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NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST REDUCING TIME FOR EMPLOYMENT CHECKS BY HALF

The organisation

Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals Foundation Trust (Newcastle Hospitals) is one of the largest NHS trusts in the UK. It provides a range of highly specialised services to two million patients each year, across multiple acute and community sites in Newcastle and Northumberland.

The trust has recently been rated as outstanding by the Care Quality Commission for its high-quality patient-centered care and first class teaching for staff.

Our challenge

In early 2015, it took between 18 to 24 weeks from a job application closing to a successful applicant starting their post (time to hire). As one of the biggest employers in the north east, processing 65,000 job applications every year and employing around 14,500 staff, this threatened the ability to provide safe staffing levels, with the potential to greatly impact on patient care. Delays in the recruitment of nurses, a key shortage occupation, emerged as a particular concern.

Employment checks were identified as a major part of this challenge for a number of reasons:

- employment checks were being completely replicated for existing employees moving within the trust
- applicants revisited the trust post interview with the required documentation, instead of earlier in the process
- candidates often presented the wrong documentation.

The process

The HR recruitment team underwent an internally delivered rapid improvement day - a service improvement tool that engages all levels of teams to assess the recruitment cycle.

The day ran with drop-in sessions for staff to suggest which parts of the recruitment process presented the most problems. Recruitment managers, HR advisors and other stakeholders, fed into a map of the employment checking process to highlight any repetition. This exercise showed that gathering correct documentation for employment checks was one of the key obstacles.

The HR recruitment team, led by the head of staff engagement and working closely with the trust's service improvement team, developed efficiencies for each of the employment checking stages. These measures were put in place to avoid lack of clarity over the process and the documentary evidence they needed to present. The changes include:

- streamline internal documentation and guidance to provide clarity for applicants for what evidence they need to provide and when
- successful applicants to receive their job offer letter within two days of the recruitment decision being made
- applicants to have a pre-employment meeting with an HR administrator to talk through each stage of the process.

The HR recruitment team also reviewed their role and moved to a more forward-facing role to act as the first point of contact for applicants.

A pilot was conducted with a range of staff including matrons, sisters and directors. The new approach streamlined the documentation that formed the recruitment pack, which was shared over a 30-day consultation period. Documents were updated after feedback and recirculated prior to full roll-out. Both the applicant and the manager recruitment packs contain checklists for the type of documents required. The applicant packs also contain a range of induction paperwork to complete as early as possible.

The changes were evaluated against the time to hire and time taken for specific stages of the employment checking process. The trust introduced an engagement platform to analyse how staff are feeling and help drive change and improvement.

Barriers

Proof of address – HR administrators are noticing that candidates are finding it increasingly difficult to provide the correct documentation due to increased use of online bills and banking and applicants living with parents.

The team approached a number of local high street banks and asked them to endorse online statements. They also enlisted the help of the HMRC to generate a letter detailing an individual's national insurance number and address. These changes have led to noticeable improvements in the time it takes for individuals to access this sort of documentation.

References - delays are encountered in the return of references and crucial information is not always provided.

Recruiting managers are now encouraged to make effective use of the NHS Jobs interface, which sends automated emails and reminders to referees as soon as a job has closed. They check reference details and professional contact details at the interview stage.

Disclosure and Barring (DBS) checks – as the trust is reliant on external organisations to carry out the checks, it is often the longest stage in the

recruitment process. Police forces have different turn-around times and major variances can make it difficult to predict timescales.

Now, teams are carrying out a rigorous risk assessments to assess whether, in very specific circumstances, some post holders may be allowed to commence employment before the DBS disclosure certificate is made available. For example, where individuals are working in non-regulated roles and required a standard DBS check. If teams complete the initial identity check as efficiently as possible, the process of requesting DBS clearance can start earlier.

Outcomes

The HR recruitment team had a positive impact on patient care, bringing in a skilled workforce quickly and efficiently, supporting the trust to meet one of their principle core values - putting patients at the heart of everything we do.

In just eight months, the time to hire has more than halved and is now averaging eight to ten weeks. The original 127-step recruitment process has been consolidated into 53 steps, and applicants are experiencing a much more efficient and communication-driven process.

In the first six months, reductions in time to hire meant that the team was able to save 25,000 working days, 16,000 of which were nursing days. Newcastle Hospitals now pride themselves on the efficiency with which they are able to get nurses on the wards.

The trust is now looking for further improvements and is focusing on a team restructure to optimise the delivery and distribution of the employment checks workload post-interview. Feedback continues to be key to improving the recruitment process and newly recruited employees and recruiting managers are asked to complete an internal e-survey on the process.

Speaking on behalf of the team, Ed Hindle head of staff engagement said:

“We don’t plan on letting the culture of service improvement and change drop. The team has been really positive and now proactively embraces change, so we plan to continue rapid improvement events.”

Top tips

- ✓ Take the time to step back and review your processes.
- ✓ Think about your team structure and how best you can utilise the skills of everyone when looking to make big changes.
- ✓ Follow a service improvement methodology to ensure sustainability and don’t be tempted to rush through changes.



Further information

For more details, please contact Edward Hindle, Head of Staff Engagement on 0191 2823704 or Edward.hindle@nuth.nhs.uk.



Contact us

NHS Employers
2 Brewery Wharf
Kendell Street
Leeds LS10 1JR
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www.nhsemployers.org
enquiries@nhsemployers.org

 @nhsemployers

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