TALENTLINE RECRUITMENT

The Five Finance Leadership Hires

From first controller to CFO

What each role does, when to hire it, and what it costs.

A practical guide for PE- and VC-backed B2B SaaS companies.

United Kingdom · United States · MENA

Searches run in English, Arabic and Urdu

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WHY THIS GUIDE EXISTS

Five roles, in the order most SaaS companies need them.

Most finance hiring mistakes in venture- and PE-backed software companies are not mistakes of judgement about a candidate. They are mistakes about which seat was open in the first place.

A board asks for better forecasting, so the company hires a Controller. A close runs late, so the company hires a CFO. In both cases a capable person is hired into a role that cannot solve the problem, and eighteen months later both sides are disappointed.

This guide sets out the five finance leadership roles we recruit, in the order they are usually needed: what each one actually owns, the stage at which companies hire it, what it costs in the current UK market, and the mistake we see most often against each seat.

It is written for founders, CEOs and boards of PE- and VC-backed B2B SaaS companies in the UK, the United States and MENA. It is deliberately short.

The ladder at a glance

	Role	Owns	Typical stage	UK base
1	**Financial Controller**	The numbers being right	£2m – £10m ARR	£65k – £125k
2	**FP&A Manager**	The numbers being useful	£5m – £25m ARR	£65k – £95k
3	**Finance Director**	The whole function	£10m – £50m rev	£100k – £180k
4	**VP Finance**	Strategic partnership	$5m – $25m ARR	£130k – £180k
5	**CFO**	Capital and the board	$25m ARR and beyond	£100k – £300k+

Stages overlap, and a company rarely fills all five. The sequence matters more than the thresholds: know which problem you are solving before you write the job spec.

ROLE 1 OF 5

Financial Controller

Also seen as: Head of Finance (in smaller teams), Group Financial Controller

The first serious finance hire most SaaS companies make. The Controller owns the numbers being *right* — the close, the controls, the audit, the compliance. Everything downstream depends on this seat being solid.

When to hire

Typically between £2m and £10m ARR, or immediately after a Series A when a bookkeeper and a fractional CFO stop coping. The clearest trigger is a month-end close that takes longer than ten working days, or an investor asking for numbers you cannot produce on demand. A first institutional round, a first audit, or a multi-entity structure will all force this hire.

What it costs

Context	Base salary	Variable
SME, up to £30m revenue	**£65,000 – £80,000**	Modest or none
Mid-market, £30m – £100m	**£80,000 – £100,000**	10 – 20% bonus
Technology / SaaS	**£75,000 – £125,000**	Options at later stage
PE-backed or complex group	**£100,000 – £155,000**	15 – 25% bonus

What to look for

— A qualified accountant — ACA, ACCA or CIMA. This is the one seat where the qualification genuinely matters.

— Someone who has closed the books in a company your size, not just worked in a large finance function.

— SaaS revenue recognition under IFRS 15 or ASC 606. Deferred revenue and multi-year contracts break people who have only done simple businesses.

— Evidence they have built a process, not just run one someone else designed.

> **The common mistake.** Hiring a Controller when what you actually needed was FP&A. A Controller will tell you accurately what happened last month. They will not, usually, tell you what will happen next quarter or why your CAC payback is drifting.

ROLE 2 OF 5

FP&A Manager

Also seen as: Finance Manager (commercial), Strategic Finance Manager

The forward-looking counterpart to the Controller. FP&A owns the budget, the model, the forecast and the unit economics — the numbers that inform decisions rather than record them.

When to hire

Usually between £5m and £25m ARR, once the board wants scenarios rather than statements. In practice the trigger is a founder or CEO spending their weekends in a spreadsheet, or a board pack that explains the past but cannot defend next year's plan. In VC-backed SaaS this is frequently the *first* strategic finance hire, ahead of a Controller.

What it costs

Context	Base salary	Variable
London, typical range	**£65,000 – £85,000**	10 – 15% bonus
Regional UK	**£55,000 – £75,000**	Modest
PE- or VC-backed SaaS	**£70,000 – £95,000**	Bonus plus options
United States (comparison)	**$70,000 – $150,000**	Equity common

What to look for

— Genuine modelling ability. Ask them to walk you through a model they built themselves — not one they inherited.

— SaaS metrics fluency: ARR bridges, net revenue retention, CAC payback, magic number, cohort behaviour.

— Commercial instinct. The best FP&A people argue with the sales team about the pipeline rather than accepting it as an input.

— Comfort presenting to a board without the CFO in the room.

> **The common mistake.** Treating FP&A as a reporting job. If the role is defined as producing the pack rather than challenging the plan, you will hire an analyst, pay a manager's salary, and lose them within eighteen months.

ROLE 3 OF 5

Finance Director

Also seen as: Head of Finance, Director of Finance

The first genuinely senior finance leader — someone who owns the whole function, manages a team, and sits credibly in front of the board and the investors. In a UK SaaS business this is often the seat that carries the company from Series A to Series C.

When to hire

Broadly £10m to £50m revenue, or when the finance team reaches four or five people and needs managing rather than doing. The trigger is usually structural: a fundraise, an acquisition, international expansion, or the point at which the CEO stops wanting to be the one answering investor questions about the numbers.

What it costs

Context	Base salary	Variable
SME / mid-market, £20m – £100m	**£100,000 – £160,000**	20 – 40% bonus
PE-backed growth company	**£120,000 – £180,000**	Bonus plus LTIP
Larger or listed business	**£160,000 – £250,000**	Substantial equity
London premium	**add £10,000 – £20,000**	—

What to look for

— Someone who has done the step up before, or has visibly been prepared for it by a strong CFO.

— Board exposure. Ask directly how many board meetings they have presented in, and what they were asked.

— Experience of the transaction you are heading into — a raise, a refinancing, a bolt-on acquisition, a due diligence process.

— Genuine people leadership. This is the first finance seat where managing badly costs you the team beneath it.

> **The common mistake.** Promoting a strong Controller into the FD seat and assuming the commercial and board-facing skills will follow. Sometimes they do. More often you lose an excellent Controller and gain a struggling FD.

ROLE 4 OF 5

VP Finance

A US-origin title, increasingly common in UK and MENA SaaS companies with American investors

Functionally close to a Finance Director, but the emphasis differs. VP Finance usually signals a strategic, FP&A-weighted leader who partners with the CEO on the business model — and who hires a Controller beneath them to own the accounting.

When to hire

Between roughly $5m and $25m ARR in the US convention. Venture-backed companies frequently hire a VP Finance *before* a Controller, on the reasoning that it is easier for a commercial finance leader to hire an accountant than for an accountant to learn forward-looking work. If your investors are American, expect this title rather than FD.

What it costs

Context	Base salary	Variable
UK, VC-backed SaaS	**£130,000 – £180,000**	Bonus plus meaningful options
UK, tracks the FD band	**£100,000 – £180,000**	20 – 40% bonus
US, Director / VP FP&A	**$145,000 – $200,000**	Equity standard
MENA (Gulf), tax-free	**Comparable, often plus allowances**	Housing, schooling

What to look for

— Strategic finance background rather than pure audit-and-close. The best VP Finance hires came up through FP&A or investment banking.

— Someone who has hired and managed a Controller — not someone who wants to be one.

— Fundraising experience on the company side of the table, including managing a data room.

— The judgement to know which numbers matter this quarter and which are noise.

> **The common mistake.** Using VP Finance and Finance Director interchangeably in a job spec. They attract different candidates and imply different reporting lines. Decide which you mean before you go to market, or you will interview two incompatible shortlists.

ROLE 5 OF 5

Chief Financial Officer

Also seen as: Group CFO

A board-level commercial partner to the CEO — responsible for capital strategy, investor relations, and the financial architecture of the company, not for running the finance department day to day. A CFO who is doing the FD's job is an expensive mistake in both directions.

When to hire

Generally past $25m ARR, and commonly nearer $50m. The real triggers are events rather than revenue: preparing for exit or IPO, a complex international structure, a Series C or later round, or the point at which your fractional CFO's fees approach three-quarters of a full-time salary. Hiring one too early is one of the most costly errors in venture-backed finance.

What it costs

Context	Base salary	Variable
SME, sub-£30m revenue	**£100,000 – £180,000**	20 – 35% bonus
Mid-market, £30m – £200m	**£180,000 – £300,000**	30 – 50% plus LTIP
Larger or listed	**£280,000 – £500,000**	Substantial equity
Fractional (2 – 3 days a week)	**£60,000 – £150,000**	—
Interim, day rate	**£800 – £2,500 per day**	—

What to look for

— Someone who has been through the specific event you are hiring for — an exit, an IPO, a turnaround. CFO experience is not fungible across these.

— Investor credibility. Your existing board should want them in the room.

— A track record of building the team beneath them rather than centralising.

— Honest answers about what went wrong somewhere. A CFO with no scar tissue has not been tested.

> **The common mistake.** Hiring a CFO to fix a problem a Controller would solve. If your close is late and your controls are weak, a £250,000 CFO will simply hire the Controller you should have hired — and charge you a year of their salary for the privilege.

BEFORE YOU GO TO MARKET

Three questions worth answering first.

01 Is this a backward-looking or a forward-looking problem?

If your numbers are late or wrong, you need a Controller. If your numbers are fine but your plan is not defensible, you need FP&A. Almost every mis-hire at this level comes from getting this one question wrong.

02 Who does this person replace, and who do they hire?

A VP Finance who will hire a Controller is a different search from a Finance Director inheriting a team of five. Write down the org chart twelve months after they join, before you write the spec.

03 What event is coming?

A raise, an audit, an acquisition, an exit. Finance leadership experience is not interchangeable across these, and the candidate who is right for a Series B is frequently wrong for a sale process.

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Sources and method

Salary ranges are UK market benchmarks published in 2026 by FD Capital, Exec Capital, Accountancy Capital and Morgan McKinley, cross-referenced against US figures from Cube. Stage guidance draws on Bessemer Venture Partners' published framework for building a finance team. Ranges are indicative: actual packages vary by sector, funding stage, location and the individual. London typically carries a £10,000 to £20,000 premium over regional equivalents, and regulated or fintech businesses a further 10 to 25 per cent.

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