



Name: Bhavna Baines APMI

Current Title: Technical support analyst

Company Name & Location: Barnett Waddingham, Leeds

I am a technical support analyst in Barnett Waddingham's Leeds office – one of seven regional offices serving our national pension administration practice. My role includes providing technical support to the administration teams across the practice, maintaining and developing the administration department's controls and procedures and delivering internal audit within the AAF 01/06 reporting framework.

Why pensions?

Why indeed?? I started my working life as a Research and Development Chemist after graduating from Leeds University with a degree in Chemistry, but I've always been interested in finance and how money makes the world go around.

Investments and tracking the stock markets was a hobby of mine a long time ago whilst designing coatings for digital printing plates and, when I was made redundant, it seemed like a good avenue to follow using the self-taught knowledge I already held. Saying I 'knew a bit about finance and investments' wasn't going to get my foot too far through the financial services door though – I needed the 'bit of paper' that proved I did.

What are your pension qualifications?

I studied to obtain what was then known as the Financial Planning Certificate and obtained a position at a pensions and actuarial company, where I learned the ropes in the continually changing world of administrating occupational pension schemes. Having progressed to a senior pension administrator role, I then joined Barnett Waddingham as a technical specialist in 2008. Since when I've been lucky enough to be able to build my own role to suit the needs of the business.

You need to keep your skills pretty current in pension administration. The Qualification in Pension Administration (QPA) taught me the mechanics of working with member benefits and I then studied for a further three years to obtain the Advanced Diploma in Retirement Provision (ADRP). I've also recently obtained the Diploma in Regulated Retirement Advice (DRRA), a new PMI qualification geared towards the Retail Distribution Review (RDR) regime.

What are the key skills of the job?

The skills of a chemist and those required for a technical support analyst aren't so very different – a

good grasp of maths, logic, analytical and diagnostic skills are all key.

What is your 'typical' day like?

A couple of months ago Francois Barker said in this column that a typical day is non-existent – I couldn't agree more. On any given day my role might involve:

- translating the continual changes in legislation into practical procedures
- understanding complex scheme rules and legislation and interpreting them for others
- answering technical queries for people within the firm across all offices
- investigating historic benefits
- performing and checking complex calculations
- testing system calculations

What are the biggest challenges you face?

A lot of my work centres on governance and the internal control environment – which to most people is exactly the same as saying 'a lot of my work centres on blah, blah, blah...'. Convincing people (clients, colleagues, people at bus stops etc.) that internal controls are there for a reason, and the reason is NOT "...to satisfy the auditor..." is an ongoing battle. We strive to develop processes with the right balance between control and efficiency – not to please an auditor, but to mitigate risk and to promote quality in our work. Trying to explain that our AAF 01/06 report simply describes what we do, and that we can change it if we want to (as long as the control objectives are still met) can be a hard sell at times. Perseverance will prevail!

What do you enjoy most about your job?

The forensic element – being a sleuth, fathoming out answers to complex technical queries requiring research and perseverance. Given the lifespan of a pension scheme my job can involve a great deal of investigating – piecing together what and why events have occurred and what a member is really entitled to many years down the line from when pension calculations were done on the back of a cigarette packet and calculators consisted of ten fingers and ten toes...

What are your hopes for the future?

Other than a lottery win and a life of luxury I'm already exactly where I would want to be – working for a fantastic and growing firm and doing a job I love! 🍀