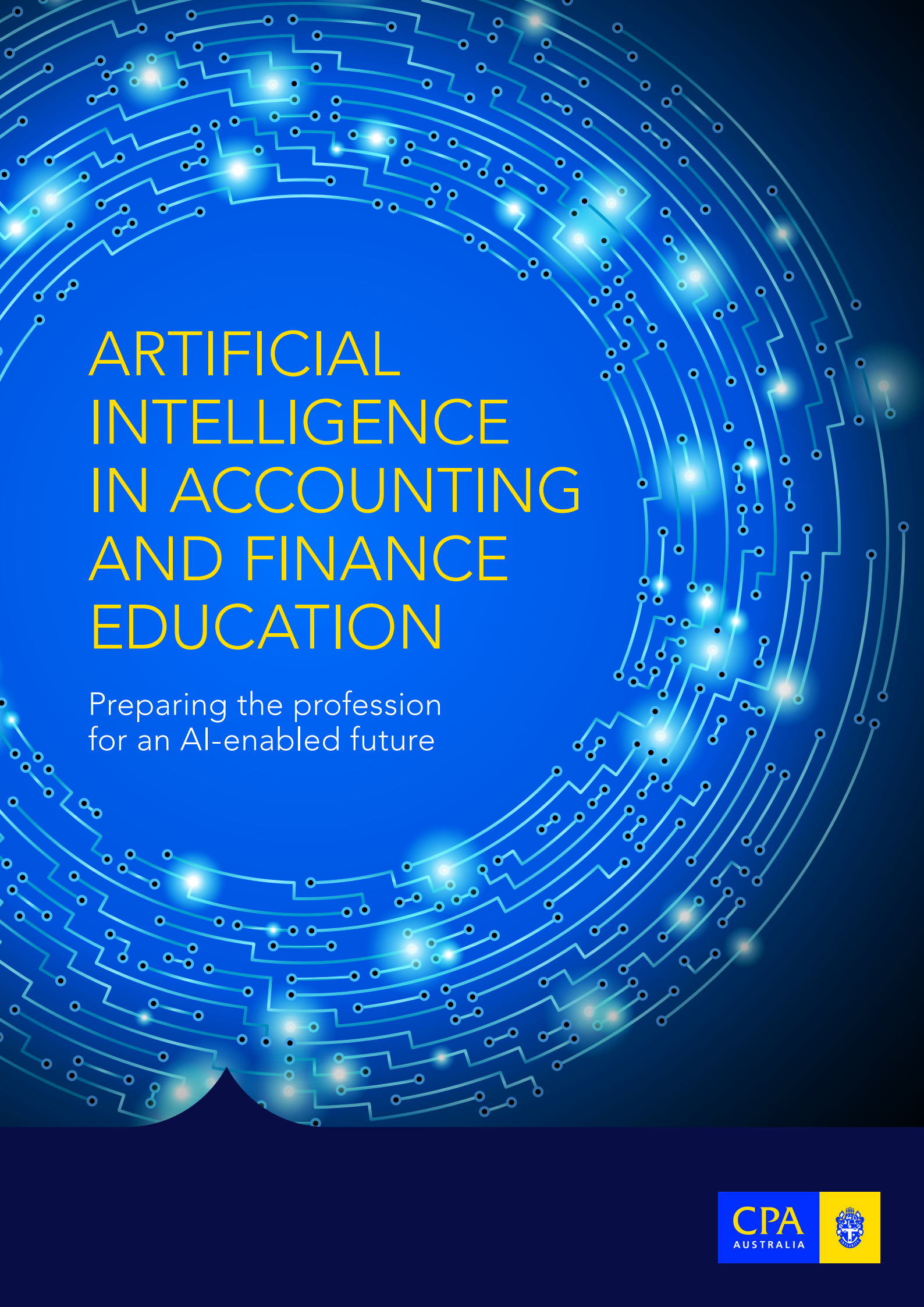

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE EDUCATION

Preparing the profession for an AI-enabled future

CPA AUSTRALIA

The future still needs your judgement

Artificial intelligence is forcing educators and the accounting and finance profession to confront a fundamental question: How do we develop, assess and recognise professional expertise in a world where knowledge is increasingly accessible on demand?

For many professions, expertise has traditionally been demonstrated by the ability to acquire, retain and apply technical knowledge. Yet, as AI becomes increasingly capable of generating sophisticated outputs, we are being challenged to rethink not only how people learn, but how we assess learning, build capability and prepare future professionals for practice.

This is why CPA Australia brought together leaders from accounting, finance, higher education and technology. We wanted to move the conversation beyond the capabilities of AI itself and explore a more important question: how can we ensure technology strengthens skills and capability to better support the workforce?

The discussions highlight a powerful opportunity. When used in the right way, AI can help create richer learning experiences and assessments that better reflect how professionals apply knowledge, exercise judgement and solve real-world problems.

At the same time, the rise of AI is increasing the importance of distinctly human capabilities. As routine tasks become more automated, professionals will need strong technical foundations alongside critical thinking, professional scepticism, contextual understanding and the confidence to challenge AI-generated outputs.

The insights paper also reinforces that preparing the profession for an AI-enabled future is a shared responsibility. Educators, employers and professional bodies each have a critical role to play. As traditional pathways for developing expertise evolve, we must be deliberate in creating opportunities for people to build judgement through practical experience, mentoring, experimentation and continual learning.

Importantly, successful AI adoption is not simply a technology challenge — providing access to tools is only the beginning. Real value comes from redesigning how professionals learn and work, creating environments where experimentation is encouraged, and ensuring governance frameworks support transparency, accountability and trust.

The future of accounting and finance will undoubtedly be AI-enabled, but credibility, judgement and accountability will remain human. Our collective challenge is to ensure that as technology advances, the pathways that develop these qualities become stronger, not weaker.

For educators, employers and professional bodies alike, this is an opportunity to shape the future of accounting and finance education rather than simply respond to it. I hope the insights in this paper help advance this important conversation.

Dr Ash Jones
Chief Learning and Innovation Officer
CPA Australia

Rigour without compromise

AI presents opportunities to transform the accounting and finance education sector by creating more sophisticated, adaptive assessment models that test how learners interrogate data, apply information and exercise judgement.

However, reaching a point where AI can help validate learners' knowledge without compromising rigour or professional standards requires more than simply adding new technology to existing assessment models. Educators and professional bodies must navigate challenging questions around academic integrity, equity, transparency and the reliability of AI-generated outputs. They must also reconsider what assessments should measure in an environment where technology can generate an increasingly sophisticated output.

The challenge is to harness AI's potential while ensuring assessment continues to provide trusted evidence of what learners genuinely know and how they apply this knowledge.

As AI continues to reshape accounting and finance, this challenge has implications beyond academic assessment. Within the workforce, professional capability must combine AI literacy with vital human skills such as critical thinking, professional scepticism, communication and decision-making. Employers also have an important role to play by providing practical support, opportunities to experiment, mentoring and clear AI governance frameworks so professionals learn to use AI effectively and responsibly.

CPA Australia recently hosted a series of roundtable events to explore how assessment, capability building and active employer support can work together to prepare accounting and finance professionals for the future. This paper draws on insights from thought leaders across accounting, finance and education who attended the events.

Five key themes emerged during the discussions:

1. Redesigning assessment around application, judgement and learning

AI demands a move in summative assessment (the evaluation of student learning) beyond testing recall and toward authentic, real-world application of knowledge. Its greatest potential may lie not in automating existing assessment practices, but in making the learning process more visible through richer feedback and assessment of how students reason, interrogate information and apply knowledge. This may produce accounting graduates who are better prepared for the judgement-based demands of professional practice.

2. AI should augment professional judgement, not replace it

Across both education and professional practice, the central principle is that AI can support analysis, speed and consistency, but accountability and judgement must remain human.

Professionals need sufficient technical and disciplinary knowledge to recognise when an AI output is wrong, to challenge its assumptions and determine whether it is appropriate in context. The higher the consequence and the harder an output is to verify, the greater the need for human scrutiny and decision-making.

3. AI literacy must develop alongside technical and professional capability

As AI takes on more routine technical work, the skills that distinguish effective accounting and finance professionals are increasingly human.

This creates a need to rethink capability development, particularly for early career professionals who may have fewer opportunities to build judgement through traditional entry-level work.

AI itself can become part of the solution through simulations, coaching and controlled opportunities to practise decision-making.

4. AI adoption requires redesigned work and learning

Providing AI tools or licences alone is unlikely to deliver meaningful value. Organisations and educational institutions must redesign how people work with AI, supported by training, practical guidance, communities of practice and opportunities to experiment. Leadership is critical — when leaders model effective AI use and create space for experimentation, they help shift AI from technology deployment to embedded organisational practice.

5. Trust requires transparency, challenge and psychologically safe experimentation

Responsible AI adoption depends on making AI use visible. Professionals and students need to feel comfortable to disclose how they use AI, acknowledge their uncertainty and question any outputs without fear of automatic penalty. At the same time, organisations need to establish a culture of challenge where AI outputs are traced back to authoritative sources, independently verified or rejected.

As a result, psychological safety and professional scepticism become complementary parts of effective AI governance.

Together, these themes point to a shared responsibility in preparing the accounting and finance profession for an AI-enabled future. This involves an accounting education system underpinned by a trusted assessment model, capability building across the broader profession, and active employer support to ensure AI strengthens professional judgement instead of eroding it.

The organisations and educators best placed to realise AIs benefits will be those that invest in both the technology and the people who use it, with meaningful human accountability at the centre.

Putting learning to the test

Accounting and finance education must harness AI to validate learners' knowledge, application and judgement without compromising the rigour and credibility the profession depends on.

AI creates a significant opportunity to rethink summative assessment by shifting attention from the final outcome to the process of learning.

AI and learning analytics can make students' planning, monitoring and evaluation more visible, while automating routine tasks and enabling educators to focus on building distinctly human capabilities such as critical analysis and judgement.

Data from the Digital Education Council's AI in Higher Education Global Survey 2026 shows 88 per cent of students globally now use AI in their learning.

The challenge, however, is ensuring AI does not undermine genuine learning. Generative AI (GenAI), for example, can encourage superficial engagement and an inflated sense of understanding, particularly when students lack the skills to evaluate AI outputs and regulate their own use.

Jon Yorke, Professor, Academic Registrar and Associate Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic at Curtin University, says there is a growing focus on testing both knowledge and its application, rather than simply learning by memorisation.

"There is a real desire to move beyond testing knowledge recall and into testing knowledge application and use, because that is what employers tell universities is so important," he says. "What we are looking at is assessment with real-world value."

Where AI adds value to assessment

AI's clearest value in tertiary education is not in replacing existing practice but in enabling work that was previously too slow, costly or difficult to scale.

Generating large volumes of exam questions can be achieved rapidly, freeing specialists to focus on judgement and quality assurance that requires human expertise.

The same applies to feedback. Rather than receiving a simple percentage score, learners can receive detailed, tailored feedback, identifying where and how they can improve. This turns assessment into part of the learning process rather than simply a final verdict.

Given the potential for subjectivity in human marking, AI can also offer a route to more consistent assessments while enabling genuinely new forms of assessment, such as live, process-based tracking of a student's thinking that is not possible with traditional exams.

"To me, the real value in using AI in education is not about volume or cost cutting," says Ella Pyman, Executive Manager of AI Client Solutions at Australian data science and AI company Quantium.

"It is about changing the process completely, and that is for the benefit of the learner — giving them more information about themselves."

Risks and unintended consequences

While AI has the potential to transform summative assessments, there are risks that must be managed.

THE TYPE OF ASSESSMENT MATTERS WHEN USING AI

Lu Tong CPA, Assistant Professor of Accounting at Southwestern University of Finance and Economics in China, teaches both data accounting analytics and managerial accounting, two courses that "have very different natures," she says, "so the assessment is varied as well".

In her data analytics course, a key part of the curriculum is to teach students to use the programming language Python to write code and scripts. "For tasks like this, there is a very defined output: whether the script can run smoothly or not. For assignments with a very clear output, it is easy to use AI to assess whether a student writes the correct script or not."

In contrast, for Tong's more traditional managerial accounting subject, students are required to write group projects or case study reports during assessment. "For tasks like this, I think it is harder to directly use AI for the final grading.

"AI could be used as an intermediary tool for the faculty to assess the base quality of the report … But for the content of the report, and the logic and reasoning behind those case studies, I believe human involvement is still needed."

Yorke notes that inequities can also arise when employing AI in assessment due to the potential for bias. "In the scenarios we generate using AI, we risk inadvertently creating unethical or unsafe situations," he says.

Aldónio Ferreira, Associate Professor in the Department of Accounting at Monash Business School, adds that there is a risk of students "outsourcing thinking".

"Understanding arises from thinking," he says. "And when we engage with AI, we can pass the thinking to the machine, but we can never pass the understanding, because that is always very personal. Students often do not know if the AI output makes any sense, because they just take it for granted that the machine is right, and it is not always right."

While AI can enhance the feedback process, Dr Nor Shaipah Abdul Wahab CPA, Head of the School of Accounting and Finance at Taylors Business School in Malaysia, warns that it must not dilute the purpose of feedback. AI should augment human effort in the learning process, not replace it.

"Over-reliance on AI can be risky," she says. "If we rely on AI when giving the feedback, that means the AI is giving the feedback, not us."

However, potential risks can be managed by ensuring that humans remain central to the assessment process, setting rubrics and learning outcomes to decide what is being tested and why. Case study logic and reasoning also require human evaluation.

"Feed AI all the data points that you want, let it create the scenario for you, then you as the teacher should sit down and answer

it," advises Rosalie Adriano FCPA, Founder, Managing Director and Executive Advisor at RA Inspired. "If you cannot, then something has gone wrong. Perhaps AI has twisted what you have fed it or, if you are able to answer it in five minutes, maybe AI oversimplified it. "Be the guinea pig," she adds. "Test if you can actually answer it before giving it to your students to learn."

AI and professional judgement

AI can enhance summative assessment when used within a framework that protects rigour, trust and professional credibility.

The Singapore Institute of Technology Teaching and Learning Academy (STLA) uses AI to scale authentic, scenario-based assessments. Its Deputy Director and Associate Professor, Mui Kim Chu, explains that the technology is used to generate learning content at a scale and speed not achievable manually.

"One tool we have is called AssessmentAId, which allows the faculty to input a module profile and the AI can suggest authentic, scenario-based assessments or projects closely aligned to our competency statements and learning outcomes."

INSIDE THE LEARNING PROCESS

Assessments are essential for measuring what students have learned, but AI can now help understand *how* they are learning. Quantium recently partnered with an Australian state education department that was rolling out a GenAI tool to its high schools. Ella Pyman, Executive Manager of AI Client Solutions at Quantium, says the technology opens up a different approach to classroom assessment. Rather than requiring students to submit an essay on a topic, they were observed while exploring a problem with the GenAI tool and using their interactions with the system to deepen their understanding and form their own view.

Data scientists analysed those interactions, reviewing students' questions against a framework similar to Bloom's taxonomy to assess their cognitive depth. As students progressed, Pyman explains, their questions often fluctuated, and often moved beyond acquiring information toward understanding, application and connecting concepts across the course material.

"The educators got incredibly excited because this could be real-time, live analytics of how a learner is learning in the moment," says Pyman. "Previously, they might have pinpoints across a week, month or a year to see how students are evolving.

"I think this builds ideas about what assessment could be, because it is not just about whether they have mastered the knowledge, it is about how long have they actually engaged with it? How deep have they gone? Can they now apply this knowledge across different disciplines?"

STLA's FeedbackAId, a feedback tool, also generates feedback based on the rubric provided by the faculty, while its AI-Orate tool helps to assess learning by asking targeted follow-up questions to probe a student's reasoning and understanding of complex concepts.

"It tests students on what they have produced and questions their assumptions," Chu says. "Of course, through this whole process, humans remain central. The faculty decides on the learning outcomes and the rubric, and they have to evaluate the content and decide on the final grade.

"We are trying to build AI bilingualism in our undergrads and future accounting professionals," she adds. "This means we have graduates who are not just proficient in the language of their technical domain of accounting, audit, finance or tax, but also in AI literacy.

"They can use AI as an assistant to help them to do the difficult work and make better decisions with better insights, but they cannot use AI to replace human judgement. We want to see professionals who are able to blend these two areas of expertise."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Redesign assessment around application and judgement.

AI can help move assessment beyond recall toward application, reasoning and real-world problem-solving while making the learning process more visible.

2. Use AI to expand what assessment can do.

AI can generate assessment variants, tailor feedback and enable new forms of process-based assessment that would be difficult or costly to deliver at scale.

3. Keep human judgement at the centre.

Educators must set learning outcomes and rubrics, test AI-generated scenarios and assess the quality of students' reasoning. AI should support assessment, not determine what counts as learning.

4. Protect against outsourced thinking.

Over-reliance on AI can encourage superficial engagement, weaken critical thinking and give students false confidence in incorrect outputs. Students need the disciplinary knowledge and judgement to evaluate when AI outputs can and cannot be trusted.

5. Build trust through rigour and transparency.

AI-supported assessment will only be professionally credible if institutions can demonstrate that it produces reliable evidence of learning, manages bias and equity risks, and maintains meaningful human oversight.

The human edge in accounting

As AI absorbs more technical tasks, accounting and finance professionals must identify and strengthen the capabilities that remain uniquely human.

Technical accounting and finance knowledge remains fundamental to professional competence, but as AI takes on more routine technical work, professionals will increasingly draw on the human skills that underpin sound judgement.

Professional services is among the industries most exposed to AI and is experiencing rapid skills transformation. PwC's *2026 Global AI Jobs Barometer* finds that the skills required for the most AI-exposed roles are changing more than twice as fast as those in the least exposed roles.

Since 2022, new tasks added to the most AI-exposed roles have also been 2.5 times more likely to rely on human-intensive capabilities such as empathy, creativity, judgement and teamwork.

However, as AI reshapes entry-level roles, human-intensive, judgement-based work may be harder for graduates to develop. Data from the QS Global Employer Survey 2024 shows employers in the Asia-Pacific region identified problem-solving, communication, leadership and resilience/flexibility among the top six graduate skill gaps.

Humans own all decisions

The adoption of AI raises important questions about the boundaries between technological capability and professional judgement.

Accounting and finance professionals must critically evaluate when AI can be relied upon by challenging and verifying outputs and ensuring that decisions are ultimately guided by human judgement.

"The guiding principle is simple," Adriano says. "The work can be delegated, but the outcome still sits with the person making the call. The higher the consequence of the decision, the greater the need for human judgement and challenge."

Dr Dimitrios Salampasis, Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Emerging Technologies and Fintech at Swinburne University, says accounting and finance professionals should treat AI as a "decision support system, not as a decision owner".

"Human involvement is needed for judgement, understanding uncertainty, materiality and the consequences of particular decisions. AI can produce answers that could be plausible, polished and internally coherent, but they may be based on a false premise. They could be missing evidence, they could be misinterpreting information or they could have an inappropriate disciplinary treatment. So, having professional scepticism is critical.

"AI, in my opinion, can be used for speed," adds Salampasis, who is also a member of CPA Australia's Digital Transformation Centre of Excellence committee. "It needs to be challenged for confidence and trustworthiness, and we must use human judgement for accountability."

Future skills development

Accounting and finance professionals work effectively in AI-enabled roles when they combine strong technical expertise with human judgement, professional scepticism and the ability to decide when AI should and should not be used.

Developing these skills requires guidance and mentorship. Kyelie Baxter FCPA, Managing Director at IQ Accountants, says skills such as validation and verification must be taught to help finance professionals earn "trust and respect as an adviser".

"They also need the ability to analyse and understand context, but in order to do that, they need to have an understanding of the process of how reports were prepared, even though they are not the ones who necessarily prepared them," says Baxter, who is also Deputy President of CPA Australia's Queensland Divisional Council. "For anything that is automated, they still need

"For anything that is automated, [finance professionals] still need to understand what the process was behind it so they can pinpoint if something is wrong. They have to be detectives, and that is part of job readiness."

Kyelie Baxter FCPA
IQ Accountants

to understand what the process was behind it so they can pinpoint if something is wrong. They have to be detectives, and that is part of job readiness."

While mentorship can help junior accountants build these valuable skills, AI may also have an important role to play.

Christina Wong Siew Fang FCPA, Co-Founder and Delivery Lead at Clover Business Services, believes AI agents can be used as a "mental sparring partner". When AI agents are trained on the knowledge held within an organisation, she says, graduates and younger professionals can use them to develop their skills at times that suit them best. "They can have a mental spar with a chatbot that is available 24/7".

Dr James Kavourakis CPA, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Accounting at the University of Melbourne, adds that "AI can be used to create simulated environments for people to exercise judgement in complex scenarios. We can utilise it to produce learning tools that juniors can engage with on a continuing basis to help build exposure to making these judgements in a controlled environment."

As routine technical work is increasingly delegated to AI, the profession's value will rest more heavily on the human capabilities that AI cannot replicate: judgement, scepticism, contextual understanding and the willingness to be accountable for decisions. The challenge for educators, employers and professional bodies alike is to ensure that as entry-level work changes, the pathways for developing these judgement-based skills do not disappear. Whether through mentorship, simulated learning environments or AI-enabled training tools, the profession must be deliberate in cultivating the skills that will define its future relevance.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **Human skills are becoming more valuable.**

As AI takes on routine technical work, judgement, scepticism, contextual understanding and communication will become increasingly important to professional competence.

2. **AI does not replace professional judgement.**

Accountants need the technical knowledge to challenge plausible but flawed outputs and remain accountable for the decisions they make.

3. **Entry-level pathways need rethinking.**

As traditionally junior tasks become automated, educators and employers must ensure graduates still have opportunities to develop judgement through practical experience.

4. **AI can help build skills.**

Simulations, AI-enabled coaching and "mental sparring" can give early-career professionals more opportunities to practise decision-making in controlled environments.

5. **Capability building needs to be deliberate.**

Education providers, employers and professional bodies can work together to develop AI literacy alongside technical expertise, professional scepticism and the human capabilities that underpin trusted advice.

From AI access to impact

Employers have a critical role in building AI capability through practical exposure, experimentation, governance and knowledge sharing, while maintaining clear accountability and human oversight.

A report from EY shows AI use at work is widespread. Almost 90 per cent of its global survey respondents say they use AI in their workplace, but only 28 per cent of organisations are positioned to turn AI deployment into high-value outcomes. The report notes that when the technology is combined with factors such as weak culture, insufficient learning and misaligned rewards, productivity benefits lag by more than 40 per cent.

> "When I see a high verifiability and low consequence model, that is probably where I would put more effort into treating AI with greater reliance. But when there is more of a low verifiability and high consequence, greater human judgement is required."
>
> **Dr Dimitrios Salampasis**
> Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Emerging Technologies and Fintech at Swinburne University

Whether AI creates value or resistance often comes down to communication, training and leadership support. However, Deloitte's *2026 Global Human Capital Trends* research finds that almost 60 per cent of organisations are taking a tech-first approach, bolting AI onto existing systems and processes rather than rethinking how people and AI actually work together. The research also shows organisations are twice as likely to exceed their return-on-investment expectations for AI when they prioritise work design, reimagining human and machine interaction and roles.

A structured approach to implementation

Guy Ioppolo FCPA, Managing Partner and Founder at Ioppolo & Associates, applied a human-centred approach to a recent AI rollout at his firm. He says the initial approach of issuing AI licenses to technically strong employees produced minimal change over several months. As a result, he appointed senior team leads as AI champions and had them collaborate as a group to define a structured way of working with AI, then had them roll it out across all teams.

"We went from a very uncoordinated approach to a very structured approach," he says. "The AI champions now meet regularly to discuss progress and whether we need to make any changes. It is an ongoing, evolving approach, because we cannot simply 'set and forget'. We are continuing with this approach to culturally and functionally change the way the business uses AI to achieve the productivity gains we are expecting from it."

Adriano believes employers and professional bodies play a complementary role in building AI and technical capability across the accounting and finance profession.

"Employers can provide the practical application and workplace learning while professional bodies can continue to provide the standards, the guidance, the capability development and credibility," she says. "The strongest development environment that I can see is when we combine formal learning with practical application."

AI experimentation and psychological safety

Data from Microsoft shows that when managers create psychological safety around experimentation, employees report up to 20 points higher AI readiness and value, and are 1.4 times more likely to be high-frequency users of agentic AI.

Salampasis says building effective, responsible AI capability requires giving accounting and finance professionals the "approved tools, examples, playbooks, expert support and safe environments to experiment".

"The experimentation piece is really important because, in my view, if we want people to apply human judgement, we cannot push them into unsafe workarounds. We need to help people apply AI appropriately within their own disciplines.

"That also comes back to psychological safety," he adds. "People need to feel able to disclose their AI use, their uncertainty and their mistakes without automatically being punished. At the moment, there can be this sense that if something is AI-generated — or even sounds like it could be — you immediately have to defend yourself. There has to be psychological safety around AI use. From a human judgement and governance perspective, hidden AI use is much harder to govern than visible AI use."

Learning by doing

The STLA supports AI adoption through enterprise tools and platforms, as well as leadership advocacy, communities of practice,

"I want my team to learn AI, but they must also apply judgment and critical thinking. When they submit reports, I ask them, 'Have you validated the number? What do you think of the results and what we should consider?'"

Patty Hu CPA
Lavazza

experimentation and hands-on initiatives such as AI challenges and student hackathons. Chu says this gives employees opportunities to experiment, collaborate and turn ideas into practical AI solutions.

"With the resources from management, we can create a lot of groundwork initiatives to provide the opportunities for employees to tinker and to develop ideas with AI," she says.

Adriano has led technology and digital transformation initiatives for most of her career and, more recently, AI adoption events to foster experimentation, demystify the technology and reduce fears about its impact on jobs. "Employees explore practical applications, from robotics and augmented reality to deepfake detection and AI-powered customer-service simulations, then submit ideas for using AI in their own work," she explains. "Senior leaders visibly support the initiative, while digital champions help sustain momentum.

"It just snowballed from there," Adriano adds. "I think if you win people's hearts and minds by letting them experience and play with AI, you are going to get better impact."

"Employers can provide the practical application and workplace learning while professional bodies can continue to provide the standards, the guidance and the capability development and credibility. The strongest development environment that I can see is when we combine formal learning with practical application."

Rosalie Adriano FCPA RA Inspired

Managers as AI role models

Research from BCG finds that when managers use GenAI themselves and model the behaviour, their teams adopt the technology use at four times the rate of their peers. This in turn leads those teams to report greater time savings and job satisfaction.

Patty Hu CPA, Head of Financial Planning & Analysis at Lavazza Australia, applies a practical, leader-led approach to building AI capability. Rather than expecting employees to find time to learn, she learns first, then shares useful tools and articles, and creates regular opportunities for discussion. Over time, she says, her team has become more engaged with AI. "When I learn, I teach," she says.

However, Hu stresses that effective AI use requires judgement, particularly for less experienced employees who may be tempted to accept AI-generated outputs without sufficient validation. To help build this judgement, she introduced regular practical prompts, examples and discussions.

"I want my team to learn AI, but they must apply judgement and critical thinking," Hu says. "When we review analysis I ask, 'Have we validated the numbers? What do we think of the results and what should we consider?'"

Governance and guardrails are essential

With AI adoption moving at rapid pace, an IBM study shows 77 per cent of organisations report that it is already outpacing their governance capabilities. Meanwhile, data from Accenture shows that although 78 per cent have established a responsible-AI program, only 14 per cent have put it into practice.

Salampasis advocates for AI governance to be managed through a risk-tiered approach, with controls tailored to low-risk assistance, professional judgement and high-stakes decisions rather than blanket bans or unrestricted use.

"When I see a high verifiability and low consequence model, that is probably where I would put more effort into treating AI with greater reliance," he says. "But when there is more of a low verifiability and high consequence, greater human judgement is required. For example, in AI-generated financial reporting, credit-risk decisions by autonomous agents require much stronger controls than simply using AI to draft summaries."

Kai Jie CPA, Partner in Assurance and Advisory at Morison LC PLT, fosters a "challenge the source" culture where

each level of the firm is required to question whether an AI answer traces back to an original standard or authority. He explains that junior employees are also taught to crosscheck one AI's output against a second AI tool or model, then against actual source documents.

"For our practice, AI is what we class as an audit tool," he says. "Human responsibility or judgement is still important as a final barrier."

AI tools offer businesses unprecedented capabilities and the power to move ahead faster. However, success depends on employees having the confidence and capability to use AI effectively. Humans must also retain ultimate responsibility for data interpretation and judgement.

Michael Davern FCPA, Professor of Accounting and Business Information Systems at the University of Melbourne and Professor-in-residence at CPA Australia, puts it simply: "Do not ask AI to do something you do not know how to do yourself, because then you cannot evaluate the outputs."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Access is not adoption.

Giving employees AI tools is only the starting point. Value comes from helping them apply the technology effectively in their work.

2. Let people experiment.

Time, permission and the psychological safety to experiment with AI can build confidence and capability.

3. Leaders set the tone.

When managers use AI themselves, share what they learn and create space for experimentation, teams are more likely to follow.

4. Redesign the work, not just the tech stack.

The biggest gains come from rethinking how humans and AI interact, collaborate and divide tasks.

5. Make AI use visible.

Employees should feel safe to disclose when and how they use AI, as hidden use is far harder to govern than open experimentation.

6. Match controls to risk.

Low-risk AI assistance does not require the same oversight as high-stakes decisions. Governance should be proportionate, not one-size-fits-all.

Conclusion

AI is reshaping accounting education and practice, but the profession's credibility will remain grounded in human judgement.

AI presents both opportunities and challenges for accounting education and practice. In education, it can help move assessment beyond recall toward application, reasoning and judgement, while making the learning process more visible. In professional practice, it can increase speed, scale and access to information, but professionals must retain the technical knowledge and scepticism required to determine whether its outputs are reliable and appropriate.

For accounting education, maintaining rigour does not mean resisting new technology. It requires being deliberate about what assessments are designed to prove. As AI becomes increasingly capable of producing polished answers, assessments will need to place greater emphasis on how learners interrogate information, explain their reasoning, apply knowledge to unfamiliar situations and exercise judgement.

AI can support this shift in various ways, such as enabling richer feedback and new forms of process-based assessment. However, its use must be underpinned by clear learning outcomes, robust rubrics, quality assurance and meaningful human oversight. The credibility of assessment ultimately depends on whether it provides trusted evidence of genuine learning.

Human capability remains the foundation

The same principle extends into professional practice. Technical knowledge will remain essential, but the ability to evaluate context, challenge assumptions, communicate effectively and take responsibility for decisions will become increasingly important as routine technical work is automated.

This makes capability development a shared responsibility. Educators and professional bodies must ensure that people develop AI literacy alongside technical and professional competence. Employers must also rethink how early-career professionals gain practical exposure to judgement-based work as traditional entry-level tasks change. Mentoring, simulations, AI-enabled coaching and opportunities to practise decision-making can help ensure these pathways remain strong.

From access to responsible adoption

The experience of the leaders at CPA Australia's roundtable events demonstrate that providing access to AI is only a starting point. Meaningful value comes when leaders redesign work, support experimentation and create cultures in which people can openly discuss their AI use.

This requires governance that is proportionate to risk. Low-consequence, highly verifiable uses may require less intensive oversight, while high-stakes decisions demand stronger controls. Transparency is essential in both cases — when AI use is visible, it can be challenged and governed, but when it is hidden, the risks become harder to identify and manage.

The path to an AI-enabled accounting and finance profession must be people-led, supported by education, professional standards, employer investment and effective governance. The goal is not to create professionals who simply know how to use AI, but professionals who know when to use it, how to challenge it and when not to rely on it.

For CPA Australia and the broader profession, this represents an opportunity to shape the future rather than simply respond to it. Protecting the rigour of assessment and investing in human capability will enable the profession to harness AI without eroding public trust.

The future of accounting will be AI-enabled, but credibility will remain human.

Thank you

CPA Australia would like to thank the accounting, finance and education leaders who generously shared their expertise and perspectives during the roundtable discussions that informed this paper.

Their insights have helped shape a broader conversation about how assessment, capability building and employer support can work together to prepare accounting and finance professionals for an AI-enabled future.

Rosalie Adriano FCPA, Founder, Managing Director and Executive Advisor at RA Inspired

Kyelie Baxter FCPA, Managing Director at IQ Accountants

Christine Blyth FCPA, CEO and Head of Strategy and Transformation at Evolvere Au

Grace Boxer, Economist at Deloitte Access Economics

Eden Chow FCPA, AACSB Coordinator in the School of Business at The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong

Mui Kim Chu, Deputy Director and Associate Professor at The Singapore Institute of Technology Teaching and Learning Academy

Michael Crevola CPA, CFO at Victoria Police

Michael Davern FCPA, Professor of Accounting and Business Information Systems at the University of Melbourne and Professor-in-residence at CPA Australia

Michael Dugina FCPA, CFO at Save The Children

Mary Dunkley FCPA, Adjunct Associate Professor at Swinburne University of Technology

Christina Wong Siew Fang FCPA, Co-Founder and Delivery Lead at Clover Business Services

Aldónio Ferreira CPA, Associate Professor in the Department of Accounting at Monash Business School

Taha Haidermota, Country Head, Australia and VP Legal, APAC at Pearson Australia

Patty Hu CPA, Head of Financial Planning & Analysis at Lavazza Australia

Guy Ioppolo FCPA, Managing Partner and Founder at Ioppolo & Associates

Dr James Kavourakis CPA, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Accounting at the University of Melbourne

Anne La Fontaine FCPA, Advisory board member at Special AI

Beverly Lim CPA, Singapore Divisional Councillor

Kai Jie Lim CPA, Partner in Assurance and Advisory at Morison LC PLT

Jannat Maqbool FCPA, Business Development Manager at Australian Urban Research Infrastructure Network, The University of Melbourne

Christo Oberholster CPA, Commercial Finance Manager at Concept Eight

Ella Pyman, Executive Manager of AI Client Solutions at Quantium

Dr Dimitrios Salampasis, Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Emerging Technologies and Fintech at Swinburne University

Fazlina Mohd Salman CPA

Ian Shi FCPA, Director of Business Development and Finance at Bromsgrove School Mission Hills

Lu Tong CPA, Assistant Professor of Accounting at Southwestern University of Finance and Economics

Dr Nor Shaipah Abdul Wahab CPA, Head of the School of Accounting and Finance at Taylors Business School

Jon Yorke, Associate DVC Academic & Academic Registrar, Curtin University

Disclaimer: This paper should not be considered as legal, tax or financial advice and may not reflect the views and opinions of CPA Australia. CPA Australia does not warrant or make representations as to the accuracy, completeness, suitability or fitness for purpose of this publication and disclaims all liability and responsibility for any acts or omissions made in reliance of this publication. Readers should seek their own professional advice that takes into account their own personal circumstances

CPA AUSTRALIA