2026

Market Insights & Salary Guide

ENGINEERING

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OVERVIEW

The UK Engineering sector remains resilient despite a cautious 2025. With renewed private and public investment flowing into advanced manufacturing, energy, defence, transport and med-tech, we expect selective hiring to accelerate in 2026.

Salaries have broadly plateaued compared with the sharp rises of 2021–2023, but scarce skills in electronics, embedded, controls/automation and regulated sectors continue to attract a premium.

This guide aggregates Chroma's internal placement data with external sources across the 6 months to December 2025, including LinkedIn, Indeed, JobServe and TotalJobs. Use these ranges as market signposts; role complexity, sector, location, and benefits will influence the direction of offers.

KEY INSIGHTS

▶ **Salary growth** has stabilised. Typical year-on-year movement is +2 % to +5 % versus 2024, with larger premiums for niche skills and security clearance.

▶ **Hiring demand** is strongest in electronics/embedded, controls/automation, electrification, and highly regulated environments (defence, aerospace, energy, medical devices).

▶ **Employers offering hybrid flexibility,** modern toolchains, and clear progression paths secure talent faster than those relying solely on salary.

NOTES

Ranges represent typical base salaries excluding bonuses, overtime, shift uplifts, cars or allowances.

Bands are split by seniority. Where a role is rarely hired at "Junior", we include an entry band reflecting early-career hires or graduates. Senior bands reflect hands-on specialists and team-leading ICs; add 5%–10% where line management/departmental scope is required.

Defence, aerospace, energy, pharma/med-tech and semiconductor often command 5%–15% premiums, especially with SC/DV clearance or Class III/ASIL/SIL exposure.

2025 UK SALARY BANDS - PERMANENT

JOB TITLE	JUNIOR	MID-LEVEL	SENIOR
Electronics Design Engineer / Electronics Engineer	£30,000 - £34,000	£36,000 - £46,000	£48,000 - £68,000
Embedded Software Engineer / Firmware Engineer	£30,000 - £34,000	£42,000 - £52,000	£55,000 - £75,000
Software Engineer (C++)	£32,000 - £36,000	£42,000 - £52,000	£55,000 - £75,000
Test Engineer	£30,000 - £36,000	£36,000 - £46,000	£48,000 - £58,000
Mechanical Design Engineer	£28,000 - £36,000	£42,000 - £48,000	£50,000 - £58,000
Electrical Design Engineer	£30,000 - £36,000	£42,000 - £49,000	£52,000 - £68,000
Controls Systems Engineer	£30,000 - £36,000	£42,000 - £48,000	£48,000 - £68,000
Automation Engineer	£30,000 - £36,000	£42,000 - £48,000	£48,000 - £68,000
Project Manager	£40,000 - £45,000	£52,000 - £58,000	£62,000 - £75,000
Project Engineer	£30,000 - £36,000	£42,000 - £48,000	£50,000 - £58,000
Quality Engineer	£28,000 - £32,000	£32,000 - £38,000	£38,000 - £48,000
Production Engineer	£27,000 - £32,000	£32,000 - £38,000	£38,000 - £52,000
Manufacturing Engineer	£27,000 - £32,000	£32,000 - £38,000	£38,000 - £52,000
Mechanical Fitter	£27,000 - £32,000	£33,000 - £36,000	£39,000 - £44,000
Electrical Fitter	£27,000 - £32,000	£32,000 - £36,000	£38,000 - £46,000
Electronics Technician	£26,000 - £28,000	£28,000 - £30,000	£30,000 - £35,000

REGIONAL MODIFIERS

The UK Engerineering market remains regionally diverse:

- ◉ **Manchester / Northwest:** Benchmark region (data baseline).

- ◉ **London & South East:** +10% to +20% premium on listed bands.

- ◉ **Midlands:** Typically 5%-10% lower than the Northwest (role and sector dependent).

- ◉ **Scotland & North East:** Generally 10%-15% lower, with exceptions for defence/energy clusters.

- ◉ **South West & Wales:** Typically 5%-10% lower than the Northwest.

Remote-first roles tend to converge toward the national median, with premiums applying for scarce skills.

2025 CONTRACTOR DAY RATE BENCHMARKS

ROLE	TYPICAL DAY RATE
Electronics Design Engineer	£400 - £550
Embedded / Firmware Engineer	£450 - £600
Software Engineer (C/C++ / C#)	£400 - £600
Test Engineer	£300 - £450
Mechanical Design Engineer (CAD)	£300 - £450
Electrical Design Engineer	£350 - £500
Controls / Automation Engineer (PLC / SCADA)	£400 - £600
Project Manager	£400 -£600
Project Engineer	£350 - £500
Quality Engineer (QA/QMS/Regulatory)	£300 - £450
Production/Manufacturing Engineer	£300 - £450
Mechanical/Electrical Fitter	£200 - £300

NOTES These figures assume OUTSIDE IR35 contracts. Inside IR35 assignments or umbrella arrangements typically reduce take-home pay by 20%-25%.

Day-rate drivers: IR35 status, security clearance, sector criticality, site requirements/shift work, toolchain and certifications (e.g., TÜV functional safety, IPC, Chartered status).

Chroma internal analytics and live vacancy/offer data, cross-referenced with external sources (LinkedIn, Indeed, TotalJobs) across July - December 2025.

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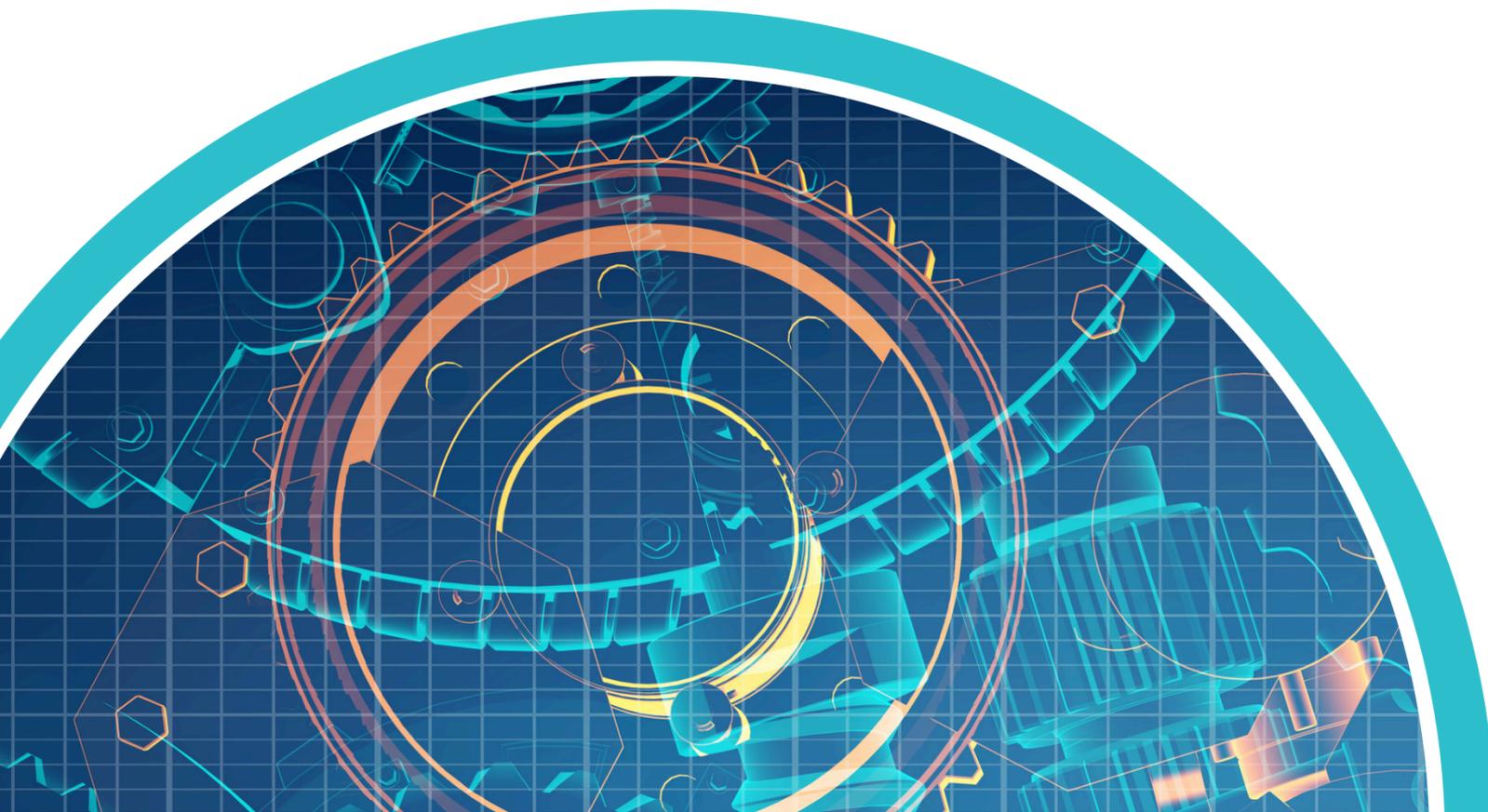
SECTOR OVERVIEW

SPACE

The UK Space sector continues to perform strongly as global investment and competition accelerate. We are seeing above-average wage growth in established hubs such as London and the Cambridge–Oxford corridor, alongside increased competition from other regions offering comparable salaries with a lower cost of living.

Salary premiums are being driven by acute skills shortages across specialist disciplines. Demand currently outstrips supply in areas including launch systems, propulsion, orbital autonomy, software engineering, and payload systems, placing upward pressure on compensation for experienced professionals.

ENERGY

The UK Energy and Utilities market remains highly buoyant, with sustained demand across a broad range of engineering disciplines. Oil and Gas continues to be one of the highest-paying areas within the sector, with industry estimates suggesting professionals earn up to 132% above typical energy sector averages, and pay growth in this area continues to outpace wider market trends.

Renewables and Clean Energy roles are now seeing faster salary growth than traditional energy positions and most other technical markets. Around half of professionals in this space anticipate meaningful pay increases over the next 12 months, reflecting ongoing investment and the accelerating shift towards sustainable energy solutions.

GUIDANCE FOR CANDIDATES

To position yourself competitively in the 2026 market:

- Show impact, not tasks: Quantify yield, reliability, safety or cost improvements; link work to standards (ISO 13485, AS9100, IEC 61508, ISO 26262).

- Stack your edge: Tooling and domain certs (e.g., Altium, DOORS, MATLAB/Simulink, PLC platforms, TÜV FS Eng) push you to the top of bands.

- Portfolio matters: For design roles, bring schematics, code samples and anonymised artefacts demonstrating problem-solving and DFM/DFT thinking.

- Stay flexible: Contracting can accelerate earnings and exposure; ensure IR35 compliance and professional insurance are up to date.

GUIDANCE FOR CLIENTS

To remain competitive in the market, employers need to act strategically and decisively.

- Define the work: Outcomes, technology stack, and regulatory context drive candidate motivation and pay expectations.

- Move decisively: In niche areas (embedded, controls, safety) top candidates are active for days, not weeks. Two-stage processes outperform multi-stage.

- Total package sells: Hybrid patterns, training budgets, chartership support, and clear progression will offset salary constraints.

- Benchmark bi-annually: Use market checks to protect internal parity and reduce counter-offer risk.

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Founded in 2016, our commitment is to Listen, Understand, Consult and Deliver the best possible service. We truly value all our customers, both our clients and candidates, and believe in a quality over quantity approach to recruitment. With a multi-talented team on hand to offer assistance, our personalised approach means that you'll be able to find the ideal new hire or position in no time.

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Chroma Engineering was formed in 2017 to provide highly-skilled white collar roles and professionals to businesses. We cover both permanent and contract staffing solutions, with specialist Consultants based in different geographical areas across the UK.

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