Job title: Workforce Manager

Current employer: Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH)

Sector: Charity / membership organisation

Tell us about your current role and organisation

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health is an organisation for doctors working in child health. We set and maintain educational standards and run exams. Furthermore, we set clinical guidelines, standards of care and conduct audits all with the overall aim of improving child health.

I work in the Research and Quality Improvement arm, where I manage a team that collects evidence about the child health workforce. Across the NHS there is a crisis in the shortage of doctors and nurses. We gather evidence, influence decision makers, and empower doctors with tools to improve their service. Children deserve the right healthcare professionals to deliver comprehensive and high-quality care.

How did you move from academia to your current role?

I did my BSc and MSc in Psychology at Bristol University. Then I moved to Brighton to do my PhD at Sussex University. I studied cognition, vision and language development in infants, toddlers and adults. During my PhD, my supervisor took maternity leave and I took the opportunity to intermit and take a secondment to work at Public Health England (PHE). I moved to Salisbury and worked at Porton Down with the Behavioural Science team on a project about stockpiling medicines.

This made me passionate about public health and I looked out for other opportunities, such as working as a Scientific Writer for the European Commission on a public health conference.

At the end of my PhD, it was a very stressful time. I had run out of funding and was still writing up my thesis. I applied for a range of jobs, but I particularly wanted to move out of academia. This was because working at PHE had showed me that a 'normal job' suited me much better than the uncertainty of academia.

I applied for a Researcher role at the RCPCH and was not successful. However, they invited me to apply for another role a few weeks later as a Project Lead in the workforce team. I had no idea what the job would entail but I applied and was successful. I moved to London in the autumn of 2017 and spent the first

months of the job continuing to write up my thesis, which I would not recommend. In summer 2019 I stepped up into the team lead role when the previous manager retired.

What does a normal working day look like for you?

I work at the RCPCH offices near Holborn station, just south of the UCL Institute of Child Health and Great Ormond Street Hospital. I travel from south of the river on the Thameslink, get in around 9am and plan my day; I respond to emails from collaborators such as paediatricians, external researchers and colleagues.

I usually have a range of meetings to discuss current projects. For example, the Paediatrics 2040 project looks at the future of paediatrics given technological developments and changing burden of disease. We are also currently analysing data from a 'workforce snapshot survey' in partnership with Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT) that looked at workforce on the ground in two given days in September to capture shortages.

I also regularly meet with media, external affairs and policy colleagues to discuss dissemination and communication of our work. For example, this week I worked with the media team to prepare a public statement on shortages in the child health workforce.

When I'm not in meetings, I am getting on with my own work such as data analysis and report writing. I manage a team of three people, so I also spend a proportion of my day supporting them in their work.

What are the best things about working in your role?

I feel like I am working in a really important area with a real-world impact. I feel aligned to the goals of the organisation I work for and I get to work with smart people with similar outlooks. I get involved in a huge range of work: any new ideas or research need the workforce to deliver services in order to succeed. As a team, we are asked to feed into a range of work within the RCPCH and outside. We have partnerships with other royal medical colleges as well as doctors, nurses, NHS England, Department of Health, Nuffield Trust, etc.

What are the biggest challenges you face in your work?

The scope of the challenge means our work is diverse, but the downside is sometimes I feel demotivated by how huge the problem is. There are also many things outside of our control. For example, we need more NHS staff, but the government control the budget and political uncertainty mean it is hard to plan.

I also sometimes have to deal with stressed out, over-stretched doctors who think the RCPCH should do more.

The pace of work can be quite intense and sometimes I feel over-stretched myself, but I have a supportive manager who looks out for my wellbeing.

What's the progression like/where do you see yourself going from here?

My interests still lie in public health and health data. I'm really interested in large-scale interventions in health, especially in the early years. After a few years in my current role, I would like to move out of London so I'm keeping an eye on interesting projects such as the devolution of healthcare in Manchester (DevoManc). I would like to get into the nitty gritty of local health and workforce planning. I can see myself moving to work in the NHS, another charity, or civil service.

What top tips would you pass on to job hunters / researchers interested in this type of work?

- Look out for opportunities – get a range of experience in your area of interest.
- However, don't undersell yourself – you deserve to be paid for your work.
- Data skills are useful in almost every job – try to become familiar with data analysis and visualisation.
- If you have data skills, make sure you can explain what you're doing to the lay person – it may seem impressive to list all the statistic software and analyses you can do on an application, but you need to be able to communicate with someone who does not have that experience.
- Project management skills are also broadly useful. This involves planning, timelines, action logs and evaluation of work.
- Make connections – this may help you to understand what the work you are interested in is actually like