

## Prize Winner 2018: Geoff Clarke



### Three times a Winner

An interview with Geoff Clark, Finance Business Partner at REED

Geoff Clark started his professional career in recruitment in Malta, before being offered an internal transfer to join his company's Finance team in the UK to work on a new project. Identifying this as a potentially lucrative and exciting career prospect, Geoff accepted the offer, and started studying towards his CIMA exams with Reed Business School almost immediately. A little over three years later, Geoff is now the proud recipient of not one, but THREE top 10 rankings globally (including placing joint first twice) in each of his Operational, Management and Strategic case study papers. So how did he do it?

### Keys to success

Geoff believes that mindset is an important factor, and he says that by having the dates of the classes and exams in a clear timetable, it means you know when exactly you'll be doing your work, and when you'll need to take a break from socialising: "Sometimes you just need to tell yourself that for those three weeks, studying is all you'll be doing," so by planning this in

advance, and letting friends and loved ones know, he was able to commit himself to his studies completely at the relevant time.

The classroom environment at Reed Business School was also really beneficial to his learning, says Geoff: “Having the discipline of the classroom environment, with someone there to teach you allows you to focus purely on your studies.” He also praises our beautiful and secluded setting in the Cotswolds which enables students not to worry about anything else while they are with us, maximising their learning opportunity,

### **Combining work and study**

Geoff admits that he was quite lucky while he was studying, in that his job allowed him to have exposure to different areas of finance, and put into practice what he was learning – which comes in very handy for the case study papers. He was also able to step back and consider areas such as project management and the company’s wider strategic goals, giving him a broader business view.

Geoff understands that not every student has the opportunity to do this within their current role, however he urges students to “speak to your employer about getting exposure to the different areas of business you want to be involved in and learn about – they’ll probably appreciate the extra help!” We always urge our students to be curious and get a fuller understanding of business in general, in addition to excelling in their accountancy studies, as this knowledge becomes really beneficial the more you progress in your career.

### **Exam preparation**

The case study papers are notoriously challenging and unlike many other exams you may have taken in the past, so Geoff’s key advice here is to attempt several past papers, which he found very beneficial – using his Reed Business School tutor as a resource to mark and give feedback

Geoff was diligent in his approach to studying the different subjects covered in all five variants of the last two or three sittings, carefully examining the questions asked and looking at the model answers to see how these were structured.

“Start by answering the question”, Geoff recalls as one of the most profound learnings he took from his classes with us, which sounds easier than it might be in reality. He says that many students want to demonstrate all the theory they’ve learnt in their other modules and try to cram this into their answers, but, he continues: “you need to forget that and remember you’re in business and need to answer what’s being asked of you, after that, if you have time, you can add in some of the extra theory that is relevant.”

### **Advice to other students**

We understand that not everyone gets their study sponsored, and perhaps can’t afford to invest as much as they would like to in their learning. As someone that’s now been through the whole CIMA course, Geoff says that “the case study modules are the most valuable to invest in and which are best to be at Reed Business School for – they are the hardest to pass, you get very little time to prepare for them, and it’s difficult to achieve success without valuable tutor feedback.” Indeed, our tutors are fountains of knowledge when it comes to how examiners approach marking these papers and what they look for, which you can’t get from textbooks or online resources.

Finally, Geoff recommends thinking outside the box and looking at the bigger picture to connect the theory with commercial application. “It can all seem quite intangible, but when you get to work on more commercial projects, it really does start to make sense, if you’re able to make the connections.”