# Real-life story - Mike Roddham

Mike's career has taken him from being his school's librarian to heading up a library and knowledge service which helps frontline NHS staff make life-saving decisions.

## Mike Roddham

### Head of Library and Knowledge Services

**Employer or university**
> Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

**Salary range**
> £40k-£50k

nhs librarian

The best bit? Definitely seeing how we have helped improved patient care.

> ## How I got into the role
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I was my school's librarian, mainly as a way to avoid PE, but it also gave me a good grounding. I actually wanted to be a stage manager but a discussion with a friend's father, an ex-actor, put me off so I decided to concentrate on becoming a librarian. If I am honest, I didn't think it looked particularly challenging but as I later found out, I couldn't have been more wrong.

I didn't do as well with my A-levels as I had hoped so I spent 2 years as a trainee with Suffolk County Libraries and they let me work in every department including lending, music & drama, reference and mobile. I found I enjoyed the investigative and customer care aspects of the role.

I retook A-levels and studied librarianship at Leeds Polytechnic. Finding a library job in the early 1980s wasn't easy but after a temporary post with Doncaster Institute of Higher Education, I applied to be nursing librarian at Ipswich Hospital's school of nursing. I was surprised to find how much I enjoyed it!

It was just me and two assistants and I was my own boss. I spent six years there, building the service – particularly for trained nurses – but felt it was time to move on. I was offered a District Librarian post in West Sussex, in one of the most-organised NHS library regions in the country. I've been here ever since. I could have got another job but I still enjoy the work the vast majority of the time. No two days are ever the same.

## What I do

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I am really lucky as I am my own boss but I don't want to become deskbound. I want my service to operate like an architects' practice where everyone has a caseload. For example, I take the lead on services for mental health staff. I design library services around their needs which means close and regular engagement. I will also answer their enquiries myself. Before that, I provided a pilot clinical librarian service to a neonatal [1] unit. This meant working on the ward, with nurses, doctors and other healthcare professionals, attending rounds and handovers.

This traditional library work fits around my main role as head of service, where I am responsible for budgeting, strategy and service development. I manage the team of librarians while my deputy manages the support staff in the library. I'm really proud of the service we run. We have a librarian looking after each major area of the local health economy – acute, mental health, community, primary care [2], commissioning and, public health. Last year, we answered over 750 enquiries and provided over 10,000 research offprints.

## The best bits and challenges

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The best bit? Definitely seeing how we have helped improved patient care. It is also great when health professionals realise how much we can help their professional practice.

One of the biggest challenge for librarians is the people's perception of what we do. Most views are formed their experience of public or academic libraries.  This makes it hard for us so a lot of our work goes into changing these perceptions so people know what we offer and how we can help them. My wife says I should describe myself as a knowledge specialist, as it more accurately represents what I do.

## Career plans and top tips for others

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Design your library service around what the customer wants, not around library 'custom and practice.'  For example, it may be more important to have a knowledge specialist embedded with healthcare professionals than to maintain a library. Doing a Masters in Librarianship gave me the confidence to follow through with my my own ideas, even in the face of disagreement from other librarians.

Getting involved with professional groups is also a great way to broaden your experience and professional horizons. I was regularly involved in the groups through our professional body – the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals.

## Life outside work

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I was involved in amateur dramatics for many years.   Being able to project confidence and capability (when inwardly you are quaking with nerves) is a very useful skill! I also like strategy games and I think they have helped me develop the service locally. Service changes in health often take several years to plan and implement.

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