

Q1 - 2026

STATE OF THE MARKET



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STATE OF THE MARKET

As we begin 2026, the Australian Accounting and Finance market is operating in a period of consolidation.

We polled over 1,100 **Finance professionals** across Australia on headcount trends, hiring practices, AI adoption, workplace flexibility and skills gaps.

The data reflects a market adjusting to leaner teams, more deliberate hiring, and a growing premium on commercial capability.

Included in this report is a detailed breakdown to help you navigate the year ahead.



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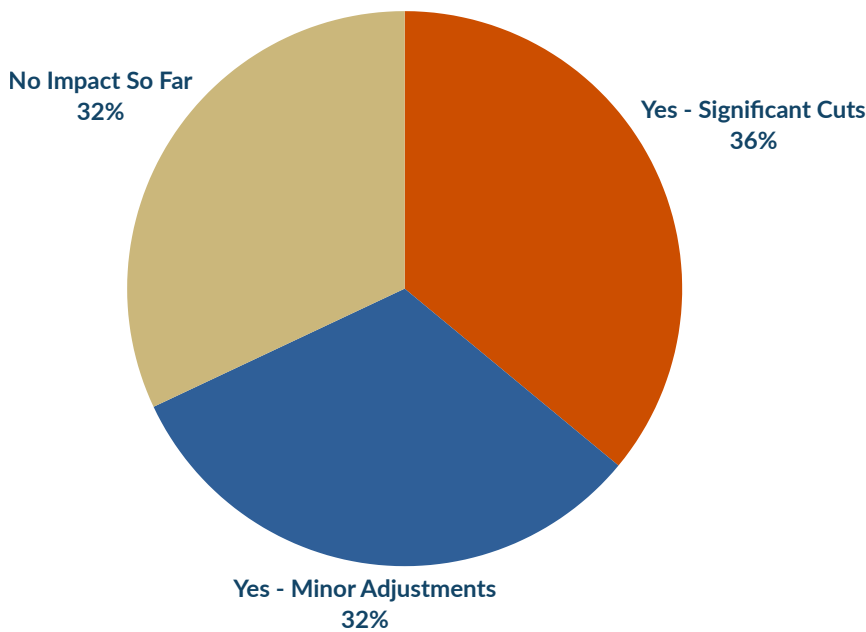
HEADCOUNT CUTS: WIDESPREAD BUT NOT UNIVERSAL

QUESTION

Has your business been impacted by headcount cuts / redundancies in 2025?

KEY INSIGHTS

69% of businesses have been affected by headcount reductions either significantly or through minor adjustments.



The split between significant cuts and minor adjustments is important.

Significant cuts point to structural change; Finance functions being reshaped, layers removed, or headcount consolidated. The 0% expecting further cuts suggests the sharpest phase of the correction is behind us.

The downstream effect is Finance teams running leaner than before, with higher workloads sitting across fewer people. That creates pressure and in many cases, a delayed but inevitable need for targeted senior hiring once confidence returns.

Takeaways:

- **For CFOs / Finance Leaders:** If your team has absorbed cuts without a reduction in scope, map where the capacity gaps are now before a key person leaves.
- **For Businesses / Hiring Managers:** Finance professionals who have navigated significant restructures often come out sharper and more commercially aware. Don't discount candidates with recent redundancy experience.
- **For Candidates:** A 2025 redundancy carries no stigma. What matters at interview is how you frame the experience; what you learned and what you are focused on next.



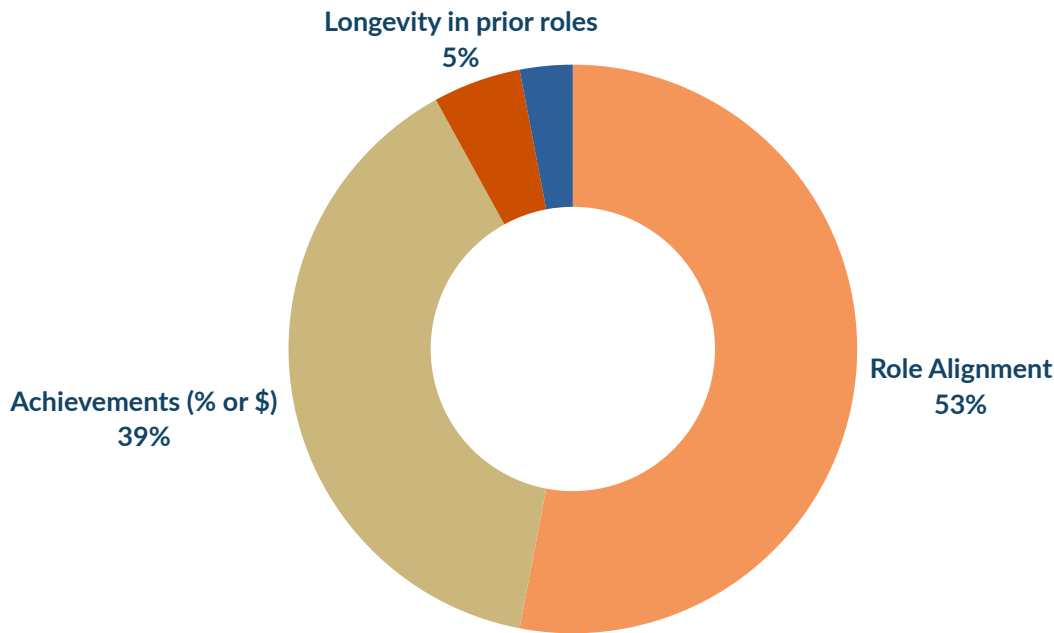
WHAT HIRING MANAGERS ACTUALLY WANT FROM A CV

QUESTION

As a hiring manager for Finance professionals, what's the first thing you look for in a CV?

KEY INSIGHTS

52% of hiring managers look first for role alignment ahead of quantified achievements, tenure or industry background.



Before a hiring manager reads a single achievement, they are asking one question: does this person's background make sense for this role?

Alignment is about trajectory and logic, the right scope, the right type of organisations, a clear connection between where someone has been and where this position sits.

Industry experience ranked at just 3%. Hiring managers in Finance are far more interested in the quality and relevance of your roles than whether you have ticked a specific sector. Transferable senior capability is valued over vertical experience which opens more doors than many candidates realise.

Takeaways:

- **For CFOs / Finance Leaders:** Define what role alignment means for this specific hire before reviewing CVs. Vague criteria produce inconsistent shortlists.
- **For Businesses / Hiring Managers:** Avoid over-indexing on industry experience in your requirements. Your own hiring community largely ignores it & broadening the search will improve candidate quality.
- **For Candidates:** Tailor your opening CV summary to establish alignment immediately. Achievements have more impact once the connection to the role is already clear.

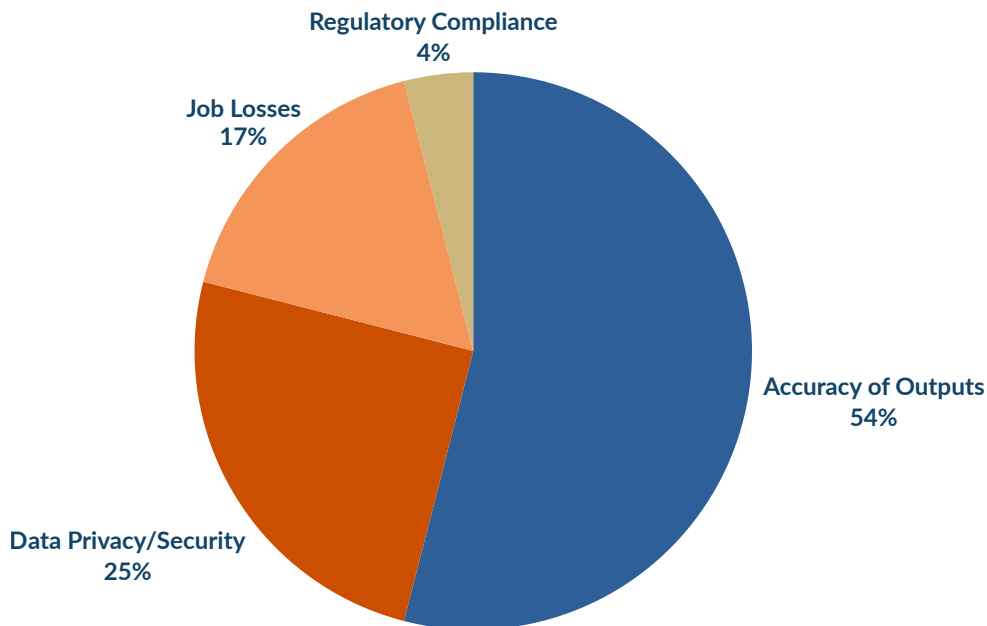
AI IN FINANCE: ACCURACY CONCERNS DOMINATE

QUESTION

What's your biggest concern with AI in Finance?

KEY INSIGHTS

54% of Finance professionals cite accuracy of outputs as their primary concern with AI, ahead of data privacy, job losses, and compliance combined.



Finance professionals are not afraid of being replaced by AI. They are afraid of signing off on something that is wrong.

That is a different problem, and a more solvable one. It is a trust and governance challenge, not a resistance issue.

Until accuracy concerns are addressed through better tooling and clear review processes, adoption will remain cautious. Businesses that develop robust AI governance frameworks now will be ahead of the market when broader integration arrives.

Takeaways:

- **For CFOs / Finance Leaders:** AI adoption accelerates through demonstrated reliability, not mandate. Build trust through controlled pilots with clear review and sign-off processes.
- **For Businesses / Hiring Managers:** Frame AI as a productivity tool in your EVP and hiring conversations. Candidates are not opposed to it, they want to know the governance around it.
- **For Candidates:** You don't need to be an AI whiz. What matters is demonstrating that you understand the tools, know their limitations, and can exercise sound judgement in applying them.



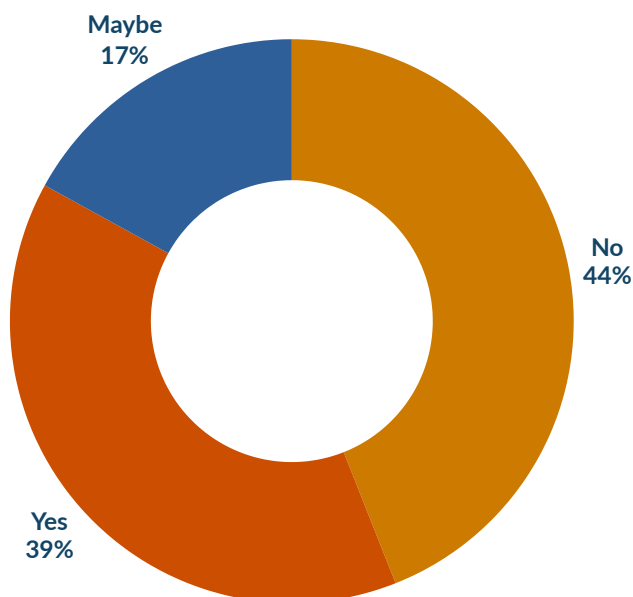
FLEXIBILITY VS OFFICE MANDATES: A CLEAR LINE IN THE SAND

QUESTION

Would you take your dream role if it was 5 days in the office?

KEY INSIGHTS

44% of **Finance professionals** would decline their dream role if it required five full days in the office. Just 39% would accept without hesitation.



This topic is always one of interest. A business enforcing full-time office attendance is immediately removing itself from consideration for close to half of the senior Finance talent pool regardless of brand, role quality, or compensation.

The 17% who said 'maybe' are not a safe middle ground. They are candidates who would accept under the right conditions. That negotiation is happening at the offer stage across the market right now & businesses that understand this can structure conversations accordingly.

Takeaways:

- **For CFOs / Finance Leaders:** If a full office mandate is non-negotiable, be honest about the talent access implications and ensure the rest of your EVP compensates for it.
- **For Businesses / Hiring Managers:** State office expectations clearly and early. Misalignment on this point is a leading cause of late-stage candidate drop-out.
- **For Candidates:** If you are open to full office attendance, make that clear early. It meaningfully broadens your access to senior roles that others are ruling out.

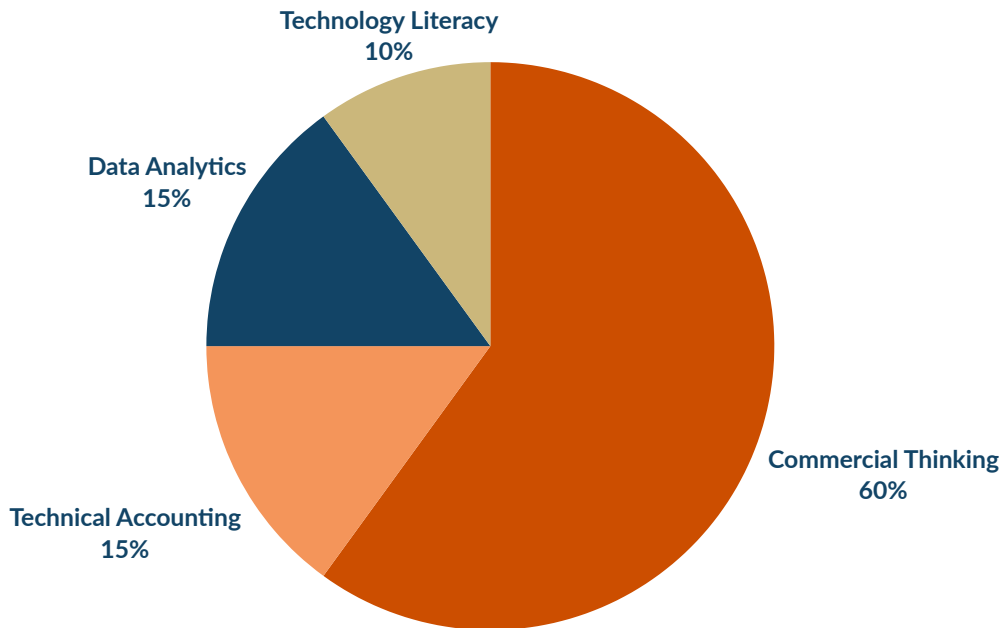
THE SKILLS GAP: STRATEGIC THINKING IS THE MISSING PIECE

QUESTION

The biggest skill gap in Australian Finance right now?

KEY INSIGHTS

60% identified strategic and commercial thinking as the most significant skill gap, outweighing technical accounting, data analytics, and technology literacy combined.



Technical accounting, data analytics, and technology literacy (three areas that dominate most hiring conversations) account for just 40% combined. The market is telling us clearly that the residual value of a senior Finance professional is not in producing the numbers. It is in knowing what to do with them.

This has direct implications for hiring. Businesses looking for a Financial Controller or Head of Finance who can genuinely partner with the executive team will find the pool is thinner than the volume of applicants suggests. Many candidates have strong technical foundations. Far fewer have developed the commercial instinct and strategic framing that defines the best senior Finance hires.

Takeaways:

- **For CFOs / Finance Leaders:** Define what commercial thinking looks like in your specific business context before going to market. It means different things across different environments.
- **For Businesses / Hiring Managers:** Use scenario based interview questions around commercial trade-offs and business decisions. They reveal far more than technical assessments alone.
- **For Candidates:** Connect your technical work to commercial outcomes in every interview. Not just what you produced but what the business did differently as a result.

MOVING FORWARD

2026 is shaping up to be a year of purposeful, selective hiring. The headcount correction appears largely complete. What follows is a period where the quality of hiring decisions matters more than the speed of them.

- **Headcount cuts** are largely behind us but leaner teams carry unresolved capacity risk heading into Q2.
- **Role alignment** is what gets a CV through the door. Candidates who tell a clear, logical story will outperform those who lead with metrics alone.
- **AI** adoption is stalled by trust, not resistance. Governance frameworks will move the needle.
- **Flexibility** remains a deal-defining factor. Full office mandates constrain the available talent pool in a meaningful way.
- **Strategic** and **commercial thinking** is the defining capability gap. The Finance professionals and businesses that prioritise it will carry a structural advantage through 2026.

If you would like to discuss what these trends mean for your team or your next career move, feel free to reach out.



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