

## NHS NORFOLK AND WAVENEY ICB: STEPPING INTO THE NHS – SOONER OR LATER. 5 STORIES OF CAREER JOURNEYS INTO THE NHS.

### EMMA KRIEHN-MORRIS, DIRECTOR OF COMMISSIONING FINANCE (17 YEARS IN NHS)

It took me two long weeks before I decided to accept a role back in the NHS after an initial 3-year sprint at the start of my career, a decision which I remain glad I made some 14 years later.

I started my career in a top 10 accountancy firm undertaking local audits before moving onto a Plc who specialised in educational software whilst living in Oxford. Shortly after moving to Norfolk, I joined a household cleaning manufacturing company where I gained my professional qualifications and worked my way up to Group Accountant consolidating multi-currencies (pre-Euro – I'm a certain vintage...) before moving on again to work for an Italian Count on his 5 companies operating in the farming and estates sector. My move back to the NHS was made solely on the role becoming available at a time when I was ready for my next challenge, no-more-no-less which was surprising given that the NHS was and remains now the largest employer in my locality.



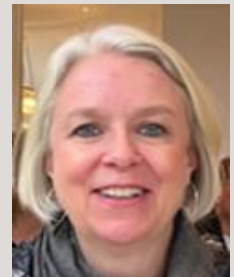
I recall having accepted and started in my new role, walking around the Acute Hospital corridors as a Finance Business Partner for the Surgical, and Women & Children's division finding it all rather overwhelming and wondering just how I could make a difference in a large, complex and multifaceted organisation which was wholly different to the well-funded private organisation I'd just left; The question at the time and for many months after remained 'was I in the right industry for me, and did I have the transferrable skills to do my job well now I had made the move'?

I didn't take long however for me to realise that my **professional skills** were indeed **transferrable**, and my previous non-NHS experiences offered me an insight that questioned the long-standing processes in place which I was being asked to adopt. Whilst the differences felt significant to start with, especially in terms of the funding and pace of change, the same challenges existed around how to deliver a high-quality service and remain financially sustainable. Once recognised in that overall simplistic summary, I was able to focus on my role and how I could support these objectives and deliver real changes to our patients and our financial performance.

After 3 fantastic years at the Hospital, I moved (with some encouragement) in 2013 to the newly incepted CCG as the Deputy CFO. This was a wonderful experience being able to shape our financial controls, processes, reporting, and team culture utilising all my pre-NHS and NHS experiences. When our system CCGs merged, I then secured the role of Associate Director of Financial Management and then in late 2022 the role of Director of Commissioning Finance, a role I still hold today.

Whilst I joined through a less conventional route somewhat later in my career, the **NHS** has provided me with a **wonderful career opportunity** which I still richly enjoy and benefit from today. The opportunity to **network** and join a finance community wider than my own organisation or indeed system is superb. I work in an environment where **I can be myself**, supported in an equally motivated team who share the ambition to make a difference in my community, recognising and valuing everyone's experiences gained from many different backgrounds. I actively encourage my team to also look outside of the NHS when recruiting to new roles at all levels; whilst a culture shock and a significant change for many who make the move to the NHS, the move is I believe one worth making!

### **HELEN ROYALL, HEAD OF FINANCE FOR COMMUNITY AND CONTINUING HEALTHCARE (8 YEARS IN NHS)**



I started my NHS career nearly 9 years ago and it has been the most varied and fulfilling part of my career to date and the most supported.

I have worked full time since July 1992 (post University), so you can guess how old I am! I Joined Unilever as a Factory Operative July 1992, working on the production lines until 1996. I then moved into production management (same location) and went from managing myself to 40 people overnight (including engineers, a little daunting!) I did many roles in Unilever across 21 years, including being supported to move into Finance aged 30 (2000), when I also commenced my CIMA qualifications. In 2007 I moved to Colman's (based in Norwich – relocation move driven by my husband) worked there as Finance Controller until 2013 when I was made redundant.

This is the key for me– having **compulsory redundancy** can be scary but it can also provide a little bit of **breathing space** to think about what you really want to do in life in terms of career.

Before joining the NHS, I worked as a Finance Manager with a Housing Association (Freebridge in King's Lynn). It was more out of curiosity to understand finance in the public sector as well as it being so different from a global commercial organisation.

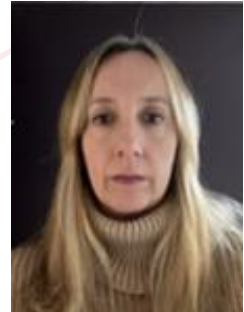
Then in 2015 I joined the NHS with Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust (the commute to and from King's Lynn was becoming arduous) so I wanted a job in Norwich and the NHS appealed to me to do something that benefitted the general-public and not shareholders (plus a very **persuasive recruitment person in Hays nudged me towards the NHS**). I worked in a **supportive** and **engaging** finance team which gave me the **confidence** to do 5 different roles over the past 8 years including a move to the ICB in 2023.

Working with Unilever taught me that learning and pushing yourself was where I gained the most satisfaction. **Commercial organisations** are very **results driven** which is incredibly useful in the **NHS** when tasked with delivering **efficiencies of 5% and beyond**.

The other element is the skills gained in managing production lines in factories and dealing with lots of different types of people and associated issues, means that **Finance Business Partnering** is a comfortable and happy space for me, and I really enjoy engaging and working with operational teams.

### LYDIA KING, SENIOR FINANCE ASSISTANT FOR MENTAL HEALTH (1.5 YEARS IN NHS)

Leaving school, I did what most people who live in Norfolk with no idea of a career plan did at that time and joined Aviva, or Norwich Union as it was, with the idea to stay for a year while I decided what I really wanted to do. Fast forward 15 years, a variety of roles from motor underwriting to household claims, and 2 children later I decided I did not want to return to my role part time with 2 small children.



I joined a wonderful complex needs school as a part time and term time finance officer. I completed some education specific finance training and found I loved my job – no one was more surprised than me as I hated maths at school, and I was so sure I would fail my “O” Level exam my parents arranged for me to take a CSE exam too (yes, I am that old – and yes, I did fail the “O” Level!).

I spent 10 years at the school, in a nicely rounded role which gave me a great experience and I became aware that there is more to finance than number crunching all day. The position worked perfectly part time, but, as my children reached high school age, I wanted full-time, year-round work so had to move on. I left finance for 18 months but found myself back in it when I joined the central office team in a multi-academy trust. I became Team Manager within the finance team and realised that I wanted/needed some form of financial qualification. A professional qualification that would be recognised outside of education finance. The Trust funded my AAT qualification and I quickly saw there’s a whole world of difference between working in school finance and a commercial or practice setting.

As I was nearing the end of my AAT, I knew I wanted to expand my knowledge further so decided to look outside of education finance, **the perfect job advert popped up at just the right time**. I joined the N&W ICB in the Mental Health Finance Team 18 months ago. The move from education finance to NHS was quite the change, not least a **whole new world of acronyms** along with finance systems, processing, and reporting methods.

One of the biggest changes for me is to be part of a financial directorate within a **large organisation** as previously I reported directly to the CFO, with just 8 of us in the central finance team. I have gained a lot of knowledge from working with so **many experienced and knowledgeable staff**, and have been granted countless **opportunities for networking, learning and development** since joining the ICB, from online short courses, in-person conferences, shadowing senior team members and getting involved in additional projects such as the Level 2 Accreditation. The ICB are also funding the full CIMA qualification for me through the online **Finance Leadership Programme**, all of which I am thankful for.

Moving to a large organisation could potentially have meant feeling a very small cog in a large machine, and initially I did wonder if would ever remember who does what and where.

However, thanks to my team and the leadership I have been given I **feel valued** and appreciated for being both a part of the NHS and as an individual.

### LISA BELL, SENIOR FINANCE MANAGER FOR PLANNING (18 YEARS IN NHS)

I had no idea what I wanted to do when I finished in fulltime education and pretty much fell into my first job as a 'Girl Friday' not sure that's a politically correct job title in the current climate, but it provided what I thought would be a stop gap until I decided upon a career.



I worked for an organisation that imported upholstery fabric from manufacturers in Europe and then sold it to Upholsterers. There was a small finance team consisting of an FD and his Deputy, Credit Controller and 4 purchase/sales ledger clerks and me. Whilst chatting to one of the team I mentioned that I would like to continue studying, fast forward 6 years later and they had funded me to study **AAT** and **ACCA** and I was the FDs deputy. Far more qualifications than experience (I often felt out of place with 'real professionals' at college studying ACCA).

After 10 years working for them, a chance meeting with my now husband had me packing up my belongings and making the journey from NW England to East Anglia, and so the NHS career begins....

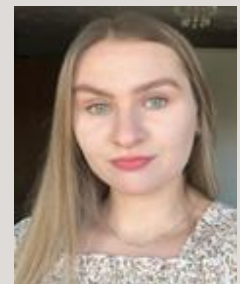
I happened upon the **NHS by accident after registering with a recruitment agency** and taking up a role with a PCT temporarily – that was 18 years ago. I've had roles in financial accounts, financial services dabbled with management accounts and currently work in financial planning across the ICB and ICS. There are so many different roles and organisations for finance professionals in the NHS, **if one area isn't your forte then I challenge you not to be able to find something that is!**

Professional development is encouraged whether that's studying for a professional qualification or the vast resources available for CPD and there **are often opportunities for secondments to gain practical experience** in different areas. I've also worked with some inspirational people either at the beginning of their careers and watched them excel, or those with many years of experience that are willing to share their knowledge and experience, their mentoring has given me the drive to keep trying to improve myself and ways of working.

I've never regretted my decision to join the NHS, it's a challenging, interesting, great place to work and I would recommend it to anyone.

### JORDANA BETTS, SENIOR FINANCE ASSISTANT FOR CORPORATE & REPORTING (5 YEARS IN NHS/WHOLE CAREER SO FAR IN NHS).

When I finished sixth form in 2019, I worked full time at McDonald's whilst I decided what I wanted to do, I knew I wanted to do an Apprenticeship but wasn't sure what in. Whilst having a clear out of all my old logins I went on my Sixth Form website and saw they had shared an advert for an Apprentice Assistant Management Accountant at the N&N. I had never considered working in accountancy, but I decided to apply anyway.



Applying for the **NHS apprentice** is genuinely one of the best decisions I've made in my life. After completing my apprenticeship and **AAT Level 2** I was lucky enough to gain a role as an Assistant Management Accountant in 2020, whilst in this role I completed my AAT Level 3 and got most of the way through my AAT Level 4. After 2 and half years in this role I decided I was ready for the next step up in my career. I took the big leap to leave all I'd ever known and took a role at the Norfolk and Waveney ICB in 2023 as a Senior Finance Assistant. Fast forward 16 months later in this role and I have since completed my AAT Level 4 and have passed 3 **CIMA** exams, as well as gaining much more knowledge on the **wider picture of the NHS** rather than just seeing it from a provider point of view.

The NHS is very pro studying, without this encouragement as well as the financial support of paying for my courses, I don't think I'd got as far with my **studying as I have in such a short space of time**.

During my NHS career I've had the pleasure of having multiple undergraduate students work with me whilst they are on a placement from university. They came into the workplace with no NHS or general work experience. It was very **rewarding** to see the **skills I taught them and the knowledge I passed on**; they left their placement with skills that would help them to succeed in their future careers.

### **In Summary**

Whilst the 5 career journeys to the NHS vary greatly in how and when they joined, there are some similarities and learning to be shared and celebrated, these being;

- Everyone quickly recognises the opportunities available to them as part of a wider NHS finance community going beyond your own employer,
- The NHS as an employer is very supportive of career progression in Finance offering many opportunities to develop at all stages in your career and at all bands,
- There are ongoing opportunities to have a varied NHS Career and be flexible how and where you work,
- Professional Finance Skills are transferable from commercial to public sectors; our previous experiences may differ but they all can add value,
- The NHS can garner in large quantities fresh mindsets and different experiences from bringing staff in at all ages and bands from outside of the NHS with targeted and supported employment processes,

For most our career journeys are not pre-planned or scripted but are made up of a number of fortuitous opportunities and happy decisions that are made along the way that brought us to the NHS Sooner or Later.