Market Insights Update: North West

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Who We Are

About DRC Search
DRC Search is the executive search division of The Digital Recruitment Company, specialising in senior management and C-suite appointments. We partner with high-growth, investor-backed and transformation-focused businesses, helping them attract and retain leadership talent that drives growth.

Our Specialisms:
- All C-Suite & Leadership Roles: NED, Board Advisory, Chief Data, Chief Marketing, Chief Digital, Chief Information, Chief Technology, Chief Revenue, etc
- Non-Executive & Advisory Appointments: Access to our **exclusive NED Library** for board, growth, M&A and scale-up expertise.

Geographic Coverage: UK, East Coast US, and major European tech hubs.

About The Digital Recruitment Company
The Digital Recruitment Company was founded in London in 2010 and has become a leading provider of global recruitment solutions across the Technology, Marketing, Product, Data and Creative sectors.

The team focuses on mid-level to senior hires, providing permanent, freelance and fixed-term recruitment, as well as payroll management and market insight consulting.

What We Do

We work across the Technology, Marketing, Product & Data Sector in both the UK & Internationally. We aim to create long-lasting partnerships with our clients.

We work across the following specialisms:

Client Services, Sales, AI, Creative Software, Developers, Engineers, Data & Analytics, Executive Appointments, Innovation & Service Design, Insight & Research, CRM, Strategy, Tech & UX. Marketing, Media Planning & Buying, Performance Media, Project Management / Product Management.

We supply permanent hires, executive search, freelance & fixed term contracts and payroll management services.

Our Service

With our clients we work alongside them not to only recruit but to consult on the current market, how best to structure, hire and retain new Marketing, Creative, Technology, Sales, Digital & Data & Insights divisions.

Our service is split into two distinct services:

- **Initial consulting** - a scoping of your requirements and a follow up document putting forward our recommendations on market insights, department structure, salaries, packages etc - this is completely free of charge and does not come with any obligation to use us for the hiring.

- **Recruitment & Retention** – delivery of a recruitment strategy and hiring plan to identify, attract and retain the ideal talent for your organisational culture and goals. Our fee structure is based upon the scale of any project.

Our Purpose is to strengthen the target market so that the business will increase

Introduction

The UK labour market is moving into 2026 in a more measured and considered position. Inflation has come down, but higher borrowing costs are still influencing how businesses operate. Companies are no longer pushing for rapid growth, but they are not pulling back either. Instead, hiring is becoming more focused, with priority given to roles that drive revenue, improve efficiency, and support long-term stability.

This shift is becoming clearer across different regions. While London and the South continue to attract strong investment, northern markets are becoming more self-sufficient, supported by their own sector strengths and changing demand. The North West in particular is standing out as a key hub for professional hiring, driven by financial services, technology, and engineering.

At the same time, there are still structural challenges. Ongoing skills shortages across digital, technical, and commercial roles mean hiring cannot slow too much. Businesses are having to balance cost pressures with the need to secure the right talent, leading to a more disciplined but still active hiring market.

The data in this report reflects that shift, combining trends from 2025 with early signs from 2026 to show how hiring is evolving across the North West and the wider northern regions.

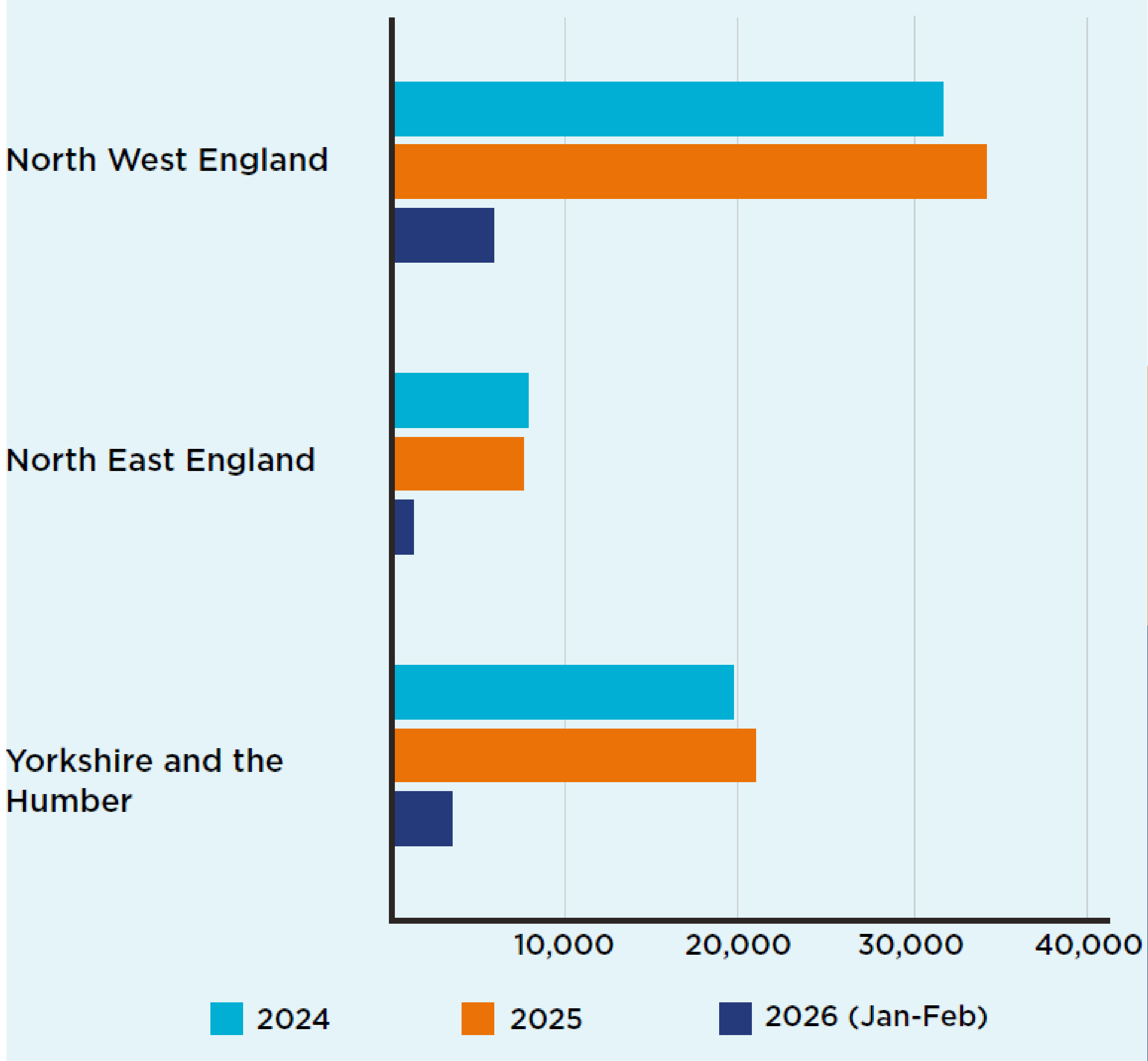
Overview

The North West labour market enters 2026 in a more balanced but still cautious position. Inflation has moderated, yet borrowing costs remain relatively high, continuing to constrain investment decisions. Employers are therefore navigating a more selective hiring environment, prioritising critical roles while maintaining flexibility in response to uncertain demand. At the same time, structural shortages in technical and revenue generating roles persist, preventing any sharp slowdown in hiring activity

Early indicators suggest a stable start to the year. January 2026 recorded 3,000 professional vacancies, signalling sustained demand following a volatile 2025. That volatility was most visible in the sharp fluctuations seen throughout the year. Vacancies peaked in March at 3,235 roles, up 19.2% month-on-month, before falling to a low of 2,484 in August, a 16.0% decline. Despite this mid-year slowdown, overall hiring remained resilient.

Regional Breakdown

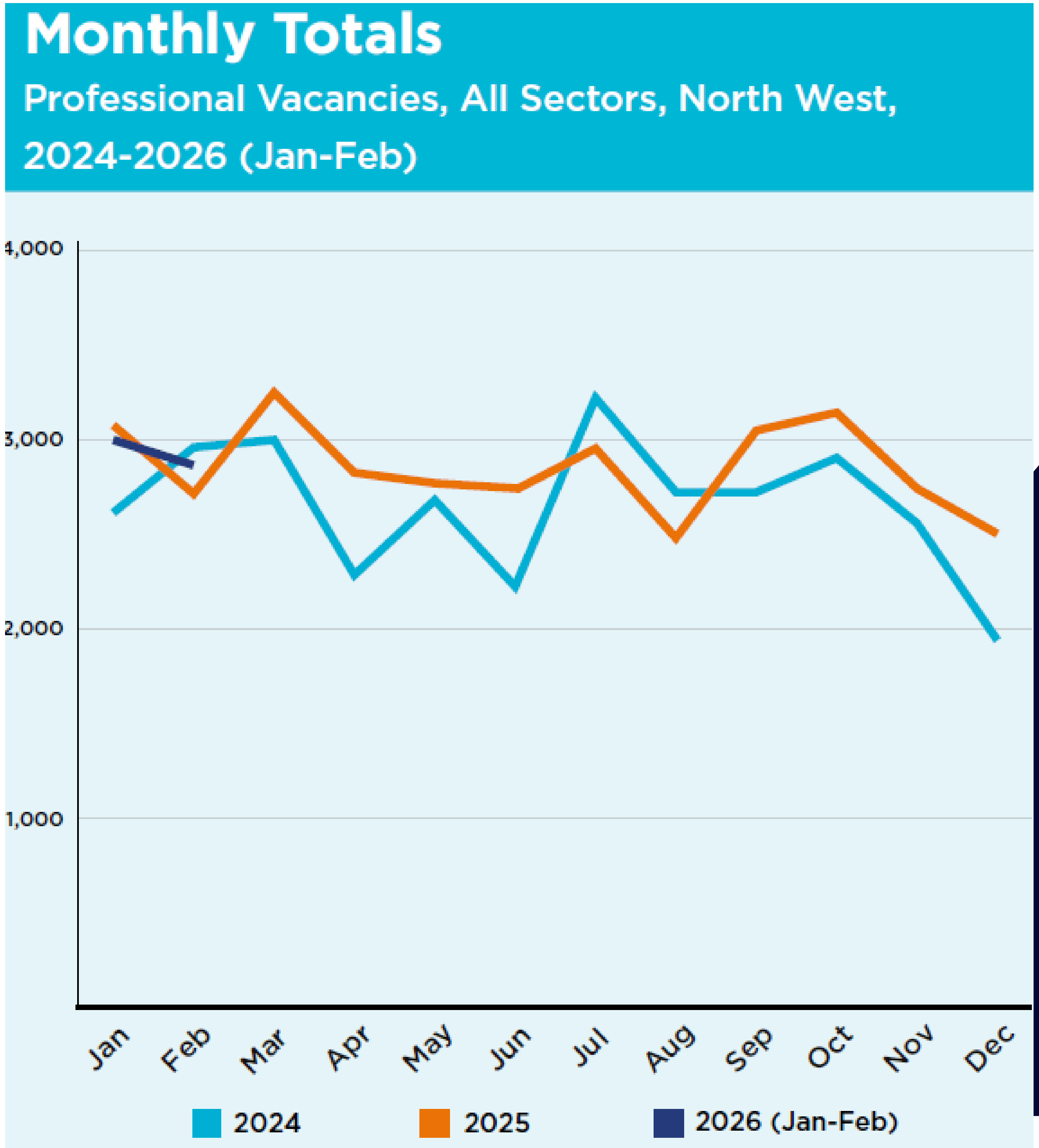
North UK,Professional Vacancies, All Sectors, UK, 2024-2026 (Jan-Feb)



In the full year, the North West recorded 34,224professional vacancies in 2025, representing a 7.7% year-on-year increase. Q1 proved to be the strongest quarter, generating 9,021 vacancies and setting the tone for the year. This performance reinforced the region's position as the dominant hiring hub in the North, accounting for 55.1% of all vacancies.

Other northern regions showed weaker momentum. The North East remained broadly flat, with a 1.6% decline to 7,696 vacancies. Yorkshire and the Humber performed more strongly, rising 5.8% to 20,857 vacancies and accounting for 32.7% of regional hiring. Notably, Yorkshire has carried this momentum into 2026, with vacancies up 3.3% in January and February compared with the same period last year.

Overall, the North West enters 2026 from a position of relative strength. However, the stop start pattern seen last year suggests that hiring will remain sensitive to economic confidence rather than follow a smooth upward trajectory.

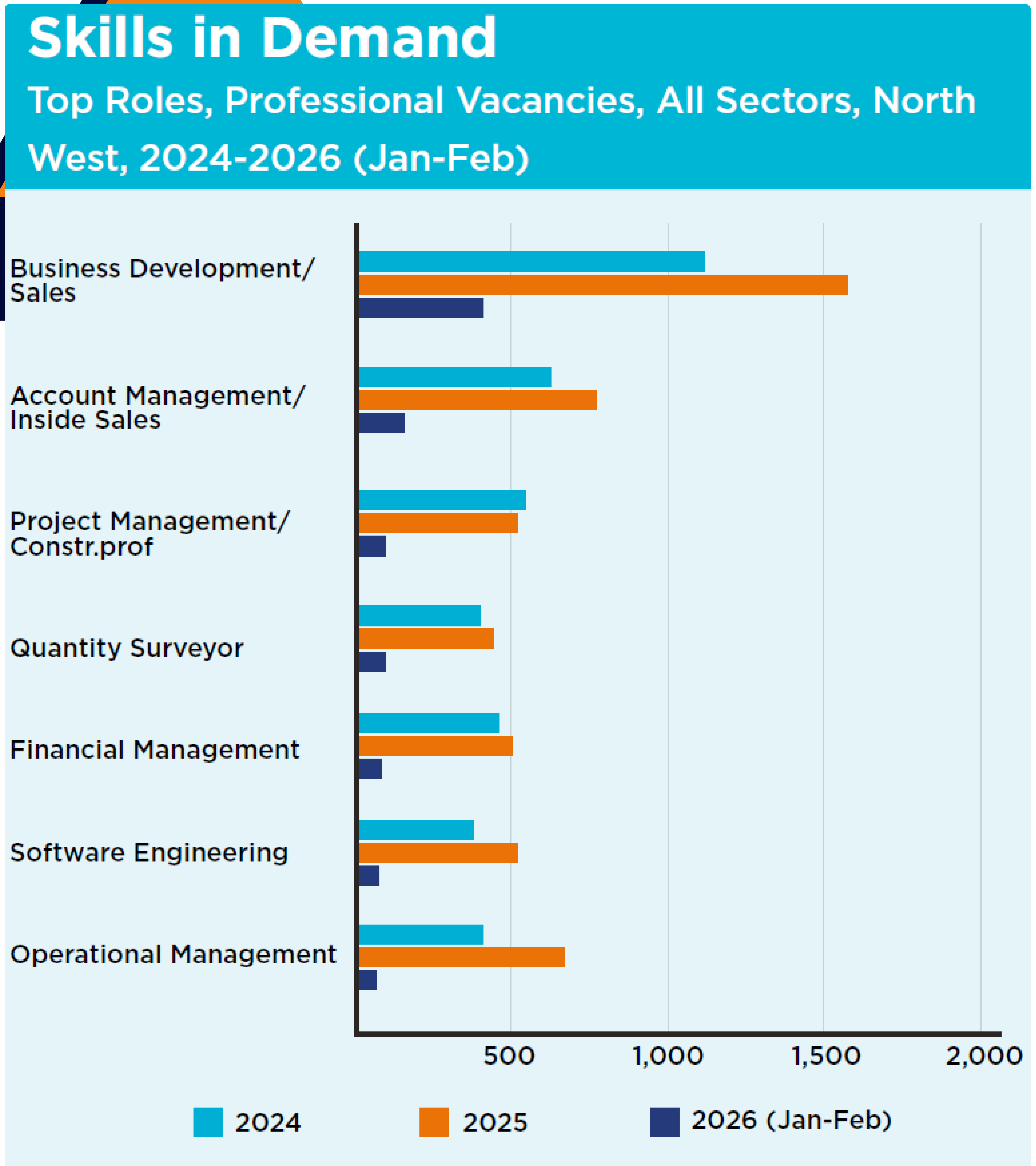


Skills In Demand

The occupational mix in the North West at the start of 2026 points to a labour market increasingly shaped by productivity, revenue generation, and operational resilience. Employers are focusing hiring on roles that either drive income directly or support core business functions, while more discretionary areas show signs of softening.

IT professionals remain central to this shift. In 2025, vacancies reached 6,651, reflecting a 10.7% year-on-year increase, with their share of total vacancies rising to 19.4%. Momentum has carried into 2026, with 1,216 roles posted in January and February, up 9.8% on the same period last year. This steady expansion underlines the continued importance of digital capability across sectors.

Sales roles are seeing the most pronounced acceleration. Vacancies rose 27.5% in 2025 to 3,061, with growth intensifying further into 2026. Openings in the first two months of the year increased by 50.3% year-on-year, lifting the occupation's share to 8.9%. This suggests a clear pivot towards commercial performance as firms seek to protect margins and stimulate growth.

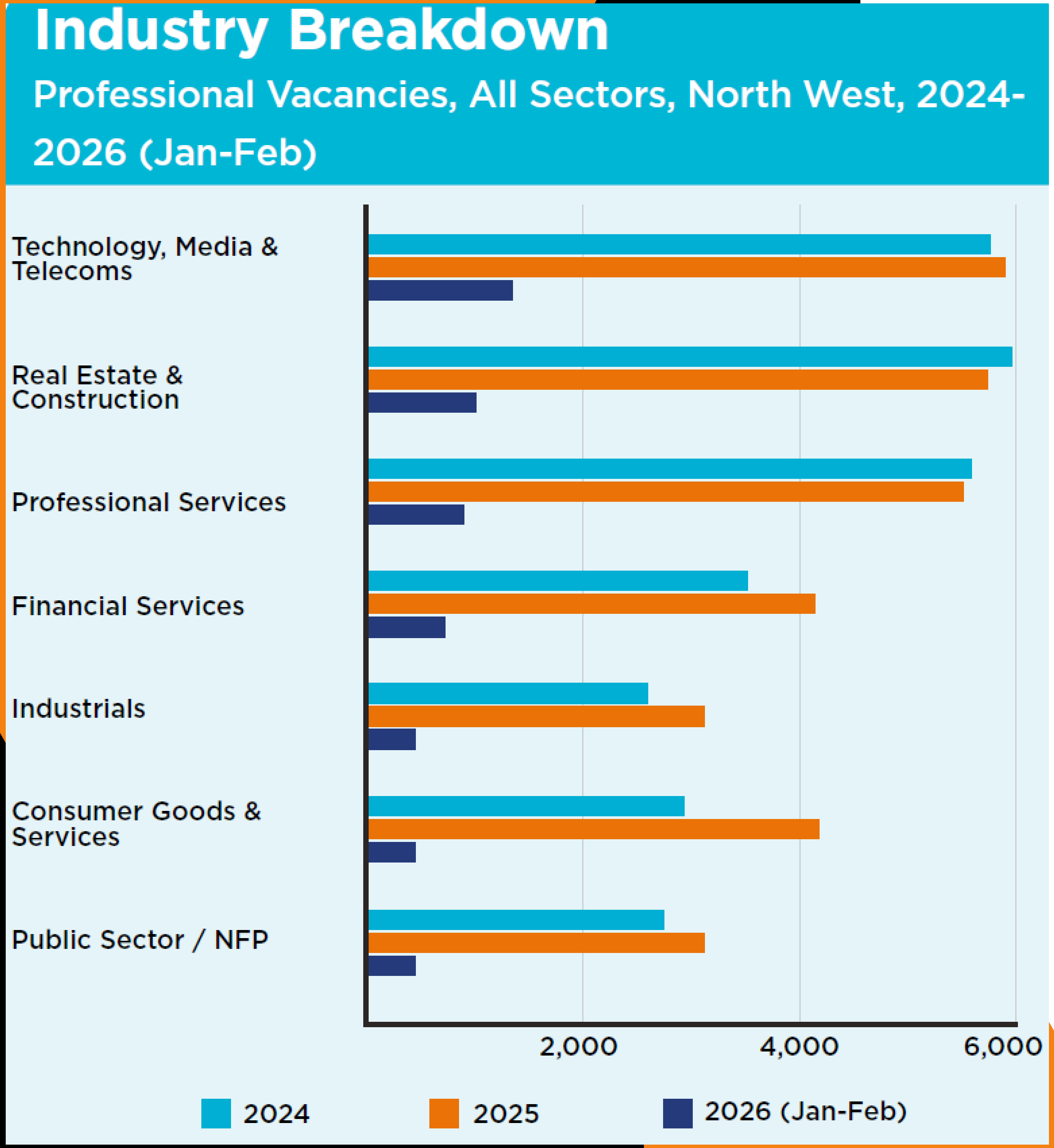


Construction and HR roles are also expanding, though at a more measured pace. Construction vacancies increased 12.0% to 3,060 in 2025, with 554 roles already recorded in early 2026. HR rose 10.7% to 2,157 vacancies, reflecting continued investment in workforce management and organisational capacity.

By contrast, marketing and PR roles are losing momentum. While vacancies rose 6.4% in 2025, early 2026 data shows a 21.1% decline compared with the same period last year. Real estate roles remain under pressure, with vacancies down 8.6% in 2025 and a further 14.6% decline in early 2026.

The direction is clear. Hiring is becoming more targeted, with employers concentrating on roles that support growth and efficiency, while scaling back in areas more exposed to economic cycles.

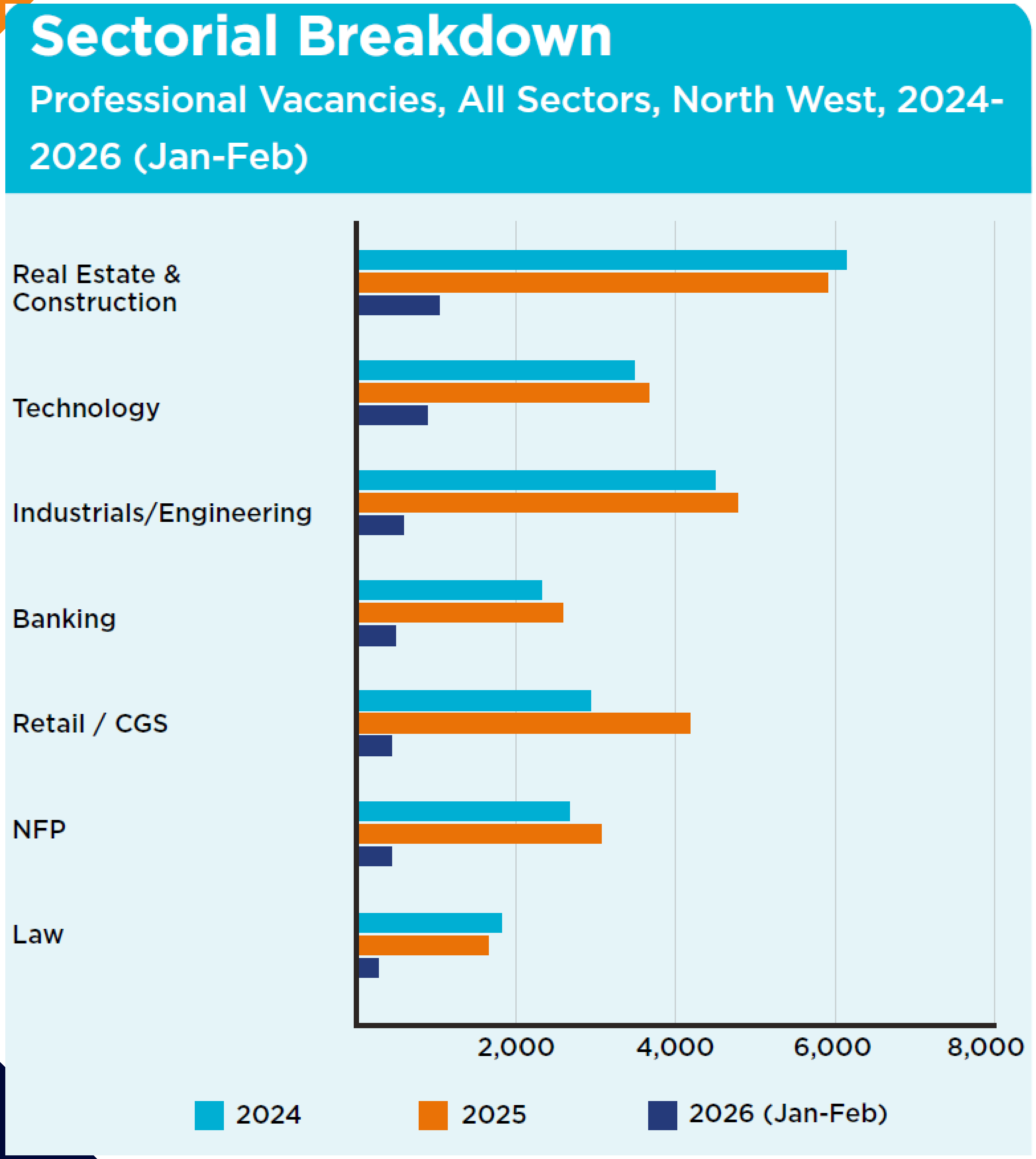
Industry Breakdown



Industry data reinforces the sense that the market is adjusting rather than expanding uniformly. Growth remains present, but it is uneven and increasingly concentrated in sectors tied to finance, technology, and infrastructure.

Technology, Media and Telecoms continues to lead in scale, with 5,889 vacancies recorded in 2025, up 2.4% year-on-year. Early 2026 activity is notably stronger, with vacancies rising 39.7% compared with the same period last year. This suggests renewed investment in digital capabilities despite broader economic caution.

Financial Services is also gaining ground. Vacancies rose 17.0% in 2025 to 4,130, with a further 19.3% increase recorded in early 2026. Banking continues to expand, with vacancies increasing by 11.1% in 2025 and by a further 27.1% in January and February 2026. This points to sustained demand for financial expertise.



Elsewhere, the picture is less stable. Industrials grew strongly in 2025, up 19.6%, but vacancies fell 16.5% in early 2026. Consumer Goods and Services followed a similar pattern, surging 42.5% last year before contracting by 40.2% at the start of 2026. These swings suggest exposure to shifting demand and cost pressures.

Professional Services edged down slightly in 2025, while Real Estate and Construction recorded a modest decline before showing early signs of recovery, with vacancies up 6.5% in early 2026. Technology-specific roles stand out, with a sharp 65.5% increase in early 2026, indicating continued structural demand.

The pattern points to reallocation rather than expansion, with hiring concentrating in sectors better positioned to absorb economic pressure.

Top 20 Companies

Company-level hiring trends highlight where demand is strengthening as the North West moves into 2026, with growth focused on technology, financial services, and engineering, reflecting broader shifts in investment and hiring priorities. Radius led the way, with vacancies up 106.3% in 2025 to 559 roles, and hiring remaining strong into 2026 with 168 roles already posted in the first two months. This reflects continued investment in digital infrastructure and data-driven services.

Financial services are also active. Barclays increased hiring by 38.5% to 471 roles, while Lloyds Banking Group grew by 42.7% to 137 roles, with steady demand continuing into 2026 across banking, risk, compliance, and transformation functions.

In engineering, RSK Group saw vacancies rise 40.7% to 242 roles, supported by infrastructure investment and demand for technical and sustainability expertise.

Not all firms are expanding. AstraZeneca reduced hiring by 43.3% to 195 roles, indicating consolidation across parts of the life sciences sector.

Overall, 15 of the top 20 employers increased hiring year-on-year, while five declined, pointing to a market that remains active but increasingly selective and aligned to sector-specific demand.

Top 20 Companies

Professional Vacancies, All Sectors, North West, 2024-2026 (Jan-Feb)

Company	Sector	2024	2025	2026 (Jan-Feb)
Radius	Technology	271	559	168
Aecom	Real Estate & Construction	737	709	130
BAE Systems	Industrials / Engineering	1063	1084	102
BNY Mellon	Banking	351	377	99
Barclays	Banking	340	471	66
AJ Bell	Banking	266	290	58
Turner & Townsend	Industrials / Engineering	676	694	55
PHMG	Media	141	119	55
Together	Banking	254	309	54
Fletchers Solicitors	Law	130	172	40
RSK	Industrials / Engineering	172	242	39
Lloyds Banking Group	Banking	96	137	33
WSP Global	Industrials / Engineering	179	113	31
Guinness	Real Estate & Construction	120	162	31
AstraZeneca	Pharmaceuticals	344	195	30
AtkinsRealis	Industrials / Engineering	127	149	28
Stantec	Industrials / Engineering	208	176	24
Costain	Real Estate & Construction	145	153	22
Balfour Beatty	Real Estate & Construction	149	176	20
MAG Manchester Airport	Retail / CGS	148	176	20

DRC Search

Thank You

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We hope you've enjoyed our Market Insight Survey. If you would like to discuss the survey or would like to work with us on your next hire or your next career move, then please get in touch.

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