

## **International Opportunities – A Quick Guide to Working Overseas**

***Trayc Keevans, Manager of the Accountancy and Finance Desk with Morgan McKinley, outlines a quick guide for those considering working overseas.***

To travel or not to travel? That is the question! For professional accountants in Ireland there is always a debate as to whether travel is necessary for career development, or are those who go overseas missing out on the opportunities that present locally?

Over the past two years especially, the state of the economy and the employment market has meant that looking for opportunities overseas became less of a choice and more of a necessity. As a recruitment consultant specialising in accounting and finance, I have long been an advocate of the benefits of international experience in enhancing employment prospects with local employers.

In recent years through our international office network we have seen the strong and valued demand for Irish accountants abroad. From Australia to London to Singapore to Hong Kong, demand for Irish accountants is high for those who have the right attitude and willingness to work, something that Irish people are well known for as well as our ability to adapt quite easily to most cultures and environments.

There are many reasons why Irish accountants look to travel and take up career opportunities in other countries. For those of you considering it I would say there is some work to do first!

### **Know Why You Are Going**

#### ***For Life Experience?***

For many a year abroad is a rite of passage once the slog of study and exams is behind them and at this early point in their career many are less concerned with the quality of experience obtained and more interested in the life experience on offer. More often than not we find that employers like to see candidates that have this 'life experience', that they have travelled and gained knowledge of the world before choosing to settle down to a 'real job'.

I would advise people who plan to work abroad to secure some relevant contracts which make use of professional qualifications gained. These tend to provide better paid employment as well as enabling you to have more quality time between contracts to travel. This allows a prospective employer to see that you have struck the right balance between career and life experience. Where possible seek out contracts with a recognised international brand name, as this makes your experience more relevant to a future employer should you wish to return home.

#### ***For Career Advancing Experience?***

If you are ambitious and hungry to fast-track your career, there is an argument that says one of the recommended ways to do this is through gaining international experience on your CV. Before you board the next plane, it is important that you have taken the sufficient time to plan what it is you are looking for.

The best approach is to audit your CV and identify any skills gaps you may have that could inhibit you from reaching your career goal. Speak to colleagues and mentors as well as recruitment consultants who have visibility of the market to gain advice on what type of role would enable you to bridge these skills gaps. It may be systems

experience (lot of larger companies are implementing ERP systems like SAP/Oracle etc.) or commercial accounting experience including analysis, forecasting, budgeting etc.

Giving consideration to your travel plans means you are approaching your search with more of a focus and this will translate to an employer that you are taking your career seriously. Take a broad view of what this role could be. In some cases the role of an internal auditor offers a much wider exposure than say, a financial accountant and can offer a bigger profile in a large company with a greater perceived understanding of the overall business which may lend itself to assuming a more senior role in the short to medium term.

### ***Out of Necessity?***

There is no getting away from the fact that for a lot of people it is necessity rather than choice that is leading them to look at opportunities abroad. Again with the right planning, this can open the door to opportunities which accountants may not have had exposure to in the local market.

Across the Irish jobs market, we have seen the tightening of requirements from employers looking for suitable hires and the lack of flexibility in considering individuals without the requisite or relevant experience.

Assessing the market and trending the experience that employers are looking for makes it easier for you to plan your search for a relevant overseas opportunity. For instance, current market conditions mean that SMEs have been severely challenged and those with experience only in this market or small practice businesses will find it more challenging to secure employment. It is multinationals, Big Four, PLC's and international financial institutions that are doing the bulk of the hiring. Looking at the number of shared service centres and multinational corporations setting up EMEA operations in Ireland, candidates with exposure to these companies are more 'marketable' to future employers.

So if you have left a small firm or SME and are considering going abroad to work, give serious consideration to gaining experience with large multinational employers. Your currency is a strong education with professional qualifications recognised worldwide which you can enhance with a solid work ethic and willingness to learn and contribute.

### **Other Options**

With Irish exports rising to a three year high in February 2011, there are also a large number of Irish PLC's who will require accounting and finance professionals to take up opportunities in their international operations around the world. This can either require the person to be resident in another country or it can require significant travel to multiple locations – sometimes as much as 70%, whilst being based in Ireland from an EMEA Headquarters. This provides the opportunity to gain international experience without relocating.

The key requirement here is flexibility; willingness to travel and not being restrictive about the locations you may be required to work in – which may be incredibly varied depending on your discipline. This flexibility will be rewarded with experience that can often help to fast-track a career.

## **Visas**

As mentioned earlier, planning is key to a successful overseas working experience and this also extends to knowing the Visa requirements in the country you are travelling to. The type of visa you are eligible for will be a determining factor in the kind of work you get. You should do your research well in advance and align it to the type of role you are looking for.

### **Use the Resources Available to You**

Utilise the support network you have built up over the years; talk to a mentor, colleagues and friends who have travelled and worked abroad and talk to the experts on the ground. Morgan McKinley has an International Candidate Management Program designed to allow ease of access and practical advice for individuals looking to move internationally. This includes presenting job opportunities in the local market in advance of an individual moving, talking you through Visa requirements and providing an insight into local life. This spans across our 24 offices in 10 countries across the UK, Ireland, EMEA and Asia-Pacific.

So whether you are intending to work overseas for the life experience, for the career advancing opportunities or to bridge a gap in employment opportunities locally remember to enjoy it, make it worthwhile and be a strong ambassador for your country. Just don't forget to come home...eventually!

**Trayc Keevans is the Manager of the Accountancy and Finance desk, specialising in recruitment for qualified accountants within Industry and Financial Services at a senior level. Trayc graduated from Dublin City University with a BBS (Hons) in 1998, is CIPD qualified with a Diploma in Employment Law. Prior to joining Morgan McKinley in 2005, Trayc worked for seven years within the Financial Services and Multinational sectors. For more information about Morgan McKinley visit [www.morganmckinley.com](http://www.morganmckinley.com).**