Edge Tech

Edge Tech's Annual Intelligent Automation & AI Market Report 2025

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2025: A Landmark Year In AI/ First Word, From Harrison

Open on one of my browser tabs right now is a PDF of something called the 'Robotic Process Automation (RPA) Annual Recruitment Market Report'.

Dated 2019-20, it's from some bunch of upstarts that was telling the market how this thing called RPA leapt into exciting new territory during 2019, how 'The good news for recruitment is that with more consultancies popping up across the to see a rise in RPA opportunities and country, we'll see higher wages arriving to accompany these positions,' and a lot more.

You've probably guessed it: this was from us at Edge Tech—and while it wasn't actually our first (2018 was, as Ollie and I have just celebrated our sixth year of stimulating, hectic and incredibly rewarding business here), it marked a trend we are proud to be continuing with what you're reading now: the annual Edge Tech analysis and summary of what we and the people we try and help saw in the previous 12 months in the world of technology recruitment.

In this, the 2025 version, we mainly look back to try and make sense of the last period. (**As the man said,** 'Prediction is very difficult, especially about the future'). Having said that, we do of course want to debate what this halfway point of the decade may hold, and I'll direct you to my co-director's thoughts on that at the end. In the meantime, now the dust has settled... What the Hell happened in those turbulent 12 months of 2024, and how should we make sense of it?

A Year Of Transition

2024 was the year AI moved from hype to action, businesses reshaped their talent strategies, and companies began to see the real-world impact of AI-driven transformation. While generative AI dominated headlines, intelligent automation, machine learning, and data science quietly laid the foundation for more sustainable, long-term change.

At the same time, the job market flipped in favour of employers, with more talent available than open roles. It wasn't that AI professionals flooded the market overnight; unpleasant as it was at times rather than hiring slowed, and job seekers had fewer options. Companies took their time recruiting, knowing candidates would wait rather than juggle multiple offers—a stark contrast to really all our previous years in operation, and it took a bit of adjusting.

But as we head into 2025, optimism is creeping back in. There's a genuine sense that hiring will pick up. Meanwhile, as AI is becoming more embedded in business operations, not just as an experimental tool but as a fundamental driver of productivity and transformation, momentum might build up again a lot more quickly than some of us expect.

We're actually not surprised, because sitting as we do between employer and talent, one of the biggest takeaways from 2024 was that AI finally moved beyond proof-of-concept into real adoption. Even if they were still refining their strategies, hand-on-heart we saw major enterprise businesses roll out AI-powered solutions. The focus wasn't just on generative (Gen) AI—though that stole most of the attention—but also on the underlying Machine Learning models, Automation frameworks, and data strategies that have been in development for years.

Landmarks along the way included:

- **The rise of AI-powered productivity tools**
  Microsoft Copilot, AI-driven EX platforms, and automated knowledge management systems gained traction

- **The "Superworker" concept becoming a reality**
  AI augmented employees' capabilities, making them more effective rather than replacing them entirely

- **AI in the enterprise operational mainstream**
  From HR and finance to legal and IT, companies experimented with AI to streamline processes and make better decisions.

These trends set the stage for a new way of working—one where AI isn't just a productivity booster but a core part of how businesses operate.

The Talent Market Shift: Fewer Jobs, Fiercer Competition

The hiring landscape in 2024 was…complex. After years of tech talent shortages, the market flipped; not because there was an explosion of AI experts, but because demand slowed down. Companies hired more cautiously, and layoffs, particularly in tech, increased the supply of skilled workers.

For candidates, this meant:

- **Fewer opportunities**
  Where once the team could offer movers 4–5 job offers at a time, many had just one or none

- **Longer hiring cycles**
  Aware they had the upper hand this year, employers took their time

- **More competition**
  With fewer roles available, candidates had to fight harder to stand out

Employers definitely benefited; they could access high-quality talent more easily, negotiate better terms, and take a more strategic approach to hiring. Some companies even delayed decisions intentionally, knowing they wouldn't lose strong candidates as quickly as in previous years.

But even before the end of the year, while hiring hasn't fully rebounded yet, there's a sense of cautious optimism heading into 2025. Companies that paused hiring in 2024 may start ramping up again. Whether demand for AI and IA talent will reach its former peak remains to be seen, but as this Report will show all the indicators are, as they say in America, pointing to the right and up.

Reasons To Be More Than Cheerful

I kind of promised to stick to the rear mirror stuff, but we are, after all, a company dedicated to buildingthe future with you. This is what all the data I see, conversations I have, and experiences I've accumulated tells me that while LLMs and chatbots stole the show in 2024, the next phase will likely focus on:

- **AI-driven decision-making**
  More companies will use AI for strategy, forecasting, and complex problem-solving

- **AI, can I introduce you to your new help-mate IA?**
  Intelligent Automation will quietly reshape entire workflows, making businesses more efficient behind the scenes, and in lockstep/synergy with Artificial Intelligence in all its guises and facets (including things we haven't seen yet)

- **HR primes talent transformation**
  AI won't just assist employees in their day-to-day, but start to redefine how organisations attract, retain, and develop talent.

One of the most critical challenges for businesses will be adapting their workforce to all this. AI won't eliminate jobs overnight, but it will change the nature of work, requiring new skills, new roles, and new ways of thinking about employee experience. And so the companies that thrive will be the ones that don't just adopt AI tools but **rethink how work itself is structured in an AI-powered world**.

Final Thoughts: The AI & Talent Landscape is Still Shifting

2024 was a pivotal year—not just for AI, but for the workforce and business landscape as a whole. As I said, it was the year we moved from experimentation to execution, and the year the talent market tilted in favor of employers for the first time in years.

As we step into 2025, AI's role in business is no longer a question of "if" but "how fast". Companies that have already built AI strategies will now refine and scale them, while those still hesitating may find themselves falling behind.

For you as a career builder, the challenge is clear: staying ahead of the AI curve will be the key to long-term success. Those who actively learn, experiment, and adapt will be in the best position—whether the job market swings back in their favour or not.

2025 is still unfolding, but one thing is certain.

The AI-driven future of work is here, and it's moving faster than ever.

Harrison Goode
Co-Founder of Edge Tech
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A Word of Thanks to Our Sponsors, Robiquity

Dear Edge Tech 2025 Report reader,

We're delighted to have been asked to support what you now have in your hands at last—the sixth in what has consistently been one of the best sources of unbiased, useful information on the real state of the UK and US advanced tech recruitment market, the Edge Tech annual Market Report.

As the UK's biggest and most experienced Intelligent Automation Consultancy Services provider, with over 140 people across the UK and MENA focused only on delivering business process transformation programmes, my company uses this information for sure. What's particularly striking to me reading this is how closely it mirrors the 2024 experiences of our clients: as Edge Tech and the many experts cited here note, the 2024 market saw a notable shift in the diversity of skills required to keep abreast with current Automation trends.

What became apparent to us as a result is the requirement to continuously evolve your knowledge and not be identified as 100% wedded forever to one solution. Fortunately, we have a strong footprint in providing technology agnostic solutions, meaning we have thrived with multi-skilled, Automation engineers. However, with AI pushing almost every agenda, we have found that we also require more specialised detailed skills. Overall, as I think you'll soon agree these findings surface so well, skill requirements have shifted from having a large width of knowledge to apply to becoming more focused on the depth of particular components and solutions.

In 2024, we also celebrated achieving Business Applications Solutions Partner status with Microsoft. This formalisation of partnership also reflected the increased demand for Microsoft skill in the automation arena, which again is a trend I think not everyone is on top of as they should be, and which, again, is picked out in this research. All in all, we have witnessed an uptick in client conversations around Microsoft capability including topics around how to apply Copilot and how to leverage automation to drive effective AI strategies.

Looking at our team and their expertise, we enter 2025 confident that the real hot trends for Automation will focus on widening the agenda to incorporate service design and journeys that ensure a seamless user experience whether that is for your customers or employees.

RPA and single, unconnected journeys are a thing of the past as data and Machine Learning take centre stage. So, let's adjust to these exciting new realities and move forward to make the most of what 2025 has to offer in Automation, AI, and beyond.

I hope you enjoy reading and absorbing the many insights in the Report. I know I and my team certainly have.

Elaine Higgins
Chief People Officer
Robiquity, Ltd

Glad 2024's Over? (Maybe It Isn't)

It was the year that started with the ChatGPT hype getting **completely out of control**, and ended with the UK Prime Minister committing to make the UK world leader in AI by '**mainlining**' it into the country's veins, which the new Labour government plans to do via steps like a promised 20-x increase in the amount of AI computing power under public control by 2030, and AI for everything from spotting potholes to freeing up teachers to teach.

But it was also the year that saw its successors start with a Chinese company coming out of nowhere **with a cut-price, edge-computing friendly way of doing LLMs** that might completely upset the apple cart and OpenAI's hopes to redraw the GenAI map with a move to allegedly evolve from yesterday's error-prone 'Large Language' to more robust, next-gen **'Reasoning' Models**.

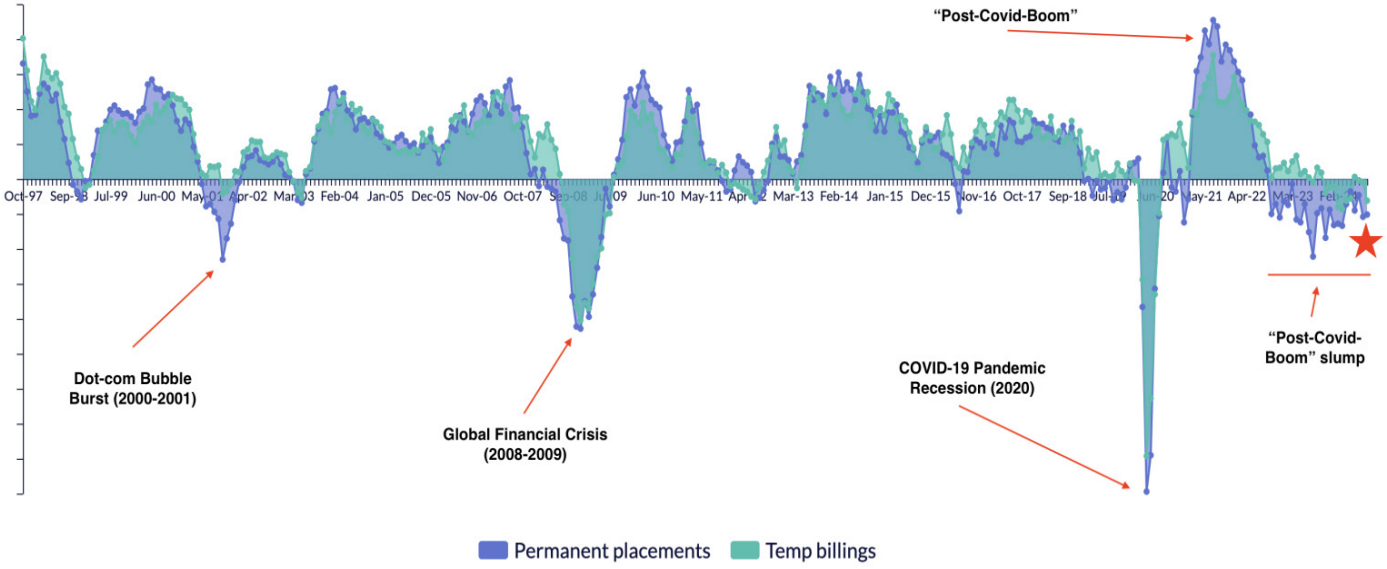
It was the year of the biggest political comeback of the century, with Trump 2 promising to roll back any restrictions that would **limit the potential for the technology and restore American tech dominance**—and with, at least for time being, a billionaire convinced **AI is the answer** at his side (but one who is also warning we're hitting the barriers on **free data to train all our models off**… and whose relationship with the man he played such **a big role in getting re-elected** may already be coming off the rails, with **very public scepticism** about the former's $500 billion promise to **make America the number one AI player on the planet**.

It was the year of the rise of **Agentic AI** (though **not everyone really knows what that means yet**) and a major global enterprise software company claiming it's already got so much AI onboard it doesn't need **any new human engineers right now**. It was a year where Europe tried to claim **the moral and regulatory high ground** while China says its version is better, as it **conforms to Socialism**. It was also the year they told us AI would **burn the planet**, and that so enormous was the demand for power to spin discs in hyperscaler datacentres they turned to buying up coal, nuclear power and all the solar **they could get their hands on**.

Though it faded from front of mind a little bit, ML (**Machine Learning**) hardly disappeared. In fact, the discoverers of tools key to ML's rapid growth actually **won the 2024 Physics Nobel Prize**, and is set to become a **$113 billion market** in 2025. And it was hardly a year for **data science** practitioners to start retiring: it's just mushrooming and mushrooming, shooting up from 2023's $104 billion to an estimated $133 billion in 2024 to **more like $777 billion by 2032**.

It was the year, finally, that analysts kept telling us AI was **a booming job market** while the rest of us saw a different reality on the ground, with anaemic growth and elongated hiring cycles—with most companies seeming to have decided the first killer app of the technology was to **embed it into their recruitment hubs**, and a leading recruitment guru finally coming out and saying it: that we have been through **more than two years of advanced tech job downturn** that's turned out to be longer than the one after the dot.com boom, longer than the credit crunch and now longer than COVID-19.

Permanent Placements and Temporary Biling Indices



Source: Greg Savage analysis of REC publicly available data

For sure, 2024 saw some incredible momentum around AI, but maybe the world just has to catch up with it a bit. External factors played a part, too; we had **the most elections** in **a single year** for decades—which if it didn't distract the average LLM builder or data scientist or RPA ninja that much, for sure distracted the C-Suites and investment decisions of the Global 2000.

It was the year we all went crazy about AI… but a certain thing whose letters go the opposite way, IA (Intelligent Automation), while squeezed out of the headlines, continued to be a major IT and tech recruitment market:

- Analysts ending the year declaring, 'We are firmly convinced that Robotic Process Automation (RPA), i.e., the capability to automate repetitive office tasks (think input a database every day after receiving a specific set of data), **has the potential to benefit strongly from the rise of GenAI'**
- SSC Blue Prism's CEO seeing **huge potential for his technology**: 'Historically, most organisations have a large number of human workers doing high volume of repetitive tasks across various systems, which can easily be automated to free humans to focus on decision making and other key activities'
- Automation Anywhere **exceeding first quarter targets**, fueled by extensive GenAI-led deals and expanded partner traction
- UiPath, which has had its ups and downs, seems to be **back on track** ('The company's recent pivot to marketing AI Agents may help to resuscitate its slowing sales. The company notes that early pilot traction for these new agents has been strong')
- And as we and others have remarked a number of times across the Edge Tech 2025 Market Report, Microsoft scored two remarkable feats in the last 12 months; not just eating up market share on the AI side of the house with Copilot, but also almost overnight becoming **an 800-lb Gorilla on the IA side, too**, with its Power solution
- The global Robotic Process Automation market size being estimated at $3.79 billion in 2024 and anticipated to grow at a **CAGR of 43.9% from 2025 to 2030**
- The fact that IA and AI are actually **complementary, not rival, technologies**
- LinkedIn's Emerging Jobs Report recording that **RPA-related roles have seen a 40% annual growth rate in job postings** over the past three years

Here at Edge Tech, the leading UK advanced tech recruitment player and this gives us a bird's-eye view of the realities of the AI, Intelligent Automation and Data job markets, yes—we confirm that 2024 was slower than previous years. And as our own data share will later say, there was almost no change in salaries we captured compared to previous years, where there were always consistent slight increases.

However, our sense of the market remains highly bullish, and all the evidence and company dialogues we're having confirms for us that 2025 will be the year when these technologies start to deliver, with organisations finally starting to catch up and move from pilot to BAU.

In this, the latest Edge Tech Advanced Tech Recruitment Report, let's see how—and more importantly, what you can do as either candidate or talent acquisition leader to make the most of all that's starting to come down the road for you in the next 12 months.

A view from an Edge Tech recruitment expert close to the sound of the advanced tech recruitment market guns

Izzy Plumbridge

In my role as Account Manager, I have a strong level of understanding of technical requirements to ensure I qualify candidates for roles and bridge the gap between technical expertise and recruitment. I manage and coordinate the end to end recruitment process, from screening candidates to salary negotiation and onboarding.

Overall, market-wise, 2024 was very hit and miss. Around Christmas and the New Year it always slows down, which is to be expected but it was slower to pick up than previous years. Summer was strong for us, though. But what surprised me most about 2024 in terms of the AI/advanced tech recruitment market was how quickly Microsoft gained ground and mindshare. With all its custom generative AI models and Copilot, more businesses are deciding to commit to a platform that wasn't really that much to speak of not that long ago, and not just because it's cheaper than other options in the productivity AI space.

What trends that everyone was so sure would pan out in 2024 just went away?

Come the pandemic and everyone having to shift their ways of working, we expected super-remote work to become the new normal. However, full-time office work models (and hybrid of various degrees) have regained popularity, as organisations want to emphasise culture-building and collaboration within teams in person. I think 2025 will see this settle down for good.

What is everyone getting wrong about the AI skills market?

I've seen a lot of people think of hiring an "AI expert" without quite realising how highly specialised the field and its many facets are getting. Sure, coding is essential, but you need deep knowledge to even start seeing small progress in GenAI. I think people got a bit overexcited about the idea of introducing AI into organisations without thinking about how valuable the expertise in this domain is. Plus, AI hiring doesn't immediately deliver results; even the best professionals in the space have to have time to bed in and get their heads around your specific data, infrastructure, and business challenges before they start pipelining effective solutions for you.

Some analysts talk a lot about the need to meet the skills challenge by upskilling/retraining internal staff instead of going to market for scarce talent. Your take?

Talent is always accessible; it's about where you look and if you are financially able to move ahead with it. Introducing someone who has the skill set from day 1 will open a lot of doors and opportunities for companies, as they will be able to walk in and start being productive. This can come at a price, but if you want good quality talent in your team ASAP this is a sure-fire and time-saving move.

Your five predictions for the next 12 months in AI and automation, Izzy?

1. **Hyper Automation will get big over the course of the year**, with businesses pursuing the idea of strategic and end-to-end process optimisation

2. **Cloud based RPA and IA solutions to dominate** because of their scalability and flexibility and users wanting to use their power to reduce the cost of maintenance and ownership

3. **RPA and AI will increasingly be tailored to specific sectors**, e.g. automating desk appointment scheduling and patient record management in things like healthcare and fraud detection/ customer onboarding in financial services

4. Given so much concern raised this year about the alleged environmental impact of AI training at datacentres, we expect **a big push towards creating energy efficient AI models that can be seen to demand less electricity**

5. **Agentic AI will start to actually happen**, and I feel we'll soon see it perform tasks and adapt to change without the need for step-to-step instructions and constant human oversight.

Izzy Plumbridge *is Account Manager at Edge Tech, where she manages and supports recruitment for all our key clients across all of their open positions while liaising and guiding candidates*

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Subject Matter Expert View 1:

Olivier Gomez, IAC.AI

Your thoughts on the last year of ups and downs

A few things really surprised me:

- **Consumers Are Sprinting**, But Businesses Are Stuck Jogging It's wild to see how quickly people have adopted AI. Tools like ChatGPT and Google Gemini are being used by 32% of Americans weekly—meanwhile, only 6.1% of companies have moved beyond experimenting with AI. The corporate world is holding back because of compliance and security concerns, but this gap between personal and professional adoption feels like a missed opportunity
- **AI Got Smarter**—Fast OpenAI's new o1 model really caught my attention. It's less about prediction and more about reasoning. For the first time, we're seeing AI that doesn't just react—it thinks (well, kind of). This shift feels like the start of something bigger
- **Governance Finally Took Center Stage** The EU's AI Act came into force this year, and it's a big deal. It's forcing everyone to think about AI responsibility—transparency, accountability, trust. Could that mean businesses can no longer skip these steps if they want to scale AI? In a time of global change, we may need to wait and see.

Is there life beyond LLMs and Hallucinations?

AI is no longer just a tool for techies or students looking to finish essays faster, it's genuinely starting to reshape how businesses work. Here's where I see the biggest impact:

- **Getting More Done, Faster** Generative AI is automating repetitive tasks, letting teams focus on the real value-add work. The productivity boost is undeniable
- **Better, Smarter Decisions** With AI analysing data and pulling out insights, organizations are making decisions based on facts, not gut feelings
- **Personalized Customer Experiences** AI is helping businesses connect with customers in ways that feel personal, even at scale. That's a game-changer for engagement.

Generative AI might be the shiny new toy, but let's not forget the foundational stuff like machine learning and computer vision. These technologies are still driving huge value—whether it's optimising supply chains, catching fraud, or improving quality control in manufacturing. Tbh, the spotlight might be on generative AI, but "boring" tech is still doing the heavy lifting behind the scenes.

Agentic AI: What's your gut feel?

Agentic AI—the idea of autonomous agents handling tasks—is the next big thing, but it's not without challenges. Trust is still a major barrier. Businesses want results, but they're not ready to hand over the reins to an AI that makes decisions on its own.

For Agentic AI to work, we'll need strong frameworks around ethics, transparency, and accountability. My guess? It's not replacing deterministic automation like RPA anytime soon. Instead, they'll coexist, with each filling its own niche.

Does the UK/Europe Have the Talent to Lead in This Space?

Absolutely, Europe has the brains to lead in AI; the research is there, with the **EU AI Act** the ethical frameworks are there. But talent alone isn't enough! Europe needs to get better at scaling ideas, collaboration between academia and industry, and funding startups. The potential is huge, but agility will be the deciding factor.

AI Legislation: Necessary Innovation Guardrails or Stifling Red Tape?

The EU AI Act is a classic double-edged sword for European business; on one hand, it's giving us much-needed structure—on the other, it risks choking innovation, especially for startups that can't afford to comply. The solution has to be more sandbox environments where companies can test AI solutions without fear of penalties. If we want to innovate responsibly, we've got to find that balance.

What's your recommendation on how companies can get set for advanced tech success in 2025?

If you're a CXO looking to get ahead with AI:

- **Retrain:** Upskill your team so they're comfortable with AI tools
- **Hire:** Bring in experts where you have gaps
- **Partner:** Work with companies that know how to get results

And remember, AI isn't just a tech investment, it's a strategy. Align your AI initiatives with measurable business outcomes, and you'll see the real payoff.

Should we worry about the global environment here?

Politics and tech are more intertwined than ever. We'll likely see deregulation in the US., which could drive faster innovation, but at the cost of oversight. In the UK, our new government is talking big about AI leadership but needs clear strategies to back it up. My advice to businesses is stay agile, and focus on what you can control, like innovating and delivering value.

Let's finish with your 2025 wishlist, Mr Gomez?

A few things really surprised me:

- **Global AI Standards:** Let's harmonise regulations so we can move faster
- **Accessible AI Education:** Make AI literacy a priority for everyone
- **Ethical AI Tools:** Build solutions that prioritise privacy and transparency
- **Venture Funding:** Support startups solving real problems, not just chasing trends
- **Courage:** We need businesses willing to take risks and explore AI's full potential

Olivier Gomez *is CEO of IAC.AI, which specialises in intelligent automation and AI solutions that actually work in the real world*

Top 2024/2025 Advanced Tech Market Trends

- **Intelligent Automation Lives**
  It may have been a bit frozen out of the headlines but Intelligent Automation (IA) has absolutely not gone away, is still a major investment area for firms and so remains a huge, huge part of what we do. For one thing, the public sector is now a very hot IA area, and we are seeing a lot of traction from this employment and career side of IT; we're also seeing RPA/IA adopted by small and medium-sized businesses who are catching up fast. So if this is you, be assured you have a very strong and well-paid future!
- **MS Power Platform Powers Along**
  More than holding its own against the standalone IA vendors, this solution (which, again, has gone under the radar slightly given the stream of headlines and podcasts about GenAI, DeepSeek R1 etc.) is becoming increasingly seen as a safe bet and more and more Power activity is racking up. We think CIOs are leaning into this because the cost of licences are much cheaper than some of the better-known options, so we are seeing demand for skills in the platform increase and know experts cross-training onto MS to give themselves a multi-tool advantage
- **GenAI: Put up or shut up?**
  Clearly still a lot of hype here, but companies started to do more real work in this over the course of 2024. Like RPA/IPA when it was solidifying, this is more of an enterprise narrative right now, but brands with the money to spend are kicking off PoCs and starting to put it to work. For job seekers, that means GenAI skills are in demand but there is a question mark for some about how real your experience is, and suspicion a few people are just looking to jump on the hype train
- **Agentic AI: Still mainly in the wings?**
  The new term everyone has been shouting about; could be the AI killer app, but we are yet to see any live examples of this. Real world expertise is hard to come by but it is out there, so we expect 2025 is likely to be the year with companies pushing this on their agenda (compare UiPath continuing its **RPA to full AI pivot**)
- **NLP**
  A core aspect of all AI, Natural Language Processing exploitation will continue to shape how companies do AI. The skills for this are more available as its been around for a little while and is a way for people doing this to get into the newer sexier tech, especially with chatbots
- **And will we see Empathetic AI solutions?**
  Rather than just more and more repetitive/easily codified work automation advancing, there seems to be growing appetite out there for software that can really understand how to interact with humans, especially in care, hospitality, and customer service type scenarios beyond today's rather limited 'bot interfaces and moving to richer UI and interfaces. One to watch?

Subject Matter Expert View 2:

James Ewing, Director - Head of Automation & Advanced Technologies EMEA at UST

I'm a CEO and I want 'in' to all this. Do I retrain my data scientists to become AI gurus, hire contractors, partner with Unis, get in the system integrators. All of the above? Something else?

Having been involved in advanced and emerging technologies for over 25 years, I've seen technology waves come and go. Some waves come crashing in and make big impacts; others wash in and just wet a few beach towels. AI is not a new technology. It dates back to the 1950s but the barrier to entry was so high it was preserved for massive research projects or tech savvy financial institutions. It hasn't really been a wave, more of a slowly filling lake now available to all. With the advent of cloud, access to high powered computers and huge data sources we have seen AI adoption accelerate and with GenAI a velocity in new activity and interest like nothing I've ever seen before.

GenAI is at the forefront of discussions in the boardroom and among CEOs who are concerned that misuse or lack of participation means they are falling behind their competition more quickly than with other technology advancements. Unfortunately, we have seen this excitement result in a leapfrog of more reliable and proven technologies like RPA and Intelligent Automation solutions. The important thing is not to 'just let it loose'. We advise clients that governance is an important first step. We have seen many clients unaware of what their teams are doing with free-to-use GenAI products. Developing corporate guidance and controls is vital to ensuring your data is not fuelling external data models and giving others a competitive advantage with the value from your IP or inadvertently disclosing proprietary information. Creating guardrails is an important step toward safeguarding your data, simultaneously allowing innovation and complying to increasing regulations in this space. Regulation is normally introduced because of some form of 'disaster' to prevent it happening again. We don't want to be the reason for new regulation.

Experimenting with AI in new product introductions, adding to business process automation, considering agentic AI, improving cybersecurity, supply chains, customer service, etc. is no different than working with any new technology that is trying to crest the wave. Along the discovery process, engineers and data scientists may touch areas a CIO or CTO may not consider. Governance structure around data policies and personal information use are common and obvious but GenAI is accessing and interpreting huge data sources either externally or internally. That should not be taken lightly. False positives, false negatives and contextual attributes may not be factored in queries if written by non-experts.

Once you stray into areas of brand protection and reputation, corporate voice, customer and employee satisfaction and potential IP infringement.... then what? But you are giving people with no experience, training, or knowledge access to what are very complex algorithms, or worse, in some cases overly simplistic algorithms to provide insight.

The problem is this could cause any number of issues. Who should own the GenAI initiative in your company? Your data team! Historically, if you wanted an analysis of a dataset, you would engage the data team and ask them to run a model with context and powerful software tools with which they have experience using and manipulating. Asking questions of data with a natural language interface, unsupervised, is a recipe for disaster. If you don't have a strong data science team, consider engaging a digital transformation service provider with deep data, research, and analytic skills to help develop the guardrails you are missing, guide teams through algorithm development, use of third party sandboxes for experimentation and the thoughtful implementation of GenAI in your company.

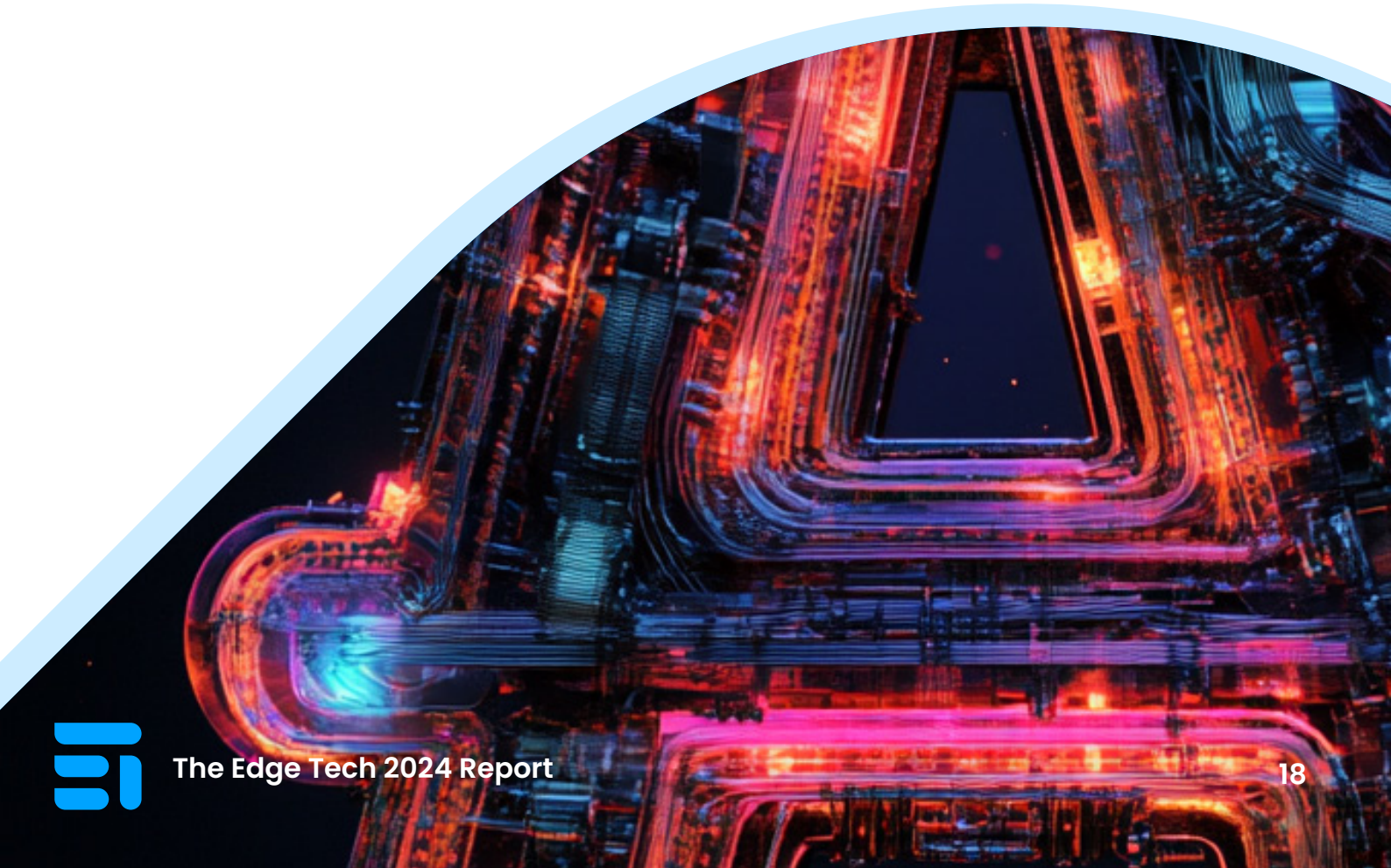
My advice to CEOs evaluating initiatives being brought forth by their leadership teams is to continue evaluating GenAI initiatives with the same rigour and metrics for making any sound business decision – profitability, improved margins, reduced cycle times, increased customer and employee satisfaction and productivity. Ignore 'cool' and market hype. If it comes with a strong business case, the technology is secondary and almost irrelevant. To that point, the answer isn't always a new GenAI solution. More mature technologies may solve the problem like Natural Language Processing, Intelligent Automation, and OCR. These may be easier for your company to drive value quickly.

Since 1999, our company has worked side by side with the world's best companies to make a powerful impact through transformation. Powered by technology, inspired by people, and led by our purpose, we partner with our clients from design to operation. Our digital solutions, proprietary platforms, engineering expertise, and innovation ecosystem turn core challenges into impactful, disruptive solutions. With deep industry knowledge and a future-ready mindset, we infuse innovation and agility into our clients' organisations—delivering measurable value and positive lasting change for them, their customers, and communities around the world. Together, with 30,000+ employees in 30+ countries, we build for boundless impact—touching billions of lives in the process.

James Ewing *works with clients to leverage cognitive, AI and machine learning opportunities at UST, a global digital transformation solutions provider*

New Market Realities

- **The IA to AI evolution is picking up speed**
  Organisations want more than just automation. As businesses move beyond simple low-risk optimisation, the thirst for more well-rounded and complex solutions is building. As a result, the lines between IA and AI are becoming more blurred by the day; people are crossing over from yesterday's RPA project to this quarter's AI project, and IA programmes of work are now generally referred to as AI ones. This was always kind of the route of travel, but became a reality last year
- **Microsoft comes out of the gate strong**
  By pushing Power at a low price point but also by very successful market seeding and support of Copilot, the sleeping giant of old-style office productivity suddenly becoming incredibly relevant in the new world of AI once again. This will make the next few months highly interesting; Redmond was hardly going to give up without a fight, and it's now in the competition to show how they are better. Our reading of the market is that rivals will now go for focused/niche solutions that are 'deeper' than Microsoft's more generic/horizontal version of GenAI etc., like specific AI banking solutions for loans and other sector-specific solutions. This could be great for both competition and choice, and also for customers who could cut their time-to-value and save a lot of customisation time
- Rather than just one dimensional tool users, Devs being more diverse in their skills. That's to say not just focusing on one IA tool like we have seen in previous years, so less of 'I've been an SS&C Blue Prism developer for 5 years and that's what I know' to opening up to wider tools and tech and so **marketing themselves as a 'Swiss Army Knife' IA/AI development competencies**. This could widen candidate skills and attractiveness, but also make for a better overall market for potential employers; we predict similar broadening out of how Business Analysts and Project Managers in advanced tech will also comport themselves, and so get the overall market warmed up for everyone



Subject Matter Expert View 3:

Chris Gatrell, Evri

2024: What caught you off guard?

The continued rate that the market and AI capabilities continue to change. Having an Innovation function at Evri has really helped us stay up to speed, but I didn't quite expect things to move quite as fast and change quite as much as they have!

AI buzzword bingo: there is a new word or description for something every week, which often leads to confusion. And as for ChatGPT (and friends): Beyond helping kids with homework and speeding up blogs, what's it actually delivering? At Evri, we've been watching closely what ChatGPT has to offer whilst utilising Copilot more extensively. The guardrails and protection we have through our enterprise licensing gives us that added bit of control, and with this being so new to so many people we feel that it supports us and our colleagues better. As a matter of fact, in a business like ours that is so heavy on meetings and Teams calls, I know it's delivering real time saving for lots of our colleagues, especially in IT and Operations, e.g., for note capturing, action tracking, creating powerpoints, job specs, agenda setting for meetings, marketing tasks, content creation, analysis and insights and more.

I think we're just dipping our toes in the water though. The real value comes with business-wide adoption and transformation but this requires time, upskilling and knowledge sharing—all of which I/m glad to say we have plans in place to achieve over the next 6-9 months.

Why does no one talk about ML & predictive models anymore?

Nobody is really talking about them as there are new descriptions for them but they are still crucial to advancements in AI. The technology is continuing to evolve but these absolutely still have a place and need in the market as they underpin a lot of the new capabilities that are being talked about.

Agentic AI: hype or revolutionary killer app?

There are signs that Agentic AI could really change the landscape of AI BUT (isn't there always a but?) only used in the correct way for areas of a business that really need it. At Evri, we always go back to our key principle, 'Automate with a purpose!' We can absolutely find use for Agentic AI across our business, but it will be built and rolled out in the correct way, following the guardrails that have seen our significant success over the past 18+ months. Here, I advise to start small, implement safely and scale fast.

Does the UK/Europe have the talent to lead in this space?

The short answer is yes. The market is growing at such a rapid pace and the skill sets are ever changing, but I truly believe that the foundations are in place to support the growth of AI across all sectors. In our case, I have recruited a new Centre of Excellence at Evri and the talent that is delivering business wide transformational change is exceptional (not to mention the many CV's we sifted through and interviewed candidates). Coupled with working closely with a leading market player in Intelligent Automation, Robiquity, I have seen firsthand the incredible talent they have right across their business, and this gives me every confidence in the talent pool we have to offer across the sector. I'd also point out the welcome rise in apprenticeships, graduates and training programmes, which all tells me the future is shaping up nicely for the UK in this vital area of the economy of the future.

The EU AI Act—necessary innovation guardrails or stifling red tape?

Absolute necessity! With the pace of change and even the unknown of the true capabilities AI can provide (fast forward 1, 5, 10 years and think how differently things will look…), I believe that having some guardrails in place are essential to support every business / user of AI. The Act is there to provide support and guidance as we navigate through this exciting time, I can't see it as a blocker to stop exploring things.

How should CXOs get "AI-ready"? Retrain, hire, partner, or a mix of everything?

There won't be a one-size-fits-all approach across any business. So, getting AI ready should be carefully planned by looking across the target business areas, to see what support AI can give our business and the colleagues who support it. A blended mix of consolidating, retraining, partnering, and hiring new skilled individuals / teams is also, I think, shaping up as essential to keep up with the pace of change.

What wider political contexts could impact the industry?

Any changes in government (UK or further afield) will always bring new opportunities and different challenges. Policy & regulations could significantly change if there are global government shifts, which would impact the AI market for businesses in these countries, and businesses they interact with.

However, as stated, I believe through UK wide innovation and investment, we can continue to grow the capabilities and talent to support such future change. I'd advise all companies to watch this space very closely and have back-up plans to pivot to if things get a little "spicy".

What should Santa have brought to the UK AI sector this year?

- Some initiatives to raise awareness about AI and support the public that AI is happening, but it's not bad news but a good thing
- I'd especially like to see more of this actioned in local schools, to assist with shaping the future of AI through our children
- Continued innovation to help us explore, quickly, the new AI capabilities that are changing the sector

Chris Gatrell *is Principal Intelligent Automation Manager at Evri, where he's responsible for building the newly recruited Automation CoE on-track to deliver £8m benefits in year one*

What we're seeing

Fascinating stuff from a practitioner out there in the market—but many readers of the annual Edge Tech survey come to us for both setting developments in context as we are doing, but also want to get our view from the front line of everything we are seeing from our unique place in the market.

So, what's the view from up here on the penthouse level of the Silverstone Innovation Centre? Data we have presented here from REC above and which is available elsewhere shows that when it comes to tech hiring, we have been at our longest lull in (UK) recruitment for well over 20 years and, at least for now, we're not seeing a bounceback.

Because of that, and probably confirmation of the challenging market of 2024, our data shows very little salary level change since the 2023 data analysis exercise. And while we'd all like to see a big surge in GenAI and presumably Agentic activity, given all the noise we're all being subjected to and all the start-up and VC investment into it, on the ground the adoption from large companies, especially building gen AI processes in-house is very slow, with not many having seen a real impact.

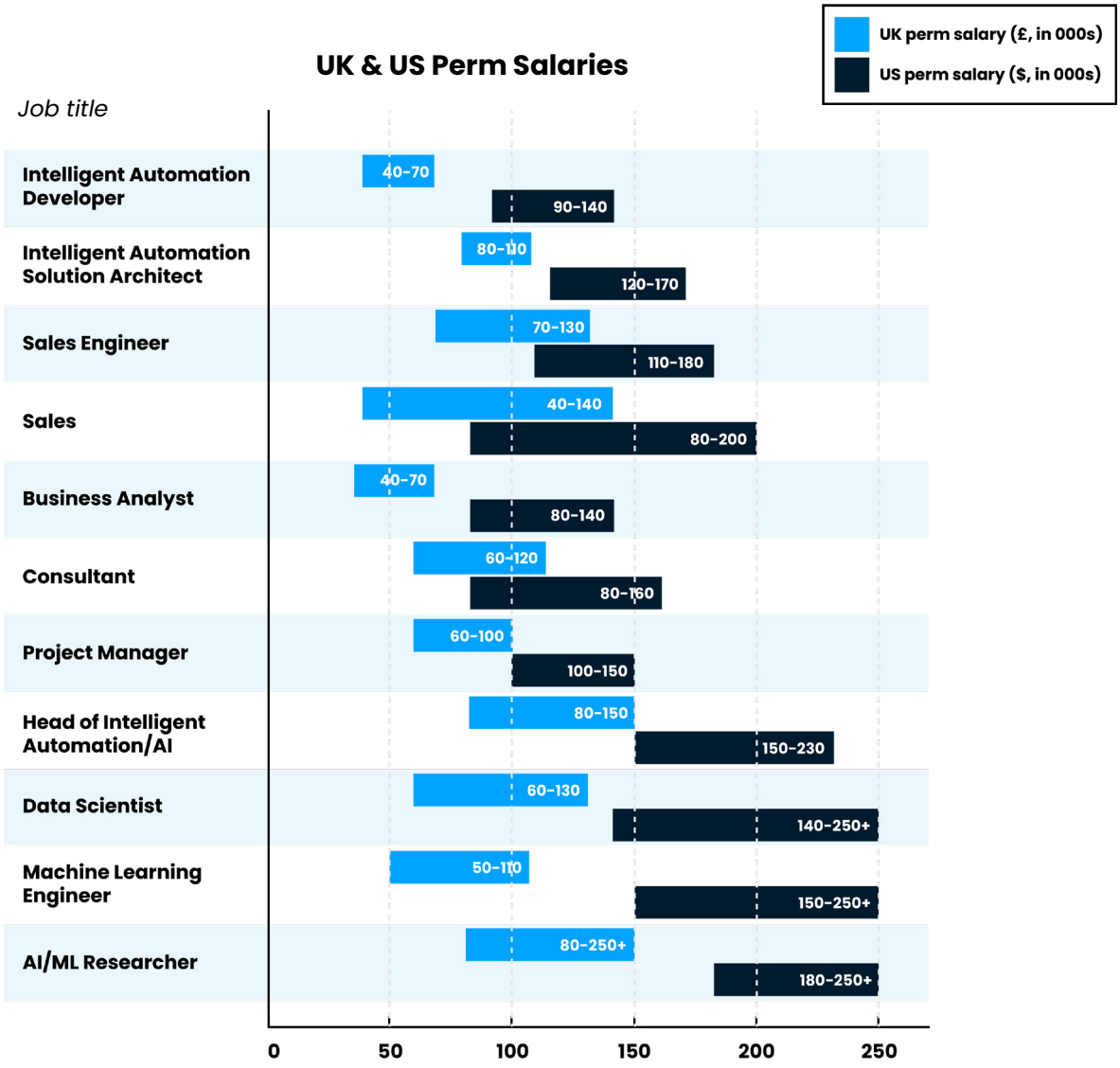
Our gut is that we still have a lot of traction in Automation and RPA to work through before this stuff, sexy as it is, is ready for prime time and BAU. People are struggling a little to find uses for AI that will have a significant impact that are not already automated or don't require a huge upheaval to work—and business is still having issues with data management that need to be addressed before being able to employ GenAI.

So, 2025 may well turn out to be a year of consolidation and ground-prepping for real AI (of whatever variety or combination of technologies, perhaps driven by a new direction suggested by a so-far outside player like DeepSeek seems to have started). Think some good work on interoperability and orchestration and continued experimentation and willingness to invest, spin out pilots of PoCs, and to some extent throw stuff at the wall to see what sticks. What convinces us there is ample basis for optimism and career growth in advanced tech these next 18 months is **ongoing spend in GenAI and AI more broadly**, while to some of us slightly surprisingly swift corporate acceptance of Microsoft that always puts the seal of enterprise credibility on a new technology.

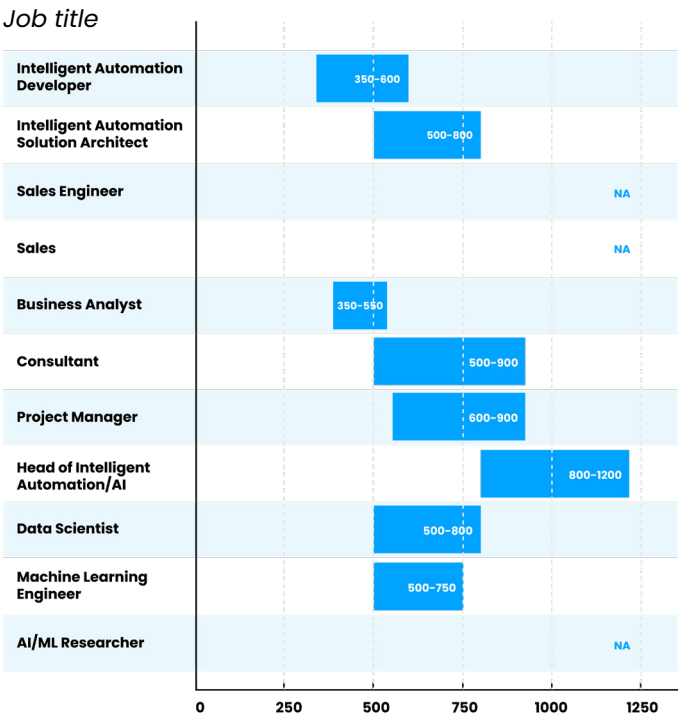
The Edge Tech bottom line for job seekers and recruiters

Let's now share some proprietary Edge Tech data. This breakdown of what we saw and helped deliver in 2024 must be seen through the following perspectives:

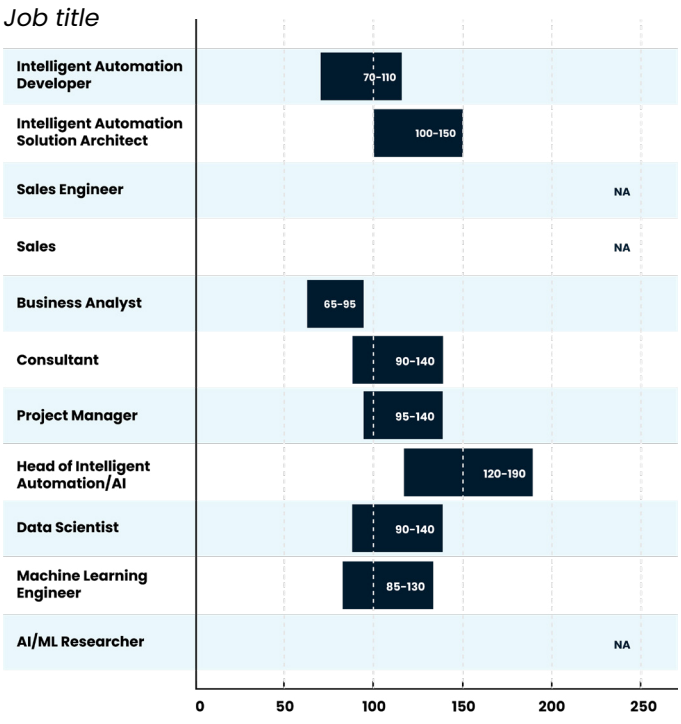
- Our summary doesn't include any OTEs or bonuses and the day rates/hourly rates nor Edge Tech fees or anything else on top
- There are clearly outliers from time to time, i.e. some salaries do go higher than £250k
- 'IA developers' includes a whole group of intelligent automation technologies (RPA, IDP, process mining etc.)
- 'Sales' covers junior to senior roles.



UK contract day rate (£)



US contract hourly rate ($)



Our 2025 talent and hiring guidance

Last year a major client engagement left us with a lot of useful insights into a cycle we think a lot of organisations tend to go through when it comes to adoption of advanced IA/AI tech and getting set for it skills-wise. This was in the shape of a Magic Circle/Tier 1 legal services leader that wanted to scale up an internal AI capability, but didn't really know why! Because of this lack of initial clarity, we were asked to provide an AI lead but struggled to connect an individual and make this work for both sides, as candidates detected that they could end up in a situation with unclear parameters that could make them the fall guy for lack of ROI.

We're delighted to say this all worked out fine for both prospective employers and new senior employees, and we have had the pleasure and fortune to work with a number of great businesses who understand the urgency of hiring in this space. But it took more than a few conversations to get the client to see what story and framework they needed to prove to all sides this wasn't just 'AI for AI's sake.' But that tension manifested itself in another case, a major hospitality brand that insisted on a long senior IA developer hiring cycle that in 2023 would have been a matter of weeks took months, and an allied RPA Developer role, a responsibility we have filled very successfully numerous times in our previous six years in the market, became a three month debate that didn't result in an actual placement.

What seems to have muddied the waters here and in a few other conversations was an almost overnight lengthening of requirements, obviously caused by internal company confusion about where IA ended and where 'AI' would need to start. More than once we saw the same pattern, to be honest: a business looking to 'urgently' hire a lead developer but then foot-dragging over a month between each interview stage, and executive demand for 'AI' that could never be translated into specifics, frustrating everyone involved.

In our game, of course we understand there are always going to be businesses that pull roles, because the budget has fallen out or they have lost a client. But what we'd like to see less of in 2025 is better market understanding of the purpose and benefits of advanced tech, including RPA and data management and their contributions to eventual (and sure-fire) Artificial Intelligence success.

We encourage healthy debate and client dialogue to make this happen. Every day we work to try and improve communication that ensures good employer brand, and which must centre on:

- sharing your business case and vision for how you want them to help you and what they could achieve in your opportunity
- keeping candidates up to date
- give them the worst case scenario (this could not get beyond the drawing board, but we're very excited about this potential direction)
- stop being unrealistic or super optimistic about hiring timelines.

But we can't say this enough: we've had a flat year or so, but momentum is building and building and we expect 2025 to be a red-letter year for our candidates, the UK and US tech sectors, and indeed the whole world of business as LLMs, Automation, Analytics, Agents, Reasoning Platforms, and who knows what else start to fuse together and acquire the huge critical mass we all see coming to transform business, the global economy, and society itself.

Subject Matter Expert View 4:

Kieran Gilmurray, Independent Tech Trend Consultant & Author

2024 is now in the rear-view mirror. How would you sum it up?

I was struck by how much positive attention Generative AI (GenAI) has received—so much so that it has overshadowed critical discussions, including its so far shall we say 'hard to quantify' return on investment. For instance, one company I know of had 223 pilots running, yet few are likely to make it to production.

This kind of inefficiency cannot continue. Equally concerning is the lack of attention on Generative AI's significant environmental impact, the importance of high-quality data and data security, and the role of automation in maximizing its potential. Another surprise was the sheer volume of coverage around Agentics; while it's for sure a potentially game-changing technology, it will take time for businesses to fully grasp how to leverage it effectively.

What surprised—and didn't surprise—me was seeing some companies publicly returning their Copilot licenses. To me, that's a costly mistake. Tools like Copilot cost $1–$2 a day, and while not every job requires Generative AI (don't see it replacing many cooks or carpenters), the reality is most knowledge worker functions can benefit. I sat down recently and worked out that in what I do I'm 40% more creative and productive using a variety of Generative AI tools, all for under $100 a month. Hiring talent to achieve the same level of output would cost more. This feels less like a problem with the tools, I am starting to feel, and more like a failure of strategy, top-down education, and practical training.

What's GenAI actually good for, though?

'Almost anything for the individual' is the shortest answer. GenAI can assist with tasks like creating web content, copywriting, brainstorming ideas for products, services, or team-building activities, generating initial iterations of images to speed up the design cycle, producing multilingual transcripts, translating foreign languages, converting speech to text, summarising dense documents, creating compelling content, writing Excel formulas, coding, conducting research, and much more.

At a larger scale, companies are leveraging Generative AI-powered conversational systems to deliver intelligent, 24/7 customer service while mining text data for real-time insights. These systems, my clients tell me, are helping them suggest next-best actions, enable cross-sell and upsell opportunities, provide coaching, ensure compliance monitoring, and more. In retail and e-commerce, it personalises shopping experiences with AI-driven product recommendations, automates customer support through chatbots and virtual shopping assistants, and generates dynamic ad copy and product descriptions at scale. The manufacturing sector benefits from AI in designing prototypes through Generative Design to optimize material usage, improving predictive maintenance by analysing machine data, and accelerating supply chain logistics through automated planning and tracking. Education is leveraging AI to create personalised learning plans for students, generate quizzes and summaries for educators, and translate lecture content into multiple languages to ensure global accessibility. Entertainment and media industries use Generative AI to produce scripts, storyboards, and visual effects for films and games, automate captioning and translations for international releases, and curate personalised playlists for users.

These applications are just the tip of the iceberg, and as we progress through 2025 will just, in my view at least, accelerate AI's transformative potential across industries.

Agentic AI: Another bandwagon or REAL next big thing?

It's the real deal, but there's still a journey ahead. While some 'so-called' Agentic AI stories—like one I read on a global tech provider's website that was merely basic fraud detection—overhype the term, true Agentic AI is already here and making an impact.

For example, Agentic AI is driving autonomous systems like drones that can navigate complex environments without human intervention. I know it also powers customer service bots that don't just respond to queries, but proactively solve problems by anticipating user needs. So, Agents aren't just vaporware, this is a potential foundational shift in AI capabilities—but for all these genuinely amazing things to fully realize their potential, businesses will need time to adopt, adapt, and integrate it into their ecosystems effectively. Conclusion has to be that the promise is real, but it requires a measured and strategic approach to unlock its full value.

Does the UK / Europe have the skills base to really contend here?

There are lots of British AI leaders of global stature:

1. **Geoffrey Hinton** Often referred to as the "Godfather of Deep Learning," Hinton's work on neural networks and backpropagation algorithms has been foundational to modern AI
2. **Demis Hassabis** Co-founder and CEO of DeepMind, Hassabis has driven impressive AI achievements, including the development of AlphaGo
3. **Stuart Russell** A professor at UC Berkeley, Russell is renowned for his work on AI safety and ethics
4. **Wendy Hall** A Dame Commander of the British Empire (DBE) and a champion for UK AI skills and women in science.
5. **Tabitha Goldstaub** Co-founder of CogX and chair of the UK Government's AI Council.

So, yes, while much of the tech spotlight shines on Silicon Valley, the UK and Europe are brimming with AI talent. The UK boasts world-class universities, exceptional individuals, and pioneering companies like DeepMind, demonstrating AI innovation at its finest. Similarly, Europe hosts leading AI hubs, exemplified by organizations driving advancements in autonomous systems, robotics, and natural language processing.

In fact it's fascinating to note the number of UK and European citizens thriving at the highest levels of AI globally. From researchers spearheading groundbreaking projects to engineers driving development in major tech firms, their contributions underscore the region's competitive edge. While Silicon Valley, and now China with DeepSeek-R1 etc, might dominate headlines, the talent and expertise in the UK and Europe prove they're more than capable of contending—and excelling—in the AI market.

Maybe that is the way we Brits like it: excellent but unassuming!

Some people hate the EU AI Act…?

I'm generally positive about it, because it promotes the responsible use of AI and data while encouraging a deeper understanding of these technologies. For instance, certain organisations must introduce AI literacy training by February 2025, so the clock is ticking for some to get moving.

But the Act is being deliberately phased in, giving companies time to prepare, so this should come as no surprise. Moreover, we've had GDPR for years, so businesses should already be familiar with the principles of compliance in the data and AI era. While I fully support innovation in technology, processes, systems, or people, it shouldn't come at any cost. Regulation like the Act aims to strike a balance between fostering innovation and ensuring ethical, responsible use of AI. Let's hope the EU has found the right balance here.

How do I as a company leader get plugged into all this?

It depends on your goals, the size of your business, and what you aim to achieve. Any business, regardless of scale, can benefit from low-cost commitments to start—$20-a-month AI tools, for instance—and training teams to use them effectively, or what I describe to clients as the 'taker' approach.

This is a quick way to enhance productivity and creativity across the board. Larger organisations might benefit from more sophisticated solutions, such as conversational AI infused with agentic and generative AI to securely deliver intelligent, 24/7 service to tens of thousands of customers (the 'maker' approach).

This requires investment in advanced tooling and integration into existing workflows. For businesses with unique intellectual property or stringent security requirements, like large tech firms, consulting companies, investment houses, or banks, on the other hand, owning and customizing a large language model within their secure data centers may be the best option (the 'shaper' approach).

This ensures tailored AI solutions that align with their specific needs. I am convinced that there's an AI solution for every budget; the key is understanding your business priorities and aligning your AI strategy to deliver tangible benefits. Depending on your ambitions, a mix of upskilling, partnerships with universities, engaging contractors, or working with system integrators might be the right approach.

What would you like to see happen in the advanced AI and IA market the rest of 2025?

If I could wave a magic wand, it would be for environmentally friendly AI that benefits the entire human race. AI—and Generative AI in particular—has the potential to be truly transformative; it could read radiology scans more efficiently, saving countless lives by detecting diseases earlier, it could optimise supply chain designs, saving both time and costs while reducing environmental impact.; or imagine AI systems that could start to radically improve access to education globally by creating personalised learning plans, translate content in real-time to bridge language gaps, and enhance food production by monitoring crop health and preventing waste. We could also be using tech to combat climate change by improving energy efficiency and accelerating the adoption of renewable energy.

So, this year, but going forward, I want to see AI that not only drives innovation but also ensures inclusivity and sustainability, addressing global challenges while creating value for everyone.

***Kieran Gilmurray**, a globally recognised authority on AI, automation, and digital transformation, is the author of two influential books and hundreds of articles on digital transformation and Artificial Intelligence and been named a Top 50 Global Thought Leader and Influencer on Generative AI and a Best LinkedIn Influencer for AI and Marketing*

The funniest things clients & candidates have said to us this year

Talking about a developer whose salary floor was £60,000

"Yeah, we really like the candidate. We're going to offer them £42,000."

Setting up a Teams interview starting in 5 minutes

"I can't make the interview. I've hurt my back."

To genuine shock from our client when we said that's literally what we do

"We've been looking for this person for months, how have you managed to turn a shortlist around in a week?!"

And best of all, the classic ask of being asked to find a purple unicorn:

"Can you find me a candidate with 15+ years of experience in AI? Oh, and they must be under 30 years old."

Subject Matter Expert View 5:

Kostas Vogiatzakis, VP - Process Excellence & Automation, Real Estate Sector

Reflections on a year of change

After the big buzz of Gen-AI and ChatGPT, we now see the practical impact of companies and governments not doing a great job at re-skilling or educating people on how to enable and support these technologies in the future, instead of feeling victims of it. None of the recent technologies are brand new, after all; they all existed in academic environments for many years now, so we are very late at preparing for them.

On the ChatGPT front, there are definitely substantial gains when using ChatGPT for individual problems or tasks. In our environment, we have seen great productivity benefits in our daily automation delivery using ChatGPT for scripting, development and debugging, for instance. But what I think would make an actual difference is to integrate those Gen-AI and LLM capabilities into the core operations of a business and go after bigger efficiencies that rules-based or other technologies can't solve for. (An example in the Healthcare context would be to automate high volume clinical tasks like reviewing blood tests and summarising clinical notes, without medical intervention.)

One of the symptoms of professional social media is that everyone gets pushed to go after the new shiny things and the buzz. ML and predictive models have been around for a long time, they are well integrated in almost every platform that considers the customer as the main product (i.e. Netflix, Spotify etc.). You see this again and again, including with IA, that by the time something becomes mainstream and it's widely used in different contexts, the social media music stops and everyone goes after the next big thing. People generally underestimate the long term benefits of applying a 'simpler' technology correctly and at scale vs. apply more advanced technologies for short term smaller benefits, only to demonstrate innovation.

Case in point: Agentic AI sounds very powerful in both virtual and real contexts given that the human intervention is minimised, whether that is to define rules beforehand or provide direction later down the line. We can all imagine hundreds of use cases in both front and back-office that not only optimise the cost of operations but also introduce a very powerful customer experience as part of it.

The problem with these big ideas though comes down to implementation. These things don't get magically deployed at scale without having the right use case, a healthy business case and ROI, a suitable team with the right skillset to implement, as well as a plan to look after it post-deployment. Most enterprises will go straight to hire a third party that claims to know what they are doing and expect magic to happen after x amount of weeks, which is not realistic in most cases.

Looking at the global context and Trump 2.0, the UK and Europe generally have a big opportunity to get even more involved in the AI industry. There are great university and educational opportunities in our part of the world which we sometimes underestimate, as well as some less expensive countries that can provide fantastic talent. But even if the educational background and talent exist, we first have to break through the mindset barriers that we traditionally had and move away from the current passive approach to new technologies. Europe was the first to introduce GDPR, the EU AI Act and other regulations, but where this leaves us is 'USA innovating and Europe regulating'. Both things are important, but they can't be mutually exclusive.

Looking forward, I would like to see:

- sharing your business case and vision for how you want them to help you and what they could achieve in your opportunity
- keeping candidates up to date
- give them the worst case scenario (this could not get beyond the drawing board, but we're very excited about this potential direction)
- stop being unrealistic or super optimistic about hiring timelines.

There is space for everyone to play a role in this new era; the business problems are too many for only a few to be able to solve. So, I wish we have a more open and shared community by the end of 2025.

***Kostas** is a Process Excellence & Automation leader who joined the Automation industry in its infancy 7 years ago, since which he has been setting up and growing high-performing teams to deliver process improvement and Automation initiatives, for multiple departments and geographies, at scale.*

Conclusion

The Last Word, From Ollie

As we step into 2025, I believe we are about to see a massive shift in how AI is actually applied in the real world. Last year felt like the "hype phase," where everyone was talking about AI's potential, but few companies had tangible results. This year, I predict we will finally see real-world applications, measurable business impact, and clear winners and losers in the AI race.

I say this as we've all seen major companies experiment with AI, but now my gut tells me we'll start seeing published, quantifiable results—actual case studies on how AI is improving business operations, cutting costs, and transforming industries. This is the year when companies that have been quietly building AI solutions will start revealing their breakthroughs.

China's AI Push: A Real Threat or Overhyped?

Nothing happens in a vacuum, and all of the above will be playing out in the real world. We're starting 2025, as we all know, with a lot of noise around China's AI capabilities, but I believe their biggest challenge isn't talent—it's hardware. With Nvidia no longer selling its most advanced chips to China (something that started with Biden but may or may not continue, of course), the PRC's AI development is running on stockpiled hardware, and so far it looks like they've really turned that to their advantage. But as demand for computing power rises, they will have to rely on alternatives that may not be as powerful, which could slow its AI progress significantly.

That said, China is known for its ability to find workarounds and accelerate innovation at an unprecedented pace. I wouldn't be surprised if the country's leaders, faced with a more antagonistic relationship with the US, demand their engineers build a separate Sino AI hardware ecosystem, or strike deals to access cutting-edge tech in unexpected ways.

Whether they succeed or not, Beijing's AI ambitions will definitely impact global markets and geopolitics. Personally, I think anything's possible here, including President Trump banning DeepSeek; but we'll have to see.

The Rise of AI Agents & the End of "Busy Work"

One of the most exciting developments in AI right now is the rise of Agentic AI—tools that don't just assist but actually take action on behalf of users. OpenAI's recent launch of ChatGPT with agent capabilities is just the beginning. It could well be that we're genuinely entering an era where AI can:

- Book travel
- Manage calendars
- Execute financial transactions
- Handle customer service inquiries
- Automate complex workflows
- And more. Much more?

This means we're very likely on the brink of a massive productivity boost. Surely it'll be the businesses that integrate AI Agents that will operate with unprecedented efficiency, while those that don't may struggle to keep up. Have you got the talent bench to help you get ready to break into open country when this kicks off?

A Startup Boom (and Bust) in AI

They say 'brain rot' was **the word of 2024**. I actually think it was hype—and I don't think we're done yet. Thanks to low-code/no-code tools making AI more accessible, Edge Tech and our network are already seeing AI-driven startups launching at a record pace. Alas, here I predict a wave of both success stories and failures; while some startups will genuinely disrupt industries, many will struggle because they're overhyped and lack real differentiation, they're up against firms like Microsoft, Google, and OpenAI who already have massive distribution and resources. And for all those amazing chaps at DeepSeek are achieving, AI training at scale isn't cheap to run, so many startups won't be able to scale effectively.

That being said, the most creative AI applications—especially those leveraging niche markets or combining AI with human expertise—will create, I know in my heart, new categories of business we haven't even imagined yet.

The Unpredictable Factor: Trump, Musk & AI Politics

I can't wait for that. Some other stuff I'm less enthused about. One of the wildest unknowns in 2025 is how politics will shape AI development. The U.S. government has committed crazy money (on paper) to AI infrastructure, but how that money is allocated remains uncertain.

Meanwhile, Elon Musk and other tech giants are clashing over AI's future, and surely it's only a matter of time before those tensions spill over into the public. With squabbles over regulation, political unpredictability, and corporate rivalries, there is at the very least an air of uncertainty and a genuine risk that we should all be planning for White House restrictions that slow AI progress in some areas and public backlash if AI disrupts the job market too quickly—no matter if that massive AI funding fuels rapid breakthroughs elsewhere.

Either way, expect AI to be one of the most politically charged tech topics of the year—and on a global basis.

A New AI 'Gold Rush' For Job Seekers?

But beyond all this, for anyone who wants to break into AI, 2025 is the year to go all in. Right now, everyone is at ground zero; whether you have 15 years of experience or 6 months, there's an opportunity to become an expert and so a very valuable commodity out there.

For all our joking about it, companies aren't really looking for people with '15 years of AI experience'. They're actually looking for:

- Curious, self-driven learners who can adapt quickly
- Lifelong learners and self-starters (from any background or current job!) who experiment with AI tools in their free time
- People who understand how AI applies to business problems, not just the tech.

That means that if you start learning and applying AI today, you could be leading projects within *months*. But on the flip side if you're looking to source talent, beware a wave of AI fake experts, as in people who claim deep knowledge without real experience. You'll have to be extra cautious about who you hire, which is why you'd really be doing yourself a favour to work with people like us so you really do secure actual problem-solvers, not just hype-chasers.

Final Thoughts: 2025 is the Year of AI Reality

There's the word again. Let's all hope for the last time; if the past year was about AI hype, this year has to be about RESULTS.

Summing up:

- In 2025, **some companies will emerge as AI powerhouses, while others will fall behind**
- AI Agents will transform how we work, but **political and economic factors could shake up the industry in unpredictable ways**
- But for individuals, **NOW is the best time to dive into AI**—whether as a career move, a side project, or even just to understand where the world is heading.

The AI revolution isn't coming—it's already here. 2025 will be the year we see exactly what it's capable of.

I don't think I've ever been more motivated to leave a mark on the technology landscape as I am this year!

Ollie Sulley
Co-Founder
Edge Tech

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Get Edge Tech's Help

Edge Tech is the market leader in recruitment for the emerging technologies space. We:

We connect fast-growing companies with talented technical, operational, and sales experts across the UK, Europe, US, and Canada. Whether you're searching for a key individual or to build an entire team, our bespoke search services are designed to help you effortlessly meet your hiring goals, including:

- **connect fast-growing companies with talented experts from around the world**
- **match companies to top talent across the UK, Europe, US and Canada**
- **have an extensive network of technical and Go-To-Market experts, so can fill your perm and interim positions in as little as 48 hours.**

Our global reach and industry expertise guarantee that our clients find the right professionals to drive their success. Ultimately, we're here to take the headache away from recruiting by reducing your time-to-hire while increasing the quality of your applications.

That's why above the Edge Tech doors it says, **We're Not Just About Results; We're About *Your* Results**. If that sounds like the level of service you need to build your advanced tech capability or sales team, then why not start today by emailing us at info@edgetech.ai or calling one of the leadership team at:

www.linkedin.com/company/edge-tech-group

01908 382 398 (UK) | +1 (628) 254 5056 (US)

info@edgetech.ai www.edgetech.ai

Together, let's make 2025 the year your company turns all you're reading about into what you can make money about. In other words, use Edge Tech's expertise to focus on what you want to achieve in terms of both your business and talent acquisition and skills planning ambitions over what will be a very exciting next few months.