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CHIEF OF STAFF

The Chief of Staff Move

An honest starting point for senior UK Executive Assistants weighing the transition, and whether to make it at all.

This is not another American playbook repackaged for a UK audience. It is a frank orientation, written by people who have lived the EA profession from both sides, to help you decide whether this move is right for you, and to show you the path if it is.

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INTRODUCTION

You Already Know Something Needs to Change

The frustration that brings senior EAs to this point is almost always the same.

You are doing Chief of Staff-level work. You know it. Your executive probably knows it too, but nobody has handed you a map for making it official, let alone a frank assessment of what *actually changes* if you do.

If you have picked up this guide, the chances are you have spent years operating at the highest levels of executive support. You anticipate problems before they surface. You hold relationships across the organisation that most senior people struggle to maintain. Somewhere along the way, you started wondering whether your title reflects what you actually do.

Most of the content on this transition is American, and largely irrelevant to a UK market with a different shape, salary landscape and culture. What remains is either surface-level or relentlessly positive in a way that does not serve you. "It's a great career move!" is not a strategy. It is marketing.

This guide is different because eavolve® is different. Emily Partridge spent 15 years as an award-winning Executive Assistant, supporting the CEO office in FTSE 100 organisations, before going on to manage 60 EAs globally. Lily Shippen has spent over a decade recruiting EAs at the highest level, and over the past five years has worked on numerous Chief of Staff briefs, developing a sharp understanding of where these placements succeed and where they fall apart.

What follows is the honest version: the UK landscape, the questions worth sitting with, the strengths you already hold and what the move genuinely asks of you. We believe the EA profession is not a stepping stone. It is a career in its own right. The decision to move into a Chief of Staff role should be made with clear eyes, not career anxiety.



SECTION ONE

Understanding the UK Landscape

The role is still maturing here, and that creates both opportunity and confusion.

Unlike the United States, where the Chief of Staff has been embedded in corporate structures for decades, the UK is only recently seeing widespread adoption outside government and the military. The role is growing fastest in startups, scaleups, PE-backed businesses and large corporates building dedicated “CEO Office” teams.

This matters for two reasons. There is genuine opportunity, because organisations are actively defining these roles and an EA with the right positioning can shape the brief rather than simply fill it. However, there is also significant inconsistency in how the role is understood, scoped and paid. Knowing the landscape protects you from a move that looks like progression on paper but feels like a step sideways in practice.

The four types of UK Chief of Staff role

TYPE	TYPICAL PAY	CHARACTER
Startup & Scaleup	£70k–£100k	Broad remit, high ambiguity, close to the founder. Often the first person in the role, building frameworks from scratch.
PE-Backed or Corporate	£90k–£130k+	More established parameters, heavy stakeholder management, frequently inside a CEO Office structure.
Public Sector & Charity	£60k–£90k	Less commercial pressure, more governance. Often titled Deputy Director or Head of Operations.
UHNW / Private Household	Varies	A different role entirely, with a different skill set. Not the focus of this guide.

A critical caveat for EAs: A senior Executive Assistant supporting a FTSE 100 CEO in London may already be earning at or above the entry point for many Chief of Staff roles. The move is not always a pay rise. Be clear-eyed about this before you begin.



SECTION TWO

Is This the Right Move for You?

When the move makes genuine sense, and when it might not.

Almost no existing guide is willing to tell an EA that this might not be the right move. That is a significant omission, and one that eavolve® is not going to repeat. The Chief of Staff transition is right for some senior EAs and genuinely wrong for others. Both paths are valid. Neither is lesser.

When making the move makes genuine sense

- ✓ You are already doing strategic work without the title or mandate for it, and the gap has become a real source of frustration.
- ✓ Your executive has expressed a need for more capacity at a strategic level, and you are the natural person to fill it.
- ✓ You are energised by ambiguity, long-term thinking and leading through influence rather than administration.
- ✓ You want to build cross-functional knowledge and are prepared to be a generalist with depth, not a specialist.

When it might not be the right move

- ✗ You love the craft of EA excellence: the precision, the immediate impact, the artistry of high-level support. That is not a lesser ambition.
- ✗ You want a clearly defined role with predictable scope. The CoS role is inherently ambiguous and shifts constantly.
- ✗ The financial picture does not add up for your situation. A lateral move, or even a step down, is not always worth the title.
- ✗ You are being pushed into it by someone else's idea of progression, rather than your own desire to do this work.

“The EA profession is not a waiting room. It is a destination for many, and a launchpad for some. Knowing which applies to you is the first strategic decision of this entire process.”

These are exactly the questions our **Chief of Staff Readiness Assessment** is built to answer, giving you a clear, personal read on where you stand before you make a single decision.

SECTION THREE

The Strengths You Already Have

Senior EAs already exercise leadership. They just do not label it that way.

Most guides tell EAs to “develop leadership skills”. That is both patronising and inaccurate. The translation from EA to Chief of Staff is closer than most people realise. Held up to a CoS lens, the work you already do every day reads as core competency:

- € **Political intelligence and executive advisory.** You read the room, manage upwards and understand how decisions actually get made. This is among the rarest CoS skills, and it cannot be taught on a course.

- € **Information architecture and strategic discretion.** You sit at the information centre of the organisation, synthesising across functions without letting anything leak. Discretion is not just an EA virtue. It is a leadership quality.

- € **Organisational stakeholder management.** You get things done through people who do not report to you. Leading without authority is the primary operating mode of every effective Chief of Staff.

- € **Strategic foresight.** The best EAs operate weeks ahead, anticipating problems before they surface. CoS work stretches that habit to quarters and years. You are not learning a new skill; you are extending one.

- € **Trusted advisor to the principal.** You already make fine-grained judgement calls about what to share, with whom and when. The Chief of Staff is nothing if not a trusted advisor.

“The core leap is not about acquiring new skills. It is about shifting from enabling to owning.”



SECTION FOUR

What the Move Actually Asks of You

The honest gaps, and the part nobody else talks about.

Acknowledging a gap is not a weakness. It is a strategic advantage. A handful of areas consistently appear in CoS requirements where EAs benefit from deliberate development:

- € **Financial literacy.** Speaking the language of P&L, budgeting and executive-level financial decisions.

- € **Project management with formal accountability.** Owning delivery timelines and success metrics in your own name, not just enabling others.

- € **Leading without authority at scale.** Moving beyond individual relationships to influence across larger systems and teams.

- € **Data-driven communication.** Using data to support strategic recommendations, not intuition and observation alone.

- € **Commercial awareness.** Understanding market dynamics, competitive positioning, and business strategy in your sector.

- € **Holding difficult conversations.** Giving feedback, challenging decisions and navigating conflict when you are accountable for the outcome.

The part nobody else covers: the identity shift

Skills can be developed. The harder shift is internal. EAs who carry their “service” orientation into a Chief of Staff seat are often seen as deferential, or unable to hold authority. The move asks you to evolve from enabling to co-ownership: to have a position, voice it and disagree constructively when you see a problem your executive does not.

This is the work that rarely happens on its own, and it is where structured support makes the biggest difference. Naming the gap is the first step. Closing it deliberately, with someone in your corner, is what turns readiness into a credible move.



SECTION FIVE

The UK Market Snapshot

Salary benchmarks and what the 2026 landscape looks like.

Salary benchmarks

CONTEXT	SALARY RANGE	SOURCE
UK-wide CoS average	£67k–£79k	Indeed / PayScale
Startup / scaleup average	£101,577	CoS Collective 2024 Survey
Large corporate / senior	£120k–£175k	Market data
London CoS range	£80k–£150k	Lily Shippen Salary Survey 2026

Regional nuances

REGION	TYPICAL COS RANGE
London	£80k–£150k
Manchester / North West	£70k–£120k
Midlands & wider UK regions	£70k–£120k
Remote / hybrid (London-based company)	Often London-aligned

Chief of Staff ranges: Lily Shippen Salary Survey 2026. Temporary CoS rates run £35–£75 per hour in London and £35–£60 per hour elsewhere.

Where the roles are growing

UK organisations are most actively creating Chief of Staff roles in tech and SaaS scaleups (particularly Series B to D), fintech, private equity portfolio companies, professional services firms restructuring their leadership teams and the charity sector, where the role increasingly replaces “Deputy Director” as the model for strategic executive support.

Headcount in the role continues to grow, and the market is more receptive than it has ever been. However, variation in how the role is scoped and paid remains significant. The organisations that understand the role properly will pay for it properly. The ones that do not will offer you an EA role with a better title and expect gratitude. Knowing the difference is the whole game.



WHERE TO NEXT

This Is Where Your Transition Begins

You have the map. The next step depends on where you are.

This guide is the honest orientation. When you are ready to move from thinking about the transition to actually making it, eavolve® supports you at every stage of the journey:

- 1 Find out exactly where you stand.** Start with the Chief of Staff Readiness Assessment for a clear, personal read on your strengths and gaps, then talk it through in a live report walkthrough with us.
- 2 Turn insight into a plan.** An Action Plan Mapping session translates your assessment into concrete, prioritised next steps.
- 3 Get application-ready.** A CV and LinkedIn audit reframes your experience in the language CoS hiring managers are looking for.
- 4 Build the capability.** Develop the skills and the identity shift through one-to-one Chief of Staff coaching, or alongside a small group in our structured live Chief of Staff course.

Ready to begin? Book a call with Emily to talk through where you are, or sign up to the eavolve® newsletter to stay close to the community as the UK Chief of Staff space grows.

[Book a call →](#)

[Get the newsletter →](#)

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