



EDUCATION

THE PASSPORT TO SUCCESS

THIS MONTH JOE O'ROURKE, INSURANCE LEAD WITH THE KING ABDULLAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (KAUST) IN SAUDI ARABIA, DESCRIBES THE ONCE IN A LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY HIS PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION AFFORDED HIM. FROM DIVING TO POWERBOATING, JOE IS ENJOYING THE MANY BENEFITS OF LIFE BY THE RED SEA, AS WELL AS ADJUSTING TO THE SWITCH FROM BROKER TO CLIENT.



Name:

Joe O'Rourke

Position:

Insurance lead

Qualifications:

CIP

Company:

King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST)

Country:

Saudi Arabia

How did you get started in insurance Joe?

In 1984 I started a 6 month Manpower work experience placement with Skeffington Insurances in Ranelagh, Dublin and once that was finished, they offered me a permanent position.

Did you always want to travel, or were you made an offer you couldn't refuse?

A bit of both really. I've always had the desire to do something a bit different and it's not every day opportunities like this arise, especially ones that are insurance related. My kids are older now and not dependant on me (in so far as they are all able to email requests for funding now) and that made the decision easier.

What impact do you feel your qualification(s) had on your relocation?

All the difference, the first thing I was asked to do was to forward a copy of my CIP certificate, I then had to bring it to the Department of Foreign Affairs and have it attested as part of my visa application.

It's so important in today's world to demonstrate experience and qualifications no matter what career path you take. Being able to demonstrate my qualifications was a huge benefit to me. The Chartered Insurance Institute (CII) is recognised worldwide and the III affiliation certainly has a distinct advantage. In fact there is a similar

institute in this region – Gulf Insurance Institute (GII) – who are also affiliated to the CII.

What are the main professional differences between Ireland and the Middle East?

I'm still finding my way to be honest, and adjusting to moving from being a broker to effectively being the client. There are cultural differences to consider and the insurance industry throughout the region is still developing, which means there's massive potential for the future in terms of the market and infrastructure.

And what about lifestyle – is KAUST an enjoyable place to live and work?

The lifestyle here is fantastic, KAUST is not just a University the campus includes housing, fantastic recreational facilities with two leisure centres, a gym beside the office, restaurants and of course the marina, where I've completed lots of diving training – I have my PADI and I'm now a qualified advanced and rescue diver. I also got my power-boating licence!

Campus life is certainly a little different but there are lots of opportunities to discover the surrounding environments and culture as there are regular buses to Jeddah, Makkah and Madinah and of course weekends are perfect for travelling further afield.

Have you any additional qualification goals in mind in the coming years?

This was such a great opportunity that I left Ireland with the MDI only partially completed. I intend to keep my CPD up to date and I am exploring other qualifications through the GII and you never know I might learn a bit of Arabic too!

What advice would you give to anyone starting out in insurance with ambitions to travel or those established in the industry looking for a change of scene?

The two most important attributes you can have are experience and education, one takes time the other you can have completed as soon as you want – so I would say complete a qualification sooner rather than later...experience and opportunities will follow.



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