

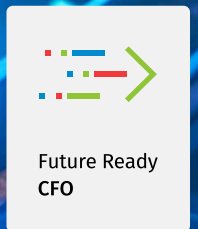
2026 Future Ready CFO Report

United Kingdom regional insights

Performance
orchestrator
in the age of
transformation



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Future Ready
CFO

United Kingdom in context: Priorities shaping finance in 2026

Finance leaders across the United Kingdom are entering 2026 with a notably future-ready mindset. The *2026 Future Ready CFO Survey* shows that while UK respondents face the same macroeconomic and regulatory pressures as other markets, the region distinguishes itself through significantly higher confidence, stronger transformation orientation, and higher agreement across every dimension of the evolving finance role.

This distinct profile reflects finance teams that are actively modernizing their functions, rapidly embracing new technologies, and preparing to lead enterprise-wide change. The following sections summarize the UK's key insights across AI and digital transformation, sustainability, risk and regulatory complexity, talent and leadership evolution, and capital allocation and growth.

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Most effective internal actions to reduce disruption

Development of new finance talent and digital skillsets



Stronger emphasis on data governance, security, and infrastructure



More collaboration between the CTO, CFO, CIO, and CSO



Current digital maturity of finance departments

Basic



Early steps



Established



Advanced



AI and digital transformation: Confidence in accelerated adoption

AI adoption is emerging as a defining force in UK finance, with 53% of finance leaders identifying it as a top organizational trend. Similarly, 53% of survey respondents expect AI to be the most influential driver of individual finance roles.

UK's expectations for AI-driven change are notably higher across core finance functions, with 73% anticipating AI will transform finance transformation and technology modernization (versus 66% globally), 72% expect it to reshape long-term strategy and modeling (versus 63% globally), and 69% foresee significant impact on budgeting and forecasting (compared to 62%). While UK's overall digital maturity aligns with global standards, leaders demonstrate greater confidence in building internal capabilities, such as improving data governance, developing finance talent, accelerating automation, and implementing non-financial reporting frameworks. This positions UK finance teams as more optimistic and better prepared to lead the next wave of AI-driven transformation.

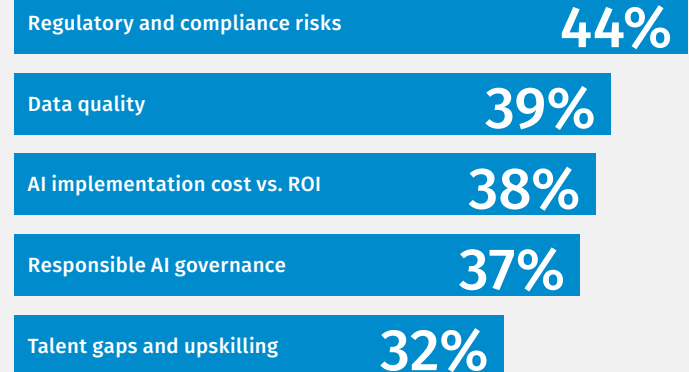
Why this matters

AI is accelerating UK finance's shift from operational efficiency to strategy-led transformation, giving CFOs greater influence over planning, forecasting, and enterprise decision-making.

Effectiveness of internal actions

	UK	Global
Development of new finance talent and digital skillsets	94%	86%
Stronger emphasis on data governance, security, and infrastructure	94%	85%
More collaboration between the CTO, CFO, CIO, and CSO	90%	84%

Top concerns about the use of AI



Sustainability: Orchestrating reporting, credibility, and long term value

Sustainability remains a significant component of the UK finance agenda. The impact of sustainability on senior finance roles is widely recognized, where 82% of respondents agree that sustainability mandates will shape future role expectations, mirroring the global average of 84%. UK finance teams express elevated confidence in adopting standardized sustainability and non-financial reporting frameworks, with 92% viewing these frameworks as effective, compared to 84% globally.

Internal initiatives such as talent development, digital skill-building, strengthening data governance, and fostering executive collaboration are considered especially impactful in advancing sustainability efforts. Strategic thinking and business partnering are also prioritized, with 48% of UK respondents citing these skills as essential for future finance leaders.

These findings highlight a proactive approach, with CFOs anticipating that sustainability reporting, long-term value integration, and strategic communication will become increasingly central to the finance function.

Why this matters

In UK, sustainability is becoming a core finance mandate, strengthening the CFO's role in credible reporting, investor trust, and long-term value creation.

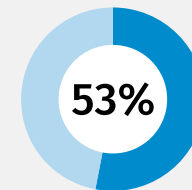
How UK finance leaders expect the CFO role to evolve

External reporting will become real time and forward looking **90%**

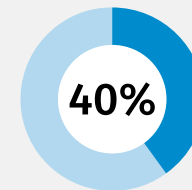
CFOs will co-lead digital transformation with CIOs **90%**

Investor relations will require stronger story-telling and communication **89%**

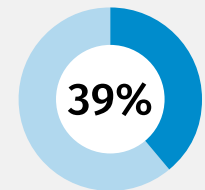
Top trends impacting organizations



Adoption and implementation of AI



Interest rate volatility and shifting capital markets



Evolving regulatory and compliance complexity

Risk and regulation: Managing volatility and compliance demands

Risk and regulatory complexity remain essential elements of the UK finance agenda, broadly mirroring global patterns but with a few notable distinctions. Finance leaders identify regulatory and compliance complexity as one of the most influential forces shaping both organizations and roles, with 39% citing it at the organizational level and 47% at the role level. Interest rate volatility also ranks high, affecting 40% of organizations and 43% of roles.

However, UK stands out for reporting lower perceived risk from cybersecurity threats. Only 21% cite cybersecurity as a top role-level concern versus 26% globally, and only 19% consider it a major influence on capital allocation versus 25% globally. This suggests UK leaders may see cybersecurity as more contained or less disruptive to finance operations relative to other markets.

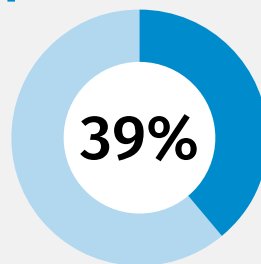
AI-related risks largely align with global patterns, with UK respondents citing regulatory and compliance risks (44%), data quality (39%), and implementation cost versus ROI (38%) as their top concerns.

Despite these pressures, UK finance leaders express substantially higher confidence in their organizations' preparedness across multiple dimensions of risk mitigation, including data governance, infrastructure, and cross-functional coordination.

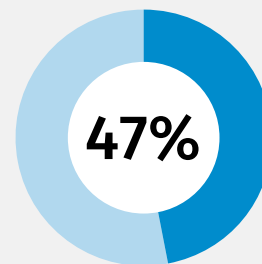
Why this matters

Rising regulatory complexity and market volatility are expanding the UK CFO's role as a risk leader, demanding stronger governance while enabling confident transformation.

Regulatory complexity is felt more acutely at the finance role level



My organization



My role

Key barriers to digital transformation

	UK	Global
Resistance to change / cultural barriers	26%	27%
Limited support from leadership	5%	9%
Legacy systems / outdated infrastructure	14%	16%

Key risks of AI adoption

Regulatory and compliance risks	44%
Data quality concerns	39%
Responsible AI governance	37%
Risks from vendors or third-party management	36%

Talent and leadership: Supporting transformation at scale

Talent expectations for UK finance leaders are expanding in ways that closely mirror global trends, but the region's strong focus on transformation sets it apart.

UK respondents demonstrate notably higher agreement than their global peers across all areas of finance role evolution. For instance, there is greater emphasis in the UK on driving cultural and workflow changes (93% vs 83%), fostering continuous learning (93% vs 82%), co-leading digital transformation initiatives (90% vs 83%), and enabling real-time external reporting (90% vs 81%), with all these figures exceeding global averages.

In these domains, UK finance professionals show substantially higher confidence and readiness than the global average.

When considering competencies required for future CFO success, UK finance leaders assign nearly equal weight to digital fluency (51%), risk and compliance expertise (51%), AI and automation literacy (50%), and strategic business partnering (48%). This balanced prioritization sets expectations for multidimensional finance leaders who can influence enterprise strategy while simultaneously accelerating technology adoption.

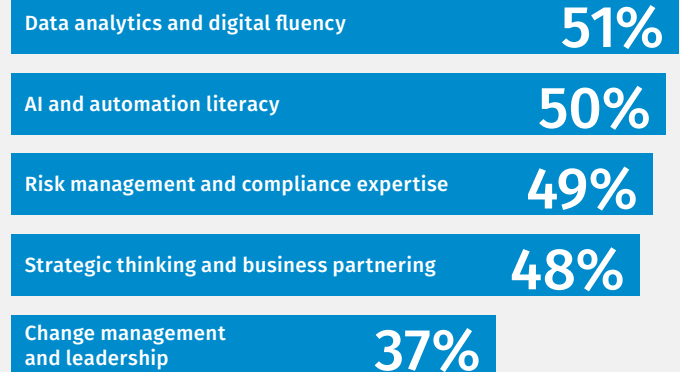
UK's strong confidence in building capabilities, including talent development and adopting new digital skillsets, further reinforces this narrative. Respondents in the region consistently score

significantly higher than their global counterparts on actions related to training, collaboration, and modernization, underscoring the proactive approach to preparing finance teams for future challenges.

Why this matters

UK finance leaders are expected to lead change, not just manage it, requiring a blend of digital fluency, strategic partnership, and cultural leadership.

Most important skills for future finance leaders



Capital allocation and growth: Strategy-led investment decisions

UK finance leaders are prioritizing capital allocation in ways that closely mirror global patterns, with AI adoption and interest-rate volatility emerging as top influences. According to the survey data, 46% of UK leaders expect AI adoption and interest-rate volatility to significantly impact capital allocation decisions, figures that are higher than the global averages of 43% and 42%, respectively. Other important factors shaping capital allocation include supply-chain disruption and ongoing digital transformation.

Strategically, UK finance leaders display a distinct future-oriented approach. The survey data also indicates that 46% of UK leaders are more involved in long-term business strategy and financial modeling, compared to 39% globally. Furthermore, 63% of UK respondents emphasize finance transformation as a strategic priority, again surpassing the global average of 52%.

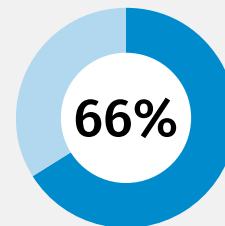
Collectively, these insights demonstrate that UK CFOs are strongly positioned to drive value creation through disciplined capital deployment, investments in modernization, and strategy-led financial planning.

Why this matters

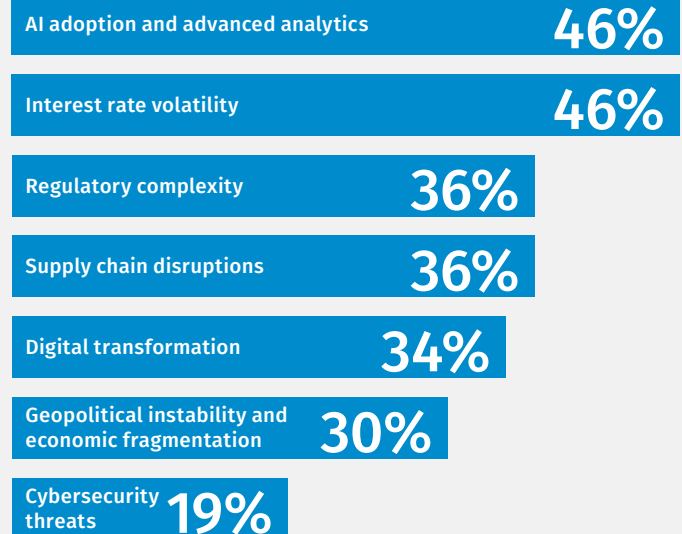
Capital allocation in UK is becoming more dynamic and technology-driven, reinforcing the CFO's role as a strategic steward of growth, resilience, and ROI.

AI is becoming central to capital allocation and ROI decision making

UK leaders anticipate a higher degree of AI-driven transformation across finance functions, particularly for financial transformation & tech modernization, long term strategy and financial modeling, and budgeting, forecasting and performance analysis.



Key factors influencing capital allocation and resource planning in the UK



UK outlook: What these findings indicate for the year ahead

The UK finance function is distinguished by its confidence, future orientation, and readiness for accelerated transformation. UK CFOs anticipate deeper AI-driven modernization, stronger collaboration across functions, and more profound shifts in strategic finance leadership compared with their global peers.

The journey ahead will require continued investment in digital capabilities, strengthened data governance, refined sustainability reporting, and expanded talent development. Yet UK leaders show exceptional confidence in their ability to meet these challenges, positioning the region's finance community at the forefront of global transformation.

The UK CFO is future-ready, prepared to lead with vision, modernize at pace, and create meaningful long-term value for their organizations.

Top skills necessary for future finance leaders' success



Methodology

This report presents findings from the *2026 Wolters Kluwer Future Ready CFO Survey*, offering a current view of how senior finance leaders around the world are preparing for the future of the finance function.

The study reflects insights from **1,672 senior finance leaders**, including CFOs and enterprise-level finance executives, from large organizations across **20 global markets**. These markets include major regions such as the U.S., United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, China, Japan, Singapore, India, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Canada, Switzerland, Austria, and others.

Fieldwork was conducted between **October and December 2025**, using an online survey translated into multiple languages to ensure consistency and comparability across markets. Respondents were recruited from trusted professional panels and represented leaders with significant strategic, operational, and decision making responsibility within the Office of the CFO.

The survey explores the priorities, pressures, and opportunities determining the future of finance, along with the evolving role of the CFO as organizations navigate economic volatility, technological acceleration, and increasing demands for strategic insight.

About Wolters Kluwer Corporate Performance & ESG

Wolters Kluwer Corporate Performance & ESG provides enterprise software solutions for corporate performance management, EHS, risk management, sustainability, internal audit and assurance.

Wolters Kluwer (EURONEXT: WKL) is a global leader in information solutions, software and services for professionals in healthcare; tax and accounting; financial and corporate compliance; legal and regulatory; corporate performance and ESG. We help our customers make critical decisions every day by providing *expert solutions* that combine deep domain knowledge with technology and services.

Wolters Kluwer reported 2025 annual revenues of €6.1 billion. The group serves customers in over 180 countries, maintains operations in over 40 countries, and employs approximately 21,100 people worldwide. The company is headquartered in Alphen aan den Rijn, the Netherlands.

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