
Financial Controller Leadership Training Course: Close, Policy and Controls

8 – 12 November 2026
Zoom





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Programme Summary

Financial controller leadership is the subject of this five-day training course for financial controllers, finance managers and heads of accounting at managerial level, ending in a controller operating plan for one finance function. Controllers answer for the accuracy of reported results, the discipline of the close and the strength of controls, while executives ask them for forward-looking advice. The approach moves from the role and accounting policy, through close, reporting and variance control, to the control environment and audit relationship, then a worked operating plan. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this programme in financial controller leadership.

The Business Case

A controller who leads a slow close, an unclear policy base or weak controls spends the year correcting results instead of advising on them. Late adjustments, repeated audit points and disputed variances erode executive trust in the numbers. A clear operating model for the function gives leaders reliable figures sooner and frees finance time for decisions.

- Close Cycle Time: Shortens as tasks, owners and cut-offs are scheduled and tracked.
- Reporting Error Rate: Falls as policy, review and reconciliation routines are standardised.
- Audit Findings: Reduce as controls are mapped, tested and evidenced before the audit starts.

Principles and Evidence Base

- COSO Internal Control - Integrated Framework: Its five components of effective internal control, including monitoring, shape the control environment work in Sessions 3 and 4.
- IAS 1 Presentation of Financial Statements: Its rules on the structure and content of financial statements guide the reporting work in Session 2.
- IAS 8 Accounting Policies, Changes in Accounting Estimates and Errors: Its treatment of policy choice, estimates and prior-period errors guides the policy work in Session 1.

Intended Participants

- Financial controllers who own the integrity of reported results.
- Heads of accounting who run the close and the reporting calendar.
- Finance managers preparing to take over the controllership function.
- Finance leaders who liaise with auditors and executive committees.

The programme serves banks, industrial groups, public entities and service companies.



Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to evaluate the scope of the financial controller role against the needs of the business.
2. Participants will be able to construct an accounting policy register with clear ownership and change rules.
3. Participants will be able to diagnose the causes of a slow or error-prone close.
4. Participants will be able to prioritise budget and variance issues for executive attention.
5. Participants will be able to design a control environment that can be tested and evidenced for auditors.
6. Participants will be able to justify a controller operating plan to a finance director and an audit committee.

Programme Structure

Day 1: Financial Controller Role and Accounting Policy Ownership

What does the financial controller own, and which policies must be kept under control?

- Controller Role Charter and Responsibility Map
- Accounting Policy Register
- IAS 8 Policy Change and Error Decision Tree
- Estimates and Judgements Log
- Finance Function Stakeholder Map

Day 2: Close, Reporting and Variance Control

How are the close and the reports made fast, accurate and explainable?

- Close Calendar and Task Ownership Matrix
- Reconciliation and Cut-Off Checklist
- IAS 1 Financial Statement Review Checklist
- Budget-to-Actual Variance Bridge
- Management Commentary Template

Day 3: Internal Control Environment

Where are the control gaps, and which carry most risk?

- COSO Control Component Assessment
- Process Risk and Control Matrix
- Segregation of Duties Review
- Journal Entry Control Test
- Control Deficiency Log



Day 4: Audit Liaison and Business Partnering

How does the controller support auditors and advise executives at the same time?

- Audit Request List and Evidence Index
- Management Letter Response Plan
- Audit Committee Reporting Pack
- Executive Briefing Note Format
- Decision Support Cost Analysis

Day 5: Applying Financial Controller Leadership to One Finance Function

Is the controller operating plan ready for the finance director and audit committee?

- Applying the Session 1 Policy Register to the Chosen Function
- Testing the Session 2 Close Calendar Against Actual Cycle Times
- Checking Session 3 Control Gaps Against the Risk Matrix
- Applying the Session 4 Reporting Pack to the Audit Plan
- Completing the Controller Operating Plan

Methodology

The programme uses case analysis and structured exercises. Participants work in small teams with an anonymised finance function, reviewing its close calendar, policy register and control matrix, then present their operating plan to a simulated audit committee for challenge. No systems skills are required.

- Suggested activity: Redesigning a close calendar to remove two bottlenecks.
- Suggested activity: Classifying five accounting events as policy changes, estimate changes or errors.
- Suggested activity: Preparing a short briefing on a variance for a chief executive.

Capstone Output

Each participant completes a controller operating plan for one finance function. It holds a role charter, a policy register, a close calendar, a variance reporting routine, a control gap list and an audit liaison plan, and it is used to brief the finance director and the audit committee.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is financial controller leadership suitable for finance managers who have not yet held the controller role?

Yes. Financial controller leadership is set at managerial level and assumes responsibility for reporting, close or controls, not prior experience as a controller.



Which standards does financial controller leadership rest on in this programme?

Financial controller leadership rests on the COSO Internal Control - Integrated Framework, IAS 1 for financial statement presentation and IAS 8 for policies, estimates and errors.

How is the operating plan from financial controller leadership used at work?

You use the operating plan from financial controller leadership to brief your finance director and audit committee, set the close calendar and plan control improvements.

How does financial controller leadership differ from an internal audit programme?

Financial controller leadership centres on running the close, policies and controls from inside the function, while an internal audit programme centres on independent assurance over them.