

COVID-19: Resourcing and the June Almeida Laboratory.

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Executive Summary

This is a good faith statement of the response undertaken by the recruitment team to meet the needs of Viapath from the week preceding lockdown. It will focus on the onboarding of a specific set of volunteers who were brought in to support additional testing capacity at Guy's Hospital.

This work was a collaboration with King's Health Partners and Viapath.

From week ending 15th March 2020 the resourcing function was approached to support the efforts of setting up new testing facilities to be housed at Guy's hospital site.

The objectives were clear from the outset although developed as time went on.

The resourcing function needed to adapt six elements of the process to meet service needs. Lockdown was approaching and with it, the usual way of working would be altered, therefore Viapath needed to adapt to respond.

Over the course of 6 weeks and prior to go live, two cohorts, adding up to a total of 24 volunteers were cleared through our new systems. Most volunteers were cleared within 10 days of first point of contact.

Whilst all efforts were put in to ensuring these two main cohorts were ready for deployment, the resourcing function was also coordinating a wider volunteer effort numbering up to 70 others.

Background

In the preceding weeks prior to lockdown planning was undertaken to establish the Human Resources response to ensure our internal customers within Viapath were equipped, as much as possible, with the challenges ahead. This was led by the Senior Leadership Team within Human Resources.

Given the unique scenario a raft of solutions were discussed whilst collaborating with other directorates within Francis House (Viapath Corporate HQ).

This report will focus on the planning, onboarding and deployment of contingency staff.

Initiatives included, but were not limited to:

- Review of diagnostic skill sets within Francis House that could be redeployed where necessary
- Review who recently retired for potential call back
- Review all contingency staff availability on the Staff Bank
- Outline approach to Agencies on our PSL (Preferred Supplier List), preparing them with what might come and outlining our potential requirements

Weekending 15th March 2020 the involvement of the Resourcing function was called upon to support another initiative led by our Medical Director Dr Jonathan Edgeworth and research colleagues in KCL.

The objective was to set-up additional diagnostic testing capacity and started with the realignment of facilities at Guy's Hospital, now known as the June Almeida Laboratory.

Whilst coordinating the on-boarding of the volunteers coming forward for these pilots at Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals (GSTT), Viapath's resourcing function also became point of contact for the wider research community and a link into Viapath for further voluntary work.

It transpired that there were 3 clear lines of enquiry coming into the resourcing function:

1. Volunteers coming in from academia specifically for the new testing facilities at GSTT
2. Volunteers from academia looking to support the wider effort
3. Volunteers from local NHS organisations seeking redeployment

Challenges

Viapath is a tripartite joint venture which includes GSTT and King's College Hospital (KCH) and is therefore a separate entity to the NHS. On the floor these differences are not always as obvious as they might be and therefore the question of, 'why can't I just start?' needed to be addressed.

As Viapath and the NHS are separate, the resourcing function needed to balance the urgency of being able to rapidly deploy these volunteers, so as not to hold up any research into combating what was now a pandemic, and ensuring that they were safe to do so. This included being able to demonstrate that those coming into Viapath were who they said they were, had the necessary clearances to undertake the work and were under an appropriate contract to protect all parties concerned.

This was a rapidly evolving situation and called for an urgent review of how we would be able to meet these obligations whilst the infrastructure normally relied upon was also rapidly changing. For example, as the rest of the population was locking down, this affected how ID and Occupational Health checks were undertaken.

The resourcing function was also learning to separate the three lines of enquiry, highlighted above, whilst also preparing the Bank to support the wider business. This would include ensuring that any personal information that was captured in the process was separated out from the established Bank of contingency labour and only used in line with our obligations under GDPR.

Adaptions to meet challenges

With foresight, Dr Jonathan Edgeworth suggested using the Bank process to onboard the volunteers, this allowed for an agile onboarding solution.

Viapath HR were able to rapidly review what needed to be done, against what could be done, to see what processes needed to be adapted to suit the new working environment.

A resourcing lead, Viapath Resourcing Specialist, was established to act as point of contact for the volunteers, review what needed to be done and coordinate activities to ensure the volunteers were deployed without delay.

Separating the activities of the resourcing function would also allow the existing Bank team space to provide their usual support for the wider business and reduce the risk of duplicating work or confused lines of communication.

Interim changes in process to meet obligations

- Occupational Health (OH)
- Face to Face ID checks
- Reference checks
- Type of contract
- Induction
- Updates to Clarity to track volunteer effort

There were six considerations as our normal face to face arrangements were turning out not to be suitable under the evolving climate and we needed to ensure an appropriate agreement was in place.

To monitor where the volunteers would be deployed and to ensure each would be able to receive recognition the Clarity Bank system was adapted to accommodate these types of positions.

Occupational Health

Our service providers were invited to work with us to solve the problem of how we would undertake sufficient checks to satisfy our obligations given that clinic appointments were being cancelled.

It was agreed that the volunteers would complete the online questionnaires in the usual way, providing evidence of immunity and completing the standard health questionnaire, in-line with our SLA (service level agreement). To replace the face to face clinic appointments, it was agreed that they would conduct any follow ups over the phone with a dedicated clinician.

Face to Face ID Checks

Verified proof of address and right to work evidence were scanned and emailed across to the Resourcing Specialist.

Reference checks

The volunteers coming in to Viapath were being recommended for this work and were known for their skills and capabilities, however to confirm this a group reference was undertaken for our records.

For the lines of enquiry from wider academia and NHS, individual references were requested.

Type of Contract

There are various forms of agreements workers can have, the most appropriate under the circumstances was an Honorary Contract to be issued to all volunteers with an accompanying confirmation statement.

Induction

The Health & Safety Team took the lead on this and produced an induction programme that would be appropriate for the work being undertaken. This would focus on elements of H&S and Quality appropriate for a diagnostic setting.

For the first cohort, this was achieved via an MS Teams meeting and consisted of the first six volunteers.

Later, for the roll out of the Jane Almeida laboratory, this was conducted on site considering safe distancing.

Adaption of Clarity Bank system

Viapath Bank workers are paid for their assignments and hours worked, this would not be the case with volunteers under the scheme as their salaries were still paid by Kings College London (KCL), therefore new volunteer posts were created with a NIL value against the timesheets.

Using the Clarity system allows Viapath to be able to acknowledge the support each volunteer provided during this pandemic.

Onboarding

As earlier highlighted, there were three main lines of enquiry:

1. Volunteers coming in from academia specifically for the new testing facilities at GSTT
2. Volunteers from academia looking to support the wider effort
3. Volunteers from local NHS organisations seeking redeployment

For the purposes of this report, line of enquiry 1 will be discussed.

Application packs and appropriate links were emailed out to the first cohort which consisted of 6 individual Scientists from KCL.

This was in week ending 15th March 2020. The following week (WK1), the resourcing function received back all returned documentation. This was saved in appropriate sub folders which were created within our HR filing systems.

Viapath's Occupational Health providers were put on notice to expedite checks for named individuals highlighted in a tracking system created to support this workflow.

By the close of WK2 all checks were completed and WK3 saw paperwork saved, contracts issued and Clarity assignments raised and approved for the first cohort.

From WK3 additional names were being sent across with the view to expand capacity with the development of the June Almeida Laboratory at Guy's Hospital.

By the close of WK4 there were an additional 20 KCL scientists being lined up to support the testing efforts, a collaboration between Viapath and our academic partners from King's Health Partners.

During this time Viapath's Resourcing Specialist was introduced to KCL Human Resources to discuss how these checks could be further expedited. It was agreed that Viapath would be able to access the compliance passport, a system whereby staff can move between facilities under the King's Health Partners collaboration using the initial pre-employment checks.

As we had a mix of staff and students from KCL, this check could only be used for those on the staff. Following the necessary GDPR statements and permissions, this information was provided by KCL where appropriate. This would support our OH providers and ensure that should this workflow need to be expanded, there was a channel to expedite such checks.

Progress was tracked and reported weekly to the Senior Leadership Team overseeing this project to provide transparency and to help in planning.

By WK6 the volunteers were ready for deployment.

Although this report focuses on the 24 Scientists eventually deployed across GSTT, the resourcing function also received offers of help from other academic institutions and NHS organisations. In total there were circa 70 enquiries of support from the early stages of lockdown to date.

Conclusion

Over all the objectives have been met, the volunteers were ready for deployment prior to go live date.

The processes were adapted with the working environment in mind and although they presented some onboarding challenges, the collaborative nature of working with external suppliers, King's Health Partners and the volunteers enabled a smooth transition into Viapath.

A process of 'lessons learnt' is currently underway and a document will be put together for any similar future events. Although unlikely, it's prudent to have a document to refer to and be able to review when the time comes.

A key enabler of any success which can be attributed to the resourcing function was the nature in which our colleagues in academia responded to our needs. The use of technology also provided the means by which we could communicate on a one to one basis and in groups. This was necessary to share information and be able to offer back an acknowledgement and thanks to those who did help during this time.