

Insider guide

# Executive search careers

Introducing graduate-plus opportunities in Executive search,  
supporting businesses in making key strategic hires

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# What is Executive search?

Executive search is a specialised recruitment service, commissioned by organisations to identify and recruit highly qualified candidates for senior-level and executive jobs across sectors, typically at Director or C-Level.

There is strong competition in the job market for such talent. Unlike traditional contingent recruitment, executive search requires a much more granular search process and is typically a lengthier process, often taking 3–12 months.

# What are the immediate career opportunities?

The first step is working as an executive search researcher.

This is a heavily analytical role, requiring good project management, organisation and time-management skills. As a consultant you become an industry expert, learning about the business worlds you support and the senior roles within them.

The ideal candidate combines strong communication and research skills, and is someone who is curious and inquisitive, detail-oriented and enjoys working as part of a team. Our clients also look for demonstrable examples of maturity and sophistication, alongside exceptional written communication skills.

# What are the core responsibilities?

- Attending client briefings on site, gathering client requirements
- Implementing search techniques and identifying relevant pools of talent, using internal databases and market-mapping techniques
- Working closely with internal teams to devise appropriate search strategies
- Approaching prospective candidates identified for the search to create a long list
- Interviewing, meeting and qualifying candidates against the client brief, creating a short list
- Briefing clients on the short list of candidates
- Managing the interview process, including offer negotiations
- Highlighting areas for business improvement and working with the Client Services Director/Sales Director to implement enhancements

# How do executive search companies make money?

The fee for a search is usually 30% of the salary, or a negotiated fixed amount which is charged to the client.

Billing is on a 'retained' basis, where a third of the fee is paid on assignment, a second third on delivery of a short list, and the remainder when the candidate starts. A minimum executive search fee search is £30,000, with amounts often going into the hundreds of thousands.

# What can I expect to earn?

**Up to £150k by year 2**

New graduates earn a basic salary of between £27,000 and £35,000, with most firms paying a discretionary annual bonus ranging from 10–30%. Some executive search companies pay additional bonuses, based on delivery of short lists and placements.

# What about career progression?

There are two main career paths in executive search companies. The first is staying in research, taking on greater levels of responsibility and often training and managing junior researchers. Experienced researchers are highly valued, moving to earnings of up to £150,000. The second pathway is progressing into a Consultant/Fee earner role, owning the client relationship and winning new client mandates. Consultants earn in the hundreds of thousands.

Executive search is an exceptional place to begin your career. People move from search into roles in management consulting, financial services, government/public sector, and often into the industries they'd been recruiting for.

# What do Executive search firms look for in candidates?

- A 2.1 degree from a top 10 university, with strong A level results
- Excellent attention to detail and analytical skills
- Ability to learn fast, see the broader picture and join up the dots
- A desire to work with people
- A humble personality and effective team player



# Lingo to know:

**C-Level:** High-ranking executive titles within an organisation, usually beginning with ‘Chief’, such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Chief Technology Officer (CTO)

**Market mapping:**

Identifying talent by company, job role or department, and then profiling them

**Retainer:** A fee paid in advance to initiate a search on behalf of a client

**Long list:** An initial list of candidates who fit the search profile

**Short list:** A list of fully qualified and interviewed candidates interested in applying for the job, who are presented to the client

**OTE:** On Target Earnings (base salary + commission and/or bonus)

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