Show me the money

First of all let’s cover off that little thing called money. Not surprisingly, IT salaries tend to be higher in London. Of the 5,000 developer jobs tracked on itjobswatch.co.uk, the London average is £55,000 whilst for the whole of England it’s £45,000, dropping to £39,500 in Scotland. However according to the London Mayor’s Office, the cost of living in London is 10 per cent higher than in Edinburgh, so all those expensive extras you will need to fork out for in London may or may not be compensated by cheaper living costs elsewhere.

However you could find yourself with a financial shortfall. So if pay is unlikely to be the key factor here, what is motivating people to look outside of the M25?

Why, sir, you find no man, at all intellectual, who is willing to leave London. No, sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford.
— Samuel Johnson
Where else?
London definitely doesn’t have the monopoly on IT jobs. According to the Telegraph, demand for techies is growing at a healthy 9 per cent in the first quarter of this year. More than 7 in 10 of these jobs they say, are in London, but there are key cities in the UK where demand is soaring.

The ‘Tech Cities’ Job Watch Report identities in addition to London - nine other cities: Birmingham, Bristol, Brighton, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester, Newcastle Upon Tyne and Sheffield. In some skill areas such as big data, the same report identifies higher salaries in Glasgow, and observes that you can earn more by being a cyber security expert in Edinburgh than you can in London - this is particularly true in the contract market. One can only assume that our economic friend supply and demand is working it’s magic here.

Clustering
One of the other geographical phenomena we tend to see in the tech sector is clustering and communities of skills and organisations. The Silicon Valley bubble works so well not just because everyone knows each other (and their respective failures) but because the tech industry has evolved as an ecosystem of investors, entrepreneurs and techies.

Did I mention the sunshine? Talking of sunshine, we’re now starting to see more of this tech community phenomenon (without the sunshine) in parts of London such as Shoreditch and the cutely named Silicon Roundabout.

Newcastle is home to the annual Thinking Digital conference and with a growing and intimate technology community, it offers a great place for technology businesses to flourish. According to TechBritain, Manchester is home to the second largest technology community in the UK and was of course home to the only recently posthumously pardoned and celebrated British father of the computer, Alan Turing.

Birmingham and Bristol are other contenders all offering, like Newcastle and Manchester, cheaper start up costs and of course, with all that working hard, the opportunity to play hard too.

Over the last 15 years in my previous life as a consultant, I’ve also had the privilege of visiting or working with many IT organisations around the UK and understanding a little bit about the cultures of IT departments within small, medium and larger enterprises. The reason why these organisations are outside London really varies.

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For some it may be due to where their wider business has been historically located, such as Clarks in Somerset. For others, it’s because they offer lower costs such as in the case of Sainsbury’s recent move to Coventry. Yet, outside of the capital the one distinguishing theme is a sense of a more permanent community.

Generalising somewhat, attrition rates tend to be lower and employees may spend their whole careers within one organisation. This tends to mean everybody knows each other and can rely on a more intimate way of working and perhaps a better work-life balance. The caution I would give is that if you do want to spend a long career in one place, then the challenge becomes ensuring you keep yourself current. BCS is clearly a great place to start - but key to remaining hot property is to understand what’s going on in the wider industry and then look for opportunities to bring your new found skills into your workplace. You may not be able to do this straightaway but you can look to organise events such as hackathons which allow you to practice what might begin as a hobby and then make things a little more permanent.

Don’t underestimate your ability to reinvent yourself and be the disruptor - rather than being disrupted yourself! So the numbers suggest that you are more likely to find a technology job within London, but that London doesn’t have an exclusive grip on opportunities. The shires provide a rich stream of opportunities with all the lifestyle trimmings that come with being out of the rat race, and depending on your skill set and demand in certain locations, you may not even have to take a salary cut.

By being in one of the growing Tech Cities you’ll give yourself the opportunity of variety should you chose to move on and if you do decide to venture into somewhere more remote for a longer period - then the world, even if it’s via your computer, is your oyster!