

2026

DRCSearch

Salary Survey - Permanent & Freelance
C-Suite & NED Roles Earning £100K+





Creating Exceptional Leadership Teams for the Tech Space USA, UK, EMEA

The no.1 choice for board advisory and specialist search

ABOUT DRC SEARCH COMPANY

DRC Search was established to provide exceptional executive search solutions to the technology and digital sectors, with a focus on placing senior leaders who drive innovation, growth, and transformation. Founded in London, our mission is to support high-growth and enterprise businesses across the US, Europe, and the UK by delivering strategic leadership talent through a rigorous, insight-led search process.

Our specialism lies in Executive and Board-level appointments across Technology, AI, Product, Data, Marketing, and Commercial leadership. From PE-backed scaleups to global technology firms, we partner with businesses that are shaping the future of their industries.

With deep sector knowledge, an extensive senior talent network, and a proven track record in executive hiring, we offer a consultative approach that goes beyond filling roles, we help organisations build the leadership foundations they need for long-term success.

Our core services include retained senior, executive search, board and NED appointments, interim leadership, succession planning, and strategic talent mapping.

WELCOME TO THE 2026 SALARY SURVEY

Welcome to our annual salary survey for the digital sector. As always, we'd like to thank all those who participated to produce this year's report. One of the things we love at DRC Search is the amazing quality and diversity of people in our network and community. It is always a pleasure to put together this survey and we hope you find it useful. Following on from previous years we have produced two separate reports, one focused on permanent staffing and the other focused on contract workers. This report covers permanent workers.

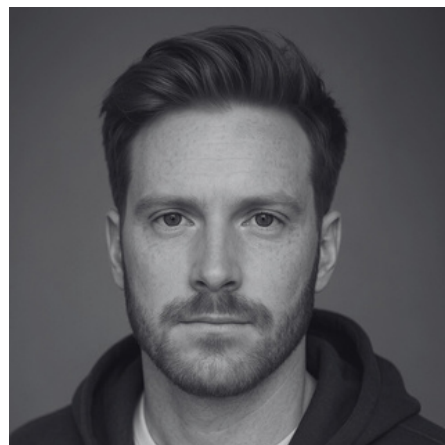
16+ YEARS OF DEDICATED CLIENT SERVICE

DRC Search provides its clients with the latest talent insights to help them achieve their workforce goals. We believe that good recruitment starts with the end in mind, that being that good recruitment leads to good retention. Our salary survey seeks to provide clients with the means to attract and retain the right hires. If you'd like to reach out or discuss anything in the report, please contact Toby Day: toby@drc-search.com



Meet the Editor

Toby founded DRC Search back in 2010. Toby has worked with a diverse range of clients over the years, including agencies and in-house teams. In addition to his recruitment responsibilities, Toby runs and edits our annual salary survey.



Meet the Director of Technology Practice

With over a decade of experience in tech recruitment, Rob has supported a range of organisations from FTSE-listed companies to high-growth scale-ups. Rob brings a strategic focus to senior and executive appointments and plays a key role in shaping our insights and content across the technology landscape.



WHAT ARE THE TRENDS FOR 2026?

Toby Day

Director / Founder

AI has moved from experimentation to operating-model change, with high reported adoption but uneven value capture and governance maturity. In the latest McKinsey global survey, 78% of respondents report AI use in at least one business function (up from 55% a year earlier), and 71% report regular generative AI use.

Regulation and assurance are now “board topics,” not functional hygiene. The EU AI Act entered into force 1 Aug 2024 and becomes fully applicable 2 Aug 2026 (with earlier milestones already in effect). Simultaneously, governance regimes are tightening (e.g., UK Corporate Governance Code 2024 applies from 1 Jan 2026 with Provision 29 applicable from 1 Jan 2026).

Technology spend growth remains strong in 2026, led by AI infrastructure. Gartner forecasts worldwide IT spending of \$6.15T in 2026 (+10.8%), with data center systems at \$653B and total data center spending surpassing \$650B.

Cyber risk is compounding via third parties, vulnerabilities, and AI usage patterns. Verizon’s 2026 DBIR executive summary reports vulnerability exploitation as 20% of initial access vectors, ransomware present in 44% of breaches, and third-party involvement doubling from 15% to 30%.



C-SUITE & EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

At the heart of every successful digital business is its leadership team. The following benchmarks highlight compensation trends for C-Suite and executive roles across the UK and US, reflecting the premium placed on strategic vision, operational excellence, and the ability to drive growth in highly competitive markets.

Permanent Roles

Role	UK (£) + Bonus/OTE	US (\$) + Bonus/OTE
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	£170K-£280K +30-50%	\$450k-\$1.1m + 30-50%
Chief Financial Officer (CFO)	£155K-£235K +30-50%	\$350k-\$590k + 30-50%
Chief Revenue Officer (CRO)	£145K-£270K +30-50%	\$275k-\$500k + 30-50%
Chief People Officer (CPO)	£130K-£240K +30-50%	\$235k-\$375k + 30-50%
Chief Digital Officer (CDO)	£110K-£200K +30-50%	\$275k-\$450k + 30-50%
Chief Technology Officer (CTO)	£160K-£310K +30-50%	\$335k-\$495k + 30-50%
Chief Information Officer (CIO)	£165K-£250K +30-50%	\$277k-\$360k + 30-50%
Chief Operating Officer (COO)	£140K-£230K +30-50%	\$245k-\$380k + 30-50%
Chief Marketing Officer (CMO)	£130K-£215K +30-50%	\$255k-\$425k + 30-50%
Chief Data Officer (CDO)	£200K-£450K +30-50%	315k-\$625k + 30-50%
Chief Product Officer (CPO)	£150K-£310K +30-50%	\$250k-\$500k + 30-50%
Chief Strategy Officer (CSO)	£130K-£215K +30-50%	\$235k-\$480k + 30-50% bonus/OTE
Managing Director (MD)	£165,000-£320,000 +30-50%	\$285k-\$575k + 30-50%

C-SUITE & EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

Freelance / Contract Day Rate

Role	UK day rate	US day rate + bonus potential
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	£1,200–£2,900	\$4,800–\$12,000 + 30–50%
Chief Financial Officer (CFO)	£1,150–£1,700	\$3,900–\$6,200 + 30–50%
Chief Revenue Officer (CRO)	£1,350–£2,400	\$2,950–\$4,000 + 30–50%
Chief People Officer (CPO)	£1,150–£2,000	\$2,300–\$3,500 + 30–50%
Chief Digital Officer (CDO)	£1,050–£2,000	\$3,000–\$3,900 + 30–50%
Chief Technology Officer (CTO)	£1,300–£2,900	\$3,500–\$5,450 + 30–50%
Chief Information Officer (CIO)	£900–£1,450	\$3,200–\$4,600 + 30–50%
Chief Operating Officer (COO)	£900–£1,200	\$2,750–\$3,900 + 30–50%
Chief Marketing Officer (CMO)	£650–£1,200	\$2,450–\$3,850 + 30–50%
Chief Data Officer (CDO)	£1,300–£2,900	\$2,950–\$5,850 + 30–50%
Chief Product Officer (CPO)	£1,400–£3,100	\$2,100–\$4,000+ 30–50%
Chief Strategy Officer (CSO)	£1,150–£1,700	\$2,350–\$4,500 + 30–50%
Managing Director (MD)	£950–£2,900	\$2,650–\$6,500 + 30–50%

NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (NED) & CHAIR COMPENSATION

Role	UK Annual Fee (PAYE)	Freelance Day Rate (UK)	US / New York Freelance Day Rate:	Equity / Shareholding:	LTIP / Additional:
Chair (Public Co)	£150k – £300k+	£2,000–£4,500+	\$4,500–\$11,000	Often required to hold equity; deferred share options standard in FTSE firms	PSPs (Performance Share Plans) standard in FTSE firms
NED (Public Co)	£35k–£80k	£700–£3,500	\$2,100–\$3,600	Encouraged to hold 1–2x annual fee in shares	Committee fees (£4,000–£20,000)
NED (Private / Scale-up)	£15K–£50K	£1,000–£2,500	\$2,500–\$5,200	0.25–1% equity (common in early-stage/scale-ups)	May be tied to advisory KPIs
Board Advisor (Private)	£10K–£75K	£800–£3,500	\$2,500–\$6,500	Sometimes 0.1–0.5% equity	Rarely LTIPs, equity vesting more common

Key Observations

- Public companies: Compensation structured around formal LTIP frameworks (e.g., PSPs, RSPs) and committee-based incentives.
- Private/scale-ups: Equity is a primary lever, often compensating in place of higher cash fees.
- Advisory/NED roles: More flexible models emerging, including convertible fees or small equity stakes.

SPECIALIST & MANAGERIAL ROLES

Technology & Engineering

Role	UK Permanent (£)	US Permanent (\$)	UK Freelance (£/day)	US Freelance (\$/day)
VP Engineering	£150k-£220k	\$260k-\$425k	£725-£1.2k	\$1.2k-\$2.5k
Head of IT / CIO	£130k-£220k	\$210k-\$360k	£600-£1k	\$1.1k-\$1.8k
Head of Software Engineering	£150k-£210k	\$235k-\$285k	£750-£1,150	\$1.1k-\$2.6k
Software Engineer	£90k-£145k	\$130k-\$220k	£450-£750	\$600-\$1k
Full Stack Engineer	£70k-£110k	\$120k-\$180k	£350-£700	\$550-\$800
Lead .NET Developer	£80k-£105k	\$120k-\$170k	£350-£525	\$550-\$875
Back End Developer	£75k-£120k	\$120k-\$180k	£375-£600	\$550-\$800
Front End Developer	£65k-£90k	\$110k-\$150k	£325-£500	\$500-\$750
Data Architect	£95k-£135k	\$125k-\$175k	£450-£650	\$600-\$900
Test Manager	£85k-£120k	\$110k-\$150k	£400-£600	\$500-\$750
Automation Test Analyst	£55k-£75k	\$90k-\$140k	£250-£375	\$400-\$650
Cloud Systems Architect	£95k-£125k	\$165k-\$220k	£425-£650	\$700-\$1k
DevOps Manager	£100k-£130k	\$133k-\$210k	£450-£650	\$750-\$1.1k
Security Architect	£85k-£125k	\$140k-\$180k	£425-£625	\$650-\$900
Application Security Engineer	£110k-£135k	\$180k-\$215k	£475-£675	\$800-\$1.1k

SPECIALIST & MANAGERIAL ROLES

Data, AI & Analytics

Role	UK Permanent (£)	US Permanent (\$)	UK Freelance (£/day)	US Freelance (\$/day)
Chief Data Officer	£230k-£450k	\$315k-\$600k	£1k-£2k	\$2.5k-\$5k
Director of Data/Analytics	£125k-£180k	\$149k-\$196k	£600-£950	\$750-\$1.2k
Head of Data Science	£140k-£250k	\$175k-\$450k	£650-£950	\$800-\$1.25k
Lead Data Scientist	£110k-£160k	\$175k-\$275k	£500-£725	\$800-\$1.75k
Machine Learning Engineer	£100k-£175k	\$105k-\$235k	£450-£650	\$500-\$900
Head of AI / ML	£150k-£250k	\$160k-\$450k	£700-£1.2k	\$850-\$1.5k

Marketing, Performance & CRM

Role	UK Permanent (£)	US Permanent (\$)	UK Freelance (£/day)	US Freelance (\$/day)
Chief Marketing Officer (CMO)	£130k-£210k	\$245k-\$325k	£600-£1.2k	\$1.25k-\$2k
Marketing Director	£75k-£135k	\$110k-\$275k	£400-£650	\$600-\$1.1k
Head of CRM	£85k-£180k	\$125k-\$235k	£425-£700	\$600-\$950
Head of Paid Social	£75k-£110k	\$120k-\$275k	£350-£500	\$500-\$850
Performance Marketing Director	£95k-£170k	\$195k-\$323k	£450-£850	\$850-\$1.4k

SPECIALIST & MANAGERIAL ROLES

Product & Innovation

Role	UK Permanent (£)	US Permanent (\$)	UK Freelance (£/day)	US Freelance (\$/day)
Chief Product Officer (CPO)	£150k-£310k	\$205k-\$400k	£750-£1.25k	\$1k-\$1.8k
Head of Product	£120k-£215k	\$265k-\$386k	£550-£900	\$900-\$1.4k
Technical Product Director	£120k-£200k	\$195k-\$315k	£500-£800	\$850-\$1.2k

UX, Service Design & Research

Role	UK Permanent (£)	US Permanent (\$)	UK Freelance (£/day)	US Freelance (\$/day)
Head of UX / UI	£110k-£160k	\$115k-\$205k	£500-£725	\$600-\$1k
Head of Service Design / Innovation	£120k-£200k	\$175k-\$325k	£550-£850	\$800-\$1.25k
Creative Director	£85k-£135k	\$110k-\$171k	£400-£600	\$500-\$800
Research Director	£100k-£150k	\$141k-\$192k	£450-£700	\$600-\$950

Client Services & Sales

Role	UK Permanent (£)	US Permanent (\$)	UK Freelance (£/day)	US Freelance (\$/day)
Head of Client Services	£120k-£175k	\$190k-\$275k	£500-£800	\$900-\$1.3k
Business Director	£150k-£225k	\$210k-\$350k	£600-£900	\$1k-\$1.6k
Director of BD / Sales	£120k-£200k	\$190k-\$333k	£500-£850	\$950-\$1.5k

DRC Search

Contact Us

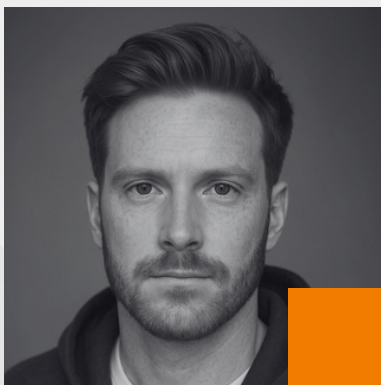


Partnering with tech leaders to build high-performing **permanent** teams across Product, Data, Engineering and Marketing.

TOBY DAY

CEO / Founder

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Delivering senior **freelance** technology talent to drive transformation, innovation, and strategic delivery across the UK and EMEA.

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