

**Bridge
Group**
research
action
equality

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Access Accountancy

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Executive summary

Access Accountancy is an ambitious collaboration of employers and professional bodies, dedicated to improving socio-economic diversity in the accountancy profession.

In 2020, the Bridge Group has been commissioned to deliver data analysis relating to the work experience element of the programme. This year's analysis (pertaining to data from 2018-19) includes data relating to 993 work experience candidates.

With respect to eligibility for Access Accountancy work experience, we were able to confirm that 64% have submitted background data that match the eligibility criteria for Access Accountancy: attending a state school and a further criterion (FSM eligibility in the last six years, attending a school with higher than regional average FSM eligibility, or representing the first generation in immediate family to attend university). As in previous years, many other candidates for whom data was not collected may have been eligible.

During the four-year period that the Bridge Group have been assessing this data, the total number of Access Accountancy work experience candidates is **3,843** (including in addition to this year, 1,013 in 17/18; 743 in 16/17; and 1,450 in 15/16)

With regards to impact, work experience opportunities deliver positive gains for participants, but this varies by ability area: participants experienced larger positive impact on their business skills and awareness and their networking / communication skills, whereas their ability to produce a CV was impacted less significantly. Survey responses also indicated improved awareness of, and increased interest in, professional services / accountancy careers, and greater perceived likelihood of being made a job offer by a firm and doing well in a professional services / accountancy career.

We advocate key recommendations for future work experience data collection. It has been a great pleasure to work with colleagues at Access Accountancy and the cohort of signatories; special thanks should go to colleagues who prepared the various datasets. We look forward to continuing to support this important and influential programme, including the analysis of applications and hires data in 2021, and commend the continued commitment to supporting socio-economic diversity.

Work experience: key findings

> 14 firms provided details regarding a total of 994 work experience candidates who undertook placements between September 2018 and August 2019.

> 62% (n = 585) were validated as meeting the Access Accountancy eligibility criteria of attending a state school **and** a further criterion, with 878% attending a state school. Note that there were some candidates where it was no possible to identify eligibility (n=52).

> Impact analysis across **all respondents** found 68% rated their business skills and awareness as 'excellent' or 'good' prior to work experience, while 96% felt their ability in this area had increased after the experience. Respondents rating their awareness of careers in professional services / accountancy as 'excellent' or 'good' also rose from 56% to 91%. Perceiving they would 'very likely' be made a job offer by a professional services / accountancy firm and do well in a professional services / accountancy career also rose (44% to 49%, 62% to 64%, respectively).

> Impact analysis across **matched respondents** (those who had completed both pre and post surveys) found that the biggest gains for respondents who had rated their abilities 'okay', 'poor', or 'very poor' prior to work experience were regarding business skills and awareness, presentation skills, application / interview technique, self-confidence and networking / communication skills. There were also gains for respondents who had already rated their abilities as 'excellent' or 'good' prior to work experience. Awareness of careers in professional services / accountancy rose for 57% of matched respondents and interest in these careers increased for 16% (and was maintained for 69%). There were also increases in perceiving they would 'very likely' be made a job offer and do well in a professional services / accountancy career (17% and 16% increases, respectively).

Work experience: data recommendations

> **Access Accountancy / the Bridge Group should provide annual guidance on school eligibility.** In particular, this should focus on whether schools are independent or state, have above regional average rates of FSM eligibility, and relevant equivalents / guidance regarding colleges and Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish schools. This will aid firms in making eligibility decisions and promote consistency across firms. Practically, this would involve sharing a master list of schools each year, indicating eligibility based on this criterion.

> **All firms should provide details of all candidates participating in work experience and corresponding details regarding their eligibility for Access Accountancy work experience (including school name and postcode).** This should typically be drawn from a firm's ATS, and will aid in calculation of total number of eligible candidates across firms and response rates for surveys.

> **All firms should use the Bridge Group online survey to capture programme impact.** This will ensure questions capturing impact are consistent and comparable across firms, can be reported on in aggregate and can be matched across pre and post survey. Four firms in this data collection year used the Bridge Group survey. This can be undertaken by firms individually, but standardising this process will add to the rigour and efficiency of the process.

> **Firms should clarify the key aims work experience is intended to meet to ensure survey evaluation captures relevant progress.**

> **Access Accountancy / the Bridge Group should consider the inclusion of a survey item asking how many professional services / accountancy work experience placements candidates have experienced / been accepted on / applied to.** This will provide information on how widespread the practice of candidates accessing multiple placements is.

Work experience: general recommendations

> **Tracking work experience participants:** Currently outcomes for work experience participants who do not apply to mainstream programmes are rarely tracked by firms beyond this point. Access Accountancy signatories could consider where they can collaborate more effectively in this area in order to share information about work experience participants in case they apply elsewhere. This could enable more consistent measurement of outcomes for work experience students across the profession rather than in relation to specific firms.

> **Conversion to apprenticeship schemes:** Not all firms currently consider work experience programmes as providing a pathway on to mainstream programmes (e.g. apprenticeships / graduate schemes). How to facilitate these pathways could be addressed by more firms as participation in work experience programmes does appear to have a positive impact on conversion rates to apprenticeship schemes for those who apply, thus offering important routes towards wider participation.

> **Maximising impact and reach:** Some signatories interviewed in 2019 suggested that a proportion of students are benefitting from multiple work experience placements, thus limiting the availability of places for others. Further collaboration between Access Accountancy signatories could aim to identify if this practice is in fact widespread and consider the response if so, in order to provide opportunities for higher numbers of students overall.

> **Informal work experience:** Increasing numbers of signatories have shut down opportunities for informal work experience or are offering one-plus-one programmes where an ad hoc / informal opportunity must be matched by one offered to a student from a lower socio-economic background. Good practice would suggest that more Access Accountancy signatories consider either reducing these opportunities and / or introducing a similar arrangement, to the extent compatible with the current culture of their firm.

Methodology and variables

The following steps were undertaken to prepare the dataset for analysis:

- > The Bridge Group negotiated data confidentiality and security agreements with each firm. Data was received using a template designed by the Bridge Group and the Data Group to help ensure consistency in responses. Comprehensive support and advice was offered including a briefing for signatories, conference calls, and one-to-one conversations.
- > Work experience data relates to the period between September 2018 and August 2019.
- > Data were received for 1,262 work experience candidates from thirteen firms (a list of the firms that submitted data is available in the Appendix). 269 were unsuccessful applicants (this is binary and therefore not possible to identify at which stage they are unsuccessful) and therefore are not counted in the analyses; 993 ultimately participated in placements.
- > Progress has been made in standardising key survey items across firms to facilitate comparisons and statistical analysis. Liaising with signatories has contributed to this progress.

Work experience data

- > 14 firms provided details regarding a total of 994 work experience candidates
- > Work experience candidate eligibility data is drawn from the survey responses completed by work experience candidates and from application records
- > 713 pre and 582 post work experience surveys were submitted by Blick Rothenberg, Deloitte, Grant Thornton, KPMG, Kreston Reeves, Mazars, MHA MacIntyre Hudson, NAO, PwC, and RSM
- > While the overall number of surveys is down from 2017-18 (approximately 300 fewer each for pre and post surveys), this is the first year there has been a significant number of respondents who could be matched across pre and post surveys, allowing for analysis of change between these timepoints for 390 respondents across nine firms
- > 34% of candidates providing ethnicity data were of Asian ethnicity, 8% Black, 11% Other (including Mixed), and 47% White. 47% were female and 53% male.

Work experience eligibility

> 14 firms provided details regarding a total of 994 work experience candidates

> 942 candidates were submitted to eligibility analysis*

> 62% (n = 585) of these have been validated as meeting the Access Accountancy eligibility criteria of attending a state school **and** a further criterion (shown in teal in Figure 1),** though missing data about whether candidates' schools were above the regional average for FSM eligibility suggest the real figure could be higher

> 87% (n = 821) attended a state school

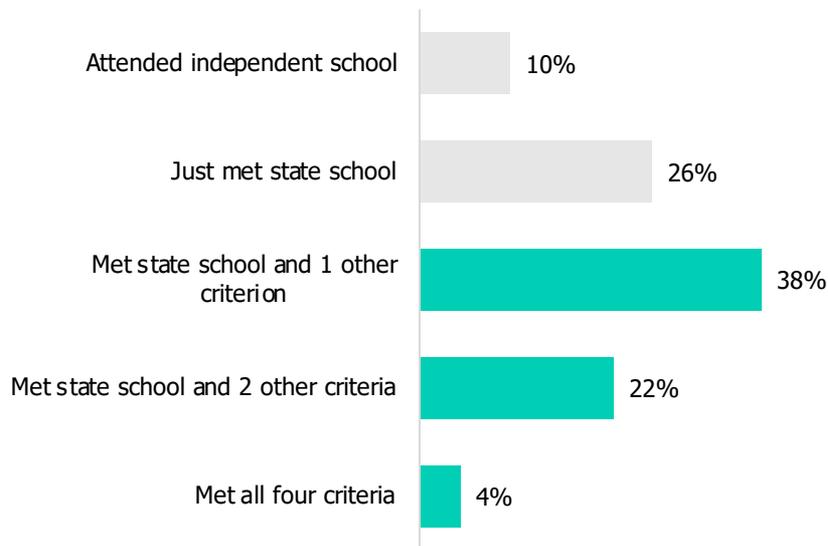


Figure 1. Eligibility of candidates attending schools in England

* Due to missing data; n = 28 had missing school data or attended school overseas; as Scottish and Welsh regional FSM eligibility data is unavailable, candidates attending school in Scotland and Wales were not marked against this criterion

** Eligibility criteria include having attended a state school / college **and** meeting one of the following: eligibility for FSM in the last six years; **or** attending a school that is above the regional average of FSM-eligible students; **or** would be of the first generation in their immediate family to attend university

Impact analysis: all respondents

Abilities

The following analysis looks at all pre and post survey responses. While 68% rated their business skills and awareness as 'excellent' or 'good' prior to work experience, 96% felt their ability in this area had increased after the experience. 92% also felt their ability to network / communicate had increased following their placement.



Figure 2. Rating of abilities prior to work experience, all respondents

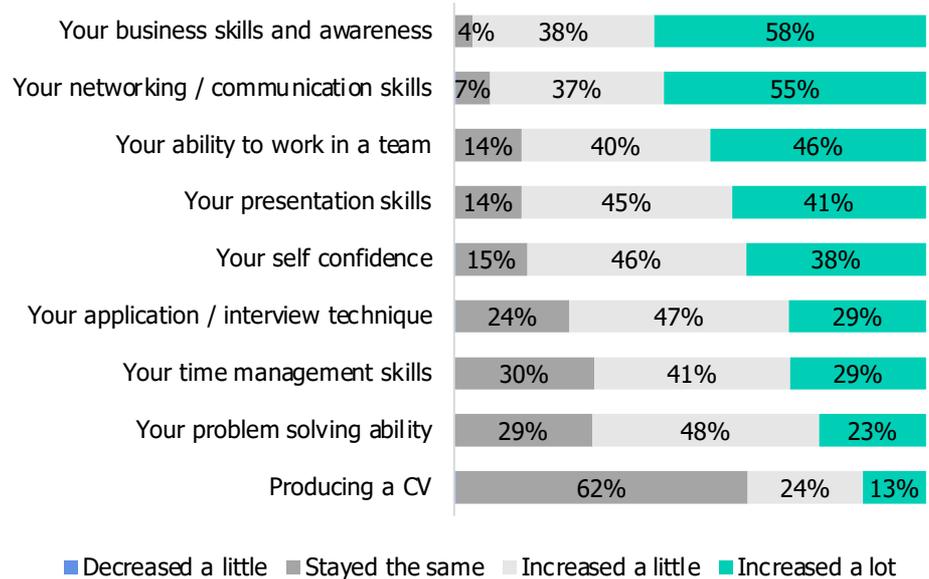


Figure 3. Impact of work experience on abilities, all respondents

Awareness and interest in careers

91% rated their awareness of careers in professional services / accountancy as 'excellent' or 'good' on the post-survey compared to 56% on the pre-survey. 94% were 'possibly' or 'very much' interested in a career in professional services / accountancy prior to the work experience compared to 92% after, though the percentage selecting 'very much' was slightly higher after (56% vs 54%).

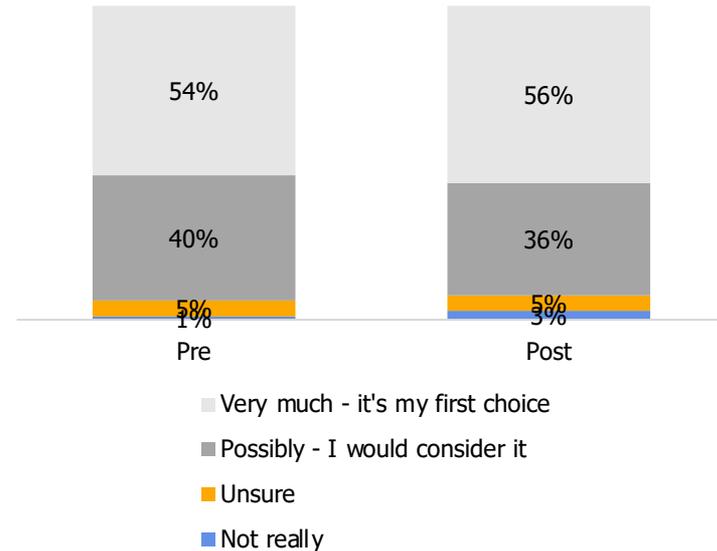
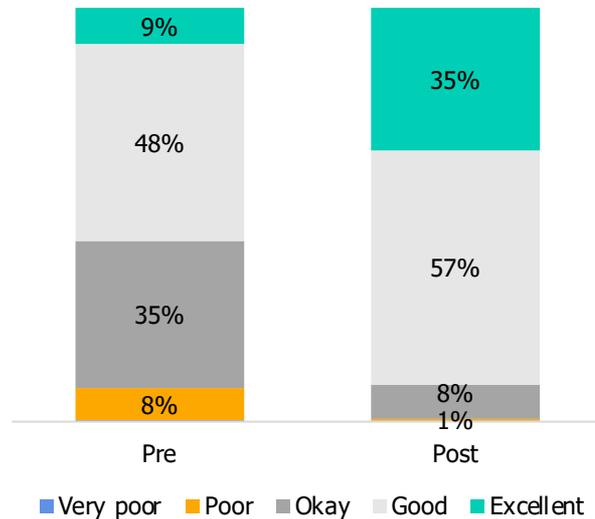


Figure 4. Awareness of careers in professional services / accountancy before and after work experience, all respondents

Figure 5. Interest in a professional services / accountancy career before and after work experience, all respondents

Accountancy careers

Pre and post survey respondents across three firms were also asked for their perceptions regarding the likelihood of getting a job offer from a professional services / accountancy firm and doing well in such a career. For both questions, the percentage selecting 'very likely' was greater amongst post survey respondents, though a small percentage also selected 'not likely'. This is not necessarily a negative outcome for these respondents as it may reflect an informed decision that a career in professional services / accountancy is not right for them.

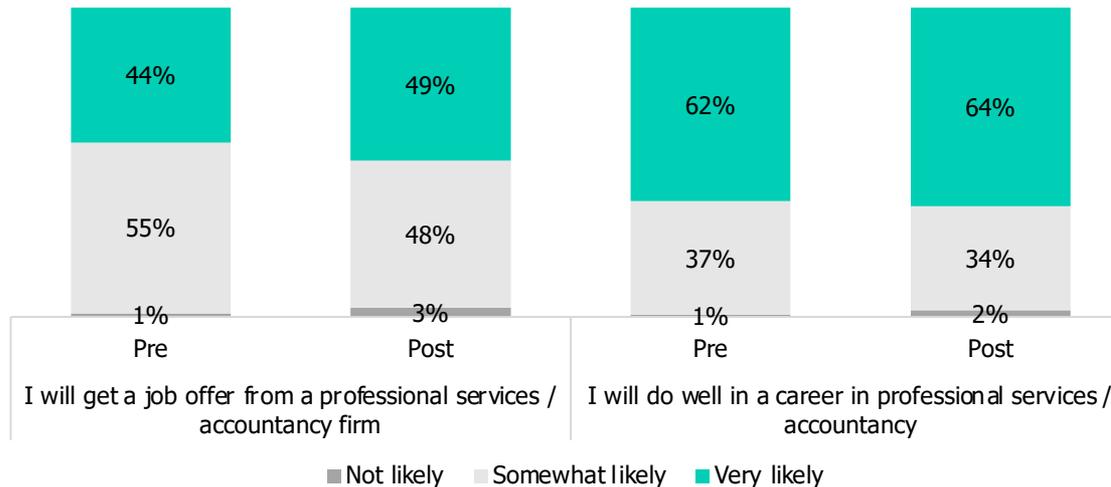


Figure 6. Perceived likelihood regarding professional services / accountancy careers, all respondents

Impact analysis: matched respondents

Abilities

Respondents to the pre survey rated their abilities from 'very poor' to 'excellent', while post survey respondents described the impact of the work experience on their abilities (e.g., 'increased a little').

Figure 7 compares change in responses for those who answered both the pre and post surveys and could be clearly matched (matched respondents, n = 390).

Business skills and awareness and networking / communication skills increased for the most matched respondents (97% and 93%). The ability that increased most for those who had rated it as 'poor' or 'very poor' prior to work experience was self-confidence (4%).

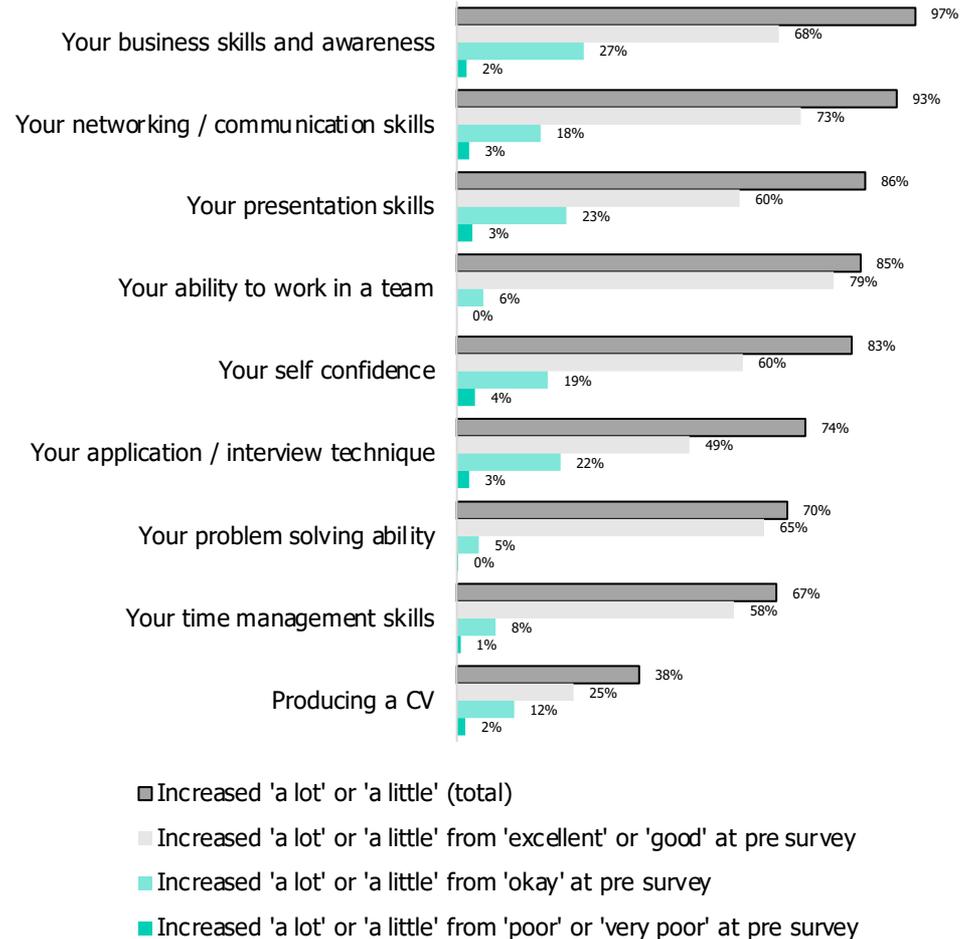


Figure 7. Impact of work experience on abilities, matched respondents

Awareness of careers

Table 1 compares change in responses for those who answered both the pre and post surveys and could be clearly matched (matched respondents, n = 390).

95% of matched respondents rated their awareness of professional services / accountancy careers as 'excellent' or 'good' by post survey (shown in box).

Ratings improved for 57% of matched respondents (shown in teal): 31% improved to 'excellent' (shown in **bold**) and 25% improved to 'good' (shown in *italics*).

'Excellent' and 'good' ratings were maintained for 36% (shown in light grey).

		Post survey			
		Excellent	Good	Okay	Poor
Pre survey	Excellent	6%	3%	0%	0%
	Good	21%	<i>29%</i>	2%	0%
	Okay	9%	<i>22%</i>	2%	0%
	Poor	2%	<i>3%</i>	1%	0%

Table 1. Changes to awareness of professional services / accountancy careers, matched respondents

Interest in careers

Table 2 compares change in responses for those who answered both the pre and post surveys and could be clearly matched (matched respondents, n = 390).

94% of matched respondents reported they were 'very much' or 'possibly' interested in a professional services / accountancy career as 'excellent' or 'good' by post survey (shown in box).

Interest increased for 16% of matched respondents (shown in teal): 13% improved to 'very much' (shown in **bold**) and 3% to 'possibly' (shown in *italics*).

'Very much' and 'possibly' ratings were maintained for 69% (shown in light grey).

		Post survey			
		Very much - it's my first choice	Possibly - I would consider it	Unsure	Not really
Pre survey	Very much - It's my first choice	45%	9%	0%	0%
	Possibly - I would consider it	12%	24%	2%	1%
	Unsure	1%	<i>2%</i>	1%	1%
	Not really	0%	<i>1%</i>	0%	1%

Table 2. Changes to interest in a professional services / accountancy career, matched respondents

Accountancy careers

Tables 3 and 4 compare change in responses for those who answered both questions on the pre and post surveys and could be clearly matched (n = 276).

By post survey, 99% of matched respondents reported they were 'very likely' or 'somewhat likely' to get a job offer from a professional services / accountancy firm and do well in such a career (shown in box).

Perceived likelihood of getting a job offer increased for 18% of matched respondents (shown in teal): 17% increased to 'very likely' (shown in **bold**) and 1% to 'somewhat likely' (shown in *italics*). 73% maintained positive ratings (shown in light grey).

Perceived likelihood of doing well in a professional services / accountancy career increased for 16% of matched respondents (shown in teal): 15% increased to 'very likely' (shown in **bold**) and 1% to 'somewhat likely' (shown in *italics*). 76% maintained positive ratings (shown in light grey).

		Post survey		
		Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not likely
Pre survey	Very likely	33%	8%	1%
	Somewhat likely	17%	<i>40%</i>	0%
	Not likely	0%	<i>1%</i>	0%

Table 3. Changes to perceived likelihood of getting a job offer from a professional services / accountancy firm, matched respondents

		Post survey		
		Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not likely
Pre survey	Very likely	51%	8%	1%
	Somewhat likely	15%	<i>25%</i>	0%
	Not likely	0%	<i>1%</i>	0%

Table 4. Changes to perceived likelihood of doing well in a professional services / accountancy career, matched respondents

Appendix: firms submitting data

Firm name	Work experience candidate data	Surveys	Matched responses available
BDO	x		
Blick Rothenberg	x	x	x
Deloitte	x	x	
Duncan & Toplis	x		
EY	x		
Grant Thornton	x	x	x
KPMG	x	x	x
Kreston Reeves	x	x	x
Mazars	x	x	x
MHA MacIntyre Hudson	x	x	x
Moore Kingston Smith	x		
National Audit Office	x	x	x
PwC	x	x	x
RSM	x	x	x