**News Release**

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**Knight Frank survey shows rural estates struggling to attract talent despite pay rises**

Rural estates are facing persistent difficulty in attracting and keeping the right people, according to Knight Frank’s 2025 Estate Staff Salary Survey. Despite a decade of steady wage increases across rural roles and nearly universal annual pay reviews, 87% of estates say it is becoming harder to attract good staff, while almost 60% say retention is also becoming more difficult.

“Employing the right people has never been more important,” said Alastair Paul, Partner in Knight Frank’s Rural Consultancy. “However, a consistent theme over the last ten or so years of us publishing our Estate Staff Salary Survey has been the difficulty rural estates have attracting employees. This year’s instalment is no different.”

The survey reports that average base salaries have risen significantly, with estate directors now earning over £103,000 on average and skilled farmworkers averaging more than £34,000. However, many estates still rely on personal judgement as the primary method for setting pay, rather than using transparent benchmarking or formal review processes.

Additionally, only 14% of estates said they operated a formal bonus scheme, with the majority of bonus amounts determined arbitrarily, rather than as a structured percentage of salary or performance-based metric.

“There could be more structure placed around bonuses to ensure the best employees feel valued for their contribution to the business,” advised Mr Paul.

The report also highlights the shifting profile of estate roles and the need to attract professionals with higher-level qualifications, particularly for technology-based or environmental positions such as environmental directors or geospatial analysts.

“People with the right skills for these types of jobs are often in demand by other higher-paying or more ‘fashionable’ sectors that may have a greater appeal to younger workers,” Mr Paul notes. “Clarity around estate purpose and values as well as their brand are key for potential new employees.”

At the same time, rural location remains a barrier to recruitment, particularly for families or younger professionals accustomed to better-connected areas with stronger transport links, education facilities or amenities.

"It is obviously impossible to change where an estate is," said Mr Paul, "but greater acceptance of hybrid working, which is still relatively uncommon in the rural sector, could help attract candidates from a much wider geographical area.

"Providing ongoing training, the opportunity to learn new skills and a clear focus on career progression will also be essential for competing with other sectors," added Mr Paul.

The provision of housing, a hallmark of rural employment, also remains undervalued in many cases. Almost 50% of estates do not account for market rent when calculating the cost of accommodation, potentially missing an opportunity to better understand and communicate the full value of their employment offer.

“Given the ongoing rise in the freehold and rental value of rural homes, in particular, character cottages and other traditional dwellings, it is important that estates know the value of the benefits they are providing and their potential impact on their bottom line,” said Mr Paul.

The survey suggests that estate employers are becoming more open to staff feedback, with almost 60% saying they would consider running a satisfaction survey. Many also recognise that environmental and social values are becoming increasingly important to potential applicants.

"We're seeing estates recognise that salary alone isn't solving their recruitment challenges," Mr Paul added. "The professionals they need, particularly for environmental and technology roles, have options across multiple sectors. Success increasingly depends on presenting a clear value proposition that goes beyond pay.

"This means being more systematic about compensation structures and considering flexible working arrangements where appropriate, but also being clearer about the estate's purpose and the meaningful work on offer. We're helping clients think more strategically about their position in the job market - not just what they're paying, but how they're presenting themselves as employers."

The findings come as estates face rising employment costs, including increases in minimum wage and National Insurance contributions and as the Employment Rights Bill moves through Parliament.

The survey captured responses from a broad range of rural properties; 76% were traditional estates, along with commercial farms (32%), country houses (33%), forestry and woodland enterprises (24%), and other mixed landholdings. Most respondents managed between 1,000 and 10,000 acres.

Mr Paul concluded, "The period since we first published this survey in 2014 has been one of massive change for the countryside. Employment strategies should be forward-looking and anticipate not only what new skills they may require in the future but also what the employee of the future will be seeking in a job."

The full Spring/Summer 2025 Rural Report, where the results of the Estate Staff Salary Survey are available to view in full can be found at: <https://publications.knightfrank.com/the-rural-report/ss25/>

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**Notes to Editors**

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