

Ending 'pot-luck' interim support

Revolutionising short-term supply – Tom McCarthy

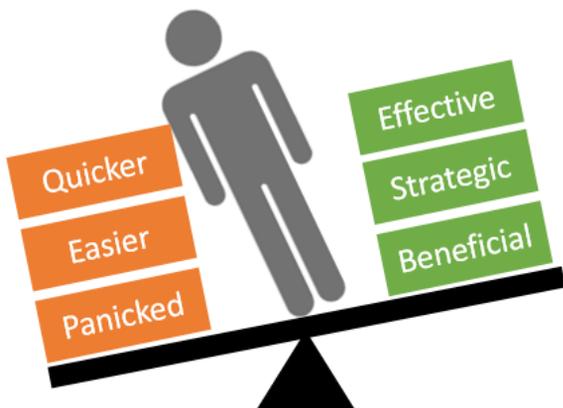


As all NHS providers know, the days of interims commanding breath-taking day-rates are much diminished. The huge (and some would say long-overdue) focus on agency spend led to the introduction of the agency cap, reinforced tax differentials for contractors and new rules-based frameworks for interim supply.

The increased scrutiny on agency pay-bill reduction and the introduction of NHSI agency spend league tables have undoubtedly shifted the focus on how providers obtain temporary support. However, the fundamental market forces of supply and demand underlying the continuing need to recruit non-permanent staff remain. Whilst over 70% of trusts have reduced their agency spend, with the overall pay-bill having reduced by 20%, the NHS is still spending around £250million a month on short-term support. This is for three main reasons:

- **Capacity** - The operational and strategic demands/challenges facing trusts is expanding faster than the capacity to deal with them. Only by adding capacity can trusts 'keep up' with their ever expanding to do list.
- **Capability** - The evolving requirement for PMO leads, transformation operatives, quality improvement experts, modelling technicians, governance/quality assurance leads and business process leads, to name just a few, has meant the NHS needs to look to an external supply of capable professionals who cannot always be 'grown' in-house.
- **Supply** - Many operationally/financially/geographically challenged trusts continue to be unable to recruit to permanent posts when good candidates are in high demand. Interims can 'pick and choose' when market forces are in their favour.

Decision makers are often forced to bow to the wrong type of **pressure**:



Whilst some interims have a good ability to promptly identify issues and promote change, many have their own issues in dealing with 'wrong-fit' placements. Often, they have accepted contracts where providers have not fully understood the gap they are trying to address or identified the outcomes they wish to see as the result of the placement.

Being an interim can be a lonely place where individuals are trying to resolve issues which are fundamentally outside of their sphere of influence or mandate; many (but by no means all) interims have undeservedly had a 'bad-rap'. They have accepted projects or placements which have been poorly devised (let's face it, it is a huge undertaking to objectively evaluate the gap that needs filling and to devise measurable outcomes).

Interims can be placed into contracts which have been poorly scoped, received little support during the placement and then are often criticised for not delivering against (what may have been) an opaque and unrealistic brief in the first place.

Taking a different approach

For NHS providers the real challenge is to try and use interim support in a much more strategic, less short-term way. To do this requires a completely different mind-set and a pronounced commitment to move away from 'pot-luck' placements. Strategic partnerships between consultancy and placement agents represent a step-change in how short-term staffing solutions can be delivered.

Niche, together with the market leading Sthree, have developed a unique approach to supporting the NHS and social care with expert interim placements.

Our model of 'InterimPlus(+)' combines the specialist consultancy input and delivery of Niche with a pool of accredited and experienced interims from Sthree. Specifically, our combined model will provide support in core areas such as company secretariat, complaints, investigations, risk management, medico-legal and broader governance. In addition to this we support transformation, strategic and analytic staff, capacity, demand and PMO support.

This new approach will allow organisations to:

- Secure the right interims to address the right challenge – we can support clients to scope out the challenge they are trying to address and the outcomes they want to see;
- InterimPlus(+) contractors will be able to access Niche support, valuable benchmarking information, good practice examples and expert independent advice, instead of flying solo;
- Secure a skilled, capable, workforce who are delivering objectives to support the delivery of strategic aims;
- Gain ongoing access to experienced consultancy support, helping them on their transformation journey with a trusted advisor;
- Demonstrate improvements in practice and value for money to the Regulator; and
- Reduce the financial and quality risks associated with poor project outcomes.

Our dedicated delivery team, headed by an experienced partner at Niche and Sthree, can talk to you to understand the levels of support that you might need. We can undertake an initial fast diagnostic with you to objectively understand your current issues and we can then propose a range of options on how to address any gaps. A range of potential options are possible and are outlined below:

NEED	DELIVERY MODEL
a) Traditional placement (i.e. the need to fill a key position on a short-term basis)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We supply a short-term requirement for support within a pre-existing improvement project. • We deliver a costed placement ensuring we fit within your existing project. • We define outcomes to be achieved not just inputs to be delivered.
b) Improvement projects (e.g. delivering new governance needs, clearing backlog SI's, transforming A&E, performance, tackling capacity/demand imbalance)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We co-create and define a plan which clearly addresses the diagnosed gap. • We define improvement outcomes and delivery milestones. • We appoint a team or individuals to best deliver your needs.
c) Project management supported by consultancy tools (e.g. help with a strategic change programme and accessing specialist advice and tools)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated project management support. • Added availability of Niche consultancy tools and techniques to support delivery, e.g. capacity and demand modelling services, executive team tool support, dedicated investigatory operating frameworks, new ways of delivering governance and assurance.
d) Total solution, e.g. a major transformation need, be it strategic, operational improvement or whole systems focused	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will undertake a full diagnostic, develop a project framework, place the correct team, define measurable outcomes and provide an outturn assurance-based report on deliverables. • Access to a comprehensive range of talent. • Support from an expert consultancy delivery team. • Defined outcomes and flexible payment options.

For more information please contact: Tom McCarthy at Niche tom.mccarthy@nicheconsult.co.uk

