

Helping accountants grow:
Using CPD to develop
an outstanding
finance team

Q & As from the session

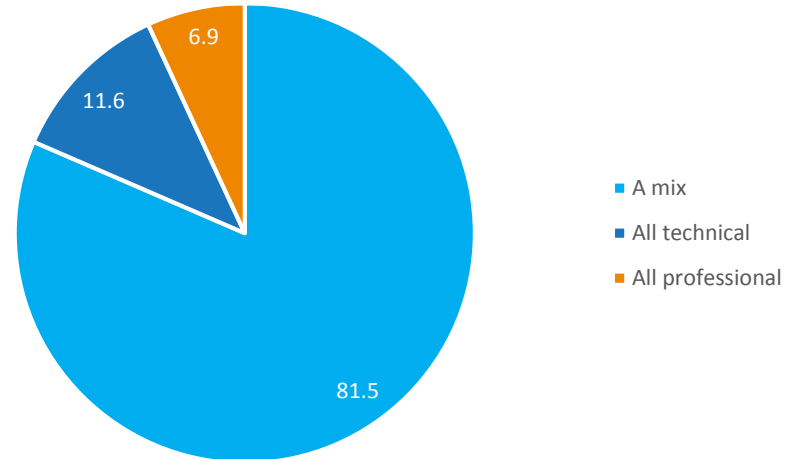


We asked you....

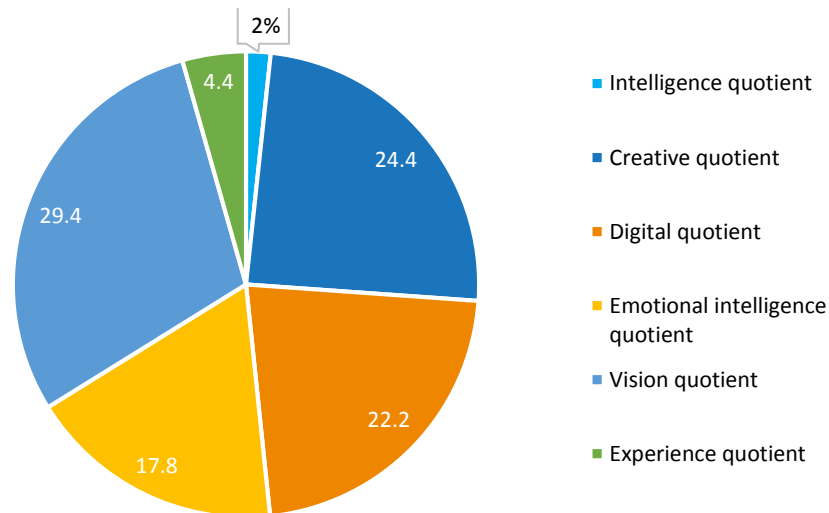
In the last year has your CPD been:

- All technical (tax, financial reporting etc.)
- All professional skills
- A mixture of both

You told us....

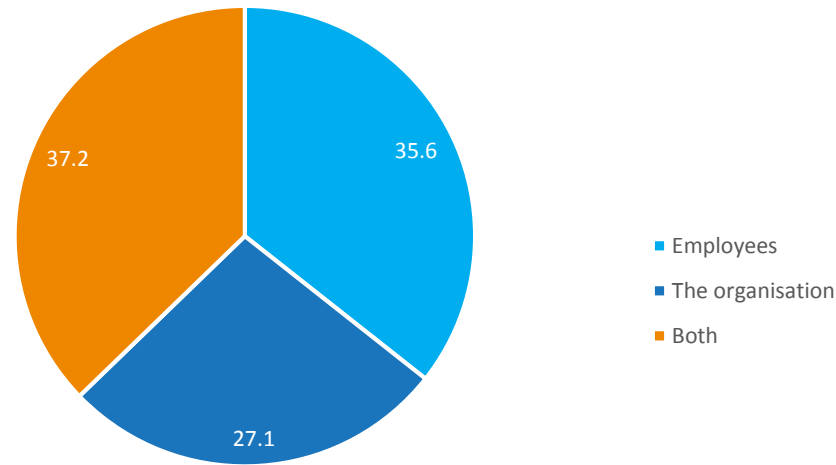


Six of the quotients focus on behaviours and skills. Thinking about these, which of them do your team feel LEAST confident about?



Who pays for your team's CPD?

- Employees pay for their own
- The organisation pays
- A bit of both



You asked us....



How do you work with managers who don't share the vision to allow you to grow (based on the statistic showing a weakness in the vision quotient)?

We answered....

Alan: I'm assuming you mean a weakness in the vision quotient on behalf of the managers. That is a challenge, yes. And I think you can *try* and work with them to develop that, but it has always been the case, whether we are talking about CPD or just as employees in organisations, that it's great to work in a place where they value the development and growth of the people who work for them. It's not so good to work somewhere where they don't. So you can try and explain and persuade people of the value of that. I certainly think it's worth talking about CPD in the same way they talk about other development activities. I think sometimes managers and HR people tend to think very carefully about the way they train their staff for work related skills but they think CPD is something that is not their 'thing', it's something the professionals have to get on with and they don't have to take any notice of it. So relating CPD back to just simply being 'This is the way the finance people do their development, it should be part of their development plan and the appraisal system' is one way. The other way, of course, is to look at whether that manager reflects the culture of the organisation as a whole, because if they do, then you'd want to consider whether that is an organisation that's perfect for you to work for. But if it doesn't, then it's the manager who is at odds and you may be able to work around that.



Does ACCA reach out to employers to make them aware of the importance of CPD for their employees?

Alan: I'm not sure I'm entirely the right person to answer this one, but from my knowledge, ACCA do have a large approved employer scheme and have a close relationship with those people. And though much of the conversation is around the way they train trainees, they also spend a lot of time speaking to them about the resources they can put in place. And I know that professionally, in my job as a Publisher of accountingcpd, we're working closely with ACCA on talking to their approved employers, so it is something they care about a lot.



Bigger picture question here – is emotional intelligence something you can learn?

Alan: Yes, I think it is. I know that some people seem to be naturally gifted in that area, but we should not give up on things just because we feel that way. In the section on emotional intelligence, I broke it down into building resilience, communication, and working in teams. Now, I think people tend to confuse personality types with emotional intelligence. If you happen to be somebody who is more introverted and isn't quite so gregarious around your colleagues at work that can be something that's quite difficult to change. But that doesn't mean you can't have emotional intelligence. It doesn't mean you can't be really good at asking good questions or listening to people. Quite often, the people who are perceived as having good emotional intelligence aren't as good at that side of it. And it's very rare that I meet somebody who is really good at arguing what they want and persuading their colleagues of things, they're very good at negotiating win/win strategies, they're very good at asking and listening, and they're very good at sympathising and empathising with their colleagues. It's a range of things, and most people aren't good at all of them. And so sometimes when our skills lie in the softer end of emotional intelligence, we don't value those as highly as those people who seem to be more gregarious and able to work more enthusiastically with colleagues. And so I think the secret to developing emotional intelligence is to think about how you can develop more emotional intelligence for yourself, not to think about how you can become more like the person who is good at it at the moment.



CPD is being done more often and in shorter forms. Is this simply pandering to shorter attention spans?

Alan: I'm not sure how to react to that. Maybe. I'm not sure that we should necessarily apologise for that and I'm not sure that people do have shorter attention spans, though I know we read that a lot. But I watch my kids, who are doing their A-Levels, and they are working much harder than I ever did when I was at school, so I slightly challenge that idea in any case. But it is something we hear a lot of, and if people do have shorter attention spans and that is the world we now live in, we need to find ways of staying up to date that work for those people and we can't just keep delivering the same old thing and then say it is their fault it didn't work for them. So I think we really need to think about people's learning preferences and learning styles, and work in ways to deliver content that works for them. I have also had to answer to the criticism that if you deliver things in really short, bite-sized chunks, it's difficult to deal with deeper, bigger pieces of learning. But as a publisher my experience is that no, you can't deal with a big topic in 15-minutes, but most topics can be broken down into much smaller topics that you can deal with in shorter amounts of time. So what's important there is to deliver something that, if you like, panders to the shorter attention span but you do that with an overarching structure that links several of those things together so becomes more than the sum of all its parts.

Jo: Yes, this is something we deal with at AB Magazine all the time too, and it's not just the pressure of short attention spans, but also the pressure of work and time poverty too.



My company has a small number of accountants. Should I use an in-house CPD function to develop in-house quality CPD training? What help is available?

Alan: I'll try and not do a straight pitch of my own service and be more balanced than that! But I think it's reasonable and not biased to say that if you have a small number of accountants, it is not cost effective to try and produce things yourself. ACCA have a range of CPD partners, I have a view as to which is the best of those but I won't share that, but they are all on the website and all of those, I imagine, certainly we would, but I imagine the others as well, have an off-the-shelf program of materials that you can use. But if you talk to them, they'd be interested in whether they can put together a package that will work especially for you as well. It's cheaper to buy things from any organisation, as they are. As soon as you start customising them or putting them into special types of bundles, they cost a bit more, but sometimes you can get something that's more relevant and appropriate.



How can we ensure that CPD provided by the employer counts and is recognised by the ACCA?

Alan: I think it's really important that you take responsibility, that we each take responsibility, for that ourselves. Employers will try to do things that are helpful and they'll try to provide things that satisfy the needs that you have in the ways that are appropriate but only you can really say whether you are complying with your own professional body's CPD regime, because you are the person who is a member of it. That said, ACCA's scheme is incredibly flexible and inclusive. So if you engage with a learning activity which is in some way verifiable, and it is relevant, and you can demonstrate that it can make a positive impact on your work, it counts.



How can we, in industry, get relevant CPD when the focus is often on practitioners and clients?

Alan: That is a good question and I know that a lot of particularly face to face sessions focus on technical briefings that are of particular relevance to people in practice. Personally, I've always been surprised by that because the stuff that I find most exciting and interesting is stuff that is more about financial management and management accounting, about cash management, and about the business strategy and organisational developments that go on, and that's one of the things we focused on really significantly, but again I point you at the ACCA website. There are loads and loads of resources there that are pointing at non-practice related issues.



How do accountants get operational or strategic exposure at work as part of giving finance professionals a better understanding of front-line services, so they are better placed to produce financial analysis that's relevant to their organisations?

Alan: That is a really good question and we spoke about this recently when we spoke about the whole idea around finance business partnering. I think it's fascinating how different organisations go about doing this. It's really important if you're going to play a business advisory role that you understand the business. That doesn't just mean the overall organisation, but also the various different business units that you might be operating in. For me, that means you've got to move people out of centralised finance departments where everyone sits together and embed people in the different business units so they can really get to know those. But once you've done that, it won't be enough because what we all tend to do is hide behind our professional knowledge and experiences and stick with that stuff. It's very unusual for someone to go into those roles and say "I'd like to spend some time being a sales person" or "I'd like to spend a couple of days working on the factory floor" or whatever it may be that you need to do to get to know the business. Two examples come to mind of organisations that do this in a really interesting way. One is Dyson, the manufacturer of various innovative products, who make all new employees spend a month working in the factory before they take up their role in the organisation. You can't work in Dyson unless you see the products being assembled. The advertising agency, Mother, make their employees change desks once a month so they're constantly sitting with different people. People at ACCA will be surprised by that because I know when they moved into their fantastic new offices at The Adelphi, everyone could hot desk and anyone could sit everywhere, every day. Now two years later, I think if you ask them, they'll say "we sit at the same desk every day". People are creatures of habit and they do that! So you have to think of creative and interesting ways to get people away from their everyday existence and their complacency around that to get them to engage with the rest of the business.



What if we provide and pay for CPD, and then the employee leaves because we've trained them?

Alan: What if you don't pay for CPD and they all stay? That is the traditional training manager's problem. You can say you'll train them and then they leave to work for someone else, but it's a bit of a negative way of looking at things. I'd much rather have a group of people who want to stay working for me because they think it's a great place to work and they'll get developed. And I will lose the occasional person and they will have been trained, but you can have some grown-up conversations about that. In my organisation, we've put people through training programs where it's been kind of implicit in the conversation that we expect them to stay for a certain amount of time after doing that training, especially with larger interventions, and we've talked about how they could help and feed back into their own work and develop the role that they have. And we have other people with who we have a definite conversation around "yes, maybe that will help us, but it will help you a lot" and so if somebody says "my next role that I'd like is this particular role" – well that might be a role you can't offer at the moment, but that doesn't mean you can't help them move towards that situation and you might have a conversation where you share responsibility for it. So I've had conversations where I've said that we will make a contribution to the cost, but I think this is something you might need to do in your own time. Or you might decide that you will pay for the whole of something but they will need to do it in their own time. There's a sensible conversation that acknowledges you don't have people for life and you train them and they might leave, but that doesn't mean you don't train them or provide any help.



How can we make sure that our staff do the professional development that we, as employers, need them to? We give them the resources but they don't do it!

Alan: We made the startling insight this year with our corporate customers that getting people to do what they paid for is a good idea. I'm being slightly flippant at our own expense, but one of the real focuses this year has been helping people to help the people who work for them to complete things. When people don't take up the resources that you provide for them, it doesn't mean that they're not interested. It probably means they thought it was a good idea but they haven't got round to it because there are other priorities. But just like anything you introduce as a new project or idea, you can't just tell people about it once, you must keep reminding them. You have to make sure you have decent reporting tools that tell you about whether people are using it or not. You have to make sure the provider you go to is going to contact them regularly. I know I'm blowing my own trumpet, but when people take out a team subscription to our service, they get reports letting them know who has used what, but also everyone receives an email weekly letting them know they have a new CPD bite available, so they know what they are being offered as they are hearing from us all the time. They really do have to quite stubbornly not engage to get to the end of the year and not have done something. Our aim is to get them to the end of the year having completed their CPD without even noticing they've done it. If they can do little and often, with 15 minutes completed while waiting for a meeting or on your commute, they can keep engaging with it throughout the year because you're helping fit it around their busy lives. But if you just give it to them at the start of the year and say 'Here it is' and it's forgotten about until the end of the year, you can't be surprised when they haven't all got around to doing it.



In my organisation we get general professional

development, but they don't provide the stuff that I need as an accountant. How can I persuade them to provide what I need?

Alan: I think this is probably down to the performance management system. If you can tie what you need as an accountant to the organisation's goals, then you are much more likely to get support. So keeping up to date with accounting standards could be tied to a move to FRS 102 or IFRS. Learning new excel techniques could be tied to a new initiative that you are charged with tracking and want to produce a great dashboard for. In the absence of a formal performance management system, you can still link CPD needs with things you are being asked to deliver to focus people's minds on why they want you to be as good as you can be.



In most of the organisations I work in, I encounter timing

issues for the courses I wish to attend - they tend to be around month end. Is there any chance ACCA organising them mid-month instead?

Alan: I am loving this question because it gives me the chance to end with a pitch. One of the issues with any face to face or live webinar type CPD is that it isn't always convenient. An online service like accountingcpd.net is available at any time and you can complete things whenever it's most convenient for you. An accountingcpd.net licence gives you a complete choice of topics and type of CPD resource, from 20-week pathways, through 4-hours courses to 15 minutes CPD Bites - all accessible via any device. It really couldn't be more convenient.

If you would like to ask us any other questions or would like to talk about the benefits of providing CPD for your employers please get in touch. accountingcpd.net offers a multi-user licence so organisations can provide quality, flexible CPD for their finance teams that each individual can tailor to their needs. An overview of the licence is available here: <https://www.accountingcpd.net/licence> and we also have a full brochure that you can download [here](#).