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CAREER STORY

I have extensive experience in Healthcare Finance and Information, both internationally and in the UK, and have progressed to a senior level during this time. At the beginning of my career in 2004, I studied for my CIMA qualification alongside working full time as a band 3, and I think that studying the theory alongside the practical application in a work setting really helped me to consolidate my understanding of the subjects. This was reflected in my career progression, as I attained a band 5 role in 2006 after reaching managerial level, a band 6 in 2009 as a finalist and a band 7 when I became qualified in 2010. Each role was at a different organisation, covering acute and mental health providers as well as commissioners. I also worked in various departments including Management Accounts, Costing, Contracts and Payroll.

After working as a qualified accountant for a year I decided to take advantage of the available working holiday visas and relocate to Melbourne, Australia. There are a lot of people from the UK working in Australia and vice versa, so it was easy to get in contact with recruitment consultants once I was there and set up some interviews for Finance jobs. I already had a long gap in my CV in 2008 from travelling, so I wanted this stay in Australia to be beneficial to my career development.

After being in Melbourne for a few weeks I successfully interviewed for a role in the Finance department of a large public hospital. My title was a Finance Business Partner for the Strategy and Commercial directorate; this involved producing business cases, setting budgets, monthly reporting, analysing tender documents, streamlining financial processes and attending statewide meetings for things like the introduction of a national Carbon Tax. I had so much relevant experience and transferable skills, and continued learning and developing there. I even got to attend the annual Australian HFMA conference where I met with NHS Directors of Finance who were visiting Victorian hospitals to understand different ways of working.

I applied for a sponsorship visa around the time when my 12-month working holiday visa was coming to an end; this type of visa requires your employer to support your application by describing why your specific skills are needed in the organisation. I stayed for another year working at Austin Health.

There were some notable similarities and differences between the UK and Australian Healthcare systems. For example, Australian Healthcare is part publicly funded from state and national funding sources, and some services are paid through insurance, which is different to the NHS. They are also under much less scrutiny and financial pressure than I was used to, so there is more scope to invest. A big project I worked on was the Olivia Newton John Cancer and Wellness Centre, which opened towards the end of my time there. ONJ even visited on opening day!

After returning to the UK, I set up my own limited company in 2014 and worked in Financial Modelling for Healthier Together and the Clinical Services Transformation work that was ongoing in the North East Sector of Greater Manchester at the time. This was invaluable learning for me as the NHS had undergone significant changes while I had been abroad, for example the formation of Clinical Commissioning Groups. I was then taken on substantively by the organisation at an 8C level and have since progressed to an 8D.

Before I went I did very little preparation or research other than getting a visa sorted as I had spent time travelling in Australia already so knew I wanted to go to Melbourne. If I had, I may have realised that arriving in January is the worst time to go job hunting. Australia practically shuts down for Christmas and doesn't open again until after Australia Day so the first couple of weeks I was there were spent waiting for people to come back from summer holidays! From February though, things got back to normal very quickly. Their financial year was July to June, so when I got a job it was initially to support budget setting in the lead up to year end, but then became a permanent role.

If anyone is thinking of doing this, I'd advise you to have a look at Australian recruitment agency pages. It's very similar to the UK and you can see all the jobs available and what sort of person they're looking for.

The varied experience and confidence I gained whilst working in Melbourne has meant I have found it easy to build working relationships quickly and has given me a broader perspective on health and social care. I am now working as Group Head of Financial Control which is an area I don't think I would have had the confidence to move into earlier in my career.