START AHEAD

Professional Apprenticeships in Accounting & Tax



BEGIN YOUR CAREER. BUILD YOUR FUTURE.

Earn a salary, study for professional qualifications, and gain real experience from day one.

ArmstrongWatson®
Accountants, Business & Financial Advisers



START YOUR PROFESSIONAL CAREER WHILE OTHERS ARE STILL DECIDING THEIRS

Start Ahead is a paid, full-time apprenticeship that combines real work with professional study. You'll follow one of two routes, Accountancy or Tax, and work towards Chartered status over six years.

The programme is split into clear stages. As your knowledge grows, so will the work you do, the responsibility you take on and the rewards available to you.

START AHEAD AT A GLANCE

- A paid, full-time role from day one, with opportunities for increases as you develop
- Gain fully funded professional qualifications without taking on university tuition costs
- Paid study leave and structured support with your training
- A route towards a Level 7 professional qualification (equivalent to Master's degree level) and Chartered status, a recognised mark of professional expertise
- Build six years of real experience with clients, colleagues and businesses
- A choice of Accountancy or Tax pathways
- A trainee community starting and learning alongside you

BUILD SOMETHING EXCEPTIONAL WITH US

Armstrong Watson is one of the UK's fastest-growing independent accountancy and financial advisory firms, working with privately owned businesses and organisations across the North of England and Scotland.

800+
colleagues ready to support your growth and development from day one

You could support well-known brands, growing companies, family businesses and local organisations. You'll learn from experienced people, contribute to real work and take on more responsibility as your confidence grows.

WHY START HERE?

Variety
You'll work with different types of businesses and learn from specialists across the firm.

Real responsibility
You won't spend your apprenticeship watching from the sidelines. You'll contribute to real work and take on more responsibility as your confidence and ability grow.

A track record of developing trainees
We have a strong record of supporting apprentices and early-career professionals, recognised through our workplace and apprenticeship employer credentials.

A career that can grow
A long-term career with room to specialise, manage client relationships or lead others.



"Armstrong Watson is a great place to learn, offering opportunities to be exposed to a variety of work, whilst also getting your qualifications."

MORE THAN NUMBERS

Accountancy and tax are about helping people and businesses understand what's happening, solve problems and make better decisions. Some tasks need accuracy and attention to detail, others need curiosity, teamwork and the confidence to ask the right questions.

What you will learn to do

- ✓ Understand how a business is performing
- ✓ Check information and evidence
- ✓ Help clients plan ahead
- ✓ Use digital tools to spot patterns
- ✓ Explain complex points clearly
- ✓ Build trusted relationships





A trainee's week might include

- Learning how a client's business works
- Preparing or checking information
- Joining a team planning meeting
- Speaking with a client
- Studying towards your next exam
- Receiving feedback on your work

TWO PATHWAYS, ONE STRONG START

You don't need previous accountancy experience, and you don't have to know everything about your future career before you apply. We'll help you understand the routes and develop the knowledge you need from the ground up.

ACCOUNTANCY

Could suit you if you enjoy understanding how businesses work, asking questions and seeing the bigger picture.

Study Route

AAT Levels 3 and 4, followed by ACA, leading towards Chartered Accountant status.

Experience could Include

Business Services, Audit & Assurance and placements across other teams.

TAX

Could suit you if you enjoy research, solving detailed problems and explaining rules clearly.

Study Route

AAT Level 3, ATT and CTA, leading towards Chartered Tax Adviser status.

Experience could Include

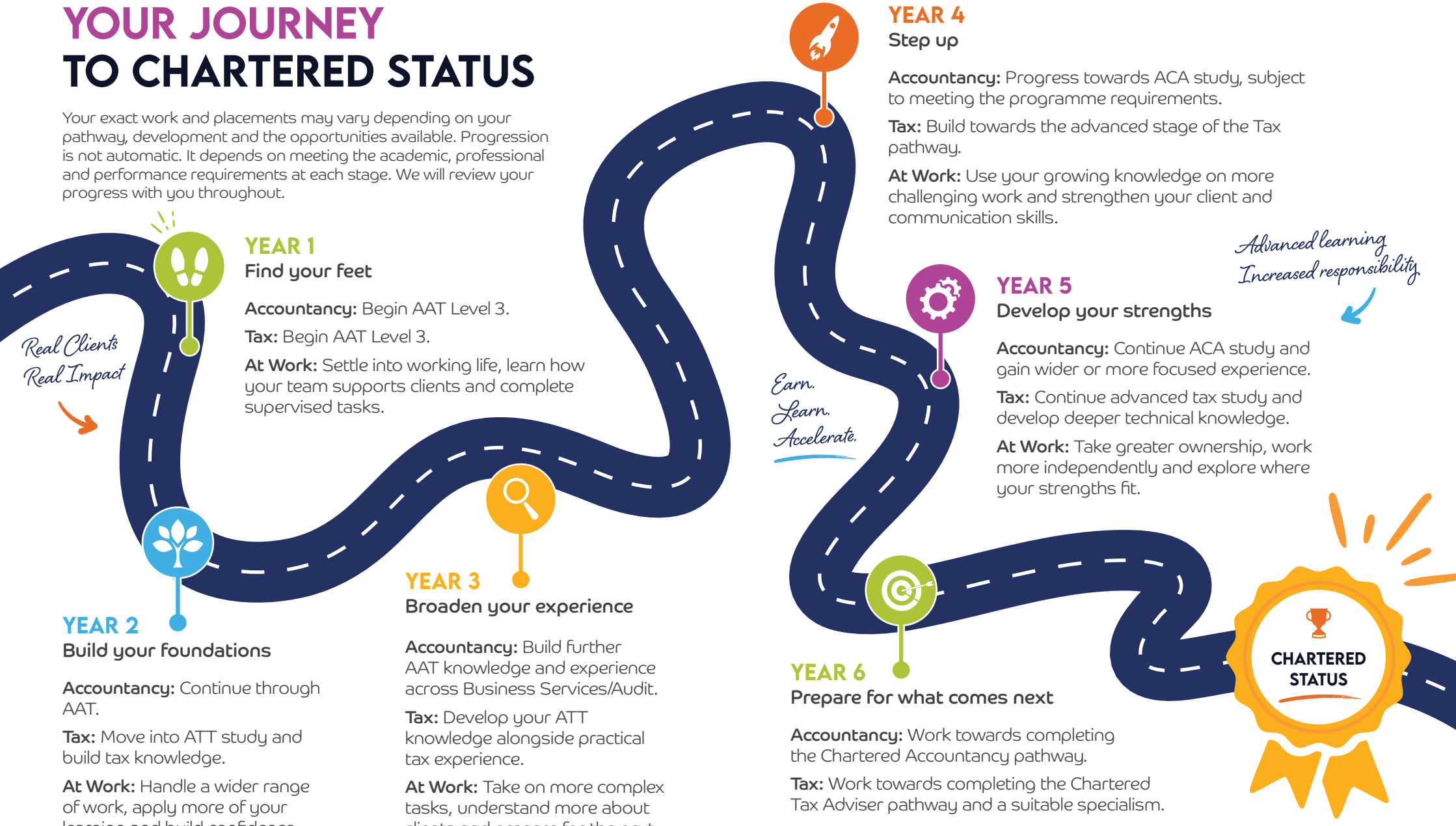
Personal Tax, Corporate Tax and a later specialism that suits your strengths.

NOT SURE WHICH PATHWAY IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

That's fine. You can share your preference during the recruitment process, and we'll consider your interests, strengths and development opportunities.

YOUR JOURNEY TO CHARTERED STATUS

Your exact work and placements may vary depending on your pathway, development and the opportunities available. Progression is not automatic. It depends on meeting the academic, professional and performance requirements at each stage. We will review your progress with you throughout.



YEAR 1
Find your feet

Accountancy: Begin AAT Level 3.

Tax: Begin AAT Level 3.

At Work: Settle into working life, learn how your team supports clients and complete supervised tasks.

YEAR 2
Build your foundations

Accountancy: Continue through AAT.

Tax: Move into ATT study and build tax knowledge.

At Work: Handle a wider range of work, apply more of your learning and build confidence with colleagues and clients.

YEAR 3
Broaden your experience

Accountancy: Build further AAT knowledge and experience across Business Services/Audit.

Tax: Develop your ATT knowledge alongside practical tax experience.

At Work: Take on more complex tasks, understand more about clients and prepare for the next stage of your route.

YEAR 4
Step up

Accountancy: Progress towards ACA study, subject to meeting the programme requirements.

Tax: Build towards the advanced stage of the Tax pathway.

At Work: Use your growing knowledge on more challenging work and strengthen your client and communication skills.

YEAR 5
Develop your strengths

Accountancy: Continue ACA study and gain wider or more focused experience.

Tax: Continue advanced tax study and develop deeper technical knowledge.

At Work: Take greater ownership, work more independently and explore where your strengths fit.

YEAR 6
Prepare for what comes next

Accountancy: Work towards completing the Chartered Accountancy pathway.

Tax: Work towards completing the Chartered Tax Adviser pathway and a suitable specialism.

At Work: Bring together your study and experience, take on meaningful responsibility and look forward to your next career step with Armstrong Watson.

YOU DON'T NEED A FIXED CAREER PLAN

You do need the drive to build one. We're interested in your potential, reliability, communication and willingness to learn, not previous accountancy experience or advanced maths skills.

TICKING A FEW BOXES?

Start Ahead could be for you.

Start Ahead could suit you if you...

- Are curious about how businesses work
- Enjoy solving problems and learning new things
- Want to work with people as well as information
- Take pride in doing a job properly
- Can ask questions, listen and respond to feedback
- Are ready to balance a professional role with challenging study
- Bring energy, enthusiasm and a positive attitude
- Treat other people with respect and help the team succeed

BEFORE YOU APPLY

Check our current vacancies for the latest academic requirements, age criteria, right-to-work information and any travel or driving expectations. If you already have a degree or are due to graduate, one of our graduate programmes may be more suitable.



"With nearly four and a half years' experience, I have really enjoyed my time at Armstrong Watson, balancing studying and working while earning too."



CHALLENGING? YES.
ON YOUR OWN? NO.

You'll have a full professional role alongside demanding study. You'll receive paid study leave, structured training and support, but you should also expect to study in your own time, particularly around exams.

Your support network

- Your line manager, for day-to-day guidance and feedback
- Experienced colleagues and mentors, who will share knowledge and help you improve
- A buddy, to help you settle in and answer the questions everyday questions
- Your training provider, for learning and exam preparation
- Our Learning & Development team, for wider professional and personal development
- Specialist technical support as you progress through your qualifications

SUPPORTED DOESN'T MEAN EASY

It means you'll know what is expected, have people to turn to and receive help to keep moving forward. You'll need to take your work and studies seriously, meet deadlines, prepare for exams, ask for help when you need it and take increasing ownership as your experience grows. In return, we'll give you structured learning, feedback and support throughout the programme.





JOIN A COMMUNITY,
NOT JUST A WORKPLACE

Starting your career after school or college is a big step. You'll join other trainees who are learning and reaching milestones alongside you, with shared training, office life, social activities and firm-wide events helping you build friendships, as well as professional connections.

- Start and settle in alongside other trainees
- Learn with people at a similar stage
- Meet colleagues across different teams and offices
- Take part in regular social, charitable and recognition activities
- Build a professional network from the start of your career

Building your career doesn't mean giving up everything outside work. Trainees balance professional study with friendships, hobbies, social events and life away from the office, with additional support around demanding periods.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Do I need to be a maths genius?
No. You need numerical confidence, but communication, curiosity, teamwork and problem-solving matter too.

Will I sit at a desk all day?
Not necessarily. Depending on your pathway and stage, you may work with different teams, speak with clients and visit client sites.

Will AI replace accountants?
Technology is changing routine work. That makes human skills such as judgement, communication, trust and understanding businesses even more important.

Will every week look the same?
No. Your work will change with client needs, your team, your studies and your growing experience.

Do I get paid while I study?
Yes. This is a paid role, and your professional qualifications are fully funded.

Where could I work?
Start Ahead opportunities are available across Armstrong Watson offices in the North of England and Scotland. You apply for a specific office vacancy, but may have the opportunity to work at one of our other offices as your career progresses.

To learn more visit: www.armstrongwatson.co.uk/careers

GOT A QUESTION?

Get in touch, we'd love to hear from you



"It's a great opportunity to learn in a professional environment, with one of the best things being the great people around you."

START AHEAD

To learn more about our Apprenticeship Scheme visit: **armstrongwatson.co.uk/careers**

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Office Locations:

Carlisle
Cockermouth
Dumfries
Edinburgh
Glasgow
Hexham
Kendal
Leeds
Manchester
Maryport
Newcastle
Northallerton
Penrith
Settle
Skipton
Whitehaven
Workington

THE SUNDAY TIMES Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers 2026

THE SUNDAY TIMES Best Places to Work 2026 BIG ORGANISATION

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE | Gold

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