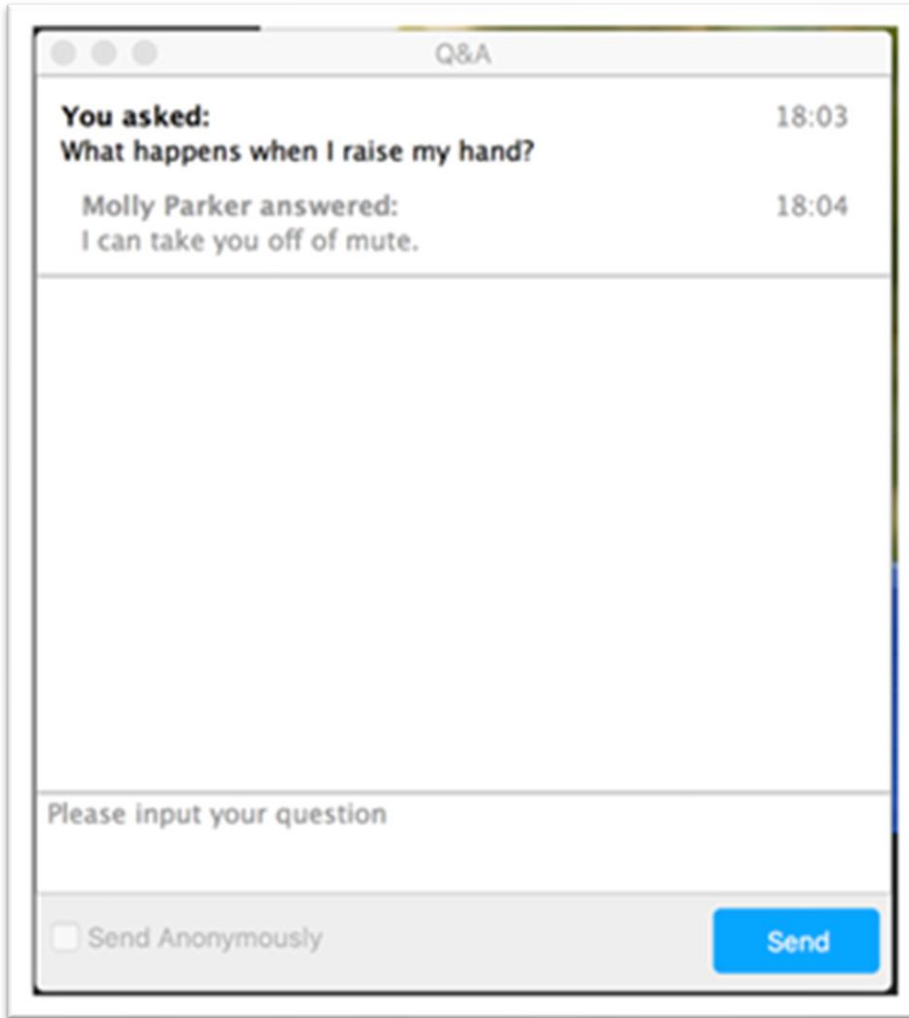# *Global research on AI and the future of the profession*

Date: 17 April 2025
Presenters: Daniel Clark, Digital Skills for Professionals
Becky Shields, Moore Kingston Smith
Ian Pay, ICAEW
Esther Mallowah, ICAEW

Ask a question

Click on the Q&A button in the bottom toolbar to open the submit question prompt.

Type in your question and click send.

Note. If you wish to ask anonymously tick the send anonymously box shown on the illustration to the left.

Did you know?

From 1 November 2023, ICAEW's revised Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Regulations brought in new CPD requirements, including a minimum number of hours and an ethics requirement.

This webinar could contribute to up to 1 hour of verifiable CPD, so long as you can demonstrate that the content is relevant to your role.

Find out more about how these changes affect you at icaew.com/cpdchanges.

Today's presenters

Daniel Clark
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Digital Skills for Professionals

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Background

CAW Technology Group Co-chaired by ICAEW and ISCA CEOs.

Partnering with Ipsos UK in 2024, the AI Working Group focused its efforts on a global research study with the aim of:

- Providing a global picture of the state of AI in the profession, including risks, opportunities, and recommendations.

- Identifying best practice and outlining AI implementation roadmaps to accelerate AI adoption across the profession.

- Identifying skills and knowledge required by Chartered Accountants to enhance their role and take advantage of the opportunity AI offers.

Methodology

Online Quantitative Survey	
Institute	**Completes***
ICAEW	124
ICAS	135
CAI	274
CA ANZ	703
ICAP	444
SAICA	78
ISCA	204
ZICA	243
ICAZ	63
ICAM	86
ICAN	332
ICAI	62
IAI	90
TOTAL COMPLETES	2718

*NB. Respondents were able to select membership of more than one Institute. As such the total number of completed interviews sums to less than the aggregate of interviews assigned to Institutes.

Fieldwork Dates: 03/09/2024 – 06/12/2024

The above dates indicate the total length of time interviews took place across all participating institutes. Institutes launched and closed surveys with memberships across this time window.

- 20-minute online survey

- Aimed to understand views, experience and expectations regarding AI technologies in the Chartered Accountancy role

- Invitations to complete the survey were sent to members of participating institutes via email, social media, and institute leadership advocacy. For the purposes of analysis members who are retired and not professionally active have been excluded from results.

- As an open link, participants had the flexibility of skipping questions so base sizes vary throughout the results. Quotas were not applied. The results are not intended to be representative of the accountancy profession as a whole – percentages in the report are indicative of respondents to the survey rather than all Chartered Accountants.

Following the online quantitative part of this study, Ipsos UK contacted individuals who had self-reported in the survey they were both willing to be contacted and had played a key role in implementing AI within their organisation, resulting in six 30-minute qualitative interviews exploring how the implementation had been conducted.

Demographics

Seniority

Job level	Completes	% of sample
Executive/C-Suite	274	12
Partner	323	15
Director	250	11
Senior Manager	321	15
Manager	282	13
Mid-level	382	17
Entry-level/Junior Accountant	131	6
Freelance / Sole Trader	108	5
Other	138	7

Age

	%	Count
18-24	5%	144
25-34	17%	462
35-44	23%	626
45-54	25%	691
55+	29%	795

Gender

	%	Count
Male	71%	1903
Female	29%	793

Location

Location	Completes	Location	Completes	Location	Completes
Angola	1	Kuwait	1	South Africa	56
Australia	379	Luxembourg	2	South Sudan	1
Bahrain	2	Malawi	82	Spain	1
Canada	20	Malaysia	12	Sweden	1
China	8	Mauritius	1	Switzerland	7
Costa Rica	1	Myanmar	1	Tanzania	1
Côte d'Ivoire	1	Namibia	1	Ukraine	1
Cyprus	3	Netherlands	1	United Arab Emirates	17
Czech Republic	1	New Zealand	284	United Kingdom	211
Egypt	1	Nigeria	314	United States	28
France	1	Oman	3	Vanuatu	1
Germany	4	Pakistan	403	Venezuela	1
Ghana	2	PNG	1		
India	47	Philippines	1		
Indonesia	88	Qatar	1		
Iraq	2	Saudi Arabia	18		
Ireland	207	Seychelles	1		
Italy	1	Singapore	205		

Headline findings

There is a clear willingness to use AI in the profession

- Chartered Accountants are embracing AI, especially younger professionals and those in larger organisations.

- Most recognise AI's potential; however, many feel unprepared for it.

- There is consensus that it will augment, rather than replace, the Chartered Accountant's role.

- AI is expected to significantly impact the profession, but there's uncertainty about implementation strategies. Some, particularly senior business members, feel adoption is slow.

85%
of those surveyed are at least fairly willing to use AI technology, given the opportunity

Data security concerns hindering uptake

- Trust in AI software often relies on pre-existing security measures, such as adopting Co-Pilot under Microsoft's security system. Some companies have established internal governance structures to ensure compliance. However, cross-national regulations can hinder adoption.

- C-suite executives are more likely to increase AI usage with data security assurances, citing it as a primary barrier to more frequent use.

30%
say concerns about data security is the main reason they aren't using AI more frequently

Professional bodies are expected to drive upskilling

- There is a gap between low availability of organisational-led AI training, and high employee willingness to participate, highlighting a need for improved training programs.

- As it stands, individual initiative is driving preparation for the future through self-directed AI learning.

- Chartered Accountants expect professional bodies, rather than employers, to provide AI training, prioritising practical skills, ethics, and integration with existing tools. There's little expectation of government funding to support this upskilling.

52%
feel that insufficient skills and training is the biggest barrier to the adoption of AI by the Accountancy profession

'Data Guardians' increasingly key as business adopts AI

- The role of Chartered Accountants as 'Data Guardians' – e.g. ensuring data governance in businesses – is perceived as becoming increasingly important by those surveyed, as AI is adopted into business more widely.

- Many are optimistic about AI's impact on their profession; more feel that AI will lead to increased job opportunities than losses.

- The majority of Chartered Accountants surveyed feel that AI will make the profession more attractive in the future, with the role changing to be more focused on strategic advice, with less focus on repeated manual tasks.

79%
agree that that as AI is integrated more into business, the role of Accountants as 'Data Guardians' will become increasingly important to organisations

Chartered Accountants are still in the early stages of discovering the more technical applications of AI

What you need to know...

- Participants are predominantly using generic AI tools for general productivity in their daily workflow and simple tasks, rather than technical work.
- Programs or tools already in use are the most likely conduits for exposure to AI. For example, professional accountants in business (PAIB) are often using AI via business intelligence tools and professional accountants in practice (PAIP) via accounting software, suggesting that AI adoption will be driven by the capabilities of these products for many.
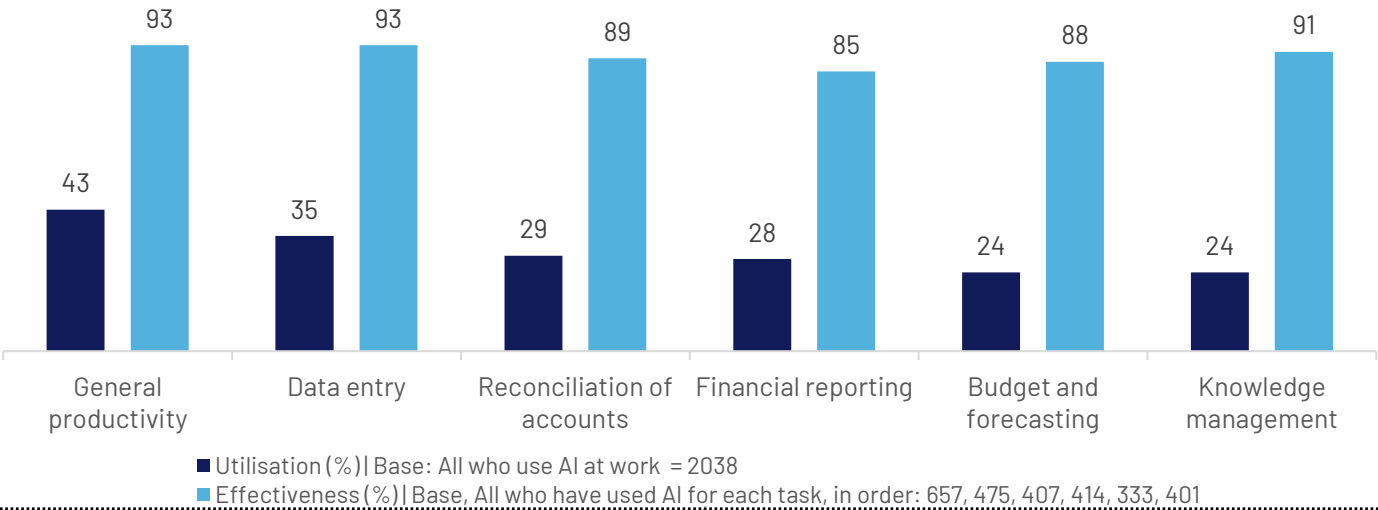
Key findings

70%

Of survey participants use publicly available GenAI chatbots, like ChatGPT or Gemini, at least once or twice a month
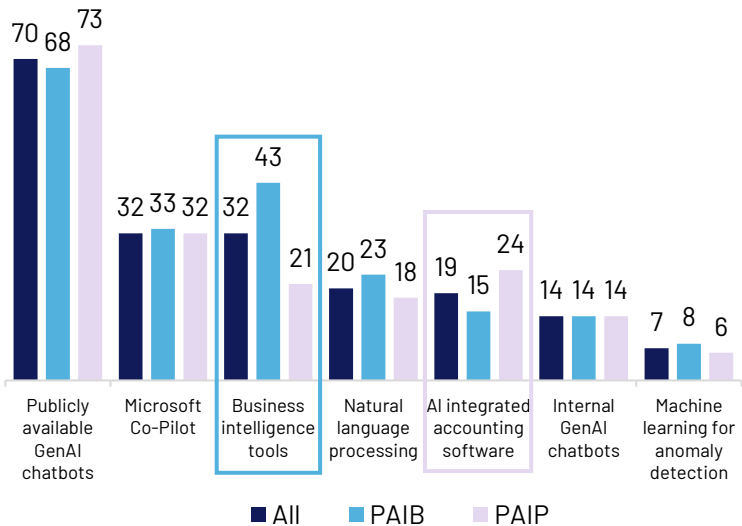
What do you need to consider?

1. With 70% of participants who use AI at least once a month using publicly available GenAI, is there a need for enhanced education and training around data security to ensure compliance in roles?

AI Task use vs effectiveness

Task	Utilisation (%)	Effectiveness (%)
General productivity	43	93
Data entry	35	93
Reconciliation of accounts	29	89
Financial reporting	28	85
Budget and forecasting	24	88
Knowledge management	24	91

Utilisation (%) | Base: All who use AI at work = 2038
Effectiveness (%) | Base, All who have used AI for each task, in order: 657, 475, 407, 414, 333, 401

Which tools are used at least once or twice a month? (Top 5,%) | Base: All = 1471, PAIB = 631, PAIP = 602

Tool	All	PAIB	PAIP
Publicly available GenAI chatbots	70	68	73
Microsoft Co-Pilot	32	33	32
Business intelligence tools	32	43	21
Natural language processing	20	23	18
AI integrated accounting software	19	15	24
Internal GenAI chatbots	14	14	14
Machine learning for anomaly detection	7	8	6

Name of the AI integrated accounting software you are using? | Base: All who have used AI integrated software and use AI at least once a month = 155

Name	%
Xero	23%
QuickBooks	15%
Sage	12%
Microsoft / CoPilot	9%
ChatGPT	6%
SAP	6%
Dext	5%
Internal	4%

Accountants stated they rely on 1) established tools, 2) strict procedure or 3) avoidance, to address security concerns

What you need to know...

- CAW members interviewed identify three primary approaches to AI adoption:

1. Integration based on trust in established, security-approved systems, such as Microsoft, which naturally extends to tools like Microsoft Co-Pilot.
2. Integration guided by unique internal approval processes, such as working forums focused on standards and governance.
3. Limited integration driven by caution, with hesitancy stemming from the increasing complexities of cross-national data security regulations.

Data security is more of a concern for senior roles

34% of C-suite respondents say reassurance about data security would make them use AI more in their role vs 24% of junior roles

36% of C-suite respondents say data security concerns are the main reason they don't use AI on a more frequent basis

What do you need to consider?

1. What steps are necessary to educate and reassure the profession about AI's potential while ensuring compliance with complex data security regulations?

Different approaches to dealing with security concerns became clear during the qualitative interviews...

Leaning on previously used and trusted platforms that incorporate AI allow simpler adoption than newer platforms, and reduce the administrative burden around further security assurances...

1 "It's essentially an add on to the previous contract. Since we already know and use Microsoft accounts for all our shared drives, the Co-pilot feature is just embedded within each file. We rely on the initial security setup we have in place." – *Partner, ISCA Member*

One company has established internal frameworks, emphasising standards and governance, to ensure a rigorous approach involving multiple senior stakeholders and relevant expertise...

2 "We've got an AI forum [that is] made-up of more senior people in our in our team, mostly the management and executive team, and take every single AI product that we use [through] our processes... We've got a 5-page document asking questions about the technology at hand. And you have to submit that to the AI forum, [which then goes] through a formalised approval process. [After that] the compliance team takes it through [their] whole process." – *Senior Manager, SAICA Member*

While others show reluctance to advance due to the growing complexities of trans-national regulations.

3 "You've got private data there. You've got all of your customers names, all of the amounts they pay to you, all of their bank details, and all the kind of reference details, which is a sort of hackers dream... [and] for most customers [AI models] are not allowed to be trained on their data or custom, [so] the board says no, we don't want them seeing all that information." – *Manager, ICAS Member*

*Findings taken from qualitative follow-up interviews

Critical thinking is considered more important than digital and data science skills in today's Accountancy training
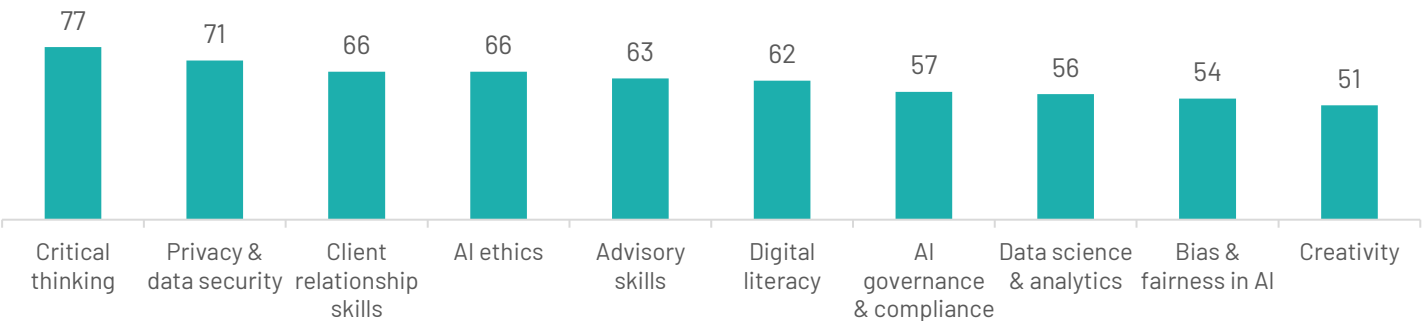
What you need to know…

- Continued emphasis on critical thinking aligns with the intention that AI works alongside the human intelligence of Chartered Accountants, and suggests these skills will be crucial in order to scrutinise and apply AI insights to provide effective advice to business/clients.
- Data privacy and security are top priorities in training. With increased AI use raising concerns about this, it's even more important to ensure structured, effective training to use technology ethically and protect data responsibly.
- There is anticipation of significant changes in training to accommodate digital skills, but those surveyed continue to believe that trainees still need to learn their role by doing hands-on technical work.
- However, from students, there is still a clear call to action for educational institutions to integrate more AI and digital skills content in the future.
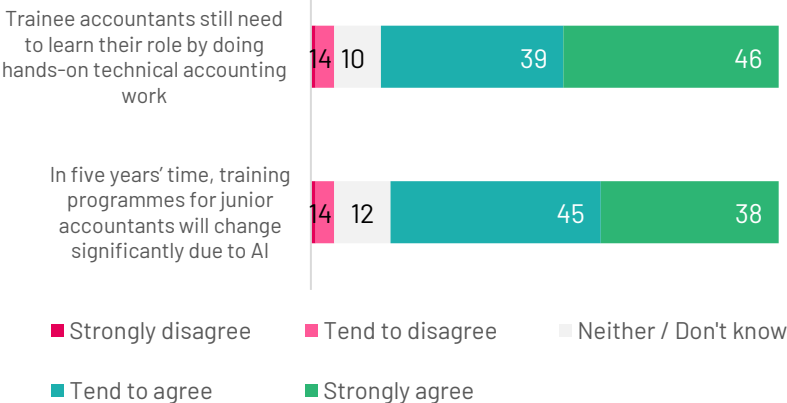
What do you need to consider?

1. How can CAW members ensure that the value of hands-on technical work is preserved and enhanced, while also integrating AI into training programs?

How important, if at all, is it for today's Accountancy training to include (% Very Important)
Base: All = 2297

Skill	%
Critical thinking	77
Privacy & data security	71
Client relationship skills	66
AI ethics	66
Advisory skills	63
Digital literacy	62
AI governance & compliance	57
Data science & analytics	56
Bias & fairness in AI	54
Creativity	51

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the present and future role of accountants? (%) | Base: All = 2387

Trainee accountants still need to learn their role by doing hands-on technical accounting work: 14 | 10 | 39 | 46

In five years' time, training programmes for junior accountants will change significantly due to AI: 14 | 12 | 45 | 38

Legend: Strongly disagree | Tend to disagree | Neither / Don't know | Tend to agree | Strongly agree

Do you feel that the course you are currently studying has a sufficient focus on the digital skills that will be required in accounting roles in the future? (%) | Base: CAW students only = 188

- Yes: 49
- No: 41
- Don't know: 10

Ipsos
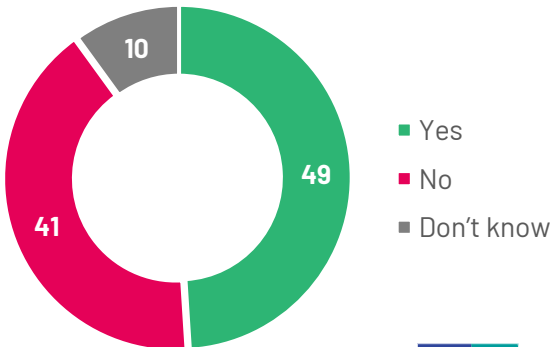
Professional institutes, rather than employers, are expected to provide training

What you need to know…

- Participants express the expectation that professional bodies should be providing training rather than employers. This stands true across all levels of seniority.
- There is little expectation that government funding should be directed towards upskilling the profession.
- Those who expect Accountancy bodies to provide training want to see the organisation involved in:
  1. Actively enhancing CPD with AI integration
  2. Create specialised AI courses,
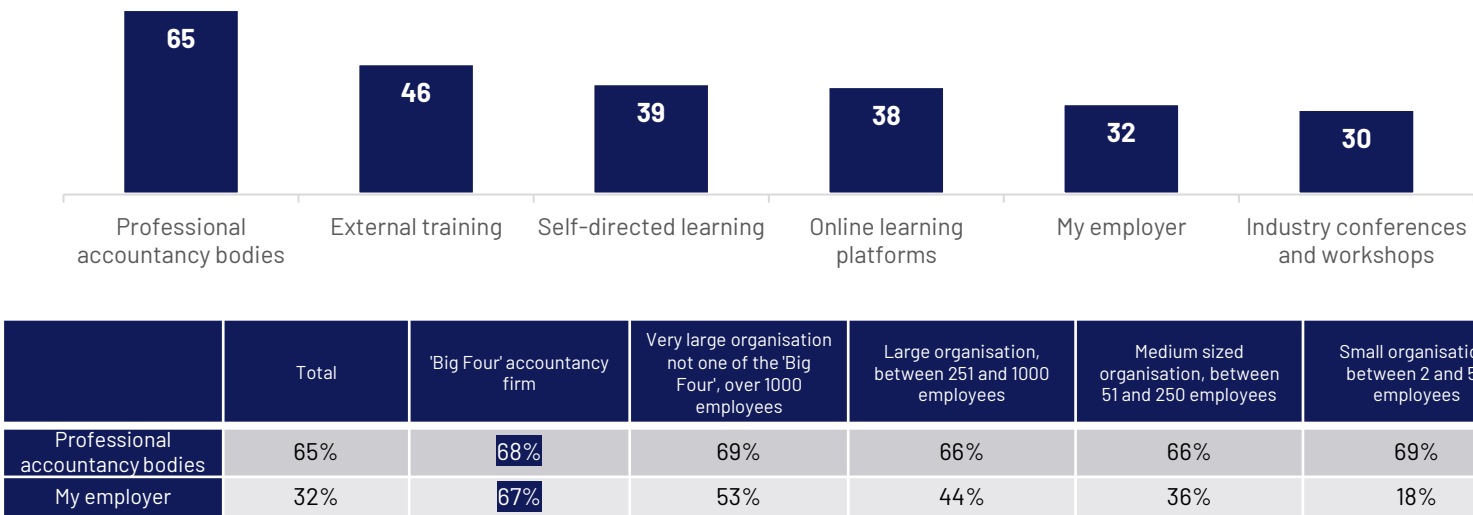 3. Provide a suite of AI learning resources.

Key findings

67% of those identifying as the primary decision maker regarding AI technology in their organisation expect professional bodies to provide AI training.
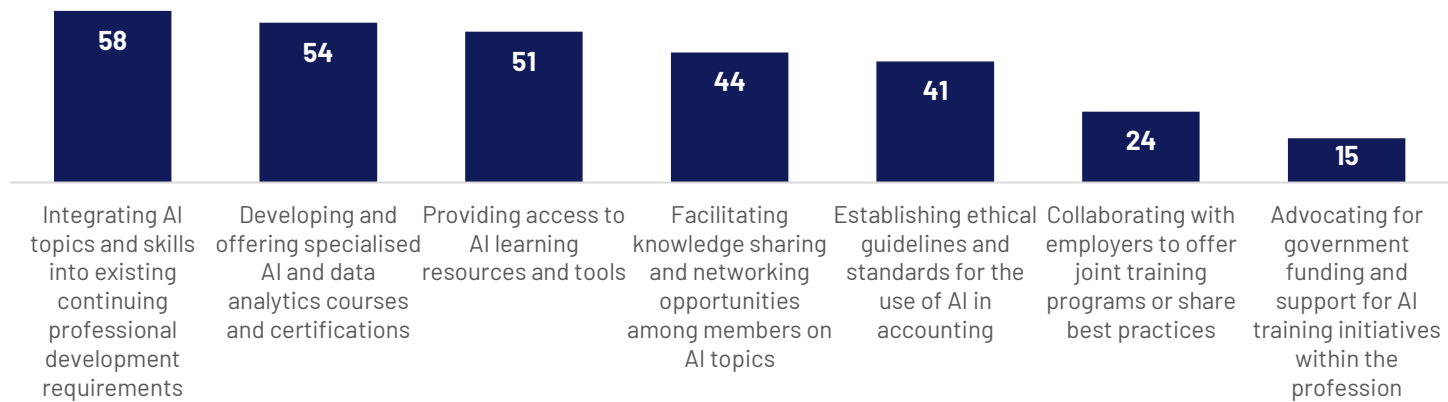
What do you need to consider?

1. How can CAW help individual country institutes to develop, deliver and co-ordinate AI education?

Where do you expect Chartered Accountants to receive training on AI and its application in their work? (%) | Base: All = 2257

	Professional accountancy bodies	External training	Self-directed learning	Online learning platforms	My employer	Industry conferences and workshops
	65	46	39	38	32	30

	Total	'Big Four' accountancy firm	Very large organisation not one of the 'Big Four', over 1000 employees	Large organisation, between 251 and 1000 employees	Medium sized organisation, between 51 and 250 employees	Small organisation, between 2 and 50 employees
Professional accountancy bodies	65%	68%	69%	66%	66%	69%
My employer	32%	67%	53%	44%	36%	18%

How do you envision your professional body supporting Chartered Accountants in developing the necessary AI skills? (%) | Base: Those who expect Professional Accountancy bodies to provide training: 1540

Integrating AI topics and skills into existing continuing professional development requirements	Developing and offering specialised AI and data analytics courses and certifications	Providing access to AI learning resources and tools	Facilitating knowledge sharing and networking opportunities among members on AI topics	Establishing ethical guidelines and standards for the use of AI in accounting	Collaborating with employers to offer joint training programs or share best practices	Advocating for government funding and support for AI training initiatives within the profession
58	54	51	44	41	24	15

ICAEW AI Hub

Resources include:

- Videos: AI Masterclasses
- Understanding AI
- Generative AI
- AI skills for accountants
- Training
- Use cases
- Managing risks

icaew.com/AI

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14 May

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