

NHS Leadership Academy case study - Executive Search Service Chelsea and Westminster

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When Chelsea and Westminster Hospital needed a new Chief Operating Officer, the leadership team turned to the NHS Leadership Academy Executive Search (ES) Service to help find one.

Chief People Officer Susan Young said it was critical to get the right person for the job.

“We had a vacancy when our previous post holder went to another organisation,” she said. “The hospital is going through a process of change where we are acquiring another hospital, the West Middlesex, in partnership for our mutual benefit. So we wanted someone experienced from within the NHS – someone who was a strong candidate with a good grip on day-to-day operational matters who could support us with our strategic growth.”

The successful candidate was Karl Munslow-Ong, who was previously at the Hillingdon Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. Karl knew of the post but had not yet thought about applying when he received a call from the Leadership Academy’s Executive Search Service.

“Part of the process involved long conversations with the staff from the service to establish if I wanted to go for the post or not,” said Karl. “These conversations clarified some of my questions and cemented my thoughts about applying.”

Susan Young had come across the ES service before at an NHS regional HR meeting. She had also had dealings with the service when it was involved in a senior level appointment in one of Susan’s previous roles.

“It was my first thought to involve the NHS ES service in the Chief Operating Officer appointment,” said Susan. “We wanted someone from within the NHS so it was not as well suited to external recruitment agencies. The Leadership Academy has the advantage of bringing forward candidates with a really deep knowledge of the NHS and the necessary experience for a COO role.

“They presented a good range of candidates and a good longlist and shortlist, and by the end of the process we were delighted with the person appointed.”

Susan felt that the search and selection process was very thorough.

“We welcomed the really regular updates that we received and everything was done proactively – we did not have to chase the team for information. We had weekly updates on how many candidates had applied, where they came from and about their skills at the start of the process.

“The paperwork was always well presented and we did lots of work together on drawing up the specification for the candidates in the application pack. The ES service was also involved

in the longlisting stage. They interviewed candidates on our behalf and came back with recommendations for a shortlist.

“We did the final interviews ourselves but the ES team provided good quality feedback reports which helped us to come up with the shortlist and talked through some of the candidates with us. They also helped with psychometric testing and assisted us in coming up with good questions for the final interviews.”

From a candidate’s point of view, Karl Munslow-Ong was impressed with the way the service dealt with the various stages of the application.

“They handled it incredibly well,” he said. “There was a good balance between a sincere desire to help individual candidates and clearly doing a good job in serving the client. The ES staff members were well prepared and honest in answering questions about things I wanted to know. I was impressed that they were well briefed on the role and had credibility within the NHS. They were also well connected and understood the system and the dynamics behind it.

“As a candidate I felt well informed at all stages, and small things were very important to me. For example, they took a long time to give me briefings and evaluations at each stage on how I had done, and about things I should pick up on. I think the process was very robust and fair for all the candidates involved.”

Acting Chief Executive Elizabeth McManus was not in post at the time and was therefore not directly involved in the early stages of the appointment, though she did take part in the interviews.

“We had a good shortlist of candidates and the feedback about individuals was very useful in helping to form the questions,” said Elizabeth. “The NHS Executive Search service has the advantage of perception – the Leadership Academy has been helping to develop a talent pool of leaders for the NHS and to further develop our future leaders, so why wouldn’t we use them! They have an advantage that other recruitment agencies do not have – an understanding of talented leaders in the NHS and access to individuals at all stages of their leadership journey. I would recommend them to others.”

Susan Young agrees that the ES service has a unique selling proposition.

“I think this concept is a brilliant one for the NHS,” she said. “The ES service provides the same or better service than other recruitment agencies at a cheaper price, and the money stays within the NHS. The service is meeting a real need and making use of the talent that already exists within the NHS. Where a post requires really deep and extensive knowledge and experience of the NHS, it is the obvious place to go. I have already recommended the service to others and would do so again.”