

Streamlining recruitment

Reducing the time to hire with factual references

Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust (DCHS) recently looked at ways to improve the recruitment experience for appointing managers and job applicants.

The first of these is factual references and the second is values based recruitment (VBR) methods.

A factual reference is a simple set of fair and accurate questions that are sent to a previous employer to establish a 'statement of employment' for an individual applying to work within another trust.

References can be sent automatically via the electronic staff record (ESR) and reduce turnaround times for receipt of reference for NHS to NHS recruitment.

This is linked to the inter authority transfer (IAT) automated process that removes the manual procedures associated with NHS staff transfer forms. It reduces data entry following the appointment of staff from other NHS trusts. The IAT process revolves around each employee's portable data set (PDS) which will accompany an individual from one NHS organisation to another.

The introduction of this process could increase reference completion rates. At the same time reduce recruiting officers' time

spent calling and emailing organisations who may not appreciate the effort of form filling for someone who has left or is leaving.

The result is faster turnaround and provides more candid feedback at a fraction of the cost and effort of old fashioned, phone or mail based reference checks system.

Factual referencing is endorsed by NHS Employers and included in their NHS employment checks standards, to reduce the recruitment timeline and to reduce the number of highly subjective references gained from the applicants preferred referees. They identify that this also reduces the risk of fake and fraudulent references being received.

Background

East Midlands streamlining programme colleagues nominated recruitment leads for participating trusts to explore factual references with a view to implementing across the region.

DCHS piloted factual references using the IAT process in ESR in July – October 2015. The pilot included all recruitment activity within two localities of DCHS' portfolio.

In tandem DCHS also introduced VBR, an approach to help attract and select

students, trainees and employees, whose personal values and behaviours align with the DCHS and NHS values outlined in the NHS Constitution.

Recruiting managers attended a revised recruitment training session which explained VBR and factual referencing. The training lasted for five hours and covered all aspects of recruitment from advert to start date.

Key aims

- A swifter process which could improve overall time to recruit.
- A fully automated process as part of the existing IAT process on ESR for existing NHS staff.
- To save line manager's time as no longer a need to complete subjective reference requests.
- To support the work DCHS are doing to implement VBR which negates the need for subjective references.
- To reduce agency and bank spend across the trust.
- To reduce the stress levels and increase the wellbeing of those staff left to cover vacancies.
- To bring the new recruit into the organisation as quickly as possible.
- Potential legislative discriminatory cases would be reduced.
- To meet NHS Employers standards.

Why we did it

DCHS staffing solutions team are always seeking ways to improve the recruitment process. We recognised the impact the introduction of VBR would have on the quality of the candidate being recruited.

They also looked at the timeline to recruit as this can have a wide reaching positive impact on all key stakeholders.

A reduction in time to recruit reduces bank and agency spend, reduces staff sickness levels and improves staff engagement and motivation.

It also makes the new employee feel valued and along with a good 'onboarding' process helps the retention of new starters.

DCHS were using NHS Jobs to request all references, which even though one had a built in reminder system to chase outstanding references, these were still being ignored and the team were having to regularly chase references. This was taking approximately one hour a week for these two localities.

The factual referencing pilot has demonstrated a reduction in timeline for recruitment and reduced the amount of chasing carried out by the team.

What we did

A member of the DCHS staffing solutions team was given access to the IAT user responsibility profile a requester and approver. For the purpose of the IAT pilot only the IAT requester was utilised.

The IAT factual referencing pilot started in July 2015 and continued until the end of October 2015 (four full months of testing).

Each IAT request was recorded on excel using several headings to record the detail. The standard subjective reference requests were also issued and recorded so that a comparison of timescales could be provided during the pilot (for the pilot period only, going forward this will not be needed).

There was no requirement for funding or additional resources, this was just a change in electronic process.

Further details of the process are detailed in Appendix 1.

Key challenges

A challenge of this pilot was that not every NHS trust uses IAT and some of the requests were returned 'No reference approver'. The notification asked that the HR department for the trust be contacted.

To resolve, references were requested via NHS Jobs for the appointing officer approval.

Going forward the long term solution is that all NHS trusts allocate the reference approver role and respond to the IAT requests.

In conjunction with the pilot, references were also requested via NHS Jobs to compare timings for the receipt of references. On average the factual references were received via ESR within 1.4 days whereas the same references that were requested via NHS Jobs took an average of 18 days

Key outcomes

The initial results have been over-whelming in support of the introduction of ESR factual referencing, with some un-expected but welcome outcomes:

- Reduced timeline for receiving references via ESR IAT – from 20 factual references received, it took on average 10.6 days less to receive. With the response to a number of these returning on the same day they were sent.
- Reduced time taken chasing outstanding references – ESR notifications are issued to referee trusts to automatically prompt action
- Reduced the amount of subjective information received on reference.
- Saving current line managers' time as no longer a need to complete subjective reference requests which could take up to 30 minutes to complete.
- Key performance indicators were drastically cut by factual references being received 16.5 days faster than the subjective reference process (average).
- Confirmed appointment decisions made by appointing managers through the values based recruitment process.

Manager buy-in to the process has been much improved with many managers feeling that their decision making is easier.

Why should we?

During 2014/15 East Midlands NHS line managers were requested to complete approximately 9,083 references for other NHS trusts, taking an average of 30 minutes each to complete. This equals a potential saving across the region of 2.5FTE or £75,000 (based on an average NHS Salary)

The impact of reducing time to hire will enable quicker recruitment and therefore impact on bank and agency spend covering vacancies that are unfilled. If all trusts reduced their time to hire by an average of 16.5 days for 2013/14 it would have saved

approximately 7.7FTE of time to recruit, the equivalent of £231,000 of average NHS salary.

The reduction of reference chasing within recruitment teams will have a significant impact on recruitment processes.

Next steps

As this was a pilot project, the factual referencing process is yet to be embedded across all recruitment activity. However, this has recently been approved and the team are now working to implement across the service.

Any NHS trusts requesting factual references from DCHS through the IAT process are now actioned by a reference approver.

- Results of the pilot were recently presented at DCHS staff partnership committee in November and approval was given to implement factual references across all DCHS recruitment activity for individuals moving from trust to trust.
- The trust started full implementation in December 2015.
 - Share knowledge and outcomes with other trusts to encourage them to implement factual referencing in their trusts.
 - Encourage trusts to turn on the relevant roles to support trusts implementing this process

Advice for other trusts

- Ensure that the process is clearly communicated to man-agers prior to implementation, outlining the benefits of this and what impact it will have on them.

- If possible include information about the process in any management training provided and the benefits behind the introduction of this process.
- Ensure there is more than one individual with 'reference requester' and 'reference approver' status on ESR to ensure cover at all times

"As executive champion for the recruitment work-stream I would recommend to all HR directors to move towards integrating factual references into their recruitment practices. The simple fact is that is an easy job to do and it saves significant time which enables you to free up resources"

Maz Fosh, director of workforce and transformation, Lincolnshire Community Health Services NHS Trust

Useful links

www.nhsemployers.org
www.dchs.nhs.uk
www.electronicstaffrecord.nhs.uk/home/

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Appendix 1 – How it works

When a candidate, appointed at interview, had recorded NHS service on their NHS Jobs application form, the IAT/Factual reference process was started to confirm NHS start dates and request references.

The process for IAT/Factual Referencing is as follows:

Login to ESR → IAT Initiation → Initiate Person Request

F11 to search for the candidates name → Control & F11 which will find names → Check NI number to ensure correct name → If correct person, click at the side of the relevant name to highlight → Tick box for Reference Request and click Auto Person Match

This will show any matched NHS Trust details with the heading as below:

IAT / VPD/ Trust Name / Last Name / First Name / DOB / NI number / Emp No / Latest Start Date / Professional Registration / NHS ID

If correct, click Approve → Requested IAT Person Confirmed – this is split into 2 headings - Matched Person/Requested Person → Check both sets of details to confirm correct → Click Yes to continue

The IAT/Referencing request is completed.

A notification is received when either the IAT or reference is received.

For the purpose of the pilot an Excel spreadsheet was created to record:

Job Ref no / Candidates Name / Date IAT initiated / Date IAT received / No of days / IAT to (Trust name) / Trust ID No / NHS Start date / NHS reference requested / Date received / No of days / Comments

The NHS start date was recorded on the candidate recruitment pre-employment form and a copy of the reference was saved electronically in the candidate's personal recruitment folder.

A copy of the reference was forwarded to the appointing officer for approval.