

**FINANCE AND  
ACCOUNTING  
WORKPLACE AND  
SALARY STUDY  
2026**



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**4.9** (539 reviews)



I have worked extensively with Cherry over the years, both as a client when sourcing hard to find talent and as a candidate when progressing my own career. They have been an invaluable partner in helping to build and grow the teams I have led in that time. Their deep understanding of our industry, unparalleled expertise in identifying top talent, and commitment to delivering exceptional candidates and service, have made them an indispensable trusted advisor.

What sets Cherry apart is their ability to truly understand a company's culture and values, ensuring that every placement is not only a skills match but a cultural fit as well. Over the years, they have consistently identified and secured high-calibre professionals who have contributed to our success. Cherry's professionalism, dedication, and personalised approach have made them a genuine strategic partner.

-Finance Director - International Rail Business - East Midlands

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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Cherry Professional 2026 Workplace Study. This study provides comprehensive insights into how benefits packages influence employment decisions across finance and accounting professionals in the East Midlands. Drawing from our extensive survey data, we examine working arrangements, pension contributions, salary growth dynamics, and the evolving expectations of today's workforce.

This report was scientifically researched based on our own extensive database as well as a comprehensive participation survey, ensuring the insights shared are grounded in robust analysis.

In this year's edition, we not only explore the critical benefits data, but also delve into key themes shaping the finance employment market. We examine how AI is transforming finance roles from processing to strategic decision-making, the growing importance of capability-led hiring beyond traditional qualifications, and the emergence of portfolio careers as professionals seek greater flexibility and variety. These trends intersect with the benefits landscape, as professionals increasingly evaluate opportunities through a holistic lens that weighs compensation, development, flexibility, and career progression as integrated components of employment value.

Whether you are looking to attract top talent, retain your highest performers, or benchmark your benefits packages against market standards, this report provides the data-driven insights you need. As the leading finance, HR and business support consultancy in the East Midlands, we are proud to share this valuable intelligence with the local business community.

Please let us know how we can further assist you in optimising your total reward strategy and employer brand. Our team of experts is ready to lend their expertise and support your success in 2026 and beyond.

*Danielle Asano*

- Managing Director





## AI IN FINANCE: FROM PROCESSING TO BETTER DECISIONS

There is no debate now about whether AI has relevance in finance. It has moved far beyond producing dashboards or handling repetitive tasks. What matters in 2026 is how finance teams are using technology to add clarity and confidence to business decisions.

Across the region, AI is being used to combine financial data with operational information, customer activity and supply chain variables. This gives a richer understanding of performance and risk. Where AI supports forecasting and scenario planning, senior leaders tell us that conversations become more constructive and decisions become more grounded.

Most finance teams are not trying to automate their function. They are using technology in targeted ways to improve quality and reduce ambiguity. The gains are often less about time saved and more about clarity achieved. Analysts report greater confidence in data accuracy. Managers report improved commercial discussions. Leadership teams report better alignment when planning financial commitments.

The continued challenge for finance professionals is not technical adoption but deciding where AI genuinely adds value and where traditional financial judgement must remain central. That balance varies by organisation. Some are moving gradually while others are pushing harder. Most are still early in their maturity curve but can see the direction clearly.

It is clear from conversations and survey responses that AI is not reducing the need for finance roles. It is sharpening them. The focus is shifting towards insight, communication and cross-functional understanding. These are not technology skills. They are core finance skills applied in a wider operating context.



## THE SKILLS SHIFT: HIRING FOR CAPABILITY, NOT JUST QUALIFICATIONS

Technical qualifications will always be valued in finance, and they remain a solid foundation for a career. What has changed in recent years is how employers assess the overall capability of the people they hire. In 2026, it is increasingly about what someone brings to business outcomes, not just what they bring to the ledger.

We are seeing more employers look for evidence of commercial awareness, analytical confidence, problem solving and the ability to communicate clearly with non-finance colleagues. These attributes are not replacing qualifications; they sit alongside them and often make the difference when teams are working at pace.

A noticeable trend from the survey is that professionals are keen to work in environments where they can influence decisions rather than simply process transactions. For finance teams, this is encouraging. It creates a more collaborative relationship between finance and the wider organisation and helps people develop careers with breadth as well as depth.

The shift towards capability-led hiring is also supporting internal mobility. Teams are increasingly willing to develop talent from within rather than assuming external hires will always be the strongest option. This helps retention, protects knowledge and can make progression more achievable for people who want to grow.

Employers are not abandoning technical diligence. They are recognising that in 2026, being effective in finance requires more than technical knowledge alone. It requires confidence with data, the ability to shape discussions and a genuine interest in helping the wider business succeed.

**72.7%** of employers say the economic climate has changed how they hire, highlighting the growing focus on commercial decision support.

**99%** of respondents say benefits influence job decisions, showing that finance professionals are assessing the full working experience, not just salary.





## PORTFOLIO FINANCE CAREERS: A GROWING TREND FOR 2026

For a long time, finance careers followed a fairly linear path. That pattern is changing. Increasing numbers of finance professionals are developing what can fairly be described as portfolio careers. They are combining permanent roles with advisory projects, fractional assignments or short term commercial support.

This shift reflects the reality that finance skills are needed in many different contexts. Some businesses need experienced finance leadership for specific initiatives but do not require a senior role on a full time basis. Others value specialist expertise to complement their internal team.

For candidates, this offers greater flexibility and a chance to shape a career based on interest as well as progression. While not everyone will choose this route, those who do often enjoy greater variety and exposure to different business challenges. For employers, it can provide practical access to experience that would otherwise sit outside the budget or headcount plan.

The survey data supports this broader trend. There is clear appetite from professionals to have more influence and work in environments where they can create outcomes rather than operate within narrow parameters. At the same time, many employers are adapting their hiring strategies to reflect changing circumstances and talent availability.

Portfolio careers do not replace permanent finance functions. They sit alongside them and, when used appropriately, can strengthen them. In 2026, they are increasingly part of the finance landscape and are likely to continue growing.



## EIGHT WORKFORCE TRENDS THAT WILL SHAPE FINANCE IN 2026

Each year, the finance employment landscape evolves. Certain themes continue, others fade, and new priorities emerge. Based on survey responses and discussions with professionals, these are the trends most likely to influence the finance workforce over the coming year.

1. Capability-led hiring. Technical qualifications remain vital, but broader commercial capability is becoming the differentiator.
2. Forecasting and planning are gaining more focus, with AI supporting clarity rather than replacing judgement.
3. Portfolio careers are expected to grow, providing flexibility for both employers and professionals.
4. Hybrid working remains firmly established and is being refined to support collaboration and development.
5. Benefits packages continue to matter, with people valuing support that recognises both career and life circumstances.
6. Retention depends increasingly on culture, recognition and professional development rather than just headline salary.
7. Finance teams are looking for more influence, with professionals keen to contribute to decisions and business direction.
8. Technology confidence is becoming more common, helping finance communicate insight rather than simply deliver data.

These themes reflect the direction of travel across the East Midlands. Each organisation will have its own nuances, but the overall direction is clear. Finance roles are becoming broader, more connected to strategy and more focused on value creation.

**78%** of respondents are in permanent roles, showing that portfolio work complements rather than replaces the core finance workforce.

**75%** of candidates receive hybrid working, underlining that flexibility has become a core part of the employee experience rather than an added perk.



# SALARY SURVEY 2026



## QUALIFIED

Job Role	Salary Range								Typical	Day Rate Range
	£30k	£60k	£90k	£120k	£150k	£180k	£210k	£240k		
CFO									£188,000	£575 - £1,550
Group Financial Director									£115,000	£425 - £1,250
Finance Director									£109,000	£425 - £1,250
Group Financial Controller									£104,000	£330 - £875
Financial Controller									£88,000	£280 - £675
Head of Finance									£87,000	£280 - £925
Finance Manager									£69,500	£240 - £620
Group Accountant									£65,000	£240 - £570
Finance Business Partner									£74,500	£240 - £675
Head of FP&A									£88,000	£330 - £775
Financial Planning + Analysis Manager									£65,500	£240 - £725
Senior Management Accountant									£59,000	£220 - £520
Management Accountant									£49,500	£185 - £465
Company Accountant									£58,500	£180 - £520
Systems Accountant									£50,000	£180 - £470
Senior Financial Accountant									£65,500	£240 - £675
Financial Accountant									£47,250	£180 - £465
Qualified By Experience									£52,500	£180 - £520

## PART QUALIFIED

Job Role	Salary Range								Typical
	£15k	£20k	£25k	£30k	£35k	£40k	£45k	£50k	
Finalist									£41,000
Part Qualified									£38,000
Trainee									£26,750

**Note:** Part-qualified roles saw stronger growth (5.8%) due to market shortages.



### TRANSACTIONAL

Job Role	Salary Range										Typical	TEMP (P/H)
	£15k	£20k	£25k	£30k	£35k	£40k	£45k	£50k	£55k	£60k		
Accounts Assistant											£28,000	£15.50 - £30.00
Bookkeeper											£29,000	£13.50 - £24.00
Graduate											£26,500	£15.50 - £22.00
Credit Manager											£48,000	£23.00 - £43.00
Senior Credit Control											£35,000	£16.50 - £30.00
Credit Controller											£29,500	£13.50 - £24.00
Purchase Ledger Manager											£38,500	£20.00 - £34.00
Purchase Ledger Assistant											£28,000	£13.50 - £24.00
Sales Ledger Manager											£41,000	£20.00 - £34.00
Sales Ledger Assistant											£28,000	£13.50 - £24.00
Payroll Manager											£48,000	£20.00 - £37.50
Payroll Assistant											£32,000	£13.50 - £24.00



### PRACTICE

#### AUDIT

Job Role	Salary Range										Typical	Day Rate Range
	£20k	£40k	£60k	£80k	£100k	£120k	£140k	£160k	£180k	£200k		
Audit Director											£106,500	£345 - £1,035
Audit Manager											£66,000	£240 - £620
Senior Auditor											£47,250	£185 - £415
Auditor											£38,000	£150 - £335

#### GENERAL PRACTICE

Job Role	Salary Range										Typical	Day Rate Range
	£20k	£40k	£60k	£80k	£100k	£120k	£140k	£160k	£180k	£200k		
Partner											£137,500	£465 - £1,345
Director											£102,000	£330 - £925
Senior Manager											£79,500	£280 - £725
Manager											£63,500	£240 - £570
Assistant Manager/Supervisor											£51,500	£185 - £520
Senior											£42,500	£165 - £415
Semi-Senior											£34,000	£135 - £335

#### INSOLVENCY

Job Role	Salary Range										Typical
	£20k	£40k	£60k	£80k	£100k	£120k	£140k	£160k	£180k	£200k	
Director											£87,750
Assistant Director /Senior Manager											£64,000
Manager											£52,750
Assistant Manager											£41,250
Senior Administrator											£35,500
Administrator											£30,000
Trainee/Junior Administrator											£25,750



### TAX

Job Role	Salary Range										Typical	Day Rate Range
	£20k	£40k	£60k	£80k	£100k	£120k	£140k	£160k	£180k	£200k		
Tax Director											£122,500	£465 - £1,240
Tax Manager											£72,500	£280 - £675
Senior Tax Accountant											£57,000	£220 - £520
Tax Accountant											£44,000	£180 - £415

### TREASURY

Job Role	Salary Range										Typical
	£20k	£40k	£60k	£80k	£100k	£120k	£140k	£160k	£180k	£200k	
Group Treasurer											£125,000
Assistant /Deputy Treasurer											£91,000
Treasury Manager											£68,000
Treasury Accountant											£45,750
Treasury Analyst											£37,500



## REGIONAL VARIATION OUTLOOK

The salary levels within this survey are based on East Midlands rates. This is how they compare to other regions of the UK.



# BENEFITS AND WORKPLACE CONDITIONS ANALYSIS 2026



## THE EVOLVING BENEFITS LANDSCAPE

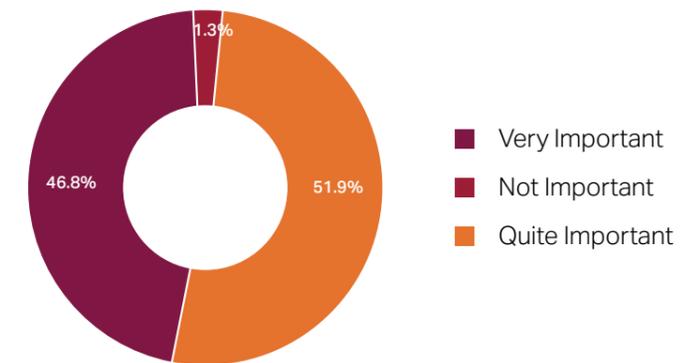
The 2026 employment market presents a fundamental shift in how finance professionals evaluate job opportunities. Benefits packages are no longer supplementary components of employment offers but have evolved into critical decision-making factors that rival base salary in importance. Our comprehensive survey data reveals how these priorities have crystallised over the past year and what employers must consider to remain competitive.

### BENEFITS AS CORE DECISION FACTORS

When finance professionals assess job offers with equivalent base salaries, benefits packages have become the determining factor. The 2026 data shows that 98.7% of professionals now consider benefits either very important (46.8%) or quite important (51.9%) when making employment decisions. Only 1.3% view benefits as unimportant, representing a vanishingly small minority.

#### BENEFITS IMPORTANCE WHEN CONSIDERING JOB OFFERS

This near-universal recognition of benefits importance represents a maturation of the employment market. Where once benefits were viewed as peripheral perks, they are now understood as integral components of total compensation that directly impact quality of life, financial security, and work-life balance.

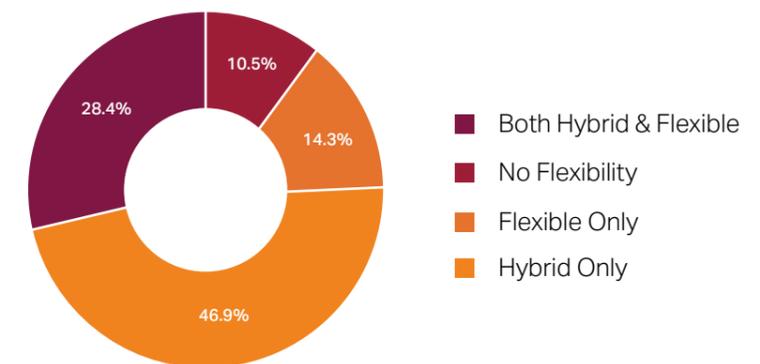


## WORKING ARRANGEMENTS: THE NEW STANDARD

The debate over remote versus office-based work has largely concluded, with hybrid models emerging as the dominant arrangement. However, the implementation details reveal considerable variation in how organisations approach flexibility.

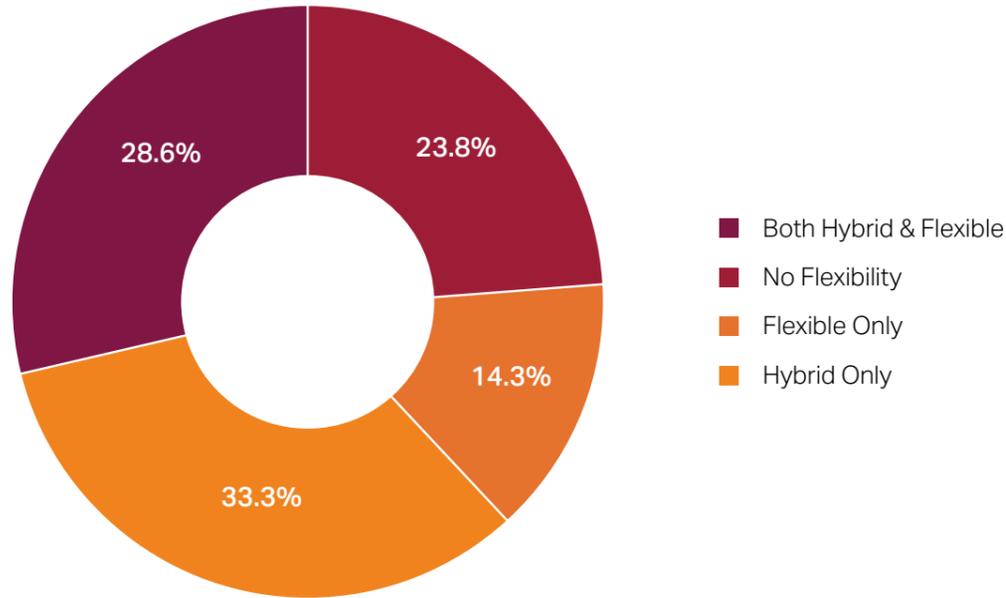
#### PERMANENT EMPLOYEE WORKING PATTERNS

For permanent employees, 75.3% now have access to some form of hybrid working. The most common model is hybrid-only arrangements (46.9%), where employees split time between office and remote locations on a structured basis. An additional 28.4% have access to both hybrid and flexible arrangements, providing maximum adaptability. However, 24.7% of permanent roles still offer limited or no location flexibility.



## CONTRACT AND INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS

The contract and interim market shows different characteristics. Whilst 28.6% of positions offer both hybrid and flexible working, and 33.3% provide hybrid-only options, a notable 23.8% of contract roles remain entirely office-based. This suggests that project-based and interim work often requires greater on-site presence, perhaps due to the nature of the assignments or the need for closer collaboration during defined project periods.



The implications for talent attraction are clear: organisations restricting flexibility face a significantly reduced talent pool.

**68%** Our survey indicates that 68% of respondents would actively seek alternative employment if their current flexible arrangements were substantially curtailed. This represents a material risk for any employer considering a return to traditional working patterns.



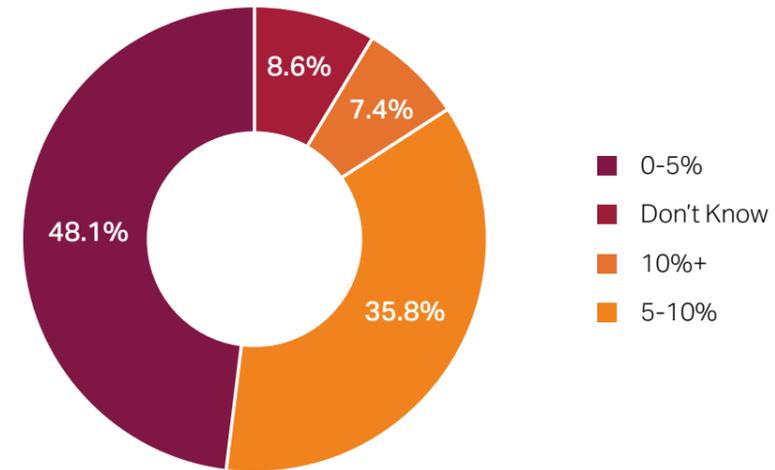
## THE PENSION CONTRIBUTION LANDSCAPE

Pension contributions represent one of the most significant long-term benefits, yet they remain an area where many employers provide only minimum statutory requirements. The gap between what employees receive and what they desire represents a substantial opportunity for differentiation.

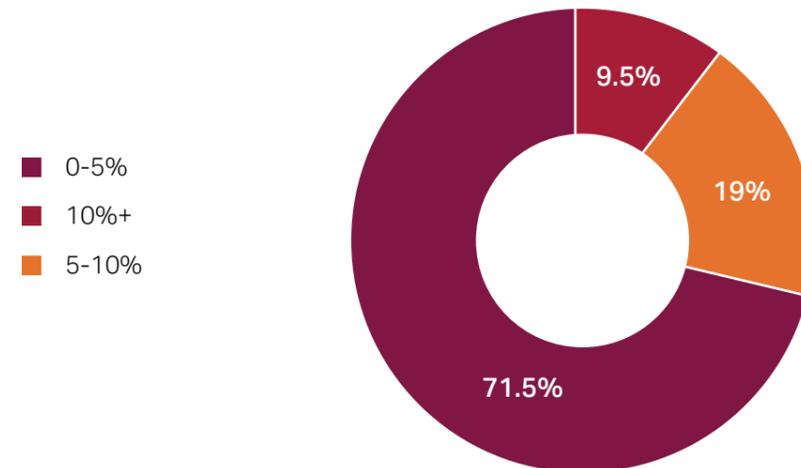
### CURRENT CONTRIBUTION LEVELS

Employee perspectives reveal that 48.1% receive pension contributions of 0-5% from their employers, whilst 35.8% receive 5-10%. Only 7.4% benefit from contributions exceeding 10%. Concerningly, 8.6% of employees do not know their employer contribution rate, suggesting a communications gap that undermines the perceived value of this benefit.

#### EMPLOYEE VIEW: CONTRIBUTIONS RECEIVED



#### EMPLOYEE VIEW: CONTRIBUTIONS MADE



The employer data shows even starker numbers, with 71.4% contributing 0-5%. This concentration at the lower end suggests most organisations are meeting minimum requirements rather than using pensions as a competitive tool. Given that enhanced pension contributions are highly valued by employees (14.8% specifically cite them as a desired benefit), this represents a significant opportunity for strategic differentiation.



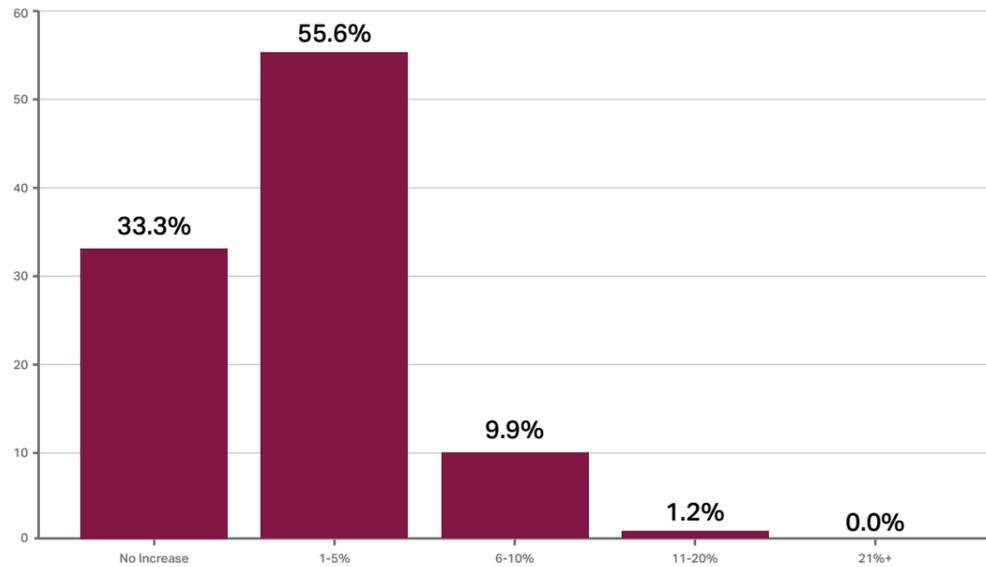
# SALARY GROWTH DYNAMICS

The salary landscape in 2026 reflects economic moderation following several years of elevated increases. Understanding these dynamics is essential for contextualising the increased importance of non-salary benefits.

## PAY RISE DISTRIBUTION

Over the past year, 33.3% of finance professionals received no salary increase whatsoever. This represents a substantial cohort whose compensation has effectively decreased in real terms. A further 55.6% received modest increases of 1-5%, whilst only 11.1% achieved rises exceeding 6%. The concentration of increases in the lower brackets creates significant pressure on total reward strategies.

## SALARY INCREASES RECIEVED IN PAST YEAR



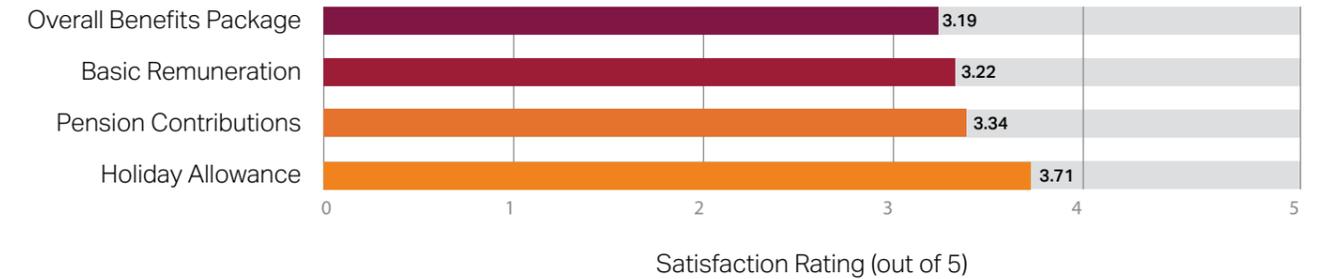
These constrained salary movements have direct consequences for benefits strategy. When base pay growth slows, employees naturally seek alternative forms of value. This shift explains the heightened focus on benefits packages, flexible working, and other non-monetary compensation elements. Employers unable to provide substantial salary increases must consider how comprehensive benefits can partially offset this limitation.



# EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION ACROSS BENEFIT COMPONENTS

Satisfaction levels vary considerably across different benefit categories, revealing where employers are meeting expectations and where significant gaps remain.

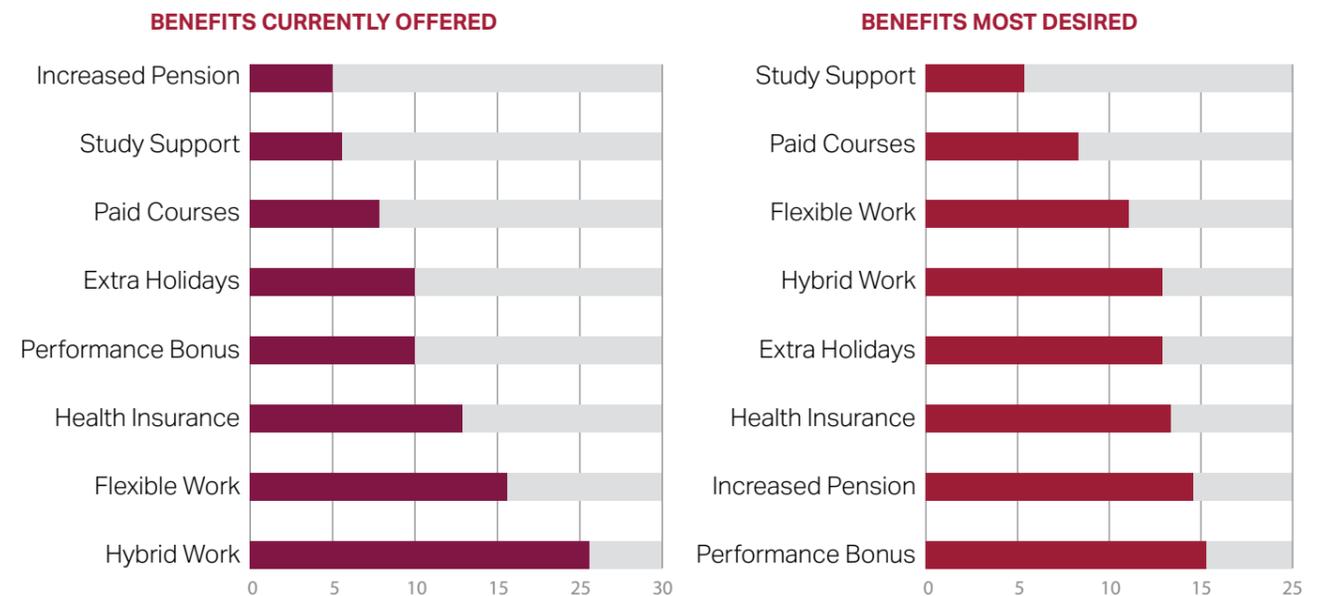
## BENEFITS SATISFACTION BY BENEFIT COMPONENT



Holiday allowance achieves the highest satisfaction at 3.71 out of 5, likely reflecting that most employers provide competitive annual leave entitlements. Pension contributions score 3.34, placing them marginally above neutral. Basic remuneration and the overall benefits package both score below 3.25, indicating widespread dissatisfaction with financial compensation elements. The closeness of these lower scores suggests employees view salary and benefits holistically, with neither component fully meeting expectations.

## THE BENEFITS SUPPLY AND DEMAND GAP

Analysing what employers currently provide against what employees specifically desire reveals critical misalignments that represent both challenges and opportunities.



## CRITICAL GAPS REQUIRING ATTENTION

The most significant mismatches include:

### INCREASED PENSION CONTRIBUTIONS:

desired by 14.8% but offered by only 5.0% - representing a

**9.8%** point gap

### PERFORMANCE BONUSES:

desired by 15.1% but offered by 10.0% - a

**5.1%** point shortfall

### EXTRA HOLIDAYS:

desired by 13.1% whilst offered by 10.0%

**3.1%** point deficit

Interestingly, hybrid work shows the opposite pattern, with 25.3% of employers offering it but only 13.1% of employees specifically requesting it as a desired benefit. This apparent contradiction reflects that hybrid working has become a baseline expectation rather than a differentiating benefit. Its presence is assumed; its absence is disqualifying.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND STUDY SUPPORT

For part-qualified professionals and those pursuing ongoing development, study support remains a critical employment factor. The level and nature of support varies considerably across the market.

### STUDY SUPPORT PROVISION

The survey reveals that 31% of respondents receive "other" forms of support or no formal support at all. Exam fees are paid for 15% of professionals, whilst 14% receive full funding for their qualifications including tuition, exam fees, and study materials. CPD support is provided to 13%, and 11% receive dedicated study time off. Only 5% benefit from structured day release arrangements, suggesting this once-common approach has declined significantly.

The substantial proportion receiving limited support creates vulnerability for employers in the part-qualified talent market. Finance professionals pursuing ACCA, CIMA, or other qualifications actively seek employers who will support their development journey, not merely tolerate it. Those organisations offering comprehensive study packages gain significant competitive advantage when recruiting ambitious early-career talent.

## STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

The 2026 benefits landscape demands strategic responses from employers seeking to maintain competitive advantage in talent markets.

### SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- Conduct comprehensive benefits audits to identify specific gaps against competitor offerings and employee desires
- Review pension contribution levels with consideration for enhanced employer contributions as a retention tool
- Clarify and communicate existing benefits more effectively, ensuring employees understand their full value
- Implement structured flexible working policies that provide genuine autonomy whilst maintaining operational effectiveness

### MEDIUM-TERM STRATEGY

- Develop tiered benefits packages allowing employees to select components aligned with their individual priorities
- Establish regular benefits review cycles ensuring packages evolve with market conditions and workforce demographics
- Create targeted retention programmes addressing the specific needs of critical talent segments
- Invest in benefits administration technology enabling employees to understand and optimise their total reward

### LONG-TERM POSITIONING

- Build employer brand around comprehensive total reward propositions rather than salary alone
- Develop succession planning frameworks that consider benefits expectations of emerging talent
- Create partnerships with benefits providers enabling innovative offerings at competitive costs
- Establish employee feedback mechanisms ensuring benefits evolution remains aligned with workforce needs





## CONCLUSIONS

As we look ahead to 2026/27, our comprehensive analysis of benefits and workplace conditions in the East Midlands finance sector highlights three crucial insights that will shape the market:

1. Benefits have achieved critical mass as employment decision factors, with 98.7% of professionals rating them as important - a decisive shift from peripheral perks to central compensation components.
2. The working arrangements landscape has crystallised around hybrid models, yet implementation remains inconsistent. With 68% willing to seek new roles if flexibility is curtailed, this represents both baseline expectation and significant retention risk.
3. Salary growth moderation has elevated the strategic importance of benefits. When 33.3% receive no pay rise and 55.6% receive only 1-5%, benefits packages become the primary mechanism for employment differentiation.

Diving deeper into the data, the 2026 Benefits Analysis spotlights key trends across workplace conditions and compensation:

- Benefits importance has reached unprecedented heights, with 95.12% rating them as very or quite important when evaluating offers - representing a 5 percentage point increase from 2024.
- Hybrid working has matured significantly, with balanced arrangements (3 days remote/2 days office) emerging as the dominant model at 42.9%, whilst fully office-based roles have declined to just 14.3%.
- Pension contributions reveal a critical opportunity gap, with 48.1% of employees receiving only 0-5% contributions whilst enhanced pensions rank amongst the most desired benefits improvements.
- Salary growth moderation creates both pressure and opportunity, with 62% of employers introducing new benefits to offset slower pay rises and 55% reporting increased total reward offerings.
- Retention strategies remain predominantly reactive rather than proactive, with 60% of departing employees receiving counter-offers yet 65% of those who accept still leaving within 12 months.

As specialists with unmatched regional expertise, our consultants offer strategic advice on optimising total reward strategies and employer branding to attract top finance talent. We leverage digital methodologies and extensive candidate relationships to instantly connect clients with the best permanent or interim professionals - fuelling mutual success and satisfaction. Our mission is to be the most trusted recruitment partner for finance roles. We strive to provide excellent service and memorable experiences that inspire confidence throughout the process.

While the benefits data provided in this study offers a broad overview, various factors influence individual circumstances and organisational requirements. These factors may encompass the socioeconomic setting, the state of the economy, the company's size, and the industry, among others. This analysis is meant to serve as a reference point. Nonetheless, our expert consultants have the capability to carry out tailored benchmarking exercises, enabling you to assess the benefits strategy for your specific organisation. If you are interested in this free service, please contact us today.



Cherry Professional are always my first choice for recruiting at all levels of finance. Over the years they have become a trusted partner, and in a world where relationships are the key – they always go above beyond to get the right fit for our organisation by understanding our needs and delivering on their promises. In particular they always provide a tailored professional service alongside a warm friendly approach which has generated numerous “wins” for our business on numerous occasions. I have no hesitation in recommending Cherry Professional to make the vital connections you need!

*Matthew Bell*

-Business Unit Controller, Global Manufacturing Business



Over the last two decades, Cherry have been my trusted recruitment partner, helping me to secure talented professionals across a variety of business disciplines. Their ability to understand our business needs and culture whilst coaching us on market trends has been instrumental in consistently finding the right candidates for critical roles. From executive leadership to specialist technical positions, they have repeatedly delivered the right person on both a permanent and interim basis.

Cherry have a strategic relationship led approach, and I like the challenge about what is essential to the role and what parts are nice to have so they can find candidates with the right mix of skills that we need.

The longevity of our partnership speaks volumes about their reliability, adaptability, and commitment to excellence. I would highly recommend Cherry Professional to any company seeking a collaborative results-driven and highly skilled recruitment specialist.

*Paul Cavanagh*

-Finance Director - Bonnington Plastics Ltd



Having worked with Cherry Professional as a candidate, placing me in my current role as People Services Director and then having them support me in recruiting for my team, they truly invest time in building strong relationships and understanding the requirements of any role they are supporting with. They are resilient, empathetic and demonstrate integrity at all stages of the process. I've always enjoyed working with them as they always demonstrate a positive attitude and deliver great results.

*Nimira Kazzam*

-People Services Director, PPL PRS



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