Case Study: Alumni

John, Computing - Maths (MSc)

Graduation Year: 2006
Job Title: Internal Auditor
Employer: ExxonMobil

What has been your career path up until now?

After graduating from Imperial College, I took a gap year travelling and volunteering in Latin America. I returned in April 2007 and did research into possible career options. I liked finance and business – fortunately this was complimented by my mathematics background – and so I applied for ExxonMobil which offered a wide variety of possible career paths and different global locations. I joined ExxonMobil in August 2007 and have now had over 5 years with the company.

What does your job involve?

My first role was within the Finance Department as a Business Analyst looking at the Marine Fuels department. My main responsibility was to monitor and report on the operating costs for the global business and then presenting on a monthly basis to the director of the Marine Fuels business. Quite a responsibility to be given my first year and a lot of interaction with contacts from across the globe!

In my second year I was based in the same group but moved to a more senior position as Business Analyst overseeing the earnings reporting for the Marine Fuels business. This was now reporting on the overall finances of the business rather than just the operating expenses.

In my third year I continued in the Finance Division but moved groups to join the Gas Marketing team. This included more responsibility and rather than just the Stewardship of the numbers, I had a lot more exposure to the accounting. In my fourth year I continued with the group and was moved to group supervisor which gave me an additional challenge of formally looking over the work of others and thinking about the direction of the group and its activities and also looking to develop others. In this role I was also assigned to a project team overseeing the divestment of a major part of our UK portfolio. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and something I really enjoyed due to its uniqueness and chance to work from scratch with no precedent to follow.

In 2012 – approaching my fifth year in the company – I moved to the Internal Audit department. This was a move that I have never looked back on. It offers variety both in terms of work and location because each ‘audit’ is approximately 3-4 weeks and is focused on a different part of the ExxonMobil organization, usually in a different country to the last. For example, my first audit was on Sakhalin (a Russian island just above Japan) auditing the Finance Department; and then my second audit was in Doha (the capital of Qatar).
Qatar) auditing a Joint Venture company in the Middle East. In the remainder of 2012, I travelled to Holland, Norway, Scotland, Nigeria and Dubai. This year – 2013 – will be just as busy with more travelling and some new destinations.

As well as the variety there is the challenge of quickly grasping a new subject area and being able to have a in depth discussion with someone who has been working in that part of the business for up to 20 years – quite a task! There is also the opportunity for leadership when I am assigned to be a lead of the audit which necessitates planning which parts of the business unit to be audited I would like to focus on and also managing the auditors on the team and giving them direction as they do their testing.

In each of my roles – and particularly my role in audit – I have had the chance to work with a wide variety of people: different nationalities; different backgrounds; and in each role to date I have had close interaction with senior management in the ExxonMobil corporation, which also provides for a great learning opportunity.

Another point to note is that entering an industrial Finance role usually provides the opportunity to be sponsored to study for a post-degree qualification. Indeed, ExxonMobil sponsored me to take a CIMA (Management Accountancy) qualification which I am pleased to say I passed in three years. There was a large amount of time dedicated to going to classes and study preparation for the exams – outside of my work hours – but it is rewarding when you finish and also gives you an additional qualification.

What part of your course did you particularly enjoy?

I enjoyed the problem-solving involved with university mathematics. There is a sense of the unknown when presented with an unfamiliar problem, but there is great satisfaction in understanding the concepts involved and forming an answer. These skills have been useful as an accountant and auditor.

What skills did you develop within your degree that you find useful in your present role?

The skills required in the finance roles I have had to date are good analytical ability (both seeing the ‘big picture’ and also being able to focus on the detail); good communicative skills in explaining what I understand in a clear way for different people to understand; good team skills but also being able to execute a task on my own and set my own targets; and finally a good work ethic. My role in audit has also developed my skill to understand a large amount of information in a short period of time and you have to be flexible because with the amount of travel and different business’ I visit, it never goes exactly to plan!

Did you gain work experience or an internship whilst at ICL?

I would recommend a gap year to any students approaching their final year. This was invaluable to me for the additional skills and worldly experience it gave me – I am sure that it also bolstered my CV and made me a more attractive prospective employee to the companies to whom I applied. With the new tuition fees in place it needs an even more careful decision before taking a gap year but if planned properly – with a mix of travel and work – then it can pay dividends as an investment in both your career prospects and general life development.

Were you involved in any extracurricular activities?

My main extracurricular activity at Imperial College was as a member of the rowing club. I was new to the sport when I first came to Imperial College but I enjoyed the challenge of daily (sometimes twice a day) training and as part of the novice eight we won the novice category of the Eights Head and went on to row at the prestigious Henley Regatta the same year. I carried on with the club during my time at Imperial and went on to win other regattas and take part at Henley again.

Could you give us one or more career tips for Imperial graduates?

The shorter the advice, often the more useful. So in a few words... my advice would be have a plan, have targets, know where you want to go and what you want to do, work hard for it, always have time to play hard and develop your all round self, be flexible in your plans and look out for opportunities, and every so often look back and forward and adjust your plans accordingly. Work hard, have fun.