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Llinos Hobson gained her MSc in Language Pathology at Newcastle University 1994 and went on to work as a **speech and language therapist** in community clinics and in mainstream and specialist schools. Having taken a career break to raise a family, she found that returning to speech and language therapy (SLT) was not as easy as she had hoped.

“I couldn’t find a suitable SLT post that fitted with my other commitments, so I did various roles including being self-employed, paid and voluntary work. However, when I found myself caring for a family member and saw the impressive care they received during long stays in hospital, I was reminded what a huge difference the NHS makes in people’s lives. I wanted to be a part of it again.

I got a post as a speech and language therapy assistant at Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust and the SLT managers told me about the return to practice (RtP) programme for allied health professionals. I contacted the return to work lead, discussed it with my line manager and together with the head of SLT, we agreed a plan.

I needed to do 60 days of RtP study and experience. Working as a Band 4 SLT practitioner was very valuable as a first step and, in addition, I did in-house training with specialist colleagues, shadowing, case discussions colleagues, and private study which included reading, checking latest research, searching relevant websites and personal reflection.

It is difficult to compare speech and language therapy now with when I first started practicing but the field of dysphagia has certainly grown significantly and now forms the main part of the work an SLT does in an acute hospital setting, rather than communication. I also found that resources, medical information and research papers are now much more easily accessible.

Allied health professionals need to have a varied set of skills; being analytical, using detail and the whole picture to work out the problems and solutions, caring about patients and their families, good communications skills, being non-judgemental, being pragmatic, and having a good sense of humour. Being an SLT is hugely rewarding; communicating, eating and drinking are fundamental needs and I am very driven to help people regain these skills, or find ways to adapt.

I also really enjoy working as a multidisciplinary team – it’s one of the best parts of the job. I work closely with OT’s, physios and therapy assistants, pooling information and expertise together to obtain a more holistic picture of what is going on for a patient with complex needs and finding ways to help them overcome their difficulties.

If you are thinking about RtP, it’s good to plan how you will balance your work placement and home study with your other commitments. You will need to be diligent and pro-active about what you choose to study in order to be fully updated. Your previous life experience and working outside the NHS all develop world knowledge and a range of transferrable skills, so take time to reflect on what you bring back to the job. This is especially useful when you first return if you are ever feeling overwhelmed with what you have yet to learn.

I have fulfilled a range of different roles before returning to practice and done a lot of what I wanted to do, so I can now settle and re-focus on being an SLT for the next phase in my life. The RtP programme has been a great opportunity for me to do this in manageable steps.”

Are you
ready to
return?