Matthew Parker took a rather indirect route into finance. After working with the Arcadia Group on the merchandising side for about four to five months, he realised that it was the financial side of the business that he was enjoying more and so asked to be transferred into the finance team.

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After studying politics at the University of East Anglia, ending up in the fashion business wasn’t exactly by accident. Matthew’s interest in fashion, coupled with his skills on the financial side made this a very good fit. He started out studying the CIMA Certificate in Business Accounting and has worked his way through the intermediate and final levels during his time at Arcadia Group, and has recently sat the TOPCIMA exam.

‘When you go into Arcadia you are expected to do a qualification. I can’t think of anyone that isn’t doing CIMA and I guess that’s reflective of the learning that CIMA offers and the skills that you gain from CIMA. You’re given the option of what you want to study and where you want to study. CIMA is the logical choice for the kind of roles that we have at Arcadia.’

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The best thing Matthew likes about his job is the variety. ‘I know it’s a cliché, but no two days are the same. I’ll sit down with the regional controllers and area managers at the beginning of a financial half and we’ll discuss the plan and then that strategy gets passed on to the decision making body, which is a great thing to be a part of. I just don’t think in many other accountancy roles you get such a level of variety and input, which makes it fantastic.’

‘CIMA gives you the technical tools to be able to back up your strategic knowledge which you need at various points throughout your career.’

The other main benefit Matthew feels the CIMA qualification provides is the ability to gain practical working experience while you are qualifying. ‘When you’re working and you’re seeing CIMA in practice rather than just learning the theory, that’s a major benefit. You are gaining the necessary core

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With over 2000 outlets in high streets and shopping centres throughout the country, Arcadia Group is the UK’s largest fashion clothing retailer.

In 2002, Arcadia became part of Taveta Investments, owned by Philip Green and his family, making it part of one of the largest privately owned retail group in Europe.

Today, they are comprised of seven brands, namely TOPSHOP, TOPMAN, Evans, Wallis, Miss Selfridge, Dorothy Perkins and Burton. Each brand targets distinct market segments and many of their brands operate with leading positions in their respective markets. Outfit extends the Group’s portfolio with its out of town format, offering a range of Arcadia and external brands.

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Matthew Parker, CIMA Passed Finalist
Retail Finance Manager, Top Shop
Arcadia Group

set of skills. But then you’re also learning about working life which is probably one of the reasons CIMA is so valued in industry. You know the people who have studied CIMA know how to apply the knowledge that they’ve learnt, which is the hardest through in their jobs. ‘With CIMA you’re getting involved in the strategic management within the business. At Arcadia you have the chance to influence and suggest ideas to key decision makers, which you can see implemented within

part of any qualification. The information I provide and the advice I can give helps make huge business decisions.’

As a place Arcadia is very young and very vibrant – everyone is very passionate about what they do and that comes the business, which is absolutely fantastic about retail. You can walk into a store and you can see the decision that you helped to make in practice.’

‘There was never any burden; no one said you must do CIMA. It’s almost something that now is just assumed, that you will do CIMA. And that I guess is indicative of the level of support you get from the colleges and the commercial aspect of the syllabus.’

‘My analyst is studying CIMA now and as her manager I’ve gone through it, and my manager has gone through CIMA, as has everyone within the business. So everyone knows what it’s like to have to study and to have to sit exams, therefore the support network is there. Because we have such a large graduate intake each year, the students all go through together. So you have both a vertical and horizontal support structure.’

‘The fact that Arcadia gives such a level of support really helps you through the CIMA qualification. The fact that you’re studying CIMA helps your career.’

If members of the press are interested in CIMA case studies, please contact:
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