

Insights from Oxfordshire professionals on what matters most in 2025

# **Voices of Oxfordshire:**

# **Pay & Benefits**

# **Report 2025**

## **What Candidates Want**



## About This Report and Our Survey

We wanted to survey our network of candidates across Oxfordshire. Our community in the county is unrivalled, giving us unique reach and insight. By working with us, our clients gain full access to this network.

Responses were gathered through online questionnaires distributed via email to our recruitment network and collected from July 2025 to August 2025. The survey comprised both multiple-choice and open-ended questions to capture qualitative and quantitative insights.

We surveyed our Oxfordshire candidate network across both permanent and temporary positions, encompassing admin, marketing, project management, finance, and HR roles.

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## About Allen Associates

Allen Associates specialises in recruitment services for job seekers and employers in Oxford. We offer opportunities in PA and Administration, HR, Marketing, and Finance at all levels, temporary and permanent.

Allen Associates' recent **Oxfordshire Recruitment Market Overview** highlighted the challenges facing both employers and employees in today's job market. We've seen a cooling of the labour market, falling vacancies, shifting candidate expectations, and a skills shortage, all of which have combined to make recruitment more difficult.

We now turn our attention to Pay and Benefits, presenting the results of a survey conducted among over 200 respondents. We'll examine attitudes towards pay (current and desired) and benefits, as well as the challenges job seekers face, both in Oxfordshire and beyond.



# Key Themes From What Oxfordshire Candidates Are Saying Today

## 1. Salary Expectations and Review Cycles Are Misaligned

There is a significant disconnect between the time respondents last received a pay review and their expectations regarding salary. Several respondents haven't had formal reviews in a long time, and this seems to correlate with reduced current job satisfaction.

## 2. Benefits: Expectation vs. Reality

While many receive standard benefits like holiday and pension contributions, the most valued benefits (flexible working, wellbeing support, career development) are often absent. There's a clear opportunity for employers to rethink benefit offerings and align them with candidate preferences.

## 3. Flexible Working Is Now Foundational

Respondents overwhelmingly prefer hybrid or remote roles, with many stating that they would consider leaving a job that does not support this arrangement. This is no longer a 'nice to have' but an essential part of role appeal and retention.

## 4. The Recruitment Process Needs a Human Touch

Candidates are calling for greater transparency, effective communication, and genuine feedback throughout the hiring process. They want fewer automated rejections and more personalised interaction, with the quality of the recruitment experience shaping their perception of employers.

## 5. Wellbeing and Culture Matter More Than Ever

Wellbeing is often described in terms of feeling heard, supported, and part of a positive team. Unsupportive or inconsistent environments, poor communication, and a lack of direction are key reasons people disengage. A better culture, more support, and manageable workloads were among the most requested improvements.

## 6. Training and Development Remain Underserved

Many feel their current roles lack meaningful learning opportunities. Respondents value CPD, mentorship, and personal development – and want these to be actively supported by employers, not just promised.



7. Values-Led Job Searches Are Increasing

Company ethics, social impact, and sustainability are increasingly influencing career decisions. Jobseekers want to work for employers whose values they share and who are seen to act on them consistently.

Pay and Benefits

We asked our network:

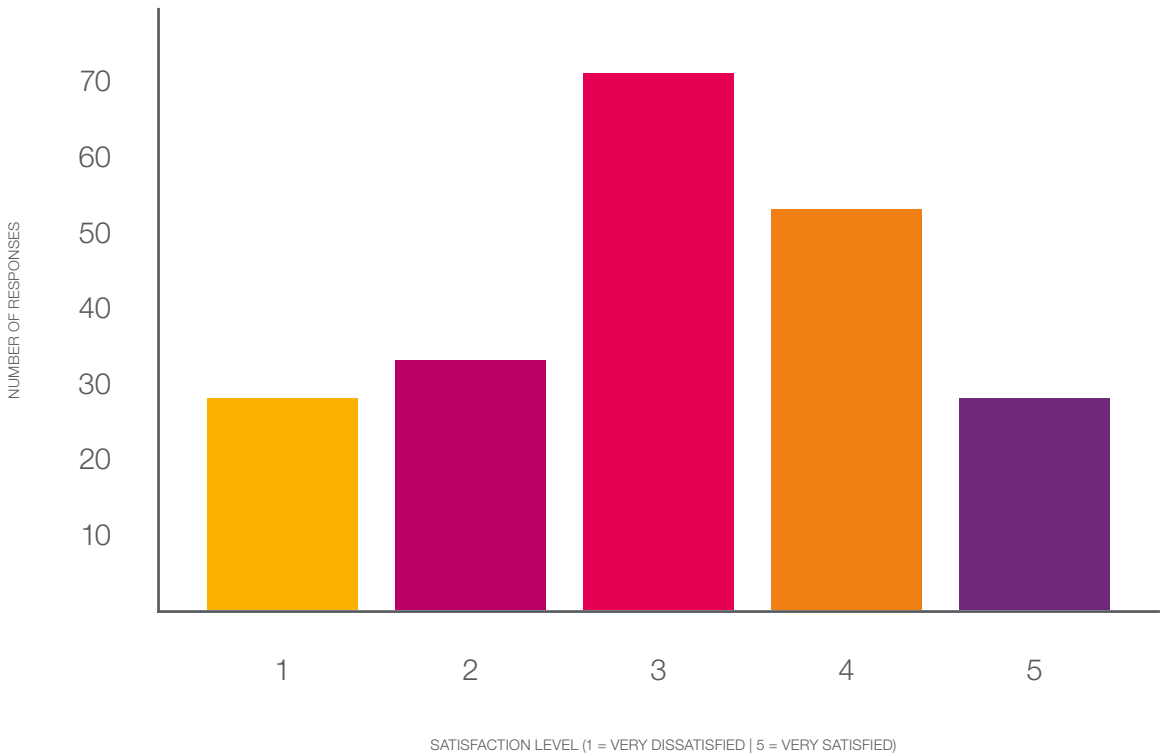


How satisfied are you with your current or most recent remuneration?

Permanent

The data on remuneration satisfaction shows that most respondents sit in the middle ground, with one in three rating their satisfaction as neutral, at 3 out of 5. While this suggests that pay levels are broadly acceptable, it also highlights a lack of strong enthusiasm or contentment with current remuneration packages. This middle clustering points to an underlying ambivalence - employees aren't necessarily unhappy, but they're also not fully satisfied, leaving room for improvement in how organisations structure or communicate pay and rewards.

Satisfaction With Current/Most Recent Remuneration:



At the same time, the distribution at either end of the scale is revealing. Nearly 30% of respondents rated their satisfaction as low (1–2), indicating a significant segment of the workforce feels underpaid or undervalued. By contrast, only about 12% reported being very satisfied (5 out of 5).



Pay dissatisfaction continues to be one of the most influential factors driving job movement. Where imbalance exists, particularly in terms of perceived fairness or competitiveness, there is an increased risk of losing valued team members.

**Kate Allen | Allen Associates**

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## Employer and Employee Disconnect

At the same time, many clients report to us that they are balancing budget constraints with the need to remain competitive in salary and benefits. Candidates want more because of the cost of living squeeze, but companies are trying to balance the books.

To remain competitive, organisations are adopting practical measures to balance affordability and employee satisfaction.

Strategies include reviewing and tailoring reward packages, revising pay frameworks, and strengthening employee engagement through career development, transparent communication, and a positive organisational culture.

Flexible and hybrid working models remain central to recruitment and retention, while outsourcing, AI-driven recruitment, and investment in collaboration tools are helping employers adapt to shifting expectations.

Ultimately, those who prioritise agility, fairness, and long-term workforce development will be best placed to manage ongoing challenges, foster loyalty, and build resilient teams in 2025 and beyond.



We asked our network:

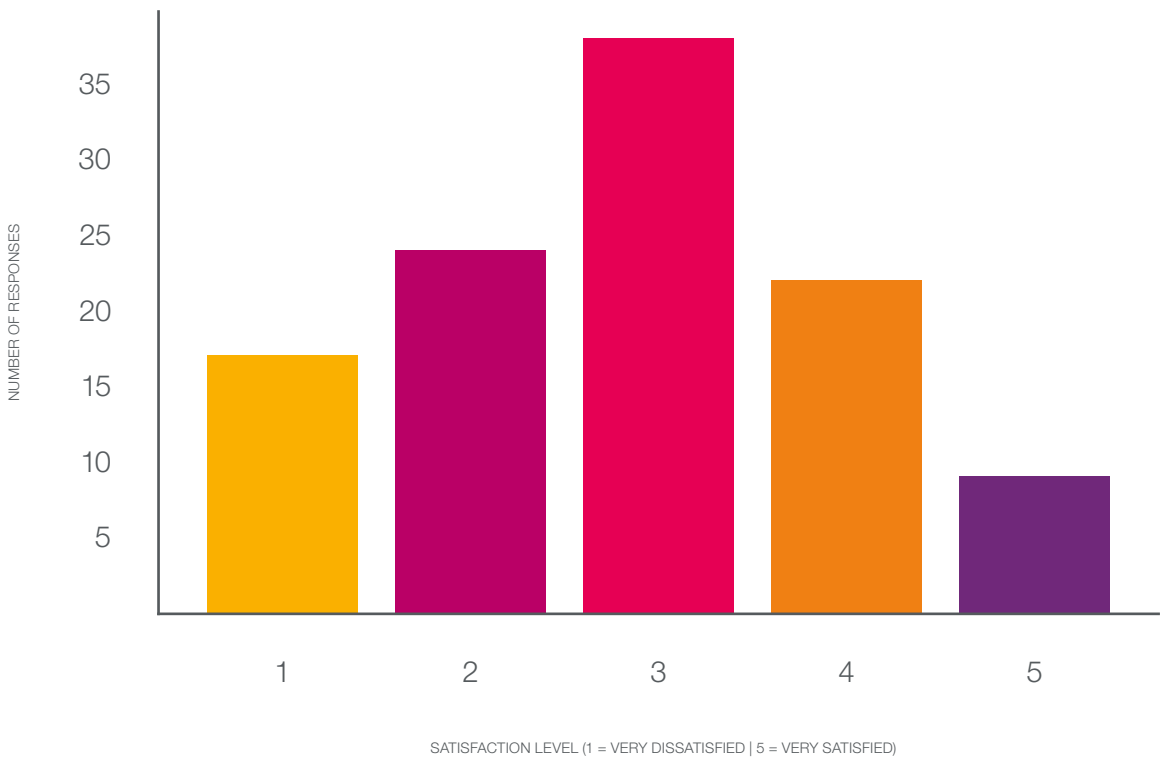


How satisfied are you with your current or most recent remuneration?

Temporary

The findings on daily rate satisfaction suggest that most respondents occupy a middle ground, with just over a third rating their satisfaction at 3 out of 5. This neutral response indicates that while temporary workers may not be wholly dissatisfied, they also don't feel strongly positive about their compensation.

Satisfaction With Current/Most Recent Daily Rate:



Around one in five expressed moderate satisfaction at level 4, suggesting there is a segment that feels reasonably rewarded, but this is not a dominant group. Overall, the data highlights a sense of ambivalence rather than evident contentment.

At the same time, dissatisfaction with daily rates is significant, with more than a third of respondents (37%) rating their satisfaction as low (1–2), indicating widespread concerns about pay adequacy within this group. By contrast, only 8% report being very satisfied (5/5), suggesting very few feel they are achieving premium value for their work.



This imbalance may reflect a misalignment between temp pay rates and evolving market expectations, particularly in the context of rising living costs and increased demand for specialist skills. For employers, it highlights the need to offer competitive remuneration and to clearly acknowledge the value Temporary Workers bring, in order to retain high-quality talent.




**Eleanor Bromage | Allen Associates**

### We asked our network:



#### When was your last pay review?



-  Within the last 6 months **50%**
-  6-12 months ago **25%**
-  Over 12 months ago **25%**

Not having regular pay reviews carries significant risks for organisations; this can quickly translate into higher turnover, as staff begin to seek roles elsewhere that offer more competitive remuneration. It also undermines trust and engagement, as employees may perceive a lack of recognition for their contribution and loyalty.



Over time, challenges with retention can begin to erode an organisation's employer brand, making it increasingly difficult to attract high-calibre candidates. Reputation plays a crucial role in talent acquisition – and once compromised, it can take significant time and effort to rebuild.

**Kate Allen | Allen Associates**



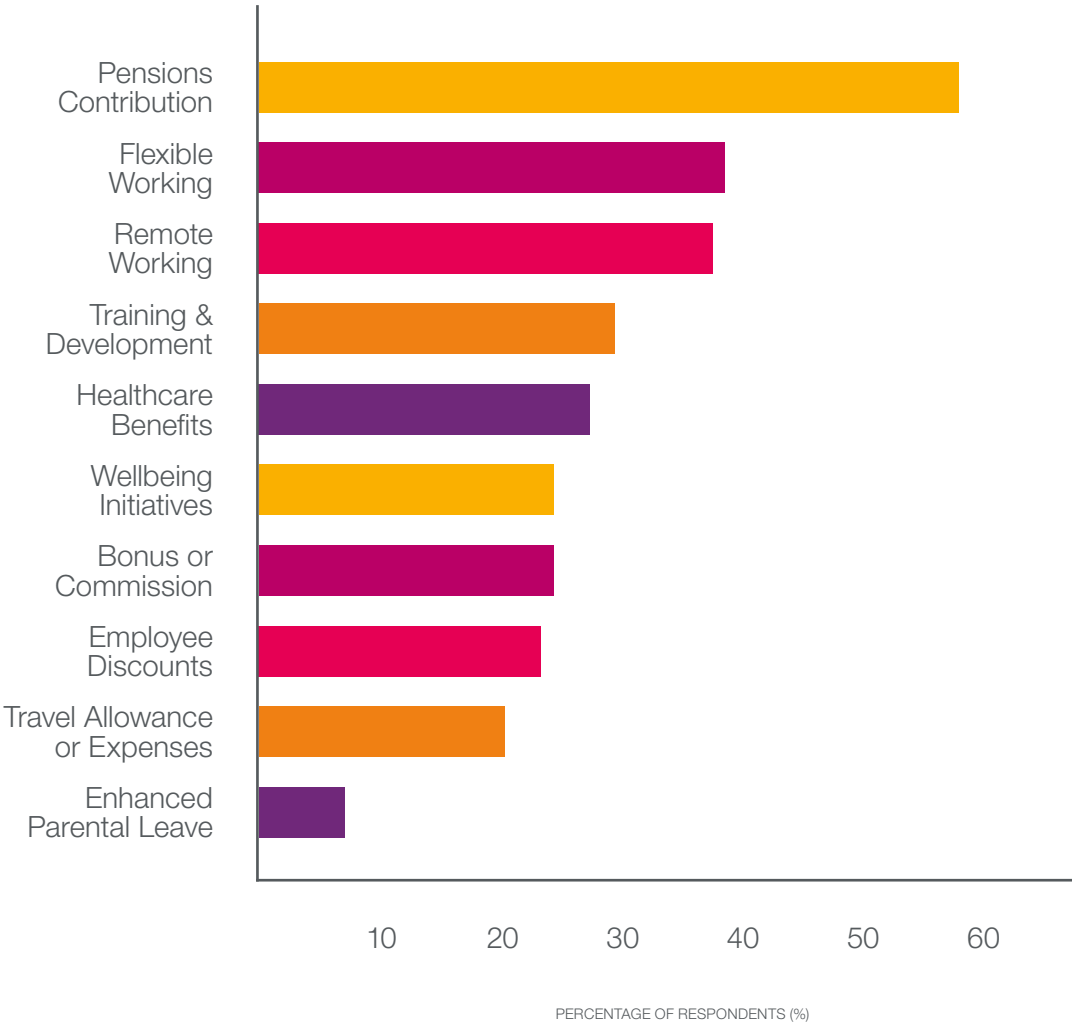
We asked our network:



What additional benefits do you currently receive?

In addition to pay it's clear that other benefits are also important.

Top Benefits Currently/Most Recently Received (As % of Respondents):



The most common benefits are pension contributions (57.6%), flexible working (37.8%), and remote working (36.7%). Other widely provided benefits include training & development (29.1%), healthcare benefits (28.4%), and wellbeing initiatives (24.8%). Financial extras such as bonus/commission (24.1%) and employee discounts (23.7%) also feature prominently. Less common benefits include a travel allowance (20.1%) and enhanced parental leave (6.5%), while very few respondents reported perks such as a company car or overtime.

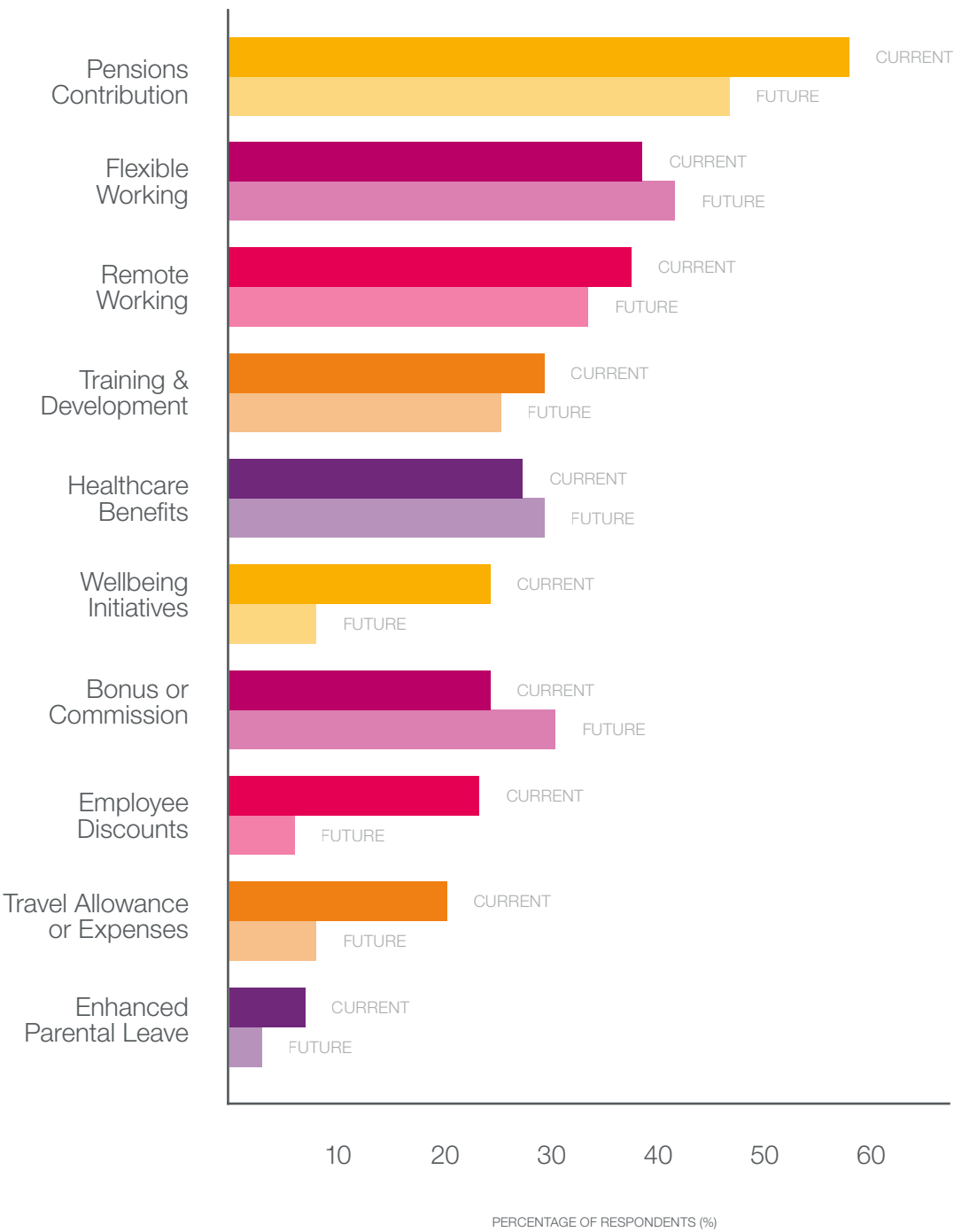


We asked our network:



How do current benefits compare to what you want in future roles?

Comparison: Current vs Future Benefits:



The comparison between current and future benefits highlights both areas of alignment and notable gaps. Pension contributions, flexible working, and remote working are currently the most common benefits provided, and these continue to be among the most valued by employees for the future.

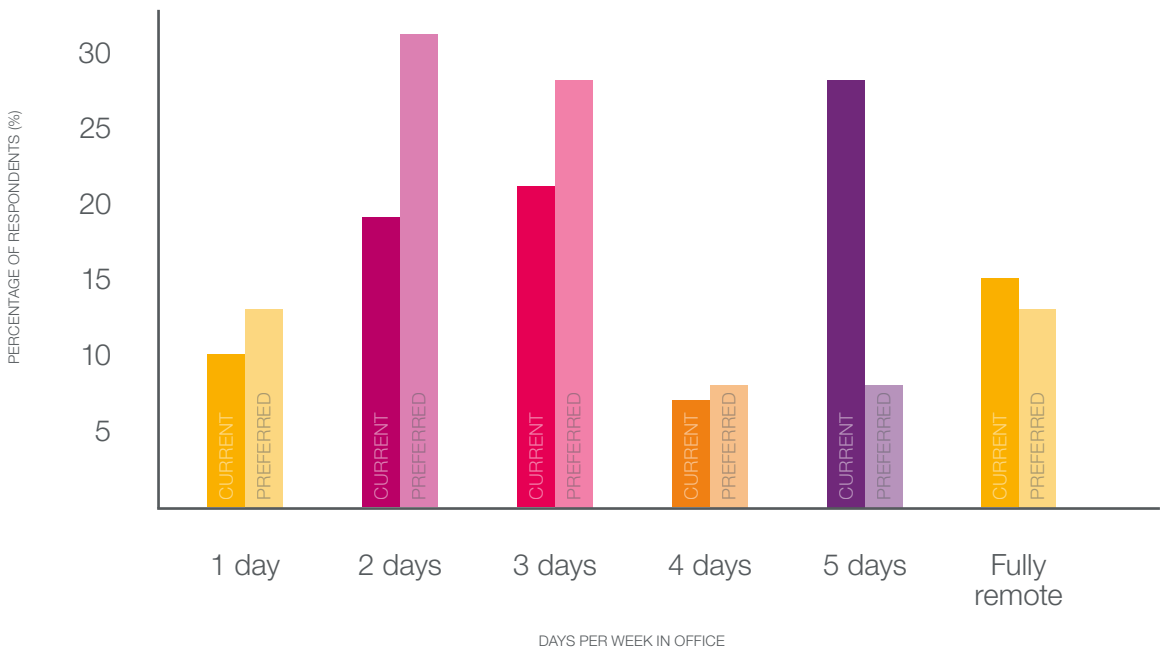
In particular, flexible working grows slightly in importance, signalling that adaptability around when and where people work has become a critical expectation. Bonus and commission schemes, as well as healthcare benefits, also emerge strongly as future priorities, suggesting that employees want more financial recognition and practical support for their wellbeing beyond core pay.

## Remote and Hybrid Working – the Great Mismatch

For employers actively recruiting, the gap between current office requirements and employee preferences has direct implications for talent attraction.

The data shows that while nearly **28% of respondents are still required to work in the office five days a week, only 7.6% want that arrangement.**

Current vs Preferred Days in Office (Excluding N/A):



Preferred: Strongest preference is for 2 days (30.5%), followed by 3 days (27.6%) and 1 day (13.3%). Only 7.6% would choose 5 days, compared with nearly 28% who currently do.



In contrast, the vast majority of candidates favour hybrid working models of two to three days in the office. Employers mandating full-time office presence may be limiting their access to top talent, as flexibility remains a key consideration for job seekers when evaluating opportunities

**Eleanor Bromage** | Allen Associates

**75%** of people would consider leaving their current role if hybrid working were no longer offered.

## Training - a Gap in Offering: Only 15% of Candidates Have Had Some Training

The survey findings show that around a quarter of respondents report receiving no training or development opportunities at all in their current or most recent role. This lack of investment in people's growth is striking when compared to the strong demand for professional development seen elsewhere in the data. Among those who do receive training, provision appears patchy and inconsistent, with relatively small numbers mentioning opportunities such as leadership training, LinkedIn Learning, DEI programmes, first aid, or management development.

This suggests a clear gap between employee expectations and what employers are offering. Earlier responses showed that candidates most value training in areas such as leadership, AI/technology, and professional qualifications, yet the current training landscape is dominated by either no provision or generic programmes.

For employers, this gap represents a risk, not only in terms of employee retention, as employees may seek growth opportunities elsewhere, but also in limiting the development of critical skills needed for the future. Investing more consistently in targeted training could therefore play a key role in both attracting and keeping top talent.

### Candidates Are Looking for AI and Leadership Training

Interestingly, this demand aligns with broader employer strategy: **over 90% of companies** plan to increase their investment in AI over the next three years. This creates both opportunities and risks; businesses must upskill staff to make the most of new technologies while ensuring people don't feel left behind.

## Wellbeing

We asked our network:



How would you describe your level of wellbeing in your current or most recent role?



#### Low wellbeing (1-2)

27.6% of respondents (almost 3 in 10) rate their wellbeing poorly.



#### Medium wellbeing (3)

36.2% sit in the middle, suggesting neither good nor poor wellbeing dominates.



#### High wellbeing (4-5)

36.2% report good or very good wellbeing, with only 10% giving the top score.

**Respondents on lower salaries (under £30,000) report the lowest average wellbeing, at around 2.9/5, suggesting financial stress may be a significant factor.**

This indicates that while over a third of people feel reasonably positive about their wellbeing, an almost equal share report low wellbeing, and the largest group clusters around average (3/5). This pattern suggests wellbeing is a mixed picture: few feel their wellbeing is excellent, while a sizable minority are struggling.

### Moving forward - we also asked:



#### What would improve wellbeing at work?

Here are the top 5 wellbeing improvements of all respondents:

## 1. Recognition and Reward



## 2. Career Development Opportunities



## 3. Supportive Management



## 4. Flexible Working



## 5. Better Work-Life Balance



## Corporate Social Responsibility

Nearly four in five respondents (79.6%) view social responsibility and ethics as important or extremely important when considering a job.

### Quite Important



### Extremely Important



### Neutral



### Not Very Important



### Not At All Important



Very few dismiss it as unimportant, highlighting that responsible business practices are now a mainstream expectation in the job market. Meaning that you need to get this right and promote it to potential employees when marketing job opportunities to future people.

Eleanor Bromage | Allen Associates



# When Looking for Work: The Recruitment Experience

We asked our network:



What challenges have you faced when applying for new roles recently?

This highlighted several recurring themes.

The most common issue raised was age discrimination/ageism (multiple mentions such as “Age”, “Ageism”, “My age”).

Other frequent challenges include CVs not being read, rejection, low salaries, and ghosting by employers.

Some respondents mentioned being considered overqualified, while others expressed frustration with lengthy or complex application processes, a lack of employer recognition for their qualifications, and the high volume of competition in the job market.



Recruitment companies can play a vital role in easing the burden on HR departments by managing the high volume of applications that many organisations now face. By combining the expertise of experienced recruiters with the efficiency of technology, agencies can quickly filter and shortlist candidates, ensuring that only the most suitable applicants are passed on to hiring teams.

At the same time, technology-driven applicant tracking systems and automation can be used to keep candidates updated at every stage of the process, reducing the risk of disengagement caused by silence or ghosting. Importantly, this doesn't replace the human touch; recruitment consultants can provide personalised feedback, answer questions, and build stronger relationships with applicants.

Together, people and tech ensure that employers benefit from a streamlined process while candidates receive a more positive, responsive, and respectful experience.

**Kate Allen | Allen Associates**

## Conclusion

Our 2025 Pay and Benefits survey highlights a UK employment market where professionals are increasingly focused on flexibility, fair pay, wellbeing, and meaningful benefits. They comprise a workforce that is both ambitious and cautious when considering their next career move.

There are clear opportunities for employers in Oxfordshire and beyond to strengthen retention by focusing on these issues, thereby attracting and retaining talent in a highly competitive landscape. Flexible working, wellbeing support, career development, and transparent reward structures are increasingly decisive factors in whether employees remain or choose to move on. The challenge for employers lies in balancing financial constraints, such as rising salary expectations, with increasing cost pressures, while simultaneously contending with **persistent skills shortages**. This creates a highly competitive landscape in which employers' ability to differentiate themselves through culture, benefits, and the employee experience becomes just as important as salary.

Looking ahead, the most successful employers will be those that adapt quickly, embracing innovation, AI, and new ways of working, as well as those who invest in people through training and development, along with meaningful support, to future-proof their businesses. As economic pressures and new technologies continue to shape the market, a balance of competitiveness and care will ensure that businesses sustain growth and retain the talent they need to succeed.

**Key takeaway:** organisations that combine competitive base pay, transparent progression, hybrid flexibility, and wellbeing initiatives will stand out as employers of choice over the next 12 months.

For more information about any of the issues discussed in this report, contact Allen Associates today.



## Implications for Employers:

- **Retention risk is high:** with almost 9 out of 10 professionals open to moving, employers cannot afford to be complacent.
- **Recognition and career development** must be prioritised alongside pay.
- **Hybrid flexibility** is now a core retention factor, not a perk.
- **Wellbeing support is expected** as standard, proactive initiatives around mental health, work-life balance, and culture are increasingly decisive.
- **Pay transparency and clear progression pathways** are critical, particularly given that the majority of respondents earn under £40,000.

Together, these findings highlight that retention is about much more than salary. Employers who take a holistic approach, blending fair pay with recognition, development, flexibility, and supportive culture, will stand out as employers of choice.

