

Q3 2025 Finance Talent Report

Market Intelligence for Decision-Makers

Ceres Financial Talent – August 2025

Report Highlights

Part 1: Introduction

Part 2: Market Conditions

Part 3: Tech Trends

Part 4: Interim Talent

Part 5: Audit & Accountancy

Part 6: Leadership Responses

Part 7: Candidate Priorities

Part 8: Final Thoughts



“Lean, tech-ready teams are shaping finance’s future, while strategic leaders rethink how and when they hire.”

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Introduction

As we move through Q3, I wanted to share some reflections on where Scotland’s finance hiring market stands, and what we believe is coming next. This is a straight, no-frills take based on daily conversations with CFOs, finance directors, HR leaders, and senior professionals across the market.

Put simply, permanent hiring hasn’t picked up the way many had hoped. Back in Q1, there was cautious optimism and a sense we’d see gradual improvement. Three quarters in, it’s been a different story. Some roles have opened up, yes, but many more have stalled mid-process or been withdrawn entirely. It’s not always about budget; often it comes down to timing, headcount planning, or internal restructuring.

My team and I are in regular dialogue with decision-makers across the market. What follows is a closer look at what’s really happening behind the scenes, and how finance leaders are responding to a changing and changing environment in many sectors.

Market Insights

A Market That's Holding Its Breath



Finance teams are stretched. But rather than rush to hire, many organisations are choosing to stretch further without adding headcount, absorbing extra workload internally, leaning on their strongest people, and watching headcount closely. There's still ambition, but there's a lot of hesitation.

- **Roles are being filled internally** – or simply left open. In many cases, the business case for external hires gets delayed or deprioritised, especially where responsibilities can be reshuffled or absorbed through process change.
- **Workloads are rising, particularly across FP&A, audit, and reporting** – but so is automation. In our conversations with clients, we're hearing about innovation and investment in new processes and technology as ways to relieve pressure without defaulting to a new hire. Tools like Excel automation, AI-enabled reporting, and smarter workflow systems are enabling finance teams to deliver more with the same resource.
- **Hiring decisions are slower, more cautious, and more risk-averse than anything I've seen since 2008.** Many organisations start the process but pause before making a final decision, not because of a lack of talent, but due to hesitancy around spend, timing, or internal alignment.

That's not to say demand has disappeared. The work still needs to be done and increasingly at a higher level of scrutiny and complexity. But the lens through which hiring is being viewed has shifted. Leaders are weighing each hire carefully, aligning it with broader team capacity, strategic priorities, and the shifting demands of finance itself.

This is where we're spending most of our time, helping leaders get clarity on whether a hire is the right move, and if so, how to get it right. In this market, the right decision isn't always a full-time hire. Sometimes, it's a restructure, a contract specialist, or a fractional appointment that delivers real impact.

Market Insights

Tech is Reshaping Finance – One Role at a Time



This has been one of the most consistent trends throughout 2025. Automation, AI, and process efficiency are no longer “on the roadmap” for finance functions – they’re happening now, and they’re reshaping how teams are structured and how roles are defined. This marks a clear shift from 2024, when adoption was still relatively low.

A number of recent surveys show that over 80% of finance professionals say their remit has expanded, often without any increase in team size or structural support. This isn’t limited to leadership, as qualified accountants, finance analysts, and even transactional staff are being asked to take on more cross-functional work, often involving data, reporting, or technology enablement.

We’re hearing from clients who have reduced costs not by cutting quality, but by investing in smarter systems and processes. In some cases, that’s meant automating core reporting tasks; in others, it’s been about streamlining billing, reconciliations, or workflow management. The common outcome is leaner teams, faster turnaround times, and a growing demand for finance professionals who can work confidently with the tools driving these efficiencies.

What’s clear is that **data fluency, automation awareness, and digital capability are no longer ‘nice to have’**. For qualified accountants, a solid grasp of tools like Power BI, Excel automation, and cloud-based platforms is becoming increasingly expected. And this shift is influencing hiring decisions too. We’re seeing stronger demand for candidates who bring more than technical finance skills, those who can interpret data, work fluidly with systems, and collaborate across the business are standing out.

For finance leaders, we believe it’s now about hiring for adaptability, digital awareness, and the ability to grow with the role. Having someone in the team who champions technology – a tech evangelist, or simply someone with a genuine interest in systems and tools could be critical in shaping how your finance function evolves over the next few years.

Market Insights

Interim Talent – No Longer a Stopgap



Interim hiring has been the most active and consistent area of movement in 2025. While permanent recruitment has stalled in places, the need for specialist support hasn't gone away, it's just being approached differently.

An increasing number of finance leaders we've worked with this year have brought in interim or contract professionals to plug skills gaps, manage transformation projects, or create breathing room for overstretched teams.

Both our experience and market data show rates are up around 10% year-on-year, particularly for those with systems, project delivery, or transformation experience. There's strong demand for candidates who can hit the ground running, especially those with a track record of stabilising quickly and building structure in complex environments.

We're also seeing a marked **rise in fractional CFO and FD appointments**, especially in PE-backed or scaling businesses. These roles offer senior leadership without the full cost of a permanent hire, bringing board-level expertise and strategic oversight when it's needed most.

Increasingly, interim hiring is being used as a bridge to permanent decisions. Whether it's a "try before you buy" approach or a way of maintaining momentum while sign-off is delayed, it's proving to be a smart, lower-risk path to securing the right fit.

In this environment, interim is no longer a stopgap, it's a strategic tool. For finance leaders needing capability without delay, it's often the fastest and most flexible route to results – and there are some highly skilled and impactful professionals available in the Scottish market at the moment.

Market Insights

Audit & Accountancy – Pressure from the Top Down



The traditional rhythm of hiring in the accountancy profession has shifted this year, and for many organisations it's been a noticeable adjustment. What was once a consistent, high-traction part of the market is now facing a period of realignment.

Big Four and Top 10 firms have clearly tightened their approach. We're now seeing experienced auditors between roles, something that would've been rare even 18 months ago. At the same time, graduate intake is down significantly, with some firms reporting drops of up to 30% compared to 2023.

Hiring freezes at senior levels, alongside increased offshoring and heavier use of automation, are contributing to a more cautious outlook in larger firms. Roles that previously came with well-defined progression pathways are now being restructured, paused, or broadened in scope.

That said, activity hasn't ground to a halt. Independent and mid-tier practices are still actively hiring, but they're being far more selective. Niche technical specialisms are less in demand, particularly in mid-tier firms where more generalist teams are the norm. Instead, there's growing appetite for professionals who can flex across compliance, advisory, and client-facing work.

We're still placing high-quality professionals into practice, but the tone of those conversations has shifted. For firms, it's about staying agile. For candidates, it's about being open-minded and ready to wear multiple hats. **Larger independent and mid-tier firms remain confident, and many are looking to capitalise on the movement of both talent and clients away from the larger players.**

Market Insights

What We're Seeing from Proactive Finance Leaders



There's no rulebook for this market, and I personally see an ongoing period of transition over the next few years. It's not like anything I've witnessed in 18+ years recruiting in this space. But the finance leaders we see getting ahead at the moment tend to share a few key habits.

First, they're open to new models. Whether that's interim, fractional, part-time, or outsourced, they're looking beyond traditional permanent hires and building teams that flex with the business. This gives them more control over cost and capability, without locking themselves into rigid structures.

They also act decisively. Not impulsively, but with confidence. In a cautious market, the temptation is to wait for the "perfect" candidate or the "perfect" time. But often, that wait ends in missed opportunities. **The best leaders are making smart, timely decisions based on what their business needs now, and what it's likely to need six to twelve months from now.**

They stay close to their network. Recruitment isn't reactive for them; it's a constant dialogue with their teams, trusted advisors, and recruiters who understand their space. When the right person appears, they act swiftly.

And crucially, they're building for where their business is going, not just where it's been. That means looking at team structure, capability, and headroom. Not just hiring to fill a gap, but thinking about the longer-term value a new hire can bring.

If you're hiring, or even just planning ahead, it's worth stepping back from the headcount conversation. Think about capacity. Think about adaptability. If the market continues to evolve rapidly, what kind of team will thrive?



“Ambitious candidates are upskilling fast – smart leaders are using this moment to attract talent others are too slow to move on.”

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Shifting Career Priorities for Finance Professionals

As we move through 2025, we're seeing subtle but important shifts in candidate behaviour, both among experienced professionals and those earlier in their careers. It's no longer the candidate-driven market it once was. While good talent still moves quickly, we're noticing more realism, more flexibility, and a sharper awareness of what the market is actually offering.

Hybrid working remains a common expectation, but there's growing acceptance that office presence is increasing, particularly in roles with leadership or commercial scope. Flexibility still matters, but candidates who approach it collaboratively tend to fare better.

Another clear trend is skills awareness. With automation and AI continuing to reshape finance teams, many early-career professionals are doubling down on upskilling, particularly around systems, data, and digital tools. It's less about chasing the next role, and more about building skills that will future-proof their careers.

And with some competitors stalling or delaying hiring, it's a good time to snap up ambitious, forward-thinking talent that's ready to grow.

Final Thoughts – Plan for a Different Market

For many of the businesses we work with, this is a time of recalibration. “Consolidation” is a term we’re hearing often. But for those willing to think creatively about team structure and talent strategy, there’s real opportunity.

If you’re reviewing your structure, exploring interim support, or simply want to benchmark your current approach – we’d be glad to have a confidential conversation.

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