Sheffield Teaching Hospitals Partnership working with Jobcentre Plus to recruit locally

The organisation

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals (STH) is one of the biggest and busiest foundation trusts in England. The trust employs more than 16,000 employees and is home to one of the three major trauma centres across Yorkshire and Humber. The trust aims to be recognised as the best provider of healthcare, clinical research and education in the UK, and a strong contributor to the aspiration of Sheffield to be a vibrant and healthy city.

Background/The challenge

In 2016, the STH human resources team and the local Job Centre Plus (JCP) began working in close partnership to recruit into the trust’s administrative and clerical posts from the local community. JCP were keen to improve access to career opportunities within the NHS, so the trust and JCP worked closely together to establish a programme of support for large-scale recruitment to its admin and clerical posts. Their shared aims were:

- to reduce the number of applications being rejected at shortlisting stages
- to improve the quality of applications to admin/clerical posts and the rates of success at assessment/interview
- to support the trust’s mission to improve representation of their local community in their workforce and to support the local community they serve.

STH recognised its role as both a large employer in the local area, a public-sector employer with a duty around equality, and its responsibility as an NHS organisation to represent the community it serves. The team at STH is committed to improving their support and engagement with the local community, and this has been supported at a senior level and throughout the trust.

The process

The STH human resources team and JCP initially held discussions in early 2016 to establish how they could support one another’s current and upcoming priorities.
Initially, it was crucial to both organisations that there would be a clear pathway for JCP applicants to progress through. STH recognised that not all candidates JCP put forward would be familiar with the NHS Jobs format, and as such they were in danger of getting lost in the application process. In light of this, a job advert was developed that any public applicant could use, and a second advert was created especially for JCP customers. In practice, this means that around half of the places available in the shortlisting stage are held for JCP applicants.

Jennifer, relationship manager at JCP, quickly decided that to best support JCP customers in their application, it would be valuable for her to learn about the process first-hand. To do this, she went through a dummy application process; filling in the application form and attending the assessment centre day. Attending the assessment day was crucial to her planning the support sessions, as she explained “we couldn’t deliver what we deliver unless we had been through that, you’ve got to make it right”. Jennifer was then able to design more interactive sessions than had been run previously, which included giving candidates the chance to have practice interviews and work through group activities in preparation for the assessment centre.

Initially, the JCP team shortlisted those who applied via the internal JCP application route. Following success at shortlisting, candidates are then offered two sessions run by JCP. The first session is a one-to-one which provides guidance on completing the application form and covers the personal statement, the second session is preparation for the assessment centre. This includes advising on documentation, supporting preparation for interview questions, and helping them to learn more about the trust. Although those who are not shortlisted cannot attend the specific sessions, they are still able to re-apply for the role via the public advert.

JCP can also support unsuccessful candidates in their public application. For example, some candidates may not be shortlisted initially due to lack of work experience, but then can be supported by JCP to move into work experience or sector based work placements. By giving these candidates this initial support, they are then able to successfully apply for a role once they have obtained an employment reference.

Joint working between the trust and its local JCP has been crucial to improving recruitment to the trust’s admin and clerical roles at band 2. The trust ensures that it can arrange its recruitment into a timeframe which is manageable for JCP colleagues to fit into their schedule of work.

**Challenges**

- **Challenge:** JCP and the trust faced pushback internally, as some staff were concerned that applicants from the JCP cohorts would have an unfair advantage over public candidates.

- **Solution 1:** Jennifer ensures that integrity is upheld in the advice sessions run at JCP, where she asks candidates who may have previously been
involved in NHS recruitment to not share specific details such as the content of interview questions.

➤ Solution 2: The STH human resources team explain that the applicants from JCP will often have faced disadvantage such as long-term unemployment or lack of access to work experience. They explain that the support offered through JCP overcomes previous disadvantage, and clarify that the posts are open to the general public and candidates outside of the JCP cohort.

➤ Challenge: JCP had previously supported recruitment for other types of recruitment across the trust, but this had been challenging as JCP staff were not able to gain access to the recruitment process. This meant that they were not able to provide enough detail to candidates on the process.

➤ Solution: JCP have now trialed the recruitment process for the admin and clerical roles in detail to gain an in-depth understanding of the process.

Successes

The trust has become more aware of the need to robustly evaluate their data on the progress of the programme. The recruitment and workforce information teams at STH now robustly collects data to monitor the outcomes of the programme. They have now collected the following stats:

➤ To date, the partnership has seen 51 candidates from the JCP cohort move into permanent or temporary employment within the trust.

➤ The candidates who are accessed through partnering with JCP are often found to provide more appropriate and correct documentation. They are also on average around 10 per cent more likely to be successful at assessment, 10 per cent more likely to be shortlisted and 11 per cent less likely to be rejected at the final stages, compared to those who have not received support from JCP.

➤ To date, only six candidates accessed via JCP have dropped out of the process prior to the assessment day.

➤ The partnership has reduced the time that the trust needs to spend on recruitment administration, and has resulted in the trust receiving applications from candidates who are more prepared, more knowledgeable and more committed to working in the NHS.

➤ Many of the candidates who are not successful at the first assessment they attend, are supported by JCP to develop their application so they can progress further next time.

Next steps

The trust and JCP have recently established a sector-based work academy (SBWA) for recruitment of domestic workers. This is currently in its second week of running. The SBWA was set up in recognition of the disadvantage those from some groups in the community, such as those in long term unemployment, have
in gaining recent work experience. JCP provides support to the SBWA initially by screening candidates for admission. Each candidate is supported in their application through the SBWA and given an opportunity to have a mock interview. The SBWA then provides three weeks in college, four days in a local domestic training school and then 11 days placement. Candidates finish the SBWA with a Level 1 BTEC qualification in work skills. The trust is keen to be involved and attend the SBWA to ensure they explain fully to the candidates attending details of the role and information about the trust. The SBWA benefits STH as they are involved in shaping the training given through the academy. The latest SBWA cohort has seen 68 per cent of candidates move into employment within the trust and gain their Level 1 BTEC qualification in life skills.

The trust is also planning to develop a wider local engagement and recruitment strategy which will include supporting; disabled people, lone parents and refugees across the local area.

**Top tips**

- Establish each organisation’s priorities, expectations and goals early on so they can be incorporated into the partnership of work.

- Each partner should learn about and stay updated on each other’s work programmes as there could be beneficial cross overs.

- Be prepared to see results over time and not instantly.

**Further information**

For more information please contact Tom Evans, Recruitment Manager, at Tom.Evans@st.nhs.uk

**Contact us**

NHS Employers
2 Brewery Wharf
Kendell Street
Leeds LS10 1JR
Published October 2017
© NHS Employers 2017

www.nhsemployers.org
enquiries@nhsemployers.org
@nhsemployers
NHS Employers
www.youtube.com/nhsemployers