

**Course Decision  
Maker**

**CHOOSE THE  
RIGHT AAT  
COURSE**

# Where to Begin?

The good news is, there are no wrong accounting choices, but there are choices that deliver more than you need and choices that alone, will not meet your ambitions.

The decision you are making now, aided by this guide, is to decide what your short and long-term financial career or business goals are. This is necessary to ensure the accounting studies you complete, will be the most direct and cost-effective route to achieve your optimum outcomes. Most importantly, making the right study choices from the outset, will ensure you are building the correct depth of knowledge building blocks to take you all the way on your exciting career or business journey.

## As a general guideline:

- if you are an individual starting or building a career, it is always best to make choices based on your long-term career goals. Those long-term goals may change over time, which is fine because each interim study step (short-term target) you take will give you the opportunity to redirect. In accountancy there are no closed doors, just many corridors of diverse opportunities.
- If you are a new business, focus on the immediate business strategy and needs. Meet those accounting needs first to gain financial awareness of income and expenditure from the outset. Then, as the business grows, you'll better understand the next accounting growth requirements. This could be further study or employing accounting staff.



- If you are an established business looking to bring your accounting function in-house, target bringing the daily accounting processes in-house first, namely sales and purchase ledger. This will generate noticeable early out-sourcing cost reductions plus improve efficiency and customer satisfaction.

You now have a general idea, so it's time to think about your personal ambitions or business goals by considering which of the questions on the next page best describes your aims.

# What's Your Goal?

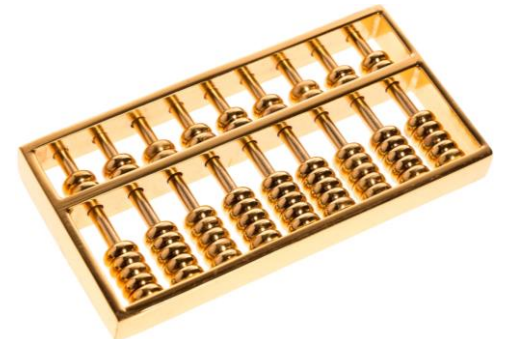
Don't worry if you haven't got a solid long-term plan yet, that's normal. Use the following questions to eliminate what you don't want, which in turn, will begin to formulate what you do want longer-term. There are many reasons why someone is looking to study accountancy. The next step will narrow your focus down by helping you to identify the study route that will best achieve your goals. The right study route will open the right employment opportunities, which in turn, will launch your career or, if a business, gain control of its financial health.



**Which of the  
questions to the  
right, best  
describes your  
long-term goal?**

1. Is your overall aim to become an AAT Accountant?
2. Is your long-term goal to become a Professional Bookkeeper either employed or self-employed?
3. Are you starting a career in accounting with a long-term target of being a chartered accountant?
4. Do you have many years accounting experience at all levels and wish to match a qualification to your skills?
5. Is the purpose of your accounting study solely to prepare your own business accounts?
6. Does your company want to move from outsourcing finance to building an in-house finance function?

The following pages give you choices and guidance on each of the 6 questions above. Whilst it was said to choose the most direct route to your long-term goals, it is important that 'direct' also includes ensuring the right depth of knowledge is acquired as you study and being aware of which study steps will give you the most financial reward and career growth short-term as you aim for your long-term goals.





# Question 1 – Want to be an AAT Accountant?

Many questions on the previous page will have multiple study option with different pros, and cons to consider.

To help you navigate through the options, remember your ultimate focus is on your long-term goals and your primary focus is on your short-term career steps and financial rewards that will come with those steps. This may appear contradictory or confusing, but it isn't. The ultimate study path will achieve the long-term goals. The study steps along that education pathway will deliver the short-term targets. Being happy and gaining the best employment as you build your career, will naturally give you purpose and increase your drive to achieve the ultimate target.

**The two following points are key considerations to have in mind whilst you navigate.**

- Careers are not built overnight. They can take years to reach optimum and are a mix of qualifications and proven work skills that will ultimately gain your promotions. This is why, the study pathway you choose at the outset, must, first and foremost meet your short-term needs. Short-term career steps deliver the financial stability that allows the achievement of your long-term goals to occur.
- The higher the career ambition, the more study success will be required. Everyone can achieve full success provided they follow the next golden rule. Continuous study success is achieved through building strong foundation stones of knowledge. It cannot be emphasised enough that the stronger and broader the knowledge blocks built, the further and higher your success will be long-term. There are no shortcuts to achieving optimum.

As you read through the following pages you will understand why the AAT Levels 2, 3 and 4 qualifications are the leaders nationally and internationally and why they are the employer's favourite choice.



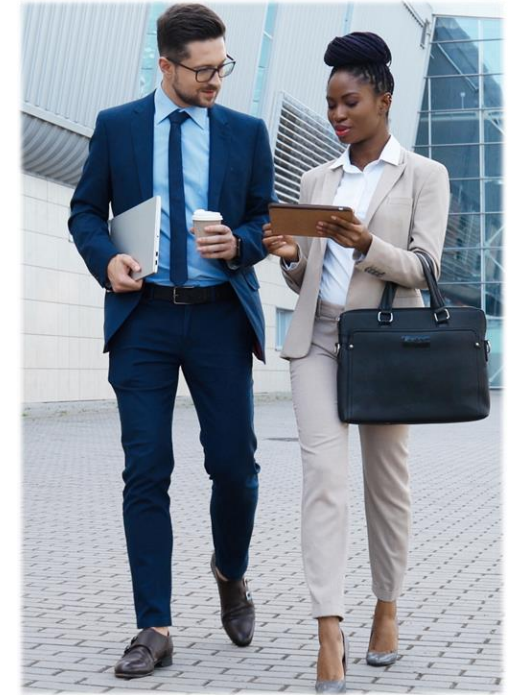
## **Why do employers like the AAT qualifications?**

The AAT qualifications at each level, offers the most comprehensive accountancy knowledge available. The different levels meet the employment skills requirement from an entry level, no accounting experience position through to head of accounts department or finance directors including experience.

# Question 1 Cont. – Want to be an AAT Accountant?

The AAT Accounting route offers the ideal short and long-term accountancy solution.

- At level 2 the AAT will deliver the skills necessary to actively complete daily accounting procedures for both purchase and sales ledger. The skills learnt at level 2 will take your knowledge up to month-end procedures. For more detailed information on the level 2, please click on the following link to our website <https://goldedgetraining.co.uk/courses/aat-level-2-certificate-in-accounting-course>
- At level 3 your knowledge expands to include month-end procedures and the production of final accounts for sole traders, partnerships and small limited companies. You will also build more in-depth management accounting skills to manage and control internal expenditure. VAT and economics are also covered at this level. For more detailed information on the level 3, please click on the following link <https://goldedgetraining.co.uk/courses/aat-level-3-diploma-in-accounting-course>
- At the level 4 your skills build to management level accountancy and the production of corporate and consolidated company financial accounts. Other skills learnt will include, top-down budgeting, project analysis, management decision and control and a selection of two of the following: business taxation, personal taxation, credit and debt control, cash & treasury management or audit.
- On successful completion of the five level 4 exams, you will become an AAT Accountant with letters after your name.
- The full AAT qualification will, with the relevant work experience, over time, give you the opportunity to build a very exciting, well-paid, high-level career. For more detailed information on the level 4, please click on the following link <https://goldedgetraining.co.uk/courses/aat-level-4-diploma-in-professional-accounting-course>
- Want your career to rise even further. Gaining the prestigious position of AAT Accountant status, is the perfect platform to go on to become a Chartered Management Accountant (CIMA).
- Students who study the AAT prior to studying chartered accountancy increase threefold their likelihood of passing chartered exams due to the depth of knowledge learnt in AAT.
- Each level of the AAT is a respected standalone qualification allowing diversification at any stage. Likewise, studying the AAT before chartered, gives you a solid career builder allowing more time and less pressure on your study CIMA. This in turn, allows more time to focus on your career, employment and gaining promotion.



# Question 2 – Become an Employed Professional Bookkeeper

Most qualified bookkeepers in the UK are AAT Professional Bookkeepers due to the in-depth skills set learnt. You can undertake any of the following roles, accounts assistant, sales ledger and purchase ledger clerk. The Bookkeeping level 2 and 3 qualifications are also ideal if your aim is to become a self-employed bookkeeper running your own practice. Covered on the next page.

## Removing the accounting and bookkeeping myths

- The AAT Bookkeeping level 2 and 3 qualifications are not entry qualifications to later study the accounting route. The AAT Bookkeeping level 2 and level 3 are of the same level and complexity as the levels 2 & 3 in the accounting route. The financial study materials and exams sat (times 2) are identical whether studied in Bookkeeping or Accounting. The difference between Bookkeeping and Accounting is that Bookkeeping studies the financial modules only up to level 3. The Accounting route studies financial and management accounting costing modules etc. up to level 4. In summary, the Accounting route simple has a broader, more in-depth syllabus, and it gives the opportunity to study to a higher level.
- Are the Bookkeeping qualifications an ideal entry qualification to a career in accounting? Yes, they can be used to start your career. As a first step into a career in accounting, it has the same employer impact as the level 2 Accounting qualification short-term. Meaning, it can be a more affordable option into an accounting career. Long-term however, Bookkeeping will not lead to the same career/promotion opportunities as the Accounting route qualification will.



- If your aim is to become an AAT Accountant long-term, progress through the Accounting route rather than Bookkeeping it will cost less overall and have more employer impact.
- Is a Professional Bookkeeper a good career option? Yes, it is a very good career option. If your aim is to work in a busy accounts' office in a bookkeeping role, the Professional Bookkeeping course is perfect for you. Not everyone wants to be an accountant. For more detailed information on Bookkeeping, please click on the following link to our website <https://goldedgetraining.co.uk/courses/bookkeeping> Not sure and want to know more about Accounting or Bookkeeping: **Read Our Course Decision Maker Guide 2 attached [Your AAT Career – Your Study Choice](#)**

# Question 2 Cont. – Become a self-employed Bookkeeper



If you want to be self-employed and start your own practice one of the best and most reliable choices is Professional Bookkeeping. It offers an excellent career opportunity that can be scaled to a level that suits you. If you have young children or commitments that restrict a standard 9 to 5 job, self-employment allows you to meet those commitments whilst also building a healthy business.

## **Getting started:**

You can start to offer daily bookkeeping services after passing the AAT Certificate in Bookkeeping Level 2. This can be passed in under 18 weeks. Getting the first few clients is not as difficult as you think. Close to 70% of registered businesses are small, either sole-traders, partnerships or small limited companies. Each of these businesses require a bookkeeper or freelance-bookkeeper. Offer a good service and word of mouth will quickly bring you more clients.

## **Increasing the Scope of your Bookkeeping Business**

- Once you've passed Bookkeeping level 3, you can increase your business to offer VAT submissions plus year-end accounts.
- In addition, small and medium sized accountancy practices want freelance bookkeepers to call upon when busy. Contact your local practices to see if they want free-lance support, it's a good and reliable income. It is best to have a few of your own clients for credibility before taking this free-lance step.

Whilst the Bookkeeping qualifications are ideal for offering Bookkeeping services up to taxation, significantly higher income can be achieved by offering tax services.

To include tax, you would need to study the AAT Accounting rather than the Bookkeeping route and study both taxes at level 4. You will still gain the bookkeeping modules as you progress through the accounting route. You can choose from the outset to study the accounting or on completion of the Bookkeeping qualification, you can upgrade your level 3 Bookkeeping to the Accounting level 3 and on completion, you can then study the level 4 accounting. As the Bookkeeping qualifications at level 2 and 3 are the first 2 units of level 2 and level 3 Accounting respectively, starting your business will happen in the same timeframe regardless of whether you take the Bookkeeping or Accounting route.





# Question 3 – Want to be a Management Accountant?

So far, the guide has focused on the AAT qualifications with the emphasis being on the breadth and depth of the knowledge gained. The AAT Accounting qualification can also play a part if your long-term aim is to be a Chartered Institute of Management Accountant (CIMA).

- CIMA is a flagship qualification in management accountancy that will guarantee you a high flying and prestigious career.



## There are three routes into studying CIMA:

1. Study the AAT Accounting to level 4, followed by CIMA - The AAT qualification will exempt you from CIMA BA. Or
2. You can - Study the CIMA BA (Certificate in Business Accounting) qualification followed by the CIMA qualification (Chartered Institute Management Accountant).
3. If you have a full finance & accountancy degree – you can start at the CIMA qualification – you'll be exempt from studying CIMA BA. Check other exemptions with CIMA.
4. It has been said throughout this guide that the deeper the knowledge built as you study, the further and higher the qualification achieved. This is the most important consideration to think about when pursuing a career as a Chartered Management Accountant (CIMA). We and many employers would always recommend you study AAT first and many employers require accountancy degree graduates to also study level 3 and 4 AAT before going on to study chartered accountancy. Why?



5. CIMA never intended CIMA BA to equal AAT's knowledge content from each level. It was designed as an alternative route to chartered. There are 4 modules and 4 exams to CIMA BA and 13 modules and 13 exams to the AAT qualification. It goes without saying that over three times more modules in AAT will deliver over three times more knowledge to build your chartered accountancy career on. The greater the knowledge, the easier you can build and absorb higher level knowledge, the more likely you are to go further.
6. There are other, less obvious, career decisions you need to make when choosing the study pathway to Chartered. Continued over....



# Question 3 Cont. – Starting Your CIMA Career

Building your best career in accountancy can take years and as previously said, it is not just about the qualifications. Accountancy qualifications at every level, open your opportunities doors. Your performance and skills at using that knowledge will then gain you the promotions. With this thought in mind, it emphasises the need to begin your career as soon as possible.

- **CIMA BA** is a standalone qualification of 4 units. **CIMA** is a single qualification including operational, management and strategic. You are required to pass 9 exams to gain the CIMA qualification to become a Management Accountant. Starting employment in the early stages taking this route is reliant on a company wanting someone who will eventually become an accountant. This isn't what most companies want in the early knowledge stages, they are not looking long-term, they are filling vacancies they have now. Most employers want new accountancy employees to start in sales and



purchase ledger, so they build knowledge from the ground up. Whilst these are covered briefly in CIMA BA, it is not covered nearly as detailed and deep as covered in AAT. This means the employer is logically more likely to choose an AAT studier than a CIMA BA studier.

- If you decide on the full **CIMA** route, which is a great qualification, be aware that you are committing yourself to completing the full package of 13 exams to gain a recognised qualification.
- You will get an interim qualification for the **CIMA BA** element, but to pass CIMA overall, you will need to pass the remaining 9 exams. This can take 12-18 months for **CIMA BA** and a further 4-5 years to pass **CIMA**. Whilst that seems a long time, it's realistic due to the complexity of the exams and less study time as you build a rising career. It is common for **CIMA** student to only study 2 exams a year at the higher levels due to complexity.

Becoming a Chartered Management Accountant through CIMA is ultimately one of the best careers you can build, guaranteeing you a bright future and the highest levels career. The considerations mentioned above may sound a bit negative, but they truly are not. We wholly recommend a long-term career aim as a management accountant. The cautions discussed above, are purely to guide you into making the best, lowest risk management accounting career entry choices. The aim overall is to give you the best early employment choices that allow you to build a career at the earliest opportunity, which in turn gives you the earliest financial rewards. We are also advising on a career pathway that allows you the opportunity to diversify if required. Most importantly the advice will give you the best long-term opportunity for success as a management accountant. Please read the following page, AAT as your entry to CIMA.

# Question 3 Cont.– Studying AAT As An Entry to CIMA

This guide has talked a lot about the importance of short and long-term career goals. Short-term goals ensure your long-term career goals stay on track and are met. This entails making the right study choices including taking the best short-term opportunities to career and income build by studying what employers want. Most importantly, short-term career goals give you the opportunity to lay down safety career platform qualifications. Meaning regularly gaining recognised qualifications that build and demonstrate your current skills to employers.

- Studying the three-levels of **AAT** as an entry into the **CIMA** ticks every box for employer needs, safety platform qualifications, early career start and subsequent income growth, Most importantly for your long-term goal, building a deep knowledge gained at every AAT level. It will take up to 2-3 years to complete AAT followed by CIMA 3-4 years. The AAT is so highly respected by employers that they are interested in employing you after the first exam is sat. Meaning potentially, you're building your career and experience just a few weeks into your study.



- Employers love the AAT because its work-based knowledge meaning students are ready to hit the ground running at employment. The AAT training means you are likely to start in either the sales or purchase ledger department, which many say is the heart of an account's office. As your studies rise, your role will too so you build good experience and understanding of the operational finance function. This is invaluable knowledge not only because you are experience building from the outset, but you'll also have the hands-on operational knowledge to later in your career, run an accounts department .
- Each level of the AAT is a stand-alone qualification, which means each level is a safety career platform that employers can measure. Once gained these are qualifications for life. For more detailed information on the AAT, click on the following link <https://goldedgetraining.co.uk/courses/accounting>
- The AAT qualification alone will allow you to build an excellent career in accountancy. The in-depth knowledge covered, particularly at level 4, is the perfect solid knowledge platform on which to build your CIMA qualification. There is a lot of crossover between level 4 AAT the CIMA Operational Level, which aids transition from AAT into CIMA.
- The AAT route into CIMA takes a little longer but comes highly recommended. With experience, you will have a very good career after 2-3 years of AAT, which allows you to be selective in how many CIMA exams you take a year. The fewer you take, the more focused you can be and the more likely you are to pass the high-level CIMA exams.



# Question 4 – Do You Have Extensive Work Experience

**Career Building with Extensive Experience** - Career building these days is reliant on qualifications to rubber stamp experience. It is not enough to have 8 years or more experience if you are seeking to change employment or look for further promotion. If your experience is at all levels including supervisory and management, then gaining the AAT or CIMA will give you the recognition you deserve. Either qualification will gain employer confidence in the experience you have already amassed.

Depending on the breadth and depth of knowledge already gained, it is possible for you to start the AAT at level 4 or if more comfortable level 3. The AAT would be all that is required to gain an accountant's position again depending on experience and past roles.



Equally so, you could go directly into studying CIMA to become a management accountant. As with the previous pages of information, you would need to commit to the 9 CIMA exams to become a qualified management accountant, but this would be a much longer journey to eventually matching a qualification against your experience, which may not be the best option if you are looking for employment or want to change jobs.

## **What is the recommended Option?**

This recommendation is dependent on levels of experience, which only you know. If you want to discuss this further with one of our teaching accountants, please feel free to ring 02394 00 3560 at any time, they will be more than happy to advise.



- Provided your experience is varied and extensive, we would recommend you completing the AAT Level 4 or Level 3, best option to be discussed. This can be completed in as little as 6 months to 2 years. An employer will not want to see the level 4 completed in full to gain employment. As long-as 1-2 exams are passed, you have proven your capabilities and rubber stamped your experience.
- Completing the level 4 AAT and becoming an AAT accountant maybe all you want to study. If you do want to go on further, even sitting 1-2 CIMA exams a year will, over time, lead to your experience and qualifications becoming the highest possible,



# Question 5 – Preparing Your Own Business Accounts

There are many benefits to preparing your own business accounts:

- It's financially beneficial because you are not paying for bookkeeper or accountant services. Although you may need an accountant to complete your tax returns at the end of the year.
- You will be in control of the income and expenditure of your business so be in a better position to manage growth and control unnecessary costs.
- You'll have sufficient financial understanding to be conversant with existing or potential stakeholder without it overtaking your business's operating expertise.

## What is the best route of study for you?

- The key is to focus on your business's short-term needs which is, being in control of the business income and expenditure. If the business is pre-trading or new, the transactions will be low initially, which gives time to fully understand the business accounting function using the software recommended below. This recommendation also applies to established small businesses.
- For small businesses, the ideal accounting solution is Sage Business Cloud Accounting and Sage Business Cloud Payroll. The software is designed for sole traders, partnerships and small limited companies. The software consists of various accounting, receipts and payment processes, time-critical tracking and payroll tools.

- You can become proficient in looking after your own accounts within a couple of months. You have access to Sage software for training and all resources used in the training are written by Sage, the market leaders in computerised accounting.
- Once your training is complete, you can license your own cloud software for just a few pounds a month giving you peace of mind that the business finance function is in-house and in your control.
- The software completes all accounting functions from double-entry bookkeeping through to producing various, full weekly, monthly and year-end reports.



# Question 6 – Moving From Out-Sourcing to In-House



In the early years of business, an often-perfect solution is to out-source key business functions. The most common out-sourced functions are Finance – HR – Digital Marketing – IT. The outsourcing is ideal, it give the business access, on-demand, to multiple, highly skilled people who either the business cannot afford to employ or there wouldn't be sufficient work to justify employing.

As the business grows, the out-sourcing will continue to meet the right needs, but at an ever-increasing cost that can run into many thousands of pounds per month. Likewise, what was seen as prompt service in the early days when the business had less time pressures, becomes less efficient as your business grows. This position once hit is never going to improve, because the bigger your business expands, the more inefficient the service becomes. This isn't the out-sourcing standards dropping, it is your business outgrowing the out-sourcing function. You need more immediate information and reaction.

The business does not want to be spending tens of thousands of pounds to be told, it's going to take a couple of days to receive a cashflow statement or aged debtors or supplier reports. The business needs the information now, anything longer affects income. Likewise, you want your marketing to be on the ball daily. Out-sourcing is very good for IT support but is it good for support in all IT functions. For instance, you don't want to wait months to have updates completed on your website. You want it to happen now to increase your income. The positives list for bringing accounts and other functions in-house is endless once you've outgrown the out-sourcing effectiveness.

It is impossible to put all options available for transition to in-house in this guide as every company's needs are different. Our business team of experts would be happy to discuss your needs in an exploratory, no obligations call. Please ring us on 02394 00 3560.

We have commercial and government funded courses available, which means upskilling is a lot less expensive than you think. Likewise, to bring key cost saving skills in-house takes less time than you imagine. Transitioning can be in part or eventually in-full. Take back control of key functions and watch your business grow exponentially.

