

Executive Search Case Study - Airedale NHS Foundation Trust

Airedale NHS Foundation Trust CEO Bridget Fletcher was extremely impressed with the service provided by the NHS Leadership Academy Executive Search team when the Trust needed to recruit a new Director of Operations.

“A good Director of Operations can be difficult to find,” said Bridget, “but the NHS team brought forward a really high quality longlist and achieved a fantastic shortlist of really high calibre people. I thought the service they provided was excellent.”

From the outset, Bridget felt that that NHS Executive Search team was really focused on finding the right person for the job.

“The team was very professional. We had very good discussions as we went out to recruit. The NHS team was much more focused than I think commercial services would be on the individuals we were searching for and whether the kind of opportunities we were offering would be a good fit for their career. It was a more holistic and thorough approach which involved talking to potential candidates about their career and aspirations as well as their suitability for the role. In this sense it was an approach building on talent management in the NHS.

“The NHS search service was also very thorough in its research. The team went to lots of different organisations to find out the key players and also looked at the next layer down. They exceeded my expectations in terms of the number of organisations approached and people they contacted. I was surprised by how detailed the search was and by the quality of candidates brought forward. It wasn't just the same old networks, as with some commercial firms,” said Bridget.

Bridget also felt that the NHS team was supportive throughout the recruitment process.

“The information that the NHS Executive Search team presented to us was very thorough,” she said. “We had a well rounded and really good debate about the candidates. The team leader had lots of expertise and was able to support us through the whole process. He fed in his thoughts about the candidates to inform our discussions and the whole process was managed well. The team leader was extremely helpful on the day of interview, helping the panel to assimilate the information and determine who to appoint.

“I think it's an advantage that the team has inside knowledge of the NHS through the NHS Leadership Academy. This gives them intelligence about different organisations within the NHS as well as a depth of knowledge about the NHS that commercial services might find it hard to match.”

Stacey Hunter, who was successfully appointed to the Director of Operations post at Airedale in July 2013, also had positive experiences of the NHS Executive Search Service from a candidate's point of view.

“I was looking for potential opportunities at Director Level within Yorkshire and the NHS Executive search team was handling the Airedale NHS Foundation Trust search on behalf of the CEO,” said Stacey. “The process involved an expression of interest, long list, interview with the Executive Search team, a shortlist by the CEO and Board at the Trust and then a final panel over two days. This was a combination of technical assessment, activities with key stakeholders and then a traditional final panel interview. The NHS Executive Search team had someone in attendance at the final panel.

“Overall the process worked well and could not have been improved on. The team was informative and provided good guidance and support throughout. In the interviews with the search team it felt like a two-way process where I was able to probe and ask questions too. At the longlisting stage the team had the opportunity to find out more about people’s personal values and experience and motivation and by that stage I also felt I had a good feel for what Airedale was looking for.”

Although Stacey has also had good experiences of working with commercial recruitment teams, she felt that the NHS team had a particular interest in finding the best person for the post.

“Part of the strength of the NHS Executive Search team is that they are part of the NHS family,” said Stacey. “There’s a sense that the service has an interest in the quality of NHS leadership per se, over and above the interaction for a particular post. This was tangible to me on the basis on my experience and feels like a positive thing, where the NHS is spending time and energy investing in its people.

“The fact that the NHS Executive Search Service is a young service but can offer a service that is at least as good and possibly better than some well established agencies is a credit to them.”

Like Stacey, Bridget Fletcher said she would certainly use the NHS Executive Search Service again in future.

“I found the service to have a very different approach,” said Bridget. “There is also an element of trust involved. You know the team will do a very thorough job and that you are not being overcharged or given a hard sell about particular candidates, as you might find with some other search services. That’s reassuring.”