



Name: Alison Colling

Job role: Executive Assistant to the Director of Finance

Apprenticeship: Level 4 Business Administration Apprenticeship

Completed: February 2017

How did you get into your current career?

I went to Secretarial College on leaving school and then into secretarial office jobs. I started work in a Solicitors' office and then took promotion to work at Barclays Bank where I worked for 16 years; I worked my way up the ladder, starting as a junior typist and finishing as PA to Assistant Director until redundancy. I joined Papworth Hospital on the bank staff as a part-time Admin Assistant, which fitted in well with my young family.

Through various promotions and training, I have reached my current role as Executive Assistant to the Director of Finance. One of the desired qualifications for this role was NVQ3 in Business Administration which I had just completed whilst working as PA to the Directorate Manager in the Transplant Unit.

Why did you decide to sign up for an apprenticeship?

To build on from achieving the NVQ 3 Business Administration; to develop and add value to my current role. I also wanted to take advantage of the training opportunity offered to add to my own qualifications.

The first year consisted of monthly assignments where I met as a group with others from the NHS doing the same course. This was really helpful to gain knowledge of how things are done in other NHS organisations and network with other staff.

The least enjoyable and most challenging aspect was meeting course deadlines at the same time as working full-time and juggling this with family life. Compared to the NVQ3, the amount of work and detail required was much greater, which was expected at Level 4, but more intense than anticipated. I undertook 95% of the course work in my own time (evenings and weekends) which was a massive commitment on my personal time.

How has your apprenticeship helped you develop in your role?

This learning has helped me look at the wider picture when completing tasks. Especially useful was considering the risk aspect; how and where things might go wrong and how this could be mitigated in advance. Such as what if the projector did not work at a meeting – how would attendees see the presentation?

In learning about the role, relationship and importance of stakeholders, going forward this is helping me in my role when liaising with stakeholders such as Non-executive Directors, Auditors, clinical staff and other administrative staff.

Do you have any further professional development activities/qualifications planned?

The NVQ Level 4 is equivalent to a Foundation Degree and I did enquire whether I could do a “bolt on” to bring this up to a full Degree level. Unfortunately this was not possible unless I undertake a full Level 5 course. At the moment I am not ready to undertake this commitment of learning and will continue to embody the NVQ Level 4 learning into my current role.

What advice would you give to someone considering an apprenticeship in your area of work?

I would encourage any form of learning if it could add value to work/home life.

But would strongly recommend that the content of the course is clear and understanding of the amount of work required before committing to the course.

You only get out what you put in.