# Accountant: job description

Accountants provide financial advice to clients that range from multinational organisations and governmental bodies to small independent businesses and individuals. Accountants often specialise in particular areas of practice, including audit, management consultancy, recovery, forensic accountancy, taxation, assurance and corporate finance (see the accountancy [areas of work](https://targetjobs.co.uk/career-sectors/accountancy-and-financial-management) for more details). Typical duties include:

* preparing accounts and tax returns
* administering payrolls and controlling income and expenditure
* auditing financial information
* compiling and presenting reports, budgets, business plans, commentaries and financial statements
* analysing accounts and business plans
* providing tax planning services with reference to current legislation
* financial forecasting and risk analysis
* dealing with insolvency cases
* negotiating the terms of business deals and moves with clients and associated organisations
* meeting and interviewing clients
* managing colleagues, workloads and deadlines.

Work tends to be office based, with working hours often extending beyond the regular nine to five at peak times, such as at the end of the financial year.

### Typical employers of accountants

* Private firms of accountants
* Professional services firms
* Industrial organisations
* Charities and not for profit organisations
* Commercial and corporate organisations
* Governmental bodies
* The public sector

### Qualifications and training required

There are routes into a career in accountancy for both university graduates and school leavers.

Graduates can have an honours degree in any discipline, though relevant subjects such as accounting, business or economics are advantageous as these can provide a faster route to the necessary qualification with a professional accounting body. Obtaining this qualification enables you to achieve chartered status, which demonstrates to employers, clients and the general public than you have the training and skills to do your job well. Graduates will also need five GCSEs (grades A\* - C, including maths and English), and at least two good A levels. Recently some firms, in particular the Big 4, have relaxed their [entry criteria](https://targetjobs.co.uk/career-sectors/accountancy-and-financial-management/advice/438970-the-big-4-s-entry-criteria-and-your-graduate-job), and it is now possible to enter the profession with a 2.2 degree or lower number of UCAS points. Prior legal knowledge, especially in relation to taxation, may be beneficial.

Qualification as a chartered accountant takes at least three years, and can be demanding; study for exams takes place alongside full-time employment and graduates should carefully consider the package offered in their training contract. While working toward chartered status, provisions for training and study leave play an important role in job satisfaction, as well as salary and the atmosphere of the firm where you work.

As part of the training, graduates must complete three years of relevant work experience. Prior experience gained through relevant internships may count toward this, but the work experience must always meet certain development objectives and be supervised by an employer approved by the qualification provider. Qualification is dependent on the fulfilment of these training objectives, professional exams, and a professional ethics assessment.

There are several separate institutes of chartered accountants (see links below) and entry requirements vary. Certain large firms have preferences for qualifications from specific institutes, although training generally covers the same topics and skills. In order to maintain chartered status, accountants are required to pursue objectives toward continuing professional development (CPD) each year.

To find out about how you can get into this career via a school leaver route (eg an apprenticeship or school leaver training programme) see the [finance sector of TARGETcareers](https://targetcareers.co.uk/career-sectors/finance), our website aimed at school leavers.

### Key skills for accountants

Accountants go through a rigorous recruitment and qualification process, and this is reflected in their high professional status. Employers look for graduates with the following skills:

* self-motivation
* integrity
* ability to reflect on one's own work as well as the wider consequences of financial decisions
* business acumen and interest
* organisational skills and ability to manage deadlines
* teamworking ability
* communication and interpersonal skills
* proficiency in IT
* analytical ability
* a methodical approach and problem-solving skills
* high level of numeracy