



# SEDR

RECRUITMENT

## 2026 UK Civils & Infrastructure Outlook: How to Plan Your Workforce Before Demand Peaks

A briefing from SEDR Recruitment.

Discover the latest salary benchmarks, workforce trends and practical steps to build stronger delivery teams in 2026.

# Foreword

This guide helps contractors plan ahead, protect margins and stay competitive as demand rises across UK civils and infrastructure.

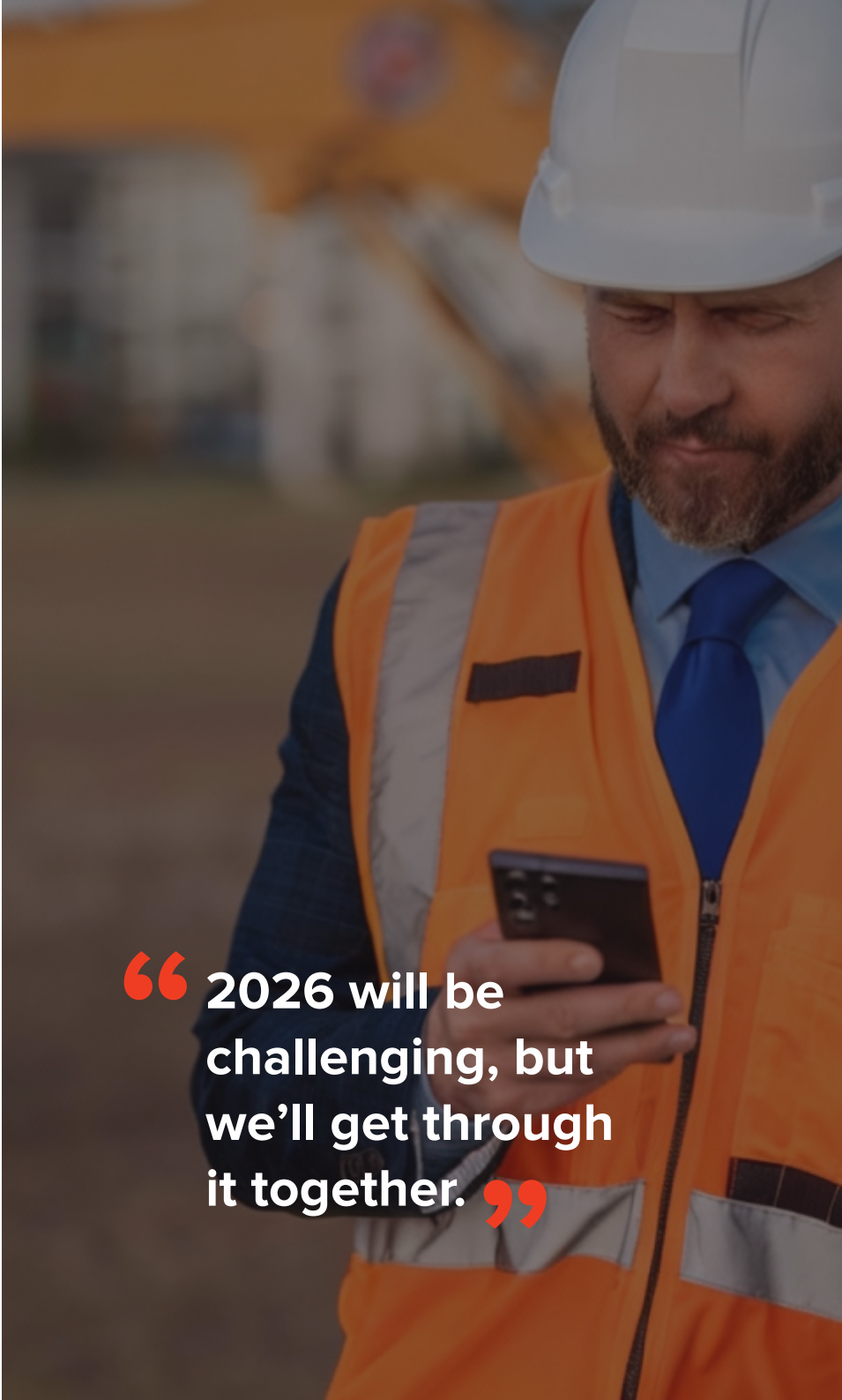
Workloads are increasing, costs are climbing and retaining talent is harder than ever. 2026 will test how well teams are led, planned and supported. Major programmes – the Lower Thames Crossing, Sizewell C, A66 Trans-Pennine Upgrade and East West Rail – are accelerating. AMP8, highway improvements and offshore wind projects like Sofia and East Anglia Three add further strain on limited resources.

The issue goes beyond pay. Leadership, planning and culture are crucial. With many senior engineers and foremen nearing retirement, succession and delivery are at risk. Contractors investing in development, communication and structure will be best placed to succeed.

At SEDR Recruitment, we help UK contractors attract, retain and develop the right people through market insight, honest advice and targeted headhunting. Challenges lie ahead, but so do opportunities. With foresight and investment in people, the industry can emerge from 2026 stronger than ever.

**Daniel Lewis**

Director | SEDR Recruitment



**“2026 will be challenging, but we’ll get through it together.”**



# What We're Seeing Going into 2026

The UK civils and infrastructure market is running close to full capacity. With multiple national programmes ramping up, competition for skilled staff has never been tougher - and long-term planning is now critical.

Everyone's chasing the same people. As project timelines tighten, salary expectations will keep climbing. Once programmes start to slip, the scramble for talent will push rates up further.

The contractors who map their future teams now, keep communication clear and maintain engagement will outperform those forced into reactive hiring when deadlines are already under pressure.

**“ Readiness is everything. ”**

## Key points

- Skilled Engineers and Foremen remain in short supply
- Pay rises of 8 to 15 percent are common across operational roles
- Candidates expect clear lifestyle or leadership improvements before moving
- Culture, communication and flexibility drive retention as much as salary
- The ageing workforce is tightening supply at supervisory level.

# Workforce and Salary Snapshot

(Permanent white-collar site staff — Early Works and Heavy Civils)

Early Works includes earthworks, remediation and enabling activity that prepares sites for large-scale construction. Heavy Civils covers highways, bridges, drainage, utilities, structures and major framework projects.

Role	Typical Salary Range
Site Engineer	£42,000 - £54,000
Senior Engineer	£52,000 - £67,000
Sub Agent	£58,000 - £72,000
Site Agent	£70,000 - £85,000
Earthworks / General Foreman	£65,000 - £72,000
Site Manager	£65,000 - £72,000
Project Manager	£80,000 - £100,000
Quantity Surveyor	£50,000 - £72,000
Senior QS / Commercial Manager	£80,000 - £110,000
HSEQ Manager	£62,000 - £88,000

These figures represent national averages across early works and heavy civils. Salaries vary by region, framework and project type, but leadership, culture and communication remain the strongest retention tools.



# Our Take on the Market

“The market still favours candidates. Experienced Foremen, Site Managers and Project Managers are in short supply, and many have multiple offers at once.

As workloads accelerate, salary pressure will only increase. Contractors without a clear workforce strategy will find themselves paying more for talent as projects slip and delivery windows close.

Leadership and communication now outweigh pay as the main reasons people stay. Contractors who engage their teams, plan ahead and show structure are holding onto key staff while competitors struggle with churn.

Readiness is everything. Those combining market data, strong communication and proactive workforce planning will protect margins and delivery quality throughout 2026.”

**SEDR**  
RECRUITMENT

**Want regional salary bands or bespoke benchmarking for your frameworks?**

Contact Daniel Lewis:  
[daniel@sedrrecruitment.com](mailto:daniel@sedrrecruitment.com)

Or book a 15-min call via  
[www.sedrrecruitment.com](http://www.sedrrecruitment.com)

# Why People Move and Stay

“The best professionals rarely move for pay alone. They move for leadership they trust, projects that challenge them and an employer that values balance and communication.

Contractors investing in mentoring, clear structure and genuine engagement are keeping their best people and attracting others through reputation, not incentives.


But when pressure builds and communication breaks down, people start looking elsewhere. Stability, trust and clarity matter more than short-term bonuses. Build an environment people want to stay in and recruitment becomes easier at every level.”

“ The best professionals rarely move for pay alone. ”



# Pressures on the Ground

Issue	Impact
Too many live frameworks	Stretch on labour and delivery quality
Mid-level shortage	Pressure on programme performance
Retention fatigue	Turnover mid-project
Cost pressure	Margin squeeze across supply chains
Competing major projects	Wage inflation and longer mobilisation times



**“ 2026 will reward contractors who plan early, budget realistically and lead well. Those who delay workforce planning until delivery starts to slip will face higher costs and fewer options.**

**With clear direction and the right people in place, contractors can protect margins, deliver quality and come through stronger. ”**

## The Year Ahead

- Skilled labour remains the biggest delivery risk
- Leadership and succession planning are critical
- Salary growth will continue as demand outpaces supply
- Early planning protects programmes and margins
- Culture and communication drive retention and performance

# What We Recommend

- 1. Plan Early**  
Forecast key roles three to six months before mobilisation
- 2. Develop Internally**  
Identify and mentor future leaders now
- 3. Budget Realistically**  
Expect salaries to rise as competition intensifies
- 4. Lead Well**  
Clear communication keeps delivery teams aligned
- 5. Partner Smart**  
Work with search specialists who understand your market

# About SEDR Recruitment

SEDR Recruitment is a specialist headhunting and workforce planning partner focused on Early Works (earthworks, remediation, enabling) and Heavy Civils (highways, utilities, bridges, drainage, structures and major infrastructure frameworks). We help contractors across the UK build strong, sustainable delivery teams through honest advice, market insight and targeted search.

We help clients plan for the future, strengthen leadership pipelines and stay competitive through insight, structure and the right people.

We are long-term partners who understand the pressures of delivery and the importance of building teams that are stable, motivated and aligned with your culture.

**SEDR**  
RECRUITMENT

**For a confidential discussion or  
to request regional salary data, contact:**

**e:** [info@sedrrecruitment.com](mailto:info@sedrrecruitment.com)

**t:** +44 7454 736 363

**[www.sedrrecruitment.com](http://www.sedrrecruitment.com)**

Data compiled from 2025–2026 SEDR placements and industry analysis across UK Early Works and Heavy Civil Engineering.





# SEDR

RECRUITMENT