

ACCOUNTANTS FOR BUSINESS



The e-professional: embracing learning technologies

FIVE MINUTES ON...

The e-professional: embracing learning technologies



ACCA developed this report in collaboration with strategic research and consulting group, Lighthouse Global, to help gauge the extent to which employers of finance professionals are adopting technology-enabled learning and assessment and the key drivers for this.

According to our research, e-learning and assessment within finance development is already widely accepted and this will only accelerate as barriers to access around the world are overcome.

The report helps dispel some common myths around technology-enabled development. Chief among these is that e-learning and assessment solutions lack sophistication and rigour. The types of learning experience experts describe in our report demonstrate

the richness and complexity that technology can add to development.

From connecting virtual global teams through collaborative learning to simulating real-life situations with which professionals are faced, our interviewees' message is clear: organisations are embracing these technological advances because they can create a better learning experience as well as more challenging and realistic tests of skills and competence and because they fit with the preferences and expectations of the 21st century finance professional.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Minchington'.

Clare Minchington

Executive director – learning and products
ACCA



"AT A TRAINEE LEVEL, THERE IS A DEMAND FOR DIGITAL LEARNING."

GREG OWENS, DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL TRAINING AND STUDENT QUALIFICATION, BDO

"E-LEARNING IS VERY MUCH THE NORM TODAY. BUT CAN WE USE TECHNOLOGY BETTER? CAN WE TAKE IT FURTHER? CAN WE BE MORE EXCITING WITH IT? THE ANSWER TO THOSE QUESTIONS IS YES."

RICHARD POLLARD, GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT LEADER, PwC

"THE WAY PROFESSIONALS LIVE AND LEARN HAS CHANGED. WE ARE EXPERIENCING THE SHIFT TO A GENERATION WHO HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN THE NET. E-LEARNING RECOGNISES THIS SHIFT, AND THAT PROFESSIONALS ARE NOT AS LINEAR AS THEY ONCE WERE. THEY DON'T START AT A AND END UP AT Z; THEY LEARN IN A MUCH LESS STRUCTURED WAY."

DAMIAN DAY, HEAD OF EDUCATION AND REGISTRATION POLICY, THE GENERAL PHARMACEUTICAL COUNCIL

About this report

This report explores the world of the accountant as an e-professional, focusing on three areas:

- how online approaches to learning and assessment are affecting professional development at an individual level
- the impact these learning technologies are having on employers of finance professionals
- what the future of online learning and assessment may look like.

The report was developed by ACCA in collaboration with the strategic research and consulting group Lighthouse Global (www.lighthouseglobal.eu.com). The content was created from a combination of primary and secondary data sources, and a series of conversations with the following training and development experts from across the world:

- May Chan, learning designer, Standard Chartered Bank
- Damian Day, head of education and registration policy, the General Pharmaceutical Council
- Laura Overton, managing director, Towards Maturity
- Greg Owens, director of technical training and student qualification, BDO
- Richard Pollard, global development leader, PwC
- Martin Ripley, CEO, World Class Arena
- Jim Robertson, VP, tax, Eastern hemisphere and global tax practices, Shell
- Martin Taylor, CEO, BPP Business Schools
- Kristin Watson, director, national exam training team, Ernst & Young.

The benefits

The advantages of training employees in an e-enabled learning environment reported are:

1 Flexibility

Seen as the greatest benefit, this relates to the location, timing and implementation of training and assessment.

2 Sophistication

Online learning and assessment technologies provide more sophisticated ways for learners to interact with content.

3 Innovation

Technological advances such as mobile devices, tablet computers, simulation and gaming technology are capturing the imagination of development experts and leading to new and creative modes of learning and assessment.

4 Value for money

When executed the right way, learning technologies can make considerable contributions to an organisation's bottom line. Towards Maturity, an organisation that works with employers to implement and benchmark e-learning capability, has found that organisations that have implemented learning technologies are reporting an average cost saving of 18%. Those organisations using more mature learning technologies are also reporting a 20% improvement in time to competency.

The future

The first half of this decade is likely to be a watershed moment when the relevance, penetration and sophistication of learning technology grows exponentially. According to the latest CIPD International Learning and Talent Development Survey, the number of organisations that deliver at least 50% of their training time by e-learning is set to more than double over the course of 2012. The evidence of shifting momentum is even greater in emerging markets: in India, for example, 52% of organisations will have trainees spending at least 25% of their training time online.

Given what may be possible with technology over the next five years, the growth areas that our experts told us are likely to have the most influence are:

- mobile devices: devices such as the Blackberry, iPhone and tablet computers are revolutionising the delivery of learning
- social networking: peer-to-peer networks are creating an environment in which the traditional hierarchy of tutor and student is being broken down
- gamification: organisations will be increasingly exploring ways in which serious gaming technology can simulate the real-life scenarios finance professionals encounter.

For the full report: www.accaglobal.com/eprofessional

The driving forces of talent strategies

Now, more than ever, organisations cannot remain static when building an effective work and learning environment for finance professionals.

The adoption of learning technologies is being driven by:

- the increasing burden of regulation and compliance
- the expectations of the digital native generation, who expect to undertake training and learning via technology
- globalisation and the need for global consistency
- a drive towards greater productivity and efficiency in the workplace.

FOUR PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

1 Technology is a means to an end, not an end in itself

Flashy technology can blind organisations into thinking that it is technology alone that is driving change in learning and assessment. Technology is a facilitator for change rather than a silver bullet.

2 Learning technologies should be part of a wider, integrated approach to learning and assessment

When putting e-learning content together it is important to think about how it will fit into a blended programme of learning.

3 Invest sufficient time and resource on planning and design

Converting existing materials into online learning requires a new approach. There is a danger that, if organisations roll out learning technologies in the wrong way they may turn employees off them in the future.

4 Technology must be user-friendly and intuitive to use

To get engagement at any level, technology has to be simple and attractive to use. Capitalise on the technologies that people are already using in a non-learning context.



"YOU HAVE TO INVEST TIME IN PRODUCING A QUALITY PRODUCT, OTHERWISE NOBODY WILL USE IT."

JIM ROBERTSON, VP, TAX, EASTERN HEMISPHERE AND GLOBAL TAX PRACTICES, SHELL

"THE REALITY IS, IF YOUR TECHNOLOGY AND YOUR STRATEGY DON'T FIT TOGETHER AS AN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE, NO LEARNING PROGRAMME IS GOING TO WORK FOR THE LEARNER."

MARTIN TAYLOR, CEO, BPP BUSINESS SCHOOLS

"THE RISK IS YOU START BY ASKING WHAT IS IT YOU WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW, RATHER THAN, WHAT IS IT YOU WANT PEOPLE TO BE ABLE TO DO. THE "KNOW" BIT IS IMPORTANT BUT THE APPLICATION ELEMENT OF THE LEARNING IS BY FAR THE MOST IMPORTANT."

GREG OWENS, DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL TRAINING AND STUDENT QUALIFICATION, BDO

"THERE ARE WAYS THAT WE CAN ALL MAKE USE OF TECHNOLOGY WHICH WOULD BE MORE INNOVATIVE FOR TUITION AND LEARNING GOING FORWARD. THIS WILL TAKE TIME TO EXPLORE. I EXPECT TO SEE SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN BLENDED LEARNING, ASSESSMENT AND ONLINE LEARNING."

KRISTIN WATSON, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL EXAM TRAINING TEAM, ERNST & YOUNG

About ACCA

ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) is the global body for professional accountants. We aim to offer business-relevant, first-choice qualifications to people of application, ability and ambition around the world who seek a rewarding career in accountancy, finance and management.

Founded in 1904, ACCA has consistently held unique core values: opportunity, diversity, innovation, integrity and accountability. We believe that accountants bring value to economies in all stages of development. We aim to develop capacity in the profession and encourage the adoption of global standards. Our values are aligned to the needs of employers in all sectors and we ensure that, through our qualifications, we prepare accountants for business. We seek to open up the profession to people of all backgrounds and remove artificial barriers, innovating our qualifications and their delivery to meet the diverse needs of trainee professionals and their employers.

We support our 147,000 members and 424,000 students in 170 countries, helping them to develop successful careers in accounting and business, with the skills needed by employers. We work through a network of 83 offices and centres and more than 8,500 Approved Employers worldwide, who provide high standards of employee learning and development.

Accountants for Business

ACCA's global programme, Accountants for Business, champions the role of the finance professional in all sectors as true value creators in organisations. Through people, processes and professionalism, accountants are central to great performance. They shape business strategy through a deep understanding of financial drivers and seek opportunities for long-term success. By focusing on the critical role professional accountants play in economies at all stages of development around the world, and in diverse organisations, ACCA seeks to highlight and enhance the role the accountancy profession plays in supporting a healthy global economy.

www.accaglobal.com/accountants_business