

MARKET INTELLIGENCE · SALARY BENCHMARK

Commercial leadership pay in UK construction

What major-projects and Tier 1 civils contractors are paying their commercial leadership across London and the South East, drawn from live search conversations across the market.

103	34	£140,000	£130,000
ROLES PROFILED	CONTRACTORS	MEDIAN BASE	LOWER QUARTILE

FINDINGS

What the market is telling you

Four things that should shape your next commercial appointment.

01 This market prices above the national picture.

The lower quartile across every level we hold is £130,000, which sits above the top of most published Commercial Director ranges. National guides aggregate a far broader population, so they are measuring something different rather than something wrong. For a London major-projects appointment, the figures in this report are the more useful place to start.

02 Scope prices the role; the title does not.

A Senior Commercial Manager leading the commercial function on a major scheme earns £115,000–£140,000, which sits squarely inside published Commercial Director territory. Because titles are applied inconsistently across the sector, we would set the band from contract value, the commercial risk carried and the reporting line before any title is attached.

03 The gradient through the first three levels is narrow.

Barely £10,000 separates the medians of Levels A, B and C, and their quartiles overlap outright, so two promotions can be delivered for very little movement in base. That is worth understanding before a review cycle rather than after one, because it shapes retention long before it shapes recruitment.

04 The premium sits at business-unit leadership.

Median base rises £22,000 between a portfolio-level commercial lead and a Commercial Director carrying full profit and loss. This is where the market places a genuine premium, and it is the clearest step you can offer someone you want to keep.

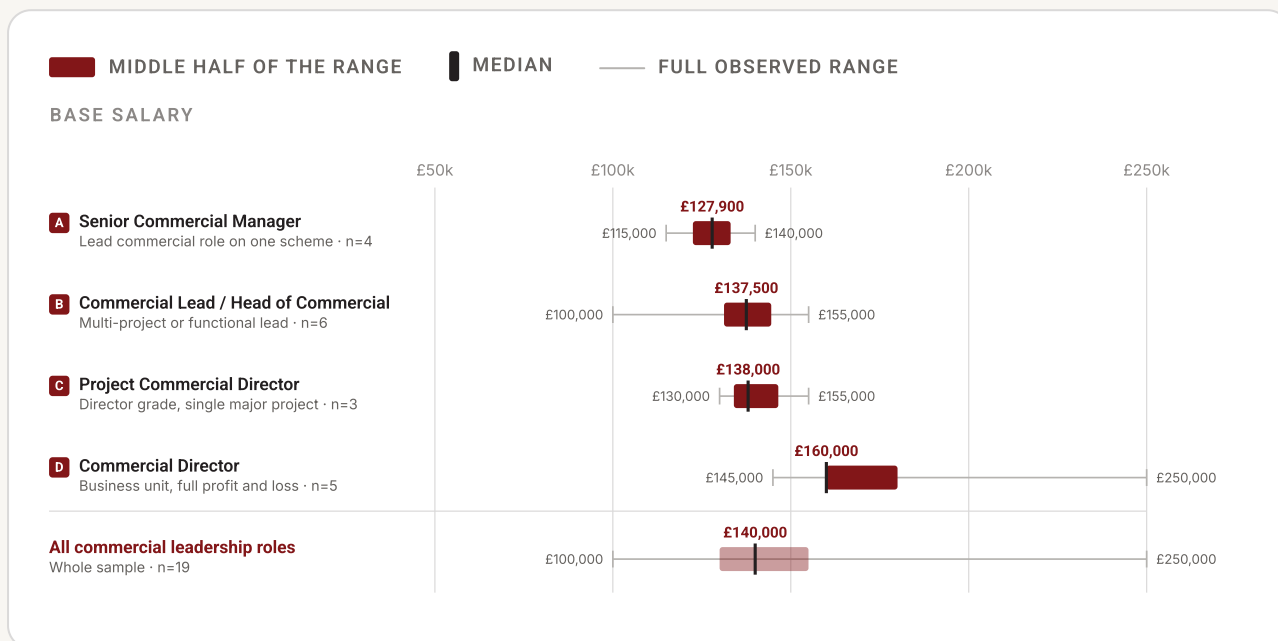
HOW TO READ THIS

Levels are set by scope of responsibility rather than by job title. Every figure is disclosed base salary, excluding bonus, car and allowances, and no figure is attributable to any individual or organisation.

THE DATA

Where the market sits today

Disclosed base salary, by scope rather than by title.



The first three levels sit almost on top of one another. Only business-unit Commercial Director separates cleanly, and its upper end is stretched by a small number of full profit-and-loss roles.

LEVEL	N	LOW	LOWER QUARTILE	MEDIAN	UPPER QUARTILE	HIGH
A Senior Commercial Manager	4	£115,000	£122,500	£127,900	£133,100	£140,000
B Commercial Lead / Head of Commercial	6	£100,000	£131,250	£137,500	£144,500	£155,000
C Project Commercial Director	3	£130,000	£134,000	£138,000	£146,500	£155,000
D Commercial Director	5	£145,000	£160,000	£160,000	£180,000	£250,000
All commercial leadership roles	19	£100,000	£130,000	£140,000	£155,000	£250,000

Quartiles drawn on three to six records per level are directional rather than definitive. Quartiles are inclusive.

CONTEXT

Why this market prices differently

The guides and this sample measure different populations.

READING THE TOP OF THE COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR RANGE

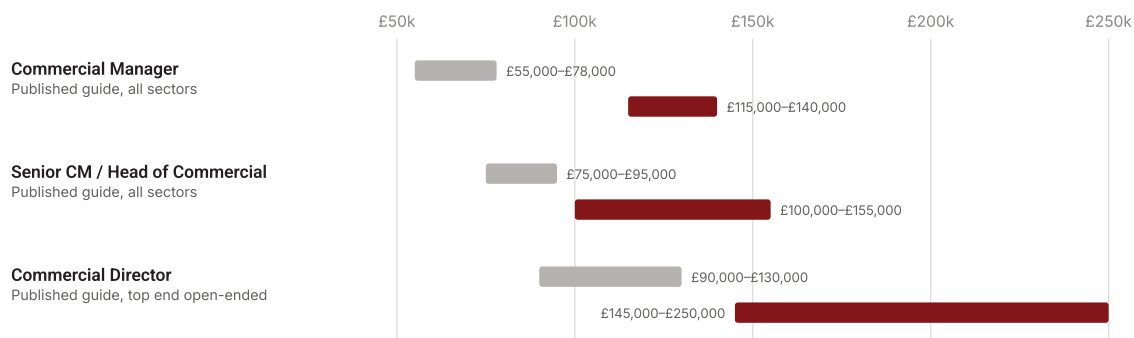
The upper end of Level D reflects a small number of roles carrying a full business-unit profit and loss, and it should not be used to price a project-facing director post. Excluding the single highest record, the all-sample median moves only from £140,000 to £139,000, while the credible ceiling for a business-unit Commercial Director settles at approximately £180,000. That is the figure we would plan against.

Different populations, not competing numbers

National aggregates blend regional contracting, housebuilding and private practice consultancy with major-projects businesses. Published guidance itself records a 10–15% premium for main contractor roles over consultancy at the equivalent level, with further premiums on top of that for data centres, nuclear and major infrastructure. Applied to a London infrastructure scheme, a national median is therefore the wrong starting point by design rather than by error.

PUBLISHED GUIDANCE **OBSERVED IN THIS MARKET**

BASE SALARY



LIKE FOR LIKE

At every level the observed floor sits at or above the published ceiling. The one published figure that lines up closely with this data is an advertised London main contractor Commercial Manager role at £110,000–£130,000 — a comparable population, and it lands where our sample does.

APPLICATION

Pay positioning for your next hire

Three bands per level, and what sits on top of base.

London and the South East, major projects and Tier 1 civils. Attract runs from the observed floor to the lower quartile; market rate spans the middle half; stretch is the upper quartile and above, which is the level required to displace a counter-offer.

LEVEL	ATTRACT	MARKET RATE	STRETCH	TYPICAL PACKAGE ON TOP
A Senior Commercial Manager	£115,000–£125,000	£125,000–£135,000	£135,000–£145,000	10–20% bonus, £5,000–£8,000 car
B Commercial Lead / Head of Commercial	£125,000–£135,000	£135,000–£150,000	£150,000–£165,000	15–25% bonus, £6,000–£10,000 car
C Project Commercial Director	£130,000–£140,000	£140,000–£155,000	£155,000–£175,000	15–25% bonus, £8,000–£12,000 car
D Commercial Director (business unit)	£145,000–£160,000	£160,000–£180,000	£180,000–£220,000+	20–30% bonus, LTIP or share options

Package is where offers are won

Across the packages disclosed to us the spread is wide. One pairs a 10% discretionary bonus with a modest car allowance and share options, another carries a 30% bonus with travel costs fully covered, and a third includes a scheduled bonus worth more than a quarter of base. We would assume 10–30% on top of base at these levels. Published guidance puts director-grade car allowance at £8,000–£12,000 and bonus at 5–20%, which describes the lower half of what we see here.

WHERE THE MOVEMENT IS

Published movement across construction and property is running at roughly **3% a year**, which is about £4,500 at these levels, and materially more where the role touches data centres, nuclear or major infrastructure. With 93% of employers reporting difficulty recruiting qualified commercial staff, we would treat a counter-offer as the likely outcome rather than the exception.

RECOMMENDATIONS

What we advise

Five things to settle before the search opens.

01

Grade the scheme, not the CV.

Set the band from contract value, commercial risk and reporting line before a title is attached. On this evidence, title alone will mis-price a role by up to £25,000.

02

Audit your internal differentials before you go to market.

Where the gap between your scheme-level and portfolio-level commercial grades is under £10,000, your strongest Senior Commercial Managers have little financial reason to take on more scope, and a competitor offering a clean step will find them receptive.

03

Budget the package, not just the base.

Add 10–30% for bonus, car and allowances at these levels. An offer that matches on base and falls short on package tends to read as a downgrade.

04

Set the counter-offer number at the outset.

Agree the stretch figure before going to market, so the decision is made calmly and in advance rather than under time pressure once an offer is on the table.

05

Review at least annually.

At roughly 3% a year the bands move about £4,500 at these levels, and faster in the sectors currently drawing hardest on this population.

METHOD

Sample, method and disclosure

No figure here is attributable to any individual or organisation.

Salary data is reported only in aggregate, and only where a group contains at least three records. Groups below that threshold are suppressed entirely. The contractors below are named to show the composition of the sample; no figure in this report is linked to any of them.

SAMPLE

103 commercial leadership roles across 34 contractors and joint ventures, profiled during 2026 and current as at 30 July 2026. Records are de-duplicated. Base salary was disclosed for 19 of them (18%), and 6 carried package detail.

WEIGHTING

The sample is concentrated in major infrastructure and Tier 1 civils across London and the Home Counties, and should not be read as representative of regional contracting, housebuilding or private practice, all of which price differently.

A KNOWN UPWARD BIAS

Salary is disclosed by people already engaged in a conversation about moving. That population tends to sit above the passive market, so these figures are best read as the cost of attracting rather than the cost of retaining.

METHOD

Roles were assigned to levels by scope of responsibility, separating project-facing director posts from business-unit Commercial Directors because the two price differently. Quartiles are inclusive.

Contractors represented in this sample

Listed alphabetically, with no figure attached to any.

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| ■ Amentum | ■ Dragados UK & Ireland | ■ Kilnbridge | ■ Skanska |
| ■ Amey | ■ EcoWorld London | ■ Laing O'Rourke | ■ STRABAG |
| ■ AWE | ■ Ferrovial | ■ Morgan Sindall | ■ Taylor Woodrow |
| ■ Bachy Soletanche | ■ FM Conway | ■ Morganson | ■ Thames Tideway (CVB JV) |
| ■ Balfour Beatty | ■ Galldris Group | ■ Multiplex | ■ United Infrastructure |
| ■ Blue Sky Building | ■ JN Bentley | ■ Murphy | ■ VINCI Construction UK |
| ■ Bouygues Construction | ■ John Sisk & Son | ■ Permasteelisa Group | ■ VolkerFitzpatrick |
| ■ Clancy Docwra | ■ Keltbray | ■ Red Sea Global | |
| ■ Costain | ■ Kier Group | ■ Sir Robert McAlpine | |

SOURCES

Published sources we drew on

Every external figure quoted, with what it covers.

Accessed 30 July 2026. Each entry notes the population it describes, because that is what determines whether it is comparable with the sample in this report.

SOURCE	WHAT IT REPORTS	COVERAGE AND CAVEAT
Surveyor Success Commercial Manager Salary UK 2026	Commercial Manager £55,000–£78,000 · Senior CM / Head of Commercial £75,000–£95,000 · Commercial Director £90,000–£130,000+. Director car allowance £8,000–£12,000; bonus 5–20%.	Aggregated from PayScale, Jobted and CV-Library. Covers all sectors and contractor tiers.
Surveyor Success Quantity Surveyor Salary Guide UK 2026	Senior management to director £80,000–£130,000+. Commercial Director ceiling £100,000–£150,000+.	Records a 10–15% premium for main contractor roles over consultancy at the equivalent level.
Hays UK Salary Guide 2026	Construction and property pay up 3.0% on average over twelve months; 78% of employers raised pay. Building services 3.5%; M&E quantity surveyors 4.9%.	Headline movement only. Full role bands sit behind a gated download.
Fawkes & Reece Advertised role, City of London, 2026	Commercial Manager £110,000–£130,000.	The closest published like-for-like: a London main contractor role. An advertised rate rather than a settled one.
CIOB Jobs Advertised roles, 2026	Commercial Director, civil engineering, £120,000–£130,000 plus package.	An opening position rather than where offers close.
JustEng Civil Engineering Salary Guide 2026	Director level £115,000–£140,000+ in permanent roles.	Discipline-wide, not specific to commercial functions.
Glassdoor Tier 1 contractor, Commercial Director, 2026	Approximately £135,000 average base, rising to roughly £235,000 at the 90th percentile.	Self-reported, with three submissions on the role page. Employer name withheld here in line with our disclosure policy.
Maxim Recruitment UK QS Salary & Market Report 2025/26	93% of employers report difficulty recruiting qualified commercial staff.	Market conditions rather than a pay band.

REFERENCES

Surveyor Success, Commercial Manager Salary UK 2026 — surveyorsuccess.co.uk/article/commercial-manager-salary-uk
 Surveyor Success, Quantity Surveyor Salary Guide UK 2026 — surveyorsuccess.co.uk/article/quantity-surveyor-salary-uk
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 Fawkes & Reece, advertised role, City of London, 2026 — exec-appointments.com/job/1973297/commercial-director/
 CIOB Jobs, advertised roles, 2026 — ciobjobs.com/job/138583/commercial-director-civil-engineering-2/
 JustEng, Civil Engineering Salary Guide 2026 — justeng.co.uk/civil-engineer-salary-uk
 Glassdoor, Tier 1 contractor, Commercial Director, 2026 — glassdoor.co.uk
 Maxim Recruitment, UK QS Salary & Market Report 2025/26 — maxim-recruitment.com

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Built from live searches

Arcavia Consulting is a specialist search firm for the design and construction market, working across the UK, Europe and the United States on commercial, project delivery, work winning and design leadership appointments.

This benchmark is drawn from live search activity, which is why it reflects what roles actually clear at rather than what they are advertised at. We refresh it as the underlying sample grows.

If you are budgeting a commercial appointment, reviewing internal differentials, or would like this analysis cut to your own regions, sectors or grades, we would be glad to prepare a bespoke version for you.