

Q1 MARKET UPDATE

Accountancy & Finance

Q1 Overview

Q1 has delivered a steady start across the Accountancy and Finance market, with vacancy volumes slightly up on Q4 and marginally stronger than this time last year. Hiring remains measured, with businesses committing to roles where there is a clear operational need rather than broad expansion, signalling cautious optimism rather than a full rebound. Notably, this comes despite recent unemployment rate figures hitting 5.2%, highlighting cooling conditions in the wider labour market, reinforcing the relative resilience of finance hiring.

Compared to 2025, when confidence was more fragile and many businesses were focused on cost control, there is a noticeable improvement in sentiment. Investment, particularly within private equity backed and acquisitive businesses, is beginning to translate into hiring activity, although most companies are still approaching growth carefully.

Replacement hiring continues to dominate, reflecting ongoing attrition and internal progression, but there is a gradual increase in growth and strategic roles, especially within businesses undergoing transformation or scaling initiatives. Regionally, activity remains strongest in established commercial hubs where investment and deal activity are more consistent.

Demand is being driven by the need for commercially minded finance professionals, alongside leaders who can improve efficiency and provide greater visibility through data and systems.

Demand Trends

Finance Managers, Financial Controllers, and senior commercial finance professionals are seeing the strongest demand. This continues the trend seen throughout 2025, where businesses prioritised individuals who could combine operational control with strategic insight.

Processes are moving fastest for professionals with crossover skill sets, particularly those who bring financial reporting expertise alongside systems implementation or transformation experience. Real time data capability and commercial acumen remain key differentiators.

Multiple offer situations are emerging at the top end of the market and within niche areas, particularly among high performing commercial finance talent and those with M&A or private equity exposure.

While backfill roles still account for the majority of hiring, there is a gradual increase in newly created positions tied to reporting transformation, performance improvement, and growth initiatives.

Compensation

Compensation trends in Q1 reflect a market that is broadly stable compared to last year. Salaries are holding at mid-levels, while niche skill sets, particularly within commercial finance, systems, and leadership, continue to command premiums.

At senior levels, there is increased scrutiny around value alignment, with employers expecting clear impact to justify higher packages. Bonuses are becoming more structured and closely linked to performance outcomes, reflecting a more disciplined approach than the volatility seen in previous years.

Counteroffers are rising again, particularly for high performers and individuals in critical roles. However, as was evident throughout 2025, counteroffers are proving less effective as many prioritise long term progression, culture, and flexibility over short-term financial incentives.

Regional salary differentials remain consistent, with London and the Southeast maintaining a premium relative to other markets.

Candidate Behaviour

Overall, sentiment remains measured. Finance professionals, who are typically risk aware, are open to opportunities but undertaking thorough due diligence before making decisions.

Flexibility and career progression continue to be the primary motivators, consistent with trends seen last year. Stability, leadership quality, and clarity of strategy are also increasingly important, particularly at senior levels.

Hybrid expectations remain influential. Reduced flexibility or lack of clarity around working patterns is a frequent reason for offer rejection, reflecting the ongoing tension between employer policies and talent expectations.

Job search activity is largely passive, with many open to conversations rather than actively seeking change. Movement is most visible at the mid-career level, where progression bottlenecks and increased workloads, particularly following leaner operating models introduced in 2025, are prompting individuals to explore new opportunities.

Counteroffers remain common but are increasingly approached with caution.

Hiring Process Trends

Typical time to offer is around three to four weeks, broadly consistent with hiring timelines seen last year. Where processes are clearly structured and decisions are made promptly, acceptance rates remain strong.

Delays most often occur during internal approvals or when hiring priorities shift. Over extended interview processes continue to risk drop off, particularly in competitive areas where top talent is progressing quickly elsewhere.

Dropouts are commonly linked to counteroffers, concerns around organisational stability, or late changes to compensation or hybrid arrangements. Employers achieving the best outcomes are those with clear role definition, streamlined processes, and consistent communication.

Q2 Outlook

Looking ahead, competition for commercially strong finance professionals is expected to intensify as businesses move from planning into delivery phases. Skill shortages are likely to be most pronounced in FP&A, business partnering, systems finance, and roles with M&A exposure.

Private equity backed businesses and businesses investing in reporting and performance capability are well positioned for increased hiring activity.

The broader shift towards data driven decision making, which gained momentum in 2025, is expected to continue shaping demand.

Budget cycles may introduce pockets of caution, but delaying hiring risks losing top talent to more decisive competitors. Leaders should focus on maintaining clarity around role scope, compensation, and flexibility while taking a proactive approach to securing critical skills ahead of demand.

KEY TRENDS



Slight increase in vacancy volumes



Strong demand for commercial finance leaders



Crossover skill sets command premium interest



Compensation stable but competitive for niche skills



Professionals prioritise progression and flexibility

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