

KPMG and REC, UK Report on Jobs

Permanent staff appointments fall at softer pace in September

45.1

PERMANENT PLACEMENTS INDEX SEP '23

51.6

TEMPORARY BILLINGS INDEX SEP '23

The KPMG and REC, UK Report on Jobs is compiled by S&P Global from responses to questionnaires sent to a panel of around 400 UK recruitment and employment consultancies.

Permanent placements decline at weakest rate in three months

Temp billings return to growth

Pay pressures ease as staff supply continues to increase

Commenting on the latest survey results, Claire Warnes, Partner, Skills and Productivity at KPMG UK, said:

"A concerning feature of this month's data is that demand for staff is losing momentum, with total vacancies falling for the first time since February 2021 amid a fresh reduction in permanent vacancies. While both reductions are slight, employers are clearly nervous due to the long-term economic uncertainty and budget constraints that are impacting businesses everywhere. This in turn is leading to a continued reliance on temporary staff."

"For several months, strong pay growth has been a consequence of a tight labour market. But strains on employers' budgets are now affecting the rate of starting salary inflation which is at a two-and-a-half-year low, while temporary wages increased at the slowest rate in 31 months."

"Skill shortages across a range of sectors – from permanent IT staff to temporary nursing roles – also continue to be an area of long-term concern for the economy."

"The labour market is starting to look slightly precarious again and recruiters will be wondering and hoping that the recent slight calming of inflation rates positively impacts the outlook for both employers and jobseekers."

Neil Carberry, REC Chief Executive, said:

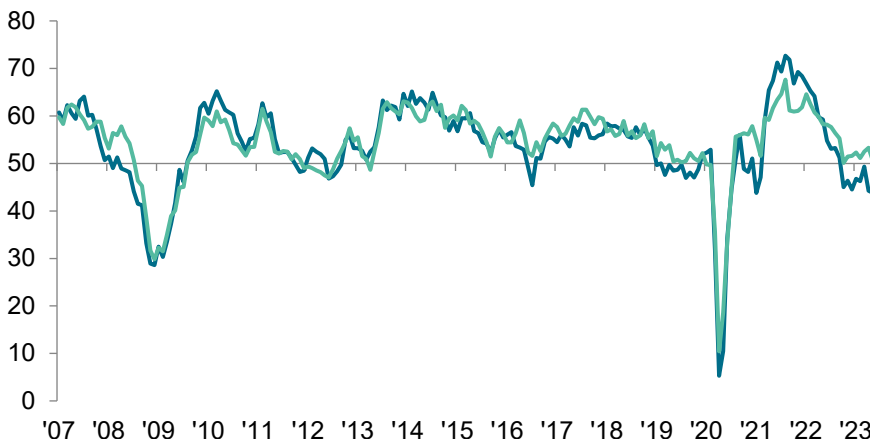
"Employers tell us they are feeling better about themselves as the year moves on, and today's data does suggest the possibility of a turnaround in hiring over the next few months. Permanent placements have been falling for a year now from abnormal post-pandemic highs. While permanent hiring activity continues to slow, fewer firms reported a slowdown last month, leading to a much shallower rate of decline than most months recently. Likewise, temporary hiring remains robust with billings growing marginally in September – as they have most months this year."

"This feels like a market that is finding the bottom of a year-long slowdown. And the relative buoyancy of the private sector is likely to be driving this more positive outlook – while vacancies are now dropping they remain robust in the private sector by comparison to the public. Some sectors such as hospitality, engineering, logistics and healthcare continue to experience very strong and growing demand. Along with high inflation, this is likely to be contributing to the growth of pay for temps and perms alike."

"As we move towards the Autumn Statement, action to help people find high quality roles is essential as the picture varies so widely from sector to sector. The REC would like to see a focus on skills, finally reforming the system to deliver a mix of high-quality courses within the levy framework, and action to tackle inactivity – like extending the Restart programme which has helped recruiters place thousands of long-term unemployed people into work. Both of these could form part of a long-overdue people and growth strategy. From reforming government procurement to better and more effective regulation, there is a lot government could do in partnership with recruiters to drive growth and prosperity."

■ Permanent Placements Index
■ Temporary Billings Index

sa, >50 = growth since previous month



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1 Executive summary

The Report on Jobs is unique in providing the most comprehensive guide to the UK labour market, drawing on original survey data provided by recruitment consultancies and employers to provide the first indication each month of labour market trends.

The main findings for September are:

Downturn in permanent staff hiring eases, temp billings rise

Recruitment consultancies across the UK signalled a softer, but still solid decline in permanent staff appointments during September. According to panellists, companies remained hesitant to commit to new permanent hires due to ongoing economic uncertainty and efforts to control costs. A preference for short-term staff meanwhile supported a fresh rise in temp billings at the end of the third quarter.

Softer increases in starting pay...

September survey data pointed to a further easing of overall pay growth across the UK. Though sharp, the rate of starting salary inflation edged down to a two-and-a-half-year low, while temp wages increased at the slowest rate in 31 months. While competition for skilled workers and the higher cost of living continued to place upward pressure on pay, there were some reports of greater strain on clients' budgets.

...amid further improvement in candidate availability

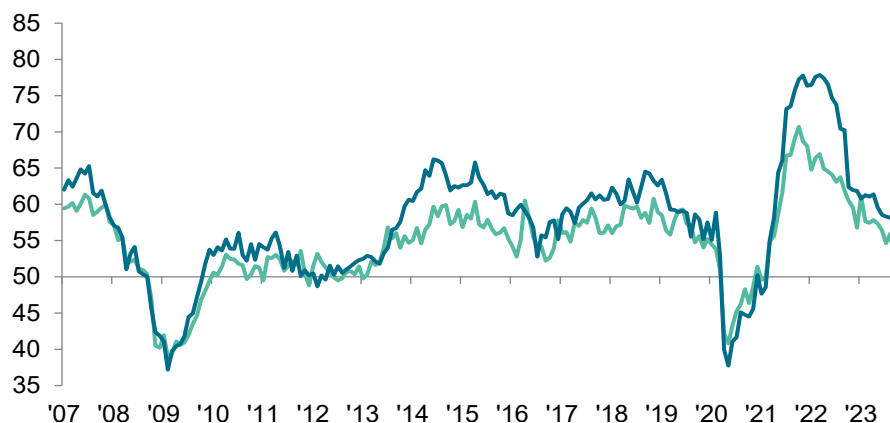
The overall availability of candidates improved again in September. Although the pace of expansion softened further from July's recent high, both permanent and temporary labour supply increased at historically strong rates. Anecdotal evidence generally linked the latest upturn to redundancies and a slowdown in market conditions.

Overall vacancies fall slightly in September

Total vacancies slipped into contraction territory in September, marking the first fall in overall demand for staff since February 2021. The rate of contraction was only marginal, however. Underlying data revealed a fresh reduction in permanent vacancies, albeit one that was slight, while growth of demand for temp staff moderated to a four-month low.

■ Permanent Salaries Index
■ Temporary Wages Index

sa, >50 = inflation since previous month

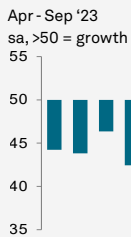


2 Staff Appointments

Recruitment consultancies report on the number of people placed in permanent jobs each month, and their revenues (billings) received from placing people in temporary or contract positions at employers.

An index reading above 50 signals a higher number of placements/billings than the previous month. Readings below 50 signal a decline compared with the previous month.

Permanent Placements Index



Downturn in permanent placements moderates

Recruiters across the UK signalled a further decline in permanent staff appointments during September, thereby stretching the current period of contraction to one year. Whilst solid, the rate of reduction eased from August's 38-month record and was the slowest since June. There were frequent reports that companies remained hesitant to hire extra workers or had implemented recruitment freezes due to rising costs and lingering economic uncertainty. Skill shortages also contributed to difficulties filling vacancies.

All four monitored English regions recorded declines in permanent placements, though in all cases rates of contraction slowed from August.

Permanent Placements Index

sa, >50 = growth since previous month

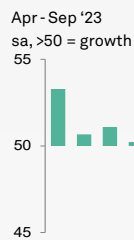


Permanent Placements Index

sa, >50 = growth since previous month

	UK	London	South	Midlands	North
Apr '23	44.2	35.3	46.2	44.7	43.8
May '23	43.8	40.4	40.5	49.5	42.1
Jun '23	46.4	36.6	43.3	46.8	52.6
Jul '23	42.4	35.6	38.6	46.4	46.0
Aug '23	38.9	39.8	39.0	37.3	38.0
Sep '23	45.1	47.7	40.2	45.7	45.5

Temporary Billings Index



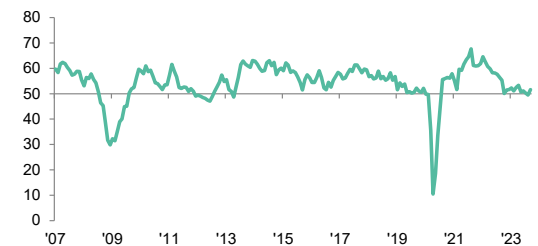
Temp billings expand at quickest rate for five months

After a slight reduction in August, billings received from the employment of temporary workers across the UK increased at the end of the third quarter. Though modest, the rate of expansion was the most pronounced since April. Anecdotal evidence linked the upturn to firmer demand for short-term staff, with some companies preferring the flexibility of temporary workers over permanent personnel. Other recruiters mentioned that greater pressure on budgets amid tighter financial conditions and high inflation had weighed on overall growth, however, which was below the long-run trend.

Temp billings increased in all four monitored English areas bar the South of England during September. The quickest expansion was recorded in the capital.

Temporary Billings Index

sa, >50 = growth since previous month



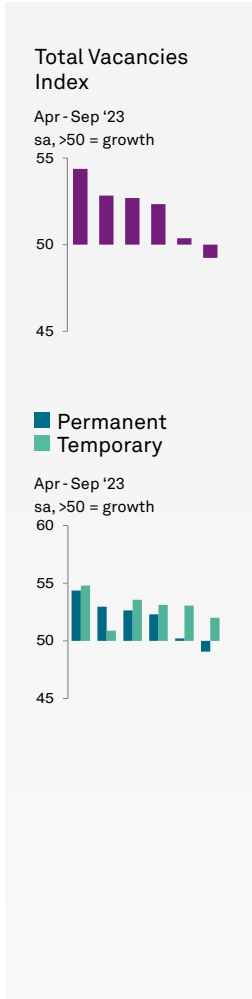
Temporary Billings Index

sa, >50 = growth since previous month

	UK	London	South	Midlands	North
Apr '23	53.3	51.5	56.8	47.2	54.2
May '23	50.7	55.5	55.2	46.5	48.6
Jun '23	51.1	53.1	52.5	51.5	46.5
Jul '23	50.2	51.4	48.6	54.5	47.2
Aug '23	49.5	47.8	49.1	51.4	49.7
Sep '23	51.6	54.6	47.2	53.3	52.9

3 Vacancies

Recruitment consultants are asked to specify whether the demand for staff from employers has changed on the previous month, thereby providing an indicator of the number of job vacancies.



Overall demand for staff falls slightly

Adjusted for seasonal influences, the Total Vacancies Index posted below the neutral 50.0 level at 49.2 in September. Down from 50.4 in August, the reading pointed to the first reduction in overall demand for workers since February 2021. That said, the rate of decline was only slight.

Permanent and temporary vacancies

Recruitment consultancies signalled a fresh fall in permanent vacancies during September. Though marginal, it marked the first reduction in just over two-and-a-half years. Concurrently, growth of demand for temporary staff moderated to a four-month low.

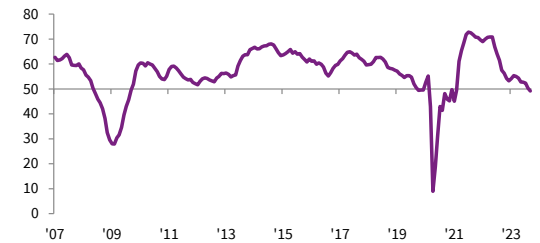
Public & private sector vacancies

Demand for permanent staff fell across both the private and public sectors during September, with the latter noting by far the steeper rate of decline.

Divergent trends were meanwhile seen for temporary vacancies. In the private sector, demand for short-term staff rose at a softer, but still solid pace, but decreased across the public sector.

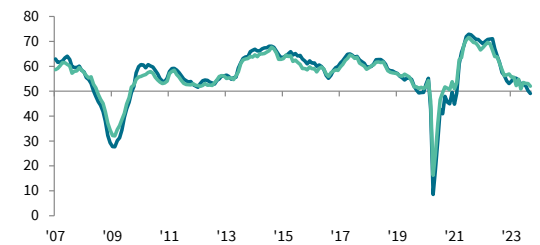
Total Vacancies Index

sa, >50 = growth since previous month



Permanent Vacancies Index

sa, >50 = growth since previous month



Vacancy Index summary

sa, >50 = growth since previous month. *Not seasonally adjusted.

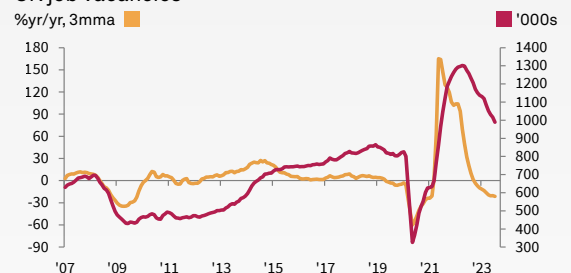
	Permanent				Temporary		
	Total	Total	Private*	Public*	Total	Private*	Public*
Apr '23	54.4	54.4	54.2	55.1	54.8	54.8	54.9
May '23	52.8	53.0	53.1	52.5	50.9	50.2	54.1
Jun '23	52.7	52.6	51.8	56.5	53.6	53.4	54.4
Jul '23	52.3	52.3	52.4	51.8	53.1	53.6	50.8
Aug '23	50.4	50.2	49.9	51.7	53.1	53.6	50.8
Sep '23	49.2	49.1	49.8	45.8	52.0	52.6	49.0

Official data: UK job vacancies

Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) pointed to a further reduction in overall vacancies in the three months to August 2023. At 989,000 the number of open roles dropped by 64,000 since the three months to May and slipped below the 1 million mark for the first time in over two years.

Overall, the figure was -24% lower than the post-pandemic record of 1,302,000. However, the number of job opportunities was comfortably above that recorded just before the COVID-19 pandemic (826,000 in the three months to February 2020).

UK job vacancies



Source: Office for National Statistics via S&P Global Market Intelligence.

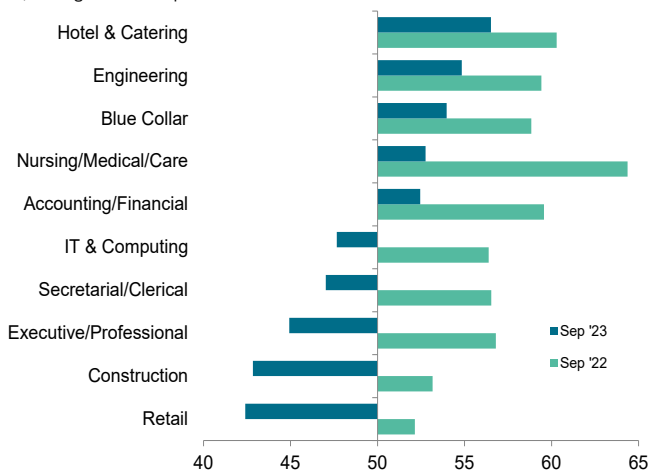
4 Vacancies by sector

Recruitment consultancies are requested to compare the demand for staff according to sector with the situation one month ago.

Permanent vacancies

Permanent staff vacancies increased in five of the ten broad employment categories during September, led by Hotel & Catering. The steepest reductions in permanent labour demand were meanwhile seen in the Retail and Construction sectors.

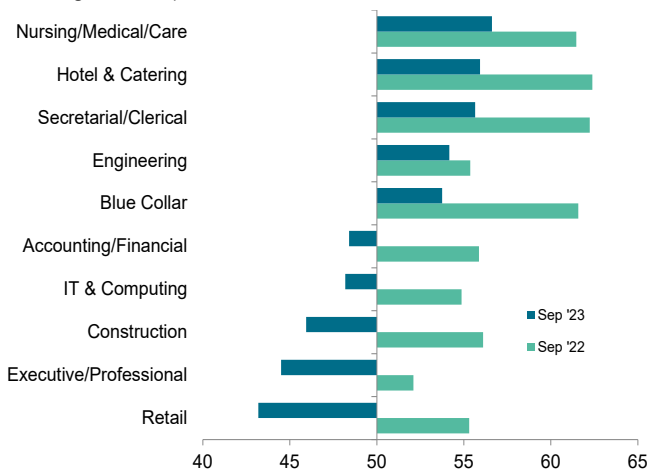
Permanent Vacancies Index
sa, >50 = growth since previous month.



Temporary vacancies

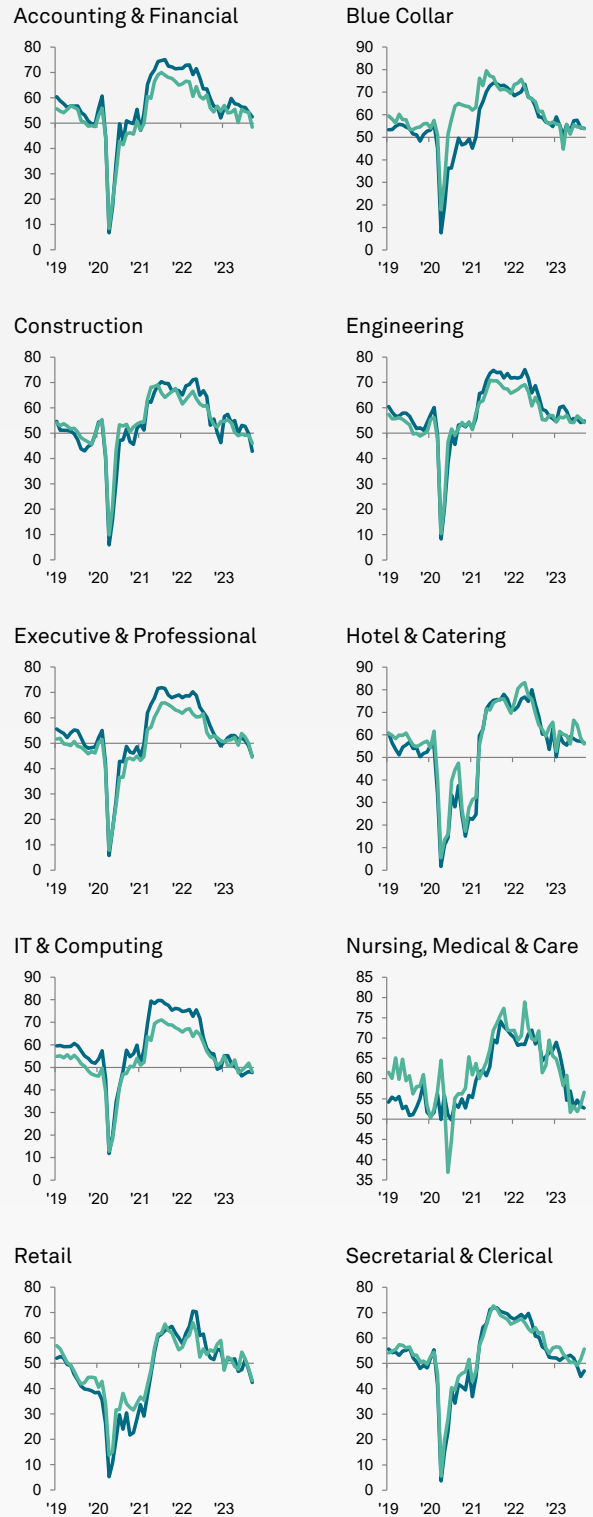
Demand for temp staff rose in five of the ten employment sectors covered by the survey. Nursing/Medical/Care registered the strongest rise in vacancies overall. Sharp deteriorations in demand were meanwhile signalled for Retail and Executive/Professional workers.

Temporary Vacancies Index
sa, >50 = growth since previous month.



Vacancy index by sector

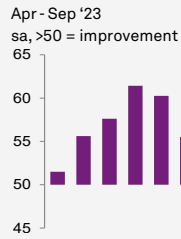
Permanent Temporary
sa, >50 = growth since previous month



5 Staff availability

Recruitment consultants are asked to report whether availability of permanent and temporary staff has changed on the previous month. An overall indicator of staff availability is also calculated.

Total Staff Availability Index



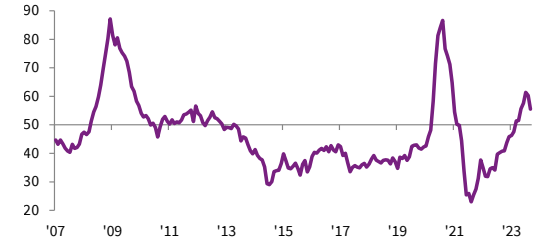
Overall candidate supply expands at slower rate

The seasonally adjusted Total Staff Availability Index posted above the neutral 50.0 threshold, at 55.5, to signal a seventh successive monthly increase in the supply of candidates across the UK in September. However, the reading was down from 60.3 in August and fell further from July's recent record, to indicate the softest expansion since April.

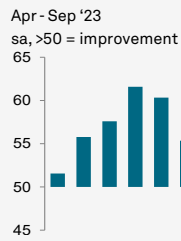
Underlying data pointed to slower increases in both permanent and temporary candidate numbers.

Total Staff Availability Index

sa, >50 = improvement since previous month



Permanent Staff Availability Index



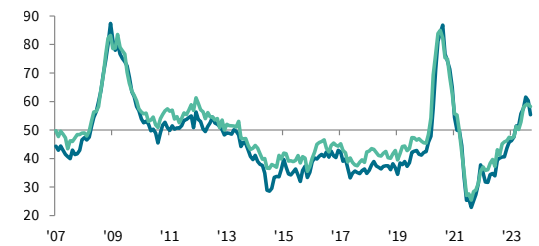
Softest upturn in permanent candidate numbers for five months

The availability of workers for permanent roles continued to increase at the end of the third quarter. Though sharp, the rate of growth slowed for the second month running and was the least pronounced since April. Where higher candidate numbers were reported, panellists frequently linked this to companies restructuring workforces and redundancies. There were also some mentions of people seeking out hybrid work roles or jobs with better pay.

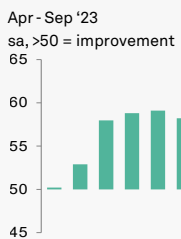
The upturn in permanent candidate supply was broad-based across all four monitored English regions, and led by the North of England.

Permanent Staff Availability Index

sa, >50 = improvement since previous month



Temporary Staff Availability Index



Availability of temp staff increases at slower, but still rapid pace

The supply of short-term staff across the UK continued to expand rapidly in September, with growth holding close to August's 32-month record. Survey respondents stated that a slowdown in market conditions and company layoffs underpinned the latest upturn in temp candidate supply.

The sharpest increase in temp labour availability was recorded in the South of England, and the softest in the Midlands.

Permanent Staff Availability Index

sa, >50 = improvement since previous month

	UK	London	South	Midlands	North
Apr '23	51.6	56.0	50.5	50.3	51.7
May '23	55.8	66.4	53.6	56.4	55.9
Jun '23	57.6	66.8	58.1	55.7	57.5
Jul '23	61.6	74.3	60.8	60.7	63.3
Aug '23	60.3	68.5	57.2	61.4	63.6
Sep '23	55.3	55.3	53.9	55.7	57.1

Temporary Staff Availability Index

sa, >50 = improvement since previous month

	UK	London	South	Midlands	North
Apr '23	50.2	51.8	49.5	48.8	54.6
May '23	52.9	56.8	51.3	51.2	58.3
Jun '23	58.0	58.1	57.7	59.2	58.6
Jul '23	58.8	62.9	55.9	59.5	60.5
Aug '23	59.1	69.1	59.3	57.6	56.8
Sep '23	58.2	54.6	64.8	52.0	57.1

6 Demand for skills

Recruitment consultancies are invited to specify any areas in which they have encountered skill shortages during the latest month.

Skills in short supply: Permanent staff

Accounting/Financial	Surveyors	Software
ACCA	Engineering	Software Engineers
Accountants	Electrical Engineers	Technical Leaders
Accounts Assistant	Engineering Directors	Technical Sales
Auditors	Engineering Management	Technical Support
Book Keepers	Engineers	Technology
CIMA	Fire & Security Engineers	Nursing/Medical/Care
Compliance Professionals	Hardware Engineers	Clinical Research Staff
Credit Controllers	HVAC Engineers	Doctors
Estimators	Mechanical Engineers	Health Professionals
Finance	Project Engineers	Medical
Finance Directors	Radio-Frequency Engineer	Nurses
Financial Controllers	Senior Electronic Engineers	Occupational Therapist
Part Qualified Finance	Technicians	Optometrists
Payroll	Executive/Professional	Paramedics
Pension Specialists	Business Analysts	Pharmacists
Qualified Finance	Business Development	Physiotherapist
Qualified Tax & Audit	Communications Manager	Social Workers
Taxation	Energy & Renewables	Secretarial/Clerical
Transactional Finance	Executives	Administration
Blue Collar	Human Resources	Office Support Staff
Automotive	Legal	Other
Blue Collar	Management	All Types of Candidates
Cleaners	Marketing	Customer Service
Drivers	Mid-senior Management	Domestic Workers
Electricians	PR	European Speakers
HGV Drivers	Procurement	Freight
HVAC	Project Managers	General Operatives
Industrials	Hotel/Catering	Good Unskilled
LGV Drivers	Catering	Life Sciences
Machine Operators	Chefs	Logistics
Manufacturing	Hospitality	National Account Managers
Mechanics	IT/Computing	Part-time Workers
Rail	AI Developers	Property Sales
Refrigeration	Analysts	Qualified Candidates
Security Guards	CAD	Sales
Warehouse	Cloud Engineers	Supply Chain
Construction	CNC	Transport Planning
Cladders	Cyber Security	
Construction	Data Scientists	
Construction Professionals	Developers	
Construction Site Managers	Front-end Developer	
Drainage Specialists	IT	
Planners	Media	
Quantity Surveyors		

Skills in short supply: Temporary staff

Accounting/Financial	IT/Computing
Accountants	BIM Modellers
Auditors	Cyber Security
Book Keepers	Data Engineers
Credit Controllers	Developers
Payroll	IT
Blue Collar	Software Engineers
Blue Collar	Technology
Carpenters	Nursing/Medical/Care
Decorators	Nurse Practitioner
Drivers	Nurses
Electricians	Social Workers
Forklift Drivers	Retail
Harvest	Retail
HGV Drivers	Secretarial/Clerical
Industrials	Administration
Manufacturing	Business Support
Mechanics	HR Administration
Rail	Office Staff
Security Guards	Office Support Staff
Sewing Machinists	Receptionist
Unskilled Labour	Sales Support
Warehouse	Transport Administrators
Welders	Other
Construction	All Types of Candidates
Bricklayers	Customer Service
Drainage Specialists	Education
Labourers	General Operatives
Engineering	Property Sales
Engineering Management	Quality Control
Engineers	Sales
Fire & Security Engineers	Supervisors
Manufacturing Engineers	Teachers
Executive/Professional	Tool Makers
Business Analysts	
Executive	
Marketing	
Professional	
Project Managers	
Hotel/Catering	
Chefs	
Hospitality	
Housekeeping	

Skills in excess supply: Permanent staff

Accounting/Financial	C-suite	Nursing/Medical/Care
Finance	Executives	Healthcare Assistants
Blue Collar	Human Resources	Retail
Blue Collar	Lab Scientists	Retail
Non Skilled Industrial	Marketing	Secretarial/Clerical
Site Managers	Project Managers	Administration
Construction	Quality Assurance	Office Staff
Construction Site Managers	Recruitment Consultants	Other
Structural Staff	Senior-level Management	Customer Service
Welding Inspectors	IT/Computing	Graduates
Window Fitters	IT	Remote Workers
Executive/Professional	IT Helpdesk Support	Sales
Area/Regional Management	IT Infrastructure	Unskilled
Business Analysts	Social Media	
	Technology	

Skills in excess supply: Temporary staff

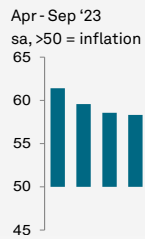
Blue Collar	Hotel/Catering	Other
Decorators	Hospitality	Customer Service
Electricians	IT/Computing	Juniors
Non Skilled Industrial	CAD	Non Experienced
Site Managers	IT	Non-English Speakers
Warehouse	Web Designers	Remote Workers
Construction	Nursing/Medical/Care	Students
Structural Staff	Healthcare Assistants	Traffic Marshall
Welding Inspectors	Retail	
Executive/Professional	Retail	
Business Analysts	Secretarial/Clerical	
C-suite	Administration	
Executives		
Human Resources		
Project Managers		

Note : Skills can be reported as being both in short supply and excess supply as we survey various recruitment agencies across the country, so there is geographical variation as well as the possibility of candidates with particular skills being concentrated in certain areas.

7 Pay pressures

The recruitment industry survey tracks both the average salaries awarded to people placed in permanent jobs each month, as well as average hourly rates of pay for temp/contract staff.

Permanent Salaries Index

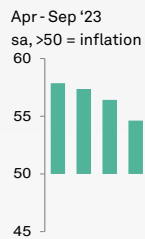


Permanent pay growth slips to two-and-a-half-year low

The rate of starting salary inflation across the UK continued to moderate at the end of the third quarter. Higher starting salaries were generally attributed to competition for skilled workers and the higher cost of living. Although sharp, the rate of growth was the softest recorded since March 2021 and broadly in line with the series average.

Across the four monitored English areas, London was the only region to register a sharper rise in permanent pay compared to August.

Temporary Wages Index



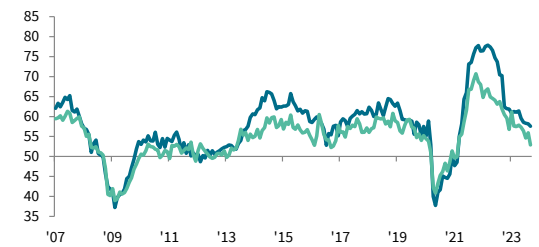
Softest increase in temp wages for 31 months

The seasonally adjusted Temporary Wages Index pointed to a further rise in average hourly pay for temp staff during September. The rate of wage growth softened from August and, although solid, was the weakest recorded since the current period of rising pay began in March 2021. Recruiters commented that firms were generally having to offer higher pay to attract and secure candidates with desirable skills. However, others noted that budgetary pressures had weighed on overall pay growth. London registered the quickest rise in temp wages.

Permanent Salaries Index

Temporary Wages Index

sa, >50 = inflation since previous month



Permanent Salaries Index

sa, >50 = inflation since previous month

	UK	London	South	Midlands	North
Apr '23	61.4	58.0	62.2	59.7	65.7
May '23	59.6	55.4	56.3	63.7	66.3
Jun '23	58.6	56.7	54.9	55.2	63.5
Jul '23	58.3	56.5	57.2	58.4	58.9
Aug '23	58.2	55.9	55.4	59.9	60.9
Sep '23	57.6	59.4	54.8	55.9	58.2

Temporary Wages Index

sa, >50 = inflation since previous month

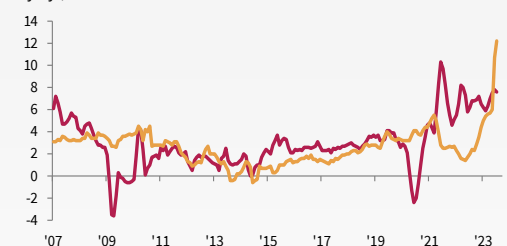
	UK	London	South	Midlands	North
Apr '23	57.9	58.6	54.6	54.4	62.9
May '23	57.4	55.0	57.5	55.6	62.1
Jun '23	56.4	59.0	55.4	54.3	56.3
Jul '23	54.6	52.3	55.9	54.1	56.6
Aug '23	55.9	60.7	52.1	56.5	55.5
Sep '23	52.9	55.7	51.4	54.2	50.7

Official data: UK average weekly earnings

Latest data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showed that employee earnings (including bonuses) increased by +8.5% over the three months to July 2023. Excluding the pandemic period, when rates of pay growth in 2021 were distorted by the furlough scheme and subsequent return to work, this was the quickest rate of expansion on record.

Public sector pay saw an unprecedented increase over the latest three-month period (+12.2%). Nevertheless, earnings growth in the private sector also remained historically elevated (+7.6%).

UK average weekly earnings



Source: Office for National Statistics via S&P Global Market Intelligence.

8 Special feature

This section features data from the Recruitment and Employment Confederation

Recruiter Confidence in AI: Bridging the Perception Gap

The proliferation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) use among the public has sparked a wider conversation about how recruiters can harness AI's potential to advance both their businesses and the industry. AI in the recruitment industry could be adopted for crafting content like job postings and interview questions using Generative AI; using Natural Language Processing (NLP) for assessing candidates via video; descriptive AI could screen CVs and candidate profiles efficiently.

A common misconception surrounding AI's role in recruitment is that these tools are either too novel or pose a threat to recruiters' job security. But AI has already made significant inroads in recruitment, with automatic CV screening tools serving as a prime example. Emerging technologies like GenAI now act as assistants, enhancing the efficiency of hiring firms. The landscape of how recruiters employ AI has undergone substantial transformation in recent years, yielding numerous benefits. Notably, AI streamlines processes, enhances decision-making, and can mitigate human biases if used sensibly. REC and the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation have done some work to offer [guidance on the ethical use of AI](#).

Public attitudes towards AI are evolving, as reflected by the [Turing Institute report](#), where nearly two-thirds of respondents expressed concerns about workplaces leaning excessively on AI for recruitment, which highlights a certain unease regarding AI's role in hiring decisions. Nevertheless, the general public acknowledges the benefits of AI in recruitment, with 49% of respondents recognising its capacity to accelerate processes as a significant advantage. Additionally, AI is seen as a way to reduce human bias, addressing a persistent challenge in traditional recruitment methods. In fact, 41% of respondents believe AI is less likely than humans to discriminate against certain groups in society.

Despite these advantages, a recent survey conducted by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) suggests the HR industry has been relatively slow in embracing AI tools. REC's [JobsOutlook](#) shows currently only 8% of recruiters use AI tools in the recruitment process and out of the remaining 92%, only 15% of recruiters intend to use AI tools in the near future. The impact is broadly similar across small, medium and large organisations, and the polling was taken from a sample representative of region, industry sector and public/ private split. As the recruitment field continues to evolve rapidly, it will be crucial for all firms within the industry to prioritise engagement with AI in order to remain competitive players.

The [Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation's \(CDEI\)](#) latest research on members of the public found that the main concern among respondents (52%) is the perceived opacity of decision-making when AI algorithms are involved. When respondents were asked to rate their trust in the use of algorithmic data in recruitment on a scale from 1 to 10, the average score was a modest 3.9. This underscores the pressing need to build public trust in AI systems used in recruitment.

To stay ahead of the curve, recruitment agencies must not only embrace AI more vigorously but actively work to foster trust and transparency in their use of AI-driven technologies.

Contact

KPMG

Rory Brown
Senior Manager
M: +44 (0) 751 0374 794
Rory.brown@kpmg.co.uk

REC

Hamant Verma
Communications Manager
T: +44 (0)20 7009 2129
hamant.verma@rec.uk.com

S&P Global

Annabel Fiddes
Economics Associate Director
S&P Global Market Intelligence
T: +44 149 146 1010
annabel.fiddes@spglobal.com

Sabrina Mayeen
Corporate Communications
S&P Global Market Intelligence
T: +44 (0) 7967 447030
sabrina.mayeen@spglobal.com

Methodology

The KPMG and REC, UK Report on Jobs is compiled by S&P Global from responses to questionnaires sent to a panel of around 400 UK recruitment and employment consultancies.

Survey responses are collected in the second half of each month and indicate the direction of change compared to the previous month. A diffusion index is calculated for each survey variable. The index is the sum of the percentage of 'higher' responses and half the percentage of 'unchanged' responses. The indices vary between 0 and 100, with a reading above 50 indicating an overall increase compared to the previous month, and below 50 an overall decrease. The indices are then seasonally adjusted.

Underlying survey data are not revised after publication, but seasonal adjustment factors may be revised from time to time as appropriate which will affect the seasonally adjusted data series.

For further information on the survey methodology, please contact economics@spglobal.com.

Survey Dates

Data were collected 12-25 September 2023.

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About REC

The REC is the voice of the recruitment industry, speaking up for great recruiters. We drive standards and empower recruitment businesses to build better futures for their candidates and themselves. We are champions of an industry which is fundamental to the strength of the UK economy. Find out more about the Recruitment & Employment Confederation at www.rec.uk.com.

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