

global
**talent
trends.**
2026

**Banking and financial
services sector** report.



About ACCA.

We are ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants), the only truly global professional accountancy body.

Since we were founded in 1904, we've been breaking down barriers to the accountancy profession. Today we proudly support a diverse community of over **266,100** members and **546,500** future members in **179** countries.

We're redefining accountancy. Our cutting-edge qualifications, continuous learning and insights are respected and valued by employers in every sector. They equip individuals with the business and finance expertise and ethical judgement to lead and drive sustainable value in organisations and economies worldwide.

Guided by our purpose and values, we're leading the accountancy profession for a changed world. Partnering with policymakers, standard setters, the donor community, educators and other accountancy bodies, we're strengthening and building a profession that focuses on people, planet and prosperity to create value for all.

Find out more at accaglobal.com

Global talent trends 2026: Banking and financial services insights.

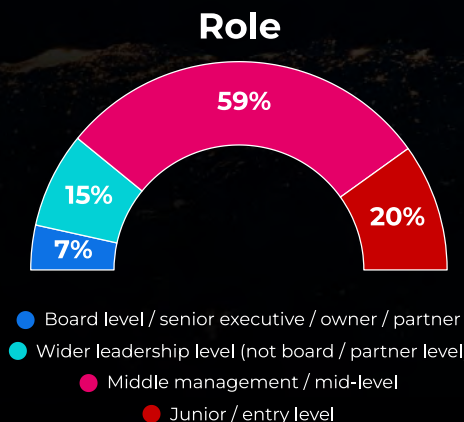
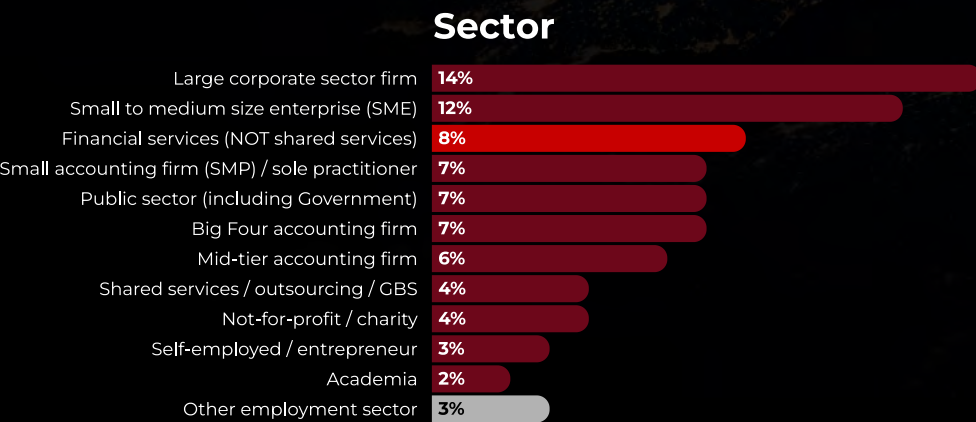
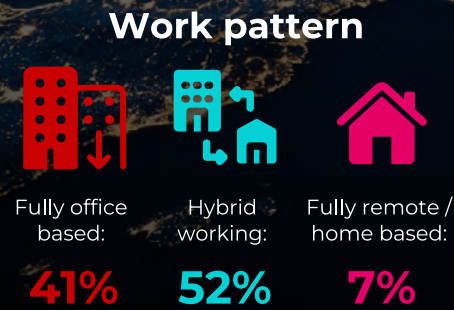
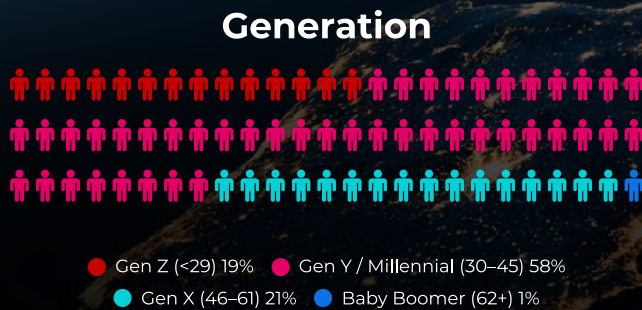
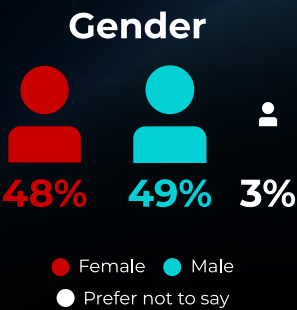
The world's largest annual survey of careers, jobs and working life in finance and accounting.

Our fourth edition of *Global talent trends* continues to identify the key issues facing finance professionals as work proceeds to transform this year.

This concise report presents sector-specific highlights from [*Global talent trends 2026*](#) – collecting compelling data, insights and perspectives shared by 935 respondents from the banking and financial services sector.

Demographics.

Global talent trends 2026 is the largest annual talent survey of accountancy and finance professionals across the world – with over **11,000** respondents from **160** countries taking part, including **935** respondents representing the banking and financial services sector.



METHODOLOGY

This report has been produced using both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. It has also used generative AI functionality to support some of the analysis, with this output reviewed by ACCA.

Fieldwork and roundtables conducted October 2025-February 2026.

2026 headlines at a glance.

Banking and financial services.



1. Two-tier finance workforces in financial services? →



2. AI use in recruitment: Concerns are widespread →



3. High demand for finance jobs that drive social impact →



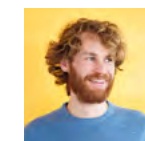
4. Older workers: A missed talent opportunity for the future? →



5. 'Cost of living' tops the list of workplace fears →



6. Fears of AI replacing jobs remain high →



7. Mental health challenges are widespread →



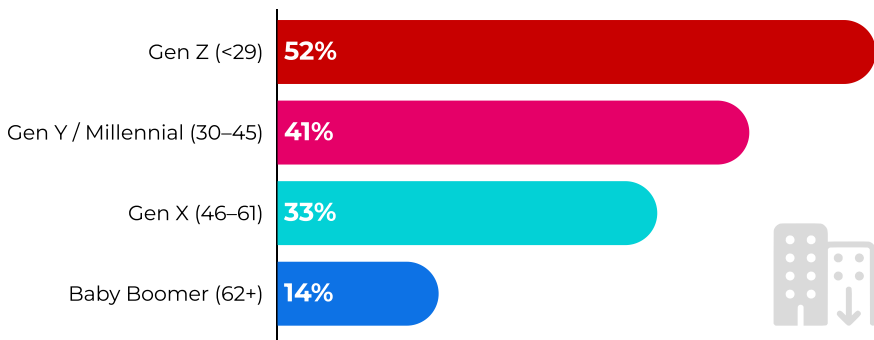
1. Two-tier finance workforces in financial services?

Major generational differences in working patterns could impact talent development.

There are stark generational differences in working patterns that catch the eye. Over half of our youngest cohort of respondents, Gen Z (**52%**), report working full time in the office – compared with only **33%** of Gen X, and **14%** of Baby Boomers.

This mismatch carries possible implications for skills development in the sector in the future. Overall, **52%** of respondents work under hybrid arrangements – yet three-quarters (**75%**) say this is their preferred working pattern.

There’s stark generational differences in working patterns – with younger generations much more likely to be working in the office full time



Percentage of respondents reporting that they are working full time in the office.

At the same time, the majority of respondents in the sector (**61%**) agree that organisations should require employees to spend a set number of days in the office – reflecting the increasing prevalence of return to office policies recently.

However, there’s a definite balance to be struck. While **55%** believe that time spent in the office has a positive impact on future promotion opportunities within the sector – **41%** say that if their employer required them to spend more time in the office, they would consider leaving the organisation.

The majority of respondents feel office presence has a positive impact on future career promotion opportunities



Percentage of respondents agreeing a greater office presence has a positive impact on future career promotion opportunities. 'Don't knows' remain the balancing figure for each response.

‘Financial services employers need to better understand the working preferences of their employees – and consider the implications for talent attraction, development and retention.’

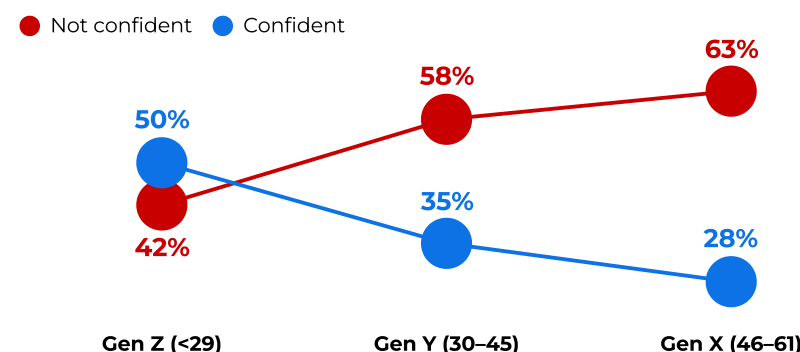


2. AI use in recruitment: Concerns are widespread.

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) for hiring accountants in financial services is a concern for many.

Over half of respondents in the financial services sector (**55%**) say they are not confident about the use of AI in recruitment activities. Concerns are equally evident among senior leaders – with **56%** of board level, senior executive, and partner respondents expressing doubts about using AI to select talent.

Over half have reservations about the use of AI in hiring processes – especially Gen Y and Gen X respondents



Percentage of respondents agreeing they are confident or not confident in the use of AI in recruitment. 'Don't knows' remain the balancing figure for each response. Baby Boomer data not included due to small sample size <50.

The issue is an even greater concern among older respondents in the financial services sector – with **63%** of Gen X having reservations about the use of AI in recruitment (compared to **42%** of Gen Z).

Our 2026 findings suggest it's an issue generating significant debate. Employers cite the need to introduce such technologies to help manage increasing numbers of job applications. But they also recognise the challenges that candidates face through the loss of human interaction in recruitment processes, and potential concerns around algorithmic bias. At the same time, candidates are increasingly turning to these technologies to support application processes – creating what feels like an AI talent arms race in the sector.

'How can financial services organisations strike the right balance and governance over the use of AI in recruitment to boost candidate confidence?'

Where is AI recruitment in finance and accountancy at, and what's next?

The use of AI tools and technologies in organisation recruitment processes has seen a significant growth over the past two years, as new functionality continues to evolve quickly. With AI technologies becoming ever-more sophisticated, their use is cutting across the end-to-end hiring process in finance, particularly at more junior levels. Its growing adoption is generating significant debate with strong opinions on both sides:

Where is AI being used in the hiring process?

- **Candidate sourcing activities:** Recruiters and organisations use AI tools to scan jobsites, LinkedIn profiles, and CV databases to identify initial talent pools against job descriptions. AI powered chat interfaces are also used as a first point of contact for candidates.
- **Candidate shortlisting:** AI technologies are commonly used to scan CVs and keyword identification, match skills and experience to job criteria, potentially rank applicants in priority order, and as initial assessment suitability tests based on the job requirements.

- **Candidate interviews and assessments:** While focus is on scheduling support, there's growing use of AI to assess performance through human-led interviews – conducting speech analysis, analysing content coverage and gaps. More generally across recruitment, there have been some pilots of the use of AI Chatbots, though, at the time of writing, adoption remains limited and challenges persist.
- **Candidate offers and engagement:** The increasing use of AI technologies to support candidate communication of job offers, issuing contracts, and managing routine candidate interactions.

Suggested benefits of using AI?

- **Productivity and speed:** The obvious big win for AI in the recruitment process is efficiency. From candidate sourcing, job descriptions, and adverts to logistics – the technology reduces many time consuming administrative tasks.
- **Volume of applications:** With the advent of Chat GPT in 2022, the volume of job applications that employers need to manage has significantly increased. Employers in our roundtable discussions cited this was a key reason for using AI in the hiring process – to help filter through high volumes.
- **Hiring quality:** AI technologies are increasingly involved in different stages of the assessment process. Many see it as a technology that augments the role of human recruiters in the process – enhancing the quality of recruitment decisions. Well designed AI tools using objective criteria can help reduce bias, drive more consistent recruitment processes, and create more inclusive hiring practices.
- **Candidate engagement:** Some AI assisted support tools can improve the candidate engagement experience by providing immediate updates and touch points.

Concerns around using AI?

- **Bias:** Despite potential benefits, bias remains the biggest concern. While AI can help reduce potential bias in human only led processes – there's often distrust in the algorithms and the data they are trained on. This could result in discrimination based on particular characteristics of candidates – eg neurodivergent applicants. Regular audits and monitoring of AI systems is a growing requirement.
- **Lack of human touch:** Our data suggests one of the big concerns that individuals have is the lack of human touch in processes – less personal feedback on applications, and the increased anonymity of processes that are less human-centric.
- **Missed talent:** If recruiters are not sufficiently able to understand the merits of individual candidates at a personal level, or build personal relationships early in the process – good candidates could be missed. The technology may not be sufficiently adept at identifying those who have a strong cultural fit, or who can demonstrate the right skills for the role.
- **Data privacy and transparency:** Concerns centre on how data is used and protected – with worries about sensitive data leakage, and that the 'black box' approach leads to a lack of transparency in hiring decisions – how a decision was made, and why it was made.

Bottom line: What's next in terms of AI in hiring practices?

AI technologies are firmly embedded across many organisation hiring processes, and indicators suggest their use will continue to expand. At the same time, there is growing awareness of the concerns around AI in recruitment. There's keen interest in the appropriate governance around the use of technologies, increased attention on the value of audits and monitoring processes around the AI algorithms being used, and strengthening regulatory requirements.

The bottom line for most is that while AI in recruitment is here to stay – ensuring appropriate safeguards and mitigations are essential as the technology continues to evolve.

'In a bank of (our) size, we see more than 100,000 applications a year and shortlisting them becomes a very big problem if you don't use AI.'

APAC roundtable participant

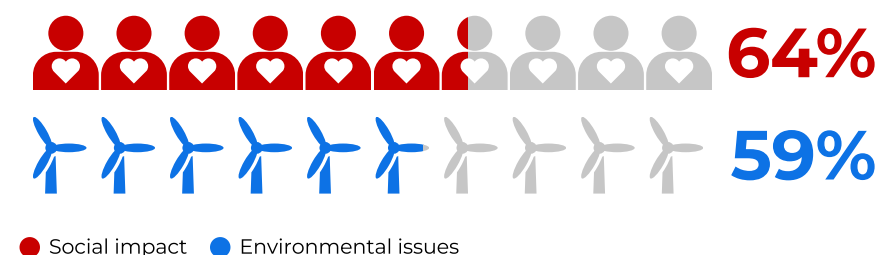


3. High demand for finance jobs that drive social impact.

Finance professionals in the sector want their work to make a difference.

Mirroring our global findings, professionals within the financial services sector increasingly aspire to work that contributes to positive social and environmental outcomes. This reflects both a broader trend across the profession – as career paths evolve and accountants seek opportunities to create widespread value beyond traditional roles – and how the regulatory environment continues to shape job change.

Most respondents want to pursue roles focused on social impact and environmental issues in the future



Percentage of respondents agreeing they want finance jobs with social and environmental impact remits in the future.

The status quo is broadly encouraging – with over one-third of respondents (**36%**) already saying their finance role currently contributes to helping their organisation respond to environmental and climate change issues. An even greater proportion (**44%**) say it contributes to helping their organisation respond to social impact issues.

Yet it's the aspirations for the future that are most promising – with **59%** of financial services respondents wanting to pursue finance and accountancy jobs that target environmental considerations, while **64%** want to take roles that make a difference on social impact.

‘It’s a clarion call for financial services employers – are accountants being provided with the appropriate career opportunities to realise these ambitions?’



4. Older workers: A missed talent opportunity for the future?

Demographic change will reshape the composition of the financial services workforce.

Financial services – similar to other sectors in the global economy – has a workforce that is generally growing older. Ageing populations and falling fertility rates across the globe are changing traditional working life patterns – while increasing the number of generations active in the workplace at the same time. Opportunities to retire at traditional ages are dwindling due to increased costs of living and reduced pension security.

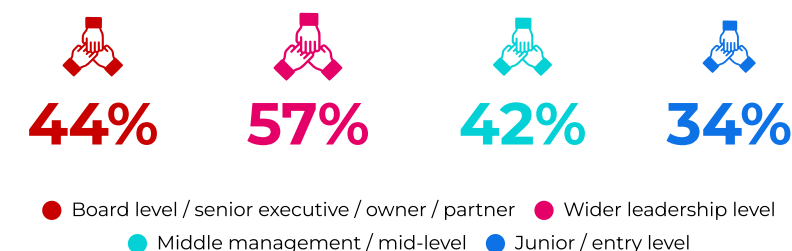
These demographic and social shifts have profound implications for organisation talent management strategies and employee engagement practices on two fronts:

- recognising the contribution that older employees will bring to financial services organisations for the future
- ensuring cross-generational work collaboration happens effectively – particularly as Generation Alpha starts to enter the workforce.

Our data suggests that there is work to do on both fronts. Recognition of the value that older workers bring to the sector is identified as the biggest diversity concern by respondents.

Meanwhile, **43%** agree their organisation faces challenges in making cross-generational collaboration work effectively, and these concerns are particularly evident among financial services respondents at leadership level.

Cross-generational collaboration is an issue for many respondents – particularly at leadership level



Percentage of respondents agreeing their organisation experiences challenges in supporting effective collaboration across different generations.

‘Organisations in the financial services sector need to take a longer-term view on their finance talent – particularly recognising the value that older workers bring.’



5. ‘Cost of living’ tops the list of workplace fears.

Cost of living challenges continue to significantly pressure compensation and retention strategies.

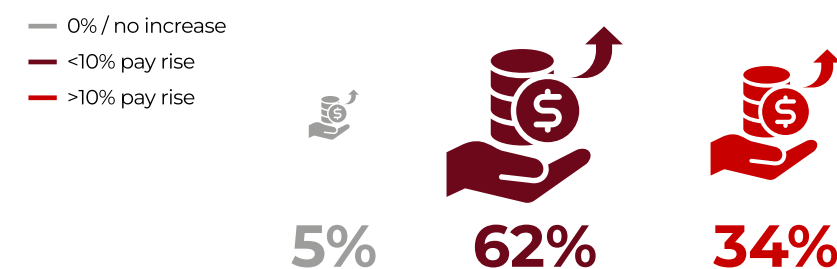
Similar to respondents across other sectors, financial services employees are not immune to rising living costs – with **44%** overall identifying it as their biggest ‘workplace fear’. It’s an issue that cuts across the generational and seniority divide, although our most senior respondents – board level / senior executives – rank a global economic downturn impacting job opportunities as the highest concern.

Pay satisfaction is closely linked to these concerns within the sector – with only **37%** reporting that they are satisfied with the level of pay they receive for the role they perform. Our data clearly suggests it’s junior respondents who have the greatest concerns. Interestingly, those working full-time in the office are also more likely to be dissatisfied – with only **28%** content with their current compensation, compared to **43%** for those working fully or partly remotely.

The data suggests a correlation between pay dissatisfaction and talent flight, although other factors will also contribute towards career decisions. Still, there’s a talent risk to be managed – with almost half (**47%**) expecting their next career move to be outside of their current organisation.

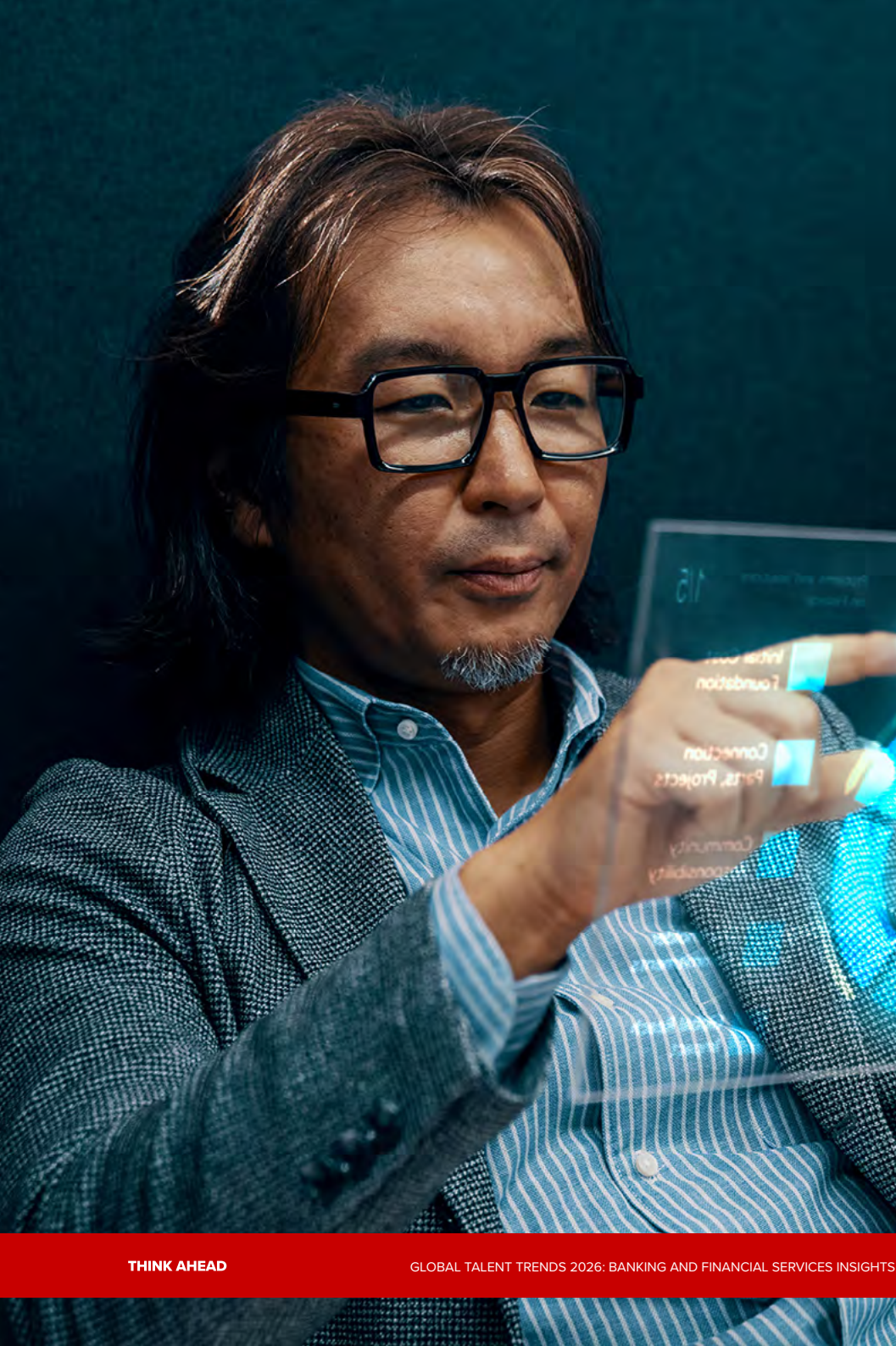
Pay demands for the year ahead are significant, with over one-third (**34%**) of financial services respondents expecting a rise of more than 10%.

Annual pay rise expectations of respondents in the sector are significant



% Pay rises that respondents are hoping for this year.

‘Managing pay demands represent a significant challenge and must be managed carefully by organisations in the sector given its importance to talent flight risk.’



6. Fears of AI replacing jobs remain high.

Concerns prevail on the potential impact of AI technologies on job roles – yet upskilling opportunities continue to grow.

Most financial services respondents (**81%**) say they are confident in their ability to learn and apply AI capabilities. This confidence is broadly consistent across generations, although it's more evident among respondents below board level.

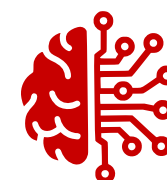
At the same time – similar to our global results – opportunities to develop AI skills in the financial services sector appear to be increasing. Almost half of respondents (**48%**) say they are receiving these opportunities (up from **39%** in 2025).

Almost half of financial services respondents say their employer is providing AI-related upskilling opportunities

● 2025
● 2026



39%



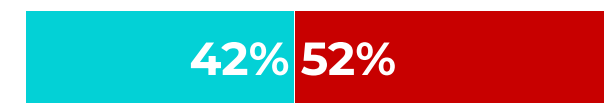
48%

Percentage of respondents agreeing their organisation is providing AI upskilling opportunities.

However, our data also suggests that concerns about the impact of AI on jobs remain widespread – and have even increased this year. Over half (**52%**) say they are worried about the impact of AI on their own job roles (up from **42%** in 2025). These concerns are slightly more weighted towards the younger generations in the financial services workforce – potentially reflecting the impact of technology on entry-level tasks.

Respondents in the sector are increasingly concerned about the impact of AI on their own job roles

■ 2025
■ 2026



Percentage of respondents that have concerns about the impact of AI on their own role.

‘Concerns about the impact of AI on financial services employees are very evident in our survey – but are they justified and borne out by the evidence so far?’



Will AI adoption lead to increased productivity in finance?

While many respondents remain concerned about the impact of AI on jobs – an equally important question is whether finance teams are currently reaping the rewards from AI deployment.

Our data on upskilling opportunities is encouraging, but there's a growing consensus that **targeted development** and **effective training** are really what matters.

'A critical and often overlooked factor in the AI adoption story is that its workflow design makes the crucial difference to driving productivity gains.'

This year will be defining in the AI productivity stakes – although organisations are currently taking a cautious 'watch and see' approach. We don't yet have a complete understanding of the productivity benefits that AI may bring to financial roles. The Real-time Population Survey (RPS) in the US estimates that 60% of workers in business and financial operations have used GenAI in some form for work purposes, with productivity benefits of just over 3% – a modest but meaningful uplift.¹

It's also worth noting that productivity and efficiency gains, more broadly, are not solely about time saved. They could be about fewer or cheaper inputs, redesigning how work is undertaken to simplify tasks, removing unnecessary steps, or making a process more reliable.²

When considering AI implementation across finance and accountancy – we need to understand which aspects we want to target when deploying AI, or any form of automation. For example, scaling anomaly detection using Machine Learning (ML) algorithms can simultaneously make detection more reliable and reduce manual effort.

¹ [Generative AI Adoption Tracker](#). This tracker visualises data from the first nationally representative U.S. surveys of genAI usage at work and at home. Our data come from the Real-Time Population Survey (RPS), a [national online labour market survey](#) of working-age adults aged 18-64 that has run since 2020. RPS is designed and weighted to be nationally representative and to complement existing government surveys, such as the Current Population Survey or the American Community Survey, by carefully replicating core sections of those surveys while still leaving room for novel questions.

² Interpreted from Potter, Brian. *The Origins of Efficiency*.

However, adoption, is not without its challenges. There is risk that operational productivity may decline, at least initially – primarily as a consequence of human roles in the process changing. Factors contributing to this include:

- shifting user roles from production to evaluation
- unhelpful changes to workflows – eg new steps, altered sequencing, or additional tasks, including changing perspectives
- interruptions or distractions – eg increasing multi-tasking or blurring of tasks
- automation making simple tasks easier and hard tasks harder – eg AI might be able to write basic reports or analysis while increasing the mental demand in complex tasks where subtle errors need to be identified, evaluated and corrected.^{3,4}

Another concern is agency decay – the gradual erosion of workers’ confidence and ability to make autonomous decisions due to an over-reliance on GenAI. The so-called ‘AI efficiency trap’ unfolds in four stages:

1. Tasks such as financial modelling or competitive analysis are reduced in time and effort – but full control is still exercised over results.
2. Managers recognise the benefits and begin to adjust workload expectations – increasing routine reliance on AI for simple tasks, eg basic analysis or preliminary drafting.
3. Targeted assistance evolves into general reliance – budget projections, strategic recommendations, and client communications become default activities for AI.
4. AI assistance becomes essential rather than selective, and employees feel incapable of achieving results without the technology.⁵

These concerns emphasise the importance of a careful workflow design as organisations deploy AI. They highlight the need for targeted upskilling and effective training on AI use – and, of course, recognising its limitations.

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Alistair Brisbane, Head of Technology Research, ACCA

3 Microsoft Study: Simkute, A. et al. (2024). *Ironies of Generative AI: Understanding and Mitigating Productivity Loss in Human-AI Interaction*. IJHCI.

4 [AI Doesn’t Reduce Work – It Intensifies It](#)

5 [The AI Efficiency Trap: When Productivity Tools Create Perpetual Pressure – Knowledge at Wharton](#)





7. Mental health challenges are widespread.

The majority of respondents in the financial services sector say their mental health suffers due to work pressures – but our data suggests these indicators are marginally improving.

Previous editions of *Global talent trends* have suggested that mental health has been a workplace challenge for the profession that's entirely irrespective of sector – albeit with some slow and gradual improvements in mental health indicators over the last three years.

In the financial services sector, **57%** of respondents say their mental health suffers because of work pressures and **59%** agree they would like more support from their organisation in managing their mental health. These results are remarkably consistent with the previous year (**56%** and **61%** respectively), although the longer-term trend indicates some improvement over the last four years. While **58%** believe their line manager would be effective in supporting their mental health challenges, **41%** say their organisation does not consider employee mental health to be a priority.

Younger respondents and those in more junior roles are more likely to cite mental health concerns. Globally, the data reveals deeper relationships between the technological displacement of roles, mental health, and overall employee engagement. These factors again have implications for talent retention and career decisions.

Respondents in the sector identify high concerns on mental health issues

I feel my mental health suffers because of work pressures

57%

I would like more support from my organisation in managing my mental health

59%

My line manager would be effective in supporting mental health challenges

58%

I don't think my organisation considers employee mental health to be a priority

41%

Sector performance on 2026 mental health indicators.

‘Mental health challenges need to be taken seriously by employers – particularly with their relationship to employee engagement indicators and risk of talent flight.’



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THINK AHEAD