ICAS Research Funding Opportunity

ETHICS AND TECHNOLOGY: WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES TO THE PROFESSION?

We live increasingly in a world of big data and massive computer processing power. Developments in robotics as well as technologies such as blockchain will bring about significant changes to business and society. Machine learning and artificial intelligence are likely to continue this trend but with even more significant impacts for everyone. Organisations and governmental and regulatory bodies are engaging in considering the ethical aspects of technological developments, and whether and how the ethical codes and norms associated with human activity can be applied in the context of these new technologies.

ICAS is interested in sponsoring research which considers questions, concerns, proposals and recommendations related to the impact of technology on the ethics of the accounting profession. This research should be helpful in informing the evolution of current practices and also have the potential to deliver evidence to standard setters and regulators.

Ethics and Technology - the challenges for the accounting profession?

Research proposals are invited to consider relevant issues around the impact of technology on ethics and specifically on the profession’s Code of Ethics1 and how the Code is applied across the accounting profession and business. Against the above background, examples of questions that are of particular interest to ICAS include:

1. Does the increasing use of new technological innovations, including AI, bring any new challenges to the appropriateness of the ICAS Code of Ethics and to the fundamental ethics principles that CAs need to comply with? What are those new challenges and how could they be faced?
2. Is the Code capable of dealing with such emerging challenges? If not, is there a need to promote a wider ethical model e.g. the Right, the Good and the Virtuous, as published by ICAS in November 2017?2
3. Does the Code provide an appropriate means of assessing and addressing such new challenges? If not, do we need to adopt a different approach?
4. How do organisations ensure that there are appropriate controls and accountability over the “ethical nature” of AI?
5. Who takes control of the design of AI self-learning programs within organisations to ensure that the organisation’s values are properly embedded?
6. Finally, could we establish a best practice framework based on the answers to the above questions?

Other Areas for Research

ICAS is also willing to consider funding research projects on the following different but connected subject areas:

- The impact of real and quick-time data on reporting and assurance;
- Broader aspects of technology and the profession, for example the impact of AI on professional judgement;
- AI applications;
- Blockchain applications;
- 5G applications;
- Virtual and augmented reality applications;
- The impact of other technologies on business and the profession.

Research projects must primarily be relevant to the accounting profession. ICAS will however also support projects which will consider impacts on other activities and professions. Likewise, research teams needn’t be solely composed of accounting academics, with multi-disciplinary teams encouraged. ICAS welcomes all research methods.

1 https://www.icas.com/ethics/icas-code-of-ethics
2 https://www.icas.com/ethics/the-power-of-one-the-ethical-journey
Terms of agreement

Proposals must address the public interest and may include, but not be confined to, any of the above suggestions. The final report(s) should draw conclusions and implications for policy makers, the profession, investors and business. ICAS will use the report(s) arising from this call to inform public debate and policy development and the project(s) will therefore be high profile.

In addition to the financial support offered by the grant, ICAS will provide support to successful teams by regular contact and communication with the ICAS Research Panel, ICAS Ethics Board and other relevant Expert Panels.

Authors will be required to make short presentations of interim and key findings to the ICAS Research and other Expert Panels and to the ICAS Ethics Board, as mentioned above. A presentation of findings at ICAS sponsored events may also be required. Reports should be a maximum of 10,000 words in length. Draft reports will be reviewed using practitioner and academic reviewers, with a view to publication and use by ICAS and to influence policy makers. ICAS encourages reports to be supplemented by other more interactive and/or innovative delivery media such as webinars, short videos etc. Grant funding is available up to a maximum of £20,000 per project. If any additional funding is required in excess of this amount, justification should be provided in the submitted proposal.

Publication in academic journals, following submission of the final report, is also encouraged.

It is essential that the research report should identify the public interest in these issues and be of interest to policy makers, regulators, investors, business and members of the profession and academia.

Expressions of interest

If you are interested in undertaking a project in this area, please email research@icas.com attaching a call for research application form (available at icas.com), a proposal together with summary CVs by 30 September 2019. You should explain why you believe you or your research team are suitable individuals to undertake the project, demonstrating your knowledge and experience in the area. You should specifically state how any team will be structured and responsibilities for completion of the report. The proposal should identify the specific topics identified in this flyer which you will focus on and include:

- details of the proposed research questions and methodology;
- a brief review of prior research/literature (academic and other);
- how the project will advance current knowledge on the topic and meet the evidence needs and objectives outlined in this call;
- the extent to which the research will be breaking new ground or building upon work which has already been undertaken;
- a summary of the key issues which you believe are likely to arise from the project;
- the anticipated impact and influence of the project;
- an indication of any assistance required from ICAS to access potential contacts or interviewees; and
- the amount of grant, in sterling, which you require to complete the project and a breakdown of the estimated costs.

You should also refer to the Guidance Notes for Research Applicants (available at icas.com) for further information on what should be included in a proposal.

The expressions of interest will be considered by a panel of academics and non-academics from ICAS to arrive at a final decision. Applicants will be advised of the decision by 17 October 2019.

For further information about this funding opportunity or any queries please contact the ICAS Research Centre:

Tel: +44(0)131 347 0100
Email: enquiries@icas.com