

Off the record

Just one year after her graduation, Alison Arthur is very definitely going places.

In the literal sense, the 26-year-old senior fund accountant faces what some might describe as a punishing commute every day from her home in Dundalk to her job at Citco in Dublin's financial services sector. But she's undeterred. "It's only an hour – I'd be spending that in the car if I lived anywhere in the city centre," she says.

Figuratively, she's not hanging round either. It's only five years since she left college and she's just been appointed senior fund accountant at Citco. Was she surprised to be promoted to a senior role so soon? "Not hugely," she admits.

"To be honest, I would have been surprised if I hadn't. I like my job and I know that if you like your job, you tend to be better at it."

Having successfully completed her Bachelor of Business Studies degree, she travelled to Australia, where she'd hoped to find work in accounting. But the recession was just biting and the only work available was valeting and waitressing. "Sydney was great," she says. "But I kept thinking, this wasn't what I got my degree for. I applied for a few accounting jobs, but there was nothing suitable."

So she came home to Dundalk, and landed a job with Horseware, the company where she'd spent her summers on work experience as a student.

She became restless for another challenge, and decided to study for her CPA qualification. "I looked at all the institutes, but the main thing that helped me decide was that out of the five qualified accountants in work, two were CPAs, including my immediate boss, so that really encouraged me to go for it."

What followed was a gruelling three years of commuting between Dundalk and Dublin for lectures – arriving home at midnight one evening a week, and having to get up for work the next morning. "Around revision time it was especially difficult. Every Saturday night my friends were out and I had to get up to travel to Dublin in the morning, so it was very tough. Six months before the last exam I really thought I'd had enough, but I had a chat with my Dad, and he encouraged me to keep at it," she says.

Is she glad now? "Am I what?" she laughs. "When I passed the exams, it took a while to sink in, as I had to obtain another six months experience. But when I qualified last September, it was amazing."

In 2003, she made the move from Horseware to Citco Fund Services in the IFSC.

"I wanted to get out of manufacturing and into financial services – and I thought the best way was to go into fund administration. The transition wasn't that difficult because the atmosphere in Citco was very similar to Horseware – it's a very young, very friendly place to work. There's a great social life and lots of team building exercises, so they all know how to enjoy themselves."

The factor that made the move from manufacturing into financial services possible was, she says, having the CPA qualification.

"It has done me the world of good. It opens doors, it earns you respect, and it's also a great practical help," she says.

"I work on three funds. One of which is the largest client in the Dublin Office. This fund was going through audit when I graduated, so my CPA qualification really came in there. It felt great that I could contribute something extra – it was a real confidence boost."

For now at least, there are no further moves in the pipeline.

"Citco is a relatively new company to Dublin and it's constantly expanding – there's so much growth there. We get a lot of graduates who come straight out of college – I'd advise anyone starting out to get a professional qualification," she says.

"I was only 25 when I qualified and I was worried about having the qualification but not the specific experience in financial services. But when I came to Citco, they said it's great you have the qualification, we can give you the experience.

"So that's what I'd say to anyone starting out - get the qualification first."

It seems Arthur's something of a glutton for punishment.

"When I finished the CPA I was thinking 'never again'. Now I'm thinking 'what can I do next?'"



Vital Statistics

Name:	Alison Arthur
Age:	26
Job title:	Senior Fund Accountant
Company:	Citco
Qualifications:	BBS, CPA

Jenny Daly is a freelance business journalist

Two minutes in the mind of...

Alison Arthur

What's the most pleasurable part of your working day?

Client contact

What are the best and worst pieces of professional advice you ever received?

Best: *Look after the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves*

Worst: *If everyone does it, it must be right!*

What's the best career decision you've made?

Moving to financial services

What's the last book you read?

The Da Vinci Code by Dan Browne

Name your greatest indulgence.

Gucci Rush perfume

What's the most rewarding aspect of your job?

Investment Manager approval of monthly financial statements

What's the most essential item in your briefcase?

My mobile phone

Where's your favourite restaurant table?

Any window table with a view

Where do you go to clear your lungs?

Sliabh na Glogh

What three items would you bring to a desert island?

A hammock, my mobile phone and a take out menu

The best thing money can buy you is...

A pension plan

What's in your CD player at the moment?

U2's How to dismantle an Atomic Bomb

Which adage do you live by?

Do it right first time

What's the most valuable piece of advice you could give to someone starting out in your profession?

Get a professional qualification as soon as possible