

BEYOND YOUR STUDIES: HOW AAT HAS HELPED ME

Whether you're just starting out with your studies, you've nearly completed each level, or you're now an MAAT, we look at some of the advantages of being an AAT member...

Words: Annie Makoff-Clark



Sharon Davis works as an assistant accountant and is currently studying AAT Level 4.

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For anyone pursuing a professional career, being a member of a professional industry body will always have its benefits, not least because having prestigious letters after your name demonstrates your credentials. From networking opportunities, professional development to accessing support and advice, members can reap the rewards, not just during study but after they've qualified too. AAT membership is no different.

As one of the world's leading professional bodies for accounting technicians, AAT provides its 130,000 international members with support and resources on a global, national and regional basis through its 580 AAT-approved training providers and regional branch network. At regional level, the UK branch network – 49 in total – enables members to access local support and training and network with other AAT members in their local area. At global level, international students can access AAT distance learning opportunities by enrolling with an AAT-approved training provider in their country.

Membership isn't just for during your studies, though. Members continue to enjoy AAT benefits throughout their accountancy career. To this end, we spoke to three AAT members at different stages of their journey to find out how ongoing membership has helped them – and how in turn it can help you, too.

Building up confidence

Sharon Davis, assistant accountant at the Manchester headquarters of the Co-operative Group is currently studying AAT Level 4 after having a six-year career break to bring up her daughter. She'd been keen on pursuing a career in accountancy ever since she was at school, but experienced a few knock-backs along the way.

"A careers advisor told me I'd never make it as an accountant because my school

grades weren't very good," she recalls. "But when I left school, I found out that you don't need to have certain grades to enrol with AAT, so I joined. It was a no-brainer."

Although it would have been possible to start at Level 3, Sharon says she wanted to start from the very beginning, if only to build her confidence up slowly. "I'm one of those people who is dead keen on learning new things and I'm pretty good at taking things on board and picking things up quickly, so it just made sense to start from the beginning."

Making use of resources

Sharon has made use of the greenlight tests and mock exam practice papers available through AAT. She has also found the AAT Facebook groups particularly useful – not just to network and get to know other AAT students, but to be part of a community where everyone helps each other out. The examiner reports have been an invaluable resource for her as well.

"The examiner reports go through every practice question and identify where students might be going wrong, as well as suggesting how to pick up easy marks," she explains. "So with the synoptic exam, it said students tend to focus too much on financials and need to develop their answers much more. The synoptic exam requires a lot more detail. So that really helped me prepare."

AAT is currently launching a new Lifelong Learning Portal for students and training providers, which will include podcasts, videos and links to individual study folders. It will mean that students like Sharon can benefit from more AAT resources aimed at supporting students on their journey to becoming qualified accountants.

Study support

May Argyle MAAT, audit and assurance at Bishop Fleming Accountants found AAT's study support videos really helpful when she was working towards Level 3 and 4. More of these videos will be available in the new

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CONVERSATION STARTER

Join the conversation with AAT on social media platforms and online...

FACEBOOK

facebook.com/youraat/

Share study tips and ideas with other AAT students and get involved in light-hearted discussions.

TWITTER

[@YourAAT](https://twitter.com/YourAAT)

Keep up-to-date with the latest industry developments, job opportunities and CPD resources.

LINKEDIN

linkedin.com/school/aat/

Add AAT to your LinkedIn profile or follow the page for latest developments and industry insight.

INSTAGRAM

[@youraat](https://instagram.com/youraat)

Get inspired by motivational images and infographics to help combat procrastination.

BLOG

aatcomment.org.uk

Read members' stories, study tips and latest industry developments.

AAT FORUMS

forums.aat.org.uk

Get involved with in-depth discussions with other students and experienced AAT members.

concepts and analysis. But distance learning taught her resilience and helped fine-tune her time management skills, as the onus was entirely on her to make sure she was up to speed. "I did have moments where I'd think, 'why am I doing this?'" she admits. "But then I'd re-read the manuals and resources until I understood it. My preferred method of studying was just to keep practicing things until I worked it out for myself."

Cementing learning

Both Sharon and May say the ability to work alongside their studies really helped cement their learning. Being part of the wider AAT student network through Facebook groups and the AAT forum has helped, too.

Every AAT member, from student to full fellow membership, can benefit from exclusive AAT Rewards, which includes discounts on everyday spending such as cinemas, holidays and insurance. This is something that May and Sharon have both made use of.

But the benefits of AAT membership don't stop when you've completed your studies. For May, the designatory letters after her name are one of the biggest benefits of ongoing AAT membership. "The letters demonstrate you're a professional, and show prospective clients and employers you're fully qualified and you're putting your skills to practical use," she says. "It's reassurance for them and a source of pride for you."

Continuing professional development

Robert Albert FMAAT runs his own business, R Albert Accountancy, while working full-time at West Midlands-based, SRC Accountancy Services. Robert says AAT membership provides him with opportunities to continue his professional development and update his industry knowledge. The CPD resource library proved invaluable when he was in the process of starting up his own business.

Robert set up his own business in 2011 following redundancy, but decided early on to work for another accountancy practice too, just in case his own client portfolio didn't turn out to be as sustainable as he'd liked. Eight years on and the set up still works well. He works at SRC Accountancy

learning portal in due course. "The study support videos were easy to follow because of the visual element," she explains.

In fact, May has appeared in some of these videos herself, when AAT asked for volunteers at their headquarters in London last year. She helped record scripts about flexing budgets, breaking even and the margin of safety and marginal vs absorption costing.

May gained AAT Level 4 in April 2019. She says she found Level 4 "a lot harder" than previous levels, because there was more focus on technical details and written communication with a lot of ethics-based

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during the week and focuses on his own business in evenings and at weekends.

"Where I am right now is exactly where I want to be," he says. "I have a good full-time job and I'm running my own business. I'm really enjoying it, and I'm still managing to maintain a good work-life balance and spend time with my family."

Being an AAT member has ensured that Robert has had the support he needs throughout his career – accessing the student resources when he was first studying, getting additional support when setting up his own business and more recently, using the CPD resource library to top up his professional skills.

"I care a lot about quality and accountancy standards," he explains. "Being an AAT member ensures I've got the standards I need to maintain my CPD. Not every accountant maintains their knowledge and skills and that's bad

news for their clients. But being part of AAT ensures that you're always doing that little bit extra to ensure you're fully compliant."

Understanding context

Sharon agrees. "Being a member of AAT shows prospective employers that you've been trained to a really high standard. We're not just trained to look at systems – we're taught to really understand them. We understand what's going on in the background, we understand the context."

Through AAT, Sharon has built up a myriad of technical skills that she puts into practice on a daily basis. She's picked up cash flow forecasts at short notice when filling in for a colleague on maternity leave, and has made changes to the Co-operative Group's processing systems. The comments from her careers advisor from all those years ago didn't hold her back.

"Actually, I'd like to go into schools and give encouragement to students," she says. "I'd tell them, 'don't let anybody tell you that you can't do something – because you can.'" 20

AAT BRANCH NETWORK

Have you made contact with your local AAT branch?

The AAT branch network, which is run exclusively by AAT volunteers, is made up of 49 AAT branches, including one international branch in Botswana. They provide networking opportunities, run CPD events and share industry best practice, usually during evenings and weekends.

To find out about your local branch or to volunteer, visit www.aat.org.uk/branches