SynkRecruiter

WHITE PAPER · OCTOBER 2026

The Boutique Advantage

What recruitment looks like in 2030, and how small agencies win it

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For owners of UK perm boutiques
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Executive summary

By 2030, the UK perm agencies that win will be small, specialist and quick, and they will get most of their placements from people they already know. Software will do most of the admin and a person will make the decisions that matter about candidates. Clients will pay agencies for what their own adverts cannot find. More than four in five UK placement agencies have fewer than ten staff (ONS). This paper is about how they get there first.

Seven shifts to 2030

#	Shift	The evidence in one line
1	**The application flood.** The CV stops being proof.	UK graduate roles drew 140 applications each in 2024/25, a record (ISE)
2	**The database becomes the moat.** Known candidates beat new ones.	66% of candidates agencies sourced from outside were already in their database (Bullhorn, vendor)
3	**Machines take the admin.** People keep the judgement.	UK recruiters log 17.7 hours of manual admin per vacancy (Totaljobs)
4	**Speed and a human voice win.** Silence loses candidates.	68% of candidates prefer a person to a chatbot (Gartner)
5	**The rules catch up.** A person must really be in charge.	New UK rules on automated decisions in force since 5 Feb 2026; EU high-risk rules from 2 Dec 2027
6	**Clients buy differently.** Agencies get the harder roles.	53% of UK organisations recruit entirely in-house, up from 47% in 2024 (CIPD)
7	**The recruiter's job changes.** Boutiques can move first.	Hays: 22% fewer UK consultants, 15% more fees per head

What to do this quarter

1. **Search your database before you advertise.** For every new brief, start with the people you already know, and count how many placements come from them.
2. **Find out where the hours go.** Time one week of admin on your desk. The tasks that are the same every time are the ones to hand to software.
3. **Put a person in every rejection.** List the tools that rank or filter candidates, make sure someone with authority reviews every "no", and tell candidates how it works.

The readiness scorecard at the end of this paper shows where your desk stands in about ten minutes.

Where UK perm recruitment stands in 2026

The UK perm market is coming out of a long slump into a different shape: fewer agency hires, more employers going direct, and more applications for every role. This paper focuses on permanent recruitment, though most of what follows applies to contract desks too. The October 2026 Report on Jobs recorded the second monthly rise in permanent placements in a row, the strongest growth in four years, though still only "marginal" (KPMG and REC, Oct 2026). Candidate supply is still rising and salary growth is slowing. In some sectors it is an employer's market.

83% **of UK placement agencies have fewer than ten staff**
ONS, 2023 data: 13,700 of 16,535

Five numbers that describe the market

Measure	Figure	Source
UK organisations doing all recruitment in-house	**53%**, up from 47% in 2024	CIPD Resourcing and Talent Planning 2026
Employers seeing more unsuitable applications	**58%**, against 33% seeing more suitable ones	CIPD 2026
Median cost per hire, senior roles	**£3,500**, up on 2024 (other roles £2,000)	CIPD 2026
Hays UK and Ireland perm fees, Oct to Dec 2025	**down 9%**; consultant headcount down 22% and fees per consultant (all business lines) up 15%	Hays Q2 FY26
UK employment placement agencies (SIC 78.10) with 1 to 9 staff	**13,700 of 16,535** (83%)	ONS, 2023 data

What the numbers say together

- **The industry is mostly small firms.** More than four in five UK placement agencies have fewer than ten staff. The future of recruitment is, in large part, the future of small agencies.
- **Clients are hiring direct, but not everywhere.** Over half of UK organisations now recruit entirely in-house, though only 49% in the private sector, and CIPD suggests lower hiring may explain part of the rise. Yet 34% of private-sector organisations that hired counted recruitment or search consultants among their most effective ways to attract candidates (CIPD 2026). The work that goes to agencies is the work clients cannot do themselves.
- **Recruitment is still big business.** The industry added £40.6bn to the UK economy in 2024, with activity forecast to grow 4.4% in 2026 (REC Industry Status Report 2024/25).

The wider backdrop to 2030

The World Economic Forum expects **170 million jobs created and 92 million displaced** worldwide between 2025 and 2030. It also expects **39%** of workers' core skills to change in that time (UNLEASH on WEF Future of Jobs 2025). For a perm recruiter that means more people changing careers and more roles nobody has filled before. That makes it harder to match on job titles and more valuable to know candidates well.

LinkedIn's head of economics put the 20% fall in hiring since 2022 down mainly to interest rates, not AI (TechCrunch, Apr 2026). The volume will come back. The question is which agencies will be ready for it.

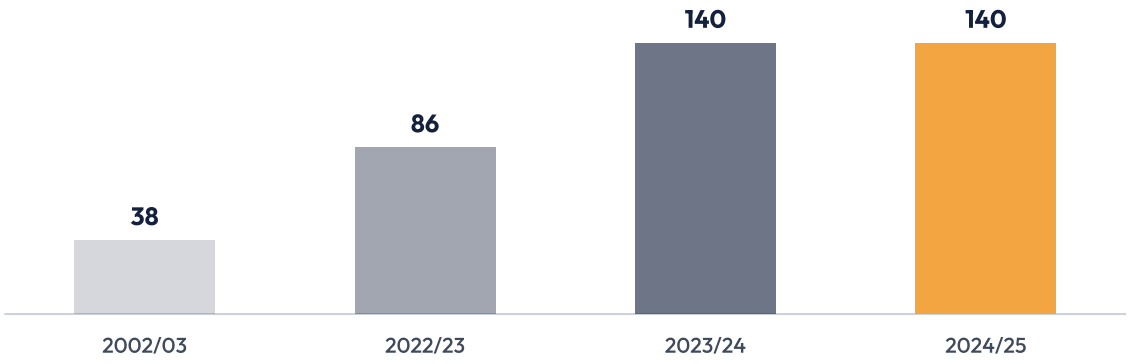
SHIFT 1

The application flood

Applications have become cheap to send and expensive to read, and the CV is losing its value as evidence. By 2030 the agencies that win will be the ones that judge candidates on what a CV can no longer prove.

Applications per UK graduate vacancy hit a record 140

Up from 86 two years earlier and 38 in 2002/03



Source: Institute of Student Employers, Student Recruitment Survey 2025 (155 employers).

More applications, less signal

- UK graduate employers received **140 applications per vacancy** in 2024/25, the highest since records began in 1991. It was 86 two years earlier and 38 in 2002/3 (ISE Student Recruitment Survey 2025).
- LinkedIn told the New York Times in June 2025 that members worldwide send **11,000 applications a minute**, up 45% in a year (eWeek).
- Across Europe, the Middle East and Africa, applications per hire **doubled** between January 2021 and June 2026, according to data from the applicant tracking vendor Ashby (Ashby, Sept 2026).

The cause is no mystery. In a Gartner survey of 3,290 candidates, **39% used AI** while applying, mostly to write CV text and cover letters (HR Dive on Gartner). Hays found **32% of jobseekers** now apply for more roles because AI makes it easy (Hays, Nov 2025).

The cost lands on the desk

In September 2026 Robert Half reported that **67% of UK hiring managers** say screening AI-written applications has slowed their hiring (Resultsense). The extra time goes on sifting unqualified people, telling AI CVs from real ones, and checking credentials.

Then there are the candidates who are not who they say they are. Gartner predicts that by 2028 **one in four candidate profiles** worldwide could be fake. In its own survey, 6% of candidates admitted interview fraud

(HR Dive). In a 2026 survey of 3,000 US hiring managers by the background-check firm Checkr, **40%** had interviewed someone later found to be using a fake identity (Checkr Hiring Hoax 2026). UK graduate employers see the same thing: **66%** caught unauthorised AI use in interviews in 2026 (Wonkhe on ISE 2026).

What replaces the CV as proof

The CV will not disappear by 2030, but it will stop being the deciding document. Three things take its place:

1. **What you already know about the person.** A candidate you placed, interviewed or spoke to two years ago comes with real history: how they interviewed, why they moved, what they earned. An AI cannot fake that. Shift 2 picks this up.
2. **Evidence of the skill itself.** In LinkedIn's 2025 survey, **72%** of recruiting professionals said improving skills assessment is a priority (LinkedIn Future of Recruiting 2025). Be wary of the slogans, though. A Harvard and Burning Glass study found that dropping degree requirements changed real hiring in fewer than **1 in 700** hires (Harvard Project on Workforce). Skills hiring works when someone actually tests the skill.
3. **A conversation with a person who checks.** Live calls, references and identity checks matter more as the paperwork matters less.

For a boutique: reading 300 applications by hand is no longer a sensible use of a consultant's day. Ranking them is a job for software. Judging the top ten is a job for you.

SHIFT 2

Your database becomes the moat

The most valuable thing a boutique owns by 2030 will not be its job board contracts or its LinkedIn seats. It will be the thousands of people it already knows. Finding new candidates is getting more expensive and less reliable, while most agencies leave their history untouched.

> **66%** **of candidates agencies sourced from outside were already in their own database**
> Bullhorn, 7.8m placement records (vendor)

The candidates are usually already there

- Bullhorn analysed 7.8 million placement records and found that **66%** of candidates agencies sourced from outside were **already in their own database** (Bullhorn).
- Among in-house teams, the share of sourced hires who were already in the company's own systems rose from **29% in 2021 to 44% in 2024** (Gem 2025 Recruiting Benchmarks).
- An older Bullhorn analysis found that candidates an agency had placed before converted **50% better** than new ones (Bullhorn, 2022).

These are software vendors' numbers, and they have a reason to publish them. No independent UK study measures how many agency placements come from an existing database. Still, every recruiter knows the experience: you pay to advertise a role, then find out the ideal candidate was in your CRM all along.

Finding new people costs more every year

CIPD reports that median cost per hire rose in 2026, "reversing the downward trend" (CIPD 2026). LinkedIn's published UK list price for a single Recruiter seat is **£8,925 a year**, and a job slot is **£1,465 a year** (LinkedIn G-Cloud 14 pricing). Meanwhile, as Shift 1 showed, the applications those ads attract are increasingly AI-written and harder to trust.

Why databases go unused

It is not laziness. A database of 20,000 people searched by keyword gives you either nothing or 900 results. Contact details and job titles go stale as people move. Notes sit in the heads of consultants who have left. Most small firms have no tool to help: CIPD found **80% of UK SMEs** use no AI in recruitment at all, against 38% of large organisations.

What changes by 2030

Matching software can now read a brief and every candidate record the way a consultant would: skills, sector, seniority, salary, location, notice period, last conversation. Then it ranks the whole database in seconds. When that becomes normal:

1. **The first shortlist comes from people you know**, before an advert goes live.
2. **Old candidates come back to life.** The person who came second for a role in 2023 is the right person for a brief today.
3. **Your history becomes an asset you can grow.** Every call, interview and note makes the next match better. That is something a new competitor or an in-house team cannot buy.

For a boutique: the cheapest placement you will ever make is with a candidate you already know. The skill for 2030 is making sure you never forget who they are.

SHIFT 3

Machines take the admin, people keep the judgement

The biggest change to a recruiter's week by 2030 will not be a new way to find candidates. It will be the end of most of the typing. Vendor surveys suggest the firms already doing this are growing faster.

> **17.7 hrs** **of manual admin per vacancy, more than two working days per hire**
> Totaljobs, Aug 2025

Where the week goes today

A UK survey of 748 HR leaders found recruiters spend **17.7 hours of manual admin per vacancy**, more than two working days per hire. That includes 3.6 hours reviewing applications, 2.5 hours scheduling interviews and 3 hours writing up notes after interviews (Totaljobs via HR Review, Aug 2025). The three biggest bottlenecks were screening irrelevant applications (72%), waiting for feedback (71%) and data entry (61%).

None of those three needs a recruiter's judgement. All three eat the hours a recruiter could spend on the phone.

What the early movers report

- In LinkedIn's 2025 survey, teams using generative AI said it saved them about **20% of the working week**, roughly a day (Recruiting News Network on LinkedIn Future of Recruiting 2025).
- In Bullhorn's 2026 survey, **46%** of recruitment firms said AI had cut screening time by half or more. Top performers were about **four times** as likely to use AI. Yet only **10%** of firms have it working across the whole process (Bullhorn GRID Industry Trends 2026).
- LinkedIn's Hiring Assistant, an AI agent that sources and pre-screens candidates, became generally available in English in September 2025 (LinkedIn).

These are vendor figures and should be read that way. But the pattern is consistent: most firms dabble, a few rebuild their week, and the few pull ahead.

What to hand over and what to keep

Task	By 2030	Why
Logging calls, filing notes, updating records	Software does it	Pure transcription, though a person should check what is filed
Ranking applicants as they arrive	Software ranks, a person decides	Ranking is fast and consistent; rejecting someone is a decision with legal weight (Shift 5)

Task	By 2030	Why
Matching a new brief to everyone you know	Software suggests, a person picks	No one can remember 20,000 candidates; everyone can judge a shortlist of ten
Acknowledgements, reminders, chasing feedback	Software does it	Candidates want replies, not a consultant's time
First drafts of adverts, emails and CV summaries	Software drafts, a person edits	Saves the blank page, keeps your voice
Interviews, offers, counter-offers, references	People	These need trust and judgement
Telling a candidate "no" after an interview	People	It is how candidates remember you
Advising a client on the market and the brief	People	It is what clients pay a specialist for

What can go wrong

Software that drafts can also invent. A CV summary that adds a qualification the candidate does not have, or a note filed against the wrong person, is your mistake in front of a client. Candidate data you send to an AI tool is still your responsibility. Check what you send, keep a person reading anything that goes out, and know where the data goes.

The rule of thumb

If a task is the same every time, it belongs to software. If the right answer depends on the person in front of you, it stays with a person. The agencies that get this right will not have fewer recruiters. Each recruiter will just spend most of their day recruiting.

SHIFT 4

Speed and a human voice become the edge

When every agency has the same tools, the difference is who gets to the right person first and who treats them like a person. Candidates are tired of automated processes and are starting to walk away from them.

> **68%** **of candidates prefer dealing with a person to a chatbot**
> Gartner, 2,901 candidates

Candidates want a person, and they leave when they do not get one

- In a Gartner survey of 2,901 candidates, **68%** said they prefer dealing with a human to a chatbot, up from 58% two years earlier. **26%** would drop out of a process if made to deal with AI (HR Dive, Jan 2026).
- Only **26%** of candidates trust AI to judge them fairly, and only half believe the jobs they apply for are real (People Matters on Gartner).
- In the UK, **28%** of jobseekers have abandoned a hiring process because of poor communication, delays or too many interview rounds (Totaljobs via HR Review, Aug 2025).
- **56%** of UK candidates were ghosted after an interview, according to the hiring-software vendor Greenhouse, rising to 71% of Gen Z (Greenhouse 2025 Workforce and Hiring Report).

The picture is not anti-technology. In a 2026 candidate survey by the recruitment-software vendor Bullhorn, **91%** of candidates who hear from their recruiter every week would keep working with them (Bullhorn GRID Talent Trends 2026). Candidates do not mind software doing the chasing. They mind silence, and they mind a machine making the call about them.

Speed is now measured in days

Bullhorn's 2026 survey of nearly 2,300 recruitment firms found that **56% of the fastest-growing firms place candidates in under 10 days** on average (Bullhorn GRID Industry Trends 2026). These are vendor figures across mixed temp and perm markets, so treat them as direction rather than benchmark. The direction is clear, though: the firms growing fastest are the ones that move fastest.

For a perm boutique, speed shows up in three places:

1. **Speed to lead.** A strong applicant hears from you the same day, before a rival agency calls them.
2. **Speed to shortlist.** A new brief gets a first shortlist from people you already know within hours, not after a week of advertising.
3. **Speed to feedback.** Every candidate gets an answer, and the good ones get a call.

For a boutique: software does the acknowledging, the reminders and the chasing, so every candidate gets a reply. Consultants spend the time they win back on the calls that machines should not make: the offer, the counter-offer, the reference, the honest "not this one".

SHIFT 5

The rules catch up with the tools

By 2030, using software to sift candidates will be normal, and so will being asked to prove a person stayed in charge. The UK has no AI-specific law, and none is expected before late 2027 (Lewis Silkin, Sept 2026). That does not mean there are no rules. Data protection, equality law and, for anyone touching Europe, the EU AI Act already apply to how an agency screens people.

5 Feb 2026 **new UK rules on automated decisions came into force**
Data (Use and Access) Act 2025

What has already changed

When	What	Why a boutique should care
6 Nov 2024	ICO audit of AI recruitment tools: almost 300 recommendations to vendors (ICO)	Some tools let users filter by protected characteristics, guessed gender or ethnicity from names, or built databases candidates never knew about
2 Feb 2025	EU AI Act bans emotion recognition at work (except for medical or safety reasons) and biometric guessing of race, beliefs or sexuality (Art 5)	Video-interview tools that "read" candidates cannot be used where the candidate or the output is in the EU
5 Feb 2026	UK Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 replaces Article 22 of the UK GDPR with new Articles 22A to 22D on automated decisions (SI 2026/82, s.80)	Solely automated rejections are now possible, but only with safeguards: tell the candidate, let them respond, offer a human review, let them contest it. Tighter limits apply where health, ethnicity or other special category data is involved
31 Mar 2026	ICO report on automated decisions in recruitment, based on 30+ employers (DLA Piper summary)	Most employers thought their tools only "supported" decisions. In practice the tools were deciding. A rubber-stamp review does not count as human involvement
7 Apr 2026	The Fair Work Agency takes over the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate (REC)	One enforcer for agency rules, expected to be more joined-up
1 Jan 2027	Six-month qualifying period for unfair dismissal under the Employment Rights Act 2025 (Ashfords)	Clients have less time to judge a new hire, so a strong shortlist matters more
2 Dec 2027	EU AI Act rules for high-risk recruitment AI apply, moved from Aug 2026 by the EU's Digital Omnibus changes (Annex III, Art 26)	Applies to a UK agency when its tool's output is used in the EU (Art 2)

The line that matters most: a person, not a rubber stamp

The ICO's 2026 report says human review must be "meaningful and active". The reviewer needs the time and the authority to change the outcome before it lands. A consultant who clicks "approve" on fifty AI rejections a morning is not that person.

This is good news for boutiques. A small desk where a named consultant looks at every application the software ranks low, before anyone is turned down, is already close to what the ICO describes. Large volume operations will have to rebuild their process to get there.

Agencies are also directly liable under the Equality Act as employment service providers (s.55). A neutral filter, such as one that drops career gaps, can still be indirect discrimination if it hits a protected group harder and cannot be justified (s.19).

What a UK boutique should do now

1. **List your tools.** Every feature that sources, ranks, filters or scores candidates, including the ones built into your CRM. Note any EU candidates or clients.
2. **Keep a person in every rejection.** Someone with the time and authority to overrule the tool, before the decision is sent.
3. **Tell candidates plainly.** Say at the point of applying that software helps sort applications and how to ask for a human review. The ICO expects more than one line buried in a privacy notice.
4. **Do a data protection impact assessment** for any screening tool, and set clear retention periods.
5. **Ask vendors the hard questions:** bias testing results, what data the model sees, who is controller and who is processor. The government's Responsible AI in Recruitment guide has a checklist.
6. **Check outcomes by group** and offer a non-AI route or reasonable adjustment to disabled candidates.
7. **Never use emotion-reading or face-analysis tools** in interviews.
8. **Train the team and write down that you did.**

None of this is legal advice. It is the minimum a careful agency would want on file before a candidate, a client or a regulator asks.

SHIFT 6

Clients change how they buy

Clients will still pay agencies in 2030, but only for what they cannot do themselves. More of them now recruit directly, their own teams are smaller and busier, and they judge agencies on whether the shortlist is better than what their own job advert would bring in.

> **53%** **of UK organisations now do all their recruitment in-house**
> CIPD, 2026

What in-house teams are dealing with

- **53%** of UK organisations now do all their recruitment in-house, up from 47% in 2024, though only 49% in the private sector. CIPD suggests lower hiring and cost pressure may explain part of the rise (CIPD 2026).
- In-house recruiting teams are shrinking while their workload grows. Data from the vendor Greenhouse, across more than 6,000 mainly US companies, shows recruiters per organisation fell **56%** between 2022 and 2025. Applications per recruiter tripled, from 1,610 to 4,890 a year, and time to fill rose from 44 to 60 days (Greenhouse Hire Standard, Mar 2026).
- Over half of organisations that tried to recruit in 2026 struggled to attract candidates (CIPD 2026).

In other words, clients hire direct because they think they can. Then they find their small team buried in applications, many of them unsuitable. That is the opening for an agency, as long as it brings something the client's own advert cannot.

Fees: held, but harder earned

Hays saw UK and Ireland perm fees fall 9% in late 2025. Across the group, perm fees fell because there were fewer placements, while the average perm fee stayed flat (Hays Q2 FY26). Clients are not mainly squeezing the percentage. They are using agencies for fewer, harder roles, and they do not always pay on time: 35% of REC members had a bad debt in the past year (REC 2024/25).

How buying is likely to change by 2030

This is our reading of the direction, not a measured trend. No reliable UK data yet tracks how fee models are changing.

What clients will expect	What it means for a boutique
A first shortlist within days, not weeks	Start from your own database before you advertise
Proof of the market, not just CVs	Bring salary data, candidate availability and honest advice on the brief

What clients will expect	What it means for a boutique
Fewer agencies, each one a specialist	Be the obvious name in a narrow niche rather than one of eight on a supplier list
Clear evidence that candidates were treated fairly	Be able to show how a shortlist was built and who reviewed it (Shift 5)
Options beyond contingency	Retained, exclusive or project-based work for the roles that matter most

The opportunity

The roles that reach agencies by 2030 will be the scarce ones: specialist, senior, confidential or urgent. Those are the roles where a boutique's knowledge of a small market, and of the people in it, is worth the most. The volume work has gone, or will go, to in-house teams and their software. The relationship work is staying with specialists.

SHIFT 7

The recruiter's job changes, and boutiques can move first

By 2030, each consultant will handle far more work than in 2022. The job does not disappear. It moves up from processing candidates to advising clients and candidates, and small agencies can make that change faster than anyone.

+15% **fees per consultant at Hays UK and Ireland, with 22% fewer consultants**
Hays, Q2 FY26

Fewer recruiters, each doing more

The shift is already visible in the numbers:

- Hays cut UK and Ireland consultant numbers by **22%** in a year while fees per consultant, across all its business lines, rose **15%** (Hays Q2 FY26).
- In-house, monthly hires per recruiter more than doubled between 2022 and 2025, from 2.2 to 4.9 (Greenhouse Hire Standard).
- Gartner's talent acquisition trends for 2026 include recruiters' skills moving towards "complex work", with AI taking high-volume tasks (Recruiting News Network on Gartner).

LinkedIn's 2025 report for search and staffing firms says AI frees recruiters to "hone irreplaceable skills" like relationship building, communication and adaptability (LinkedIn Future of Recruiting 2025, Search and Staffing). The same report found **62%** of recruiting professionals think AI can improve how quality of hire is measured.

The 2030 recruiter

Less of this	More of this
Reading every CV	Judging a shortlist and saying why
Typing up calls	Having more calls
Posting adverts and waiting	Knowing who in the market is ready to move
Sending CVs	Advising on salary, the brief and the counter-offer risk
Chasing feedback	Managing the client relationship
Being measured on activity	Being measured on placements and quality of hire

Why boutiques have the advantage

The large networks have scale, but scale is slow to change. A boutique owner can decide on Monday to change how the desk works and see the result by Friday. Three things work in a small agency's favour:

1. **Specialism.** Clients send agencies the hard roles (Shift 6). Deep knowledge of a narrow market is exactly what hard roles need.
2. **One person owns the relationship.** Candidates want a human voice (Shift 4). In a boutique the person who interviewed them is the person who calls with the offer.
3. **Less to unpick.** No legacy systems across 40 offices, no global IT project, no committee. The tools that let a consultant get through far more in a day are now within reach of a firm of three.

The squeeze is on the generalist middle: firms too big to be nimble and too small to be cheap. It is not on the specialist.

For a boutique: the question for 2030 is not whether you can compete with the big networks. It is whether each of your consultants can do the work of two, while staying the person candidates and clients actually want to speak to.

The 12-month boutique playbook

You do not need a transformation programme. You need to know where your desk stands, fix the two or three gaps that cost you the most, and keep the human parts of the job human. Start with the scorecard.

Readiness scorecard

Score each statement: **0** = no, **1** = partly, **2** = yes. Be honest; nobody else sees it.

#	Area	Statement	Score
1	**Database**	When a new brief lands, we search everyone we know before we advertise	☐
2	**Database**	We can find a strong candidate from three years ago in under five minutes	☐
3	**Database**	Every call and interview is written up on the candidate's record, not in someone's head	☐
4	**Database**	We regularly get back in touch with good candidates we have not placed	☐
5	**Speed**	Every new applicant is looked at within one working day	☐
6	**Speed**	We can send a client a first shortlist within 48 hours of a brief	☐
7	**Speed**	Every candidate who interviews gets an answer, good or bad	☐
8	**Admin**	Consultants spend most of their day talking to candidates and clients	☐
9	**Admin**	Interview scheduling, reminders and acknowledgements happen without anyone typing them	☐
10	**Admin**	We know which tasks take the most time each week	☐
11	**Rules**	We have a list of every tool that ranks, filters or scores candidates	☐
12	**Rules**	A named person reviews every rejection before it is sent	☐
13	**Rules**	Candidates are told plainly how software is used and how to ask for a human review	☐
14	**Clients**	We bring clients market data and advice, not just CVs	☐
15	**Clients**	We are known as the specialist in at least one clear niche	☐

Your total: _____ / 30

What your total means (out of 30):

- **24 to 30: ready.** You are working the way the best boutiques will in 2030. Focus on growing the niche.
- **15 to 23: exposed.** The basics are there, but competitors with better tools will reach your candidates first. Fix your two lowest areas this year.
- **0 to 14: at risk.** Your database and your consultants' time are leaking placements. Start with the first quarter below.

A year in four steps

1. **Months 1 to 3: know what you have, and start searching it.** Count your database and how much of it has been touched in the last two years. Time a week of admin. List every tool you use and what it does to candidates. From now on, search existing candidates before every advert.
2. **Months 4 to 6: measure what the database gives you.** Track how many shortlists and placements come from people you already knew, and get back in touch with the best candidates you have not placed.
3. **Months 7 to 9: take the typing off the desk.** Automate call notes, acknowledgements, scheduling and chasing. Rank applicants as they arrive, with a person deciding.
4. **Months 10 to 12: sell the difference.** Use the time you have saved for client meetings, market updates and retained conversations. Put your fair-process wording on your website and application forms.

Start, stop, keep

Start	Stop	Keep
Searching your own database before every advert	Reading every CV by hand	Phoning candidates with news, good or bad
Measuring placements from known candidates	Letting notes live in inboxes and heads	Owning the client relationship personally
Telling candidates how software helps you	Rubber-stamping software decisions	Your niche and your network
Bringing market data to every brief	Advertising before you have looked at what you have	Interviewing in person or on video yourself

Ten questions to ask before you buy any AI recruitment tool

Based on the government's Responsible AI in Recruitment guide and the ICO's audit findings:

- [ ] Does it suggest, or does it decide? Can a person overrule every outcome before it is sent?
- [ ] Does it ever reject candidates on its own?
- [ ] What data does it look at, and does it ever guess gender, ethnicity or age?
- [ ] Has it been tested for bias, and can I see the results?
- [ ] Does it give reasons for every score, in plain words?
- [ ] Where is the data stored, and who are the sub-processors?
- [ ] Is my data, or my candidates' data, used to train models for anyone else?
- [ ] Who is controller and who is processor, and is there a data processing agreement?
- [ ] How long is candidate data kept, and can I delete it?
- [ ] Does it use any emotion, voice or face analysis? (If yes, walk away.)

About SynkRecruiter

SynkRecruiter is the desk for UK perm boutiques that want more placements and less admin. It started inside one working agency that had years of good candidates and no time to look at them.

- **More placements.** Every new brief is matched against everyone you already know, so your first shortlist comes from your own history. New applicants are ranked the moment they apply, with reasons, and a person always makes the call.
- **Less admin.** Calls are filed, follow-ups drafted and reminders set, in Outlook, Slack and Calendly, the tools your team already uses.
- **Know where to focus.** See where your billings come from, which clients matter most and what each desk is earning.

Book a free desk review

Twenty minutes on a video call with Joe Chaplin, who built SynkRecruiter. We look at where placements and hours leak on your desk and give you three things to try, whether or not you ever buy anything. No candidate data needed.

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How we wrote this

We researched this paper in October 2026 from public sources: government and regulator publications, industry bodies (REC, CIPD, ISE, KPMG), listed company results and published surveys. We opened every source we cite. Figures from companies that sell recruitment software or services are named as such in the text, because those companies have a reason to publish them. Where we could not check an original, we say so. The predictions for 2030 are our own reading of the evidence.

This paper is general information, not legal advice. For decisions about your own data protection or employment law duties, talk to a qualified adviser.

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