



100  
YEARS

Celebrating women in  
Chartered Accountancy

[icaew.com/100years](https://www.icaew.com/100years)

# Contents

Foreword	1
Introduction	2
Mary Harris Smith: first female ICAEW fellow	4
Ethel Watts: first female ICAEW associate	8
Mary Yale and Jane Robinson: first female ICAEW council members	12
Baroness Noakes: first female ICAEW president	16
Dr Hilary Lindsay: ICAEW president 2016-17	18
Fiona Wilkinson: ICAEW President 2019-20	20
Conclusion	22
ICAEW and access to the profession	23
Appendices	24
Key events	24
ICAEW female membership	25
Some sources of information	26

## Acknowledgements

With many thanks to the author and researcher of this booklet, **Dr Jane Berney BFP, FCA**, Manager, Business Law, at ICAEW.

The author would like to thank the staff of the ICAEW Library, the London Metropolitan Archives and the Women's Library (LSE) for all their help in tracking down the sources used.

# Foreword

I am delighted to present this history of female firsts in chartered accountancy to mark 100 years of women in the profession.

Chartered accountancy is a fantastic profession, which can take you down many routes into different sectors and careers anywhere in the world. I am proud to say that today the profession is incredibly open, but this was not always the case. Until 1920, women could not become ICAEW Chartered Accountants and, even after admission was opened up, they continued to face discrimination and bias.

As you will discover, the first female chartered accountants were pioneering women, who pushed boundaries, challenged assumptions and continually exceeded expectations.

These women were pivotal in shaping the profession we have today, and this history serves to honour their achievement.

*Fiona*

**Fiona Wilkinson BA, BFP, FCA**  
President  
ICAEW



100 YEARS

## *Introduction*

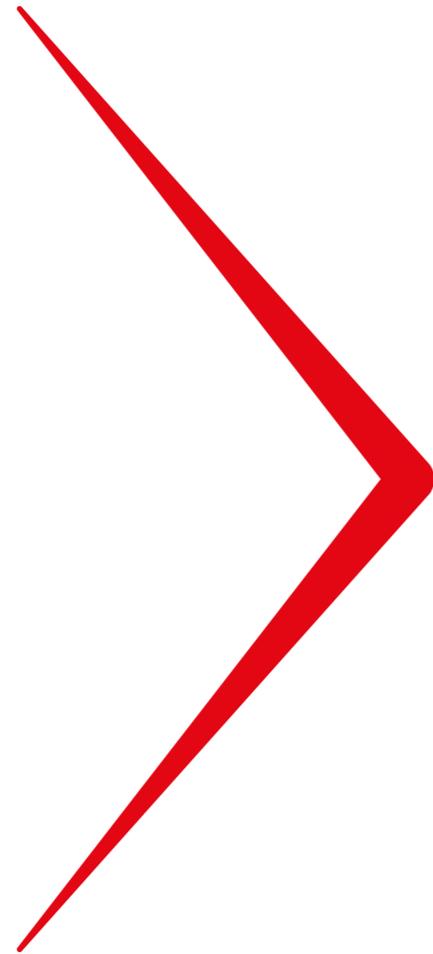
ICAEW is proud to celebrate female chartered accountants, from the first pioneers to current members. It is no coincidence that our centenary of female membership occurs shortly after the centenary of the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act in December 1919. Hailed as a landmark, the Act opened the way for women to be admitted into the professions (such as accountancy).

The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 stated that:

*'A person shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage from the exercise of any public function, or from being appointed to or holding any civil or judicial post, or from entering or assuming or carrying on any civil profession or vocation.'*

This publication is not a comprehensive history of female membership, but more of a snapshot. It looks at the careers of some standout female members, thereby honouring all ICAEW female members who have contributed to the fight for equality and continue persisting today.

The sources used are mainly the records of ICAEW, such as the minutes of the council, application and admission committees and the articles and correspondence in ICAEW's official journal. These record the discussions and concerns of male ICAEW members about the admission of women before 1920. The female voice is absent. To redress the balance, we have used press interviews and spoken to some of the female pioneers to celebrate their experiences of succeeding as ICAEW members.



## *The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 stated that:*

*'A person shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage from the exercise of any public function, or from being appointed to or holding any civil or judicial post, or from entering or assuming or carrying on any civil profession or vocation.'*

# Mary Harris Smith: first female ICAEW fellow

## Leading the way

Mary Harris Smith is rightly celebrated as the first female chartered accountant in the world. She achieved this in May 1920 when ICAEW accepted her application to join as a fellow. This was not her first application and, at the advanced age of 75, one has to admire her tenacity in reapplying once it was clear that ICAEW could not refuse her again after the 1919 Act was passed. Her persistence was consistent with her belief that she should pursue her claim as she was not acting for herself, but for all women. She based her request on the grounds of 'admission equal, and status equal with male members'.

**'Require of me what you would  
require of a man and I will  
fulfil it.'**

**Mary Harris Smith**  
*The Woman's Signal*  
1895

Harris Smith first became interested in an accountancy career through helping her father, a shipping clerk. She initially went to work for what she described as a 'mercantile firm in the City' (London). After nine years, in 1887, she set up her own offices in Victoria Street, London, trading under the name of M. Harris Smith, Public Accountant, until ill health forced her to retire in the late 1920s.

In an 1895 interview in *The Woman's Signal* entitled 'Man's Monoply. An Interview with a Lady Accountant', she described her clients as 'very varied', and comprised of both men and women. She also audited and provided professional services to a number of women's organisations that supported female suffrage and equality. These included the Parliamentary Committee for Women's Suffrage, the Society of the Return of Women as Poor Law Guardians, the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, the National Union of Women Workers of Great Britain and Ireland, the Gentlewomen's Employment Club, and the Soroptimist Club (a volunteer movement aiming to transform the lives of women and girls, set up in the 1920s). Other clients included the British Women's Temperance Association and the Needlewoman's Co-operative Association. While this work underlined her commitment to the suffragist cause, it was also part of a shrewd business plan. As *The Accountant* observed in its obituary of her (October 1934), 'her practice developed among women with their many modern activities who entrusted their accounts to Miss [Harris] Smith'.

By setting up in practice as an accountant, Harris Smith was unusual but not unique. In 1909 ICAEW identified five female accountants working in London and it was relatively common for women to be bookkeepers. Harris Smith herself frequently stressed that there was no 'conceivable reason why a woman should not be an accountant'.

## Persistence that paid off

Harris Smith's determination to become a member of ICAEW was much less common as most female accountants did not seek membership of a professional body. Jessie Connah, one of the five female accountants identified by ICAEW in 1909, for example, said she did not wish to qualify as a chartered accountant as she felt that many of the examination subjects were of little use to her. On the other hand, another one of the 'five', Ethel Ayres Purdie, joined the London Association of Accountants (LAA) but did not apply to ICAEW. As Harris Smith explained to Millicent Garrett Fawcett (a leader of the campaign for female suffrage) her aim was the 'opening of the profession of accounting to women upon the same footing as that of [male] members' and this included being allowed to join professional accountancy bodies such as ICAEW. Although she originally (unsuccessfully) applied to join the Society of Incorporated Accountants and Auditors (SIAA) in 1887, from 1891 onwards she focused on gaining admission to ICAEW.

Harris Smith first approached ICAEW in 1891 when she applied to join as a fellow. The application was on the basis that she had been in practice as a public accountant for a number of years and was entitled - like men in a similar position - to seek membership without following the standard route of examinations and articles as set out in ICAEW's Royal Charter (see page 8). The Applications Committee agreed but, as recorded in the minutes, decided to refer the matter to ICAEW's solicitor as the

committee was unsure whether women were eligible to join, irrespective of their professional experience.

The solicitor advised that women were not eligible as the ICAEW Charter referred to 'his', 'himself' and 'he', not 'her', 'herself' or 'she'. Apparently there was no appetite to change this terminology. In 1895, for example, ICAEW's council minutes recorded that 'it was unwilling to petition the Privy Council for an amendment to the charter' to facilitate female admission. Considering this restriction, in 1896 Harris Smith wrote to ICAEW's council requesting to sit ICAEW's final examination. At the time, some practitioners were allowed to do this if they met certain educational standards. However, Harris Smith was refused again.



*‘That with respect to the admission to membership of persons hereafter desirous of entering into the profession the Petitioners contemplate that subject to future determination by the Council or Governing Body of the Corporation a strict system of examination should be established including a preliminary examination to be held before the candidate for membership enters on service under articles an intermediate examination to be held in the course of his service and a final examination and that no person be allowed to present himself for the final examination unless he has served for five years at least or if he has graduated in any of the Universities of the United Kingdom then for three years at least under articles as a Public Accountant’s Clerk.’*

ICAEW Royal Charter  
1880  
<https://bit.ly/2MLovR5>

### Male allies and friends

Charles Fitch Kemp, ICAEW president between 1894 and 1896, reportedly said, ‘it would be so embarrassing to manage a staff composed partly of women, that ... [he] would retire from the position rather than contemplate such a position’. However, we can’t assume that all ICAEW members agreed with him. Harris Smith acknowledged that not all men were hostile to women joining ICAEW. She said that her many ‘city friends’ were sympathetic to her cause and she also enlisted the help of a number of MPs – all of whom, of course, were male.

Some members did not object when, in 1909, the UK Government Board Of Trade agreed to support the Professional Accountants Bill only if it included the requirement that professional accountancy bodies admit women on equal terms. Other members, however, only reluctantly agreed to accept this when they realised that the Board of Trade would not budge on this point and after it was pointed out that the number of potential female members was less than 10. However, the Bill was eventually dropped, so the matter of female admission was also left. ICAEW continued to refuse women entry.

For some, the solution to the problem of female admission was to allow women to set up their own accountancy body. This was not the view of Harris Smith. She argued that her professional experience and range of clients meant she was as fully qualified to join ICAEW as any man in a similar position.

In the interview with *The Woman’s Signal* in 1895, when asked why she was successful, she replied:

*‘I think my speciality is in investigating and reporting upon the prospects of various undertakings; planning and remodelling books of accounts so as to save labour, and to ensure a good check system; unravelling neglected accounts and restoring order and good form out of chaos and confusion.’*

This was not boasting on the part of Harris Smith. Rather, she was clearly distancing herself from bookkeeping (usually perceived as the domain of women), and aligning herself with ICAEW members. Harris Smith further acknowledged that the qualities needed to be a successful chartered accountant were many and varied, but not the exclusive preserve of men. She was adamant that women should be trained in the same way as men.

### Lasting legacy

Mary Harris Smith died in 1934. Her obituary in *The Accountant* states that ‘her election as a Fellow of the Institute in 1920 was a matter of great pride to her. She was staunch in her support of its traditions’. Far from diminishing the status of ICAEW, *The Accountant* agreed that Harris Smith had proved that women were worthy members of ICAEW.

# *Ethel Watts: first female ICAEW associate*

## Passing the baton

In 1924 Ethel Watts became the first woman to qualify as an ICAEW Chartered Accountant by examination. In this respect, her admission was not an exception as she had followed the normal route taken by men. Moreover, ICAEW records show that she was quickly followed by a number of other women. Still, the number of female admissions remained low until the 1980s, when changing attitudes and increased educational opportunities encouraged and enabled women to enter the profession (see table win the appendices).

Born in 1895, Watts was the daughter of a police officer. Unlike many of the other early female members, she does not appear to have had any family connections to accountancy firms. Mildred Pearce, for example, who was admitted in 1925, and Ethel Lovelock, admitted in 1926, were both articled to their family firms. In 1928, Dora Hamlyn was admitted, having served her articles with Binder, Hamlyn and Co. *The Accountant* noted in 1930 that, of the four women admitted in that year, two bore 'names well known in the accountancy profession'. Even so, the women concerned were still pioneers. Christine Mosley may have been the third generation of chartered accountants in her family, but she was still the first female chartered accountant in Manchester and the first female to join the Manchester Chartered Accountants Student Society. Similarly, Mary Aston, daughter of a chartered accountant, was only the second female chartered accountant in Birmingham.

## A career path

Ethel Watts attended Coburn School for Girls in Bow, London, before studying at Bedford College and then reading history at Royal Holloway College (both colleges of the University of London), where she was awarded a Class 2 BA Hons in 1916. After the First World War, and on the advice of Sir Harry Peat, she decided to train as a chartered accountant rather than as a lawyer, which she later said had been her first thought.

Watts served her articles with S. Williams of Manchester and Aberystwyth before joining W.B. Peat and Co. She was issued a practising certificate in April 1925 and joined the practice of Miriam Homersham briefly (Homersham and Watts of Clement's Lane, London), before setting up her own firm, E. Watts & Co.

Watts continued as a sole practitioner until her retirement in 1961. Even though she was married, she always practised under her maiden name. Keen to enable women to enter the profession, Watts took on other women as articled clerks, including Sarah Evans BSc, who was admitted to ICAEW as an associate in 1933, and Nellie Elizabeth Lawson, who was admitted as a member of SIAA in 1933.



## A life in accountancy

Watts mainly provided tax advice, with her husband remarking in *The Accountant* (in an article entitled 'I married an accountant - by a husband'), that she was always glued to the wireless when the Budget was broadcast. She did have audit clients, including a firm of hatters who felt a female auditor might be more understanding of their business problems than a man. Like Harris Smith, Watts was also a treasurer for, and provided tax advice to, a number of women's groups. Watts admitted that this was her deliberate policy as it was a useful way to gain clients. In her own records there is a letter from Harris Smith passing on the audit of the Soroptimist Club to Watts. They clearly knew each other, but given the few female members this is hardly surprising.

Nevertheless, Watts stated that male support enabled her to get articles and train. Then, as now, gaining admission to ICAEW is not simply a case of passing examinations. A potential member also has to serve articles with an existing member. Before 1920 this could only be a man and, given the few women who did become members and partners before the 1980s, it continued to be almost always a man. This may explain why many of the early female members worked for family firms. Fathers, brothers and uncles, for example, may have been more appreciative of their female relatives' capabilities or simply wanted to keep firms the preserve of the family.

## Ongoing obstacles

Even if some men were prepared to grant articles to women, there were still quite a few obstacles to overcome. Many ICAEW members felt that women should be treated differently to men. In 1935, for example, Watts wrote to the ICAEW president asking why women had to sit their examinations separately in the examination hall and not in alphabetical order among the men. She objected to this because the anonymity of the examination scripts would be compromised. The response was that the 'fairer sex' would distract the men. In a 1945 article in *The Accountant* advising women who might wish to train as ICAEW Chartered Accountants, Watts stressed that women should insist on going out on audit rather than staying back in the office. Like Harris Smith, Watts was adamant that women should be treated no differently from men: equality was the aim, not a preference.

***'For the woman who is proposing to enter into articles it is essential that she should make certain that she is choosing a firm where she will be treated in every respect in the same way as if she was a man.'***

**Ethel Watts**  
*The Accountant*  
1945

### Further achievements

In 1945 Watts founded the Women Chartered Accountants' Dining Society, 'because in their professional life many ... might be in isolated or lonely positions, as usually there was no other woman of comparable age or with similar interests in the immediate office circle'. In 1950, she was elected as the first female committee member of the London Society of Chartered Accountants. She recounted that the first dinner she was entitled to attend as a committee member was held at the Junior Carlton Club, which did not allow women to be admitted. As Watts wryly pointed out, she would have been allowed in if she was a waitress. She also told of the time she received an invitation to a student dinner as E. Watts Esq., with the request that she wear a dinner jacket.

From 1953 until her death, Watts was on the executive committee of the Chartered Accountants' Benevolent Association (CABA) and in 1962 represented ICAEW at the Eighth International Congress of Accountants in New York. Although she was involved in ICAEW's affairs throughout her professional life, she does not seem to have harboured any ambitions to be on the council or serve as president.

Watts died suddenly in 1963. The many letters of condolence sent to the Fawcett Society (a leading feminist organisation of which she was chair) spoke of her 'clear brain' and 'ability', but also that she was charming, delightful, kind and elegant, as well as an avid reader and music lover with catholic tastes in both. The Fawcett Society was in no doubt, however, about her achievements as a pioneer.

***'It can be stated with confidence that the first 25 years have proved that women are useful members of the accountancy profession.'***

**Ethel Watts**  
The Accountant  
1948

1

***'There are uncountable hundreds of women in this country who do not know to what extent they owe their emancipation and their status to the undefeated persistence and application of women like Ethel Watts.'***

The Fawcett Society  
Unpublished obituary of Ethel Watts  
Women's Library  
1963



***Women Chartered Accountants' Dining Society***

## ***Mary Yale and Jane Robinson: first female ICAEW council members***

Although female members still only comprised approximately 3% of ICAEW's total membership by the late 1970s, things were starting to change. Women were becoming partners of firms, including the predecessor firms of the Big Four, and getting elected to the various governing, student and district societies of ICAEW. In 1979, the first women were appointed to the council - Mary Yale and Jane Robinson - just in time for ICAEW's centenary celebrations in 1980. Both women had previously been on the executive committee of the London Society of Chartered Accountants, following in the footsteps of Ethel Watts.

### **Mary Yale**

A multiple prize winner in ICAEW's exams, Mary Yale said she became an accountant because 'she liked playing with figures' and because her father wanted her to. Still, it was never a decision that she regretted.

In 1955 she was articled to a sole practitioner in North Wales but, following her success in ICAEW's examinations, she received multiple offers of employment from other firms. In 1961, Yale chose to join the audit department of Thomson McLintock & Co (now KPMG). In 1965 she decided to specialise in tax amid a period of major change to the UK tax systems with the introduction of corporation tax and capital tax. Yale became a partner in 1971 and remained with the firm through its merger with Peat Marwick Mitchell in 1987, until her retirement in 1994.

Like Watts before her, Yale was on several ICAEW committees beginning with the London and District Society in the 1970s. She was elected to council in 1979 and remained a council member until 1995. In addition, she served on a number of committees, including ethics and tax, was chair of the Internal Services Committee and the

Technical Committee and vice chair of the Disciplinary Committee. Yale was a founder member of the first ICAEW faculty, the Tax Faculty, set up in 1991. After her retirement she joined the Livery Company - The Worshipful Company of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

# 1

## ***Female members***

*still only comprised approximately 3% of ICAEW's total membership by the late 1970s*

*'If you have the ability to do a job,  
you should be allowed to do it.'*

Mary Yale  
Accountancy  
1979

### Jane Robinson (now Jane Allan)

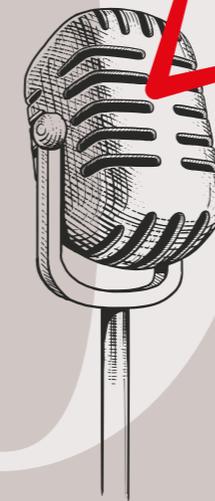
Jane Robinson trained with J. Dix-Lewis, Caesar, Duncan & Co (now part of Robson Rhodes) and went on to become the first female partner of Edward Moore, in 1978 and at the age of 30. However, Robinson also pursued a number of other careers, both before and after becoming an ICAEW Chartered Accountant. Her first job after school was as a bilingual secretary. After qualifying as a chartered accountant, she became the technical editor at *Accountancy* (1973-1975) and also worked in the advertising industry. At Edward Moore, she was first a training manager and then the partner responsible for training.

Robinson also served as the chair of the Education London Sub-Committee of the London Society of Chartered Accountants. In 1979 she became a member of ICAEW's council, serving until 1984. She was also on a number of other ICAEW committees. These included the Examinations Committee, the Education and Training Committee and the Smaller Practitioner Committee.

In 1980, Robinson gave a speech at ICAEW's Centenary Conference entitled, 'Using that Peculiar Contribution'. She welcomed the fact that more and more women were entering the profession, but felt that too often the role of women was restricted to tax and training, while female partners tended to be staff partners. Furthermore, she highlighted that many women, once qualified, were unable to develop their full potential. She urged the profession to make sure that the skills of all members were used fully, rather than lost to other professions or industries.

*'Social change has encouraged and enabled women to take a new role – I believe the opportunity is there and it should be used to the fullest extent possible. If such use is not made then not only will women who might have entered this profession be the losers, but so will the profession itself.'*

Jane Robinson  
ICAEW Centenary Conference Speech  
1980



## ***Baroness Noakes: first female ICAEW president***

In 1999 Baroness Noakes (then Dame Sheila Masters) became ICAEW's first female president.

After studying law at Bristol University, Baroness Noakes joined Peat Marwick Mitchell & Co (now KPMG) in 1970 with the objective of joining the Revenue Bar after qualifying as a chartered accountant. She later said that it was very hard for women to join a City law firm or the Bar without family connections, but slightly easier for women to join an accountancy firm. It may have been easier but, of the 100 trainees who joined KPMG in 1970, only four were female. Baroness Noakes qualified in 1973, after winning multiple prizes in the ICAEW exams, but did not follow her original plan as she decided to stay on at KPMG in general practice.

Although Baroness Noakes remained at KPMG until 2000, her career has certainly been varied. It has included two secondments: to the Treasury in 1979 for two years and, in 1988, to the NHS as director of finance. She became a partner at KPMG in 1983 - only the second female in the firm to do so. Three years later she was appointed head of KPMG's public sector industry group and, in 1991, she became chair of KPMG's international government practice. In these roles Baroness Noakes led large teams supporting the government's privatisation programmes. She has had a number of part-time public appointments, such as senior non-executive director of the Court of the Bank of England and a commissioner of the Public Works Loan Board. In 1996 she was made a DBE and then became Baroness Noakes four years later. She now sits in

the House of Lords as a Conservative Peer and, from 2001 to 2009, sat on the Opposition Front Bench as a shadow minister in the Lords. She is also on the board of a number of listed companies.

Baroness Noakes was a member of the London Society of Chartered Accountants (from 1984 to 1989) and on ICAEW's council (from 1987 to 2002). When she became ICAEW's first female president in 1999 she vowed to modernise it for the new millennium.



*‘There should be no necessity to consider a woman’s special role in any profession, since she should be accepted as an integral part of that profession as a whole and not in a special class of her own.’*

Baroness Noakes  
The Accountant  
1972

## ***Dr Hilary Lindsay: ICAEW president 2016-17***

Hilary Lindsay may have been the second female president of ICAEW, but she was the first academic to hold the post.

After studying statistics at University College, London, Lindsay began her career in 1974 with Haswell Brothers & Co, in Wrexham, winning a Liverpool Society tax prize in the ICAEW examinations. She had originally considered becoming an actuary, but chose to train as a chartered accountant because of the variety and flexibility it offered. After qualifying, she remained in practice until 1986 when she joined ICAEW as a practice adviser before moving on to become the finance director of ICAEW's commercial division. This was followed by her appointment in 1992 as the director of district societies and boards, which saw her become the first woman on ICAEW's senior management team. She has also served as the chair of a housing association and president of the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) in 2011–2012.

In 2000 Lindsay embarked on the academic stage of her career by studying for a masters and then a doctorate at the Open University, before becoming an associate lecturer in finance and management. She is the author of a number of studies that bring together CPD and lifelong learning into a framework, which identifies the skills needed by the 'complete professional'.

Throughout this time, Lindsay has been an active ICAEW member. She was president of the Leicester and Northamptonshire District Society, a trustee of the Chartered Accountants' Benevolent Association (CABA), chair of the Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies (CCAB) and served on ICAEW's council from 2002 to 2019. She is now the Master of the The Worshipful Company of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

She was elected as ICAEW president in 2016 and chose 'inclusiveness' as the theme for her presidential year.

# 2016

*'It's about encouraging people to come into the profession so that we reflect the diversity of society. And that's not just because I will be only the second ever woman president of ICAEW. Yes, women are still less than a third of the membership, but we have to keep showing potential future members, both men and women, what the profession can look like.'*

Hilary Lindsay  
economia  
2016



## ***Fiona Wilkinson: ICAEW President 2019-20***

As Fiona Wilkinson has observed, it is a 'happy coincidence' that her term of office as ICAEW's third female president coincides with the centenary of women's admission to ICAEW.

Wilkinson studied French with Italian at Royal Holloway College, the University of London, before joining the audit department of the London office of Touche Ross & Co (now Deloitte) in 1976. She spent 10 years with Touche Ross in London and one in Jersey. When she started a family, she set up her own practice acting as a technical consultant on auditing and financial reporting to other firms of chartered accountants.

She was president of the South West District Society in 2004–05, and has been an ICAEW council member since 2003. She has served on various ICAEW boards and committees including having been chair of the Professional Standards Board, the Ethics Advisory Committee and the Diversity Advisory Group.



# 2019

*'I have always maintained that chartered accountancy is a fantastic profession for women. It can take you down so many routes into different sectors and careers anywhere in the world and is flexible enough to let you work round caring responsibilities such as bringing up a family.'*

Fiona Wilkinson  
economia  
2019

## Conclusion

This snapshot of history highlights just how much attitudes to women in the workplace have changed over the last century.

Women now account for just under a third of ICAEW's overall membership, with the gender balance 50:50 for those entering the profession today. It will take time for this ratio to have a greater impact on our overall membership figures, but we are moving in the right direction. Progress has and is being made, but there is much more work to do.

Broadly, many businesses have woken up to the need for their workforce to reflect the client base they serve and the society they operate within, but women are still poorly represented at the most senior levels of business. The number of women on FTSE 100 and 350 boards has increased, but parity is still a long way off. At the time of writing, six of the FTSE 100 CEOs are female, and two of these are ICAEW Chartered Accountants. We must build a female pipeline, board-ready, to achieve gender balance at the top. We believe that more women becoming chartered accountants will be a key part of this, as the qualification equips members with many of the skills and commercial acumen needed to succeed at board level.

Chartered accountancy is a stimulating, flexible and rewarding career with the potential to radically change life prospects. We honour the legacy of these pioneering women by continuing to broaden access to the profession, ensuring that anyone with the talent and drive to succeed can do so regardless of their gender, skin colour, sexual orientation or background.

I hope that you have enjoyed reading this history, and that you are as inspired as I am by these women to strive for equality in business and not stop until it is achieved.



**Sharron Gunn BFP, FCA**  
Executive Director  
Members, Commercial and Shared Services  
ICAEW



100  
YEARS

## ICAEW and access to the profession

Central to our beliefs at ICAEW is that anyone with the talent and drive to succeed in this profession should have the opportunity to do so. Gender equality is one aspect of enhancing access to the profession. ICAEW has a range of initiatives to ensure that talented individuals can succeed as chartered accountants, whatever their background.

### Women in Leadership

Women in Leadership is a six-month programme specially designed to empower women to find the style of leadership that is already within them. The programme takes delegates on a journey of discovery, helping them develop their personal strengths and translate them into a unique and powerful leadership style, allowing them to thrive in any environment. [icaew.com/womeninleadership](https://www.icaew.com/womeninleadership)

### Free support for all ICAEW members

**Women in Finance Community** – aiming to create a profession in which members can lead a career without limits. Its programme provides personal development and networking opportunities to enable women in finance to achieve their potential. [icaew.com/wif](https://www.icaew.com/wif)

**Diversity Community** – providing information and best practice guidance on the different areas of diversity, helping to educate, support and raise awareness. [icaew.com/diversity](https://www.icaew.com/diversity)

**Career Breakers Community** – providing personal, professional and technical support to enable members to return to work in a role that suits their needs. [icaew.com/careerbreakers](https://www.icaew.com/careerbreakers)

### Women in Finance Charter

ICAEW is a signatory to HM Treasury's Women in Finance Charter, which commits organisations to build a more balanced and fair industry. Firms that sign up to the Charter pledge to support the progression of women into senior roles in the financial services sector. <https://bit.ly/2JmRA3k>

### BASE

It is critical to build a pipeline of diverse talent. We do a lot of work with schools to widen access to the profession and educate students on the opportunities that training to be a chartered accountant bring. BASE is ICAEW's National Business and Accounting competition for students in school or college aged 16-17. Students engage in business challenges that enable them to develop key employability skills and understand what it's like to be an ICAEW Chartered Accountant. Our message is that the profession is open to anyone who has the drive to learn and work hard. Being numerate is important, but other skills such as problem solving, communication and teamwork are just as crucial to a successful career. In 2019, the competition was well balanced, with a near 50:50 split of male and female finalists, and 30.3% were from BAME groups. [icaew.com/base](https://www.icaew.com/base)

# Appendices

## Key events

1880	ICAEW set up by Royal Charter	1950	Ethel Watts became the first female elected onto the executive committee of an ICAEW district society (London)
1887	Mary Harris Smith set up her own accounting firm		
1891	Mary Harris Smith's application to be a fellow at ICAEW was rejected	Late 1970s	First females were appointed as partners in Arthur Young McClelland Moore (now EY) and Peat Marwick Mitchell (now KPMG)
1896	Mary Harris Smith's request to sit ICAEW's final exams was refused	1978	Fran Harper elected as first female president of a Chartered Accountants' Student Body in Nottingham
1909	The Board of Trade insisted that women be admitted as part of the Professional Accountants Bill, but this was never passed	1979	First women elected to the ICAEW council (Mary Yale and Jane Robinson)
1919	The Sex Disqualification Removal (Act) was passed	1970	Equal Pay Act was passed (compliance voluntary until 1975)
1920	Mary Harris Smith was admitted as an ICAEW fellow	1975	Sex Discrimination Act was passed, to protect men and women from discrimination on the grounds of sex or marital status
1921	First women registered for articles		
1924	Ethel Watts qualified and was admitted as an associate	1999	Baroness Noakes became the first female ICAEW president
1945	Ethel Watts founded the Women Chartered Accountants' Dining Society	2010	Equality Act was passed, replacing older discrimination laws including the Sex Discrimination Act
1946	Royal Commission on Equal Pay was published and tentatively suggested equal pay for teachers and the civil service only	2016	Gender Pay Gap Reporting Regulations were introduced
1950	First female partner of a significant firm - Margaret Fox of Howard, Howes & Co (now Baker Tilly) was appointed; until then most female partners were sole practitioners	2016	Hilary Lindsay became the second female ICAEW president
		2019	Fiona Wilkinson became ICAEW's third female president

## ICAEW female membership

Year	Total ICAEW female members	Female share of ICAEW membership %
1920	1	0.0
1925	6	0.1
1930	23	0.2
1935	61	0.5
1940	84	0.6
1945	105	0.8
1950	137	0.9
1955	182	1.0
1960	342	1.0
1965	464	1.1
1970	711	1.4
1975	1,413	2.3
1980	2,971	4.1
1985	5,716	7.0
1990	10,560	11.1
1995	17,136	15.7
2000	22,141	18.6
2005	28,176	22.1
2010	34,154	25.0
2015	40,809	28.0
2019	43,962	29.0

### Some sources of information

If you would like to find out more about female members of ICAEW you may find the following useful:

*Economia*

ICAEW Library, *Accountancy*, *The Accountant*, books and articles on the history of accountancy

London Metropolitan Archives, ICAEW Records

Women's Library, LSE, Ethel Watts' papers

For further information, please see our digital hub:

[icaew.com/100years](https://www.icaew.com/100years)



[icaew.com/100years](https://www.icaew.com/100years)



There are over 1.8m chartered accountants and students around the world – talented, ethical and committed professionals who use their expertise to ensure we have a successful and sustainable future.

Over 181,500 of these are ICAEW Chartered Accountants and students. We train, develop and support each one of them so that they have the knowledge and values to help build local and global economies that are sustainable, accountable and fair.

We've been at the heart of the accountancy profession since we were founded in 1880 to ensure trust in business. We share our knowledge and insight with governments, regulators and business leaders worldwide as we believe accountancy is a force for positive economic change across the world.

[www.charteredaccountantsworldwide.com](http://www.charteredaccountantsworldwide.com)  
[www.globalaccountingalliance.com](http://www.globalaccountingalliance.com)

## ICAEW

Chartered Accountants' Hall  
Moorgate Place  
London  
EC2R 6EA  
UK

T +44 (0)20 7920 8100  
E [generalenquiries@icaew.com](mailto:generalenquiries@icaew.com)  
[icaew.com](http://icaew.com)

