

UK PERMANENT · SALARY GUIDE

The 2026 UK Tech Hiring Salary Guide.

Live placement data, client benchmarking, and offer intelligence from Q1 2026 and late 2025, across JavaScript, Backend, Data & AI, Platform & Security, and Product & GTM.





The challenge isn't hiring. It's finding the **right people.**

VERTICALS COVERED

JavaScript · Backend
Data & AI · Platform & Security
Product & GTM

DATA SOURCES

Live placements
Client benchmarking
Q1 2026 & late 2025 offer data

"Companies are hiring. The challenge is finding and attracting the people they actually want."

The start of 2026 brought a wave of economic pessimism, rising NI contributions, minimum wage increases, predictions of unemployment near a decade high. For much of the labour market, that caution was warranted. For Software Engineering, Data, and Product talent in the UK, it largely wasn't.

Across our verticals: JavaScript and frontend, backend and platform, data and analytics, product and GTM. Q1 2026 saw sustained, and in some cases intensified, demand at the senior and leadership level. Companies are hiring. The challenge is finding and attracting the people they actually want.

The dominant force shaping UK tech hiring right now is AI, and its effects are more nuanced than the headlines suggest. Demand for AI/ML engineers, LLM-adjacent backend developers, and data engineers is strong. But the more meaningful shift is AI capability bleeding into every other role. A backend engineer who can build with LLMs, or a data engineer comfortable with vector databases, commands a materially different salary than one who can't.

We've seen this play out directly. Clients across our book, from Series B SaaS to listed enterprises, are hiring fewer people and expecting more from each one. The narrowly scoped specialist is giving way to the high-impact generalist, with AI tooling now a baseline expectation rather than a differentiator.

Return-to-office has continued to firm up, particularly for senior hires. Hybrid (2–3 days) is the norm; candidates holding out for full remote in London or major regional hubs are finding options limited. Performance cultures are intensifying too, engineers and EMs who can lead technically and drive delivery are seeing the most competitive offers.

Areas we're most focused on heading into the rest of 2026: AI Engineering as a standalone specialism, DevSecOps and Platform Engineering where demand is outpacing supply, and continued strength in senior JavaScript and TypeScript. Data hiring is at an inflection point, the convergence of analytics engineering and AI infrastructure is producing genuinely new role profiles that didn't exist 18 months ago.

The salary data in this guide is drawn from live placements, client benchmarking, and offer data across Q1 2026 and late 2025. It's a working document, because in a market moving this fast, precision matters more than ever.

Karl Penhale, Managing Director, Wave Talent



CONTENTS

Five specialisms. One market.

01 • JavaScript

02 • Backend Engineering

03 • Data & AI

04 • Platform & Security

05 • Product & GTM

Numbers throughout are mid-market permanent base salaries in £GBP, London-weighted. Add 10–20% equity/bonus uplift at Senior+ in VC-backed environments. Expect a 5–15% regional discount outside London.



JavaScript.

01

JavaScript and TypeScript has remained one of the most active verticals in UK tech, but the definition of a strong engineer has shifted materially over the last 12 months.

— AI-FLUENCY IS THE BASELINE

Most companies we partner with sit between Seed and Series B, and being AI-native is now an expectation, not a selling point. Engineers are expected to be actively building with Cursor, Claude, or Copilot. Reading, debugging, and reasoning about AI-generated code in production is a genuine interview bar.

— STACK FLEXIBILITY IS INCREASING

Clients are more open than they were 12 months ago to engineers crossing between TypeScript and Python, provided the candidate is genuinely AI-fluent. Mindset and tooling comfort now outrank prior stack experience on most briefs. Pure frontend demand is softening.

— FORWARD DEPLOYED & PRODUCT ENGINEERS

The most notable role trend is the mainstream arrival of the Forward Deployed Engineer and Product Engineer at Series A and B. The profile is full-stack TypeScript, commercially sharp, comfortable in customer conversations, and capable of turning a real problem into a shipped feature. Compensation tracks Senior to Staff, but strong candidates are commanding above-market rates.

— REACT NATIVE HAS EVOLVED

Demand is up, but pure mobile specialists are a harder sell than 18 months ago. Clients want a TypeScript engineer who can span web and mobile (RN, React/Next.js, Node when needed). The salary gap between senior RN and senior web engineers has largely closed.

— ON-SITE EXPECTATIONS HAVE FIRMED

Three days is where the market naturally sits, the most common client requirement and the ceiling most engineers will accept. Full remote accounts for under 10% of live early-stage briefs.

Heading into the rest of 2026, demand for TypeScript-first, product-minded, AI-fluent engineers shows no sign of softening. The profiles commanding the most competitive offers are full-stack, startup-experienced, and capable of owning a feature end to end.

"AI-fluency is no longer a differentiator, it's the baseline. Mindset and tooling comfort now outrank prior stack experience on most briefs we're running."

- **Most sought-after.** Full-stack TypeScript engineers, AI-native, comfortable owning features end-to-end.
- **Hardest to fill.** Forward Deployed & Product Engineers, technical depth plus customer-facing fluency at Series A–B.
- **Rising fast.** TypeScript ICs who span web and mobile (RN + Next.js + Node) on a single brief.
- **Softening.** Pure-frontend specialists and pure-mobile RN engineers without full-stack reach.

PERMANENT SALARY RANGES · £GBP · LONDON-WEIGHTED

ROLE	JUNIOR	MID-LEVEL	SENIOR	LEAD	HEAD OF
Frontend · JavaScript / React	£45k – £65k	£65k – £90k	£90k – £120k	£120k – £150k	£140k – £180k
Backend · Node / TypeScript	£45k – £65k	£65k – £90k	£90k – £125k	£125k – £155k	£145k – £185k
Full-Stack JavaScript	£45k – £70k	£70k – £95k	£95k – £130k	£125k – £160k	£150k – £190k
Engineering Manager · JS focused	—	—	£110k – £140k	£130k – £165k	£160k – £200k

Caveat. Figures reflect VC-backed product companies in London. Founding Engineer and leadership roles often trade base for meaningful equity, expect base to flex down 10–20% when equity is material.



Backend.

02

Backend Engineering demand is at its highest point in years, and what companies are actually hiring for has shifted considerably.

The biggest change is AI. Not engineers who use AI tooling to ship faster, that's now table stakes. Companies want engineers who are actively building AI-integrated products: working directly with LLMs, designing the backend infrastructure that makes those products scale.

There's a clear distinction in the market between engineers who are adjacent to AI and engineers who are building with it. Hiring managers know the difference.

AI-assisted development has also become standard inside engineering teams. Engineers who move fluidly within those workflows, accelerating delivery without accumulating technical debt, are meaningfully more attractive than those who can't.

But the most interesting shift is commercial. Companies are increasingly hiring for engineers who understand the *why* behind what they're building. Product-aware, user-focused, and able to connect technical decisions to business outcomes. Pure backend in a vacuum is a harder sell than it was two years ago.

"The purely siloed backend person is becoming less relevant."

- **Building with AI, not around it.** LLM orchestration, retrieval infrastructure, agent tooling, now a baseline expectation at senior level.
- **Commercial fluency.** Engineers who can translate technical decisions into business outcomes command a clear premium.
- **Generalist premium.** Narrow specialism is being priced down relative to high-impact generalists with product instinct.

PERMANENT SALARY RANGES · £GBP · LONDON-WEIGHTED

ROLE	JUNIOR	MID-LEVEL	SENIOR	LEAD / STAFF	HEAD OF
Java / Kotlin / Spring	£45k – £70k	£70k – £90k	£90k – £120k	£110k – £140k	—
Python (Backend)	£55k – £75k	£70k – £100k	£90k – £120k	£120k – £150k	—
Golang	£50k – £75k	£70k – £90k	£90k – £120k	£120k – £150k	—
Scala / Clojure	£60k – £80k	£80k – £100k	£90k – £140k	£120k – £160k	—
C# / .NET	£45k – £65k	£70k – £90k	£90k – £120k	£110k – £130k	—
Engineering Manager	—	—	—	£120k – £160k	—
Head of Engineering	—	—	—	—	£140k – £200k

Caveat. Ranges vary by industry. Founding Engineering and leadership roles with material equity typically trade 10–20% of base for upside.



Data & AI.

03

The UK data and AI hiring market entered 2026 with real momentum. After a cautious 2025, demand for specialised talent has accelerated.

Permanent salaries across AI, machine learning, and data engineering have risen between **8% and 20%** over the past year. The strongest growth sits in mid-level and specialist roles.

The most sought-after profiles combine technical depth with commercial and product thinking. ML engineers who can operationalise GenAI. Data engineers building the foundations AI projects depend on. And a growing wave of AI governance specialists as regulation moves from theory to enforcement.

Engineers whose work sits close to revenue or product are commanding £100k–£150k+. Those in more experimental or internal-tooling roles are landing £50k–£90k. At the top end, Head-of level roles in AI and research science are now reaching £180k+.

The organisations that win in 2026 will invest in stronger data foundations, clearer governance frameworks, and leaders who can turn technical capability into commercial outcomes. Headcount for its own sake is out. Lean, high-impact teams are in. And if you're hiring a Head of AI or Data in 2026, expect a fight.

"A two-tier market has solidified, and the gap is widening."

- **+8–20%** salary movement YoY across AI, ML & Data Engineering.
- **£180k+** now standard for Head-of in AI and Research Science at VC-backed.
- **Two-tier market.** Revenue-/product-adjacent £100k–£150k+; internal tooling £50k–£90k.
- **AI governance** is the fastest-emerging new specialism as regulation bites.

PERMANENT SALARY RANGES · £GBP THOUSANDS · LONDON

ROLE (LONDON)	JUNIOR	MID-LEVEL	SENIOR	LEAD	HEAD OF
Data Engineering	£45k – £55k	£60k – £80k	£85k – £115k	£120k – £140k	£140k – £180k
Analytics Engineering	£45k – £55k	£60k – £80k	£85k – £115k	£120k – £140k	£140k – £160k
Data Science	£45k – £55k	£60k – £80k	£85k – £115k	£120k – £140k	£140k – £180k
Machine Learning Engineering	£50k – £65k	£70k – £90k	£95k – £130k	£130k – £160k	£160k – £200k+
AI Engineering	£50k – £65k	£70k – £90k	£95k – £130k	£130k – £160k	£160k – £200k+
Data Analyst	£40k – £50k	£55k – £70k	£75k – £90k	£95k – £110k	£115k – £130k
BI & Data Warehousing	£40k – £50k	£55k – £70k	£75k – £90k	£95k – £110k	£115k – £130k
Data Governance	£40k – £50k	£55k – £70k	£75k – £90k	£95k – £110k	£115k – £130k



Platform & Security.

04

The DevOps, Platform, and Infrastructure market has quietly become one of the most supply-constrained spaces in UK tech.

The clearest driver is AI. As organisations scale AI-integrated products, the infrastructure holding them up has become a critical priority. Platform and SRE teams are being asked to build systems that are more complex, more latency-sensitive, and more failure-intolerant than anything they were running two years ago.

Cloud fluency is now assumed. The real differentiator is what sits on top of it. Infrastructure as Code, internal developer platforms, deployment pipelines that actually accelerate engineering teams rather than slow them down. Engineers who can build platforms that other engineers *want* to use are commanding significant premiums at Senior and Staff level.

Senior Platform and SRE roles sit firmly in the £100k–£140k range, with Staff and Principal-level engineers pushing £150k+ in competitive environments. DevSecOps, still undersupplied relative to demand as compliance and security requirements intensify, is seeing some of the sharpest upward movement in the whole engineering market.

The line between DevOps and Software Engineering is blurring. Hiring managers increasingly want engineers who can write production-grade code *and* own the infrastructure it runs on. The pure "ops person" who doesn't code is becoming a harder sell. Demand will only firm into 2026, if you're hiring here, move fast.

"The gap between a good Platform Engineer and a great one has never been more commercially visible."

- **DevSecOps** is the sharpest upward mover in the entire engineering market.
- **Platform as product.** IDPs, IaC and pipeline-as-accelerator skills carry a clear premium.
- **Code + Infra.** The engineer who can do both is one of the most sought-after profiles in the UK right now.
- **Structurally undersupplied.** Regulation, AI infra complexity, and platform-engineering adoption all compound demand.

PERMANENT SALARY RANGES · £GBP · LONDON-WEIGHTED

ROLE	JUNIOR	MID-LEVEL	SENIOR	LEAD	HEAD OF
DevOps / SRE	£40k – £60k	£60k – £85k	£90k – £125k	£100k – £140k	£140k – £180k
Platform Engineering	£40k – £60k	£60k – £85k	£90k – £125k	£100k – £140k	£140k – £180k
Cloud Engineer · AWS / GCP / Azure	£40k – £60k	£60k – £85k	£90k – £125k	£100k – £140k	£140k – £180k
Infrastructure Engineer	£40k – £60k	£60k – £85k	£90k – £125k	£100k – £140k	£140k – £180k
Security Engineer / DevSecOps	£40k – £60k	£60k – £90k	£90k – £130k	£100k – £140k	£140k – £190k
Solutions Architect	£40k – £60k	£60k – £75k	£80k – £100k	£100k – £130k	£120k – £160k
Engineering Manager · Platform / Infra	—	—	—	£90k – £130k	£110k – £150k



Product & GTM.

05

Product and Design hiring is accelerating into 2026, with the clearest signal from B2B SaaS at Series A+.

The market has shifted firmly toward senior ICs. Principal, Lead and Staff-level PMs are in demand; pure management hires are being deprioritised in favour of player-coaches who still execute day-to-day. B2C lags B2B by an estimated 20–25%, driven by funding and product complexity, and that gap isn't closing.

Design mirrors the same trend. Founding designers with a zero-to-one mindset, commercially sharp, comfortable with ambiguity, able to build a function from scratch, are among the most sought-after profiles in the market. The pool is shallow. If you find one, move fast.

"Top-tier Sales/GTM IC talent is in high demand and commands a premium. Speed and decisiveness in hiring will be a competitive advantage."

- **Technical credibility** is non-negotiable, engineering / CS background or the ability to hold a credible technical conversation from day one.
- **Trajectory signals everything.** BDR→AE→Senior AE progressions. Promotions mean coachability.
- **Quota is the baseline**, not the differentiator. President's Club, especially more than once, carries real weight.
- **Enterprise = five-year floor.** Multi-stakeholder deal complexity can't be shortcut.
- **Playbook pedigree matters.** AEs from MongoDB, Zscaler, Wiz and peers are in high demand.

PERMANENT SALARY RANGES · £GBP · LONDON-WEIGHTED · OTE NOTED WHERE APPLICABLE

ROLE	JUNIOR	MID-LEVEL	SENIOR	LEAD	HEAD OF
B2B Product Designer	£50k – £60k	£65k – £90k	£90k – £120k	£110k – £140k	£130k – £170k
B2C Product Designer	£50k	£50k – £70k	£70k – £95k	£90k – £120k	£120k – £140k
B2B Product Manager	£45k – £70k	£70k – £100k	£100k – £130k	£120k – £150k	£140k+
B2C Product Manager	£45k – £60k	£55k – £80k	£80k – £110k	£100k – £140k	£130k – £180k
Product Marketing Manager	£45k – £70k	£70k – £90k	£80k – £100k	£90k – £110k	—
BA / Product Owner	£40k – £55k	£50k – £70k	£70k – £90k	£85k – £110k	—
VP Product	—	—	—	—	£150k – £200k
CPO	—	—	—	—	£180k – £250k
AE / BDR · base + OTE	—	£60k + £120k	£75k + £150k	£85k + £170k	—
Customer Success Manager	—	£55k – £70k	£70k – £90k	£90k – £110k	—
Solutions Engineer / Pre-Sales	n/a	£70k – £100k	£100k – £130k	£120k – £150k	—
Enterprise Account Executive · base + OTE	—	£90k + £180k	£100k + £200k	£125k + £250k	—

LET'S TALK

Hiring, benchmarking, or just **comparing notes.**

If anything in this guide raised a question, sharpened a hiring decision, or you'd like a deeper look at a specific role, team shape, or comp band, get in touch. Happy to share live market data, candidate intel, or a second opinion on a brief you're running.

karl@wavetalent.co

Karl Penhale · MD, Wave Talent

ONLINE

wavetalent.co

Live roles, market reports, and case studies.

WAVE TALENT · UK PERMANENT

THANK YOU FOR READING