

IN-HOUSE AGENCY

TALENT & SALARY



SURVEY 2024

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Foreword by IHALC



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While we frequently touch on the importance of process and culture at our IHALC events, our third pillar is arguably the most important when it comes to in-house agency success: talent.

With this survey we wanted to equip in-house leaders with data and analysis that could help them benchmark against the sector and external agency peers in terms of how they are not only remunerating talent but also on strategies and challenges for recruiting and retaining their people.

It's encouraging to see that pay for in-house teams appears broadly comparable with the industry as a whole, but senior hires can remain a challenge. IHA leaders, however, have other tools at their disposal - whether that is share options, career development or benefits – that can help make up for pay disparity.

And as we hear in the report's last section, the in-house sector offers huge attractions above and beyond remuneration. It's no

wonder that, every week, I receive emails from senior external agency people wanting to move client-side.

Expert analysis and context has been provided throughout by Zoe Edwards and Melissa Smith from our partners on this project, The Industry Club. I'd like to thank them for their work and support. And thank you to everyone who responded to the survey.

I hope you find this report valuable and useful.

”

Patrick Burgoyne
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IHALC

In-house Agency Leaders Club

About IHALC

The In-House Agency Leaders Club brings the in-house agency community together to learn from, support and inspire each other. Through events, content and research, IHALC helps in-house teams to work better and do better work.

It was launched in 2020 by ex-Creative Review Editor and D&AD Trustee and CEO, Patrick Burgoyne and founding partner, WDC. Our members now encompass major brands and organisations across industry sectors in the UK and EMEA. Find out more about membership and our upcoming events at ihalc.com.

Foreword The Industry Club



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We're proud to partner with IHALC and sponsor the inaugural In-House Agency Talent & Salary Survey. As specialists in talent solutions, recruitment, and training for the creative sector for the last 13 years, we have deep expertise in in-house agencies. Over the past 8 years, we've placed top talent into brands and IHAs, watching it grow and evolve. What began with a focus on design roles and production has expanded into fully-fledged creative and lead agencies, with new IHA roles emerging in strategy and conceptual creative teams.

Once seen as limiting for creativity, IHAs are now demonstrating their creative capabilities, winning awards, and challenging traditional external agencies. We've witnessed top talent from some of the best external agencies choosing to move in-house, drawn by the opportunity to work more closely with the brands they're passionate about.

The evolution from production-focused roles to lead agencies and the introduction of strategy and conceptual creative teams highlight the exciting times ahead for IHAs. We're also excited to see the adoption of future roles like AI Prompt Engineers and Data Scientists, which will shape the future of creative and brand work.

This salary survey captures these shifts, offering valuable insights. Whether you're already part of the in-house revolution or considering joining it, these findings will help you navigate the opportunities and trends shaping the future of creative work in-house.

”

Melissa Smith
Founder and Managing Director
The Industry Club
theindustryclub.co.uk



Executive Summary

As in-house agencies continue to evolve and grow (with 48% reporting an increase in headcount over the past year), attracting and retaining the right talent will be key to their success. While being part of larger corporate entities can mean that IHAs are able to offer significant benefits for employees, it can also mean that IHAs are struggling with hiring practices and policies that do not always align with their needs.

While pay levels for the more mature IHAs are nearing parity overall with their external agency peers, significant gaps still exist at the senior level. Nevertheless, the nature of in-house agency culture, an emphasis on work-life balance, and the opportunities to have real impact on an organisation over the long-term mean that IHAs are continuing to attract high quality talent, both from other IHAs and external agencies.

IHAs can be frustrated by internal hiring practices

When we asked our respondents to tell us their biggest challenges when it comes to recruiting, the speed, knowledge and processes of internal hiring teams were frequently cited as an issue. Some 88% of the IHAs who responded use an internal talent acquisition team, but common criticisms concern the amount of time it takes to recruit talent, a lack of knowledge about the needs of a creative agency and the roles therein, and the extra workload it places on IHA management when CVs are unfiltered. As one respondent put it: "Our systems and processes are not attuned to creative recruitment."

To manage freelancers, IHAs frequently engage third party suppliers (42% of respondents said they do this): this can be in order to circumvent corporate red tape, navigate concerns around IR35 and to ensure that freelancers get paid promptly.

IHAs are recruiting from external agencies, but not exclusively

While IHALC has certainly observed an increased appetite, particularly among senior staff, to switch from external agencies to in-house, the data from our respondents reveals a more nuanced picture. Yes, IHAs are recruiting from their external peers: 22% said that over half their new recruits had come from external agencies. But 24% told us that none of their hires in the past 12 months had come from that source. The data does highlight the difficulty of hiring internally across the business for the highly-specialised roles of an IHA: 78% told us that fewer than 25% of their hires had come this way. Nevertheless, IHAs can be mandated to advertise all open roles internally first and to interview all internal candidates, adding to the time it takes to find the right talent.

Senior pay can be a challenge, but other benefits can make up for it

Even the most mature IHAs can struggle to match the salaries that external agencies will pay for top leadership talent. Creative Directors in-house typically earn between £100k and £125k, but £60k-80k is by no means uncommon, particularly for Creative Studios.

However, IHAs can use other benefits to make up for this: 50% of respondents told us that they offer shares in their company to IHA staff as part of their benefits. In tech firms in particular, this can be a powerful incentive and means of retention.

But, one respondent reported that "[Although] we have been able to attract talent thanks to extensive benefits, flexibility and work-life balance, I am seeing, post-Covid, that many agencies have integrated the same and those benefits have become an expectation. We are therefore losing competitiveness versus agencies." Nevertheless, a healthy team culture, focus on well-being and psychological safety at IHAs can help retain staff.

Career development could be a major advantage for IHAs

With access to training budgets and the support of corporate HR policies, career development should be an area where IHAs can be at an advantage. 84% of respondents told us that they have a budget for staff training, but only 38% have an agency-wide CPD programme, suggesting that training is more skills-based and ad hoc than part of a long-term career development strategy. Also, while 76% have DE&I and Gender Parity KPIs, only 30% have a DE&I talent strategy specifically for the in-house agency. Some in-house agencies, such as BBC Creative's Creative U night school, have set up initiatives to recruit from under-represented backgrounds, but this feels like an opportunity for IHAs to take a lead and is something IHALC will look to support in future.

People are joining IHAs for...

A variety of reasons, but among the most often cited are deeper engagement and impact, work-life balance, stability, and a place where senior people can be valued and thrive. This last point is particularly important as a differentiator to an external agency culture of shedding older, more expensive employees in favour of cheaper, younger staff.

Three quotes from our respondents perfectly sum up the value of IHAs, both for staff and businesses:

"Those who stay the longest benefit from the challenge of deeply engaging with a single brand. There is a unique satisfaction in exploring familiar territory, applying insights to different projects, and witnessing [your] efforts culminate into something substantial and fulfilling over time."

"Being in an IHA means you are better connected to the business and people. You have a deeper understanding of the problems you can help solve. Shared successes (based on shared ambitions, and bonus-able objectives) create a feeling of being more valued, which leads to better camaraderie. And ultimately that leads to better work and outcomes."

"In-house agencies aren't just cheaper and faster, they're better. If you place them at the heart of what you do and focus on the value they give not just being financial, but creative and strategic, then you'll get so much more out of an in-house agency than a traditional external agency. Be careful not to view them solely as cheap labour or an all you can eat buffet. If you place your trust in them and invest in them, you'll be amazed at what you can achieve together."

About the survey

IHALC's surveys are intended to provide in-house agency leaders with relevant, useful benchmarking data about the sector. For the Talent & Salary Survey, respondents represent approximately 50 businesses and organisations within the UK only. We have endeavoured to create a representative sample of IHAs according to sector, size and remit and to acknowledge how the differing capabilities of IHAs may affect the issues discussed here.

More information on the type of IHAs responding can be found in section one, Your In-House Agency. Sectors represented in the responses include **Charities, Media, FMCG, Financial Services, Retail and Tech businesses.**

Research was conducted over summer 2024.



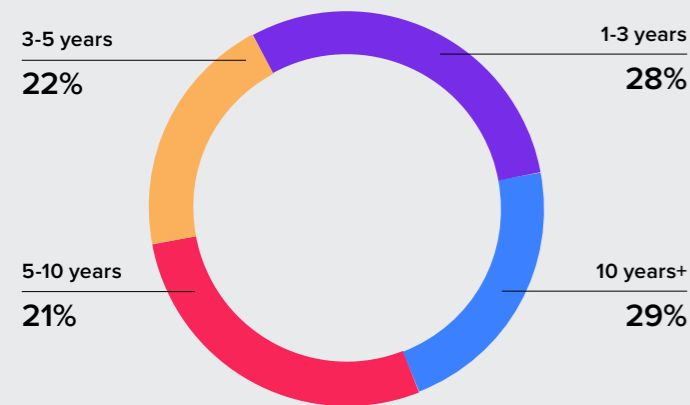
Your In-House Agency

We know that every in-house agency is different: in order to provide context regarding the respondents to the survey, which represent almost 50 major brands and organisations in the UK, we asked some basic questions about their in-house agency.

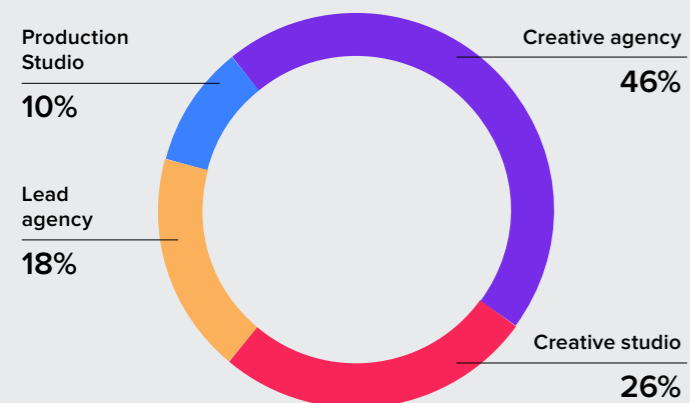
In terms of maturity, it's a very mixed picture with 28% of respondents having an IHA or equivalent for fewer than one to three years, and 29% with an IHA that is ten years old or more. This reflects the nature of the UK in-house sector as a whole where many brands have recently established inhouse teams, while others have very mature operations.

We also asked respondents to tell us how they would characterise their in-house operation: as a Production Studio, a Creative Studio, Creative Agency or Lead Agency. The highest proportion, 46%, see themselves as Creative Agencies (activating big campaign ideas in multiple channels as well as originating and developing tactical campaign ideas). The next largest was Creative Studio at 26%. 10% saw themselves as Production Studios and 18% as Lead Agencies.

How long has your organisation had an IHA or equivalent?



From the graphic opposite, which model most closely describes your IHA currently?



We also wanted to know how many staff, including those currently on contract and freelance, the IHA had. The top answer here was 20-49 people (32% of respondents), but it's a diverse picture with 22% having fewer than ten people and 24% 70 or more.

Encouragingly, 48% say that their overall headcount has increased in the past 12 months, with only 20% noting a decrease. The majority (58%) expect headcount to stay the same over the coming year.

Not all IHAs fulfil the same remit



PRODUCTION STUDIO

Executes solutions by producing master artwork and adapts to spec



CREATIVE STUDIO

Originates design & copy solutions to simple / single channel briefs
Crafts & evolves brand guidelines



CREATIVE AGENCY

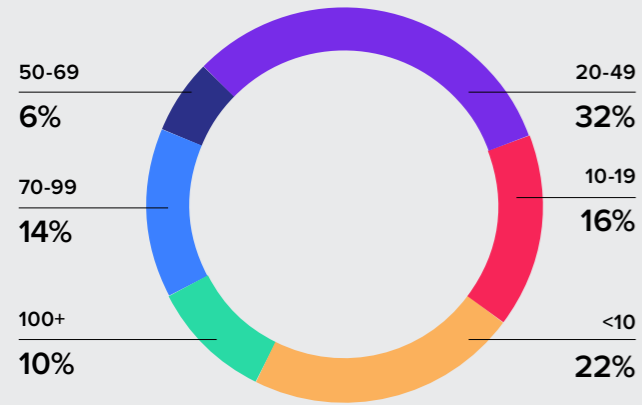
Activates big campaign ideas in multiple channels
Originates & develops tactical campaign ideas



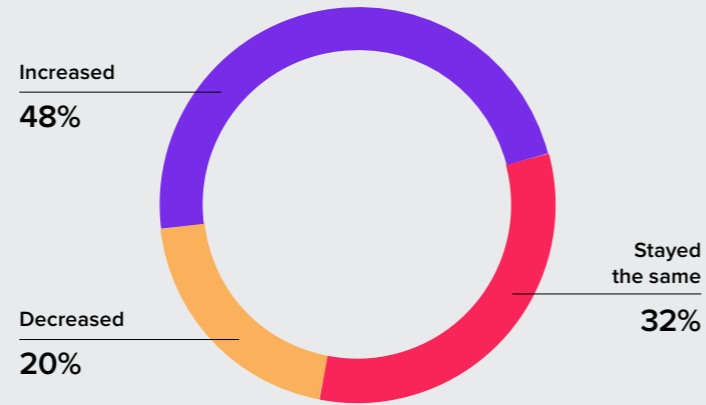
LEAD AGENCY

Devises brand / campaign/ channel strategy
Originates & develops big campaign ideas

How many staff are there in your in-house agency (including those on contract and freelance currently)

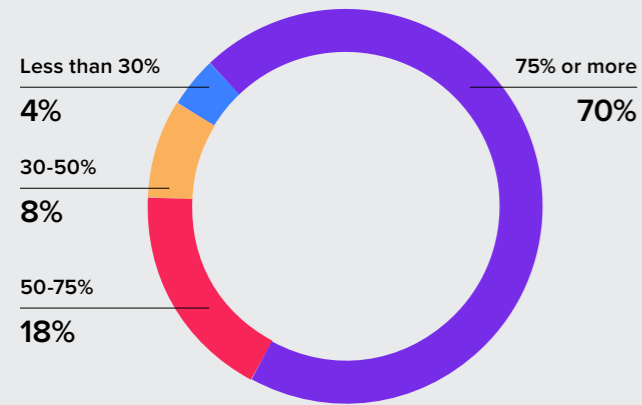


Compared to previous 12 months, has the overall headcount stated above:

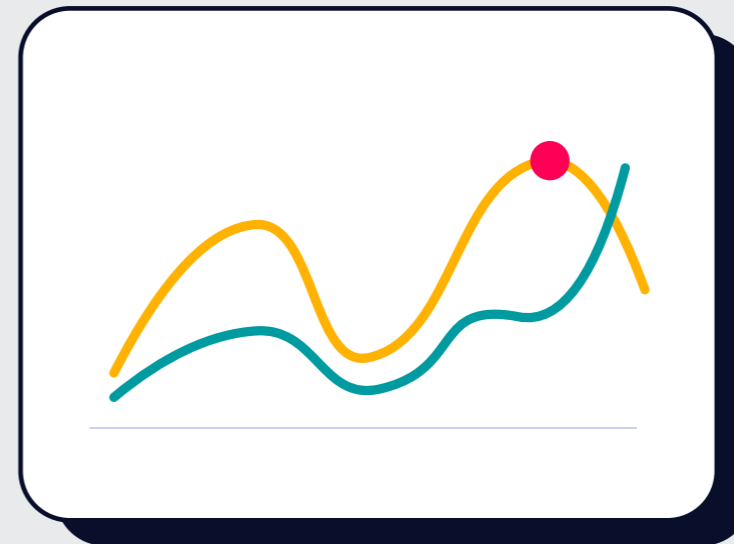
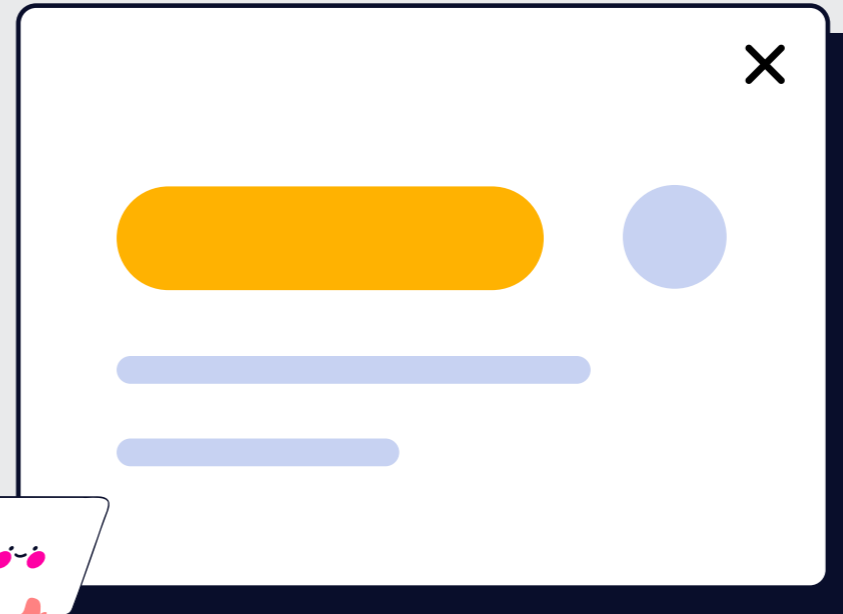
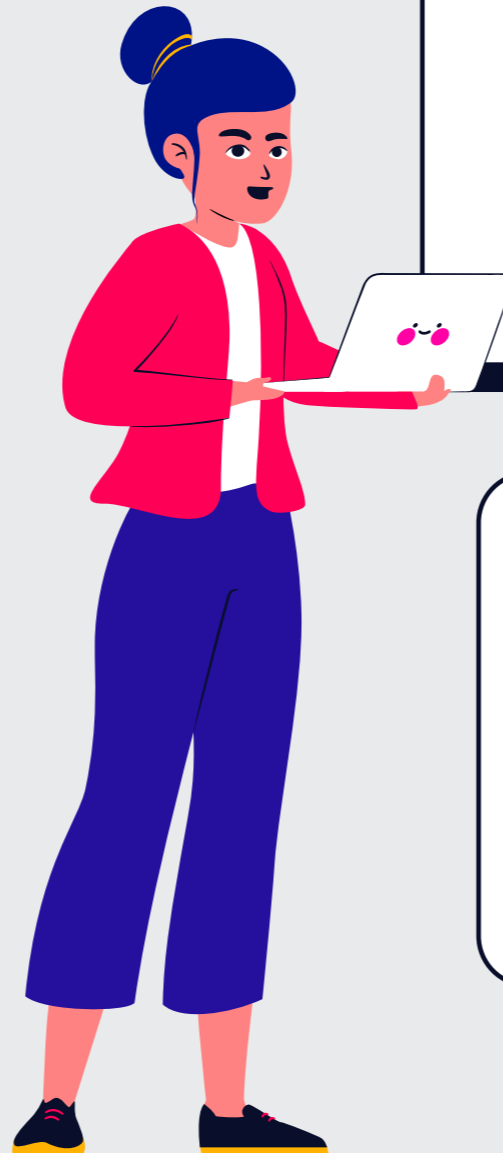
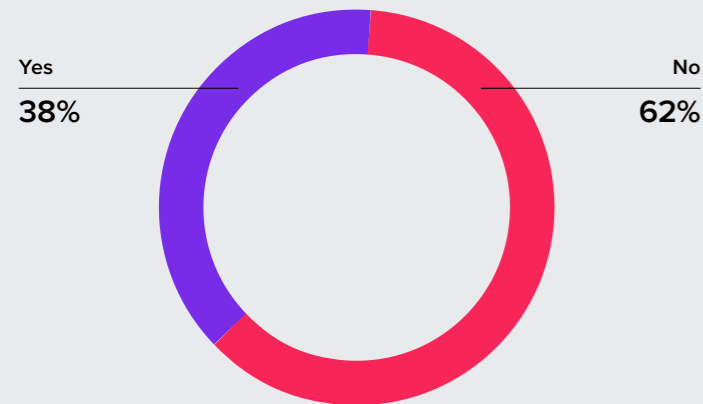


70% of respondents told us that 75% or more of staff are Full-Time Employees, while over 80% of respondents told us that freelancers and those on contracts make up 30% or less of the workforce. Most expect those proportions to stay the same over the next 12 months ie no major shift away from FTEs. 38% of respondents use an offshore team for some of their work.

What proportion of staff are full-time permanent employees?



Do you have an offshore team?



Talent and Hiring

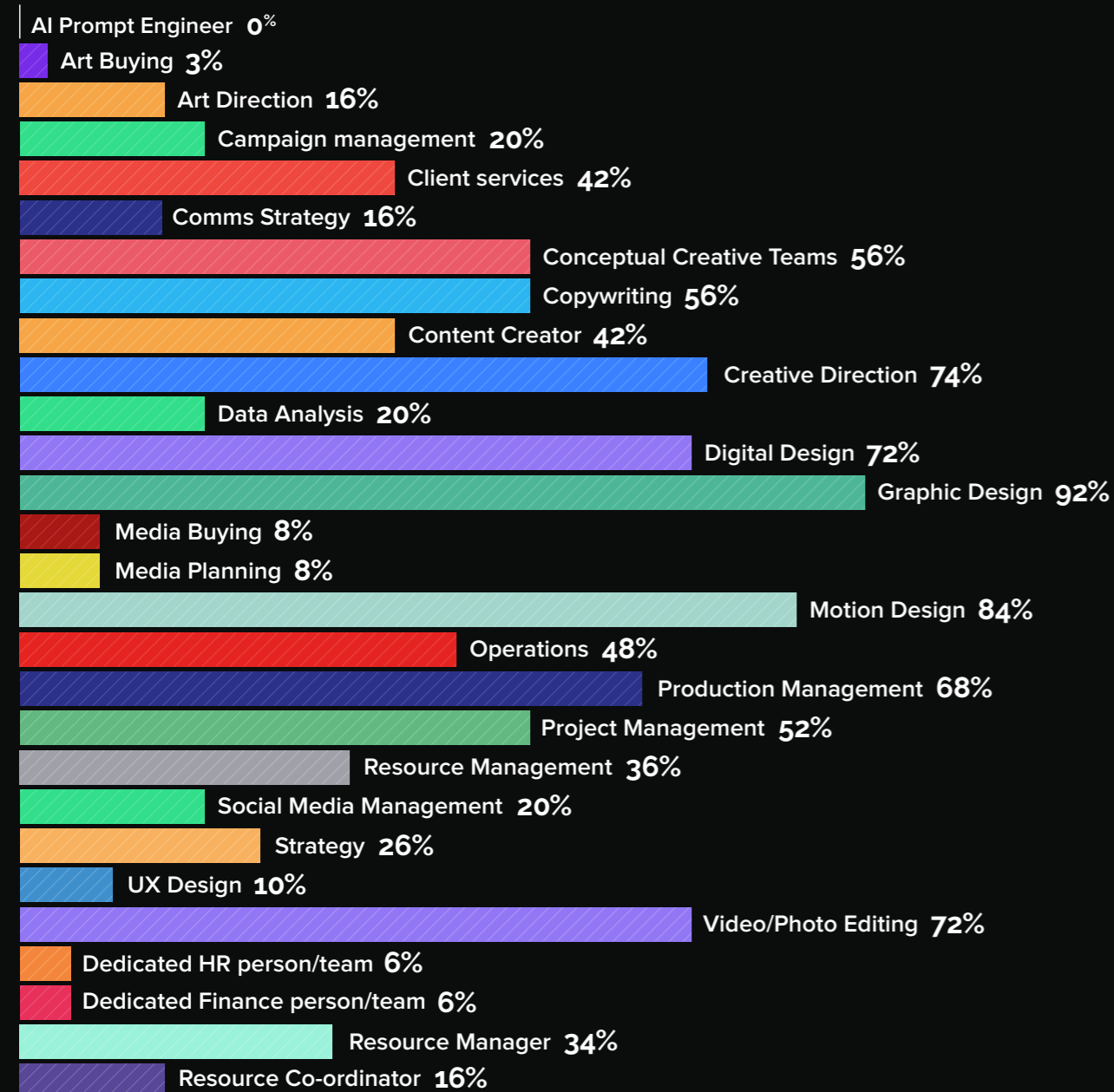
We wanted to look at the range of talent that in-house teams possess, which roles will increasingly be in demand, where that talent comes from and how it is managed.

92% of IHAs have Graphic Design as a role, while 84% have Motion Design, 74% Creative Direction, 72% Digital Design and 72% Video or Photo Editing. Much less common are Strategy (26%), Comms strategy (16%), and Campaign and Social Media Management (both at 20%). No-one has AI Prompt Engineer as a distinct role – yet.

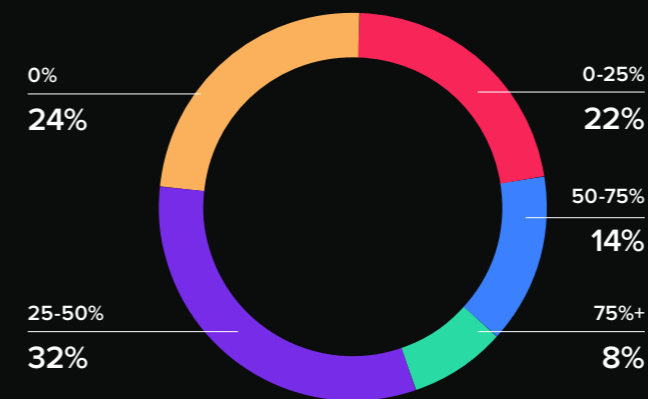
However, we also asked which roles respondents felt would be more in demand in future: here, AI Prompt Engineer was one of the top answers with 44% citing it. Other top answers were Conceptual Creative Teams (reflecting IHAs' ambition to do more higher-tier work), Data Analysis and Campaign Management. 32% cited Strategy.



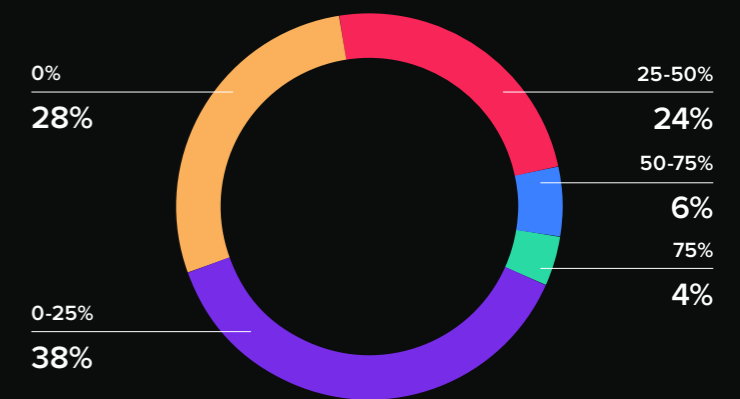
Which roles do you have in your team (permanent or freelance)?



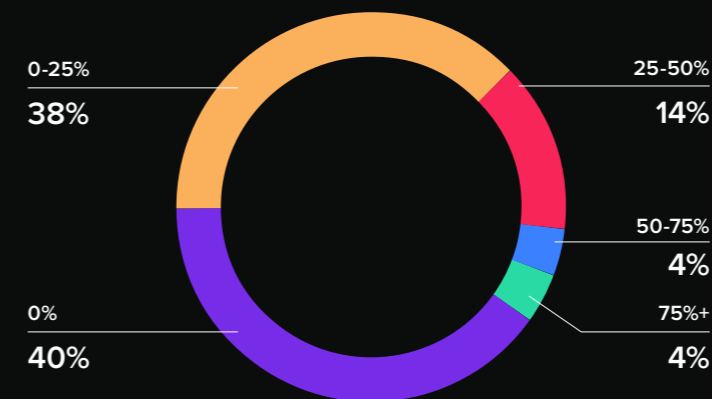
What proportion of the talent you've hired in the last year has come from external agencies?



What proportion of the talent that you've hired in the last year has come from other IHAs?



What proportion of the talent that you've hired in the last year has come from internal hires?



Next, we wanted to understand where IHAs are hiring talent from: external agencies, other IHAs or internal hires. It's a mixed picture: 78% of respondents told us that less than 25% of hires come from internal candidates, perhaps underlining the challenge of transferring people from other parts of a business to the highly-specialised world of an in-house agency. Similarly, 66% told us that less than 25% come from other IHAs. The most likely source of talent, then, is external agencies with 22% of respondents telling us that they get over 50% of hires this way.

We asked you to tell us which roles you found most difficult to fill. The wide variety of replies here suggest that hiring is a challenge in general, but some of the comments we received were:

“Senior Creatives (hard to compete with salaries in the market).”

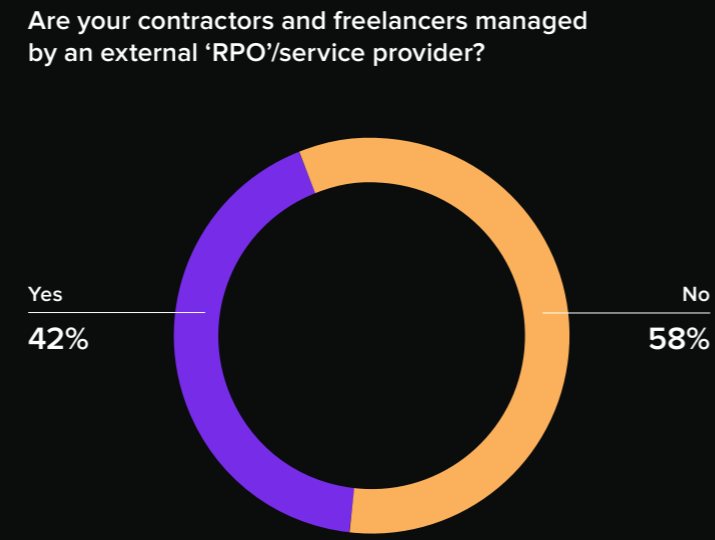
“Content Creators – as they are expected to do everything from concept the ideas, execute them, edit them, and self-produce them. We’re asking for a unicorn.”

“Motion Designer FTE - CVs were all written by ChatGPT and oversold their skillsets.”

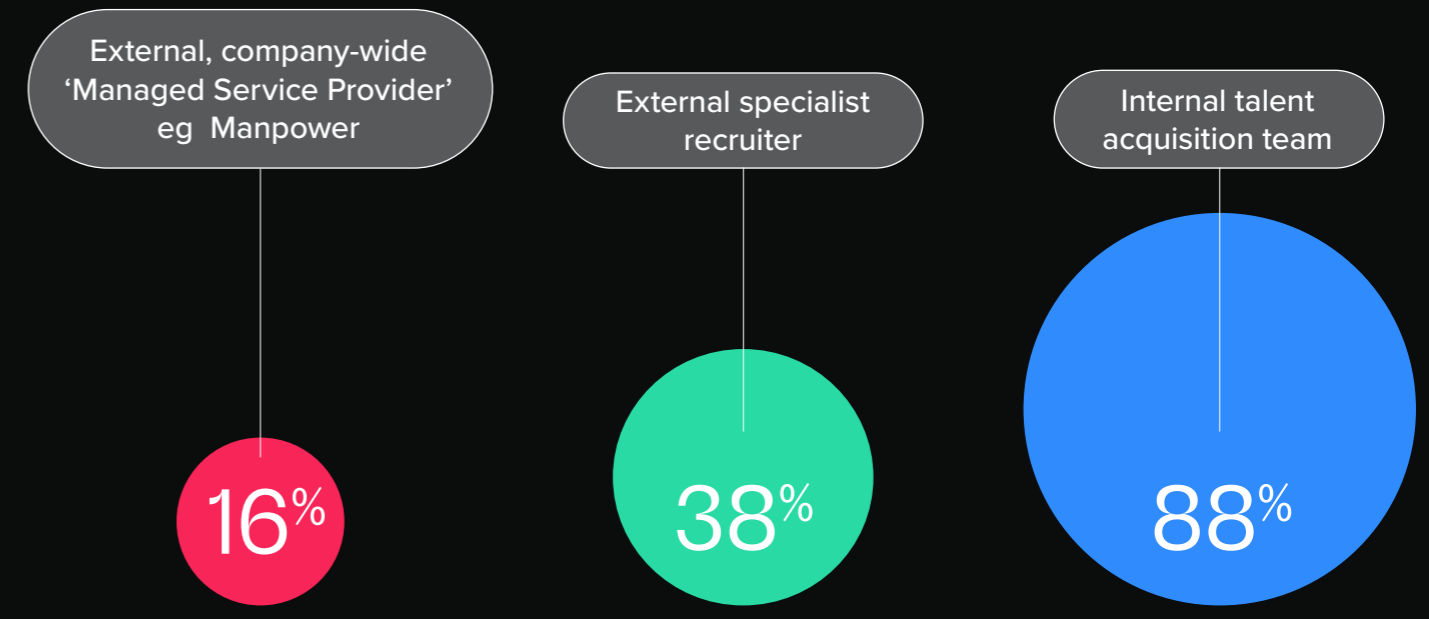
“Good Conceptual Designers and Copywriters. At the wages we pay, they often don’t have the strong concepting background I’m after.”

“FTC Creative Operations - good ops people are like hen’s teeth so not offering a FTE contract really can make it hard to find the right people with the right skillset.”

88% of respondents told us that they go through an internal talent acquisition team, 38% use an external specialist recruiter and only 16% use an external, company-wide Managed Service Provider. In terms of contractors and freelancers, 42% use an external provider to manage them.



How is your talent recruited?



Why do you use a third party to manage freelance resource?

“Hiring freelancers at speed within our bank isn’t possible due to HR and procurement processes, so we have a partner in place to help us manage short-term and longer term freelancers.”

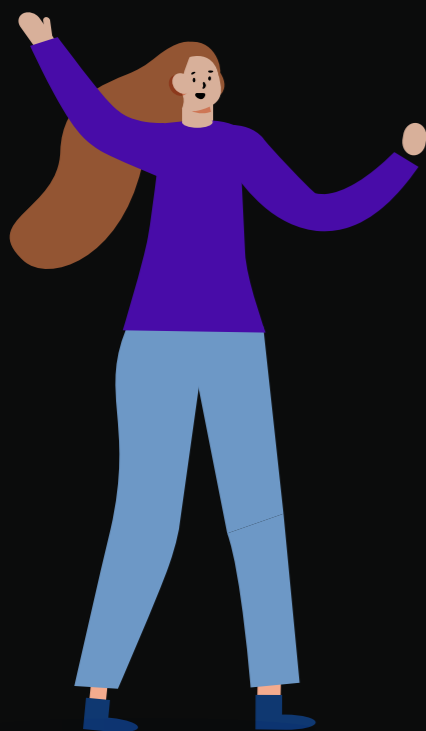


“There’s too much red tape involved to employ freelancers directly. We have been working with a trusted supplier for over five years: they have a good understanding of what we need and are set up for payment.”



“As the business evolves, we need to evolve with it, so external partners can help provide specialist skills, tech and knowledge.”

“Budget for headcount is capped, whereas budget for external suppliers comes from marketing and is more available. Working with external suppliers also allows better access to creative talent when recruiting.”



“To help minimise the risk to the organisation (who were skeptical but curious about in-housing) we use a dual model of both FTEs and contractors: it meant if it didn’t work, or if we had to scale it up or down, we could do this rapidly with minimum impact to the company. It also meant that we could switch up skillsets swiftly. An agency also helped us to scale at pace.”

We also asked respondents to tell us their biggest challenges when it comes to recruiting talent, either permanent, contract or freelance:

“Candidates’ perception of working in-house and feeling it is a step backwards, especially if coming from an external agency.”

“Convincing them that in-house can be interesting, impactful, varied and award-winning.”

“Recruiting strategists with the breadth and depth of experience required that are willing to make the shift in-house. Using external freelancers for this role is not only a time drag but diminishes our competitive advantages of deep business knowledge, proximity and cost efficiencies.”

“We don’t have anyone in the in-house hiring team that fully understands a creative team, and the nuances between an AD and a CD for example. Not being able to use an agency to hire is frustrating as they would instantly get us the right talent in.”

“Managing expectations about the style of work we produce.”

“Understanding and knowing how to navigate the corporate world. Strong portfolios that show the range of skills and experience and fully understanding the role played in delivering it. Not enough talent coming from under-represented communities.”

“The internal talent team are not well equipped for helping with creative hires. They are set up for much more corporate roles. Recruiters were very dismissive of putting forward good talent for an in-house role. Their loss.”

“Systems and processes are not attuned to creative recruitment.”

“Judging the right mix of specialisms vs generalist for an evolving brand.”

“The length of time our HR dept take to process requests to recruit, and long interview and onboarding process. From a person handing in their notice it can take 5-6 months before a replacement is in post. And if the person is on one month’s notice, we are without a person for 4-5 months.”

“Finding allrounders is challenging - we need people who are polymaths to maximize efficiencies in our group.”

“We’re always hiring a very specialist skillset within the wider business and we don’t have the same level of specialism in the recruitment team.”

“Money is very tight at our organisation so they’ve introduced some unhelpful cross-org rules, one being no use of recruitment agencies, which I feel is a big hindrance as my best talent has been found through recruiters. We also have low wages compared with agencies (especially advertising agencies) so it’s a struggle to find creatives who are really good at campaign concepts.”

“We don’t use recruitment agencies to find the right talent, it’s all done internally by a team that covers the whole business which is predominantly construction so they are unable to filter for the skills we require. We end up having to review 100s of CVs, not a selected few.”

Hard-to-hire roles & freelance rosters

Insights by



Recruitment poses significant challenges for in-house agencies (IHAs). They often rely on internal talent teams managing the entire organisation's hiring, limiting specialisation in creative agency roles. This broad responsibility can dilute understanding of specific positions, such as art directors versus creative directors and various types of strategists.

Strategists, designers, and motion designers are particularly difficult to recruit for permanent roles, as many prefer the flexibility and higher pay of freelance positions. IHAs typically offer more permanent contracts but often struggle to attract top talent. To address this, IHAs should consider leveraging freelance talent. However, they must offer day rates that account for deductions from IR35 regulations, which may require significantly higher rates than typically seen in other IHA freelance roles.

There's also a growing demand for **multi-skilled content creators** who can handle concept creation, execution, and self-production, reflecting IHAs' evolving needs for comprehensive creative roles.

More broadly IHA agencies report that slow organisational hiring processes and onboarding hinder their ability to respond quickly to the freelance market. Some brands have implemented solutions like creating a pre-vetted freelance talent pool available on-demand for projects.

Hiring freelancers or fixed-term contractors (FTCs) can help **IHAs build a business case for new roles**, particularly in strategy. Freelancers can demonstrate the value of creative strategy, justifying permanent hires, which is crucial for evolving an agency from a creative to a lead agency.



Salaries and Day Rates

In seeking to compile useful benchmarks for salaries and freelance rates for this survey, we have been very mindful of the varied nature of the remits and scopes of in-house teams, and how that will impact pay. Roles may have the same title but a creative director at a Creative Studio with a remit to produce the appropriate diet of work for that brand may be very different to one operating at a Lead Agency which does major integrated brand campaigns.

We have produced 'typical' salary ranges for in-house roles across the functions of in-house teams, but for some of those roles we have also shown how salaries compare according to the type of in-house operation to illustrate the variation in pay according to IHA type. Owing to the low number of self-declared Production Studios completing the survey, we did not receive enough data to include that model of in-house agency in the comparisons. We should also note that for some of the roles we requested data on, we did not receive enough responses to generate robust data and so have left them out of the tables presented here.

Overall, pay and day rates across the in-house sector appears in line with external agencies when we compare it to some of the major published surveys. Where there is more of a marked disparity is at the top end. Typical salaries for creative directors come in at £100k-£125k, but can be more toward £80k at Creative Studios and we did see some at as low as £60k. Again, this is a function of the different types of IHA, but does reveal a point where in-house can struggle to match external pay.

We should also note, however, that at the ECD level, there are some global roles at Creative or Lead Agencies which pay well above the £125k+ benchmark. It is not unknown for these roles to command up to £250k.

Creative/Design FTE or FTC

Role	Typical Salary Range
Junior Designer	£30k-£35k
Mid-weight Designer	£35-£45k
Senior Designer	£45k-£60k
Junior Creative	£35k-£40k
Mid-weight Creative	£40k-£50k
Senior Creative	£50k-£60k
Mid-level Copywriter	£45k-£60k
Senior Copywriter	£55-£70k
Head of Copy	£80k-£100k
Social Creative	£40k-£50k
Content Creator	£35k-£45k
Design Director Head of Design	£70k-£90k
Associate Creative Director	£80k-£100k
Creative Director / Head of Creative	£100k-£125k
ECD	£125k+

Operations and Production FTE or FTC

Role	Typical Salary Range
Junior PM	£30k-£35k
Mid-weight PM	£40k-£50k
Senior PM	£55k-£65k
Project Director	£60k-£80k
Director / Head of Creative Ops	£75k-£100k
Junior Producer	£30k-£35k
Mid-weight Producer	£35k-£45k
Senior Producer	£45k-£60k
Executive Producer	£75k-£85k
Head of Production	£90k-£110k

Studio FTE or FTC

Role	Typical Salary Range
Video Editor	£35k-£45k
Animator	£45k-£60k
Retoucher	£45k-£55k
Artworker	£45k-£55k
Studio Manager / Head of Studio	£55k-£70k

Client Services FTE or FTC

Role	Typical Salary Range
Account Executive	£30k-£35k
Account Manager	£35k-£45k
Account Director	£45k-£60k
Business Director	£80k-£100k
Head of Client Services	£100k-£110k

Content/Editorial FTE or FTC

Role	Typical Salary Range
Content Writer / Producer	£35k-£45k
Content Lead	£55k-£65k
Director/Head of Content	£85k-£100k

Strategy FTE or FTC

Role	Typical Salary Range
Junior Strategist/Planner	£35k-£45k
Mid-weight Strategist / Planner	£40k-£55k
Senior Strategist/Planner	£60k-£80k
Strategy / Planning Director	£70k-£90k
Head of Strategy/ Planning	£100k-£125k

Studio

Freelance

Role	Typical Day Rate
Video Editor	£350pd-£450pd
Animator	£300pd-£400pd
Retoucher	£250pd-£350pd
Artworker	£250pd-£350pd
Studio Manager / Head of Studio	£350pd-£450pd

Creative/Design

Freelance

Role	Typical Day Rate
Junior Designer	£200pd-£300pd
Midweight Designer	£300pd-£400pd
Senior Designer	£350pd-£450pd
Junior Creative	£300pd-£350pd
Mid-Weight Creative	£350pd-£450pd
Senior Creative Team (each)	£450pd-£650pd
Midlevel Copywriter	£300pd-£400pd
Senior Copywriter	£400pd-£500pd
Social Creative	£450pd-£550pd
Content Creator	£450pd-£550pd
Design Director / Head of Design	£550pd-£650pd
Associate Creative Director	£500pd-£600pd
Creative Director	£500pd-£700pd
ECD	£600pd-£700pd

Content/Editorial

Freelance

Role	Typical Day Rate
Content Writer / Producer	£300pd-£400pd
Content Lead	£400pd-£600pd
Director / Head of Content	£400pd-£700pd

Operations and Production

Freelance

Role	Typical Day Rate
Junior Project Manager	£250pd-£350pd
Mid-weight Project Manager	£300pd-£400pd
Senior Project Manager	£350pd-£500pd
Project Director	£400pd-£500pd
Director / Head of Creative Ops	£400pd-£600pd
Junior Producer	£200pd-£300pd
Mid-weight Producer	£300pd-£400pd
Senior Producer	£400pd-£500pd
Executive Producer	£500pd-£700pd
Director / Head of Production	£550pd-£700pd

Client Services

Freelance

Role	Typical Day Rate
Account Executive	£200pd-£300pd
Account Manager	£300pd-£400pd
Account Director	£300pd-£500pd
Business Director or equivalent	£500pd-£700pd
Head of Client Services	£500pd-£800pd

Strategy

Freelance

Role	Typical Day Rate
Junior Strategist / Planner	£200pd-£300pd
Midweight Strategist / Planner	£300pd-£400pd
Senior Strategist / Planner	£400pd-£600pd
Strategy / Planning Director	£400pd-£600pd
Head of Planning / Strategy	£500pd-£700pd

Typical Salary Range for Selected Roles by IHA Type

Role	Creative Studio	Creative Agency	Lead Agency
Senior Designer	£45k-£60k	£45k-£60k	£45k-£60k
Senior Creative	£45k-£60k	£45k-£60k	£60k-£80k
Studio Manager / Head of Studio	£60k-£80k	£60k-£80k	£80k-£100k
Creative Director / Head of Creative	£80k-£100k	£100k-£125k	£100k-£125k
Director/Head of Creative Ops	£80k-£100k	£100k-£125k	£100k-£125k
Senior Strategist / Planner	£60k-£80k	£60k-£80k	£60k-£80k
Content Lead	£60k-£80k	£60k-£80k	£60k-£80k
Account Manager	£35k-£45k	£45k-£60k	£45k-£60k
Senior Producer	£45k-£60k	£45k-£60k	£60k-£80k
Senior Project Manager	£45k-£60k	£60k-£80k	£60k-£80k

How IHA Pay Compares with External Agencies

Insights by



Mid-Level Salaries Are Competitive, but Senior Roles Lag

IHAs offer competitive mid-level salaries, but senior roles like Executive Creative Directors (ECDs) and Strategy Directors often pay more in external agencies, where work tends to be broader and more varied. For instance, ECD salaries in external agencies can exceed £150k, while IHAs typically cap around £125k. As IHAs expand into these areas, they may face challenges with salary expectations and need to enhance benefits to remain competitive.



Freelance Rates Are Generally Lower in IHAs

Freelance rates in IHAs are typically lower. Top-tier external freelancers can earn £600+ per day, compared to around £500 in IHAs. Mid-level designer roles reflect this pattern, with IHAs offering about £300 per day versus £350+ at external agencies. This gap is compounded by IR35 regulations, which reduce take-home pay for IHA freelancers due to additional deductions like Employer National Insurance contributions.

Strategy Positions Often Pay Less in IHAs

Head of Planning salaries are generally lower in IHAs because these roles are often newer and less senior than their titles suggest. Responsibilities may be narrower, with smaller teams and fewer clients, reflected in lower pay.

Client Service Roles Offer Better Pay and Benefits in IHAs

In IHAs, client service roles often offer higher pay and better benefits than in external agencies, particularly for experienced talent. Account Directors in IHAs tend to receive higher permanent salaries due to broader responsibilities and better benefits, including bonuses. However, freelance rates for Senior Account Directors are typically higher in external agencies, averaging £450 per day compared to around £375 in-house.

Atypical Freelance Rates in Client Services

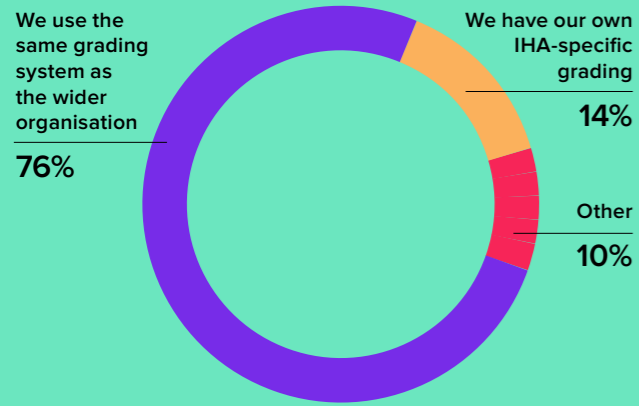
Freelance roles in client services often command higher day rates in IHAs due to demand for experienced talent. This is unusual compared to other IHA roles. These professionals manage senior stakeholder relationships and add high internal value. Freelance rates for Business Directors in IHAs can reach £500-700 per day, whereas external agencies average £450-550.

Remuneration

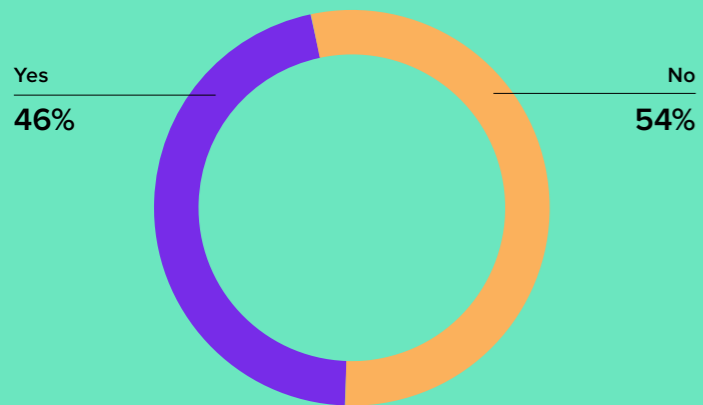
We wanted to look at the way in which remuneration is organised and structured. Grading can be a challenge for in-house agencies where corporate pay and career progression structures may not align with those of typical creative agency practice.

Our research found that 76% of IHAs use the same pay grading system as that of the wider organisation. Only 14% have their own, IHA-specific system, while the remaining 10% includes those where “All HR functions, including remuneration, are overseen by the external partners, so whatever their grading system is, that is what applies.”

How are staff graded at your IHA?



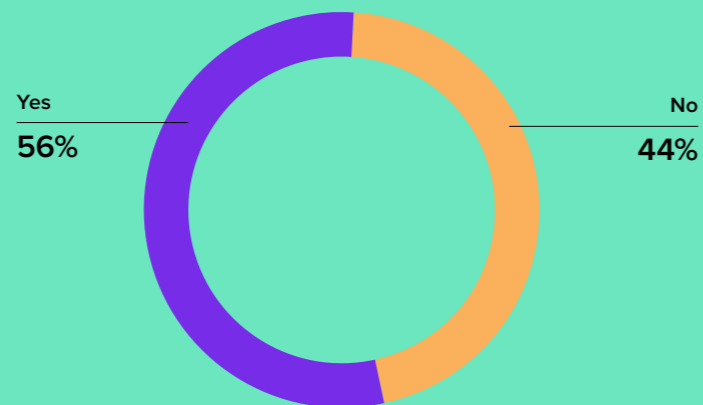
Does your organisation operate Pay Transparency?



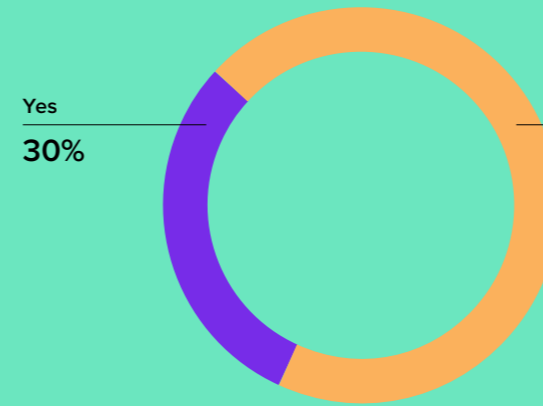
In terms of salary incentives, 66% of IHAs responding told us that they use personal performance-related bonuses. Some 28% offer an IHA performance-related bonus, while bonuses based on the performance of the business as a whole may also be in play. 12-monthly pay reviews are the overwhelming choice of respondents, with 96% using them.

Fewer than half (46%) of IHAs responding operate Pay Transparency, while 56% offer London Weighting, where applicable. Only 30% pay travel costs for employees. 50% of respondents told us that staff are offered shares in the company, which can be a major advantage for in-house teams looking to recruit from external agencies, but only 16% pay Loyalty Bonuses.

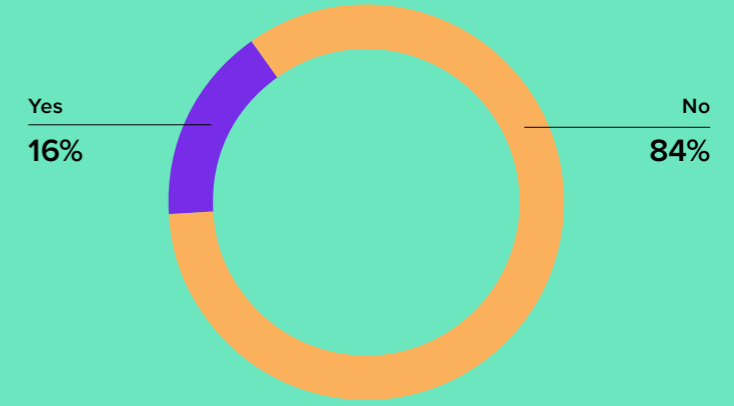
Do you pay London weighting?



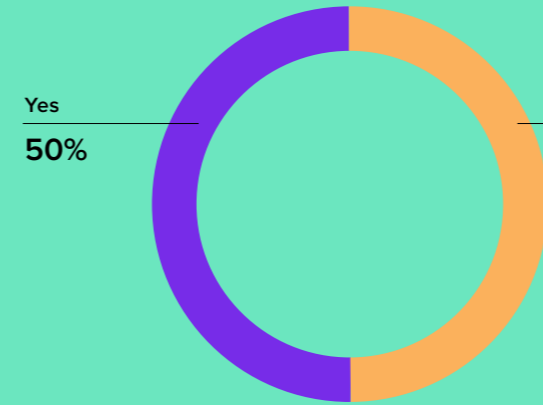
Do you pay travel costs?



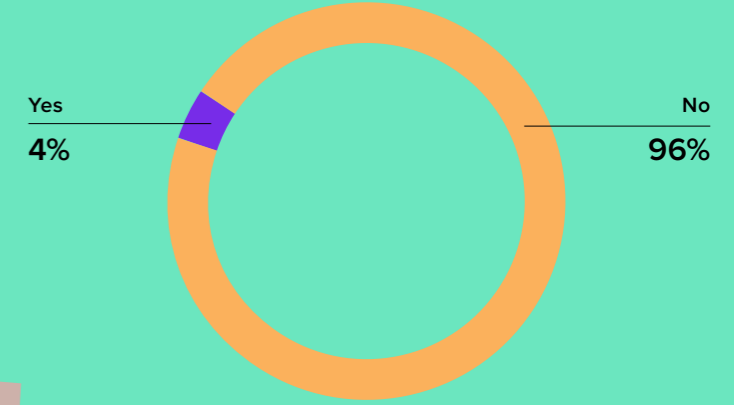
Do you pay loyalty bonuses?



Do you offer staff shares in the company?



Do you pay sign-on bonuses?



Soft Benefits

So-called Soft Benefits have become a feature of in-house agency packages, perhaps as a result of a reduced ability to offer significant pay rises or share options.

Our respondents told us that the most common Soft Benefits offered by them are:

- Flexible or Hybrid working – 94%
- Healthcare – 84%
- Mental Health Support – 80%
- Cycle to Work schemes – 74%
- Enhanced Maternity/Paternity or Care benefits – 74%
- Enhanced Pension Contributions – 68%
- Travel Cards – 20%
- IVF Policy – 32%
- Work From Abroad Policy – 38%
- Offer paid holiday to FTC and freelance workers – 58%
- Offer the same group pension contributions – 38%

Other Soft Benefits on offer (many of which relate to the nature of the parent organisation):

“A flexible allowance to spend as we like; employee travel discount; bonuses paid as travel credit.”

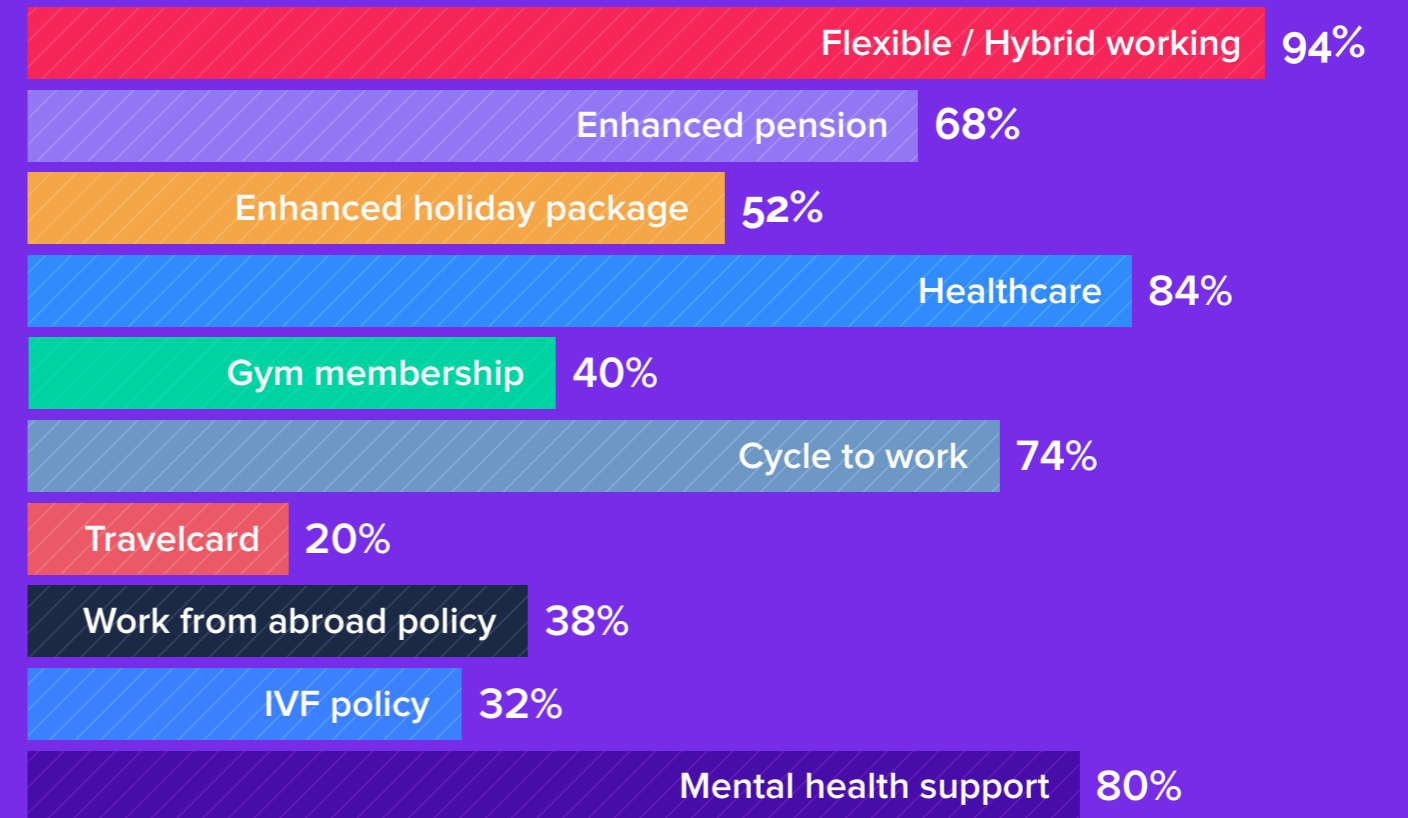
“Product discounts. Dental. Holiday purchase. Electric car discount. Wellbeing. Shares and savings.”

“All inclusive weekend break away. Ability to sell or buy annual leave. Car salary sacrifice. Retail discounts. Insurances such as Critical Illness, Travel, Personal Accident. Tech scheme. Health screening. Flu jab. Clothing/work wear. Giving Back Day. Sabbatical.”

“Subsidised canteen, well-being support, free entry to museums and gallery exhibitions, good sick pay and support, staff engagement such as Christmas and summer party.”

“Free breakfast/lunches/coffee in office, free flu shots, mental health days, death in service, enhanced sick pay.”

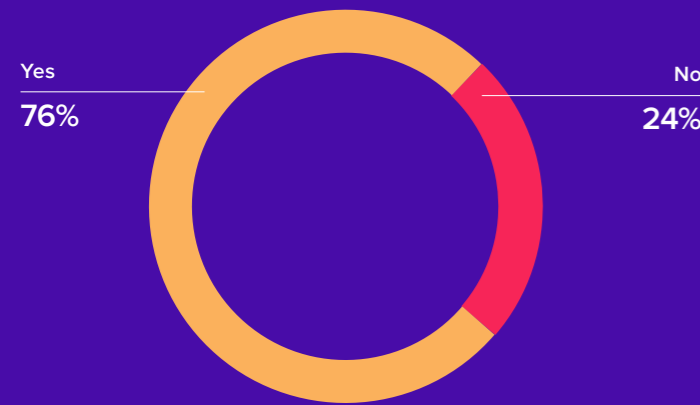
Which of the following do you offer?



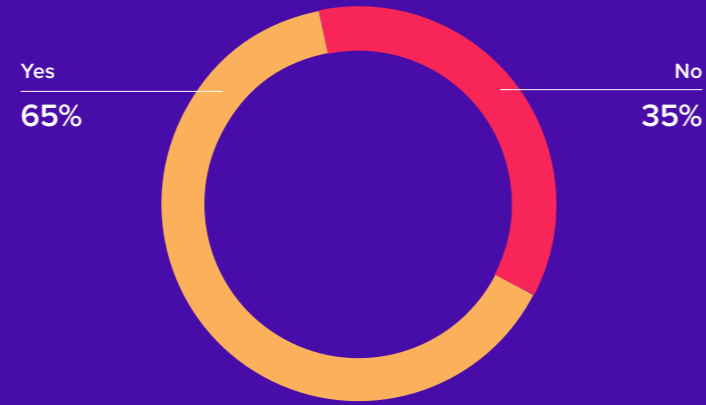
Diversity Equity & Inclusion Initiatives

Are IHAs leading their external peers when it come to DE&I initiatives? Respondents told us that 76% have DE&I and Gender Parity KPIs. These are published in 65% of cases.

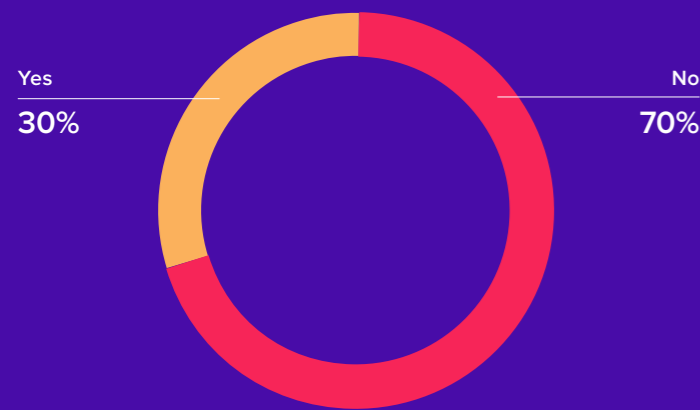
Do you have DE&I Gender Parity KPIs?



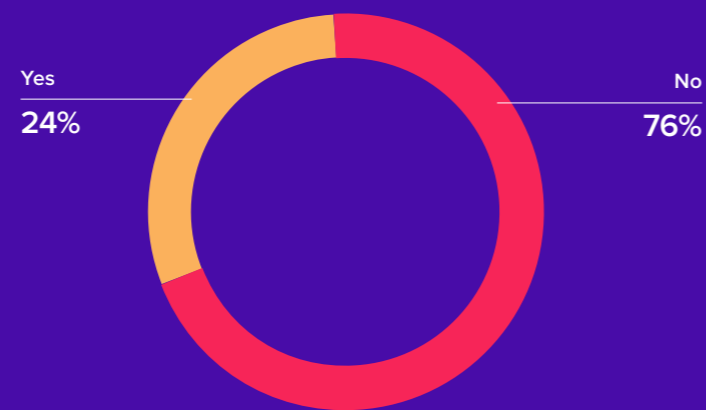
If Yes, are these published?



Do you have a DE&I talent strategy for the in-house agency?



Do you work with any external DE&I talent partners?



Only 24% work with external DE&I talent partners, and just 30% have a DE&I strategy specifically for the in-house team. Where this exists, we asked respondents to describe it for us:

“Our DE&I talent strategy is centred on building a dynamic and inclusive creative agency that recognises the power of diversity in bringing different perspectives into the work we do. By attracting, developing, and retaining a diverse talent pool, we enhance creativity, drive innovation, and produce work that resonates with a broader audience. We prioritise inclusive hiring practices, ongoing development, and mentorship opportunities to support under-represented groups. By fostering a culture of belonging, promoting work-life balance, and establishing clear accountability, we ensure that our agency not only reflects diverse perspectives but also reaps the benefits of enhanced creativity, improved decision-making, and increased market relevance. Through strategic partnerships and continuous improvement, we aim to create an environment where every individual can thrive and contribute to our collective success.”

“This is specific to the Marketing department we are part of rather than just the IHA but we have a DE&I approach that aims to increase ethnic representation and the number of men as marketing is female-heavy in the organisation.”

“To ensure a truly creative team, it needs to be as diverse as possible in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, nationality and physical ability. We work with our talent agency to monitor this throughout each stage of the hiring process to ensure there is no bias (unconscious or otherwise).”

Experienced, diverse hires for better creative

Insights by



While IHAs typically utilise their organisation’s broader DE&I policies, there’s an opportunity to develop strategies tailored specifically for in-house agency teams. Although 76% of respondents report DE&I and gender parity KPIs at the organisational level, these may not always fully address the unique dynamics within creative agency departments. Introducing IHA focused DE&I efforts – such as diverse hiring practices, mentorship programs, and initiatives to foster an inclusive team culture – could further support IHAs in resonating with a diverse audience.

In an IHA, where teams work exclusively on a single brand, there can be a higher risk of ideas circulating within a “bubble,” lacking the varied perspectives often found in external agencies. Several external agencies are now engaging DE&I strategists and running initiatives to address unconscious bias within creative processes. Adapting similar, creative-specific DE&I efforts within IHAs can help ensure that teams remain attuned to broader cultural sensitivities and that their work aligns closely with diverse audiences’ expectations.

Ageism

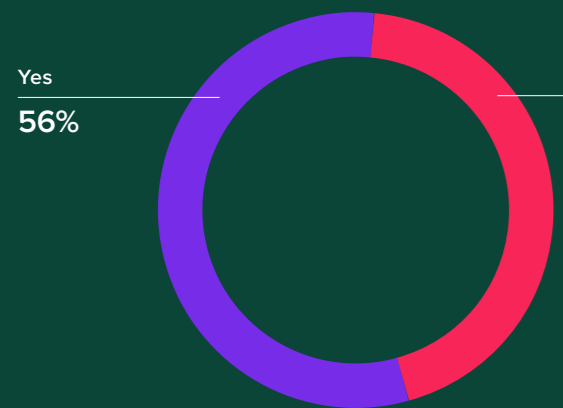
A related industry trend is the perception of ageism, particularly in external agencies, where younger talent is often prioritised to bring fresh perspectives. IHAs, by contrast, frequently have more mature teams, which provides the stability, experience, and deep brand knowledge needed for long-term growth. This focus on experience is an asset, helping IHAs leverage strategic thinking and institutional knowledge while maintaining relevance across audiences.



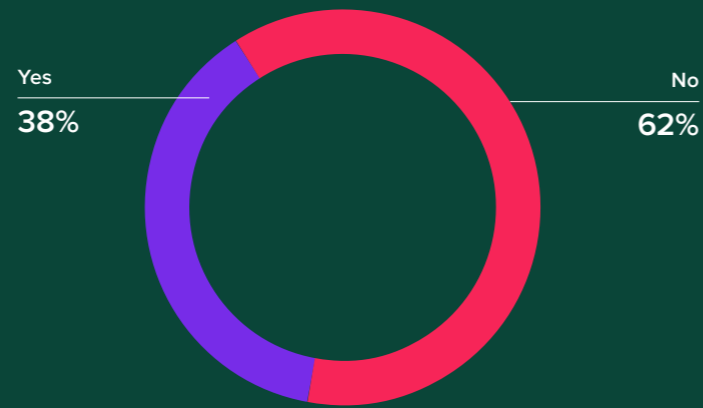
Professional Development

How do in-house teams look to develop staff? Only 56% of respondents told us that they provide transparent paths for salary growth and promotion. 84% have a budget for staff training but only 38% have an agency-wide CPD programme, suggesting that training is focused more on covering skills gaps. In fact, when we asked respondents to tell us which areas they were looking to develop in the next 12 months, there was a big focus on skills, such as AI, presentation, briefing, motion graphics, production and project management.

Do you provide transparent paths for salary growth and promotion within the in-house agency?



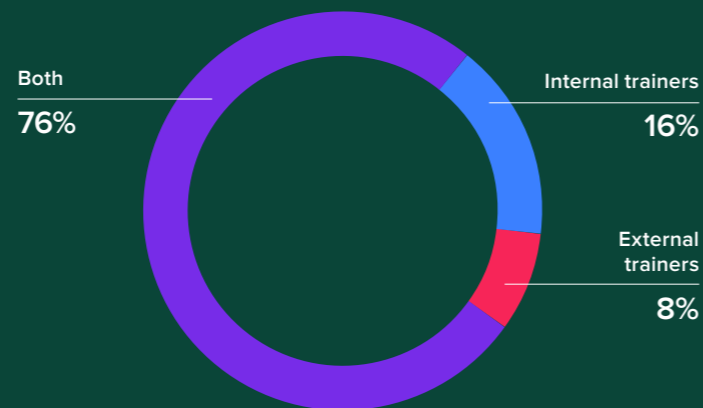
Do you have an agency-wide CPD programme?



Do you have a budget for staff training?



Is training provided by



Nurturing your teams

Insights by



IHAs often struggle to provide clear career progression, especially for junior and mid-weight staff. Only 44% offer transparent progression plans, and flatter structures mean progression is often lateral rather than upward. In contrast, external agencies generally provide faster, clearer paths to promotion, making them more attractive for those seeking rapid advancement.

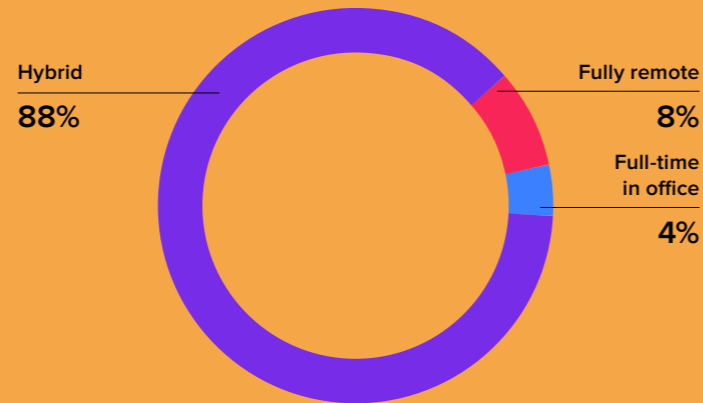
Another challenge is the limited availability of structured development programs within IHAs, with only 38% reporting agency-wide CPD (Continuous Professional Development) programs. Training is typically skills-based and ad hoc rather than part of a long-term development strategy. Implementing career roadmaps, mentorship programs, and internal rotation opportunities can help address these gaps, offering growth paths that make in-house roles more appealing for career-driven employees.



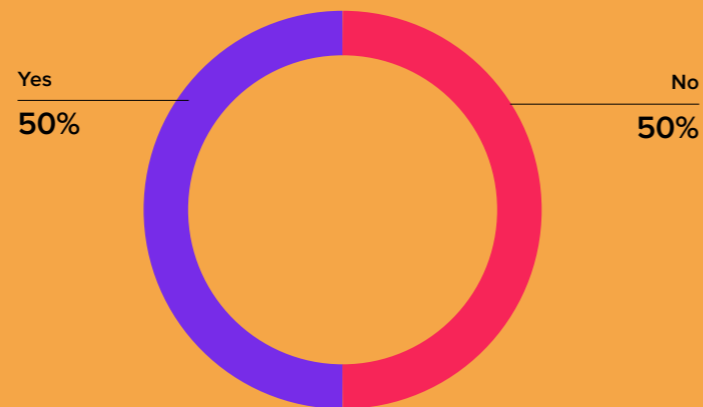
Working Environment

It will be no surprise to learn that a very high proportion (88%) of in-house teams responding to the survey are currently operating hybrid working, with only 4% full-time in the office. Only half of those mandate specific days for coming into the office, with the majority of those doing so opting for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Most (66%) believe that this pattern will stay the same over the next 12 months but, perhaps signalling an upcoming shift, 32% of respondents think that they will be spending more time in the office in the next year.

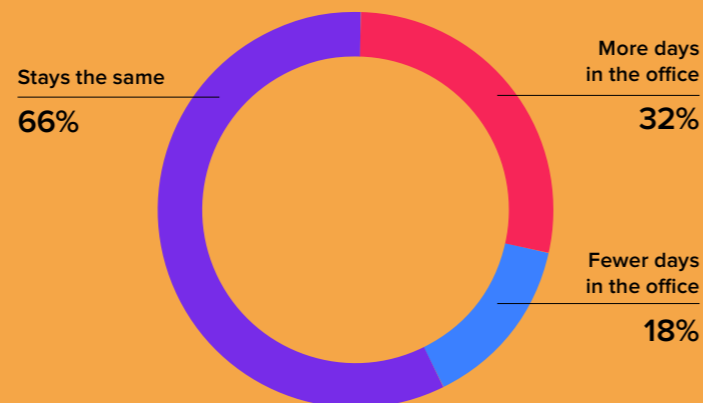
How do you currently organise working for your team?



If Hybrid, do you have set-in office days?



How do you see your current policy changing in the next 12 months?



Strategies for an engaged and motivated team

Insights by



Hybrid Work for Work-Life Balance

Hybrid working is now the norm in IHAs, with 88% of teams offering a mix of remote and in-office work. This flexibility appeals to candidates who value work-life balance and stability – advantages that IHAs hold over external agencies, where workload peaks and pitching cycles create high-pressure environments.

Keeping Junior and Mid-Weight Talent Engaged

However, this stability can sometimes feel less stimulating for junior and mid-weight talent, who may crave the creative energy and variety of external agencies. IHAs can address this by introducing high-energy, innovative projects that mimic the dynamic agency environment, helping retain ambitious talent while maintaining work-life benefits.

Enhanced Benefits in External Agencies

While IHAs offer solid benefits, external agencies are raising the bar with perks like flexible work-from-abroad options, unlimited holidays, and enhanced parental leave, including support for adoption and family-related needs. Mental health support is also prioritised in many agencies, with wellness programs, therapy access, and mental health days.

Career Growth and Training Opportunities

For career development, external agencies often offer structured training, leadership development, and mentorship, plus chances to attend industry events. Perks like sabbaticals and long-service leave are on the rise, rewarding loyalty and allowing for rejuvenation.

Creating Inspiring Workspaces

External agencies create inspiring offices with amenities like free food, wellness facilities, and creative breakout areas to foster a vibrant atmosphere. In contrast, IHAs can be seen as more corporate and rigid. Designing creativity-driven spaces—or using external off-site options where internal space is limited—and investing in collaboration and innovation initiatives could help IHAs attract top talent.



Final thoughts

As more people look to leave the agency world for in-house roles, please share with us what employees are saying their main reasons are for doing so and what you think the big opportunities are for talent in-house:

"My personal opinion on why I've always preferred the in-house model over agency is firstly it's financially better for the brand, secondly and an important one is that you can affect more earlier in the process. You can get involved with product concepting to make sure that the brand is represented through every touchpoint. You would never get those opportunities agency-side."

"Being in an IHA means you are better connected to the business and people. You have a deeper understanding of the problems you can help solve. Shared successes (based on shared ambitions, and bonus-able objectives) create a feeling of being more valued, which leads to better camaraderie. And ultimately that leads to better work and outcomes."

"Having spent 20-plus years agency-side, I didn't think I would enjoy working client-side but couldn't be more wrong! In-house teams gain so much more product knowledge and understand the business – this helps with briefing and improving efficiencies. With the right talent, in-house teams provide more value and are more invested in the long-term results. It can take a few years to change behaviours and convince stakeholders that the in-house team has this capability."

"Work-life balance, stability and job security, deeper brand engagement"

"We have been able to attract talent thanks to extensive benefits, flexibility and work-life balance, however I am seeing, post-Covid, that many agencies have integrated the same and those benefits have become an expectation. We are therefore losing competitiveness versus agencies. Another real benefit is our team culture and focus on psychological safety and well-being which is lacking in agencies. I believe this is what is keeping the team from leaving despite increasingly attractive agency packages."

"In-house creative teams are increasingly being entrusted with greater responsibility and ownership as businesses recognise their crucial role in driving brand and company growth. This presents in-house talent with the opportunity to significantly shape and take long-term ownership of the brand while working on a diverse array of projects."

"Better benefits and flexible working with salaries regularly reviewed and annual bonus (depending on business performance). The opportunity is to really get to know the brand and business and have much more of an impact than working externally."

"Better work-life balance. Closer to the products and services they are marketing. Sense of ownership."

"What I'm hearing from employees is that in-house roles offer the flexibility not always apparent in 'always on' agency world. It's usually experienced people who have either become parents or want a bit more balance that find in-house attractive. These people are hugely talented and experienced so there's a bit of a brain drain from external agencies - which means we have an opportunity in-house to step up and re-imagine what 'inside agencies' can do"

"Some senior staff are looking for a new challenge. Others want to get away from the old outdated models of agencies and the constant grind (we've all experienced 'the last one to leave wins' syndrome) for very little reward."

"There is a feeling of more security in an in-house creative team, and a connection to a brand and team."

"Building up a core team that has a great understanding of the organisation, its goals and vision, and can really get to grips with how to express that in a creative way that is appropriate to the needs of the organisation. Creating consistency of approach and retaining knowledge in-house, so you are always building on learning and not reinventing the wheel with new people all the time. Investing in your people to create a strong sense of commitment to the organisation, and get the best out of them for the organisation."

"Partnership with colleagues instead of an 'us and them' mentality with clients, closer proximity to and understanding of a wider business, greater impact in helping advertising/branding influence all areas of the business not just the marketing team, removal from the 'advertising bubble' by virtue of interacting with more elements of a business, better working hours with overtime being very uncommon."

"Better understanding of your brand and tighter control of guidelines and consistency. Helps businesses to reduce working in silos in various departments."

"You get depth. You understand the brand inside and out, as well as the complexities of the company's values and ambitions and how you balance this with the need to stand out and be creative. You never have the luxury of enough time if you're agency-side to fully explore that or to understand the nuances of the brand enough. Undoubtedly in-house also gives stability and certainty in terms of job security as you can also show the cost-saving and efficiencies you bring to replace the sometimes very complex and embedded agency relationships."

"In-house agencies aren't just cheaper and faster, they're better. If you place them at the heart of what you do and focus on the value they give not just being financial, but creative and strategic, then you'll get so much more out of an in-house agency than a traditional external agency. Be careful not to view them solely as cheap labour or an all you can eat buffet. If you place your trust in them and invest in them, you'll be amazed at what you can achieve together."

"To work deeply on the most exciting brands out there!"

"The level of impact you can have over a brand in-house is far greater than when you are just given set briefs from a client to work on. That for me, is the most exciting opportunity you can have within your career."

"Increased flexibility and being able to be closer to the brand allowing for more relevant creative output. However, to keep a sustainable model, the broader organisation needs to recognise the talent within the in-house offering and support the structure. It can be a bit swings and round-a-bouts, and there needs to be a continued support of the in-house team to allow full potential to be reached."

"Our recent recruitment round (concluded only last month) for video editor, social animation and content producer saw 100s of CVs from the TV world. We had our pick of talent, some way too talented for the roles we have. Speaking to them it seems there has been a collapse in that industry leaving people out of work and in a flooded market. They applied firstly out of necessity, secondly as many are used to being in-house and had no desire to move agency-side."

"I have found in-house a great place to grow. We hear first-hand from the channels we deliver work to. The feedback is clearer on what works and what doesn't. We can see the whole picture - including business needs. At my stage in career it's fantastic to still feel like I'm learning."

"Ownership on work is far greater. There is such a deep understanding of the brand and the business we can do far greater work."

"Those who stay the longest benefit from the challenge of deeply engaging with a single brand. There is a unique satisfaction in exploring familiar territory, applying insights to different projects, and witnessing their efforts culminate into something substantial and fulfilling over time."

"Not everyone can be an 'advertising rockstar' but those that work hard and actually enjoy what they do without the continuous pressure of pitching can have a very successful career in-house. It's been rewarding to work with many ex-agency creatives that have expressed this."

Talent and the Evolution of IHAs

Insights by



To evolve as Lead Agencies, IHAs need a talent strategy that goes beyond compensation. While competitive pay is important, it's equally vital to create an environment that attracts top talent through flexibility, development, and creative freedom. Key strategies include:

1

Talent Flexibility

IHAs typically focus on full-time roles, but to scale up to Lead Agency status, they should embrace contingent hires like freelancers and contractors. This flexibility allows IHAs to bring in specialised skills quickly, adapt to changing needs, and expand capabilities without increasing permanent headcount.

4

Cultural Shift

IHAs can blend corporate stability with a creative-first culture. Unlike external agencies, IHAs are often embedded within brand organisations, which may feel less experimental. Embracing a space for innovation within a corporate structure can make IHAs more appealing to top creative talent.

2

Cross-Disciplinary Expertise

Leading on creative means integrating strategy, data, and tech. IHAs should hire talent who can bridge creative and data insights, ensuring campaigns that resonate across digital, social, and traditional media. Strategists with data-savvy backgrounds are essential for delivering cohesive, results-driven work.

5

Retention Through Development

Many creatives join agencies for exposure to diverse brands and projects. IHAs can mirror this appeal by offering growth opportunities, cross-departmental learning, and high-impact projects that shape the brand. Providing clear paths for creative and leadership growth is just as important as offering competitive pay.

3

Differentiation and Brand Perception

IHAs are often seen as less innovative than independent agencies. To change this perception, they must position themselves as creative leaders through awards, thought leadership, and showcasing standout work. This visibility will help attract high-caliber talent and highlight the agency's creative achievements

6

Compensation and Beyond

Beyond salary, top talent is drawn to work-life balance, meaningful work, and a strong company culture. IHAs can differentiate themselves by offering flexible work arrangements, promoting DEI and sustainability initiatives, and fostering creative autonomy. These factors are increasingly valued in the talent market and enhance IHAs' competitive edge.



For IHAs aiming to become lead creative agency, it's about more than pay. Creating an environment where top talent wants to work — one that offers creative opportunities, flexibility, and growth — is key. By fostering a culture of innovation, career development, and purpose, IHAs can attract top-tier talent and position themselves as Lead Agencies, driving both creative and strategic agendas to fuel brand success.

Find your

Tribe

"Fact. You will leave an IHALC event inspired by new ideas, enriched by relevant conversations and connected with like-minded people."

Shelley Morrell
Head of Creative Hub,
National Lottery

"IHALC isn't just a community, it is an authority. Through their continuous support and direction they are helping people like me raise the benchmark of what an in-house agency can achieve in terms of creativity and effectiveness"

Mat O'Brien
ECD, Three



Join the In-house Agency Leaders Club (IHALC)

IHALC exists to support the in-house agency community. Through our events, content and research, we create a safe space for in-house agency leaders to meet and learn from each other.

Join IHALC to access:

Places at our in-person events

Exclusive members-only advice and insight from IHA leaders

Discounts on training from our industry-leading partners