

CFO H1 Update | UK, Asia-Pacific & North America

After a tough and turbulent FY24, unfortunately FY25 to date has yet to deliver the full rebound many hoped for. Global economic uncertainty and volatility continues to weigh heavily across major markets. That being said, there are early signs of recovery, with green shoots emerging in pockets and regions, offering a cautious sense of optimism for the months ahead into 2026.

United Kingdom

UK wide CFO salaries appear to be showing a healthy improvement. With a broad range of £140,000 to £300,000 in London and entry points in Manchester & Birmingham north of £100,000, it reinforces the value placed on strategic finance leadership. Despite rising redundancy figures in certain sectors, demand remains strong for CFOs who bring AI fluency, data-centric thinking and a bold technology vision - traits that increasingly position them as natural successors to the CEO. Sitting at the crossroads of finance, operations, and innovation, the modern-day CFOs are steering transformation agendas at pace.

Over 40% of CFOs anticipate AI will automate at least 30% of core finance tasks, a figure set to rise by 2026 as our AI friends get comfortable under the table. It's no coincidence that the Office of the CFO software market is projected to surge to £130B by 2028 from £75B today, with investment driven by CFOs expected to wear multiple hats within traditional finance, technology and change.

Meanwhile, there are encouraging signs emerging across the Private Equity space. Following a difficult post-COVID period, over 70% of General Partners anticipate valuation rises based on predicted interest rates falls - hopefully the MPC can give us all something to smile about towards the end of the year! Sectors like Pharmaceutical & Healthcare, Technology, and Sustainability continue to dominate the investment landscape and GPs expect to see a huge ramp up in exit activity in the next 6-12 months. CFOs who can navigate the full investment lifecycle, from pre-deal due diligence through to exit planning remain in short supply and high demand across the PE ecosystem.

Asia Pacific – Market Update

Over in the Far East, the narrative remains largely unchanged. Despite ongoing economic pressures, transformational CFOs continue to be highly sought after. Financial powerhouses like Singapore, Tokyo, and Sydney still strongly favour finance leaders who combine AI fluency with operational agility and a clear capacity to drive enterprise-wide change.

While the major cities remain core to the Asia Pacific economy, the overall outlook appears to be somewhat muted. Tighter financial conditions and a shift toward protectionist trade policies have taken the sting out of regional growth. Still, strategic CFOs are in demand, particularly those with the ability to navigate cultural nuance, lead dispersed teams, and adopt emerging technologies with confidence.

APAC anticipates significant disruption from AI within the next year or two, and we're seeing a monumental rise in interest around agentic AI.

The software market aligned to the Office of the CFO is expanding rapidly in Asia, with spending expected to more than double over the next three years. Employers are increasingly prioritising CFOs who understand both the tech and the human side of transformation and those who can manage across borders, realign functions, and deliver with efficiency.

M&A activity is recovering in markets like Japan, China, and Southeast Asia, putting added pressure on CFOs to act as deal architects and post-transaction integrators. ESG has also matured significantly in the region and in China and Japan in particular, green financing has shifted to board-level priority. The CFO's role in shaping ESG strategy from capital planning to investor messaging has never been more pivotal.

North America – Market Update

In North America, CFOs are operating in a climate that stems between uncertainty and opportunity. While it's no secret the economic tornados are still circling, the role of the CFO has only grown in stature, often taking the lead on growth strategy, risk management, and enterprise-wide change.

Some finance leaders are understandably more cautious in their outlook, but many are still being bullish, raising capital, driving M&A, and positioning their teams for long-term transformation.

Like every nation, AI has become a central theme in the CFO agenda. From early-stage pilots to more embedded use cases, it's not just about back-office efficiency anymore, it's about unlocking faster decision-making, more robust planning, and better visibility across the business. However, that brings several hurdles to jump - building trust, choosing tech that's powerful, explainable and creates value.

ESG has also evolved rapidly. No longer just a box ticking exercise, it's now intertwined with investor messaging, capital planning and overall strategy, particularly in sectors like tech, healthcare and industrial to name a few. Finance leaders are having to translate big-picture ambitions into a tangible, measurable impact.

What is encouraging to see is the increase in M&A activity. Albeit unevenly, activity is starting to pick up again. What's emerging is a sharper focus on strategic acquisitions, spin-offs, and consolidation plays. CFOs are often at the helm of these moves, shaping the deal logic and ensuring post-merger integration delivers real value.

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