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**IMPERIAL COLLEGE HEALTHCARE NHS TRUST**

## CAREER PATH

I did a degree in Accountancy, mainly because I enjoyed Maths and Economics. I managed to gain work experience at a local accountancy firm during the summer holidays of my 2nd year at university, where I made my mind up that financial accounts and working in an accountancy firm wasn't for me. It was certainly an interesting experience, especially as it was a small firm in my local town, and many business owners came in with bags of receipts for their accounts to be compiled (it was 1998!). My role was to sort the receipts into relevant piles and support the bookkeepers compiling a list of expenses to pass to the accountant.

It wasn't a conscious choice to join the NHS, luckily Leeds Teaching Hospitals, my local hospital Trust, had a number of entry level roles just as I was finishing my final degree exams, including band 3's advertised in management accounts, and I was lucky enough to be offered a role as Finance Assistant in the Pathology finance team, and started the August after finishing university. I was definitely thrown in the deep end for my first month end, which was a good thing! I had been in post for a couple of weeks when both the assistant finance manager and the finance manager ended up being off, (a broken wrist and paternity leave respectively), so I was suddenly the most senior person in our team and there was only myself, the placement student that had been in post a year and the new placement student who had been in post a few weeks like me, to produce a draft month end position. All three of us pulled together, asked the senior finance manager for advice where necessary. The key advice I would give anyone at any level is to take notes, my line manager used to laugh as I walked round with a notepad constantly, but as I was new not only to the NHS, but to using a finance system, and new to management accounts there was so much to remember and learn, that's what helped me.

I decided very quickly that management accounts was for me, as I loved the interaction with the budget holders and finding out about the services that they ran, and supporting them in utilising their budget in the best way possible, and solving any issues that they had. I was luckily enough to be shown round various labs, shown the equipment and was lucky to have the managers taking time to explain the different roles and tests they undertook, which greatly helped my understanding of the budget, how the rota's worked, and gain an understanding of the maintenance contracts and consumable spend. My advice would be to take any opportunity you get to be shown round any department or observe clinicians, as it helps with understanding how the service runs, the operational and finance issues faced, and makes more sense of the budgets and overspends!

I have left the NHS on a couple of occasions, and although I have now been back in the NHS for the last 17 years, but I did gain a different perspective when working for a university, a travel company overseas (more glamorous than it sounds) and a national charity. They were all useful experiences and showed me how different organisations are structured, and their different cultures.

Within several trusts I have taken advantage of 'acting up' opportunities, sideways moves to gain experience in different roles, which have provided different experiences and stood me in good stead for when substantive roles come up. At a particular Trust, I was seconded to the financial recovery team and led on clinical improvements, which enabled me to secure my current role as Head of Finance Continuous Improvement, where I am responsible for the Trust wide efficiency programme and a remit of department wide improvement projects, as well as health & well being, and staff development. I had also volunteered as development lead a year before it was formally included in my current substantial role, so if you are interested and passionate about a particular area, just get involved to gain the exposure. Supporting the whole finance team with advice on professional qualifications, CPD opportunities and leading on the ONF level 2 accreditation is the part that I enjoy most from my role, and gain most satisfaction from.

I would also recommend anyone at any level or role to consider a mentor or sponsor, I was luckily enough to be put in touch with my sponsor by my CFO, and my sponsor has supported and provided advice on what is next in my career, provided feedback on my CV so it best reflects my achievements and skills, advice on my personal statement for job applications, discussed interview feedback, as well as advice on specific work related issues. Its been invaluable to gain a perspective from someone who works in a different organisation and outside of my sector.

Now more than ever I would say that for a successful career in NHS finance you need resilience and patience, but I would definitely recommend it, the varied roles available within finance, and range of organisations within the NHS is vast, and the interesting people that you meet. Also the support with professional qualifications is excellent in my experience, and once qualified the NHS finance community have access to significant CPD opportunities through ONF and SDN.

Also for me the part of the role that has always appealed and I still find interesting is working in a provider organisation, supporting clinicians and operational colleagues to enable them to deliver excellent patient care, and gain an understanding of the services that they provide.

My home life is extremely important to me, I have a rule not to work weekends (even if I have to work longer hours in the week), having the weekend break from work is important, and I try and switch off after work, by reading fiction, and walking my two labradors with my husband in the countryside, and catching up with friends and family.