

In the first of a series on how banking is developing as a profession, **Robin Mathison** talks to CIOBS Fellow **John McLeish**, who stresses the importance of taking responsibility for your own career



ALL ABOARD THE KNOWLEDGE EXPRESS

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

is a major part of employability, according to John McLeish. He believes people should continue to upgrade their skills according to their organisation's needs. For him it's about taking responsibility for your career; about not letting the world pass you by.

"Careerwise, you may be happy reaching a certain level but that doesn't mean you can't continue to learn," he says. And he should know about career progress...

When McLeish was elected youngest-ever Fellow of The Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland (CIOBS) in 1995, it was a significant milestone in the career of a man for whom the theme "continuing professional development" had become something of a mantra.

And a look at his career – from graduate trainee at the then-TSB Scotland to his current position as HR Director at Andersen – shows that the former Head of HR at LloydsTSB Scotland, and self-confessed knowledge junkie, practises what he preaches.

The Fellowship at 32 was also recognition of an active involvement with CIOBS stretching back 15 years to when he

signed up for the Institute's banking exams. McLeish was keen to gain financial services qualifications, and – already a holder of a degree in Business Studies and a post-graduate qualification in Personnel Management – he believes they have equipped him with more than just the knowledge to succeed in banking.

"It was not only my CIOBS qualification, but also my general involvement with CIOBS, that helped me develop my career. I was extremely proud when I was elected as a Fellow. It meant a lot to me, and it also interests prospective employers, particularly when backed up with the qualification by exam. And now there is the added attraction of Chartered Banker status.

"The exams themselves gave me an excellent grounding. The course provided an outside view to complement the internal on-the-job training. It was also a good networking opportunity, which is very important to the learning process.

"Having done a business studies degree then personnel management, what the CIOBS course did was translate some of the more academic thoughts into a real environment and a specific industry. It helped me develop a commercial and financial focus – at the time a relative weakness. I think that was

very important in my move into HR. I believe you have to have a business focus to succeed in HR."

McLeish's career path took him into the Human Resources function at LTSB, and he was Head of HR there from 1996 to 2001.

"The Institute's qualifications were of great use when I moved into HR, as I understood a lot of the issues being faced by the industry and its workforce."

Of course, with this HR specialism, McLeish is ideally placed to comment on career development and personal growth through learning. He is a firm advocate on the importance of continuing to learn, not just through formal courses. Mobility, employability and, by definition, the transferability of skills are vital.

"Employability is a big issue in banking as all organisations are changing, and roles within them are changing," says McLeish. "There are many different access points into a banking career now. People join from many different levels and backgrounds – from school, university, work experience or as a specialist in, say, Marketing or HR."

Employability is one of the five pillars of CIOBS, and McLeish says: "They are all very important. Qualities such as professionalism, responsibility and ethics reflect well on a person and on the industry. Someone who is CIOBS-qualified is seen as having a certain set of qualities, and these values are transferable across different areas of banking. They create a 'quality' stamp, showing that a person adheres to these codes and has these values.

"But there is also the wider nature of the offering from CIOBS. Do people fully realise that courses can link to an MBA at Heriot Watt or a BA? The courses are not just about exams. They offer a good general management education, as well as a specific banking education.

"All careers are, and will continue to be, more mobile than in the past, either within organisations – for example, working in a branch and moving to a specialist function, or vice versa – or moving between industries.

"Education and development give you confidence, and a deeper understanding, when talking about issues. Sometimes you have to push yourself forward for an opportunity, and if you know your subjects you'll be more confident and more able to go for it."

One opportunity McLeish took recently was to join Andersen, one of the big five professional services firms, as HR Director; but he intends keeping up his ties with CIOBS.

"There is no doubt my involvement with CIOBS has helped

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me in my career," he says, "and I would encourage people to get involved – in district centres, for example. I'm very happy to be retaining a link with the banking community through the Institute Council, as it's an industry that has inspired me over 15 years and continues to do so."

And the next stop on the knowledge express? In 2001, McLeish completed a Strategic HRM Program at Harvard Business School, and as recently as last month took part in a

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Global Diversity Conference in the Netherlands.

Still learning. Still developing. No danger of this career going off the rails.

For details of CIOBS courses, including Continuing Professional Development, contact Colin Morrison at colin@ciobs.org.uk

