

# CPA Profile

## Mary Considine



**Title:** CEO  
**Company:** Shannon Group

### What made you decide to start out on a career in accountancy?

I was always interested in a career in business. I enjoyed accountancy and maths in school and wanted to work in a profession where I could use my problem-solving skills and help businesses to achieve their goals. I was also interested in the opportunity to develop many skills including leadership, team building and communications skills, all of which are solid skills that you need in a business career.

### Why did you choose CPA Ireland as your qualification route?

I wanted a qualification that I could be proud of and that was industry recognised. I researched and was pleased to learn that several well-established practices in the region were affiliated with CPA Ireland. I found it very beneficial in providing me with the building blocks to progress my career.

### Please provide a brief history of your career.

I have gained incredible experience throughout my career working with amazing people. I started my career in a local accountancy practice, J.W. Williams & Co. and from there I went to work in Aer Rianta based in Shannon. There my career path gave me great experience in a broad range of areas within the company from finance to aviation route development and marketing, commercial and corporate affairs.

I was appointed Managing Director of Shannon Airport in 2010, and in 2012 lead the separation of Shannon Airport from the daa taking the first step in setting up a new commercial semi state body, Shannon Group. Shannon Group was established to

manage not only the airport but also the significant property portfolio of Shannon Commercial Properties, the portfolio of Heritage attractions managed by Shannon Heritage and established the international aviation services centre, a cluster of now more than 80 aviation companies based at Shannon. I served in the role of Company Secretary and then CFO/Deputy CEO before taking on the role of acting CEO in June 2019 and was appointed CEO of the Group in October 2019.

### How have you got to where you are now and how has your CPA qualification contributed to such a fascinating career?

The qualification is a really important first step, and after that it is hard work and determination that gets you further along your career path. Studying for my CPA qualification taught me the importance of focus, hard work and discipline in achieving goals.

I have carried these with me throughout my career and hopefully have instilled them in other people I have met along the way.

### What has been your biggest career achievement?

Seeing Shannon Group have a real impact on the lives of the people in our region. Since our establishment in 2014, the Group has played a vital role in promoting the economic wellbeing of our region and our activities across the Group support a significant number of jobs. At Shannon Airport we have grown passenger numbers by 23%.

I am proud of what Shannon Group has achieved. We have demonstrated our commitment to our region and

balanced regional development by investing €115 million across the Group. We have upgraded our core airport infrastructure and built world-class property solutions that have attracted FDI and indigenous companies to locate here and create jobs. Occupancy rates at the Shannon Free Zone have grown from 40% to over 90%, while visitor numbers to our Shannon Heritage sites have almost doubled, growing from over 520,000 in 2014 to almost one million in 2019.



### Who has inspired you most in your career?

I don't think I could name one person as I have been inspired by a range of people throughout my life. People I have met in a work capacity

and people I've met in my own community. What I've learnt is that inspirational people come from all walks of life. For me it's their energy, drive to succeed and positive attitude that sets them apart.

In a business environment it is leaders who look to inspire others and mentor them in their career path. It is those leaders who look at the impact they can have not only on their own careers, but on leading others and providing opportunities and creating employment.

**If you were advising someone just starting out with their CPA qualification, what tip would you give them that would make their journey smoother?**

My advice would be to keep your eyes on the stars but your feet firmly on the ground. Have a clear vision for where you want to go and what you want to achieve in both your professional and personal life, work life balance is key to success.

Set goals and remember that your professional skills are important, but it is equally important to develop social skills to be an effective communicator. A rounded development is key.

Take every opportunity life presents and be willing to learn from others. Don't be afraid to look for a mentor, someone you admire to help you along your path.

**Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, airports have seen a huge drop in passenger numbers. How is Shannon airport addressing the impact this pandemic is having on the aviation and tourism sector?**

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been catastrophic. It has sent shock waves through the aviation and tourism sectors which will be felt for many years to come. Two of the three businesses we own and operate, Shannon Airport and Shannon Heritage, have been devastated by this pandemic.

When the shutdown happened in March, literally overnight, our entire visitor attraction business closed in line with public health measures. The business suffered a total collapse in visitors and revenue. Our Heritage business is heavily dependent on international tourists, which at sites like Bunratty Castle & Folk Park and King John's Castle account for over 70% of its visitor numbers.

Like airports globally, Shannon has witnessed an almost total collapse of airport traffic, connectivity and revenues. The imposition of the travel restrictions in March particularly in the US, a key market, wiped out business from there, then very quickly all of Europe started to shut down. Airport passenger numbers at Shannon reduced to a trickle.

Throughout this crisis we have endeavoured to maintain a level of service at our airport to allow repatriation flights, essential cargo movements, provide emergency cover and facilitate hangar operations, and I am proud of the role our employees played throughout in ensuring these services were available. In June, we welcomed the Antonov-225, the world's largest aircraft as it carried the single largest consignment of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), bringing almost one million surgical gowns for Irish hospitals.

We took decisive action to preserve our businesses and protect jobs in the long-term. This required us taking difficult but necessary short-term measures to preserve the business for the future and allow us to recover and rebuild from this crisis.

We implemented temporary layoffs and reduced working hours across the Group and will continue to do so in line with business activity. We availed of the wage subsidy scheme to support our employees at our sites and across the Group. We also targeted all discretionary spending across the Group reducing our operating costs as much as possible.

Like other airports, we have engaged with our employees on a number of measures to reduce payroll costs while we recover from this crisis; temporary and permanent reduction in working hours; career breaks; temporary layoffs; temporary reduction in pay and a voluntary severance scheme.

On 1st July the airport reopened to scheduled passenger traffic with the recommencement of 16 routes with Ryanair. Given the Government advice for essential travel only, passenger numbers have been extremely low.

To coincide with the restoration of scheduled services, we launched a Covid Customer Safety Charter and introduced rigorous new public health measures to protect the health and safety of staff and passengers, and to instill confidence in everyone coming to our airport.

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused massive disruption. It has changed how we live and work. Until there's a vaccine – there will be many issues which have to be managed.

We have taken many short-term difficult decisions in Shannon Group to deal with Covid-19 in order to preserve our businesses for the future, but we are resilient. Recovery will be slow, but we will prevail.

**Have you managed to take time away from work to unwind?**

I enjoy nothing more than spending time with my family, my husband Éibhear and my children Aron, Áine and Colin. I love going out for long walks and I am very fortunate to live in a very beautiful part of County Clare. If I feel like venturing further afield, the Wild Atlantic Way is on my doorstep which is wonderful.

I believe that it is important to give back to your community and I have been involved with many local community initiatives over the years. I am a past President of the Shannon Chamber of Commerce, and current Director of Mary Immaculate College and LIT in Limerick and serve on the VHI Members Advisory Council.