

**UK MANUFACTURING &
MAINTENANCE ENGINEERING
MARKET UPDATE
Q4 2025**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UK manufacturing and maintenance engineering market remains active but selective as 2025 draws to a close. Demand for skilled engineers, particularly multi-skilled and electrically biased maintenance professionals, continues to outstrip supply.

While the frenzied post-pandemic hiring has cooled, skill shortages, automation projects, and sustainability initiatives are keeping recruitment steady across Food, FMCG, Pharma, and Packaging sectors.

Economic caution, rising costs, and visa challenges are influencing hiring decisions, but investment in modernisation and upskilling is growing. Retention and culture have become just as important as attraction, with employers prioritising flexible shifts, development, and wellbeing to keep hold of hard-to-find talent.

Looking ahead to 2026, the market is expected to remain stable but evolving, characterised by steady technical demand, more focused hiring and an increasing need for partnerships that deliver long-term workforce resilience.

INTRODUCTION

As we move towards the end of 2025, the UK manufacturing and engineering recruitment landscape remains defined by one constant; demand continues to outstrip supply. While the post-pandemic hiring frenzy has eased, competition for skilled maintenance and automation engineers is as fierce as ever. Businesses are becoming more strategic in how they attract, develop, and retain talent, balancing caution amid economic uncertainty with the need to invest in long-term capability.

“BUSINESSES ARE BECOMING MORE STRATEGIC IN HOW THEY ATTRACT, DEVELOP, AND RETAIN TALENT.”



MARKET OVERVIEW

The market has steadied, but it remains tight. Demand for skilled engineers is strong across core sectors such as Food, FMCG, Pharmaceuticals, and Packaging. While we've left behind the "panic hiring" of recent years, employers are still contending with a limited talent pool; particularly for experienced, apprentice-trained engineers.

A generational gap is also clear. Many seasoned engineers are approaching retirement, while younger apprentices are still working their way through early training, leaving a shortage of mid-level, highly experienced professionals.

Automation and digital transformation continue to shape the market, pushing demand for multi-skilled engineers who can combine hands-on maintenance with systems and controls expertise.

KEY INFLUENCES ON HIRING

Recruitment activity is being driven and restrained by a blend of economic, political, and technological factors.

Rising costs, from energy and materials to salaries, are prompting more selective hiring decisions. Many businesses are focusing on essential hires that directly impact productivity or modernisation projects.

The upcoming budget and potential policy shifts are also leading to cautious planning, while changes to immigration rules have made visa sponsorship more challenging and expensive. That said, ongoing investment in automation, energy efficiency, and sustainability is generating consistent demand for technical talent, especially in modernising plants and green initiatives.

INDUSTRY HOTSPOTS

Certain sectors continue to outperform the wider market. Food manufacturing remains consistently busy, supported by steady consumer demand. FMCG, Packaging, and Logistics also remain active, while Renewable Energy and Recycling are emerging as growth areas.

Pharmaceuticals and Biotech are particularly buoyant in regions like the South East and North West, reflecting sustained investment in healthcare and life sciences. Distribution and e-commerce-driven logistics are also fuelling new site openings, creating further demand for field engineers and maintenance professionals.

While larger manufacturers tend to move more cautiously, smaller and mid-sized firms are showing greater agility, acting quickly to fill key vacancies and retain critical skills.



“ONGOING INVESTMENT IN AUTOMATION, ENERGY EFFICIENCY, AND SUSTAINABILITY IS GENERATING CONSISTENT DEMAND FOR TECHNICAL TALENT, ESPECIALLY IN MODERNISING PLANTS AND GREEN INITIATIVES.”

SKILLS IN DEMAND

Multi-skilled maintenance engineers remain the most sought-after professionals in the market, particularly those with an electrical bias and experience on 4-on-4-off or continental shifts. Expertise in PLC fault finding, controls, and automation (particularly with Siemens, Allen-Bradley, and SCADA systems) continues to command premium salaries.

As automation advances, there's growing need for engineers who can not only fix breakdowns but also drive reliability and continuous improvement initiatives. Project, process, and automation engineers are increasingly valued for their ability to modernise operations and integrate new technologies.

CANDIDATE TRENDS

The market remains firmly candidate-driven. Engineers know their value and are selective about where they work. Salary expectations continue to climb, and stability is no longer a key motivator; many are open to moving after just a couple of years for better pay, development, or improved shift patterns.

Days or fixed shifts remain particularly attractive, as do roles offering exposure to modern technology and clear progression paths. Counter-offers are still common, especially for automation and controls specialists, while visa changes have slightly reduced overseas candidate availability.

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Interestingly, there's been a rise in early-career engineers choosing apprenticeships and hands-on training routes, which could help build longer-term pipelines if employers continue to invest.

EVOLVING EMPLOYER STRATEGIES

Retention of staff is becoming just as critical as attraction. Many manufacturers are re-evaluating their employee value propositions; introducing wellbeing initiatives, flexible shifts, and clearer development pathways. Diversity, inclusion, and future skills pipelines are also taking centre stage, particularly around encouraging more women into engineering and supporting international hires.

Recruitment partnerships are evolving too. Clients are moving away from transactional recruitment models and towards more collaborative, data-driven relationships, focusing on workforce planning, benchmarking, and long-term capability building.

Those investing early in structured PSL frameworks and specialist recruitment input are finding themselves better equipped to navigate ongoing skills shortages and market fluctuations.

“RETENTION OF STAFF IS BECOMING JUST AS CRITICAL AS ATTRACTION. MANY MANUFACTURERS ARE RE-EVALUATING THEIR EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSITION.”



OUTLOOK FOR 2026

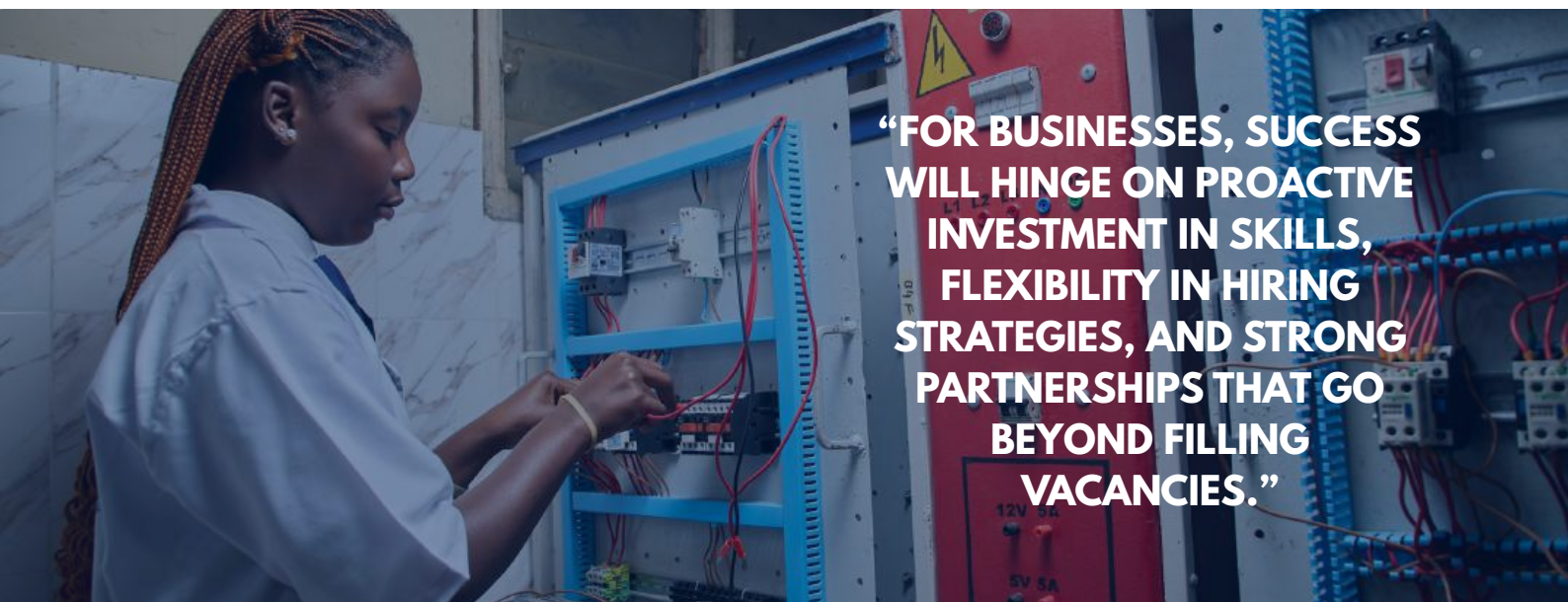
Looking ahead, the market is expected to stay steady but evolve. Demand for skilled engineers will remain strong (particularly in automation, maintenance, and project delivery) but hiring will be more measured. Wage pressure is likely to persist as employers compete for scarce skills, while temporary and contract demand will stay robust to cover shift work and project surges.

The focus is shifting towards retention, upskilling, and talent development. Apprenticeships and structured training programmes are gaining traction again, as businesses recognise the need to rebuild experience pipelines. We also expect greater emphasis on leadership, culture, and digital transformation as manufacturers look to improve both performance and engagement.

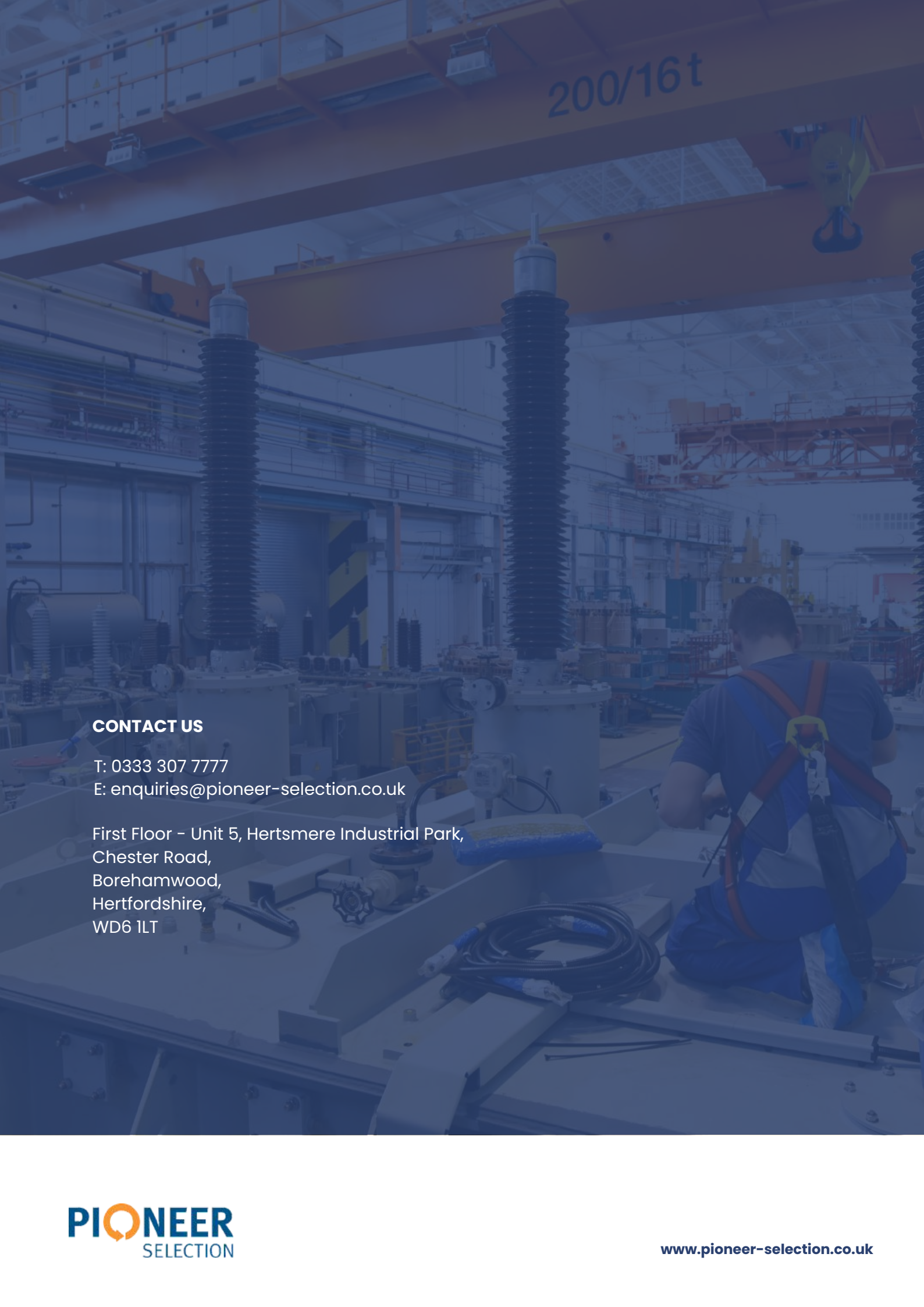
CONCLUSION

The manufacturing and maintenance engineering market remains resilient but complex. While uncertainty around costs, politics, and global pressures continues, the underlying need for skilled engineers is not going away, in fact, the gap is widening.

For businesses, success will hinge on proactive investment in skills, flexibility in hiring strategies, and strong partnerships that go beyond filling vacancies. The next phase of growth will belong to those who plan ahead, develop their people, and embrace innovation in both engineering and recruitment.



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