**SPECIAL REPORT**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Turn values into action**

Our role is to make it easier for employers that are working hard to improve staff experience, says NHS Employers’ Caroline Waterfield

Over the past 18 months there has been a lot of focus on values – what we do with them and are we recruiting for them?

When NHS Employers started its work programme last year I wanted to make sure we showcased the great work that employers have been doing, as well as provide opportunities to build expertise and share learning.

We have had an overwhelming response, with HR and organisational development leads from across the country asking to be involved.

A group of dedicated, passionate people have helped us to shape the work programme. Through our network of “partners” and workshops we have been able to provide access to information, ideas and shared learning.

From the work we’ve done at NHS Employers we know that it’s not enough to just have values and know about them.

We use five small words that form the core of how we work and how we behave with each other: assuring, bold, leading, expert and respect.

We created a huge amount of momentum and connection to our values, but to translate the engagement into actual culture change we also needed to incorporate our values into our systems and processes.

The job of articulating how a manager could make decisions about shortlisting, assessment and selection using our values became just as important as creating the initial buy-in.

Our programme for employers has a focus on embedding values into recruitment processes but the principles can just as easily be applied to appraisal.

Recruitment seemed a sensible place to start – across the NHS we spend vast amounts of time advertising, shortlisting and going through assessment and selection processes. This wasn’t about starting with a blank sheet of paper but enhancing what already existed and using an evidence base to steer our activity.

We know as a national organisation that we can’t do the work for people.

But I hope that by developing the network, generating ideas, sharing the evidence base, producing resources and providing training on values based interviewing, we are able to make it easier for the many employers who are working hard to improve staff experience by using their values to ultimately improve the experience for patients.

Singling out a few case studies from the many we have for this special report (see page 18) was really difficult and you can find more on the NHS Employers website. If you want to be involved in the network, please get in touch.  ● Caroline Waterfield is assistant director of employment services at NHS Employers. Follow her at @NHSE_Caroline. For more information see nhsemployers.org/recruitingforvalues

**WORKFORCE**

**GOING THE EXTRA MILE**

By using values based recruitment, NHS organisations can create a workforce that really wants to do the best for patients, as Ingrid Torjesen finds out

Values based recruitment is about ensuring that the NHS hires people whose personal values align with those of the NHS constitution and the organisation they apply to work for. It is about enhancing existing recruitment processes that already ensure the NHS recruits candidates with the right skills and aptitude.

Some organisations have been using values based recruitment for several years, but its popularity has increased dramatically since the publication of the Francis report on Mid Staffordshire Foundation Trust. The report highlighted the importance of the NHS employing staff who not only have the right qualifications and experience, but also values that align with those of the service, such as compassion and respect.

Lydia Larcum, programme manager for the values based recruitment project at NHS Employers, says that staff employed using this approach are happier and more engaged, which benefits employers, employees and patients.

“Organisations have been able to demonstrate a significant reduction in staff turnover; they’ve seen reduced sickness absence levels and increased job satisfaction,” she says.

“We know that this has real benefits. A lot of it is common sense. If we go to work and we are happier and feel as though we fit within our organisation, we are going to be more productive. We are going to want to be there and go the extra mile. That’s what it’s about.”

Implementing values based recruitment is a priority programme for Health Education England (HEE). The organisation is due to launch a national values based recruitment framework and a toolbox of evidence based resources next month. The idea is for universities and employers to embed these values into their recruitment processes.

The HEE programme incorporates three elements:  ● recruiting for values in higher education institutions when selecting students for all new NHS funded training posts by March 2015;  ● recruiting for values when NHS organisations employ staff, an initiative that is being carried out in partnership with NHS Employers; and  ● providing the evidence base for values based recruitment.
While the NHS constitution’s values are at the heart of the NHS, each organisation will have its own unique set of values, in a language that resonates with its staff, patients and service users. NHS Employers and Health Education England have created a tool that enables organisations to easily map their values to those within the NHS constitution.

When designing bespoke tools for recruiting staff to specific posts, it is helpful for organisations to conduct a role analysis and develop a framework, outlining the behaviours they would expect to see if a person had the desired values, and those that they would not expect to see.

Exploring whether a candidate’s personal values align with those of the NHS organisation requires a different approach to assessing their knowledge, qualifications or experience.

One recognised and evidence based way of doing this is to use a structured values based interview. This is similar to a traditional interview, but the questions are designed with a set of behavioural indicators. “You’re asking candidates to provide examples of behaviour that they have previously demonstrated, or to explain how they would respond to a particular situation,” Ms Larcum explains.

Values cannot be assessed with superficial questions asked in a rushed manner, she adds, “to pull out relevant examples and behaviours, a probing or conversational style of questioning and listening is needed, so that it pushes into the candidate’s rationale and understanding.”

Employers can also put candidates through situational judgement tests or use assessment centres. Situational judgement tests can be written, online or video based. These present the candidate with a scenario followed by a number of possible responses, from which he or she has to select the most appropriate. Assessment or selection centres can include tasks where the candidate is asked to participate in a role-play scenario, so that interaction and responses can be observed and scored by a trained observer.

“While it would be wonderful to have one assessment or approach that could test for all types of values, the evidence suggests that a more tailored approach is required,” says Nicki Latham, chief operating officer of Health Education England. She considers it a high priority that values based recruitment methods are evidence based and can be shared across higher education institutions and employers through HEE’s values based recruitment framework.

One approach that is commonly used by universities is the personal statement, but the evidence suggests that this lacks the validity in assessing for values that an interview would more effectively test. “What we’re doing now is investing some money to train people in values based interviewing, not only in universities but also in trusts,” Ms Latham says. “We’re developing a training package in order to do this.”

The people who we are funding the training now will still be working in the NHS in 2050 so this is an important investment, Ms Latham points out. “We don’t know what the actual future workforce will look like, but we do know the values around the NHS will still be absolutely clear – that we will need to work with respect, dignity and compassion. That will never change.”

Ms Larcum emphasises that the HEE values based recruitment programme should mark the start of a values based employment journey (see diagram, left). “We can’t bring people into an organisation with a set of values that we are looking for, and that they expect the organisation to have, if the other parts of the employment life cycle don’t marry up. You’d want the values to flow through the induction, training, development, appraisal and all employment processes.”

“It is by living and working with the values that you achieve staff engagement as well as positive patient experience and care,” she says.
Three different types of NHS organisations show how using values based recruitment and tailored interviews can provide high quality candidates who want to be part of their team.

**NORTH EAST AMBULANCE SERVICE**

This summer North East Ambulance Service Foundation Trust received a bronze award in the UK National Contract Centre Awards in recognition of its work recruiting emergency call handlers.

The trust has standardised recruitment assessments across the organisation so that five core values form the basis of their recruitment: committed, professional and accountable; working together; delivering consistently; shaping the future; and showing we care. The recruitment team recruit staff for 999 and 111 call centres and the Patient Transport Service, as well as emergency care and administrative and support roles.

As part of the recruitment process for 999 and 111 call operators a standard set of materials and assessments have been developed, which are rotated so candidates who reapply do not see the same set of questions or role plays. These assessments were developed based on feedback from contact centre managers on the specific behaviours that make a good emergency call handler. The most important behaviours required are empathy, the ability to question appropriately, to control the call, to listen and interpret responses correctly. Given the nature of the role it is also essential for the call handler to be able to work quickly and accurately between two screens in order to hit response times.

Neil Gatenby, recruitment business partner at North East Ambulance Service Foundation Trust, says: “We have had instances where people had great behaviours but they weren’t able to use the system properly. You do get some people who have got a great deal of life experience and fantastic behaviours but might find the technical side of things more challenging.”

Shortlisted candidates have to pass a remote situational judgement test, where they are presented with various scenarios and potential outcomes. Those that pass this are then invited in for an online assessment, which examines their ability to accurately input information quickly and correctly first time, to move between multiple screens and to make informed judgements based on policy and procedure guidance to ensure that they would not deviate from established procedures.

Following this test, the candidate then has a personality assessment, which assesses if they are “fit for the role”. Part of this involves receiving computer generated calls.

The first call could potentially be from a suicidal person or somebody trying to resuscitate their partner. “Some applicants may not fully understand the role and its challenges. It’s really important to make sure that the role is for them, because it is vital we recruit the right candidates,” Mr Gatenby says.

For those that pass this, there is one more day of assessment, in which candidates are interviewed by the contact centre management team, shown a video on what it’s like to work at the contact centre, and have a behavioural role-play and interview. In the role-play they are faced with a difficult patient and have to try and use appropriate questions to get the best resolution for that person. This assesses their ability to openly probe and treat the patient with empathy and dignity.

Mr Gatenby admits that it’s a long process but is clear about why it has to be so. “We have to be confident that the candidates aren’t putting themselves in a situation that they find too challenging, personally and emotionally, that the role is right for them and that we are getting the best possible person for the job, because everything that we do is about making sure that the patient gets the best possible care.”

**NORTHUMBRIA HEALTHCARE FOUNDATION TRUST**

Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust, which employs around 9,000 staff, is implementing values based interviews across the trust for the recruitment of all types of staff and at all levels. Since the beginning of this year, around 450 people working in clinical, managerial and non-managerial areas across the trust have been trained in how to conduct them.

Values based interviewing is...
Northumbria Healthcare has trained 450 people in how to conduct values based interviews

For example, in order to demonstrate that they put patients first, a candidate will be asked to give an example of when they had shown compassion or sensitivity towards another person in the past. “Because it’s the best predictor of what they will do in future,” she adds.

The interviewer will have a list of aligned and non-aligned behaviours and they will rate the candidate on each so that an overall score for each question can be calculated. To score well on putting patients first, candidates have to show a willingness to listen; a willingness to do all that they could to act on the patient’s wishes; they made an effort to ensure that the patient was emotionally and physically comfortable; and that they had verified that the patient was happy with what they were doing.

Banks of specific questions have been developed using this approach for different types of staff, and managers are also able to add their own questions.

“You can’t ask a lot of questions about values and not ask candidates about how they can technically do the job,” Ms Cook says. “Managers also include questions which relate to the technical ability of the person to do the job.”

NHS BLOOD AND TRANSPLANT

Earlier this year, the relaunch of the NHS Jobs website, with its added functionality, provided NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) with the ideal opportunity to include competency based questions on their application forms.

For each job that was advertised NHSBT included a short summary of the job, information about the organisation and any experience or specific knowledge necessary. To be able to find the right person for the position and the organisation, it also included information on how the role fitted into the organisational structure, and a person specification incorporating the values and behaviours required.

The values and behaviours were also used to develop questions for the NHS Jobs site application form, which enabled NHSBT to rate the candidates against pre-set criteria based on the answers provided.

Examples of questions include: “please give examples of when you feel that you have demonstrated good customer care skills” and “please give examples of where you feel that you have acted on feedback to improve your own performance or change your behaviour”.

Gill Travis, head of recruitment and transactional services at NHS Blood and Transplant says: “We can now judge applicants on the quality of the answers that they give, whereas before it was very much a tick box exercise.”

One of the first posts that the new application form was used to recruit for was a planning assistant (band 3), which is an administration role.

“It proved very successful,” Ms Travis said. A total of 87 people started filling out the application form, and 34 people completed it. Eight of the non-completed applications were blocked because candidates did not hold essential qualifications.

Of the 34 people who completed the form, 23 (68 per cent) were suitable for shortlisting and 15 were invited to interview. Two people did not attend, but of the 13 who did, only one person was considered not suitable for the post and seven people were offered roles.

Feedback from the managers was that shortlisting was much easier and that the quality of the applicants was fantastic.

“The beauty of this is that it’s easy for the managers, it incorporates our values throughout the process and enables us to obtain a higher proportion of good quality applicants – improving our recruitment effectiveness without increasing resources for application management,” Ms Travis says.

“It’s not just that we are asking some values based questions at interview. It is actually incorporating it from a very early stage and in all of our documentation that is given to candidates so they can clearly see what our values and expectations are.”

centred around identifying staff who exhibit the trust’s core values. Northumbria has five: patients first; safe and high quality care; responsibility and accountability; everybody’s contribution counts; and respect.

Joanna Cook, one of the two organisational psychologists in organisational development at Northumbria, explains: “One of the strategic objectives of the trust is to embed the values in everything we do, and recruitment is just one part of that. All of our recruitment and HR processes are reflecting that objective.”

“Anyone coming to work for Northumbria will see references to the values in the job advertisements and will be interviewed against them,” she says. They will then be assessed against the values at the end of their probationary period and at subsequent appraisals.

The organisational psychologists developed the values based interview approach in a very structured way. “We tried very hard to identify the behavioural competencies that made up each value so we could base questions around it,” Ms Cook says.

Posters around trust buildings can help to remind staff of its values