

Celebrating student success - Lily Gammon

This month we caught up with Lily Gammon, a Senior at PKF Francis Clark, who is currently completing her ACA qualification with us, and who recently achieved first place and the Knox Prize in her Tax Compliance exam.

Humble beginnings

Like many people when they come towards the end of their A-Levels, Lily didn't have a clear direction of the path she wanted to follow.

"I knew university wasn't for me, as I'm a home girl at heart, but when I finished college I wanted to continue learning while working at the same time."

Lily chose to stay close to her hometown of Plymouth, and explored options related to her interests and skills. Always enjoying and excelling at Maths, Lily joined local firm PKF Francis Clark as a trainee accounts assistant, and enrolled on a local college course to begin her AAT. She enjoyed the balance of spending one day a week studying, while being able to apply her learning to real world situations at work during the other four days of the week.

Starting her ACA

After completing her 3-year AAT qualification, Lily took a break from studying, which allowed her to consider her options again. Then realising the study bug was still alive and well, she joined some of her colleagues from across PKF Francis Clark's offices in undertaking her ACA qualification with Reed Business School in 2019.

Lily really enjoyed her trips to our school while working through her certificate level papers, taking advantage of everything our idyllic setting has to offer.

"Going to the manor was great to get away from other distractions and just focus on studying, and I loved being cooked for every day as well!"

Classroom vs online learning

While Lily valued the classroom environment and the structure and pacing of the lessons, she's also enjoying our online classes, and is clearly excelling in them too.

"Being in a classroom allows tutors to respond to student questions, and give further explanations where we need them, but the quality of learning online is still excellent, and the tutors have adapted really well."

Secrets to success

While Lily was surprised to do so well in her recent paper, she puts her success down to her hard work and preparation.

“I’m someone who likes to be prepared with my revision, and I hate leaving things to the last minute.”

Lily admits she’ll attend our revision sessions having already done a lot of work herself, so she can be ready and armed with questions about things she’d like some extra support with. And when it comes to practice papers, her approach is just as thorough and well-planned.

“I’ll make use of every practice paper I can, starting with individual questions 2-3 weeks before the exam, working up to full papers in timed conditions, to make sure I’m as prepared as possible.”

Lily will mark her own papers using the guidance and mark scheme provided, but be quite harsh on herself to keep her motivated to do better.

“I just want to do the best that I can do.”

She’ll average about 20 hours per week of study time, across evenings and weekends, and believes that hard work and preparation is more important than being naturally clever.

Lily also believes being able to apply her studies to what she does at work is an excellent way to help embed her knowledge.

“I do quite a lot of tax in my current role, and it’s interesting to learn more intricate details on the job, to take my understanding that one step further - I have quite a few moments where I think ‘*Oh that’s why we do it that way,*’ or ‘*that’s what that means.*’”

Advice for others

Lily believes everyone has their own style of learning, and advises students to follow what works best for them.

“I’m quite an independent studier, and love starting early to get ahead, then just getting into my books to figure things out. But it’s good to have a network of people to call on when you get stuck on something.”

She also advises taking a pragmatic approach to time management, carefully balancing work, study and home life.

“In some ways covid has made things a bit easier to focus on studying, as I go out a lot less, so have more time at home to revise and do practice papers, but I make sure I give myself breaks, and if I want to take a night off sometimes, I do. Because I plan in advance and start early, I take a bit of pressure off myself by the time the exam comes around.”

However, Lily advises against underestimating how hard the training really is.

“It’s a lot of work and a big commitment. You need to be willing to put in the hours if you’re going to get anything out of it.”

What’s next for Lily?

All being well, Lily has about 18 months left with us to become fully qualified, at which point she’ll definitely take a break. At the moment she works in her firm’s client services team, with quite a varied role that she enjoys.

“I don’t see myself specialising in one area at the moment, I just want to get through my exams and then see where we are.”

Lily, we wish you all the best and we look forward to welcoming you back to the manor soon!