### **Case Study – Appointment process: Getting the best out of candidates**

**North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust: 31% female; 38% BAME**

Cedi Frederick, Chair of North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust is no stranger to feeling like the ‘token’ candidate. As one of just 11 BAME Chairs across NHS England trusts, when he was initially contacted by headhunters regarding the role “*I immediately responded, ‘Thanks, but no thanks.’…I genuinely believed they would not appoint a BME Chair”.* Luckily, the headhunters persisted and were able to prove to Cedi that they had done their research on his executive and non-executive experience, knowing his reputation as “*someone able to deliver change and change cultures”*. They were able to persuade Cedi that his experience made him *“a very credible candidate”*.

*“I think it starts with the headhunters’ approach…applicants from a BME background or women, a lot of them will carry all the negativity of their careers and their paths into that process, and perhaps they will go into that process lacking... perhaps not truly believing that they are a credible applicant… they have a little less belief in the process… and often, the systems we use do nothing to alleviate those concerns that people have.”*

As Cedi points out, with a history of negative experience, there are so many points at which the process can go wrong for the ‘minority’ candidate. He particularly highlights preparation, diverse panels and “*checks and balances on the decision-makers”*. Once an application has been made, *“first and foremost people have to be prepared. They have to have a level of self-belief that many don’t have”.* Transparent information on what the board is really looking for allows candidates to understand why they are considered a credible applicant.

Next, he ensures the interview panel are diverse. “*I’ve been asked the question, ‘Why is it so important to have diverse panels?’ So if you are a woman and you walk into a NED interview and the panel are all men, I think subconsciously, before you even open your mouth, you’re gonna feel slightly disconnected. It’s very difficult to have the empathy and the rapport that allows you to give your best in that process.”*

He mentioned the importance of challenge, *“So asking ‘So why didn’t you think she was as good as the other candidate?’ Asking that ‘why’ question can sometimes just spark a different conversation. It’s not about being judgemental; it is about rapport. When you walk into an interview, it’s about those first seven seconds, or whatever it may be, of connectivity”*. He recalled an example where as an independent panel member, he challenged his colleagues *“because the whole atmosphere in the room was very different from the first candidate, who was male, in terms of asking follow-on questions. The person really struggled to answer a question, so they were prompted. The next candidate was a female and the questions were short, sharp... I think the whole thing probably took twenty minutes less than the first interview, and I said to the panel, did they notice, and they genuinely looked nonplussed – ‘Notice what?’… ‘ how you supported the first candidate to give the most fulsome answer he could, whilst you only accepted the first part of the answer that the second candidate gave, when you knew that she probably was struggling just to marshal her thoughts, and if you’d said to her, ‘What about...?’ she would have said, ‘Oh, of course,’ and carried on.”*

On paper it was a fair process, both candidates were asked the same questions, but *“subconsciously, they had just put the first candidate at his ease and the second candidate was obviously tense, obviously nervous… and no doubt the feedback to her would have been, ‘Well, we’re really sorry, but the other candidates were better.’ Well, actually we didn’t get the best out of this candidate.”*