



CompassPoint Careers

Navigate Your Future

INDUSTRY INSIGHT

Finance and Banking

The Numbers You Need to Know

125,000+

Students: Economics,
Finance and Accounting
HESA 2024/25

£32,000

Average graduate starting
salary, financial services
Graduate-Jobs.com, Apr 2026

85%

In relevant employment
within 15 months
HESA Graduate Outcomes 2022/23

150:1

Applicants per place at
top investment banks
Financial Times, 2025

£55,000+

Investment banking
analyst starting salary
eFinancialCareers, 2025

76,500

People employed
in UK fintech
Innovate Finance, 2024

The Honest Market Picture

What your university careers service probably did not tell you

Finance and Banking attracts graduates from almost every degree subject. At the top end, investment banking graduate schemes receive over 150 applications per available place. Spring weeks and summer internships are not optional extras for those targeting banks or asset managers — they are the primary hiring pipeline. Most front-office graduate hires have completed an internship with that firm first. If you are in first or second year and have not applied for a spring week, you are already behind.

Big 4 accountancy, retail banking, insurance and fintech all run large graduate schemes with far less extreme competition. The ACA, ACCA and CFA qualifications are the professional infrastructure of this sector. Arriving at interview without knowing the difference between ACA and ACCA is a red flag. AI is automating reconciliations and basic analysis. Junior hires are expected to add judgement and relationship capability that technology cannot replicate.

Employment Outlook 2025 to 2029

- Investment banking deadlines arrive far earlier than most graduates realise. Spring week applications open in September for first and second-year students. Graduate scheme applications for 2027 entry open October 2026.
- ESG and sustainable finance roles are growing across all subsectors. Graduates who can discuss green bonds, ESG frameworks and net-zero transition finance are increasingly attractive to large employers.
- Fintech continues to expand. Revolut, Monzo, Wise and Starling compete directly with traditional banks for graduate talent and offer faster progression at entry level.
- AI is automating routine financial tasks. Graduates who understand Python, SQL or data visualisation tools are pulling ahead of those with only traditional financial knowledge.
- The Big 4 remain the single largest entry point into professional finance outside banking. Deloitte, PwC, EY and KPMG collectively hire thousands of graduates across audit, tax, advisory and deals.
- Chartered qualifications add significant earning power. ACA-qualified accountants earn around £55,000 on qualification. CFA charterholders in investment management typically exceed £70,000 at two years.

Sources: ISE Student Employment Survey 2025; HESA Graduate Outcomes 2022/23; Graduate-Jobs.com Apr 2026; eFinancialCareers 2025; Innovate Finance UK Fintech Census 2024; Financial Times Graduate Recruitment Report 2025

What Employers Actually Want in 2026

Skill	Why it matters	How to demonstrate it
Numerical literacy	Essential for every finance role regardless of specialism	Quantitative modules; Maths A-level; data-driven project work
Financial modelling	Expected at graduate level in banking and investment roles	Excel modelling courses; CFA Institute free resources; investment tracking projects
Commercial awareness	Interviewers probe this hard. Generic answers fail	Read the FT daily; follow markets; reference real deals in interviews
Data and Excel	Automates the manual work graduates used to do	Excel Analyst certification; Bloomberg Market Concepts (free for students)
Attention to detail	Errors in finance carry real consequences; employers test for this	Cite examples where accuracy mattered; evidence of structured checking
Chartered qualification intent	ACA, ACCA or CFA signals long-term commitment to the profession	Reference your planned study route in cover letters and at interview

Top Graduate Employers and Schemes

Investment Banking	Big 4 and Consulting	Retail and Commercial	Fintech and Insurance
Goldman Sachs JP Morgan Morgan Stanley Barclays IB Deutsche Bank	Deloitte, PwC, EY, KPMG Accenture Oliver Wyman Mazars	Lloyds Banking Group HSBC, NatWest Barclays, Santander Metro Bank	Revolut, Monzo Aviva, Legal and General AXA, Prudential Wise

The Mistake Most Finance Graduates Make

The most common failure is applying only to investment banks without a credible Plan B. IB graduate schemes are among the most competitive hiring processes in the world. Many highly qualified graduates apply and receive nothing. Those who succeed apply broadly, treat Big 4, asset management and fintech as serious targets, and use rejections as data rather than outcomes.

The second mistake is not starting early enough. In Finance, early means September of your penultimate year. Spring week applications, insight days and first-round interviews are all underway while most graduates are still deciding whether to bother. The best schemes close once full — well before their advertised deadlines. Missing October often means waiting another twelve months.

How to Stand Out in 2026

- Apply for spring weeks and insight days in September of your penultimate year. Do not wait until final year.
- Complete Bloomberg Market Concepts before applying. It is free for university students and signals genuine interest to recruiters.
- Build a clear 'Why Finance, why this firm, why this division' narrative before writing any single application.
- Start CFA Level 1 preparation or reference your intention in cover letters — it demonstrates commitment beyond the degree.
- Get Excel to a professional standard. Financial modelling is directly testable at interview. Practice before you apply.
- Network at virtual and in-person insight events. Hiring managers at major banks attend these. A warm introduction matters.

Application Timeline: When to Apply

Penultimate Year	September to October: Spring week and insight day applications open at major banks and Big 4. Apply immediately — places fill fast.
Penultimate Year	November to January: Spring weeks take place. First-round assessments and video interviews for summer internship schemes begin.
Penultimate Year	February to April: Summer internship assessment centres. Offers typically made by April for a June to August internship.
Final Year	September to October: Graduate scheme applications open for September the following year. Many close before Christmas.
Final Year	November to March: Assessment centres and final-round interviews for graduate roles. Conversion offers for previous interns.

CompassPoint Careers gives Finance and Banking graduates the CV, LinkedIn profile and interview preparation to compete at the highest level. Book a free 15-minute discovery call.

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