



TALENT ADVISORY

The FM Talent Challenge

From today's hiring crisis to tomorrow's operating model

A strategic briefing for senior HR and TA leaders
in Facilities Management and volume hiring sectors

BRIEFING OVERVIEW

Executive Summary

Facilities Management is one of the UK's largest and most important sectors, employing over 1.2 million people and generating around £81 billion a year. It is also one of the most structurally challenged when it comes to hiring and keeping the people it depends on.

This briefing sets out where that challenge comes from, what organisations are doing about it, and what we think the future needs to look like. It is written for senior P&C and TA leaders who want more than a list of technology options. It is for those thinking seriously about whether the operating model itself needs to change.

Part 1 maps the eight structural challenges facing FM hiring today: chronic turnover, a shrinking labour supply, the impact of post-Brexit immigration restrictions, the growing complexity of Right to Work compliance, absenteeism, high application volumes with low conversion rates, slow and fragmented onboarding, and a sector image that is losing the competition for frontline talent.

Part 2 looks honestly at what organisations are actually doing to respond, covering both the traditional approaches that have had real impact and the AI and automation tools that are changing what is possible at scale. The evidence here is encouraging in places, but the overall picture is one of promising responses to individual problems rather than joined-up thinking about the whole challenge.

Part 3 makes the harder argument: that better tooling is not enough. The TA operating model itself needs to be redesigned. Not just augmented, redesigned. We set out what the future model looks like structurally, what roles change, where TA sits in the organisation, and how volume hiring in particular needs to be rebuilt around continuous capability rather than reactive process.

Part 4 covers the transition, including the failure modes that derail most transformations and a pragmatic four-phase sequence for getting from here to there.

Part 5 closes with a concrete strategic agenda: what to do now, what to build next, and what the operating mode should look like by the end of the decade.

The central finding

The central finding is straightforward, even if the path to it is not. The differentiator in 2026 to 2030 won't be the AI an organisation deploys. It will be the operating model that AI is deployed inside. Organisations that redesign the model will pull ahead. Those that automate the existing one will scale its inefficiencies, faster.

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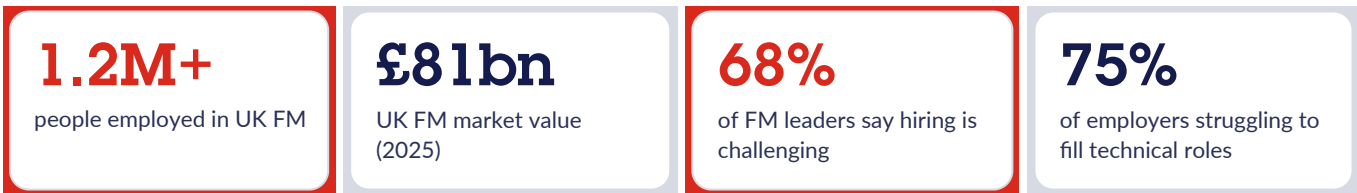
PART 1

The Burning Platform: The Eight Challenges Facing FM Hiring Today

UK Facilities Management employs approximately 1.2 million people, generates around £81 billion annually, and is projected to grow to £95 billion by 2031. The European FM market is expected to almost double to \$26 billion by 2030. These are substantial, growing sectors with genuine strategic importance to the organisations they serve.

Yet the workforce reality underneath those commercial headlines is in persistent crisis. FM depends on a large, geographically dispersed and often multilingual frontline workforce, comprising cleaners, security officers, engineers, maintenance technicians and porters, filling roles that are shift-based, physically demanding, and structurally undervalued relative to competing sectors. The result is a hiring challenge that is simultaneously high in volume, high in compliance complexity, and persistently hard to solve with traditional approaches.

What follows is not a comprehensive survey of every difficulty facing FM employers. It is a focused account of the eight structural challenges that matter most to large-scale hiring, each of which will need to be addressed in any serious redesign of the operating model.



1 Challenge 1: Chronic High Turnover

Employee turnover in FM frontline roles routinely exceeds 40% annually, with some cleaning and security contracts running significantly higher. The UK average across all sectors sits at around 34 to 35%, so FM is running materially hotter than the norm. The drivers are structural: salaries in soft services haven't kept pace with inflation, many contracts are priced on the assumption of low labour costs, and workers who leave FM are largely moving to retail, logistics and hospitality for similar pay with better patterns and more visible career prospects.

The commercial consequence is severe. An operator replacing 40% of a 500-person contract workforce every year is hiring 200 people annually just to stand still. At an industry-standard cost of 16 to 20% of annual salary per replacement, that is a hidden workforce cost of £400,000 to £500,000 per year on a single contract, before accounting for the service quality impact, SLA risk and client relationship damage.

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Challenge 2: Shrinking Labour Supply and a Widening Skills Gap

The FM workforce is ageing. Experienced engineers, maintenance technicians and supervisors are approaching retirement, and the pipeline of younger workers is insufficient to replace them. Around 75% of employers reported difficulty sourcing talent for building operations and maintenance roles in 2024, and over 40% struggled to fill property management positions. The skills gap has a second dimension: FM roles are becoming more complex. Facilities managers are now expected to navigate compliance frameworks, interpret data outputs, understand digital systems and contribute to sustainability objectives alongside their traditional technical responsibilities. Employer investment in training has fallen approximately 28% since 2005, creating a growing capability deficit precisely as buildings become more sophisticated.

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Challenge 3: Post-Brexit Immigration Restrictions

FM has historically relied on a significant proportion of EU-born workers. Post-Brexit, free movement ended. The 2025 Immigration White Paper raised the minimum skill level for new Skilled Worker sponsorship to RQF Level 6, effectively degree-level equivalence, closing off the routes FM depended on for cleaning, catering and security roles. Net migration is now at its lowest point in five years, with a 19% decline in worker visa applications in the year to December 2025 and a 50% decline over two years. Hospitality, cleaning and catering face an estimated 132,000 vacancies directly attributable to post-Brexit labour market changes. This is a structural constraint that won't ease in the near term.

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Challenge 4: Right to Work Compliance at Scale

Right to Work compliance has moved from an administrative inconvenience to a frontline legal risk. Fines for a first breach now stand at up to £45,000 per illegal worker, rising to £60,000 for repeat offenders. Between July 2024 and March 2025, over 1,500 civil penalty notices were issued. In Q1 2025 alone, 748 notices generated £41.6 million in fines, a 40% increase on the prior quarter. For FM operators hiring at volume across multiple sites, achieving consistent compliance is genuinely difficult. Different managers in different locations apply different methods. Documents expire. Onboarding systems vary. The Home Office has identified construction, FM and logistics as priority sectors for enforcement activity. This is a board-level risk, not a back-office HR issue.

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Challenge 5: Absenteeism and Workforce Stability

Frontline FM roles, physically demanding, shift-based, often isolated and with limited wellbeing support, carry above-average absence risk. Unplanned absence on a cleaning, security or maintenance shift means either a service gap or a costly last-minute agency fill. The UK Employment Rights Act 2025 adds further complexity to how operators manage short and long-term absence. More than half of large employers were still using manual or no systematic process to manage absenteeism at last count. The cost isn't just sick pay: it's the agency premiums (often 30 to 50% above standard rate), the overtime for covering colleagues, and the client relationship damage that follows a visible service gap.

6 Challenge 6: High Application Volume, Low Conversion

Large FM contracts attract significant application volumes for front line roles. On paper this looks straightforward. In practice it creates a different problem: recruiter teams buried in unqualified applicants, slow response times, and qualified candidates accepting offers elsewhere. Frontline candidates applying for a cleaning or security role are simultaneously applying to multiple employers. Response times that exceed 24 to 48 hours lose those candidates to competitors. Manual processes simply can't operate at the speed the market demands. There's also a structural quality challenge: many applicants lack the right certifications or clearances, such as an SIA licence, DBS certificate, or specific trade qualification, meaning a large proportion of the applicant pool can't be placed, and screening this out manually is both slow and inconsistent.

7 Challenge 7: Onboarding, References and Pre-Employment Screening

Even when a candidate is recruited, the pre-employment screening process for FM roles is one of the most complex across any sector. Depending on the contract environment, requirements include DBS checks, SIA licences, CSCS cards, trade qualifications, Right to Work verification, and references, all of which need to be confirmed before an individual can be deployed to site. For public sector FM contracts, the clearance requirements are higher still, with security vetting measured in months rather than days. This creates a structural lag between offer and start date that drives significant candidate dropout. A slow onboarding process doesn't just lose the candidate — it delays coverage, creating SLA exposure from day one.

8 Challenge 8: Brand Perception and Talent Attraction

FM has an image problem. The sector employs over a million people in the UK, but it isn't where most school leavers, graduates or career changers aspire to work. Frontline FM roles are perceived as low-status, low-pay and low-progression, a perception that underrepresents the genuine career opportunities the sector contains. FM operators are competing for the same frontline labour pool as retail, logistics, hospitality and healthcare, all of which have invested more heavily in employer branding, candidate experience and EVP communication. There's also a generational dimension: Gen Z candidates expect speed, mobile-first application experiences, transparent communication and genuine responsiveness. A hiring process that asks candidates to submit a CV via a desktop portal and wait a week for a response isn't just inefficient; it's a brand statement.

The uncomfortable truth

These eight challenges are interconnected. High turnover drives volume requirements. Volume requirements create compliance risk. Compliance complexity slows onboarding. Slow onboarding creates candidate dropout. Candidate dropout increases agency dependency. Agency dependency drives cost. Cost pressure limits investment in retention. And the cycle begins again. Addressing any one challenge in isolation produces marginal improvement. The operating model redesign that follows is designed to address the system, not the symptoms.

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PART 2

What Organisations Are Doing About It

For each of the eight challenges, there is now a body of evidence on what works, covering both the structural and cultural responses that predate the current technology wave, and the AI and automation tools that are beginning to change what's possible at scale. The honest message from the evidence is that neither approach works in isolation. The best outcomes consistently combine thoughtful process design with well-chosen technology, and the organisations making the most visible progress have done the unglamorous structural work first.

1. Addressing Turnover

TRADITIONAL RESPONSES

- Living wage commitments and annual salary benchmarking against competing sectors
- Structured career pathways from frontline operative through to supervisor and contract manager
- Stay interviews and regular manager check-ins as standard practice
- Employee wellbeing programmes including EAP, mental health support, and site wellbeing champions
- Workforce retention KPIs written into FM contract terms
- Internal promotion priority policies, with roles offered internally before external advertising

AI AND AUTOMATION RESPONSES

- Predictive attrition modelling: AI flags disengagement signals such as absenteeism patterns and performance shifts before resignation occurs
- AI-powered pulse survey analysis identifying systemic issues at team or site level
- Internal talent marketplace platforms (Eightfold, Beamery) surfacing mobility opportunities to employees based on their skills profile
- NLP analysis of exit survey data at scale to identify structural patterns rather than individual cases

DMA Group | HARD FM, UK

DMA addressed turnover by treating career development and pay benchmarking as operational priorities rather than HR initiatives. Engineers receive cross-trade training, visible promotion pathways run from technical roles to management, and salaries are benchmarked annually against top-quartile market data. Exit feedback consistently shows that leavers would consider returning, which is a meaningful signal that the employer relationship is valued even by those who've moved on.

OUTCOMES

- Lower voluntary turnover than the sector average
- The majority of leavers indicate they would consider returning in future
- Strong internal referral rate, attributable to a positive employee experience

Source: DMA Group FM Skills Gap Report, May 2025

2. Addressing the Skills Gap

TRADITIONAL RESPONSES

- FM Supervisor (Level 3) and FM Manager (Level 5) apprenticeship standards now well established
- Rotational apprenticeship programmes giving early-career candidates exposure across FM service lines
- IWFM-aligned professional qualifications integrated into development tracks
- Cross-trade training, for example mechanical to electrical, to improve coverage flexibility
- Secondary school and college engagement to position FM as a viable career destination

AI AND AUTOMATION RESPONSES

- Adaptive learning platforms personalising training content to individual development pace and gaps
- Mixed reality training overlaying holographic instructions onto equipment for hands-on technical development
- AI-powered skills mapping identifying curriculum gaps within apprenticeship cohorts
- Name-blind CV screening and skills-based matching to broaden the candidate pool beyond credential requirements

OCS Group | INTEGRATED FM, UK AND IRELAND

OCS made apprenticeships a strategic priority rather than a compliance exercise. Its 2024 programme offers an 18-month rotation across eight-week stints covering all FM service lines plus corporate functions, and targets 18 to 19-year-olds with no prior FM exposure. The explicit goal is to build future contract managers from scratch. OCS committed to over 1,000 apprenticeship placements across 12 professional pathways and 39 programmes in a twelve-month period.

OUTCOMES

- 140% growth in apprenticeship uptake year on year
- Commitment to 1,000+ placements in a twelve-month period
- Glassdoor recognition as 36th Best Company to Work For in 2025, attributed partly to the development culture

Source: OCS Group Apprenticeship Case Study (2025); FM Journal (July 2024)

Mitie | INTEGRATED FM, UK

Mitie has been named a Top 100 Apprenticeship Employer by the Department for Education for four consecutive years, offering programmes from entry level through to degree-level and combining structured learning with real operational responsibility from day one.

OUTCOMES

- Sustained internal talent pipeline reducing dependency on the external market
- Four consecutive years on the DfE Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers list
- UK Top 50 Inclusive Companies recognition, contributing to broader talent attraction

Source: Mitie Apprenticeships (mitie.com)

3. Addressing Post-Brexit Labour Supply

TRADITIONAL RESPONSES

- Increased school and college engagement and partnerships with DWP and Jobcentre Plus
- Targeted outreach to economically inactive populations, returners, refugees and care leavers
- Living wage accreditation and transparent pay scales to remain competitive against retail and logistics
- TUPE planning and retention protocols to manage workforce continuity on contract transfers

AI AND AUTOMATION RESPONSES

- AI talent pool tools such as Phenom and Beamery that build and maintain warm pipelines of domestic candidates without relying on reactive job board advertising
- AI scheduling platforms including Quinyx and Rotageek, optimising shift planning to reduce the coverage gaps that trigger costly emergency agency hiring
- Digital Right to Work platforms automating share code verification with monitoring alerts before permissions expire

4. Addressing Right to Work Compliance

TRADITIONAL RESPONSES

- Centralised HR compliance teams with standardised checklists across all sites
- Regular manager training on Right to Work requirements and frequent legislative updates
- Internal audit programmes to identify inconsistencies before Home Office involvement
- Secure physical and digital filing systems for compliance records

AI AND AUTOMATION RESPONSES

- Certified Identity Service Providers (IDSPs) including Yoti and TrustID, using biometric verification and AI document validation via smartphone
- Automated workflow systems preventing onboarding from progressing until all compliance steps are verified and recorded
- Automated permission monitoring with alerts triggered weeks before time-limited permissions expire
- Digital audit trails stored against each hire, instantly retrievable and legally defensible

Sterling and Yoti Partnership | BACKGROUND SCREENING, UK MULTI-SECTOR

Sterling (a First Advantage company) partnered with Yoti, the UK's first certified Identity Service Provider under the Digital Identity and Attributes Trust Framework, to create an identity-first digital onboarding workflow. A candidate's biometric identity is verified before any other check proceeds, removing the most common bottleneck from large-scale onboarding. Candidates create a reusable digital ID, verified once and instantly reusable for future applications. By March 2026, Yoti was completing over 254,000 Right to Work and DBS checks per month.

OUTCOMES

- 25% more candidates completing identity verification compared to the previous solution
- Checks completed four times faster than the prior process
- 35% of Sterling's global employer clients now use an identity-first approach as standard
- Reusable digital ID reduces friction for candidates applying across multiple roles over time

Source: Sterling and Yoti Case Study (sterlingcheck.co.uk); Yoti CEO Blog, June 2026

5. Addressing Absenteeism

TRADITIONAL RESPONSES

- Return-to-work interviews and Bradford Factor tracking as standard practice
- Wellbeing investment including EAP, occupational health referrals, and mental health first aiders on large sites
- Agency cover pool agreements for planned and unplanned absence
- Flexible working arrangements for non-site-bound roles

AI AND AUTOMATION RESPONSES

- Predictive analytics flagging fatigue and disengagement risk from scheduling and performance data before absence materialises
- AI-powered scheduling tools such as Quinyx, Rotageek, and Humanity, automatically identifying and notifying available cover workers when absence is reported
- SMS-first absence reporting removing the barrier of calling a manager: organisations using this approach have seen up to 17% reduction in absence rates
- Real-time absence dashboards identifying patterns at team and site level for proactive management

6. Addressing Application Volume and Conversion

TRADITIONAL RESPONSES

- Simplified application forms removing unnecessary questions for frontline roles
- Telephone screening with a guaranteed recruiter callback within 24 hours
- Knockout question filtering on job boards to reduce unqualified applicants
- Licence and clearance status requested upfront to filter ineligible applicants early

AI AND AUTOMATION RESPONSES

- Conversational AI platforms including Paradox Olivia, Carv, and Fountain, replacing form-based applications: candidates apply via SMS or WhatsApp in under three minutes, any time of day or night, in over 100 languages
- Automated scheduling: qualified candidates book an interview slot immediately upon passing screening, with AI handling reminders and rescheduling
- Automated SMS reminders reducing candidate no-show rates by 20 to 35%
- Programmatic advertising tools such as Appcast and PandoLogic, automatically allocating spend to the channels producing the best conversion rates in real time

Sodexo | INTEGRATED SERVICES, GLOBAL

Sodexo, one of the world's largest employers in services and facilities with over 400,000 employees, deployed Paradox's Conversational ATS (branded internally as DEXI) to automate end-to-end candidate engagement from initial screening through to pre-onboarding. The platform operates via SMS and WhatsApp in over 100 languages, handling job matching, screening and interview scheduling without recruiter involvement.

OUTCOMES

- 60% reduction in time-to-hire
- 60,000 or more hires per year managed through conversational AI
- Significant increase in total applications through mobile-first, multilingual reach
- Recruiter time freed from administrative work to focus on candidate relationships

Source: Paradox and Sodexo Case Study ([paradox.ai](#))

Johnson Controls | BUILDING TECHNOLOGIES, GLOBAL

Johnson Controls deployed Paradox Olivia specifically to address candidate dropout caused by slow recruiter response times. The SMS-first engagement platform sends immediate follow-ups at critical moments in the application journey rather than waiting for recruiter capacity to free up.

OUTCOMES

- 14% increase in hire rates attributed directly to timely SMS follow-ups
- Reduced candidate ghosting and drop-off from the pipeline
- Directly relevant to FM's multilingual, mobile-first workforce

Source: Paradox case studies ([paradox.ai](#))

7. Addressing Onboarding, References and Pre-Employment Screening

TRADITIONAL RESPONSES

- Staged sequential compliance process with dedicated in-house vetting coordinators
- Digital basic DBS via Disclosure Scotland, with written reference requests via email
- Pre-offer conditional communication to manage candidate expectations on timelines
- Dedicated interim deployment restrictions for high-clearance environments

AI AND AUTOMATION RESPONSES

- Identity-first digital workflow: biometric identity verification as step one, with all subsequent checks running in parallel rather than sequentially
- Automated digital reference platforms such as Xref and SkillSurvey, with automated chasing producing significantly higher completion rates than manual processes
- API-based SIA licence verification integrated into the application flow and checked in real time
- Automated onboarding documentation via mobile, with AI identifying incomplete items and chasing automatically

8. Addressing Brand Perception and Talent Attraction

TRADITIONAL RESPONSES

- EVP development and career website redesign showcasing FM as a technology-enabled profession
- Employee advocacy programmes featuring real frontline worker stories
- Partnership with IWFM for professionalism and industry prestige messaging
- Inclusive hiring practices including name-blind CVs, diverse interview panels, and guaranteed interview schemes

AI AND AUTOMATION RESPONSES

- AI-personalised career site content matching candidates to relevant role pathways based on browsing behaviour
- Programmatic advertising using real-time conversion data rather than guesswork on media spend
- Conversational AI providing 24/7 instant response to candidate queries, eliminating the 'heard nothing' experience that damages FM's candidate reputation
- AI bias detection in job descriptions, flagging exclusionary language before posting

What the evidence tells us

The organisations making the most visible progress have done the unglamorous work first: career pathways, pay benchmarking, inclusive hiring practices. Then they've layered technology on top to scale what works. FM's two biggest immediate opportunities for AI impact are candidate engagement speed at the application stage and compliance automation in onboarding. Both have clear ROI, proven deployments in adjacent sectors, and relatively low implementation complexity. But neither solves the structural problem. For that, we need to look further forward.

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PART 3

The Future: Redesigning the Talent Acquisition Operating Model

The previous two sections addressed the current state: what the problems are, and what's being done about them. This section makes the harder argument, which is that better tooling isn't enough. The operating model itself needs to be redesigned.

The evidence for this comes from multiple independent sources across 2024 and 2026, including the Josh Bersin Company's Talent Acquisition Revolution research (October 2025), Gartner's top four TA trends for 2026 (published October 2025), McKinsey's work on HR's role in an agentic future, Deloitte's 2025 Global Human Capital Trends, the WEF Future of Jobs Report 2025, Aptitude Research, RedThread Research, and the CIPD. The convergence across these sources is striking. The traditional TA operating model, designed as a transactional service centre optimised for time-to-fill, is giving way to a smaller, more strategic, intelligence-led function built around different accountabilities, different skills, and different measures of success.

3.1 Why the Traditional Model Is Failing

The CIPD's 2024 Resourcing and Talent Planning Survey, supported by Omni RMS found 69% of UK employers reported increased competition for well-qualified talent, and 64% of those recruiting struggled to attract candidates. Aptitude Research found in 2025 that only 38% of TA leaders can demonstrate ROI on their TA technology investments, and one in three believe their current budget is being wasted. A separate survey found only 5% of organisations rate their TA strategy as world-class, while 51% still operate reactively.

These aren't technology gaps. They're operating model gaps. The current model has four structural flaws that technology can't fix.

- It's organised around the requisition rather than the workforce. Every hire starts from scratch, with no persistent talent intelligence informing the decision.
- TA sits downstream of the business, receiving hiring briefs as completed decisions rather than contributing to workforce strategy before those decisions are made.
- It separates external hiring from internal mobility, treating them as different functions when they're actually one talent system.
- It measures the wrong things. Time-to-fill and cost-per-hire are process metrics, not outcome metrics. They say nothing about quality of hire, retention, or the capability gap the hire was meant to close.

3.2 The Structure of the Future TA Model

The destination emerging from 2024 to 2026 research is an operating model with five structural differences from the current norm.

From a recruiting service centre to a talent intelligence function

The future TA function doesn't just fill roles. It provides the intelligence and orchestration capability that drives all four workforce growth levers: recruiting external talent, retaining and engaging existing employees, reskilling the current workforce, and redesigning work before adding headcount. Josh Bersin describes this as 'Systemic HR', an organisation that functions like a professional services firm rather than a hierarchy of disciplines. Within that, TA stops being a discrete centre of excellence and becomes a blended capability spanning external hiring, internal mobility and workforce planning.

A smaller core team plus a flexible delivery engine

Gartner's October 2025 research anticipates an AI-infused operating model where recruiter capacity is augmented by agentic AI for high-volume, low-complexity roles, and outsourced or contingent recruitment capacity flexes with demand. Leading organisations are moving away from carrying full recruiting headcount through hiring troughs. A small, highly capable core team owns intelligence, governance, technology, EVP and relationships, while a flexible engine of AI agents, RPO capacity, and project support handles throughput.

New roles emerging, existing roles redesigned

Certain roles disappear or are absorbed by AI: sourcers, schedulers, and most coordinator functions. What emerges in their place:

- Talent intelligence analysts blending external labour market data with internal skills, attrition and performance data to inform hiring decisions before they're made.
- Skills architects and taxonomy stewards owning the skills ontology that connects hiring, mobility and learning.
- TA technologists managing the AI agent stack, ATS and CRM ecosystem, governance and data flows.
- Candidate experience designers owning the end-to-end candidate journey, increasingly drawn from CX and product backgrounds rather than HR.
- Talent advisors paired with business unit leaders in senior consultative roles, challenging the brief rather than just filling it.
- Workforce planners embedded within TA, not sitting separately from it.

Where TA sits in the organisation

In leading organisations, TA is moving out from underneath generalist HR and reporting directly to a Chief People Officer with an integrated workforce planning, mobility and talent development mandate. McKinsey's November 2025 work describes HR and by extension TA as becoming 'an enterprise integrator of business strategy, technology and human capital' rather than a downstream service. This structural repositioning matters because it changes the questions TA is asked to answer.

A federated pod model rather than a central recruiting factory

Volume-hiring organisations are increasingly running TA as a hub-and-spoke structure: a central Talent Intelligence and Operations hub covering data, technology, sourcing, brand, EVP, governance and partner management, alongside business-aligned pods serving each operational division. For FM, this means regional or contract-level pods accountable for hiring outcomes, supported by shared infrastructure rather than dependent on a central queue. This breaks the false binary between centralised efficiency and decentralised business alignment that has constrained FM TA design for two decades.

3.3 Skills-Based Hiring as Structural Change

Skills-based hiring is widely cited but poorly implemented. The Bersin Company's 2025 data is revealing: only 20% of organisations use skills insights for hiring, and just 9% have a working skills-based internal talent marketplace. The direction of travel is nonetheless clear. In the UK, 83% of employers now prioritise demonstrated skills over qualifications (2025 sector data). Goldman Sachs has moved to 'skillset recruiting' where candidates apply to skill areas rather than specific jobs. JPMorgan and Kurt Geiger have removed degree requirements as part of structural hiring reforms.

The key point for senior FM leaders is that skills-based hiring isn't a sourcing tactic. It's an organising principle that requires structural change: a skills architecture connecting jobs to competencies, assessment redesign moving beyond the CV, persistent pre-engaged talent communities organised by skills cluster rather than job title, and internal mobility designed in rather than bolted on. The WEF Future of Jobs Report 2025 finds that internal reskilling costs approximately 30% less than external hiring while yielding higher retention. Organisations using skills-based matching achieve internal fill rates of around 37%, while external hires cost 1.7 times more and have double the first-year attrition.

3.4 Talent Intelligence as an Operating Principle

'Talent intelligence' has become a product category, covered by Aptitude Research, IDC, Lightcast and others. For senior leaders, the more useful framing is as an operating principle: making talent decisions on the basis of integrated internal and external data rather than instinct, or requisition-by-requisition judgment.

The four operational expressions of talent intelligence in a mature model:

- Predictive workforce planning, replacing static annual headcount budgets with rolling 12 to 36-month skills-based plans linked to scenario models. McKinsey describes this as shifting from 'static approaches based on human roles' to 'dynamic, activity-based models specifying which tasks are performed by humans, AI agents, or hybrid teams.'
- Internal mobility as a default first move: every hiring decision routes through a build-vs-buy-vs-borrow framework before an external requisition is raised.
- Persistent, segmented talent pools curated by skills cluster, geography and lifecycle stage, maintained continuously rather than activated per vacancy.
- Outcome-linked commercial accountability: measuring TA performance on quality of hire, retention at 90 and 180 days, time-to-productivity, and internal fill rate rather than time-to-fill.

3.5 The Future of the Recruiter Role

The recruiter role doesn't disappear. It's materially redesigned. Across Bersin, Gartner, LinkedIn and SHRM 2025 data, a consistent picture emerges.

What AI absorbs: sourcing, CV screening, scheduling, status communications, compliance steps, initial assessment scoring, interview note-taking and summaries, and offer letter generation. LinkedIn's Future of Recruiting 2025 found that TA professionals using generative AI report a 20% reduction in weekly workload.

What recruiters do in the future model: they become talent advisors, diagnosing the real workforce problem with hiring managers and challenging the brief before posting; hiring manager coaches; candidate closers and humanising touchpoints for senior or complex roles; quality and bias stewards auditing AI outputs; talent community managers running pre-engaged networks; and AI-fluent operators managing a portfolio of sourcing, screening and scheduling agents.

For FM and volume-hiring sectors where many recruiter roles have historically been junior and transaction-heavy, the right response is to retain a smaller, more senior advisor cadre and partner with RPO and AI for the throughput layer, rather than defend headcount that AI is already hollowing out.

3.6 What the Future Looks Like for Volume Hiring Specifically

Volume hiring in FM, logistics, retail and healthcare is the single biggest TA reorganisation opportunity in 2026 to 2030, and the area where most organisations remain trapped in 2015-era operating models. Fountain's frontline data puts the commercial urgency in sharp relief: 91% of frontline hiring managers describe their need to fill open roles as urgent, and 57% of frontline candidates cite slow hiring as their top frustration. The average time from application to offer is 27.5 days, in a market where candidates expect SMS-speed response and are applying to multiple employers simultaneously.

The structural redesign emerging in leading volume-hiring organisations has eight features:

- Treating volume hiring as a continuous operating capability rather than a recurring project: always-on, always-pooled, with persistent local talent communities rather than reactive requisition response.
- Moving the front door to mobile, conversational and zero-friction: no login, no email required, and SMS and WhatsApp first.
- Decoupling sourcing and screening from interviewing: AI agents handle the funnel, while site or regional managers conduct one structured human interview with a strong realistic job preview.
- Building a regional and site pod model with shared platforms: each region or site operates with an embedded TA partner accountable for hiring outcomes including 90-day retention.
- Integrating TA, scheduling, onboarding and early engagement into a single platform ecosystem rather than four separate systems with manual handoffs between them.
- Redesigning the work itself before redesigning the hiring: applying automation, robotics and process redesign to reduce the total volume of roles that need to be filled.
- Integrating contingent and permanent workforce decisions under a single total talent strategy.
- Embedding compliance, Right to Work and safeguarding checks into the platform itself, so they run in parallel with hiring rather than after it.

The operating model matters more than the tools

Gartner's guidance to recruiting leaders is unusually direct: 'There is such a thing as too much efficiency.' An AI-augmented volume hiring process that generates thousands of applications from candidates who are wrong for the role, poorly matched to the culture, or likely to leave within 90 days isn't a success. It's a faster version of the same failure. The structural redesign described in this section addresses the system. Technology, within that redesigned system, can then do what it does well: speed, consistency, scale and compliance. Without the redesign, more technology just creates more noise, faster.

4

PART 4

The Transition: Moving from Here to There

The strategic picture in Part 3 is compelling. The practical question is how to get there from a standing start, or more accurately, from a model that has been built over many years, has real inertia, and sits inside a business that's running live contracts and can't afford a failed transformation.

The research across Bersin, Gartner, Deloitte and Aptitude points to a consistent set of failure modes and a consistent set of success patterns.

4.1 Why Most Transformations Fail

- **AI on top of a broken process.** Faster bad hiring is still bad hiring. ManpowerGroup are direct about this: 'If you throw tech at a broken process, you'll just get bad results, quicker.'
- **Buying a technology suite to solve a strategy problem.** Aptitude Research found that despite years of investment, many large platform decisions have locked organisations into poor model design rather than enabling better ones.
- **Underinvesting in change management.** Academic data cited by Bersin shows 45% of change programmes fail, and 72% of those failures are attributable to people resistance rather than technical failure.
- **Treating internal mobility as a separate function from TA.** This is the single most common design error in volume-hiring companies. Candidates inside the organisation often have no visibility of progression paths that sit right in front of them.
- **Letting vendor or RPO provider decisions drive the operating model by default.** Works best with a true partnership, led by expertise and data and joint agreement on the desired model.

4.2 A Pragmatic Transition Sequence

Drawing on the patterns in organisations that have navigated this successfully, a four-phase approach emerges.

PHASE 1

Diagnose before deploying (now)

Commission an honest structural audit of the current TA model. Map where work originates, who decides, what data is captured, and what the true full cost of hire actually is. Most organisations genuinely don't know this figure. Quantify the eight challenges against your own operation. Define the target operating model on paper before any technology procurement or RPO renegotiation. Decide where TA sits, what the hub-and-pod structure looks like, which roles change, and what the governance model will be.

Doing this yourself can be a challenge, Omnis Resourcing Effectiveness Assessment (REA) is a flexible audit of an organisations resourcing maturity, designed to quickly understand strengths and areas to improve.

PHASE 2 Fix the process before automating it (2026)

Agree service standards, hiring manager accountabilities, intake quality and decision rights before layering AI agents on top. Redesign the most broken processes first: candidate response speed, Right to Work compliance, and onboarding documentation. Pilot conversational AI in one bounded, high-volume domain, perhaps one region or one role family, and measure quality of hire and retention outcomes rather than just speed. Audit the skills data foundation: if you can't describe roles in skills terms, no future-state move will land. Start now, even imperfectly.

PHASE 3 Build the intelligence layer (2027 to 2028)

Stand up a central Talent Intelligence and Operations capability at the heart of the TA function, even at small scale initially. Hire or develop one or two analysts whose job is labour market and internal mobility data, not transaction management. Make that intelligence part of every quarterly workforce planning conversation. Build persistent talent communities at site and region level for the highest-volume roles. Integrate mobility, contingent and permanent under a single workforce strategy. Begin the recruiter re-skilling programme: advisory capability, data literacy and AI fluency are the core of the role in this model, not optional extras.

PHASE 4 Operate the future model (2029 to 2030)

Run TA as a hybrid human, AI and RPO ecosystem with a small core team, shared platforms with strategic partners, and outcome-based accountability for capability rather than fill rate. Operate build-vs-buy-vs-borrow as an explicit, data-led discipline on every workforce decision. Embed TA permanently inside business and workforce planning, contributing to strategic decisions before they're made rather than executing after the fact.

The governance question

The EU AI Act (effective 2024, phasing through 2026 to 2027) classifies recruitment AI as high-risk and requires thorough risk management, documentation and bias auditing. UK regulatory direction is moving the same way. This isn't a future concern: it's a current one for any FM employer deploying or planning to deploy automated screening. Organisations building compliance and auditability into their AI governance now will face far less disruption when enforcement intensifies. Those treating it as a future problem will be retrofitting at cost.

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PART 5

A Strategic Agenda for Senior Leaders

Synthesising the research and analysis across all four parts of this briefing, here is a practical agenda for CHROs and TA Directors in FM and volume-hiring organisations.

What to do now (2026)

- Commission an honest diagnostic of the current TA operating model. Quantify the true total cost of acquisition: most organisations genuinely don't know this figure, and it's usually much higher than expected.
- Define the target operating model on paper before any technology procurement or RPO renegotiation. Design first and procure second.
- Pilot agentic AI in one bounded, high-volume domain. Measure quality, retention and compliance outcomes rather than speed metrics alone.
- Audit the skills data foundation. The absence of skills data is the single biggest blocker to the future model. Start now, even imperfectly.
- Renegotiate any RPO or technology contracts coming up for renewal towards outcome-based metrics: quality of hire, retention at 90 and 180 days, and internal fill rate rather than cost-per-hire alone.
- Prioritise digital Right to Work compliance. The Home Office enforcement trajectory is clear and accelerating. This is not optional.

What to build next (2027 to 2028)

- Stand up a Talent Intelligence and Operations capability at the centre of the TA function, even at small scale initially. Data and intelligence first, platform second.
- Build persistent talent communities at site and region level for the highest-volume roles. Stop starting from zero on each requisition.
- Integrate internal mobility and external recruitment under a single workforce strategy and a single accountability.
- Begin the recruiter re-skilling programme. Advisory capability, data literacy and AI fluency are not optional future skills. They're the core of the role.
- Codify governance for AI in hiring: candidate transparency, bias auditing, human oversight protocols, and regulatory alignment.

The operating model to run by 2029 to 2030

- A small, high-seniority core TA team owning intelligence, governance, EVP and strategic partner relationships.
- A flexible delivery engine combining AI agents, embedded RPO and project capacity, scaling up and down with operational demand.
- Build-vs-buy-vs-borrow as an explicit, data-led discipline on every workforce decision, not just a phrase in a strategy document.
- TA embedded inside business and workforce planning, contributing to strategic decisions before they're made rather than executing after the fact.
- Outcome accountability for retention, quality of hire, internal fill rate and time-to-productivity alongside, or instead of, traditional process metrics.

The single most important insight

Across the research and analysis in this briefing, one finding recurs consistently: the differentiator in 2026 to 2030 won't be the AI an organisation deploys. It will be the operating model that AI is deployed inside. For FM and volume-hiring sectors, where the constraints are sharpest and the rewards from getting it right are largest, this is the strategic question of the decade. The organisations that redesign the model will pull ahead. Those that simply automate the existing one will scale its inefficiencies, faster.

SOURCES & METHOD

About this research

This briefing synthesises published research from 2024 to 2026 across the CIPD (UK Resourcing and Talent Planning Survey 2024 and Labour Market Outlook Winter 2024/25), the Josh Bersin Company (Emerging Trends in Talent Acquisition 2025, Talent Acquisition at a Crossroads, The Talent Acquisition Revolution October 2025, and the Systemic HR initiative), Gartner (October 2025 TA and talent management trends for 2026), McKinsey (HR's Transformative Role in an Agentic Future, November 2025), Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends 2025, the World Economic Forum (Future of Jobs Report 2025 and Frontline Talent of the Future Initiative), BCG (Skills-Based Hiring with Lightcast), Aptitude Research (Madeline Laurano's 2025 work on talent intelligence, project RPO and ATS evolution), RedThread Research (skills strategy, 2025), Lighthouse Research and Advisory (adaptive workforce research), Fountain (frontline hiring data 2025), iCIMS, LinkedIn, SHRM, the SFG20 State of FM Report 2025, and sector data from Mordor Intelligence, Baachu, DMA Group, and Energi People.

Case study data is sourced directly from company publications, Paradox client case studies, the Sterling and Yoti partnership case study, and OCS Group and Mitie apprenticeship reporting. All statistics are attributed to their original source within the text.

Omni RMS · omnirms.com · June 2026

This document is intended for senior HR and TA leaders in FM and volume-hiring sectors and may be shared freely.