

Shaping your ACCA

**Health Sector
focus groups 2018**



ACCA conducted three consultative meetings in Leeds, London and Cardiff, speaking to members working in the health sector.

Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of ACCA members attending the focus groups, and do not necessarily reflect the views of ACCA.

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1. Key Issues and Challenges

Generating efficiencies within a statutory structure

Funding, talent and staff retention
Apprenticeships
Partnerships

It is difficult to work flexibly within a structure that cannot easily be overhauled.

It can be a challenge to recruit staff in more junior positions, with a reliance on agency and temp staff to fill these roles.

Generating efficiencies within a statutory structure

Making efficiency savings and maintaining a good level of services with budgets being cut is a challenge within the constraints of a statutory structure. It is difficult to work flexibly within a structure that cannot easily be overhauled.

Funding, talent and staff retention

With regard to funding, some members felt that more support was needed when it comes to the timeframes given for bidding for funding from CCGs (Clinical Commissioning Groups) for example. It is important to allow enough time to put together a comprehensive bid and sometimes timescales can be a bit tight, especially towards the end of the financial year. For the social care sector, and hospices in particular, staff retention is difficult due to lack of funds. Most of the costs incurred by the hospice are staff costs (clinical staff in particular) and with no large salary budgets members of staff go to other places such as teaching hospitals, where they can earn more money. Social care budget allocation has a major impact on health organisations in this sector.

Issues with staff retention were generally linked to the inability to match the salaries provided by other opportunities in the area. In some areas it was the lure of organisations in city centre locations that was an issue with people less willing to work in more remote areas.

The talent issue in Wales was linked to issues around generating a pipeline of financial professionals to take on senior roles. Due to differences in the Welsh and English health systems it is not always easy for senior staff to make the transition from England to Wales for example. Senior staff coming up to retirement age is also part of the talent pipeline issue. There are no smaller stepping stones for finance staff to take in a route to the top – the jump is too big.

It can be a challenge to recruit staff in more junior positions, with a reliance on agency and temp staff to fill these roles.

Overall, the NHS is under extreme budget pressure and pay structures do not always enable institutions to recruit adequate staff.

The opportunity for AAT apprentices going on to do the full ACCA qualification was seen as a good opportunity and a way of developing staff.

It was also suggested that Health Service Journal could be a useful partner in helping spread word about the profession in the health service.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are being considered by NHS institutions and members see them as an opportunity for students to gain both experience and a qualification.

The opportunity for AAT apprentices going on to do the full ACCA qualification is seen as a good opportunity and a way of developing staff.

Partnerships

We asked the members at our meetings what organisations they felt we should be working with, in the interest of promoting ACCA and the profession in the health sector. The Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA) was one suggestion especially given that a key part of their syllabus is accountancy.

The Finance Skills Development (FSD) network was also mentioned, and we explained how we were already looking at developing partnerships with networks nationally.

It was also suggested that HSJ (Health Service Journal) could a useful partner in helping spread word about the profession in the health service.

2. Innovations to the qualification and the future of the accountancy profession

Innovations to the qualification were a step in the right direction, especially given the greater emphasis on strategic and ethical thinking.

Despite the growth in technology, there will always be a role for a trusted advisor to understand the bigger picture and be able to provide a trusted opinion.

Innovations to the qualification

Members welcomed the innovations in ACCA's qualification, especially given the greater emphasis on strategic and ethical thinking. According to those based in Wales in particular, the ACCA is an extremely good qualification that bridges gaps and goes across all sectors.

The future of the accountancy profession

Members felt that the role of the finance professional in the health sector was growing to accommodate more project management based activities, with the scope of the role going beyond just financial aspects. Management, financial accounting and project management will shape the future of the profession. It was felt that more training in this area was needed and it was agreed that the focus on the innovations to the qualification including an emphasis on a broader skill set, e.g. the seven skills quotients, was a step in the right direction.

It was also agreed that automation would help create efficiencies and should be a good opportunity to share skills and ideas across organisations. In one health board in Wales they have an automated process for dealing with invoices for example, something which used to take weeks can now be done in 15 seconds. In England the issue with IT is that there are projects across a range of organisations and there is often a battle against silo working. The systems need to be efficient for all organisations and streamlined, rather than tailored to individual ones.

Despite the growth in technology there will always be a role for a trusted advisor to understand the bigger picture and be able to provide a trusted opinion. Good influencing and persuading skills will be needed to be able to ascertain the best solutions and a strong ethical stance will continue to be needed.

Financial reporting will become more important as a way of bringing in efficiencies and better ways of working. The profession will no longer just be about finding and reporting information, it will be about interpreting the information and delivering it to different stakeholders. With value-based results, finance staff can be more involved in working with clinicians. For example, managing processes for dementia can be done by working in conjunction with clinical staff. By looking at different financial models of different schemes across the board and sharing information, streamlining can be done to make the service more efficient.

3. What members would like to hear from ACCA

Improvements to the ACCA website could include more sector-specific content relevant to their industry and a shortening of the navigation journey.

Future CPD topics could include commercialising the NHS, clinical negligence, cost control finance in healthcare and cyber security.

What members would like to hear from ACCA

It was agreed that how best to work with local government around the social care agenda would be a helpful conversation - it can sometimes be difficult to get decisions made and progressed when dealing with elected local councillors who will be looking to make decisions based on what will be popular with their constituents for example. Members participating at this consultation exercise suggested some improvements to the ACCA website such as including more sector-specific content which is relevant to their industry or shortening the website navigation journey. It was suggested as well to work with other partners in the production of content and relevant articles.

Welsh members in particular were very happy that ACCA has an office in Wales, something which they feel gives a real edge over the competition. There was also an appetite for more networking events in Wales to share best practice and ideas across all Welsh health boards – something members felt could be done better.

Finally, members suggested the following health topics to consider for CPD activity (either digital or face to face): commercialising the NHS, efficiencies and key focuses from the NHS for the next five years, clinical negligence, cost control, finance in healthcare, cyber security, integrated health and social or business partnering.

All the issues raised by the groups will help us to develop our activities in the sector going forward.