



Equipping students with the right tools to thrive

QP is a key ingredient in the recipe for success for the accounting profession.

Helping students future-proof their career

To help accountants thrive in the ever-changing business world, the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants has recently announced the reform of its Qualification Programme (QP).

Dr. Shirley Kan, Director of the Professional Accountancy Programme at the Chinese University of Hong Kong Business School, believes the reform is a step in the right direction to help young accountants excel in the profession.

Though Dr. Kan started as a tax assistant assessor with the Inland Revenue Department in the 80s, she has chosen to devote her accounting career to teaching. She has more than 30 years of experience in delivering and designing curriculum to nurture young talent into professional accountants.



About the CPA

Name:	Dr. Shirley Kan
Job title:	Director of the Professional Accountancy Programme, School of Accountancy, The CUHK Business School

Dr. Kan notes that integrating the knowledge acquired from study with the real-life challenges one would face in the workplace is a major hurdle for fresh graduates. She thinks the new version of the QP does a great job of helping young accountants address this issue through the Capstone workshops.

“The three-day workshops put a lot of emphasis on developing and assessing students’ higher-order enabling skills and ability to excel in the real-life working environment,” says Dr. Kan.

The workshops inspire students to integrate knowledge and skills they have acquired with real-life working experience through a series of interactive case studies. One of the goals of the workshops is to equip young accountants with the necessary skills to overcome challenges in a professional setting. A key element of the workshops is testing students’ understanding of ethical issues as an accounting professional. Students are given real-life cases involving the practice of ethics in professional type situations. By being placed into real-life cases, students are expected to have a much more in-depth understanding of business ethics.

“I advise students to take full advantage of the resources provided by the Institute. Getting the most out of the Capstone workshops will go a long way in helping one develop a career in accounting,” says Dr. Kan.



The newly added Associate Level of the QP offers an alternative pathway for students from various education backgrounds to pursue a career in accounting. This level provides structured training for sub-degree holders and non-accounting majors to become certified public accountants. This alternative option will attract more people to join the profession, ensuring a sustainable supply of talent.

“There is no question the new version of the QP is more challenging, but it is able to well-equip students for the future. It enhances the employability of students by providing them with the crucial knowledge and skills they need to excel in the accounting profession,” says Dr. Kan.

Changing with the times

Looking ahead Dr. Kan sees technology as a major force in shaping the future of the profession. The trend of artificial intelligence (AI) replacing jobs has been a popular topic of date. She does not see accounting jobs being replaced by machines any time soon, instead, she sees the possibility of AI taking over lower level of accounting jobs, giving way for accounting professionals to focus on the higher level strategies.

Globalization has also led to the outsourcing of basic level accounting jobs to other regions. Dr. Kan thinks today’s accounting professionals need skills to effectively communicate with diverse groups of people such as the outsource partners. “No longer only talking face to face, we need to communicate in virtual meetings with people from different cultural backgrounds,” she says.

Dr. Kan adds that knowledge on corporate governance is gaining importance as authorities from around the globe continue to tighten regulations and disclosure rules. “There is a keen demand for talent in these areas. Fresh graduates must learn about it,” she says.

Finding work-life balance

It is not surprising for young accounting professionals to be overwhelmed while trying to find a balance between developing their careers and studying for the QP. Dr. Kan’s advice is to form study groups to prepare for the professional examinations.

“Accountants work as a team, so they should also study as a team. Having mutual support from people who are facing the same challenge is very inspiring,” she says.

On handling work pressure, Dr. Kan says everyone should have a hobby to help him or her blow off steam. Long-distance running is a popular hobby among accountants, and she herself has participated in a few 10 kilometer races.

“Long-distance running is a great hobby because it inspires one to be persistent, a great quality to have in life and in career development. At the beginning, one might think it is impossible to run 10 kilometers. But after achieving their goal, one will find it very satisfying and become inspired to set and achieve higher goals. It is a great exercise for the mind and the body,” she says.

Interview and reporting by Wong Yat Hei