

CAREER VIEW

ACCOUNTING

Wherever there is business there are work opportunities for people with accounting skills. The complexities of commerce in a global economy are constantly changing and ethical requirements are increasing. The use of technology to perform tasks such as financial modelling means that accountancy and business professionals can spend more time on financial analysis and adding value to their business. In fact the term “accountant” is becoming rarer as accountants perform business advisory roles, acting increasingly as multi-skilled business managers and consultants.

To remain competitive and to run efficiently, organisations everywhere need to ensure they are financially accountable and that the decisions they make are cost effective. The purpose of many accounting functions is to provide some accountability to shareholders, stakeholders and taxpayers. Accounting professionals hold a position of trust and are themselves answerable to stringent national and international regulations which govern ethical practice.

To embark upon a successful career path in accounting and related professions, graduates need excellent grades, but success requires more than grades. Many firms look for accounting professionals who are multi-skilled, outgoing individuals with diverse interests and experiences. These attributes are useful for accountants when building and managing varied client accounts.

Accounting is sometimes called the language of business. Accountants need to be adept at translating the complex, specialised language of business to clients. Being able to understand specialised business information helps people to make management and investment decisions that involve public or private sector organisations (entities). The major role of an accountant is to measure, interpret and communicate information which is relevant to these decisions. Their clients may be the owner of your local dairy or a multinational corporation. Graduates with a degree in Accounting find that their qualification opens doors to an exciting and diverse range of career opportunities all over the world.



WHAT IS ACCOUNTING?

Accounting is multi-disciplinary within the wider field of business. Accountants and auditors also offer services in budget analysis, financial and investment planning, information management and technology,

Topical coverage of career related issues brought to you by Victoria University Careers and Employment.

Areas covered include how degrees and courses relate to employment opportunities, to life/work planning, graduate destination information and current issues or material relevant to the employment scene. Your comments and suggestions always welcomed.

consulting and limited legal services. Inter-related areas include:

Financial accounting. Information is prepared and presented as financial reports or statements. These reports may be used within the organisation or externally. Users can include bankers, investors, suppliers, managers, customers and financial analysts. Their purpose is to assess the expected return and risk from investing in, or providing services to an organisation, as well as providing for the accountability of the firm's management.

Auditing. *External auditing* involves an independent examination of the accounting records of an organisation in order to be sure its financial statements are a true and fair representation of the organisation's financial activity. *Internal auditing* involves verifying the control over an organisation's systems, and checking for mismanagement, waste or fraud. It also involves a review of the organisation's operations, particularly their compliance with the organisation's policies and statutory responsibilities.

Taxation involves both compliance and planning. Compliance refers to the meeting of statutory and regulatory requirements, such as income tax and GST returns. Planning relates to how an organisation or an individual might arrange their affairs so their tax liabilities are kept to the legal minimum.

Management accounting draws together information, both financial and non-financial, that facilitates management decision-making and strategic planning from within an organisation or company. A Management Accountant is frequently part of the organisation's senior management team.

Public sector accounting involves issues of public accountability and political consequence in addition to the usual range of accounting functions encountered in the private sector, such as financial accounting, tax and payroll services.

Forensic accounting often applies in circumstances where crime is known or suspected, and in a range of commercial disputes. It can involve high levels of technical accounting, finance knowledge and electronic expertise.

Sustainable reporting. Recording and reporting on the effect of business and other organisations on the environment including reporting on the environmental impact and sustainability by individual organisations.

A sound understanding of commercial law is vital for



those interested in accounting. Studies in Finance, Economics, Management, Tourism Management, Law and Information Management will broaden career options.

WHAT SKILLS DO ACCOUNTING STUDENTS DEVELOP?

Accounting professionals are highly skilled, well informed citizens of the world who continually keep up with the play to be effective in their role. They are also people of high professional and personal integrity. During their degree studies, students develop many marketable skills and through work on assignments and projects, high level information processing and analytical skills as they relate to commerce and numbers.

Analytical skills are used to identify the essential components of a situation and stay focused on what is relevant. **Strategic thinking** is used to analyse a situation and understand how various connections and consequences might impact on potential decisions. Having an **eye for detail**, being **methodical** and **accurate** are also key strengths.

Problem-solving. Students learn to systematically 'unpack' a problem and propose a viable solution, and often **critical judgement** is used to evaluate and prioritise information, generally in order to make an effective decision in real-world situations.

An understanding of **professional standards** and **professional ethics** is developed through the study of auditing and commercial law, with real-world application further developed on-the-job through postgraduate professional studies.

Numerical sense is the ability to see beyond basic computation to the relationships between numbers, including underlying patterns, and interpret these in a meaningful way. Understanding the language

of numbers as it relates to financial systems is a specialised skill. A degree or even a few courses in accounting gives graduates a grounding in commerce which is useful in any career.

Research skills. Knowing where to access relevant information and extract what is useful when researching for assignments and group projects. Accounting students develop valuable transferable skills from gathering, understanding and analysing data and applying theoretical models to complex financial problems.

Communication skills include being able to listen carefully, speak clearly, summarise concisely, simplify complex information, write logical and grammatical reports, 'read' non-verbal language and project a confident and professional demeanour. Through assignments, tutorials, presentations and team work for projects, students develop the skills to listen, to impart information clearly in verbal and written form, and to engage in discussion.

Presentation skills. The ability to communicate a 'package' of information, convincingly and succinctly. Through giving class presentations, students master technology and learn effective ways of communicating information and engaging an audience.

Relationship building includes working alongside clients in a 'partnership' role, maintaining and expanding a client base, and working effectively in a team situation. During three to four years of degree work graduates learn to build effective collaborative relationships with staff and fellow students. Employment outside study gives valuable experience in building relationships in different workplaces.

Leadership. Accounting professionals often work

in teams and will be required on occasions to take a leading role. Effective communication skills are particularly important when leading a group. Project work for a degree in Accounting gives students opportunities to lead.

BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANT

Gaining membership of any professional body, be it in medicine, engineering, law or accounting, requires commitment and hard work. More often than not this commitment and hard work is compensated by the long term rewards - financial and professional. There are three sets of requirements to be met before becoming a member of any of the following professional organisations: academic study, professional competence and the completion of practical experience programmes.

Accountancy like other professions, such as law and medicine, has a body created by an Act of Parliament to control and regulate the profession for the benefit of society. While in New Zealand anyone can use the term Accountant to identify their occupation or job, certification and professional accreditation is applied at a number of levels from Accounting Technician through to Chartered/Certified Practising Accountant. Four organisations provide certification and free student memberships. When thinking about membership of the professional accounting bodies, remember that in addition to their usefulness for working as an accountant, membership provides an internationally recognised business qualification. The practical experience and professional competence programmes are normally undertaken during your first three years after graduation while engaged in full-time employment. These programmes provide the opportunity to combine knowledge gained in university study with the knowledge you are gaining in the workforce as an accountant.

Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand. To become a Chartered Accountant (CA) and apply for admission, students need to have completed a three-year programme of academic study. Successful applicants complete modules and workshops over six months in specific specialisations towards a Graduate Diploma in Accounting, followed by a period of mentored practical experience.



The requirements for the Associate Chartered Accountants and Accounting Technicians are not as demanding as for the CA, requiring less academic study and less demanding practical experience and professional competency programmes. Nevertheless becoming an Accounting Technician or an Associate Chartered Accountant is an ideal qualification for those interested in accounting and commerce but not looking to become a Chartered Accountant.

Certified Practising Accountants

Australia (CPA Australia) requires the completion of compulsory and elective courses offered by distance education each semester. To use the CPA designation you must have completed a relevant undergraduate or postgraduate degree, complete the CPA programme, including three years of professional experience finance, accounting or business.

Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA). Their qualification includes an examination syllabus, a professional ethics module and practical experience requirement, all of which can be completed in three years.

Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) is the world's largest professional body of management accountants and runs online assessments of core accounting skills as well as professional development courses. You don't need a relevant degree to start your CIMA studies, however if you've already completed an accounting or business degree, you may be entitled to exemptions from some CIMA exams, allowing you to progress onto the professional CIMA qualification sooner.

WHERE DO ACCOUNTING GRADUATES WORK?

Every business has an accounting function, whether it is in-house or outsourced to a chartered accounting firm. The bigger the organisation, the more specialised the roles and the greater the opportunity to develop in-depth expertise. Smaller organisations give scope to acquire knowledge and skills across a wide range of accounting and business functions. The following is a sample of the extensive and varied choice of organisations graduates can work for.

Major **accounting and business service firms**, are often multinational operations that offer a wide range of auditing, tax and business advisory services. Their



clients include large public companies and government organisations. They offer valuable training and career development opportunities, including full support for professional qualifications and the possibility of working overseas through secondment. CA firms often promote a distinct culture with an emphasis on team commitment.

Smaller accountancy practices tend to service small to medium sized businesses, smaller not-for-profit organisations and individuals. Apart from the fairly standard emphasis on tax and auditing, new recruits can quickly take responsibility for a wide range of clients' business concerns.

Government organisations that have a particular requirement for accountants and recruit at the graduate level include Audit New Zealand, Inland Revenue, The Treasury, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and the Reserve Bank. An Honours or Master's degree can be an advantage for policy analytical or advisory roles.

Business and commercial enterprises range from small private companies to large public companies and corporations, and spread across every industry sector. They employ accounting staff at all levels of responsibility. Job descriptions vary widely and many jobs are listed with recruitment consultants but, as always, personal initiative and networking can be effective job seeking strategies.

Non-profit organisations (NPOs) can be public organisations such as hospitals or private organisations such as sports clubs. NPOs that are accountable for public money, such as government departments, report in accordance with the requirements of the Public Finance Act, therefore knowledge of accounting and auditing in central and local government organisations is useful.

GRADUATE PROFILES

Banking and financial services. Banks, insurance companies, tax consultants, fund managers, share brokers and other financial institutions have wide ranging services, including investment advice, retirement planning, funds management, insurance, risk management, credit services and trusts, which open opportunities for flexible, client-driven services typically requiring high levels of intellectual analysis and interpersonal skill.

Management consultancies. In addition to accounting (and other) degrees, management consultancies tend to be interested in graduates with a second 'technical' degree in, for example, engineering or science. Postgraduate study is valued for the analytical and research skills it develops.

Educational organisations. Secondary schools, universities, technical institutes and some private training providers employ people to teach accounting. Requirements vary from relevant degrees and a further secondary teaching qualification, to relevant degrees plus combinations of commercial and professional experience in the tertiary sector. PhD study is necessary for academic positions.

Law firms recruit graduates with both commerce and law degrees for the practice of law.

JOB TITLES

There is a wide range of work opportunities available to Accounting graduates. Following is a selection of titles taken from our graduate destination surveys. Some roles may require postgraduate or conjoint qualifications and training. Titles can include:

Accountant • accounts administrator • accounts clerk • accounts officer • assistant accountant • auditor (external) • auditor (internal) • business adviser • business analyst • business planning and reporting co-ordinator • business advisory services accountant • company accountant • cost accountant • credit analyst • finance administrator • finance manager • finance officer • financial accountant • financial adviser • financial analyst • financial systems specialist • foreign exchange dealer • forensic accountant • graduate accountant • group accountant • insolvency administrator • investment accountant • lecturer • management accountant • payroll co-ordinator • policy analyst • pricing analyst • product developer • programme administrator • project accountant • project manager • secondary school teacher • tax accountant • technical accounting manager • treasury accountant • treasury systems accountant • trust officer • tutor.

Vaughan Samuelu

*Management Accountant
Somerset Group Holdings Ltd*



I took Accounting and Economics at school so it was a natural progression for me. I enjoyed some parts of accounting and heard it was a solid foundation, and economics really intrigued me. To be honest, as we began with basic foundations and principles, it wasn't until second year when we started to get into activity based costing and other management accounting topics that I became engaged with accounting again. We got the chance to look more closely at the real-world application of all types of accounting practices and I had the opportunity to also study complementary subjects such as Commercial Law, Economics and Taxation.

Because Accounting is an increasingly popular major, I think it's important to be able to differentiate yourself by being aware of, and putting forward, your unique skills and experience. From my studies, along with the ability to understand and analyse financial information, report writing was a useful skill to bring with me to the workplace. I learned how to structure a report or an argument and present it succinctly to a range of audiences. Accounting obviously also helped towards gaining my Chartered Accounting (CA) qualification, which opened up opportunities and further enhanced my financial and business knowledge. More generally, time management and self-discipline have been big for me as when you don't exercise those in the workplace, you find out pretty quickly!

I went straight out of university to PwC, which as well as offering the range of accounting services, provides management and digital consulting, legal and business advisory services. I joined the private business team, which is part of our business advisory function. This included compliance work (ensuring our clients meet financial reporting requirements, policy and guidelines) and then progressed into more advisory based work such as monthly and quarterly reporting. I later became heavily involved in the Cloud accounting area, implementing online or web-based accounting software. This wasn't something I saw myself doing when I was a student, but my degree helped me in applying accounting concepts in a different form and in response to rapid technological developments. I recently moved on to Somerset Group Holdings, a major provider of retirement villages and aged-care services.

Arthur Elliott-Jones

*Customer Experience Specialist
Xero*



For me, initially, it was a toss-up between studying industrial design, and commerce. I chose to study a Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting and Taxation because I have always wanted to be a decision-maker in the business world and I felt a degree in Accounting would put me in a good position to accomplish this goal. Alongside the technical and numerical skills, my studies taught me to think. Lecturers and tutors were involved in the industries that they were teaching and put what we were learning into context.

Tutoring in Taxation was an incredibly valuable and enjoyable experience for me. I have helped a wide range of students to do their best in the base level second-year Tax course. It is something I have really enjoyed and has helped me develop leadership, written communication, presentation, and time management skills, all the while reinforcing my own knowledge of taxation. I have worked in a number of roles during and before my time at University that had a strong service orientation – it has always been important to me maintaining commitment to my work as well as contributing to the training of other staff.

I spent a summer as an intern as part of the International Tax team in the Policy and Strategy Department at Inland Revenue, researching and producing a report on the UK's Diverted Profits Tax. This experience helped me to develop my research and writing skills as I was consistently provided with feedback on my work. I also gained valuable insights into the way the department functions and the way it interacts with government and other agencies and the business environment.

Confidence and willingness to put yourself out there are key, as well as showing how you can contribute value and not underselling yourself. Since graduating, my degree has opened up numerous opportunities—from an internship at Inland Revenue, to a job at Xero, one of New Zealand's most exciting start-ups. As a Customer Experience Specialist I investigate and respond to a wide range of accounting queries, via email, and over the phone. It requires strong analytical skills along with excellent communication skills to ensure that Xero customers are provided with the best possible advice.

Bernadette Scanlon

*Senior Analyst
PwC New Zealand*



I never wanted to be an accountant. In fact, when I first enrolled at university, my intention was to complete two majors – Law and Economics. However, I soon realised that Accounting, and the business world that it relates to, just made sense. Having an Accounting degree offered a highly practical skill set. I could see that by furthering my studies and becoming a Chartered Accountant I would hold an internationally recognised and respected qualification, giving me the opportunity to work abroad without significant barriers. Also looking back, my time at university was not simply about study as I also focused on the wealth of opportunities available. My experience was that the university would support anyone trying to 'do good', who recognised a need was not being met and something had to be changed. I was a committee member of the Commerce Students' Society and Law Students' Society, a mentor to Pacific Island Students and was a founding member of the Wellington Community Justice Programme.

What really sold accounting to me was seeing it working in action. I was fortunate enough to secure an internship with PwC in my third year of university. I chose to work in Tax, as I saw this as an area in which I could use all three of my subject disciplines. It was the exposure to the corporate environment where I saw the importance of being able to understand the core principles of accounting. It is not just about preparing or auditing accounts but also interpreting financial statements, understanding how investment works, being familiar with strategy and governance and knowing the structure of an organisation.

Since graduating, I have continued to work at PwC. After spending three years within Tax, I decided to broaden my skill set and joined the Restructuring team where I worked with distressed businesses. I recently transferred to Management Consulting where I work mainly with public sector organisations. Whilst I have not strictly practiced law or worked as what could be viewed as a traditional accountant or economist, I am constantly drawing upon all I have learned in these areas and have realised how versatile my chosen degrees really are.

Olivia Chappell

*Assistant Manager Audit
KPMG*



I didn't actually plan on doing an Accounting major initially. I began my degree studying Finance and Economics and found that Accounting was a good compliment to my finance studies. What sealed the deal on accounting was the prospect of getting a job that balanced working with both numbers and people. In the end I decided to do my Honours degree in Accounting, partially to fulfill the Chartered Accountancy requirements that were in place at the time, but also because I was interested in the challenge of studying accounting from a broader perspective. Accounting is more than just numbers and spreadsheets (although these are definitely part of the package!)

During my Honours year, I especially enjoyed taking a step back to question the status quo in business practices and consider accounting within a wider social context. Aside from technical accounting skills I developed research and critical thinking skills as well as the ability to balance multiple projects or demands which has set me up well for life after university. A lot of accountants begin their career at one of the 'the Big Four' accounting firms and I landed a role with KPMG. I'm currently working as a Chartered Accountant in the audit division of the Edinburgh office having initially begun work in Wellington. Audit has been really good for giving me a grounding in accounting, but also allowing me to use the big picture thinking I developed in my Honours year. I work with a wide variety of clients in a range of industries so being able to pick things up quickly and learn as I go has been important.

The skills I learnt at university gave me not only the technical knowledge required to become a Chartered Accountant but also the time and people management skills to be successful in my career. I've been able to use these skills throughout my career to date, and have been lucky enough to have been given multiple opportunities to work overseas. A key thing I would recommend is to speak to people in industries and roles that you find interesting. This will help give you an idea of what your career could look like once you graduate and you could make a vital contact for the future.

Jessie Du Preez

*Consultant Operational Advisory
Grant Thornton*



I always loved Accounting and Business Studies during high school. As business is something that shapes our everyday world, I also wanted to do something where I could hopefully one day be the voice for others and make a contribution. In those days I was also fascinated by what 'business men' did. That was something I noticed back then – that there were more men than women in senior commercial roles. I wanted to do something to prove that women can also be successful in leadership positions.

I would also like to break the stereotype that accounting is boring. There is so much more to accounting and business studies than numbers. Sure, studying Accounting does require dedication and, like anything, is not always fun, but it will pay off in the long run. Management accounting especially, is never dry and in your studies you can combine with other disciplines such as psychology, marketing or criminology to gain a wider perspective. Studying Accounting opens so many different doors for you in the business world and not all of these lead to accounting specific roles.

It seems a simple thing, but professionalism is such an important concept in the work place. By communicating with lecturers, PhD students, tutors, students and potential employers it is as if I learned a new language. Accounting and business studies give you a platform to understand basic business language, to really read the numbers and understand how to apply them in the real world. Also the tight deadlines and short study periods before exams prepared me really well for work routines. Often I am juggling multiple engagements (jobs) with deadlines that I need to prioritise for and meet.

That moment in my first year when I realized that I could actually express an opinion on something was amazing and I have come to love communication and presentation. Reading and writing are just as important as numeracy. I used to hate all the report-style exams I wrote, but now I find I write at least one report a day and without all that writing practice during my studies, I would not have been prepared.

ACCOUNTING AT VICTORIA

The School of Accounting and Commercial Law (SACL) offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in Accounting, Commercial Law, and Taxation. The School maintains excellent relationships with the accounting and legal professions and business and government communities. Specifically, we have accreditation arrangements with New Zealand and international accounting professional bodies to provide courses that allow our students to meet their academic requirements.

The accounting professional bodies to which Victoria are currently accredited to are:

- Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand – previously the New Zealand Institute of Chartered Accountants (NZICA)
- CPA Australia
- Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), UK
- Association of Certified Chartered Accountants (ACCA)

Our School provides a dynamic and inclusive learning environment for its students and staff. There are many scholarships for which Accounting, Commercial Law, and

Taxation students are eligible to apply.

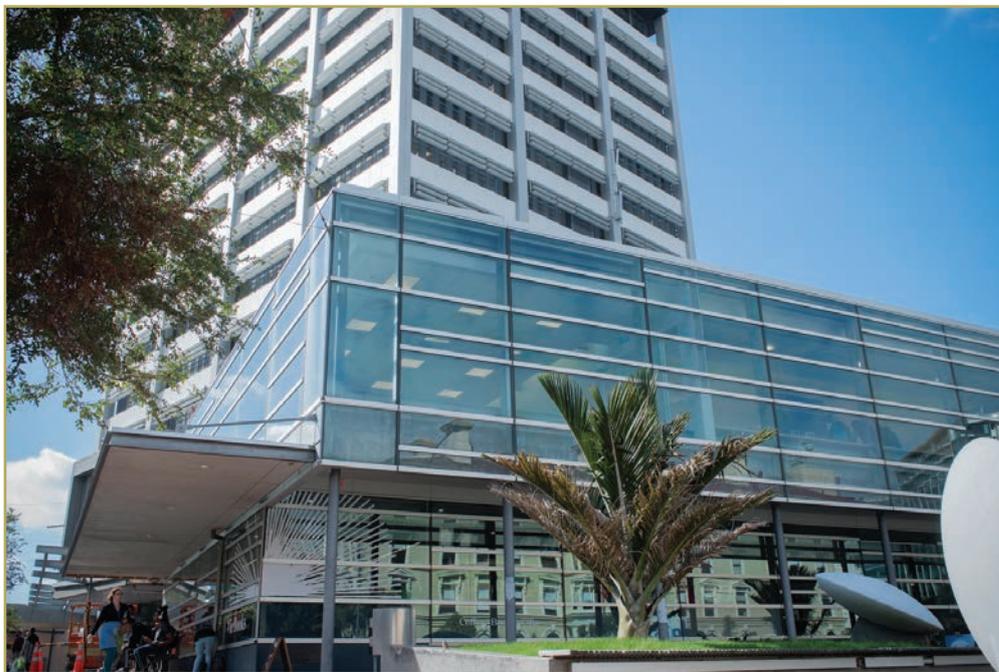
Prizes are awarded to the best student in some Accounting, Taxation and Commercial Law courses as well as for excellence in Accounting, Commercial Law and/or Taxation.

Accounting, Commercial Law and Taxation at Victoria are offered as both majors and core courses within a Bachelor of Commerce (BCom).

The graduate certificates and diplomas available are:

- Graduate Certificate in Commerce
- Graduate Diploma in Commerce with specialisation in our undergraduate majors: Accounting, Commercial Law or Taxation.

The postgraduate degrees available are BCom with Honours, Master of Commerce (MCom), Master of Professional Accounting (MPA) and PhD.



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