

Diary of a student...



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Tell us a little about your background and life so far.

After school, I had no idea what I wanted to do, so academia followed. My tutor suggested I go to university and study history which I enjoyed, and then decide. Thinking this a good idea I did a three-year degree at the University of Kent, Canterbury. Though I enjoyed this qualification and graduated, I did not want to become a historian or history teacher – which meant I still had no idea what to do.

Over the next few years, I studied and trained as an accountant in my hometown of Bury St. Edmunds, but not enjoying it I moved to London as an independent financial adviser in September 2008. Alas, this was a fortnight before the credit crisis hit, and that was my job gone.

After this, I got a call asking would I be interested in an interview for a payroll job. As I had nothing to lose, I said yes and started my career in payroll in March 2009.

What can you tell us about your career and qualifications?

My first payroll job was at pub company Greene King running a payroll of around 3,000 people. After moving around the weekly payrolls over the next four years, I needed a new challenge.

Whilst I had completed the first year of the CIPP Foundation Degree in Payroll Management, Greene King decided I did not need years 2 and 3 for my job, so I moved on and tried my luck elsewhere. While also trying to do years 2 and 3 I worked at the head office for cleaning company Servest, working on their four-weekly payrolls. Following this, I worked at

Peter's Elworthy & Moore in Cambridge, which was my first exposure to a payroll bureau. Subsequently, I worked as payroll manager for Taylor Keeble in their Cambourne office, but they also had an office in Canary Wharf, London where I would sometimes work. This prompted me to move to London and become payroll manager for Citroen Wells, working close to Oxford Street.

With Taylor Keeble and Citroen Wells, I got to complete my payroll qualification.

I have now been working in payroll for twelve years, 4.5 years as a payroll manager, and I am qualified with the CIPP up to level 5 (Foundation Degree level).

Why did you choose to study the Foundation Degree, and how did you find the qualification?

Though the qualification was the choice of Greene King, I saw first-hand that the CIPP qualification was the one you want.

Year one on the whole, I found pretty easy; as long as you learn the basics of payroll, you can do it. However, the second and third years are much more complex, and this is where the qualification tests you.

What advice would you give to others who are thinking about studying to improve their career?

If you want to go further in your career, this is a no-brainer! Go for it. It will improve not just your career but you as a person, too.

How did you manage the work-life balance and your study? Do

you have any tips for others in the same position?

Work/life was the most challenging part of the qualification, but when you are trying to study running the department takes priority. There were some very late nights involved, but they were all worth it. There is no better feeling than having studied hard for something, and then a week later in the real world you're asked a technical question which you answer, even quoting a technical reference to the legislation.

What would you say is the most important thing you learnt?

There is so much to learn in payroll, so realising that you will never know it all helps to relieve pressure that you should. There are always sources or places you can find out the things you don't know. (I recommend the CIPP's Advisory Service.)

What did you gain from this qualification – both in terms of skills and also career progression?

I gained a sense of knowledge and perspective, and specifically fantastic knowledge in people management. Also, learning about the Employment Rights Act etc are things which I would never have known but are fascinating. It has also helped my career progress.

I would not have been able to be a payroll manager without this qualification. You can be found out quickly if you don't know your stuff, especially in London. This qualification has helped my career move forwards, and helped my confidence in my profession, too.

Knowing you have the support of the CIPP qualification (and ensuring you keep up your CPD) helps ensure you keep the confidence levels to a maximum so that when you are challenged on something, you will have the confidence to respond professionally and back it up with the relevant evidence. ■