

Anaesthetics CT1 recruitment review report

Background

As a result of two issues that impacted Anaesthetics CT1 recruitment in February 2023, it was agreed by the Royal College of Anaesthetists (RCOA) and NHS England (formerly known as Health Education England) that a review of these issues would take place.

The review team included experts from the Medical Dental Recruitment and Selection (MDRS) team, RCOA clinical lead for recruitment, RCOA Vice president, RCOA trainee representative and a recruitment manager external to the lead region for anaesthetics.

Although the review team was setup in February, it was agreed that the review would not take place until completion of CT1 & ST4 Anaesthetics recruitment. This was to ensure Anaesthetics National Recruitment Office (ANRO) team members remained focused on the successful delivery of recruitment throughout February, March and April 2023.

Description of Issues

Both issues experienced related to applicant communications sent out on 7 February.

1. Two applicants who applied with reasonable adjustments for their interview had not reached the threshold for interview and were emailed specific interview dates and times erroneously
2. In addition, a further 20 applicants who had been advised they had a status of *shortlist reserve* were then sent another email saying they would be informed of their interview date and time.

In both cases these were manual communications and sent outside of the recruitment system Oriel, this was part of the root cause analysis.

Roles and responsibilities

The remit of the group is set out in Appendix 1 (Terms of Reference).

Immediate actions

The Anaesthetics National Recruitment Office (ANRO), who were responsible for the issues described above, took immediate action to rectify the errors and ensure that Anaesthetics CT1 interviews starting 14 February were not affected, this included strengthening the team temporarily via experienced extra resource. The immediate priority was to apologise to those affected and assure the review team that recruitment would not be affected.

Longer term action

ANRO were involved in a regional team lesson learned workshop in May 2023 once the recruitment round had completed. Within this session, the team picked up on many of the areas covered in the Terms of Reference and it was agreed with the review team, so not to duplicate work, that the group would await the outcomes of the lessons learned workshop. The resulting high-level report and action plan were presented to the review team on 3 July.

The review team felt it was right to focus their attention on the following given that this was not being fully picked up as part of the lessons learned workshop, extract from Terms of Reference below:

- *Review the processes for training of recruitment staff and whether all individuals had undertaken the training*
 - *Engagement in and delivery of training*
- *Review staffing levels in the national recruitment team in West Midlands; considering size, structure, skill mix, engagement.*

Members of the review team met with ANRO on 7 June.

Findings

The review team were satisfied that the lessons learnt process and action plan presented by the regional managers were robust and proportionate.

It was clear that the events that led to the two communication issues to applicants were partially due to the use of manual processes and also attention to detail issues. The action plan directly addressed the improvement of managing these processes.

There were no concerns regarding training and engagement in the team, review members found that engagement is extremely high in the team, and training is a high priority in the team. Weekly workstream sessions, peer support and external communication training sessions had taken place.

Where the review team were concerned was around the size of the team, at the time the issue occurred there were only two members of staff whose focus was administering Anaesthetics CT1 and ST4 recruitment. Compared to other recruitment offices within NHS England, this is a large and complex workload for a team of that size.

It was highlighted to the review team that there is a lack of confidence within the team, they feel run down and feel they are not resourced adequately for the size of workload.

Other concerns discussed included:

- NHSE regional consultation underway, restrictions to recruiting new staff to fill gaps in the ANRO team
- Fixed term contracts in the wider team with an end date of October 2023
- Annual leave for team is very difficult to take in the very busy periods affecting work/life balance

Following these discussions with the team and evidence presented, it was felt that more resource in the team could have reduced the likelihood of the two issues.

An action plan and a high level report developed by ANRO following their lessons learned workshop and the wider West Midlands team was

brought to the review team that met on 3 July and members were satisfied with both documents.

Recommendations

1. ANRO staffing levels are increased to ensure that there is an Anaesthetics national recruitment officer and administrator assigned to each CT1 and ST4 level. In addition to this, an additional coordinator in the team would allow one to be dedicated to overseeing the ANRO team, focusing on the relationships with key stakeholders and overseeing the quality assurance processes within ANRO. This would be an addition of three members of staff to the West Midlands team structure which is currently at consultation stage within NHS England.
2. Applicants affected by the communication errors are contacted to ensure they are aware the review has taken place and provide assurance that measures are in place to ensure these errors are avoided in future.
3. Key stakeholders are provided with a high level summary of the findings and recommendations of this review group
4. ANRO provide quarterly updates to this group against recommendations set out

**Anaesthetics CT1 recruitment
review team
July 2023**

Appendix 1

Terms of reference

Investigating Team

Professor Lindsay Donaldson	Co-Chair of the MDRS Recruitment Group
Alana Martinez	MDRS
Dr Caroline Evans	RCoA Clinical Lead for Recruitment, Chair of the RCoA Recruitment Committee
Dr Helgi Johannsson	RCoA Vice President and elected Council member
Dr Giovanna Kossakowska	RCoA Co-opted Council member representing Trainees Member of the RCoA Recruitment Committee
Stephen Harding	Service Delivery Manager, London and KSS

Roles and Responsibilities

- To identify system and process issues that led to the incorrect communication going to candidates about interview dates on 7 February 2023
 - Governance, oversight and sign off of actions
 - Accuracy, clarity and content of the process plan
 - Staffing levels, recruitment, retention and maintenance of knowledge and skills within the Anaesthetic National Recruitment Office
- To identify aspects of the recruitment process that could be improved to reduce the risk of future error.

Governance

- To review the governance arrangements during this recruitment round and advise whether these were followed
 - Direct supervision of actions
 - Checking processes and quality assurance
- To ensure that the findings, outputs, any reports and recommendations of this review and investigation are reported to the MDRS Board and RCoA Council, together with a commitment to provide a quarterly update on progress against any recommendations.
- To publish a report, recommendations and action plan of this investigation
- To ensure that anonymity of individuals involved in previous outputs leading to this review

Staffing

- To review the processes for training of recruitment staff and whether all individuals had undertaken the training
 - Engagement in and delivery of training
- To review staffing levels in the national recruitment team in West Midlands; considering size, structure, skill mix, engagement.

Timescale of Investigation

Investigation processes will commence in May 2023, allowing for current recruitment processes to be completed and to ensure that recruitment team members remain focused on current delivery.

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