

Supporting the eProfessional

ACCA chief executive Helen Brand describes the major digital developments that are transforming the organisation, ensuring that it is fit for the future – and its customers

ACCA was founded on distinct core values – one of which is innovation. We have a proud tradition of leading the way in new developments, particularly those that have created greater opportunity to gain a highly regarded international professional accountancy qualification.

At the core of ACCA's offering is providing one high-quality qualification, recognised the world over. As testament to this, in a recent independent survey of employers, 50% of respondents said that ACCA was the leading global professional accountancy body in reputation, influence and size.

In order to maintain this position, ACCA needs to ensure that it continues to innovate to offer best-in-class delivery and offerings – including a qualification and modes of examining that meet the needs of the evolving global business environment.

Another key part of our proposition is providing a consistent, high-quality, globally accessible service. And we've recently been making major strides in enhancing our offerings, harnessing technology to deliver an experience that is truly customer centred.

The eProfessional

It is clear that the working world is changing. The future of work is online – indeed, in many ways it is with us already. ACCA is now working towards new ways of developing professional skills to meet the needs of employers in the online world and is seeking innovation to develop and support the eProfessional.

ACCA has a consistent record of pioneering the delivery of accountancy qualifications worldwide. This includes being the first professional accountancy body to base its syllabus on International Financial Reporting



***ePROFESSIONAL:**

Standards (IFRS); introducing a global quality assurance scheme to deliver high standards around the world; and developing a global network of offices and centres that enables us to build mutually supportive relationships with employers and learning providers. We've recently taken the latest exciting step in our evolution by announcing a new partnership to deliver all ACCA examinations online through an innovative e-assessment programme.

Employers are seeking newly qualified accountants who can enhance the value of their business by being able to put the complex technical knowledge the ACCA Qualification provides quickly and effectively into practice. At the same time, students are looking for the connection between what they learn in their actual or virtual classrooms and what employers and clients demand of them in the workplace to be direct and tangible.

Current and emerging technologies are now presenting professional bodies

To create the next generation of finance professionals ACCA will be working with its unrivalled global network:

- * 83 ACCA offices and centres
- * 239 Approved Learning Partners
- * 8,500 Approved Employers
- * 78 global accountancy partnerships

with the opportunity to test students' knowledge and skills in a way that prepares them for the true reality of the working world as never before.

Working in partnership with our global network of employers and learning providers, ACCA will be leading the way in this exciting field. The announcement we made with Summit Consulting Group last month (see overleaf) marks the start of a long-term move towards a new generation of on-demand examinations that will enhance the quality and rigour of our assessment, maintaining the premium



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→ www.accaglobal.com

brand of the ACCA Qualification. Through this we will aim to continue to deliver our promise of bringing opportunity to people of talent and application who seek a rewarding career in accounting and business – equipped with the skills required by employers in the digital age.

ACCA has a history of consulting widely on its proposals to ensure that they are relevant to markets around the world. We believe that the concept of the eProfessional could radically change the role of the accountant and finance professional, as we move to new business models and a connected world. Indeed, ACCA commissioned a report called *Where Next for the Global Economy?* which suggests that we are moving towards a very different world over the coming 20 years, but one where the core skills of the professional accountant are still vital to business. ACCA will be seeking the views of members, employers and other influential audiences around the world to identify their needs and map out the requirements of the eProfessional. We believe that this is an essential and leading contribution to the future shape of the overall global accountancy profession to ensure our ongoing relevance.

Best-in-class service

As we pursue the exciting vision of the eProfessional, we are also using the power of online to support better delivery of products and services to our students and members in the here and now:

New online registration process

In January, we launched a new registration process that enables prospective students to register with us completely online for the first time. The process – designed around customer feedback – is quicker and more convenient, allowing students to upload all supporting documentation, save part-completed applications and track their application online. As a result, students can complete the registration process in around 10 minutes. All this has vastly improved the first major

transactional experience that our students have with ACCA.

Since the new process was introduced, more than 5,000 applicants have registered completely online with ACCA, representing a third of all applicants received this calendar year.

Foundations in Accountancy

At the start of this year we also launched Foundations in Accountancy, a new, flexible suite of entry-level awards, designed to meet the needs of both students and employers. The suite was created in partnership with employers, learning providers, members, students and other professional accountancy bodies and regulators, consulting closely with them.

Foundations in Accountancy allows students to benefit from a range of entry points, meaning that they can

in phases so that improvements can be experienced as soon as possible.

In May, we launched the first phase of the new site with an improved navigation system on the homepage; an enhanced 'Discover ACCA' section with all ACCA's corporate information brought together; and new landing pages for students, members, employers and learning providers. There is also clearer signposting to transactional services such as applying online and links to leading social media sites. In addition, the site uses better search engine optimisation (SEO) so that content can be found more quickly.

We've also used the new site to bring ACCA's unrivalled global network to life. By linking to profiles of members and students around the world, we are demonstrating our genuine international

WE BELIEVE THAT THE ePROFESSIONAL COULD RADICALLY CHANGE THE ROLE OF THE ACCOUNTANT

begin at the right level for them and then progress through the awards. Certification is awarded at each level, helping students to monitor their progress, and helping employers to recruit and train to meet their business needs.

Through these awards we have also increased our computer-based offering, meaning that students can now choose to sit seven of the 10 examinations by computer-based exams (CBE), providing much greater flexibility.

First phase of the new ACCA website

With 8.5 million visits to our website over the past year, accaglobal.com is one of the primary ways in which ACCA supports and informs its stakeholders around the world. Enhancing the site has also been a key priority, recognising that an increasing number of our customers want to engage with us online. We are therefore in the process of completely upgrading and redesigning our website with the main objective of making it even more user-focused. Given the size of ACCA's website, we will be introducing changes

reach in a very tangible way.

Where next?

ACCA was created over a century ago to respond to the specific needs of the coming generation of accountants at that time – a generation who did not want to be bound by restrictive approaches to the profession and who embraced innovation.

As the world changes around us and moves increasingly online, ACCA will continue to listen so that we can be at the forefront of developments that enhance our global reputation and the experience of our customers.

Our exciting work on e-assessment will be at the heart of our transformation work. At the same time, we will also be investing significantly in our IT infrastructure, recognising that it is essential to support enhanced service delivery through online means.

I look forward to reporting on how we are continuing to evolve to meet the future expectations of all our customers in forthcoming editions of *Accounting and Business*.