



PROMOTING NHS FINANCE CAREERS

MELANIE NICHOLAS, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT, FINANCE BUSINESS PARTNER – SENIOR ASSISTANT – INCOME, LANCASHIRE & SOUTH CUMBRIA NHS FT.

Employment history:

| Year | Organisation | Role (s) |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| June 1997 – Jun 2008 | NHS Business Services authority | Prescription payment and pricing assistant (B2) |
| Jul 2008 to Jan 2013 | Lancashire & South Cumbria NHS FT | Accounts payable clerk (B3) |
| Jan 2013-Jul 2013 | Lancashire & South Cumbria NHS FT | Management Accounts Assistant – FMST (B4) |
| Jul 2013 – Jun 2015 | Lancashire & South Cumbria NHS FT | Deputy Section Manager – FMST (B5) |
| Jun 2015 to date | Lancashire & South Cumbria NHS FT | Finance Business Partner – Senior assistant – Income (B6) |

Professional Qualification(s):

9 GCSE Passes including Maths, English, French, Economics, Geography & Chemistry
BTEC National diploma in Business & Finance
AAT Level 2, 3 & 4

Tell us about your career path and how you arrived at your current role? (Include any qualifications you studied to get there!)

From a very young age I was very intent on working in a bank, it might have been the Cashiers till I got for Xmas once but it always stuck with me throughout school and into college. At college I particularly enjoyed the finance elements of the course and from there decided to go to University to do a BA Honours Degree in Accounting and Finance. Unfortunately I didn't finish the course completing just 2 out of the 3 years as I struggled with some of the end of year exams, a combination of working part time at home meant I liked the idea of earning and having money to spend at weekends! A hard decision to make but I left Uni and looked for a job near home!

The NHS appealed to me because it was a national corporate employer with great pension benefits and I'd hoped at that point a job for life!

What was your first role?

Working for the NHS Business Services authority as a prescription processing assistant. Prescriptions sent in from the pharmacies needed to be manually priced so the NHS could re-imburse the pharmacists for dispensing the prescriptions! It was mainly memory based and I had a chart with over 5000 codes on for every drug that was available for dispensing. Each drug on each prescription had its own code and we had to enter this into a database so their payments could be formulated on a monthly basis. This covered all pharmacies within Lancashire! Bonus payments were earned on top of the Band 2 salary so I loved it, having a photographic memory for numbers I loved earning TOP BONUS I can still remember some of the codes 14 years on (Aspirin - 775!!)

Whilst in this role I went to college in the evenings to do my AAT qualification (self funded) as I knew I wanted to work in the accounting world in the future and when redundancy came up due to relocation I took my chance and applied for the AP role at LSCFT!

Any roles that gave you an opportunity to develop or use new skills learnt?

The Accounts Payable clerk role enabled me to put into practice some of the things I had learnt doing the AAT qualification and gave me the understanding of why we need to do the transactional based processing elements of the job and the importance of accuracy for the next person who would be using this information. This has been a constant within all the roles I have done at LSCFT to ensure that my work is always accurate and if we get it right first time then saves work for others in the long run.

Whilst working as the Deputy Section Manager in FMST I was able to better my organisational skills and learn new management techniques, being able to hold 1-1 sessions with staff and deal with HR issues and answer queries, it helped me build my confidence too when dealing with other people.

Any deliberate decisions you made on your career path? Any particular reasons for changes to a role?

Whilst in the Financial Services role I started to challenge myself about how I could make the role better and more interesting and I struggled as some of the processes began to become mundane and I didn't feel like I was developing any further than I already had so when an opportunity came to move into Financial Management I hesitantly took it but so glad I made the move as it has opened up a lot of opportunities to learn more new skills and I can now see both sides of the accounting structure, both the transactional side and the reporting side.

Why choose a finance career in the NHS compared with Private sector finance?

It felt the safer option at the time, peace of mind that you would have job security and the NHS had a good reputation for being one of the top employers.

What is the most rewarding part of your career?

Being part of a great finance team has made a real difference to my working life. Being able to make suggestions about processes and the way we work, continually thinking how we can improve things and create value for money for the patients is a big driver for myself.

What has been the biggest lesson learnt on your journey?

Communication is key! Talk to people, let them know things, ask questions, listen to others, it's all a big learning curve!

Is there anything you would change about the journey you have taken?

I would've liked to have completed my degree and studied further to become a qualified accountant sooner in life, I may have started in a Finance role sooner

Biggest influences in your career?

Would have to be line managers from current and previous roles who have championed me to develop myself and encouraged me to help others, seeing what they have achieved has helped me believe you can do it if you really try!

What advice would you give to anyone who is wanting to start a career in NHS Finance?

Go for it! Start your NHS journey earlier in life and then there will be more opportunities available to you in your career, if you work hard you will get the reward!

And Lastly, A little bit about yourself:

What is your Favourite film: Home Alone

What is your Favourite TV Show: I watch lots of TV so can't single 1 out, maybe a good drama!

What is your Favourite food: Lasagne

Do you have any hobbies or Interests: Nothing interesting enough to scribe sorry!