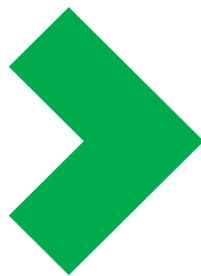
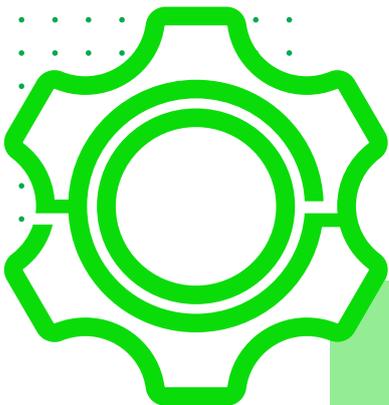


# FILLING THE GAP



➤ **Skills report**

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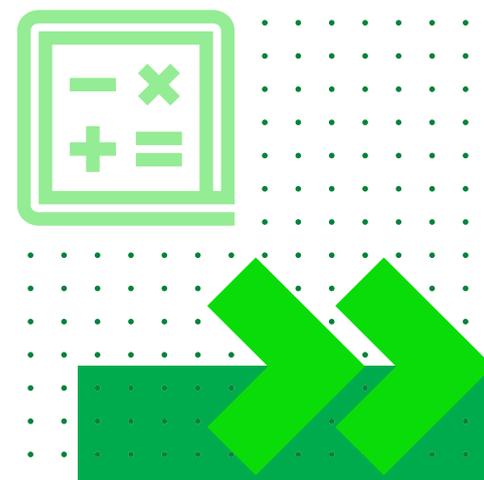
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# INTRODUCTION

*Filling the gap* from AAT explores the growing skills shortages in the UK's finance and accounting profession. This three-part series highlights where the gaps are, what's causing them, and how we can work together – across government, business and education – to close them.

Chapter 1 of *Filling the gap* highlighted that **employers face critical skills shortages in accountancy and finance**, impacting their talent pipeline and the growth of their business.

**FOUR IN FIVE OF ALL EMPLOYERS**  **REPORT SKILL SHORTAGES, LEADING TO A DROP IN PRODUCTIVITY AND QUALITY.**



**Filling the skills gap is a priority for business and for the UK government - this second chapter in the report explores where the talent is coming from and where it's going.**

Read on to find more about how people are qualifying into the profession, the drivers for those who leave and stay, and the challenges and opportunities for attracting a wider and more diverse pool of talent into accountancy and keeping them there.

# ➤ WHERE IS THE TALENT COMING FROM?

There are several pathways open to people entering the sector: as part of their formal or higher education or as a pivot later in life.

AAT research on social mobility, conducted in conjunction with YouGov, shows that people entered the accounting profession from a wide range of stages in their education and career. Only a small minority (5%) knew from an early age that they wanted to pursue an accounting qualification. A bigger proportion made the decision during school (16%) or shortly after finishing school (14%).

Many chose accounting after gaining some work experience: 9% decided when starting a non-accounting role, 18% when starting an accounting related role, and a further 21% after working for some time in either an accounting (10%) or non-accounting (11%) role.

Over one in five of those whose first accountancy qualification is through AAT are later career entrants into the profession, as they decided to pursue an accounting qualification after they had been in their careers for a while.

**There's a wealth of data publicly available that helps us to understand the picture of where the talent is coming from. This predominately comes through the lens of education and learning.**

## 18–24-year-olds

Across the board there's been an increase in the number of young people completing accounting qualifications as part of their formal education. In 2023–24, nearly 4,000 students (3,926) in England completed accounting-related qualifications across A-levels, T-levels, and apprenticeships.

The number of **A-level students** who studied accounting and finance increased by 10% between 2019–20 and 2023–24, from 2,076 to 2,284 students. Despite a slight dip in 2022–23, completions have generally trended upward year-on-year.

Since their introduction in 2022, uptake for **T-levels** has grown substantially. The number of students who received a T-level result in Accounting and Finance increased from 132 in 2023–24 to 354 in 2024–25, reflecting an increase of 222 students. Within this, Accounting rose from 95 to 256, and Finance from 37 to 98. Across all subjects, 91% of students achieved a Pass or above in 2023/24, rising slightly to 91.4% in 2024/25.

The number of 16–18-year-olds completing **accounting apprenticeships** has grown steadily, increasing from 1,150 in 2021–22 to 1,510 in 2023–24. This represents an overall rise of 360 achievers, with the largest year-on-year increase occurring between 2021–22 and 2022–23 (+280). Growth has continued into 2023/24, albeit at a slower pace (+80).



### The wider pool of accountancy students

The above data provides a clear view of increasing participation from young people in accounting and finance qualifications. What it doesn't do is provide a wider view of different learners entering the market such as career changers, or mature students.

To get a clearer view we looked at the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) report covering seven major UK accounting awarding organisations (including AAT). This report shows that 225,393 students were enrolled in accounting-related qualifications in 2024.

This marks an 8.4% increase compared to 2023, reversing a three-year downward trend in student numbers (Table 1). While the overall student numbers rose in 2024, this growth was not evenly distributed across all professional bodies (Table 1). The increase was primarily driven in enrolments at AAT which rose by 30.8%, from 60,439 in 2023 to 79,063 in 2024.

Whilst the FRC report covers only the leading accountancy bodies and other organisations also offer qualifications in accountancy-related subjects, these figures show an increasing interest in accounting qualifications that matches what is being seen through A-level, T-level and apprenticeship data.

**Table 1: Total number of students in UK and Ireland enrolled in accounting-related courses across seven top awarding organisations**

Year	ACCA	CIMA	CIPFA	ICAEW	ICAS	AIA	AAT	Total number of students	Y-o-Y % change
2020	76,208	47,904	2,113	23,309	3,839	139	<b>80,138</b>	233,650	
2021	75,188	47,101	2,116	25,014	4,112	144	<b>79,611</b>	233,286	-0.2%
2022	71,449	43,947	2,100	26,134	4,081	143	<b>73,451</b>	221,305	-5.1%
2023	72,370	40,797	1,937	28,348	3,916	144	<b>60,439</b>	207,951	-6.0%
2024	73,658	37,246	1,929	29,456	3,891	150	<b>79,063</b>	225,393	+8.4%

Source: FRC Key Facts and Trends in the Accountancy Profession 2025



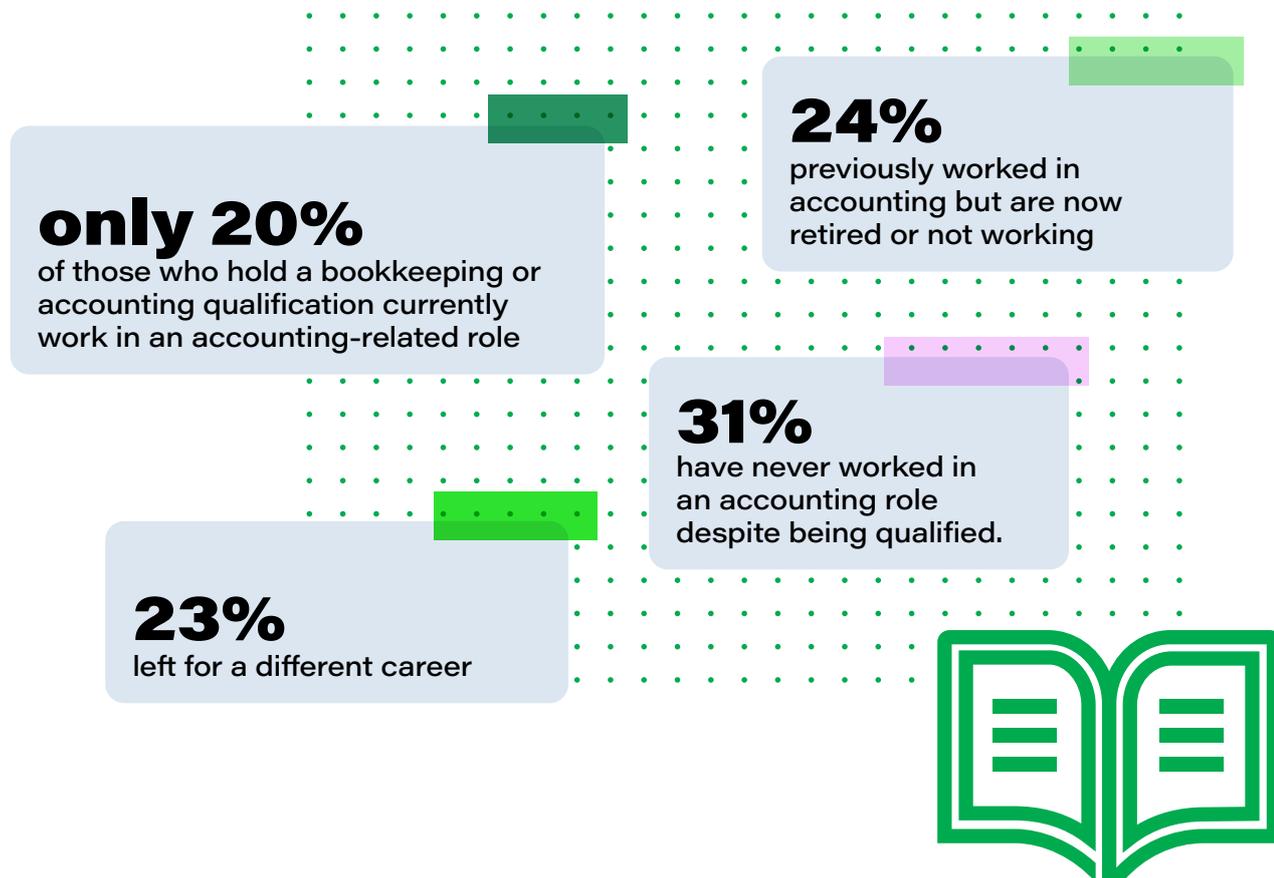
# ➤ WHY

## DO WE HAVE A SKILLS SHORTAGE IF PEOPLE TAKING UP QUALIFICATIONS IS ON THE RISE?

Naturally the path an individual takes through their professional qualifications will vary dependant on circumstance, desire and a myriad of other factors, so not all students who start their qualification journey will complete or land up with a career in the subject they study, but there are other factors at play here reducing the available talent pool.

### Not everyone who qualifies goes onto a career in finance

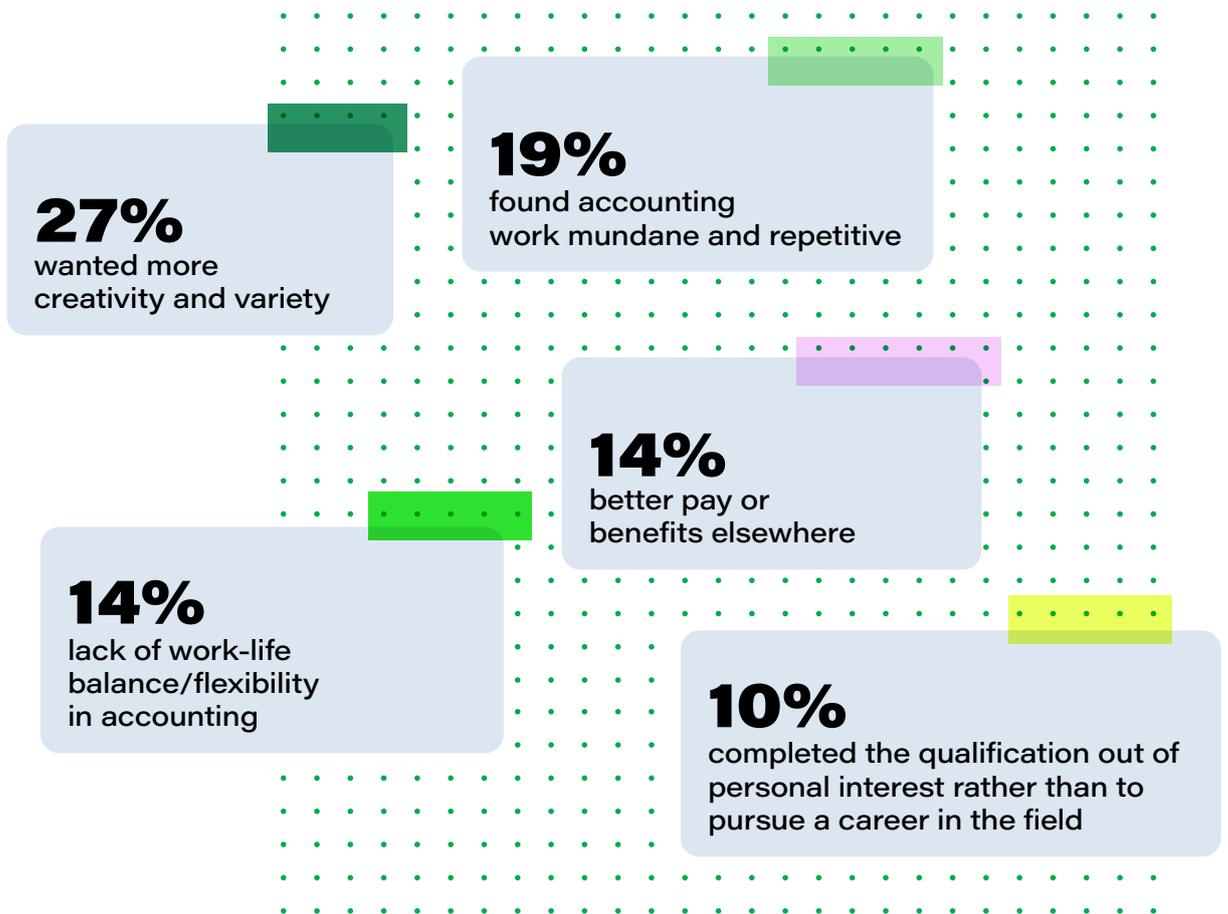
Our research shows that only 20% of those who hold an accountancy qualification currently work in an accounting-related role. New YouGov research commissioned by AAT, focused on accounting qualifications in the UK, reveals that one in ten (9%) of UK adults have completed a bookkeeping or accounting qualification.



# SO, WHY AREN'T PEOPLE WITH BOOKKEEPING OR ACCOUNTING QUALIFICATIONS WORKING IN THE FIELD?

This isn't necessarily a negative, showing how accounting qualifications open up access to a range of career choices from finance and beyond, including aspiring CEOs and becoming your own boss but it does present a challenge when it comes to filling the skills gap.

We looked at the top reasons why, which include:



Interestingly given recent negative reporting, only 6% reported concerns that accounting would be replaced by AI – suggesting that perceptions of the profession, rather than technology anxiety, are the main deterrents. In fact, **AAT research** shows that automating 'mundane' tasks could broaden the appeal of the profession, with two in five people stating they would consider a change of career to accountancy if they could use AI to replace routine tasks.

Source: **Two in five people would consider accounting due to AI | AAT news**



### Skills shortages vary within the accountancy sector

The composition of core accounting occupations has shifted between 2021–22 and 2024–25. Overall, the combined total number of individuals in accounting occupations dropped from 780,000 to 724,200, a decrease of 7.2%. Chartered and certified accountants grew by 17.0% from 223,100 in 2021–22 to 261,100 in 2024–25, while financial and accounting technicians saw the sharpest rise, from 11,100 to 38,800 (+249.5%). In contrast, taxation experts declined by 34.1% (from 65,900 to 43,400), and bookkeepers, payroll managers, and wages clerks fell by 20.6% (from 479,900 to 380,900).

### Those who enter are here to stay

When asked where they expect to be in their career in the next five years, two thirds planned to remain working within the bookkeeping and accounting profession (67%).

From AAT’s 2025 salary survey, we can see that 85% of AAT students and members are expecting to be working within the accounting and finance profession in the next five years with only 2% saying they expect to be working in a different profession, showing us that there is potentially a higher degree of engagement within this cohort.

**THOSE WHO ENTER THE PROFESSION,  
PREDOMINANTLY STAY AND PLAN TO  
REMAIN FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.  
THE TRICK IS TO ENCOURAGE THEM INTO  
THE PROFESSION IN THE FIRST PLACE.  
BUT HOW DO WE DO THAT?**

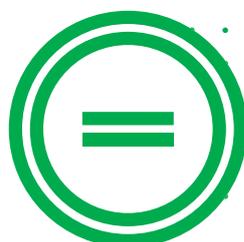
# ➤ THE OBSTACLES TO ENTERING THE PROFESSION

The UK finance and accounting profession faces a mix of structural, perceptual, and technological challenges that affect both entry into the field and long-term retention. These barriers are interconnected and impact diversity, accessibility, and career sustainability.

## Limited awareness and misconceptions

- **Persistent myths deter young people:** A Grant Thornton UK study found 62% of 16–25-year-olds believed high grades were essential to become an accountant, and 57% assumed a university degree was mandatory, despite the availability of apprenticeships and vocational routes.
- **Careers advice is lacking:** The Grant Thornton study also uncovered that 65% of young people reported never receiving targeted guidance on accountancy careers, with students from private schools 20% more likely to receive such advice than those from comprehensive schools.
- **Perceived image problem:** AAT research shows that only 11% of the public view accountancy as an “evolving and future proof” career and just 16% felt it offered the options of working with AI tools. This suggests that the profession’s modernisation has not yet filtered into public perception, limiting appeal among younger entrants.
- AAT research also shows that there is a perception that accounting is for people from higher socio-economic backgrounds (23%), that accounting lacks role models (30%) and that it was a career for highly intelligent/numerate individuals (33%)

This presents a conundrum. *Filling the gap chapter 1* showed that half of employers say that the candidates they see have strong technical skills but often lack the key transferable skills such as communication, resilience, digital skills and problem solving. Yet what this desk research is showing us is that qualified candidates are turning their backs on the sector because they don’t see the opportunity to work differently, to be business leaders, strategy shapers or AI experts – exactly what business is telling us they need.



## Social mobility and diversity constraints

**Research** by the Bridge Group highlights persistent socio-economic disparities across financial and professional services.

- Over-representation of privileged backgrounds: Individuals from higher socio-economic backgrounds account for around 51% of the financial services workforce, compared with 33% in the wider UK economy. At senior levels, this rises to 89%.
- When looking at AAT’s own membership, these figures change, with 43% of licenced members coming from a professional background, and 31% coming from a working-class background. And for non-licenced members this changes again to 38% coming from a professional background, and 34% coming from a working-class background, reflecting much more closely the wider UK figures.
- Employees from lower socio-economic backgrounds take 25% longer to progress, even when performance and experience are similar. This gap widens further for those who also identify as black.
- Access to work experience and networks: The Bridge Group’s evaluation of **Access Accountancy** shows that targeted outreach and structured placements significantly improve awareness and access for under-represented groups. However, candidates from higher socio-economic backgrounds remain more likely to secure offers than their peers.

These further compounds the sector’s image issue – with people not seeing accounting as a place for them, or barriers to entry remaining too high, thus reducing the overall talent pool and pipeline.

## Skills mismatch and technological disruption

- Retention risks linked to automation: **AAT research** shows that around 12% of professionals who have worked in accounting report leaving the sector due to AI adoption by their employer, a figure that rises to 30% among 18–24-year-olds. However, only 6% reported concerns that accounting would be replaced by AI.
- 23% say they would have stayed longer if they had access to AI tools, and 22% would re-enter the profession if automation could support basic tasks. This underlines the need for better integration of digital training and clearer communication about how technology can enhance, rather than replace, accounting roles.

## Workplace culture

- Workplace pressures and career structures continue to challenge retention in the accounting profession. A recent **survey** of 250 accountants and bookkeepers across the UK uncovered that 36% of accountants are considering leaving the profession within the next five years, with work-life balance cited as a key factor.
- The **survey** data also found that 24% of those aged 25–44 are leaving due to a lack of healthy work-life balance, and 22% of accountants with children attribute their decision to poor work-life balance.

## Changing expectations of work

- Evolving workforce expectations are reshaping how younger professionals engage with accounting and finance careers, with flexibility, autonomy, and access to modern digital tools being core priorities. A 2023 Deloitte UK **survey** found that 77% of Gen Z workers and 71% of Millennials would consider leaving their job if required to work full-time in the office.
- Similarly, **Accountancy Age (2025)** reported that 64% of Gen Z accountants already work under hybrid models, and 61% aspire to run their own business.

# ➤ CONCLUSIONS

**It's no surprise that the research demonstrates that finance and accounting suffer from both a perception challenge and an accessibility challenge.**

But this also represents opportunities:

**1**

**Providing opportunities to ensure careers pathways are open to all, regardless of background or circumstance.**

**2**

**Collective efforts to build a better image for the sector and myth bust misconceptions of the role of the accountant, and what an accountant looks like.**

**3**

**Careers advice, early on, as young people start to think about their future careers, providing exposure to work experience – virtual or in person.**

**4**

**Early exposure to finance, ensuring the UK develops a generation of young people confident in their own personal finances and therefore see accounting and finance careers something for them.**

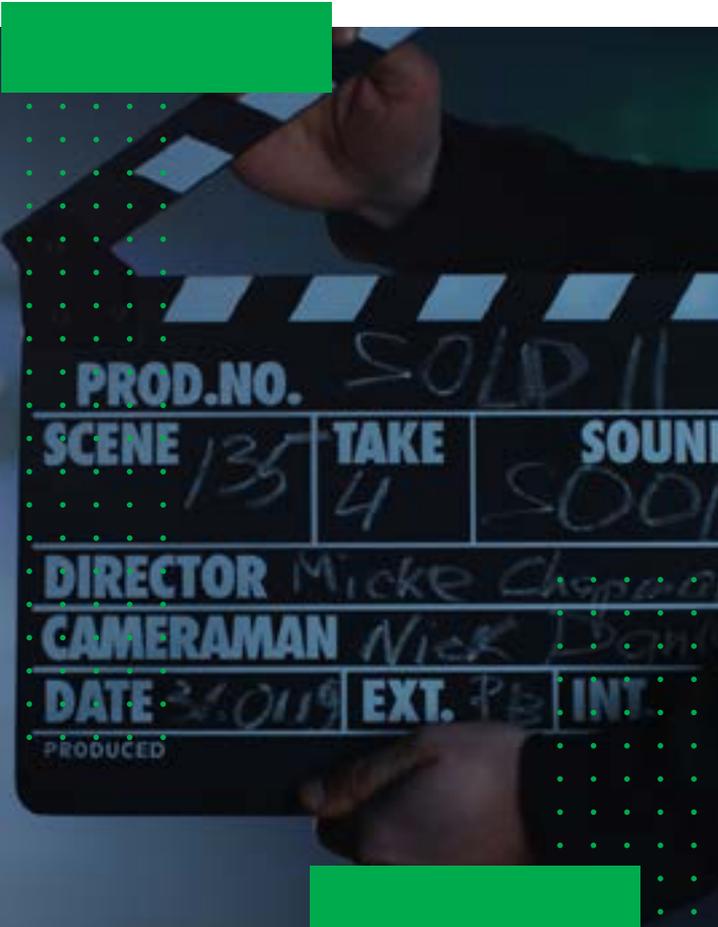
**5**

**Technological adoption – through accounting qualifications and day to day work to remove the fear and build the capability that will unlock opportunity.**

**6**

**Creating qualifications that are future focused and consider the evolving skills landscape.**

CASE STUDY  
**ACCOUNTING IN  
 THE FILM INDUSTRY**



Behind the scenes of all major motion pictures and TV shows are hard-working accountants crunching the numbers.

**Cheryl Anderson, Manager –  
 Film and TV, Saffery Champness**

As a manager in the film and TV team at Saffery Champness, Cheryl Anderson helps production companies with their accounts and audit, as well as advising on the tax reliefs that the projects will qualify for and then helping them get those. Saffery Champness has worked on several hugely popular TV shows including Game of Thrones, Mr Selfridge and Downton Abbey, and blockbuster films including Skyfall, Prometheus and The Dark Knight Rises.

Part of a team of 50+ in London (and another 14 in Dublin), Cheryl has been with the company for more than three years. “I work mostly on film and TV productions, but I have also done some work for video games as well,” she says. “Anything that’s been produced in the UK, chances are they’ve probably come to us for help with claiming the tax credits.

**Read more here:**  
[Accounting in the film industry: what you need to know – AAT Comment](#)

## CASE STUDY

# ACCOUNTING IN THE CHARITY SECTOR



Working as an accountant in the charity sector offers a rewarding alternative to traditional practice, according to **Harriet Foxon MAAT**.

After gaining experience in an accountancy practice and discovering a talent for bookkeeping while covering a colleague's role, she pursued an AAT qualification which opened many doors. From here, she moved to The Brick, a Wigan-based charity supporting people facing homelessness, poverty and debt.

In her role as Commercial and Finance manager, Harriet supports teams with financial processes and ensures consistency across the organisation, while also being responsible for producing and maintaining financial records. However, she has really enjoyed stepping beyond traditional accounting.

In her words: "As it's a charity, there's a lot of 'mucking in'. I have found myself delivering food parcels some days or serving lunch to people we support, which is far away from my finance role, but I think it's equally important to do these things. It's very humbling but also reminds me of what The Brick is all about".

One of her favourite parts of the job is the year-end finance audit, as the charity is not profit-generating, so it's not just the financial side that's audited, but also the social and environmental impact of the year.

**Read more here:**

[What it's like working for a charity as an accountant – AAT Comment](#)

## CASE STUDY

# ACCOUNTING IN LUXURY RETAIL



**Rasa Adomaitytė** decided to combine her love of fashion and numbers to become a Financial Accountant for Braveheart International Limited, an online fashion retail business.

She was introduced to AAT by her store manager while she was working in a retail store as a head cashier. After completing her studies, it was her retail background and AAT qualification which helped her work up the career ladder into her current role.

Rasa says that her current role as a Financial Accountant provides the opportunity for her to merge two completely different worlds into one which is a big positive. She said: "I look after the receivables side, various VAT returns, fixed assets, prepayments, and other month-end reporting tasks.

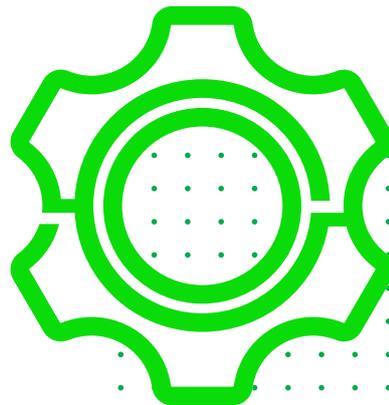
Just some of the key skills involved in Rasa's role are critical thinking to avoid costly mistakes, data analysis to make the right decisions, time management to keep on track of tasks and communication skills to respectfully advise and direct the business.

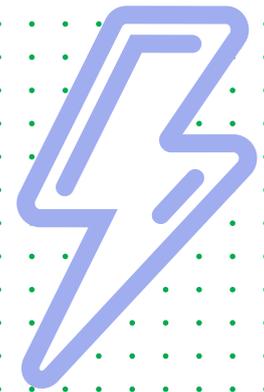
**Read more here:**  
[From retail to luxury fashion with AAT – AAT Comment](#)



# METHODOLOGY

To create the evidence basis this report is founded on we commissioned six questions in the YouGov omnibus survey looking at the destination of accounting professionals. We also included some questions in the recent salary survey which went to our members and students looking at their intention to remain in the profession, and if not why. Alongside this we conducted desk research and broader market data analysis to complement our analysis, while also pulling in some insights from the recent social mobility research.





# ANY QUESTIONS?

If you'd like to know more about AAT and our qualifications, please get in touch with us.

Call us on **+44 (0)20 3735 2468**.

Lines are open 09.00 to 17.00 (UK time), Monday to Friday.

Email us at [aat@aat.org.uk](mailto:aat@aat.org.uk) or visit [aat.org.uk/fillingthegap](https://aat.org.uk/fillingthegap)

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