Career development: From tax trainee to director

Briefings

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Employment Tax Director Hayley Perkin explains how the ATT qualification and new opportunities have helped her build a successful career in employment tax.

When I began my career as a tax trainee in 2007, I did not have a fixed route to becoming a Director. What I did have was curiosity, a willingness to volunteer and an ATT qualification that gave me the confidence to pursue new opportunities. It provided practical tax knowledge I could apply immediately and became the foundation for my career.

Early in my career, I managed a mixed portfolio of individuals, partnerships and employers. As my responsibilities grew, I moved from technical delivery towards supervising others, advising clients and taking a broader commercial perspective.

I also volunteered to support the wider tax department and helped guide tax trainees, secondees and students. This strengthened my communication and leadership skills. Progression is not only about technical knowledge; it is also about supporting others.

Throughout my career, I have benefited from the mentoring and support of colleagues and leaders at Azets and KPMG, as well as through my involvement with ATT. Their encouragement to take on new challenges has played an important part in my progression and how I coach others.

Finding a specialism

A turning point came in 2013, when I helped clients prepare for HMRC's introduction of Real Time Information reporting for PAYE. Supporting employers through this significant compliance change deepened my interest in employment taxes and confirmed that I wanted to help clients navigate future developments.

While at Azets, I put myself forward to champion the firm's Employment Taxes Group and invested time in researching technical developments, Budget announcements and draft legislation. This helped me build a specialism that now spans employment tax, payroll compliance, governance, workforce tax strategy and business transformation.

At KPMG, client secondments have strengthened my understanding of governance, controls and operational processes in complex businesses. I have also taken two periods of maternity leave and valued the firm's support on returning to work, including while caring for a one-year-old during the pandemic. This has shown me the value of embracing each stage of a developing career while also growing my family.

Through volunteering with ATT, I have contributed to government consultation responses, draft legislation and stakeholder discussions. In 2015, I became ATT's representative on HMRC's Employment and Payroll Group. I have volunteered with ATT for more than 17 years, including serving as a Council Member and Trustee.

Building skills for the future

Today, I help employers navigate compliance, governance and workforce tax challenges through practical, technology-enabled solutions. Technology does not replace professional judgement; it creates greater capacity to interpret results, challenge risk and design better outcomes. Confidence in data and technology alongside technical expertise can also broaden career opportunities.

Looking back, many of my most valuable opportunities began with asking questions and being willing to learn. My advice is to use ATT as a platform: seek varied assignments, ask for feedback, build relationships, welcome support and volunteer for work that stretches both technical and commercial skills. ATT can open the door, but curiosity, practical experience and continuous learning turn that into a long and rewarding career.

Practical note: claiming professional membership fees
Rather than claiming my professional membership fees through my employer, I claim tax relief online through my Personal Tax Account. This automatically updates my PAYE coding, subject to HMRC eligibility rules and personal circumstances.