

The **SAP** **Report** Q1 2026



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Welcome



Vincent Dunlop
Co-Founder / Director

Welcome to the first quarterly SAP Report of 2026!

A year that will almost certainly mark massive changes in the way that SAP landscapes are run and the demand for skills to make them happen. Here are three to look out for:

 **bluewaveSELECT**  **22%**

bluewaveSELECT Grows by 22%

bluewave secured a 4th record year in 2025, achieving 22% YoY EBITDA growth. Despite geopolitical volatility, we expanded our global delivery to 150+ countries. Our 'talent-first' model offers the flexibility of contract, permanent, or SoW agreements - providing high-value SAP expertise across the UK, Europe, Americas, and APAC. With the talent gap being the main barrier to S/4HANA success, we offer a fresh approach to resourcing headaches. Get in touch to experience the bluewave WOW Factor.

1

THE 2026 S/4HANA DEADLINE

While the official deadline for SAP ECC extended maintenance is 2030, 2026 is the practical point of no return for starting migrations. Currently, 60% of global SAP customers have gone live or are mid-migration. This leaves a 40% minority at risk; as the deadline nears, those who haven't started will face spiking consultancy costs and a shortage of S/4HANA experts.

2

MANUFACTURING AND SUPPLY CHAIN SURGE

Having completed initial finance-led migrations, many companies are now entering the next wave, focused on manufacturing and supply chain. This shift prioritises solutions like SAP Digital Manufacturing and IBP to boost decision speed and cost transparency. Consequently, demand is surging for experts in MM, PP, and QM.

3

EMBEDDED AI FINALLY TAKES HOLD

Despite heavy AI promotion from SAP, businesses remain cautious due to a lack of proven use cases. While 85% of UKISUG delegates said they were yet to deploy AI agents, adoption is expected to surge in late 2026 as success stories materialise. This shift will drive significant demand for Joule development, BTP architecture, and data engineering.

Specialist SAP Reports and Guides

We've worked with some of the best in SAP to bring you these helpful guides and reports, to help you achieve your goals. So here they are, all in one place.



DOWNLOAD FREE RESOURCES BELOW:



Neurodiversity in SAP >

The latest stats on neurodiversity in the tech sector, why now is the right time for employers to improve their approach to neurodiversity.



IR35 Guide >

Advice from Qdos to help hiring managers build an internal business case for engaging outside IR35 contractors.



Hiring Manager's Playbook >

Eighteen pages filled with useful, objective data on how to attract and retain great SAP contractors.



SAP Contractor Survey Results >

UK & Ireland contractor survey results on how much contractors are paid, what drives them to accept or reject a role, and what makes them stick around for the duration of a project.



Women in SAP >

How the percentage of women in SAP has progressed over time and the impact of AI.



SAP Licensing Guide >

Practical advice from Gaurish Dessai, Enterprise Solutions Architect, on how to navigate the complex world of SAP licensing.

Free S/4HANA Advisory Sessions

Your Guide to SAP BTP & CPI: Essentials for ECC to S/4HANA Migration Success >

With Faraz Mohsin, SAP S/4 Lead, Thrinath Krishnamoorthy, CPI & BTP Architect

'No Regret' Moves: How to Mitigate Risk with a Capability Assessment for Your ECC to S/4HANA Transition >

With Tim Smith, SAP S/4 Programme Lead

Demystifying SAP Datasphere: Futureproof Your Business Analytics >

With Ali Bashir, Business Solution Lead

Why Integration is Critical to S/4HANA Success: The 5 Things SAP Leaders Need to Know >

With Kirit Mistry, Enterprise Architect

5 Ways to Accelerate Business Growth Through Data in Your S/4HANA Upgrade >

With Floyd Sepanya, Data Design Lead

The 5 Key Components of a Successful S/4HANA Implementation in Retail >

With Paul Drage, SAP Retail Programme Manager

The 5 Biggest Challenges of an S/4HANA Implementation (and How to Overcome Them) >

With Paul Kelly, Chief Technical Architect

C-Suite Approved: How to Build a Winning Business Case for SAP S/4HANA >

With Roberta Watts, CIO



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Industry News



Airbus Exec: Most of Us Will Not Hit Migration by 2030

[READ HERE](#)



SAP: Biggest Fall in 5 Years Amid Concerns Over Cloud Business

[READ HERE](#)



S/4HANA in 2026: Three Ways to Move Off SAP ECC

[READ HERE](#)



Körber Purchases Majority Stake in Stellium

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SAP Builds AI Into the Core of Retail at NRF 2026

[READ HERE](#)



SAP Holds Firm: No Renewal Discounts Despite Share Slide

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SAP Holds Firm: No Renewal Discounts Despite Share Slide

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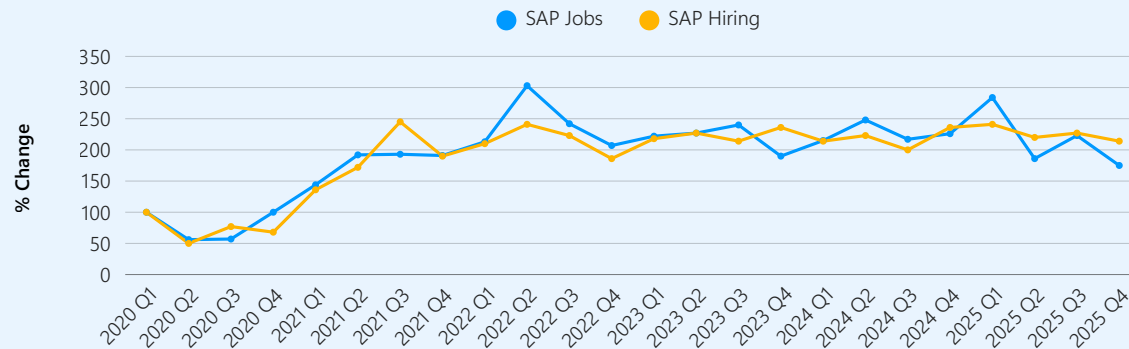


The 7 Biggest S/4HANA Migration Hurdles and How to Overcome Them

[READ HERE](#)

SAP Jobs & Hiring Activity

SAP Jobs and Hiring Activity

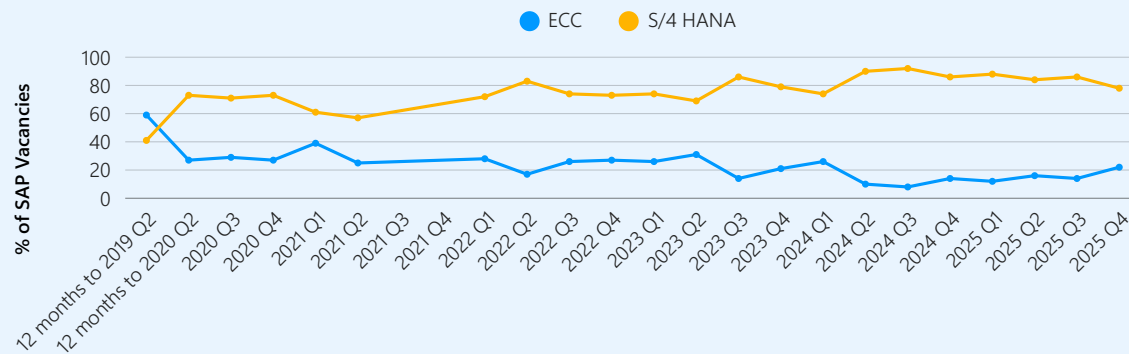


Q4 saw the usual seasonal drop in SAP vacancies, but actual hiring was in line with previous quarters. 2026 has got off to a fast start with more new SAP openings in Jan than in both Nov and Dec last year.

In 2026, all signs point to a continuation of sustained high demand for SAP professionals driven by:

- 1) The number of in-flight S/4HANA programmes (is 2026 the true deadline for migrating?)
- 2) The shift to SAP's cloud, AI, and platform-oriented offerings (driving workforce reorganisation)
- 3) The sheer size, complexity (and people-heavy nature) of implementing and running SAP.

S/4HANA vs ECC

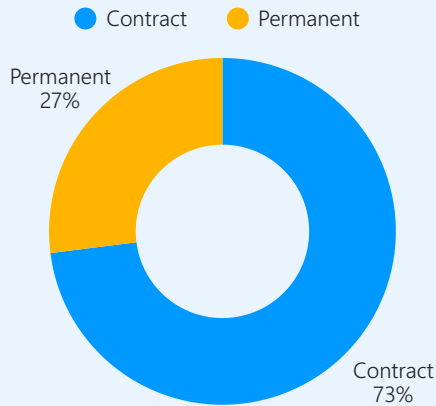


And our predictions for 2026's hottest SAP skills:

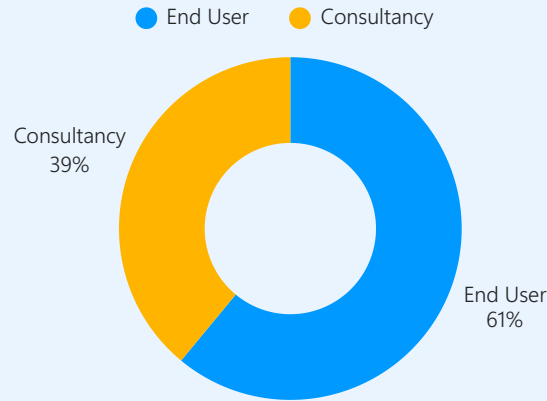
- Functional:** SMEs (all core processes) with essential business process knowledge rather than 'just' configuration/build expertise.
- Technical:** BTP, integration/API, AI & Joule enablement, Security/GRC, Fiori/UX/Low-Code, cloud ops.
- Data:** Datasphere, DW/semantic modelling, SAC, governance and security, AI-relevant data skills ready for embedded AI agents.
- Business Adoption:** Change management, training management, training delivery.

SAP Jobs & Hiring Activity

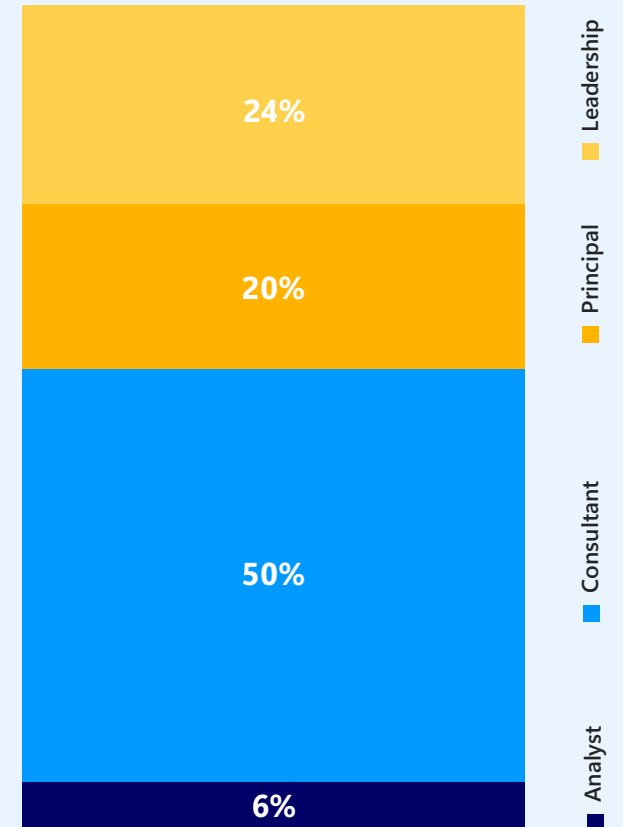
Permanent vs Contract Jobs



End user vs Consultancy



SAP Jobs by Seniority



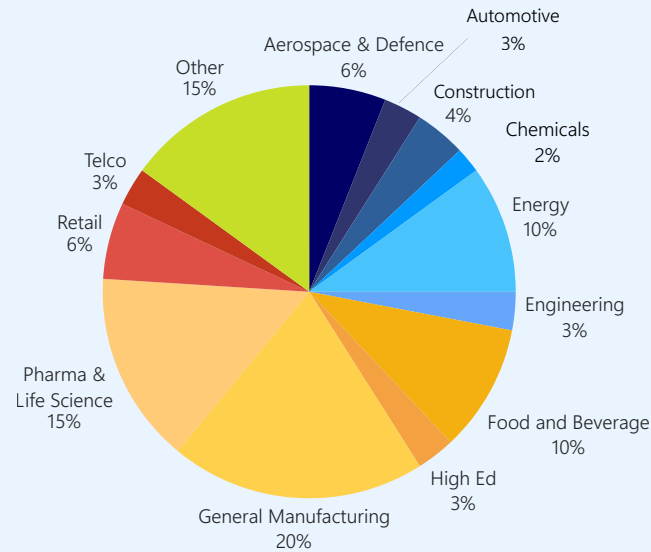
UK Contract: Inside IR35 vs Outside IR35



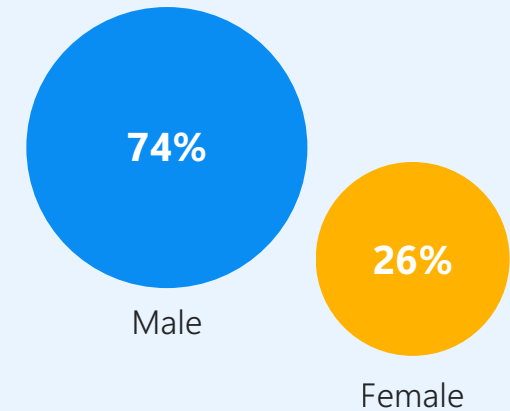
The project-driven nature of SAP programmes means **the vast majority of contract roles are Outside IR35.**

SAP Jobs & Hiring Activity

End User Industry Split



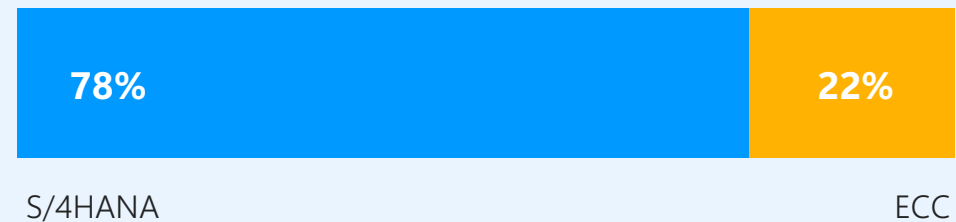
Women in SAP (Contract & Perm Placements)



Aside from the stand-out sectors of manufacturing and pharma & life science, SAP resource demand in Q4 was fairly evenly split across all industries. And given that 78% of vacancies in the same period were related to S/4HANA programmes, it's safe to say that digital transformation programmes are now underway at the majority of SAP customers, regardless of sector.

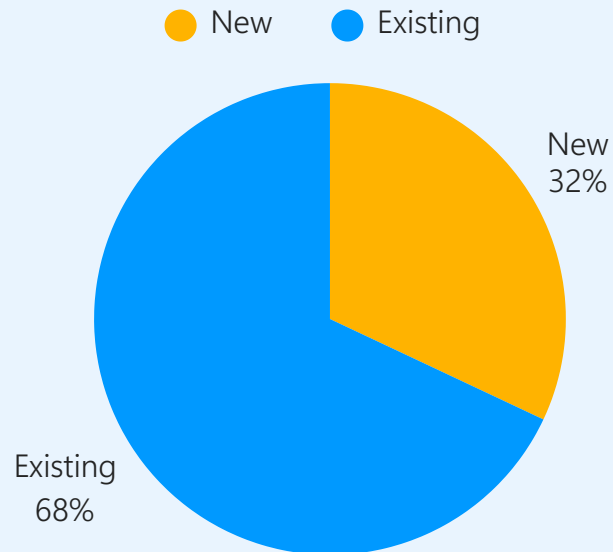


S/4HANA vs ECC

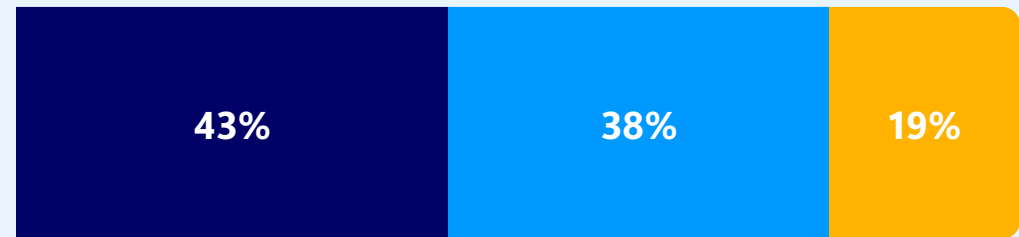
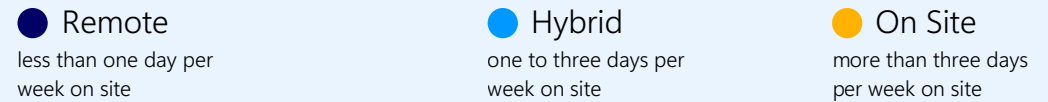


SAP Jobs & Hiring Activity

New vs Existing Programmes



SAP Jobs by Work Requirement

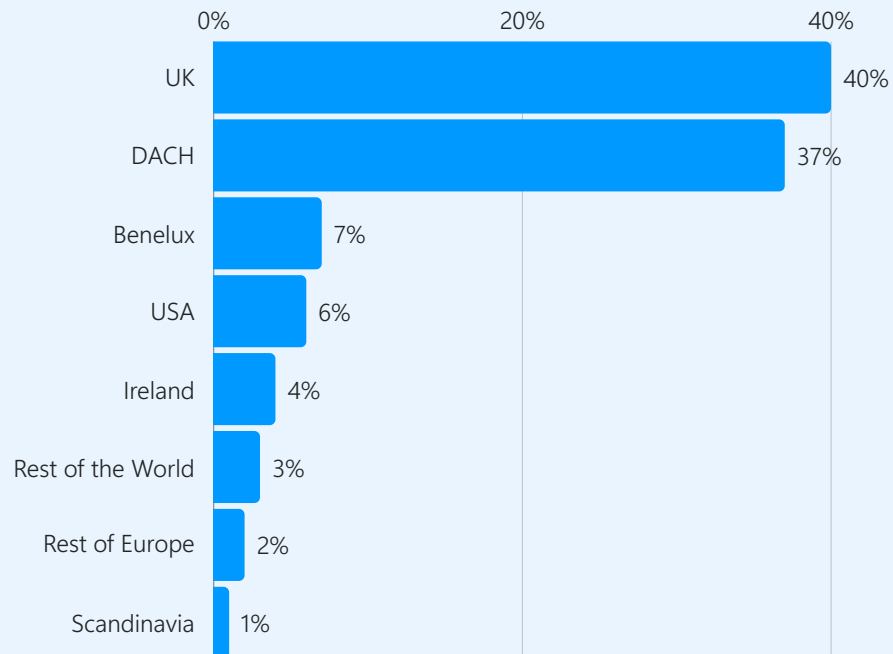


The percentage of on site SAP roles increased by 5% last quarter and accounted for a post-pandemic high of 19% of all vacancies. Despite the increase, hybrid working and entirely remote working remained the most popular working by far, accounting for 81% of all jobs.

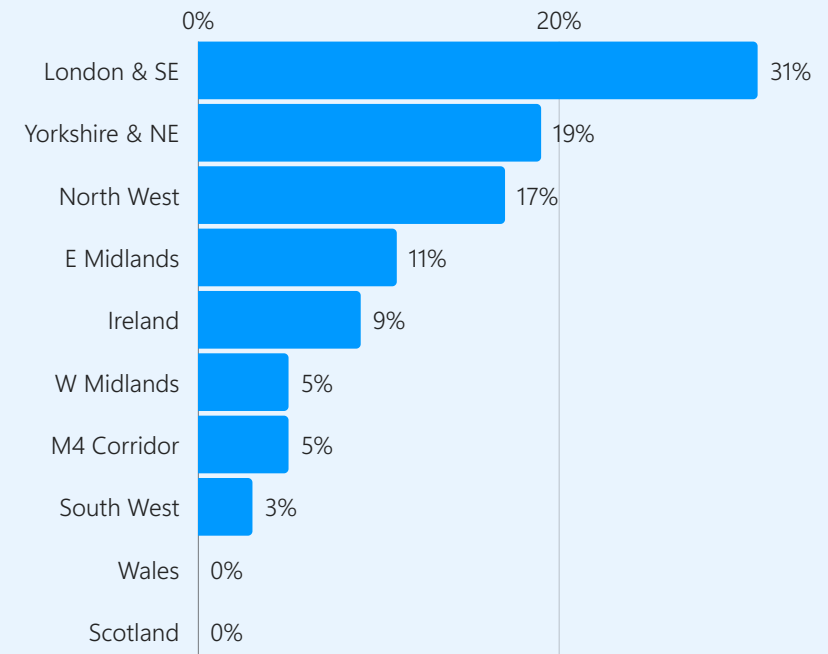
SAP Jobs & Hiring Activity

Although the UK and Europe dominate SAP hiring activity for bluewave, the third highest country for demand was the USA, with rest-of-the-world hiring stretching from Brazil through to Japan, emphasising the need for effective hiring solutions that meet the global demands of SAP programmes.

Location Split - Global



Location Split - UK & Ireland



Top 5 In-Demand SAP Skills in Q4 2025

1

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Migrations to S/4HANA are generally large multi-year transformation programmes, particularly for larger SAP businesses. The scale, along with the complexity and cost of requiring global teams and vendors delivering multiple solutions, processes, modules and integrations, has created sustained demand for SAP-experienced project managers. Because failure is costly, organisations prefer project managers who understand SAP (and preferably S/4HANA) landscapes rather than general PMs.

17% of Q4 2025 SAP demand

2

SUCCESSFACTORS

SuccessFactors is a regular feature in the quarterly Top 5 as organisations worldwide are moving their HR systems from on-prem to the cloud and are redesigning workforce processes to embrace and reflect post-pandemic working practices. Key SuccessFactors areas recruited for last quarter included EC, EC Payroll, integration, reporting, architecture and programme advisory.

10% of Q4 2025 SAP demand

=3

FINANCE

Every S/4HANA migration team requires finance expertise, which creates a constant pipeline of demand. In addition, the increase in global regulatory and real-time reporting requirements ensures that demand is high even outside of S/4HANA programmes. High-demand finance areas last quarter included standard FI/CO – analyst to solution leads, data, central finance, tax, treasury, banking, and PaPM.

9% of Q4 2025 SAP demand

=3

ABAP

Even with the advent of S/4HANA, businesses need experienced ABAP developers to convert legacy custom code and to help build modern SAP landscapes; Fiori apps, BTP, APIs, and integrations all require ABAP expertise combined with newer skills. The supply of ABAP developers is relatively small and ageing (fewer new developers choose to specialise in the language), and this, combined with the large number of transformation projects, has resulted in persistent high demand.

9% of Q4 2025 SAP demand

5

MANUFACTURING

Manufacturing is the next wave of S/4HANA transformations. Many companies completed finance migrations first and are now implementing more complex manufacturing and supply-chain modules. Fewer consultants specialise in manufacturing compared to finance, and many experienced experts are retiring while demand is rising, so expect high demand for specialists in MM, PP (PP-PI), QM, SAP Digital Manufacturing/MES, and the new S/4HANA PEO solution.

8% of Q4 2025 SAP demand



Q4's Top 5 in-demand SAP skills accounted for **53%** of all vacancies.

SAP Salary Benchmarking

Are you paying the right amount for your permanent SAP resources?

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SAP Salary Benchmarking



Job Role	Salary Range			
Leadership	Lower		Higher	
Transformation	£150k	↔ 0%	£220k	↔ 0%
Programme	£115k	↔ 0%	£150k	↓ -6.3%
Project	£80k	↑ 14.3%	£120k	↔ 0%
PMO	£45k	↓ -10%	£80k	↔ 0%
BAU/Head of	£85k	↔ 0%	£120k	↔ 0%
Technical	Lower		Higher	
Architect	£80k	↓ -11.1%	£130k	↑ 4%
Basis	£60k	↓ -7.7%	£95k	↔ 0%
Security	£60k	↑ 9.1%	£85k	↓ -5.6%
ABAP	£60k	↔ 0%	£85k	↑ 6.3%
Integration	£70k	↔ 0%	£95k	↔ 0%

Job Role	Salary Range			
Technical	Lower		Higher	
Data Manager	£75k	↔ 0%	£105k	↔ 0%
Data Lead	£80k	↔ 0%	£100k	↔ 0%
Data Consultant	£55k	↔ 0%	£85k	↔ 0%
Business	Lower		Higher	
Process GPO	£85k	↔ 0%	£125k	↑ 4.2%
Process Lead	£85k	↔ 0%	£110k	↔ 0%
Process BA	£50k	↔ 0%	£80k	↔ 0%
Change Manager	£75k	↔ 0%	£100k	↔ 0%
Change Consultant	£60k	↔ 0%	£85k	↔ 0%
Training Manager	£70k	↔ 0%	£90k	↔ 0%
Training Lead	£60k	↔ 0%	£90k	↔ 0%
Training Delivery	£45k	↔ 0%	£70k	↔ 0%



Compared to prior quarter

SAP Salary Benchmarking

Are you paying the right amount for your permanent SAP resources?

Share this page

SAP Salary Benchmarking



Job Role	Salary Range			
	Functional	Lower	Higher	
Solution Architect	£85k	↓ -5.6%	£120k	↔ 0%
OtC Lead	£80k	↔ 0%	£105k	↑ 5%
OtC Consultant	£60k	↔ 0%	£85k	↔ 0%
RtR Lead	£90k	↔ 0%	£125k	↔ 0%
RtR Consultant	£70k	↔ 0%	£85k	↔ 0%
PtP Lead	£70k	↔ 0%	£95k	↔ 0%
PtP Consultant	£70k	↔ 0%	£90k	↔ 0%
Manufacturing Lead	£80k	↔ 0%	£95k	↔ 0%
Manufacturing Consultant	£65k	↓ -7.1%	£85k	↔ 0%
Warehousing/Logistics Lead	£80k	↔ 0%	£95k	↔ 0%
Warehousing/Logistics Consultant	£65k	↓ -7.1%	£85k	↔ 0%

Job Role	Salary Range			
	Functional	Lower	Higher	
SF Manager	£95k	↔ 0%	£115k	↔ 0%
SF Lead	£75k	↔ 0%	£115k	↔ 0%
SF Consultant	£70k	↑ 7.1%	£105k	↑ 5%
BI Manager	£75k	↔ 0%	£100k	↔ 0%
BI Lead	£65k	↔ 0%	£85k	↔ 0%
BI Consultant	£45k	↔ 0%	£80k	↔ 0%
Test Manager	£75k	↔ 0%	£95k	↔ 0%
Test Lead	£65k	↔ 0%	£90k	↔ 0%
Test Consultant	£45k	↔ 0%	£75k	↔ 0%



Compared to prior quarter

SAP Day Rate Benchmarking

Are you paying the right amount for your contract SAP resources?

Share this page

SAP Day Rate
Benchmarking



Job Role	Contract Benchmarking			
Leadership	Lower		Higher	
Transformation	£1,500	↔ 0%	£2,500	↔ 0%
Programme	£750	↓ -6.3%	£1,000	↓ -9.1%
Project	£600	↔ 0%	£800	↓ -5.9%
PMO	£400	↔ 0%	£600	↔ 0%
BAU/Head of	£600	↔ 0%	£700	↔ 0%
Technical	Lower		Higher	
Architect	£800	↓ -5.9%	£1,200	↑ 9.1%
Basis	£500	↔ 0%	£650	↔ 0%
Security	£500	↔ 0%	£650	↓ -7.1%
ABAP	£400	↔ 0%	£650	↔ 0%
Integration	£550	↔ 0%	£850	↓ -5.6%

Job Role	Contract Benchmarking			
Technical	Lower		Higher	
Data Manager	£800	↔ 0%	£1,000	↑ 5.3%
Data Lead	£600	↔ 0%	£850	↔ 0%
Data Consultant	£450	↔ 0%	£550	↔ 0%
Business	Lower		Higher	
Process GPO	£650	↔ 0%	£850	↔ 0%
Process Lead	£550	↔ 0%	£650	↔ 0%
Process BA	£350	↔ 0%	£500	↓ -9.1%
Change Manager	£600	↔ 0%	£1,000	↔ 0%
Change Consultant	£500	↔ 0%	£650	↔ 0%
Training Manager	£600	↔ 0%	£700	↔ 0%
Training Lead	£550	↔ 0%	£650	↔ 0%
Training Delivery	£400	↔ 0%	£500	↔ 0%



Compared to prior quarter

SAP Day Rate Benchmarking

Are you paying the right amount for your contract SAP resources?

Share this page

SAP Day Rate
Benchmarking



Job Role	Contract Benchmarking			
	Functional	Lower	Higher	
Solution Architect	£1,000	↔ 0%	£1,200	↓ -7.7%
OtC Lead	£550	↓ -8.3%	£700	↓ -7.1%
OtC Consultant	£500	↔ 0%	£600	↔ 0%
RtR Lead	£600	↓ -7.7%	£800	↔ 0%
RtR Consultant	£500	↔ 0%	£650	↔ 0%
PtP Lead	£650	↔ 0%	£750	↔ 0%
PtP Consultant	£550	↔ 0%	£650	↔ 0%
Manufacturing Lead	£650	↔ 0%	£850	↔ 0%
Manufacturing Consultant	£550	↔ 0%	£750	↔ 0%
Warehousing/Logistics Lead	£600	↓ -7.7%	£850	↔ 0%
Warehousing/Logistics Consultant	£500	↔ 0%	£650	↔ 0%

Job Role	Contract Benchmarking			
	Functional	Lower	Higher	
SF Manager	£700	↔ 0%	£900	↑ 12.5%
SF Lead	£600	↔ 0%	£750	↔ 0%
SF Consultant	£500	↔ 0%	£650	↑ 8.3%
BI Manager	£600	↑ 7.7%	£750	↔ 0%
BI Lead	£600	↔ 0%	£700	↔ 0%
BI Consultant	£550	↔ 0%	£650	↔ 0%
Test Manager	£600	↔ 0%	£850	↔ 0%
Test Lead	£500	↔ 0%	£600	↔ 0%
Test Consultant	£350	↔ 0%	£450	↔ 0%



Compared to prior quarter

Global SAP Freelancer Pay Rates

Last quarter, we published a global view of SAP freelancer rates in 2025 to reflect the cost-benefit of optimising local resources for the localisation of global template rollouts and the ever-popular blended onshore, nearshore and offshore implementation teams.

The costs have been updated for 2026 and to provide consistency, we have used SAP freelancer pay rates in the UK and Northern Europe as a baseline for global comparison. This data has been collated as a budget benchmarking tool to help guide programme managers, procurement teams, business leaders, and other interested parties through the intricacies of global SAP resource costs. You'll find this on the next page.



Global SAP Freelancer Pay Rates

bluewaveSELECT delivers compliant, risk-free SAP resources in all regions highlighted, and updates average day rate values on an ongoing basis.

Region	Rate vs UK/N. Europe	Notes
UK & Northern Europe	100% (Baseline)	Baseline: SAP contractor £600-900/day depending on modules, scarce skills, and experience
USA & Canada	+15% to +30%	Higher bill rates for S/4HANA transformation programmes; large consulting budgets
DACH (Germany, Austria, Switzerland)	+15% to +25%	Typical €700-€1,200/day in Germany/Austria; Switzerland highest in Europe
Southern Europe (Spain, Italy, Portugal)	-20% to -30%	Local budgets lower; remote EU contracts often close to UK-equivalent rates
Eastern Europe (Poland, Romania, Czechia, etc.)	-25% to -40%	Increasing remote cross-border contracting pushing top-tier specialists closer to Western European rates
Nordics (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland)	+20% to +25%	Scandinavian freelance SAP rates often 20-25% above UK levels
Middle East (UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar)	+15% to +35%	Mega-transformation programmes (public sector, oil & gas) driving premium rates
India	-50% to -60%	Offshore delivery centres dominate; only niche freelance architects approach EU pricing
China	-40% to -50%	Mostly permanent/local contracting markets
South-East Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam)	-35% to -50%	Growing S/4HANA demand but budget-sensitive clients
Australia & New Zealand	+5% to +15%	Stable, mature SAP market, limited local talent pool
Africa (South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt)	-30% to -50%	Few large SAP programmes, except selected expat contracts
Latin America (Brazil, Mexico, Argentina)	-25% to -40%	Increasing near-shore delivery to US clients narrowing gap slightly

What's Changed in 2026?

1

DACH AND NORDICS SLIGHTLY HIGHER

Large S/4HANA migrations and smaller talent pools increased premiums; Western Europe SAP contractors frequently reach €900-€1,200/day.

3

EASTERN EUROPE GAP NARROWING

Remote cross-border contracting allows senior specialists to secure UK/EU-level rates more often, especially in architecture or programme roles.

2

USA PREMIUM WIDENED SLIGHTLY

Cloud ERP transformation budgets and consulting-led delivery have pushed US bill rates higher than most of Europe.

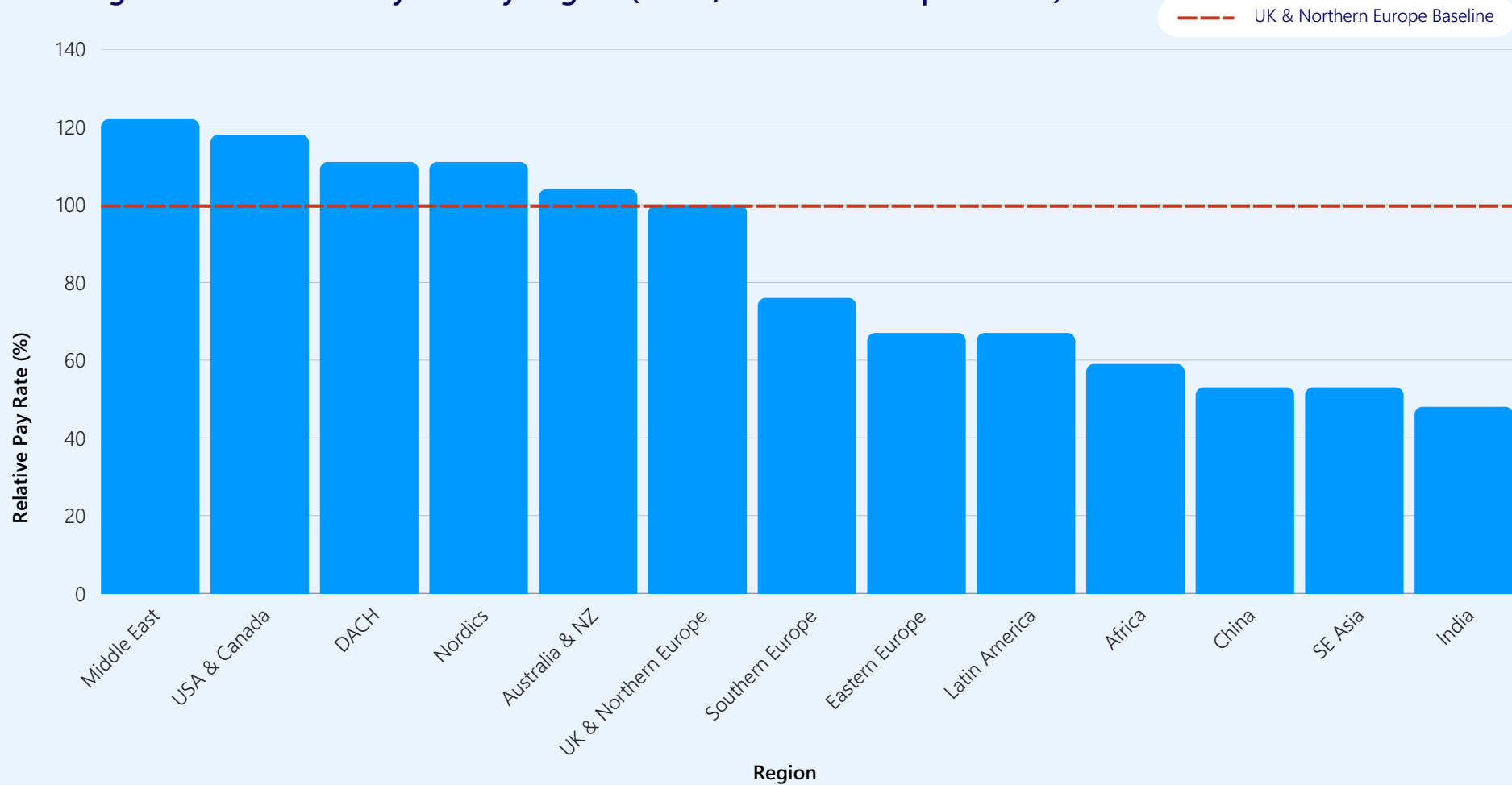
4

MIDDLE EAST PREMIUM INCREASED

Government transformation programmes (Saudi Vision initiatives, etc.) continue driving higher programme-level rates.

Global SAP Freelancer Pay Rates

Average SAP Freelancer Pay Rate by Region (vs UK/Northern Europe= 100%)



Global SAP Freelancer Pay Rates

bluewaveSELECT's global network of specialist SAP talent enables large enterprises to deliver complex implementations with confidence. By connecting organisations to the right expertise anywhere in the world, we help ensure projects move forward seamlessly across multiple regions.

Our international reach not only accelerates deployment and drives consistency but also provides the flexibility to scale resources as needs evolve, balancing cost efficiency with high-quality delivery. With access to consultants who understand both global best practices and local business nuances, we provide the expertise that allow companies to achieve smoother rollouts, stronger user adoption and sustainable long-term success with SAP.



bluewaveSELECT delivers compliant SAP talent solutions globally. Please ask your consultant how we can help.

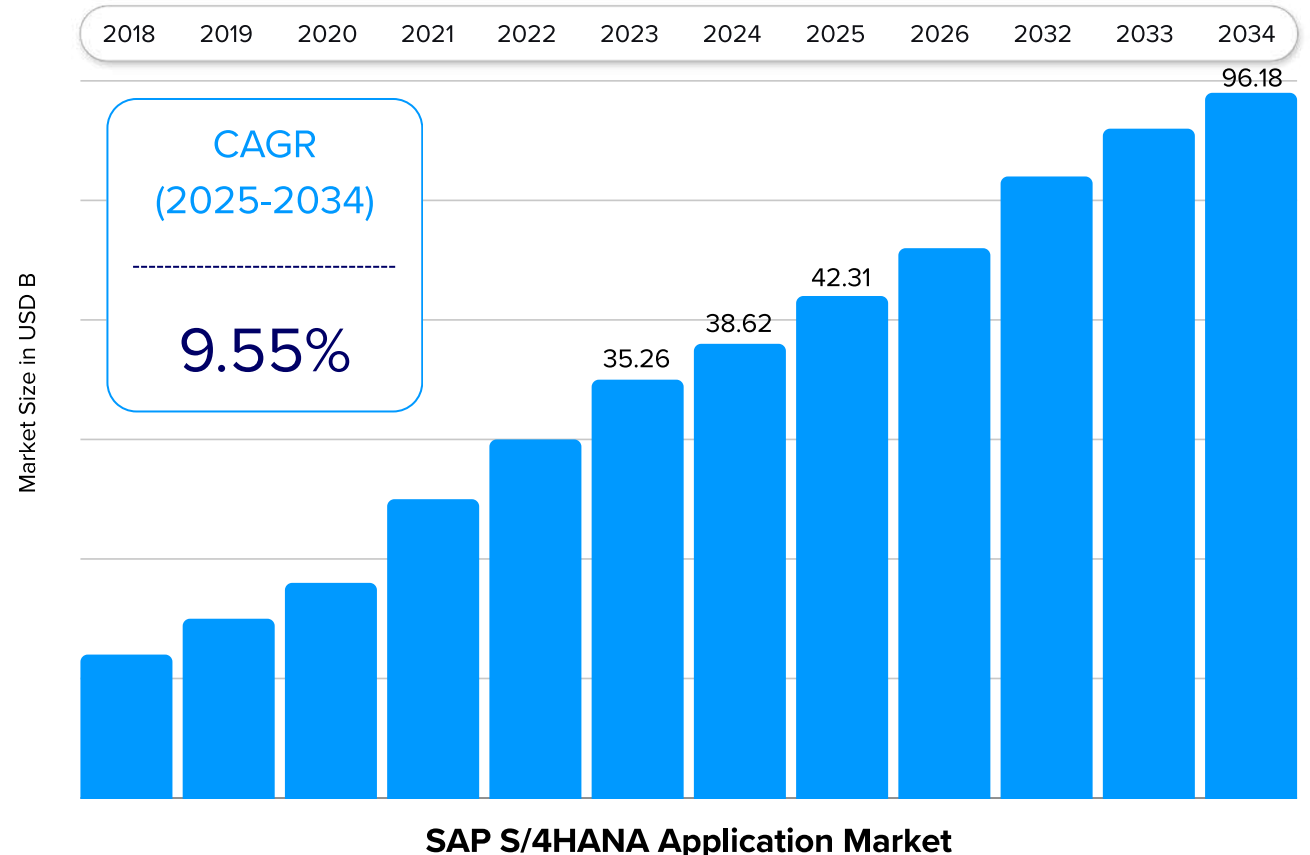
S/4HANA Adoption

Current Deployment Levels

In February an SAPInsider survey showed that 31% of member organisations had already transitioned to S/4HANA, 26% are in active implementation and 21% remain in the evaluation phase.

41% plan to move before the 2027 SAP ECC end-of-support deadline however, 18% of these businesses say will not finish by 2027.

Globally, the SAP S/4HANA market is projected to grow from USD 42.31 billion in 2025 to USD 96.18 billion by 2034, reflecting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.55%.



S/4HANA Adoption

Adoption Rates and Key Drivers for SAP S/4HANA by Industry

Industry	Adoption Rate	Key Drivers
Manufacturing	40% (UK)	Supply chain optimisation, real-time analytics, AI integration
Retail	30% (UK)	Omnichannel inventory management, customer experience enhancement
Banking & Financial Services	Moderate	Risk management, regulatory compliance, financial reporting
Healthcare	Emerging	Patient care improvement, regulatory compliance, process integration
Utilities	Growing	Operational efficiency, asset management, sustainability reporting
Public Sector	10% (UK)	Legacy system challenges, budget constraints
Technology & Telecom	Moderate	Customer relationship management, real-time analytics

S/4HANA Adoption

Adoption by Company Size

No. of Employees	% of S/4HANA Customers
Small (<50 employees)	22%
Medium (50-1,000 employees)	41%
Large (>1,000 employees)	37%

Revenue Range	% of S/4HANA Customers
Small (<\$50M)	38%
Medium (\$50-\$1B)	20%
Large (>\$1B)	42%

Adoption by Region

- **UK** manufacturing and retail lead S/4HANA adoption due to digital transformation and real-time data.
- In the **USA**, manufacturing, healthcare, pharmaceuticals and consumer packaged goods are key adopters, seeking streamlined production, optimised processes and enhanced customer experience.
- **APAC's** S/4HANA adoption is growing rapidly (10.2% estimated growth in Q2 2025), with Greenfield deployments common in manufacturing, healthcare, and energy.

S/4HANA Adoption

Deployment Models & Preferences

We have gone through the different S/4HANA deployment options that cater to different business needs in some detail below:

1

ON-PREMISE

Ideal for large enterprises in regulated industries and/or requiring full control over their IT environment, allowing customisation and integration with existing systems. For example, defence, banking, manufacturing, or public sector businesses.

2

CLOUD OPTIONS

- **Public Cloud:** A multi-tenant environment managed by SAP, suitable for businesses looking for rapid deployment, scalability, simplicity, and lower upfront costs.
- **Private Cloud:** Ideal for organisations wanting cloud benefits but with more control and flexibility than public cloud allows.
- **Hybrid Models:** Combines on-premise and cloud solutions, allowing businesses to balance control and flexibility.



S/4HANA Adoption

Here's a clear comparison table outlining the key differences between SAP S/4HANA On-Premise and Cloud (both Private and Public options where relevant):

Category	On-Premise	Cloud (Private Edition)	Cloud (Public Edition)
Deployment Location	Customer's data centre	SAP-managed private cloud	SAP-managed public cloud
Control Over System	Full control (customisation, updates, infra)	Moderate (limited infra control)	Minimal (standardised environment)
Customisation	Extensive customisations possible	Moderate customisation allowed	Highly limited customisation
Upgrades	Customer controls upgrade schedule	SAP recommends upgrades, but some flexibility	Automatic, frequent upgrades by SAP
Cost Model	Capital Expenditure (CapEx)	Operational Expenditure (OpEx)	Operational Expenditure (OpEx)
Infrastructure Needs	Customer must procure and maintain	SAP provides and manages	SAP provides and manages
Implementation Speed	Longer (due to setup and config)	Faster than on-premise	Fastest
Security & Compliance	High control, good for strict compliance needs	Strong, but dependent on SAP's policies	Strong, but less customer control
Performance	Depends on customer infrastructure	Optimised by SAP	Optimised by SAP
Innovation Adoption	Slower (manual adoption)	Faster (cloud features accessible)	Fastest access to new features
Integration Flexibility	High (ideal for legacy/3rd-party systems)	Moderate	Limited (designed for standard integrations)
Use Cases	Heavily customised, regulated industries	Hybrid needs, moderate customisation	Standard business processes, rapid scaling

Risk Mitigation Checklist

Implementing SAP S/4HANA presents technical, strategic and organisational challenges. This nine-point Risk Mitigation Checklist helps anticipate and reduce major project risks.

[Download this page](#)[Download Checklist
as PDF](#)

1

PROJECT PLANNING & GOVERNANCE

- Define clear business goals and KPIs for the implementation.
- Choose correct deployment model (on-premise, private or public cloud) early.
- Establish a strong project governance structure (PMO, steering committee).
- Secure executive sponsorship and business buy-in.
- Include change control and escalation procedures in your governance model.

2

SCOPE & REQUIREMENTS MANAGEMENT

- Clearly define and freeze project scope early in the lifecycle.
- Avoid scope creep by enforcing a change request process.
- Prioritise high-impact business processes and modules.
- Identify "must-have" vs "nice-to-have" features to manage complexity.

3

TECHNICAL PREPARATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

- Conduct a readiness assessment (including sizing and landscape planning).
- Upgrade/prepare infrastructure (servers, network, cloud subscriptions).
- Evaluate & refactor existing custom code using SAP's Custom Code Analyser.
- Plan for system performance and load testing before go-live.

4

DATA MIGRATION & QUALITY

- Perform early data cleansing and validation.
- Use SAP tools (e.g., SAP Data Services, Migration Cockpit) for data migration.
- Establish a master data governance (MDG) framework.
- Test data migration in phases to avoid full rollback risks.

5

CHANGE MANAGEMENT & TRAINING

- Conduct an impact analysis to identify affected teams and roles.
- Develop and execute a structured change management plan.
- Provide hands-on training for SAP Fiori and redesigned processes.
- Identify and prepare super-users or change champions.

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE 

Risk Mitigation Checklist

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6

TESTING & VALIDATION

- Perform end-to-end integration testing with all upstream/downstream systems.
- Include negative test cases and performance/load testing.
- Involve business users in user acceptance testing (UAT).
- Maintain a robust defect tracking and resolution process.

7

CUTOVER PLANNING & GO-LIVE

- Create a detailed cutover checklist with clear task ownership.
- Perform a dry run (mock go-live) to identify bottlenecks.
- Set up rollback procedures and contingency plans.
- Ensure helpdesk and hypercare support are ready post go-live.

8

SECURITY, COMPLIANCE & AUDIT READINESS

- Implement role-based access controls aligned with business processes.
- Review SOD (segregation of duties) risks with GRC tools.
- Ensure audit trails, logging, and compliance reporting are configured.
- Test data privacy and compliance scenarios (e.g., GDPR, SOX, HIPAA).

9

RESOURCE & VENDOR MANAGEMENT

- Vet system integrators/consultants for S/4HANA-specific experience.
- Align internal resources and SMEs with critical project phases.
- Monitor vendor SLAs and hold regular check-ins.
- Use a blended team model for knowledge transfer and long-term support.



Cost vs business benefit remains the primary inhibitor for the move to S/4HANA, however, there is no denying that adoption is entering a mature phase in 2025. The majority of businesses we partner with are 'S/4HANA-active' in one form or another and are increasingly selecting hybrid cloud-based deployments, with the private cloud option being particularly popular due to its balance of control and scalability.

Global SAP S/4HANA Resources 100% Delivered

PROBLEM STATEMENT

- A \$50bn pharma giant needed to improve its route to market for specialist SAP resources to drive and deliver its multi-year global SAP S/4HANA migration programme.

OUTCOME

- Thanks to bluewave's vast Europe/APAC network, **the search for local SAP expertise was a breeze.**
- Leaning on extensive experience of ECC to S/4 on multi-country projects, and manufacturing/chemicals, bluewaveSELECT acted fast and **shortlisted the top 5% of SAP talent for each location** - the team found accurate matches within 48 hours.
- Worked in partnership with the client to structure a **one-interview-to-offer onboarding strategy.**

COMMERCIAL MODEL USED

- Positioned as a dedicated SAP resource partner for all functional, technical leadership and business change/training resource requirements on the programme.
- Embedded in the programme with direct communication with regional resource hiring leads.
- Suitable candidate shortlists within 24 hours, enabling fast mobilisation of critical skills.
- 100% offer-to-hire ratio.

THE RESULTS

- ✓ Accelerated resource onboarding, reducing project ramp-up time and preventing delivery delays.
- ✓ Benchmarking insights help to refine budgets and future resource planning, avoiding over-provisioning.
- ✓ Instant hiring capability in 150+ countries with effortless onboarding. Localised contracts, payroll, workers' rights and legislation administration with 100% compliance and built-in tax and legal protection.
- ✓ Volume-based rebate scheme based on annual spend is in place to deliver substantial programme savings.

P's and T's in the Green. Warning Lights Off. Proceed as Planned.

A Practical Assurance & Governance Framework
for AI Projects: A Guide for IT Programme
Directors Who Must Run AI Delivery Safely



A Practical Assurance & Governance Framework for AI Projects



Ivan Snell

IT Delivery Expert & AI Risk Specialist

Ivan Snell is the founding Director of Snell Consultancy. For over 30 years, he has made his career helping senior IT leaders, IT Programme Directors, and Business Executives take a pragmatic, human-focused approach to IT project delivery, particularly with regards to agile projects that take an iterative and incremental approach to development, including AI or ML projects. When Ivan is not providing guidance on IT project delivery and managing AI risk he spends his time sailing with his family and flying helicopters. You can connect with Ivan at ivan.snell@snellconsultancy.co.uk or at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/ivansnell/>.

Introduction

Like delivering an Artificial Intelligence (AI) or Machine Learning (ML) project, piloting a helicopter is a complex, challenging and cognitively demanding undertaking. Neither are for the faint hearted.

Flying a helicopter is challenging due to a helicopter's complex controls, which are super sensitive to pilot input, and to a helicopter's aerodynamic instability when compared to fixed wing aircraft.

If you skip either your 'inflight' helicopter engine health and systems checks or your IT project 'go/no go' stage gates you do so at your peril.

Helicopter aviation is also inherently dangerous due to a reliance (leaving aside twin turbine aircraft) on a single engine and the inability for a helicopter to glide down to terra firma like a fixed wing aircraft if the engine should fail. Pilots are trained to put the helicopter into an 'autorotation' (imagine a sycamore leaf spinning slowly the ground) but the pilot only has seconds to act.

However, from the moment that the pilot lifts the helicopter into the hover they will use a series of checks to constantly monitor the aircraft's engine health and systems. As long as the 'Ps & Ts' are in the green and the 'warning lights are off', the flight can proceed as planned. Should there be any indication of engine poor health the pilot is trained to land immediately.

I believe such in-flight checks provide a strong parallel to IT project quality checks, often known as 'go / no go' stage gates, which are found between stages of a project to control, assess and govern whether the project has met the criteria of the current stage before proceeding to the next stage.

First though, it is worth stating the simple differences between the approach to an AI project and a typical Software Development Lifecycle (SDLC) approach.

A Practical Assurance & Governance Framework for AI Projects

How is an AI Project Approach Different to a Typical Software Development Project?

Traditional project management and application development methodologies do not fully address the complexities of AI projects. AI solutions are data-driven, not just software-driven, requiring a systematic approach that ensures **alignment with business objectives and ROI, proper data preparation and governance, robust model evaluation and operationalisation** and **iterative development to adapt to changing data and needs**.

The most successful AI projects take the best aspects of an iterative and incremental agile delivery approach and combine this with the data centric, 'data first' approach of data projects. To execute an AI project it should be organised into six iterative stages along the lines of the following:

Stage 1 – Business Understanding

Focuses on understanding the project objectives, requirements, and goals from a business perspective.

Stage 2 – Data Understanding

Data collection needs, identifying potential data quality problems, and understand what data is still needed.

Stage 3 – Data Preparation

Prepare the required data in order to use it for your project.

Stage 4 – Model Development

Evaluate, select & apply the appropriate modelling techniques.

Stage 5 – Model Evaluation and Testing

Test your model to make sure it's behaving the way you were expecting.

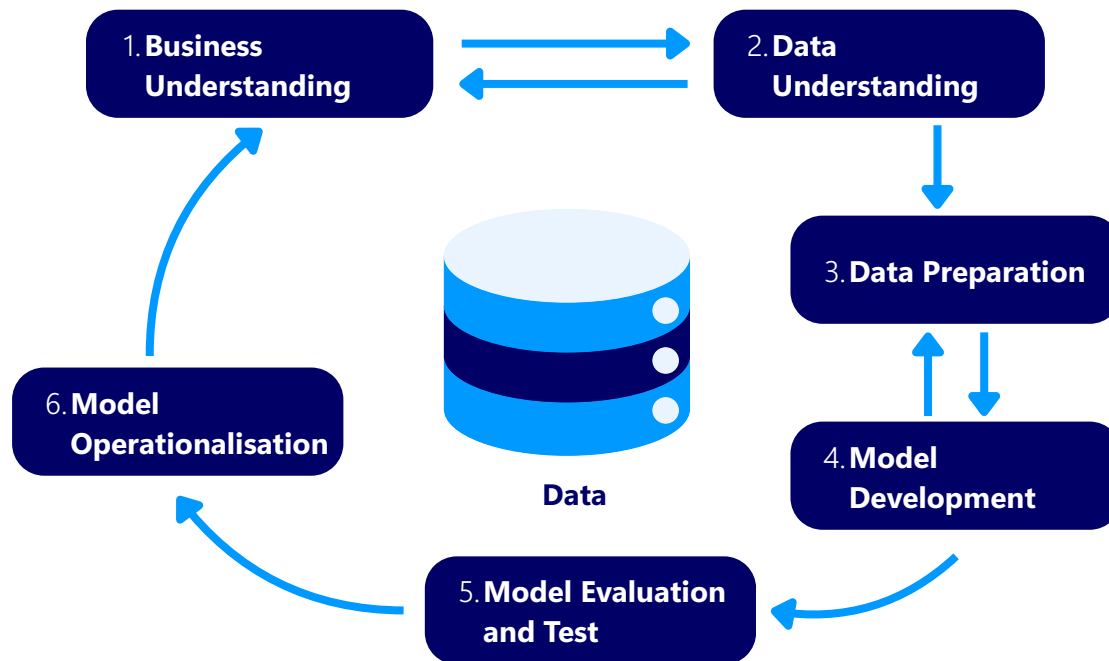
Stage 6 – Model Operationalisation

Put your model into the real world, and make sure it's behaving as expected.

A Practical Assurance & Governance Framework for AI Projects

How is an AI Project Approach Different to a Typical Software Development Project?

Far from a linear checklist, these stages form a loop that incorporates ongoing feedback, continuous learning, and alignment with business objectives. These stages can be visualised as an iterative cycle.






Is this the way you, your other IT Programme Director colleagues, and your organisation is approaching its AI projects or are you trying to shoehorn your AI projects into an existing project management delivery framework?

If it's the former you are on the right track, if it's the latter it might be time to reflect on the different characteristics of AI Projects compared to traditional software development projects and change your approach somewhat.

A Practical Assurance & Governance Framework for AI Projects

Addressing the High Rate of Failure of AI Projects

It is well documented that 80% or more of AI projects fail to deliver the promised impact or never move beyond prototypes *. These failures are not usually caused by the underlying AI technology itself but rather by how AI projects are planned, managed, and aligned to real business needs. Several common pitfalls are often used to explain this high failure rate:

-  **Lack of clear business alignment**
-  **Neglecting data feasibility**
-  **No plan for continuous updates**

*e.g. the MIT NANDA initiative, 'The GenAI Divide: State of AI in Business 2025', found that approximately 95% of corporate generative AI pilots fail to achieve a return on investment (ROI) or scale to full production; TechRepublic found 85% of AI projects eventually fail to bring their intended results to the business; Gartner has published research findings that 85% of Machine Learning (ML) projects fail; and, according to IDC, most organisation polled reported failures among their AI projects, with a quarter of them reporting up to a 50% failure rate.



Analysis by FinTellec AI indicates that 80% of AI projects in the Financial Services sector fail to reach production. Of those that do, 70% do not deliver measurable business value.

This is particularly striking given that Financial Service firms spent an estimated \$35bn on AI initiatives in 2023, according to the World Economic Forum's 2025 white paper AI in Financial Services.

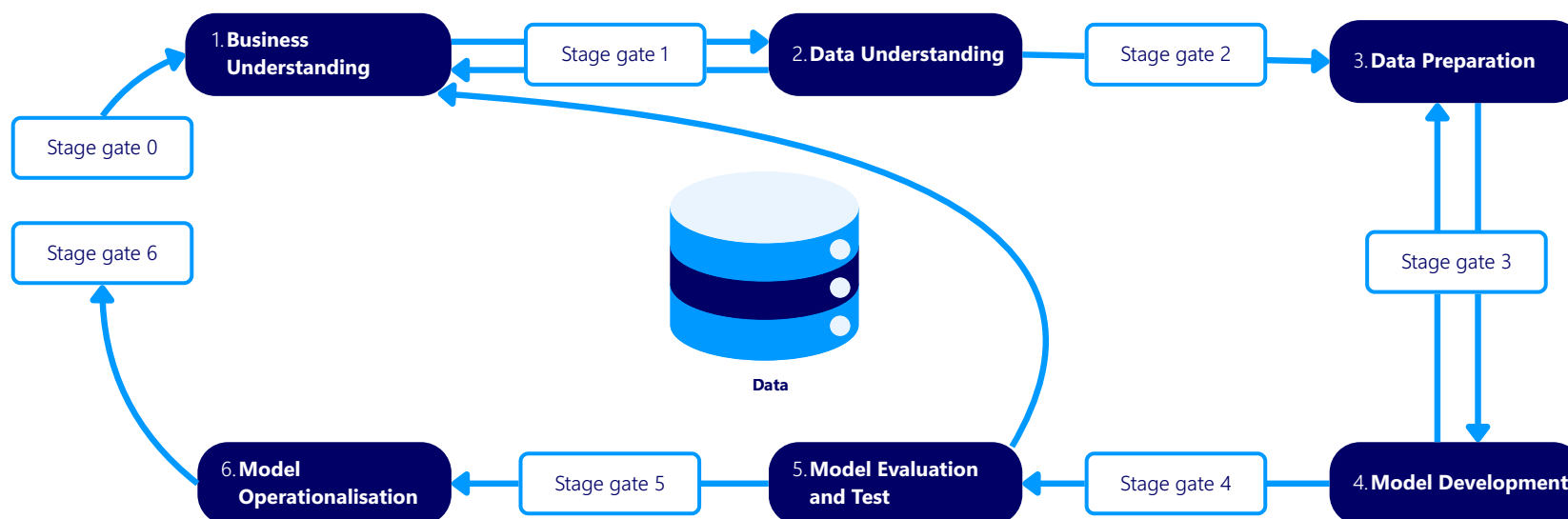
A Practical Assurance & Governance Framework for AI Projects

Addressing the High Rate of Failure of AI Projects

Another Common Pitfall - the Absence of AI Project 'Go / No Go' Quality Stage Gates

Snell Consultancy has a successful track record in helping organisations like yours deliver IT projects and programmes whatever the most applicable and preferred methodology. But what we have seen repeatedly is that the inclusion of quality check points, otherwise known as 'Go / No Go' quality stage gates, at the appropriate points on the delivery roadmap, are a critical determining factor to IT project success. In our opinion, AI projects should be no different and the absence of these can be another critical common pitfall. Similar to helicopter inflight engine health and other systems health checks, leave them out at your peril.

Our approach to AI project's stage gate management is based on that experience and explains what I and my colleagues would do to help you.



A Practical Assurance & Governance Framework for AI Projects

Seven Stage Gate Approach to AI Projects

Stage Gate 0: Project Kick Off Go / No Go – Start the Project

I will help you conduct an AI Stage Gate 0 Go / No Go Assessment to ask the obvious and not so obvious AI project pre-investment questions and document the answers. The assessment includes questions such as:

- Why do we have to deliver this AI project?
- Does it have to be done now?
- What does success look like in terms of ROI and key metrics?
- Is there a good strategic fit with other IT projects / programmes planned, or underway, and with wider organisational and digital strategies?

A 'Go/No-Go/Pause/Recycle' decision should be made and documented.

Stage Gate 1 Business Understanding - Proceed to Data Understanding

Before proceeding to Data Understanding you will need to ensure that you have mapped the AI solution to the business problem and for three things to be in alignment: the business feasibility, the data feasibility, and the technology / execution feasibility. Also, it's worth checking the project's 'Trustworthy AI Requirements' at this point. e.g regulatory context (UK/EU/sector regulators), ethics and explainability, security and model integrity, operational gating criteria.

Your AI Project Stage Gate 1 Business Understanding Go / No Go Assessment will focus on questions like: Have you determined the business requirements? Why does the project's business objective need AI? Are there potential other non-cognitive solutions that could be used instead? Which of the seven common AI patterns will the project use? How will the solution be used in a real world (production) environment? A formal 'Go/No-Go/Pause/Recycle' decision will be made and documented.

A Practical Assurance & Governance Framework for AI Projects

Seven Stage Gate Approach to AI Projects

Stage Gate 2 Data Understanding – Proceed to Data Preparation

The next step is determining what data is needed and whether it is sufficient in quantity and quality. From my experience this is where an AI project's potential pitfalls are really first exposed. Successful AI efforts depend on having the right data, at the right time, in the right format - and Stage 2 is designed to confirm this. So, the AI Project Stage 2 Data Understanding Go / No Go Assessment should cover:

- What any Data Source Inventory and Data Quality Assessment has shown about how ready your data sources for use on your AI project are?
- Is the location or locations of your data clear and the nature of the data clear (e.g. its Volume, Variety, Velocity, and Veracity)?
- Have the proper guardrails for data governance, privacy and compliance, essential to prevent ethical, legal, or reputational harm, been addressed?

Your AI solution is likely to fail if the underlying data is not up to the task. Lack of data, data privacy concerns, or uncertainty over data ownership can derail the best-intended plans. Identifying and solving these issues now dramatically increases the likelihood of success in later stages. A formal 'Go/No-Go/Pause/Recycle' decision will be made and documented.

Stage Gate 3 Data Preparation – Proceed to Model Development

By systematically planning and executing data preparation, you will maximise the chances that your AI project will succeed. Once the data cleaning, labelling and annotating, data pipeline development (both training and an inference or "production" pipeline) activities of this stage are completed you will be ready to hold the AI Project Stage 3 Data Preparation Go / No Go Assessment. Arriving at a formal 'Go' decision could be one outcome but if there are blockers it might be time to return to Stage 2 or Stage 1.



Daniel Green

Director,
Data Management at EBRD

Ivan is an energetic and experienced programme leader who navigates the complexities and challenges of Agile delivery with confidence and clarity. A genuinely strong, diligent programme leader with tremendous drive and commitment.

A Practical Assurance & Governance Framework for AI Projects

Seven Stage Gate Approach to AI Projects

Stage Gate 4 Model Development – Proceed to Model Evaluation and Test

In Model Development your AI project should transition from the foundational data-centric work of the earlier stages toward creating, testing, and refining a working AI or ML model. At the end of this stage I would help you conduct an AI Project Stage 4 Model Development Go / No Go Assessment:

- Have you identified which algorithms would be most suitable for this iteration?
- Can you use or extend pre-trained models for this iteration?
- What tools and technologies will you use for model development?
- What technology requirements do you need for model training?
- Will you train your model on-premise or in the cloud?

Arriving a formal 'Go' decision could be one outcome but if there are blockers it might be time to return to Stage 3, Stage 2 or Stage 1.

Stage Gate 5 Model Evaluation and Test – Proceed to Operationalisation

This stage ensures that the AI solution is accurate, aligned with your organisational goals, and robust enough to handle changing data or conditions over time.

I would help you conduct an AI Project Stage 5 Model Evaluation and Test Go / No Go Assessment to help you make the final determination if your AI solution is ready for use in the real world.

- Meeting performance thresholds
- Stakeholder confidence and approval
- Determination of rollout strategy

Stage 5, we may arrive at the recommendation to loop back to earlier stages. This iterative mindset helps refine data, adjust modelling decisions, or even pivot to a different AI solution if needed. If there is a 'Go' decision made you can move to Stage 6 Operationalisation.

A Practical Assurance & Governance Framework for AI Projects

Seven Stage Gate Approach to AI Projects

Stage Gate 6 Model Operationalisation

In Stage 6 Model Operationalisation your team will be integrating their validated AI solution into your organisation's systems and workflows, ensuring the AI solution consistently delivers value and can adapt to inevitable changes in data, objectives, or real-world conditions. The process is sometimes referred to as "putting AI into operation or production" and it should also address continuous integration, monitoring, governance, and user adoption needs. Key considerations being:

- Determining Deployment Environments
- Real-Time Monitoring of AI Solutions
- Determining Model Lifecycle Management
- Versioning and Retraining Pipelines
- Relevant Trustworthy AI Concepts have been Embedded (particularly Governance)

In the AI Project Stage 6 Operationalisation Go / No Go Assessment we would address whether your AI project needs to return back to one of the previous five stages because it has faced significant blockers during this stage or whether it is ready to be signed off as having successfully completed the first iteration and it can circle back to Stage 1: Business Understanding, beginning the next iteration of continuous AI improvement.

Conclusion

It cannot be said that the use of AI project Go / No Go stage gates will guarantee the success of your AI or ML project, but if you've read this far you will already know that there are significant benefits to including them in your AI or ML project methodology.

Delivering any iterative or incremental delivery type IT project requires experience, judgement, and flexibility to navigate ever changing project needs with confidence and a smile. We've done it time and again at Snell Consultancy, it's what we get out of bed for every day and weird though it might seem, we relish the challenge.

So, if you're ready to put this guide into action and want expert guidance tailored to your specific AI or ML project, please do schedule a call with us during which we can discuss your AI project in detail and developing an AI project stage gate checklist tailor made for your organisation.

UKISUG Update

UK & Ireland SAP User Group

Get to Know UKISUG – Your Independent SAP Community

The UK & Ireland SAP User Group (UKISUG) is the independent voice for SAP users across the UK and Ireland.

We exist to help SAP customers reduce costs and maximise the value of their SAP investments by connecting them with a community of over 4,000 SAP professionals.

Additionally, we're delivering unparalleled education, resources and advocacy.



UKISUG Update

UK & Ireland SAP User Group

What will we learn from the insights paper?

In this insights paper, we will learn about the strategic benefits a COE can enable, including:

- 1 BUSINESS-IT ALIGNMENT
- 2 GOVERNANCE AND STANDARDISATION
- 3 INNOVATION ENABLEMENT



New Insights Paper: Building a Successful SAP Customer COE

An SAP Customer Centre of Expertise (COE) can provide vital support to organisations looking to modernise their legacy ERP systems or migrate to SAP S/4HANA. However, it can also be difficult to know where to start.

Based on interviews with customers who have successfully built their own SAP Customer COEs, we have launched a new insights paper which shares practical insights to support organisations that are evaluating or planning to set up a COE.

UKISUG Update

UK & Ireland SAP User Group

Full 2026 Events Calendar

View all upcoming events [here](#).

2026 Symposia Highlights

APRIL 22	S/4HANA SYMPOSIUM	LONDON
JUNE 17	PEOPLE MANAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT SYMPOSIUM	MANCHESTER
JULY 15	BTP SYMPOSIUM	LONDON
SEPT 15	CLOUD SYMPOSIUM	BIRMINGHAM
SEPT 29	CLOUD SYMPOSIUM	MANCHESTER

View all Symposia [here](#).

KEY

IN PERSON EVENTS

UKISUG 2026 EVENTS CALENDAR- PARTNER			
JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL
16 WELLBEING SESSION 20 WISAP MENTOR SESSION	11 PAYROLL 25 SUPPLY CHAIN 26 IRISH HR & PAYROLL	16 PUBLIC SECTOR 19 SUCCESSFACTORS 26 DATA SYMPOSIUM (DUBLIN) 31 SECURITY & CONTROL	22 S/4HANA SYMPOSIUM (LONDON) 28 ENTERPRISE ASSET MGT
MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST
7 ENTERPRISE ARCHITECTURE 13 REAL ESTATE 14 FINANCE 21 CONCUR	3 PUBLIC SECTOR 5 SUPPLY CHAIN 17 PEOPLE MANAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT SYMPOSIUM 18 ENTERPRISE ASSET MGT 23 SECURITY & CONTROL FORUM	15 BTP SYMPOSIUM	
16 WELLBEING SESSION WISAP MENTOR SESSION	16 WELLBEING SESSION WISAP MENTOR SESSION	20 WELLBEING SESSION WISAP MENTOR SESSION	17 WELLBEING SESSION WISAP MENTOR SESSION
SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
8 APPLICATION LIFECYCLE MGT 15 CLOUD SYMPOSIUM 16 FINANCE 24 IRELAND 29 AI SYMPOSIUM 30 LEARNING & CHANGE MGT SUPPLY CHAIN	15 IRISH HR & PAYROLL 21 SUCCESSFACTORS 27 PAYROLL SECURITY & CONTROL CLOUD ERP BTM FORUM		CONNECT
23 WELLBEING SESSION WISAP MENTOR SESSION	16 WELLBEING SESSION WISAP MENTOR SESSION	16 WELLBEING SESSION WISAP MENTOR SESSION	WELLBEING SESSION WISAP MENTOR SESSION

UKISUG Update

UK & Ireland SAP User Group

Get in Touch

For more details on UKISUG membership, events or how we can support your organisation, please contact:



Craig Berger
Community Development Executive
craig.berger@sapusers.org



Grosh Singh
Community Development Executive
grosh.singh@sapusers.org

Or visit us at www.sapusers.org

UKISUG Update

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Craig Berger
Community Development Executive
craig.berger@sapusers.org



Grosh Singh
Community Development Executive
grosh.singh@sapusers.org



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placed

Email Vincent Dunlop (vin@bluewaveselect.com) to unlock access to the best SAP people.

Sources

bluewaveSELECT

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SAPInsider

UKISUG (UK & Ireland SAP User Group)

FinTellect

Gartner

Market Research Future

Business Wire

AllInvest

Qdos

CIO.com