

Passport to success –  
**Michelle Or**

## Hiking towards your goal



*Nothing is too difficult to achieve when you plan ahead and remain dedicated. Michelle Or, assistant accountant at Full Home Limited, believes that attaining the AAT qualification was a breakthrough for a sub-degree holder like her and a vital step towards achieving her goal of becoming a certified accountant one day.*

### Getting started in accounting

After graduating from secondary school, Michelle was not sure about which career to pursue. A cousin had been studying accounting and introduced her to the field. At the time, she thought that accounting had something to do with mathematics, which she believed she was good at, and this together with a vague notion of entering the world of business persuaded her to study for a diploma in accounting.

Michelle adds that, in more realistic terms, accounting is a necessary component of company administration. “Someone told me that almost all major decisions made by a company’s management depend heavily on information from the finance and accounting department.”

After obtaining a diploma in accounting studies from the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education

(IVE), Michelle decided to further equip herself to join the profession. She needed to find a way to become a Certified Public Accountant (CPA). She understands that as a sub-degree holder, she has to work hard to acquire the qualification by attaining more professional qualifications than her counterparts with a degree. The AAT articulation serves as a good cornerstone for her. With exemption from four papers due to her diploma studies, Michelle completed the remaining AAT examination papers in 2007. She then immediately embarked on the Professional Bridging Examination (PBE), and took just one year to finish all four papers.

### Utilizing knowledge in work

Michelle’s current employer, Full Home Limited, is an agency mainly distributing electronic components from Korea. The Hong Kong office has about 20 people, of which four are in the accounting department. Michelle first joined the company in its most junior position and had limited responsibility. But later on, when her superiors realized that she had acquired the AAT qualification, she was entrusted with more complicated tasks. Now her work involves handling the financial matters of four supplying manufacturers. These matters include managing the companies’ full set of accounts, account receivables, credit control and other payment due control issues.

Michelle values her AAT and PBE training very much. Through her studies for Paper 7 “Financial Accounting”, she laid a strong foundation for her work in preparing financial statements for stakeholders’ and decision makers’ review. She is able to grasp the related concepts underlying her work assignments. In addition, she can also help colleagues with their personal investments through her financial management knowledge.

Michelle’s studies also enable her to understand the contracts her company is entering into with clients. “Though I do not possess a very in-depth legal knowledge, the basic framework I got from my studies for the AAT Exam and PBE are enough for me to interpret the basic terms of a contract and their implications,” Michelle says. Another area in which she can use her knowledge is corporate administration. As her company has to deal with issues arising from application of the Employment Ordinance, her knowledge from her studies for Paper 6 “Fundamentals of Business Law” helps her in solving these issues for the company.

### Appropriate nurturing and prudent choices

Michelle has learnt that having a qualification is vital in the accounting profession. Having a CPA qualification can equip her with the ever-changing accounting standards. Though she kick-started the qualification programme (QP) under Hong Kong Institute of CPAs, she was also eager to secure a degree in accounting. Now, she has completed two modules of the QP. “The public exam experience I gained from the AAT Exam and PBE is coming in useful in my preparation for the QP modules. I’ve also learnt good time management. However, I need to adopt my techniques to the open-book exam mode for QP.” Michelle believes the main challenge she faces in her QP studies is the different exam format. She is grateful for the understanding and support from her superiors. There were occasions when she had to work overtime, but her superiors still allowed her to leave early whenever possible in order to get to her lessons on time.

Michelle advises current AAT students not to give up

easily. Sub-degree holders should take heart from the fact that there are alternative routes to becoming a CPA, with the AAT pathway one of the possible ways of achieving this. Michelle thinks the most important thing to remain dedicated to one’s goal and studies. As for those wishing to pursue a top up degree programme part-time, Michelle advises, from her personal experience, to choose a Hong Kong Institute of CPA accredited programme as this can save time and money. Students should also make sure they allocate their time well between their work and studies. “The truth is that companies cannot afford to be infinitely accommodating to every employee’s study needs. You should therefore plan ahead your study schedule well in advance,” she concludes.

### Future plans and goals

Michelle plans to complete the remaining two QP modules in the near future. “As an accounting professional, upgrading my knowledge and qualifications is the key to success.” Career-wise, Michelle is also considering job opportunities at a larger-scale establishment. She believes large companies offer more diversified work and opportunities and a whole different level of professional exposure, and that this will be highly beneficial for her career in the long-run.

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#### Michelle Or’s study and career path

1998	Form 5 graduate
2000	Obtained a diploma in accounting studies from the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (Lee Wai Lee)
2003-07	Completed all eight papers in the AAT Examination (with exemption from four papers)
2006-present	Assistant accountant at Full Home Limited
2007-08	Completed all four papers in the Professional Bridging Examination
2009-6/2010	Obtain BA (Hons) in Accountancy from Coventry University and PEAK (Institute of Professional Education and Knowledge)
current	Completed modules B & D of Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants’ Qualification Programme