

Women in Leadership Case Study

Lynne Hobbs, Locality Reporter Manager

If I think back to what shaped my career, I think this started when I was quite young as my mum and dad both worked in the public sector – my dad as a prison officer and my mum in the NHS. My mum and dad shared parenting and all the other household tasks, so there wasn't really a gender divide. That made me realise that I could do whatever I wanted and there was no way I was going to stay at home. My dad died very unexpectedly when I was 18 and in my first year at university. Although this was very traumatic, I think my good childhood gave me resilience and I was determined that the trauma wasn't going to define me.

When I went to university, I didn't have any great plan of what I wanted to do. Or rather, I had many plans of what I wanted to do. You name it, if a job looked good to me then I wanted to do it: the RA, astronaut and Chancellor of the Exchequer were all careers I wanted at one point! I really didn't have a fixed idea as to what direction I wanted to go in when I was growing up or when I was at university.

“It's okay to not know what you want to do or where you want to go with your career, and certainly not when you're 18. My interests developed as I learnt more and I let my interests guide me rather than some overarching idea of what it was I wanted to 'be'. It evolves naturally and there is more satisfaction as its driven by your passions and interests rather than a fixed idea.”

I chose to Study a BA at Strathclyde University and my main interests were psychology and economics. I quickly realised I hated both these subjects and they were not for me. Luckily in your first year Strathclyde insist you pick 5 subjects and I loved history and politics. I found I really enjoyed politics and the more social related aspects of the course. I'm glad I did what I did – a degree in social and economic history – as I was always interested in how history impacted on people's lives and loved modern studies and I am still very interested in politics and political ideology. Whilst I was at university I worked in a variety of shops part-time to support myself.

When I graduated from university I knew I wanted to work in the civil service, but I wasn't really sure in what way. I applied for lots of jobs and took the first one I was offered at the Child Support Agency doing administrative support. It was interesting, but ultimately it wasn't for me. Two years after I graduated I decided I wanted to do some further study and, after looking at courses and their content, I decided to do an MSc in Information Systems Management. It wasn't anything I'd done before, but it looked interesting and it would broaden my skills and knowledge and would open me to other career possibilities.

I had just completed my MSc when I saw a post at SCRA advised in 2003 for Practice Information Assistant. This looked ideal as I could see how I could use my newfound information systems management skills and I could see how my own background could tie in with the organisation as a whole. I successfully applied and it was one of the best decisions I've ever made. Not only was it a fantastic job – it was a new role that I could shape to what I wanted it to be – but I also made some friends for life who, to this day, I still go on holiday with and count amongst my best friends. I

am incredibly lucky as I had a job I loved, a job I could make my own and a bunch of friends.

A couple of years into this post and I was starting to get itchy feet and thinking about developing. I'd been doing a lot of Reporter training on induction and helping the Practice Reporters with training, so I was spending a lot of time helping Reporters and talking to them. This led me to wanting to become a Reporter and so, in 2005 I decided to study law to put me on the path towards that. I had my mortgage by this time so I had to continue to work so I studied my LLB part-time with the University of Strathclyde. The support from my colleagues and line manager was invaluable in encouraging me in applying to study the LLB and supporting me to attend the classes at night. I picked classes relevant to being a Reporter and a solicitor so that I had a career to fall back on if I decided I didn't want to be a Reporter. I'll never become a solicitor though, that job just isn't for me.

“You can always follow another path if you don't like the one you're on; you can keep learning and do new qualifications. It might take time and it most definitely will be hard work and you'll have to juggle, but my qualifications and career path shows that it is possible to pursue a career that, at first glance, may seem unattainable.”

About a couple of years into my LLB (which I did over five years) a temporary Reporter post was advertised in West Lothian. Although I was only mid-way through my LLB, I applied and was offered the post. My new line manager and Reporter Manager were both incredibly supportive and was allowed to plan my leave and study days around exams because I wasn't going to quit my LLB – when I start something, I finish it! I became a Reporter in 2008 which was a baptism of fire as this was right at the height of the highest referrals that SCRA had ever seen. I knew that the best way to learn how to do a job was by doing as much of it as I could, so as soon as I was able, I started doing court work. My first proof was an offence referral and involved vulnerable witnesses. My line manager was really supportive and I had the support from a more experienced colleague. Even though it was a nerve wracking experience, this support gave me the confidence to do this proof and court work.

“It's okay to do things outwith your comfort zone – confidence comes with experience. It's hard and a learning curve but you'll reap the rewards and it's way better than learning from a book or observing someone else.”

I've always had very supportive friends, colleagues and line managers and always found support in SCRA senior management too. My family have always been very supportive and have supported me to achieve my career goals. To get this support you need to share your career goals with the people you work with and ask them what your options are for progression. It's these conversations that have encouraged me – alongside my sheer bloody-mindedness! You also need to take on extra responsibility now and then; whilst I was a Reporter I volunteered to do training of Panel Members in my own time in evenings or weekends and I also took the lead on training for social workers about the role of the Reporter and decision-making. I also took on the role of UNISON representative in 2009 which means I sat in on Locality Management Team meetings and I took advantage of any opportunities which this afforded me and this also meant I became really familiar with all the HR policies. I'm still to this day a UNISON representative and I've been treasurer of UNISON SCRA Branch for about seven years now.



I have always worked full time in SCRA, I did my law degree part time in the evening and weekends so that I could work full time. After a few years as a Reporter and after completing my LLB, the organisation had a bit of change in terms of operational set up and the Senior Practitioner role was created. I love supporting people, complex cases, the legal side of the role and delivering training, this was a role that really interested me. I was unsuccessful when I applied the first time for a Senior Practitioner post and I discussed the feedback from my interview with my line manager, to discuss opportunities for my personal development to have a better chance the next time an post become available. A Senior Practitioner role then become available in Central Locality in 2017 and I was delighted when I was offered the post.

While I was considering applying for the Senior Practitioner post I also wanted to consider longer term options and eventually applying for an LRM post. In 2013, following discussion my line manager, I undertook the Diploma in Public Sector Leadership.

“Supervision is very important in progression – it’s there for you to help you develop in your role so use it. My line managers have all been very supportive and helpful when I’ve used supervision to highlight opportunities I’d like to explore. As much as your line manager can suggest an opportunity, it really is up to you to seek them out and explore what you can do to get there.”

After a few years I applied for a job as LRM, but was unsuccessful. I asked for feedback on my application and interview and discussed my limitations and gaps with my line manager and together we identified areas that I needed to develop so that next time an LRM post came up I’d meet all the essential competencies. So I spent a bit of time finding ways to fill the areas I was lacking in by representing my manager at internal and external partnership groups to gain strategic leadership and networking experience. A while later my LRM retired and a part-time LRM post was advertised and I successfully applied and I was a part-time LRM and a part-time Senior Practitioner. I loved this as it was the best of both worlds – management and staying involved with the actual day to day work – but it was very difficult to differentiate my time from one role to the next so it became very blurred.

In November 2019, I moved to a full time LRM post in South East. I hadn’t been in the role long when COVID-19 happened and it’s certainly been quite the introduction to being a full-time LRM and a whole new team of people and managing people during this time has been quite difficult as it’s been an incredibly challenging time for staff. I enjoy what I’m doing, but it’s difficult at the moment and I do miss the operational involvement, although I do try to do court work when I can. At the moment, COVID-19 has stalled all thoughts of progression for the time being, but when the time comes and there’s less stress and pressure I’ll explore any opportunities that come my way.

“If you want to progress you have to be resilient to knock backs. You also have to use the policies and processes that exist to help you progress. I’ve spoken about the value of supervision. There’s also the Flexible Working Policy to help you if you need to study outwith work. You need to use these to the advantage of your career, they’re not just there for people with caring responsibilities.”

