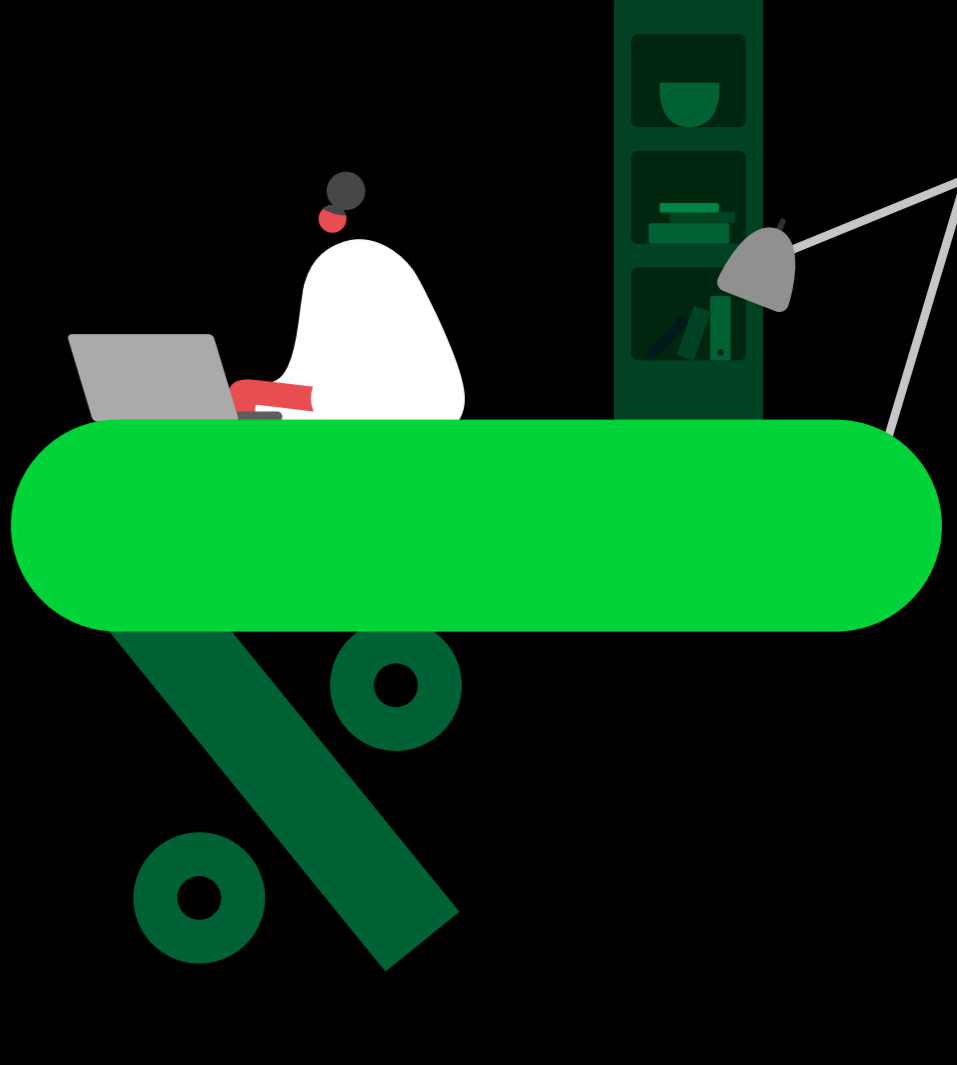


The Hidden Hours of Accountancy

How accountants and bookkeepers really spend their time, and what it's costing them.



82% of accountancy practices whose primary clients are sole traders say they regularly act as a therapist for clients.

This is just one example of a volume of work growing at **50%** year on year.

You might write this off as occasional favours, one-offs, or extra value you're giving. But they are dominating real hours every week and leaving revenue on the table.

They are the Hidden Hours of Accountancy.

The shape of a modern working week

We asked 1,000 UK-based accountants and bookkeepers to allocate their working time across four categories: core accounting and compliance, advisory and technology, running the practice, and beyond-the-brief client support. The results paint a striking picture.

44% of the working week spent on core accounting — **down from 50% just 12 months ago**

24% on advisory and technology work

18% on running the practice (admin, billing, chasing clients)

13% on beyond-the-brief client support — **up from 9% a year ago**



That last figure is the one to watch

Beyond-the-brief work has grown by nearly **50%** in a year, which is faster than any other category. And with only **8%** of practitioners saying they do none of this kind of work, it is now a near-universal feature of the profession.

62% of accountants say they are spending more time on beyond-the-brief tasks than 12 months ago.

74% say the same compared to three years ago.

What does 'beyond-the-brief' mean?

The work accountants are absorbing is wide-ranging. Business mentoring on non-financial matters and acting as an emotional support resource for clients in personal difficulty are both reported by **52%** of practitioners, making them the two most common types of beyond-the-brief work.

Others include:

37% HR and employment support

36% tech troubleshooting unrelated to accounting

30% ad hoc administrative or government support

The picture varies by client type. Among practices whose primary clients are sole traders, **82%** say they regularly act as a therapist for clients. Among those focused on limited companies, that figure is **35%**.

52% of practitioners find themselves acting as a non-financial business mentor or emotional support resource for clients

Hard work, rarely charged

If accountants were simply choosing to broaden their offering, the picture would look different. The data suggests otherwise. This work is rarely charged for, unclear in scope, and absorbed by default.



81% regularly take on tasks outside their agreed scope of work.

70% say their fees don't reflect the full range of support they provide

19% charge for most or all of their beyond-the-brief work.

When out-of-scope work arises, the most common outcome is simply absorbing it:

44% say it's completed without any additional charge.

22% raise a separate fee.

14% formally re-scope the engagement.

53% of accountants say their services are not always clearly defined for clients.

14% say their scope is typically very clearly defined.

Female practitioners (**63%**) are significantly more likely to provide emotional support to clients than their male counterparts (**42%**). And, the impact of this additional work on their own wellbeing is greater.

The cost to the people doing the job

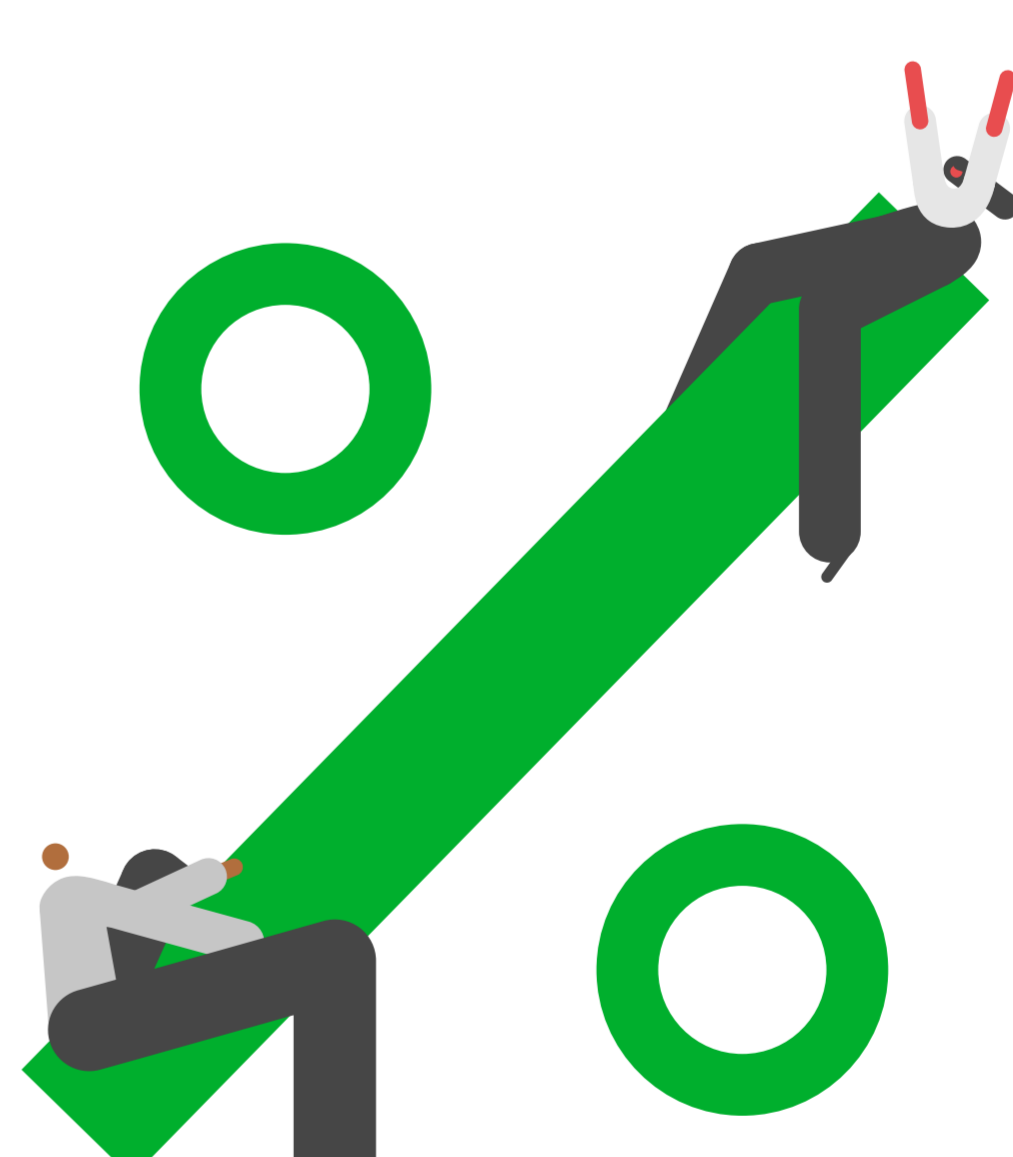
The volume and nature of this expanded role is taking a measurable toll. More than half of practitioners (**56%**) say they are satisfied with their job — but that figure is falling. Over the past three years, **44%** say their satisfaction has declined, and only **19%** say it has improved.

80% say beyond-scope tasks make their working life more stressful.

72% say it makes it harder to do their actual job effectively.

42% say the reality of the role is worse than expected when they entered the profession.

13% say they are likely to leave the accounting profession within the next three years.



Among those considering leaving, almost half (**47%**) point to too much time on non-accounting tasks as a key driver. The top sources of satisfaction remain deeply human: building relationships with clients (**63%**), helping clients succeed (**58%**), and problem-solving (**52%**). The work that practitioners value most is being crowded out by the work they find most draining.

What comes next

Accountants know their role is changing, but whether that's for better or worse depends on who you ask.

38% believe the profession is moving in the right direction: towards advisory work, greater use of technology, and wider recognition of the value they provide. But **34%** disagree, pointing to rising workloads without fair pay, a compliance burden that keeps expanding, and client expectations that are difficult to match.

The profession does not have a shared sense of where it's going and when you look at the data by career stage, **18%** of the next generation of practitioners that will be shaping the profession for the next two decades say they are likely to leave within the next three years.

The profession is doing more than ever before. Much of that work is invisible, uncharged, and unacknowledged. This report is the start of a longer conversation about how accountancy may evolve.



More findings from The Hidden Hours of Accountancy are coming

We'll be releasing new data and analysis across the coming months, covering everything from structuring fees and practice profitability to mental health and the future of the profession. Follow Sage to stay up to date.

[Accountant's hub](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [YouTube](#)

Based on a survey of 1,000 UK-based accounting and bookkeeping practitioners. All respondents were client-facing practitioners working in firms that serve external clients. Fieldwork conducted April 2026.