

LEADERSHIP SALARY AND MARKET REPORT 2025/26



SPORTS - ENTERTAINMENT & GAMING – SPORTS TECHNOLOGY

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2. Introduction: Kinetic Search Solutions

Kinetic Search Solutions is a boutique leadership search firm at the forefront of the executive talent market, providing tailored leadership search solutions for growth investors and businesses across converging sectors in Sports, and Entertainment, with, Technology businesses represented horizontally across these sectors.

Our extensive network, talent mapping, milestone and deep industry insights ensure our clients secure transformative leaders.

About this report:

This executive hiring report is built upon proprietary data sources including; client interviews, owned database insights, market trends analysis, and real-time executive compensation benchmarks, along with industry data gained from leading news sources, companies, and consulting services.



FOREWORD

As we continue from 2025 into 2026, the landscape of executive hiring across the converging Sports, Entertainment, Gaming, and Technology is evolving at an unprecedented pace.

The past year, was a defining one for leadership in these industries, characterised by rapid digital transformation, economic pressures, regulatory shifts, and an increasing demand for leaders who blend commercial acumen with technological expertise.

From boardrooms of leading football clubs and sport's governing bodies to the executive suites of agencies, streaming giants, gaming studios, and sports technology disruptors, one theme has remained constant: change is no longer an option, it's a necessity.

The employers that thrived in the last year were those that embraced innovation, data-driven decision-making, and dynamic leadership, while those that hesitated found themselves struggling to adapt.

This next year is set up to be another challenging year across these sectors, but with investors likely to fund more growth than we've seen in previous years, and more consolidation likely across our sectors, strong leadership and transformational capability, underpinned by technology will no doubt again be at the forefront.

Fraser Bryden
Founding Partner at Kinetic Search



What This Report Offers

This report provides a deep dive into the executive hiring landscape across Sports, Entertainment, Gaming & Esports, and Sports Tech in the UK. It brings together salary benchmarking, hiring trends, and strategic insights to help industry leaders, investors, and talent specialists navigate an evolving market.

- **Comprehensive Salary Insights** – A broad breakdown of executive pay across industries, reflecting regional variations, company size, and market trends.
- **Key Hiring Trends & Challenges** – An analysis of the most in-demand skills, leadership traits, and sector-specific hiring priorities.
- **Diversity & Inclusion Focus** – A look at the gender pay gap and broader diversity challenges in executive hiring.
- **Regulatory & Tax Considerations** – An overview of how changing UK tax policies impact leadership compensation and hiring decisions.
- **Case Studies & Future Skills** – Real-world examples of major leadership appointments in 2024/25 and the evolving skill sets required for success in 2026.

In a rapidly evolving landscape, leadership hiring is more crucial than ever. This report offers actionable insights to help build resilient executive teams, backed by proprietary data, market analysis, and expert industry insights.

3. Market Overview: 2025 Trends and 2026 Predictions

Macroeconomic Influences

- **Inflation & Economic Pressures:** Rising costs have impacted salary expectations, with a stronger emphasis on performance-related incentives.
- **Regulatory Shifts:** Employment laws and taxation changes are influencing hiring structures, particularly in high-remuneration roles.

Emerging Executive Hiring Trends

- **Hybrid Leadership Models:** Increased demand for leaders who can operate across digital and physical platforms.
- **Diversification of Revenue Streams:** Executives must drive new commercial strategies, including sponsorships, content monetisation, and direct-to-consumer models.
- **Cross-Industry Talent Migration:** Executives from tech and media increasingly transition into Sports & Entertainment roles, bringing fresh perspectives.



A Year of Transformation

The past year saw significant shifts in leadership priorities, driven by external factors such as economic turbulence, shifting audience behaviours, and regulatory updates.

- **In Sports**, the financial sustainability of clubs and governing bodies became a focal point. The pressure to diversify revenue streams beyond traditional broadcasting deals intensified, leading to a surge in hiring of commercially savvy executives with digital and direct-to-fan expertise.
- **In Entertainment**, the streaming war intensified, and content strategies had to be redefined. With consumers overwhelmed by choice, the role of data-driven content executives and platform leaders became crucial in shaping engagement strategies.
- **In Esports and Gaming**, the industry faced a market correction, with some teams and publishers cutting costs and re-evaluating revenue models. However, the demand for leaders with expertise in AI-driven game development and community monetisation grew significantly.
- **In Sports Technology**, advances in AI-driven performance tools, fan data platforms, and direct-to-consumer content delivery have driven a new wave of executive hiring. Companies are prioritising leaders with expertise in product innovation, data infrastructure, and fan experience, alongside those able to scale SaaS, wearable, and OTT platforms into commercial success.

The Year of Strategic Adaptation

If this last year was a year of adaptation, this next year is a year of strategic evolution. Leadership teams across these industries must prepare for fundamental shifts in business models, regulations, and talent requirements.

- **Technology Will Dictate Leadership Priorities:** AI, automation, and predictive analytics are no longer just buzzwords, they are defining the next generation of leadership roles across all sectors. From AI-enhanced fan engagement in sports to algorithm-driven content recommendations in entertainment, executives will need strong digital literacy to stay ahead.
- **Financial Discipline Will Be Key:** With economic uncertainty persisting, leadership teams will be tasked with balancing innovation with financial sustainability. Expect more CFOs and COOs with turnaround experience to take centre stage in hiring strategies.
- **Diversity & Inclusion Will Move from a Mandate to a Competitive Advantage:** The gender pay gap and underrepresentation of minority leaders remain pressing issues. However, the next year will hopefully see organisations not just reacting to diversity metrics but actively embedding inclusivity into leadership strategy to drive better business outcomes.
- **Regulatory Pressures Will Demand New Expertise:** Changes in UK tax policies, IR35 regulations, and potential gaming industry reforms will make regulatory knowledge a must-have for executive hires. Expect General Counsels and Compliance Chiefs to play an even greater role in leadership teams.

4. Executive Salary Benchmarking (C-Suite)

The table below outlines executive annual compensation across the UK’s Sports, Entertainment, and Sports Technology sectors. Compensation varies by sector, company size, and location. Equity, bonuses, and long-term incentives are key in private and venture-backed firms. This data serves to offer benchmark ranges for hiring organisations and senior professionals. These bands are based on salaries from London and The Southeast.

Role	Small (Sub-£50m)	Mid (£50m-£250m)	Large (£250m+)
Chief Executive Officer	£180k - £350k	£350k - £600k	£600k - £1.2m
Chief Financial Officer	£150k - £280k	£280k - £450k	£450k - £900k
Chief Operating Officer	£140k - £260k	£260k - £420k	£420k - £850k
Chief Marketing Officer	£130k - £240k	£240k - £400k	£400k - £750k
Chief Technology Officer	£140k - £250k	£250k - £430k	£430k - £800k
Chief Commercial Officer	£140k - £260k	£260k - £450k	£450k - £850k
Chief Content Officer	£120k - £230k	£230k - £400k	£400k - £700k
Chief Growth Officer	£130k - £250k	£250k - £420k	£420k - £780k
Chief Data Officer	£140k - £260k	£260k - £440k	£440k - £820k
Chief Strategy Officer	£130k - £240k	£240k - £410k	£410k - £760k
Chief Information Officer	£140k - £270k	£270k - £450k	£450k - £830k
Chief Innovation Officer	£130k - £250k	£250k - £420k	£420k - £790k
Chief Product Officer	£140k - £260k	£260k - £430k	£430k - £810k

5. Future Leaders: Salary Benchmarking (Director/VP & Head of Level)

The table below benchmarks compensation for 'Future Leaders', C-suite minus one and Head of Level roles across converging UK sectors. Compensation varies by sector demand, location, leadership scope, and company scale, with equity, incentives, and digital expertise playing a growing role. As businesses future-proof leadership, salaries reflect the rising value of commercial, tech, and strategic skills. These bands are based on salaries from London and The Southeast

Role	Small (Sub-£50m)	Mid (£50m-£250m)	Large (£250m+)
Finance Director	£100k - £180k	£180k - £250k	£250k - £400k
Marketing Director	£90k - £160k	£160k - £240k	£240k - £350k
Head of Product	£90k - £160k	£160k - £230k	£230k - £350k
Head of Data & Insights	£95k - £170k	£170k - £240k	£240k - £370k
Head of Talent Management	£85k - £150k	£150k - £220k	£220k - £320k
Human Resources Director	£100k - £180k	£180k - £250k	£250k - £400k
Head of Finance	£100k - £180k	£180k - £250k	£250k - £380k
Head of FP&A	£90k - £160k	£160k - £230k	£230k - £350k
Head of Sponsorship (Sports)	£95k - £170k	£170k - £250k	£250k - £380k
Head of Rights (Sports)	£95k - £170k	£170k - £250k	£250k - £380k
Head of Brand Partnerships	£80k to £100K	£85k - £110K	£110K - £140K
Finance Director	£100k - £180k	£180k - £250k	£250k - £400k
Marketing Director	£90k - £160k	£160k - £240k	£240k - £350k

6. Regional Salary Variations

Executive salaries vary significantly by location, with London offering the highest pay due to its economic influence and associated living costs.

Regional hubs like Manchester and Birmingham are growing in competitiveness, while remote roles are reshaping salary structures across sectors.

London: As the UK's economic powerhouse, London-based executives command the highest salaries. In sports and entertainment, top executives earn 20-30% more than their counterparts in regional hubs. For example, a CEO of a major London-based sports organisation can earn upwards of £500k, while similar roles in Manchester or Birmingham might fall between £300k-£400k.

Regional Hubs: Cities such as Manchester, Birmingham, and Edinburgh are becoming increasingly competitive, especially in gaming and digital commerce. For instance, senior gaming executives in the Northwest earn 10-15% less than their London peers but benefit from lower living costs. The entertainment, gaming and esports scene in Manchester is growing, with salaries gradually increasing to match demand.

Remote-Based Leadership Roles: Remote executive roles are becoming more prevalent, particularly in digital commerce and gaming. While some companies offer London-weighted salaries regardless of location, others apply a regional adjustment, typically reducing salaries by 5-15% for those outside London.



Regional North West: C-Suite

London & North West and Midlands & North West

Executive salaries vary by region due to industry presence, cost of living, and talent demand. London leads with the highest pay, while cities like Manchester and Birmingham offer competitive but lower rates. Scotland and the Northeast see smaller salaries, though growth in digital and remote roles is narrowing the gap.

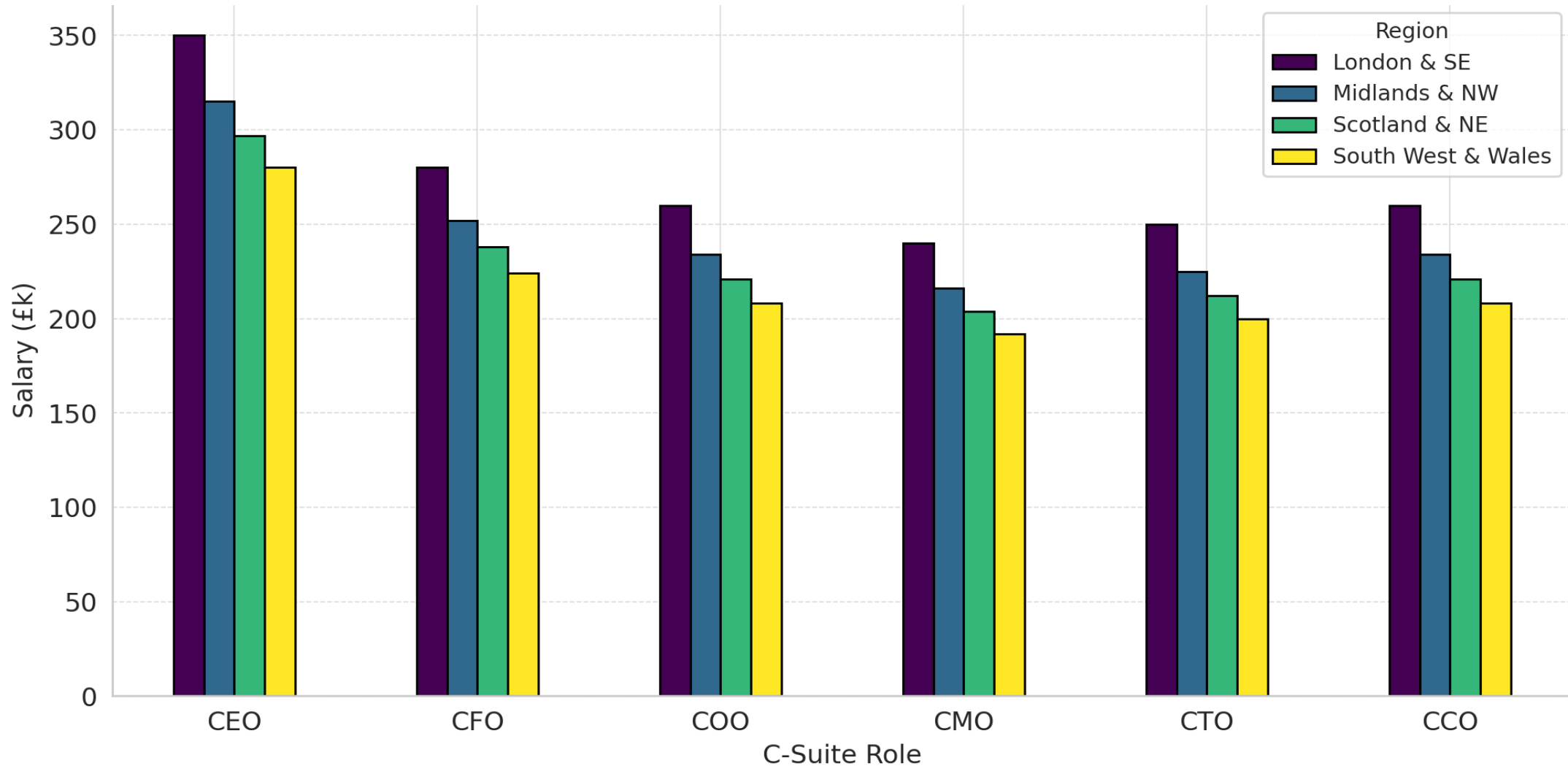
Region	Role	Small (Sub-£50m)	Mid (£50m-£250m)	Large (£250m+)
London & South East	CEO	£200k - £350k	£350k - £600k	£600k - £1.2m
	CFO	£150k - £300k	£280k - £450k	£450k - £900k
	COO	£140k - £280k	£280k - £420k	£420k - £850k
	CMO	£130k - £250k	£240k - £400k	£400k - £750k
	CTO	£140k - £250k	£250k - £430k	£430k - £800k
	CCO	£140k - £260k	£260k - £450k	£450k - £850k
Midlands & North West	CEO	£162k - £315k	£315k - £540k	£540k - £1.08m
	CFO	£135k - £252k	£252k - £405k	£405k - £810k
	COO	£126k - £234k	£234k - £378k	£378k - £765k
	CMO	£117k - £216k	£216k - £360k	£360k - £675k
	CTO	£126k - £225k	£225k - £387k	£387k - £720k
	CCO	£126k - £234k	£234k - £405k	£405k - £765k

Regional Salaries (C-Suite)

Scotland & North East and South West & Wales

Region	Role	Small (Sub-£50m)	Mid (£50m-£250m)	Large (£250m+)
Scotland & North East	CEO	£153k - £297k	£297k - £510k	£510k - £1.02m
	CFO	£127k - £238k	£238k - £382k	£382k - £765k
	COO	£119k - £221k	£221k - £357k	£357k - £722k
	CMO	£110k - £204k	£204k - £340k	£340k - £637k
	CTO	£119k - £212k	£212k - £365k	£365k - £680k
	CCO	£119k - £221k	£221k - £382k	£382k - £722k
South West & Wales	CEO	£144k - £280k	£280k - £480k	£480k - £960k
	CFO	£120k - £224k	£224k - £360k	£360k - £720k
	COO	£112k - £208k	£208k - £336k	£336k - £680k
	CMO	£104k - £192k	£192k - £320k	£320k - £600k
	CTO	£112k - £200k	£200k - £344k	£344k - £640k

Regional Salary Variations - C-Suite (Mid-sized companies)



7. Gender Pay Gap & Diversity Trends

Sports: The gender pay gap remains a significant challenge in UK sports, particularly in executive roles. According to UK government data, the average gender pay gap in the sports industry is around 35%, with men earning significantly more in leadership positions. While organisations like the FA, RFU, and Premier League have introduced diversity hiring initiatives, executive leadership remains overwhelmingly male. The push for more women in boardroom roles, spurred by initiatives such as the Women in Football Leadership Programme, is gaining momentum but remains slow.

Entertainment: The entertainment industry has made notable progress in closing gender pay gaps at senior levels. However, research from the BFI suggests that women in executive roles still earn around 20% less than their male counterparts. Major entertainment groups like the BBC have implemented pay transparency measures following high-profile pay disparity cases. Diversity initiatives such as the BFI Diversity Standards have encouraged more equitable hiring, but BAME representation in leadership remains below 10%.

Gaming & Esports: Gaming has long struggled with gender representation at the executive level. Women hold only around 15% of leadership roles in UK gaming companies, and the gender pay gap remains at approximately 22%, according to UKIE. However, initiatives such as Women in Games and esports organisations committing to more diverse hiring practices are helping to address the imbalance. The esports industry, in particular, has faced scrutiny for its lack of diverse leadership, but progress is being made through sponsorship programmes targeting underrepresented groups.

Sports technology: The sector continues to face significant gender pay gaps, with women in C-suite roles earning as much as 30% less than their male counterparts, according to industry analyses. While early-stage and investor-backed sports tech startups often lead the way with progressive hiring practices and diverse leadership pipelines, larger and more established organisations are slower to achieve gender parity at the top. Investor pressure, athlete advocacy, and regulatory scrutiny are driving some positive movement, but achieving true pay equity for senior executives remains a persistent challenge.

8. Tax & Regulatory Considerations

IR35 & Employment Status

The continued enforcement of IR35 regulations has significantly impacted executive compensation, particularly for those in consultancy or interim roles. Many senior professionals have transitioned from contractor models to PAYE, leading to:

- Lower net take-home pay due to increased income tax and National Insurance contributions.
- Changes in bonus structures, as PAYE executives typically have different performance incentive mechanisms than contractors.
- Reduced flexibility in remuneration structures, affecting the attractiveness of certain roles.

Sector-Specific Tax Considerations

Sports: HMRC is tightening scrutiny on executive compensation in sports, particularly bonuses, long-term incentives, and performance-linked pay. Changes to employer National Insurance and corporation tax impact take-home earnings, while dividend and CGT adjustments affect executives in private equity-backed clubs and commercial ventures. Global tax regulations also influence pay structures for those managing international sponsorships and media rights.

Entertainment: Film and TV tax relief incentives remain critical for industry investment, though their direct influence on executive pay is limited. However, corporate tax adjustments could impact production budgets and executive salary growth.

Gaming & Esports: The UK's Video Games Tax Relief (VGTR) has supported studio profitability, enabling competitive executive salaries. However, potential global tax reforms targeting digital businesses (such as the OECD's global minimum tax) may reshape long-term pay structures.

Technology: The shift toward digital taxation, including VAT on online sales and changes to platform-based revenue models, influences executive remuneration, particularly for performance-based incentives tied to profitability.



9. Emerging Skills & Leadership Traits

The evolving, converging landscapes of Sports, Entertainment, and Tech is driving demand for executives with a blend of commercial acumen, digital fluency, and adaptability. As industries converge and new technologies emerge, leadership success is increasingly defined by innovation, data-driven decision-making, and audience engagement expertise.

Sports: Leadership in sports is shifting towards commercial and digital transformation expertise. Executives with experience in sponsorships, fan engagement technology, and data analytics are in high demand

Entertainment: Creativity remains crucial, but leaders with experience in streaming, digital monetisation, and AI-driven content strategies are now highly sought after.

Gaming & Esports: Executives with expertise in blockchain, virtual economies, and community engagement are increasingly valuable, particularly as esports continues to commercialise.

Sports Technology: Growth leadership, AI integration, and deep knowledge in data and insights for fan engagement, or performance are top skills required at the executive level.

The following sector insights illustrate how executive leadership needs are rapidly evolving in response to technological advancements, economic pressures, and changing consumer behaviours

A high-angle, top-down photograph of a swimmer in a pool. The swimmer is wearing a white swim cap and dark swim trunks, and is captured in a freestyle stroke, creating a large splash of white water. The water is a deep blue color. The swimmer is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the frame.

10. Sports: Executive Salary & Hiring Trends

- Executive salaries in UK sports vary widely based on the governing body, club, or league.
- The rise of private equity investment in sports has led to an increase in commercial and financial leadership roles.
- The demand for executives with experience in fan engagement technology and sports media rights is growing.

Salary Trends & Executive Compensation in Sports

- CEOs of major UK sports organisations (e.g., Premier League, RFU, FA): £600,000 – £2 million+
- Commercial Directors & Chief Revenue Officers: £250,000–£600,000, with bonuses linked to sponsorship & broadcast rights deals.
- Heads of Digital & Fan Engagement: £120,000–£250,000, reflecting the sector's pivot towards direct-to-fan revenue streams.
- Regional Disparities: London-based executive roles still command 20-30% higher salaries than regional equivalents, particularly in football and rugby.

Sports: Hiring Priorities & Emerging Trends

Digital & Direct-to-Fan Expertise in Demand: The sports sector is shifting towards hiring leaders with experience in digital content, streaming platforms, and DTC (Direct-to-Consumer) strategies to combat declining traditional TV revenues.

Ex-Athletes in Leadership: More retired professionals are transitioning into governance, leveraging first-hand insights into athlete welfare and high-performance culture.

Future Challenges

Financial Sustainability in Football: With 75%+ of club revenues spent on wages, sustainable leadership hiring in finance and operations is becoming critical.

Broadcast Revenue Diversification: As linear TV viewership declines, executives must explore innovative monetisation models via social media, digital, gaming and microtransactions.

Thought Piece: Could sports CEOs from tech and media backgrounds drive the next evolution in fan engagement? With Amazon and Apple entering the live sports market in recent years, leadership expertise from these sectors should be in high demand.





11. Entertainment: Executive Salary & Hiring Trends

Entertainment:

- Streaming platforms continue to dominate the industry, leading to higher salaries for executives with digital distribution expertise.
- Talent management and licensing roles are expanding, with salaries increasing accordingly.
- Content production and intellectual property (IP) monetisation remain key priorities for executive hiring.

Salary Benchmarks & Industry Compensation

Studio Heads & Managing Directors (e.g., BBC Studios, ITV Studios, Netflix UK): £500,000 – £1 million, often with equity bonuses.

Head of Streaming & Digital Content: £250,000 – £500,000, as on-demand platforms battle for market share.

Head of Production & Creative Directors: £130,000 – £300,000, reflecting the rising importance of in-house content creation.

Divisional Heads in Talent / Creator Management are earning upwards of £120K to £150K base salaries, plus performance bonuses and commission from talent.

Entertainment: Key Hiring Trends and Challenges

Streaming Fragmentation Creates Leadership Shifts: The decline of traditional broadcasters (e.g., Channel 4's ad revenue falling 15% in 2024/25) has accelerated the hiring of executives with subscription-model expertise.

Diversity & Representation at the Top: While progress has been made (BBC targets 50% female leadership by 2026), executive-level representation for ethnic minorities remains below 15% in UK entertainment firms.

Future Challenges

Globalisation vs Localisation: With platforms like Netflix localising content aggressively, executives must balance global production priorities with UK market relevance.

AI & Content Creation: Generative AI is starting to impact hiring needs, with studios seeking leaders who understand AI-driven content automation.

Thought Piece: Will the next wave of media CEOs come from data science backgrounds rather than creative fields? With AI-driven recommendations shaping 80%+ of viewership habits, data literacy is becoming a core executive skill.

12. Gaming & Esports: Executive Salary & Hiring Trends

Gaming & Esports:

- The UK gaming sector remains one of the most lucrative, with senior leadership roles seeing steady salary increases.
- Esports leadership salaries are rising as sponsorship deals and league structures become more established, but there's still a long way to go to meet the other sectors.
- Blockchain and Web3 gaming executives have been in high demand, with salaries reflecting the niche expertise required.

Salary Benchmarks & Compensation Trends

- Gaming CEOs (e.g., EA UK, Ubisoft UK, Activision Blizzard UK): £600,000 – £2 million, typically including equity.
- Chief Marketing Officers (CMO) – Gaming: £200,000–£500,000, due to the importance of influencer & community marketing.
- CEO in Esports: Packages of £150,000 – £250,000, as the industry increasingly focuses on commercialisation beyond sponsorships.



Key Hiring Trends & Skills in Demand

In the year ahead, the games industry will experience heightened demand for product managers and monetisation specialists as studios prioritise revenue growth from existing games. With increased M&A activity, CFOs will be sought after to manage acquisitions, while data science and machine learning experts will be essential for driving AI-powered improvements in product management and marketing.

Monetisation Strategy Experts: As the esports industry grapples with unsustainable revenue models, executives who can build long-term profitability beyond sponsorship deals are in high demand.

Gaming Executives with AI Expertise: The rise of AI-generated assets, NPC interactions, and procedural world-building has created a need for technically-savvy leadership in game studios.

Cross-Industry Hiring: Executives from traditional sports, entertainment, and fintech are being recruited into gaming & esports to bring fresh monetisation strategies.

Industry Challenges

Esports Market Correction: Valuations in esports have cooled, requiring leadership that prioritises sustainable growth rather than speculative investment. Investment from Saudi Arabia, and inflated prize money has certainly helped, but there is a way to go to realise sustainability.

Regulation & Player Welfare: The UK government is considering stricter regulations on in-game monetisation (loot boxes, gambling-style mechanics), meaning legal & compliance expertise is increasingly valuable at an executive level.

Thought Piece: Should major esports teams bring in traditional sports executives to help stabilise finances? With football clubs generating 70%+ of revenues outside of matchdays, esports teams could follow a similar path. Or should they be focusing on leaders from Entertainment and Content, looking at ways to monetise own channels, digital assets, and creator content. Perhaps both!



13. Sports Technology: Executive Salary & Hiring Trends



Leadership hiring in sports technology continues to surge, fuelled by innovations in performance analytics, fan engagement, wearable tech, OTT platforms, and AI-driven coaching tools.

Companies are competing for leaders with experience in scaling digital platforms, building B2B2C revenue models, and using data to enhance both elite athlete performance and fan interaction.

As the sector matures, early-stage firms are attracting entrepreneurial product and tech leaders with equity-heavy packages, while later-stage or PE-backed firms are investing in proven executives to commercialise, scale, or prep for M&A.

The next pages gives more of a breakdown on salaries, hiring trends and skills in demand.

Key Hiring Trends & Skills in Demand

UK – Sports Tech Leadership Compensation

Role	Early-Stage (Seed–Series A)	Growth-Stage (Series B–PE)	Notes
CEO / Founder-CEO	£150,000–£250,000 base + 1–5% equity	£300,000–£2.5m total comp (incl. bonus/equity)	Bonuses often tied to ARR or product licensing
Chief Technology Officer / CDO	£150,000–£250,000 + equity	£200,000–£500,000	Strong demand in AI/ML, data pipelines, and mobile platforms
Chief Product Officer / Head of Product	£120,000–£180,000 + options	£180,000–£300,000	Particularly valued in OTT, AR/VR and second-screen apps
Chief Commercial Officer	£150,000–£250,000 + bonus	£200,000–£400,000 OTE	Often incentivised on B2B revenue or partnerships
Head of Performance / Sport Science Tech	£90,000–£150,000	£140,000–£220,000	Focus on elite sport, biofeedback, recovery tech

Key Hiring Trends & Skills in Demand

US – Sports Tech Leadership Compensation

Role	Early-Stage (Seed–Series A)	Growth-Stage (Series B–PE)	Notes
CEO / Founder-CEO	\$180,000–\$350,000 + 1–5% equity	\$500,000–\$3.5m total comp	Equity plays a major role in early-stage
Chief Technology/Data Officer	\$250,000–\$400,000	\$400,000–\$750,000	Deep expertise in AI, data visualisation, and cloud infra in demand
Chief Product Officer	\$200,000–\$300,000 + equity	\$300,000–\$500,000	Strong market for OTT/streaming and fan-facing UX leaders
Chief Revenue Officer	\$250,000–\$400,000 base + bonus	\$350,000–\$700,000 OTE	Focus on commercial rights tech, SaaS, or global expansion
VP, Performance Tech / Biomechanics	\$140,000–\$200,000	\$200,000–\$300,000	Especially active in collegiate and pro leagues' tech arms

Key Hiring Trends & Skills in Demand

The sports technology sector will see growing demand for product leaders, data engineers, and commercial strategists as platforms focus on deepening user engagement and monetising performance, fan, and broadcast data. With an increase in M&A and investment activity, CFOs and corporate development leaders will be essential to navigate acquisitions and strategic partnerships. AI and machine learning experts are also playing a central role in transforming everything from injury prevention to fan personalisation.

Fan Monetisation & Product Growth Experts: As many sports tech platforms shift focus from enterprise sales to D2C or hybrid models, there is strong demand for executives who can optimise recurring revenue, subscription models, and digital fan spend.

AI-Focused Sports Leaders: The integration of AI in areas like performance tracking, injury prediction, automated content creation, and fan data analytics is fuelling demand for technically-literate executives with strong commercial and product instincts.

Cross-Industry Hiring: Leaders from healthtech, media, and even fintech are being brought into sports tech to support innovation in payments, personalised content, and scalable B2B2C platforms.

Industry Challenges

Fragmentation & Consolidation: The sports tech landscape remains fragmented, with dozens of niche platforms serving clubs, athletes, or leagues. Consolidation is expected to accelerate, requiring strategic leadership and operational experience across integrations, partnerships, and product rationalisation.

Data Ethics & Regulation: With growing concerns over athlete data privacy, wearable tech, and consent, there is increasing scrutiny from regulators, particularly in the UK and EU. Executive leadership now requires a strong grasp of ethical data use, compliance, and safeguarding in tech-enabled sport.

Food for thought: Should sports tech companies borrow more from entertainment?

With the biggest revenue leaps happening at the intersection of tech, storytelling, and D2C fan platforms, are performance and wearable tech firms missing a trick by not bringing in more entertainment and content leaders? Or is the real value in doubling down on SaaS and B2B performance insights? Maybe the future lies in leaders who can blend both.

14. Executive Hiring Case Studies

Recent leadership appointments in the last 18-24 months illustrate evolving hiring trends and priorities. Notably, companies are increasingly looking beyond traditional industry backgrounds, bringing in leaders with cross-sector experience, digital transformation expertise, as well as a strong focus on diversity and inclusion.

Sport & Entertainment



Scottish Rugby Union (SRU)

Alex Williamson, formerly associated with organisations like Goodwood sporting estate and House of Fraser, was appointed as the Chief Executive Officer of the Scottish Rugby Union (SRU). His diverse background is anticipated to bring fresh perspectives to Scottish Rugby.

Source: The Times

British Olympic Association (BOA)



In November 2024, Dame Katherine Grainger became the first female chair in the BOA's 119-year history. A decorated Olympian and former Chair of UK Sport, Grainger brings athlete advocacy, funding strategy expertise, and inclusive leadership to the organisation. Her appointment highlights the trend of appointing former elite athletes to executive positions to shape performance-focused governance.

Source: BOA



Manchester United FC

Michael Sansoni was appointed as Director of Data at Manchester United. Background: Formerly a performance engineer for Lewis Hamilton at Mercedes F1, Sansoni was appointed Director of Data at Manchester United in 2025.

This representational move illustrates how high-performance engineering from automotive/F1 is now highly valued in football's tech-led recruitment and analytics, a broader trend relevant to sports tech firms.



LIV Golf

Scott O'Neil was appointed as CEO, LIV Golf in 2025. e.g., Sixers, MSG Sports)
He previously led major North American sports franchises (and headed Merlin Entertainments.
Why It Matters: His broad sports and entertainment leadership brings structure and global business acumen to the scaling new golf league, with a strong bias towards entertainment.

Womens Tennis Association



Portia Archer's transition is notable. She went from roles at AOL Time Warner, BBC, HBO, and NBC Sports to becoming CEO of the WTA, starting in July 2024. Her media and entertainment leadership background brings critical digital expertise and narrative-driven strategy to one of the foremost organizations in women's sports.



WPLL (Women's Professional Leagues Ltd (WPLL):

All-Female Leadership Team: In August 2024, an all-female executive team took charge of the Women's Super League (WSL) and Women's Championship.

The leadership includes:

- Nikki Doucet, Chief Executive
- Holly Murdoch, Chief Operations Officer
- Ruth Hooper, Interim Chief Marketing Officer
- Mirelle van Rijbroek, Chief Football Officer
- Zarah Al-Kudcy, Chief Revenue Officer

This team aims to drive growth and maximize the potential of women's football in England.



M&C Saatchi Sport & Entertainment

Last year, Laura Collier was promoted to UK Group CEO after 15 years at the company, including seven as a Board Director. Collier played a crucial role in leading award-winning campaigns for major rights holders and brands. Her appointment signals a commitment to continuity, deep industry expertise, and creative leadership.

Source: M&C Saatchi



JAGEX (Video Games Developer)

Marc Allera's Appointment as Chairman of Jagex: In March 2024, Marc Allera, previously the CEO of BT Consumer overseeing brands like BT, EE, and Plusnet, was appointed as Chairman of the Board at Jagex, a leading UK-based video game developer and publisher. Allera's earlier career included a tenure at Sega, where he led the UK launch of the Dreamcast console, bringing valuable experience to his new role at Jagex.

Source: Jagex.com



WFTV (Women in Film and Television UK)

Katie Bailiff: In September 2024, Katie Bailiff was appointed CEO of Women in Film and Television UK (WFTV). With extensive experience in television production, including her tenure as creative director at Century Films, Bailiff's leadership is expected to enhance WFTV's initiatives supporting women in the industry.



Zenith UK (Media Agency)

Sannah Rogers Promoted to CEO at Zenith UK, Sophie Wooller Joins as COO

In 2024, Sannah Rogers was promoted to CEO at Zenith UK, marking a significant leadership shift. With extensive experience in driving innovative strategies, Rogers took the helm at a time of growth and transformation within the company. Alongside her promotion, Sophie Wooller joined Zenith UK as Chief Operating Officer (COO). Wooller brings a wealth of expertise from her previous roles in the media sector, and her appointment is expected to strengthen the agency's operational capabilities.

Source: Zenith UK

15. Key Takeaways & Actions



- Gender pay disparities persist across all sectors, with the most significant gaps in sports and gaming.
- London remains the highest-paying region, but regional hubs are gaining ground.
- IR35 and other regulations have reshaped executive pay structures.
- Digital transformation skills are now essential across all industries.
- Emerging sectors such as esports, Ai, and digital commerce are creating new executive opportunities.

Strategic Recommendations:

- Organisations should implement structured pay equity audits and transparency measures.
- Companies must prioritise leadership diversity initiatives to close the gender pay gap.
- Adapting executive compensation models to account for remote and hybrid work trends will be essential.
- Investment in leadership training for digital skills should be a core focus.
- Organisations should leverage tax incentives and compliance frameworks to optimise executive compensation structures.

By following these recommendations, businesses can stay ahead in the evolving executive hiring landscape.

Key Hiring Trends & Decision-Making Factors:

- **Commercial Leaders with Digital Expertise**
 - Sports and entertainment organisations are prioritising executives with digital and audience growth expertise, ensuring businesses adapt to evolving consumer engagement trends.
- **Industry-Crossover Hiring**
 - Esports and gaming firms are bringing in leaders from adjacent industries (e.g., traditional sports, FMCG, and media) to drive revenue diversification and audience expansion.
- **AI & Machine Learning in Leadership**
 - Sports Technology is increasingly looking for executives with expertise in AI-driven analytics, automation, fan engagement and performance analytics to improve operational efficiency and drive enhanced experiences.
- **Diversity & Inclusion in Executive Hiring**
 - The appointment of *Dame Katherine Grainger at BOA* and *Laura Coller at M&C Saatchi* reflects a positive shift towards more diverse leadership teams in historically male-dominated industries.
- **Former Athletes in Leadership Roles**
 - More ex-players and Olympians are moving into executive positions in governing bodies and commercial sports organisations, bringing firsthand experience of high-performance environments.

The case studies highlight how executive hiring is evolving across industries, with an increasing emphasis on digital transformation, diversity, and industry crossover expertise in leadership roles.

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