

User Involvement in Staff Recruitment

Record of A Course that took place in Redbridge Feb 2001

(The course was divided into sessions of a half day each)

Key : text in green records the points that came out of discussion in the student group.

Session 1 1.00-4.00

- Introductions etc
- What is Interviewing ?

It's an assessment of a person's ability
It's asking people questions to find out how good they are
It's about finding out how a person really ticks,
not just how he presents himself
It involves a process

This leads to two questions :

How do you assess how a person really ticks,
ie how do you get below the surface ?
How do you do it in a way that's fair to all candidates ?

- What is Equal Opportunities interviewing ?

It is do with being fair, to make sure everyone has an equal chance
It's an attempt to counter bias
It's an attempt to assess people in a way that's objective and systematic

some Principles of EO interviewing

fairness

objectivity

openness and accountability

candidates to be facilitated to do themselves justice, not given
a bad time to find out how "tough" they are

- Elements in the process

jd/person spec

Essential Characteristics

Here are characteristics the student group felt were essential/desirable in a psychiatrist :

Proper Qualifications

Proven Record of Good Professional Practice

Good Communication Skills,

good ability to explain clearly the treatment offered

Good Ability really to take on board patients' concerns, to empathise

Good team member, good leader

Desirable Characteristics

Good Understanding of Vol Sector

Appropriate Dress

application form

short-listing - according to how candidates application forms meet the person spec

The interview

small panel with a chair

the panel results in a more thorough assessment
a broader cross-section of assessors
less chance of bias than if one person interviews alone

questions previously prepared, – indicators of what constitutes a good answer also prepared (not to be rigid but to act as a guide) ;

the issue of the hypothetical question – when is it acceptable ?

the importance of asking open questions

scoring – different ways of doing this

some interviews include a presentation by candidates

Here are questions put together by the Redbridge student group (to be asked at a psychiatrist's interview)

Can you explain how you would put a disruptive patient at ease ?

How would you end a session with a distressed patient in a way that does not leave the person feeling you weren't interested in what they had to say ?

Can you explain how you would make a non-communicative person feel at ease ?

How would you explain to a patient a change of medication and convince him or her that it was for his/her good ?

Session Two

- Why User Involvement in Interviewing ?

To make sure user point of view is taken on board.

The user experiences services at first hand. The user perspective is therefore crucial to staff recruitment – and good staff recruitment is crucial if we're to have a quality service.

The service user has first hand experience not only of mental health problems but also of mental health services and knows all too well what is a good worker and what is a bad.

User involvement in interviewing emphasises the principal that the customer's experience is important, and that the user is that customer.

User involvement uses skills that might otherwise be wasted ; and helps to restore confidence in people who inevitably are often low in confidence. It gives real power to service users to influence the quality of services.

It adds a whole new dimension to the recruitment process – by making it possible to assess in a methodical and thorough way how candidates relate to and communicate with people with mental health problems.

- Different models of user involvement in interviewing

Model 1. One user in main panel

you take part in the short-listing

bring your own question(s) to the interview (having discussed possible questions with fellow users beforehand ?)

you play a part in the debate and are part of the final decision

Positives

The user is part of the recruitment process and of the final recruitment process

Negatives

A lot of pressure for the user alone

you are you, but you also represent all users everywhere ;
it can effect

the lone user is not constricted by having other users present

how the panel treat you, as someone apart,

symbolic and/or suspect. It can be very stressful.

The user alone is free to be him/her self, not constricted etc etc ;

this can be a disadvantage too. The sole user can too easily forget that he/she belongs to and is standing for a wider constituency.

The solitary user can feel very isolated ; but also over time can get sucked in to the professional circle, so that holding an independent position can become very difficult.

The user alone feels unconfident ; looks to the rest of the panel for how to do things. Takes the lead from them. Is this empowering ? On the contrary.

The user as part of the main panel might have to share accountability for a decision that is faulted after a candidate's appeal. R to find out more about possible liability.

An issue we looked at was also that of confidentiality. Should the user rep have access to candidates' application forms ? If no, the user is being separated out from rest of panel, and deprived of an important source of info. If yes, there might be a problem if at some point a user interviewer became the patient of a successful candidate. Is this an issue ? Rogan suspects it is, student group thought not.

NB. We did look at how to strengthen a user recruitment panel member's link with other users ; and we concluded that the user should go to the interview with his/her question already prepared, this question having been discussed with the wider user group first.

Model 2. Two users in main panel, one supporting the other – this model is used in Goodmayes Hospital by Jimmy Bell, Head OT there

Positives

Users can support one another ;the position feels stronger and comes across stronger (both should ask questions)

Negatives

It can enlarge the panel too much.

The model is still essentially the conventional one, the user presence just a bolt-on job.

Model 3. A panel of users, informing main panel

- This panel does not take part in shortlisting
- Is not part of final decision
- Is used for the senior posts only, incl Pyschiatrists
- Is composed of between 4 and 6 users, incl a Chair
- Asks series of questions of concern to users
- T and K compenent to assess relationship skills
- Observer from main panel
- An experienced chair
- A pre-agreed status and influence for panel – ie a candidate whom this panel agrees lacks communication skills does not get the job. This can be done by making Communication Skills an Essential Characteristic in the Person Spec, and appointing the user panel as the chief means of assesing that characteristic.

Positives

The user group is in strength, on its own territory, with all able to support one another

Can concentrate on user concerns

It offers the interview process a real chance for closely and methodically assessing how candidates relate to service users.

Negatives

makes the interview process more complex

Will the main panel really take note ?

There has to be good credibility and trust

Model 4 Candidates give a presentation

Candidates do a presentation to a large audience composed of groups of all the various stakeholders, such as carers, ground level workers, and service users. Main panel present as observers. Each group feeds back its assessment to main panel before final interviews are held.

Positives

It includes all the Stakeholders and has some of the advantages of Model Three. (But surely users aren't just "stakeholders ?" They're what it's all for ; and is this the ideal venue for someone who may not be feeling that steady today ?)

Negatives

Fearsome for candidates !

• Discussion of Action to Follow

Rogan has successfully piloted, and showed his preference for, Model Three, so long as it can be made to have real influence and its members are skilled enough to assess communication skills well. At the same time all models are steps forward and all areas must go for the model that works best for them. The student group included people who've been involved already in various models of staff interviewing, and approve of the models used there. Jimmy Bell at Goodmayes is running interviews which seem to combine full user panels with mixed panels, which made Rogan ever so excited.

There is clearly more debate to be had.

Kieran said he would show course papers to Jimmy Bell.

Bob said he would ask for this topic to be raised at a meeting between the User Forum and the Associate Director.

- We did a role play of a user panel interview, using questions students had already formulated and score sheets that we'd studied earlier
- A poem was read
- Evaluation