



REIGATE GRAMMAR SCHOOL



RGS Careers

Guide to Accounting & Finance

2015 – 2016



www.reigategrammar.org

RGS GUIDE TO ACCOUNTING & FINANCE

So you are interested in studying accounting and finance?

Did you know that there are several different accounting and finance courses? To begin, perhaps it would be helpful to give a very brief overview of what these are. I have used the COA Careers Directory, which Fifth Form students who take the Preview careers profiling test receive, as well as ***www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk*** as my main sources for this.

Contents

- ◆ Degree Courses in Accounting and Finance
- ◆ Joining Accountancy firms and banks straight from school
- ◆ Gap Schemes in Accountancy
- ◆ Training as an accountant
- ◆ What Old Reigations Have to Say
- ◆ Useful Websites

DEGREE COURSES IN ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE

Entry Requirements

There are vast numbers courses in Accountancy or Accounting & Finance, so it is very difficult to be accurate about entry requirements. The most competitive universities tend to ask for AAA including an A in Mathematics; however, many universities, even Russell Group ones, seem to ask for lower grades, and they do not always insist upon Mathematics at A Level.

Look out for GCSE requirements on UCAS Course Search though (<http://search.ucas.com/>). A lot of universities ask for A grade in GCSE Maths, especially where A Level is not offered, and there are sometimes requirements regarding GCSE English Language too.

TIP: Do the A Levels that you think that you will do best in, and those that you enjoy most. Having Maths is clearly a big advantage, and it is a requirement at a number of universities, but if it is not for you, don't do it! If you do not want to do Maths at A Level though, you really ought to at least question whether this is the right career path for you.

Course Choice

TIP: Consider courses that offer sandwich placements (year in industry).

Around 50% of graduate jobs currently go to students who have worked for that employer prior to joining them. On this basis, Sandwich degrees seem to offer an advantage. For example, Bath offer 'Accounting and Finance with professional placement.'

It is a good idea to try to find out how much help the university offers you in finding professional placements (try to do this without sounding lazy!)

TIP: Consider courses that offer a year abroad. E.g. Bristol offers a four year course entitled 'Accounting and Finance with Study in Continental Europe'. This kind of course will help you to experience another culture and business environment and to stand out from your peers.

It is also often possible to choose to study abroad with a university that has links to your university though the Erasmus Scheme. You can enquire about this when you are at university.

Tip: Consider investigating courses that sound a little different. These could differentiate you from your peers. For example, Nottingham University offers 'Accounting and Finance for contemporary China.'

Tip: If you are good at Modern Languages, consider continuing with one as a part of your degree. This could increase your employability, as well as your career options. It could also bring the grade requirements down to get in in the first place. Aberystwyth University offer 'Accounting and Finance with French.'

Tip: Some universities that you might not have considered are well known for Business and Finance-related courses. Some have their own Business School. E.g. City University have the Cass Business School, Reading University has the Henley Business School.

Tip: Consider courses that are linked to Accountancy firms (see section in booklet)

Tip: Go to open days and get personal insight into courses. Contact Mr Hylton from *Network Reigation* on jdj@reigategrammar.org and ask if he knows of any former students who are studying Accountancy and Finance courses. Find out from them what their courses are like rather than just relying on prospectuses.

Feedback from Will Preston, who is studying Accounting and Finance at the University of Bath:

“Although the word Accounting may prompt quick dismissal, it is worth understanding the variety my course offers. In a brief breakdown there are five modules per semester, and two semesters per year. In each semester there will indeed be one Accounting module, but the other four can entail a diverse range of studies. I have looked at Contract Law, Company Law, Empirical research methods, Statistics, Corporate Finance (my favourite), Behaviour of Firms, and other areas of the financial world including the stock market.”

What attracted me to the course?

I have been at Bath nearly two years now and I'm on a four year course with the third year being a placement year. I think what attracted me to my course was the employability aspect. I'm certainly not looking to become an accountant, but the course gives you a very solid and employable skill set. The great thing about Bath is you can get a placement, which really helps distinguish you post-graduation. I'm working in London next year in Corporate Finance at Grant Thornton, being paid £22,000 (relatively low amount surprisingly – some of my friends are earning up to £35,000). This placement aspect was particularly attractive, giving me excellent experience and it will also help me to clarify what I want to do after university.

Any bad aspects?

I hate to join the bandwagon on accounting, but unfortunately I can't sell you the actual accounting part. It's methodical, logical and very employable, but I needed something more intellectually stimulating. It is important to note that my course does not bind me to accounting by any stretch; you learn a wide base of skills, and can apply for nearly any financial job on your placement year.

Any A Levels required?

Maths was the only A Level that was a necessity for Bath. There is a lot of financial analysis and you need to be sharp in this area. But don't be put off if you don't think you're great at the harder A Level stuff; 99% of the Maths is the easiest parts of the A Level. Indeed, you certainly don't need Economics or Business Studies (I had neither), or Accounting. They go through the Economics A Level course in lectures.

Is it right for you?

I guess you will need some sort of determination to move in to the financial sector afterwards. A coherence with numbers and an interest in the current events in the business world will stand you in good stead. I still don't know what I will do post-graduation, but the financial sector will probably beckon if you choose this course. My main bit of advice is not to be put off by the word accounting, which I know a lot of people instantly are. The course provides you with a great set of financial skills to extrapolate into various jobs. It has given me a much better perspective into all things financial. I now completely understand the way a business is run, for example, and understand certain areas of the stock market, which has been really engaging.

Accounting and Finance Courses that are linked to Accountancy Firms

EY

If you study the BSc in Accounting and Finance at Bath or Warwick you can apply for the EY Assurance Scholarship. This offers two paid work placements, three £5,000 bursaries, as well as a head start towards the Chartered Accountancy Qualification.

Details are at:

<http://www.ey.com/UK/en/Careers/Students/Schools---EY-Degree>

Lancaster University has a degree, which is run together with Ernst and Young. It includes a year in industry, as well as a £5,000 bursary in each year of study. You would have to attend a selection workshop at Ernst and Young and Lancaster University in order to gain a place. Details are on: <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/lums/study/undergraduate/degree-courses/accounting-auditing-and-finance-bsc-hons-nn43/>

PricewaterhouseCoopers

If you study Business, Accounting and Finance at Newcastle University, Business and Accounting at the Henley Business School (Reading University) or Accountancy at Nottingham University, you have the opportunity to study for the PWC Flying Start degree programme.

This involves studying for a degree, as well as gaining 16 weeks of paid work experience with PWC during the second, third and fourth years of the degree.

You would also study for enough exams in Accountancy that you would only be required to sit the three Advanced examinations, as well as do 18 months of work before qualifying as an ICAEW Chartered Accountant.

<http://careers.icaew.com/school-students-leavers/Entry-routes/University-and-higher-education/Flying-Start-Degree> for details of this and other

Accounting and Finance degree courses with industrial links.

KPMG

In partnership with the University of Birmingham and the University of Durham, KPMG offer degrees in Accounting. They will pay your tuition fees and accommodation, as well as pay a starting salary. Should you complete the six years, you can gain a degree and become a fully qualified Chartered Accountant.

NB: This is a fantastic opportunity, but it is very different to a normal university experience. Do be sure to explore the details very carefully. Your starting point is <http://www.kpmgcareers.co.uk/school-leavers/school-leaver-programme>.

Other degree programmes such as those at Cass Business School (City University), Liverpool University and Leeds University include study for Chartered Accountancy examinations, as well as, in some cases, offering work placements at accountancy firms. Gaining degrees from these universities will give you exemptions from examinations when you start your career as an accountant. Details and links are on: <http://careers.icaew.com/school-students-leavers/Entry-routes/University-and-higher-education>.

Tips: There are some great opportunities here, but do make sure that you know exactly what commitment you are expected to make. For example you may decide that you do not want to be an accountant. Do you have to commit to working for the company to get your degree?

Joining accountancy firms and banks straight from school

You can train as an accountant straight from school. Indeed a number of accountancy firms are looking to take a vastly greater percentage of their intake at 18 in the future than they have up until now.

CLEAR ADVANTAGES

- ◆ No tuition fees.
- ◆ Earn a salary.
- ◆ Potential to get the valuable and highly transferable Chartered Accountancy qualification one year earlier than by most degree routes.
- ◆ I know of people who have become Partners in Accountancy firms or Leaders elsewhere in industry after going by this route.

BUT

You are a long time at work. Do you want to start at 18?

18 seems very young to decide to commit to being an accountant.

Beware that, although you are not in school or university, there will be a lot of exams. In fact you will have to go to work and do exams!

One or two organisations, who prefer to see the degree, even if you do have the Chartered accountancy qualification (these seem few and far between and, as starting at 18 becomes more common, this is unlikely to be an issue in the future).

If you decide that it is not for you, you could, of course, change your mind and begin a degree course, although you would be a year or two behind your peers.

TIP: The Big Four Accountancy firms (EY, Deloitte, KPMG and PWC) all offer excellent School Leaver Schemes; check out their individual websites. Do not limit yourself to these though. Other firms such as BDO Stoy Hayward and Grant Thornton also have fantastic School Leaver Schemes. Try to speak to people who have taken places on these schemes. We always bring a few in to careers evenings such as the Careers Convention, but you may be able to be put in touch with someone through *Network Reigatian*.

Feedback

Maggie Stilwell, a partner at EY, confirms that EY is increasing the number of students that it takes on at 18. They are finding that these students, who have made an early career decision, are often particularly mature and they perform at least as well as their graduate peers. Interestingly, the drop-out rate has been no higher for school leavers than for graduates.

Mrs Stilwell states that, in her opinion, once you have the ACA Chartered Accountancy qualification, the value of this qualification makes you just as marketable as those with a degree as well. There is also, of course, the advantage of having no debt and earning a salary straight from school.

The key point is: At 18, do you really know that you want to be an accountant? If you are sure about your career path, this is a really good option for you. If not, go to university, spend three years growing up,

thinking about your options and making sure that you go into a profession that you are sure (or as sure as you can be!) is the right one for you.

Feedback from Cara Young, left RGS in 2005 and joined the School Leaver Scheme at BDO:

Advantages of joining an accountancy school leaver scheme

With many schemes you will qualify as a Chartered Accountant earlier than your peers, who went to university and earn a salary at 18; no student debt some firms now offer a combined scheme where you earn both a degree and professional qualification with university fees being paid by the firm.

Things to consider

You need to be ready to work in a professional and client facing environment. Anyone who joins a school leaver scheme needs to have a certain degree of self-confidence and resilience.

A lot of schemes don't have a degree linked to them so a career change in the future may be harder depending on what you want to do; however this could be the case even if you have a degree!

Any impact of not having a degree?

Cara says that she does not believe that she has been held back in her career by not having a degree. She says that once you have your professional qualification employers will look at that rather than the lack of degree. Indeed, sometimes it can stand out as being a bit different. She believes that she has always been promoted based on merit.

It could possibly make a change in career harder, but it is unlikely to have a big impact.

What did the scheme involve?

It was essentially a route into the accountancy profession for school leavers.

The scheme involved spending a year working for the business split between both the audit and tax departments before joining the graduate ACA training scheme the following year. Opportunities for school leavers within the profession have increased significantly in the past few years with the 'big 4' and other top 10 firms recruiting more and more staff at these levels each year. A number of firms are looking to have a 50:50 split between graduates and school leavers.

Cara believes that it takes a certain type of personality to succeed on any school leaver scheme, and this is a major factor when considering this route as you will need to be ready to work in a professional, client-facing environment, sometimes working long hours. Thus you will need to have a certain degree of self-confidence and resilience to cope with this transition from a school environment.

Cara's experience of moving directly into the accountancy profession rather than going to university has been nothing but positive and she would suggest it as a consideration to any school leaver who wants to go into the profession, but feels that university is not necessarily for them.

There are many other opportunities out there. They are all very different. Some sources of information would be:

- ◆ www.directions.org.uk (an excellent web-site for research into all options in the finance area).
- ◆ www.notgoingtouni.co.uk (provides information on a wide range of options at 18 including sponsored degrees)
- ◆ <http://www.investment2020.org.uk/> (more for investment management opportunities at 18).

I can't really sell any of these options, but we will be on hand to help should you consider any of them. There are external experts, whom you can contact, through the web-sites above.

Gap Schemes in Accountancy

Deloitte Scholars Scheme

Students from RGS have regularly taken up places on the Deloitte Scholars Scheme. Indeed Natalie Liu (OR 2014) is currently working for Deloitte on the Scholars Scheme. This, no doubt, contributed to her gaining a place at Oxford for Politics, Philosophy and Economics for September 2015.

It is very competitive to get onto this scheme, and, given what it offers, this is not surprising. Students are well paid for the year, they get invaluable business experience with a world-renowned firm, and they then get paid work placements during their university course with Deloitte. We will give you the opportunity to meet people, who are on this scheme during the course of the year.

Most other accountancy firms seem to concentrate on School Leaver Schemes rather than Gap schemes. Do look out for insight days and weeks or any other work opportunities though on accountancy firm websites or on the Directions website:

(<http://www.directions.org.uk/careers/accountancy/>).

NB: There are lots of other Gap Schemes and School Leaver Schemes in other financial fields. The Directions website is a good starting point for research, as is the Student Ladder website:

(<http://www.studentladder.co.uk/>) and www.notgoingtouni.co.uk.

Training as a Chartered Accountant post-degree

This is by far the most common route for RGS students. You join an accountancy firm that is approved by ICAEW after your degree, work for them and take your Chartered Accountancy examinations. It is perfectly possible to join an accountancy firm from any degree subject, although Maths, Economics or some of the degrees in Section 2 can provide an advantage.

TIP: It is very competitive to get a training contract, especially with the big London firms. The best candidates will have gained an internship or at least some work experience during their time at university. Good starting points for looking into this would be accountancy firm websites, the Directions website or www.milkround.com You could also try contacting people you know or try *Network Reigatian*.

In order to qualify as a Chartered Accountant you would need to pass your three years of examinations, as well as completing 450 days of work.

There are various guides to the qualification process, but a fairly simple one is on the Prospects website:

(http://www.prospects.ac.uk/chartered_accountant_training.htm)

Different firms undertake the training in different ways. Some have intense, lengthy periods of training for the examinations during which you would not work, whereas others have regular, short periods of training in between work.

This is a very flexible qualification. Many qualified accountants will rise up the ranks in accountancy firms to become managers and partners; however, around half of all qualified chartered accountants work outside public practice, in commerce, industry, financial services, banking and the public and not-for-profit sector.

What does an accountant do?

There are many facets to a career in Accountancy and many areas that you can specialise in. Clearly, I can only give a very brief overview here. There is a good basic background given on the Prospects web-site and certainly on the Directions web-site. I have drawn on information in the COA careers directory (available on-line to all those who did Preview or Centigrade).

Professional Accountant

As a professionally qualified accountant you would be working with financial and management information. Depending upon the organisation that you work for (or whether you work for yourself) you could be advising a range of clients from multi-national organisations to small businesses and individuals. One of the nice things is that you get to see lots of different businesses and get a feel for how they work.

The services that accountancy firms tend to offer range from basic book-keeping to audit, taxation advice, management consultancy and corporate financial planning. You could be involved in keeping financial records for a company, overseeing credit control systems or even, possibly, being involved in strategic planning for the future development of the organisation.

1 Audit

Most trainee accountants join the Audit team. The basic role of the type of external audit run by accountancy firms is to provide unbiased assurance that the financial statements, that organisations have to submit each year, provide a true and fair representation of the company's financial position. A company might, for example, want to appear in a more healthy financial position than they are to attract shareholders, or in a less healthy financial position to avoid corporation tax.

A series of checks are run. The auditor might investigate whether the figure that the organisation has marked as Debtors is accurate by checking that all of the companies that are supposed to owe them money are still in existence and able to pay. The auditor might check that the valuation of vehicles that it owns is accurate by running tests to see how much they will have depreciated in value over time.

There is far more to it, of course, but that is the basic role. For more detail, you could go to:

<http://www.kpmgcareers.co.uk/graduates/graduate-programmes/audit>

2 Taxation

You would be working with companies to minimise their tax liabilities while staying within the boundaries of tax regulations. You would need to keep up to date with these ever-changing tax regulations.

3 Corporate Finance

This involves helping businesses make informed decisions about how they manage their capital and transactions. Essentially it means advising companies on how they raise capital, invest it and make best use of it. It is to do with ensuring the long-term financial health of organisations. The EY website gives more detail:

http://www.ey.com/UK/en/Careers/Students/Students_Graduates#fragment-3-na

4 Advisory

This is to do with helping clients to improve their performance and manage risk effectively. It is about advising clients on their most pressing business challenges. The KPMG website gives more detail:

<http://www.kpmgcareers.co.uk/graduates/graduate-programmes/advisory>

There are other areas of accountancy but these are the main ones graduates move to.

Accounting Technician

Accounting technicians work alongside professionally qualified accountants. They carry out activities such as keeping financial records, preparing tax returns and providing information for management reports. They may work in specialist accountancy firms, but they could also work in industry or commerce. They are not legally qualified to conduct full scale audits, but they are often responsible for much of the preparation. They tend to be involved in the practical application of day-to-day accounting issues rather than the kind of financial management that is dealt with by professionally qualified accountants.

For more information go to www.aat.org.uk (the web-site for the Association of Accounting Technicians)

Person Specification for an Accountant

You don't need to be a brilliant mathematician (though you must be numerate!), You need to enjoy working with figures and problem-solving.

You need to be self-motivated, diligent and accurate.

You need leadership skills, but you also need to be a good team-player; accountants tend to work in teams.

You need good communication skills.

You need to have a genuine interest in finance and business.

USEFUL WEBSITES

Refer to the individual websites of individual accountancy firms such as KPMG, Ernst and Young, Deloitte, PWC, Grant Thornton and BDO Stoy Hayward.

- ◆ <http://www.directions.org.uk> for specifically finance-related careers/gap/university advice and guidance.
- ◆ <http://careers.icaew.com> for information on Accountancy including university courses.
- ◆ www.notgoingtouni.co.uk for information about school leaver schemes and sponsored degrees.
- ◆ <http://www.prospects.ac.uk> A really useful Careers website with information about most careers, as well as guidance on CV writing and interviews.
- ◆ <http://www.studentladder.co.uk/> for various Careers information and guidance.
- ◆ www.milkround.com for information about graduate jobs.
- ◆ www.aat.org.uk (the website for the Association of Accounting Technicians).
- ◆ www.ucas.ac.uk for details on all Accounting and Finance courses and links to individual university websites.
- ◆ www.unistats.com to help you to compare courses based on data such as student satisfaction, cost of living, contact time and employability prospects.
- ◆ <http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/> for league tables and comparisons between courses.
- ◆ <http://www.theguardian.com/education/universityguide> does something similar.
- ◆ www.rgsinfo.net then hit the Taster Courses link to find university preparation courses. Do not spend a lot of money on these; lots are free. However, it is a very good idea to go on at least one.
- ◆ <http://www.london.ac.uk/TASTERS> gives details of free London university taster days. These book up fast so get straight onto it!



Reigate Road, Reigate, Surrey, RH2 0QS

Tel: 01737 222231 Fax: 01737 224201

Email: info@reigategrammar.org

www.reigategrammar.org