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Accounting History

Entry routes into ICAS training: status versus sustainability

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Entry routes into ICAS training: status versus sustainability

Abstract

Education plays a pivotal role in establishing the elite status of a profession. This paper sets out to understand the role of social and political influences in the determination of entry routes to professional accounting training with the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland (ICAS). The paper charts the development of various entry routes which converted ICAS from an Institute with few graduate entrants in the mid-1950s to an Institute with almost 100% graduate entrants today.

Key words: entry routes, access, student debt, professional training, sustainability, social inclusion

Introduction

“Ultimately the quality of the profession depends on the quality of the candidates it can attract. Entry requirements are the first step in this process” (IFAC, 2014: 33).

This quote, taken from the introduction of International Education Standard (IES) 1 Entry Requirements to a Program of Professional Accounting Education (effective date 1 January 2005), highlights the importance of the setting of entry requirements for access into training by professional accountancy bodies.

Accountancy is well established as an elite professional occupation in most parts of the world (FRC, 2003; Kirkham and Loft, 1993; MacDonald, 1995; Shackleton and Walker, 2001; Walker, 1995, 1999, 2004). This status has been derived through exclusionary closure of the market (Lee, 1995; Walker, 2008) which in part has been determined by the characteristics of those who practice the occupation (Crompton, 1987; Crompton and Sanderson, 1986; Milkman, 1983). Whilst professional status has been afforded through association with educational qualifications, (Abbott, 1988; Burrage, 1990; Crompton, 1987; Freidson, 1986; Larson, 1977; Richardson, 1988), in effect ‘producing the producers’ (Larson, 1977:71) controlling the educational input through the setting of entry requirements has aided the monopolisation of professional knowledge (Coronella et al., 2015; MacDonald, 1995). This social closure apparatus (Murphy, 1988; Weber,

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9 1976) founded on individualist academic credentials (Hammond et al., 2009; Parkin,
10 1979) serves to legitimise and enhance the professional status of the accountancy body
11 (Annisette and Kirkham, 2007; Ciancanelli et al., 1990; Gammie and Kirkham, 2008;
12 ICAS, 1970; Inglis et al., 2011) as it provides a warrant of the abilities of the
13 practitioner (MacDonald, 1995) and creates a certain social cachet (Beckman, 1990;
14 Larson, 1977; MacDonald, 1995). Thus, by restricting access to their membership,
15 professional accountancy bodies have been able to monopolise their social and
16 economically advantaged positions (Lee, 1995; MacDonald, 1995; Parkin, 1979;
17 Walker 2008; Wilmott and Sikka, 1997)
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29 However, educational credentials often reflect social (Bourdieu, 1984) or cultural
30 backgrounds (Coetzee, 2016; Hammond et al., 2009) as opposed to individual abilities
31 or achievements and recent attention in the UK has focussed on the barriers of entry to,
32 and accessibility of, the professions (Hall, 2009; Milburn Report, 2009; PARN, 2009;
33 Sullivan, 2010).
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41 The desire to increase accessibility to the accounting profession has also been
42 recognised by the International Accounting Education Standards Board (IAESB).
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45 Whilst the initial IES 1 indicated that the entry requirement set should be the equivalent
46 to that for admission to a recognised university degree program (IFAC, 2014), the
47 revised standard which was effective from 1 July 2014, was less prescriptive. The
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9 overall objective of the standard was still to protect the public interest through the
10 setting and maintenance of high-quality standards, however, the concepts of fairness
11 and proportionality were introduced. The standard therefore currently requires member
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15 bodies to:

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18 “allow entrance only to those with a reasonable chance of successfully completing
19 the professional accounting education programme, while not representing
20 excessive barriers to entry” (IFAC, 2014: 230).
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26 The revised IES 1 also recognises that completion of a full professional qualification is
27 just one of a range of exit points from a professional accounting education programme.
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31 This relaxing of the meritocratic criteria required for entry by IES1 introduces the
32 principle of flexible access to professional accounting programmes and recognises that
33 entry requirements may vary by jurisdiction due to differences in government and
34 regulatory arrangements (IFAC, 2014). Entry requirements set by professional bodies
35 may, however, also vary over time as the bodies respond to the market, political and
36 societal influences which inter-act to impact on educational policy:
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46 “Our arrangements for education and training must be kept under review and they
47 must be changed from time to time to take account of new demands on the
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profession and of alterations in the educational environment in which we live”

(ICAS, 1970: 5).

This article sets out to understand the role of these various influences in the determination of ICAS education policy by concentrating on one particular aspect, namely, the shifting entry requirements of ICAS to professional accountancy training.

The paper will firstly set the scene for the discussion by outlining the ICAS context within the chartered accountancy market and the changing social and political landscape within the UK. The paper will then outline the method used to collect the material for the analysis before outlining how ICAS responded to the challenges they faced in the setting of their entry requirement. The paper closes with a discussion and some concluding comments.

The ICAS context within the chartered accountancy market in the UK

ICAS celebrated its 160 year history in 2014 and as such is the oldest professional accountancy body in the World (Anderson-Gough, 2009; ICAS, 2014). Over this time, its membership has grown from 146 members in 1864 (ICAS, 2004a) to 20,700

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9 members in 2015 (FRC, 2016). Whilst ICAS may be one of the smaller UK based
10 bodies (FRC, 2016), ICAS articulates success in its occupational quest for status in the
11 social order (MacDonald, 1995; Weber, 1978) through claims of an elite status in the
12 accountancy profession (ICAS, 2007a). Indeed the ICAS President in 2004 stated:
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18 “ICAS not only has a long and distinguished history, it has a reputation for high
19 standards in education and research, and for thought leadership in accounting. It
20 has a reputation in the international accounting world for punching way above its
21 weight” (ICAS, 2004a: v).
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28 This sentiment was further reinforced in 2011, when it was articulated in the strategic
29 plan:
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34 “What has traditionally distinguished ICAS as a professional accountancy body is
35 excellence in education, thoughtful applied research, rigorous but fair regulation
36 and a powerful sense of professional community amongst our members” (ICAS,
37 2011a: 1).
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43 Education, or in the words of Larson (1977:71) ‘producing the producers’ clearly plays
44 a pivotal role in establishing the self-reported elite status:
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9 “The education and training of young people entering our profession is one of the
10 most important functions of our Institute and of ourselves as members” (ICAS,
11 1970: 5).
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16 “Our CA students are our future members....they are a vital part of our
17 professional community” (ICAS, 2011a: 1).
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21 Whilst achieving exclusionary closure by status-based vertical segmentation of the
22 market can afford professional bodies increased profitability (Wilmott and Sikka, 1997;
23 Yee, 2012), another manifestation of this social closure strategy is to achieve and
24 defend a monopoly in the market for services (Larson, 1977; MacDonald, 1995). This
25 is achieved through the monopolisation of professional knowledge via education
26 restricted to the select few granted entry (MacDonald, 1995) and through the
27 establishment of a jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988). Despite the fact that accountancy in the
28 UK has never persuaded the legislature to pass a statute to define its jurisdiction
29 (Parkin, 1979) some monopoly building was achieved through legislative requirements
30 for auditors to be chartered accountants (MacDonald, 1995). This resulted in some
31 horizontal segmentation of the market, which highlighted the differentiation of tasks
32 associated with particular accountancy bodies (Richardson and Kilfoyle, 2012), as
33 chartered accountants (ICAS and ICAEW members) had a monopoly over audit
34 services (MacDonald, 1995).
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9 Since the 1990s, however, audit has become increasingly automated, which resulted in
10 decreased audit revenue and a corresponding reduction in profit (Brock, 2006). Driven
11 by their pursuit of higher profits, paralleled by the growth in client demands for
12 consulting services, the larger professional accounting service firms (PASFs), and the
13 Big 4 in particular, started the process of becoming multidisciplinary practices,
14 expanding their offerings and, recruiting heterogeneous professionals (Andon et al.,
15 2015; Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006; Hanlon, 2004; Suddaby et al., 2007; Suddaby et
16 al., 2009; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). This has resulted in some of the PASFs such
17 as Deloitte (Deloitte, 2015a) and Ernst & Young (Ernst & Young, 2015) who
18 traditionally trained their staff with ICAS and ICAEW now offering the Chartered
19 Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) training to their staff who join the
20 financial services consulting arm of the firm. KPMG further extended this opportunity
21 for employees following the apprenticeship route for school leaver and college leavers
22 where they can study towards CIMA whilst working within tax, audit and advisory
23 (KPMG, 2015). The segmentation of the market is therefore becoming more indistinct.
24 Indeed, following the introduction of the Training Outside Public Practice scheme
25 (TOPPs) in 1998 ICAS members can also undertake their training outside of the PASF
26 environment¹ (Hunter, 1998), an environment traditionally associated with CIMA and
27 the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) training. Whilst very few
28 students pursue this TOPPS route, ICAS and ICAEW who traditionally train their
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9 members in PASFs have more members employed in industry and commerce than in
10 any other setting (FRC, 2016). The ability of members to transfer the domain of their
11 employment demonstrates the esoteric collection of knowledge that the accountancy
12 profession demands as opposed to a particular cognitive domain often associated with
13 professional bodies (MacDonald, 1995). Thus, the horizontal segmentation of the
14 accountancy profession has become blurred (Richardson, 1987).
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23 Another segmental erosion is the geographical segmentation of the chartered market
24 (ICAS versus ICAEW) whereby students working in Scotland traditionally trained with
25 ICAS² and those working south of the border trained with ICAEW. In 1999, 90% of the
26 397 ICAS trainees who commenced training in that year were based in Scotland
27 (Marrian and Allison, 2004). However, following the introduction of more bespoke
28 training which resulted in Ernst and Young, PricewaterhouseCoopers and KPMG Tax
29 Business School moving the training of some or all of their students based in England to
30 ICAS, the intake numbers rose to 881 in 2000 and increased further to 997 in 2001
31 (Marrian and Allison, 2004). These increased numbers have remained relatively stable
32 and in 2014, 59% of the ICAS student body were based outside of Scotland.
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46 ICAS therefore operates in a highly competitive market place where the recruitment of
47 students for training who then progress to membership is critical. This has particular
48 relevance for ICAS, as ICAS is not only responsible for the assessment regime as with
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the other UK based bodies such as ICAEW, CIMA and ACCA, but unusually in the UK market, it is also responsible for the provision of the training (ICAS, 2016a). The education fees that ICAS collects are therefore a sizeable proportion of total revenue as identified in Table 1.

Table 1: Education income of ICAS

	1997	2002	2007	2012	2015
Education income expressed as a percentage of total income	21%	40%	34%	36%	37%

Source: ICAS, 2001, 2002, 2007b, 2012a and 2015

Whilst it has not been possible to identify the profit generated from the education activity within ICAS it is clear that the income from education contributes quite significantly to the income generation of ICAS. This is particularly the case following the increase from 21% to 40% in 2002, which reflected the doubling of student intake from the year 2000, but which has now stabilised at just over a third of income. ICAS, however, is not unusual in this regard as the other professional bodies based in the UK, with the exception of CIPFA and ICAEW, also report significant elements of their turnover being derived from education and exam fees (FRC, 2016). In the long term ICAS' objective of sustainability is achieved by having an increased level of membership fees derived from this increased student intake (ICAS, 2011a).

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9 To summarise, in order to retain its status as an elite professional grouping, ICAS has to
10 continuously renegotiate and defend its claims (MacDonald, 1995; Shackleton and
11 Walker, 2001) and with an increasingly blurred segmentation within the accountancy
12 market, entry standards may be an important component in this defence. This is of
13 particular relevance when other occupations are trying to improve their status and
14 appeal and gain academic parity (Evetts, 2003; Fournier, 1999; Hill et al., 1996; Perrott,
15 2002). ICAS, however, has also to recruit sufficient trainees to remain viable in an
16 increasingly less stratified market place, which offers both threats and opportunities.
17 Both of these challenges, status and sustainability, need to be framed within the
18 changing social and political landscape within which ICAS has operated.
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32 **The changing social and political landscape**

33 **The changing educational landscape**

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38 Post the second world-war, Britain has become a post-industrial society, where most of
39 the employment was within the 'middle class' service sector (Roberts, 2011; Vogt,
40 2016). The growth of this 'middle class' sector required many of these positions to be
41 filled from beneath (Aldridge, 2001) and this upward mobility was facilitated by
42 education (Bourdieu, 1986; Goldthorpe and Mills, 2008; Roberts, 2011). Educational
43 reform widened the opportunities of working class children and boosted their
44 educational attainments (Roberts, 2011). For example, in England and Wales, the
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9 Education Act 1944 introduced the tripartite system of secondary education (grammar
10 schools, secondary technical schools and secondary modern schools whilst fostering the
11 creation of comprehensive schools which combined all three) and made all schooling
12 free (Halsey et al., 1980). Similar provisions were enacted in Scotland a year later in the
13 Education (Scotland) Act 1945. Working class children, however, predominantly went
14 to the secondary modern schools and were thus prevented from following more
15 academic routes (Benn and Chitty, 1996; Bennet et al., 2009). Thus the education
16 system was not the panacea for social mobility as advocated by some stratification
17 sociologists (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Coleman, 1981; Halsey et al., 1980) and class
18 ridden diverseness continued (Jones, 2003). With the election of Labour in 1964, the
19 selective grammar system was under threat, more comprehensive schools were created
20 (Galton et al., 1980) which paved the way for more working class children to attend
21 university (Roberts, 2011).
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38 In terms of higher education, an educational ladder for social mobility had been
39 provided in the UK from as early as the 1920s due to a small number of state university
40 scholarships. As a result, British universities until a generation after the second world
41 war, had a larger proportion of working class students than any other West European
42 country except Sweden (Perkin, 1996). However, due to the unequal social
43 stratification, pupils from working class backgrounds still only had a one in thirty
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9 chance of a university place, compared to a one in four chance for the professional class
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11 (Halsey et al., 1980).

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14 Following the publication of the Robbins Report on higher education in 1963, which
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16 recommended the immediate expansion of university places, the university sector in
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18 Britain expanded considerably (Anderson-Gough, 2009). Thus, while only 8.5% of the
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20 adult population aged 20-24 in the UK had a university or college degree in 1960, by
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22 1988 this had risen to 22.8% (Perkin, 1996). However, this growth lagged behind the
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24 considerable student expansion that took place elsewhere in the world (Perkin, 1996).

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28 The priority of subsequent governments was therefore to improve access to and quality
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30 within universities with a view to developing an inclusive, world class higher education
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32 sector (Department for Education and Skills, 2002). This resulted in further growth to
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34 the extent that by 2012, 38% of the adult population in the UK held an undergraduate
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36 degree in comparison to only 17% in 1992 (ONS, 2013). Thus, a university education
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38 is now regarded as the expected norm for many school leavers within the UK as
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40 opposed to an educational privilege reserved for the academically elite (Gammie and
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42 Kirkham, 2008).

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47 However, despite increasing opportunities for a higher education in the UK, there was
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49 still government concern that insufficient had been done to widen access (Department
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51 for Business Innovation and Skills, 2014) as the class gap had remained virtually
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9 unchanged (Halsey et al., 1980; Roberts, 2011). By 2011, over 70% of upper middle
10 class children progressed into higher education compared with less than 20% in the
11 working class (Roberts, 2011) and particular criticism has been levelled at the highly
12 selective, research elite universities who have failed to make any progress in this regard
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17 (Milburn, 2012).
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20 Therefore despite the opportunities offered by comprehensive schooling to those from
21 the lower classes, and the unprecedented increase in higher education opportunities,
22 there has been little change in the proportion of working class children going to
23 university in the UK.
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33 **The burden of student debt**

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36 Education is one of the more expensive items in the UK welfare state (Perkin, 1996).
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38 Funding the provision of increasingly mass higher education has been a constant source
39 of political debate and change as evidenced by Table 2 which provides a summary of
40 the changing funding arrangements in England over the last 50 years.
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Table 2: Higher education funding arrangements

Date	Rationale for change	Living costs	Tuition fees
1962	In order to encourage the expansion of higher education the UK Education Act of 1962 was passed which introduced the requirement for funding by education authorities.	Means tested maintenance grants provided by local education authority for full-time first degree students (Gillard, 2011)	Paid by government/ local education authority (Gillard, 2011)
1990	By the late 1980s concerns had been raised regarding the growth in student numbers and the related cost to the government. Following a review, student loans were introduced (Wyness, 2010).	Maintenance grants continued but student loans introduced <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initially, maximum loan was 1/6 of total support available, by 1996 maximum available loan increased to 1/2 Loans repaid after graduation and reaching specified income level. Repayments mortgage style with repayments a set monthly amount paid over a 5 year period (Bolton, 2015a)	
1998	Dearing Report published in 1997 which recognised that an increase in funding was necessary for higher education and that "...graduates in employment should make a greater contribution to the costs of higher education in the future" (Dearing, 1997: 288). A number of options as to how this was achieved were considered with a recommendation being made to end free tuition for higher education. Specifically the Dearing Report recommended "... for graduates in work to make a flat rate contribution of around 25% of the average cost of higher education tuition" (Dearing, 1997: 323). The report further recommended that the payment of both tuition fees and living costs by graduates in work should be contingent on their income level (Dearing, 1997). Despite the recommendations made by the Dearing Report, a flat rate upfront tuition levy was introduced for students starting their course from September 1998 with no student loan available in relation to this.	Maintenance grants cut with corresponding increase in student loans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Style of loan changed to income contingent loan Repayments now based on income level rather than being flat rate over specified period (Blake, 2010)	Tuition fee levy introduced <ul style="list-style-type: none"> £1000 upfront contribution Means tested with exemptions available for poorest students (Blake, 2010) No student loans available to cover tuition fee (Wyness, 2010)
1999	Government affordability concerns	Maintenance grants fully replaced by student loans (Wyness, 2010)	
2004	Social mobility concerns	Means tested grants of up to £1000 reintroduced – renamed Higher Education grant Student loans continued to be main source of support (Bolton, 2015b)	
2006	Government affordability and social mobility concerns	Higher Education grants replaced by new style of means tested maintenance grants of up to £2700 Student loans continued to be available (Bolton, 2015b)	Variable tuition fees introduced in England <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximum of £3000 per year Tuition fee loans introduced to cover these tuition fees (Bolton, 2015b)
2012	A further review of higher education was commissioned in 2009 with its findings published in the Browne Report in 2010. The report		Maximum tuition fee limit for students studying in England or English students

	highlighted that the current funding of higher education was unsustainable and in need of urgent reform. Its recommendations included higher education institutions being able to charge variable and higher tuition fees. The report further recommended that no upfront payment of tuition fees should be required by the student and that finance should be available to meet the costs of both tuition fees and living costs. Furthermore, the repayment of these should only be required once the student was benefitting from the education received. An emphasis was also placed on the need for any repayments to be at an affordable level (Browne, 2010).		studying in Scotland increased to £9000 per year Tuition fee loans still available <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repayable with interest once student earning at least £21000 • Repayment equal to 9% of income over £21000 threshold (Bolton, 2015a)
2016	Government affordability concerns	Maintenance grants no longer available for new students but level of student loans increased (Bolton, 2015b)	

Whilst funding arrangements of students residing in Scotland had traditionally mirrored that of English residents, funding in Scotland (and indeed Wales) changed following the Referendums in 1997, whereby certain powers including education were devolved to the respective Scottish and Welsh Governments. A detailed review was subsequently undertaken into higher education funding in Scotland, the findings of which were published in the Cubie Report in 1999. The recommendations included abolishing the income dependent tuition fee levy in Scotland and replacing this with a graduate endowment scheme (Alley and Smith, 2004). The resulting Education (Graduate Endowment and Student Support) (Scotland) Act 2001 enacted this recommendation and the means tested tuition fee levy was abolished in Scotland. Instead a graduate endowment scheme was introduced whereby a one off payment, initially set at £2000 was levied and this became due for payment in the April following a student's graduation. This one off payment was applied to any student, irrespective of their

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9 parental/family income, who started their first full-time degree course on or after 1
10 August 2001 (Wyness, 2010). The graduate endowment scheme was subsequently
11 abolished by the Scottish National Party, who came to power in 2007 narrowly
12 defeating the incumbent Scottish Labour party, in February 2008. Students who had
13 graduated in 2007 were thus no longer required to make the payment (Wyness, 2010)
14 and hence students received free university education. This free education remains in
15 Scotland at the time of writing (2017), and tuition fees continue to be paid by the
16 Scottish Government for Scottish domiciled students studying in Scotland (Scottish
17 Government, 2015).

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Despite the advent of student endowments and fees, increasing numbers of students
have entered higher education (Association of University Teachers, 2002; HESA, 2009,
2010, 2012, 2014 and 2015; Scottish Executive, 2003). However, the introduction of
the £9000 tuition fee in academic year 2012/13 reversed this trend in England where
numbers dropped by 12.22% from the intake in 2011/12. By contrast, in Scotland,
where for home students variable fees were not levied, there was actually an increase of
1.76%. Recent trends of students entering first year of full time undergraduate courses
are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Student numbers entering first year on full-time undergraduate courses

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
England	381,060	410,085	427,890	426,375	438,705	385,105	417,160
% change		+7.26%	+4.34%	-0.35%	+2.89%	-12.22%	+8.32%
Wales	26,210	27,245	30,370	29,595	30,310	28,025	29,070
% change		+3.95%	+11.47%	-2.55%	+2.42%	-7.54%	+3.73%
Scotland	41,940	45,430	47,440	43,065	41,745	42,480	44,850
% change		+8.32%	+4.42%	-9.22%	-3.07%	+1.76%	+5.58%
Ireland	10,185	10,245	10,780	9,990	10,800	10,650	11,145
% change		+0.59%	+5.22%	-7.33%	+8.11%	-1.39%	+4.65%
Total	459,395	493,005	516,480	509,025	521,560	466,260	502,225
% change		+7.32%	+4.76%	-1.44%	+2.46%	-10.60%	+7.71%

Sources: (HESA, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2015)

Despite the reduction in England in 2012/13, the intake in 2013/14 showed a recovery with an increase of 8.32%, although the intake (n=417,160) was still below the highest level recorded in 2011/12 (n=438,705) albeit more than the levels recorded in 2007/08 (n=381,060).

Whilst increased levels of government funding has resulted in considerable expansion of higher education (ONS, 2013) with 55% of Scots in 2013/14, and 46.6% of individuals residing in England, entering higher education by the age of 30 (Weedon et al., 2016), it is clear that the availability of student funding is a key determinant in the attractiveness of higher education. However, what is less clear is the influence of funding type on the uptake of higher education by those from less privileged backgrounds.

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9 Whilst the early evidence from Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)
10 (2013) indicated that young people from poorer backgrounds had not been deterred
11 from applying, it was suggested that students who applied to start courses in the
12 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic years may have already made decisions about higher
13 education before the changes were widely understood (Department for Business
14 Innovation and Skills, 2014). It was therefore deemed, by the UK government, more
15 important than ever to safeguard and promote access and student success and in April
16 2014 the Department for Business Innovation and Skills developed a strategy for
17 widening access, articulating that the “unifying ideal in this strategy is that everyone
18 with the potential to benefit from higher education should have equal opportunity to do
19 so” (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2014:4). Widening participation in
20 higher education therefore remains a UK government priority as this will help drive
21 social mobility (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015). Challenging
22 goals have been set within this arena, namely, to double the participation rate of people
23 from disadvantaged backgrounds entering higher education from 13.6% in 2009 to
24 27.2% in 2020 (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015). With a current
25 participation rate, in 2015, of 18.2% (Department for Business Innovation and Skills,
26 2015) there is still much to be done to achieve this ambition.
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49 Interestingly, despite the increased uptake of higher education in Scotland (Weedon et
50 al., 2016) and the divergent funding model through the funding of tuition fees by the
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9 government (Scottish Government, 2015), 18 year olds in Scotland from the most
10 advantaged backgrounds are four times more likely to go straight to university from
11 school than those from the least advantaged backgrounds (Weedon et al., 2016). This
12 compares unfavourably with England where the rate is 2.4 times (Weedon et al., 2016).
13 Thus, increased participation in Scotland has not increased social diversity. Likewise,
14 the potential for student debt in England has not decreased social diversity.
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23 **Social inclusion in the accounting profession**

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26 Whilst social mobility and widening participation is clearly a facet of the social and
27 political agenda for higher education, it is also of relevance for professions. Increasing
28 social diversity and social representativeness within professions has also received
29 attention with arguments in favour of widening access positioned in relation to the
30 business case (Ashley and Empson, 2013; European Commission, 2005; PARN, 2008;
31 Milburn, 2009). Despite a claim by the Labour (socialist) Prime Minister in his speech
32 at the annual conference in 1999, two years after coming to power in 1997, that the class
33 war was over (Ashley and Empson, 2013) the Milburn Report (Milburn, 2009)
34 suggested otherwise. The report, argued that by stifling entry to the UK professional
35 services sector, of which accountancy is a component, the sector risked its reputation for
36 dynamism, innovation and creativity (Milburn, 2009). The accounting profession is
37 particularly criticised for a decline in social mobility over the past 30 years whereby it is
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9 suggested that accountants born in 1958 spent their childhood in families with an
10 income level around the national average, whereas those born in 1970 spent their
11 childhood in families with an income level greater than 40% above the national average
12 (Milburn, 2009). Indeed, there is recent evidence to suggest that accountancy firms
13 remain socially exclusive, which is largely due to the requirement for high educational
14 entry requirements and the propensity of the firms to recruit from the elite universities
15 (Duff, 2016).
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25 It is against this political and social backdrop of educational change and social
26 inclusion, compounded by the organisational desire for status and sustainability that
27 entry requirements to ICAS chartered accountancy training over the past 60 years will
28 be considered.
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34 35 **Method**

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38 Subsequent to the post second world-war educational reforms, Scottish universities, by
39 the mid-1950s were producing increasing numbers of graduates which led ICAS to
40 challenge their education model (McKinstry, 2000). This challenge was articulated by
41 the Lister Committee which reported to ICAS in 1955 on the examination and training
42 of apprentices.
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9 Using this paper (Lister, 1955) as the starting point for a review of the shifting entry
10 requirements of ICAS to professional accountancy training, an in-depth archival
11 analysis of Council minutes which considered this issue was undertaken. Council
12 minutes were the most appropriate base as the Council of ICAS is responsible for the
13 effective direction of the Institute's affairs (ICAS, 2016b), of which education is a key
14 component and therefore any changes to entry requirements would be discussed at
15 Council level. Any Education Reviews commissioned by Council were subsequently
16 identified. Further elaboration on any key issues identified from the Council minutes
17 from 2003 onwards was obtained from Qualification Board (QB) minutes. This board
18 was set up in 2003 to formulate, advocate, implement and monitor policies and
19 standards designed to achieve the strategic aims and objectives set by Council in
20 relation to business education and professional competence (ICAS, 2016b).
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36 **The increase of graduates for chartered accountancy training**

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39 Universities in Scotland had been involved in the training of Scottish chartered
40 accountants from as early as 1866 when the Society of Accountants in Edinburgh³
41 required that all apprentices attend law classes at the University of Edinburgh
42 (Anderson-Gough, 2009). This involvement was further extended in 1926 when
43 attendance at university classes in accountancy, law and economics became a
44 compulsory component in the third year of the five year apprenticeship required in order
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9 to become a chartered accountant (Paisey and Paisey, 2000; Walker, 1994). However,
10 the Lister Committee questioned the attractiveness and status of the qualification as
11 very few graduates applied to train as chartered accountants. The Lister Committee
12 subsequently provided ICAS Council with a fundamental re-appraisal and revolution of
13 the examination and training of Apprentices in a quest to ensure that:
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20 “the syllabus and training scheme are such as to attract suitable new entrants in
21 competition with other professions or, indeed, other accounting bodies” (Lister,
22 1955: 1).
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28 This report, which was adopted by Council in early 1956, introduced a three-year
29 indenture for ‘slanted graduates’ who were in effect accountancy graduates. This
30 indenture was two years shorter than the five year apprenticeship in place at that time,
31 thus ICAS introduced the principle of recognition for prior learning into their education
32 process. However, despite this change, only a very small proportion of the annual
33 intake trained in this way as can be seen from Table 4 below:
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Table 4: Accounting Degree Entrants 1954-1969

Intake year	Accounting Degree Entrants	Total Entrants	%
1954 and 1955	40	635	6.2
1959	17	321	5.3
1966	11	370	3.0
1967	15	354	4.2
1968	20	269	7.4

Sources: (Dewar, 1966; Shaw, 1969)

The next major education review was undertaken in 1966 by Dewar, who raised concern about achievement rates, both in terms of the numbers completing the qualification and the speed of doing so. From the populations of students starting in 1954/55, 22% did not qualify, and in 1959, this rose to 23%. For those that did complete the qualification only 52% from the 1954/55 intake and 43% from the 1959 intake had done so by the end of 6 years (Dewar, 1966). Examining which candidates were successful the Dewar Committee highlighted a direct correlation between success and those apprentices who had achieved a pass in Higher Mathematics at school (Dewar, 1966).

The desire for more graduates to enter into ICAS training was also articulated, as despite the three year indenture route introduced on the recommendation of Lister (1955) only 3% of the intake in 1966 had an accountancy degree (see Table 4 above). Whilst the total graduate intake (accounting degree and other degrees principally in

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9 economics and law) was higher at around 9% (Dewar, 1966), graduates were clearly in
10 the minority. With the expansion of higher education following the Robbins Report
11 (1963) still in its infancy the Dewar Committee did not consider there were sufficient
12 capacity at university to meet the demand from potential students. Dewar (1966)
13 therefore deduced that there was insufficient students graduating from university to fill
14 the ICAS training vacancies although this was likely to change. In addition, few of the
15 accounting degrees matched the new syllabus that ICAS was proposing to introduce
16 although the Institute was “pleased to learn that the universities were thinking along
17 similar lines” (Dewar, 1966: 8).
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29 The Dewar Committee subsequently made several recommendations which were
30 accepted by Council in 1967 as follows:
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35 • A minimum entry requirement of Attestation of Academic Fitness for entry to a
36 Scottish University – despite the correlation between performance in Higher
37 Mathematics and success in the chartered accountancy examinations the
38 requirement for this level of numeracy was rejected.
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- 45 • In the long term recruitment for chartered accountancy training should be mainly
46 through universities.
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- Graduates from accounting degrees would only be examined by the Institute at the final level of examinations. Accounting graduates would therefore be exempt from the earlier examination stages.
- The compulsory attendance at university classes for the non-accounting graduates be brought forward from the third to the second year of the five year apprenticeship.
- A new examination syllabus should be introduced from 1968/69.
- A compulsory four week book-keeping course be introduced for all apprentices irrespective of their background.
- The practice of the Institute “recommending rates of remuneration for apprentices be discontinued so that masters are free to offer whatever remuneration they feel to be appropriate in the circumstances” (Dewar, 1966: 17)

By 1969 there were three widely different routes to becoming an ICAS member. Scheme A candidates had three years of relevant full-time academic study, namely a University degree in Accounting or Business Administration, followed by three years of practical experience during which they undertook part-time ICAS classes, which were held in the evenings and weekends, and sat examinations for all the final stage subjects. Scheme B candidates were graduates from a variety of non-accountancy related degrees

who underwent a four year apprenticeship whilst undertaking the same ICAS training and assessment that the Scheme C trainees were exposed to. Finally, Scheme C was a five year non-graduate apprenticeship which incorporated a full-time academic year which was undertaken in year two of the five year apprenticeship. Whilst the impact of these changes slightly altered the intake profile (see Table 5), the non-graduate route was still very prevalent.

Table 5: Apprentices registering indentures

Intake	Scheme			
	A	B	C	Total
1966/67	11	34	325	370
1967/68 (post-Dewar Committee's Report)	15	37	302	354
1968/69 (minimum entry qualification raised)	20	50	199	269
1969/70 (estimate)	50	55	190	295

Source: (Shaw, 1969: 1)

Scheme A, whilst building momentum was taking time as when the Dewar Committee first met only four universities offered Scheme A degrees (Williamson, 1969). By 1969, eight universities (including some in England) were offering Scheme A degrees with more on the way. However, the initial output of graduates from these newly developed degrees was not available until the early 1970s (Williamson, 1969). There

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9 was also concern that the standard of degrees and faculty was variable, and that there
10 were difficulties for smaller offices in affording graduate salaries (Williamson, 1969).

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14 Another issue to vex the Institute, at this time, was the impact of raising the entrance
15 qualification requirement, to the equivalent for entry to a Scottish University, for the
16 1968/69 intake. This resulted in a significant decline in students who entered training
17 under Scheme C, with a fall from 302 students in 1967/68 to 199 students in 1968/69.
18 This fall, which was only partially offset by the increase in graduates, raised some
19 consternation:
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28 “Whilst the increase in the number of graduates is an excellent thing from the
29 academic point of view, the overall reduction will have a serious effect on the
30 finances of our tutorial classes in due course” (Williamson, 1969: 2).
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36 The need to balance education and commercial considerations was therefore apparent.
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38 There was also a general feeling that ICAS could still be regarded as an 0-level
39 profession and hence was unattractive to brighter students (Williamson, 1969). Shaw
40 (1969) cited “Gresham’s Law of Recruitment” to articulate this point:
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46 “A graduate will be attracted to openings which *demand* his qualifications. Those
47 openings which *prefer* but do not *require* high level entrance qualifications have
48 difficulty in demonstrating the seriousness of their preference” (Shaw, 1969: 3).
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9 Further concerns about increased competition from ICAEW, the effect of integration
10 proposals⁴, and the decline in the public image of the chartered accountant set the scene
11 for further quite radical change (Williamson, 1969).
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16 **The all graduate intake**

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19 This radical change was delivered, following the publication of the 'Tomorrow's CA in
20 the Making' consultation report, commonly referred to as the Charles Report (ICAS,
21 1970). This report argued for exclusively graduate recruitment on three levels; it was
22 essential for the Institute, it was advantageous to the master and it was attractive to the
23 student entrant (ICAS, 1970). Five Institute reasons were given; (1) the need to
24 demonstrate the intellectual foundation of the profession, (2) the alternative was a failed
25 university profession, (3) the change in educational patterns had created a situation
26 whereby people who could go to university did and there was no longer a pool of
27 capable students who chose not to undertake a university education, (4) universities
28 were accepting that accountancy was a valid academic discipline and (5) in the
29 complexities of modern commercial life a conceptual basis of principles was essential to
30 the efficient practice of professional skills (ICAS, 1970). It was further suggested that a
31 graduate would only be attracted to openings which demanded rather than preferred
32 their university qualifications:
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9 “anyone who can go to university will do so and the former pool of students who
10 elected not to enter university no longer exists” (ICAS, 1970: 27).
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14 The Council of ICAS, however, did not fully endorse this all graduate proposal and
15 stated:
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19 “Council was not ready to endorse the principle of all graduate entry because of a
20 desire not to shut the door altogether on entry direct from school and because of
21 doubts as to the feasibility from the point of view of availability of training places
22 for graduates” (ICAS, 1971).
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29 Once again it is clear ICAS were keen to maintain some flexibility in entry although the
30 sustainability of ICAS through the recruitment of sufficient trainees was obviously also
31 a consideration. If firms were not willing to pay graduate salaries and hence offer CA
32 training there would be insufficient numbers to sustain the education provision.
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39 The Council of ICAS subsequently resolved that:
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42 “the recruitment of graduates from all possible disciplines be given maximum
43 encouragement with the aim of achieving as soon as possible majority of
44 graduates among the intake” (ICAS, 1972).
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49 The resulting routes to entry following this report in 1973/74 were as follows:
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- Graduates with sufficient accountancy, law and economics (relevant degree holders) were eligible for a three year indenture during which they were required to attend block release classes and sit a range of examinations.
- Non-relevant graduates were required to undertake a one year full-time post-graduate diploma course at university, commonly referred to as the conversion course, which equated or nearly equated with an accountancy degree and these trainees thereafter followed the same route as the relevant graduates. The diploma was to be in the subjects of accountancy, law and economics.
- A Higher National Diploma⁵ (HND) apprenticeship as a four year programme for non-graduates was introduced which effectively wound down the school leaver route as all entrants needed now to be educated to at least HND level (ICAS, 1972).

All students (accounting graduates, HND accounting students and non-accounting graduates) would then attend ICAS day release classes to be held in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, Aberdeen and London for the new two part exam syllabus. However, despite the greatly increased intake of students in the late 1970s⁶ (Marrion and Allison, 2004) and in effect, an all graduate intake as the numbers entering into training from the HND route had fallen to around 2% of the intake (Marrion and Allison, 2004), when pass rates achieved in 1978 fell dramatically in 1980 the Council of ICAS asked once more for a review (ICAS, 1980a).

The conundrum of falling pass rates

The Institute's Examining Board reported to Council that the fall in pass rates related to an expansion of the syllabus learning content and poor performance by certain entry programmes (ICAS, 1980b). A subsequent report to Council noted that the HND students' performance had been disappointing so far although recent syllabus improvements to the HND should improve the situation. However, it was further recognised that any improvement might take three years to show through. Several recommendations were made, although perhaps the most controversial was the proposal to introduce a compulsory Preliminary Examination in the basic subject matters of Accounting, Maths, Law and Tax. This examination, undertaken at the end of a new four week course, which was compulsory for all students irrespective of their background, would act as a filtering mechanism for those who were unlikely to succeed (ICAS, 1981). Students were allowed two attempts at the exam within a period of three weeks and those failing at the second attempt became ineligible to continue in the student education scheme. Consultations on the proposals to members continued through 1982 and were approved by Council on 28 January 1983 for implementation from September 1983 (ICAS, 1983). In addition, to this new layer of assessment, the number of papers increased from six to eleven which were spread over two levels and a further layer of assessment was introduced by way of a multi-disciplinary case study (ICAS, 1983).

Responding to the threat of competition

This new structure, however, had a limited shelf life. University departments that produced relevant graduates expressed discontent over the preliminary course as they viewed the course as a repetition of their teaching and assessment. However, the death knell for this new education scheme was due to a concern about the impact of the increased examinations on non-accountancy graduates. It was noted that the number of examination papers made the CA qualification unattractive in comparison to other alternatives open to non-accounting graduates. Indeed, it was recognised there was a significant risk that non-accounting graduates would study for the examinations of ICAEW in Scotland. It was further reported to the Council of ICAS that 30 students had trained with ICAEW in 1986 and that this could rise to between 60 and 70 in 1987 (ICAS, 1987).

Council acting on a paper and proposals set out by the Education Committee, "The CA in the 1990s" (Lothian, 1985) responded by dispensing with the preliminary exam. The same paper also recommended that the requirement for non-relevant students to undertake the one year post-graduate diploma (the conversion course) be discontinued. This was an attempt to try to attract a higher quality of non-relevant student as this additional course was "an off-putting factor" (Lothian, 1985: 48). When concerns were further raised about the continuation of government funding for these post-graduate

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9 diplomas in accounting, swift action was needed as the Institute firmly believed that it
10 needed a competitive post-graduate scheme. The syllabus was immediately altered so
11 that both accounting and non-accounting graduates could become a qualified CA within
12 three years. In order to achieve a three year indenture period, without the need for any
13 post-graduate conversion course at University, non-accounting graduates undertook
14 their 'conversion' by way of an intensive 13 week block release course spread over the
15 first nine months of the training contract.
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25 These changes and their speed of change were controversial. The syllabus changes
26 planned for 1992 were brought forward to 1988. The HND scheme, which struggled to
27 find sufficient employment opportunities for diploma holders and had recorded
28 significantly lower pass rates than either the relevant or non-relevant degree routes, was
29 also closed although a clear route for special cases was to be maintained. With the
30 changes, student intake numbers in 1989 were 446.
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43 **Catering for the non-graduate**

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46 In order to still offer a route into CA training from a non-graduate entry route, a
47 proposal was put forward to create a bridge between the perceived high quality
48 Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) qualification and the CA qualification. A
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9 scheme was proposed to Council of ICAS which followed a similar model with what is
10 now known as CAI (ICAS, 1990). This was the first time that the AAT qualification
11 was considered as an entry route, and the proposal was subsequently ratified by Council
12 in 1991. However, the AAT scheme, as time would show, did not change the CA
13 education entry model in Scotland as student entry numbers peaked at 20 and by 2014
14 had fallen to 3. Whilst ICAS could be seen to be keen to open routes for non-graduates,
15 market demand was weak.
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25 The entry routes to CA training were subsequently quite stable during the 1990s, and
26 with only small numbers of AAT students joining CA training, ICAS was in effect a
27 graduate only profession (Marrian and Allison, 2004). During this time ICAS
28 Education concentrated on syllabus changes (Gammie et al., 1995) and trying to
29 increase the graduate student numbers which had fallen due to training firm mergers and
30 efficiencies brought about by technological advances (Marrian and Allison, 2004). The
31 focus on growing numbers resulted in TOPPs whereby students could undertake their
32 training in an industrial, commercial or public sector environment as opposed to a
33 professional accounting office. However, this scheme did not generate a significant
34 increase in numbers and the maximum intake from this scheme was around 5%
35 (Marrian and Allison, 2004). The efforts of the ICAS education staff, however, bore
36 fruit in 2000 when Ernst and Young agreed to train all of their graduate students who
37 were employed in the UK with ICAS, following a bespoke UK wide CA education
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9 model. PricewaterhouseCoopers swiftly followed suit although rather than training all
10 of their students based in UK offices they split the trainees based in England between
11 ICAS and ICAEW. Whilst these additional students resulted in a significant increase in
12 numbers to 997 in 2001 (Marrian and Allison, 2004), and a different profile of students
13 in terms of their degree background with around 70% of the intake now holding a non-
14 accountancy degree (Gammie and Kirkham, 2008), the eligibility for entry remained
15 the same.
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25 ICAS had therefore not compromised on their requirement for degree entry but had
26 expanded the intake by seeking out other geographical areas and other environments
27 within which students could undertake their training. ICAS therefore continued to
28 recognise the importance of a degree education as the underpinning for professional
29 training. Indeed, when a review by the Office of Fair Trading in 2000 “A Review on
30 Competition Restrictions in the Professions” suggested that access to the professions
31 was too restrictive, ICAS was clear in its response in relation to the area of entry to the
32 profession of accounting “our concern is not that there is too much restriction... but that
33 there may be too little restriction for the public good” (ICAS, 2000a). However, this
34 rebuttal to the Office of Fair Trading, did not prevent ICAS from developing some new
35 proposals, although not all were ratified by Council.
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9 The first of these proposals followed some discussions with the KPMG Tax Business
10 School. The proposal was for an innovative new route to the CA qualification which in
11 effect gave access to students who had undertaken the Association of Taxation
12 Technicians (ATT) qualification at the KPMG Tax Business School. Students on this
13 route would acquire ATT membership before either specialism in tax or following a
14 pathway to CA. This new entry route was ratified by Council in November 2000 (ICAS,
15 2000b). Whilst these ATT students may or may not be graduates, this scheme was not
16 dissimilar to the AAT scheme already in place. The main differences between the
17 schemes was (1) the level of specialisation in tax for the ATT students and (2) the fact
18 that all the students were employed by one of the big accounting firms which would
19 have set very competitive selection criteria, thus guaranteeing some level of quality of
20 intake.
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36 In the second of these proposals ICAS, in 2001, developed a unique working model
37 with the University of Newcastle and PricewaterhouseCoopers whereby students would
38 gain a university degree alongside their CA qualification whilst also working with a
39 firm of accountants. However, the Institute's QB had ultimately been unwilling to
40 sacrifice control of the examination requirements to facilitate the venture and the
41 proposal did not reach Council for further deliberation. ICAEW subsequently stepped
42 in and formed the successful longstanding PricewaterhouseCoopers Flying Start
43 scheme.
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9 However, in 2003, Ernst & Young, ICAS and Lancaster University developed a
10 variation of this degree entry programme whereby students study for a BSc (Hons)
11 Accounting, Auditing and Finance degree over a 4 year period. This degree, like other
12 fully-accredited accountancy degrees exempts students from the Test of Professional
13 Competence (TPC)⁷. However, integrated within the degree programme are two out of
14 the five Test of Professional Skills (TPS) subjects and 18 months practical work
15 experience through placements at Ernst & Young. If students pass their professional
16 examinations, excel at their work placement and obtain at least a 2.1 degree then they
17 will be offered a graduate job (Lancaster University, 2015).
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30 Interestingly, each of these three proposals was developed in conjunction with major
31 players in the employment market, KPMG, PricewaterhouseCoopers and Ernst &
32 Young. ICAS was therefore responding to the needs of these major employers by
33 designing schemes which fitted their business model. However, it is clear from the
34 rejection of the PricewaterhouseCoopers scheme that ICAS were not prepared to
35 relinquish control of their educational programme in order to chase student numbers.
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The impact of rising student debt – the school leaver route

In 2003 concern was raised by ICAS about the impact of demographic changes on the pool of university graduates and the increasing costs of undertaking a university education in the UK. By this stage the tuition fee levy of £1000 had been introduced and maintenance grants had been abolished and replaced with loans. ICAS Council therefore suggested, through the 'Fast Forward to 2010' strategy document, that access should be widened to enable entry by school leavers. This strategy document set out to position the ICAS brand at the forefront of the profession and identified that one of its priorities was to confirm the ICAS qualification as:

“a pre-eminent accounting and business qualification for the future by driving excellence in a way which is responsive to changes in demographic and market conditions. This will be achieved whilst preserving the overall standard and relevance of the final qualification” (ICAS, 2003: 4).

The document listed four education proposals, one of which was to:

“open the CA qualification to well qualified school leavers and other non-graduate entrants” (ICAS, 2003: 5).

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9 Whilst it was possible prior to this proposal, for non-graduates to gain access to CA
10 training through either the AAT or ATT KPMG route, this proposal extended the access
11 by offering a supplementary route to an ICAS training contract. The proposal was
12 specifically targeted at school leavers who had received no additional educational
13 training post-secondary school education.
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20 With such pervasive arguments put forward by ICAS in 1970 for an all-graduate entry
21 route, and their subsequent rebuttal to the Office of Fair Trading report in 2000, the
22 2003 proposal to re-open access to school leavers appeared to be a retrograde step for an
23 Institute wishing to position itself at the forefront of the accountancy profession
24 (Gammie and Kirkham, 2008). Gammie and Kirkham (2008) argued that if ICAS were
25 to pursue the school leaver initiative then the proportion of non-graduate trainees was
26 likely to increase with consequential implications for the composition of the overall
27 membership. Any lessening or erosion of the link between accountancy and university
28 education, whether symbolic or material, may portray an altered professional identity
29 (Crompton, 1987, 1997; Milkman, 1983). This may ultimately influence the career
30 choices of potential recruits (Bebbington et al., 1998; ICAS, 1970). Gammie and
31 Kirkham (2008) concluded that if a school leaver route was made available, over time,
32 this may serve to alter the absolute and relative educational profile of ICAS CAs.
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9 Despite concerns raised, the Education Department of ICAS were subsequently tasked
10 with conducting research into the school leaver initiative which was reported back to the
11 Student Education Committee in July 2004 (ICAS, 2004b) and the QB in October 2004.
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13 The conclusions drawn were that insufficient numbers of students were likely to be
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15 attracted to a dedicated school leaver route to make an additional ICAS training model
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17 cost-effective. Student numbers in higher education were still rising and the increased
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19 cost to students of going to university was not acting as a deterrent. The principle of a
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21 school leaver route into ICAS training was, however, still deemed worthwhile and
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23 therefore it was recommended that the AAT and the ATT route should continue to be
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25 used. It was also agreed that in view of student endowments and fees and the potential
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27 impact that this could have on the number of school leavers attending university, the
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29 demand for university places should be reviewed annually (ICAS, 2004b). It was also
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31 reported at the QB meeting (ICAS, 2004c) that the Executive Group were concerned
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33 ICAS were losing CA firms who had traditionally offered ICAS training contracts to
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35 other Institutes and QB were requested to consider alternative models of delivery, as
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37 opposed to alternative entry routes, which were cheaper and more attractive to
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39 employers facing high costs of training (ICAS, 2004c).
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47 Hence, at the August 2005 meeting of QB (ICAS, 2005a), when the first annual review
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49 of the demand for university places was presented, support was expressed by QB for a
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51 further investigation into a school leaver route (ICAS, 2005a). As a result, discussions
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8 were held with one of the 'Big 4' firms with a view to running a pilot scheme. This
9 scheme was presented and agreed by QB in November 2005 (ICAS, 2005b).
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17 The pilot scheme offered students the opportunity to commence their CA training
18 without any prerequisite education, apart from a school academic background
19 equivalent to that required from a graduate⁸. It was to be a small, controlled pilot
20 scheme with an expected intake of approximately 20 individuals. Trainees on the
21 scheme would be required to undertake the same three levels of ICAS examinations as
22 graduates, namely; TPC, TPS and the Test of Professional Expertise (TPE). However
23 instead of a three year training contract, trainees on the school leaver route would be
24 required to undertake a five year contract. This five year term, which incidentally
25 mirrored the five year apprenticeship in existence until the early 1970s, would shorten
26 the time taken to qualify for school leavers. In comparison to graduates from an English
27 university where honours degrees take three years to complete, school leavers could
28 qualify 12 months sooner⁹. In comparison to graduates of Scottish universities where
29 honours degrees take four years to complete, the time saving would be 24 months.
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46 The rationale for the school leaver proposal was market led. It was introduced in
47 recognition of the potential for a smaller pool of graduates following an anticipated
48 decline in the take-up of a university education based on cost. Interestingly, the issue of
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9 graduate salaries as previously highlighted by Williamson in 1969 was also raised. This
10 alternative educational route to qualification was also viewed as a possible means of
11 alleviating any drift of CA training firms towards other UK accountancy bodies, such as
12 ACCA, which offered school leaver routes. There was a general feeling that smaller
13 offices were employing school leavers and training these students with ACCA as they
14 were cheaper to employ than graduates. ICAS, however, was careful not to throw
15 caution to the wind. By keeping the scheme to a small pilot, with a target intake of only
16 20 students out of a total student intake of 1020 in 2005 and 1188 in 2006, if the scheme
17 was unsuccessful it was unlikely to have any impact on how ICAS was viewed as a
18 professional body. The pilot also enabled ICAS to evaluate (i) whether this type of
19 initiative would be attractive to school leavers and (ii) whether a lack of any post-
20 secondary school education would be detrimental to the trainees' progress.
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36 At the November 2006 and 2007 meetings of the QB, the first two annual reports of the
37 pilot scheme were discussed (ICAS, 2006, 2007c). It was noted that the 'Big 4' firm
38 running the pilot had experienced difficulty in recruiting good quality 'A' level
39 candidates and that in order to do so, significant effort had been required by the
40 recruitment team to ensure that their selection standards were maintained whilst also
41 meeting the recruitment targets of the business. The firm confirmed that it was difficult
42 to recruit school leavers as there was still a significant amount of pressure from both
43 schools and parents for school leavers to go to university. Thus only very small numbers
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9 were recruited onto the pilot scheme (2005 intake, n = 6; 2006 intake, n = 8; 2007
10 intake, n = 4), which fell significantly short of the annual target of 20. Feedback on the
11 performance of the students on the pilot scheme suggested that the school leavers were
12 just as strong as the graduates in their work based performance. They were perceived to
13 be enthusiastic, willing and quick to learn. The students were viewed to have a positive
14 focused attitude, approached their work seriously and were thought to have a surprising
15 level of maturity for their age (ICAS, 2007c). Despite this positive evaluation only one
16 of the six trainees recruited by the firm for the 2005 intake was still with the firm. The
17 scheme was subsequently abandoned.

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30 Whilst the advent of the variable university fees in England of £3000 in 2006 had no
31 negative impact on the uptake of university education, there was increasing speculation
32 following the Browne report “Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education”
33 (Browne, 2010) that this variable fee would increase in England, which by now was
34 where the majority of the ICAS trainees were based. Whilst ICAS, voiced concern
35 about both the direct and indirect implications in England of the Browne report they
36 were also wary about the situation in Scotland where no variable fees were in existence.
37 Noting the Scottish Government Green Paper “Building a Smarter Future: Towards a
38 Sustainable Scottish Solution for the Future of Higher Education” published in 2010,
39 ICAS concluded that the prospect of fiscal spending gaps would mean that student fees
40 would in time be applied in Scotland. ICAS therefore responded to these government
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9 sponsored reports by re-engaging once again with non-graduate entry to the profession.
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11 In February 2011, at a time when 99% of the annual student entry were graduates, the
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13 QB reiterated their support for the principle of a school leaver entry program and further
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15 suggested that other forms of non-graduate entry (Technician and HND) also be
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17 reconsidered (ICAS, 2011b).
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21 During this time the Education team at ICAS were actively engaged with both the
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23 university sector and the 'Big 4' with a view to expanding the provision of integrated
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25 ICAS degrees along the lines of the Ernst & Young degree at Lancaster. This activity
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27 resulted in the launch in 2011 of a school leavers' programme with KPMG which was
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29 deemed to be a compelling alternative to pursuing a traditional university route (KPMG,
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31 2011). The programme which spans a 6 year period offers school leavers the
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33 opportunity to get a job in a KPMG audit team, obtain an accounting degree at
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35 Birmingham or Exeter University¹⁰, and become a fully qualified chartered accountant
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37 with ICAS. Students receive a starting salary straight from school and KPMG pay the
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39 university tuition & accommodation fees together with the professional qualification
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41 fees. The impetus for this development was not only in response to university fees but
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43 also in response to the need to increase social diversity within the firm. Oliver Tant, the
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45 Head of Audit at KPMG, was subsequently reported as stating:
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9 “We believe that our proposition offers a truly innovative model that will help to
10 broaden access to the accountancy profession. We want to increase the diversity
11 of the intake into the profession and this scheme is central to our plans to make
12 that happen. At a time when the affordability of higher education is uppermost in
13 many people’s minds, this scheme clearly offers an alternative route that should
14 see students emerge not only with first class qualifications but also a positive bank
15 balance. We very much look forward to working with Exeter and Birmingham to
16 make the scheme a success” (Lymer, 2011).
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27 Whilst this scheme has not had sufficient time to demonstrate progression and
28 achievement rates from the school leaver intake to professional qualification, both
29 universities are attracting between 40-50 students on an annual basis. This integrated
30 offering is therefore clearly attractive to school-leavers, which is in contrast to the
31 previous school leaver scheme piloted in 2005 where the firm struggled to fill the places
32 on offer. The lure of a university education to school leavers as articulated by ICAS in
33 1970 and Gammie and Kirkham (2008) would therefore appear very much still to be in
34 evidence.
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45 However, there still remained concern by firms, and the Big 4 in particular, that the
46 increased variable university fees of up to £9000 being levied by universities would
47 deter some good quality candidates from going to university and that there was a
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9 growing demand from students and parents alike for an alternative to the traditional
10 career path into professional services (Woods, 2011). Stephen Isherwood, Ernst &
11 Young's Head of Graduate Recruitment was reported as stating:
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16 "With rising tuition fees and living costs, students are considering their next move
17 after A-Levels more carefully than they perhaps have done in previous years.
18 University is no longer the default; they are looking at all the options available"
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23 (Woods, 2011).
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26 Chris Loughran, Midlands practice senior partner at Deloitte, further highlighted social
27 inclusion as the driver for the school leaver development:
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31 "Not all students want, or are able, to go to university, but that shouldn't exclude
32 them from having equally attractive career opportunities. Talent is the lifeblood of
33 a business like ours and it is crucial that we do all we can to ensure that talented
34 young people with the ability to learn and develop can find their way into
35 Deloitte, whatever their background. As a business, we want to be as inclusive as
36 possible" (Business Birmingham, 2011).
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46 The Big 4 therefore launched or extended their school leaver programmes which did not
47 include any element of university tuition. Whilst PricewaterhouseCoopers were
48 regarded as the trendsetters in the school leaver programme market (All About School
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9 Leavers, 2012) Deloitte launched their Bright Start programme in 2011 which built on a
10 successful small scale regional programme already in existence (Business Birmingham,
11 2011) and Ernst & Young followed suit in 2012 (Woods, 2011).
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19 ICAS needed to respond to this developing market and in 2012, the five year training
20 contract was once again introduced, whereby students with sufficient school grades to
21 obtain entry into a university, could progress straight to their CA training within an
22 authorised training office directly from school. The magnitude of the changing fee
23 structure and the potential impact on prospective students, particularly those from
24 disadvantaged backgrounds were important drivers to this change. Based on employer
25 research an initial target was set at a modest number of 30 students per annum, which
26 equated to around 3% of the target intake. Interestingly, the number of students
27 commencing their training on this route has yet to reach the target thereby indicating
28 that this route to date has yet again not proved popular with students or more
29 importantly with employers.
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45 During the introduction of this new five year school leaver route, a further suggestion
46 was put forward to Council at their August 2012 meeting (ICAS, 2012b) by the ICAS
47 Education team. This new route, named the professional entry route would be open to
48 anyone. This flexibility could subsequently widen access to any individual who aspired
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9 to gain the CA qualification. The crucial difference, however, between this programme
10 and either the graduate entry or school leaver entry programmes was the elimination of
11 the requirement for a training contract. The need to follow an education programme and
12 gain work experience at the same time was also to be abolished as was the requirement
13 to be employed by an authorised employer. Indeed, this new route would allow
14 students to gain their work experience with several different employers (Allison, 2012).
15 Council were, however, not convinced and the concept was returned to the Education
16 team for further deliberation. When this route was re-presented to Council in November
17 2012 (ICAS, 2012c) Council approved the proposals for this new route. In terms of
18 entry requirements, candidates for this route would either need a degree or five years'
19 experience in a financial environment. Council would, however, have discretion to
20 accept entrants by exception which in practical terms would operate through delegation
21 of the decision making to either the CEO or the Education Executive Director (ICAS,
22 2012c). The resulting candidates entering into training from this professional entry
23 route have also been small with only 10 candidates joining in 2015. ICAS, therefore,
24 ostensibly remains a graduate profession as evidenced by the most recent statistics from
25 the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) whereby ICAS has the highest proportion of
26 graduates (98%) of all the UK accounting bodies (FRC, 2016).
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49 Discussion

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9 The status of a profession is influenced by the characteristics of those who practice an
10 occupation (Crompton, 1987; Crompton and Sanderson, 1986; Milkman, 1983),
11 therefore the setting of entry standards to permit access to professional accountancy
12 training is of particular relevance for establishing and maintaining elite status
13 (Coronella et al., 2015; MacDonald, 1995). Indeed, ICAS has long recognised the
14 importance of education, of which setting entry requirements is a component, to the
15 legitimisation of ICAS as a pre-eminent professional body as advocated in the sociology
16 of professions' literature (*inter alia* Abbott, 1988; Burrage, 1990; Crompton, 1987;
17 Friedson, 1986; Hammond et al., 2009; Larson, 1977; MacDonald, 1995; Richardson,
18 1988).

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32 ICAS has a unique position in the UK as unlike other bodies such as ICAEW, CIMA
33 and ACCA who set the qualification syllabus and assessments, ICAS also undertakes
34 the actual training of aspiring professional accountants. The financial impact of
35 education within ICAS is therefore twofold; first, to contribute an element of income
36 from educational activities such as tuition and examination fees and second, to generate
37 members who will subsequently pay membership fees. ICAS therefore needs to be
38 cognizant of the attractiveness and consequent financial viability, both individually and
39 collectively, of any training routes that emanate from the different entry routes on offer,
40 whilst further ensuring the sustainability of the Institute with sufficient numbers of
41 students qualifying each year.
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9 Education in the UK, post the second world-war, underwent significant change with the
10 reform of the secondary education system (Galton et al., 1980; Halsey et al., 1980;
11 Roberts, 2011) and the massification of higher education (ONS, 2013; Perkin, 1996). A
12 university education therefore became the expected norm for academically bright
13 students (Gammie and Kirham, 2008) and this challenged the ability of ICAS to attract
14 these individuals directly from school. In order to maintain and indeed enhance the
15 status of the Institute, various education reports commissioned by the Council of ICAS
16 (Dewar, 1966; ICAS, 1970; Lister, 1955; Shaw, 1969; Williamson, 1969), were
17 unanimous in their view that it was vital to position the Institute as a graduate rather
18 than a school leaver professional body. This re-positioning of the Institute would in turn
19 render the Institute more attractive to graduates which would ultimately change the
20 profile of those entering CA training and further legitimise and enhance the professional
21 status of ICAS.
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38 The first ICAS response to this re-positioning challenge was to shorten the training for
39 accountancy graduates from five to three years thus recognising the prior learning of
40 students from these types of degrees (Lister, 1955). However, when this intervention
41 failed to have the desired effect, ICAS raised the bar to entry for school leavers and
42 redesigned their training for non-accountancy graduates so that the qualification became
43 far more attractive to students from a variety of different university disciplines (Dewar,
44 1966). Further changes followed in 1973 on the recommendation of the Charles Report
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9 (ICAS, 1970) to further restrict non-graduate entry and ICAS therefore essentially
10 morphed into a graduate only Institute. Whilst professional status was clearly the
11 driving force behind these changes, the sustainability of the Institute was also on the
12 agenda. This was evidenced by the concern voiced about (1) the competition threat from
13 other professional bodies such as ICAEW in a time of increasingly blurred geographical
14 segmentation (Williamson, 1969), (2) the unintended consequence of falling student
15 numbers on the school leaver route following the introduction of the more rigorous
16 entry requirements (Williamson, 1969) and (3) the lack of sufficient training
17 opportunities for graduates who were more expensive to employ (ICAS, 1971). Despite
18 strong recommendations by the Charles Report (ICAS, 1970) to exclude non-graduates
19 from training, there was a reluctance by Council to fully endorse this proposal grounded
20 upon the risk of student number retraction (ICAS, 1971). The concern was therefore
21 centred around sustainability as opposed to social inclusion and there was no mention in
22 the minutes about the potential impact of an all graduate intake on social diversity
23 within the Institute.
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43 With ICAS establishing itself as an all graduate Institute, the focus of Council turned to
44 the attractiveness of the qualification to graduates, particularly those from a non-
45 relevant background. Following the work of Lothian (1985) significant changes were
46 made to the entry requirements of non-relevant graduates who were no longer required
47 to undertake a conversion course at university but instead received all of their
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9 accountancy training from ICAS. This subsequently paved the way for ICAS to double
10 their student numbers as the Institute was awarded contracts with the Big 4, the first
11 being awarded in 2000, to train students based in England, the majority of whom has
12 progressed from non-relevant degrees.
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18 Whilst ICAS was still firmly of the view that restricting access to the profession was in
19 the public interest (ICAS, 2000a), the advent of student loans in 1990 (Bolton, 2015a)
20 and tuition fee levies in 1998 (Blake, 2010; Wyness, 2010) raised concerns about the
21 demand for university places and the subsequent supply of graduates, particularly those
22 from less privileged backgrounds. ICAS therefore, working in conjunction with
23 universities and some of the largest employers of their trainees, introduced an integrated
24 training whereby students were sponsored through a specially designed degree which
25 not only incorporated some of the ICAS education system but also included some work
26 experience with their sponsoring firm. Whilst these schemes were in effect a school
27 leaver route as students were recruited by the firms directly from school, these schemes
28 maintained the status afforded by a university education whilst encouraging social
29 diversity, as students would not incur the debt they would otherwise have if they
30 completed a degree first before applying for a training place. Recruitment was aimed at
31 schools throughout the UK where attainment was below average and where there were
32 government statistics of a greater proportion of students from economically poor
33 backgrounds. When, however, university fees were raised to a maximum of £9000 in
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England in 2012 (Bolton, 2015a) the Big 4 were of the view that there was a growing demand for alternative career routes that did not include a university education. The Big 4 were therefore keen to launch and expand their school leaver routes and ICAS obliged by reintroducing a school leaver route through a five year apprenticeship which would accommodate these students. Furthermore ICAS also introduced a professional route which opened up access to those individuals with five years relevant work experience. However, despite similar entry routes being offered in 2015 to those offered in the 1960s the profile of the 2015 intake is far removed from that recorded in the 1960s as evidenced in Table 6.

Table 6: 2015 intake versus 1967 intake

Entry route	Number 2015	Percentage of total intake 2015	Cumulative percentage of total intake 2015	Number 1967	Percentage of total intake 1967	Cumulative percentage of total intake 1967
Relevant graduate (Scheme A in 1967)	380	38.8%	38.8%	15	4.2%	4.2%
Non-relevant graduate (Scheme B in 1967)	570	58.1%	96.9%	37	10.5%	14.7%
Professional entry – graduate and those with appropriate work experience	10	1.1%	98.0%	Not available in 1967		

School leaver – with no university education (Scheme C in 1967)	15	1.5%	99.5%		302	85.3%	100%
Technician	5	0.5%	100%		Not available in 1967		
Total	980				354		

(Allison, 2015, personal communication; Shaw, 1969)

The profile of student intake has changed significantly over the period and ICAS has developed into ostensibly an all graduate professional body and continues to remain this way despite non-graduate routes being re-introduced, with 98% of the 2015 intake coming from a degree background in comparison to only 14.7% in 1965. This contrasts with the other professional bodies based in the UK as evidenced by the statistics provided by the FRC in Table 7.

Table 7: Graduate intake (expressed as a % of the total intake)

Professional body	2001	2015
ICAS	92%	98%
CAI	93%	93%
ICAEW	90%	76%
CIPFA	52%	47%
CIMA	45%	53%
ACCA	50%	51%

Source: (FRC, 2002, 2016)

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9 Whilst some bodies such as CIMA and ACCA have traditionally had significant
10 numbers of non-graduates, other bodies such as ICAEW, which was more graduate
11 focussed, have seen an erosion of graduate intake over recent years falling from 90% in
12 2001 (which was broadly equivalent to ICAS with 92%) to 76% in 2015. This resulted
13 from successful AAT schemes in England. ICAS, by contrast has increased its' graduate
14 intake to 96% in 2015. Is there an unintended consequence of this move to an all
15 graduate intake by ICAS?
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25 Despite the expansion of university places (ONS, 2013; Perkin, 1996) this expansion
26 has not resulted in greater social inclusion in the higher education environment (Halsey
27 et al., 1980; Roberts, 2011). The introduction of the higher fees in England is likely to
28 further exacerbate this situation despite early evidence that young people from poorer
29 backgrounds have not been deterred to any greater extent than those from more affluent
30 backgrounds from applying to university following the introduction of the higher fees
31 (UCAS, 2013). Changing the profile on entry to a graduate only profile is therefore
32 likely to result in a decrease in social inclusion. This is particularly the case, when
33 organisations such as the Big 4, concentrate their recruitment on the more prestigious
34 universities (Burkham and Lee, 2002; Feinstein, 1999, 2003) which are criticised for
35 their recruitment of disproportionate numbers of students from poorer areas and lower
36 social classes (Duff, 2016; Milburn, 2012; Sutton Trust, 2010). Unfortunately, there are
37 no statistics available from any of the accountancy bodies on social diversity of their
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student intake or indeed membership, however, the accountancy profession has been identified as an occupational group that has suffered the greatest decline in social mobility over the past 30 years (Milburn, 2009).

For Peer Review

Conclusion

Educational changes post the second world-war underpinned the desire of ICAS in the 1950s and 1960s to alter the educational profile of its members by raising the entry qualifications and converting what was ostensibly a school leaver professional body into a graduate only body. This social closure founded on academic credentials (Hammond et al., 2009; Murphy, 1988; Parkin, 1979) was deemed necessary to maintain and enhance the professional status of the Institute in the face of market competition from other accountancy bodies and career competition from other professions.

Following the transformation into a graduate body, albeit with at least one non-graduate route open, subsequent attention focused on responding to market demands in an attempt to maintain and grow student numbers and ensure the financial viability of the Institute. This altered focus, in a competitive market where segmentation has become blurred (Richardson, 1987) was a further drive to maintain market share (Larson, 1977).

However, when concerns were raised in 2003 about the impact of demographic changes to the pool of university graduates and the increasing costs of undertaking a university education in the UK, the focus of ICAS returned once more to the changing educational landscape, which has resulted in a proliferation of non-graduate routes into training. These routes are all characterised by opening access but have all had very limited take up. Despite the massification of higher education in the UK (ONS, 2013) to the extent

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9 that a degree is no longer regarded as an elite qualification (Gammie and Kirkham,
10 2008) it would appear that employers, career advisors, family members and students
11 have been reluctant to trade a university education with direct non-graduate entry to a
12 professional training scheme. Therefore whilst the ICAS statistics of graduate intake
13 proportions would indicate social closure apparatus at work, the reality is not that of
14 elitism by ICAS but rather a series of failed initiatives to open the market. The signs of
15 elitism may now be the province of the largest accounting firms who have concentrated
16 their recruitment on the more prestigious universities which produce disproportionate
17 graduates from lower social classes (Duff, 2016; Milburn, 2012; Sutton Trust, 2010).
18 These firms are, however, attempting to address this elitism issue through a change in
19 their recruitment approach whereby applications are now evaluated on the basis of skills
20 and behaviours demonstrated in the application process as opposed to school results and
21 university attended (Agnew, 2016).
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view

Notes

¹ Although trainees on this route account for a very small proportion of the annual student intake.

² In the late 1980s small numbers of ICAS students (between 10 and 20 a year) attended classes in London (Marrian and Allison, 2004).

³ The Society of Accountants in Edinburgh, the Institute of Accountants and Actuaries in Glasgow and the Society of Accountants in Aberdeen were the predecessor organisations of ICAS.

⁴ This proposal had been put forward and subsequently rejected by ICAEW to integrate what are now known as CIMA, ACCA and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants (CIPFA) into the three chartered Institutes, namely; ICAS, ICAEW and the Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI) (McKinstry, 2000).

⁵ An HND is a higher education qualification available within the UK which normally takes two years to complete. Some HNDs can be used as a stepping stone to obtaining a higher qualification (Whatuni, 2016).

⁶ Between 1970 and 1975 membership rose from 8608 to 9308, which averages an increase in membership of 140 per year. Between 1975 and 1980, membership rose from 9308 to 10368, which averages an increase of 212 (ICAS, 2004a).

⁷ Trainees who have undertaken relevant degrees can be exempt from all or part of this level, dependent on the examinations taken at university.

⁸ For this particular ‘Big 4’ organisation, this equated to 24 UCAS points from A levels (A levels are taken in the final year (6th) of secondary school, which were awarded as follows: A - 10 points, B - 8 points, C – 6 points, D – 4 points, E – 2 points) together with a grade B in GCSE Mathematics and a grade C in GCSE English Language (GCSEs are taken in the 4th year of secondary school). Once an applicant had met the academic criteria, subsequent selection was based on a rigorous recruitment process which consisted of an online numerical and reasoning assessment, two interviews and a one day assessment centre.

⁹ For students undertaking their degrees in England, the three year honours degree followed by the three year training contract, results in a minimum training time of six years to qualify as a CA. For students undertaking their degrees in Scotland, the additional year at university, plus the same length of training contract, results in a minimum training time of seven years to qualify as a chartered accountant.

¹⁰ A similar programme is offered with Durham University and ICAEW

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