



# mature accountants



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1<sup>st</sup> July 2007

Dear Michael

## **Robert Half Career Benchmarking Survey 2007**

We have never met but we are both members of the same Institute so I think that we will probably hold similar values and beliefs. I was intending to have a leisurely weekend trying to avoid the rain in Nottingham when I became aware of the following headline on the Institute's web site:-

### **ACAs in business attract average salary of nearly 80k**

**The high demand for the skills of chartered accountants means that the average salary for those working in business is nearly £80k, according to research from the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) and specialist financial recruitment consultancy Robert Half Finance & Accounting.**

I read the survey in some detail and I decided that the leisurely weekend would have to wait. I hope that I can now convey to you why I was so taken aback by the claims made in this survey and the endorsement that the ICAEW has apparently given to it.

I am an experienced FCA having been a Partner with BDO Stoy Hayward in my younger days and for many years I have been involved with a number of companies as FD and MD. I discovered a couple of years ago at the age of 52 that suddenly finding oneself out of work and being over 50 was a bit of a problem despite what the CV might say. I found myself unemployed for 9 months and possibly the most humiliating part of the process was having to be "interviewed" by 20 something recruiters in the main agencies who had probably never been near a Balance Sheet in their lives. As the money was running out and my sense of self-worth declined in equal proportions I suddenly had a spark of inspiration thanks to a very well-written article in Accountancy Age – "when Accountants Go to Seed" which summed up my frustration and disillusionment. So I decided to fight back and [www.matureaccountants.com](http://www.matureaccountants.com) was born in August 2005 and nearly 2 years later we have just recruited our 1,000<sup>th</sup> candidate and I can barely keep up with the demand. I have now seen at first hand that my problem was not unique and I have been stunned and humbled by the amount of talent and experience that is going to waste.

What I have seen over the last 2 years has opened my eyes, which is why the Robert Half survey struck a raw nerve. I know from my experience that if I advertise a job at £50k to £60k I will get killed in the rush, regardless of location. In fact I have advertised roles at £30k and had applications from up to 10 ACAs.

I have a major concern with the way that the survey was headlined in particular:

1. When I was training to be an ACA it was constantly drummed into me that you had to be impartial, objective and independent. The way that the survey has been reported /spun is as if it is "Fact".
2. It seems that this is a self-serving exercise for both the Institute (it will act as a Recruiting Sergeant for the graduate market) and for Robert Half who no doubt will use this "evidence" to push up market rates and increase their profitability.
3. The sample surveyed by Robert Half was just over 3,000, being less than 10% of those members in business. Of those surveyed 73% were aged 45 and younger, and 44% lived/worked in London. As a former auditor I am aware that you can read anything into a set of statistics but based on these figures do you really believe that the headline "ACAs in business attract average salary of nearly £80k" is a **true and fair** statement?
4. On what basis did the Institute decide to carry out a salary survey with Robert Half when they are notorious for "favouring" the younger end of the market? That is not just my impression but typical of the feedback that I get from my candidates all the time – RH are not the only agency that is mentioned in dispatches on a regular basis.
5. My daughter is a Cambridge graduate and will qualify with one of the Big4 in London in 2 years at which point she will be technically bang up to date, commercially naïve and earning a £50k package which no doubt will increase to the magic £80k while she is still in her 20s. I am proud of her achievements and good luck to her but she is probably typical of the Robert Half market.

So Michael I decided that it was time for action and I have conducted my own "career benchmarking survey" of my 1,000+ candidates. Attached to this letter is the summarised response from 60 of my candidates which is quite amazing as I started this on Saturday morning and I am writing this on Sunday afternoon. You may discover that these people inhabit a different universe to the one that the Officers of the Institute are familiar with and I hope that you will find some of the comments most enlightening.

My survey shows some startling evidence of the problems that qualified accountants have in this country trying to maintain a roof over their head once they get past a certain age. Here are my headlines:

1. The average salary of Chartered Accountants polled by mature accountants is £45.3 k. – **not £80k** according to Robert Half. The average salary of other accountants is £43.4k. These figures have assumed that where a day rate is quoted, the earnings will be at a consistent rate for 48 weeks a year which is probably over-optimistic and may mean that the true average is somewhat lower. You can earn more as a skilled tradesman.

2. Most accountants surveyed are not earning as much as at their peak, hence my assertion that Accountancy is one of the few professions where your earning power decreases once you get past a certain age – probably around 45.
3. Despite being finance professionals, the majority surveyed do not have adequate pension provisions and many are going to have to downsize their house to survive and keep on working until they drop.
4. Most surveyed were very disparaging about recruitment agencies and an underlying suspicion or belief that they are still ageist.
5. There are equally disparaging comments about the support given by the Institutes.
6. Once you fall of the corporate ladder you are in trouble.
7. I wonder if this is typical of the thousands of older accountants who have discovered that despite all that training to pass professional exams and many years of relevant experience, they have become disenfranchised.

I trust you will take this in the spirit in which it is intended and that you will find the information both informative and maybe illuminating. If there is anything that the Institute can do to address some of these issues, then giving up my weekend will have been worth it.

Yours sincerely

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