appcast™

U.K. RECRUITMENT MARKETING

Benchmark Report 2026

U.K. VERSION

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Welcome to Appcast's fourth annual U.K. Recruitment Marketing Benchmark Report. Within this report, we aim to provide talent acquisition teams with critical recruitment marketing data to benchmark and analyse their own hiring performance.

A Note to Our Readers

Before diving into the data, please note the following:

- The data within this report serves as a reference point to benchmark your company's recruitment marketing performance. Your own results may vary based on a number of factors. For best results, be sure to view these metrics in context with your own internal data.
- When looking at this data, we encourage you to keep your company's specific hiring goals in mind. Ask yourself what your goals are for 2026. Are you prioritising candidate quality, quantity, quicker hiring processes, etc.?
- Throughout this report, many charts include a three-month moving average. Data can be volatile, so using this average helps us to identify and stay focused on the underlying trend despite one-month swings.
- At the beginning of this report, we have included labour market insights for additional context on how the U.K. economy impacts recruitment marketing. Recruitonomics.com helps recruiters navigate the ever-changing hiring landscape in the United Kingdom and beyond.
- AppcastOne, our recruitment marketing solution, helps employers create and execute a holistic recruitment marketing strategy, attracting and engaging not just active job seekers but passive jobseekers as well. We encourage you to contact us to learn more about AppcastOne.

Executive Summary

- The labour market softened in 2025, losing more than 100,000 payroll jobs since late 2024. Unemployment rose to 5.2%, creating a more active job seeker pool.
- Apply rates have increased steadily since early 2024, reaching a 3-month moving average just above 5% by the end of 2025 as more job seekers compete for fewer open roles.
- CPC and CPA declined or stabilised year-over-year due to reduced hiring demand and greater candidate availability.
- Recruiting costs differ significantly by occupation, with white-collar, “sitting down” roles remaining among the most expensive despite broader cost declines. Gig and other low-barrier “standing up” roles continue to yield the highest apply rates and lowest CPAs.
- Regional hiring performance varies sharply, with apply rates ranging from 4.43% to 7.17%. London leads the nation in apply rates, while Northern Ireland faces the most difficult recruiting conditions, with low apply rates and high CPAs.
- Job-ad optimisation remains essential for hiring performance, with data showing that apply rates are highest early in the week, shorter job titles perform the best, mobile optimisation is essential, and longer application times severely reduce conversion at the top of the funnel.

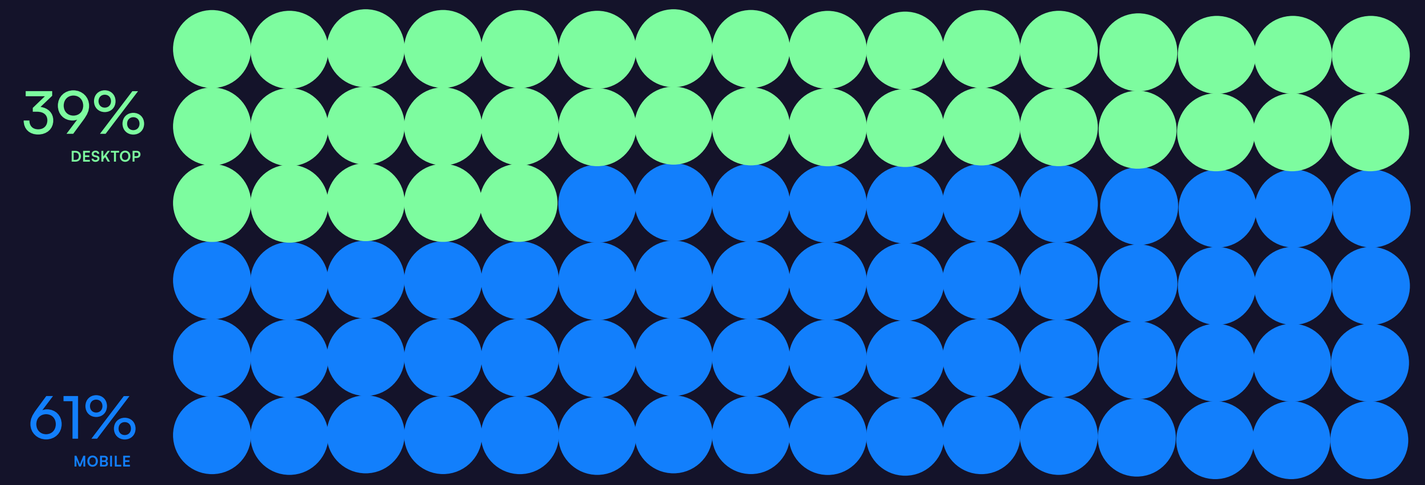
Our Scope and Methodology

Appcast's analysis utilises 2025 job ad data from more than 190 employers in the United Kingdom. In total, 880 thousand applies and 13.6 million clicks were analysed for the study.

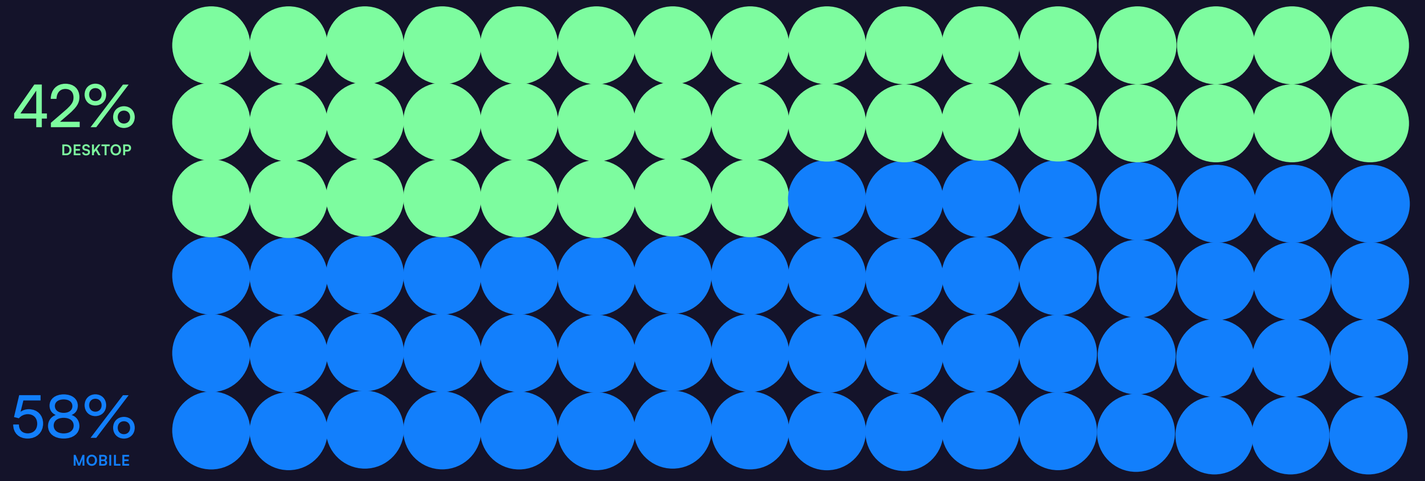
Appcast analysed pay-for-performance recruitment ads across every major occupational group. Duration-based postings and slots were not included. Only recruitment ads purchased on a performance basis — cost-per-click (CPC) or cost-per-application (CPA) — were factored into this study. Mobile data includes tablets.

Unless otherwise indicated, all data in this report is sourced from Appcast's proprietary database and analysed by our team of data experts.

880 Thousand Applies



13.6 Million Clicks



SOURCE: APPCAST, 2026

Labour Market Insights

In this section, we examine the key labour market and economic trends that shaped 2025 to provide context for the recruitment marketing data that follows.

Payroll job losses and rising unemployment

Weak labour market are a result of tax hikes for employers and increased minimum wages.

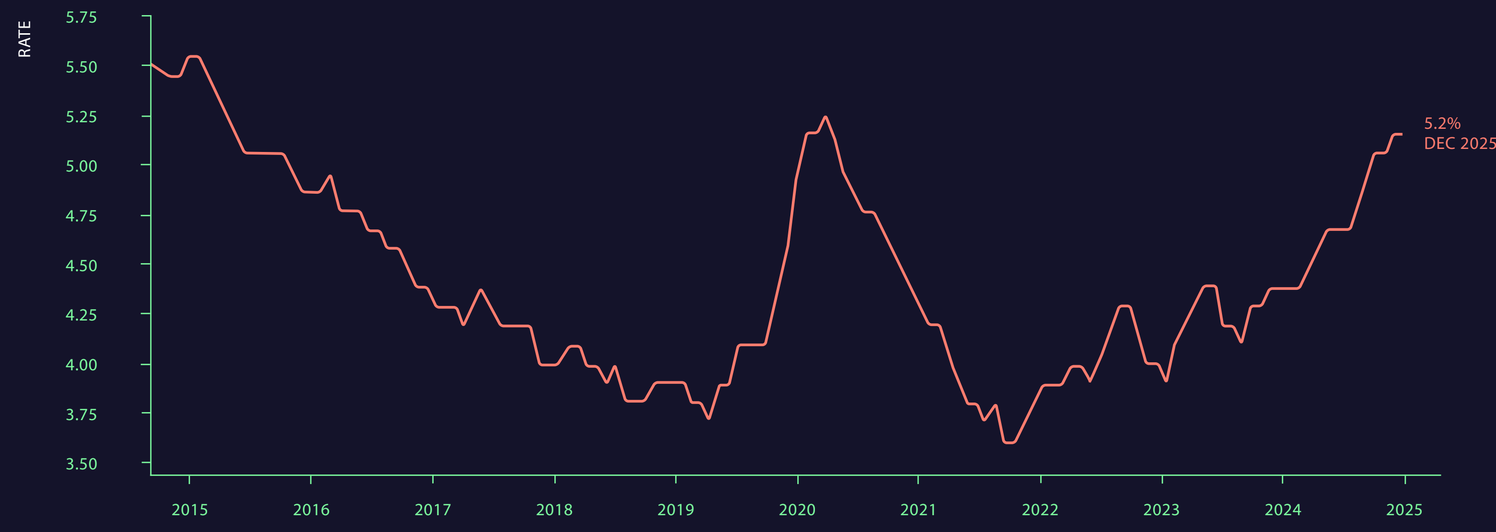
The U.K. job market has slowed substantially following the post-pandemic economic recovery. Between the autumn of 2024 and February 2026, more than 100,000 payroll jobs have been lost. The unemployment rate has risen from a low of around 4% in 2022 to 5.2% at the end of 2025.

Domestic policies have been the main culprit for the weakening labour market. Several successive minimum wage increases combined with tax hikes for employers have led to a large decline in hiring demand. On the global level, elevated economic uncertainty and the white-collar recession, possibly deepened by the emergence of AI, have created a difficult backdrop for hiring in the U.K.

U.K. Payroll Employment since January 2024



U.K. Unemployment Rate



SOURCE: ONS VIA MACROBOND, 2026

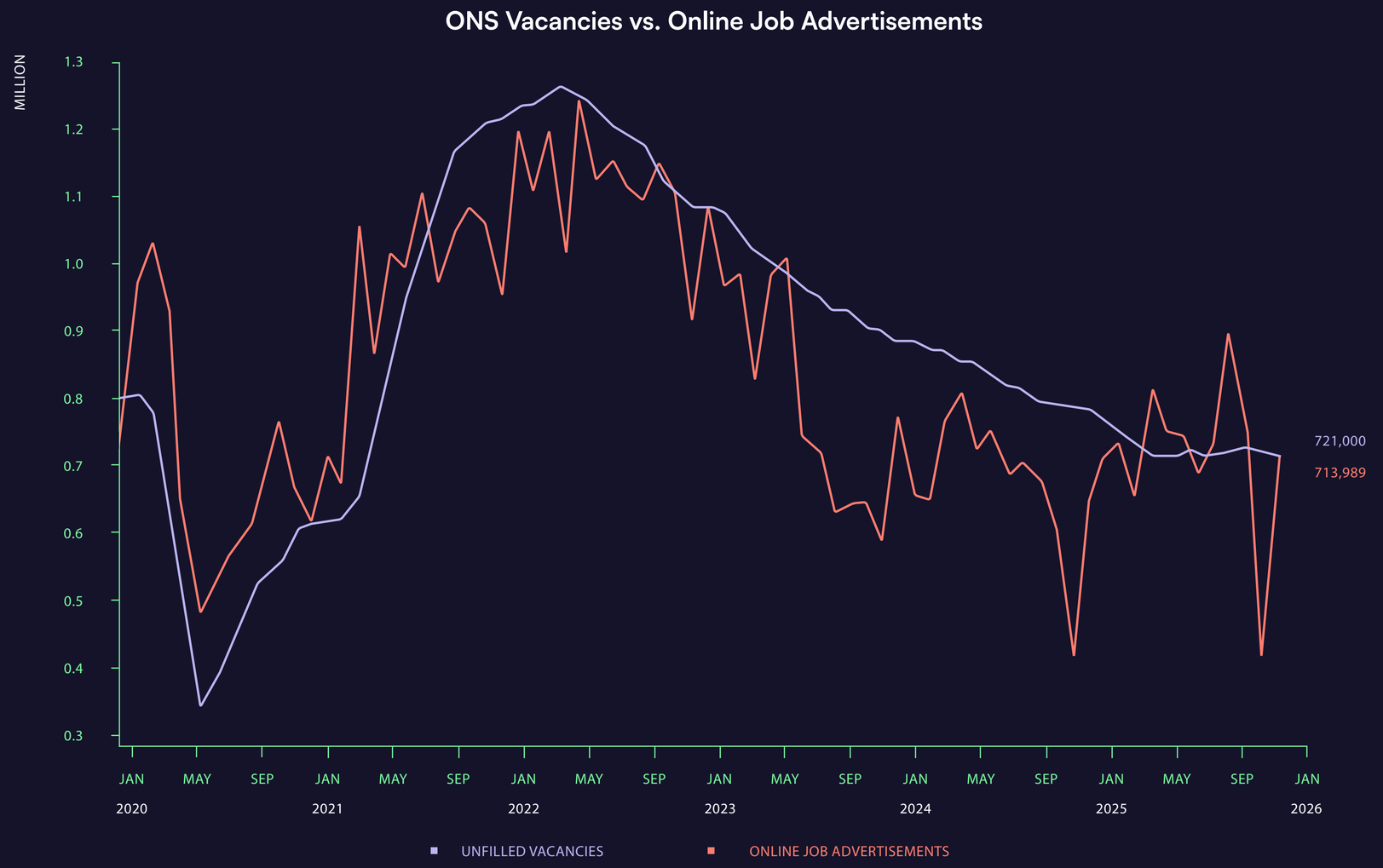
But vacancies are stabilising

The total number of vacancies reached a record high of about 1.3 million in early 2022 during the economic recovery following COVID.

Since then, vacancies have plummeted to just over 700,000 due to the weaker labour market.

Nevertheless, hiring demand is showing signs of stabilisation. Both the ONS vacancy measure as well as the total number of online job advertisements in the U.K. reached a low in early 2024 and have been stable since then.

With GDP growth projected to be sluggish but positive (under 1% this year), the expectation is that hiring will be unlikely to fall below its current value but continue to remain flat, with a recovery expected by year-end. However, the current oil price shock has increased the risk of a stagnant economy and further weakening of the job market.



SOURCE: ONS, INDEED HIRING LAB VIA MACROBOND. 27/3/2026

Rising costs drive youth unemployment

Youth unemployment highest it's been for over a decade.

Under the Labour government, the minimum wage has continued its relentless ascent, reaching about **66% of the national median** wage.

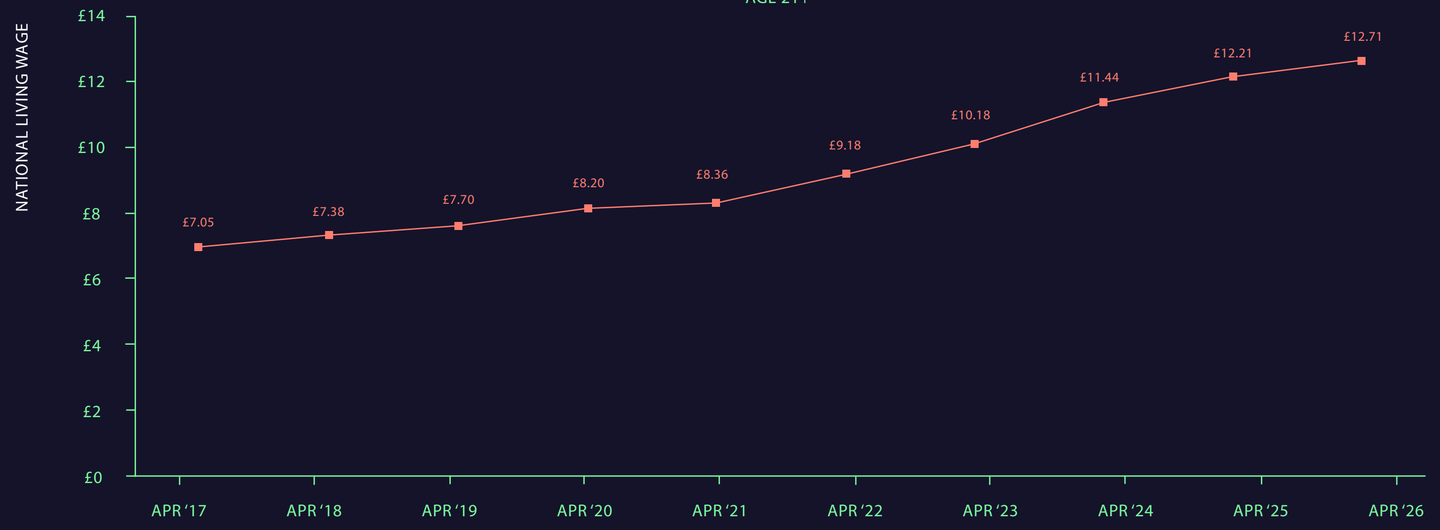
Successive increases have far outpaced wage growth in the middle of the wage distribution, leading to a significant **wage compression**. This, together with the rise in the National Insurance contribution, has led to a massive surge in employment costs since 2024.

Consequently, employers have reduced hiring and shed workers, especially in low-margin sectors like retail, hospitality, and care, which are suffering the most from rising wage bills.

Young workers are **suffering the brunt** of the burden with youth unemployment rising to 16%, the highest since 2015.

Changes in the National Living Wage

AGE 21+



LOW PAY COMMISSION. 17/3/2026

Youth Unemployment Rate

AGE 16-24



ONS VIA MACROBOND. 1/4/2026

Wage growth is slowing but inflation will remain high

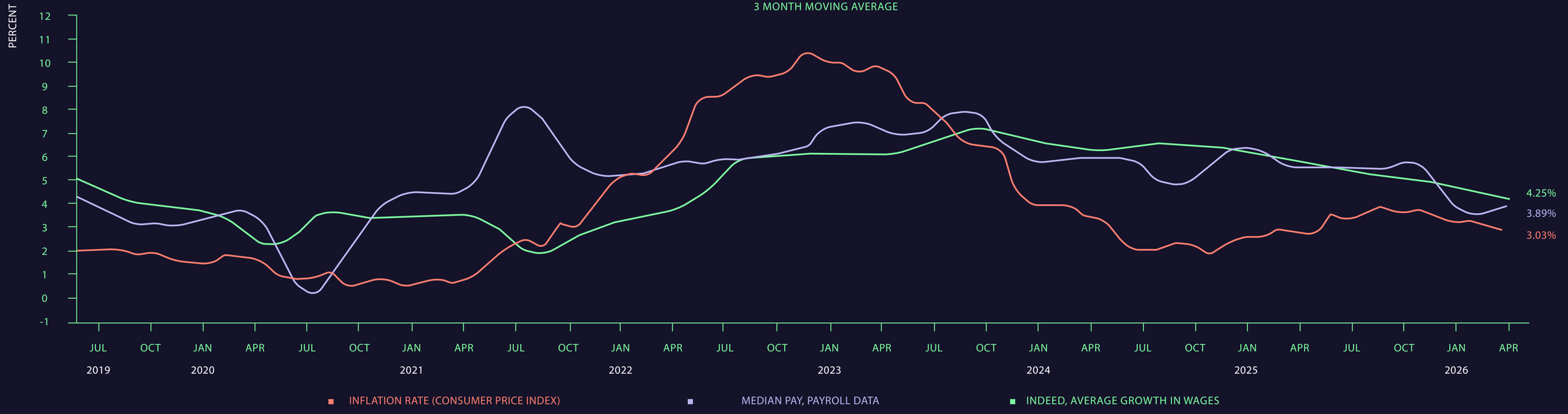
The U.K. labour market has experienced several years of **elevated nominal wage growth**, running well-above 6% between 2022 and 2024. Only by the end of last year, wage growth finally slowed to 4% while inflation was close to 3%.

With both measures well above the Bank of England's comfort zone, monetary policy makers have resisted big rate cuts so far. This has been an additional barrier to faster economic growth and job creation.

While wage growth will slow further, inflation is expected to be closer to 3% this year rather than fall to 2% because of the conflict in the Middle East. Therefore, it is unlikely that monetary policy will provide meaningful support to the labour market and boost growth throughout 2026.

U.K. Nominal Wage Growth and Inflation

3 MONTH MOVING AVERAGE

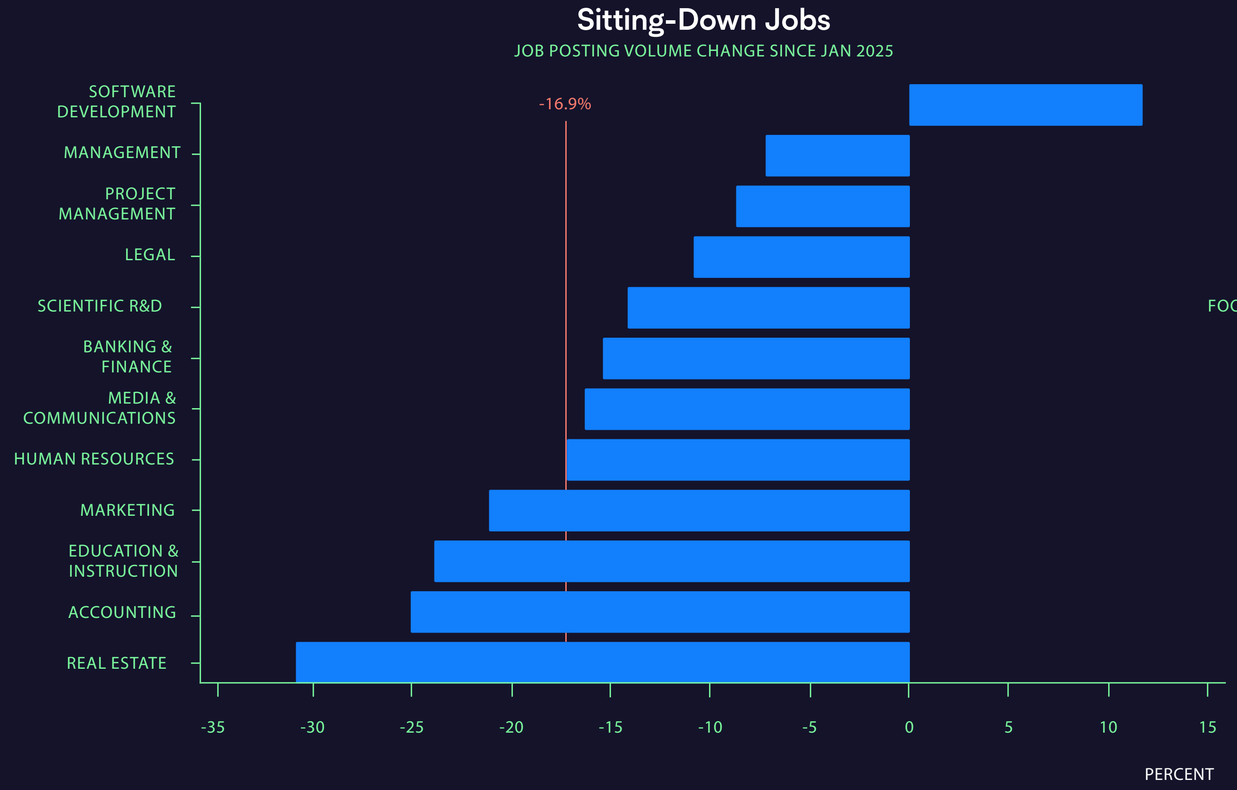


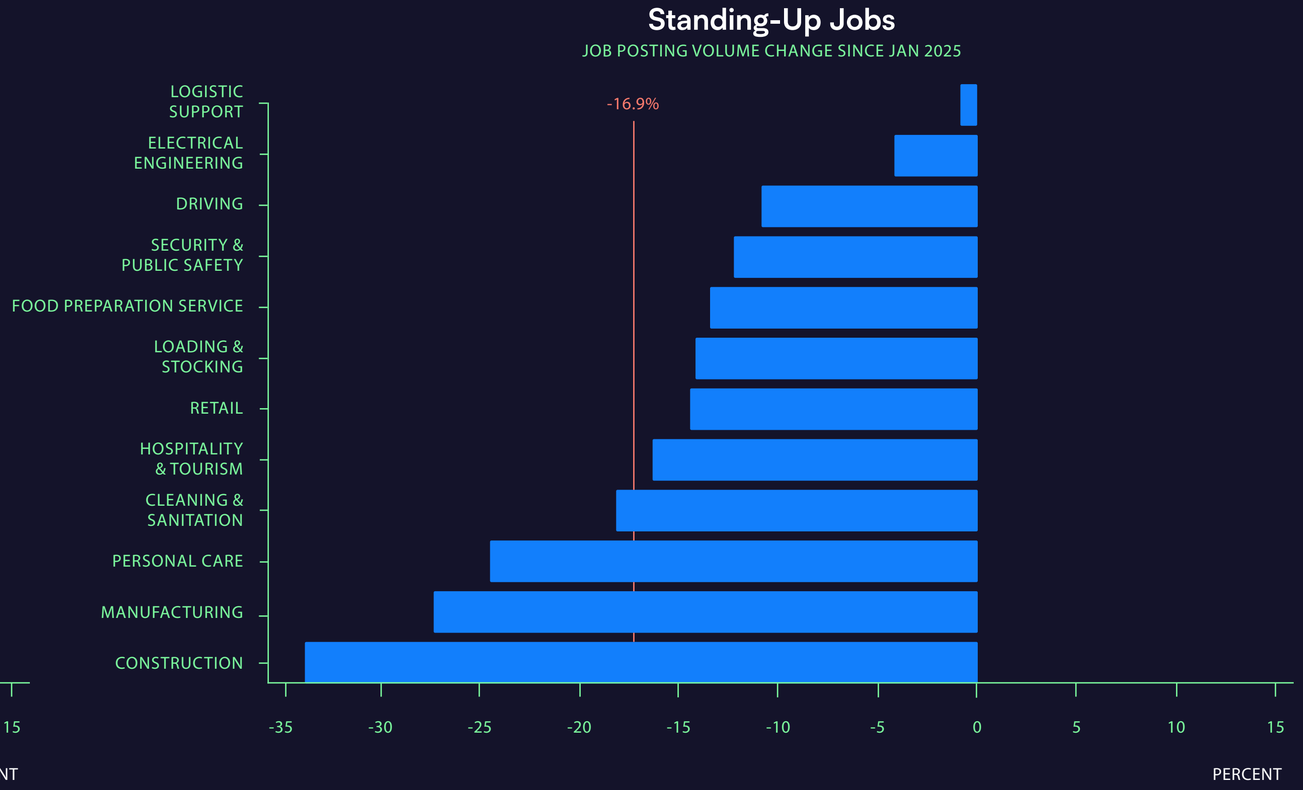
SOURCE: INDEED HIRING LAB, ONS VIA MACROBOND. 17/3/2026

Hiring demand is notably uneven across occupations

Even as overall demand is down across sectors, the decline is uneven across occupations. Like other advanced economies, the U.K. has experienced a so-called **white-collar recession**, affecting most “sitting-down jobs”. While job postings for such desktop occupations have declined faster than the market (-16.9% since January 2025), software development and legal are the notable exceptions, even though they are considered to have high AI exposure.

Due to the weak economy, many standing-up jobs have equally suffered, but there is significant variation among industries. Logistics, security, and food preparation have fared better than construction, manufacturing, or care.





SOURCE: INDEED HIRING LAB, ONS VIA MACROBOND. 27/3/2026

Recruitment Marketing Benchmarks

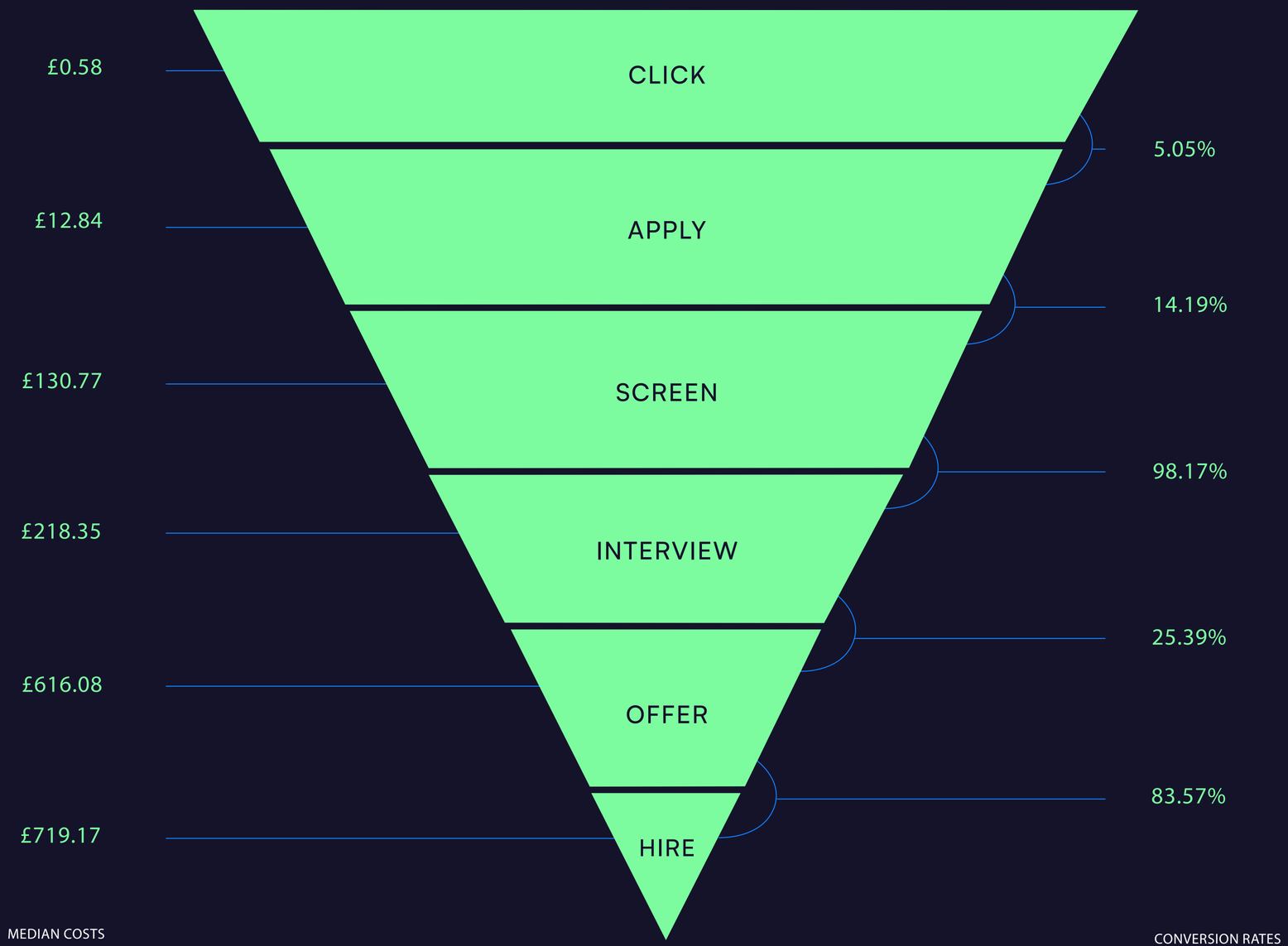
This section examines key headline benchmarks drawn from job board advertisements.

New Data: Tracking the Full Funnel

Candidate disposition data includes new metrics that track the entire candidate journey from click to hire. These expanded metrics include cost-per-screen, cost-per-interview, and cost-per-hire, along with the conversion rates between each stage of the funnel.

In the past, recruitment marketing data has focused primarily on top-of-funnel costs and conversions such as cost-per-click and cost-per-apply. By introducing candidate disposition data, there is greater visibility into the full recruiting process, making analysing and optimising performance even easier. Now, talent acquisition leaders can see their performance at each stage of the hiring funnel to better understand where budgets should be allocated and where improvements can be made.

This is Appcast's first year incorporating candidate disposition data into the U.K. Benchmark Report. As we continue to collect these metrics in the coming years, the depth of insights will expand, providing even clearer guidance on how to optimise performance throughout the funnel.



Recruitment costs align with the state of the labour market



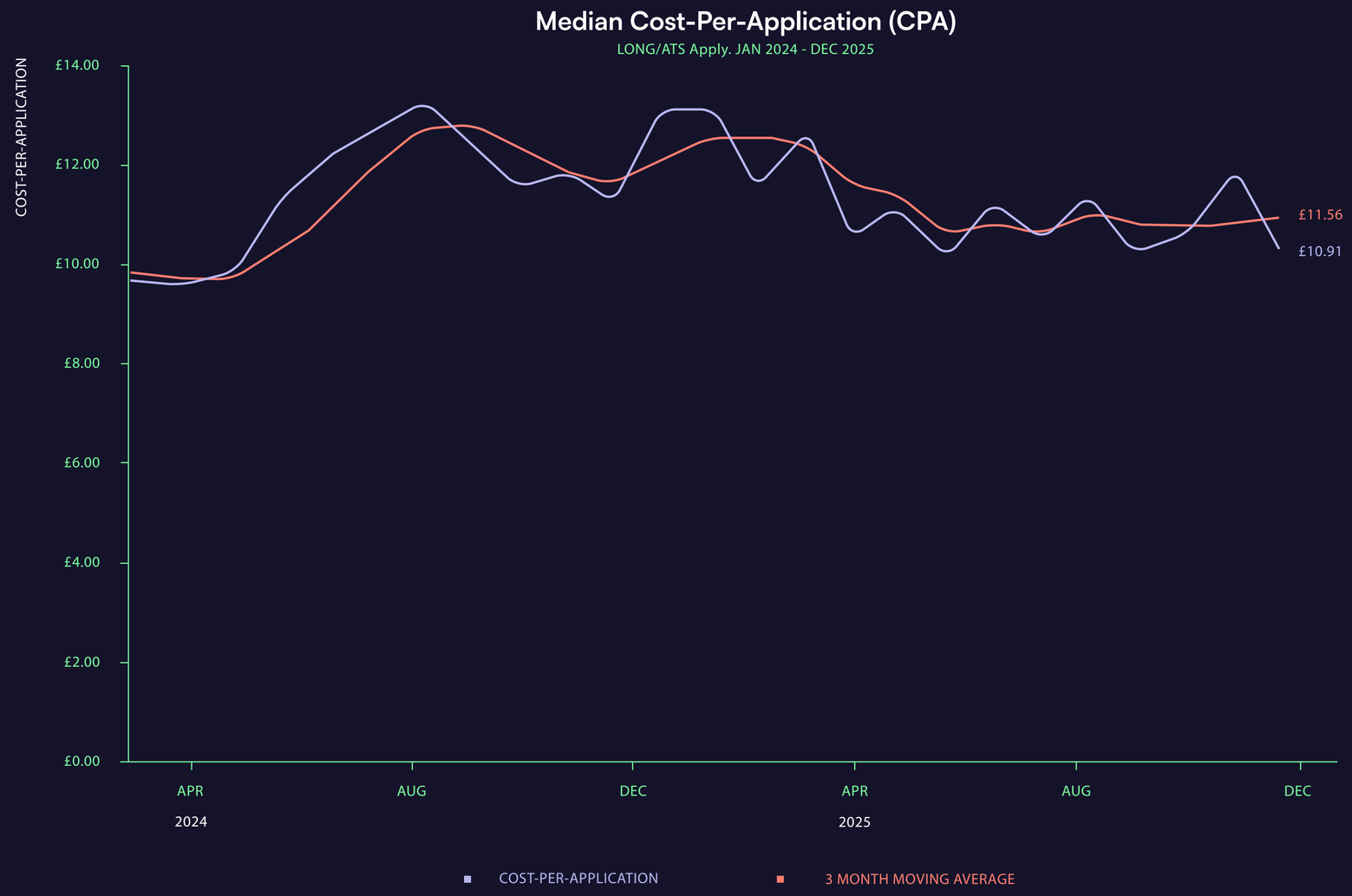
Although cost-per-click appears volatile throughout 2025, with sharp increases and decreases in the second half of the year, it is important to note the overall year-over-year trends.

Cost-per-click showed a steady decline between 2024 and 2025. This aligns with the reality of the labour market, which continued to weaken. We see a significant dip in CPC in Q4.

Job losses, rising unemployment, and fewer job vacancies lead to more job seekers, and thus lower costs. For companies that are still hiring, filling open roles should be easier and less expensive.

SOURCE: APPCAST 6/3/2026

Application costs remained stable all year



Throughout the year, cost-per-application remained relatively steady. There was a slight decrease at the beginning of 2025 which then held throughout the year, especially when referencing the 3-month moving average. For a year-over-year comparison, 2024 ended with a CPA of £13.98 while 2025 was £10.91.

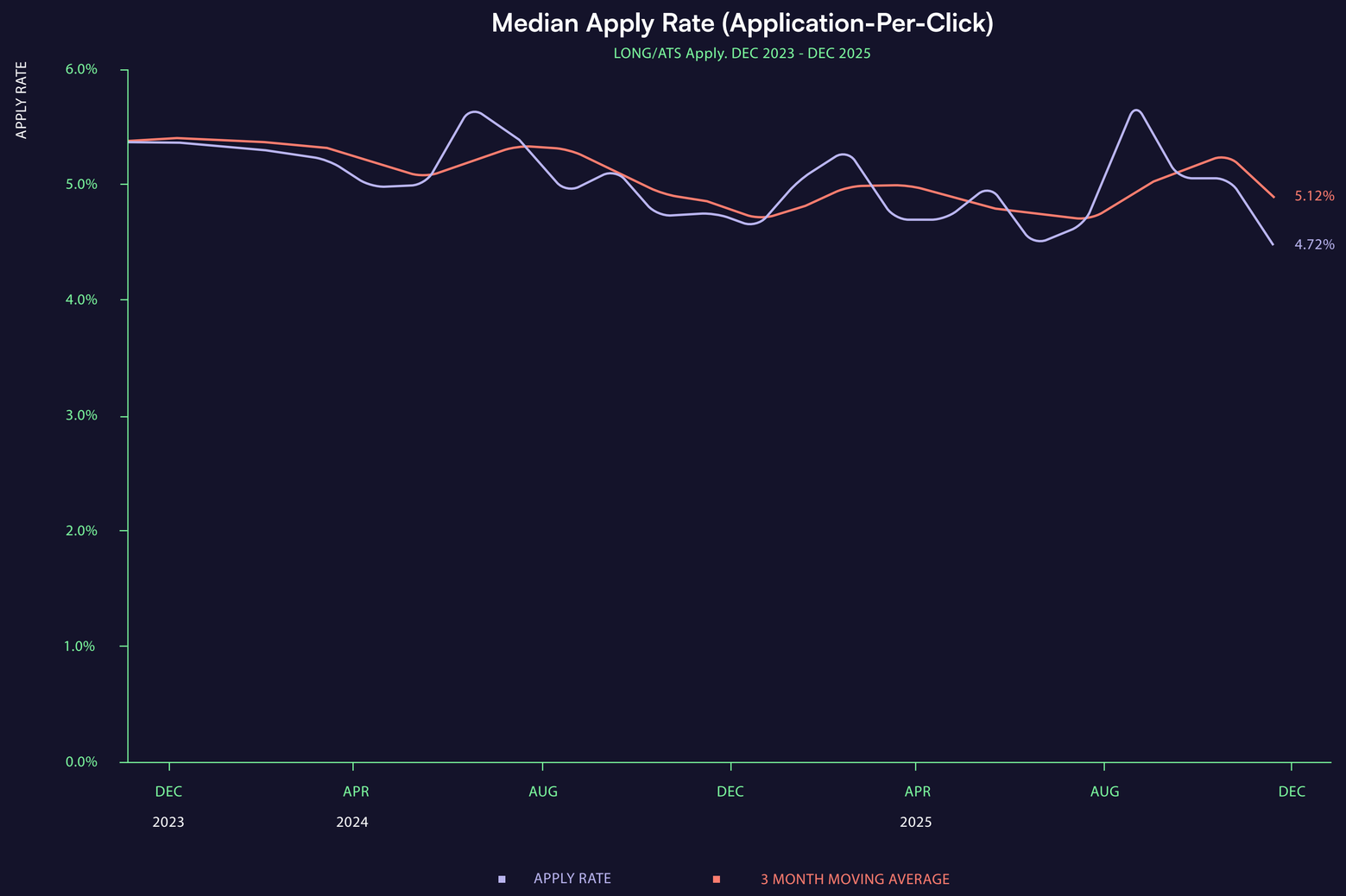
CPA is another reflection of how the labour market has impacted the cost and ease of recruiting.

SOURCE: APPCAST 6/3/2026

As the labour market tightens, apply rates rise

Continuing the trend of a tight labour market driving down costs and boosting application volumes, apply rates have risen since early 2024. This reflects a situation where more job seekers are applying for a smaller number of open roles.

The 3-month moving average is now just above 5%. Although this may seem like a small difference when compared to 2024's 4.93%, it is important to note that even a small lift in apply rates can significantly impact recruiting budget and volume of applicants, especially in high-volume hiring environments.



SOURCE: APPCAST 6/3/2026

Occupational Group Insights

This section explores recruitment marketing data organised by occupational group, meaning groups of related roles rather than the industries employers operate in.

Application rates reflect a new job seeker reality

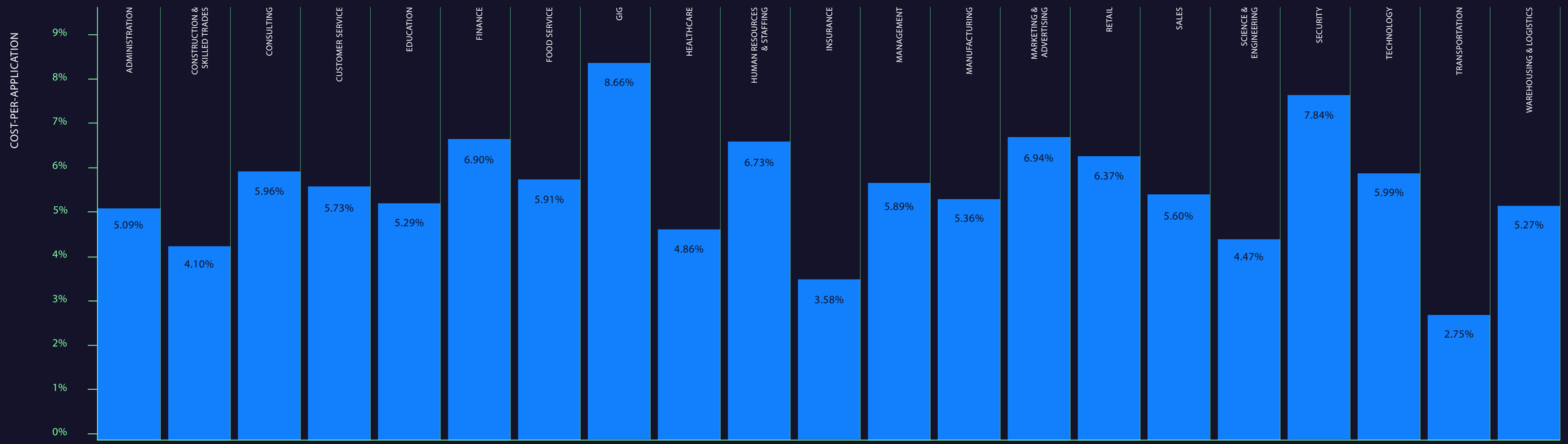
As always, apply rates will differ by occupational groups and depend on the current state of the labour market. However, this year's data might be a sign that candidates are adapting to a new reality.

In 2025, gig roles recorded the highest apply rates at 8.66%, surpassing 'sitting-down' roles that have seen increased layoffs and hiring slowdowns. This surge is a reflection of job seeker behaviour in a weakened labour market. With fewer traditional opportunities available, job seekers are applying en masse to roles with the lowest barrier to entry and giving them the highest chances of landing a paying job.

Research shows that workers turn to gig employment as a form of income protection during periods of job loss or economic instability. This dynamic directly contributes to higher application volumes for gig roles as job seekers prioritise earning potential amid uncertainty.

Median Apply Rates by Occupational Group

LONG/ATS APPLY, 2025



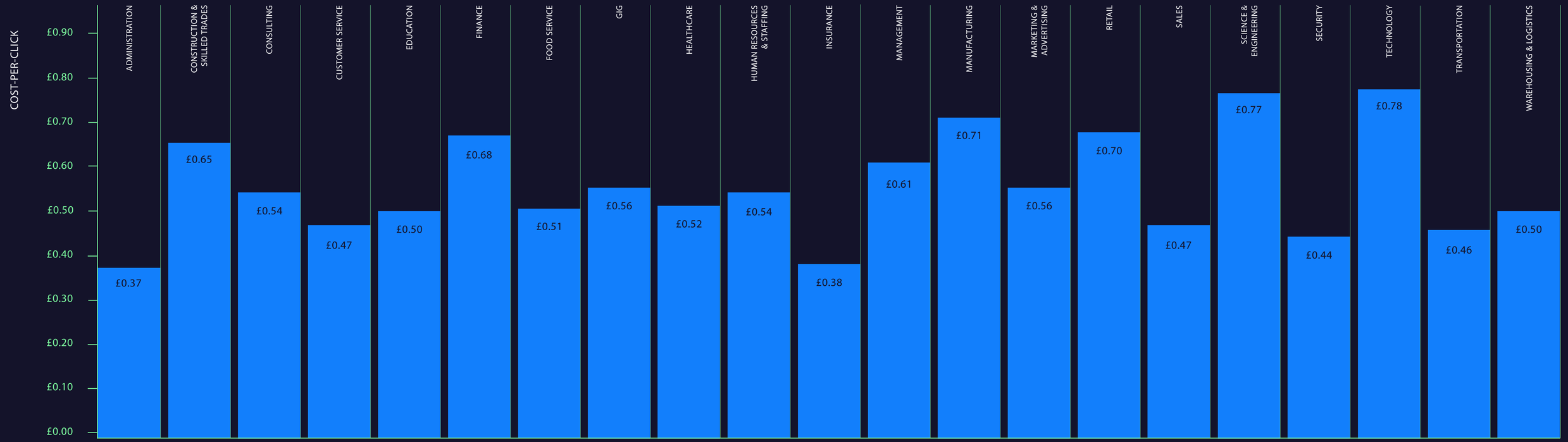
SOURCE: APPCAST 6/3/2026

‘Sitting Down’ roles remain among the most expensive

Despite broader labour market trends pushing overall recruitment costs down, white-collar roles continue to command more budget. In particular, technology, science & engineering positions have the highest cost-per-click of all occupation groups, highlighting how specialised skills and competitive talent pools drive up prices. This is further proof that industry dynamics play a major role in determining recruitment costs, often outweighing general market trends and leading to patterns that may not align with broader expectations.

Median Cost-Per-Click by Occupational Group

LONG/ATS APPLY, 2025



SOURCE: APPCAST 6/3/2026

Cost-per-application differs by occupation

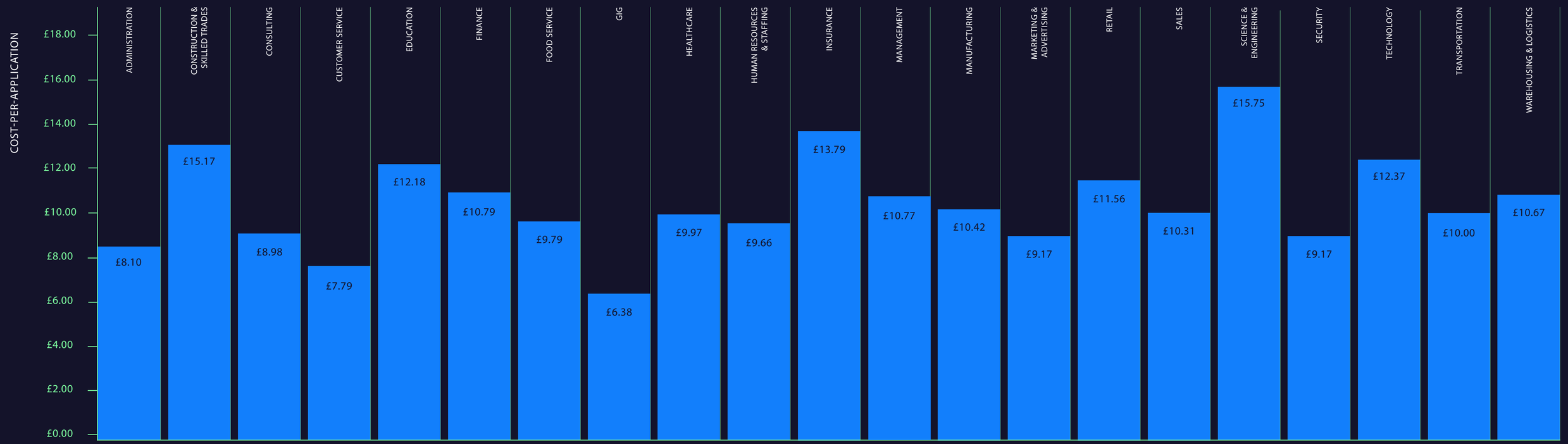
While cost-per-application trends may appear inconsistent, clearer patterns emerge once you look at the underlying labour market dynamics.

Some general white-collar roles show lower CPAs due to the ongoing white-collar recession, which has increased candidate supply. However, specialised fields like science and engineering remain costly to recruit for, as demand for niche expertise keeps competition high.

On the other side, construction and skilled trades continue to post elevated CPAs, driven by Brexit-related labour shortages and persistent gaps between employer demand and available workers. Meanwhile, gig roles retain the lowest CPA, supported by high apply rates and broad candidate pools. These differences highlight how industry-specific dynamics continue to shape recruitment costs more than overall labour market trends.

Median Cost-Per-Application by Occupational Group

LONG/ATS APPLY, 2025



SOURCE: APPCAST 6/3/2026

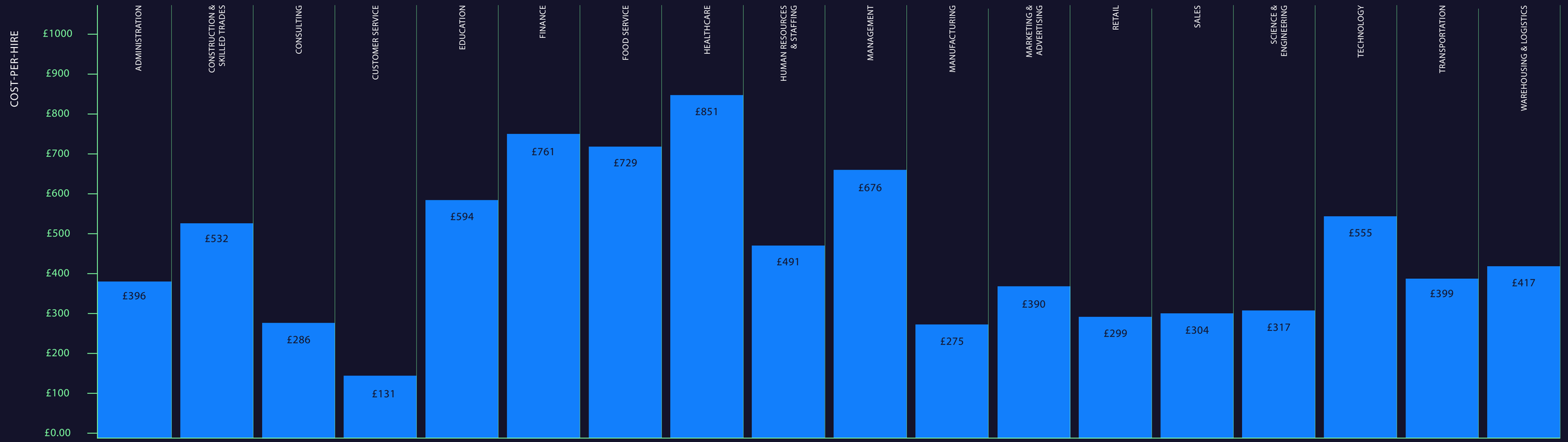
Optimised marketing lowers cost-per-hire

Cost-per-hire is another metric with seemingly no consistent pattern. Again, occupational groups that appear unrelated (healthcare, finance and food services) are all at the higher end of the CPH range, influenced by industry-specific conditions. However, healthcare could offer helpful lessons and insights. Healthcare has the highest cost-per-hire at £851 despite having average top-of-funnel costs.

This indicates that the drop-off is happening deeper in the hiring process. Somewhere between the application and hire the funnel becomes less efficient. However, this may not be a reflection of poor performance by talent acquisition teams. As one of the few sectors still hiring at scale, healthcare may be receiving a large volume of unqualified applicants who fail early screening steps and drive up overall hiring costs.

Median Cost-Per-Hire by Occupational Group

LONG/ATS APPLY, 2025



SOURCE: APPCAST 6/3/2026

Mobile applications reveal some surprises

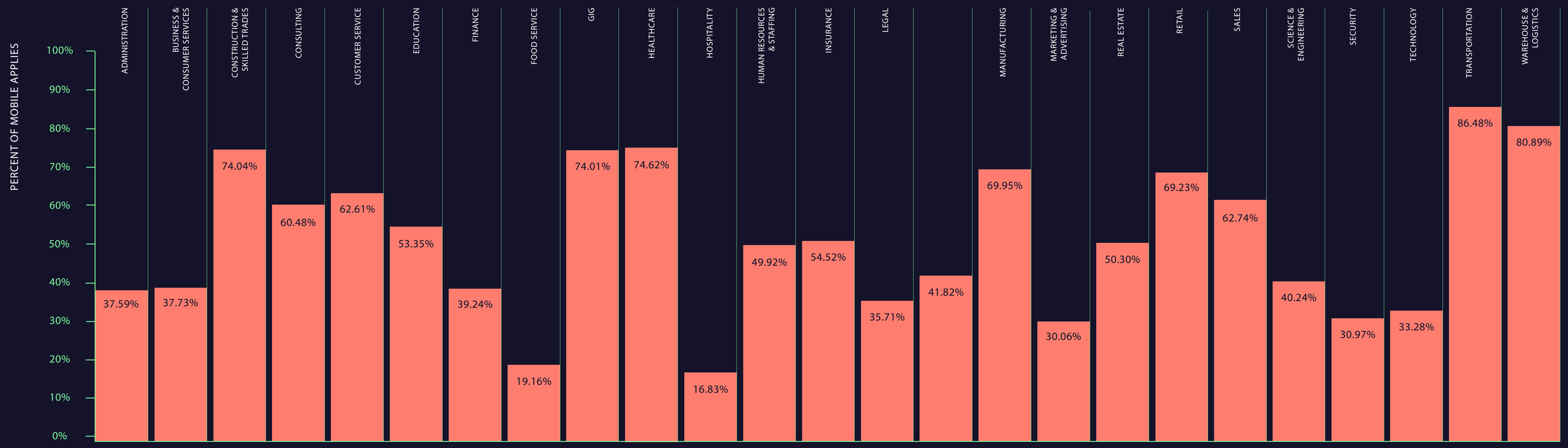
For the most part, share of mobile applies by occupation group is as expected. “Standing up” roles such as gig work, construction, skilled trades, warehousing, logistics and transportation consistently sit at the top of the mobile-apply range. Meanwhile, desk-based roles like HR & staffing, marketing, advertising and technology tend to have lower mobile apply rates, reflecting how these candidates often apply on desktop devices.

However, there are some surprising outliers. Food services and hospitality roles show lower than expected mobile apply rates. This suggests that candidate behaviour does not always follow a pattern and can be influenced by other factors such as the complexity of the application itself. Regardless of the industry, employers should ensure job postings are optimised for both mobile and desktop. Apply behaviour can be unpredictable and relying on assumptions can lead to missed candidates.

Keep applications streamlined, especially for ‘standing up’ roles where candidates are more likely to apply on the go. A frictionless application process improves conversion across every device and occupational group.

Share of Mobile Applies by Occupational Group

LONG/ATS APPLY, 2025



SOURCE: APPCAST 6/3/2026

Geographic Insights

This section explores U.K. regional performance, which can greatly impact recruiting metrics and costs.

Apply rates mirror labour market trends

Apply rates vary significantly by region, ranging from 4.43% to a notable 7.17% across the U.K. Overall, regional trends align with what we would expect given labour market dynamics.

London has the largest and most competitive labour force, and its labour market has weakened more quickly than other regions, resulting in higher unemployment. This combination of a large candidate pool and increased job-seeking activity has driven London's apply rate to the highest in the country at 7.17%, reflecting a surplus of active job seekers compared to the number of available roles.

Northern Ireland, by contrast, records the lowest apply rate of all regions. This area has historically presented hiring challenges, and this continued low apply rate further compounds the difficulty for hiring employers.

Apply Rate by Region

LONG/ATS APPLY, 2025



SOURCE: APPCAST 6/3/2026

Northern Ireland remains a difficult region for recruiting

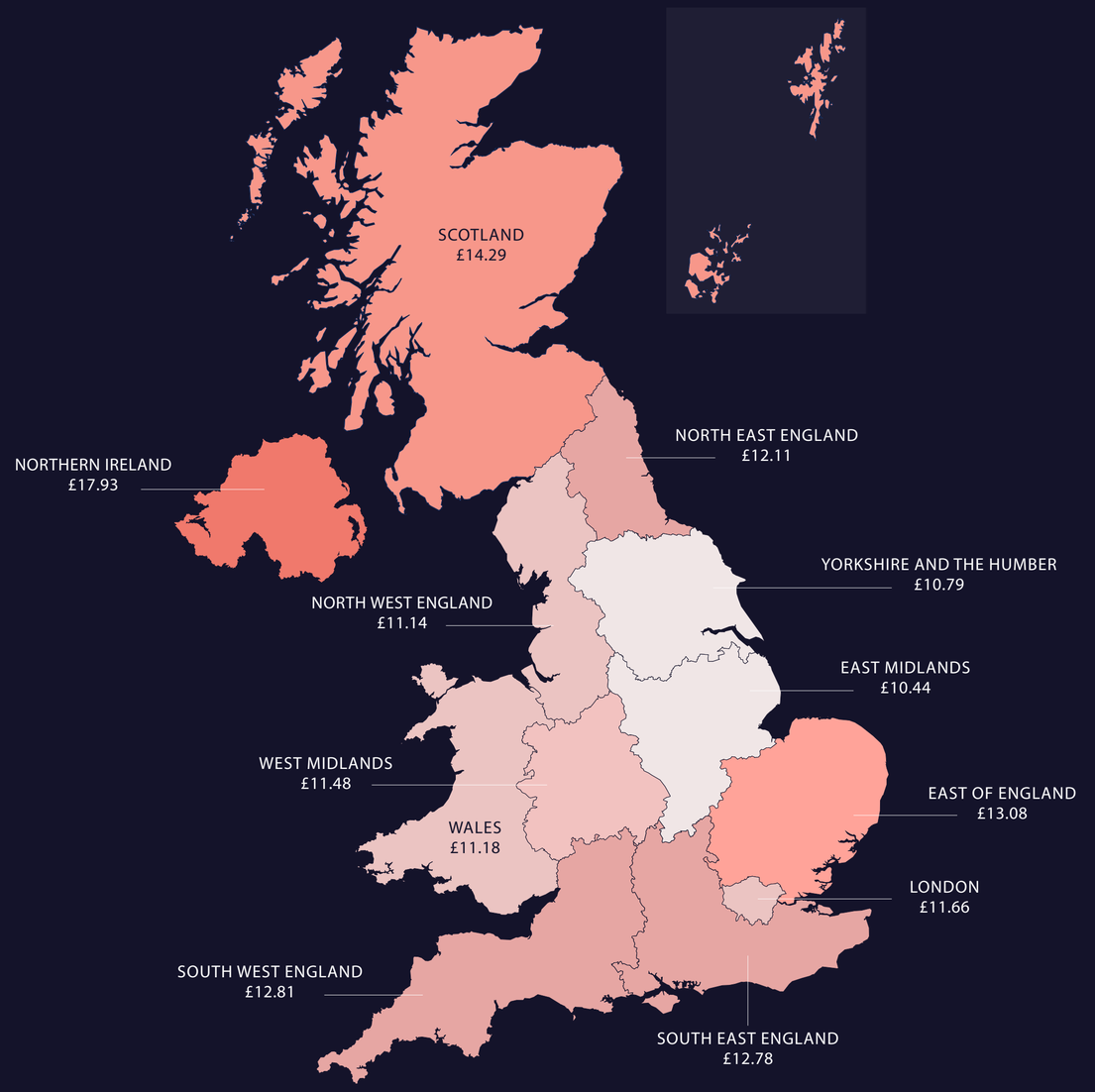
Unsurprisingly, regional recruiting costs mirror apply rate patterns: areas with higher apply rates tend to see lower costs as a larger volume of applicants drives greater efficiency.

Northern Ireland stands out once again as an area of hiring difficulty within the U.K. Its combination of low apply rates and high cost-per-application creates a challenging environment for employers who may need to invest more heavily to attract qualified candidates.

Employers recruiting in London will benefit from the opposite dynamic. With the highest apply rate across all regions, London offers a deeper pool of prospects, allowing well-managed recruiting budgets to stretch further and deliver stronger performance.

Cost-Per-Application by Region

LONG/ATS APPLY, 2025



SOURCE: APPCAST 6/3/2026

Costs shift unevenly across the U.K.

The percentage change in cost-per-application varies widely across the U.K. Several areas saw notable increases, including Northern Ireland with a substantial increase of 40.36%, Scotland with an increase of 14.90%, and the East of England with an increase of 14.55%. These jumps indicate rising costs for recruiters and TA leaders in those areas.

Other regions saw costs decrease. The Midlands posted a 14.98% decrease, the largest drop on the map. London, meanwhile, saw a modest +2.24% increase in CPA, consistent with its fast-weakening labour market where applicant volume is high but competition for qualified candidates remains intense.

Percent Difference in Cost-Per-Application by Region

LONG/ATS APPLY, 2025 (AS COMPARED TO 2024)



SOURCE: APPCAST 6/3/2026

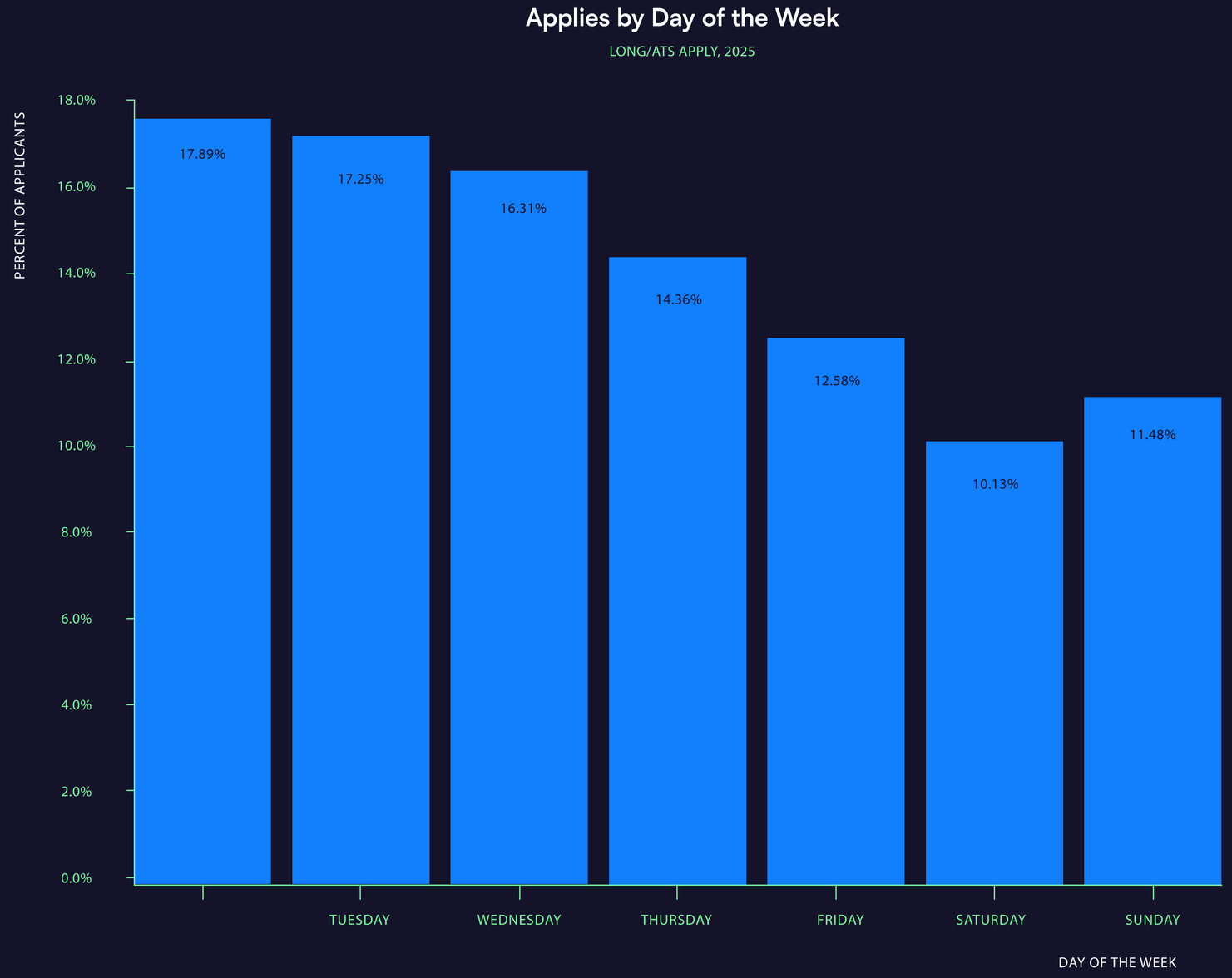
Best Practices in Job Ad Content

The following pages highlight data to support the creation of effective job advertisements.

Job seekers are applying at the beginning of the week

When it comes to job ads, the day you post matters. Data has repeatedly shown that job seekers are most active at the beginning of the working week, and the activity usually drops off as we enter the weekend.

Simply put, if you are posting new jobs, then you should prioritise Monday or Tuesday for the highest volume of candidates. Small shifts in apply rate can have a big impact on your budget and hiring outcomes.

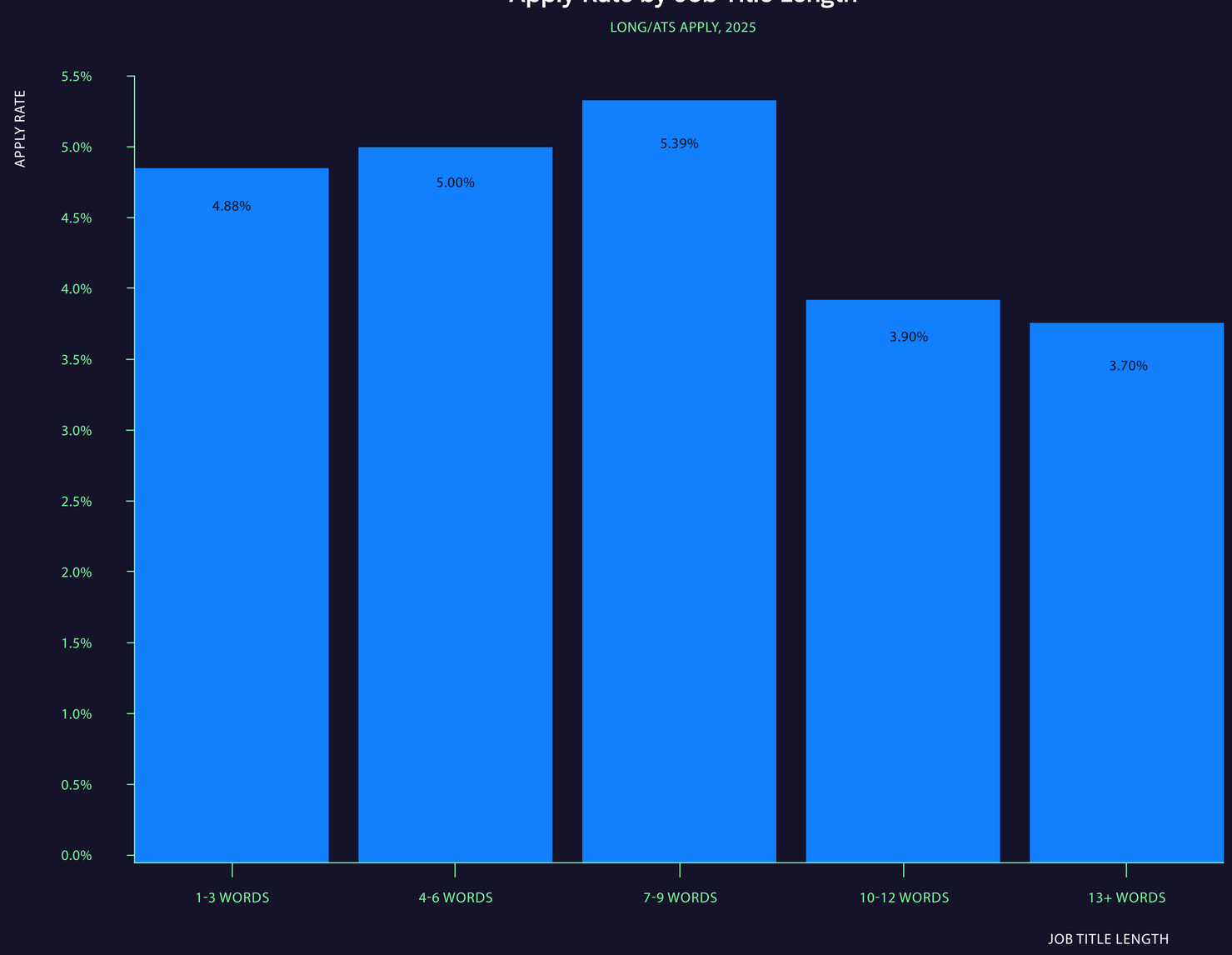


SOURCE: APPCAST 6/3/2026

Job titles perform best when they're under 10 words

There's no way around it: Titles are a critical component of the job ad. By keeping your job titles between 7-9 words, you're more likely to see a higher apply rate and more applications. Once your title length reaches 10 words, apply rates decline notably.

Short, succinct job titles in the 1-6 word range may still perform well, but adding additional context (and a few more words) may help lift performance.



SOURCE: APPCAST 6/3/2026

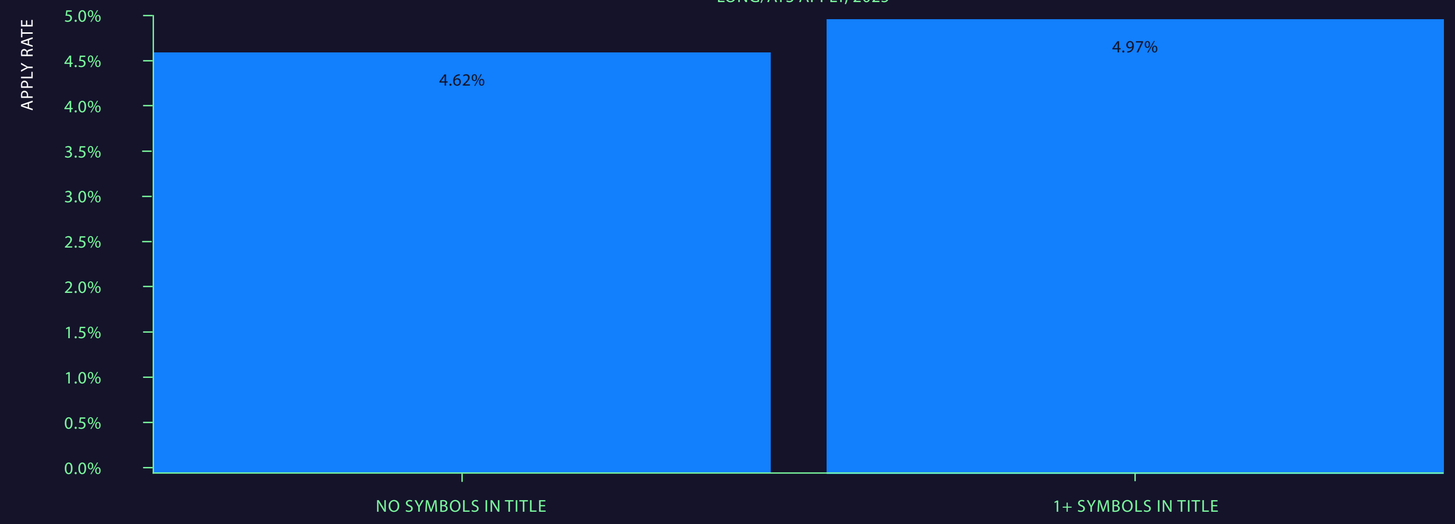
Certain symbols can impact apply performance

Including symbols in job titles can lead to an increase in the apply rate, but it is important to note that the type of symbol you use matters.

Exclamation marks can show enthusiasm and pique a candidate's interest, while colons may include too many details and lead to a lengthy title. Make sure to smartly test symbols to see if they positively impact your job ad performance.

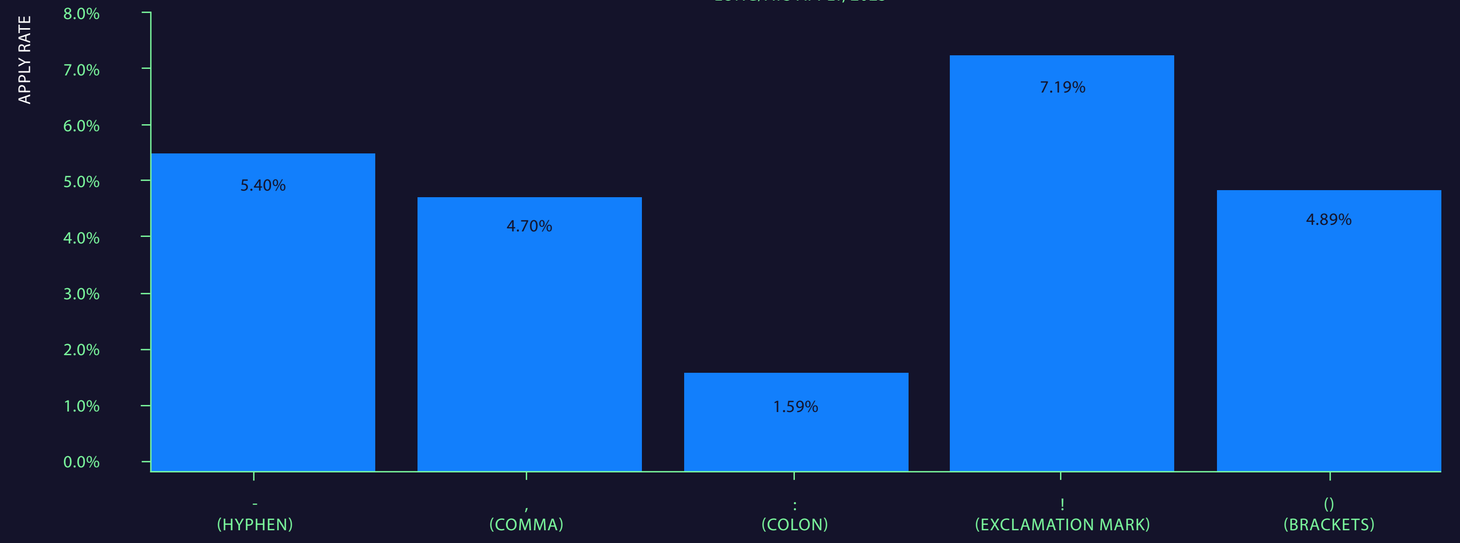
Apply Rate by Symbol Presence in Job Title

LONG/ATS APPLY, 2025



Apply Rate by Symbol Type in Job Title

LONG/ATS APPLY, 2025



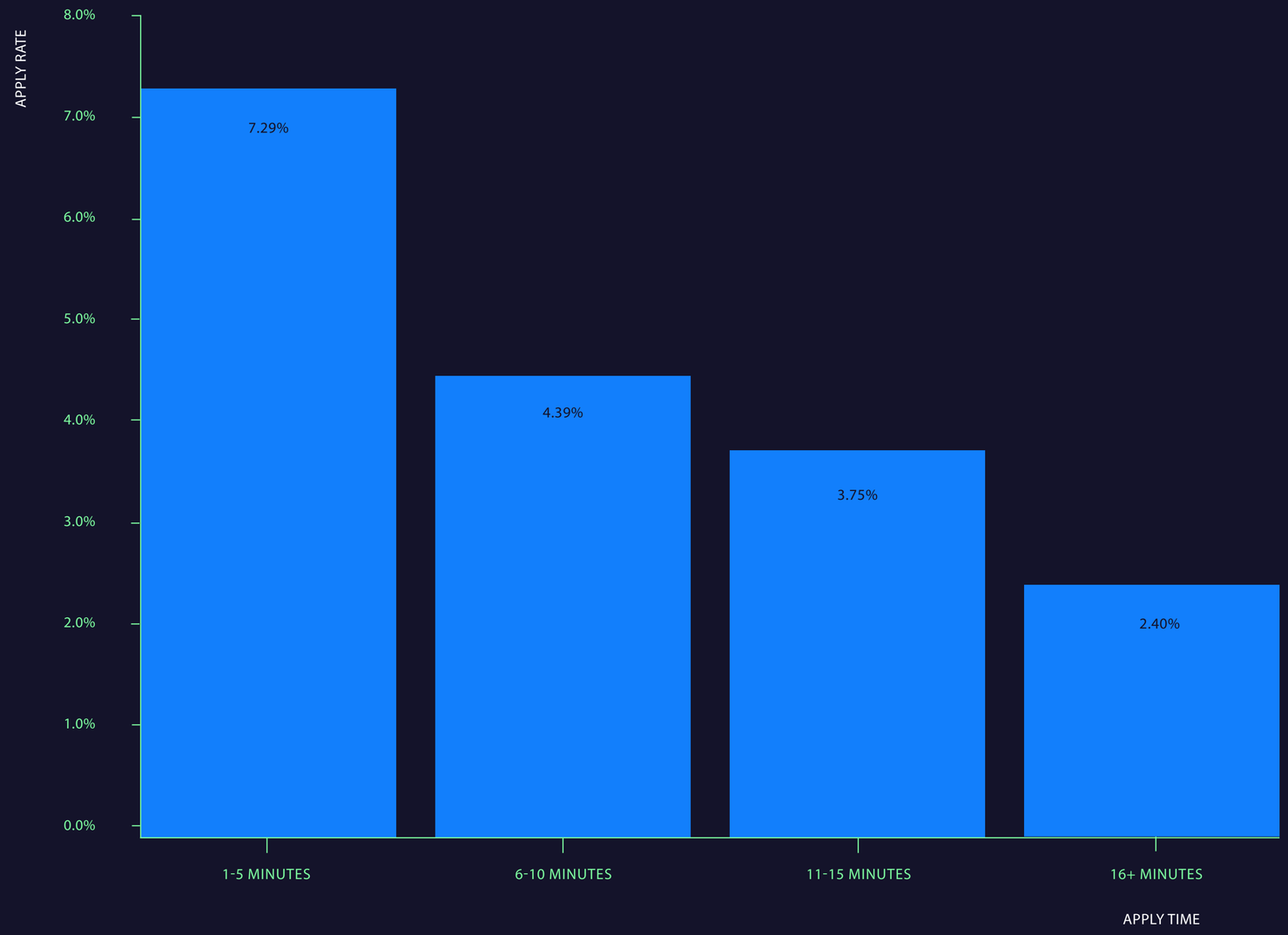
SOURCE: APPCAST 6/3/2026

Application length hurts conversion rates

Apply rates decrease significantly as application length increases. To maximise conversions, the application process should take five minutes or less. Even extending the apply time to just 6—10 minutes leads to a noticeable drop in apply rate, from 7.29% down to 4.39%. This shows how even small amounts of friction can significantly reduce candidate engagement.

Apply Rate by Apply Time

LONG/ATS APPLY, 2025



SOURCE: APPCAST 6/3/2026



THANK YOU FOR READING

This year's U.K. data reflects meaningful shifts in the labour market and reveals new insights through candidate disposition data.

The year ahead brings new challenges, but also massive opportunities. We hope these benchmarks help your team adapt, spark new ideas, and optimise your recruitment strategy across the entire funnel.

Let's keep the conversation going

↘ Book a Demo

Dive deeper into these trends with our recruitment experts. We have the technology and insight to deliver the scale, efficiency, and quality you need to hit your 2026 hiring goals.

Glossary

- **Apply rate**
  The percent of completed applications per clicks on a job. Perhaps one of the most effective conversion metrics for understanding the performance of job ads.
- **Click**
  Counted when a user clicks on a search, social, or job board advertisement.
- **Click-through-rate**
  Number of clicks per impressions. Used to measure effectiveness of social and search campaigns.
- **Cost-per-application**
  Amount necessary for each individual application to a job advertised on a job board.
- **Cost-per-click**
  Total number of advertising pounds spent per click received on search, social, or job board advertisement.
- **Cost-per-hire**
  Advertising pounds spent per hire. In this report, it does not include recruiter or source expenses, training costs, etc.
- **Cost-per-interview**
  Advertising pounds spent for each candidate who reaches the interview stage of the hiring process.
- **Cost-per-offer**
  Advertising pounds spent for each job offer extended to a candidate, regardless of whether the offer is accepted.
- **Cost-per-screen**
  Advertising pounds spent for each candidate who completes an initial screening step (such as a phone screen, skills assessment, or recruiter review).
- **Disposition data**
  Normalised applicant-tracking-system (ATS) information that maps candidate progress into shared stages such as applied, reviewed, screened, interviewed, offered, and hired, allowing consistent down-funnel benchmarking across employers and systems.
- **Sitting-down jobs**
  Occupations that require workers to be sedentary for most of their shifts, such as office workers in tech and legal fields.
- **Standing-up jobs**
  Occupations that require workers to be on their feet for most of their shift, such as RNs, construction workers, and more.

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