

NHS NORTH WEST REGIONAL AND QIPP CLUSTER CLEARING HOUSE ARRANGEMENTS

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Clearing House and how will it operate?

The Clearing House is a process through which vacancies are advertised via the NHS Jobs website on a restricted basis in the first instance to enable NHS employees who have been declared as “at risk” to be given priority access to any vacancies that arise in the NHS in the North West.

There are two different levels of Clearing House operating in the North West:

- i) Regional wide Clearing House for Bands 8a and above which will be managed by NHS Stockport on behalf of the NHS North West.
- ii) 7 sub regional Clearing Houses by QIPP area for Bands 7 and below:
 - North Mersey managed by Liverpool HR Services
 - North Cheshire managed by St Helens & Halton PCT
 - West Cheshire & Wirral managed by COCH
 - Eastern & Central Cheshire managed by Cheshire HR Services
 - Greater Manchester managed by Pennine Care FT
 - Lancashire managed by East Lancs PCT
 - Cumbria managed by Morecombe Bay Hospitals

Even though these Clearing Houses will be managed on a QIPP footprint basis all vacant posts at the appropriate band will be visible to all staff across the North West.

Both levels of clearing house will operate on a three stage process:

Stage 1 7 days restricted to staff formally declared at risk (regional cluster restricted)

Followed by

Stage 2 14 days open on a regional basis to all North West staff only (Group Internal Vacancies)

Followed by

Stage 3 NHS Jobs open national advertisement

Individuals will be able to apply for posts on their current substantive grade/band and below at Stage 1 and 2 of the process. If individuals wish to apply for a post on a higher band they are able to do so at Stage 3.

Each stage of the Clearing House system operates independently, ie if an “at risk” individual applies for a vacancy at Stage 1, they must be considered against the person specification and if appropriate interviewed before the vacancy can be moved to stage 2 and again to stage 3.

All posts will move through the three stages until they are filled.

2. Who is an “at risk” employee?

An individual is at risk if they have been formally issued with an “At Risk” letter as a result of organisational change (as a result of Transforming Community Services, changes to Tariff/Payment By Results arrangements, technological change etc) or because their fixed term contract is coming to an end. This list is not exhaustive - anyone who has a query on whether they are eligible to access the clearing house should seek advice from their HR Department.

Because the underpinning principle of the Clearing House is to redeploy as many “at risk” staff as possible, individual employers are encouraged to inform staff that they are at risk at the earliest opportunity in order to increase the period they are eligible to access Clearing House “restricted” vacancies at Stage One and Two of the process.

Staff on fixed term contracts should be informed they are at risk and given access to the Clearing House when they are informed that their fixed term contract will not be extended or renewed or at the point that they are issued with notice informing them of the expiry of the FTC, whichever is the earlier.

3. Will “at risk” employees on permanent contracts be given priority over those on fixed term contracts?

No – In line with employment legislation for staff on fixed term contracts, all NHS employees who have been identified at risk will have equal access to restricted vacancies and should be considered on an equal footing at Stages 1 and 2 regardless of whether they are on a permanent or fixed term contract.

4. When can vacancies be advertised internally?

There is an expectation that vacancies are only advertised through the Clearing House following the completion of internal organisational change processes once “at risk” staff have had the opportunity to apply for any posts arising as a result of any change within individual organisations.

5. What happens if someone who is at risk misses the first seven days of a post being advertised?

If they can demonstrate a legitimate reason for missing the Stage 1 advertising process (eg a two week period of annual leave) individuals will be given equivalent Stage 1 priority for the first seven days of the Stage 2 process (ie they will be considered prior to any other NHS North West employee).

6. When will the Clearing House arrangements take effect?

The North West Clearing House for Band 8A and above vacancies becomes operational on Monday 12th April until further notice. Individual QIPP Clearing Houses should also become operational from this date and all vacancies advertised from this point should be advertised using the Clearing House.

7. Which vacancies are covered by this arrangement?

All vacancies, including non training medical career grades and other clinical posts and VSM/Board posts including secondment opportunities and fixed term contracts lasting longer than 6 months must be advertised through the Clearing House process. Vacancies for doctors in Training will continue to be advertised through the Deaneries/National Training programmes.

8. Will any vacancies be exempt from this? Are we able to go direct to external advert for specialist posts that are difficult to recruit to?

There are to be no exceptions to the principle that all posts must go through the each of the three stages identified in the Clearing House process.

9. Can employees apply for any vacancy that they see on the clearing house?

No - at risk individuals can only apply for vacancies at their substantive banding/equivalent salary at Stages 1 and 2 of the Clearing House process. The Clearing House does not exist to allow individuals to benefit from promotion.

Individuals who are not at risk can apply for vacancies at Stage 2 but again this may only be at their substantive banding/equivalent salary.

Individuals who are at risk may choose to apply for post at one band lower than their substantive band through the clearing house subject to discussion with their line manager, HR lead and TU Representative regarding whether the post would be deemed as Suitable Alternative Employment and whether pay protection may be payable.

Any individual can apply for any level of post at stage 3 of the process, ie open competition.

10. Can employees apply for Stage 1 “restricted vacancy” posts outside of their own QIPP area?

Yes. The seven identified “QIPP” Clearing Houses have been established to ensure a more cohesive and structured approach to the management of the process and in most circumstances individual employees will choose to apply for posts within this geographical location. However, any individual can choose to apply for restricted vacancies through other QIPP clearing houses and any application will receive equal consideration.

11. How will employees be alerted to restricted access vacancies?

Once an employee has been formally designated as “at risk”, the nominated HR contact will notify the clearing house of the individuals’ details (name and email address) to record on the NHS Jobs “At Risk” register in order that they are eligible to access restricted vacancies at stage 1 of the process. The individual will receive an email from NHS Jobs notifying them of this access before they are able to view restricted vacancies in the navigation areas. Individuals will also be able to set up “Jobs-by-Email” terms to receive

notification of available jobs under the restricted label for which they meet the basic criteria.

NB: Individuals are required to set up a normal NHS Jobs Account prior to receiving restricted access.

It will be the responsibility of the individual to access the NHS Jobs Site on a regular basis (ie at least every week) to ensure that they are able to view all vacancies.

12. What does the employee need to do?

An individual who is designated as at risk should meet with their nominated HR contact at the start of the "At Risk" period. They will be able to discuss their position and identify further support needed, be given information on vacancies and how to apply for roles. Arrangements may be made in some organisations for the individual to keep in touch with their HR contact to update on their situation and review progress with ongoing applications. Additional support may also be offered.

13. Employees at Band 8a will be given access to the North West Clearing House for Stage 1 of the Clearing House process. If they are also granted access to one of the seven QIPP areas to access posts at Band 7, will they need two passwords?

The employee will need to ensure that their HR contact registers them with both clearing house leads. Access to restricted vacancies is based upon access which will be granted by the respective clearing house lead. Only one log-in and one password will be needed. Once access has been granted all suitable vacancies will be available for review and application.

14. How will you ensure that only NHS employees in the North West are able to access Stage 2 vacancies?

A lot of work has been done with NHS Employers and NHS Jobs to give the North West the functionality on the NHS Jobs website that is required to ensure this level of access. In order to access Stage 2 vacancies (listed as Group Internal Vacancies on NHS Jobs), individual employers will need to have a link on their organisation's intranet which gives staff direct access to a new "NHS North West Vacancies" webpage which has been developed to support this approach. The webpage will not be accessible via the NHS Jobs homepage.

Once individuals have accessed this webpage, which sets out vacancies in organisations at stage 2 by three main areas (Greater Manchester, Cheshire & Merseyside and Cumbria & Lancashire) they will have access to an individual job reference number and will then be able to apply for vacancies from any computer.

The website address for accessing Stage 2 vacancies is:
www.jobs.nhs.uk/internal/in/northwest.html

This webpage cannot be accessed via the homepage of NHS Jobs and therefore should not be available to any individuals who are not currently employed in the NHS in the North West. However, anyone with this web

address will be able to access the page and therefore apply for posts which they are not entitled to apply for which will cause additional administrative burden on HR teams and recruiting managers.

15. How will employers know if an individual applicant for a job is designated as at risk?

When viewing the list of applicants for a particular post, the name of designated “at risk” individuals will have a small circle around a red “R” above their name which will alert employers to this person’s status.

16. Will candidates who are at risk be automatically offered a job if they are the only applicant for the role?

Provided the candidate meets the person specification or it is identified that this can be covered by appropriate training within an agreed timescale, then they should be offered the post, on a trial period of four weeks in the first instance.

17. What is suitable alternative employment?

Reference is made to the definition of Suitable Alternative Employment in the Agenda for Change Handbook at Paragraphs 16.19 which states that when considering if a post is suitable alternative employment, regard should be had to the personal circumstances of the employee although the employee will be expected to show some flexibility.

Advice should always be sought from HR and the appropriate TU representative before agreement is reached.

18. Are individuals expected to move to another organisation if there is a job available through their or another clearing houses?

There are responsibilities on both the employer and the individual to consider any NHS posts which could be deemed as suitable alternative employment where an individual has been declared as at risk and a job in a different organisation becomes available and for these to be discussed and a mutually acceptable decision made.

19. Will individuals be compensated if they apply for and accept a job in another organisation on a lower pay band?

This will be dependent upon the current organisation’s Organisational Change Policy. Normally, individuals who take up posts on a lower band within the same organisation do receive pay protection for a designated period. If an individual accepts a post in a different organisation, the issue of pay protection will need to be agreed between the two relevant employers and the individual (and their TU representative) concerned.

20. Will individuals be compensated if they accept a job in another organisation which requires them to travel further to get to work?

This will be dependent upon the current organisation’s Organisational Change Policy. Normally, individuals who take up posts in different locations within the same organisation do receive some excess mileage for a designated

period. If an individual accepts a post in a different organisation, the issue of excess mileage will need to be agreed between the two relevant employers and the individual (and their TU representative) concerned.

21. What if a candidate or recruiting manager is unsure about someone's suitability in a role?

All offers of posts through the Clearing House process will be subject to a 4 week trial period. This may be extended if deemed necessary by mutual agreement. Should it be decided by either party by the end of the trial period that the role is unsuitable, the employee returns to their "at risk" status. The reasons for non-suitability need to be fully documented.

22. The Clearing House has been set up based on QIPP footprints, is this function just for those affected by QIPP?

No, the Clearing House includes all staff within the North West who have formally been declared at risk, including fixed term contract and any termination of contract/ redundancy situation brought about by of the organisational change programmes. If in doubt, please ask.

23. Has the Clearing House Policy been through an Equality Impact Assessment?

Yes. Some concerns have been raised that the policy of restricting access to existing at risk employees may adversely affect some under-represented groups in the population due to the current demographics of the current workforce, however the rationale for this is that:

- individual employers have a statutory duty to offer suitable alternative employment to staff who are at risk of redundancy
- eligibility to NHS redundancy pay and early retirement benefits are linked to individuals being able to secure suitable alternative employment across the NHS economy

Therefore it has been agreed in partnership with the Trade Unions that this is a necessary measure.

24. How will the effectiveness of the Clearing House system be monitored?

Individual employers will be required to complete a monthly return to their Clearing House Lead identifying the numbers of staff identified as at risk during each period, the number of vacancies advertised at each stage in the process and the number of posts filled at each stage. This information will be collated by each Clearing House and shared with the SHA who will provide summary information back through the HR Networks.

1 April 2010