

**EMILY KIRKPATRICK
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BACKGROUND

By way of introduction, my name is Emily Kirkpatrick, and I am the Deputy Director of Finance at Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust. I am a CIPFA qualified accountant with 20 years experience across a range of different areas of the public sector.

CAREER PATH

I started my career at KPMG as a public sector auditor. Coming from a family whose careers had primarily been in the public sector (librarians and lawyers), I always knew that ultimately I wanted to work in the public sector but wasn't quite sure where. I saw a job advertised at KPMG for a position as a graduate trainee in public sector audit, and decided it would give me broad experience across a range of areas in the public sector, and would help me pinpoint where I wanted to ultimately work. If I'm totally honest, becoming an auditor and qualified accountant was a byproduct of the job, and not something that I necessarily planned for originally, but it has stood me in good stead. As luck would have it, I have found that public sector finance is a career that suits my personality well, with a good balance between analysing and interpreting data and business partnering.

After qualifying as a CIPFA accountant in 2009, I was successful in securing a role at DWP as a finance business partner. This was a new role in central government at the time, and I really enjoyed making it my own, supporting budget holders through a period of significant spending cuts (sound familiar?!).

In 2011 I secured a role as finance business partner at The Metropolitan Police. Over the next 6 years I supported a wide range of areas at the Met, including front line policing, digital services, and corporate functions. It was a steep learning curve as to how different bits of the public sector could be so materially different but provided me with some amazing opportunities in terms of supporting an organisation through transformation, largescale procurements and much more.

In 2017 after I was due to come back from the maternity leave of my second child, I secured a promotion to the role of Head of Financial Management at The Royal Marsden. My first NHS role. Another steep learning curve of stepping into the role of managing a bigger team,

and stepping away from the detail to see the bigger picture. It was a role I loved, and really felt I grew in my time there in terms of learning to lead and support a team.

In 2021 my husband and I decided that a move to the North West where he is originally from, was the right move for us as a family, and as luck would have it a role as Associate Director of Finance at Alder Hey was advertised at the same time. I took the bull by the horns and applied, and was over the moon to be offered a role as Associate Director of Finance -Commercial for 3 days a week. It was a role that really worked for me with my young family. Since my youngest started to school in Sept 2022 my role expanded to cover Financial Services, and then in December 2023 I was promoted to Deputy Director. I love my role within Alder Hey – there is never a dull day, and it is always busy – but always interesting too, and super fulfilling.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

I feel I have been very lucky in my career to have had a number of informal mentors who have really pushed me out of comfort zones at times, and encouraged me to try things that I might have ordinarily let pass me by. For example at KPMG I had a line manager who encouraged me to take an opportunity for a secondment to the tax department, and to the charity audit department. Both experiences extended my networks, and taught me a lot about picking up new skills on the job.

At DWP I had a line manager who was very experienced in the world of Central Government finance, and was integral in supporting me to build good stakeholder relationships, and also to think about what I wanted to get out of my time at DWP. He let me try new things autonomously but I was always aware he was there for me in the background to support should I need it.

At The Royal Marsden I encountered my first opportunity to be formally mentored. It was by the then CFO (Marcus Thorman) and it blew my mind how willing he was to give up his time to support me. It was a really positive experience, and I would say was integral to me really pushing my boundaries, as well as talking through the for and against the big move “up North” from a professional perspective.

I have to say the mentoring, sponsorship and coaching opportunities is one of the most positive elements of being part the NHS finance family. I am now a sponsor myself, and love to have the opportunity to see my sponsee develop – it is hugely rewarding.

WORK LIFE BALANCE

Getting the right balance between work life and home life is an ever changing learning curve. I have two young children and I am slowly learning that what works for one phase of life may change again in an instant – and that can be hard. What I can say though is that to date, the NHS has been incredibly accommodating in facilitating the different phases, whether that be through covid and home schooling, part time working, or now working flexibly to fit in the needs of my family and my work. I don't pretend to have got this right yet but my biggest piece of advice would be to keep talking to your team and your line manager. The more open you can be about your needs and wants, the easier it is for your line managers and team leaders to help facilitate this.

ON REFLECTION

I am very grateful for the career I have had to date. Whilst sometimes it is easy to think about the “could have beens” – the jobs I didn’t get, or the opportunities on the path less travelled, I am a huge believe in the old adage “what is for you won’t go by you”. I believe in taking the opportunities that are presented to you, and not losing too much sleep about the ones that pass you by – you can’t do everything after all.

I have never been much of one for a fully planned out career, so am not quite sure what the “what’s next” looks like for me. But for now I am excited to develop in my role as Deputy Director, which still feels quite new, and build up my networks in the North West and after that we’ll see!

As for careers advice for anyone considering a career in NHS Finance I would wholeheartedly say go for it. It can be hard at times as ultimately there is never enough money to do everything we’d love to do, but it can also be hugely rewarding. Some of my proudest moments have been when a business case that you know will be life changing for the patients it impacts gets signed off, or where a big procurement exercise is concluded, and you know your actions will have a direct consequence for service users for the better – there’s nothing that beats it!