Security leaders face today's challenges

Never has it been more important for executive boards to have access to a trusted security leader as they wrestle with challenging global dynamics and risks. The SSR® Personnel & Executive Profiles 2024 annual salary survey explores the context, challenges and priorities for today's security leaders.

The context for security leaders

Multiple crises such as natural disasters, the current geopolitical landscape, cyber and physical attacks are heightening the risk temperature in all organisations. Furthermore, there are challenges of sustainability, shareholder trust, client-centric behaviours, and executive committees seeking greater profitability with increased risks. All of this within an increasing regulatory framework that is becoming more aggressive to corporations.

Executive boards are embracing analytics, using them within their boardroom dashboard settings, integrating AI and allowing security leaders to set agendas in line with the corporate vision. Security leaders must nurture a culture of resilience and adaptability, ensuring that all levels of the organisation are equipped to handle the unpredictability and complexity. This proactive and comprehensive approach not only protects but contributes to long-term sustainability and success.

Impact on salary and role

The progressive security management team of today will have seen an above – average salary increase of up to 25% over two years. This was due initially to the pandemic bounce, where they stepped up to the emergency. Their inbox has continued growing, with more issues than before the financial crash of 2008. From the end of 2023 until today, cost constraint has seen many organisations apply recruitment freezes, instead hiring in flexible contracted specialist skills. With financial certainty returning, employment will increase in the second half of 2024. Security is well placed to continue its expansion through technology interchange.

Priorities for security leaders

The top priorities remain consistent:

- Cyber security concerns are increasing in both business and private lives.

- Attracting talent at all levels is a challenge.

- Communicating effectively across generations with differing values. For example, Gen Z are unsure that the workplace reflects their values, many with managers (most probably Gen X) not sharing their views on areas such as sabbaticals, buying more personal holiday time and not answering company communications in non-work hours.

- Adopting a leadership style of coordinating rather than empowering.

Sharing the message

In this digital world, some security functions have adapted their messaging into a gaming style, with points and status for champions. They develop interactive tabletop exercises with real incidents and write their playbook with security very much part of the crisis team. Investing time in training local leaders who can make informed decisions quickly under pressure, with a deep understanding of cultural and regional nuances, puts the organisation into a ready status, and cuts down decision- making trees with an established rulebook.

Increasing efficiency through AI applications

AI is enabling security professionals to perform tasks at a faster pace, with greater accuracy, streamline processes and provide businesses with valuable insights to drive growth. Algorithms can help tailor security to regions and business units, effectively gaining a competitive edge in the market by staying ahead of industry risks.

There are risks of unconscious bias in algorithms as the systems are only as good as the data they are trained on, and if this data is biased, it will lead to discriminatory outcomes and reinforce existing inequalities. This could be within predictive tools developed internally for a business,

such as for recruitment. The complexity of AI algorithms can make it difficult for businesses to understand how decisions are being made, raising questions around accountability and ethics.

Sustainability and the ESG agenda

Security leaders are grappling with ethical and humanitarian considerations, including issues related to human rights, civilian protection, and the use of force. They are incorporating ethical frameworks and principles into their decision-making processes to ensure that responses to crises are not only effective but also morally justifiable.

Chief Security Officers have Sustainability added to their job titles so the organisation knows where they can go to for a raft of issues: resilience, recovery, business continuity and more. Progressive incumbents have centred around the ESG agenda. There is pushback against the wokery of some ESG stakeholders and subsequently the needle has been dialled down. However, organisations have retained transparency in their operations and continue with better environmental credentials since this is important to employees and investors alike.

Today's security leader

Security leaders can help boards proactively manage and mitigate risks, rather than just react to incidents after they occur, saving the organisation time, money, and reputational damage. They should be well-versed in compliance and regulatory requirements related to data security, privacy, and other security concerns. Boards should be able to rely on this expertise to help the organisation meet its legal obligations.

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UK Salary Survey 2024
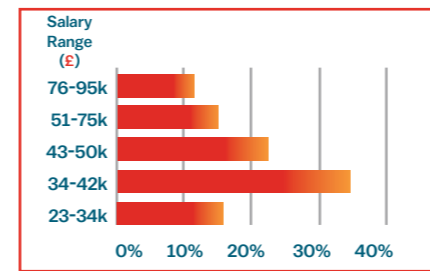
Cyber Analyst / Ethical Hacker

Salary Range (£)
76-95k
51-75k
43-50k
34-42k
23-34k

A role that is developed across a range of sectors as organisations elevate their response to cyber attacks. The rapid controls on WFH users' organisations need to have a robust cyber policy against perennial and growing risk. As a hunter role they will coordinate attacks across a range of holistic actors. Computer sciences degree; you are seeking technicians who have an exploring nature, 'in harmony with machine code' and neurodivergent. Bonus medium 15%.
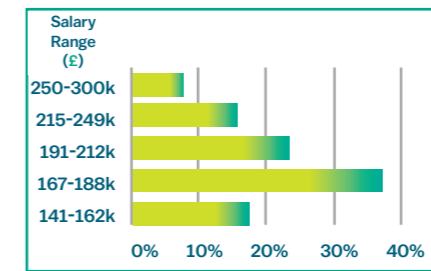
CSO / Global Resilience & Risk Director

Salary Range (£)
250-300k
215-249k
191-212k
167-188k
141-162k

Responsible for policy, executive board briefings. Dotted line or direct responsibility for subsidiary CSO / Head of Security position. Oversight budget responsibility of £30m+. Revenues of £2bn+. Responsibility for pandemic response, cyber & resilience, crisis management. Included in LTIP: executive bonus range to 50%; share options; health care; travel allowance £12K; executive share purchase.
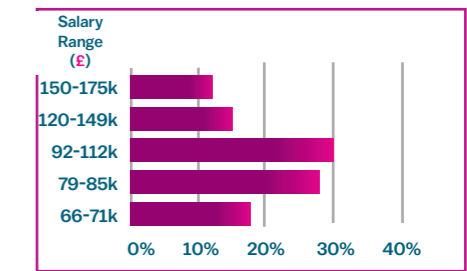
Cyber Resilience Manager / Head of Cyber

Salary Range (£)
150-175k
120-149k
92-112k
79-85k
66-71k

The internal case manager, you will be deciding on which events you can successfully pursue, provide proactive attack strategies, work with cyber agencies to encourage coordinated actions. Trawling newly created domains and URLs, allowing the business leadership to understand the threat actors, national or criminal groups. Experience drawn from a mixture of physical and digital backgrounds. Bonus medium 25%, company benefits.

European Security Head

Salary Range (£)
137-147k
112-132k
97-106k
81-96k
50-76k
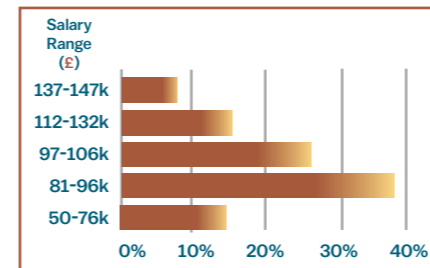
Regional reporting, policy implementation, promulgates corporate policy. Developed crisis response to COVID, increasingly managing cyber preparedness programmes. Responsible for physical and information security. Budget responsibility £5m - £10m. Bonus medium 30%, health plan; Car or allowance up to £9K, share purchase scheme.
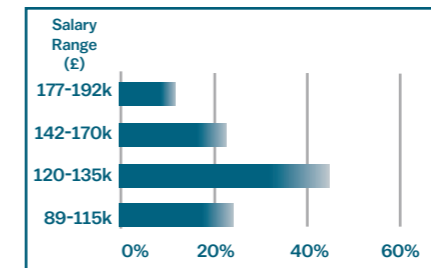
Director, Risk & Resilience / Head of Security

Salary Range (£)
177-192k
142-170k
120-135k
89-115k

Responsible for delivering localised policy, executive board briefings. They are a driver for change and service expansion. Increasingly managing cyber and pandemic response. Budget responsibility of £10m - £30m. Revenues of £1bn+. Included in the LTIP; executive bonus medium 35%; share options; health care; Car or allowance £12K; executive share purchase.

EMEA Security Head

Salary Range (£)
158-171k
126-150k
101-121k
90-100k
70-89k
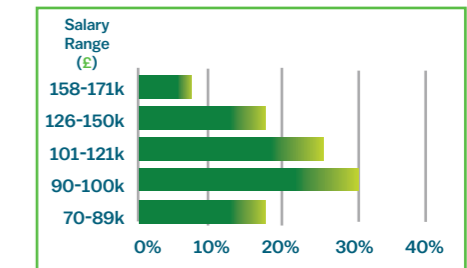
Regional policy development, executive reporting, promulgating corporate policy overview of physical and intellectual protection. Taking responsibility for cyber preparedness, pandemic response, business continuity and crisis management. Medium bonus range 30% share options; travel allowance up to £10K.

National Security Head

Salary Range (£)
102-120k
88-100k
65-83k
50-61k
37-48k
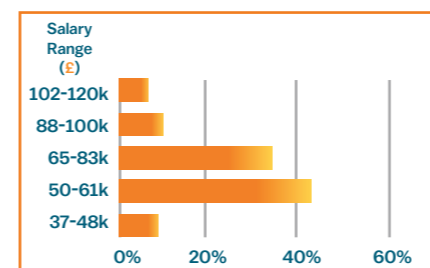
Responsible for all aspects of corporate security and maintaining standards across an estate. Developing an estate programme for internet-connected devices and plant that has been overlooked by IT departments. GDPR has been and remains a major part of this role. Organised pandemic response across all sites. Budget responsibility £2m - £10m. Bonus medium 20%, car £5k; health care.

Cost of One Cappuccino across the UK

City	Price
Dundee	£3.50
Edinburgh	£3.40
Manchester	£3.56
Glasgow	£3.30
Leeds	£3.30
Sheffield	£3.42
Liverpool	£3.18
Bradford	£3.19
Birmingham	£3.23
London	£3.61

Anchoring the UK Salary Survey through comparing the cost of a cappuccino provides more indicators as to the regional variances we find in salaries. In these indices we see that cost has risen in all major cities across the UK, highlighted by a 71p increase in Dundee. The difference between the lowest cost (3.18 in Liverpool) and the highest cost (3.61 in London) is 12.7%, Interestingly, that gap has closed from 25.2% last year, which emphasises rising costs outside the capital.

The Survey

The SSR® Personnel & Executive Profiles 2024 annual salary survey partners with ASIS International. Data is collated from more than 14,000 security professionals from across 40 business sectors, including finance & insurance, manufacturing, extractives, e-commerce, FMCG and logistics. We also populated with data collected during our bespoke salary surveys which covers 1.3 million employees and EURO 1.2 trillion revenues.