



6 hiring shifts to watch in 2026

What's coming next and how to prepare

This practical guide for TA leads and recruiters sets out the trends and wider forces shaping UK hiring next year. See what to do now, what to watch, and what to prioritise before HR budgets are signed off.

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Prediction #1

AI in hiring will face audits. Be ready to show evidence

The use of AI for screening and shortlisting will continue in 2026; it's become an invaluable tool for helping teams **cut down on shortlisting time** and **reducing bias**. The question of transparency in AI usage was big this year, but the focus next year will shift from **the declaration of whether or not AI was used, to proof of how it was used**. This change is about **candidate trust as much as it is about compliance**. The EU AI Act sets the tone across Europe, and will impact UK HR teams too, in terms of the tools they use and also the expectations of candidates and clients. People will ask how AI affected a hire, and who reviewed the recommendation.

Actions to take now



Write down every place that AI touches your hiring flow. Note the **pauses where a person must review** before anyone is progressed.



Check the wording on every hiring touchpoint, and state **where AI assists and where decision are made by a human**.



Make sure your HR team is able to **explain the use of AI** in your organisation's hiring process.



Prediction #2

Pay transparency will be normal in the EU and will impact UK hiring

By June 2026, many EU markets will be expected to **show salary ranges in their job ads**. Candidates will compare salary ranges across countries and advertising channels. We're already seeing the huge benefits around pay transparency in the UK; when salary range is visible, people tend to trust more and make faster decisions. **Hidden salary ranges see more drop-out and drawn-out negotiations.**

The first public reports, published in 2027 will be based on 2026 salaries, so any **unclear or inconsistent pay bands from next year could be highlighted**. Transparency is the smart move here and keeps your business in step with our European counterparts. Consider starting with roles where supply is tight, **measure what happens and scale accordingly**.

Actions to take now



Choose roles where you'll **start showing salary ranges**, track how this affects interviews and offers, and decide who can approve exceptions and why. Make sure you record reasons clearly.



Update your careers page to explain how your salary ranges are set. Transparency and clear expectations will help build candidate trust.



Prediction #3

UK migration will remain controlled, so expect friction for external hiring

Since 2024 the UK has raised salary thresholds and tightened the list of eligible roles for overseas workers. As a result, **it's tougher to hire international candidates for lower-paid roles, cross-border moves can take longer**, and mistakes with Right to Work can be costly. With signals from the Government that **more immigration changes may be on the way**, there's a degree of uncertainty around hiring timelines that employers simply can't control. If your organisation has relied heavily on international recruitment in the past, then aim for balance. Look at internal mobility, **hire locally when possible and do not rely on international routes too much**.



Actions to take now



Identify roles within your organisation **that are most affected by changing immigration rules**.



Review a recent hire's Right to Work documentation step-by-step to ensure your records are complete and compliant. Fix any gaps you find.



Create a simple definition for an internal secondment that any employee can apply for, to cover busy periods and build skills.

Prediction #4

Older workers will remain in the workforce for longer

From 2026 the State Pension age rises to 67, which means more experienced people will stay in work. Many of these people might want reduced hours or phased roles but can still make a big impact. This is an opportunity to **turn long careers into shared know-how**. The **loss of institutional knowledge** can have a huge impact on an organisation, so use the time with seasoned employees to teach methods, tools, and context to newer colleagues. **Make knowledge transfer part of your organisational goals and routines**. Take time to record guides or instructions that may otherwise get overlooked as colleagues leave the workforce.

Actions to take now



List roles that would fall over if one expert left, name understudies, and consider using “earn-while-you-learn” programs.



Set clear handover objectives for each role and build them into senior employee’s work plans or performance objectives.



Consider adding **seasoned employees to interview panels**, so they can help spot emerging talent.



Prediction #5

Cyberattacks will become more common and will disrupt the everyday work of HR teams

More and more of our work now is digital, which means we are at **increased risk of attacks, scans, data leaks and outages**. UK legislation, including UK GDPR, requires ever stronger internal controls together with **evidence that your incident response measures are effective**. You need access controls that make sense, audit trails that you can produce, supplier assurance that is real, and thoroughly tested restore processes. You also need a **full business continuity plan** that names the people, the steps and the channels you will use when systems fail. Being able to **switch to a backup workflow** quickly and keep people informed of what's going on helps protect trust and keep hiring moving.

Actions to take now



Decide which one tool will be your main reference point for candidate communications during an incident.



Test that you can quickly export today's pipelines and interview schedules on demand.



Document how Right to Work checks will continue if one or more systems go offline.





Prediction #6

Stability is back: Hire for long term fit from day one

Job vacancies are currently well below the 2022 peak and job to job moves are easing. **Stability, it seems, is back in fashion.** Both candidates and employees are now placing more value on **role fit, predictability, manager quality and a believable development path.** There's a clear desire to stay in role longer if the match is right and that changes the hiring landscape considerably. Since it takes considerably longer to recover if a new hire isn't the right fit, getting the **best talent match from the start matters much more than hiring fast.** It's useful to connect hiring data to what happens after the start date.

Actions to take now



Consider making your first candidate **screen a simple skills exercise** rather than a CV skim.



Add short, **realistic job previews** to ads and interview packs.



Ensure your **ATS integrates with your other HR tech**, so offer, onboarding and retention data can be viewed without spreadsheets.

The Solution

How an ATS can be used to support these six shifts.

A dedicated applicant tracking software (ATS) like Reach ATS gives HR and Talent Acquisition teams a single, reliable platform for implementing changes to support these shifts.

Widely regarded as the best single source solution for hiring compliance, parity, auditing and data, **an ATS is a central repository for all your hiring correspondence, communication and documentation.** It provides clear, factual evidence where needed, faster execution where it counts and the control and visibility that leaders will expect in 2026.

Let's take a closer look at how a good quality ATS can support each of the shifts we've mentioned.

Whether you already use a dedicated ATS for your hiring, or are in the market for one, the key features listed below will ensure your hiring is futureproofed.





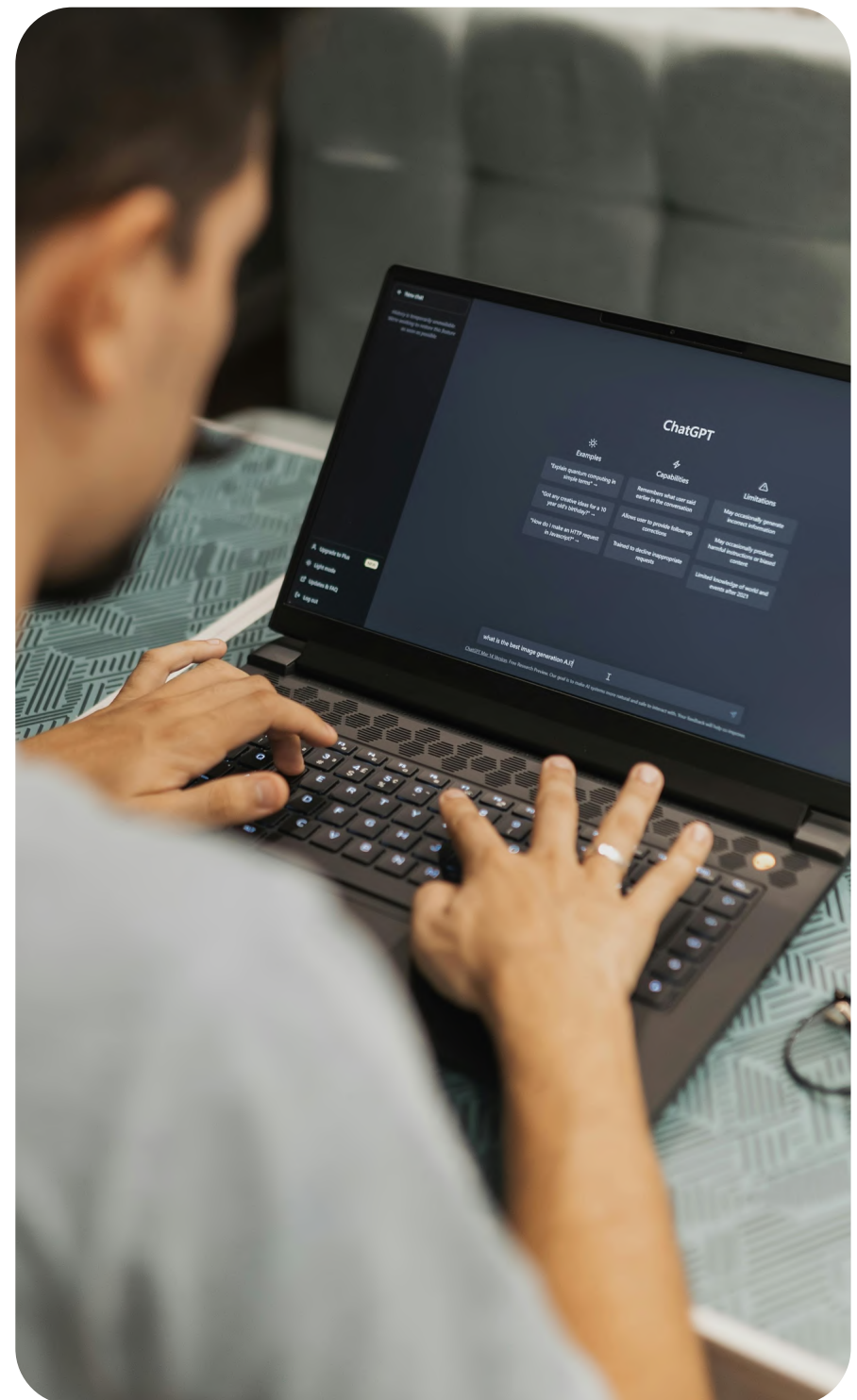
1. Evidence for AI use in hiring

What to look for: AI that assists with shortlisting and blind screening, plus activity logs that show exactly what happened on a real vacancy.

Key features:

- **The ability to track the workflow** used for each job posting and see the trail of actions across the entire hiring process.
- **AI-powered shortlisting that analyses CVs** and ranks candidates (with reasons) so that HR can review them efficiently.
- **Complete audit trails** so you can understand at a glance what was done, why and by whom on each vacancy.

Why it matters: Internal stakeholders, auditors and candidates will ask “how was this decision made” and expect a clear, rapid answer.





2. Pay transparency and cleaner job ads

What to look for: Easy to use requisition and posting tools that make adding salary ranges simple, enable multichannel job posting, and provide clear reporting of performance data.

Key features:

- **Multi-board job posting, templates, scheduling and ad analytics** to help you keep salary details and copy both consistent and measurable.
- **Automatic posting to career pages and/or careers microsites** ensures your own website is effortlessly kept up to date.

Why it matters: Consistently showing pay scales across all channels builds trust in your employer brand. Practising transparent reporting now will also help with pay reporting later.



3. Migration friction – keeping on top of Right to Work and hiring closer to home

What to look for: The ability to post fast, clear information to local boards and networks, effortless data reporting on pipelines, and simple, personalised and automated communications, to keep local candidate engagement high.

Key features:

- **Automated updates** and an optimised candidate experience help reduce drop off.
- **Dedicated Hiring Manager portals** and smart interview scheduling tools improve internal collaboration.
- **Flexible systems** that let you build compliance into automated hiring workflows.

Why it matters: When international routes are slowing down, it's important to be able to move quickly on internal and local options without administrative bottlenecks.





4. Knowledge transfer and early-career pathways

What to look for: Simple, reliable ways to assign the right reviewers to the right stages. Plus tools to maintain interviewer pools, schedule interviews easily and capture and share structured feedback.

Key features:

- Dedicated hiring manager portals that let interviewers, assessors and seasoned employees see only the roles they are involved with.
- Task alerts, notifications and self-serve interview scheduling to keep the process moving.
- Systems that allow HR teams to add multiple hiring managers.

Why it matters: Allocating seasoned employees as interviewers or reviewers and assigning them to specific hiring stages allows organisations to **leverage their institutional knowledge.**



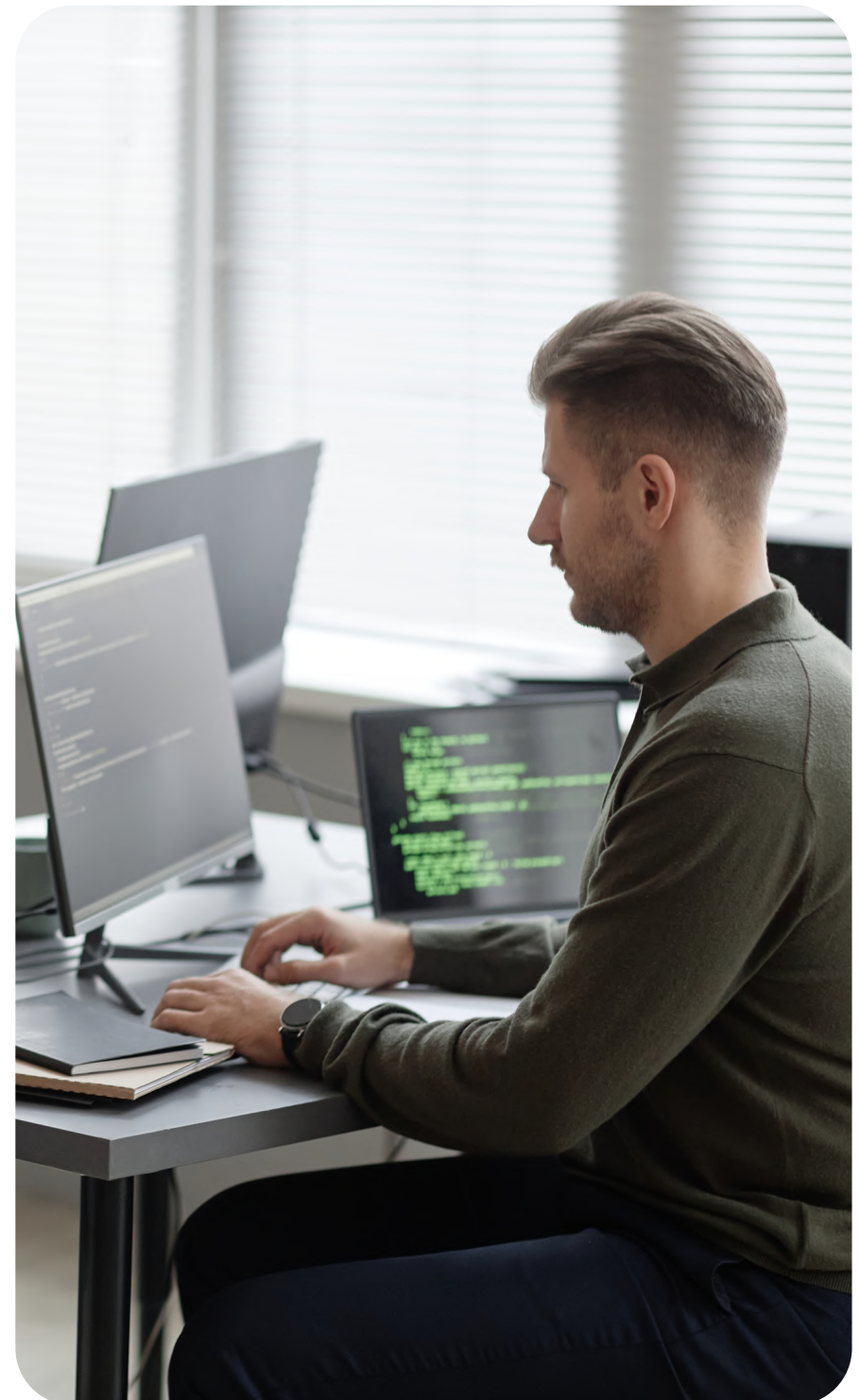
5. Cyber resilience and everyday security for people operations

What to look for: Certified state of the art security and encryption, alongside role-based access, comprehensive audit trails, and rapid export paths for live vacancy pipelines and schedules.

Key features:

- **Comprehensive audit trails**, and easy data exports to keep hiring moving during drills or incidents.
- **Multi-Factor Authentication** and role-based access to protect your most secure data.
- **ISO 27001 and Cyber Essentials Plus certification.** These prove that security practices are independently assessed and maintained across the platform and provider company.

Why it matters: A good quality ATS will provide significantly stronger security and compliance features, keeping your most sensitive personal data secure through the talent acquisition and onboarding.





6. Hiring for long-term fit

What to look for: Tools that help you assess candidates' skills, track their communication and share data easily with other systems.

Key features:

- AI shortlisting and sifting help you weigh skills against job criteria for a clearer view of match quality.
- Automated reminders, a branded candidate portal, modern integrations (calendars, video, SMS etc.) help keep candidates engaged and your team efficient.
- Standard and custom reporting allow teams to collect the data breadcrumbs for post-hire analysis and strategic decision-making.

Why it matters: Employee retention is becoming increasingly more important. These tools will help you identify which sources and assessments bring in top talent that sticks around.



Turn predictions into plans.

The six shifts ahead aren't hype - they're a roadmap. Use this guide to tighten compliance, sharpen job ads, unblock local hiring, embed knowledge transfer, harden your ops, and connect hiring to retention.

When you're ready to operationalise those actions, let's talk.

Book a Demo

Reach for a future-proof ATS

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