



PROMOTING NHS FINANCE CAREERS

RACHEL LEES, FINANCE BUSINESS PARTNER AT LANCASHIRE & SOUTH CUMBRIA
NHS FT

Employment History:

Year	Organisation	Role (s)
2002	Morecambe Bay Hospitals	Undergraduate Placement
2004	Lancashire Ambulance Service/ North West Ambulance Service	Financial Services Assistant, Assistant Management Accountant, Assistant Financial Planning Accountant, Senior Assistant Management Accountant
2010	Lancashire Care/ Lancashire & South Cumbria FT	Deputy Programme Accountant, Deputy Network Accountant, Project Accountant, Network Accountant, Finance Business Partner

Professional Qualification(s): CIMA

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

My route into NHS Finance started when I was looking for a placement year as part of my Business studies degree. I hadn't done particularly well in my A Levels so struggled to get onto a national graduate schemes. I wrote to large organisations in my local area and obtained a 12 month placement at Morecambe Bay Hospitals. My placement gave me a great grounding for NHS Finance moving around department's accounts payable, receivable and management accounts. I was given the opportunity to shadow people for short periods of time finding out about lots of different roles.

My first substantive role was at Lancashire Ambulance Service in Preston, it was a small team so I had exposure to different aspects of NHS Finance. I experienced my first reconfiguration of services when North West Ambulance came together. I still draw on this in my current role when systems and

processes change, in particular how different people may be feeling about the process at different stages.

During my time at the ambulance service I took the opportunity to get to know clinical services which I would recommend at any point in your career as it gives you an insight into how NHS services operate. I did numerous shifts as admin support in the regional operational command centre (ROCC) where I logged incidents, I spent a day on an ambulance in Blackpool and visited a team when it became operational for which I had completed costings to go into a bid for funding.

I began studying for a CIMA qualification which seemed to fit with my business studies background and offered me lots of career opportunities. I was exempt from the foundation level due to my degree. In hindsight the exemptions made the first year or so of study difficult due to some gaps in my knowledge, but I persevered.

An opportunity arose at LSCFT in March 2010 for a 3 month secondment which I deliberated about for some time due to the short duration. Looking back I'm not sure why as I have come to realise that changing roles in the NHS happens all the time and subsequently at the end of the tenure it was made permanent. My secondment was the first time I worked in a team alongside project managers and clinicians and had no month ends which I loved. It offered lots of new challenges and stretched me in terms of financial knowledge and broadened my financial skill-set. I was involved in working groups looking at workforce models for a new hospital, worked with a new joint venture and contributed to capital business cases.

Since this point I have spent the majority of my career in management accounts as this is the area of Finance that I have come to enjoy the most. No two days are the same, the to-do list has no end and I get to work with a huge range of interesting people and teams every day. Some of the tasks I have been involved in include costings, tenders, forecasting, efficiency programmes and business cases. My current role as a Finance business partner allows me to be an integrated member of a senior leadership team. I lead on various financial aspects for the network alongside providing general business support which comes with lots of variety and challenge.

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

I didn't really think about it, it just happened that way. I don't think I'd change it now as I can see what working in the NHS is all about

What is the most rewarding part of your career?

One of the most rewarding parts of my career has been supporting the introduction of new services. I love being around people so working with clinicians and managers to look at different ways of working has provided me with great satisfaction. Another area that has been rewarding has been developing individuals and seeing them grow in their roles and as people. This opportunity has come about from being a line manager and getting involved with the NHS skills development network.

What has been the biggest lesson learnt on your journey?

The people I work with are as important as the tasks I undertake for making my roles interesting. Pushing yourself out of your comfort zone (even if only slightly) allows you to achieve incremental progress in your career.

Biggest influences in career?

I'd love to say parents but to be honest I think they'd have been happy whatever career I took as long as I was happy and 'trying my best' in my chosen field. I think the biggest influences have come from the people I have worked with and managers I have had along the way. The support and encouragement I have received from others to develop and go for new roles has really driven me forward.

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

Do it! There are a variety of Finance roles in lots of different organisations each with their own opportunities. Despite staying at organisations for a considerable length of time I have managed to take the opportunity to apply for new roles and progress within them.

Complete your studies whilst you are in a junior role if possible as there is likely to be less day to day pressure from your workload.

And Lastly, A little bit about yourself:

What is your Favourite film: Top Gun- can't wait to see the new one.

What is your Favourite TV Show: I love a good crime drama. Recent favourites have been Time, Line of Duty, The Bay

What is your Favourite food: I have to pick one? That's very difficult as I love food especially anything savoury! I would say cheese, I think stems from my very first Saturday job working on a market stall.

Do you have any hobbies or Interests: I am a team captain for a local hockey club and have a Fundraising Manager role on the Management Committee. I recently started competing for the clubs veteran team (aka those that don't listen to their creaking knees and move a lot slower). I raise funds for a local charity The Baby Beat Appeal by organising events.