

RESEARCH · UK FINANCE PAY

Negotiating a Finance Offer

What a senior finance package is really worth once you look past the headline, from 426 Finance Pay Index responses, and how to use that when the offer arrives.

3%

Median annual pay rise once you are in the job

88%

Of a senior bonus actually paid, at the median

44%

Of senior bonuses paid in full

50% vs 5%

FDs and CFOs with £250k+ equity: PE backed against privately owned

What this is built on

The Finance Pay Index: 426 permanent salaries reported by UK finance professionals up to 14 October 2026, counted once per person, with what they were offered as bonus, what was actually paid, their equity, pension and benefits. The senior figures cover the 270 Financial Controllers and above. Groups with fewer than eight responses are left out rather than estimated.

The offer is the pay rise

Once you are in a role, pay moves slowly. The median last rise across 253 respondents was 3%. One in five (19%) had nothing, and six in ten (61%) had less than 4%. Only one in eight (13%) had 10% or more, and that did not change with length of service.

So the base you agree at offer is the base you will be living with, plus a few per cent a year, until you are promoted or move again. Leaving £5k on the table at offer is not £5k. Across four years at typical rises it is over £20k, before the bonus and pension that are calculated as a percentage of it.

“The offer stage is the one point in a job where your pay is genuinely open. Every review after it starts from the number you agree now.

HARPER MAY

Base first, then everything else

Settle the base before discussing anything that sits on top of it, because bonus, pension and often car allowance are percentages of it. An employer offering a larger bonus in place of a higher base is offering something that, as the next page shows, pays out in full less than half the time.

A bonus on paper is not a bonus paid

We asked for both the bonus potential and what was actually paid last year. For people with a bonus scheme, by level:

LEVEL	HAVE A BONUS	MEDIAN POTENTIAL	MEDIAN SHARE PAID	PAID IN FULL	PAID NOTHING
CFO	87%	25%	80%	39%	25%
Finance Director	91%	20%	100%	53%	11%
Head of Finance or FP&A	83%	20%	85%	42%	0%
Financial Controller	72%	15%	80%	38%	10%
Finance Manager, FP&A Manager or Business Partner	78%	10%	100%	61%	7%

Finance Pay Index, data to 14 October 2026, 296 responses. Payout figures rest on 51 CFOs, 55 Finance Directors, 24 Heads of Finance or FP&A, 21 Financial Controllers and 28 Finance Managers and Business Partners who reported both numbers.

The largest bonuses are the least certain. A quarter (25%) of CFOs with a bonus received nothing last year. Across all senior roles, the median payout was 88% of potential, fewer than half were paid in full, and 23% received under half.

What to ask about a bonus

- What it actually paid in each of the last three years, as a percentage of potential. A business that will not tell you is telling you.
- What it is measured on, and how much is personal objectives against company results you do not control.
- Whether it is contractual or discretionary, and whether you must still be employed on the payment date.
- What happens in year one. Joining mid year usually means a pro rata bonus at best. Ask for it to be guaranteed at target for the first year if you are giving one up to join.

Equity depends almost entirely on who owns the business

FDS AND CFOS, BY OWNERSHIP	RESPONSES	NO EQUITY	EQUITY WORTH £250K OR MORE
Private equity backed	42	31%	50%
Listed (PLC)	19	53%	16%
Privately owned	65	72%	5%

Finance Pay Index, data to 14 October 2026, 126 responses. Finance Directors (including Group and Commercial) and CFOs who reported their equity.

In a PE backed business, equity is normal for an FD or CFO: 69% have some, and half (50%) hold a stake worth £250k or more. In a privately owned one, 28% have any equity and 5% have that much. If you are moving from one to the other, compare the whole package over the likely holding period, not the base alone.

What is normal for the rest of it

For Financial Controllers and above, so you can tell a standard offer from a light one.

ITEM	TYPICAL	RANGE OR DETAIL
Employer pension contribution	5%	Middle half 3% to 7% (228 responses)
Annual leave	25 days	Middle half 25 to 28 days (251 responses)
Days a week in the office	3	Middle half 2 to 4 (247 responses)
Private healthcare	77%	Share who have it (260 responses)
Car allowance	33%	Share who have one; median £7k where paid (153 responses)
Long term incentive plan	49% / 23%	PE backed against privately owned (65 and 104 responses)

Finance Pay Index, data to 14 October 2026, 270 responses. Financial Controller and above.

Running the conversation

- **Know your number before the first interview.** Check where your level sits for a business of that size and ownership, so the figure you give is anchored to the market rather than to your current salary.
- **Talk about the job, not your current pay.** If you are underpaid now, the offer is the time to correct it. You are being hired for the role in front of you.
- **Ask for what you are giving up.** An unpaid bonus, unvested equity or a long notice period are real costs of moving. A buy out or a guaranteed first year bonus is a normal request at senior level.
- **Agree the start date honestly.** Three months' notice is standard for senior finance. Offering to leave early rarely impresses an employer who will one day rely on your notice too.
- **Decide on a counter offer before you resign.** If more money would make you stay, have that conversation before you start looking. In our experience the reasons you started looking are rarely the ones a counter offer fixes.
- **Get it in writing before you resign.** Base, bonus terms, equity, notice and start date, in a signed contract or a written offer you have accepted.

Source: Finance Pay Index, data to 14 October 2026, 426 responses; senior figures cover Financial Controller and above. Groups under 8 responses withheld. The advice on running the conversation is ours, from the offers we negotiate.

If an offer is on the table

CHECK IT AGAINST THE MARKET

financepayindex.com shows where a salary sits for your level, sector and size of business, free and anonymous.

ASK US

If you want a second opinion on an offer, ours or anyone else's, get in touch. We would rather you took the right job than the one we put you forward for.

SENIOR FINANCE ONLY

We place CFOs, Finance Directors, Heads of Finance and Financial Controllers, and nothing else, mostly in London.