



Association of Accounting Technicians:

Communication on Engagement

AAT report on support for the UN Global Compact for the 24 months ended 31 August 2019



Dear Mr Secretary-General,

I am pleased to confirm that AAT reaffirms its support to the United Nations Global Compact and the Ten Principles.

This is our first Communication on Engagement with the United Nations Global Compact since becoming signatories in 2017.

In this Communication on Engagement, we outline the activities AAT has taken to support the UN Global Compact, its Principles, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

AAT is the world's leading professional body for accounting technicians. We work across the globe with around 144,000 members in more than 100 countries. Our members are represented at every level of the finance and accounting world including students, those people already working in accountancy, and self-employed business owners. There are 4,250 licensed AAT accountants providing accountancy, tax and business advisory services to more than 400,000 British businesses.

AAT members are ambitious, focused accounting professionals, many occupying senior, well rewarded positions with thousands of employers – from blue-chip corporate giants to public sector institutions.

This communication focuses on our activities in relation to the UN Sustainable Development Goals which we have used as the basis for developing the AAT Responsible Business strategy.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Farrar".

Mark Farrar
Chief Executive

Description of Actions

In initially developing the AAT Responsible Business strategy, we undertook workshops with key stakeholders to identify the Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs) most material to the aims and activities of our organisation.

These are:

- Quality Education (SDG4)
- Reduced Inequalities (SDG10)
- Gender Equality (SDG5)
- Partnerships for the Goals (SDG17)

Quality Education (SDG4)

Quality education underpins everything AAT does. As a [qualifications provider](#) AAT is committed to maintaining and developing education which is relevant, forward thinking and, most importantly, open to all. The popularity of AAT's qualifications and continuous regulatory recognition are measures of that ongoing commitment.

Reduced Inequalities (SDG10)

AAT recognises that all businesses have a part to play in providing access to work experience and associated skills, particularly for those without access to traditional networks via family, friends etc. For the last two years, AAT has run a paid internship programme in the organisation, working with schools in some of the most disadvantaged London boroughs.

In providing learning and qualifications that are open to all, AAT recognises that supporting social mobility is integral to the ethos of AAT activities. In addition to encouraging accountancy qualifications through less traditional routes, AAT is an active signatory within [Access Accountancy](#), an organisation made up of proactive accountancy firms and professional bodies with the aim of offering large numbers of work experience opportunities, and career paths, for those from more socio-economically deprived backgrounds. Shortlisted for a UK Social Mobility award 2018, Access Accountancy has provided tens of thousands of hours of work placements.

AAT recognises that socio-economic factors are not the only barriers to equality and mobility within accountancy, and have produced a series of [member-led videos](#) telling stories of how AAT qualifications helped individuals in difficult circumstances to improve their life chances, including mental health problems, disability, long-term unemployment, redundancies and career changes.

In 2015 AAT initiated, and continues to lead, an annual roundtable meeting to highlight and discuss the benefits of alternative roles and pathways in the accounting professions. Regular participants include Professional Accounting Organisations from around the world, IFAC, Regional Associations and donor bodies such as the World Bank.

This forum aims to build understanding of how the development of skills across a wider community working in accountancy can help improve standards, support public institutions and help sustain professional organisations in developing economies.

In July and August 2019 AAT produced a series of communications to members and more widely, under the banner 'Power Up', focusing on a wide range of social mobility issues including disability, entrepreneurship, diversity and inclusion, unconscious bias, cognitive bias, and the role of accountants in promoting social mobility.

As well as equality within the profession, AAT is committed to promoting more general awareness of the value, in terms of sustainability and resilience, of a diverse workforce. Within the organisation this has taken place via a number of staff learning activities including awareness around: unconscious bias; LGBTQA+ awareness; disability awareness; mental health awareness. AAT also pays all staff the UK National Living Wage.

Gender Equality (SDG5)

In the UK, businesses with more than 250 staff are required in law to publish details of their [gender pay gap](#). In support of gender equality in the workplace, AAT took the decision to publish our gender pay gap figures, despite not being obliged to do so.

AAT is a key supporter of the [Women in Finance Charter](#), being one of the first 100 organisations (and first accountancy body) to sign up, including giving evidence to the UK Treasury Select Committee.

Partnerships for the Goals (SDG17)

AAT is a member of a number of International Accounting bodies around the world championing the role that Accounting Technicians can make to the profession. Part of our work with the Confederation of Asia & Pacific Accountants (CAPA) has been to support the understanding and importance of Accounting Technicians in the region. We embarked on research in 2017 and in 2018 we supported CAPA in the publication of a Guide "[Accounting Technicians: Exploring opportunities for the Profession](#)" which was launched at the World Congress of Accountants in November and distributed across the region. These activities help raise awareness of alternative and non-traditional paths into accountancy, which are particularly important in places where strong primary and secondary education infrastructures may not exist.

AAT is a member of the Institute of Business Ethics AAT which promotes high standards of business practice based on ethical values. They raise awareness of business ethics through the dissemination of knowledge and good practice.

Rule of law (SDG16)

A further key activity of AAT, which touches on many of the SDGs, is the activity as an anti-money laundering (AML) supervisor. AAT commits significant resources in providing training and guidance for our members to help them understand the AML regulations under which they operate. The UK National Risk Assessment has identified financial services, including accountancy, as high risk areas and AAT is committed to working with law enforcement agencies and other professional bodies to promote understanding and compliance, and to impose penalties where appropriate, in an effort to fight the scourge of money laundering and the socially destructive activities from which the money is derived.

Ethical Behaviour

Every AAT member must adhere to our [Code of Professional Ethics](#) in all of their professional and business activities, whether paid or voluntary. AAT members are expected to demonstrate the highest standards of professional conduct, and to take into consideration the public interest, at all times. Ethical behaviour is vital in building and maintaining public trust and upholding the reputation of the accountancy profession.

Other activities

- Supporting the Prompt Payment Code in advance of any reporting requirements (SDG8).
- Development of numerous SME support tools, particularly the independent [Informi website](#) (SDG8).
- Reduced use of plastics within our premises (SDG12).
- Working with our building owners to increase use of renewable energy (100% renewable electricity sources) (SDG13).
- Using procurement to embed changes in our supply chain and seeking more local procurement in areas such as catering (SDG8 & SDG13).
- Measuring and reporting carbon footprint of business travel (SDG13).
- In seeking to lead by example, we have worked with our suppliers, and recently updated contracts to ensure that those suppliers we use have committed to paying Living Wage rates and have up-to-date Modern Slavery policies (SDG 8, SDG16 & SDG18).
- AAT has introduced a number of staff well-being activities including yoga, self-defence, mindfulness, team-based exercise challenges, and an improved volunteering policy aimed at both individuals and teams (SDG3).

Thought leadership

AAT considers thought leadership to be a key responsibility to AAT members, and to the many tens of thousands of clients and employers they service and engage with. AAT aims to be a bold and knowledgeable voice.

Specific examples of thought leadership activity include a wide range of written resources:

- [AAT Comment](#) Articles on topics such as:
 - *Bookkeeping and social mobility;*
 - *How accountants can combat modern slavery;*
 - *How to recognise and prevent money laundering.*
 - *Mental health in the workplace.*
- [Articles](#) on the destructive societal impact of ‘dirty money’
- Working with the UK government [Flag it Up](#) campaign to raise awareness of money laundering
- [‘Accounting for Good’](#) publication (2016) highlighting how research shows that the accountancy profession can be a force for social good.
- Various responses to IFAC (International Federation of Accountants) highlighting the need to prioritise public trust, independence and public good.
- [Numerous responses to government consultations](#) on a wide variety issues including fair tax, money laundering, economic crime, single use plastics and fair pay.
- Article in AAT magazine on combatting ocean pollution