

Celebrating excellence in first-year accounting education

Insights from the 2026
Inspiring Minds Award Finalists

A message from CA ANZ

Dear Academic Community,

It is a pleasure to present to you the executive summary of our talented 2026 Inspiring Minds Award finalists.

These awards recognise innovative educators and initiatives that are reshaping how accounting is taught, experienced and understood. This year's finalists highlight the depth of creativity, care and impact across our academic community, advancing approaches that strengthen student engagement, improve outcomes and deliver a lasting impact on first-year accounting students at a critical stage of their journey.

Across all applications, a clear theme emerges; first-year accounting is no longer simply about technical foundations. It is a critical moment to build confidence, foster belonging, and inspire students to see themselves as future professionals. From inclusive course design and active learning models to real-world engagement and emerging technologies, these initiatives demonstrate what is possible when teaching is both intentional and forward-looking.

We hope this collection provides not only insight, but inspiration. Each finalist offers practical ideas that can be adapted, scaled or reimaged across institutions and contexts.

On behalf of Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand, thank you to all applicants, finalists, winners and educators for the vital role you play in shaping learning experiences and contributing to the future of accounting education and the profession. We look forward to receiving next year's applications and continuing to recognise the impact of your work.

Best regards,

Simon Hann

Group Executive, Education and Marketing

Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand

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About the Inspiring Minds Award

The CA ANZ Inspiring Minds Award, proudly supported and endorsed by AFAANZ, celebrates outstanding innovation and impact in first-year accounting education across Australia and New Zealand.

The award recognises exceptional educators and initiatives that are shaping the future of the profession from the ground up. These individuals go beyond teaching – they spark curiosity, build confidence, and create meaningful learning experiences that leave a lasting impact on students and their perception of accounting as a career.

It highlights educators and initiatives that:

- Enhance student engagement and belonging
- Improve academic outcomes and progression
- Strengthen connections between education and the profession
- Introduce innovative, scalable teaching practices

The Inspiring Minds Award reflects CA ANZ's commitment to strengthening the pipeline of future-ready accounting professionals. By championing excellence in first-year education, we aim to make accounting more accessible, inclusive, and inspiring – ensuring students are supported from their very first interaction with the discipline.

The enthusiastic response to the inaugural awards highlights the extraordinary work taking place across the accounting education community. We received 70 expressions of interest and 27 applications (19 from Australia and 8 from New Zealand), including both individual and team submissions. Together, they reflected the passion, creativity and commitment of educators, while showcasing innovative, student-centred approaches to strengthening first-year accounting education. We sincerely thank every applicant for sharing their work and contributing to the future of accounting education.

Following a rigorous assessment process, an expert panel of judges from across Australia and New Zealand—including academics, a professional accountant in practice, and a CA ANZ teaching and learning specialist—selected the 2026 finalists.

Their initiatives represent leading examples of how first-year accounting can be reimaged to meet the needs of today's students and tomorrow's Difference Makers.

Dr Iki Mafi Uele | University of Otago

Turning first-year accounting into a 'catapult' for confidence, capability and progression.



As of 5 July 2026, and as announced at the 2026 AFAANZ Conference, Dr Iki Mafi Uele was named the 2026 Inspiring Minds Award Winner (New Zealand).

Overview

Dr Iki Mafi Uele leads BSNS115, the University of Otago's foundational first-year accounting paper, which enrolls approximately 430–500+ students each semester. His initiative reimagines introductory accounting as a high-support, high-expectation learning environment that is both academically rigorous and genuinely inclusive. Designed for students entering university with varied levels of preparedness, confidence and prior knowledge, it helps students succeed in a key gateway course while building confidence, belonging and academic capability.

At the centre of the initiative is a deliberate combination of relational teaching, responsive course design, and structured academic support. Rather than treating support as an optional add-on, Dr Uele embeds it into the design and delivery of the course itself. The result is a model that strengthens student achievement, improves equity outcomes, and helps students see themselves as capable participants in accounting study and future professional pathways.

What the initiative includes

Dr Uele's approach brings together a set of reinforcing strategies that support learning, engagement and belonging from the outset:

- Weekly personalised clinics that provide timely, relational support and help students work through difficult accounting concepts in a low-barrier setting.
- Regular student voice feedback through Padlet, enabling concerns to be identified early and teaching to be adjusted during semester in response to student experience.

- Inclusive first-year course design through the Catapult model, with a focus on conceptual understanding, confidence-building and accessible learning for diverse cohorts.
- Structured assessment and scaffolding, designed to support progression, reduce cognitive overload and create opportunities for feedback and improvement.
- Clear links to the profession, including alignment to CA ANZ technical and professional capabilities and activities that help students understand accounting as an applied, decision-focused discipline.

Key impact statistics

The initiative has delivered strong and sustained evidence of impact:

- Pass rates of 83–91% from 2020 to 2025, among the stronger outcomes reported for comparable first-year accounting papers.
- A 16–20 mark performance uplift for students who regularly attend clinics.
- Pass rates increasing from 82.5% for non-attendees to 100% for clinic attendees.
- Strong equity outcomes, including Māori parity and outperformance in multiple years, a positive Pacific pass gap in 2025 (+1.6), international student outperformance in 2025 (+5.5), and disability outcomes consistently close to parity.

Why this initiative stands out

This initiative stands out because it demonstrates that equity, student belonging and academic rigor can be advanced simultaneously at scale in a large first-year course. It is not a single intervention or support program operating at the margins. Instead, it is a coherent teaching model in which course design, assessment, feedback mechanisms and personalised support work together to improve outcomes for the whole cohort.

It is also distinctive in the way it combines human connection with evidence-informed teaching practice. Students consistently describe the course as clear, well organised and supportive, and report that the clinics make complex material more manageable. This responsiveness, combined with strong structure and high expectations, enables students to experience first-year accounting as both challenging and achievable.

Why it matters

Foundational first-year courses often shape whether students persist, succeed, and develop confidence in their chosen field. Dr Uele's work matters because it provides a practical, scalable model for improving outcomes in a gateway accounting paper

while also advancing inclusion and equity. It strengthens academic performance, narrows achievement gaps, and helps students from a wide range of backgrounds feel that they belong in higher education and in the accounting profession.

More broadly, the initiative offers a compelling example for the sector. It shows how thoughtful course design, student voice, and sustained relational teaching can improve results without lowering expectations.

Dr Kristina Vojvoda (Lead) and Associate Professor Conor Clune | University of New South Wales

Repositioning accounting as the engine of business – driving engagement, confidence and major choice at scale.

Overview

Dr Kristina Vojvoda and Associate Professor Conor Clune's initiative in COMM1140 Financial Management at UNSW responds to a common first-year challenge: many Bachelor of Commerce students begin with the view that accounting is technical, dry and disconnected from real business practice. Their work seeks to change that perception early by positioning accounting as central to an understanding of how organisations make decisions, manage performance and create value.

Delivered in a compulsory first-year course enrolling up to 3,000 students per year, the initiative combines industry insight videos, structured collaborative tutorials, assessment-aligned participation, student partnership, and professional engagement activities to strengthen students' understanding of accounting's relevance and to support more informed pathway decisions.

What the initiative includes

A central feature of the redesign is the Industry Insight Video Series, launched in Term 1, 2024, comprising nine video interviews with accounting, finance and tax professionals aligned to weekly course topics. Over six months, Dr Kristina Vojvoda and Associate Professor Conor Clune partnered with these professionals to produce these video interviews. Embedded into tutorials, these videos help students see how accounting informs practical decisions such as investment evaluation, performance management and risk oversight. Tutors then extend the learning through applied mini-cases and collaborative Excel-based problem-solving, integrating professional relevance with technical learning.

The tutorial model was also redesigned around small-team, shared Excel activities hosted through Microsoft Teams, shifting learning from passive listening to collective analysis. This structure encourages students to interpret information, debate business options and justify reasoning in a psychologically safer environment than whole-class participation. Tutorial participation is worth 15% of the course grade, reinforcing preparation and contribution as core parts of the learning process.

To support quality at scale, the team leads and mentors up to 20 sessional tutors each term, using structured slides, Excel workbooks, facilitation guides, weekly coordination meetings and peer observation. The course also draws on UNSW's Student Partner Program, through which student feedback has informed the development of interactive weekly Survival Guides in UNSW's learning management system, Moodle.

Beyond the classroom, the team has also built early professional engagement through initiatives such as the COMM1140 BBQ, which connected 250+ first-year students per term with staff, student societies and CA ANZ representatives, and the event 'Accounting or Finance: Which major is right for you?', delivered in 2023, 2024 and 2025 for 100+ students with input from professionals and alumni.

Key impact statistics

- Tutorial attendance consistently exceeds 95% each term, indicating strong sustained engagement.
- Year-on-year enrolments in second-year accounting courses increased substantially at UNSW. ACCT2511 and ACCT2522 are the first two second-year courses in UNSW's Bachelor of Commerce (BCom) accounting major. In ACCT2511, enrolments rose by 50.4% in T1 (238 to 358) and 35.9% in T3 (340 to 462). In ACCT2522, enrolments increased by 34.9% in T1 (258 to 348) and 55.7% in T3 (273 to 425). Both courses had a combined increase of 242 students. Overall growth of 35 -56% year-on-year across both courses indicates a significant uplift in progression into the accounting major.
- In the 2024 in-session poll for the 'Accounting or Finance' event, 56% of attendees showed interest in majoring in accounting.

Why this initiative stands out

A notable strength of this work is its coherent first-year design. Rather than relying on a single intervention, the initiative aligns curriculum, tutorials, assessment, tutor development, student feedback and professional engagement around one central message: accounting is not an isolated technical discipline, but a critical way of understanding and running a successful business.

The approach is also significant because it addresses both engagement and progression. Students are supported to build confidence in discussing business decisions, to experience accounting as relevant and applied, and to make more informed choices about majors and future careers. The reported increase in second-

year accounting enrolments suggests that this first-year reframing is influencing students' commitment to the accounting discipline.

Why it matters

This initiative demonstrates how first-year accounting-related learning can be reshaped to improve student engagement, belonging and progression at scale. It is especially relevant for educators interested in curriculum redesign, active learning, first-year transition and accounting pipeline development.

More broadly, the work demonstrates that strategic first-year design can do more than improve classroom experience: it can help students see the profession differently, understand where their studies may lead, and choose accounting with greater confidence and clarity.

Phoebe Lake (Lead), Heather Prider, Philip Johnson, Scott Copeland and Dr Gosia Ludwichowska-Alluigi | Adelaide University

From uncertainty to confidence: Lifting outcomes, engagement and persistence in first-year accounting



As of 5 July 2026, and as announced at the 2026 AFAANZ Conference, Phoebe Lake, Heather Prider, Philip Johnson, Scott Copeland and Dr Gosia Ludwichowska-Alluigi were named the 2026 Inspiring Minds Award Winner (Australia).

Overview

This initiative addresses a significant challenge in online first-year accounting education: how to help diverse students succeed in a fully online environment while balancing study with work, family and other commitments. The course serves large cohorts of approximately 200–300 students per offering, including many mature-age learners returning to study with varying confidence in numeracy, academic writing and independent learning.

In response to high attrition rates of 23–30% per offering, the teaching team designed an integrated, evidence-informed support model to reduce assessment anxiety, strengthen engagement, and improve persistence. The initiative combines targeted academic intervention with interactive online learning design to build both capability and belonging from the outset of students' degrees.

What the initiative includes

The initiative brings together two connected strategies designed to support both academic success and student confidence.

Assessment bootcamps are delivered in the lead-up to major assessments and focus on high-risk concepts, step-by-step problem solving, realistic practice opportunities, immediate feedback, and practical guidance on study strategies and time

management. Delivered live via Zoom and recorded for later access; the bootcamps provide flexible, timely support tailored to the needs of online learners.

Interactive online learning activities were embedded across the course to promote active learning in an asynchronous environment. These include automated quizzes, worked examples, reflection prompts, and self-monitoring tools that help students check their understanding, identify misconceptions early, and stay engaged with the learning process throughout the term.

Key impact statistics

- Average course marks increased from 67/100 to 79/100 following implementation of the support model.
- Completion rates increased from 76.7% to 83.9%, indicating stronger student persistence and progression.
- Student ratings for 'the assessment items assisted my learning' improved from 58.93 and 57.69 in 2024 to 72.73 and 74.14 in 2025 after the introduction of the bootcamps.
- 93% of students (195/210) engage with interactive learning resources.
- Interactive activities received over 400% more views than other course materials.
- Student satisfaction with teaching support averaged 79% or higher across five consecutive years, exceeding the institutional benchmark cited in the application.

Why this initiative stands out

A key strength of this initiative is that it goes beyond improving content delivery to deliberately build confidence, self-regulation and connection in the first year of study. The teaching team combines structured academic support with personalised communication, proactive outreach, and flexible delivery, creating an online learning environment in which students feel both supported and capable. Qualitative feedback reported in the application indicates that students particularly valued the clarity, encouragement, and responsiveness of the teaching team, and described increased confidence and a stronger sense of belonging.

The initiative also stands out for linking first-year learning to long-term employability. Professional capabilities such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and self-management are embedded early, helping students see accounting not only as a

discipline to study, but as a profession to enter. Program-level assurance of learning results reported in the application show strong outcomes across these capability areas within the online Bachelor of Accounting program.

Why it matters

This initiative provides a practical and transferable example of how targeted support, interactive design, learning analytics, and a strong culture of care can improve both student experience and academic outcomes in first-year higher education. It is particularly relevant to educators and program leaders seeking effective approaches to online engagement, retention, inclusive teaching and employability development in accounting and related disciplines.

Dr Sendirella George (Lead), Dr Emmanuel Edache Michael and Dr Isabella Li | Victoria University of Wellington

From technical subject to societal force: Redefining accounting as social, moral and political practice

Overview

This application presents a coordinated first-year approach across two courses – BCOM 101: Identifying Grand Challenges in Business and Government and ACCY 130: Accounting for Accountability and Decision Making – designed to reposition accounting as more than a technical discipline. The initiative invites students to see accounting and accountability as technical, social, moral and explicit political practices that shape decisions, allocate resources and influence societal and environmental outcomes. At its core is a dialogic pedagogy that replaces passive content delivery with structured discussion, debate and reflection.

In BCOM 101, students examine climate change and environmental accountability, while in ACCY 130 they extend this thinking to taxation, inequality, sustainability disclosures and decision-making frameworks. Across both courses, students are encouraged to ask not only how accounting works, but who is held accountable, to whom, and with what consequences. This creates a more purposeful and intellectually engaging first-year experience.

What the initiative includes

The initiative combines interactive lectures, structured debate, case-based tutorials, short micro-videos, formative quizzes, reflection tasks and practitioner engagement to create a coherent first-year learning journey. In BCOM 101, students use live polling and facilitated discussion to position themselves along different perspectives on accountability issues, then revisit and reconsider those views through debate. Short 2–4 minute micro-videos introduce key concepts and support preparation for class discussion.

In ACCY 130, lectures and tutorials are deliberately linked so that conceptual ideas are tested through real-world scenarios involving taxation systems, sustainability disclosures and accountability relationships. Students work through low-stakes tasks, real-time interactions and quizzes following major lectures, helping surface misconceptions early and strengthen conceptual understanding. The application also highlights a growing bank of reusable teaching resources, including

grand challenge case studies, worldview spectrum tools, debate frameworks, scaffolded reflection tasks and concept-check questions.

Industry engagement is another important feature. Students are exposed to panels and guest speakers from CA ANZ, the External Reporting Board, the Climate Change Commission, major accounting firms, iwi organisations, and sustainability and assurance specialists, helping them connect classroom learning with contemporary professional practice.

Key impact statistics

- The initiative is built across 2 coordinated first-year courses, creating a scaffolded student experience rather than a stand-alone intervention.
- ACCY 130 uses concept-check quizzes after major lectures, typically in weeks 3, 4, 9, 10 and 12, to reinforce learning and identify misconceptions early.
- Polling data reportedly shows consistently high engagement across cohorts, with students demonstrating greater confidence in articulating positions and stronger motivation to continue accounting study.
- The application provides evidence of progression impact through student reflections such as changing major to accounting and direct correspondence seeking advice on accounting pathways after exposure to this teaching approach.

Why this initiative stands out

A major strength of this application is that it reframes accounting from the first semester as a discipline connected to major public issues, including climate change, inequality, accountability and responsible decision-making. Rather than presenting accounting as neutral or procedural, the initiative helps students understand it as a field that carries ethical, social and political consequences. This gives first-year learning a stronger sense of purpose and relevance.

The work also stands out because it is coherent across courses, rather than confined to a single classroom activity. Students encounter a consistent narrative across both courses: accounting is a way of understanding and shaping the world, not simply recording it. The application presents strong qualitative evidence that this approach deepens engagement, supports analytical reasoning, strengthens understanding of stakeholder implications, and encourages students to see themselves as future accountability actors rather than only future technicians.

Why it matters

This initiative offers a compelling example of how first-year accounting can be redesigned to be more intellectually rigorous, more participatory and more professionally meaningful.

More broadly, the application demonstrates how first-year curriculum design can shape not only learning outcomes, but also student identity, motivation and progression into the profession. By helping students see accounting as future-focused, socially consequential and relevant to complex global problems, this initiative contributes to a stronger and more inclusive pipeline into accounting education and practice.

Dr Ka Wai (Stanley) Choi | Queensland University of Technology

First-year accounting students to train AI agents

Overview

Dr Stanley Choi's initiative in AYB150 at QUT presents a distinctive approach to first-year accounting education by positioning students not simply as users of artificial intelligence, but as emerging professionals who can design, train and evaluate AI tools. In this model, students take on the role of 'senior accountants', creating AI agents intended to support the learning of junior team members. This shifts the focus away from using AI to produce answers and towards using AI to clarify reasoning, structure explanations, and support learning.

The initiative responds directly to the changing nature of professional accounting practice. As AI becomes more embedded in workplaces, graduates will need more than technical proficiency: they will need to exercise judgement, evaluate outputs, and work critically with AI-enabled systems. Dr Choi's approach helps students build these capabilities early by combining accounting knowledge with explanation, critique, and reflective thinking.

What the initiative includes

The initiative combines several elements that make the learning experience both innovative and professionally relevant:

- **A learning-by-teaching model**, in which students design AI tutors rather than passively relying on AI-generated answers.
- **Role-based learning**, with students acting as 'senior accountants' responsible for training AI agents to support others.
- **Workshops on educational and prompting strategies**, helping students understand how to scaffold explanations, guide reasoning, and ask effective questions.
- **Design, testing and review of AI agents**, enabling students to build practical experience in creating and refining AI-supported learning tools.
- **Peer review**, where students evaluate one another's AI agents, compare instructional choices and identify strengths and limitations in both the tools and their own reasoning.

- **Development of open-access resources**, including workshop videos and slides intended to support educator uptake and broader professional dialogue around AI in accounting education.

Key impact statistics

The initiative has generated encouraging early evidence of impact:

- Confidence and readiness: builder-group students recorded a mean of 4.250/5.000, compared with 3.750/5.000 in the control group.
- Ease and convenience of AI for learning accountancy: 4.071/5.000.
- 'It is easy to use AI to learn Accountancy': 4.143/5.000.
- Comfort using AI: builder-group students reported 4.500/5.000, suggesting that creating AI agents can reduce technology anxiety.
- Interaction and future intentions: 4.071/5.000, indicating a strong willingness to continue using AI-based learning tools.
- Quality of student-designed AI agents: reviewers gave an overall mean of 3.778, including 4.000 for concise and relevant responses, and 3.667 for both learning support and accuracy.

This pilot also identified areas for further enhancement, with cognitive engagement rated at 3.571/5.000 and technical reliability at 2.714/5.000, providing a clear basis for future refinement.

Why this initiative stands out

This initiative stands out because it moves beyond the now-common question of whether students should use AI and instead asks how students can be prepared to train, supervise, and critically evaluate AI in professional contexts. That is a much more forward-looking and educationally valuable proposition. It reframes AI as an object of professional judgement rather than a shortcut to task completion.

It is also distinctive because it connects first-year learning, assessment, and future-focused professional capability. Students are not only learning accounting concepts; they are also learning how to communicate those concepts clearly, diagnose misunderstandings, and assess whether an AI response genuinely supports learning. This integration of accounting knowledge, metacognition, and AI literacy makes the initiative especially innovative in a first-year setting.

Why it matters

Dr Choi's initiative matters because it offers a practical and scalable response to one of the most pressing challenges in higher education and the profession: how to prepare students for a future in which AI is part of everyday work. Rather than treating AI as a risk to be managed, the initiative treats it as a context in which students must develop stronger judgement, deeper understanding, and greater responsibility.

For the Inspiring Minds Award 2026, this project represents a compelling example of innovative teaching that is both timely and meaningful. It builds student confidence, introduces authentic future-facing professional skills, and demonstrates how first-year accounting can be redesigned to help students engage critically and constructively with emerging technologies.

Dr Yuanyuan Hu | Massey University

From passive listening to active mastery: Integrating technology, practice, and feedback at scale

Overview

Dr Yuanyuan Hu's application centers on the first-year course Introductory Financial Accounting (110109) at Massey University, delivered both on campus and via distance learning. Dr Hu's approach is built around three clear principles – active learning, timely feedback, and equity of access – with the aim of creating a more supportive, engaging and successful first-year accounting experience.

The application presents a sustained, multi-year model of course enhancement rather than a single intervention. It combines curriculum redesign, interactive technologies, scaffolded assessment, targeted student support, industry engagement and practical career guidance. Across the period covered in the application, this work is associated with a substantial improvement in student achievement.

What the initiative includes

The initiative brings together a set of integrated teaching and support strategies designed to improve learning, motivation and progression. These include interactive technologies such as TopHat and Kahoot, weekly online quizzes, hands-on workshops, recorded lectures, and live online sessions that support both campus-based and distance students. Student comments in the supporting evidence repeatedly identify quizzes, workshops, recorded materials and clear weekly structure as especially valuable for learning and revision.

A further feature is the emphasis on practical and professionally relevant learning. Dr Hu integrated Xero and Excel into assessment to help students develop real-world accounting capabilities, and redesigned course materials to align with New Zealand financial reporting and current professional expectations. The application also highlights the creation of high-quality learning resources, formal moderation processes, and course redevelopment following an external quality review.

The initiative also includes targeted equity and progression support. Dr Hu established dedicated online forums for Māori and Pasifika students, linked students with senior mentors and targeted tutorials, and provided wider advising and employability support through CV assistance, references, scholarship support and

mentoring of the Massey University Accountancy Club. These activities are presented as part of a broader strategy to build confidence, connection and progression into the profession.

Key impact statistics

- Course pass rates increased from 63% in 2017 to 90% in 2025.
- The supporting evidence draws on student feedback collected across 2017–2025, providing a longitudinal base for the application’s claims about sustained impact.
- Dr Hu has mentored the Massey University Accountancy Club, strengthening professional connection and early industry engagement for students.
- Student feedback identifies strong value in weekly quizzes, hands-on workshops, recorded lectures, interactive tools, and Xero/Excel-based assessments, indicating that the initiative improves both accessibility and applied learning.

Why this initiative stands out

A notable strength of this application is its intentional integration of pedagogy, technology, equity support and professional relevance. Rather than relying on one innovation, Dr Hu has built a coherent first-year model in which students practice accounting actively, receive timely feedback, and engage with learning resources that are structured, practical and accessible across multiple modes of study.

The application also stands out for its strong focus on inclusion and student support. The targeted forums and mentoring arrangements for Māori and Pasifika students, together with extensive support for student progression and employability, indicate a commitment not only to academic success but also to belonging, confidence and long-term opportunity. The evidence suggests that this support is reinforced by Dr Hu’s broader contribution to teaching quality, moderation, external review and professional engagement.

Why it matters

This application offers a practical example of how first-year accounting can be strengthened through a combination of interactive teaching, inclusive course design, authentic assessment and proactive student support. It is particularly relevant for educators seeking ways to improve outcomes in subjects taught across both campus

and distance modes, and for those interested in balancing academic rigor with accessibility and engagement.

The sustained improvement in pass rates, combined with evidence of industry connection and progression support, makes this a strong example of student-centered, profession-facing first-year accounting education.

Summary insights

Across these initiatives, a clear and consistent theme emerges: intentional first-year curriculum design is a critical lever for both student engagement and longer-term progression. The most impactful approaches move beyond discrete or reactive interventions and instead adopt a holistic, program-level lens, creating coherent, integrated learning ecosystems that align curriculum, assessment, academic support, and professional context.

What distinguishes these leading examples is not a single innovation, but the deliberate orchestration of multiple elements to support student transition into higher education and into the discipline of accounting. Several shared success factors are evident:

- Active, applied learning that situates accounting within authentic, decision-based contexts, enabling students to understand not just what they are learning, but why it matters, and how it translates into real-world practice
- Structured, early-stage support and feedback mechanisms, which play a critical role in building foundational confidence, normalising challenge, and reducing early attrition
- Embedded industry and professional integration, ensuring students are exposed to career pathways, professional identities, and employer expectations from the outset of their studies
- Inclusive and scalable design approaches, which recognise the diversity of first-year cohorts and intentionally reduce barriers to entry, capability development, and success
- Constructive alignment between learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment, reinforcing capability development and ensuring students are consistently working towards clearly defined skills and competencies

Importantly, these initiatives reinforce that enhancing the first-year experience is not solely an engagement objective. Rather, it is central to shaping students' academic self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and emerging professional identity. The evidence across the finalists demonstrates that when students can see the relevance and application of their learning, and are supported to succeed early, they are

significantly more likely to persist, progress, and ultimately pursue a pathway into the accounting profession.

Taken together, these approaches highlight a shift from content delivery to capability development, where the first-year experience is intentionally designed as the foundation for both academic success and professional readiness.

Inspiring Minds Award 2027

The breadth and quality of work submitted highlights the innovation already happening across the accounting education community. Whether through small changes or large-scale redesigns, every initiative plays a role in shaping how students experience the profession from day one.

If you are trialling new ideas, redesigning your course, or embedding more applied and student-centred approaches, you are already contributing to this impact.

CA ANZ's Inspiring Minds Award 2027 is your opportunity to share that work. Applications will open later this year, we encourage you to keep an eye on the [Inspiring Minds Award website](#) to be among the first to know when submissions go live.

If you are improving the student experience, strengthening engagement, or preparing students for the future of the profession, we encourage you to put forward an application.

- Share your approach
- Showcase your impact
- Help shape the future of accounting education

Your work could inspire the next generation of Difference Makers.