

CPA Profile

Aidan Conlon



Title:
Head of Risk, Assurance and Compliance

Company:
Irish Prison Service

Qualifications:
MA (Leadership and Management), FCPA, MIATI.

Why did you decide to start out in a career in accountancy?

My family ran a small business and as a child, I remember how much my parents valued the advice they received from their accountant. Looking back, my family played a big part in influencing the early stages of my career.

Why did you choose CPA Ireland as your qualification route?

I believe that most people are familiar with the CPA brand, which is highly regarded both nationally and abroad. I was also attracted to the syllabus, the course options and the examination timetable.

Please provide a brief history of your career.

Most of my early career involved working in a small accountancy practice. Back then, working from incomplete records was a regular challenge, but it also provided great opportunities for learning. I subsequently joined the Office of the Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG), where I gained valuable experience as part of a team auditing multiple Government departments and State agencies. The Office of the C&AG also provided a unique insight into Government accounting and related principles, which I continued to benefit from in later roles.

After leaving the Civil Service, I worked in various audit-related positions in Pobal, which manages a wide range of EU and State funded programmes aimed at addressing disadvantage and supporting social inclusion. My latest Pobal role of Audit & Risk Manager involved leading a team in delivering a range of audit, verification and compliance services for multiple Government departments, mainly in non-profit organisations. An important part of the brief involved managing risks as part of a process of conducting

intelligence-led audits in a wide variety of complex situations.

In 2021, I was appointed to the role of Head of Risk, Assurance and Compliance in the Irish Prison Service, which employs around 3,500 staff and is responsible for the safe and secure custody of approximately 4,000 prisoners in ten closed and two open facilities. The Irish Prison Service is a unique and dynamic organisation, which has continuously strengthened the governance framework underpinning its important work. Developing risk management strategies and related compliance activities are a key part of my role, which is also a focal point for anti-fraud policies.

What one word describes what your CPA qualification has given you?

Foundation. A CPA qualification provides a sound basis for pursuing numerous career options. It also provides an excellent platform for engaging in further education.

What has been your biggest career achievement?

While working for Pobal, I designed and successfully delivered a pilot project aimed at enhancing the standard of governance in community childcare services, which are mainly companies limited by guarantee. At the time, the voluntary directors of these services were taking steps towards achieving full compliance with the provisions of the Charities Governance Code. To facilitate this, I designed a suite of checks in a way that struck a good balance between providing assurance on the existing governance arrangements and constructively assisting the boards of management by signposting them towards available resources for any areas of development. The relevant stakeholders welcomed the pilot

project and its success helped to pave the way for a wider governance programme. As all audit staff were involved in delivering the project, it was widely regarded as a great team achievement.

What or who inspires you most in business?

I greatly admire volunteers, especially those who serve as directors on the boards of non-profit organisations. The level of time commitment given by "Ireland's Silent Army" is inspirational and their continued support is crucial to the success of the charitable sector.

What advice would you give to those recently qualified or currently studying for their CPA qualification?

Try not to restrict yourself to the traditional options of practice and industry. Instead, be open to less obvious options. There are good opportunities in the charitable sector and there also seems to be a growing trend towards the public service recruiting staff with specialist skillsets. Whichever route you choose, a CPA qualification will provide you with a wide variety of paths to success.

How do you unwind?

Currently, I enjoy life's simple pleasures like spending time with my family, walking the dog and watching the odd Netflix series. Last year, I enjoyed being a member of Toastmasters International, which was a fun lockdown challenge for me.

What traits do you admire in others?

I greatly admire problem-solvers. Most people find it easy to be critical, but those who are solution-focused are less common and in my experience, make the most credible leaders in Irish business.