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A SPECIAL REPORT ON UK RECRUITMENT

# The View From Outside The Glass.

**Why Hertfordshire and Home Counties businesses are struggling to recruit themselves in 2026.**

# 6:1

THE STORY IN NUMBERS

**Six weeks. One candidate.  
One hour. Two.**

WRITTEN BY

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with Claude AI

 **Shout.**

# Contents.

A field guide to UK recruitment in 2026, written for the businesses doing it themselves.

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

**This is not a sales pitch. It is what the data says, said out loud.**

14 pages. 28 sources. Every claim referenced. The same standard we hold ourselves to on every Shout brief, candidate profile and fee disclosure.

## THREE NUMBERS, BEFORE YOU START

### VOLUME

# 280

applications per role. The new UK average.

### TIME

# 8wks

UK time-to-hire. Up from 4.8 in 2024.

### COST

# £132k

average cost of one failed mid-level hire.

# A Tuesday morning that crystallised everything.

It started over breakfast. The hiring manager was my wife.

**A** few weeks ago, I had a conversation that I keep coming back to. A business I had been speaking with for months had been trying to fill an Office Sales Administration role themselves. Standard administrator profile: order processing, booking, diary, basic systems, a friendly voice on the phone. They posted the role, picked up the CVs, and got stuck in.

Nearly **six weeks later**, they finally circled back. They had one suitable candidate left in the pipeline and were about to make an offer they were not really sure about, because their alternative candidates were not great and they did not want to start again. Their hiring manager, whom I know very well (I am married to her), was exhausted. The role had taken over her workload, the person who had been doing the job had since left, and the sales manager was struggling to keep up.

Over breakfast my wife asked me, "*if I send you the brief over, can you see if you have any candidates?*" Within the hour I had introduced two viable candidates. Both available. Both within budget. Both genuinely interested.

That gap, six weeks versus one hour, is what this article is about. It is not a sales pitch. It is an honest look at what is actually happening inside Hertfordshire and Home Counties businesses who are trying to recruit on their own.

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**Not because the candidate did not exist. They did. The process of finding them was buried under volume.**

AN HONEST REFLECTION

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— THE STORY IN  
NUMBERS

**6**

WEEKS OF TRYING

**1**

HOUR WITH A RECRUITER

**2 viable  
candidates**

# The candidate volume crisis.

"We are not short of CVs. We are drowning in them."



FIG. 01 · AN INBOX IN MAY 2026

Modern CV's UK Job Interview Statistics 2026 reports over **280 applications per role**, up 124% from around 125 in 2022. There are now 2.5 unemployed people per vacancy, a 32% increase from 1.9 in 2024.

For administration roles, exactly the kind we were talking about, it is even worse. CV-Library ranked Administration as one of the top sectors for applications per vacancy in the UK.

LinkedIn's 2025 data found **42% of HR professionals** say less than half of applications meet the listed job requirements. 23% of recruiters spend 3-5 hours every day just reviewing applications.

## THREE NUMBERS, ONE INBOX

— TRIBEPAD · NOV 2024

# 48.7

Applications per UK vacancy.

— JOBLABS · 2026

# 30%

Of UK CVs contain detectable AI content.

— PROSPECTS · 2026

# 67%

Of large UK firms report increased application fraud.

The result on the ground: a hiring manager in Hertfordshire who has agreed to "just have a look at the applications" opens their inbox to hundreds of CVs, an increasing proportion AI-polished or AI-generated, many not meeting the spec. They are overwhelmed before they have even started.

# The time-to-hire problem.

A number that has nearly doubled in twelve months. The yardstick has moved.

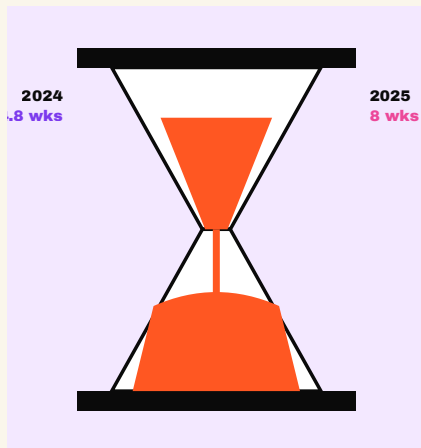


FIG. 02 · UK TIME-TO-HIRE, 2024 VS 2025

The headline UK time-to-hire figure has shifted dramatically in the last two years.

Totaljobs' research, based on 1,000 UK HR decision-makers, found that **average time to hire in 2025 has stretched to eight weeks, up from 4.8 weeks in 2024**, with larger organisations taking up to nine weeks. Talos360 puts the 2025 average at 42 days, with almost **70% of internal recruiters** stating recruitment is taking too long.

SmartRecruiters' Recruiting Benchmarks 2025 Report, which analysed 89 million applications globally, places the UK median at 40 days. Two days above the global median.

When a business tells me a process is "taking a bit longer than expected" at five or six weeks in, they are still within national averages.

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## The standard businesses are measuring themselves against is no longer the yardstick that matters.

THE SHIFTING BASELINE

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The cruel and frustrating paradox of 2026 hiring: **more candidates, longer time-to-hire, and a falling sense among internal teams that they are hiring well.**

# What it is actually costing.

Most of the cost of in-house recruitment is invisible. Until you measure it.



## — THE HIDDEN INVOICE

AVERAGE COST OF ONE FAILED MID-LEVEL HIRE

# £132,000

SOURCE · REC, 2025/26

## THREE NUMBERS THAT ADD UP

### — INTERNAL TIME

# 26hrs

Per hire. Writing, sifting, interviewing, negotiating.

### — BRANDON HALL

# 95%

UK businesses admit one bad hire every year.

### — OLEEO · 2025

# £125k

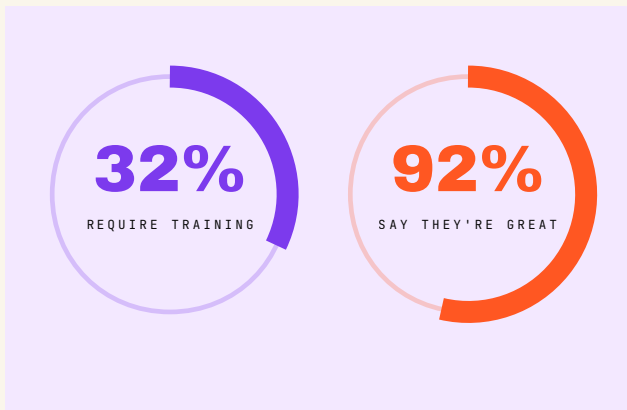
Annual waste on failed recruitment, 250-person SME.

The CIPD puts the average cost per hire in the UK at **£6,125** when you factor in advertising, staff time, pro-rata salary of others involved, and external costs. For SMEs, time spent on a single hire averages over 26 hours: around £530 per hire, totalling £2.9 billion a year.

When a finance director tells me they are "doing recruitment in-house to save money," I respect that. But the cost is rarely lower. It is just better hidden.

# The interviewer skills gap.

A disconnect most businesses don't see. Confidence and competence aren't the same thing.



SOURCE · SEEMEHIRED UK INTERVIEW TRAINING RESEARCH

The honest truth: most UK hiring managers have never been trained to interview.

Only 32% of UK employers require interview training. Just 14% on neurodiversity. Yet **92% of those same employers believe their D&I processes are strong.** HR managers admit bias affects their hiring 48% of the time.

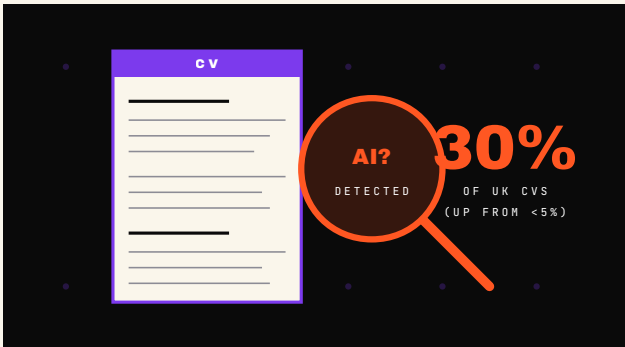
This is not a slight. The heads of department I work with are excellent at their jobs. They are untrained interviewers because nobody trained them.

## — WHAT THIS PRODUCES, CONSISTENTLY

- / **Unstructured interviews.** Two candidates assessed on different criteria.
- / **"Pub test" hiring.** "Would I want to sit next to them on a flight?" A recipe for monocultures.
- / **Underselling, then overselling.** Ads that undersell, interviews that oversell to close the gap.
- / **Decisions on instinct, not evidence.** The least reliable predictor of performance.

# The CV honesty problem.

How do you tell who is overselling, underselling, or being honest? Harder than ever.



SOURCE · JOBLABS UK JOB SEARCH STATISTICS  
2026

Ipsos MORI: 30% of all UK workers admit to having been untruthful in applications. Only 24% of managers think more than 1 in 10 CVs contains misinformation. A serious blind spot.

Now layer in AI. With a third of UK CVs containing AI-generated content and half of candidates using AI to tailor applications, the signals we used to rely on, writing quality, formatting, structure, have all been polished out.

Davidson Morris warns: "Generative AI can lift phrases wholesale... do not rely solely on an AI-polished document."

— CIFAS · 2023

## 1 in 10

UK adults admit to lying on their CV.

— IPSOS MORI

## 34%

Of managers don't background-check.

— JOBLABS · 2026

## 52%

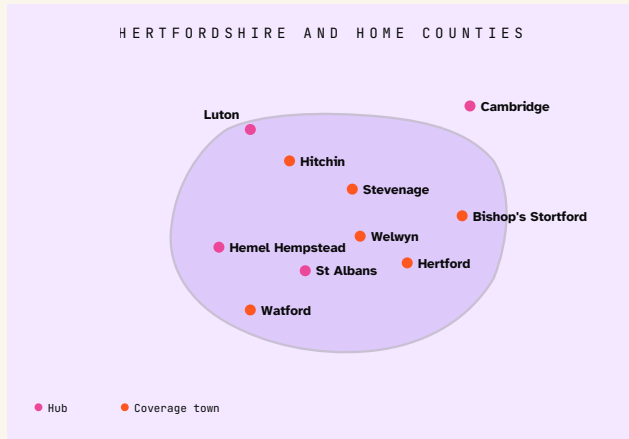
Of UK candidates now use AI for CV writing.

**I know what they sound like describing a real achievement versus a polished one. Most of the time, none of that is on the CV.**

WHY RECRUITERS EARN THEIR PLACE

# What's specifically happening here.

The national pattern plays out in Hertfordshire, with a local twist.



Businesses are not short of CVs. They are short of **suitable** candidates. The British Chambers of Commerce reported **75% of UK firms** trying to recruit in Q3 2025 were struggling: "not a lack of applicants; it's a mismatch between roles and skills."

## 56%

Of Hertfordshire businesses planned to take on new staff (up from 40% the year before).

## 43.4%

Said the biggest issue was simply not getting enough suitable applicants.

## 40.6%

Citing lack of relevant technical skills among applicants.

SOURCE · HERTFORDSHIRE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
LSIP, DEC 2024

**It is encouraging to see so many businesses hoping to add to their workforce, but equally disappointing that the ongoing skills gap continues to be an issue.**

DONNA SCHULTZ, CEO · HERTFORDSHIRE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

# The five barriers.

What businesses say. What the data says. An honest accounting.

01

## "Agencies are too expensive."

The CIPD has the average all-in cost per hire in the UK at **£6,125** when internal time is factored in. Oleeo's analysis put the true cost of a £25,000 hire, including HR time, training and lost productivity, at **£9,183 even when the hire works**. A standard agency fee on a £25,000 admin hire at 15-20% is £3,750-£5,000. "Doing it ourselves to save money" is comparing an invoice that exists against costs nobody is measuring.

02

## "We know our business better than any agency could."

True. Nobody knows your culture, customers or team dynamics like you. What an agency knows better is the candidate market. The CIPD found **40% of UK employers have made a counteroffer** in the past 12 months, with 38% matching the new salary and 40% offering higher. An internal team rarely sees that whole landscape.

03

## "We've used agencies before and the candidates were no good."

Full sympathy with this, it is often true. There are agencies who CV-bomb every brief without genuinely qualifying candidates. But the question is not "are all agencies good?" It is "do I have a recruitment partner who has actually met the people they send me, knows my business, and is prepared to be honest when they do not have the right candidate?" A different test. A fair one.

# ...continued.

The structural reasons most internal teams over-extend themselves on hiring.

04

## "If we use an agency, we lose control of the process."

The opposite tends to be true. When you use a recruiter properly, you take **back** control of your own time. You stop spending 26+ hours per hire on sourcing and admin and start spending your time where it matters: meeting the right candidates, making the right decision, protecting the offer once it is out.

05

## "We have an internal recruitment team / HR person already."

Excellent. And the data shows they are working under enormous pressure. **A quarter of UK businesses spend up to 10 hours a week just scheduling interviews.** The average UK HR professional tenure is 1.6 years. Internal teams are not a reason not to use external partners. They are a reason to use them well, for the right roles, at the right moments.

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## If you are not happy paying 18%, be cheeky and name a fixed price. You may be surprised.

ON TRANSPARENT PRICING

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As a recruiter, I have an obvious vested interest in this chapter. So rather than telling you what I think, I have set out the barriers I most commonly hear and what the public data says about each. Make your own judgement.

# What it looks like when it works.

Closing with the same honesty I opened with. Here is what changes.

— 01

## Time-to-shortlist drops from weeks to hours.

The recruiter is already talking to the people who fit the brief. That is the six-weeks-versus-one-hour story.

— 02

## Hiring managers see fewer, better CVs.

The volume work has already been done. With 280 applications per role becoming the norm, that filtering is no longer something most managers can realistically do.

— 03

## Counter-offers managed before they happen.

Not after. Protecting the offer in a market where 40% of UK employers are making counter-offers.

— 04

## Salary calibration in real time.

Drawing on data from candidates currently in conversation, not benchmarks from twelve months ago.

— 05

## The business keeps what it does best.

Knowing the team. Making the final call. Owning the culture. And outsources knowing the market.

— 06

## Transparent pricing.

Great recruiters value quality, but also value clients. Not happy paying 18%? Name a fixed price. You may be surprised.

**The six-week recruitment that opened this article was not a story about a bad business. It was a story about a good business operating with the recruitment toolkit it had three years ago, in a market that has changed beyond recognition.**

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END

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we know.  
We label what we  
don't.  
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