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Framework for International
Education Standards for
Professional Accountants and
Aspiring Professional
Accountants (2015)

IAESB

International Accounting
Education
Standards Board™

This document was developed and approved by the International Accounting Education Standards Board™ (IAESB™).

The IAESB develops education standards, guidance, and information papers on pre-qualification education, training of professional accountants, and continuing professional education and development.

The objective of the IAESB is to serve the public interest by setting high-quality education standards for professional accountants and by facilitating the convergence of international and national education standards.

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FRAMEWORK FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS AND ASPIRING PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS

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PART ONE—INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE, AND SCOPE

Introduction

1. This *Framework for International Education Standards for Professional Accountants and Aspiring Professional Accountants* (the “Framework”) establishes the concepts that the International Accounting Education Standards Board (“IAESB”) uses in its publications. The Framework also provides an introduction to the IAESB publications and related obligations of International Federation of Accountants (“IFAC”) member bodies.
2. The IAESB acts in the public interest to raise the level of confidence and trust of stakeholders in the work of professional accountants.
3. The IAESB’s mission is to serve the public interest by strengthening the worldwide accountancy profession through the development and enhancement of professional accounting education. The IAESB seeks to achieve its mission through the development, adoption, and implementation of International Education Standards (“IESs”). The IESs improve the quality of professional accounting education worldwide by prescribing requirements for:
 - Entry to professional accounting education programs;
 - Initial Professional Development (IPD) of aspiring professional accountants; and
 - Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of professional accountants.
4. The accountancy profession includes, but is not limited to:
 - Preparing, analyzing, and reporting relevant and faithfully represented financial and non-financial information;
 - Partnering in decision making, and in formulating and implementing organizational strategies;
 - Auditing financial and non-financial information, and providing other assurance and advisory services; and
 - Preparing and analyzing relevant tax information.
5. The accountancy profession serves the financial and, in some circumstances, the non-financial information needs of a broad range of decision makers including, but not limited to (a) the public, (b) present and potential investors, (c) management and employees within organizations, (d) suppliers and creditors, (e) customers, and (f) government authorities. The accountancy profession’s ability to satisfy users’ information needs contributes to an efficient economy that creates value to society.
6. Development, adoption, and implementation of IESs provide an effective approach to developing professional competence. Other desirable outcomes include:
 - Reducing international differences in the requirements to perform a role as a professional accountant;
 - Facilitating the global mobility of professional accountants; and
 - Providing international benchmarks of good practice for professional accounting education.

7. Terminology in accounting education is not universal; the same term might be used in different ways in various jurisdictions. Definitions and explanations of the key terms used in the Framework and IESs are set out in the *IAESB Glossary of Terms*.

Purpose of the Framework

8. The Framework provides a conceptual base for the IAESB to continue developing and supporting adoption and implementation of the IESs. The Framework assists IFAC member bodies in their activities related to the learning and development of professional accountants and aspiring professional accountants.
9. The Framework is also useful to other stakeholders who support the learning and development of professional accountants and aspiring professional accountants. These other stakeholders include:
- Universities, employers, and other stakeholders who play a part in the design, development, delivery, and assessment of professional accounting education programs for professional accountants and aspiring professional accountants;
 - Regulators who are responsible for oversight of the accountancy profession;
 - Government authorities with responsibility for legal and regulatory requirements related to professional accounting education;
 - Professional accountants and aspiring professional accountants who manage their own learning and development; and
 - Any other stakeholders interested in the work of the IAESB and its approach to developing publications on professional accounting education.
10. The benefits of the Framework include:
- An efficient and effective standard-setting process by providing a conceptual base for the IAESB's publications;
 - IESs that are consistent, because they are based on a common set of concepts relevant to professional accounting education; and
 - Increased transparency and accountability of the IAESB for its decisions, because the concepts underlying the IAESB's decisions are included in the Framework.

Scope of the Framework

11. The Framework describes the learning concepts underpinning the IESs; however, the Framework does not establish requirements that apply to IFAC member bodies. The IAESB applies the concepts set out in the Framework when developing the IESs. The concepts in this Framework may also be applied to other aspects of professional accounting education not covered by a specific IES.
12. For the purposes of the IESs and other IAESB publications, the IAESB defines a professional accountant as an individual who achieves, demonstrates, and further develops professional competence to perform a role in the accountancy profession and who is required to comply with a code of ethics as directed by a professional accountancy organization or a licensing authority.

13. Professional accountancy organizations include, but are not limited to, IFAC member bodies. When a professional accountancy organization or a licensing authority is not an IFAC member body, the IESs serve as an international benchmark of good practice.
14. A code of ethics establishes a set of ethical principles for professional accountants. A code of ethics will ordinarily comprise the *International Ethics Standards Board for Accountants' Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants* ("IESBA Code"), whether in its entirety or used as a basis for a locally developed code of ethics such that the standards therein are no less stringent than those stated in the IESBA Code.
15. The IAESB defines an aspiring professional accountant as an individual who has commenced a professional accounting education program as part of IPD.
16. The IAESB may also establish requirements for roles that are widely practiced by professional accountants in the accountancy profession or that are a matter of public interest.

PART TWO—EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTS

Professional Competence

17. The overall objectives of professional accounting education are to (a) develop the professional competence of aspiring professional accountants, and (b) develop and maintain the professional competence of professional accountants.
18. Professional competence is the ability to perform a role to a defined standard. Professional competence goes beyond knowledge of principles, standards, concepts, facts, and procedures; it is the integration and application of (a) technical competence, (b) professional skills, and (c) professional values, ethics, and attitudes.

Learning Outcomes, Competence Areas, and Proficiency Levels

19. A number of the IESs include learning outcomes that establish the content and the depth of knowledge, understanding, and application required for each specified competence area. Learning outcomes can be achieved within the context of a work environment or a professional accounting education program.
20. An example of a learning outcome for the technical competence of a professional accountant working in a financial accounting role is to “prepare financial statements, including consolidated financial statements, in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards (“IFRSs”) or other relevant standards”. Achieving this learning outcome requires knowledge of the IFRSs, the ability to assess their relevance to the situation, and the ability to apply the requirements of the relevant IFRSs.
21. The IESs include competence areas that are categories for which a set of related learning outcomes can be specified. Examples include *Financial accounting and reporting* and *Management accounting*.
22. Within IPD, a competence area is assigned a level of proficiency that describes the context in which the relevant learning outcomes are expected to be achieved. The level of proficiency for a competence area is based on consideration of the ambiguity, complexity, and uncertainty of the environment. Appendix 1 provides details of the foundation, intermediate, and advanced levels of proficiency. These levels describe the typical progression that occurs in the development of professional competence throughout the career of a professional accountant. The IESs prescribe the level of proficiency for competence areas to be achieved by the end of IPD.
23. An IFAC member body may (a) include additional competence areas; (b) increase the level of proficiency for competence areas; or (c) develop additional learning outcomes. For example, these changes may be necessary when an IFAC member body prepares professional accountants or aspiring professional accountants to work within a particular industry sector or for a particular role.

Learning and Development

24. Learning and development is an ongoing process of developing and maintaining professional competence throughout the career of a professional accountant. The IAESB defines primary types of learning and development as follows:

*Education*¹

Education is a structured and systematic process aimed at developing knowledge, skills, and other capabilities; a process that is typically but not exclusively conducted in academic environments.

Training

Training describes learning and development activities that complement education and practical experience. Training emphasizes practical application, and is usually conducted in the workplace or a simulated work environment.

Practical experience

Practical experience refers to workplace activities that are relevant to developing professional competence.

25. In addition to education, training, and practical experience, learning and development activities can include informal learning such as (a) coaching, (b) networking, (c) mentoring, (d) observation, (e) reflection, and (f) self-directed and unstructured gaining of knowledge.
26. The extent to which the different types of learning and development are used may vary. For example, during the initial stages of IPD more emphasis may be placed on education including professional accounting education, than in later stages of learning and development. During CPD the balance may shift more to learning and development through practical experience and training.

General Education

27. General education (a) develops essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes, (b) helps prepare an individual for entry to a professional accounting education program, and (c) supports lifelong learning and development.
28. General education helps professional accountants and aspiring professional accountants integrate technical competence, professional skills, and professional values, ethics, and attitudes developed through professional accounting education. It supports the development of decision making skills, judgment, and skepticism. Examples of general education topics include, but are not limited to (a) understanding ideas and events in history, (b) knowledge of different cultures, and (c) awareness of economic, political and social forces in the world.
29. General education may be obtained in a number of different ways and within different settings. General education commences before entry into a professional accounting education program and can continue during IPD and CPD.

Initial Professional Development

30. IPD is the learning and development through which aspiring professional accountants first develop professional competence leading to performing a role of a professional accountant.
31. IPD includes professional accounting education, practical experience, and assessment. The IAESB defines these terms as follows:

¹ The IAESB uses the term "education" in its own title and publications; however, its terms of reference include the entire learning and development process.

Professional Accounting Education

Education and training that build on general education, and develop (a) technical competence, (b) professional skills, and (c) professional values, ethics, and attitudes.

Practical Experience

Practical experience refers to workplace activities that are relevant to developing professional competence.

Assessment

Measurement of professional competence developed throughout learning and development.

32. IPD continues until aspiring professional accountants can demonstrate the professional competence required for a role as a professional accountant. One result of demonstrating this professional competence may be admission to membership in an IFAC member body.
33. Qualification, licensing or certification (“qualification”) is the formal recognition of an individual having attained a professional designation, or having been admitted to membership in an IFAC member body. Internationally, there are significant legal and regulatory differences that determine the point of qualification of professional accountants and it may occur from very early to very late in a career. Each IFAC member body can define the appropriate relationship between the end of IPD and the point of qualification for its members.

Continuing Professional Development

34. CPD is the learning and development that develops and maintains professional competence to enable professional accountants to continue to perform their roles competently. CPD provides continuing development of the learning outcomes for (a) technical competence, (b) professional skills, and (c) professional values, ethics, and attitudes which were achieved during IPD.
35. Change is a significant characteristic of the environment in which professional accountants work, requiring them to develop and maintain their professional competence throughout their careers. Pressures for change come from many sources including, but not limited to, (a) public expectations, (b) globalization, (c) advances in technology, (d) business complexity, (e) societal changes, and (f) increase in regulation and oversight. As a result, continuous learning is integral to CPD as professional accountants need actively to pursue the education, training, knowledge, and skills which they need to anticipate and adapt to changes in processes, technology, professional standards, regulatory requirements, employer demands, and other areas.
36. Professional competence requirements may change as professional accountants take on new roles during their careers. For example, a professional accountant in business may wish to become an accounting educator; or an accounting technician may wish to work in an audit role. CPD that includes many of the same elements as IPD also develops the additional breadth and depth of (a) technical competence, (b) professional skills, and (c) professional values, ethics, and attitudes which may be necessary when moving into a new role.
37. CPD includes practical experience that provides individuals with the opportunity to develop their professional competence within the workplace. As a professional accountant’s career progresses, emphasis tends to shift from structured learning activities to practical experience and informal learning.

Assessment, Measurement, and Monitoring

38. Assessment, measurement, and monitoring are central to demonstrating professional competence and determining that learning and development has been effective.
39. Assessment is used to gather evidence that the individual being assessed has demonstrated the professional competence to perform a role of a professional accountant. In addition, assessment provides valuable information that may be used to improve the quality of professional accounting education programs. Effective assessment activities achieve high levels of validity, sufficiency, reliability, equity, and transparency. A mix of different assessment activities is often adopted to assess professional competence.
40. Assessment includes the measurement of professional competence. In the context of assessment, measurement includes evaluating, and providing verifiable evidence of the achievement of (a) technical competence, (b) professional skills, and (c) professional values, ethics, and attitudes.
41. Measurement approaches focus on measuring observable outputs (for example, workplace performance, workplace simulations, written examinations, and self-assessment), quantifiable inputs (for example, CPD hours or equivalent learning units), or a combination of both.
42. Monitoring is the systematic process of collecting, reviewing, and confirming the evidence that demonstrates professional competence has been developed or maintained.

PART THREE—IAESB PUBLICATIONS

International Education Standards

43. The IESs are authoritative and are used by IFAC member bodies when setting education requirements for professional accountants and aspiring professional accountants.
44. The IESs establish requirements for (a) entry to professional accounting education programs, (b) IPD of aspiring professional accountants, and (c) CPD of professional accountants.
45. The IAESB is conscious of (a) the diversity of culture and language, educational, legal, and social systems globally, and (b) the variety of roles performed by professional accountants. The IESs have been developed as principle-based standards that provide IFAC member bodies flexibility in implementing the IES's requirements. Each IFAC member body needs to determine how best to implement the requirements of the IESs and is subject to the *Statements of Membership Obligations* ("SMOs"). The IAESB also recognizes that individual IFAC member bodies may adopt learning and development requirements that go beyond the IESs.
46. The process that the IAESB follows in developing its standards is set out in the *IAESB Terms of Reference*.
47. The IESs are written in accordance with the *IAESB Drafting Conventions* that are set out in Appendix 2.

Other IAESB Publications

48. In support of the IESs, the IAESB issues other publications and additional support material to assist IFAC member bodies in achieving good practice in learning and development.

PART FOUR—IFAC MEMBERSHIP OBLIGATIONS

IFAC Membership Obligations Relating to IESs

49. Individual IFAC member bodies determine the competences and criteria for membership that are appropriate to the professional accountant roles performed by their members. The SMOs set out the obligations of IFAC member bodies and associate bodies. Obligations related to the IESs may be found in *Statement of Membership Obligations 2, International Education Standards for Professional Accountants and Other Pronouncements Issued by the IAESB* (“SMO 2”).
50. Some IFAC member bodies are subject to the requirements of law or regulation within their jurisdictions. IESs cannot legally override educational requirements or restrictions placed on individual IFAC member bodies by such laws or regulations. In cases where IESs set a higher requirement than laws or regulations, SMO 2 requires that, where the IFAC member body that has no responsibility or shared responsibility for areas covered by the IESs, it uses its best endeavors to comply with the requirements of the IESs. In these instances, the IFAC member body would (a) determine its level of responsibility, (b) assume the appropriate set of actions to best meet its obligations under SMO 2, and encourage those responsible to implement the requirements of the IESs into relevant laws or regulations.

DESCRIPTION OF LEVELS OF PROFICIENCY

This description of levels of proficiency supports the IAESB's use of learning outcomes in the IESs and other publications. It provides descriptions of three levels of proficiency. These descriptions, together with the learning outcomes, provide information to help member bodies design their professional accounting education programs for a variety of professional accounting roles and specializations.

Level of Proficiency	Description
Foundation	<p>Typically, learning outcomes in a competence area focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining, explaining, summarizing, and interpreting the underlying principles and theories of relevant areas of technical competence to complete tasks while working under appropriate supervision; • Performing assigned tasks by using the appropriate professional skills; • Recognizing the importance of professional values, ethics, and attitudes in performing assigned tasks; • Solving simple problems, and referring complex tasks or problems to supervisors or those with specialized expertise; and • Providing information and explaining ideas in a clear manner, using oral and written communications. <p>Learning outcomes at the foundation level relate to work situations that are characterized by low levels of ambiguity, complexity, and uncertainty.</p>
Intermediate	<p>Typically, learning outcomes in a competence area focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independently applying, comparing, and analyzing underlying principles and theories from relevant areas of technical competence to complete work assignments and make decisions; • Combining technical competence and professional skills to complete work assignments; • Applying professional values, ethics, and attitudes to work assignments; and • Presenting information and explaining ideas in a clear manner, using oral and written communications, to accounting and non-accounting stakeholders. <p>Learning outcomes at the intermediate level relate to work situations that are characterized by moderate levels of ambiguity, complexity, and uncertainty.</p>

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Level of Proficiency	Description
Advanced	<p>Typically, learning outcomes in a competence area focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selecting and integrating principles and theories from different areas of technical competence to manage and lead projects and work assignments, and to make recommendations appropriate to stakeholder needs; • Integrating technical competence and professional skills to manage and lead projects and work assignments; • Making judgments on appropriate courses of action drawing on professional values, ethics, and attitudes; • Assessing, researching, and resolving complex problems with limited supervision; • Anticipating, consulting appropriately, and developing solutions to complex problems and issues; and • Consistently presenting and explaining relevant information in a persuasive manner to a wide-range of stakeholders <p>Learning outcomes at the advanced level relate to work situations that are characterized by high levels of ambiguity, complexity, and uncertainty.</p>

IAESB DRAFTING CONVENTIONS

Language and Structure

In developing the IESs, the selection of appropriate wording will be guided, wherever possible, by these *IAESB Drafting Conventions* and the *IAESB Glossary of Terms* (the “Glossary”). Definitions found in the IAESBs pronouncements are included in the Glossary. The Glossary is intended to support translation, interpretation, and application. The definitions are not intended to override definitions that may be established for other purposes, whether in law, regulation, or otherwise.

The structure of the IESs shall be organized to include the following as separate sections: Introduction, Objective, Requirements, and Explanatory Material.

Introduction

The introductory material includes information regarding the scope and effective date that provides context relevant to a proper understanding of each IES.

Objective

The IESs contain a clear statement of the objective of the standard. The objective assists an IFAC member body to understand the overall aim of the standard, and what needs to be accomplished, as well as to decide whether more needs to be done to achieve the objective.

Requirements

The objective is supported by clearly stated requirements that are necessary to achieve the objective. Requirements are always expressed using the term “shall.”

Explanatory Material

The explanatory material is intended to explain the scope, objective, and requirements in more detail. The explanatory material assists IFAC member bodies in the application of the requirements and may include examples of how to meet them. The explanatory material does not impose any additional requirements; its purpose is to assist in application.

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