

Successful graduate

A well-rounded communicator

For Echo Chan, working in commercial field as an accountant is an opportunity to get to the heart of business.

Accountancy provides the business insight

These days, the work of accountants is ingrained into the fabric of business, and commercial accountants need to break out of the finance ghetto and acquire general knowledge of the company and its market; you cannot ignore facets of the business that do not affect the accounting department – because those facets no longer exist. For Echo Chan, an accountant with Harris Communications Ltd., that was the appeal of working in the commercial sector.

Hong Kong is the Asia hub for Harris, part of a 1,600-strong, US\$7 billion-revenue company headquartered in the United States that provides communications products, systems and services to governments and corporations. Chan's role in the department involves looking after the books and records of its companies in seven countries around the region.



Graduate profile

Name	: Echo Chan
QP graduation	: December 2006
Education	: Bachelor of business administration in accountancy, City University of Hong Kong
Job title	: Accountant
Company	: Harris Communications Ltd.
Past experience	: Senior associate, PricewaterhouseCoopers

Like many, Chan started her career as an auditor for a Big Four firm – but the opportunity to work at the coal face of business lured her away from the world of practising into the commercial sector. “For me, I think that in an audit firm, what I learn is the broad overview of an organization’s structures, practices and control procedure. But if you want to go in depth to the business, you have to be a commercial accountant – you will have the first hand experience in participating in the operation and planning of the company,” she says. “My audit experience is very useful to my work in commercial accounting. It helps me to build up a skill set to look into the issues or procedures from different perspective, in order to strive for the balance between simplifying the operation process and maintaining sufficient level of control.” In addition, Chan finds QP training is indispensable for helping her to transfer smoothly from practising to the commercial sector. “Throughout the group discussion activities at QP workshop, I had the opportunities to communicate with the peers, facilitators, and to analyze real case problems and find out practical solutions by applying our knowledge,” she says.

QP sharpens the interpersonal skills

Chan says that although she studied accountancy, it was not always her plan to enter the profession. "I did not think of being an accountant when I was in secondary school. At university, I was able to get more information and conduct an in-depth study of accountancy. I found it interesting: it is a professional job, and at the beginning, everybody has an equal opportunity to try. It is fair to both science and arts students."

Having made the decision to become an accountant and join the Big Four firm, she needed to qualify – and duly completed her QP studies two years after she left university. The programme, she says, was an obvious choice for her. "QP is a well-recognized programme, and it is tailor-made for Hong Kong, making it the most relevant local qualification for young accountants," she says. "Also the programme itself is very comprehensive."

She adds that QP is not just for what it teaches, but for the way it teaches. In particular, she appreciated that students are encouraged to interact with each other and share solutions to problems in its regular workshops, providing them with the communication and leadership skills which are essential in the workplace. "I am also greatly benefit from being the group leader at the workshop. Within a very short time limit, we needed to allocate tasks to teammates, summarize their findings, come up with a solution on case problem, and organize the ideas for presentation in a structured way. This kind of training is really challenging and useful which not just train up my leadership skill, but also my communication skill, analytical skill, presentation skill and time management."

"Furthermore, in the workshops, it really helps to meet other accountancy students with different background and share information with each other, in two-, three- or even four-way communication," she says. "It helps us not only to gain more knowledge, but also to improve our communication skills."

What should accountancy graduates look for in a prospective employer?

- Job exposure: the chance to participate in different parts of an engagement to enrich and build up technical skills.
- Development opportunities: clear performance measurement and career path motivate graduates to identify career goals.
- Coaching, technical training and support equip graduates with the most updated technical knowledge, and apply it in their work.



Interview and reporting by Richard Lord