

The need for exciting new challenges and the opportunity to acquire new skills doesn't disappear when you qualify. **Calum Robson** meets an ACCA member who has no regrets

don't stop me now



■ The most talented professionals strive to acquire new skills to progress their careers, maximise earnings potential and gain lasting job satisfaction. As ACCA members are discovering, the Diploma in Financial Strategy at the prestigious University of Oxford's Saïd Business School provides all this – and more.

The Diploma, a masters-level postgraduate qualification, is described as rigorous and intellectually challenging, teaching the strategic approaches of management consultants alongside the advanced skills of modern finance directors. ACCA membership offers a suitable entry qualification for the Diploma, and a discount from the course fees.

Those wishing to make a significant impact in senior management will gain a practical understanding of business and wealth creation, while successful graduates can go on to study on Saïd's executive MBA programme (from which the Diploma provides exemptions). Participants are given access to prestigious business seminars, high profile lectures and networking opportunities.

Diploma student Ibrahim Turay, who became an ACCA member in 2000, is finance director for a recent start-up company in the niche relaxation products and spa sector. His broad remit demands more than mainstream accounting skills. 'Finance is no longer an isolated discipline,' he says. 'You can't just

leave strategy to consultants – you need the knowledge yourself in order to steer things in the right direction. I'm putting my lessons into practice immediately, so the value of the course for me is phenomenal; I don't know how I'd gain so much knowledge so quickly elsewhere.'

'The course provides the stimulating environment I need at this point in my career. The strategy module was fascinating and the case studies forced me to view financial decisions from multiple perspectives. It's intensive but the content is highly relevant and our lecturers provide plenty of guidance.'

The Diploma comprises four four-day modules, scheduled over nine months and covering finance, strategy and management systems. Each student must complete a 10,000-word project, based on current or emerging issues within their own organisation or sector, giving them the opportunity to apply the skills and best practice they have learned in real-life situations.

'My company needed me to help with strategic direction as well as robust funding and finance strategies,' says Turay. 'I'd have struggled had I not embarked on the Diploma, but I was immediately able to put into practice techniques I'd learned in the fast-track strategic planning classes. This helped enormously. My CEO and senior management were pleased, as the model I developed gave us a sound framework for identifying and managing strategic issues, which will continue to support business growth.'

Ruthless

Like many qualified professionals who explore continued formal education, Turay had misgivings about the time commitment. 'I was concerned about my capacity to balance work, family and studies,' he says. 'It's been tough, especially as I have a young baby; I've had to be ruthless with planning – but there's no doubt I'm doing the right thing.'

The course aims to instil general management skills that enable qualified accountants to play more valuable all-round roles. 'The programme makes you challenge common assumptions but validates some of your own ideas in the workplace too,' says Turay. 'I'm no longer afraid to challenge

management theories presented to me as givens. I've been encouraged to always look at the bigger picture, addressing issues from a wider perspective while also developing an ability to listen and to see things from others' viewpoints.'

One of the Diploma's key benefits is the prestige attached to qualifications conferred by the University of Oxford, which enjoys a worldwide reputation. 'By studying at Saïd, I'm gaining a valuable qualification,' says Turay. 'I knew that Oxford prided itself on the highest academic principles and I haven't been disappointed. The calibre of my fellow students and standard of support from the staff have been extremely high, which makes a big difference to the study experience.'

'I'd advise all ACCA members who want to advance their careers to consider the Diploma. It's challenging – they should keep that in mind – but they won't regret it. Their knowledge will deepen and they'll gain a competitive advantage, enabling them to take a full and leading role within their employer and across many functions, not just finance.'

So what of the future for Turay? 'At the moment, I'm planning to go straight on and study for an executive MBA after the course finishes,' he says. 'I'm impressed by how things work here at Oxford. I know it'll be tough, but there's no point slowing the tempo while I have the energy and enthusiasm to carry on.' ■

If you would like to find out more about studying for the Diploma in Financial Strategy, please visit www.accaglobal.com or e-mail diploma-enquiries@sbs.ox.ac.uk