

AFLAQ KHAN

**HEAD OF FINANCIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION
UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS SUSSEX**



CAREER JOURNEY TO DATE

I studied Engineering at University so Accountancy wasn't on my radar at all. I worked in a Steelworks in my final year work placement and ended up working in the same room as the company accountant. He was completing the annual accounts and got me to help him. I enjoyed working with him and I decided to explore accountancy as a career after graduation. I applied for numerous Finance roles but got many rejections as I didn't have a related degree so was on the verge of giving up but kept going however and I was accepted onto the CIMA Finance Graduate scheme at BT.

There were 30 graduates on the scheme and only two hadn't studied a business-related degree so we always felt we were behind the others in our studies. The other graduates had exemptions and at college seemed to know the questions immediately. I found working and studying was really demanding and giving up evenings and weekends was especially hard. I realised that the only way to pass was to have a detailed plan each week so I didn't feel guilty when not studying. I was also helped by older members of the team in understanding how to improve my exam technique. The perseverance paid off and after 4 years of hard work I successfully completed the CIMA exams.

My experience at BT was great. One of my roles was supporting product managers with financial analysis for new products. I worked on one of the very first business cases for mobile and video phones. The Investment Committee didn't approve it as the technology wasn't ready. They approved investment in video phones instead which wasn't commercially successful! In hindsight we probably didn't sell the business case in the best possible light and this taught me the importance of solid narrative to explain numbers.

After qualifying I moved into the city and worked for several large banks. The work was interesting but the long hours and travelling were not great with young children. My wife and many family members worked in the NHS so when a job close to home came up working in a local mental health trust I decided to apply. I joined the NHS in 2010 as Associate Director of Financial Services and inherited a large team. I was thrown in at the deep end as the FD had left and the Trust was facing financial challenges. I worked closely

with senior team to stabilise our cash position and ensure salaries were paid we kept afloat! I benefitted from finding a coach from a neighbouring Trust who I turned to for advice and guidance and this proved especially valuable in helping me dealing with setbacks and finding solutions. I also worked hard at developing a network of peers in local trusts who again proved valuable when seeking advice. I went on to work in several NHS Trusts in the South East and found each role helped me piece together the complexities of the NHS.

I have always been passionate about staff development in my career which has led me to my current role of Head of Financial Skills Development and Innovation at University Hospitals Sussex. One of my main aims is to ensure we improve training and development opportunities for the Finance team and a deeper understanding of Finance among staff in the wider Trust. I will also be preparing our application for the One NHS Finance Towards Excellence accreditation and to ensure we have a high performing Finance function. We also have a group of trainee accountants and apprentices in the Trust and I hope to use my experience to help them in their studies and to equip them with the skills needed in the ever more complex world of NHS Finance.