

London can be a dream and a gauntlet for employers. The city packs deep sector ecosystems, a sophisticated investor base, and a talent pool that speaks the language of global growth. It also compresses timelines, raises salary expectations, and pits you against employers with bigger brands and slicker playbooks. I have watched high potential candidates accept another offer between a second round and a debrief, and I have watched founders win outstanding hires by changing just three small parts of their process. Both outcomes usually come down to clarity, speed, and credibility.

I coach executives across finance, technology, creative industries, and professional services, and the pattern is remarkably consistent. The teams that win talent treat hiring as a product with a customer, a value proposition, and a launch plan. They also use a Business Coach or Executive Coach not just to polish leadership presence, but to de-risk decision making across the whole funnel. What follows is a field guide drawn from that work, with practical detail you can apply this quarter.

## **What makes London's market uniquely hard, and worth it**

London's density of opportunity changes candidate behaviour. A mid career engineer can book three onsite within a week without leaving Zone 1. A portfolio manager can walk from one Canary Wharf tower to another and add 20 percent to base. Creative leads jump between Shoreditch agencies and in-house brand teams that run at different clocks. That proximity shortens decision cycles and raises the bar on your [Executive Coaching](#) offer story.

Compensation is not just base and bonus. Many candidates weigh pension contributions, flexible benefits, equity liquidity, and hybrid policies with equal seriousness. A senior product lead comparing two £120k offers may pick the one with a realistic equity growth narrative and two anchored office days near good commuter lines, rather than the one waving a bigger cash sign-on. For finance, total compensation is volatile year to year, so candidates look at stability and promotion runway. In technology, equity maturity and layoff risk still linger in conversations. If you want to compete, understand those trade-offs out loud and early.

Post Brexit immigration rules added friction on timing and cost, but also widened the aperture for global candidates willing to relocate. The strongest employers know the sponsorship math, set expectations clearly, and move paperwork with rigor.

Finally, hybrid work is no longer a perk, it is a policy with operational consequences. Talent evaluates which days, which hours, and which rituals define culture. The teams that specify anchor days, core collaboration hours, and norms for deep work send a signal of competence. That signal attracts people who value clarity.

## **Start with a hiring thesis, not a job ad**

Before you write another role description, step back. I ask hiring managers three questions that usually save weeks of churn. What problem will be unmistakably better after this person's first 90 days. What two or three strengths must be present for that outcome, and which good to have skills can wait. How will we know quickly if we mis-hired, and what is our corrective plan.

From those answers, craft a scorecard that decouples outcomes from activities. For a revenue operations lead, the outcome might be a measurable improvement in pipeline hygiene and forecast accuracy. For a head of design, it might be a first pass design system shipped and in use by two product teams. A clear scorecard helps the interview panel align. It also helps candidates self select. Vague role ads inflate pipelines and waste precious time.

Here is a compact scorecard template that I use with founders and senior leaders in London. Keep it short and ruthless.



- Business outcomes in 90 and 180 days, phrased as metrics or shipped artifacts
- Must have capabilities, two to four, with behavioural examples you can probe
- Nice to have capabilities, no more than three, to avoid bias toward all rounders
- Culture commitments the role must model, written as observable behaviours
- Deal breakers and risk flags you will test explicitly, such as low ambiguity tolerance

Calibrate this with your panel before the first screen. A Leadership Coach or Executive Coach can facilitate the calibration in one hour, smoking out hidden disagreements that otherwise surface during debriefs.

## **Move at market speed without breaking things**

Long cycles kill good hiring. The median candidate in London who enters two strong processes will receive an offer in 10 to 20 business days. If your process reliably stretches beyond four weeks between first conversation and offer, you are sending a market signal that either you cannot decide or you do not know what you need. Both scare top performers.



You can compress time to accept without lowering the bar. The trick is to replace idle gaps with parallel steps and planned decision points. I use a simple sprint method when a client needs to hire a director or head level role within six weeks.

- Assemble the panel and block key time slots up front. No candidate outreach until you have interview blocks reserved over two weeks.
- Replace generic rounds with work simulations. For example, a 45 minute live case with your data, or a stakeholder alignment meeting the candidate runs with your panel in role.
- Pre brief and debrief fast. Ten minute huddles after key rounds, with a decision owner who calls next steps the same day.
- Make your sell moments part of the process. A 30 minute call with a future peer, a short demo of your product roadmap, or a coffee with the hiring manager on an anchor office day.

- Send a clean, complete offer within 24 hours of final round agreement. Include a concise rationale for comp and progression.

Notice that none of this asks you to skip diligence. It asks you to decide what matters, stage it, and remove dead air. The best candidates do their own due diligence. Your job is to equip them.

## **Sell with substance, not slogans**

Every employer claims a great culture and big upside. What convinces candidates in London is proof, specificity, and measured transparency. If you are hiring in technology, be prepared to discuss the stage of your equity and the likely liquidity windows. You do not need to promise dates or numbers, and you should not, but you can describe governance, board composition, and recent financing in plain language.

Talk about compensation bands with ranges and logic. For example, a senior individual contributor engineer in central London might see base offers in the low six figures, with equity and bonus varying widely by stage and sector. Present your band, the levelling framework behind it, and the promotion criteria. If you are slightly below the median on cash, show where you are above the median on pension match, learning budget, or time to lead a team. I have seen candidates accept a lower base in exchange for a defined leadership transition within six months, supported by targeted Leadership Training and regular sessions with a Leadership Coach. The commitment felt real because it came with names, dates, and a plan.

If you sponsor visas, state your track record and your process owner. If you operate a hybrid policy, specify anchor days, hours, and equipment support. If you have made layoffs in the last year, be ready to discuss what changed and how you rebuilt trust. London talent reads the FT and talks to former employees. Respect that.

## **Use an Executive Coach as a strategic hiring partner**

The title can mislead. An Executive Coach is not only a confidant for C suite leaders. Done well, coaching strengthens the entire hiring system. I often sit in as a silent observer during panel interviews, then run a 15 minute debrief to map evidence against the scorecard. The discipline here is to separate likeability from fit, and to surface disagreement before it calcifies into a veto.

Coaches can also design and facilitate work simulations that reveal judgement under pressure. For a head of growth, we might run a session where the candidate defends a budget reallocation in front of a mock CFO and CMO, with a curveball data revision mid meeting. For a chief of staff, we can simulate a one hour window to brief the CEO on two emerging risks and secure alignment on next steps. These exercises are fair, fast, and deeply predictive.

On the candidate side, offering a short session with an external Business Coach can be a powerful signal. It shows you invest in development from day one. Several of my clients include a three month coaching ramp for director level and above. That investment often pays for itself in faster onboarding and lower early attrition.

## **The first 90 days decide retention**

Great hiring is fragile without structured onboarding. London's competitiveness means your new hire will be approached within weeks. The antidote is momentum. I work with leaders to set a 90 day plan that combines delivery, learning, and relationship building in equal measure.



Start with stakeholder mapping. Who are the five to eight people whose view of this hire's performance will most influence success. Schedule recurring one to ones before day one. Clarify what each stakeholder expects to see in the first month and what worries them. Capture this in a short brief that the new hire uses to guide their calendar.

Define two deliverables that ship in the first 30 to 45 days. Make these small enough to win, big enough to matter. For instance, a mini audit and reset of the sales forecast cadence, or a pre mortem workshop for a risky product launch. Pair each deliverable with a visible moment, such as a show and tell at an all hands, or a readout to the exec team.

Build learning loops. A weekly 30 minute session with the hiring manager focused on judgement calls, not status. A biweekly touchpoint with a mentor outside the reporting line. One session a month with a Leadership Coach to process pressure and pattern match. These rituals compound.

Finally, narrate progress. London teams move quickly. If you do not tell the story of early wins, people assume drift. Give your new hire the stage, help them show their work, and give them credit in rooms they do not yet

attend.

## Hybrid work, London style

The hybrid debate burned a lot of energy, but most London companies have settled into a rhythm. Two to three anchor days in the office is common. What varies is intentionality. The winning pattern I see has three features.

First, precise anchor days with clear purpose. Tuesday and Thursday are collaboration days for cross functional rituals. Wednesday is optional for deeper whiteboarding, with meeting light afternoons. Second, a commute aware stance. A candidate living in St Albans or Brighton is doing careful arithmetic about train costs and journey time. Offer flexibility on hours so they can avoid peak fares and crowds. Third, attention to space. If your office is open plan and noisy, create quiet zones and bookable rooms. Nothing undermines a hybrid policy faster than a packed commute followed by a day of video calls from a loud bench.

Being explicit here helps hiring. Advertise anchor days in the job ad. Mention the closest Tube lines. Offer a stipend for home setups that meets health and safety expectations. It demonstrates care and competency.

## International candidates and the visa puzzle

If you sponsor, make it an advantage. That means fluency with timelines, costs, and communication. For the UK Skilled Worker route, the steps often look like this. You secure or already hold a sponsor licence. You assign a Certificate of Sponsorship once the candidate accepts, then the candidate applies for the visa. Processing varies by service level and country of application, but many cases complete within 3 to 8 weeks after the paperwork is in order. Add your internal steps and you are looking at roughly 4 to 12 weeks from contract to start for most scenarios.

Costs also vary. The sponsor licence fee is in the hundreds to low thousands of pounds depending on company size. The Immigration Skills Charge is charged per sponsored year, with a lower rate for small sponsors and a higher rate for large sponsors. Visa application and health surcharge fees add further costs. Add relocation support and you can forecast a reasonable total. Share these numbers at offer so no one is surprised.

Do not over promise start dates. Build buffer for notice periods, which in London often run 1 to 3 months for mid senior roles. Help the candidate find interim workarounds for knowledge transfer at their current employer, and plan a soft landing period with you. A thoughtful, realistic approach differentiates you from peers who are vague until delays bite.

## Equitable assessment without lowering standards

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are not slogans in a market this fierce, they are competitive advantages. The more perspectives at your table, the better your products and decisions. The challenge is to hire equitably without diluting the bar. Here is how I see it done well in London.

Calibrate your job language. Strip out clichés like rockstar and ninja. Avoid inflated years of experience where skills matter more. Replace algorithmic whiteboard puzzles with job relevant exercises. Train your panel on structured interviewing and bias interruptions. Keep scorecards visible during debriefs so evidence anchors the discussion.

Expand sourcing beyond obvious ponds. Partner with professional networks that reach underrepresented talent in your sector. Sponsor events that put your hiring managers on stage to discuss real problems. Offer returnship or re entry paths for experienced professionals who have taken career breaks. None of this is charity. It is a way to find exceptional people others overlook.

## **Compensation clarity without handcuffs**

Salary transparency helps speed and fairness. The risk is false precision that boxes you into bad deals. You can avoid that by publishing ranges tied to levels, then explaining how you calibrate within those bands based on market data and internal parity. For equity, offer education. Many candidates understand percentages but not dilution or vesting cliffs. Provide a one page explainer with examples and a simple model. Invite questions.

Remember the total package. London talent looks at pensions, private healthcare, wellness budgets, and tax efficient benefits. If you cannot match cash, tune these levers. Offer targeted development like Leadership Training credits in year one, or a reserved seat in a high value external program. I have seen a £2k annual learning budget, clearly articulated and easy to claim, tip the scales against a higher cash competitor with vague promises.

## **Interim, fractional, and the art of buying time**

When the market is hot and headcount is tight, interim leaders can be a lifesaver. London has a deep bench of fractional CFOs, CHROs, and product leaders who can stabilize a function while you run a thorough search. The trick is to treat interim as a designed phase, not a holding pattern.

Set a clear mandate with two or three outcomes, a time bound engagement, and a knowledge transfer plan to the permanent hire. Pair the interim with a Business Coach who focuses on political mapping and stakeholder alignment, especially if the interim has to reset norms. If the interim becomes a candidate for the permanent role, separate their evaluation from their interim performance with a fresh scorecard and unbiased panel. Confusing the two is a common and costly mistake.

## **Metrics that keep you honest**

You manage what you measure. Most London companies track time to fill and cost per hire. Useful, but insufficient. Add three metrics that predict quality and retention.

Time to accept, measured from first conversation to signed offer. Aim to keep this inside 15 business days for experienced hires when you can. Onsite to offer ratio, which tells you if your screens and calibrations are working. If you are bringing five candidates onsite for each offer, your early filters are off. Ninety day attrition, split by regretted and non regretted. If that number creeps above a low single digit percentage, diagnose onboarding and role clarity.

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Layer inclusion metrics. Track who makes it past the first screen by demographic where lawful and appropriate, and who receives offers. If you see falloffs at specific stages, redesign those stages. Do not obsess over perfect measurement. Directional data beats anecdotes.

## **When to invest in Leadership Training during hiring**

Sometimes the best candidate is strong on the craft and lighter on people leadership. In London, where span of control can change fast, that is not a deal breaker if you plan development deliberately. Offer a defined package. For example, six months of Leadership Training focused on feedback, delegation, and difficult conversations, paired with a Leadership Coach who meets biweekly. Tie progression to observed behaviours, not a certificate.

Make the business case in the offer. Explain how their first team will be shaped, who mentors them, and how you will protect time for learning. I have watched candidates choose a smaller company because it showed a more coherent plan to make them a better leader sooner. Your willingness to invest early says a lot about your culture.

## **Hard trade offs and the art of saying no**

You cannot win every candidate, and you should not try. The temptation in a hot market is to overpay or relax standards. Resist both. Instead, know your red lines. If your culture depends on intense collaboration two days a week in the office, do not stretch to four remote days to land a star. If your compensation philosophy caps equity at certain levels to maintain internal parity, hold the line and explain why.

Say no quickly and kindly. London is smaller than it looks, and reputation compounds. If a candidate is not the right fit, give useful feedback when possible. Close the loop with recruiters fast. Pay your referral bonuses on time. Those small acts build goodwill that sends strong candidates your way later.

## **A final note from the coaching chair**

The leaders who consistently win talent in London are rarely the loudest in the room. They are the ones who do a few things consistently well. They know exactly what problem a new hire will solve. They move at a clip that respects candidates' time. They sell without bluster, with specifics and honesty. They invest in development on day one. And they design rituals that sustain performance, not just spike it.

If you are a founder or executive wrestling with a tough hire, bring an Executive Coach or Leadership Coach into the process early. Use coaching to align your team, stress test your plan, and keep your decisions grounded. If you are a candidate choosing between offers, ask for the details that reveal how a company actually runs. Both sides, done well, make London's talent market less of a lottery and more of a craft.

The city rewards craft. Build your hiring like you build your product. Put the customer at the center. Set a high bar and show your work. When you get it right, the compounding effect on culture and performance is immediate. I have seen teams double their delivery capacity within six months with just two great hires. I have also seen ambitious plans stall because the wrong leader landed in the wrong system at the wrong time. The difference is not luck. It is disciplined intent, a clear scorecard, and the humility to iterate.

London is competitive because it is rich with possibility. Treat that as an invitation to lead with clarity. Your future colleagues are paying attention.