

RESEARCH · FINANCE CAREERS

Interim and Your Career: Does It Help or Hurt?

What 1,722 finance careers show about taking an interim or contract role: how common it is, what people moved to next, and where it really costs you.



What this is built on

The work histories in 1,722 finance CVs sent to us between May and October 2026, read role by role with dates, levels and employers. A role counts as interim when its title says interim, contract, temporary, fixed term or maternity cover. A run of interim roles back to back is treated as one interim spell.

Two cautions. These are CVs from people applying for jobs, so they show careers at a moment of moving rather than a random sample of finance people. And a CV is written by its owner: interim work that was left off, or not labelled, cannot be counted.

It is common, and it is usually short

Almost a quarter of all the careers include an interim or contract role, rising to **more than a third** of those who reached Financial Controller or above. At senior level, interim is a normal part of a finance career rather than a sign that something went wrong.

INTERIM SPELLS (566 IN TOTAL)	SHARE
A single interim role	66%
Two roles back to back	18%
Three or more roles back to back	16%

The median spell lasted **12 months**, with the middle half between 5 months and just under 2 years. Most people do one assignment and go back to permanent work. A smaller group stay in interim for years, moving from one assignment to the next, and that group is where the costs show up.

Most people come back at the same level or higher

The fear is that interim work takes you off the ladder. For the people in this data, it mostly did not. Comparing the first permanent role after an interim spell with the highest permanent level held before it:

FIRST PERMANENT ROLE AFTER INTERIM	ALL SPELLS	AFTER A SINGLE INTERIM ROLE
At a higher level than before	31%	33%
At the same level	52%	48%
At a lower level	18%	19%
Cases where both levels are clear	91	67

Only cases where both roles have a clearly identifiable level are counted. Spells of three or more roles are too few in this comparison (11) to report separately.

And for some people interim is the way up. In 22% of interim spells, the interim role was at a higher level than any permanent role the person had held before: a Financial Controller covering as Finance Director, or a Finance Manager stepping in as Controller. Interim can be the quickest way to show you can do the next job.

But it rarely turns permanent

Only 1 in 22 interim spells that were followed by another role led to a permanent job with the same employer. People often take an interim role hoping it will convert. In this data, that is the exception. If you take an interim role, take it for what it is, and keep looking for the permanent one.

Where it does cost you: the first read of your CV

SENIOR CVS (FINANCIAL CONTROLLER AND ABOVE)	CVS	IN OUR STRONGEST GROUP	FIVE OR MORE EMPLOYERS IN FIVE YEARS
Two or more interim roles in the last two years	30	0%	60%
Everyone else	558	25%	18%

When a permanent role is being filled, a run of recent interim assignments is read as a risk that you will not stay. Each assignment also counts as an employer, so three or four short contracts quickly add up to the five employers in five years that most often screens a senior CV out. None of the 30 senior CVs with a recent run of interim work made our strongest group, against a quarter of everyone else.

The honest answer

One interim assignment between permanent roles does not hurt a finance career. Most people come back at the same level or higher, and some use interim to step up. What hurts is a long run of assignments followed by an attempt to go back to permanent work, because by then the CV reads as someone who moves on every six months, whatever the reasons were.

“ One interim role reads as a career decision. Four in a row reads as a pattern, and a permanent employer will ask whether you will stay.

HARPER MAY

How to take one without it costing you

- **Decide what it is for.** Income between permanent roles, a step up you cannot get permanently yet, or a new sector. Each is a good reason; drifting into the next assignment because it was offered is not.
- **Set an end point.** If your aim is a permanent role, plan to be back looking within a year. Interim spells in this data lasted a median of 12 months.
- **Label it and group it on your CV.** Put interim or contract in the role heading. A run of assignments goes under one heading, "Interim finance roles, 2023 to 2025", with each one underneath. That shows one period of your career rather than four employers.
- **Say what you were brought in to do, and whether you did it.** Interim roles have a reason: a resignation, a system change, a sale. One line on the brief and the result turns a short stint into evidence.
- **Ask about permanency directly, but do not count on it.** If the business might want to keep you, say you would be interested at the start. Just 1 in 22 converted in this data.
- **Use it to step up.** If an interim role offers a level above your last permanent one, it is worth having on your CV, and one in five interim spells did exactly that.

Source: Harper May, 1,722 finance work histories from CVs received May to October 2026. Interim identified from role titles. Levels compared only where both are clearly identifiable. The advice is ours.

If you are deciding between interim and permanent

TALK IT THROUGH

Send us your CV and tell us what you are weighing. We will tell you honestly how a permanent employer would read the move.

KNOW THE PERMANENT NUMBER

Before you compare a day rate with a salary, check what your level pays for free at financepayindex.com.

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