

Choose Staff

Reporter

Lesley Wilson at [St Andrew's Healthcare](#) on 6 February 2015.

What did you do*?

Making a staff appointment involves a number of steps, including; agreeing the job description, person specification, advertisement and interview questions or tests; shortlisting and interviewing, before scoring the candidates and then coming to a decision about who to appoint. A number of current and past service users help to devise interview questions and form a 'service user panel' to interview all candidates. Their scores for each applicant are taken into account in deciding who to appoint. A substantial proportion of appointments are made in this way, and this figure is higher for appointments to the senior management team.

What is excellent about it?

Informal feedback from patients indicates that people find participating in the recruitment process builds their self worth, improves their decision-making skills and helps convince them that their opinion is being valued. As an organisation, we are convinced that listening to the perspective of patients has improved our values-based recruitment and delivered a stronger workforce. Candidates find the interviews daunting but value this fundamental declaration that their job is for the benefit of patients and not merely their own career advancement.

This approach has been developed in partnership with our Human Resources Department to ensure that our recruitment process is legal and compliant with best practices. Confidential information is not disclosed to any panellist, whether professional or service user, and routine practice keeps everyone safe without the need of additional safeguards.

Patients who wish to participate as interview panellists are selected for suitability and then receive training. Suitability is assessed in the light of cognitive ability, mental health state, current behaviour, and their respect for the position of trust. We generally seek out patient panellists who provide expert knowledge of the speciality where the candidate will work.

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Training includes an understanding of diversity, the recruitment process and the role that is to be filled by the appointee, the process of measurement and scoring and what happens in the event of a difference of view.

Sometimes people need some additional support in order to participate as interview panellists. This can vary from a staff escort to reach the interview room, easy-read scoring sheets and debriefing sessions after the interview is over. A staff member facilitates the service user panel, and helps the user panel present their observations to the staff panel.

Even better next time?

At present, only a proportion of appointments are made in this way, and we would like to expand this practice so that all staff occupying patient-facing roles have patients on their appointment panel.

This approach to recruitment is well supported by our senior management team and Governors, and relies on their ongoing support.

At present, panellists are unpaid volunteers and this role has considerable kudos. We will continue to explore whether paying people for this significant responsibility is viable, legal and affordable.

Further work could be undertaken to formally evaluate the impact of this approach on patients, candidates and the organisation's ability to fulfil its mission.

* [NDTi](#) was commissioned to deliver a staff development programme promoting a more personalised and inclusive approach for those living and working in locked rehabilitation services in the English East Midlands. While the current inspection routine has a focus on risk prevention, our job is to focus on sharing positive practice and innovation. Peter Bates led the programme and wrote up these stories.

The Excellence Programme is for independent and voluntary sector providers of locked residential rehabilitation services for people with mental health issues or learning disabilities living in the East Midlands. It has delivered:

- A series of seminars for key staff and people using services to promote a more personalised and inclusive approach
- A shared sense of what excellent services look like, captured in an [Excellence Framework](#) document.
- Learning exchange visits between members which lead to individual action plans for each service

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- *Excellence stories that capture and share ideas for service improvement.*

These case studies have arisen from members of the Excellence programme and NDTi has not independently verified what we have been told. Some are radical and ambitious approaches that transform the whole service, while others consist of small steps that may not seem especially exciting to other readers, but make a difference to one person. Some readers might even question whether progress is being made at all! The overall purpose is to stimulate reflection and celebration for every step forward, whether large or small.