

Enhancing the Recruitment of Graduates in the NHS

Founded in 1948, the NHS has seen tremendous growth over the last five decades, and is recognized by the World Health Organization as one of the best health service providers in the world.

The organization's Graduate Management Training Scheme is a key provider of future NHS Directors and Chief Executives, and enjoys an outstanding reputation among graduates. As a result, the scheme has won a number of accolades, including sixth place in the Times Top 100 Graduate Employers (2006-2007), and the Employer of Choice for General and HR Management in the Times Awards UK Graduate Careers Survey.

Each year, the NHS recruits approximately 220 graduates from more than 7,000 applicants. "We want talented people who are looking for a challenge and have a genuine desire to help improve healthcare in the future," said Julie Ribbons, National Resourcing Manager of the Graduate Management Training Scheme.

The complex, high-profile and constantly changing UK healthcare system demands that only the very best graduates are recruited. "Our target is 220 graduates, but if there are only 215 with the desired qualities, we are happy to miss the target," said Ribbons.

The candidates have a choice of three specialist qualifications: Finance, General and HR. "Previously, we had three separate schemes," said Ribbons. "However, we have now introduced one scheme with three specialties so trainees complete a foundation in each. An additional program of shared integrated experiential learning helps the trainees to form relationships and encourages cross-functional working."

Selecting Kenexa

Candidates apply for the scheme online where they have to take five different questionnaires and ability tests including Kenexa's online numerical and verbal reasoning tests, an NHS culture fit questionnaire, a situational judgement questionnaire, and a motivational trait questionnaire.

The numerical and verbal reasoning tests are item-banked, meaning each candidate is presented with a randomized set of questions so that, in essence, each applicant completes a different test. Because the candidate cannot predict the questions he or she will be given, the exposure and practice effects are almost eliminated.

Validation Study

The NHS approached Kenexa to undertake a validation study of the recruitment processes that would establish the strength of the relationship between the assessment elements used within the recruitment process and future leadership capability. "From the validation study, Kenexa's numerical reasoning test was clearly identified as the strongest predictor of a candidate's success at the final stage of the recruitment process. However, shortlisting was at the other end of the spectrum as a very low predictor. Given the evidence, it was decided to remove manual shortlisting and introduce several other online tests including Kenexa's online verbal reasoning test to enhance our process even further," said Ribbons.

The findings showed that the majority of changes introduced had major beneficial effects on the validity of the selection process and the early sifting stages had greatly increased validity.

Further Stages

Candidates who pass the testing stage are invited to a structured competency-based interview. The final stage of the process involves candidates attending a 24-hour Leadership Challenge. "This is a 24-hour Day in the Life of an NHS Manager exercise," said Ribbons. "Those candidates achieving a pre-agreed benchmark are offered a place on the scheme."

Enjoying the Benefits

The inclusion of Kenexa's tests as a sifting tool has provided, and will continue to provide, a number of benefits to the NHS. "The use of Kenexa tests has supported the removal of manual shortlisting," said Ribbons. "The whole process is now far less labor intensive and our NHS manager assessors are now able to give their valuable time to a more focused process concentrating on candidates who have the potential to succeed."

In addition to speed and efficiency, the NHS has also become more environmentally friendly. "Before working with Kenexa, thousands of applications had to be printed and read through, so the amount of paper we have now saved has been huge," added Ribbons.

To enhance the recruitment process even further, Kenexa was asked to train five members of the graduate team so they could achieve the British Psychological Society's Level A and B qualification.

"Kenexa has provided a very professional service from start to finish. I definitely want to continue working with Kenexa so we can expand the portfolio of things we do," said Ribbons. "Kenexa has supported thorough analysis and evidence-based decision making. It has been a really good learning experience for all of the team."

AGR Award for Graduate Selection and Development

In 2007, this enhanced graduate approach received additional industry recognition as the NHS received the prestigious Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) award for graduate selection and development. "This award provided significant recognition for the range of changes and improvements made to our graduate process. Overall, the phenomenal speed with which we achieved this has put the NHS on the map as a

leader in effective recruitment of large numbers of graduates," added Ribbons.

Long Term Challenges

Looking ahead, the NHS believes its biggest hurdle is continuing to attract high caliber graduates to a career within the NHS. "The NHS is always in the public eye through the press," said Ribbons. "Naturally, applicants ask us about what they read or hear in the media. As the biggest employer in Europe, we must continue to attract the very best talent in a fair, equitable and non-biased way. Kenexa is helping us deliver that objective."

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About NHS

Founded in 1948, the NHS is the largest organization in Europe employing over one million members of staff, and has a multi-billion pound budget. The organization's graduate scheme was listed sixth in the *Times* Top 100 Graduate employers (2006/07).
Website: www.nhsleadstheaway.co.uk