

CAREER EDUCATION – WRITTEN Q&A

1. What is your job role and organisation?

Group Financial Controller of Allia Ltd, and Financial Controller of both Allia Future Business Centres Ltd and Allia Impact Ltd.

2. What do you do in this job?

Allia is a not-for-profit organisation and the Parent of the Allia Group. Allia Future Business Centres provide workspace in centres in Cambridge and Peterborough. Allia Impact carries out the group's impact projects.

I work within the finance team and am based at the Future Business Centre in Cambridge. I am responsible for the accounting, monitoring and reporting processes of Allia Future Business Centres and Allia Impact. I line manage a small team and am a member of the senior management team of Allia Future Business Centres and Allia Impact.

In addition, I support the CFO at a group level. This involves a number of tasks, including preparing quarterly board finance packs, helping with financial modelling or scenario planning on new opportunities and liaising with the auditors on all aspects of the group audit.

3. Why did you choose this career?

I was attracted to a career in finance as I knew that gaining the ACA qualification would give me many opportunities. There is a great variety of roles within finance, in organisations of all sizes.

I've developed an interest in the not-for-profit sector and have been lucky to be able to develop my career within it. Whilst my role requires technical accounting skills, I also get to use other skills and particularly enjoy that my role means I interact with individuals across the organisation.

4. What background education or training do you have?

I studied A-levels in Maths, Biology and English Literature. I also completed Chemistry AS level. When I chose my A-levels I was unsure if I would pursue a career in midwifery or finance. I enjoyed the subjects at GCSE level and thought they would keep my options open.

5. What has your career path been?

I left school in 2012 and joined a Cambridge based accountancy firm as a trainee accountant. Whilst in the role I studied the AAT and ACA qualifications, qualifying as a Chartered Accountant. I gained experience of a wide range of clients whilst working in the audit department.

I moved to a role in the commercial sector around 18 months after I qualified, where I worked for just over a year. During this time I decided to specialise and pursue a career in the non-for-profit/charity sector.

I have worked at Allia for almost three years and during that time have been promoted to Group Financial Controller. Whilst at Allia, I have completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Charity Accounting and Financial Management with Bayes Business School.

6. What does a typical day involve?

Each day is different, which is one of the things I love about my role, I never have time to get bored.

There are finance tasks such as payroll, payments, reconciliations or management information reports, which have to be done on a regular basis. This varies between weekly and monthly, depending on the task. A proportion of my day will usually be spent on these tasks, supported by the finance team.

The remainder is dependent on what projects are ongoing. I might be working on the preparation of the annual budget, or looking at the financial viability of a future project or decision.

7. What is your work environment like?

Since the pandemic, Allia has adopted a hybrid model and I spend around 60% of my working time in the office. The team who work at the Cambridge Future Business Centre work from one open plan office, it is lovely to engage with other departments including HR and Marketing on a daily basis. I travel to the Peterborough Business Centre around once a month.

Allia has always supported flexible working and a good work life balance. Inevitably there are times when deadlines must be met or longer hours are needed, however generally there is a good work life balance. Having been in the role a while now, I am better at predicting when the busy times will be (usually around our quarter ends and audit) and plan much better for these.

8. What aspects of your job are most challenging?

Within Allia there are a number of activities, it can be challenging to stay on top of everything and to plan a workload around this. Good communication, lots of lists and regularly speaking to different members of staff is essential.

I trained in practice and moving to an industry role was challenging. Whilst many of the skills I learnt were transferable, it was very different working on the finances of the same organisation everyday, compared to auditing many organisations each year.

9. Can you give an example of a project or piece of work that you have been most proud of?

I am incredibly proud of the work that Allia delivers and whilst the finance department is not involved in the direct delivery, the support teams are essential to the operations of the organisation.

In my role I am always thinking about how a process could be improved. I have really enjoyed working with the finance team to build efficiencies. This all supports the smooth running of the organisation. It is pleasing to be able to provide timely, accurate financial information which influences decisions within the organisation.

10. How do you hope your career will progress?

I'm really enjoying my role at Allia and have learnt a lot in my time with the organisation. I am ambitious, so I hope to continue to have opportunities within Allia to learn, progress and develop my skills further. I'm particularly keen to develop my leadership skills.