



ACCA

WHY CHOOSE A CAREER IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ACCOUNTANCY PRACTICE?

FOR EMPLOYEES

Think Ahead

About ACCA

ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) is the global body for professional accountants. We are a thriving community of 241,000 members and 542,000 future members based in 178 countries and regions, who work across a wide range of sectors and industries. We uphold the highest professional and ethical values.

We offer everyone everywhere the opportunity to experience a rewarding career in accountancy, finance and management. Our qualifications and learning opportunities develop strategic business leaders, forward-thinking professionals, with the financial, business and digital expertise essential for the creation of sustainable organisations and flourishing societies.

Since 1904 being a force for public good has been embedded in our purpose. In December 2020, we made commitments to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which we are measuring and will report on in our annual integrated report.

We believe that accountancy is a cornerstone profession of society and is vital in helping economies, organisations and individuals grow and prosper. It does this by creating robust trusted financial and business management, combating corruption, ensuring organisations are managed ethically, driving sustainability, and providing rewarding career opportunities. And through cutting edge research, we lead the profession by answering today's questions and preparing for the future. We are a not-for-profit organisation.

Find out more about us at www.accaglobal.com

241,000
members



542,000
future
members



178
countries
and regions



About the Toolkit

The opportunity for small and medium sized-practices (SMPs) to grow in today's business environment is unprecedented. Digital transformation, in particular, is fully enabling smaller accountancy firms to reimagine the services they offer.

The toolkit contains practical recommendations and links to ACCA's resources - tailored for those of you interested in careers in SMPs.



Why choose a career in an SMP?



Be at the forefront of change and progress

Accountancy is an ever-changing profession - and SMPs are at the forefront of these changes. SMPs are essential in supporting entrepreneurs and small businesses to start up and grow in local economies. Smaller accountancy firms don't offer just financial advice and compliance services to their clients. They're the natural business adviser at every stage of the growth process, from initial business conception to supporting wider business expansion plans and strategy development and you can be part of that.



Champion technology and sustainability

SMP accountants have led the move to digitalisation while continually looking for new ways of using and improving the latest technology. Accountants are also championing sustainability in the small business sector - and joining an SMP brings you a chance to be part of this crucial process.



Accountancy is also a people business

SMP accountancy may be fitting if you want a career that involves high levels of customer contact, helping clients achieve their goals and being exposed to a wide range of industries and business situations. It offers the opportunity for professional growth and a career as a practitioner - as well as opening the door to other careers in accountancy.



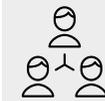
See results of your work

Essentially, you'll be able to see the results of your efforts. This is an element that's often missed in many fields of work, especially within larger corporations - where employees can feel remote from the end result. In an SMP you'll be able to see how your work is shaping the tangible success of businesses - you'll have a very noticeable role to play.



Become a driver of social responsibility and ethics

Accountancy also has a wider social responsibility - and the training will equip you with a strong professional and ethical framework.



The potential is enormous

The potential for career progression is enormous: accountants go on to become chief financial officers (CFOs), chief executive officers (CEOs), partners and owner/managers of their own practices - or find success in many other contexts. Working for an SMP you have a chance to become a virtual CFO for several small businesses. Many SMPs encourage entrepreneurial spirit among their employees. 'Intrapreneurship' enables employees use their entrepreneurial skills while benefiting from the resources, capabilities and security of the current organisation, and learning from possible failures without the personal risks that entrepreneurship entails.

practice connect



VIDEO

A careers success story at SMP: from apprentice to head of department. Alex Black shares his career journey at Ad Valorem Chartered Certified Accountants - from apprentice to becoming head of research and development.

ALEX BLACK

To find out more about career opportunities in SMP backed by case studies and testimonials from global practitioners – read section three of the ACCA and CA ANZ co-branded report [Careers in SMPs](#)

Why choose a career in an SMP?

Read our member stories:

From setting up a bold, new technology driven practice to managing teams of accountants or overseeing international tax - this series of articles talks to ACCA members who are re-defining what direction accountancy and finance career paths can take.



> Member stories

PART 1



> Member stories

PART 2

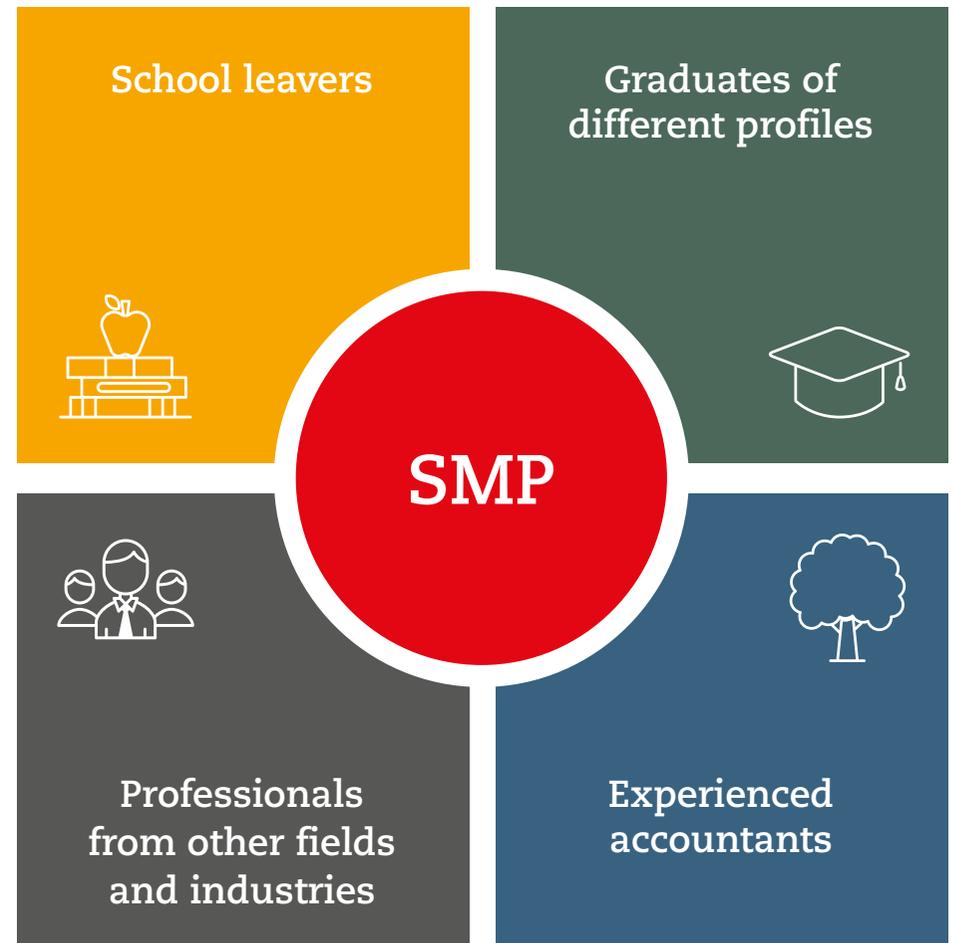
SMPs – the opportunity for various talent groups

SMPs are actively seeking both entry-level and experienced talent. There's no universal recruitment pattern among accountancy practices - with much depending on the business model and strategy of a particular practice.

SMPs often recruit graduates - sometimes with business or accounting qualifications but also from non-finance backgrounds. While non-finance graduates have fewer exemptions from accountancy exams, this is balanced by a broader educational background and life experience.

Given the growing diversity of services provided by SMPs and demand for multidisciplinary, talent from other industries may be both attracted to careers in SMPs and bring value added to those practices – eg IT, sustainability, data science.

Flexible working patterns enabled by technology also mean that SMPs can be attractive for those who have been taking a career break.



Decide your entry point



You may wish to enter the workforce as soon as possible - making an apprenticeship scheme an attractive opportunity.

Alternatively, you may choose to take a degree – not necessarily in accountancy or business – and enter a career after graduation. Experienced specialists are also highly in demand from SMPs, where they often act as virtual CFOs for several small businesses.



Position yourself for success



Many practice leaders recruit talent for their attitude as much as technical ability. They look for work and life experiences that indicate a well-rounded person with good ‘soft skills’ - and a willingness to embrace change.

Look at the list of the top skills, attitudes and experiences suggested by practice leaders in ACCA's Careers in SMPs report, and make those skills visible in your CV.

[> View ACCA's Career for SMPs report](#)

In addition to a traditional CV, you can create a short video about yourself, your experience and what appeals to you about the position you're applying for.

Would you like to get recruiter advice?
Visit the careers in SMPs section of ACCA Careers

Navigate your own careers

Our **Groundbreakers: Gen Z and the future of Accountancy** report suggests some great tips for future proofing your careers based on the discussions with employers and Gen Z around the world. Those tips were initially aimed at supporting Gen Z, but different groups and generations might find them inspiring.



#1 Bring your tech know-how. In a fast-changing world of work, digital know-how is key for all organisations in creating competitive advantage and transforming their businesses. Organisations are prizing candidates who bring their tech know-how to the organisation quickly, innovating and using technology to solve challenges differently, and more efficiently. It is very relevant to SMP, where digitalisation has brought a tremendous change from pricing models to geographic reach, business structures and the very nature of client relationships.

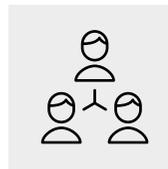


#2 Work your brand internally. There's a risk with more remote working and a plethora of Teams or Zoom calls that personal relationships suffer. It's critical for you to think about how you can make work engagements more personal, and how you can build deeper relationships in the workplace. Employers cite that as work environments democratise, junior team members have quicker access to senior people when joining businesses.

Cultivating strong personal relationships internally is key to achieving strong work outcomes and building managerial skills.



#3 Care for your health and build resilience. Prioritising your mental health and using techniques available for managing stress is important. Employers cite the importance of their employees building their emotional resilience to help cope with work particularly in the current environment with remote working presenting risks of increased isolation. But resilience is also important to thrive longer term in the face of different challenges as career journeys unfold. More businesses are identifying new ways of supporting the health, safety and well-being of their employees; lean on these and find support when you need it.



#4 Remember, it's a team game. With technologies transforming, connectivity possibilities and changing how work gets done across the most diverse and inter-generational workforce in history, there are brilliant opportunities for you to find multi-disciplinary work opportunities to Hoover up new experiences and learn from others in the workplace. Employers cite the growing importance of collaboration and project work driven by fast-changing business. Ultimately, work is a team game, and it is more important than ever for a successful career in SMP to be part of the team and support SMPs on their exiting journey of reimagining the services they offer.



#5 Disrupt yourself. Adaptability is a prized trait in today's fluid work environment. As roles transform and career paths diversify, tried and tested career routes become less obvious. Whilst it's natural to always want a promotion and more pay as you take on new roles, be prepared to disrupt yourself, and to think more laterally about the skills you can acquire by taking different career paths. SMPs often create different work streams such as data analytics, applications development, research and development or encourage employees to become champions for particular applications, or a specific technical field, or to lead a client relationship. Those can be great professional development opportunities.



#6 Seek mentors, find sponsors. While technology may sometimes provide a 'short circuit' to better or more efficient solutions at work, employers we talked to suggest that sometimes it may come at a price. They cited the challenges of career progression in a world where some of the 'hard yards' of knowledge traditionally acquired in accountancy have vanished. Actively seeking mentors and colleagues from different generations to provide you with essential support to help 'fill in the blanks' and give you vital knowledge and wisdom from years of experience is very valuable.. Ask employers about career support mechanisms such as career conversations and feedback processes to ensure your career journey is supported effectively. Reverse mentoring is very commonly used in multigenerational SMP teams.



#7 Continuously learn. The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the point that as work transforms and career changes intensify, there is a pressing need for continuous upskilling across the workforce. This fast-moving environment necessitates a rethink in how we all acquire new capabilities to remain relevant, particularly as professional education transforms and the distance between the workplace and the classroom collapses. This isn't just about learning new knowledge, it's about acquiring and applying new capabilities in shifting contexts. Having an adaptable, proactive and open mindset to acquiring new skills, and tapping into different learning activities in the workplace affords new opportunities to acquire skills essential to future proof your competence.



#8 Recognise the importance of the "early years".

The only person ultimately accountable for your career is yourself, and entering the workforce, it's critical to recognise the importance of the 'early years' in work. These experiences typically lay the foundation for a career which may span 40 or 50 years. Even as work transforms and career paths diversify, formative experience acquired in our 20s and early 30s remains critical in shaping future opportunities and opening doors.



#9 Build life-long networks. In the world of work, ultimately, people buy people. Building a strong external network throughout your career expands learning opportunities and will provide access to new career opportunities not necessarily posted on a job board. Whilst it's a given that your online profile has to be managed carefully, it's also vital to build deeper relationships that are much more personal, and which go way beyond just a new on-line "connection". Time invested in important personal relationships over the long term will always pay dividends.



#10 Pursue your dreams. Data suggests the pandemic made many employees rethink their career aspirations and take career turns. Jobs in accountancy are changing, offering fantastic opportunities to contribute and make a difference. It's important to pursue the things that interest you, that provide purpose and career fulfilment. And even if you don't have a single burning vocational cause that you want to follow in life, finding something that interests you and at which you can become good at will reap benefits longer term. It's a cliché because it's true: 'Find a job that you love, and you will never work a day in your life!'. Careers in SMPs provide multiple opportunities in finding purpose and meaning in your career.

How ACCA Career Navigator can help?

Our **Career Navigator** defines the seven capabilities needed by professional accountants - **expertise, insight, ethics, sustainability, digital, collaboration and drive.**

You can **explore each of these in more detail**, looking at the key competencies required across three different career levels – **proficient, expert and leader** – to find CPD opportunities to further your skills in each one. You'll also be able to see how the ACCA Qualification helps develop these skills and capabilities.



There are four key career zones for professional accountants – **the transformation driver, the enterprise analyst, the assurance provider and the stakeholder reporter.**

You can find out more and explore over a hundred job roles across our career zones. You'll be able to see the mix of capabilities they require, CPD opportunities to help you get there, as well as job opportunities and inspiring case studies.



[VIEW CAREER ZONES](#)

ACCA Careers

Keep on track and be prepared for the next opportunity by exploring the latest learning competencies to boost your career ambitions - and connect to live job opportunities and careers advice on ACCA Careers.



[FIND LIVE JOB OPPORTUNITIES](#)

ACCA Mentoring Programme

We know that our members have a wealth of knowledge to share with each other and with affiliates.

The ACCA Mentoring Programme aims to make impactful connections that provide opportunities for personal and professional growth.

[> Join the programme now](#)





ACCA
The Adelphi
1/11 John Adam Street
London WC2N 6AU
United Kingdom

020 7059 5000

The information contained in this publication is provided for general purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure that the information is accurate and up to date at the time of going to press, ACCA accepts no responsibility for any loss which may arise from information contained in this publication.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, in any format, without prior written permission of ACCA.

© ACCA

Think Ahead