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**What factors influence accounting students deliberating their choice of
professional qualification?**

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**This research project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the Masters of Arts in
Accounting at the Athlone Institute of Technology**

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Declaration

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List of Abbreviations

ACCA	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
ICAI	Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland
CIMA	Chartered Institute of Management Accountants
CPA	Certified Public Accountants in Ireland
AIT	Athlone Institute of Technology
GMIT	Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
WIT	Waterford Institute of Technology

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Abstract

Purpose The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors influencing intentions toward becoming a student member of one of the four major professional accountancy bodies in Ireland by students who are studying accounting degrees.

Scope This research focused on investigating the factors accounting students consider when making their choices of professional qualification and the relevant importance of such criteria. It helped to establish the role third parties play in making the professional membership decisions. This study provided an understanding of the process involved in making professional qualification choices.

Methodology The sample comprised of accounting students of the final year of Undergraduate Programme or Master's Programme at the following colleges; Athlone Institute of Technology, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology and Waterford Institute of Technology. A questionnaire was distributed to those students in order to examine relationship between influencing factors and their professional qualification choices. A total of 111 effective responses were analysed. Additionally, interviews were conducted with eight existing/current members of the four major professional accounting bodies to gain understanding of the process of choosing professional qualification by prospective accountants.

Findings Findings of this study demonstrate that prospective accountants are motivated and encouraged by a mixture of factors that would imply short-term and long-term focus when deciding on their professional association. Accounting students are influenced by third parties, particularly training firms and current body members. Gender was not found to lead to significant differences in the approaches taken or choices made. The process of how choices are made had significant impact on the final decision. The critical stage of the process occurs at the moment when students decide how many options to consider as most students do not look at all professional accounting bodies available but rather weigh only one or two alternatives.

Implications Possible consequences of this approach for students is, that by failing to include of all of the options in their research and decision making they may be impulsively rejecting or even failing to consider viable possibilities. Been aware of the critical stage of the decision making involved in choosing professional qualification, accounting bodies may act accordingly to ensure they are present in student's mind at that point of the process.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will offer an initial overview of the research project. It contains the background to the study, the rationale for undertaking the study, the specific research aim, and the research objectives. It also provides a brief overview of each subsequent chapter within the research project.

1.2 Research Aim

The main purpose of the present study is to identify important factors that influence the choices of professional qualification made by prospective accountants in Ireland.

1.3 Research Objectives

The research aim translates into the following objectives:

1. To investigate what factors prospective accountants consider when making the membership decision and how influential those factors are.
2. To establish the role third parties play in making the professional membership decision.
3. To explain any gender differences in professional membership decision making of prospective accountants.
4. To provide an understanding of the process involved in choosing a professional qualification and its relevance to the outcome (final decision).

1.4 Rationale for undertaking the study

As an accounting graduate and a prospective accountant the author was faced with the decision to select a professional body she would like to join. The author found it surprising how students differed in the approaches taken and the criteria considered in the process of making such decision and decided to investigate the matter further. Upon an initial review of relevant literature the author found that although, there has been a substantial body of research which has explored the key influences on accounting students' career decisions or choice of a major; the area of the decisions regarding joining a professional accounting body seems to be overlooked, verifying the need to carry out the present study.

1.5 Background to the study

Thousands of accounting students graduating each year are left with the question; "what's next?" Majority of those graduates choose to major in accounting by pursuing a professional qualification and therefore need to decide on their professional association. Historically the Institute of Chartered Accountants had monopoly of the market, that is, it dominated the accounting profession in terms of the numbers of students as well as the number of members.

Currently, there are several professional accounting bodies in Ireland with Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland, Institute of Certified Public Accountants in Ireland playing a major role. Recruiting high quality students is critically important to the future success of each of the bodies. To be able to attract new members, the professional accounting associations need to understand what influences the choices of prospective accountants, thus may have a deep interest in this study.

Decision regarding professional membership is also significant from the point of view of students to ensure they choose a body that would suit their own set-ups. The purpose of this study is not to establish which of the body is best to join. There is no one answer that would fit all as it depends on person's own circumstance. The focus of this research is rather to try to understand how prospective accountants make their professional association choices, the number of options they consider and the criteria they use in order to evaluate those alternatives.

Understanding the factors that influence the decision making process, it is important to understanding what decisions are made. That is, the factors that influence the process may impact the outcomes.

As learnt from the interviews with existing body members, in the past the accounting profession was dominated by ICAI and other bodies did not exist or were insignificant on the Irish market. The information was not as easy accessible as it is now. Students often felt there was only one option to consider and found themselves not giving this decision much of a thought, in many cases following what other peers in a group were doing. The share of the market has changed. With the advancement in technology and significant marketing efforts of all of the bodies, the information is readily available for anyone who wants to access it. Having that in mind it will be interesting to see if the way in which students decide on their professional association have altered accordingly to those changes.

There are many factors that influence decisions including family, social, and psychological factors. Due to their complexity decision-making processes as a subject of research are approached from different points of view and it would be extremely time consuming to try to combine in one study all of the factors that may influence a decision making process. Therefore, this research will be incomplete focusing on the reasons why students are attracted to major accounting bodies and the factors that may influence their membership decisions, namely gender and the role others play in making such decision.

1.6 Project Roadmap

1.6.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter will offer an initial overview of the research project. It contains the background to the study, the rationale for undertaking the study, the specific research aim, and the research objectives. It also provides a brief overview of each subsequent chapter within the research project.

1.6.2 *Chapter 2 – Literature Review*

This chapter will review the literature relevant to the subject of this research. The author will summarise current academic thought in this particular area of interest. The author found that no previous study was conducted on the factors influencing the decision regarding joining a professional accounting body. Taking that such decision can be considered as a career decision, the author broadened the search of relevant literature to include literature concerned with making career choices and decision making in general.

1.6.3 *Chapter 3 – Research Methodology*

The previous chapter provided the reader with a generalised summary of the literature available on the area of career choices and decision making. This chapter outlines the methodology adopted by the author in order to achieve the research aim and objectives.

1.6.4 *Chapter 4 – Presentation of results*

This chapter will present the findings of the quantitative and qualitative data collected through the methods discussed in chapter three. The author will link questions to the specific objective of the research and show how the results gathered in the questionnaires and/or interviews helps to achieve each objective. The author will use pie charts and bar charts as an aid to analyse some of the data gathered from the respondents.

1.6.5 *Chapter 5 – Discussion*

This chapter will discuss and critically analyse the research findings that were displayed in chapter four, whilst addressing each research objective individually. The author will also attempt to link those findings to the literature discussed in chapter two and debate whether or not they agree.

1.6.6 *Chapter 6 – Conclusion*

This chapter aims to conclude the main findings of the research under each objective and to give a personal reflection on the author's experience of carrying out this research. The chapter will also address limitations in the research and give recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will review the literature relevant to the subject of this research. The author will summarise current academic thought in this particular area of interest. The author found that no previous study was conducted on the factors influencing the decision regarding joining a professional accounting body. Taking that such decision can be considered as a career decision, the author broadened the search of relevant literature to include literature concerned with making career choices and decision making in general.

2.2 Methods

The literature review was mainly conducted using the resources of the library at Athlone Institute of Technology, which were accessed both online and in person. Journal articles sourced online through databases such as Emerald, Science Direct and ProQuest as well as direct access to websites such as the Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority (IAASA) and websites of all of the major professional accounting associations have provided valuable resources for the author. Examples of keyword searches included: “influences on professional membership decisions”, “career choices”, “accounting profession”, “key influences on students”, “career decisions in post-compulsory education”, “from student to accounting professional”.

2.3 Decision Making

In recent years, there has been increased interest in the importance of differences in decision making. The number of measures that aim at distinguishing among the various ways people make decisions are numerous (over 160); however, most of the measures focus on decision making in general, and only a few on career decisions and even fewer on professional career-decisions. The literature considering professional association membership seems to explain why people may wish to join a professional body, however the aspect of choosing between alternative professional bodies available seems to be overlooked.

Decision making and career decision making theories can be used as an infrastructure for understanding the processes involved in making decisions regarding joining a professional accounting body by prospective accountants.

“People are said to approach decisions in different ways. Some emphasize an objective, detached manner, gathering much information and performing explicit analyses. Others see themselves as more holistic and intuitive. Some operate autonomously, while others rely on others’ input to navigate the process. Some people approach decision-making tasks with a more spontaneous manner, in contrast to those who are much more deliberative and intentional. Other individuals try to avoid the process entirely. These individual differences are thought to be independent of cognitive abilities such as intelligence, and more related to motivational or personality differences.” (Galotti, et al., 2006)

2.4 Historical Remarks

A majority of the classical decision making theories stemmed from economy, statistics and philosophy. Among early decision making models, a model of economic human prevailed, assuming that decision makers are: “(1) fully informed regarding all possible options for their decisions and of all possible outcomes of their decision options, (2) infinitely sensitive to the subtle distinctions among decision options, and (3) fully rational in regard to their choice of options.” (Polic, 2009)

Very soon deficiencies of this approach became evident and alternative approaches to decision making were introduced taking of account psychological aspects.

The alternative models included:

Subjective Expected Utility (SEU) is another example of classical models of decision making. It was based on the principle that “the goal of human activity is the search for pleasure and avoidance of pain. During decision-making people try to maximise satisfaction (positive utility) and minimise dissatisfaction (negative utility). In the process of making choices they apply subjective utility (based on individual judgement and not objective criteria) and subjective probability (again based on subjective criteria).

The prediction of the optimal decision for a given individual is based on the belief that people want to make rational decisions taking into account all known option, using maximum quantity of available information, conscientious, although subjective

weighting of the potential costs and benefits and calculation of the probability of different outcomes and the maximum degree of sound reasoning. (Polic, 2009)

Both of the above mentioned classical models of decision making were based on the principle of utility maximisation that is, searching for the optimal solution (Neumann and Morgenstern, 1953).

The following are examples of some of the more contemporary models:

Simon (1955) in his Nobel Prize winning research observed that our capacity for rationality is constrained, and proposed the concept of *bounded rationality* to explain those constraints. According to Simon, we rarely have all of the information we need to make a consummate rational choice and even if we did, we do not individually possess the cognitive capacity to use it optimally. Instead, we engage in *satisficing*, a relatively crude application of reason in which we settle for an adequate selection, as opposed to the optimal one. (Krieshok, et al., 2009) Simon believed that people are not necessary irrational, but they do not take into account all the options and do not calculate which ones will give the greatest benefit and the smallest loss as claimed in previous research. Simon argued that people consider options one after other and choose the first that satisfies them, that is, that meets the level of acceptability. (Polic, 2009)

In 2002, Kahneman was granted a Nobel Prize for his work with Tversky on mapping the parameters of bounded rationality originally detected by Simon. While Simon studied the limits of rational decision making, Tversky and Kahneman concerned themselves with cognitive heuristics and biases that confound intuitive judgments. According to Kahneman (2003), “we held a two-system view, which distinguished intuition from reason”.

Kahneman referred to the intuitive mode of processing as System 1 and the rational mode as System 2. System 1 operations are typically habitual, implicit, associative, heuristic, and often emotionally charged.

System 2 operations are typically deliberate, explicit, deterministic, systematic, and not generally subject to emotion. Kahneman’s research has demonstrated System 1 to be more susceptible to biases and heuristics in decision making. (Krieshok, et al., 2009)

2.5 Decision making styles

Decision-making styles constitute a subset of broader cognitive styles, defined generally as the way people deploy their intellectual abilities, or the manner in which they approach cognitive tasks. A common dimension of difference in many of the learning style, thinking style, and decision-making style investigations is the contrast between rational and intuitive approaches. The former connotes approaching a task objectively, unemotionally, analytically, and thoroughly; the latter, personally, emotionally, holistically, and drawing on one's feelings (Stanovich & West, 2000) with the rational approach remaining to be the dominant paradigm in both decision making and career decision making literature.

Many proposals have been offered for dimensions of decision-making styles. Research on individual differences in career decision-making processes have often focused on classifying individuals into a few types of decision-making styles based on the most dominant trait or characteristic of their approach to the decision process.

Scott and Bruce (1995) for example, proposed five distinct stylistic dimensions: rational (characterised by a thorough search for and logical evaluation of alternatives), intuitive (characterised by a reliance on hunches and feelings), dependent (characterised by a search for advice and direction from others), avoidant (characterised by attempts to avoid decision-making), and spontaneous (characterised by a sense of immediacy and a desire to complete the process quickly).

The two main assumptions of this theory say that those styles are distinct, that is, you can be only one of them and that the style proves constant, that is, an individual continuous to make decisions in same approach regardless of the decision made. Some researchers contradicted these assumptions underlying Scott and Bruce's approach.

Gati, for example, questioned the "relative stability" of decision making styles and argued that while people may have a dominant decision making style, they may also change their approach to the decision being made depending on the situation.

Krieschok, et al. (2009), in turn claimed, that decisions are a result of both conscious (rational) and unconscious (intuition) processes which are mutual informants of career decision making, therefore questioning the distinctiveness of stylistic dimensions of decision-making styles.

The next section will describe the work of Gati et al. whereas Krieschok's research will be described in the career decision making section.

Gati, et al. (2010) introduced an alternative approach to decision making which offered a multidimensional profile characterisation of individuals' career decision-making process based on a simultaneous consideration of 11 dimensions. The model was derived from analysis of the various career decision-making styles presented in previous research.

Gati argued that “previous studies had typically yielded taxonomies, based on the assumption that a decision-making style is a relatively stable personality disposition” classifying individuals into a few types based on their most dominant characteristics.

Gati highlighted that some researches such as Driver, Brousseau & Hunsaker (1990) and Harren (1979) argued that “in addition to their primary decision-making style, individuals also have a secondary style. That is, where an individual's approach to a given decisional task may be characterised by one dominant style, elements of other styles can also be present”. Furthermore, Gati et al. called on Payne, Bettman and Johnson (1993) who exhibited in their research that individual adopt different strategies when faced with different decisions.

Gati et al. proposed alternative model for characterising career decision-making called decision making profiles that was different compared to previous theories for two reasons:

- 1) it indicated that when dealing with career decision making “we are dealing with a complex, multidimensional construct rather than a single dominant trait and thus several characteristics are required to adequately characterise the way the individual makes decisions (i.e. individuals may differ in many dimensions even though their most dominant trait is the same); and,
- 2) Career decision-making profile refers to both personality and situational influences on the decision-making behaviour.” (Gati, et al., 2010, p. 278)

The 11-dimensional model proposed by Gati (2010) provides further refinement and elaboration of previous career decision-making style models: for example, instead of labelling an individual “dependent” with respect to the relations with and the role of significant others (Scott & Bruce, 1995) the particular characteristics of the relationship with the significant others are explained. Gati et al (2010) distinguished between relations with others that involve consultation (i.e. significant others as a resource), wanting to please others (i.e. significant others as authority) and transferring responsibility for the decision to others

(i.e. significant others as a responsible source that reduces anxiety). Thus, even if dependence on others is the individual's most dominant career decision-making style, the multidimensional model allows for a more refined description of the individual's manner of incorporation the influence of significant others. (Gati, et al., 2010)

2.6 Differences in criteria considered and information sought

When making a decision people differ in the number of criteria or options they consider and the number of information sources they consult. There is contradicting literature trying to explain where those differences derive from.

Bruce and Scott (1995), for example, claimed that those differences come from different approaches to decision making. They expected people who reported themselves as more "rational" or "planful" to consider more options and/or more criteria, and/or consult more information in making this decision. In contrast, they expected students who described themselves as more "avoidant" or "spur-of-the-moment" to consider fewer options or criteria and consult fewer sources of information. Galotti, et al., (2006) tested this hypothesis in 2005 surveying 133 students deciding on their college major and found that "individual differences in scores did not correlate with structural measures of decision-making, such as number of options considered, the number of criteria used, or the number of information sources consulted. This data suggest that students who deem themselves to have very different approaches to decision-making consider themselves to gather and consider the same amount of information as they face this important decision (of choosing college major)."

However, Galotti mentioned that the hypothesis suggested by Bruce and Scott may prove true in less important or intentional decisions and advised further research in that area.

One of the reasons why individuals may differ in the way they approach career decisions is their orientation to the future. Some research has demonstrated that individuals differ reliably in the degree to which they consider future consequences, set goals, allocate resources for those goals – in other words, in their planning ability (Simons & Galotti, 1992). Galotti (2001) argues that "planning skills or tendencies may direct individuals to organise their search for information, their structuring and integration of the information gathered, and help them better synchronise their decision-making activities with their broader goals.

2.7 Career decision making

Industrialization, immigration, and urbanization propelled the development of vocational psychology in early 20th century in America. Of the early theoretical approaches to vocational psychology, Parsons' (1909) systematic conceptual framework for career guidance is one of the few that has endured. (Krieshok, et al., 2009)

Parsons asserted that the decisional process applies reason to the relationship between knowledge of self and knowledge of the conditions of success in different lines of work. The implications of this model have informed vocational psychology ever since, especially the concept that individuals can be successfully matched with occupations, eventually known as the trait-factor theory. The trait-factor theory has inspired more contemporary theory of person–environment correspondence developed by Lofquist & Dawis in 1991. According to this theory “*occupational selection is best accomplished by matching individual traits to work requirements. An effective person–environment fit is hypothesized to yield both vocational satisfaction (as experienced by the worker) as well as vocational satisfactoriness (of the worker—as experienced by the employer).*” (Krieshok, et al., 2009)

The concept of person–environment fit is also found in Holland's theory of vocational personalities and work environments, the most extensively employed assessment approach in vocational psychology.

A typical career counselling experience involves deriving an individual's Holland code. The whole process is based on a belief of “one's ability to apply reason to the relationship between knowledge of self and knowledge of occupations in the service of a career decision” introduced by Person.

The belief that “there is one right career for me” is a common belief among those preparing to enter the workforce. Career counselling services still appear to hugely rely on the concept that “*vocational success is all about the match that matches being the one occupation or career that best suits of one's particular combination of interests, skills, and personality.*” (Krieshok, et al., 2009)

A wide range of approaches exist in the career decision making area. The major career development theories include the three-dimensional model created by Carpenter and Foster (1997). Many studies have referred to this model while exploring career choices.

This model recognises that a career's perceived value is determined by the importance an individual places on intrinsic factors (e.g. intellectual interest and job satisfaction), extrinsic factors (e.g. employment availability and remuneration) and interpersonal factors (i.e. the influence of others). It acknowledges that people develop predispositions for particular values and that they perceive different occupations as varying in terms of the extent to which they satisfy particular desired extrinsic and intrinsic outcomes. Additionally, person's belief about a career's value is influenced by the perceptions, attitudes and expectations of others such as parents, teachers, guidance counsellors and friends. (Byrne, et al., 2012)

Other researchers, interested in career choices in accounting, have used the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) to examine the factors that impact on students' career decisions. (Ajzen & Fishbein 1975). According to the TRA, individuals' career choices are determined by their intentions to pursue a particular career which in turn, are influenced by their attitudes towards that career and their perceptions of social pressure to follow or reject that career. Attitudes about a career are determined by an individual's belief that a career will lead to certain outcomes. An individual's perception of social pressures is a function of that person's beliefs that specific referents, such as parents or teachers, will approve or disapprove of particular career.

The extent of a referent's influence on an individual's career choice depends on how much significance the individual places on the approval of the referent. (Agarwala, 2008)

Byrne et al. (2012) conducted a study to examine the importance of factors synthesised from the above mentioned theories of career development and found that students who intended to pursue a career in accounting found "prestige and financial rewards" as far more important than those who had decided against an accounting career.

This finding is consistent with the results reported in similar studies conducted in other countries which reported that students interested in accounting place more importance on extrinsic rewards.

Overall, previous studies demonstrate that people are motivated by a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic outcomes in choosing a career. It will be interesting to find out what mixture of intrinsic, extrinsic and interpersonal factors motivate prospective accountants deliberating their decisions on which professional association to join.

2.8 Gender differences

Gati et al. (2010) in his study of career decision profiles mentioned earlier, highlights some gender differences among dimensions that were examined. Inspection of the interaction between the 11 dimensions and gender revealed that “the highest score for men was for *locus of control (internal-the degree to which individuals believe they control their occupational future and feel that their decisions affect their career opportunities, or that these are mainly determined by external forces such as fate or luck-external)* whereas for women it was for *consulting with others (the extent to which individuals consult with others during the different stages of the decision process.)*”

Additionally, in three dimensions the gender differences were statistically significant. Specially, women’s scores were higher than those of men for *effort invested* and for *consulting with others*. Men’s scores were higher than women’s scores for *speed of making the final decision*. These differences suggest that women tend to invest more effort in the decision-making process and to consult more with others, whereas men tend to make the final decision faster. (Gati, et al., 2010)

Galotti (2001) also believes that: “There are individual differences that impact on decision-making and these individual differences may relate in part to gender.”

Agarwala (2008) found in her research that “in terms of the “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” classification of career choice factors, it appears that intrinsic factors (such as skills and competencies) were more important for female students in their choice of management career, while extrinsic factors (such as availability of employment and remuneration) were more important for male students. This study, however, revealed no gender differences on any other variable.

Hall (2004) proposed that a person’s career orientation was unrelated to gender. As regards the study of sex differences, Baumeister (1988) proposes that this is no longer necessary, while Eagly (1987) and Lefkowitz (1994) advocate the investigation of sex differences in organizational behaviour. If obtained consistently across studies, even null findings are important (Lefkowitz, 1994) since these would help establish that women and men are similar in many respects.

From a gender perspective, it will be very interesting to examine whether the factors influencing the choice of professional association made by female prospective accountants will differ to that of their male counterparts, as it was reported in the prior literature in relation to career decision making.

2.9 The role third parties play in decision making process

The influence of others has also been considered an important aspect that may influence a student's career intention. "General research on career choice has demonstrated that key figures in the lives of people exert a strong influence on their career aspirations. However, studies that have examined the importance of referents on students' career choice in accounting have failed to provide consistent results." (Byrne, et al., 2012)

Paolilo and Estes (1982), in a US study, reported that teachers had a greater influence than parents or peers on students' decisions to pursue a career in accounting. In a study set in New Zealand, Tan and Laswad (2006) reported that accounting majors were more motivated to comply with their parents than non-accounting majors when making career choices.

Similar to parental attachment, peer relationships have been found to influence an individual's career choices (Felsman & Blustein, 1999; Wilkinson, 2004). As adolescents separate from their families, secure attachments are transferred and fostered in peer relationships. As a result, young adults with positive peer relationships experience a sense of freedom in regard to making career choices, allowing them to explore career options in greater depth.

Byrne et al. (2012) investigated the influences on school leavers' career choices reported that parents and subject teachers are the only people who influence their career decisions with friends, relatives, guest speakers and interestingly, career guidance teachers having no influence.

In contrast, Gul et al. (1989) found that Australian students were not influenced by their parents, teachers or peers in choosing to study accounting. Similarly Lowe and Simons (1997) reported that friends, teachers and parents were the least influential factors in the decision to major in accounting. This latter finding is consistent with a later study by Strasser, Ozgur and Schroeder (2002) who reported that parents, peers and advisers had little influence on students' choice of business major. However, Agarwala (2008) found that a young

person's belief about a career's value is influenced by the perceptions, attitudes and expectations of others such as parents, teachers, guidance counsellors and friends.

Prospective accountants operate within a set of relationships made up of parents, relatives, friends, professionals (i.e. lecturers and career advisors) and other people they come into contact with in their jobs, leisure activities, etc. Greenbank (2010) argues that these networks represent forms of 'social capital' that may be utilised in the career decision-making process. According to his research, students are reluctant to deal with people they are unfamiliar with, what is more many of them lack proactivity, that is, courage, initiative and an action-orientation and as a result they are likely to contact sources of information they are familiar and feel comfortable with such as their peers or parents rather than people who have expertise in the field (e.g. career counsellors or people in industry). (Greenbank, 2010)

2.10 The influence of reason and intuition on career choices

As mentioned previously, decision making and career decision making theories emphasise the "true reasoning", that is, the rational approach as the dominant paradigm

"Many psychologists and philosophers equate effectiveness of decision-making with rationality. Rational decision-making requires one to gather information about a decision as carefully as possible under the circumstances. In particular, rational decision-making requires that the person look at not only evidence that supports their initial inclinations but also evidence that does not." (Baron, 1994)

According to Galotti (2001) that may or may not honour the conventional advice to "consider all options carefully"; time and other constraints will probably preclude a decision-maker from examining every possible option. "Rationality in general requires not that a decision-maker be error-free in outcomes, but instead that the decision-maker have good reasons for making the decision she or he makes at the time that she or he makes it." (Moshman, 1999)

Galotti (2001) in her study presents the rational model of decision making as a preferred approach to making important decisions claiming that "the absence of good models of careful, prolonged, reflective thought may lead young people especially to place too much value on quick decisions that are never ever revisited. They may avoid the hard work of rational decision-making because they lack a system to do it."

Conversely, upon review of the social and cognitive psychology literature on decision making, Krieshok (1998) called into question this emphasis of reason, suggesting those literatures conclude that “most processing performed by the human mind for decision making and behaviour initiation is not performed at the conscious level”. Specifically, empirical evidence from social and cognitive psychology as well as from neuroscience suggests that introspective access to cognitive processes is limited (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977); that our cognitive processes are often confounded by biases and heuristics (Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982; Simon, 1955; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973, 1974, 1982; Wason, 1960); and that an intuitive mode of processing parallels the rational one and is active and influential in decision making (Epstein, 1994; Kahneman, 2003; Lieberman, 2003). Neuroscience research reveals a state of affairs that is generally consistent with the dialectical models proposed by Kahneman (2003), Epstein (1994), and Lieberman (2003).

Krieshok et al. (2009) claims that *“it is likely more accurate to consider the matter in dialectical terms, with rational and intuitive processes mutually informing career decision making and, ultimately, career adaptability.”*

A review of empirical research on career decision making reveals that it clearly is not an exclusively rational process. In a study involving college students trained in a five-step rational decision making strategy, Soelberg (1967) was able to predict their post-graduate job choices in 87% of the cases. Although the students claimed to rely on the rational decision-making methods they had been taught, they typically opted for their initial, intuitively derived choices. Soelberg concluded that the students were in fact applying systematic methods, but not in the interest of making rationally informed decisions. Rather, he hypothesized that they were rationally constructing justification for their intuitively derived choices. (Krieshok, et al., 2009)

Gati and Tikotzki (1989) also challenged the emphasis on rational processes in career decision making. They determined that career decision-makers explored occupational information to the sequential elimination model (Gati, 1986), rather than the rational utility model (Pitz & Harren, 1980). Adapted from Tversky’s (1972) theory of elimination by aspects, the sequential elimination model involves identification and ranking of select occupational aspects (e.g. salary, prestige) followed by elimination of occupational alternatives that violate those aspects. As opposed to the expected utility model, in which the

probable utility of each vocational option is computed and weighted, this strategy allows one to economically reduce the potentially bewildering multitude of vocational options to a manageable number. Moreover, it is consistent with Simon's (1995) conclusion that we rarely have all of the relevant information we need to make a rational decision. (Krieshok, et al., 2009)

Galotti (2001) observed a similar trend in her study. "Students appear to naturally avoid becoming swamped with information by restricting the number of alternatives they consider, and the number of criteria they use to assess alternatives. Adults apparently do this too, pruning the number of options they consider at any given point in to time."

Galotti argues that such approach may form a hindrance to good adolescent decision-making; "it seems quite plausible that in their rush to screen options and criteria, decision-makers may be impulsively rejecting or even failing to consider viable possibilities."

This chapter looked at the relevant literature covering the main theories and some of the influences on decision making and career choices. Decision making is a complex process that depends on several factors. The differences in decision making are results of psychological, personal, demographic and sociological attributes of the decision maker.

The author has found a vast range of research on decision making and career choices, however the area of the decisions regarding joining a professional accounting body seems to be overlooked, verifying the need to carry out the present study.

The following chapter will detail the methodology chosen for this research project.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided the reader with a generalised summary of the literature available on the area of career choices and decision making. This chapter outlines the methodology adopted by the author in order to achieve the research aim and objectives.

3.2 Research Aim and Objectives

3.2.1 Research Aim

The research aims to investigate the influential factors on the professional membership choices of prospective accountants in Ireland.

3.2.2 Research Objectives

The research aim translates into the following objectives:

1. To investigate what factors prospective accountants consider when making the membership decision and how influential those factors are.
2. To establish the role that different individuals play in making the professional membership decision.
3. To explain any gender differences in professional membership decision making of prospective accountants.
4. To provide an understanding of the process involved in choosing a professional qualification and its relevance to the outcome (final decision).

3.3 Research Methodologies

Ragin (1994) describes research design as “*a plan for collecting and analysing evidence that will make it possible for the investigator to answer whatever question he or she has posed*”.

In order to explain the research process, the author will use the research onion, Figure 3.1 (Saunders, et al., 2012)

By going through different layers of the research onion, the author will explain alternative options available at each level and justify the choice of philosophy, strategy and research methods that are best suited for this study.

As seen in Figure 3.1, the research process has been categorised into six stages/layers.

1. Research Philosophies

2. Research Approaches

3. Research Strategies

4. Research Choices

5. Time Horizons

6. Techniques and procedures

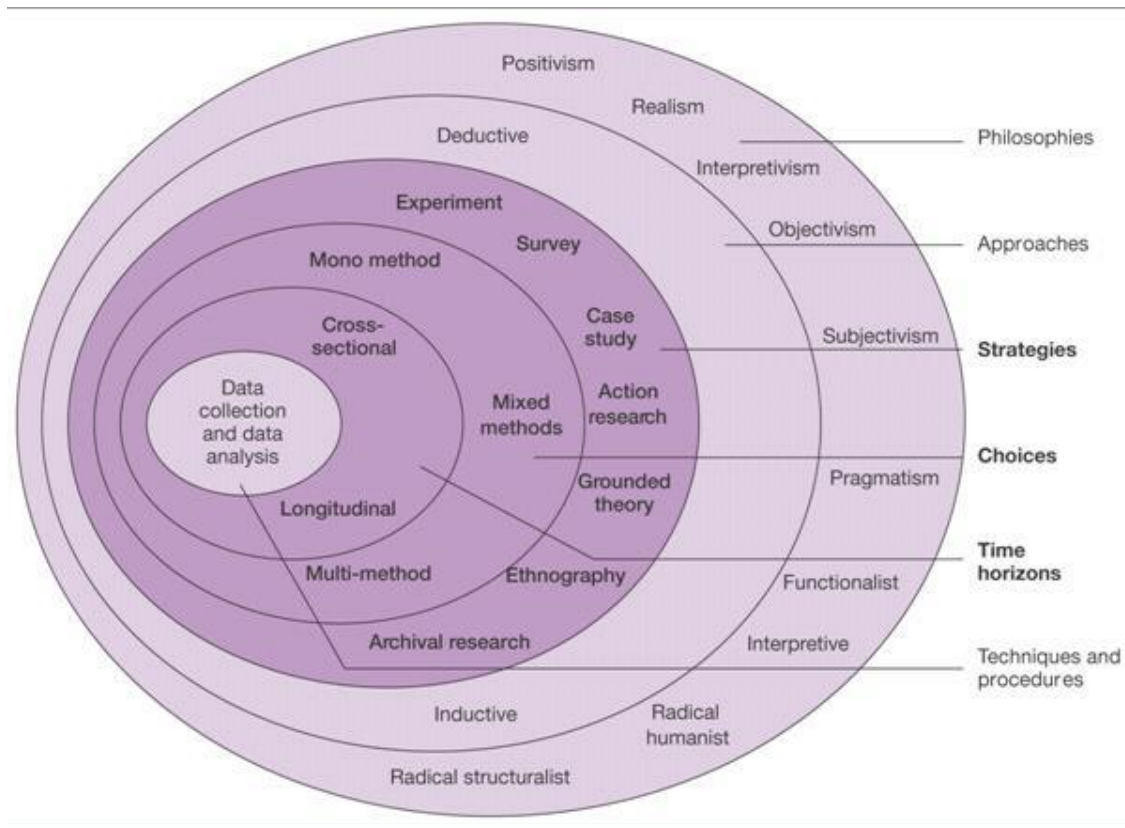


Figure 3.1: The research ‘onion’ (Saunders, et al., 2012)

3.3.1 Research Philosophies

There are four philosophies that are used in management and business research.

Positivism - *“working with an observable social reality and that the end product of such research can be law-like generalisations similar to those produces by the physical and natural scientists”*. (Saunders, et al., 2012)

It is based on factual information and is quantitative, focused on figures and statistics.

Realism - *“The essence of realism is that what the senses show us as reality is the truth: that objects have an existence independent of the human mind”* and it takes on a scientific approach to the development of knowledge (Saunders, et al., 2012)

Interpretivism - states that we are not independent from reality. It *“advocates that it is necessary for the researcher to understand differences between humans in our role as social actors”* (Saunders, et al., 2012)

Pragmatism - Niglas (2010) argues that a researcher could adopt a philosophy as a *“multi-dimensional set of continua rather than separate positions”*, when undertaking a particular study. Pragmatism is *“a position that argues that the most important determinant of the research philosophy adopted is the research question, arguing that it is possible to work within both positivist and interpretivist positions”* (Saunders, et al., 2012))

The author has adopted a research philosophy of pragmatism as she believes it would be most suited to the research methods employed to satisfy the research aim and objectives.

“Pragmatists recognise that there are many different ways of interpreting the world and undertaking research, that no single point of view can ever give the entire picture and that there may be multiple realities.” (Saunders, et al., 2012, p. 130)

A positivist philosophy was employed by the author in dealing with the quantitative information derived from the questionnaire.

The author believes that this part of the project is best served through *“ working with an observable social reality and that the end product of such research can be law-like generalisation similar to those produced by the scientists.”* (Saunders, et al., 2012, p. 134)

To emphasize the researcher’s underlying philosophy, the quantitative approach had been undertaken when designing the research aim and objectives. As the project evolved, the qualitative approach was also applied in order to seek new insights. The author adopted a mixture of positivism and interpretivism when dealing with the qualitative data gained from semi-structured interviews.

3.3.2 Research Approaches

The next layer of the onion reveals the research approach. Deductive research and inductive research are the two main research approaches which result in the achievement of a new knowledge.

Deduction- “involves developing a theory or hypothesis that is then subjected to a test through a series of propositions.” (Saunders, et al., 2012)

Induction - “involves the development of a theory as a result of the observation of empirical data.” (Saunders, et al., 2012)

The author believes that the inductive approach is best suited for this study. There has never been academic research done in the area of deciding which professional association to join as a student member and therefore there are no theories that could be tested by the researcher in this field.

The author also adopted some of the factors that influence decision making and career decision making found in the literature and included those as potential influencing variables to the process of making the decision on professional membership. However no specific hypotheses were made as to how these variables are related.

The author started this research by conducting informal interviews with a sample of prospective accountants about their experience in deciding which professional accounting body to join. The author also engaged in extensive research on each of the professional accounting bodies in which those interviewed are members of. This enabled the author to formulate of suitable questionnaire and interview questions.

As a next step, the appropriate data will be collected and then analysed. The result of this analysis would be the formulation of a theory which is the crowning point of the inductive research approach.

3.3.3 Research Strategies

Saunders et al. (2012) defines research strategy as “a plan of how a researcher will go about answering her or his research question.”

Different research traditions have led to a number of possible research strategies.

This research project used the research strategy of surveys, which addressed the descriptive element of the research, while the case study strategy incorporates the explanatory element of this project.

The survey was employed, as it “can be used to suggest possible reasons for particular relationship variables” (Saunders, et al., 2012). Denscombe (2010) suggests that “survey are used to best effect when the researcher wants factual information relating to groups of people: what they do, what they think, who they are” and that is the kind of data the author needs in order to fulfil the first three of research objectives of this study.

However, it has been argued that this strategy fails to add depth to the topic being investigated. For that reason, the author decided to give attention to the process of how prospective accountants arrive at the final decision (the outcome) by going into sufficient detail to unravel the complexities of a given situation.

Denscombe (2010) argues that “The real value of a case study is that it offers the opportunity to explain why certain outcomes might happen – more than just find out what those outcomes are”.

The author believes that combining those two strategies will provide both the breadth (questionnaires) and the depth (case study) to the research subject.

3.3.4 Research Choices

The next layer of the Research Onion features the authors’ research choices.

This examines whether qualitative or quantitative data collection techniques were used.

Quantitative research has been defined as “a formal, objective, systematic process in which numeric data are utilised to obtain information about the world” (Burns & Grove, 2005).

This method is often aiming “to identify and explain casual relationships between events”. (Porter, 2003). Malhorta (2006) explains that quantitative approach also seeks “to identify the data and, typically applies some form of statistical analysis.”

Porter (2003) argues that qualitative research “is often associated with the search for reasons and assumes multiple constructions of reality, or no one single truth”. Malhorta (2006) claims that “quantitative research provides insights and understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations” and emphasise that the method “produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification.”

The author is of the opinion that using multiple methods in this study is a research choice that is best suited to achieve the research objectives as most of the data required to answer those objectives is descriptive in nature, however there is also some explanatory data required. The author agrees with Saunders et al. (2012) who suggest that the combination of both quantitative and qualitative research in a research design is likely to overcome weaknesses associated with using only one method as well as providing scope for a richer approach to data collection, analysis and interpretation.

“Mixed method research is an approach that involves combining both the statistical trends and stories to study human and social problems. Combining these two methods gives us a complete understanding of the research problem.” (Creswell, 2013)

Saunders et al. (2012) describes triangulation as “*use of two or more independent sources of data or data collection methods to corroborate research findings within a study.*”

Denscombe (2010) adds: “The purpose of behind this is that the researcher can get a better understanding of the thing that is being investigated if he/she views it form different positions.”

The author believes that adoption of triangulation will help her to gain a fuller picture of the research subject, that is, the influences on professional membership decisions made by prospective accountants. This approach can also enhance the validity of the data if it is found that the data has some consistency across methods.

3.3.5 Time Horizons

The next layer of the Research Onion illustrates two time horizons:

Cross-sectional – Saunders et al. (2012) describes cross-sectional research as “the study of a particular phenomenon at a particular time”.

Longitudinal – is defined as “the study of a particular phenomenon over an extended period of time.” (Saunders, et al., 2012)

Due to the time constraints placed on the author, cross-sectional research was the most appropriate time horizon deemed by the author.

3.3.6 Techniques And Procedures

The final layer of the Research Onion outlines the data collection and data analysis techniques used in this process. The author had chosen a research method that reflects the overall research strategy. Thus in order to fulfil the research objectives, the research choice consists of the quantitative approach incorporating questionnaires and qualitative approach incorporating interviews.

Quantitative Approach – Questionnaire

In order to fulfil the first three objectives of this study collection of quantitative primary data was required. The data collection techniques available to the author under the survey research design were structured observation, structured interviews and questionnaires.

The author rejected the use of structured observations and structured interviews for the purpose of collecting such data as those techniques were not be feasible for this study. They are time consuming activities and as a result they would not yield a large enough number of participants to allow generalisations.

The researcher believes that a questionnaire is best suited technique for this study as it allows large amount of data to be collected in most efficient way. Moreover, questionnaires collect data in a standardised way so that the data are internally consistent and coherent for analysis allowing trends and patterns to be established.

THE PROCESS

Sampling

The author decided to focus the research on prospective accountants who studied towards relevant degrees as they form the majority of student intake of professional bodies e.g. 46% of newly registered students in Ireland in 2012 held a relevant degree or post-graduate qualification. (IAASA, 2013)

The researcher used purposive sampling that is, 'hand-picked' participants for the study on the basis of relevance to the subject being studied. As a result the author chose students who in April 2014 (at the point of survey being carried out) were in the final year of Undergraduate or Masters Programmes in Accounting on the assumption that majority of those students would have decided on their membership. The courses that took part in this research were as follows:

- Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT): Masters Programme in Accounting and Final Year of Undergraduate Degree in Accounting
- Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT): Masters Programme in Accounting and Final Year of Undergraduate Degree in Accounting
- Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT): Final Year of Undergraduate Degree in Accounting

Data collection

Questionnaires were issued to the relevant colleges in April 2014. Hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed to students during classes by academics who agreed in advance to participate in the research. The researcher decided to use that procedure as she felt that by doing so a higher response rate would be achieved. All questionnaires were returned to the researcher within two weeks. Total number of students enrolled in the relevant accounting courses at AIT, WIT and GMIT was 201. After eliminating an unusable questionnaire, 111 responses (55.72% effective response rate) were analysed. The eliminated responses were disregarded mainly due to incompleteness.

Questionnaire design

A questionnaire was designed to gather data on the relative importance of a set of variables on the professional membership decisions of prospective accountants.

The questionnaire was divided into a number of sections. One section sought responses on demographic questions such as gender, age and type of a course undertaken that were common to both groups of participants. Another section was based on a set of variables that could potentially make prospective accountants attracted to a professional accounting body where students were asked to respond on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from 5 (most influential) to 1 (not influential). There was also an option provided for those who did not consider certain factors while deciding on their professional association.

The author included in the questionnaire a measure of the factors included in the “Why choose CAI/ACCA?” etc. sections. The rationale for this inclusion is that:

1. because those factors are included and promoted in the marketing efforts of each of the bodies, they are believed to have some influence on the decisions students make and the author will test that in this study.
2. those factors may capture differences in the extent to which people acquire and evaluate the information they use in deciding which professional body to join.

In next section students were asked to indicate, by ticking relevant boxes, what research activities they had engaged in prior to making their final decision. The next section sought responses regarding influence of others on decisions of prospective accountants. A five-point Likert scale was used for that purpose. The final section of the questionnaire was designed to gather information on intentions of those who had not made that decision at the point of time the survey was conducted.

The following steps were taken in the process of designing the questionnaire.

A number of informal exploratory interviews were conducted with a sample of prospective accountants (classmates) to determine the factors they considered in deciding which professional accounting body to join and the process involved in making that decision.

The researcher analysed information regarding membership of each of the major professional accounting bodies in Ireland looking for cues for potentially influencing factors that may be considered by prospective accountants when deciding on their professional body.

The review of the literature resulted in additional factors that could possibly influence the decision maker being added to the questionnaire.

A draft version of a questionnaire was prepared. The author sought advice from individuals who were more experienced in designing questionnaires and made necessary changes

The survey was piloted with a sample of prospective accountants (classmates) and further changes were made based on the comments made in order to improve the clarity of questions.

A copy of the questionnaire used in this study can be found in Appendix A.

Qualitative Approach – Semi-Structured Interviews

The fulfilment of the last objective of this study requires collection of qualitative data. This part of the research looks at the issue holistically, that is, to understand the complexity of the situation. The author will need to look at different components of the process rather than just focusing on the outcome. To do so, the researcher needs to get deeper insights and therefore will use interviews as the most suitable data collection technique.

Saunders et al. (2012) defines a research interview as “a purposeful conversation between two or more people, requiring the interviewer to establish rapport, to ask concise and unambiguous questions, to which the interviewee is willing to respond, and to listen attentively.”

Interviews can be categorised as; structured interviews, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. The researcher conducted a number of semi-structured interviews as she felt this type of interviews best suited the purpose of this study. Semi-structured interviews were used in order to collect data that would help to find out what is happening when a prospective accountant make a decision as to which professional accountancy body to join and to understand the context. Saunders et al. (2012) suggests that data gathered through semi-structured interviews “are likely to be used not only to understand the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ but also to place more emphasis on ‘why’.”

The purpose of conducting interviews for this study was to collect data that will help to understand what factors influence the decisions of prospective accountants, how that decision is made and why some consider certain factors and find them influential where others do not. Semi-structured interviews are also most helpful when a research design adopts an inductive approach, and that is the case here. For all those reasons, the author decided to gather the qualitative data for this research via semi-structured interviews.

THE PROCESS

The interviews were undertaken with existing members of each of the accounting bodies in Ireland. The total number of interviewees amounted to 8 members which met the minimum sample requirement of 5-25 for semi-structured interviews recommended by Saunders et al. (2012)

Seven of the eight interviewees were academics from the Athlone Institute of Technology. The eighth person was a Financial Controller working for a multinational company based in Longford. Majority of participants are members of the Institute of Chartered Accountants (50%), followed by two members of the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants (25%) and one member (12.5%) representing the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants and one member (12.5%) of the Certified Public Accountants Ireland.

Participants were asked to describe the process of deciding on their professional association. The main purpose of these interviews was to learn more about the process of making such decision including the factors considered and the research activities engaged in but also to assess whether factors other than those included in the questionnaire may have influenced decisions of prospective accountants.

The author lacked previous experience in interviewing therefore she decided to perform a mock interview and asked for critical feedback.

The list of questions asked in interviews is attached in Appendix C

3.4 Limiting Bias

The researcher was aware of the need to formulate neutral questions when designing both the questionnaire and the interview. The piloting of questionnaire represented an additional anti-bias safeguard. The interviewer was aware of the need to remain neutral throughout the interview process.

The author is satisfied that the bias in the research was negligible and that the information gathered was consistently valid.

3.5 Ethical Issues

Being aware of the importance of research ethics, the author applied the following steps to ensure ethical behaviour was maintained throughout the course of the project:

1. Participants of this study were made fully aware they were subject of research. They were informed of the aim and nature of the research project. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any stage.
2. The author ensured the confidentiality of responses of both the students surveyed and members interviewed. The questionnaires were anonymous. The interviews were voice recorded only with the consent of the interviewees.

3.6 Limitations

The researcher experienced some external factors, which influenced the research findings.

The main limitation of the research was the time constraint. It was originally planned that this study would also include the point of view of accountancy bodies on the research subject, however due to the shortage of time, this idea was abandoned.

Despite all efforts, the inherent limitations of interview, that is, the impact of the interviewer and the context means that objectivity may not have been fully achieved.

Some of the participants taking part in the interviews made their membership decisions a long time ago. One limitation of that was that they could not remember all the details of the process of making the membership decision. A different time frame may cause a threat that their approach to membership decision may have been different to the approaches of current prospective accountants, perhaps due to a number of conditions that existed back then for example the information was not as easy accessible as it is now and the CAI had almost a monopoly on the Irish market with other bodies being insignificant (at least in the opinion of the interviewees) at the point of making the decision by them. This may negative effect on the generalisability of the findings.

Questionnaires, by their very nature, can start to impose a structure on the answers and shape the nature of the responses in a way that reflects the researcher's thinking rather than the respondent's. Every effort was taken to minimise the likelihood of this and to ensure that the study remains as objective as possible.

As the researcher did not meet the respondents in person and because the answers were given 'at a distance', there was little opportunity for the researcher to check the truthfulness of the answers given by the respondents. Considering the fact that questionnaires were anonymous and they did not concern a sensitive issue there is however no reason to believe that the answers given by the respondents were not true.

Nevertheless the author believes that the information gathered is valid.

3.7 Summary

This chapter outlined the research methodology implemented by the author in order to achieve the research aim and objectives. It also gave a brief overview of the threats to credibility, the limitations and the ethical considerations the author had to overcome.

The following chapter will attempt to analyse the results obtained by the methods outlined in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

This chapter will present the findings of the quantitative and qualitative data collected through the methods discussed in the previous chapter. The author will link questions to the specific objective of the research and show how the results gathered in the questionnaires and/or interviews helps to achieve each objective. The author will use pie charts and bar charts as an aid to analyse some of the data gathered from the respondents.

4.1 Profile of participants

4.1.1 Questionnaire respondents

The questionnaires were administered by academics in the classrooms in April 2014. The total number of students enrolled in the relevant courses at AIT, WIT and GMIT was 201. After extracting an unusable questionnaire, 111 responses (56% effective response rate) were analysed. Of the 111 participants whose data was included in the analyses, 54 (49%) were men and 53 (48%) were women. 4 (3%) participants did not state their gender. The majority of respondents fitted the <23 age category.

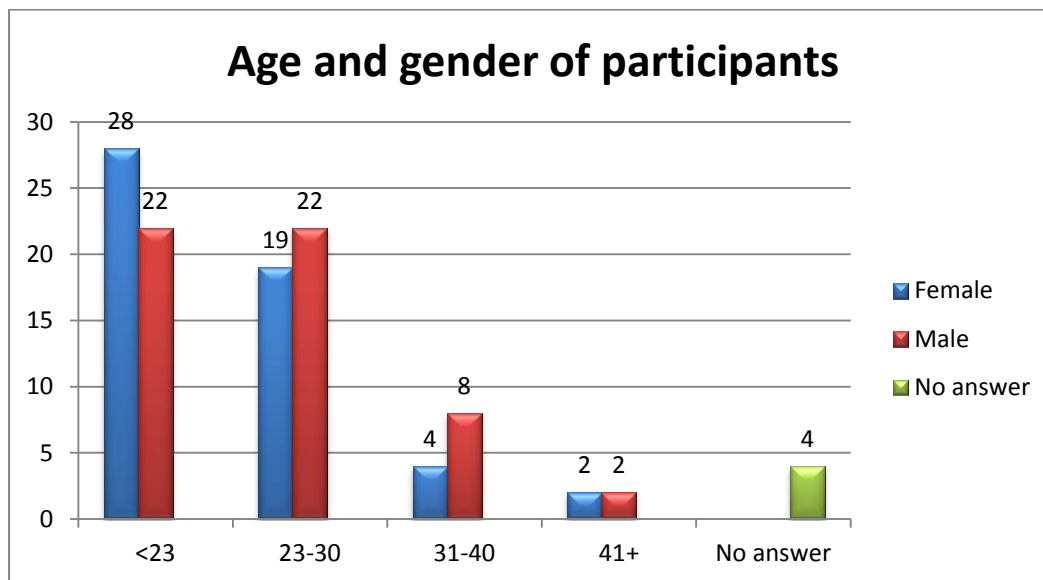


Figure 4.1 Age and gender of participants

Out of the 111 respondents, 86 were completing their final year of the undergraduate accounting degree. There were 22 students completing their Masters in Accounting Programme who took part in this research. The remaining 3 participant of the WIT did not specify what course they were doing.

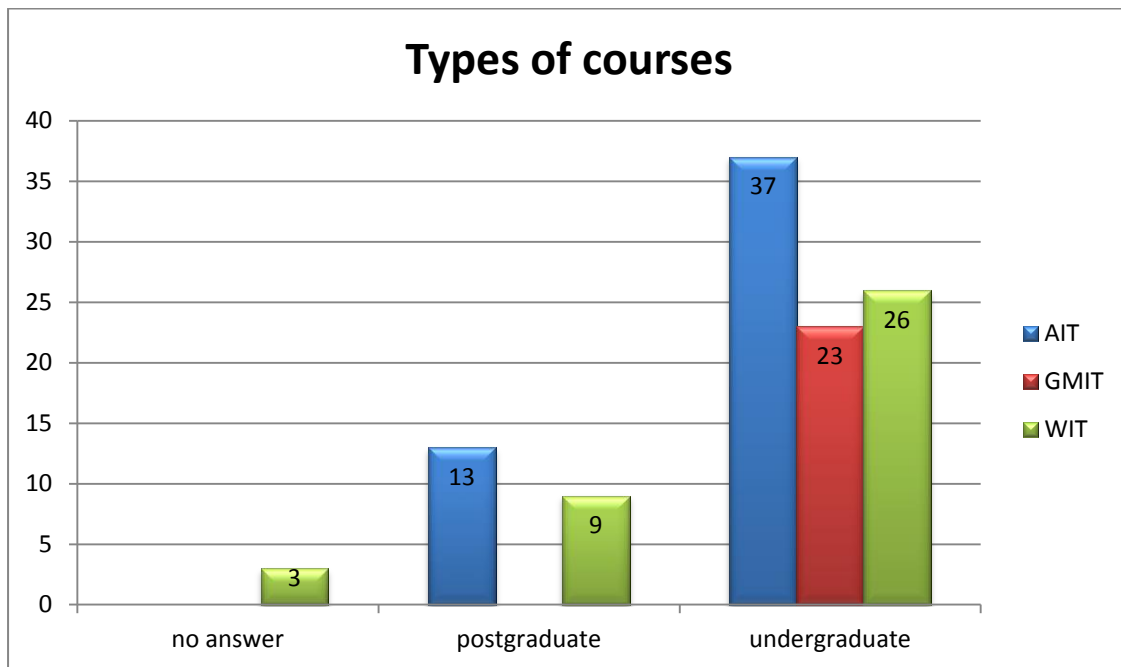


Figure 4.2 Types of courses undertaken by participants

68% of the students participating in this study have decided which of the professional accounting bodies they wish to join after graduating from college. 16% have not made that decision yet but wish to become fully qualified accountants. 14% of respondents stated that becoming a fully qualified accountant is not their aim. 2% did not respond to that question. All of the postgraduate students who responded to the survey decided on their professional association. 58% of undergraduate students have also made that decision.

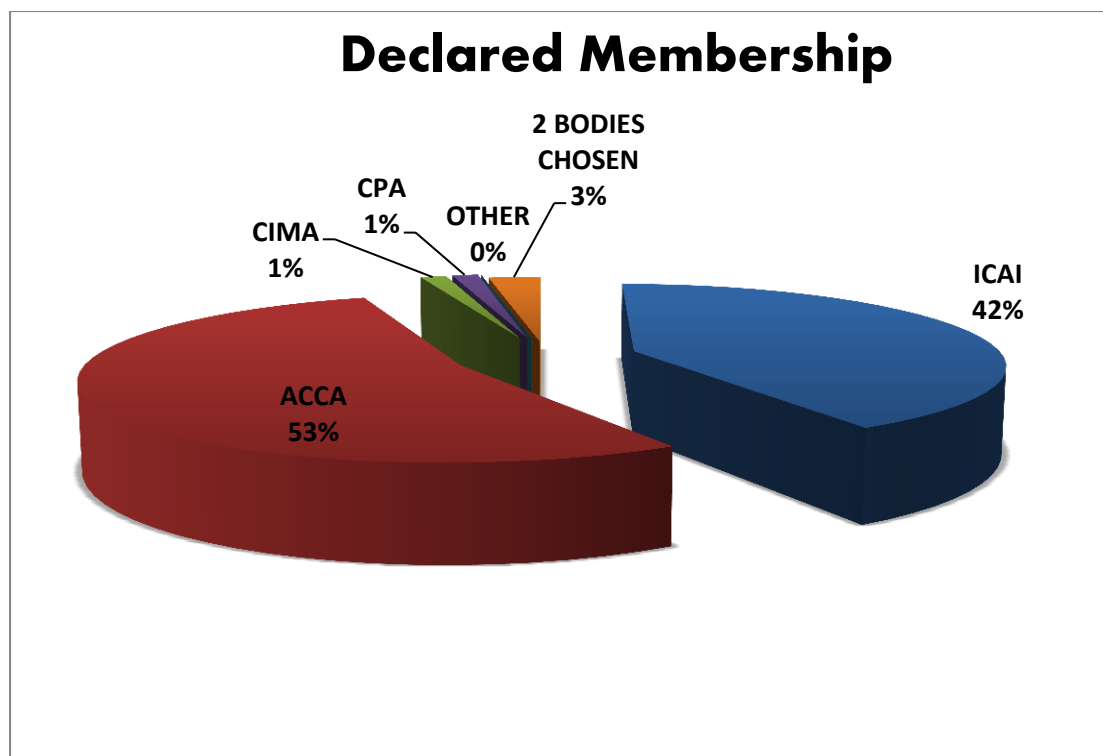


Figure 4.3 Break-down of respondents declared membership

The chart above illustrates the break-down of respondents going for each body. Out of the 75 respondents who declared having made the membership decision 40 (53%) decided to become student members of the ACCA. 31 (42%) of participants of the survey wish to gain their full accounting qualification with the ICAI. CIMA and CPA having one respondent each aspiring to become their members. There were also two persons who put down two bodies as their choice meaning they have not made the final decision but are deliberating the following options. One respondent deciding between CAI and ACCA and another considering ACCA and CIMA. There were no participants who indicated that they wish to become a member of a professional accounting body other than those listed above.

15 of the respondents (42%) who did not decide on the membership of a professional association said becoming a fully qualified accountant is not their aim. Among the alternative courses of action; working in financial services sector and teaching proved most popular.

4.1.2 Interviewees

Interviews were undertaken with existing members of each of the accounting bodies. The total number of interviewees amounted to 8 members. Seven of the eight interviewees were academics from the Athlone Institute of Technology. The eighth person was a financial controller working for a multinational company based in Longford. Majority of participants are members of the Institute of Chartered Accountants (50%), followed by two members of the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants (25%) and one member (12.5%) representing the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants and one member (12.5%) of the Certified Public Accountants Ireland.

Professional Body	Length of Membership in years	Current position held
ICAI	39	Lecturer
ICAI	40	Lecturer
ICAI	43	Lecturer
ICAI	10	Financial Controller
ACCA	15	Head of Department
ACCA	35	Lecturer
CPA	7	Tutor
CIMA	23	Lecturer

Figure 4.4 Profiles of interviewees

4.2 OBJECTIVE 1 To investigate what factors prospective accountants consider while making the membership decision and how influential those factors are.

Questions 8,12,13 and 14 on the questionnaire were designed to gather the data necessary to achieve objective one of this study.

4.2.1 Influencing Factors – Questionnaire Respondents

In question 12 participants were surveyed about the criteria they were using and the relative importance of each criterion. There are 14 factors listed in the question 12. Most of them were derived from the “Why you should choose ACCA/CAI etc.” sections and represented the unique selling points/differentiating factors that are directed at prospective students and are believed to have some bearing on the decision made by the prospective accountants. This question also included an intuition as a factor that may be taken into consideration while making any decision. Students were asked to rate importance of each of the factors on a 5-point Likert scale, anchored by 5 = most influential and 1 = not influential.

70% of respondents stated that they considered at least 13 factors listed in question 12. In two cases people said they considered all of the 14 factors listed. There were 3 cases where this question was left completely blank and 1 case where person considered only 1 factor- the influence of others and ranked it as 4 (influential).

There were 2 cases where only 2 of the factors listed were considered. One student said he/she considered global mobility and number of exemptions and rank both of them at 5. The second participant stated he/she only considered number exemptions and intuition while making the decision and also ranked both of them as

On average respondents considered 12 factors. The bar chart below illustrates graphically the degree of influence of each of the factors listed in question 12 as points a) to n). expressed as the average value of variable per response.

From this chart we learn that “exemptions available to you” appears to be the most influential factor with the average value of variable per response of 4.25 on the 5-point Likert scale.

“Long-term career goals” factor falls just behind it with the average value of 4.08.

The least influential factor of all variables listed in the question was “previous exam pass rates”.

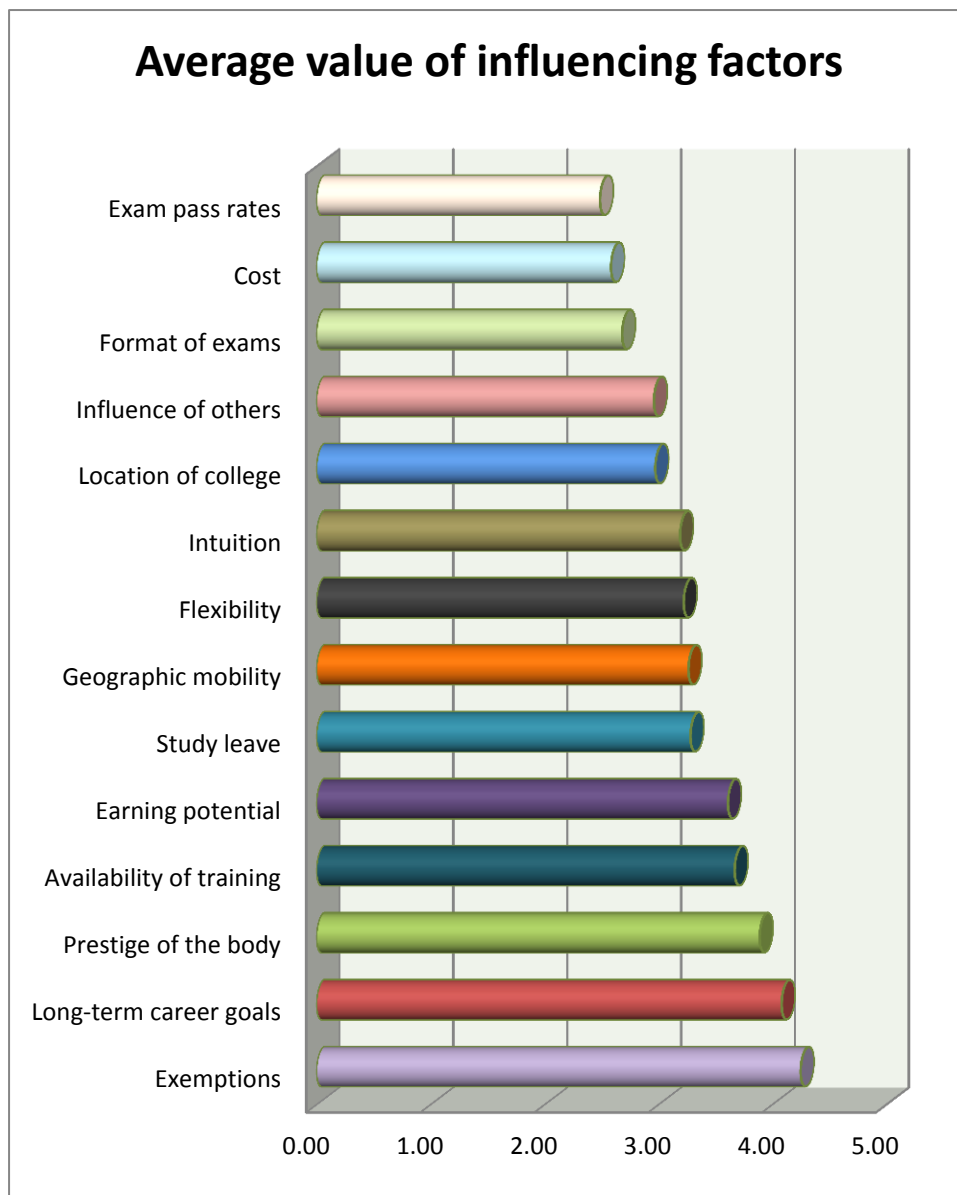


Figure 4.5 Average value of influencing factors

4.2.2 Factors considered by interviewees

When asked to name the factors considered as a part of the process of deciding which professional accounting body to join, 5 out of 8 interviewees mentioned “influence of others” as a variable of a significant importance. Three of them found themselves “*following what others in a peer group were doing*”, whereas the other two stated their choices of a professional body were influenced by lecturers who were members of those bodies.

For those who were in a workplace at the point of making decision as to which of the professional association to qualify with “flexibility” was the most dominant variable. One of the participants identified: “*By the time I got to study with ACCA I was married. Because I had family commitments and I was working for the Revenue, I wanted to qualify in a way that would allow me to mix work, study and family life. And I felt ACCA was most flexible in that manner.*”

“Exemptions available to you” were considered only by one of interviewees and it proved to be the most influential criteria in that case. “*I made my decision primarily on the number of exemptions available to me.*”

4.2.3 Comparison of average value of influencing factors between CAI and ACCA

The bar chart below represents average value of influencing factors distinguishing between different accountancy bodies. The researcher decided to exclude the CPA and CIMA for the purpose of this analysis as only two participants (one each) chose those bodies as their professional association and therefore the sample is too small to be representative of a larger population.

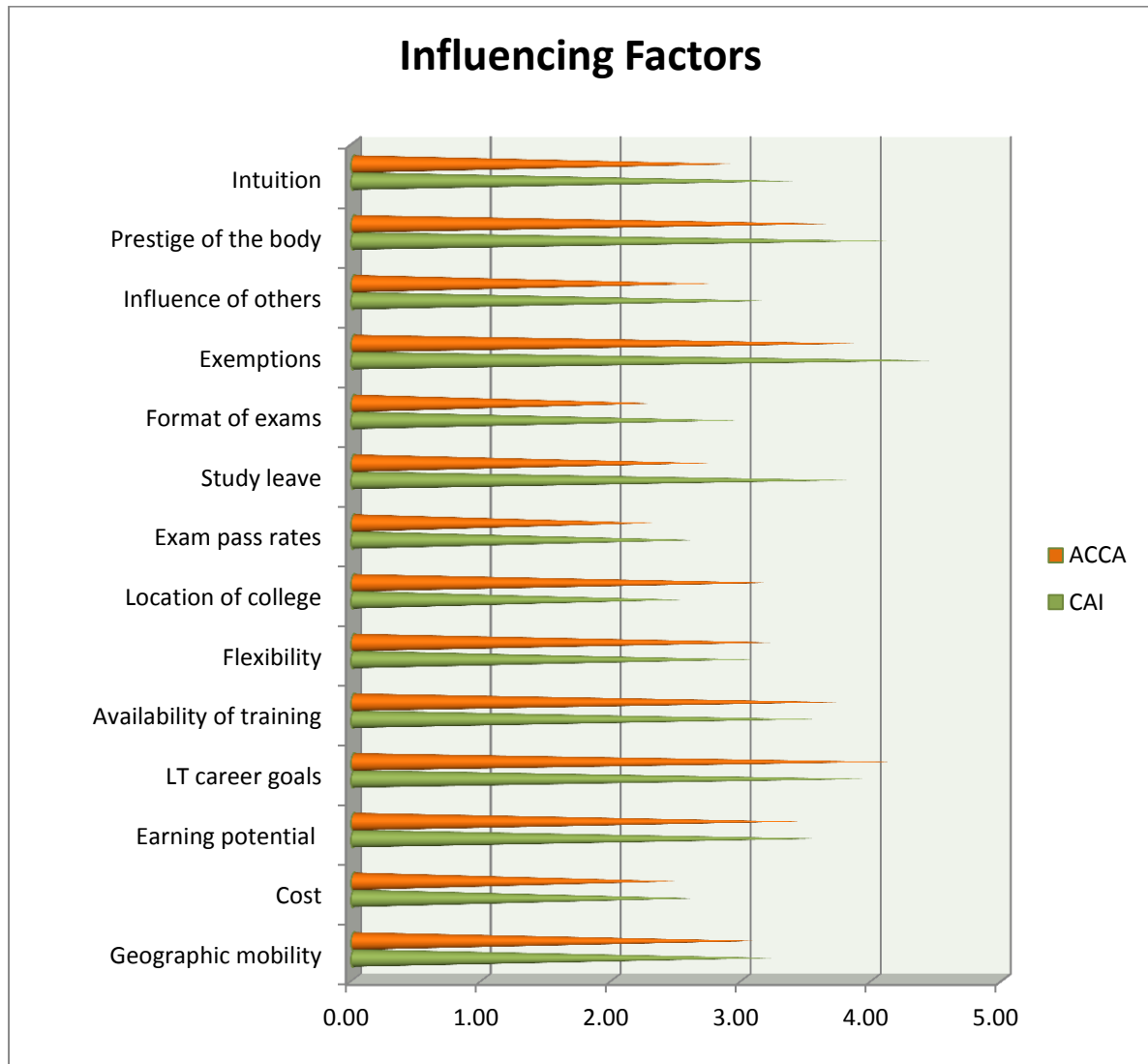


Figure 4.6 Comparison of influencing factors between CAI and ACCA

The three most influential factors for CAI prospective accountants were 1. Exemptions available, 2. Prestige of the body, 3. long-term career goals. They found location of college to be the least influential factor. Participants who aimed to become ACCA members ranked 1. long-term career goals, 2. exemptions and 3. availability of training as the three most influential factors and previous exam pass rates as least influential variable. There were few significant differences, that is, those exceeding 0.5 of a difference in the average value of influencing factors per response between bodies. The highest difference of 1.11 for “study leave” valued by CAI prospective students (3.84) significantly higher than by ACCA prospective members.” Location of college” generated a difference of 0.71 with ACCA students ranking it (3.26) as more influential than CAI candidates (2.55). There were no other significant differences found.

4.3 OBJECTIVE 2 To establish the role that third parties play in making the professional membership decision.

Questions 4, 12 point 1 and 15 of the questionnaire were aimed towards objective two.

Question 4 addressed the role of the training firm in making the membership decision. This question asked the respondents whether or not their choice of professional body was influenced by the training firm. Out of the 75 students who made their membership decision 27 secured training contracts. 23 respondents admitted that their choice of professional association was influenced by the training firm

There appears to be quite a similar consensus coming across from the interviews. Two of the eight interviewees declared the “training firm had absolute influence on what accountancy body I joined.” Another three interviewees hold job positions when making the decision to pursue a professional qualification. As a result, they were aiming to qualify with a body that would allow them to keep their jobs. One of them stated: “The major factor for me was the restrictions on completing the exams. Because my objective was to complete the exams, I wasn’t interested in the practical experience requirement because I already had a career.”

As part of question 12, the researcher asked participants to rank on the 5-point Likert scale the impact of the “influence of others” on their overall decision. There were 66 students who considered that factor while making their membership decision. 71% of respondents ranked “influence of others” between most influential and somehow influential to their decision. The table below represents the frequency of each point on the 5-point Likert scale for the “influence of others” factor.

THE IMPACT OF INFLUENCE OF OTHERS ON THE OVERALL DECISION MADE				
	CODE	FREQUENCY		
most influential	5	13	20%	
influential	4	19	29%	
somehow influential	3	15	23%	71%
slightly influential	2	8	12%	
not influential	1	11	17%	
left blank	11	3	5%	
not considered	0	6	9%	

Figure 4.7 Influence of others

Question 15 attempts to establish the most influential parties of those who had impact on the decisions of prospective accountants

Participants were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale (where 5 most influential and 1 not influential) a number of groups who influenced them. The most common case of this factor for each of the groups were as follows: friends/classmates Mode: 1, career guidance Mode: 1, lecturers Mode: 4, Qualified accountants Mode: 5.

13 of respondents specified other groups that influenced their decision with “training firm” being listed by 6 of the 13 respondents and rated as one of the most influential groups in all 6 cases.

In order to establish the most influential party, the groups were compared on the basis of average value of variable per response. Qualified accountants prevailed with an average value per response of 3.7 on the 5-point scale and lecturers with score of 3.4 per response. Friends /classmates proved to be least influential party with an average value per response of 2.7.

Lecturers also proved to be influential party among interviewees. With two cases where participants relied of the feedback they got from lecturers as the main source of information. They made their membership decision basing it solely on the advice they got from the lecturers. An ICAI member stated *“I did not look into other bodies to be honest. I primarily relied on the opinions of lecturers who promoted the Institute and the qualification it offers.”*

Almost all, with the exception of one, interviewees had consulted and were influenced at least to some extent by various third parties when choosing their professional association.

4.4 OBJECTIVE 3 To explain any gender differences in professional membership decision making of prospective accountants.

To provide an understanding of any gender differences the researcher will use some of the data discussed in previous objectives distinguishing the results between male and female responses, particularly to questions 1,2,12,15.

52% (39 out of 75) of those who decided which professional body to join were male, meaning that 72% (39 of 54) of the total number of male participating in this study had made their decision. 43% (32 of 75) of the group who choose their professional association consisted of female, meaning that 60% (32 of 53) of overall number of women participation in this research had made their decision.

5% of students surveyed did not specify their gender.

4.4.1 Declared Membership

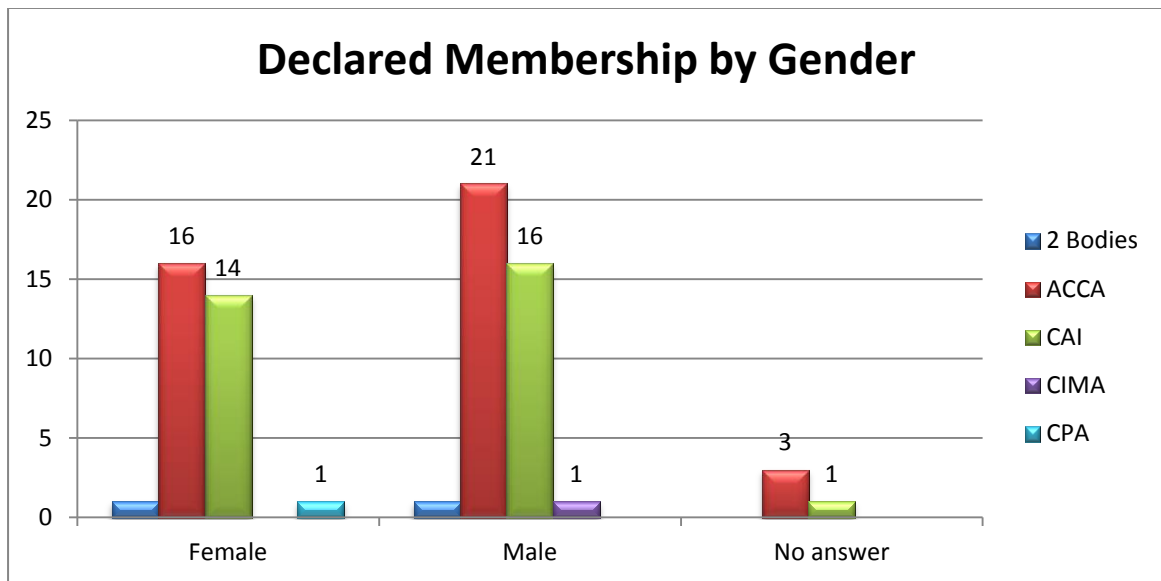


Figure 4.8 Membership by gender

There are slight differences in the choices of professional bodies made by the female and male participants of the questionnaire.

50% of total number of females who decided on membership (32) chosen ACCA as their preferred professional association.

Most male prospective accountants, 54% declared ACCA to be their professional accounting body. Second most popular professional body is the CAI with 44% females and 41% males aiming to become a member of the Institute. No female participants of the questionnaire decided to join CIMA. There was one male respondent who aims to become a member of the CIMA. One female decided to join the CPA Ireland and no male made such decision.

4.4.2 Research Activities Undertaken

Engageg in research activity 1-3 but only for their own body	Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3
ICAI	4	4	4
ACCA	16	15	14
CIMA	0	1	0
CPA	0	0	0
Total	20	20	18
Male	10	9	10
Female	10	11	8
Extreme cases		Male	Female
No reasearch 1-3 on any of the bodies	8	5	2
		13%	6%

Figure 4.9 Research activities

As shown in table above, out of the 8 cases where students did not engage in any of the three research activities listed in the question, 5 were male, 2 female and 1 person did not specify their gender. There were no gender differences in terms of engaging in activities to research information on their own bodies but no other bodies.

Activity 1 Reading information published by the body itself

61% of the total number of males who decided on membership (39) declared reading information published by professional bodies prior to making the final decision. 71% of females engaged in the same activity.

Activity 2 Searching sources of information other than body's own website

67% of male and 56% of female population searched sources of information other than bodies' own publications.

Activity 3 Attending presentations

71% of males and 75% of females attended some presentations to make themselves familiar with an accounting bodies.

4.4.3 Different Types of Feedback Sought

There were 7 cases where participants did not seek feedback from any of the sources of information listed in question 10 on any of the bodies. 4 of them were male and 3 were female.

LECTURERS 56 participants who decided on membership sought a feedback from lecturers on at least one of the four major bodies. 29 of them were male and 27 were female, meaning that 74% of the 39 males and 84% of the 32 females who decided which body to join, consulted lecturers about the option(s) available prior to making the decision.

PEOPLE IN INDUSTRY 42 prospective accountants consulted people in industry prior to choosing their professional body. 28 of them were male and 14 female, forming 72% and 87% respectively of each population.

CURRENT STUDENT MEMBERS There were 36 cases where respondents sought feedback from current student members on at least one of the four bodies. 22 of them were male, meaning that 56% of the male population who made the decision on membership (39) had sought information from existing student members of certain bodies. 14 of them were female, 44% of the female population.

4.4.4 Influencing Factors

The data gathered in question 12 was analysed extensively for the purpose of answering objective one. Here the author will look for any gender differences in the responses given by male and female. The graph represents average value of each factor per response distinguishing between genders.

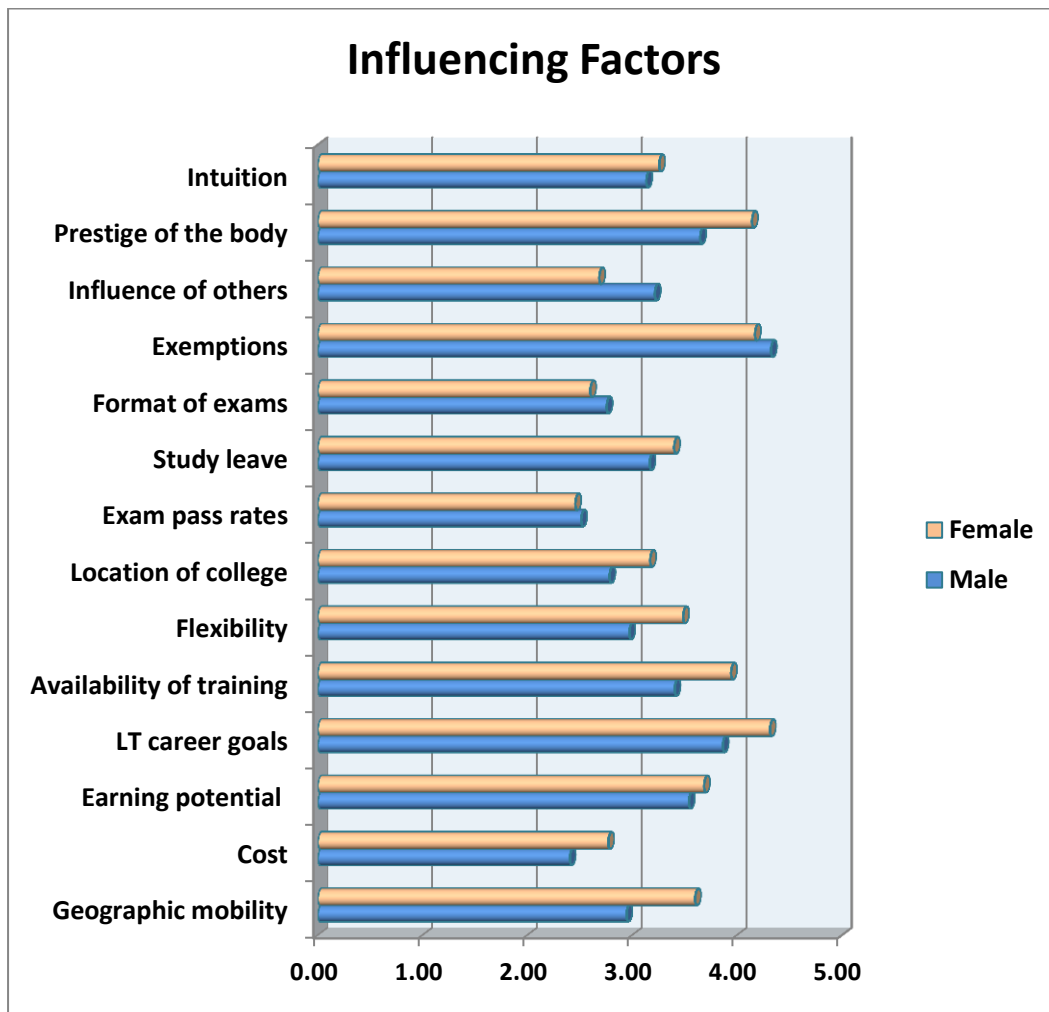


Figure 4.10 Break-down of influencing factors between genders

Male find “exemptions available” to them as the most influential factor, with the average value of 4.32 on the 5-point Likert scale. “long term career goals” (3.86) are the second most influencing factor for men, with “financial cost of obtaining the qualification” (2.41) being the least influential variable.

Female ranked “long-term career goals” (4.31) as being the most influential factor, with “exemptions available” (4.17) to them falling just behind. “previous exam pass rates” (2.46) was found to be the least influential factor for female.

4.4.5 Differences in Average Value per Response between Genders

There are 4 differences that are higher than 0.5 of a point between the results for males and females with the highest difference of 0.65 for global mobility, valued by women (3.60) slightly higher than by men (2.95). Second highest difference “availability of training” again being slightly more influential for females (3.94) compared to males (3.41). Third highest difference “influence of others”- men (3.22) tend to be more sensitive to that variable than women (2.69). Fourth highest difference: flexibility slightly more influential on female 3.49 than male 2.97. The lowest difference of 0.15 in average value of a variable was “earning potential” being slightly more influential factor for females (3.69) than males (3.54).

	Male		Female	
	FREQUENCY		FREQUENCY	
most influential	9	26%	4	15%
influential	9	26%	9	33%
somehow influential	9	26%	5	19%
slightly influential	3	9%	4	15%
not influential	5	14%	5	19%
left blank	1		2	
not considered	3		3	
		100%		100%
		males who considered 35 the factor		females who considered 27 the factor

Figure 4.11 Influence of others

The table above illustrates the impact of “influence of others” for both genders. 35 out of 39 males and 27 of 32 females who made the decision considered influence of others when deciding on which professional accounting body to join.

77% of males who considered the factor stated that the factor had some influence on their decision. 67% of females who considered the factor stated that the factor had some influence on their decision.

4.5 OBJECTIVE 4 To provide an understanding of the process involved in choosing a professional qualification and its relevance to the outcome (final decision).

To answer this objective the author will use data gathered through interviews and questions 7,10 and 11 in the questionnaire.

4.5.1 Timing of the Decision

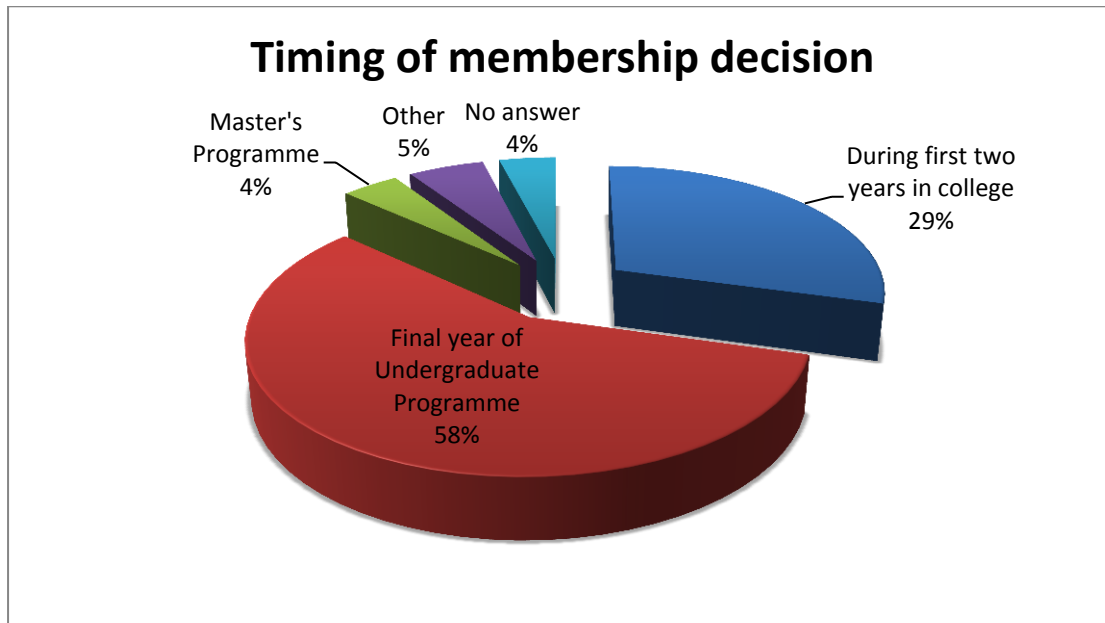


Figure 4.12 Timing of decision

Majority of respondents (58%) made their decisions regarding their choice of a professional accounting body in their final year of Undergraduate Programme. 29% of participants chose their professional association during the first two years in college. 4% made their choices in the final year of Masters Programme. There was one participant who decided which body to join during secondary school and one who made that decision after receiving a training contract. 3 respondents did not provide answer to this question.

4.5.2 Research Activities Engaged In Prior To Making the Final Decision

The author will start analyses of the research activities students engage in by highlighting some extreme cases. First of all, there were 8 cases of the 75 prospective accountants who made their membership decision that had not engaged in any of the 3 activities listed in this question.

There were no cases where a participant engaged in all 3 activities for all of the four major bodies. The remaining 67 cases engaged in one or two types of the research activities listed on some of the four bodies.

There were 7 cases where respondents engaged in all 3 activities but only for their own body. One participant engaged in all 3 types of activities but only for two bodies ACCA and CAI.

Activity 1 Reading information published by the body itself

47 out of the 75 participants read information published by professional bodies prior to making the final decision. 20 of the 47 participants declared reading information published by their own body but not other bodies as a source of information.

Activity 2 Searching sources of information other than body's own website

44 of the 75 searched sources of information other than bodies' own publications. 20 out of 44 respondents searched information exclusively on their own body using sources other than the body's own website.

Activity 3 Attending presentations

52 of the 75 attended some presentations to make themselves familiar with an accounting body. 18 of the 52 attended only presentations organised by their own body.

In interviews, the author asked the question: "*Please describe the process of how you decided which professional body to join*". The answer to this question varied among interviewees.

From very little research done and reliance on others to researching all of the options. Five of the eight interviewees did little or no research. They based their decision upon recommendations of existing members, mainly lecturers or actions of their peers. Reputation of the body was other factor considered. They did not research other options. CIMA member stated: "*I only spoke to one or two lecturers about it but that's all the research I've done.*" One of the CAI members declared: "*Not whole a lot research was done. I have to say I was influenced by others in my peer group.*"

Two of the interviewees (both ACCA members) decided on their professional association through a process of elimination. They both rejected CIMA as they were not interested in working in the industry. Joining CAI was not an option for them because they both held full-time jobs at that point of time and as a result they were not able to fulfil the requirement of training with a chartered firm of accountants. CPA at that time did not appeal to them “*as it was very small and not significant body*”. Both were left with ACCA as the option best suited for them. One of the interviewees illustrates the process by following statement:

“It was very simple, financial accounting was my field, so CIMA wasn’t a choice. CPA at that time didn’t appeal to me as it was very small and it wasn’t a very significant body so it came down to the choice between CAI and ACCA and Chartered required that you’d be in a training contract before you’d complete your final exams whereas ACCA would allow you to complete your exams in advance of any contract and that suited me better because I was lecturing at that time, hence ACCA was the choice.”

The remaining interviewee declared engaging in some research on all of the bodies. He admitted seeking feedback from existing members but also doing his own search for information on each body. He then weighted all of the options and chose the one that suited him best. The major criteria he used was the number of exemptions that were available to him.

4.5.3 Different types of feedback sought

This section will present details of the feedback sought by participants by looking separately at each source of information, that is, lecturers, people in industry and current student members of bodies.

LECTURERS 75% of participants sought feedback from lecturers on at least one of the four major bodies. 22 of the 56 students consulted lecturers seeking feedback on the body they would like to join and not on any other body.

PEOPLE IN INDUSTRY 56% of prospective accountants consulted people in industry prior to choosing their professional body. 18 of the 42 participants did it only for the body they aim to join as a member.

CURRENT STUDENT MEMBERS 48% of respondents sought feedback from current student members on at least one of the four bodies. 20 of the 36 participants spoke to current student members of their own body and not any other body.

4.5.4 The most frequently used research activity

Type of Research Activity	Occurrence
Reading information published by the body itself	86
Searching sources of information other than body's own publications	75
Attending presentations	98
Feedback from lecturers	121
Feedback from people in industry	75
Feedback from student members	61

Figure 4.13 The most frequently used research activity

Looking for a feedback from lecturers is the most frequent activity with 121 occurrences. Second most popular research engagement is attending presentations (Activity 3 in the questionnaire) with 98 occurrences. Reading information published by the body itself (Activity 1) comes straight after with 86 occurrences.

4.5.5 Number of bodies being considered Data gathered through question 10 was also analysed from the point of view of the number of options being considered by students, that is, the number of bodies being researched regardless of the type of research activity engaged in. The following summarizes findings of this analysis. 8 participants of the survey did not do any research. The remaining 67 participants who decided on their membership, did their research in the following manner; 30% of students engaged in some research but only on one body, 54% researched two bodies, 9% researched three associations. All four major accounting bodies were research by 5 of the 67 participants.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss and critically analyse the research findings that were presented in the previous chapter, whilst addressing each research objective individually. The author will also attempt to link those findings to the literature discussed in chapter two and debate whether or not they agree.

5.2 OBJECTIVE 1 **To investigate what factors prospective accountants consider when making the membership decision and how influential those factors are.**

Question 12 asked the participants surveyed about the criteria they based their decision and the relative importance of each criterion. Most of them were derived from the “Why you should choose ACCA/CAI?” etc. sections. The assumption here was that because those factors represent the unique selling points of each body and are included in the marketing strategies directed at attracting new student members they are believed to have some relevance to the decision made.

The majority of respondents ranked at least 12 of the 14 influential factors listed in the questions which would suggest that most prospective accountants make their decisions after considering a wide range of factors. There were also few cases where students evaluated options based on one or two criteria that were of a great importance to them, for example one student indicated that the influence of others was the only criteria used. The number of exemptions available, global mobility and intuition were the variables considered by others in that group.

The fact that students considered 12 factors (on average) implies that participants were, at least to some degree, rational in their approach. At the same time only 8 of the 75 respondents said that they did not consider intuition or they did not find it influential to their decision. This is in line with the theories of Epstein (1994), Kahneman (2003), Lieberman (2003) who argue that *“an intuitive mode of processing parallels the rational one and is active and influential in decision making”* Lieberman (2003) *“with rational and intuitive processes mutually informing career decision”* Kahneman (2003).

Looking at the whole population of this research, factors weighted as having most influence on which professional body respondents chose were 'exemptions available to you' (4.25), 'long-term career goals' (4.08) and 'prestige of the body' (3.89). The three least influential factors found in this study were 'previous exam pass rates' (2.49), 'cost of obtaining qualification' (2.58) and the 'format of exams' (2.68).

Overall, the analysis revealed that factors perceived as influential, that is, with average value between three and five on the five-point Likert scale were a combination of variables which indicated that prospective accountants took both a short and long-term focus when deliberating their professional association membership. The average values for both variables were similar with short-term (exemptions, availability of training, flexibility and study leave) and long-term 3.7 (long-term career goals, geographic mobility and earnings potential) were similar. What is more, variables such as 'cost', 'pass exam rates', 'location of college' which could suggest a short-term focus were all found as least influential factors. This finding is contradictory to what was learnt in interviews with the representatives from the major accounting bodies. They argue that students tend to take a short-term view when choosing a professional accounting body. This believe is not entirely inaccurate as students placed great importance on factors such as number of exemptions and availability of training, for example. Nonetheless, they also considered long-dated variables such as long-term goals and geographic mobility and ranked them as some of the most influential factors to their decisions with a mode value of 5.

Although every care was taken ensure every critical factor was taken into consideration in designing the questionnaire, the following two factors were omitted

The support offered by individual accounting bodies when students become members was one possible factor that may influence the choices made by prospective accountants. This was brought to the attention of the author as a result of an interview conducted with a representative from CPA. As rightly pointed out: *“you are going to be a member of that particular body for a longer time than you are going to be a student.”* Regrettably, this study fails to test importance of this variable.

One of the influences that was revealed through interviews (with members of bodies) but was not included in the questionnaire was ‘family status’. This variable can play a significant role in the process of choosing a professional body. As prospective accountants may need to juggle study and training life with family commitments, they are highly likely to choose a body that will facilitate that. As one of the ACCA members explained in interview *“I wanted to qualify in a way that would allow me to mix work, study and family life. And I felt ACCA was most flexible in that manner.”*

The importance of various influences on professional association choices varied according to stage of life that the individual was at the point of making the membership decision, with those in a workplace and/or with family commitments placing significantly more emphasis on *‘ability to train with existing employer’*, *‘option to complete the final exams prior to completing the practical experience’* and the *‘flexibility in terms of number of exam sittings per year as well as the number of exams that needed to be completed per sitting’*

Consequently, as prospective accountants begin to experience personal life commitments they come to appreciate the benefits coming from a qualification that facilitates the work/study/family life balance.

Analysis of the differing influences on professional association choices between students who intend to join CAI and those who aim to become ACCA members revealed following trends.

Prospective students of each of these bodies ranked 'long-term career goals' and the number of 'exemptions available' to them in the top three influencing factors. 'prestige of the body' was of a more importance to CAI candidates where ACCA prospective accountants found 'availability of training' more influential.

Those aspiring to become members of CAI placed significantly more emphasis on 'study leave' (difference of 1.11) and exemptions (difference of 0.59), whereas those aiming for ACCA qualification placed more emphasis on 'location of college' (difference of 0.71) and 'flexibility' (difference of 0.4).

The following section will deal with some discrepancies of the factors that author felt were particularly noteworthy.

Long-term career goals It is interesting to see that 'long-term career goals' were ranked as a highly influential factor when over 50% of students did not have preferences or were unsure which sector they wish to work in. Also 30% of students did not have preferences regarding the size of the organisation they would like to work in. This prompts the question of how one can set long-term goals without considering the sector or the size of an organisation they would like to work in. We lack sufficient data to draw any conclusions here. In hindsight perhaps the author should have asked participants what their long-term career goals were to enable further analysis.

Exemptions Overall this was found to be most influential variable, this could be an indication of short-term focus of students as well as practicality all of the respondents spent at least 3 years in third level education and it will take several years more for every one of them to become fully qualified, therefore it seems logical that they would like to fully utilise their 'education' to date and for that reason find number of exemptions as an influential factor. The number of exemptions appears to be a much more influential factor for the prospective ICAI students than ACCA students. This may relate to the fact that 19 of the 31 going for the CAI were master's student with both Masters Programmes offering generous exemptions from the CAI CAP2 exams.

Prestige of the body This was ranked as second most influential factors to decisions of CAI prospective students. The Institute appears to be a superior accounting body in the public perception and therefore it is not unusual that it attracts students who place high importance on the prestige of the body.

Availability of training Those aspiring to become members of ACCA ranked ‘availability of training’ as one of the most influential criteria used in their evaluation of bodies. Bearing in mind that the top ten accountancy firms in Ireland provides training mostly for students studying towards the Chartered qualification this finding may seem wrong at first glance. Having said that, there is no requirement for ACCA student members to train with a chartered firm which automatically broadens the number of organisations ACCA students can train with.

Study leave This factor generated the highest difference of 1.11 between bodies. It was valued by CAI prospective students significantly higher than by ACCA prospective members. Considering the generous study leave offered by the Institute, this finding does not come to as a surprise.

Location of college This was ranked by CAI students as the factor least influential in their decision. Most of the lectures provided by the Institute are organised in-house in limited locations including Dublin and Belfast. On the other hand, ACCA outsource its lectures through colleges located nationwide. In other words, if the location of college was a criteria of a critical importance to a student, ACCA would have a greater change of attracting that student based on this factor. In fact, this study generated a difference in relation to ‘location of college’ of 0.71 with ACCA students ranking it (3.26) as more influential than CAI candidates (2.55).

Geographic mobility Given the fact that ACCA is a body that has a global footprint whereas CAI is an Irish body which does affiliate with certain countries but not globally, it is interesting to note that those aiming to get a CAI qualification (3.26) put more emphasis on the ‘geographic mobility’ factor than those striving to be ACCA members (3.15).

‘Influence of others’, ‘prestige of the body’ and ‘intuition’ are additional factors which the CAI prospective members put more emphasis on compared to their ACCA counterparts. Looking at those three factors together may explain how students who consider those factors as influential chose to join the CAI. As the ‘influence of others’ has a greater bearing on the decisions of those aspiring to become CAI members, students are guided by the public’s perception of CAI’s superiority and using their intuition, it seems logical that those students are likely to become CAI members. Existing body members (lecturers and qualified accountants as learnt from analysis of question 15) are the most influential group with the CAI dominating the market in terms of membership, therefore most of those lecturers and qualified accountants are likely to be CAI members based on the assumption that they would encourage students to join their own body.

5.3 OBJECTIVE 2 To establish the role that third parties play in making the professional membership decision

This objective has been achieved by analysing whether or not training firms are an influential factor in deciding which professional accounting association to join, the influence of others and who prevail as the most influential parties in making the decision.

The author will begin by interpreting the findings gathered from question four. The aim of this question is to understand the influence of a training firm on to the choices prospective accountants make in relation to professional accounting bodies. 74% of respondents who secured training contracts with accounting firms stated that their choice of professional association was influenced by the training firm. This suggests that training firms play a decisive role in the process of choosing an accounting body. The importance of a training firm in the process is additionally affirmed by the example of three participants who had not secured a contract, yet indicating that their choice of professional body was influenced by a training firm, perhaps by a firm of their interest.

Similar patterns, emerged from the interviews conducted with existing members, where two participants stated that *“training firm had absolute influence on what accountancy body I joined”* while another two admitted that staying with their employer was paramount to choosing a professional accounting body.

Those results are consistent with what the author learnt from talking to representatives of some of the professional bodies, namely ACCA and CPA. When asked about the factors that impact on the membership decisions of prospective students both stated that training firms are extremely influential in terms of selecting a professional association. Jean, a representative of CPA stated *“Another big influencer is their employer. If your employer tells you take one route, that’s the route you are likely to take.”*

Question 12 sought the opinion of the participants, asking them to rank the impact of the “influence of others” on their overall decision. In response, 71% of participants ranked the “influence of others” between the most and somehow influential to their decision.

The influence of others has been considered in previous studies as an important aspect that may influence a student’s career intention. “General research on career choice has demonstrated that key figures in the lives of people exert a strong influence on their career aspirations.” (Byrne, et al., 2012)

Scott and Bruce (1995) argue that the importance of others in decision making depends on the decision making style of that individual, highlighting that people with a ‘dependent style’ of decision making are more prone to search for advice and direction from others.

Question 15 attempts to establish the most influential parties on the decisions made by prospective accountants. Qualified accountants prevailed with an average value per response of 3.7 on the five-point scale. Lecturers were placed second with a score of 3.4, while also proving to be an influential party among interviewees. In two cases participants relied on the feedback received from lecturers as the main source of information, while six out of eight admitted that feedback from lecturers had only some relevance to their final decision.

Literature fails to provide consistent results on the influence third parties have on the career choices of accounting students. The above mentioned results are consistent with the work of Paolilo and Estes (1982) who reported that teachers had a greater influence than peers on students’ decisions, as well as the work of Byrne et al. (2012) who proved in their study that parents and subject teachers are the only people who influence their career decisions with friends, relatives, guest speakers and interestingly, career guidance teachers having no influence.

The relatively high influence of lecturers noted in this study is contradictory to findings of, Gul et al. (1989) who found that Australian students were not influenced by their teachers in choosing to study accounting. Similarly Lowe and Simons (1997) reported that teachers were the least influential factors in the decision to major in accounting.

Friends and/or classmates proved to be least influential party of those listed in question 15 with an average value per response of 2.7 on a five-point scale. Those results are in turn consistent with the work of Agarwala, Gul et al. and Lowe and Simons. In contrast, they disagree with the results of the research conducted by Felsman and Blustein (1999) and Wilkinson (2004) who found that “peer relationships have influence an individual’s career choices.”

For the purposes of accuracy and reliability, it should be acknowledged that the researcher failed to list ‘training firm’ as an influential party in this question, however six respondents ranked it as most influential using ‘other, please specify’ option. Taking this into consideration as well as the fact that 74% of those who secured training contract stated they were influenced by the training firm when choosing their professional body, the author speculates that training firms may have been ranked as one of the most influential parties, if not the most, once included in this question.

5.4 OBJECTIVE 3 To explain any gender differences in professional membership decision making of prospective accountants.

First and foremost, it is worth noting that the participants of this study were spread equally between the genders with 54 males and 53 females taking part in this research. Four respondents did not specify their gender. 72% and 60% of the total number of males and females, respectively, participating in this study had decided on their professional body.

ACCA was the dominant choice for both genders with 54% of males and 50% of females. The CAI proved to be the second most popular professional body for both females (44%) and males 41%. The remaining two major bodies attracted one female - CPA and one male – CIMA.

The analysis of the extreme cases where all or none of the research activities listed in question 10 were engaged in, revealed no significant differences between genders. Extensive analysis of those activities showed that 61% of males and 71% of females used reading information published by the body itself as a research activity, whereas 67% of males and 56% of females examined information independent from the accounting bodies' own publications. 71% of males and 75% of females attended presentations to familiarise themselves with the various accounting bodies.

Overall, there were no significant gender differences found in terms of research activities prospective accountants engage in prior to making their final decision on professional association. Gati et al. (2010) found in his study of career decision making profiles that *“women tend to invest more effort in the decision-making process”*. This study demonstrates that it is not necessary the case, at least not in terms of researching options.

Some gender differences were found in terms of the amount and the nature of feedback sought.

74% of males and 84% of females, who have decided which body they intend to join, sought the advice of their college lecturers, while 72% of men and 87% of women deliberated with people working in the industry prior to selecting a professional body. 56% of the male and 44% of female population sought information from existing student members of certain bodies. It became apparent that men tend to prefer the opinion of existing student members as a source of information whereas women tend to put more emphasis on feedback acquired from lecturers and people in industry. Those results illustrate that women seek feedback from others more often than men. This is consistent with the findings of Gati et al. (2010) who stated that: *“Inspection of the interaction between the 11 dimensions and gender revealed that “the highest score for women was for consulting with others (the extent to which individuals consult with others during the different stages of the decision process.)”* (Gati, et al., 2010)

Participants were also surveyed about the criteria they based their decision on and the relative importance of each criterion. It is interesting to note that ‘long-term career goals’ and ‘exemptions’ are rated as the two most influential factors by both genders. Men find “exemptions available” to them as the most influential factor, with the average value of 4.32 on the five-point Likert scale. “Long term career goals” (3.86) are the second most influencing factor for men, with “financial cost of obtaining the qualification” (2.41) being the least influential variable. Women ranked “long-term career goals” as being the most influential factor (4.31), with “exemptions available” to them falling just behind (4.17).

The influences varied according to gender, with males placing additional emphasis on the influence of others (0.53), format of exams (difference of 0.16), previous exam pass rates (0.06) and number of exemptions available to them (0.15). Women placed more emphasis on all other factors, with the highest differences in the importance of global mobility (0.65), availability of training (0.54) and flexibility (0.51).

It is interesting to see that although females tend to consult more with others, based on the results of question 10 and related literature, men participating in this study tend to put more reliance on ‘influence of others’ when choosing a professional accounting body.

5.5 OBJECTIVE 4 To provide an understanding of the process of choosing professional qualification by accounting students.

This research found that prospective accountants differ in terms of the amount of research and the type of research activities they engaged in prior to making their membership decisions.

Certain patterns emerged by analysing the results of question ten on the questionnaire in terms of the number of bodies being researched and therefore the number of options being considered by students choosing their professional association. The majority of them (54%) researched two bodies. 30% of participants engaged in some research but only on one body. The study found that 9% researched a minimum of three associations whereas 7% of students researched all four major accounting bodies. The author will elaborate on each of those cases separately.

Case I Students engaged in research on two of the four or more options.

It appears that in this case prospective accountants screen out the options based on some criteria. As ascertained from interviews students may be basing their provisional evaluation of the bodies on a general knowledge of the bodies, public perception or a feedback. Students reject some options and perform research on the remaining bodies, evaluate the options available to them based predetermined criteria and make their final decision.

This may imply the concept of bounded rationality introduced by Simon (1955) and Tversky's (1972) theory of elimination by aspects. *“The sequential elimination model involves identification and ranking of select occupational aspects (e.g. salary, prestige) followed by elimination of occupational alternatives that violate those aspects. As opposed to the expected utility model, in which the probable utility of each vocational option is computed and weighted, this strategy allows one to economically reduce the potentially bewildering multitude of vocational options to a manageable number.”* (Krieschok, et al., 2009)

This finding is also consistent with the work of Gati et al. (2001) who found that *“students appear to naturally avoid becoming swamped with information by restricting the number of alternatives they consider, and the number of criteria they use to assess alternatives.”*

In question 12, the researcher noted that respondents were considering an average of 12 out the 14 criteria listed. Combining this result with the fact that 54% of students researched only two bodies, that is, eliminating other options prior to getting the full information on all of them, this may suggest that students are not necessarily irrational in their approach, as they carefully evaluated the options under consideration (used wide range of criteria), however *“in their rush to screen options and criteria, decision-makers may be impulsively rejecting or even failing to consider viable possibilities.”* (Galotti, 2001)

Case II Students research exclusively on one body.

In this approach students considered only one option and perform research activities on one body. This may suggest that the decision had been made, perhaps based on general knowledge, feedback or intuition, before searching further information. The researched engaged in merely justifies the choices made rather than researching alternative options available.

This result is consistent with the study of Soelberg (1967) who pointed out that students who took part in his study “*were in fact applying systematic methods, but not in the interest of making rationally informed decisions. Rather, he hypothesized that they were rationally constructing justification for their intuitively derived choices.*” (Krieshok, et al., 2009)

Another explanation of this approach taken by some students could be the idea of choosing an alternative that is “good enough” introduced by Simon (1978). “*Simon believed that people are not necessary irrational, but they do not take into account all the options and do not calculate which ones will give the greatest benefit and the smallest loss as claimed in previous research. Simon argued that people consider options one after other and choose the first that satisfies them, that is, that meets the level of acceptability.*” (Polic, 2009)

Assuming that the first option considered meets the level of acceptability, hence, it is “good enough” the student does not research other options. In fact, two CAI members who participated in interviews applied that approach. The chartered qualification was recommended to them by their lecturers. They engaged in some research to verify the option and once satisfied performed no other research, considered no other options.

Case III Students engage in research activities on 3 or 4 bodies

The author decided to analyse the last two cases together as they are similar in nature. This approach contains some elements of a rational approach to decision making introduced by Neumann and Morgenstern (1953) who claimed that “*people want to make rational decisions taking into account all known option, using maximum quantity of available information, conscientious, although subjective weighting of the potential costs and benefits and calculation of the probability of different outcomes and the maximum degree of sound reasoning.*” However, we do not poses enough data to be able to specify whether students in the Case III group used the rational approach when deciding on their professional body. One of the interviewees also considered all of the options, which he then evaluated based on a range of criteria. The fact that he was the only one of the eight interviewees applying this method of decision making confirms that this approach is used by the minority of participants (both questionnaire and interviews) of this study.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to summarise the main findings of the research undertaken to achieve the outlined objectives and to provide a personal reflection on the author's experience of carrying out this research. The chapter will also address the limitations in the research and provide recommendations for future research.

6.2 OBJECTIVE 1 To investigate what factors prospective accountants consider when making the membership decision and how influential those factors are.

Based on the findings of this research, students take into account the unique selling points that bodies include in their marketing strategies. Prospective accountants become aware of these differentiating influences mainly by attending presentations (most popular research activity) and/or feedback from lecturers (most often sought feedback).

Participants of this study can be grouped into two cohorts who differ significantly in terms of the number and nature of factors considered. The majority of students considered a wide range of criteria in evaluating professional bodies (12 out of 14). There is also a group of students who considered a very limited number of factors. This study demonstrates that prospective accountants are motivated by a combination of factors that would imply both a short-term and long-term focus when deciding on their professional association. Overall, the average for each group of those factors gave similar results, meaning that students consider both the short and long-term variables and place a similar degree of emphasis on both groups. How influential students find those factors depends on the perceived importance of each variable. Overall, the number of exemptions and the long-term career goals were found to be most influential factors. Intuition also forms a part of the process of choosing a professional association, although not an extremely influential factor (overall average value 2.96 and mode of 3) it proves that to some extent prospective accountants choose their association based on feelings.

6.3 OBJECTIVE 2 To establish the role that third parties play in making the professional membership decision

The findings from the questionnaire with respect to this objective revealed that students tend to be influenced by others in their professional qualifications choices. The majority of those who took part (66 out of 75) considered this factor as the most influential, whereas 71% of participants ranked “influence of others” between most influential and somehow influential to their decision. Qualified accountants and lecturers were found to be most influential parties.

Findings of this study suggest that talking to lecturers and those working in industry is the most popular type of feedback sought, and as learnt from interviews in many cases the only source of information. We can extrapolate that students not only seek feedback from lecturers and those working in industry but they are also highly influenced by their opinions. Qualified accountants and lecturers (existing members in general) can therefore play significant role in the process.

Training firms appear to be another highly influential party based on in this research. Results from both the questionnaire and interviews suggest that training firms/employers are key players in the process. The fact that 74% of respondents who secured training contracts stated that their choice of professional association was influenced by their training firm and 50% of interviewees admitting that their choice of professional bodies was highly impacted by their training firm/ employer implies that prospective accountants perceive the decision regarding the choice of professional association to be of a lesser importance than the choice of a training firm/employer. As a result, the researcher has speculated that in the event of conflict, training firm vs. professional body, the training firm would prevail.

Taking into account that the top 10 accountancy firms in Ireland recruit the *majority* of accounting graduates with most positions been assigned to the Chartered qualification, training firms can be seen as extremely influential factor in the choices prospective accountants make.

6.4 OBJECTIVE 3 To explain any gender differences in professional membership decision making of prospective accountants.

There were some minor differences found between the genders with male placing additional emphasis on the format of exams, previous exam pass rates and number of exemptions available to them. This implies that males are more practical in their approach to decision making and problem solving.

Female participating in this study tend to consult more with others, whereas men tend to put more reliance on 'influence of others' when choosing a professional body.

Summarizing, not a huge differences discovered in the factors influencing membership choices between sexes. Despite of that, the author argue that such comparison was still worth doing and agree with the Lefkowitz (1994) who said: *“even null findings are important since these would help establish that women and men are similar in many respects.”*

6.5 OBJECTIVE 4 To provide an understanding of the process involved in choosing a professional qualification and its relevance to the outcome (final decision).

The dominant pattern found in this research is that accounting students use a wide range of criteria to evaluate their professional qualification options. Their choices are motivated by a combination of short-term and long-term view factors, which would suggest that they aim to make rational decision. However, the analysis of the process of how membership decisions are made reveals one significant shortcoming to their approach. The majority of students screen the options without thoroughly researching all the opportunities available, limiting themselves to one or two options and engaging in research exclusively on those one or two options.

Therefore, if accounting bodies wish to attract a larger pool of students to their associations, it is this stage of the membership decision process they should target to ensure that they are present in student's mind at that stage of the process.

The possible consequences for students taking this approach is that by failing to consider all the options, students may be limiting themselves and *“in their rush to screen options and*

criteria, decision-makers may be impulsively rejecting or even failing to consider viable possibilities.” (Galotti, 2001) Future career progression of prospective accountants may be affected depending on their career aspirations. Hence, students should choose their professional qualification carefully, perhaps considering all the options available or at least *“have good reasons for making the decision she or he makes at the time that she or he makes it.”* (Moshman, 1999)

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that influence accounting students deliberating their choice of professional qualification. The next section will briefly summarize the findings.

Firstly, the majority of students take into account a combination of short-term and a long-term view factors. The range of factors considered, their nature and how influential students find those factors will have impact on their decision.

Secondly, how significant students find the opinions of others and who they consult can influence their choices. This study found the influence of the training firms and opinions/feedback of existing members is particularly significant.

Thirdly, gender was not found to lead to significant differences in the approaches taken or choices made.

Lastly, the whole process of making the decision, that is, how many options students consider, how they gather the information, their life stage at the time of making decision, as well as, their perceived importance of criteria used, will all to some extent influence their choice of professional qualification.

The results from this study are valuable to accountancy professionals as it provides an insight into factors which influence the membership decisions of prospective accountants, an area which has largely been ignored by prior accounting researchers. With this knowledge this knowledge the professional bodies can better tailor some of their recruitment campaign to highlight the ways those influential factors in the qualification/membership they offer.

6.6 Recommendations for future research

The sample selected for this study comprised only those prospective accountants studying toward relevant degree in accounting. Even though these students make up the majority of the student intake for all of the four major bodies in Ireland, a large number of student members come from a non-relevant degree background or hold no degree. Yet, this aspect was ignored in this study. Future research may extend to perform comparative analysis between these other groups of students as it would further enhance our understanding of the factors influencing decisions on professional accounting associations.

6.7 Limitations to the study

There are some limitations to this study which need to be addressed.

The main limitation of the research was the time constraint. It was originally planned that this study would also include the point of view of accountancy bodies on the research subject, however timing did not allow for this to be accomplished.

Although this study found relationships in several of the variables examined, it failed to incorporate all the influential factors. There is possibility that other variables may have even stronger influence on the professional membership decisions of prospective accountants. For example, this research could be extended to address the influence of the length of time it takes to become fully qualified and the support accounting bodies offer to its members.

The evaluation of influencing factors across all four bodies would have yield better results for comparison, however this proved impossible because of the very low number of students aspiring to pursue CPA and CIMA qualification participated in the study

Despite these limitations, this research is the first study of this type undertaken in Ireland to provide an understanding of the factors that influence professional qualification choices among prospective accountants studying relevant accounting degrees.

6.8 Personal reflection

Completing a master's degree has always been author's aspiration therefore she welcomed the fact that her application for the Master's Programme at AIT was successful. Saying that, the author was also apprehensive whether she would be able to successfully complete the course, while working on a part-time basis. Despite the fear, the author decided to give it a try and joined up with her new classmates in September 2013.

The author found semester one particularly intense as it required her to balance three modules with the 'milk round' for accountancy firms. For that reason, the author decided to postpone the research project until the second semester. The author found searching for relevant literature frustrating as there was no previous research done in the area of factors influencing the choices of professional qualification. The author spent weeks looking for previous research in that area and felt like she was getting nowhere with it.

Nevertheless, with great help of her supervisor Mr Peter Melinn the researcher managed to have the questionnaire distributed to students in April. Having in mind the upcoming year end exams the author decided to defer further work on the project till end of May. Soon after the exams were over, the researcher started working full-time which put on her additional pressure. She managed to conduct eight interviews with members of professional accounting bodies by mid-June and another four interviews with representatives of each of the body early July. That was the last stage of gathering data for this research.

As an inexperienced researcher the author needs to admit making many mistakes in the process of carrying out this research project. First and foremost, she picked a topic that involved element of psychology - area that she would be interested in but have no expertise in, meaning extra work had to be put in to familiarise herself with the subject. Reading literature proved very challenging because of the jargon used.

Lack of detailed plan of action resulted in poor time management. Despite the fact that the author spent number of days trying to get in contact with representatives of each body and travelled to meet them for interviews, she was not able to fully utilise the data gathered mainly due to time constraints.

The researcher found herself wanting to do too much. She combined different data collection methods (questionnaire, and interviews), aimed for examining the topic from three perspectives (students, members and professional bodies) and set four objectives that had to be altered because initially they were too broad. As a result, the author spent time collecting and analysing data which eventually could not be included in the thesis because of the time constraints and the word count limit. The main reason behind this is that the researcher has never done a project of this magnitude and did not realise how much time and effort will need to be invested to achieve it.

The researcher decided to use hard copies of questionnaires to ensure high rate of response and this was successfully achieved. However, paper copies meant that the data had to be entered into Excel manually. Taking into account that it yielded 112 responses, which had to be coded for the purpose of analysis made this task extremely time consuming. The researcher also had to invest considerable amount of time to up skill herself to be able to use Excel to perform analysis for this study.

Being honest, the author was sceptical about doing dissertations. However, looking back it has been a great learning experience which allowed the author to develop her personal and professional skills. It was a first real-life experience project completed by the researcher. In spite of all the errors made and obstacles met she is happy with her overall performance and feels sense of pride in completing this research project.

Being a class representative during this academic year also helped the author to develop leadership skills. Overall, the MAA programme has been very intense but particularly enjoyable, allowing the author to gain not only the theoretical knowledge but also a range of soft skills that she will undoubtedly be able to rely on in her professional career.

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Appendix: A

Questionnaire investigating the factors encouraging prospective accountants to join a professional body of their choice.

1. Have you decided which of the professional accounting bodies you wish to join after graduating from college?

- Yes No

If no, please go to questions 16-21.

2. Which professional accounting body do you aim to join?

- ICAI ACCA
 CIMA CPA
 AITI Other (Please specify) _____

3. Have you secured a training contract?

- Yes No

4. If yes, has your choice of professional accounting body been influenced by your training firm?

- Yes No

5. Do you consider the decision on which professional accounting body to become a student member to be an important career decision?

- Yes No

6. Please state why you think it is important or otherwise to decide which professional accounting body to join as a student member.

7. At what stage of your academic study did you decide which professional accounting body to join?

- During first two years in college
- Final year of Undergraduate Programme
- Master's Programme
- Other (Please specify) _____

8. As a qualified accountant do you wish to work in:

- Practice
- Industry
- Either
- Don't know

9. What size of an organisation (practice or industry) would you like to work in?

- Small-medium
- Large
- Either

10. Please indicate the research activities you engaged in prior to making the final decision on which professional accounting body to become a student member of.

	ACCOUNTANCY BODIES					
	ACCA	ICAI	CIMA	CPA	AITI	Other
ACTIVITIES:						
Reading information published by the body itself e.g. journals, online resources						
Searching sources of information other than body's own website						
Attending presentations to make yourself familiar with an accounting body						
Talking to accountancy lecturers						
Was the feedback positive/negative?						
Talking to people in the industry						
Was the feedback positive/negative?						
Getting feedback from student members of accounting bodies						
Was the feedback positive/negative?						
Other (please specify)						

11. Which of the above activities do you consider as the most useful research activity?

12. Please rate the following influencing factors in choosing which professional accounting body to become a student member of.

(Where 5 is most influential and 1 is not influential)

						Factor not considered	
a.	Geographic mobility (See note ¹)	5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
b.	Net financial cost of obtaining the qualification (see note ²)	5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
c.	Earning potential	5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
d.	Your long-term career goals	5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
e.	Availability of training	5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
f.	Flexibility (See note ³)	5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
g.	Location of college (See note ⁴)	5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
h.	Previous exam pass rates	5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
i.	Study leave and support provided	5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
j.	Format of exams	5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
k.	Exemptions that you're entitled to	5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
l.	Influence of others	5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
m.	Prestige/reputation of an accounting body	5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
n.	Your intuition	5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
o.	Other (Please specify) _____	5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>

Notes:

- ¹ The number of countries the qualification is recognised in
- ² The fees payable and grants available
- ³ Flexibility in relation to entry routes, training, sitting exams etc.
- ⁴ Location of college preparing for professional exams.

13. Was your decision on joining the professional accounting body of your choice influenced by the promotional material produced by the professional body?

- Yes No

14. If yes, how appealing did you find the factors included in the promotional material?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Appealing | Somewhat appealing | Undecided | Neither appealing
nor unappealing | Unappealing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

15. Please circle the following groups who influenced your current choice of professional accounting qualification. (Where 5 is most influential and 1 is not influential)

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Friend/Classmates | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| <input type="radio"/> Career guidance | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| <input type="radio"/> Lecturer | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| <input type="radio"/> Qualified accountants | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| <input type="radio"/> Other | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| <input type="radio"/> (Please specify)_____ | | | | | |

- I was not influenced by others while making the decision

16. What is your gender?

Male

Female

17. Select the age category specific to you.

< 23

23-30

31-40

41+

18. What type of course are you currently undertaking?

Undergraduate

Postgraduate

19. Which category best represents your average overall grade so far?

<50

50-59

60-69

70-79

80-89

90-100

20. If you have not yet decided on which professional accounting body to join, do you still aim to be fully qualified accountant?

21. If becoming fully-qualified accountant is not your aim, what is your alternative course of action?

Thank you for taking your time to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix B: Cover letter for survey

07 April 2014

Dear Student,

My name is Patricia Jurkowska. I am currently undertaking a Masters in Accounting in Athlone Institute of Technology. As a part of my programme, I am required to complete a dissertation. My chosen area is to investigate the influencing factors which encourage prospective accountants to join a particular professional accounting body.

For my research I am required to distribute a questionnaire which will help me to gather the necessary data. The questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The ultimate success of this research study depends on the participation of students. In this regard, your involvement and assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Please be advised that all participants will remain anonymous and information gathered will be held confidentially and used for academic purposes only.

I would like to take this opportunity, in advance, to express my gratitude for your participation in this research study.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia Jurkowska

Appendix C: A list of interview questions used in interviews with current members of accountancy bodies

GENERAL DATA:

- Which accountancy body are you a member of?
- When did you join the body as a student member?

HOW AND AT WHAT POINT OF TIME THE DECISION IS MADE, DEGREE/TYPE OF RESEARCH A PROSPECTIVE ACCOUNTANT ENGAGES IN:

- At what stage of your education/career did you decide which professional accountancy body to join?
- Could you please describe the process of how you made the decision on which accountancy body to become a member of
- What type of research did you engaged in prior to making the final decision as to which accounting body to join?
- In your opinion: Is the membership decision important? i.e. does it make a difference which accountancy body you belong to?

INFLUENCING FACTORS:

- What were the factors that you considered while making the membership decision?
- Which of them were most appealing in relation to the body you became a member of and unappealing in relation to the bodies that you rejected?
- Was your decision influenced by others? If yes, by whom and to what extent?
- Was your membership decision influenced by the training firm/availability of training?

Appendix: D Sample email to current members of professional accountancy bodies

Hi Dermot,

I hope you are keeping well. As a part of the MAA programme, I am required to complete a dissertation.

My chosen area is to investigate "*influencing factors that encourage prospective accountants to join a particular professional accounting body.*"

As a part of my research I intend to conduct interviews with members of each of the professional accounting bodies in Ireland to get their view on the topic. I would appreciate if you as a CIMA member agreed to participate in my research.

The interview will be kept short and will be mainly directed at discussing the factors that attracted you to CIMA.

I would very much appreciate if I could conduct an interview with you in perhaps period between 9-20 June 2014 at a time and venue convenient to you.

Kind Regards,

Patricia

Appendix: E Interview Schedule

Name	Professional Accounting Body	Position	Date	Place
MEMEBERS				
Peter Melinn	CAI	Lecturer	12.06.2014	AIT
Barry Donnelly	CAI	Lecturer	09.06.2014	AIT
Brendan McF.	CPA	Tutor	17.06.2014	AIT
Brendan Doyle	ACCA	Head of Department	17.06.2014	AIT
Sean Arthur	ACCA	Lecturer	16.06.2014	AIT
Frank Conway	CAI	Lecturer	09.06.2014	AIT
Dermot O'Leary	CIMA	Lecturer	10.06.2014	AIT
Aoife	CAI	Financial Controller	24.06.2014	Phone interview
REPRESENTATIVES				
Jean Ryan	CPA		02.07.2014	CPA Head Office, Dublin
Ronan O'Loughlin	CAI		20.06.2014	AIT
Katherine Moore	ACCA		24.06.2014	ACCA Head Office, Dublin
Karen Greene	CIMA		13.08.2014	Phone interview

Appendix: F A sample email sent to representatives of each of the major accountancy bodies

Hello Katherine,

My name is Patricia Jurkowska. I am currently undertaking a Masters in Accounting in Athlone Institute of Technology.

As a part of my programme, I am required to complete a dissertation. My chosen area is to investigate "*influencing factors that encourage prospective accountants to join a particular professional accounting body.*"

As a part of my research I intend to conduct interviews with representatives from each of the professional accounting bodies in Ireland to get their view on the topic. I would appreciate if the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants agreed to participate in my research. The interview will be mainly directed at discussing the factors that ACCA believes attract new student members.

I would very much appreciate if I could conduct an interview with you in perhaps mid- late June or early July at a time and venue convenient to you.

Kind Regards,

Patricia

Appendix: G Interview Questions – Representatives of accountancy bodies

1. In your opinion, what factors do prospective accountants consider in general while making decision as regards to which accounting body to join?
2. What do you think attracts us – prospective accountants to the Institute of Chartered Accountants?
3. What factors other than those coming from the body (what it has to offer, its unique selling points) may affect which professional accountancy body a prospective accountant decides to join?
4. How do you think the membership decision is made (in most cases)?
5. In your opinion, what research an average prospective accountant engage in prior to making the final decision on the membership?