

Margaret McPheat



Margaret McPheat is Group Technical Services Director for 2 Sisters Food Group (2sfg)

What are your responsibilities and how many people report to you?

I have five direct reports and a total Group Technical Team of ten.

We provide technical support and governance to our 22 sites in the UK and Ireland in areas of supplier assurance, food integrity, supply chain mapping, hygiene expertise, technical training, KPI tracking and trending, along with coordination of the internal governance programme.

My main responsibilities are around aspects of food safety and compliance. One of the main elements of the role is supplier assurance which includes supply chain mapping for our ingredients, packaging and key technical services.

As a team we ensure that Group governance and compliance is met across all of our sites. Our key stakeholders are varied and include our site teams, our suppliers, our customers and retailers.

Thinking back to school days, did you know what you wanted to become?

I knew that I really enjoyed science and geography so I was a bit undecided when I was at school. I decided that a paramedic degree was for me and would allow me to develop in chemistry, biochemistry and biology, so I took a four-year BSc Dietetics degree at The Queen's College Glasgow (now Glasgow Caledonian University).

During my placement year, at the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, I was given a secondment to the microbiology laboratories. This, along with exposure to food science in practice, changed my career path completely. When I graduated I decided that food science was the path I wanted to follow.

What were/are your main interests, e.g. science in general, food, technology, microbiology, nutrition, something else?

When I was at school my main interests were around chemistry and biology. Then, whilst doing my degree, microbiology became an area that I really enjoyed. This expanded a little later, during my degree, into food science.

What qualifications do you have? GCSEs? A Levels? Degree(s)/other?

At school my 'Highers' were in Biology, Chemistry, Geography and English. I have a BSc in Dietetics, with my final year dissertation in microbiological method comparisons.

Later in my career I completed the Oxford School of Coaching and Mentoring Diploma in Mentoring – an area that I feel strongly about. This has been invaluable on a personal level and I have been lucky enough to

have been involved in Technical Graduate recruitment in several businesses, which has been extremely fulfilling.

In rough outline, what was your job pathway – companies and job titles, plus anything of particular note, e.g. level of responsibility, exposure to any particular developments/issues?

On completing my degree I joined Northern Foods as a graduate and ran a microbiology lab on a Ready To Eat (RTE)/chilled site. Within Northern Foods I had several roles over 10 years, including Supplier Auditor, Process Technologist, and Site Technical Manager.

Two roles helped me immensely with my understanding of food technology – as a Supplier Auditor, I audited many varied food processes over a relatively short period of time, which was hugely helpful. Then I was seconded to a new factory commissioning project; this expanded my process and systems knowledge – again very beneficial in order to gain knowledge and experience.

From Northern Foods I held several Site Technical roles, spending five years with RHM as a Technical Executive in Ready To Cook chilled food manufacturing sites.

After leaving RHM I spent 14 years with Greencore in several roles as a Divisional Technical Executive looking after several RTE sites and then as Group Technical Services Director, which was similar to my current role.

What were your aspirations when starting your career and what are they now?

I think I was pretty unclear at the beginning of my career and was unsure what I could 'use' science for. Finding the food industry, and my graduate role within Northern Foods, certainly helped me decide that this was the career for me. It's certainly challenging and no two days are the same – that's what I enjoy most.

Now I enjoy working within teams who strive to do the best job possible. It's good to be part of that evolution and to become as good as you can possibly be as a team – it's extremely rewarding (and challenging at times!).

What would you say to encourage them further? What is the best bit?

The best bit is easy – it's challenging, fast paced and can be extremely rewarding (and you get to work with some of the best people).

And to encourage people? Fact find. Find out what's out there. Don't be afraid to change track if it's the right thing to do. I started out to be a dietitian and decided that food science and microbiology were more interesting to me. I have never looked back and I am glad I found out my options and made that decision.