

FLEXIBLE WORKING:

JOB SHARING IN NHS FINANCE



OVERVIEW

This case study looks at a successful job-sharing arrangement shared by Alice McEwan and Toni-Rhiann Thomas-Hodgetts at The Dudley Group NHS FT (DGH) in the Corporate Financial Management team. Alice and Toni bring a wealth of experience and knowledge gained from different career journeys. Both are equally passionate about the NHS's mission and looking for a work-life balance that allows them to continue their careers and be there for their families.

BACKGROUND

ALICE'S CAREER JOURNEY

Alice's NHS career began back in 2014 when she was successful in gaining a place on the HFMA Regional Financial Management Training Scheme (FMTS). During her time on the scheme, Alice was lucky enough to get the opportunity to work across several NHS Organisations including commissioners and providers, gaining the perfect foundation for her later career. Whilst on the scheme, Alice completed CIMA, gave birth to her first child and put in a request for flexible working to reduce her working week to three days.

Following completion of the scheme in 2017, Alice was successful in gaining a Finance Manager role at one of her placement organisations, Sandwell and West Birmingham Clinical Commissioning Group (SWB CCG). The job was advertised as full-time, but after a discussion with the recruiting manager, Alice was encouraged to apply and to specify the hours required. Alice's requested hours were agreed upon, and the remainder of the funding for the post was used to put in a lower banded support post.

Alice worked at SWB CCG (subsequently Black Country Integrated Care Board- BCICB) for 6 years. In this time, two big organisational changes took place in transitioning from CCG's to ICB's and whilst on her third maternity leave, a formal management of change process led Alice to a job share arrangement with another member of the ICB team who was also already working part-time. Alice requested a further reduction in hours to three school days to accommodate the changes in her home life, which was accepted.

TONI'S CAREER JOURNEY

Toni always had a desire to work in NHS finance, in 2006 whilst studying for her Accountancy degree she applied to join the staff bank at DGH. Open to any role available to gain experience of NHS functions. For two and a half years, she worked as admin in Oncology services, which provided a strong foundation of understanding and insight into the day-to-day running's of a ward and the back office within a hospital setting.

Graduating in 2009, Toni contacted the Finance Director at DGH requesting the opportunity to volunteer within the finance department. The FD was open to the idea and Toni began a two-week voluntary placement within financial management. The placement was a success; it confirmed Toni's wish to pursue a career in NHS finance and opened opportunities should any vacancies arise. At the time of placement, a member of staff was due to leave the Accounts Payable department and Toni was encouraged to apply. She was successful and appointed as full time payments clerk, where she remained until 2011.

2011, Toni secured a place on the NHS National Graduate Management Training Scheme. During this time, she had also applied for and was offered a role at DGH as Corporate Management Accountant. Enjoying her time at DGH and the support she received, Toni turned down the Graduate scheme offer and accepted the role within DGH, embarking on her CIMA studies with the support of the trust.

Toni wanted to experience other functions within NHS finance and other NHS bodies, in 2014 she was appointed as an Assistant Costing Accountant at the then Birmingham Women's NHS FT (now Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS FT). This new role provided valuable insight into the costing and income methodology within a specialised organisation.

In 2015, a Costing Accountant role became available in a local trust, this was a natural progression for Toni and she was appointed to the role at Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust. This role was built on knowledge gained whilst offering wider costing and income exposure in a larger trust. 2016, Toni's flexible working journey began as she had started a family and requested to return from maternity to part time hours. The trust was able to accommodate the request but in a different role and department, which Toni was happy to accept. On return from maternity and a 12-month career break she began as a Financial Accountant 15 hours per week supporting the Financial Services team.

During her role as Financial Accountant Toni completed CIMA and gained qualified status. At this point Toni was ready and wanted to progress her career in a more senior finance role. As she was able to increase her hours in 2022 she took on a role as Finance Business Partner three days per week with a private manufacturing organisation. Toni continued this role alongside her role at SWBH until the opportunity as a part-time Project Accountant became available with NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin ICB.

Toni's role in the ICB was originally a secondment, naturally she was looking for her next role when in 2023 a senior role was advertised for DGH, the place her career began. She contacted the recruiting manager enquiring if the role could be considered as part time and was encouraged to apply in the hope there would be other candidates also requesting part-time hours. Luckily, Alice had also enquired and applied. Toni was appointed on a job share arrangement to the role of Divisional Finance Manager for Corporate at DGH.

FORMATION OF THE JOB SHARE

ALICE'S EXPERIENCE

I have always been career-focused, but my home commitments made me feel I would struggle to progress to a more senior role due to my flexible working requirements. When the opportunity came up in 2023 to work at the closest Organisation to me, DGH, at a more senior level, it felt too good to be true. The job was advertised as full-time and despite my concerns, I requested an initial discussion with the recruiting manager. I was encouraged to apply despite my need for flexible working, which now included commitment to school pick-ups and drop-offs alongside reduced hours. Luckily enough, the other successful applicant at the job interview, Toni, also required reduced hours and a commitment to school pick-ups and drop-offs. We were therefore offered a job share arrangement, which we have now been successfully completing for 2 and a half years.

TONI'S EXPERIENCE

Toni has always been keen to progress her senior career within the NHS, when the Divisional Finance Manager role became available at DGH it felt like the right time and place. The role was advertised as full-time, but Toni contacted the recruiting manager enquiring if the role could be considered as a job share and was encouraged to apply in case others applied requesting the same. Thankfully, Alice had applied and was also requesting part time flexibility as a working mom. Toni and Alice were appointed to the role on a job share basis.

Manager experience

Toni and Alice were the strongest candidates at interview but we knew at the outset they were looking for less than full-time hours so initially we thought it would be difficult to make a job share add up in light of our fixed staffing budget for the full-time post. After discussion with both candidates we arrived at the current job share and flexible working arrangement which works for Alice, Toni, their manager and the organisation.

OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE AND PRACTICES

Toni and Alice split their responsibilities based on service areas, but can cover urgent requests for each other when they arise. They also share manager responsibility, ensuring one of them is available to support the corporate team. In terms of hours and days per week, Toni covers the first half of the week and Alice the latter end of the week with Wednesday being their crossover day.

Ensuring they stay up to date is crucial, Toni and Alice require regular and effective communication with each other but also with the wider corporate team. They have weekly catch-up meetings with their senior manager and corporate team on their cross over days, ensuring key updates are communicated and ensuring a smooth handover.

Over the past two years they have worked to align working papers, processes/procedures, filing systems and team ways of working to ensure they can cover more easily for each other when needed. Forward planning is crucial to ensure working days align with monthly commitments and one-off deadlines.

The partnership demonstrates how successful job sharing can be, not just for the individuals involved but also for the wider team and organisation.

Manager Experience

Service managers' report excellent feedback for the financial management support Alice & Toni provide. Managing the job share role is very similar to managing the role when it was previously occupied by a full-time member of staff; however its much more important to know when the job sharers are on non-working days or leave to ensure service managers continue to receive a timely response to their queries.



BENEFITS OF JOB SHARING

- **Increased Flexibility** – Despite the perception that individuals requiring flexible working leads to decreased productivity and flexibility, Toni and Alice have shown that there can be increased flexibility within the constraints they have. Varying working days and times each week to ensure cross cover and dual working when required. This can be beneficial both for them and for the Organisation in achieving deadlines and efficiency.
- **Work life balance & Wellbeing** – Working flexibly, with reduced hours supports Alice and Toni's work life balance, ensuring they can not only fulfil their career desires, meet the demands of both home and work life, but also have time to devote to their own wellbeing.
- **Talent Retention and Development** – Supporting flexible working in the NHS allows talented individuals to continue to work even when home commitments are highly demanding and can even allow them to take time to develop. Toni and Alice are both committed to professional development and have continued to attend SDN and take on other training opportunities outside of working hours.
- **Cost Efficiency with Added Value** – offering a job share allows for lower operational costs as two skilled workers provide two perspectives and potentially fewer mistakes.
- **Enhanced Resilience** – When one member of staff is on leave or sick the other can cover providing business continuity. This is also true if a member of staff was to leave the trust, the other member retains the information shared to support training the new starter.

Manager Experience

Alice & Toni work flexibly around the organisation's monthly and annual deadlines, which means there is often two full-time equivalent people working at these crucial times for the team. It often feels like Toni & Alice produce more than what a single full-time member of the team might.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Managerial support can sometimes be challenging, having multiple managers for the team to seek advice can lead to conflicting advice and authorisation. Communication is key here, and this is something Alice and Toni ensure is their number one priority. Keeping each other in the loop on decisions, consulting each other when necessary and ensuring their decisions are aligned.

Keeping each other updated on business matters, working days and leave. Another key challenge for Alice and Toni is the unavoidable school run commitments, allowing no scope for flex at certain times of day. Forward planning is key here, ensuring diaries are in sync with each other and deadlines can be met.

IMPACT AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

This arrangement has significant benefits not just for Alice and Toni, to allow them to balance work and family commitments but also the DGH. The flexibility works both ways and when faced with urgent deadlines or high workloads, they can flex working days and hours to help each other and the wider team. Job sharing allows the retention of skilled staff, particularly those from underrepresented groups such as women and caregivers.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Encourage a variety of flexible working options as it is beneficial for both the individual and the organisation.

Request or accept flexible working requests wherever possible to take on and/or allow talented individuals to make the most of opportunities.

Effective, timely communication is key to successful job sharing and wider team working.



FURTHER RESOURCES



FLEXIBLE WORKING IN THE NHS

[Read the guide here](#)



FLEXIBLE WORKING: JOB SHARING CASE STUDY

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If you have any questions on any of the above or would like any further information, then please get in touch with the team at one.finance@nhs.net

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