

BENEFITS OF TRAINING WITH ICAEW - A CASE STUDY



ArmstrongWatson® Accountants, Business & Financial Advisers

Sector: Practice

Size: 410 employees

Training ACA students since: 1970

Company overview: Armstrong Watson is an experienced accounting and financial advisory firm providing a full range of services including audit, tax, accounting and financial planning. Founded 150 years ago, their head office is in Carlisle, but they have 15 regional offices and support clients across the North of England and Scotland.

ACA TRAINING HAS HELPED THEM WITH:



With their first ACA trainee dating back nearly 50 years, Armstrong Watson is a firm with a long history of training with ICAEW. When it acquired its Glasgow office, the firm was keen to ensure that its students there would also train on the ACA and, working alongside ICAEW and Kaplan, the firm established the first ACA training centre in Scotland. The organisation is now able to provide ICAEW training across its offices, offering clients consistency in quality and all their future leaders the same robust technical knowledge and work experience.

ACA AS PART OF THE FIRM'S CULTURE

When Zoe Pluckrose-Norman, Head of People, joined Armstrong Watson, the firm already had a long heritage of training staff on the ACA. While the firm offers AAT training to school leavers and career-changers, as well as the ATT qualification, it predominantly trains with ICAEW.

On top of the experience they gain on the job, the ACA exams provide trainees with technical knowledge, whilst the practical ladders help them develop their skills. Zoe explained: 'As they progress through the training, and with ethics being an integral part of the ACA qualification, students become more mature, both in their studies and their professionalism.'

In terms of what the qualification means to the firm, Zoe commented:

'The ACA is part of our culture. It's a prestigious qualification and a real bedrock within the accountancy profession. The chartered status demonstrates a high level of experience, competence and expertise, which reassures our clients that the advice and support they receive is provided by professionals who had to work incredibly hard to get to where they are.'

COLLABORATION OPENS UP NEW OPPORTUNITIES

When Armstrong Watson acquired its office in Glasgow, all students there initially trained with ICAS. However, as a great advocate of the ACA, the firm was keen to ensure that students across its locations not only followed the same training programme, but also gained the same qualification.

As there was no training centre in Glasgow providing ACA courses, it meant that the firm would have to send their Glasgow students to Manchester or Newcastle. Zoe commented: 'Neither option felt right. As an ICAEW firm, it was important to us that we offered the ACA qualification to our trainees in Glasgow and we had to find a way to achieve this. That's when we started having conversations with ICAEW and tuition providers in Scotland.'

The ICAEW Business Development team introduced Armstrong Watson to different tuition providers. In the end, the firm chose Kaplan to offer ACA courses in Glasgow, at which point it started sending all of its Glasgow trainees, and those from the Carlisle office, to that training centre.

INSTITUTE AND FIRM GROWING TOGETHER

Referring to the success of this initiative, Zoe commented:

'We've always appreciated working closely with ICAEW, and while we had received great support from them up until then, this initiative took on a different direction when it came to collaborating with the Business Development team. This time it was all about working together for the development of ACA training in Scotland. By offering the ACA to our students in Glasgow, we also wanted to support ICAEW in its endeavour to grow in the area.'

This collaboration has led to the firm hosting an ICAEW employer consultation about the future of the ACA and has created a close working relationship between Armstrong Watson and ICAEW.

Providing the ACA qualification to all of its students has benefitted the firm in many ways. It not only connects students in Glasgow to their fellow trainees in other offices – it also ensures that they all get the same training, achieve the same qualification and have access to the same resources.

'We encourage our ACA students to make the most of the benefits available to them – from attending ICAEW events to taking advantage of the support that CABA offers', Zoe explained.

Thanks to the close relationship between ICAEW and Armstrong Watson's students, one of its trainees was chosen to be a mentor at ICAEW's BASE competition. This was an opportunity for them to share their knowledge and for Armstrong Watson to gain visibility with school students. The trainee in question was even awarded BASE Mentor 2017 at the Northern Society of Chartered Accountants (NorSCA) Awards.

As for the firm, it's the support and flexibility that ACA training provides that has been most beneficial. Zoe commented:

'The online student training file has been incredibly helpful. Not only does it allow everyone involved in the training to keep track of our students' progress, it also saves us valuable time as we can check things really quickly.'

BUILDING THE FUTURE

As trainees progress in the firm, they become mentors to the new students. Seeing the level of skills, expertise and influence that their ACA colleagues possess acts as an incentive for new recruits to work towards the qualification. This progression has led to positive feedback from clients who can see employees growing from one year to the next.

'We have seen great commitment from ICAEW when it comes to growing their presence in Scotland. This has enabled us to offer our students in Glasgow ACA training, with plans to send four new trainees to our tuition provider in Scotland this year, and we have started initial discussions about degree apprenticeship opportunities. Our students are the future of our firm and being able to offer the ACA qualification to all of them has been an incredible achievement', Zoe concluded.

Find out more about ACA training on our website or by contacting our Business Development team:

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