

"Apart from anything else, I really love working in the NHS, which I believe in wholeheartedly."

Jo was looking to switch careers so she started working in a school library and is now a knowledge specialist at NHS England.

Jo McCrossan

Knowledge specialist

Employer or university

NHS England

Salary range

£30k-£40k

NHS Knowledge specialist, Jo McCrossan

How I got into the role

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I speak German and Russian, and worked as a translator and proof-reader for a few years until the pressure to meet ever-changing demands became too much for me. I didn't know what to expect, but liked the idea of working in a library while I thought about my next step.

I got a job as an assistant in a secondary school library and moved from there to be a library assistant at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust. I completed a master's degree in library and information services management while I was there.

I wanted to move into a more research-based role and spend more time flexing my information retrieval skills. NHS England was recruiting for knowledge specialists, and I

applied even though I felt like I wasn't experienced enough. To my intense surprise, I got the job, and here I am!

What I do

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I've usually got at least three literature searches or evidence briefs on the go, and I produce two monthly current awareness bulletins. But I never know when I could be asked to facilitate an after-action review, plan and deliver an online training session, or track down a journal article that's nowhere to be found. It's genuinely very varied.

The best bits and challenges

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'Knowledge management' as a concept isn't at all self-explanatory, so our colleagues don't always realise the extent of what we're able to do to support them. This means that we spend a lot of time reaching out to people and promoting our services. It's always satisfying to see how surprised or relieved someone is when they realise that help is available!

Apart from anything else, I really love working in the NHS, which I believe in wholeheartedly. I'm the most squeamish person you will ever meet - as a library assistant I couldn't even look at the books about wound care, pressure ulcers, or the diabetic foot! So, I love the fact that the work I do now supports healthcare professionals and has an impact on patient care.

Life outside work

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My mental health is frequently unreliable, and I manage it by doing nice things. My primary extracurricular activities are modern calligraphy, brush lettering, and illustration,

and I sometimes sell prints of my designs online. I also really love musical theatre, tennis, houseplants, The West Wing, and yoga, and I read a lot.

This all keeps my brain reasonably quiet, and probably explains why I wanted a busy, varied job to go with it.

Career plans and top tips for others

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After a couple of years off studying, I'm now thinking about becoming a Chartered Knowledge Manager through CILIP's Professional Registration process.

If you're the kind of person who's always looking random things up online for fun and telling people about them, you'll love this job. You need to be patient and persistent, and have an instinct for making yourself useful. It also helps if you can communicate well verbally and in writing, appreciate the importance of verifying information and citing your sources, and enjoy wrangling technology.

There are two morals to my story:

- 1) you can change career, and the world will not end
- 2) imposter syndrome will convince you that you're not qualified to do things you're absolutely capable of; please ignore it as much as you can.

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