



2024/5 so far

## **Hiring trends & analysis**

*UK Drinks sector - Wine, Champagne,  
Sparkling, Rose, No & Low*



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## ***Introduction & Observations***

### ***Areas of heightened focus for hiring***

- *Significant areas of interest:* salespeople covering the UK multiple retailers; brand marketers covering all types of customers; digital marketers (TikTok for no alcohol); experienced London on-trade sales; proven mid-level regional sales; wholesale on-trade sales; independent wine shop sales; senior roles (more detail below).
- *Difficult areas to hire:* fine wine (& whisky) private client account managers who can bring an established book of minimum revenue £1m. Regional sales in wine is still limited due to a small talent pool although this will improve by the end of 2025 due to increased hiring at junior levels in this area. London on-trade salespeople because hiring managers are ideally wanting good contact books and several years experience in business development & account management. Junior roles (second job): quality candidates with enough experience and wine knowledge are still limited.
- *Senior roles:* a significant increase in 2024 and so far in 2025 we already have several roles in the pipeline here. Examples of these roles: Managing Director, Head of Sales, Head of Sales & Marketing, Head of Brand Management, Commercial Director. For business critical roles where companies see some red flags with incumbents succession planning is a useful tool.

### ***Demand for recruiting services***

- 2024 was a strong market in the UK for wine companies looking to hire. The number of candidates in a process has increased apart from at junior levels such as second job which has reduced. Candidates are keen to consider new roles and are receptive to approaches. We have been able to offer our clients a thorough process with a good range of quality candidates given our network and trusted reputation; we have found this has been a significant factor in candidates dealing with us.
  - 2025 so far has been a mixed bag with regards recruiting services. We are seeing companies first trying to recruit directly and often finding this difficult - at which point they come to us to complete the hire. This appears mainly to be impacting mid-level roles.
  - There is still high interest from candidates outside the UK however UK work visa availability is a barrier as many companies do not want to provide sponsorship. There is a continued increase in supply of candidates from Australia & New Zealand who can have favourable visa situations.
  - Personality/aptitude testing is becoming standard in searches at mid-to senior levels. In our experience this adds significant value to the recruiting process and comfort to the hiring manager. Here at Vinokelly we include this as a standard service for no extra fee for any client.
  - At senior levels in 2025 we are introducing a Succession Planning product as well as providing specific recruitment/headhunting for Board level positions such as NEDs & Chair.
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## ***Introduction & Observations***

### ***Hiring from outside the wine industry***

- For some roles: salespeople focusing on multiple retailers, brand marketers & operations/supply chain, the trend to welcome candidates from outside the industry has continued. However, these candidates will often need some knowledge and experience of the alcohol industry - ideally that they will have been in the wine trade in the past and they want to return. The exception here is strong wine, champagne and sparkling wine brands as they can sometimes successfully hire salespeople/marketers from outside the alcohol industry.
- The no-&-low sub-sector in wine is attractive to candidates in the health & wellness industry - these candidates typically have experience in drinks and in building brands. However despite interest from these candidates we have not seen the corresponding enthusiasm from hiring managers who are still looking for wine experience.



## ***Key Remuneration Issues***

### ***Salary Growth & Expectations 2024/2025***

- After the salary increases of the last 2 years linked to inflation & cost of living increases, currently salaries have remained stable often with little or no increase. We are not seeing any signs of significant salary increases within an existing role unless the person is critical to the organisation - shortage of skills/business critical role/high performer.



### ***Bonus payments***

- As in previous years companies offering clear structures towards bonuses/commission rather than an opaque structure & unclear criteria will always attract better candidates and retain staff. If a bonus payment can include an element of targets-led payments rather than 100% discretionary this will make a significant difference.

### ***The importance of benefits & holiday days***

- Benefits such as alcohol allowance/offering portfolio wine or spirits at cost, medical & health insurance are very popular and do make a difference in hiring and also in retaining employees. Candidates will consider moving roles for a smaller salary increase if benefits are significantly better, especially company pension contributions. Companies offering these benefits do attract better candidates and it can make the difference between 2 roles offered simultaneously.
- Holiday allowance is typically 25 days + UK bank holidays – anything above this is a huge plus! Annual holiday allowance of 20 days can make it difficult to attract & retain candidates.



## ***Key Remuneration Issues***

### ***Flexibility/working from home – now a normal part of the working week***

- Most companies have settled with a hybrid structure of 3 days in the office and 2 at home - the days being Mon/Fri working from home and Tues/Wed/Thurs in the office. Salespeople tend to spend more time at home/with clients and typically meet 1 day a week in the office although this can vary; those selling to multiple retailers tend to go to the office least.
- Last year there was some contention around this hybrid working pattern and there was a clear push from senior management to increase the number of days in the office - this now appears to have settled down with most people at all levels & functions assuming this is normal.

### ***WSET/MW Qualifications***

- A significant benefit to candidates in wine roles is the company paying for WSET qualifications or the MW at more senior levels. This does mean that employees stay longer in their roles as it builds loyalty and goodwill. Additionally on completion of the qualification it is normal to ensure (contractually) that either the employee stays with the company for a period of time (often 2 years) or they refund a portion of the fee to the company if moving on sooner.
- Many employers will pay for 100% of the costs and within the wine trade this is considered fairly normal.



## ***Wine Sales***

### ***Multiple Retailers & Convenience***

- In 2023 there was a significant investment in people at the NAE/NAM level. In particular it was the larger agencies/producers hiring people from inexperienced backgrounds with no obvious relevant skill set mainly bringing enthusiasm and some drinks industry knowledge/experience. This made sense given the lack of talent pool even at the very junior levels. This has not continued in 2024 or 2025 so far.
- Q3/Q4 2024 we are experiencing an increase in demand for experienced candidates focusing on specific accounts within the multiple retailers. The focus is wine people with brand & high volume experience. Supermarket buyers are being considered for these roles more often than in the past few years in particular if a specific supermarket account is needed.
- Salary ranges are large because candidates can experience significant jumps in salary currently by moving roles. Particularly currently if the candidate can bring deep experience and relationships with the buyers at a specific retailer.
- For salespeople covering Convenience/Impulse/Cash & Carry customers, they will often sit in this team at a junior or mid-level. Occasionally there is an experienced salesperson at this level however their salary level is capped and does not keep up with the salespeople covering the multiple retailers.

### ***National On-trade***

- Salaries in this area have increased at a lower pace than the market in this area; hiring demand has remained relatively low compared to other sectors. This is a trend we have seen maintained over the last few years.





## ***Wine Sales***

### ***Regional Sales***

- Currently in regional roles there is an undersupply of candidates. The wine talent pool at the junior level has seen a lot of new entrants from other areas (not necessarily alcohol). These employees are likely to stay in their roles for at least 2 years while they learn the wine trade and gain some wine qualifications. Looking forward to end 2025/2026 there could be an increase in the supply of candidates in this area.
- Specific demand in 2024 and so far in 2025 in regional sales are experienced candidates (Territory Manager) who can bring a contact book and have experience running an area and developing new business. These candidates are demanding (and getting) a premium re salary levels of 13%+.
- On-trade Wholesale customers & Indies coverage is mostly part of the customer base for regional/territory managers. There are a few occasions where these roles are split out for specific focus and depending on the coverage salaries could be along regional or national lines. If a stand-alone role this is a very small people market.

### ***London Sales***

- In London sales (mainly on-trade) we are experiencing significant demand from companies keen to hire. However this area is still under-resourced. There needs to be investment & training at the junior entrant level and despite significant enthusiasm from candidates in hospitality or wine retail, that typical route into this role isn't currently popular with employers. "Plug and play" candidates who can bring a contact book, business development and account management skills (min 3-5 years experience) are in a strong position able to pick any one of a number of companies hiring in this area.
- Candidates are discerning about opportunities in this sector. If the hiring company wants someone with a strong contact book the salary level for this type of candidate has increased. In 2024 a lot of companies were looking to add to their London teams and were unable to hire; we are seeing candidates who had moved out of London sales tempted back into these roles at enhanced salaries.
- A handful of senior, high billing London on-trade salespeople have very high overall remuneration packages.



## ***Wine Sales***

### ***E-Commerce/E-Tailer Sales***

- These types of customers (online retailers, Amazon, D2C platforms) are still generally covered in the off-trade national sales teams and coverage is often added to an individual's remit alongside several other accounts.
- Although in previous years (post-covid) this area was of interest to hiring managers there are still very few stand-alone roles in wine and there hasn't been growth in placements in this area.
- The talent pool in this area exists mainly at the mid-level where someone might also be a secondary contact for a big 4 multiple retailer. However these candidates often want to move to primary coverage of a multiple retailer rather than continuing with Amazon coverage.

### ***Country Managers***

- Demand for this role has levelled out after an increase since 2022.
- These roles are typically aimed at senior salespeople and have at least 5 years' experience due to the nature of the role: typically working alone from a home office often invoicing salary rather than payment via PAYE, drawing heavily on buyer contacts and network from previous sales roles. Coverage: from the UK to UK/ROI/EU.
- Some candidates are happy to take on a portfolio approach representing multiple wineries on a retainer & commission basis via self-employment. This tends to be amongst candidates who have a high level of experience and contacts and perhaps who prefer this structure instead of taking on a senior role in an organisation.

### ***International Sales/Export Sales***

- International/Export Sales is a mostly small market in the UK with often 1-2 people (unless there is a particular focus on export in which case there can be large teams). This area is of particular interest to English sparkling wine brands. Often there is a senior salesperson running a high number of distributors overseas perhaps supported by a junior salesperson. Some agencies include European supermarkets in the coverage of UK supermarkets.
- Turnover in these roles is low and demand for these candidates has been flat.





## ***Wine Sales: Champagne, Sparkling, Rose and No & Low***

### ***Companies with Grandes Marques Champagne as part of their portfolio***

- These companies might need to increase the salary ranges in this sales section by up to 10% particularly after 5 years' experience.
- This sub-sector successfully hires from outside of wine because of the focus on strong brand sales experience. Those in spirits and luxury goods sales with a keen interest in the wine sector are welcomed and generally they will have higher salaries than in wine, hence the differential.

### ***English Sparkling Wine***

- Salaries across English sparkling wine are still slightly lower for all junior sales roles, regional sales roles and mid-level export roles.
- Senior export salaries can be higher than the industry average although these roles can cover a large number of countries and distributors, often more than in a standard export role.

### ***Rose***

- Strongly brand-led and often hiring from spirits rather than wine. If an established brand then the salary will be at the higher end of the range.
- Some smaller players mainly hiring junior candidates especially in regional sales (including London on-trade); these roles are at the lower end of the salary range and these companies suffer from high turnover of people.

### ***No-& Low-alcohol***

- Moving out of the "start-up" stage these companies are now starting to hire based on specific skill sets rather than passion and enthusiasm.
- There is still pressure on salaries and packages in general - less holiday days, undefined bonus schemes, no private medical.
- There is plenty of excitement about this new and growing sub-sector of the market however often these companies look to hire candidates with wine experience rather than those in the spirits or health/wellbeing sectors. Candidates from the latter are attracted to this area as they see it as a natural extension.



## ***Wine Category Managers***

### ***Category Managers***

- Category managers mainly exist in larger agencies & producers; if this expertise is needed in smaller companies it can be outsourced to specific agencies or a data-focused salesperson may take on some parts of this in addition to their role.
- Generally aligned to the salesforce rather than marketing.
- It is a very small people market and these people are rarely asked to come to the office as they mainly deal with national sales, significantly grocery customers. It would be unusual for them to be in the office 2 - 3 days per week.
- Category managers can move between alcohol sub-sectors easily and there are more at junior and mid-level in the large beer and spirits companies.



# ***Wine Marketing***

## ***Brand Managers***

- Since 2023 the demand for hiring Brand Managers at all levels has continued to stay strong. The levels Assistant Brand Manager (ABM) and Junior Brand Management (JBM) have seen increased hiring, in some cases ABM level roles newly added to teams.
- The ABM role is a second role rather than an entry level role requiring some knowledge of wine/WSET qualifications 2/3.
- The Brand Manager/Senior Brand Manager (BM, SBM) salary range is large because there is such a variety of roles at this level. Some companies do not have the SBM level rather just different levels of BMs with experience. This generally depends on the size of the marketing team and overall company.
- Head/Director Brand Management is still only present in a few companies that have teams of 4/5+ brand managers. Otherwise this role is taken by others such as Head of Marketing, Portfolio Director, Agencies Director.
- Salaries at the ABM/JBM have softened slightly as there are more roles at these levels. At the BM/SBM level there is definite pressure to keep salaries stable with little increase with a strong need to manage candidate expectations particularly on moving roles.
- Supplier Relationship Manager is often a similar role to Brand Manager with overlapping skill sets.

## ***Brand Ambassadors***

- In 2024/5 there has been very little demand for Brand Ambassadors. Currently demand is at the mid-level although at significantly reduced levels from 2022/2023.
- Occasionally Senior Brand Ambassadors exist although turnover at the senior end is very low as it is often difficult to find a comparable role elsewhere.

## ***Trade/Customer Marketing***

- Trade & Customer Marketing is often found in the team at the mid-level of candidates. This hasn't changed since previous years and hiring demand has remained stable.

## ***Titles***

- Titles for junior roles have changed: Marketing Executive isn't popular and in many cases has become Assistant/Junior.



## ***Wine Marketing***

### ***Digital Marketing***

- Very little hiring since 2024 for specific digital marketers after a hiring spike in 2021/2022/2023. Whereas during and after covid this was a stand-alone role this is now an expected skill set for all marketers and brand managers.

### ***PR/Comms Manager***

- Very low levels of hiring specific PR/Comms people - these roles generally only exist in larger agencies/producers, particularly if there is a strong champagne/sparkling brand. Otherwise this is part of the Marketing Manager role in conjunction with PR agencies.



## ***Wine Marketing: Champagne, Rose, Sparkling and No & Low***

### ***Companies with Grandes Marques Champagne as part of their portfolio***

- These marketing roles can recruit outside of wine, often within champagne/sparkling, spirits or luxury sectors including beauty or premium.

### ***English Sparkling Wine***

- For marketing roles, smaller sparkling wine companies often hire marketers from the local area around HQ regardless of wine expertise or knowledge. Large companies with strong brands will hire those with spirits/champagne experience.

### ***Rose***

- Similarly to the champagne bullet point above, this area can successfully recruit from outside of wine, looking in premium sectors.

### ***No-& Low-alcohol***

- Unlike the rest of wine/champagne, young digital marketers are a key focus for marketing in this sector. In particular Instagram & TikTok experience.



## ***Wine Buying, NPD/Technical***

### ***Wine Buying***

- Buyers were mostly based in the office although now hybrid working is also normal. Often bonuses are not paid/small at a junior level despite this being part of the package. This could be due to buying trips, WSET qualification sponsorship and the high demand for buying roles.
- The level of wine knowledge required for a buyer role is high with employers often looking for WSET Diploma level when hiring at even at the mid-level. It is common for buyers to undertake the MW sponsored by their employer in these roles.
- In larger companies the head of the buying team is often on the management committee & reporting into the MD. This person can also run NPD/Technical and can have additional responsibility for Operations/Marketing. Bonuses at this level can be significant and a profit share arrangement may apply. Titles of this role can be varied such as: Agency Director, Portfolio Director, Buying Director.
- Turnover of wine buyers is low as this is seen as a desirable role within wine. Support through the WSET Diploma, MW and significant trips/travelling are held in high regard by candidates and this has kept salaries flat in recent years.

### ***Technical/NPD Manager***

- In 2024 there was an increase in demand for Technical Managers. In the wine industry there are still very few Technical managers as most companies have 1 person in this role, there are very few teams.
- Salaries have increased significantly at mid-level (+10-15%) as this is where hiring demand has been concentrated. Bonuses are an important part of the package and percentages have increased.
- WSET Diploma and MW company-funded studies are almost always added to the overall package for Technical Managers if requested.





# Operations

## ***Operations/Supply Chain/Demand Planning/S&OP Manager***

- 1.Roles across customer services, demand planning, operations, logistics and supply chain can intermingle depending on the size and structure of the company.***
- 2.This commentary applies to wine, champagne, sparkling, rose and No & Lo equally.***

- In small companies often there is 1 Operations Manager comprising many roles.
- If the role is demand planning then the salaries are normally at the higher end of the role and advanced excel experience is key.
- Whereas these roles traditionally did not offer flexible working, it is now very much the norm with maximum 3 days in the office.
- Head of Operations/Supply Chain compensation can vary considerably hence the large range.
- Often the Customer Services team is overseen by Head of Supply Chain/Operations.

## ***Customer Services***

- In general the salary levels in Customer Services roles are fairly low with little bonus or benefits offered until more experienced levels. Many people will move into supply chain or operations roles after gaining some experience at the junior level.
- There is high turnover in Customer Services roles and most people use these roles as a way to into the wine sector. Candidates tend to join these teams with diverse experience normally outside of wine and drinks.
- Head of Customer Services only exists in a large team and this person will often combine responsibilities with another area such as Supply Chain.
- ***Stock Controller*** - Often a junior/mid-level level role and a small candidate market in wine. People normally move on to other roles as their experience grows. Often people are brought in from outside of the wine sector to these roles.
- ***Sales Operations*** - A role rarely seen at a senior level if found then in companies with large on-trade sales teams. Head of the team is known as Manager and will be paid less than any full sales Manager position. Car allowance depends on the company and how much direct contact this person has with certain types of customers. Salary levels at the junior/mid-level are similar to Customer Services.



## ***Fine Wine***

### ***Private Clients/Fine Wine Sales***

- 2024 saw a widespread decline in the trading of Fine Wine and many companies are seeing fewer returns than previous years. This was exacerbated by a lacklustre Bordeaux En-Primeur campaign with new release prices being set too high and consumers being able to access similar/ better quality aged wines at lower prices. Businesses that rely heavily on France and En-Primeur sales have naturally been the most affected.
- Fine Wine Buying & Private Client/ Trade Sales roles have all been affected by this. Companies are keen to secure good people however the increase in remuneration offered has not been enough to motivate a change of company for many candidates.
- Company management/owners are cautious about hiring new salespeople unless they can be certain of them successfully bringing with them a strong client list. Candidates have also been cautious to move and are more likely to consider strong counter offers from current employers. The message to employers with talented fine wine staff is very much do whatever is possible to retain these people.
- There is still a distinct lack of investment in more junior/ inexperienced candidates on the Private Client side as companies remain unwilling to take a chance on more inexperienced candidates and train them in the fine wine market.
- Currently in Q2 2025 we expect this current trend to continue for a while, but there are signs that hiring in this market is starting to pick up. However the supply of strong candidates is currently low and employer expectations re new joiners' 1st year billings is often unrealistic.



## ***Vinokelly Drinks Recruitment***

***Established in 2016 by Elizabeth and Gareth O'Kelly, we have established a reputation with clients and candidates alike for detailed knowledge of the UK drinks sector.***

- We are based near London, UK.
- Specialists in wine, champagne, rose, sparkling wine, spirits, whisky, no & low.
- A thoughtful, informative approach to your hiring needs.
- We work exclusively and in partnership with you on your searches, we do not work multi-agency.
- We aim to turn around searches quickly: 6-8 weeks is our average time from initial briefing to the candidate resigning.
- Almost all of our business is from referrals.
- We offer EQ/personality testing & reference checking as part of our fee.
- We are a family business providing continuity and integrity of our people over the long term unlike other companies who experience regular turnover of "recruitment consultants".

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