 120 employees have made use of their CSR Days, showcasing our unwavering commitment to CSR and community support.

Annual initiatives:

Our employees nominate charities close to their hearts, and the company supports these choices throughout the year with events like Tough Mudder, Snowdon, or Movember fundraisers. In 2024, Make-A-Wish UK was our Charity of the Year. Our team surpassed our annual target by 60%, raising £8,000 in total for this incredible cause. In addition to this, our team donates time and recruitment expertise to local students and professionals.

Our partnership with Ethy:

Through Ethy, we're making ethical choices a part of our daily operations. Ethy acknowledges our commitment to charity, our community, and our employees. This is seen in the badges we have earned thus far. Together with Ethy and our dedicated team, we're working towards a more sustainable and ethical future.



CURRENT STATE OF THE MARKET

A recent Work Change Report¹ compiled by LinkedIn provides an in-depth comparison of global AI hiring relative to all hiring. This report highlights that AI has been shaping the future of work for years, with demand for AI talent steadily rising. Since 2017, global AI hiring has surged by over 300%, with a 30% increase since last fall alone. While AI isn't a new trend, its workforce impact is still in its early stages. Those who embrace the technology now will be best positioned for future success.

The second figure is taken from Layoff.fyi² compares the number of employees laid off from their jobs with the number of companies with layoffs since COVID-19. This graph peaked in both employees laid off and companies with layoffs in Q1 of 2023. Over the past two years, the former fluctuated until Q1 of 2024, after which we saw a steady decline, while the latter saw a steep drop in Q2 of 2023 and then a continual decline thereafter.

The third figure provided by KPMG³ compares permanent placements and temporary billings between 2007 and 2024. This graph demonstrates the significant impact that the pandemic had on hiring and the surge experienced in 2021/2022. However, over the last two years, hiring has steadily declined to below the average, denoted as 50.0 on the graph.

FIGURE 1: CHANGE IN GLOBAL AI HIRING RELATIVE TO ALL HIRING¹



FIGURE 2: TECH LAYOFFS SINCE COVID²

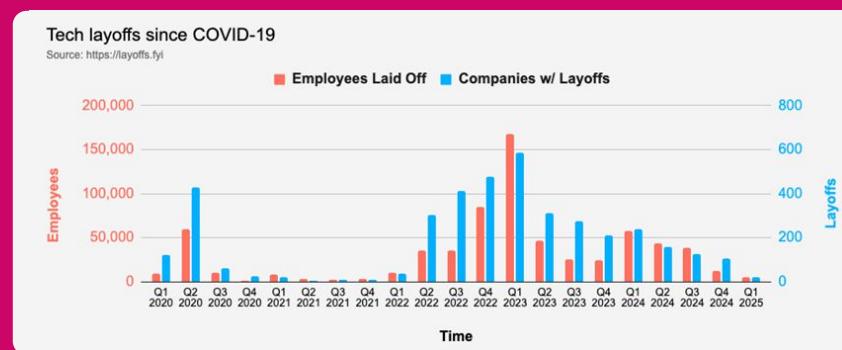
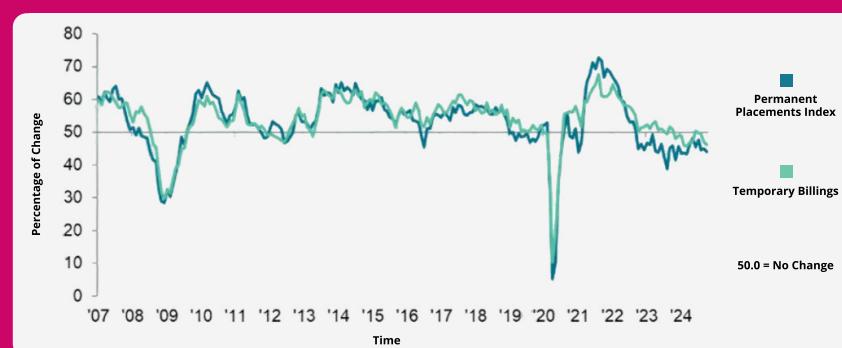


FIGURE 3: KPMG AND REC, UK REPORT ON JOBS³



More than **10%** of professionals hired today have job titles that didn't even exist in the 2000 - and in the US, the figure's even higher at **20%.**¹



Professionals entering the workforce today are expected to have **twice as many** jobs over their careers as those who entered 15 years ago.¹

PERMANENT ROLES	JUNIOR	MID LEVEL	SENIOR	LEAD	HEAD OF
BI & Data Warehousing	£40 000	£53 000	£70 000	£82 000	£104 000
Digital Analytics & Optimisation	£37 000	£50 000	£63 000	£74 000	£106 000
CRM & Marketing Analytics	£40 000	£53 000	£78 000	£79 000	£104 000
Product Analytics	£42 000	£63 000	£78 000	£96 000	£115 000
Data Science	£38 000	£55 000	£84 000	£102 000	£137 000
Machine Learning Engineering	£44 000	£65 000	£87 000	£110 000	£135 000
Analytics Engineering	£35 000	£53 000	£82 000	£95 000	£117 000
Data Engineering	£47 000	£60 000	£82 000	£104 000	£143 000
AI & Research Science	£54 000	£67 000	£90 000	£114 000	£140 000
Data Governance	£54 000	£65 000	£87 000	£91 000	£117 000

CONTRACT ROLES	INSIDE IR35	OUTSIDE IR35
BI & Data Warehousing	£650 - £750	£500 - £600
Digital Analytics & Optimisation	£600 - £750	£500 - £650
CRM & Marketing Analytics	£550 - £600	£350 - £500
Product Analytics	£550 - £650	£425 - £600
Data Science	£550 - £750	£500 - £550
Machine Learning Engineering	£600 - £800	£425 - £700
Analytics Engineering	£550 - £700	£450 - £650
Data Engineering	£400 - £800	£500 - £700
AI & Research Science	£800 - £1200	£700 - £950
Data Governance	£550 - £800	£500 - £750

Despite challenging market conditions, permanent salaries remained relatively steady. Some positions experienced a decrease, particularly at the junior and mid-levels, while senior-level roles saw more stability or slight increases. The most notable decreases were seen across junior roles in the Digital Analytics/Optimisation and CRM & Marketing Analytics fields, with salaries dropping on average between 5% and 12%. Data Engineering and Analytics Engineering saw the most significant growth, with an average of 7-10% in salary increases. Overall, the junior level showed a trend of reduced salaries across several roles, reflecting possible shifts in hiring focus or entry-level market dynamics.

Contract rates showed slight shifts, with inside IR35 roles increasing by an average of 5% for specialised fields like AI & Research and Machine Learning. Outside IR35, rates remained stable overall, with increases concentrated in high-demand areas such as AI & Research Science. The trends highlight a steady demand for specialised expertise and a slight preference for inside IR35 roles, likely due to regulatory shifts.

INDUSTRY VIEW

"There has been an explosion of demand for skillsets related to AI infrastructure and deployment, leaning towards candidates who have knowledge in RAG systems at the backend and software development at the frontend. Whilst a lot of hype has focussed on model fine-tuning, most businesses don't have the capital for this exercise, and GenAI's focus has been more heavily across system integration, middleware optimisation, prompt engineering and UX. This year, I expect to see heightened demand for NLP specialists who are exposed to multimodal and agentic setups."

Chris Pearce - Chief Data Officer - esure





XCEDE'S EXPERT OPINION: DATA

In 2024, the Data Market continued to build out critical Data Platforms and focused on developing Data Products that delivered clear ROI.

We also noted that product analysts struggled to secure new roles, with redundancies in certain areas, largely due to perceived over-hiring in previous years and a desire to streamline operations. We believe this resulted from a significant decrease in VC funding dedicated towards Business-to-Customer (B2C) companies as individuals cut down on their personal spending globally. Additionally, the rise of AI-led roles and technologies automating tasks previously performed by these professionals has played a significant role. We discuss this in more depth in our AI section. Instead, the focus moved towards Business-to-Business (B2B) sectors, where Data engineering roles remained in high demand. Senior professionals and those with expertise in Azure were being offered higher salaries. This was an interesting development as, previously, AWS and GCP engineers would have been on the higher side of the salary range. Meanwhile, digital and insight analysts faced a more static or slightly declining market with more competition for fewer places, resulting in redundancies and parallel salaries when changing jobs.

Despite this, Data Science remains key in the Data industry. While projects like recommender systems and customer personalisation became less of a priority—likely due to the downturn in B2C markets—other techniques, such as forecasting and optimisation rooted in operational research, grew in demand. Accurate stock, supply, and delivery forecasting is seen as very important, as businesses aim to avoid overstocking and minimise wastage, focusing on efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

Looking at the year ahead, Data roles are likely to favour specialists with a blend of software engineering and computer science skills, moving beyond roles that focus solely on SQL-based work. This could involve specialising in a particular domain, such as finance, healthcare, or another relevant sector, or equally deepening your expertise in a specific tech stack or area of focus. From a candidate perspective, as companies push for a return to full-time office work, mirroring strategies used by big tech firms like Amazon to maximise ROI, remote and hybrid work is set to become a significant selling point once again. Organisations offering flexible arrangements, such as 1-2 days in the office, will likely gain a competitive advantage when attracting talent.



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XCEDE'S EXPERT OPINION: AI & MACHINE LEARNING

The AI and Machine Learning market in 2024 had an interesting year as companies moved beyond proof-of-concept (POC) phases and began productionising applications of Generative AI and Large Language Models (LLMs). This development has given rise to two prominent job categories: AI engineers focusing on building or refining Generative AI models and those specialising in productionising these systems. Certain companies are looking for candidates with both Research and Engineering skill sets, which can be challenging to find and, therefore, command a more competitive salary.

We've noticed that companies with cutting-edge projects frequently recruit from academia, target researchers with advanced specialisation, or promote internal Data Science and ML team members, using these roles as a retention strategy. Employers with strong internal data teams often leverage existing talent to lead POC and production efforts, rewarding tenure and institutional knowledge.

This year, we anticipate the creation of more managerial roles in AI as companies expand their AI functions. Organisations will likely seek experienced professionals to scale these operations and lead technical teams. We also expect to see more AI engineering roles, especially for companies aiming to deploy their Proof of Concept (POC) projects. We also want to see how companies expand on text-based and Generative AI work—having seen the value of LLM-based projects, whether document-led or conversational AI, we can see that this could create a boom in the market even in adjacent fields like Computer Vision. As businesses explore capabilities such as text-to-video technologies, we expect demand for computer vision engineers to rise.



Artificial Intelligence Engineer is one of the **fastest growing jobs in 15 countries** and ranked #1 in the Netherlands, Singapore, UK, and US.¹



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ii PRODUCT & DESIGN

PERMANENT ROLES	JUNIOR	MID LEVEL	SENIOR	LEAD	HEAD OF
Product Management	£52 000	£70 000	£84 000	£98 000	£132 000
Data Product Management	-	£75 000	£91 000	£104 000	
AI Product Management	-	£78 000	£97 000	£121 000	
Technical Product Management	-	£74 000	£89 000	£101 000	
Product Owner	£50 000	£61 000	£80 000	£95 000	
Service Design	£35 000	£55 000	£75 000	£80 000	
UX Research	£40 000	£55 000	£65 000	£85 000	
UX Design	£40 000	£55 000	£70 000	£85 000	
Product Design	£45 000	£65 000	£80 000	£95 000	

CONTRACT ROLES	INSIDE IR35	OUTSIDE IR35
Product Management	£550 - £650	£450 - £600
Data Product Management	£550 - £650	£500 - £600
AI Product Management	£600 - £850	£500- £750
Technical Product Management	£550 - £750	£500 - £650
Product Owner	£550 - £650	£500 - £600
Service Design	£550 - £750	£500 - £650
UX Research	£450 - £650	£350 - £550
UX Design	£450 - £600	£350 - £650
Product Design	£450 - £650	£350 - £550

Last year, permanent salaries saw an average change of approximately 3-5% across most positions. A major shift in 2024 is the continued growth of AI Product Management and Technical Product Management roles, reflecting industry demand for specialised skills. Meanwhile, Data Product Management salaries declined at the lead level by approximately 13%. UX Research, UX Design, and Service Design salaries remained unchanged, indicating stability in these areas.

Contract salaries have also seen notable shifts. Inside IR35, rates remained stable across most roles, with some increases of approximately 8% in areas like UX Research. The most significant changes were in Outside IR35 contracts, where Product Management saw a 10% decrease in the lower starting rate. AI Product Management and Technical Product Management were introduced at higher rates, reaching up to £850 and £750, respectively. UX Research and Product Design saw moderate increases of around 10% on the upper end of Outside IR35 rates.

INDUSTRY VIEW

"While we're starting to see green shoots, the success of this year will still be determined by macroeconomic conditions, with investors continuing to weigh growth against optimisation. The noise around AI will only grow louder, and although there's still caution in the UK, product professionals must begin preparing for a future that will likely demand a more hands-on approach to product management. Companies will seek individuals who can deliver impact quickly and contribute to the bottom line, so if you're not already involved in AI, consider building your personal AI product portfolio on GitHub to prepare for what's ahead."

Ankur Sharma - CPO - Perkbox





XCEDE'S EXPERT OPINION: PRODUCT

While overall salaries have remained steady or slightly increased, the ranges have varied largely based on industry, with fintech and AI roles typically seeing the higher end of the scale. For example, a Senior Product Manager in Fintech may earn between £90k and £110k, whereas the same role in retail might fall between £80k and £90k. The growing demand for AI-driven roles, especially those requiring specialised skills, has also driven up salaries, with some principal-level positions reaching £180k.

Across the market, there's been a notable shift towards hiring specialists rather than generalists. Companies with mature product functions are looking for talent that can address specific challenges. This demand for specialisation reiterates that companies are moving toward building leaner, more cost-efficient teams that can deliver targeted expertise and measurable results.

On the candidate's side, the priority is very much aligned with the industry and product setup. Candidates are looking to work in high-impact roles with a large user base where they can get exposure to product-led environments and tech-for-good industries.

Moving forward, we expect continued growth in AI roles as venture capitalists invest in AI start-ups and scale-ups, and other more established companies that were potentially tech-first when they were founded are now incorporating AI into their products. We expect positive hiring activity as a result of these investments. However, the market does remain competitive, which will prove challenging. As AI adoption continues to grow, so does the need for diverse skill sets within AI Product Management to meet the unique demands of each organisation. Some companies require a hands-on professional with a Data Science background to work closely with their team, while others are looking for someone who can focus on guiding the team and taking the product to market.

From a cost-saving perspective, the Product market has been affected by a need to stabilise and sell as opposed to improve, which is one of the reasons why we have seen the rise of Growth Product Managers. As it stands, the mantra remains "do more with less" and build leaner teams, and whilst we expect more positivity in 2025, many companies are unlikely to hire at mass in order to avoid future redundancies. This will likely remain until the economic outlook is clearer.

Another trend for this year is the possibility of remote positions from US-based companies opening up for UK talent. This could provide exciting opportunities, especially for senior Product roles, as the market adjusts to a more optimistic outlook after recent years of economic uncertainty.



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PERMANENT ROLES	JUNIOR	MID LEVEL	SENIOR	LEAD
Java / Kotlin / Spring	£45 000	£62 000	£83 000	£95 000
Scala / Clojure / Haskell	£50 000	£72 000	£90 000	£110 000
Python	£50 000	£67 000	£87 000	£105 000
Golang	£52 000	£74 000	£98 000	£110 000
C++	£65 000	£82 000	£102 000	£128 000
Frontend JavaScript / React	£42 000	£61 000	£82 000	£90 000
Backend Node / TypeScript / JS	£50 000	£65 000	£90 000	£105 000
Applications Architect	£118 000			
C# / .NET	£45 000	£55 000	£82 000	£93 000
Engineering Manager	£116 000			
Head of Engineering (NEW)	£132 000			
Mobile Development	£44 000	£65 000	£87 000	£109 000
Testing & QA	£38 000	£48 000	£63 000	£82 000
DevOps / SRE	£52 000	£68 000	£90 000	£107 000

Over the last 12 months, we witnessed average increases of around 3-5% in many roles, though some permanent salaries saw more significant shifts. Salaries for Golang and Scala-related roles experienced an average increase of about 5-10% across various levels. Meanwhile, C++ saw notable decreases, with senior and lead salaries dropping by an average of 18-20%. A key change in 2024 was the introduction of fixed salaries for some leadership roles, such as Applications Architect and Engineering Manager, with higher average salaries at the head level, notably a £132k salary for the Head of Engineering.

Regarding contract salaries, Inside IR35, rates remained relatively stable, with minor increases of 2-4% in roles like C#/.NET. The most significant change was seen in Python, where the top end of the Inside IR35 rate increased by around 10%. Outside IR35, rates remained more consistent, with small increases of 2-5% in most roles, especially at the lower end of the salary ranges. Notably, Testing & QA saw a slight drop in the lower range of Outside IR35 rates, with a decrease of about 5%.

CONTRACT ROLES	INSIDE IR35	OUTSIDE IR35
C# / .Net	£500 - £750	£430 - £660
Java / Kotlin / Scala	£600 - £700	£500 - £650
Python	£650 - £1100	£500 - £900
Golang	£550 - £800	£400 - £650
C ++	£650 - £1000	£500 - £850
Front End JavaScript / React	£550 - £750	£450 - £650
Back End Node / TypeScript / JS	£480 - £750	£400 - £600
Applications Architect	£500 - £900	£400 - £850
Engineering Management	£600 - £800	£500 - £700
Mobile Development	£500 - £650	£450 - £600
Testing & QA	£350 - £650	£300 - £650

INDUSTRY VIEW

"In 2024, companies were working with tighter budgets, leading to lower salaries and a shift from specialised roles to more generalist positions, where one person could perform the work of multiple employees. Senior professionals saw a reduced influence in business decision-making as priorities shifted toward immediate revenue and the bottom line rather than long-term planning. Organisations are beginning to realise that 'throwing more people at a problem' is no longer viable. Instead, we're seeing a reallocation of resources—moving away from headcount growth and toward investments in advanced technologies, such as AI agents, that can address inefficiencies."

Andrei Nita - CTO - McKenzie Intelligence Services





XCEDE'S EXPERT OPINION: SOFTWARE

Over the last year, the Software Engineering market has made a gradual recovery from the tech downturn. Companies are stabilising after the initial shock experienced in 2022, where major layoffs and cost-cutting were prioritised. We have seen an increase in hiring since around late August and September 2024. This improvement shows that companies are adopting a more measured approach to hiring as interest rates and market conditions level out. Looking ahead, a positive trend we have seen is a renewed flow of venture capital into startups, signalling a more optimistic outlook for hiring activity in 2025.

Despite this, Software Engineering salaries have generally remained the same or slightly decreased, largely due to increased candidate availability. This shift has given employers more leverage, allowing them to maintain or even lower offers compared to prior years. However, the demand for senior, lead, and principal engineers remains high as there are still noticeable skill shortages at these levels. While specialist skillsets are still highly in demand, with companies needing to provide competitive offers to secure these professionals, we are seeing a return of traditional job opportunities, such as Java Engineers and Senior Front-End Engineers.

As for industry trends, roles in Generative AI attracted interest at the beginning of the year, but many companies have since slowed hiring in this area, finding that the technology may not fully support their goals yet. A surprising trend we've noticed is the rise of elaborate "fake" candidates. These individuals use Generative AI to create convincing CVs and LinkedIn profiles, to the extent of deepfake videos and AI-generated responses during interviews. Several companies have been deceived by this and now rely on our services to help screen and filter them out. While the motives behind these actions are still unclear, our priority is to minimise disruptions and protect our clients' time.

Another trend is that many companies are encouraging a return to the office, leading to tension between organisational policies and candidate preferences for flexible or fully remote work. We expect this conflict to be a defining factor in hiring and retention efforts in 2025, with candidates potentially willing to accept lower offers for more flexible opportunities.



SAM WEBB
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PERMANENT ROLES	JUNIOR	MID LEVEL	SENIOR	LEAD	HEAD OF
Infrastructure	£40,000	£50,000 - 80,000	£80,000 - £120,000	£90,000 - £140,000	£100,000 - £160,000
EUC / Workplace	£35,000	£50,000 - £80,000	£80,000 - £120,000	£90,000 - £140,000	£100,000 - £160,000
Cloud / Platforms	£45,000	£55,000 - £85,000	£80,000 - £120,000	£100,000 - £140,000	£110,000 - £160,000
Networks	£40,000	£55,000 - £85,000	£80,000 - £120,000	£90,000 - £140,000	£110,000 - £160,000
Project / Service Management	-	£65,000 - £75,000	£80,000 - £95,000	£90,000 - £110,000	£100,000 - £140,000
Programme Management / Transformation	-	-	£100,000 - £150,000	£120,000 - £170,000	£130,000 - £200,000

CONTRACT ROLES	INSIDE IR35	OUTSIDE IR35
Infrastructure Architect	£650 - £850	£600 - £800
Infrastructure Engineer	£500 - £650	£450 - £600
EUC / Workplace Architect	£650 - £850	£600 - £800
EUC / Workplace Engineer	£500 - £700	£450 - £650
Cloud / Platform Architect	£700 - £1000	£650 - £900
Cloud / Platform Engineer	£600 - £850	£550 - £750
Network Architect	£650 - £850	£600 - £800
Network Engineer	£500 - £750	£500 - £700
Linux / Systems Engineer	£500 - £750	£500 - £650
Project Manager	£550 - £750	£500 - £600
Programme / Transformation Manager	£750 - £1000	£700 - £900
Migration & Support Engineers	£275 - £450	£200 - £350

Reviewing 2024, junior Cloud salaries dropped by 10%, while mid-level salaries remained stable with broader pay variations. Senior and lead roles saw mixed changes between -15% to +10%, while Head of salaries rose by 10-15%, reaching £160,000.

For contract roles Inside IR35, Cloud / Platform Architects saw a 10% increase at the lower end, while Cloud / Platform Engineers dropped 5% at the starting level but remained stable at the top. Infrastructure and Network Engineers faced 5-10% reductions at the lower end, while Programme / Transformation Managers saw an 11% rise, reaching £1,000. Outside IR35, the upper-end rates of Cloud / Platform Architect increased by 6%, and Programme / Transformation Managers rose 10% to £900, reflecting a strong demand for leadership in cloud transformation projects.

INDUSTRY VIEW

"In 2024, we observed a crucial skills gap, with many candidates focusing on mastering specific technologies rather than developing strong engineering fundamentals and leadership capabilities. Looking ahead to 2025, success will depend on balancing innovation with solid engineering principles. We're also seeing promising growth in emerging tech hubs across Eastern Europe, particularly in platform engineering, which evolved into a more product-focused discipline last year and, moving forward, offers new opportunities for scaling technical teams."

Emiliano Mancuso - Head of Data Engineering - Fresha





XCEDE'S EXPERT OPINION: CLOUD

In 2024, the cloud space saw a period of stagnation following the hiring booms of 2022 and 2023. However, salaries have remained competitive, driven by the ongoing demand for skilled professionals to assist companies migrating to the cloud or those that previously migrated poorly. Key trends throughout the year included a growing focus on financial operations (FinOps) and cost optimisation as organisations struggle with increasing expenses tied to singular cloud usage. Companies' solution to this issue is implementing a multi-cloud strategy to hedge their bets and negotiate a reasonable price. Meanwhile, some companies are reverting to building private data centres to meet AI's intensive demands and maximise its value.

We have seen more senior Cloud roles emerge, and we expect hiring to continue to pick up in 2025, with organisations increasingly prioritising multi-cloud expertise and AI-driven projects. We have noticed a skills shortage amongst experienced cloud architects, specifically those working with GCP, with more candidates moving into the contract market as it is more lucrative. Another industry struggling with a skills gap is FinOps, which is still an emerging space. From the candidate's side, flexibility - whether it be hybrid or ideally remote work - and opportunities for diverse project exposure, such as multi-cloud environments, remain at the top of their priorities when looking for their next role.



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PERMANENT ROLES	SALARY RANGE
Head of Cyber	£110,000 - £180,000
Cloud Security Architect	£75,000 - £130,000
Cloud Security Engineer	£60,000 - £110,000
Security Engineer	£55,000 - £110,000
IAM Architect	£75,000 - £125,000
IAM Engineer	£60,000 - £85,000
IAM Developer	£50,000 - £85,000
DevSecOps	£80,000 - £130,000
SOC Analyst	£45,000 - £85,000
Incident Response / Digital Forensics	£75,000 - £100,000
Security GRC	£75,000 - £110,000

The UK's Cyber market is anticipated to experience exponential growth, with a market value projected to reach US\$12.09bn in 2025. Security Services is set to dominate the market among the various segments, with expected revenue to reach US\$6.83bn in the same time period.⁴

Last year, permanent Cyber salaries, on average, increased by 5-10% for leadership and specialist roles, with the Head of Cyber seeing the highest growth of 10% in both the lower and upper salary ranges. DevSecOps also saw a notable increase of 14% at the lower end. Conversely, some roles experienced slight declines, particularly in Cloud Security Architect and Cloud Security Engineer.

On the contract side, roles such as Cloud Security Architect and Network Security Engineer saw significant upper-range increases of up to 25% outside IR35. Inside IR35, roles also saw a notable rise, with the upper-end rates for Cloud Security Architect jumping from £900 to £1200 (33%). The Microsoft Cloud Security Engineer role remained relatively stable, with only minor adjustments. However, Cloud Identity/Digital Identity Consultant saw a nearly 18% increase in its upper range for Inside IR35, indicating a rising demand for specialised cloud security expertise.

	CONTRACT ROLES	INSIDE IR35	OUTSIDE IR35
CORE	Cloud Security Architect	£670 - £1200	£585 - £1000
	Network Security Architect	£700 - £1000	£500 - £800
	Network Security Engineer	£500 - £1000	£450 - £900
MICROSOFT	Cloud Identity / Digital Identity Consultant	£600 - £850	£590 - £750
	Microsoft Cloud Security Engineer	£740 - £800	£650 - £700



XCEDE'S EXPERT OPINION: CYBER

In 2024, the Cyber market remained stagnated, with minimal change in both demand and candidate expectations. Similarly to 2023, we are still seeing more business through third-party organisations such as consultancies and advisory companies who provide the resources to the end customer whilst offsetting risk. Companies are already operating with lean teams, and while there is a lot of goodwill out there for permanent and contract roles, companies have been more cautious with their hiring, adopting a “recession footing” due to wider economic factors, such as political changes in the UK and US, conflict within the Middle East, and potential trade wars in Asia. The salaries in cyber roles have stayed the same, if not decreased, influenced by cost scrutiny and recruitment apathy.

As we look at the year ahead, candidate interest is expected to remain cautious, with many professionals opting to stay in their current roles until they receive their annual bonuses or see a positive, clear increase in hiring sentiment.

In terms of technical skills, cybersecurity demands haven't evolved drastically; there's still high demand for specialisations like DevSecOps (specifically containerisation security), network segmentation, and FinOps, with companies looking for talent who can complete key but more long-term projects. Specialisation remains crucial as generalist skills have become more commoditised and are increasingly being offshored, whereas niche expertise is better protected from cost-cutting trends. AI hasn't yet made a significant impact in replacing roles in cybersecurity, but it's likely to augment existing tasks rather than replace specialists outright.



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CONTRACT OVERVIEW

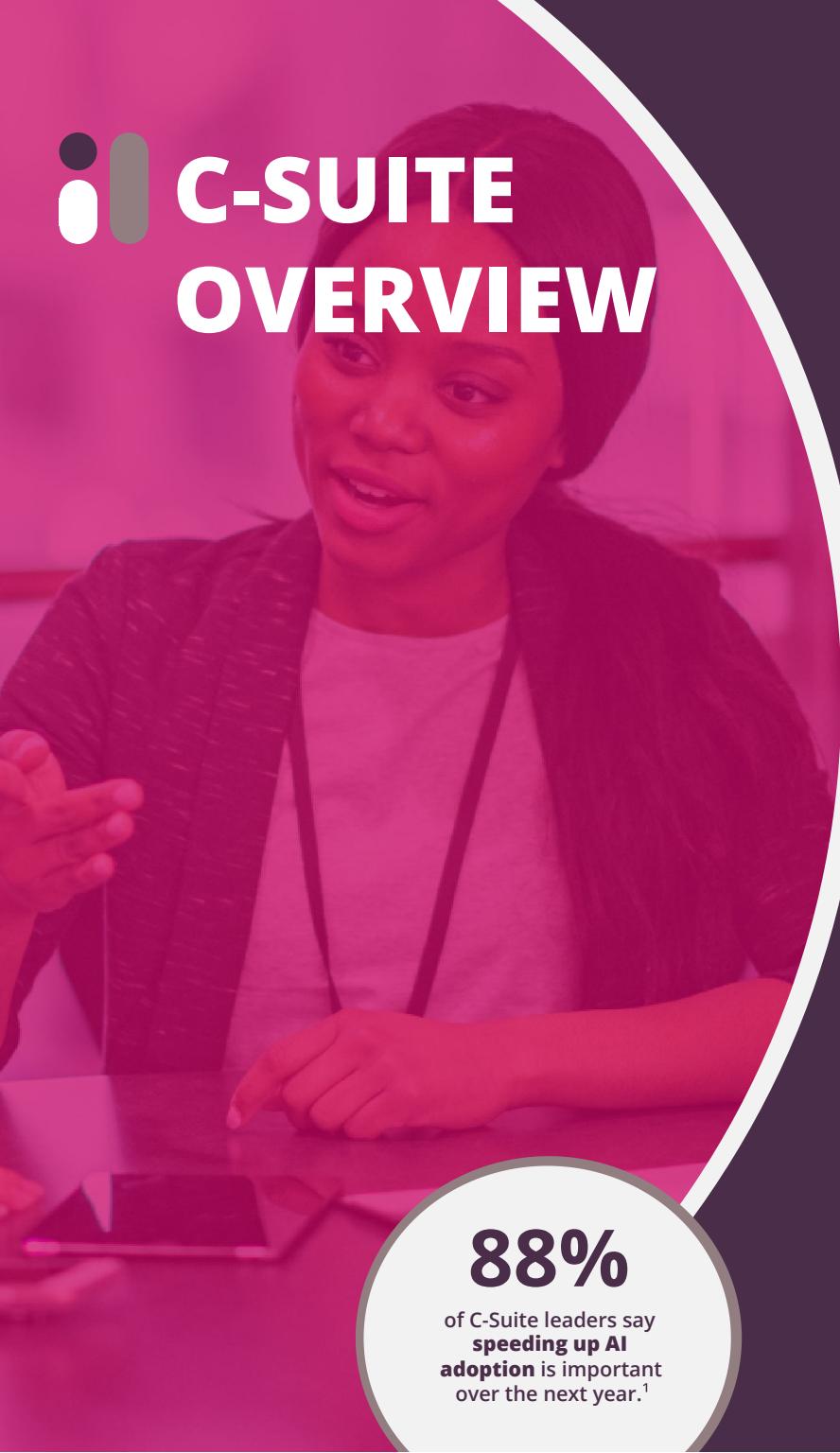
In 2024, the Contract market remained relatively stable. Rates in the contract market have remained steady overall, with exceptions in specialised fields like financial services, where competition for top-tier talent continues to push offers higher. We expect that recent changes to employment legislation, specifically the reduction of probationary periods for working rights, will make employers more cautious when hiring permanent staff moving forward. We anticipate that this legislation change will drive a preference for contractors because it offers businesses greater flexibility and risk mitigation.

Another trend we expect to see in 2025 is the rise of AI and how it will significantly affect the market, creating an increased demand for contractors skilled in managing AI-driven workloads. Additionally, emerging roles in financial operations (FinOps) and cloud optimisation are gaining traction as companies focus on cost efficiency. These roles require a blend of expertise in cloud architecture and vendor management. However, this is an emerging space, so these skills are niche, creating a wide skills gap.



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C-SUITE OVERVIEW



88%

of C-Suite leaders say
speeding up AI
adoption is important
over the next year.¹

In addition to our expertise across various roles and levels in the tech sector, we recognise the dynamic nature of the C-Suite market. In 2024, compensation rates for C-suite executives in tech have remained relatively stable compared to 2023, with salary averages not seeing significant growth. However, compensation packages are structured in several ways across businesses, with bonuses, Restricted Stock Units (RSUs), stock options, and other incentives put in place on top of base salaries and benefits in order to align an executive's interest with long-term organisational goals. Additionally, experts forecast the rise of an employer's job market in 2024, with trends in C-suite recruitment emphasizing the need for leaders who can balance high-tech solutions with deep connections. While AI and intelligent automation have gained a significant foothold in recruitment, hiring for the C-suite remains very much relationship-driven.⁵



OUR EVENTS

As part of our regular thought-leadership events, we also host networking events and roundtable dinners exclusively for our C-Suite audience. These niche events bring together executives from top companies to discuss pivotal topics shaping the future of business and technology. If you're interested in attending future events, reach out to us now and be part of an exclusive community driving innovation!

EXECUTIVE HIRING

When it comes to C-Suite or Senior appointment hires, Xcede takes an exclusive and retained approach. We understand the critical role that senior executives play in your organisation's success. Our executive talent acquisition experts have an extensive network and a deep understanding of the qualities needed for leadership positions. We work closely with you to identify, engage, and secure top-tier talent that will drive your company's strategic goals forward.

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C-SUITE TRENDS & 2025 OUTLOOK



2024 was a transitional year for the C-Suite market, driven by macroeconomic factors like the US and UK elections. Businesses took a cautious 'wait-and-see' approach, anticipating policy changes and their impact on interest rates and inflation. Salaries for C-Suite executives have largely remained stable, ranging anywhere from £180,000 to £450,000 base pay, depending on the role and company size. We have seen the demand for fractional roles has grown, enabling companies to secure top talent for transformational projects without long-term commitments.

A key 2024 trend at the board level was AI's deep integration into strategic decision-making, with businesses investing in AI tools or in-house solutions to cut costs, streamline operations, and enhance efficiency.

In the Chief Technology Officer (CTO) and Chief Product Officer (CPO) space, hiring activity was relatively slow in 2024, with more cost-cutting than hiring at the senior level. We witnessed more and more CTOs absorbing product responsibilities, with some companies merging their roles into a Chief Technology & Product Officer (CTPO) position to align product, engineering, and technology strategies. As businesses continue to focus on revenue-driven product development rather than purely user-experience-led innovation, CPOs must maximise ROI with streamlined teams and demonstrate clear financial impact.

Another notable development is the ongoing transformation of the Chief Data Officer (CDO) role. The market is seeing a divide between transformational leaders, who specialise in building and restructuring functions, and operational leaders, who focus on steady growth. We have seen CDO roles migrate into tech for understandable reasons (infrastructure and data platform builds, migrations, etc.), so CDOs must evolve. That said, we are hearing positive feedback from Chief Finance Officers (CFOs) who are looking to get POCs developed into actual GenAI products, so the need to control spending and outcomes is imperative for top-line growth vs. bottom-line improvements. The pendulum is starting to swing back the other way in terms of business basics. Career progression for CDOs remains a topic of discussion, with some transitioning into Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or other C-Suite positions as companies better understand the strategic value they bring.

The 2025 outlook is optimistic as inflation eases and investment rebounds. Companies are investing in tech like GCP and Snowflake to support AI growth. However, internal debates over AI ownership highlight evolving C-Suite dynamics. Ensuring CDOs have a voice will be key to long-term success.



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ii REFERENCES & CONTACT US



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Whether you're interested in discussing the latest insights from our Salary Guide or want to learn more about our tailored services across the tech market, we're here to help. From junior roles to C-suite level, our team is committed to providing the expertise and support you need.

Reach out today!



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