

RESEARCH · SENIOR FINANCE CVS

The Finance CV That Gets Shortlisted

What reading 2,008 finance CVs taught us about the first look a CV gets, and how to make sure yours is judged on the career you have had rather than how it is laid out.

2,008

Finance CVs read and coded, May to October 2026

616

At Financial Controller level or above

45%

Of those had been in their current role under two years

2 VS 5

Employers in five years; strongest CVs against those screened out

What this is built on

Every application to a role we advertised between 24 May and 1 October 2026: 2,008 CVs, each read and coded the same way. The work history is pulled out role by role with its dates, level and employer, and the same written rules are applied to every CV, so the results are consistent rather than one reader's mood on a Tuesday. Nothing here identifies anyone.

The figures that follow are for the 616 people whose CVs showed they had held Financial Controller level or above. They are what the first read of a senior finance CV turns on.

The first read looks for four things

- Before anyone weighs your sector, your systems or your achievements, a CV is read for four facts. If they are hard to find, the rest is not reached.
- **The level you have genuinely held.** Not your highest title, but the most senior level you held for two years or more. A brief senior title does not count for much on its own.
 - **How long you stay.** Time in your current role and the number of employers in the last five years.
 - **Your qualification.** Whether you are chartered, with which body, and when you qualified.
 - **That your current role is a finance role.** Six per cent of senior applicants were currently in something else, usually operations or general management, and their CVs rarely explained why they were coming back.

How the 616 came out

OUTCOME ON THE FIRST READ	CVS	SHARE
Strongest: qualified, level held, three years or more in current role, clear progression	142	23%
Strong, but current role under three years	181	29%
Strong, but progression has been flat	23	4%
No chartered qualification found on the CV	121	20%
Five or more employers in five years	103	17%
Current role not in finance, or other	46	7%

Tenure is the single biggest divider

The strongest senior CVs showed a median of two employers in the last five years and 50 months in the current role. The CVs screened out showed five employers and 13 months. No other measure separated the groups so cleanly.

EMPLOYERS IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS	SENIOR CVS	SHARE
One	116	19%
Two	164	27%
Three	131	21%
Four	91	15%
Five or more	113	18%

Many of those short stints have an ordinary explanation: an interim contract, a redundancy after an acquisition, a fixed term maternity cover, a business that failed. The problem is that most CVs did not say so, and a short stint with no explanation is read as the worst version of itself. Hiring managers for permanent senior roles want someone who will stay, and the most recent two years carry the most weight. A long, stable career a decade ago does not cancel out a run of short roles now.

Make the short stints legible

- **Label interim and contract work as interim or contract**, in the role heading, not the bullet points. Group a run of interim assignments under one heading if it was one period of your career.
- **Give the reason for any role under eighteen months in one line.** "Role made redundant following sale to a trade buyer" is enough. It is not an admission; it is the fact the reader is otherwise going to guess at.
- **Use month and year for every date.** Year only dates make a 13 month role look like it might be 2 months or 23, and readers assume the worse.
- **Do not leave a gap unexplained.** Career breaks, study and caring are normal. A blank is what gets questioned.

Title is read against time and scope

Finance Director in a 12 person business and Finance Director in a 400 person group are different jobs, and the reader knows it. What counts is the level you held for at least two years, and the scope around it. Give the reporting line, the team you ran, and the size of the business in revenue and headcount next to every senior title. That turns a title that might be discounted into one that is believed.

Qualification: say it plainly, near the top

One in five senior CVs had no chartered qualification we could find. Some of those people were qualified and had buried it on page three. Put the body and the year you qualified in the first few lines, for example ACA (ICAEW), 2014. If you are part qualified or studying, say which papers remain and when you expect to finish.

Describe the business, not just your role in it

Once a CV passes the first read, the question becomes whether you have done this job in a business like theirs. That is a question about the business model, not the sector label. A subscription software company and a subscription meal kit company have more in common for a Finance Director than two companies that are both "technology".

So under each employer, one line on what the business does and how it makes money, its revenue and headcount, and who owns it: family owned, PE backed, venture funded, listed. Most CVs we read gave the employer's name and assumed the reader knew it. Usually they do not.

Then the achievements, with numbers

- **Lead with what changed because you were there.** Month end cut from twelve days to five. Refinanced a £40m facility. Built the FP&A function from nothing to four people.
- **Name the events a buyer will care about.** A sale process, a PE investment, an audit transition, an ERP implementation, a turnaround. These are what get a CV forwarded.
- **Cut the duties.** "Responsible for the month end" tells the reader nothing they could not infer from the title.
- **Two pages, three at most for a CFO.** Detail on roles more than ten years old can be a single line each.

A checklist before you send it

CHECK	WHY IT MATTERS ON THE FIRST READ
Every date is month and year	Tenure is the biggest single divider, and it is read from your dates
Interim and contract roles are labelled	Otherwise they are counted as short permanent roles
Any role under 18 months has a one line reason	An unexplained short stint is read at its worst
Qualification, body and year in the first few lines	One in five senior CVs showed none we could find
Each employer has a one line description	Fit is judged on business model, size and ownership
Scope next to every senior title	Titles are discounted without team, reporting line and size

Source: Harper May, 2,008 applications to advertised finance roles, 24 May to 1 October 2026, coded to a fixed rule set. Senior figures cover the 616 CVs at Financial Controller level or above.

When the CV is ready

SEND IT TO US

We read every senior finance CV ourselves. If yours fits a role we are working on, we will call you. If something is holding it back, we will say so.

KNOW YOUR NUMBER FIRST

Before you talk to anyone about salary, check where you sit for free at financepayindex.com.

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