Why did you decide to work in HR?

The simple answer is I didn’t especially want to work in HR, I didn’t even know what HR was. Like a lot of people I fell into HR and I happened to be working for a small publishers that was just growing and growing, and I tended to take on any additional responsibilities, so I fell into HR.

But it’s a pretty good place to be really because I think people don’t always understand what HR is about, yes it’s a strategic function but it also has quite a contrast in its expectations, so you have to be a brilliant administrator, you also have to be a psychologist, you have to have a real interest in legal detail, so there’s never a dull moment really.

What changes have you witnessed in the move from personnel to HR?

I think I’ve witnessed the HR team, the biggest transformation has been in the HR team, whereas the HR team when they were Personnel and delivered a Personnel function, were very much routed in the operational day-to-day things, and I think that was as it should be because that was what the business expected from them.

But Personnel has its roots in the welfare function, after the war when the ladies went into the factories Personnel sprang up to basically look after everyone and make sure everyone was ok, similar to what the army had at the time.

What’s happened since is that HR, or Human Resource Management as it’s termed, has become a much more strategic function and a management function, and it’s about planning and strategy and trying to help the business achieve what it wants to in the future. And I think that’s been the most exciting part of it, but that’s also meant that the Personnel staff have had to really, you know, adapt the way they interact with the business and they’ve become much more part of the management teams. They need to know what the business is doing in order to support them.

So the way I would describe it is that the business needs to make the HR team more commercially aware, and the HR team need to make the business more HR savvy, and that way it’s... that I would say would be the biggest change in the evolution from Personnel to HR.

What are the challenges faced in recruitment at the moment?

It’s an odd time at the moment because I think we’ve just come through a phase where we’ve had lots of graduates and people competing for... lots of graduates, but the trouble is
now with the recession and with the way the labour market is going you’ve got too many graduates for the job, so what you’re looking for more often is experience and that’s really difficult for the graduates, so, you know, I think in terms of what our particular offering is with graduates, we do want to review that because I think there’s a huge opportunity at the moment to maybe attract the sorts of graduates that we haven’t really been able to.

**How do you encourage diversity in the marketplace?**

It’s difficult because for Macmillan, partly it’s geographical, so we have a local labour market, you just get who applies. I think for Nature Publishing Group which is an international business it’s much easier to have diversity because people come from everywhere, it’s very much about their scientific specialism, but unfortunately the world isn’t actually working in our favour at the moment with regards to immigration, so as much as we might want to have more diversity we have to be very careful about how we manage that because immigration status and... is getting much more problematic.

**What advice would you give to students who want to work in HR in the future?**

I think what I... the advice that I would give to someone is to sort of on the one hand do a bit of what I did, so if you’re in a standalone role in a smaller company your experience tends to be much broader because you have to do everything and you have to become quite resourceful. I would also say the benefits of going to a really big company, either the public sector or the consulting firms, is that where you have... where you have lot of people you usually have the best administration systems because you have to, and that’s sometimes what the much smaller companies would lack. It only becomes an issue when you’ve got volume to have to deal with, and that might be volume recruitment, volume payroll, volume anything, so I think that would give a really good spectrum of experience to their focus if they tried that.