

Sally Thomson

Administrative Assistant, Faculty of Music

Interviewed by Marie Synakewicz

In the administrative offices of the Faculty of Music part-time hours are not unusual. Sally works in a team of secretaries who are all working flexibly, each in their own way. While some of her colleagues work 4 days a week, Sally works shorter days and term time only.

Initially, she and somebody else were sent to Music by the Temporary Employment Service (TES) of the University to cover for a secretary who had fallen ill. The responsibilities of that position had grown so much over the previous years that Music re-evaluated and decided to split it into 1 and ½ positions. In that particular capacity, Sally worked 4 hours a day and was employed for one term only. Fortunately, the Faculty was able to retain her after her TES contract ended. Since then her duties have changed quite a lot. Apart from the normal secretary's jobs, she now draws up the course guides for undergraduate teaching every year, manages the termly timetables and takes care of the payment of teaching staff.

Before she had her daughter, Sally worked for the government as a civil servant for 18 years. After her maternity leave she had the option to return on a part-time basis. However, she felt that she would not have been able to do her responsibilities justice on such an arrangement. Yet, going back full-time would have been in conflict with her family life at the time. Therefore, when early voluntary redundancy was offered, she took the opportunity to look for employment elsewhere – a decision she never regretted. Sally works reduced hours during term with one additional week either side of it. This arrangement suits Sally very well as she can drop off her daughter at school and pick her up in the early afternoon. Most of the University vacations coincide with her daughter's school holidays and it helps immensely that Sally is off during these times because they do not have to worry about holiday play-schemes for example. During half-term, when she has to work, her partner and her mother take over childcare.

Sally really appreciates the opportunities Music has given her in terms of flexibility. Although they had an established flexible working policy in the Civil Service, she thinks that she would not have had the same freedom primarily due to how the work was organised. The Music Faculty on the other hand worked around her needs and hence, her responsibilities got adapted to what they are today. Recently, she has increased her time to continue working further into the long vacation than previously – an arrangement that suits both her and the Faculty. Music has seen a steady increase in the number of students enrolled on graduate degrees and hence they are faced with a larger administrative work load in general. Since her daughter's summer holidays do not start until July, Sally can stay on for longer without any qualms.

At the moment, Sally enjoys that she can leave the office once the work is done without having to worry about it at home. Since her husband is working away a lot, she has to be the primary carer of their daughter. Her line manager is aware that Sally is perfectly content with the arrangements right now. However, she also appreciates that there will come a time when Sally would like to work full-time again. "But that," Sally says, "I will review at a later time, when my daughter is older."