

On The Ladder Up

There are a number of career paths that accountants can take. **Ryan DeBeasi** talks with some newly qualified accountants on their experiences to date

Joanne Farrell

Joanne Farrell didn't envisage a career as an accountant when she did her leaving cert at the tender age of 16, though she did do business studies as one of her subjects. Ten years later the 26-year-old is working as a financial accountant with Hertz. "When I completed my leaving certificate I had no idea what career path to take. I decided to do a Business and Office Administration Diploma with FÁS, which took one year to complete. I started work in the accounts payable department in Dunnes Stores head office even though I wasn't 100% sure a career in finance was for me," said Farrell.

After Dunnes, she spent five years as an accounts assistant in the Accounts Payable department with Budget Travel. "After a while I was offered the position of Accounts Payable Team Leader. During this time, my manager at Budget Travel encouraged me to think about studying for a professional accountancy qualification but at that time I was quite happy to pursue a nine-to-five career.

"After five years in Budget Travel, I needed a new challenge and became focused on my career. I needed to decide whether this would be accountancy or something completely different. It was when I was offered the role as Netting Team Leader at the Hertz European Service Centre that I decided accountancy was going to be the career for me.

"I started with Hertz in April 2004 and started the ACCA syllabus in September 2004 with the encouragement of Hertz. I chose the ACCA because it is a well-recognised qualification worldwide, and Hertz has operations globally. I started the syllabus at the first level and it took two-and-a-half years to qualify," said Farrell.

"I received study leave from Hertz and

they subsidised my exam and college fees at Griffith College and once I passed my exams and became qualified they paid for all the costs. I plan on progressing in the company. Hertz is an international company and there are definitely opportunities to progress. My advice to anyone thinking about ACCA is to make sure that it is what you want to do. It requires determination and dedication," she said.

Michael Graham

CIMA accountant Michael Graham got his degree in accountancy and economics at the University of Ulster at Coleraine, and then received his post-graduate degree in marketing in 1992. Over the years, the 39-year-old worked in companies ranging from pharmaceutical company Oregon Scientific and online payment company Swiftpay to WorldCom. He later moved to BT Ireland, where he decided that he had put off his accountancy qualification for long enough.

Graham began taking night classes at BPP and ATS. His graduate degree allowed him exemption from the foundation level courses as well as one subject in the managerial level. "I was basically a management accountant without the qualification. But once I got the qualification, a lot of doors opened. Starting studying again wasn't that difficult." He said that his employers were supportive of his courses and provided study leave.

Graham said that although the syllabus is flexible enough to accommodate mature students, he became increasingly busy as the years passed. For that reason, he recommended getting the qualification as soon as possible. "Near the end of the CIMA programme, I moved to my current job at Eircom, which required the qualification. The CIMA qualifica-

tion is very relevant to practically every company that I can think of. It has a very wide scope within the syllabus," he added.

Ingrid Halligan

Ingrid Halligan did her leaving certificate in 1990 and went straight into an accounting practice to train as a certified public accountant. "I decided that I wanted to be an accountant when I was in school. I had an aptitude for figures and knew that I would like a career that centred around that. I also enjoyed working with people so I was sure early



Ingrid Halligan: an aptitude for figures

on that it was the way forward for me. I studied to be an accounting technician at first, but always dreamed of progressing on to qualify as a CPA. I used the IATI qualification as a stepping-stone to get there. The CPA institute looks after both their members and students very well.

"I have mainly worked in CPA practices throughout my career to date. I did work in industry on two occasions over the years but always preferred the variety of working in practice. Having an accountancy practice background means that I deal with a variety of clients with different business interests on a daily basis, so adaptability and interpersonal skills are vital." She now runs her own practice, Halligan Dunne, offering her clients a range of accounting and financial services.

"The accountant is no longer just a number cruncher. In response to market demand, the accountant must offer more value added services. A much greater level of business management skills is now required where the ability to translate raw financial data into usable business information is vital. Owner-managers increasingly rely on accountants to advise them on all aspects of their business, from choosing the most suitable technology solutions for financial

management to human resource management. To adapt to their changing role the accountant must acquire interpersonal and technological skills that will enable them to deliver the new services that growing businesses need," said Halligan.

Niall Savage

Seven years ago, Niall Savage entered the Institute of Chartered Accountants (ICAI) syllabus as a 21-year-old trainee at accounting consultancy firm KPMG. Today, he is corporate services manager at MKO Partners, an accounting consultancy firm in Sandymount, Co Dublin. After earning a graduate degree and a Masters degree at UCD, Savage entered into the ICAI programme as all of KPMG's trainees do. He said that 40 other people in his department were also working on the qualification.

Savage added that KPMG was a supportive, challenging environment in which to work for his ICAI qualification.

"You knew you had to perform," he said, adding that the ICAI distance-learning programme allowed him to continue to play sports. "I also think some of the lectures were brilliant," he said.

Savage said that accounting practices, unlike corporate accounting departments, place a heavy emphasis on having broad, up-to-date technical knowledge. "You couldn't not keep up; you wouldn't be able to cope," he said. According to Savage, MKO employees go to ICAI learning courses regularly and the company maintains a library for staff and holds a technical learning afternoon every two months. He added that he is required to have a certain number of course hours each year and that he has taken six courses so far this year. Savage explained that such training is required by the ICAI. "Practice has become very much about technical compliance. It's a constant fight trying to keep up with new standards and regulations," he said.

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