

# Accounting Technicians

THE TIME HAS ARRIVED TO RECOGNISE THIS  
VITAL PART OF THE ACCOUNTANCY PROFESSION

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE  
ACCOUNTANCY PROFESSION



# Foreword

CAPA has had a long interest in Accounting Technicians (ATs). It dates back as far as 1987 when a technical assistance grant was provided by the Asian Development Bank to fund the development of training materials for ATs, using as its framework the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) International Guideline (IEG 7) on Education and Training Requirements.

In more recent times, research projects have revealed a significant interest in ATs amongst CAPA members – indeed, some Members and Affiliates are focused only on ATs, organisations that in relatively recent years became members of IFAC. Such organisations can be seen to flourish in developed economies, whilst for a long time development partners have been advocating the need for ATs in developing and emerging economies.

CAPA is of the view that there are enormous opportunities for the accountancy profession in embracing ATs and providing clarity around the position, role and attributes of ATs. More importantly, there are enormous benefits to the market, represented by organisations in the private and public sectors, including the providers of accounting and auditing services.

Accordingly, CAPA brought together a broad range of interested parties to discuss the situation, which led to an initiative and goal termed 'Achieving AT Recognition'.

What is meant by recognition? Recognition is achieved once there is widespread understanding of what an AT is and where ATs are positioned in the accountancy profession, accompanied with an unambiguous acknowledgment of the value of ATs.

This report discusses the issue, the case for recognition, a call to action and resultant suggested next steps.



*(Standing left to right) Diosdado Salvador, former CAPA executive director; Roberto L. Castillo, consultant; Eduardo Villanueva, CAPA past president; Manuel Perlas, ADB representative; Camilo C. Tierro, consultant; (seated left to right) Virginia T. Obcena; Charles Coe, ADB representative; Rosario Manahan, CAPA executive secretary.*



*Nine volumes of the Accounting Technicians teaching materials funded by the ADB grant.*

# Executive Summary

Accounting Technicians (ATs) - it is time to recognise this essential section of the global accountancy profession.

## THE REALITY ABOUT ACCOUNTING TECHNICIANS

Every country has individuals involved in accounting related activities that would normally be associated with an AT.

- The accountancy profession, in terms of the global, regional and national institutions that represent accountants, rarely make mention of ATs
- ATs is not a term recognised in all jurisdictions, and even where it is, is poorly understood
- ATs have historically been associated with the term 'book-keeper' and as a consequence there has been a blurring between those that are formally qualified and those that hold no qualifications

## MOVING FORWARD WILL NOT BE WITHOUT CHALLENGE

- Achieving recognition of ATs will be an enormous task, requiring the efforts and goodwill of many stakeholders addressing many matters
- Where AT programs already exist, these vary in nature, and hence quality, across jurisdictions. Whilst IFAC has issued an illustrative competency framework, there is no global benchmark to establish a consistent understanding of the minimum requirement for an AT designation. Well recognised AT organisations will desire others meet their standards if they wish to use the AT brand.
- For countries or PAOs considering implementing an AT program, there are many matters to consider: market demand and employer support; relationship to the Professional Accountant (PA) program; development and establishment costs, including possible sources of funding; and regulation. It also includes providing ongoing member services to retain members.

## THE OPPORTUNITIES AND BENEFITS ARE HUGE:

- For the profession - to enhance its sustainability through relevance, growth and public interest
- For employers in all sectors - to access the right skills for the job, improving efficiency and effectiveness
- For individuals - providing access to a career in accountancy that otherwise may not exist
- For society, markets and economies - increasing worthwhile employment, addressing aspects of inequality, and raising standards and economic growth. The impact on Sustainable Development Goals will be significant for many jurisdictions.

# Executive Summary (cont.)

The remainder of this study addresses the following:

- 1 Why widespread Recognition of Accounting Technicians is important
- 2 The Case for Recognition
- 3 The Call to Action
- 4 Next Steps

## RECOGNITION MUST START INTERNALLY – WITH THE PROFESSION:

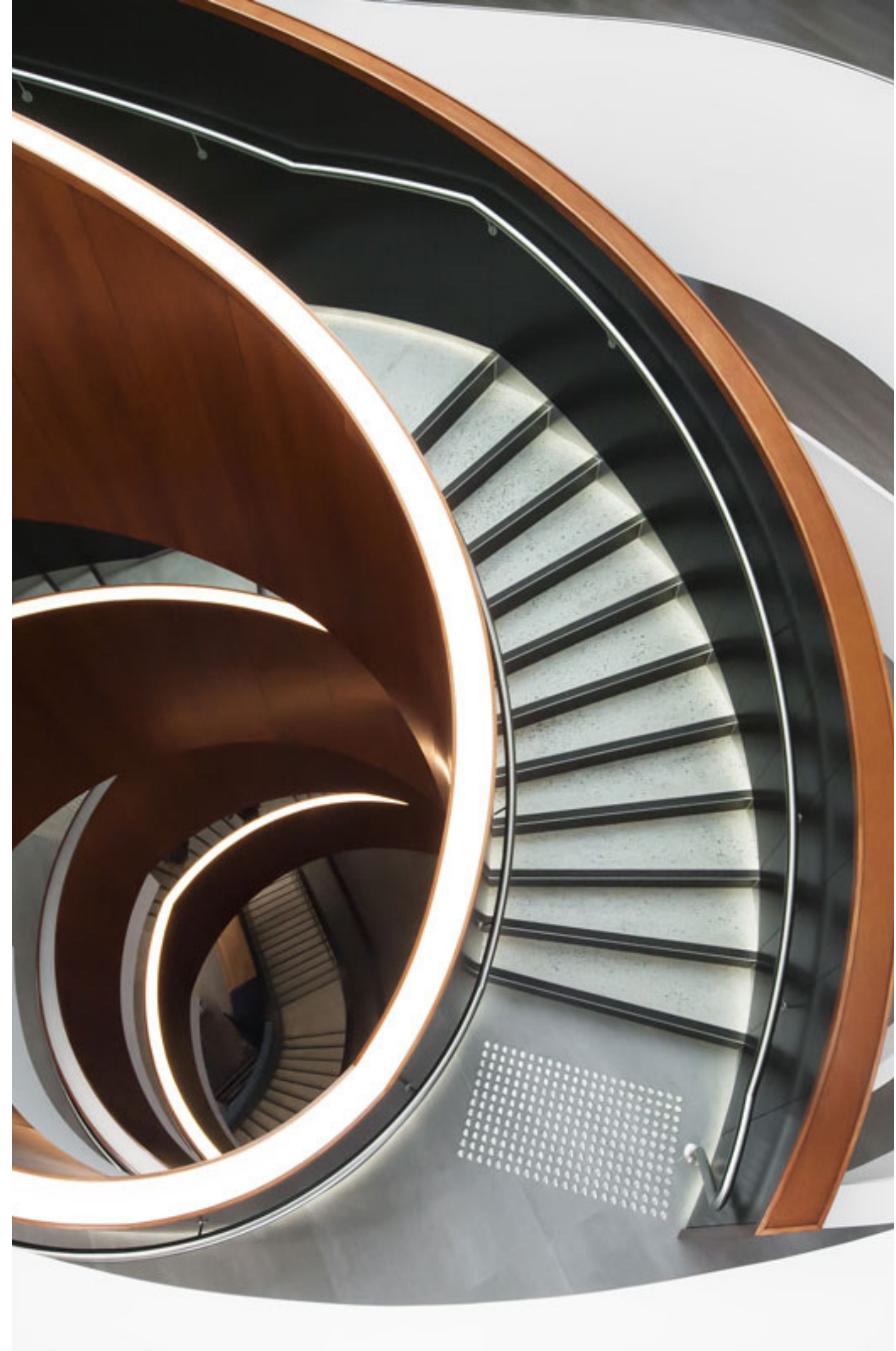
Leadership, coordination and collaboration will be vital, together with a willingness to invest. It is time to better define the accountancy profession, and address professionalising those without qualification that operate in the accountancy sector. There is a need to understand the delineation between ATs and those that are educated, trained, qualified and recognised to have additional responsibilities - for the purpose of this report referred to as professional accountants (PAs).

## ACTION IS NEEDED GLOBALLY, REGIONALLY AND NATIONALLY. SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS ARE:

- CAPA to engage in dialogue with IFAC on establishing or increasing global and local recognition of ATs
- AT interested PAOs to come together to drive the initiative forward. A number of PAOs have committed to work together to make this happen, and other organisations have expressed their willingness to support and collaborate with these PAOs. A coordinated group could consider and prioritise the following initiatives, and develop considered strategies and a roadmap, which may include the formation of a formal grouping of PAOs:
  1. the use of common terminologies and definitions
  2. increasing the awareness and understanding of ATs in the marketplace
  3. understanding and benchmarking current education programs
  4. the creation of minimum standards associated with the AT designation
  5. advocating for increased recognition of ATs
  6. collaborating to share resources, materials and ideas
  7. working towards commonality of programs to support mutual recognition
  8. consideration of a formal grouping of interested parties operating under a common branding

ACCOUNTING TECHNICIANS - THE TIME HAS ARRIVED TO RECOGNISE THIS VITAL PART OF THE ACCOUNTANCY PROFESSION

1  
WHY WIDESPREAD  
RECOGNITION OF  
ACCOUNTING  
TECHNICIANS IS  
IMPORTANT



*“Whatever their stage of economic development, all countries, across all sectors, have a workforce supporting the preparation of financial information at an operational level. Timely, credible and reliable information is fundamental to successful investment, to effective governance and to the quality-of-service delivery both by the workforce and by professional accountants that rely on it.*

*Training and professionalising the workforce is not just about benefiting individuals.... It is about benefiting national and regional economies, business and government and ultimately the public interest”*

Accounting Technicians: Exploring Opportunities for the Profession - CAPA, 2018

# 1 Why widespread recognition of ATs is important

The term “professional accountant” or “PA” is globally recognised – it is used to describe accountants who have studied with and are members of a nationally recognised Professional Accountancy Organisation (PAO), having attained a professional accountancy qualification and designation, such as CA, CPA, CMA, etc. Often offering services to the public, they tend to be regulated and therefore the public has a certain expectation of them.

In contrast, the term “Accounting Technician” or “AT” has some level of recognition, such as in certain jurisdictions or by a limited number of stakeholders. The AT name, role and type of qualification is not recognised in all jurisdictions, nor by all stakeholders relevant to the accountancy profession.

The International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) indicates that its membership of 180 PAOs, across 135 countries and jurisdictions represents more than 3 million PAs across the globe. It is not clear how many ATs (or equivalent designations) exist across the globe. IFAC research published in 2015 (Nexus 1: The Accountancy Profession Behind the Numbers) estimated that PAOs represented only one-third of those working in accounting related fields:

*“The remaining two thirds are, for example, people who identify as accountants – but whose jurisdiction may not require professional training or qualification – and people who identify their role as an accounting support function.”*

**The Accountancy Sector** therefore comprises PAs, ATs and others that have no accountancy related qualifications. This latter group is often seen as an issue for the profession, yet many in this group would be eligible for, and capable of, completing an AT program if one was readily available to them.

# Who are Accounting Technicians?

The words 'Accounting Technician' may mean different things to different people. In some countries this term is not used, and equivalent programs may go under a wide array of terms.

However, 'Accounting Technician' is the most common term in use and understood by key elements of the profession, including IFAC, and key stakeholders, such as development partners. Accordingly, this name has been retained for the purpose of achieving widespread recognition, and a common definition established to assist the understanding and awareness of ATs:

SUGGESTED NAME AND TAGLINE	SUGGESTED DEFINITION
Accounting Technicians - Practical, technically-focused and appropriately qualified accountants, essential to the overall accountancy profession.	Accounting Technicians 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.

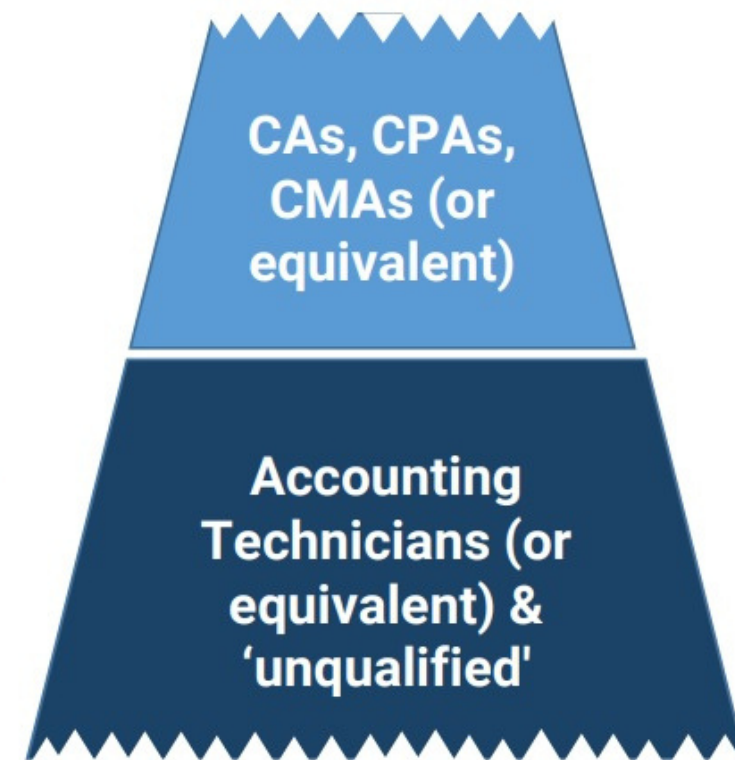
# The Accountancy Sector

There are many individuals who work in the field of accountancy, with a large proportion having no qualification at all and therefore are not members of a PAO. The opportunity exists to strengthen the overall accountancy sector, and in particular reduce the number of unqualified accountants that operate in the sector.

## The Current Situation

All 'Qualified'\* and many are members of a PAO\*\*.

The majority are not 'Qualified' and not members of PAOs.



## The Opportunity

To source aspiring accountants from the pool of qualified ATs.

To 'professionalise' the unqualified and embrace qualified ATs as members of PAOs – growing the membership.

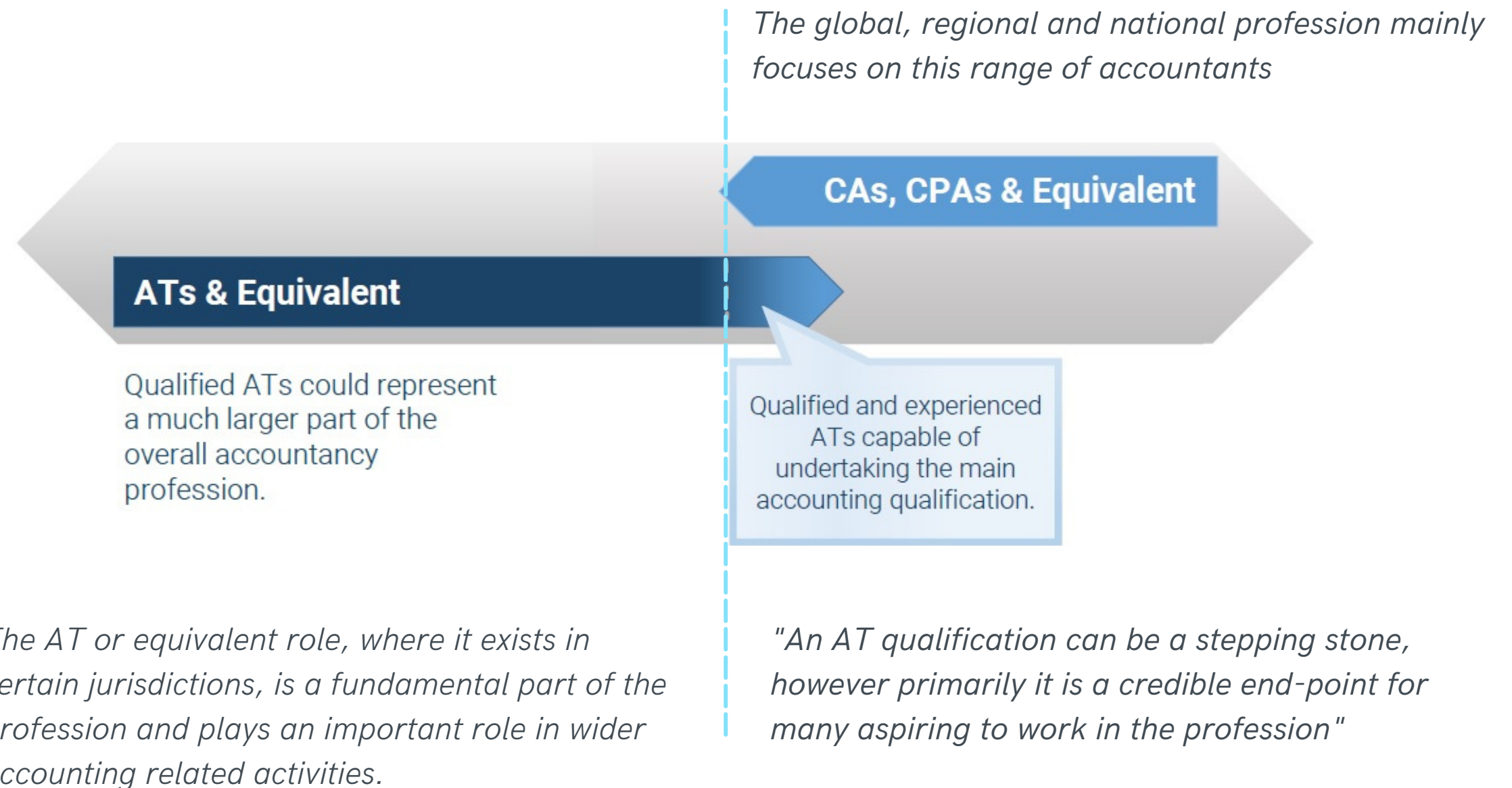
\* Successfully completed a formal, structured education program and examinations

\*\* Professional accountancy organisations as recognised by IFAC



# The Accountancy Profession

PAs and ATs that have successfully completed their respective education programs and qualifications operate across the spectrum of the accountancy profession. An intersection will always exist where both PAs and ATs may operate. Clear differentiation of PAs and ATs will ensure this intersection is relatively small in the total breadth of the accountancy profession, and will often reflect the practical experience of PAs and ATs at respective stages in their careers.



# Differentiating the PA and AT

Achieving recognition of an AT will require a clear understanding of the difference between PAs and ATs. The market needs to understand the difference. Importantly, PAs need to understand the difference, acknowledging the value an AT provides as part of the accountancy profession, including working with, and complementary to, PAs.

	The Professional Accountant	The Accounting Technician
<b>Typical Designations</b>	CA, CPA, CMA	AT, CAT
<b>Common Definitions</b>	Leader of, or advisor to, accounting or audit activities	Undertake many day-to-day accounting operations
<b>Typical Roles / Titles</b>	CFO, Financial Auditor	Book-keeper, Financial Accountant or Tax Administrator
<b>Key Differentiating Skills</b>	Managing complexity - strategic problem-solving, critical decision-making	Managing data - systems applications, processing, analysis, report production
<b>Typical Education</b>	Entry - University degree or recognised qualification, e.g. AT Program - usually 3 years, higher end of any national qualification framework (NQF)	Entry - School or college certificate; non-relevant degrees; or mature students in existing finance roles requiring career progression Program - usually under 2 years, up to mid- and higher- levels of any NQF

*"ATs and PAs are not competitors - they are complementary, each supporting the work of the other. The benefit to PA's working with well trained ATs is significant - knowing what to expect technically and ethically to efficiently deliver services to organisations and clients."*

# Accounting Technicians - the current landscape

CAPA research over a number of years has allowed a picture to emerge of the current landscape, which can be characterised as being variable and uncoordinated:

- Education programs and qualifications go under different names in different countries – whilst the underlying focus and standard may be somewhat similar
- Very few dedicated AT organisations exist – nearly all are supported by a national PAO. Within IFAC membership these are based in the UK, Ireland, Pakistan and Sri Lanka
- AT programs are embedded in many national PAOs – beyond the dedicated AT organisations, a reasonable number of PAOs have some form of AT type program. Some partner with other PAOs to access programs
- The number of ATs within PAO membership is low – in some PAOs, ATs may be excluded from membership altogether, or have limited rights
- Pathways usually exist to progress from AT to PA – some evidence suggests this is a growing source of students to the PA programs
- The apparent lack of emphasis on ATs, and low number of ATs in membership, can reflect:
  1. Perceived competition issues – some PAOs are concerned that an AT cohort will take the work from their PA members.
  2. Retention challenges – some organisations that do offer the AT program have struggled to retain the ATs as members. As with PAs, it is important there is a clear value proposition in retaining membership
  3. Lack of information – some PAOs have not considered AT programs and membership due to a lack of understanding

International recognition is a prerequisite to acceptance, coordination and advancement.

TYPES	EXAMPLES
<p><b>Separate AT organisations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sponsored (now or previously) by a national PAO</li> <li>• independent of a national PAO</li> </ul>	<p>Australia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, United Kingdom and Ireland</p> <p>National Institute of Accounting Technicians (Philippines)</p>
<p><b>Embedded within a national PAO</b></p>	<p>Accounting Technician (AT) – CA ANZ Advanced Certificate in Accounting and Finance (ACAF) – CPA Canada Certified Accounting Technician (CAT) – ACCA Certificate in Finance, Accounting and Business (CFAB) – ICAEW</p>
<p><b>Partnering to deliver</b></p>	<p>ACCA delivers with approximately 13 PAOs, e.g. KICPAA Cambodia</p> <p>Pakistan Institute of Public Finance Accountants (PIPFA)</p>

The above types and examples are taken from the CAPA publications below, and the situation in any country can change over time. The CAPA publications provide detailed insight into the landscape, especially across Asia Pacific:

- 2018: Exploring Opportunities for the Profession
- 2020 Update: Recent Developments

# The Market for Accounting Technicians

Whilst unqualified accountants may currently hold some of the following roles, for reasons ranging from trust and confidence, skills and abilities, it is increasingly in the interest of these entities to have appropriately trained and regulated accountants, and indeed it is in the public interest. Many are involved in public interest entities, or public sector organisations responsible for public monies, or large firms providing services to the public; others are the sole person operating within an SME or part of a small practice. Accordingly, any reference to an AT must be seen as a reference to an appropriately trained and qualified person.

The activities undertaken by ATs can occur in all markets:

## PRIVATE SECTOR

- Corporates, including public interest entities – often supporting PAs within large accounting departments. Roles may include data management, analysis and reporting, increasing involving the use of sophisticated technology and systems.
- SMEs – potentially the only ‘accountant’ within the business, maintaining the ‘books’, banking and reporting in situations where on a daily basis the size and complexity does not warrant, and the business cannot afford, a PA.

## PUBLIC SECTOR

- In developed countries, the same situation and opportunities arise as in the private sector.
- In developing and emerging countries, the ability to attract any accountants is challenging, especially where the only available recognised accountants are PAs. Yet the demand for skilled accountants in these countries is growing substantially alongside the demand for improved public financial management, including the introduction of accrual accounting

## ACCOUNTING SERVICES

- Accounting firms, of all sizes – to perform defined roles or to support the work of PAs. Large firms make use of centres based offshore to undertake various tasks, including tasks associated with audit and tax. ATs do and can fulfil many of these roles.
- ATs could also be self-employed and provide defined or specified services allowed under legislation, such as the preparation of tax filings for individuals

## Developing or Emerging Economies

Where education systems may not be strong, and the profession is small and/or maturing, PAs are in short supply. Often, in these same jurisdictions, the economy is largely represented by SMEs and the public financial management systems are weak. The combination of these factors tends to demand ATs more so than PAs.

## The Impact of Technological Change

Some commentators have suggested that technology, particularly the advent of artificial intelligence, may render the role of ATs obsolete. Whilst technology is expected to impact many aspects of the accountancy profession, just as with PAs, the view that emerged during this project was that the role of ATs will continue to evolve, using technology within their work, but far from having technology replace them. Without any evidence to the contrary, the parties involved in this project could only foresee an increase in opportunity given the relatively poor capacity currently existing in many countries.

ATs in some countries have progressed to general management positions with significant responsibilities – the accountancy training having equipped them well to understand the financial aspects of their roles.

# The Opportunity

The opportunity exists to embrace ATs within the accountancy profession, and in so doing, strengthen the overall profession. This includes increasing the overall supply of accountants, much needed in many markets. It includes ensuring PAs are better placed to do what they do best – to provide strategic advice and to make the important judgements.

Formal and widespread recognition of ATs as part of the accountancy profession is needed. The opportunities include:

<b>To provide a workforce that is fit for purpose</b>	>> the right people with the right qualifications and the right experiences to be present in the right place, at the right time, at the right cost.
<b>To promote a common baseline</b>	>> which may include common terminology, definition, program design and competency requirements
<b>To professionalise the 'unqualifieds' and strengthen the AT cohort</b>	>> increasing quality through appropriate qualification programs, and requirements for continuing professional development and adherence to international standards, especially ethics.
<b>To 'regulate' ATs</b>	>> through PAO membership or regulatory frameworks
<b>To increase supply</b>	>> to meet growing demands, and strengthen the sustainability of PAOs

The opportunity addresses matters of quantity and quality, for the benefit of many.

# Success stories - where opportunities were taken and recognition achieved

## UNITED KINGDOM

The impetus to address unqualified accountants carrying out basic accountancy functions came from employers. They put pressure on PAOs within the UK to recognise this junior and mid-tier level of accountants and do something to 'professionalise' them. PAOs took on this challenge and created the Association of Accounting Technicians - now AAT. The Government also provided support and funding. It was recognised that there were many non-graduates who were carrying out key roles in finance functions in both the private and public sectors. Training providers became involved in this venture by delivering the AT qualification (ATQ) program.

### SUCCESS FACTORS:

- Recognition by stakeholders of the need in the economy to properly train this level of accountant.
- Recognition that skills were needed at a different level.
- Collaboration of stakeholders: Government, PAOs, Training Providers.
- An understanding that stakeholders needed to be influenced at different levels to make this work.

## SOUTH AFRICA

The South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) recognised the need for ATs in the public sector (PS). Working with the National Treasury (NT). SAICA funded the development of the PS ATQ and the NT funded certain students as part of a pilot project. SAICA aligned the ATQ with the government's technical competency framework which establishes the minimum competencies that finance officials need to maintain their employment. The PS ATQ was created incorporating 60% of the mainstream ATQ and 40% PS specific content. SAICA registered the PS membership designation with the regulator to allow for it to be regarded as a key milestone.

### SUCCESS FACTORS:

- Recognition by the PAO of the need for ATs in the public sector
- Collaboration with the appropriate government departments, regulators and funders
- Creating a PS ATQ with specific public sector related content
- Creating and registering a new PS ATQ designation with the regulator to give it appropriate status

ACCOUNTING TECHNICIANS - THE TIME HAS ARRIVED TO RECOGNISE THIS VITAL PART OF THE ACCOUNTANCY PROFESSION

# 2 THE CASE FOR RECOGNITION



Recognition would align to, and be an important contributor to, achieving aspects of the IFAC 2022-2023 Strategic Plan:

**A STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE ACCOUNTANCY PROFESSION**

FOCUS AREA	ACTIONS
<p><b>PAO Resilience and Adaptability</b></p> <p><b>Outcome:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong and sustainable PAOs able to equip their members for the future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance and grow IFAC membership that supports the accountancy profession at all levels and sectors</li> <li>• Support PAO Capacity building and development</li> <li>• Provide ongoing member engagement support to enable future ready PAOs and professionals as well as customised member engagement to align IFAC and PAO priorities</li> <li>• Advance accountancy education to maintain IES standards and support PAO educations initiatives</li> </ul>

Extract from the IFAC 2022-2023 Strategic Plan

# 2 The Case for Recognition

Any case for change is founded on the benefits expected to arise.

PAOs in countries where ATs already exist have been able to identify a wide range of benefits accruing to a wide range of stakeholders. These are portrayed in the following 'benefits matrix' and includes:

- Increasing the overall supply of 'professionalised' accountants in whom others can have increased trust and confidence
- Addressing specific scarcity of accountants, such as in the public sector or in developing countries
- Enhancing the sustainability of PAOs with increased activity and membership
- Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the accountancy supply chain, better aligning the required skills to meet needs, and at the appropriate cost
- Increasing employment opportunities for non-graduates interested in accountancy, including pathways to a PA
- Increasing opportunities for mobility
- Improving the quality of information for decision-making, with opportunity to reduce fraud and corruption, as a result of more accountants having a qualification and a requirement to stay up-to-date and also to behave ethically

Many of these benefits align to sustainable development goals, another significant reason for pursuing this initiative, which puts it front and centre as a matter of public interest.



# Recognition and the Public Interest

The accountancy profession as a whole is relied on to engender trust in organisations and financial markets. Professionalisation of a workforce that can be recognised as ATs, including demonstrated technical competence and adherence to ethical values, contributes greatly to this.

## PAO GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT REPORT



MOSAIC: THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING TO STRENGTHEN ACCOUNTANCY AND IMPROVE COLLABORATION

PAOs, as an integral part of national financial infrastructure, hold the potential to provide a significant contribution to the financial, economic and social development of their countries, regions, and the world. When PAOs function appropriately, they (amongst other things):

- Act in the public interest; and
- Develop and produce capable and competent accountancy professionals.

PAO Global Development Report - 2013.

**Serving the Public Interest is core to the work of IFAC and its members**

IFAC states:

*"A robust and well-functioning accountancy profession, composed of competent and capable professionals supported by a strong PAO, contributes significantly to the sustainability of small, medium and large business; sound capital markets; effective stewardship of public finances and delivery of public services; and ultimately, economic growth."*

Accounting Technicians: Exploring Opportunities for the Profession - CAPA, 2018

# Recognition and Sustainable Development Goals

If the accountancy profession has a duty to act in the public interest to support and contribute to the financial infrastructure, economic growth and social development of their jurisdictions, a critical question is: where will these opportunities and future workforce come from and how will people gain access to these opportunities?

The introduction of AT programs addresses a number of SDGs, and whilst the largest impact may involve developing and emerging economies, they are also relevant in more developed economies.

The Accountancy Profession can take the lead in creating:

- these opportunities for future generations that may not have equal and equitable access in their jurisdictions;
- good quality educational programs and pathways (from the bottom up) and provide flexible entry points to allow access to a larger, more diverse talent pool (including for women and girls);
- decent work and career opportunities which, in turn, enables economic growth and development of countries and helps to alleviate poverty



Social and intergenerational mobility is an important factor in the creation of a healthy economy – allowing individuals and families to create their own wealth and helps to end poverty over time.



Inclusive and equitable educational opportunities, and professionalising the workforce is fundamental to increasing the long-term quality and quantity of finance staff.



Flexible entry points and different methods of learning allows women and girls equal access to education and career opportunities.



The right people, with the right qualifications at the right time supports the economic growth of countries.



More flexible criteria to accounting qualifications allows access to a larger, more diverse talent pool and helps to reduce inequalities within and between countries.

# The Benefits Matrix

Key categories of benefits have been identified, with societal good being added to the traditional measures of cost, quality and quantity. Key stakeholders have also been identified, and the benefits accruing to these stakeholders are explored later in greater detail.

STAKEHOLDERS*		BENEFITS			
		ECONOMIC		PUBLIC INTEREST	
		Supply	Cost	Quality/Professionalisation	Societal Good
PROFESSION	PAOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased membership</li> <li>Improve sustainability</li> </ul>	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce the 'unqualified'</li> <li>Increased confidence in profession</li> </ul>	N/A
	Firms	Right person for the job	Reduced cost of service	Appropriately trained**	N/A
BUSINESS	Corporates	Right person for the job	Reduced cost of operation	Appropriately trained**	Economic growth
	SMEs	Right person for the job	Reduced cost of operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriately trained**</li> <li>Better information</li> </ul>	Economic growth
	Public Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Right person for the job</li> <li>Ability to attract finance personnel</li> </ul>	Efficient cost of operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to trained, qualified finance personnel</li> <li>Better information</li> </ul>	Improved PFM
SOCIETY	Individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employment opportunities</li> <li>PA Pathway opportunities</li> </ul>	N/A	Recognised qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Career opportunities</li> <li>Mobility</li> </ul>
ALL	N/A	N/A	N/A	Reduce fraud & corruption	Impact various SDGs

\* Relative impact on stakeholders varies by jurisdiction, particularly across developed or developing economies

\*\* Includes training in ethics and for those in membership, requirement for Code of Conduct compliance and CPD

# BENEFITS

## - To the Profession

- AT programs, targeted towards a different level of educational accomplishment, yet capable of undertaking important functional roles in the area of accountancy, increase the overall capacity of the accountancy of profession. The 'Qualification Ladder" illustrates how this can work, and includes the opportunity to allow students that do not complete a PA program, often referred to as 'part-qualified' to potentially be recognised as an AT
- Evidence also exists indicating ATs are a good and increasing source of entrants into PA programs.
- AT programs also provide the opportunity to reduce the "unqualified and unregulated" accountants operating in the accountancy profession
- For PAOs, there is the opportunity for increased membership, resulting in a more sustainable accountancy profession, at a time when competition to attract talent into other areas is high, and PAOs need to benefit from economies of scale
- For accountancy firms, there is the opportunity to utilise the right person for the right job, thus supporting more efficient and effective operations (reduced costs). A number of large accountancy firms operate hubs in certain jurisdictions to undertake certain activities at low cost - the opportunity to 'professionalise' these workers should be attractive to firms and clients
- For PAs, there is the opportunity to efficiently and effectively partner with other accountants with the right skills, whether in business or in practice
- Overall, the introduction of AT programs with the opportunity to reduce the number of persons that operate as 'accountants' without appropriate qualifications and training, can only increase trust and confidence in the profession

"PAOs with broad membership (e.g., auditors, management accountants, accounting technicians, financial statement preparers, public sector accountants, internal auditors) are working to meet the needs of their professional members and their economies."

"A broad-based profession offering different education requirements, assessment, and practical experience suited for the different areas of emphasis within the profession provides personnel who are "fit for purpose" offers the opportunity to enhance the profession, and builds the membership base of PAOs, which allows for self-sustaining operations."

PAO Global Development Report - 2013

# An AT program expands access to the Profession

A 'qualification ladder' opens up opportunities to all and widens access to the profession, often supporting social mobility and helping to narrow the gender equality gap.

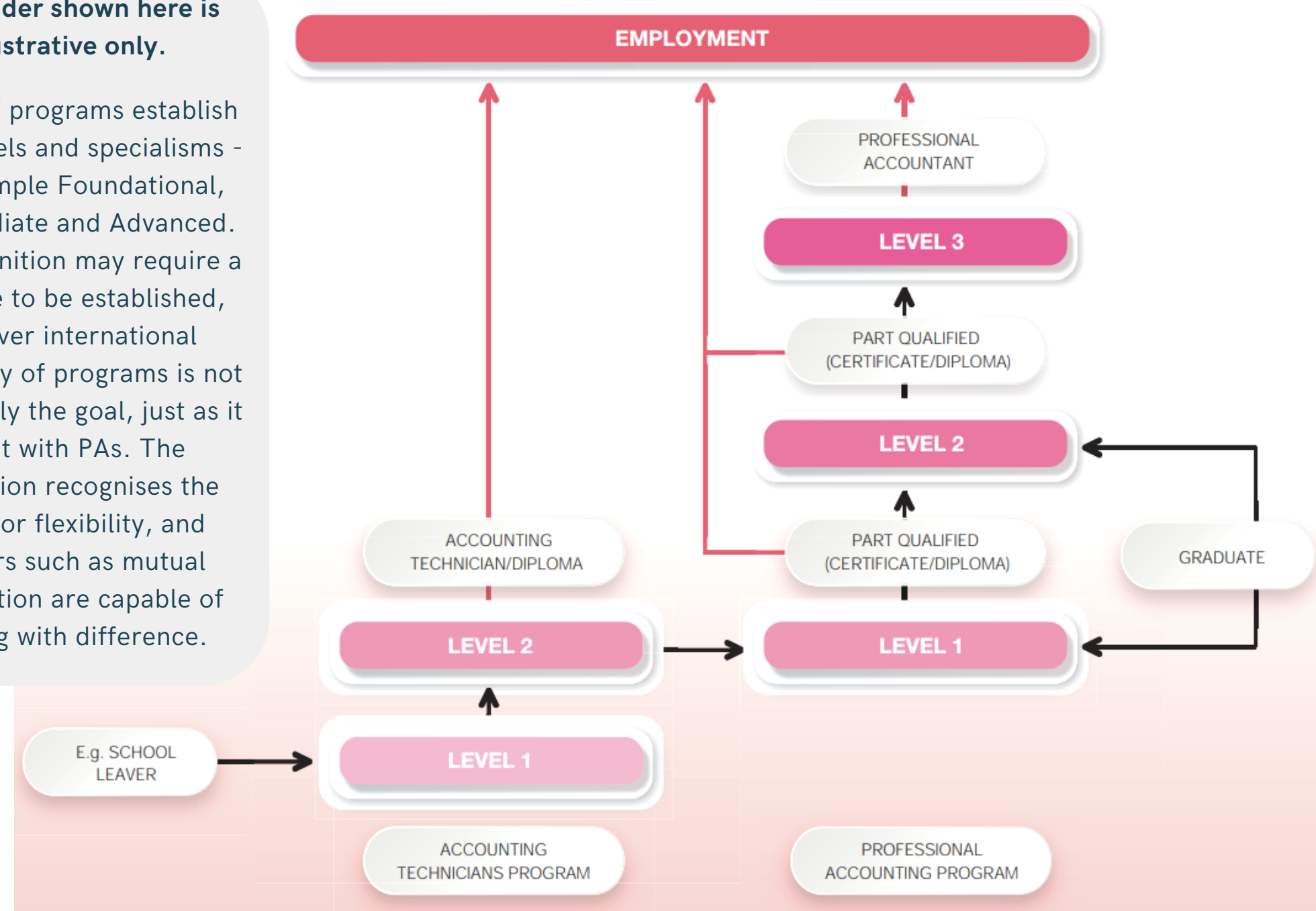
PA entry requirements are stringent and specific - therefore the talent pool is limited.

Multiple entry and exit routes minimise barriers to qualifications, including:

- School leaver/higher education/mature students have ready access to AT programs. Many governments are emphasising apprenticeship and vocational training programs
- ATs may choose:
  1. no further studies and enter the workforce with a recognised qualification; or
  2. continue with further studies and enter a PA program, probably receiving credits (exemptions) for prior learning
- Graduates that enter but do not complete the PA program may be eligible to be recognised as an AT (particularly where the term 'part-qualified' has no or limited recognition or standing)

**The ladder shown here is illustrative only.**

Some AT programs establish other levels and specialisms - for example Foundational, Intermediate and Advanced. AT recognition may require a baseline to be established, however international uniformity of programs is not necessarily the goal, just as it is not with PAs. The profession recognises the need for flexibility, and matters such as mutual recognition are capable of dealing with difference.



The Maturity Model in Action: Professional Qualification - CAPA, 2022

# BENEFITS

## - To Business Sector/Employers

The business sector, comprising public, private and not-for-profit organisations, represent the key employers of any type of accountant. The benefits to the business sector will therefore drive the success of ATs as part of the accountancy profession. Given the relatively poor understanding of the difference between ATs and PAs, the efforts of PAOs to explain the differences will also be vital.

In terms of benefits, the following emerge:

- **Increased capacity** – access to a greater number of skilled accountants, with varying skill levels and attributes. Supply challenges will vary by country. They will also vary by sector - with known challenges in attracting PAs to the public sector in many countries, ATs are a very viable alternative, with opportunities to make progress in improving PFM in many countries
- **Increased quality** – businesses employ persons in financial roles that have no specific qualifications, nor any professional requirements, such as ongoing training or ethical/code-of-conduct compliance. AT programs and membership address this, with benefits such as producing better information for decision-making, and reducing the risk of fraud and corruption.
- **Right person for the right job** – in terms of relevant training for the required role, at a cost appropriate to the skill level. Businesses pay for what they need.

These benefits, associated with efficiency and effectiveness, all contribute towards economic growth and prosperity.

## - To Society

- The ability to access both ATs and PAs, and hence the right person for the right job, lowers the average cost of the accountancy supply chain.
- The availability of an AT program increases the options for non-graduates, leading to good employment opportunities, which in certain circumstances may address issues of family poverty. In some countries, this may be particularly relevant in terms of opportunities for females.
- Improves information for decision-making and hence economic growth, and the opportunity to reduce fraud and corruption. In the public sector, this translates to the better use of public finances and taxpayer revenues.

## - To Individuals

- An AT program, combined with pathways to a PA program, provides:
  1. entry opportunities to a greater array of interested and aspiring accountancy students, or mature age persons often with work experience in various accountancy roles
  2. opportunities to progress to a PA program for those who wish to advance further
  3. exit paths for those unable to complete a PA program, however are regarded as 'part-qualified' yet could be recognised as an AT
- Qualification and PAO membership provides access to a profession and the ensuing benefits of employability. This also includes opportunities for global mobility.

ACCOUNTING TECHNICIANS - THE TIME HAS ARRIVED TO RECOGNISE THIS VITAL PART OF THE ACCOUNTANCY PROFESSION

# 3 THE CALL TO ACTION



# 3 The Call to Action

**A concerted effort will be required to achieve widespread recognition of ATs.**

Recognition needs to initially be achieved within the profession itself - those with significant control or influence over the direction of the profession. It will require leadership, champions of change, collaboration and commitment.

**Global recognition will drive local recognition.**

Using global messages, PAOs can tailor them to their context to achieve local recognition.

**Recognition from the profession is key, yet is also the greatest challenge that needs to be overcome. Recognition is not insurmountable if the matter is understood, acknowledged and properly addressed.**

ATs do not currently have a recognisable 'brand'. Therefore many stakeholders do not understand ATs, nor the benefits that ATs bring.

'Trust' and 'confidence' in the work of accountants is paramount. Many persons work in the accountancy sector without having undertaken any formal accountancy qualification.

ATs are already part of the accountancy profession, with a number of PAOs that are members of IFAC providing AT programs. However, the understanding of these programs, where they fit in, and the benefits ATs provide to many stakeholders, is not widespread. Indeed, in some countries ATs are simply 'not recognised' and yet, in reality, many persons do exist and operate in the sector with characteristics similar to an AT. Professionalising this cohort, through the provision of an appropriate program of education and qualification is in the public interest.

The time has arrived to recognise this vital part of the accountancy profession. Recognition will create the understanding that is required for PAOs to take interest and make AT programs available, as well as to influence the demand for ATs by educating stakeholders in respect to AT skills, roles and benefits.



# The Journey towards Recognition

Recognition is achieved once there is widespread understanding of what an AT is and where ATs are positioned in the accountancy profession, accompanied with an unambiguous acknowledgment of the value of ATs.

Many stakeholders therefore need to reach a position of understanding, including understanding the difference between ATs and PAs, including:

<b>The Accountancy Profession</b>	> to understand training, qualification and membership opportunities
<b>Governments and regulators</b>	> to understand any required legislative changes
<b>Academia</b>	> to understand program requirements
<b>Aspiring accountants</b>	> to understand career options and opportunities
<b>Employers/firms</b>	> to understand skill and role differences
<b>The Public</b>	> to know what they are getting and what to expect



Key Stakeholders relevant to the overall goal of 'Achieving AT Recognition'

# The Journey to Recognition – the role of different stakeholders

## FIRST AND FOREMOST:

- **The Accountancy Profession:**
  1. IFAC to provide leadership, espousing the opportunities and benefits
  2. IFAC Network Partners to leverage the work of IFAC
  3. PAOs to recognise the opportunities and benefits, to seek to include in membership, and to create the local demand and supply
- **Government and Regulators**
  1. To formulate and enact any required legal or constitutional arrangements.
  2. To provide any guidance or frameworks necessary to implement the legislation

## THE USERS:

- **Employers**
  1. Private sector – corporates and SMEs
  2. Public sector and NGOs
  3. Accounting firms and practitioners, and Supreme Audit Institutions
- **Recruiters**
  1. Recruitment firms
  2. Human Resource departments

## THE SUPPORT ACTS:

- **Institutional organisations:**
  1. Standard setters – particularly education standards
  2. Development partners – to support and assist their establishment in some countries

## THE SUPPLY CHAIN:

- **The Education Providers**
  1. Secondary and Tertiary institutions
  2. Private Training organisations
- **Students**
  1. School leavers
  2. Mature age students

All leading to recognition by the public and society in general.

# Who needs to do what?

The immediate key players and high-level requirements are :

## IFAC - to lead the dialogue

- to promote that ATs have a clear and legitimate role within the accountancy profession
- to position ATs relative to PAs and appropriately include in the vision and strategies for the profession
- to advocate to members to consider introducing or strengthening AT programs/memberships
- to ensure ATs are appropriately included in existing education standards and associated frameworks or guidance

## Existing AT program providers (PAOs) - to drive forward recognition efforts

- to promote a common understanding of what/who an AT is, and what they provide
- to promote consistent language and aim towards consistency in programs and designations by proposing minimum education standards and any other required criteria, ie. an international benchmark
- to lead, share, advise and support other PAOs

## IFAC Network Partners - to support and leverage the messages and work of IFAC, and support their members address recognition of ATs

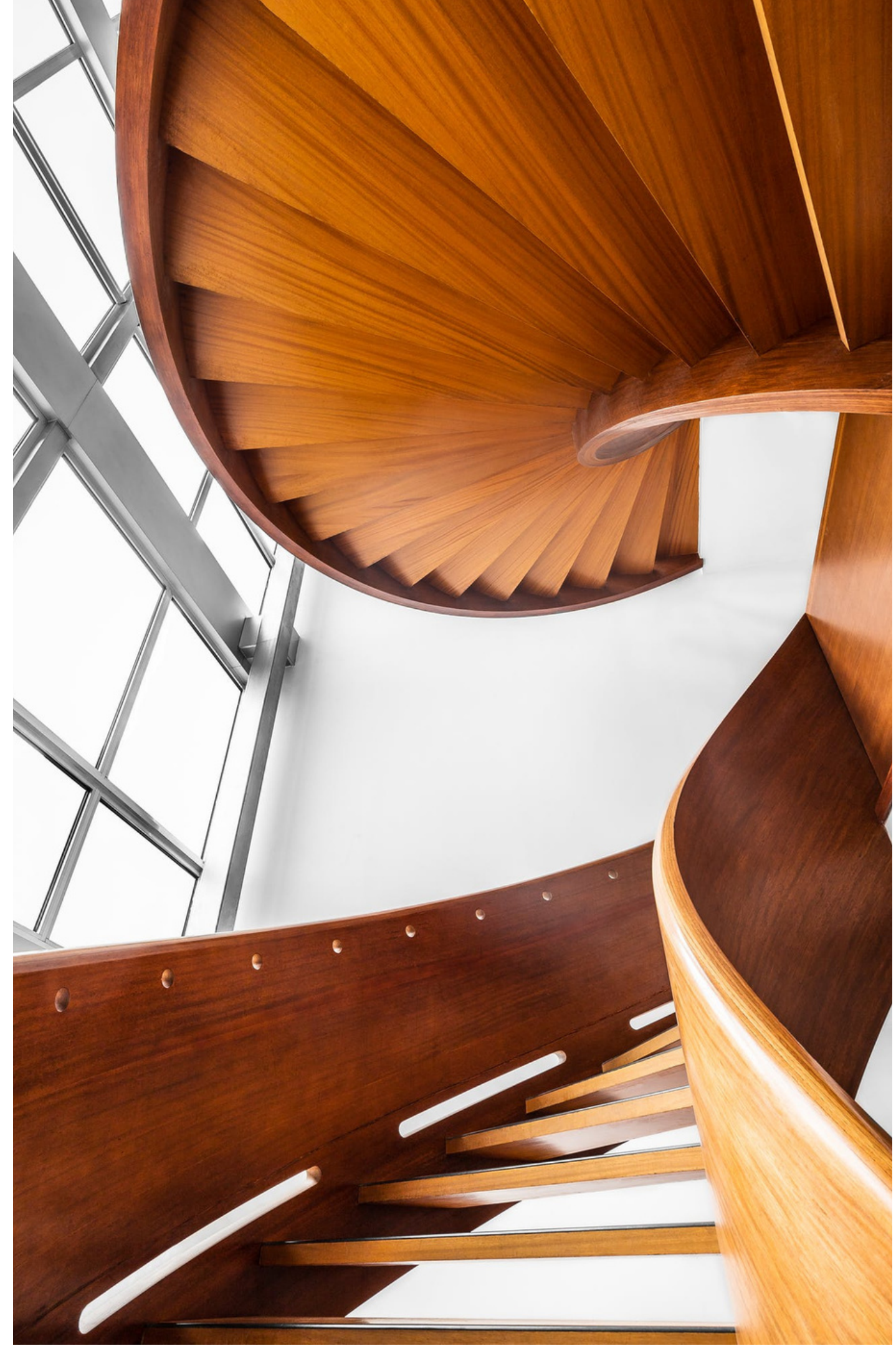
These stakeholders are well placed to collaboratively consider value propositions, necessary investment requirements, relevant awareness, marketing and branding activities, qualification programs, consistent terminologies and understandings, market needs, and so much more.

## Other PAOs - to consider, and as appropriate, introduce AT programs and memberships, working with:

<b>Existing members</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to properly position and align the AT designation, garner support and address any concerns</li> </ul>
<b>Governments and Regulators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to ensure any necessary legal frameworks accommodate ATs</li> </ul>
<b>National education standard-setting organisations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to ensure ATs are included in national frameworks</li> </ul>
<b>Development Partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in jurisdictions where financial and technical support may be available</li> </ul>
<b>Education Providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to align secondary and tertiary education with AT programs and assist promote to students</li> </ul>
<b>Training Providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• as appropriate, to design and deliver AT programs</li> </ul>
<b>Employers and Recruiters</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to promote ATs and explain where they fit in the accountancy supply chain</li> </ul>

ACCOUNTING TECHNICIANS - THE TIME HAS ARRIVED TO RECOGNISE  
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# 4 NEXT STEPS



# 4 Next Steps

Due to the interest of its members, CAPA has taken both a leadership and a coordination role to date in respect to considering ATs within the accountancy profession.

Whilst CAPA will remain active in this area as a regional leader, the matter now requires global consideration if wider recognition of ATs is to be achieved. **A key next step therefore is for CAPA to share this work with IFAC and engage in a dialogue regarding establishing or increasing global and local recognition of ATs.**

Further, the AT community needs to be coordinated, active and visible. This will be very important as the AT sector develops, for which there are clear signals of this happening in Africa, and potentially in Asia, with ongoing encouragement by the World Bank. There is a timely opportunity to influence and support future developments. Mature AT organisations have much to offer, and in doing so can ensure the AT sector and the AT designation is well defined. International recognition requires a common understanding of the AT sector and a common expectation of quality as defined by competencies and training programs.

Achieving acceptance of minimum standards of proficiency or capability underpinning the AT designation will not be easy. In some jurisdictions programs have been established whereby the qualification sits just below the professional accountancy qualifications as denoted, for example, by the CA and CPA brands. Where national qualification frameworks exist, this positioning can be very clear.

In other jurisdictions, the AT program may have been in existence for many years, and the AT designation may be well recognised nationally, however this may not mean the program is equivalent in educational learning when compared to programs in other jurisdictions.

In developing and emerging economies, it is accepted that AT programs can be well suited to meet the needs of the jurisdictions, providing a supply of individuals trained in accountancy that otherwise may not arise. However a program that meets national needs may not necessarily be equivalently positioned in an international context.

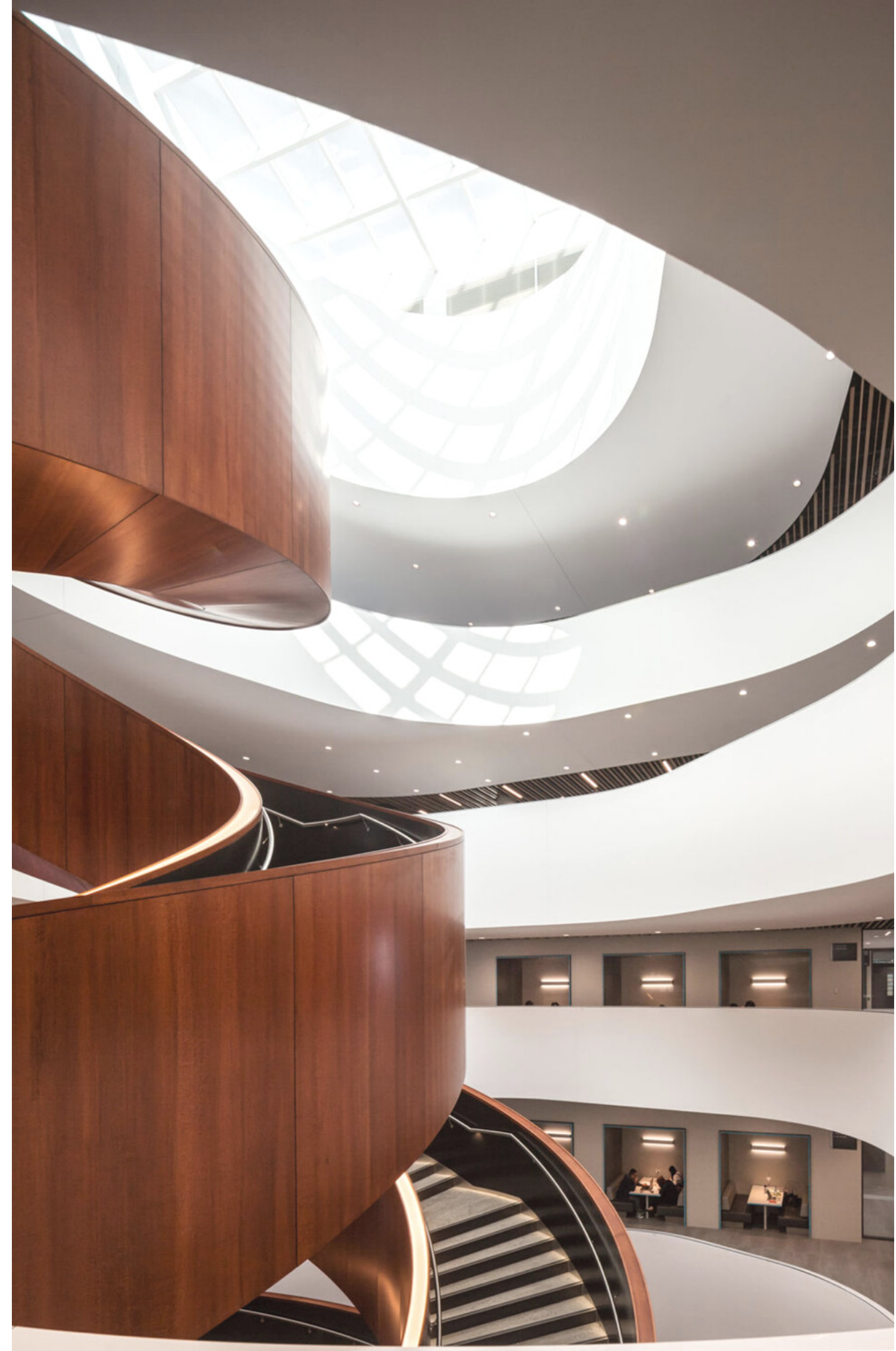
A comparative assessment of programs established in different countries has not been undertaken. This would therefore need to be a future task as part of a broader initiative whereby organisations with an interest in AT programs work closely together to achieve a mutual objective. Whilst international uniformity is not necessarily the objective, in some cases this work may suggest that certain programs should be improved to attain minimum standards and mutual recognition. **Another key step is therefore for interested parties to come together, to help each other, and to drive this initiative forward.**

The following are suggested matters a coordinated group could consider and prioritise:

MATTERS TO ADDRESS	COMMENTARY
1. The use of common terminologies and definitions	The AT sector is not well understood - common language will assist greatly
2. Increasing the awareness and understanding of ATs in the marketplace	Both within our own profession and importantly with employers
3. Understanding and benchmarking current education programs	To understand the current level of consistency in quality
4. The creation of minimum standards associated with the AT designation	Including education, exams, ethics, competencies and experience
5. Advocating for increased recognition of ATs	Currently poorly recognised globally, regionally and nationally
6. Collaborating to share resources, materials and ideas	To accelerate change and convergence
7. Working towards commonality of programs to support mutual recognition	Implementing change and improvements to support international recognition
8. Consideration of a formal grouping of interested parties operating under a common branding	To advance mutual benefits - structured similar to other groupings with a common purpose, e.g. Chartered Accountants Worldwide

ACCOUNTING TECHNICIANS - THE TIME HAS ARRIVED TO RECOGNISE  
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# APPENDICES



# CAPA and Accounting Technicians

## CAPA'S MISSION:

To enhance the value of the accountancy profession in Asia Pacific by:

- Contributing to the development of Professional Accountancy Organisations (PAOs)
- Promoting ethical values and the benefits of high-quality accounting, reporting and assurance
- Speaking out as the voice of the accountancy profession

## CAPA'S WORK IN RELATION TO ACCOUNTING TECHNICIANS

CAPA's interest in ATs dates nearly 40 years. More recently, it has continued to encourage a better understanding of the AT sector and to encourage PAOs to consider the importance of ATs as part of the wider accountancy profession. CAPA's recent work includes:

- Accounting Technicians: Exploring Opportunities for the Profession publication - 2018
- Accounting Technicians: 2020 Update: Recent Developments publication - 2020

Through the research behind these publications, it has been clear that a strong AT cohort is beneficial to the economy, government, businesses and individuals - and is in the public interest. The level of activity and interest in ATs is high in the Asia Pacific Region. The Pan-African Federation of Accountants (PAFA) indicated, through its research more recently, that there is also a high level of interest in ATs in Africa.

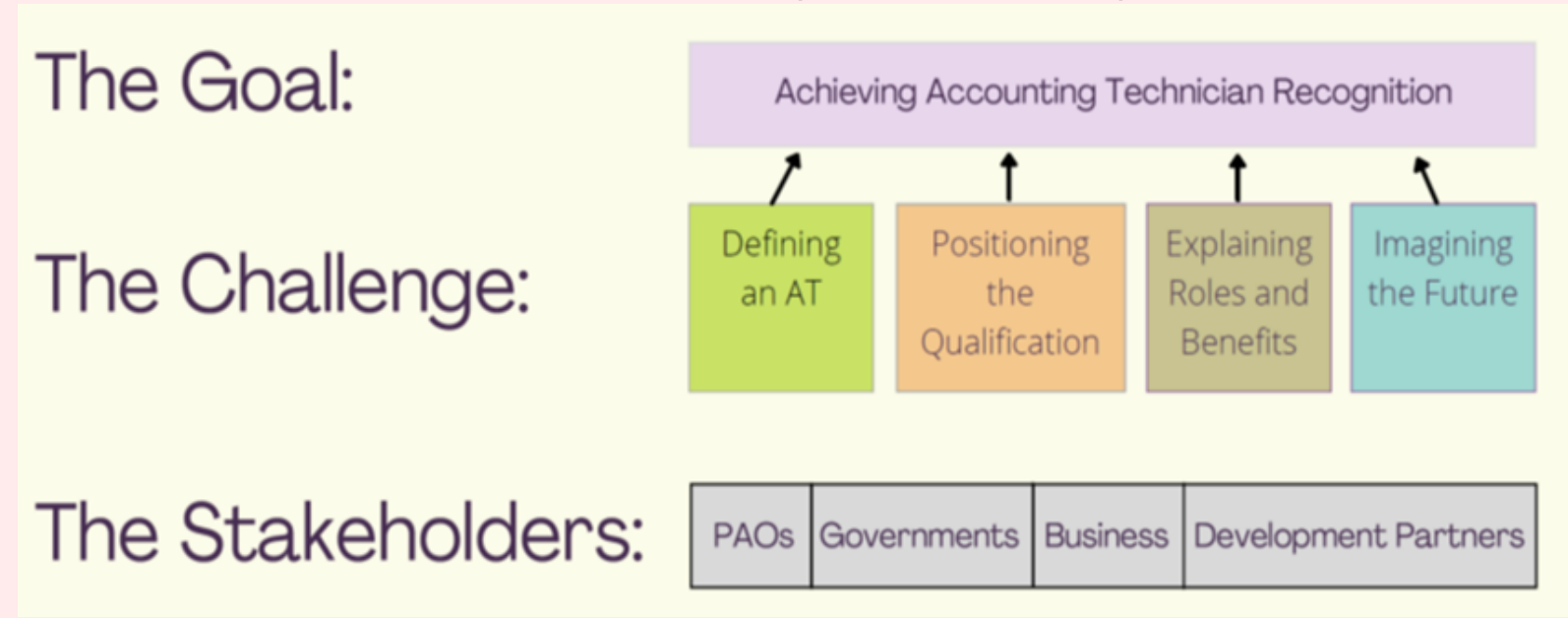
In July 2021, CAPA held a webinar, Accounting Technicians: Where to, from here? to explore what more, if anything, could be done to raise the profile of Accounting Technicians. Attended by PAOs mainly from Asia Pacific, Africa and the UK, together with representatives from the World Bank, the conclusion of the webinar led to a challenge and a goal - to examine and succeed in 'Achieving AT Recognition'.

## THE PROJECT - TO CONSIDER THE GOAL OF 'ACHIEVING AT RECOGNITION'

From late-2021 to mid-2022 a series of roundtables were held to strategically and systematically consider a range of relevant matters related to the goal, specific challenges and stakeholder roles.

At the roundtables were representatives for PAOs listed on page 32 as well as representatives from IFAC and PAFA.

The outcome of these discussions is captured in this report.





## Commitments

The following organisations that participated in the development of this document have expressed a willingness to drive this initiative forward:

- Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT United Kingdom)
- Association of Accounting Technicians of Sri Lanka (AAT Sri Lanka)
- Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)
- Accounting Technicians Ireland (AT Ireland)
- Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand (CA ANZ)
- Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)
- Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nepal (ICAN)
- Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Sri Lanka (CMA Sri Lanka)
- Institute of Public Accountants (IPA)
- National Institute of Accounting Technicians (NIAT)
- Pakistan Institute of Public Finance Accountants (PIPFA)
- South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA)

The following organisations have expressed a willingness to support and collaborate with others in promoting global and local recognition of ATs:

- Confederation of Asian and Pacific Accountants (CAPA)
- Pan African Federation of Accountants (PAFA)
- The World Bank

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Confederation of Asian and Pacific Accountants (CAPA)



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