

FREE PRACTICAL CHECKLIST

INTERNAL AUDIT RESOURCE LIBRARY

PAYROLL

Payroll Audit Checklist

A practical checklist for employee master data, pay changes, leavers, payroll processing and payment.









How to use this checklist

This checklist is designed as a practical fieldwork aid for payroll audit. Use it to prepare interviews, structure testing and document areas requiring deeper evidence. A checked box should mean the point was considered and supported - not simply that a question was asked.

SIMPLE STATUS KEY

- ☐ **Done** Evidence supports the point
- ☐ **Review** More evidence or clarification needed
- ☐ **N/A** Not applicable - document why

Employee master

- ☐ **01** New hires are supported by approved HR records.
- ☐ **02** Employees have unique IDs and valid bank/tax details.
- ☐ **03** Changes to salary, grade or bank details require authorized approval.
- ☐ **04** Leavers are removed from payroll on time.
- ☐ **05** Duplicate bank accounts, IDs or addresses are analyzed.

AUDITOR NOTES / EVIDENCE

Payroll processing

- ☐ 06 Payroll inputs have clear ownership and cut-off dates.
- ☐ 07 Overtime, bonus and allowance calculations are validated.
- ☐ 08 Manual adjustments are separately reviewed.
- ☐ 09 Payroll is reconciled to prior month and HR headcount.
- ☐ 10 Gross-to-net and statutory deductions are reviewed for unusual changes.

Risk prompts

- What could fail even if the documented procedure looks adequate?
- Where can one person initiate, change and approve the same outcome?
- Which exceptions are common enough to have become normal practice?
- What data pattern would indicate control bypass or management override?

TESTING NOTES / EXCEPTIONS

Payment and access

- ☐ 11 Payroll payment file is independently approved.
- ☐ 12 Payroll and HR system access is role-based and reviewed.
- ☐ 13 Users cannot both create employees and release payments without controls.
- ☐ 14 Rejected/returned salary payments are investigated.
- ☐ 15 Management reviews payroll trends and unusual movements.

Evidence to retain

- ☐ 01 Relevant system reports or extracts with source and period visible.
- ☐ 02 Approval/workflow evidence for selected high-risk items.
- ☐ 03 Screenshots or logs supporting key control steps and exceptions.
- ☐ 04 Reconciliations or reperformance showing how the conclusion was reached.
- ☐ 05 Management explanation only where corroborated or clearly identified as explanation.

Use data to challenge the checklist

Where transaction data is available, do not rely only on samples. Run targeted tests that identify unusual behavior, control bypass and concentrations. Adapt the tests below to the process and available fields.

- ☐ **01** Trend exceptions by user, approver, location, vendor/customer or month.
- ☐ **02** Identify transactions just below approval or policy thresholds.
- ☐ **03** Search for duplicates, repeated round values and unusual timing.
- ☐ **04** Compare master-data changes with subsequent transactions or payments.
- ☐ **05** Review override, manual-entry and emergency/urgent indicators.
- ☐ **06** Investigate outliers that combine multiple risk indicators.

RED-FLAG RULE

A red flag is not proof of wrongdoing. Treat it as a reason to obtain more evidence. Combine pattern, business context, approval history and supporting records before reaching a conclusion.

Completion and conclusion

Before you close the checklist

- ☐ **01** All material exceptions have an evidence reference.
- ☐ **02** Open questions have an owner and due date.
- ☐ **03** Control design issues are separated from isolated execution errors.
- ☐ **04** Recurring exceptions have been considered for root cause and systemic impact.
- ☐ **05** The conclusion is proportionate to evidence and business risk.
- ☐ **06** Any issue requiring escalation has been communicated promptly.

FINAL CONCLUSION

Overall assessment / key message:

Owner / follow-up date:
