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CAREER PATH TO DATE

When I was at school, I always had an interest in mathematics and science. After my A-levels I had originally planned to go to university to study animal behaviour however, due to rising university costs, I decided against this. I searched on the government apprenticeship website where there was an opportunity to apply for a fixed term finance apprenticeship at East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust in which I was successful at interview. I started working at the Trust in April 2016. The apprenticeship involved working 4 days per week with a day release at college to study AAT Level 2 (Association of Accounting Technicians). During this 12-month period I supported the medicine division with month end, budget setting and budget holder meetings.

Following the completion of level 2, I was successful at interview and was given a permanent band 3 role at the trust and went onto study AAT level 3 as an apprenticeship. I rotated into the Corporate division where I mainly supported the estates and facilities team. The apprenticeship took longer than expected due to the lack of knowledge and support from the college as the AAT guidance had recently changed. Throughout this process, my line manager was very supportive in communicating with the college about the concerns I was facing.

After completing level 3 AAT, I was successful at interview for a management accounts assistant role. I transitioned from Corporate to the Planned Care division which comprised of Surgery and Women's and Children's at the time. At this point in my journey, I got more involved with costing shift plans and more advanced business partnering than I did as an apprentice. From a study point of view, I had to decide whether I wanted to study CIMA straight away at certificate level or study level 4 AAT. I decided on level 4 due to having completed levels 2 and 3 and taking on advice I received from my colleagues. I studied AAT Level 4 through evening classes as there was no apprenticeship available at my local college at the time. This took slightly longer than expected due to having to transition from classroom to remote learning because of Covid. I received my final level 4 result in January 2021.

Studying took up a huge part of my life outside of work and for that reason I decided not to take a long break before I went onto study the Level 7 CIMA apprenticeship. I attended my first lesson at the end of March 2021 and sat my last CIMA exam in November 2023 becoming qualified in January 2024. During this time, I was seconded into the role I am in now which I job shared with another colleague whilst we continued to support our divisions. I had moved into Unplanned Care which consisted of Medicine and Women's and Children's. The dual role was a challenging part of my journey as there were often conflicting priorities and an overlap between these priorities and deadlines.

CURRENT ROLE

In April 2023, I applied for the substantive Deputy Head of Reporting role in which I was successful at interview. In this role I line manage the apprentices within the department, monitor the reporting tasks that feed into the ledger and ensure that the various apps with Qlikview are refreshed. During year end I support the Trust's annual stock take and support the audit process of gathering backing documents and evidence. The role that I am in requires me to be flexible as I provide support to the divisional teams during month end which could change month on month. This has enabled me to drive improvement through the department where I can link both roles to find the best solution to potential problems that occur.

REFLECTIONS

The apprenticeship route has been a huge benefit to me and my journey as it allowed me to have studied and worked side by side. It has benefited the trust as they have been able to 'grow their own'. It allowed me to learn on the job from the very basics when I started, to more advanced as I have progressed up through the bandings. I believe this has helped my development and compliments the job role that I am in now. I had no idea when I applied for the band 2 apprenticeship that I would go on to become CIMA qualified and end up where I am now. I would highly recommend the apprenticeship route for those wanting to work in finance but are unsure about going to university.

As I have mentioned previously, studying whilst working does take up a huge part of your life. It is a case of weighing up a work, study and home life balance which can be difficult at times. The level 7 apprenticeship consisted of 3 to 4 day releases per module and the rest was either during evenings, weekends or annual leave. Although it was hard, I am happy that I chose to continue studying to become CIMA qualified which I would not have been able to do without the support of my family, friends, and work for giving me the opportunity. Since qualifying, I have become the finance departments student skills development lead to support the students currently studying, and share any knowledge or experience that I have with them.

THE FUTURE

I have been at the Trust for 8 years now, for which most of the time I have been studying alongside working. As a result, the future for me is currently in progress as so much of my time was dedicated to studying that I did not often have room or allow for other thoughts. Following on from qualifying, I have had career conversations with my Director of Finance who is invested in my development within NHS finance. I am keen to explore different areas within finance as I have only ever worked in Management Accounts.

I have been part of a working group that are gathering evidence to submit for our level 2 accreditation. From this, I am also part of the training and development ambassador group. These groups have opened new training opportunities for the finance departments such as job shadowing, and the completion of a skills assessment will identify areas where individuals may require additional training.