

Executive Search Case Study - University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust

Kate Bradley, Director of Human Resources at the University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust, was expecting to struggle with finding the right candidate for a Chief Operating Officer role at the trust in summer 2013.

“It’s a difficult job, so we felt we would be fishing from a small pool. But we received a brilliant service from the NHS Executive Search team and were very pleased with the results. They did a very professional job,” said Kate.

Kate chose the NHS search service partly because she had previously had some variable experiences with commercial recruitment agencies.

“We have had some good experiences with commercial agencies, but in one case we did not feel we were kept well enough informed throughout the process, and the support given to candidates could have been better,” she said.

Another driver for using the NHS search service was that it is also part of the NHS family. “It’s very important that the NHS Executive Search service understands the NHS, even if they recruit from outside it,” she said. “It is great that an NHS-led and run service should be so excellent, and often better in my experience than the service provided by commercial organisations.

“They are also honest about what they can and can’t do, and don’t overstretch themselves. The NHS team declined to recruit for one post as they felt they did not have the right external contacts, but they helped us to appoint a good commercial search agency. It’s professional to admit your limitations.”

Kate was most impressed by the fact that the NHS recruitment service was very thorough and robust, as well as fair and transparent.

“We have used the service twice, once for the COO role and once for a Chief Nurse post. They researched the roles extremely well and gained a very good understanding of what we needed. They found the best person for the job in both cases.

“The research stage was very thorough – I had 71 questions to answer and the level of detail in the candidate reports was very comprehensive. The experience was excellent from start to finish.”

Richard Mitchell, who was appointed to the COO role, has had experience of the NHS Executive Search service as both a commissioner and candidate. Both experiences have confirmed his positive views.

“I struggle to understand why anyone would use another executive search service, because the quality of the NHS service is fantastic,” he said.

“I have had some good experiences of commercial search agencies, but the NHS service has built up a very large and predominantly NHS database and network of contacts that is bound to be more comprehensive. The team also seems to share a belief in the NHS and in the importance of finding the right candidates. It helps that they have inside knowledge of the NHS and that they have similar values.”

As a candidate Richard felt very well supported and informed by the NHS team.

“The team is very careful about who they approach. In my experience commercial firms are not all that interested in who they appoint – they may call you on a weekly basis and say an appointment is perfect for you, but they have not done their research.

“I felt the team had a much better understanding of the NHS and they were very accommodating. All the dealings I had with them were very professional and they were generous with their time. I wanted to meet with them before the final interviews and they were happy to do that. The questions they asked were informed and the recruitment process was easy to understand, with no unnecessary delays between rounds. I felt they were very keen to find the best candidate.”

Richard highly recommends the NHS Executive Search service, not least because the cost of external recruitment agencies can be excessive, and the quality variable.

“If you are paying for an executive search service for a senior post and you know that the NHS service is brilliant, and that the money is also going back into the NHS, then it’s the right thing to do,” he said.