



# ACCOUNTING TECHNICIANS:

## Roundtable 5: Defining an AT Outcomes

Accounting Technicians  
Roundtable  
25 May  
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Confederation of Asian and Pacific Accountants (CAPA)

# Defining an AT: Summary Outcomes

- ✓ Consensus a common name/term/concept needed for general, global use:
  - compromise will likely be required
  - local variation can exist, however preferably under a common global banner
- ✓ In terms of common name, consider the risks in:
  - Using the current generally recognised name of 'AT'; or
  - Changing it completely
- ✓ A clear, succinct definition will support the positioning of the AT within the accountancy profession

## Slides 3 - 5:

Key responses to the specific questions, and challenges/thoughts arising from these

## Slide 6:

AT Tagline and Definition – revised post RDT5

## Slides 7 - 18:

Original slides presented at Roundtable 5

## **DEFINING AN AT**

**1. Acknowledging current differences in terminologies & programs globally, would you like to see (& would your organisation support) a common term/name for this cohort?**

### **Directly relevant responses:**

- i. A common brand (and/or a common certificate) signifying global recognition and quality would be supported
- ii. Significant benefits from a common name
- iii. Yes, but only if we can agree a method of assuring an equal and comparative equivalence

### **CAPA Thoughts**

- Any common term/name might benefit from one or more 'tag lines' that further assist in positioning/ differentiating ATs from PAs, for example:

**Accounting Technician** - A qualified, practical and technical operator essential to the accountancy profession

### **Relevant comments at RDT**

- To gain support of the profession, concentrate on a global term and concept, (recognising that there will be local variations)
- Position the definition of individual AT (not the qualification) in their own right

# DEFINING AN AT

## 2. Is 'Accounting Technician' the right term/name for the desired designation?

### Directly relevant responses:

- i. Certified Accounting Technician (CAT):
  - ✓ good brand name with strong recall
  - ✓ goodwill has been built around this name – why change?
- ii. Yes. A name change is not needed/required – could reduce recognition in those markets where the AT brand is well-known
- iii. For now, it is the right brand – and is entrenched in bylaws and regulations
- iv. AT is a globally recognised term. Suggest Technical Accountant might be a better fit (to avoid similarities to the use of Technician in other sectors):
  - ✓ Would sit well with CPA and CA
  - ✓ Would need global agreement and a competency framework

### CAPA Thoughts

- 'Certified' in title may indicate 'qualified' i.e. has a certificate - differentiates from an unqualified individual doing AT type work.
- PAs operate under various guises (CAs, CPAs) due to history, and maybe ATs can. However, in the circumstances, perhaps a common term/name would benefit everyone.

### Relevant comments at RDT

- Consider and balance risks between:
  - Using the current recognised name of 'AT'; or
  - Changing it completely
- A standard term may be needed for a definition and positioning, while varying designations exist 'on the ground' – just as with accountants (PAs) and the various designations CA, CPAs, CMAs.

# **DEFINING AN AT**

## ***3. How could the designation be defined?***

### **Directly relevant responses:**

- i. Use an existing accepted 'industry' definition e.g. Missouri State University\* or modify – ensure any definition reflects ATs in industry or in practice
- ii. Use of agreed key words or phrase – and a common legal designation
- iii. There may be a difference between ATs with and without statutory rights

\* Included in slides 10 to 12

### **CAPA Thoughts**

- Slides 10 to 12 include some existing 'definitions', many of which extend into descriptions of common roles and responsibilities.
- Suggest any definition:
  - ✓ Be relatively brief - an 'elevator pitch'
  - ✓ Differentiate ATs from, and position relative to, PAs
  - ✓ Provide a sense of competency
  - ✓ Provide a sense of role
- A draft definition was created for discussion - included as slide 16. Revised definition post discussion at slide 6.

### **Relevant comments at RDT**

- Need to be clear who the definition is being defined for which will determine the terminology used:
  - the accountancy profession; or
  - other stakeholders
- Recognise that ATs work in all sectors (public, private, not-for-profit) regardless of size of entity

# AT Tagline and Definition – post RDT discussion

## Tagline:

**Accounting Technicians** - Qualified, practical and technical operators essential to the overall accountancy profession

or

**Accounting Technicians** - Practical, technically-focused and appropriately qualified accountants, essential to the overall accountancy profession

## Definition:

**Accounting Technicians (AT)** are part of the overall accountancy profession, complementing more senior accountants across all sectors, or working independently in less complex environments.

An AT has successfully completed an appropriate program of education to develop competencies in financial and non-financial systems and processes, data management and the preparation of information for decision-making. As a member of a professional accountancy organisation, an AT is subject to professional responsibilities, including ethical and continuing educational development requirements.

## Suggestions to include:

### In the tagline:

- Global – the original definition is based on the individual – ‘overall’ ties better to the concept of the accountancy spectrum and to the definition
- Professional – we talk about the accountancy profession within the tagline

### In the definition:

- Public sector and SMEs as well as private sector, business etc – the suggested draft includes ‘across all sectors’
- ATs run own businesses – suggested draft includes ‘working independently’
- Behavioural and ethical standards – *The Code of Ethics covers professional behaviours as one of the fundamental principles*
- Use of word ‘Supporting’ may downplay an AT – amended to ‘complementing’
- Include both financial and ‘non-financial’ – amended

## **DEFINING AN AT**

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# EXAMPLE DEFINITIONS/DESCRIPTIONS

## **IFAC Good Practice Guide: The Education, Training and Development of Accounting Technicians (2009):**

*An AT is a skilled person who undertakes many of the day-to-day functions in the accounting environment. ATs may work alone in smaller organizations but in larger organizations usually work in support of senior accountants. ATs work in all types of organizations, including commerce and industry, government, public services and private practice. Accounting Technicians may progress to higher level jobs or qualifications once they have completed their technician level of training.*

## **IFAC AAT UK: An Illustrative Competency Framework for Accounting Technicians (Feb 2019)**

*An AT is an individual who plays a key role in the production of timely, credible, and reliable financial information for decision-making by senior accountants in large entities. They help the growth of organizations by delivering high-quality advice and financial information to support business planning, facilitate access to credit, and expand operations. ATs assist senior accountants, using manual or computerized systems to process invoices, receipts and payments, completing and submitting tax returns, managing payroll and expenses, producing monthly accounts, planning and controlling budgets, etc. The more experienced ATs may also advise on budgeting, tax compliance, audits and consulting, and all tasks requiring an understanding of systems and how they are best used.*

## **CAPA definition: Accounting Technicians: Exploring Opportunities for the Profession (2018)**

*ATs assist the more highly qualified professional accountant with routine tasks such as processing invoices, receipts and payments, completing and submitting tax returns, managing payroll and expenses, producing monthly accounts, and planning and controlling budgets. The tasks may be routine, but timeliness and accuracy are essential. The more experienced ATs may also advise on budgeting, tax compliance, audits and consultancy, all tasks requiring both an understanding of systems, and judgement as to how they are best used.*

# EXAMPLE DEFINITIONS/DESCRIPTIONS

## IPA Australia:

*ATs are qualified bookkeepers and BAS agents whose skills and experience are acknowledged as far more than just the traditional bookkeeper role of historical data entry and record maintenance. AT is a globally recognised term for professionals in the accounting industry and indicates the modernisation and evolution of bookkeeping into a more involved and proactive advisory role. An AT is qualified and skilled to support a successful business's bookkeeping and accounting needs in today's online and global business environment. ATs have evolved from bookkeepers and BAS agents to provide a range of services to support business owners such as general accounting functions, business process and systems analysis, software conversion and implementation, business advisory, software training, compliance, HR and payroll support.*

*CATs perform the functions of ATs and have completed further studies and the AAT bespoke professional program (CAT Program) and are qualified to hold a statutory registration as a Registered BAS Agent. CATs have the capacity to offer advice and support to small businesses and are held to professional and ethical standards and a legislated code of conduct.*

## Accounting Technician Ireland:

*An AT is someone who executes tasks in the areas of accountancy, finance, and taxation, to help prepare the work of accountants. An AT may work under the supervision of an accountant and is responsible for updating, checking and analysing financial records, which can then be utilised by accountants. As an AT, you can also offer independent accountancy services, which can give you an opportunity to help expand your professional portfolio. An independent AT can work on complex tasks, such as, consulting and advisory.*

## ACCA

*ATs work across sectors in private, public and not for profit organisations. They carry out a range of practical accountancy, financial and taxation work.*

# EXAMPLE DEFINITIONS/DESCRIPTIONS

## **SAICA: Accounting Technician:**

*An AT takes on the day-to-day practical work and plays a key operational role in producing reliable financial information. In larger organisations, this allows senior accounting staff to play a more proactive and strategic role. In smaller businesses, ATs will often be involved in all aspects of financial management, delivering high-quality financial information to support business planning, facilitate access to credit, and expand operations. ATs assist senior accountants, using manual or computerized systems to process invoices, receipts and payments, completing and submitting tax returns, managing payroll and expenses, producing monthly accounts, planning and controlling budgets, etc. The more experienced ATs may also provide information necessary for budgeting, tax compliance, audits and consulting, and all tasks requiring an understanding of accounting systems and how they are best used. ATs have successfully completed a prescribed program of education, training, and assessment, and will have access to CPD. They are subject to monitoring, investigation, and discipline to ensure adherence to international standards and codes of ethics. They work across organizations, in commerce and industry, the public sector, and private practice. Alongside the senior accountants, ATs often contribute to the sustainability, relevance, and credibility of an organisation.*

## **Missouri State University Definition\***

*The AT is based in a Financial Services unit and performs responsible and complex bookkeeping/accounting clerical, purchasing, and/or cashiering functions that require a thorough knowledge of federal and state regulations, University policies, and departmental operations, the exercise of independent judgment in the absence of established procedures, and discretion in the dissemination of information. Within an overall context of serving as a customer service representative of the University, the AT maintains diverse and detailed financial records and provides a variety of responsible clerical assistance in an assigned function such as accounts payable, accounts receivable/collections, payroll, cashiering/cash receipts, acquisitions and/or purchasing functions. The AT's work is occasionally spot-checked but is primarily reviewed through continuous or periodic audits and evaluations of final results and includes such functions as preparing, recording, and examining fiscal records. This job description is intended to indicate the basic nature of the positions allocated to the classification and give examples of typical duties that may be assigned. It does not imply that all positions within the class perform all of the duties listed, nor does it list all possible duties that may be assigned.*

# DEFINING AN AT SUMMARY

- ✓ Consensus that a common name and term is needed for recognition.
- ✓ Several new terms have been raised in the project:
  - Accounting Technician (existing)
  - Certified Accounting Technician (existing in some jurisdictions)
  - Technologist
  - Technical Accountant
- ✓ Difference in views regarding what the name / term could be:
  - a. Keep the term AT or CAT – it is widely recognised
  - b. Change to ‘Technical Accountant’ to differentiate from use of the term ‘technician’ in other sectors
- ✓ A clear succinct definition will support the positioning of the AT within the accountancy profession

## OTHER COMMENTS RECEIVED

One body uses both AT and CAT to differentiate based on responsibilities and rights, noting:

- AT is a global term which describes professionals performing general accounting roles, who are subject to CPD, ethical requirements etc.
- CATs have completed additional studies and hold a statutory registration enabling them to offer more services to support SME / other sectors

### Example Visual

Feature	Accounting Technician	Certified Accounting Technician (CAT)
Completed a Cert IV or Diploma	✓	✓
Performs accounting functions (monthly reports, bank reconciliations, tracking accounts payable and receivable, monitoring cash flow etc.).	✓	✓
Close contact with clients (typically small business)	✓	✓
Support work of public accountants and Tax Agents	✓	✓
Bound by professional and ethical standards	✓	✓
Maintain Continuing Professional Development hours	✓	✓
Hold BAS Agent Registration		✓
Completed CAT Professional Program		✓
Bound by legislated Code of Conduct		✓

# The Accountancy Profession

	The Accountant	The Accounting Technician
Typical Designations	CA, CPA, CMA	AT, CAT
Common Definitions	Leader of, or advisor to, accounting or audit activities	Undertake many day-to-day accounting operations
Typical Roles / Titles	CFO, Financial Auditor, Tax Advisor	Book-keeper, Financial Accountant or Tax Administrator
Key Differentiating Skills	Problem-solving, data interpretation, critical decision-making	Systems applications, data processing and management
Typical Education - Entry Requirements - Qualification Program	Entry – University degree  Program – higher end of any national qualification framework (NQF)	Entry – School or college certificate; non-relevant degrees  Program – up to mid- and higher- levels of any NQF

# AT Definition – draft to prompt discussion

*Accounting Technicians (AT) are part of the overall accounting profession, supporting more senior accountants across all sectors, or working independently in less complex environments.*

*An AT has successfully completed an appropriate program of education to develop competencies in financial systems and processes, data management and the preparation of financial information. As a member of a professional accountancy organisation, an AT is subject to professional responsibilities, including ethical and continuing educational development requirements.*

# Forward Program – What next?

## 1. Scene Setting

## 2. Imagining the Future

**Aim:** To explore ‘the future AT’

- ✓ Will there be a market need/demand for this type of accountant?
- ✓ What roles (and critical skills) are envisaged?
- ✓ What, if anything, needs to change in how this type of accountant is perceived?

## 3. Positioning the Qualification

**Aim:** To explore if qualified ATs can be established as a recognized element of the broader accountancy profession

- ✓ Why has it not become a widely recognised qualification?
- ✓ Can the related issues be overcome?
- ✓ How could the qualification become an established part of the professional accountancy supply chain?

## 4. Recognising the Benefits

**Aim:** To explore the benefits of ATs and if these warrant the separate recognition of ATs

- ✓ Can compelling benefits be identified?
- ✓ What stakeholders have an interest in this cohort of accountants?
- ✓ How do these support the concept of separate recognition?

## 5. Defining an AT

**Aim:** To explore a common definition for an AT'

- ✓ Acknowledging current differences in terminologies & programs globally, would you like to see (& would your organisation support) a common term/name for this cohort?
- ✓ Is ‘Accounting Technician’ the right term/name for the desired designation?
- ✓ How could the designation be defined?

## 6. Stakeholder Analysis – details tbc

# Forward Program

