



The Seacole Group

Recruiting for Diversity

A Guide for NHS Provider Organisations

Foreword

Diverse boards provide opportunities for innovation and can draw on a range of thought, experience, and expertise.

Without diversity, homogenous boards can breed ignorance, groupthink and lead to bad decision making at the highest level which in the NHS, can be fatal. This is why diversity matters.

Culturally intelligent and diverse Boards, that reflect the communities they serve and ensures the wellbeing of patients remain central to all we do, are vital elements for NHS Boards - both now and in the future.

Dal Babu OBE
Chair, Seacole Group

About the Seacole Group

The Seacole Group is the national network of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic Non-Executive Directors in the NHS.

Our purpose is **to strengthen the Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) NED representation and voice on NHS Boards.**

We are on a mission to be the most progressive and strategic voice for issues that are pertinent to Black, Asian, and other ethnic staff in the NHS. We do this by providing insight with evidence, excellence, and integrity.

We encourage members to utilise their skills and experience to help us deliver on our objectives which include:

- Strengthen the BAME pipeline for Chair roles in the NHS through supporting potential applicants.
- To improve the effectiveness of BAME NEDs.
- Provide a support network for BAME NEDs to share common concerns and best practice.

This guide explores what it means to be inclusive from a legitimate place of our lived experiences as Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic people. Using an intersectional lens, we cover a variety of ways to support organisations on their recruitment journey which acknowledges and recognises the importance of other protected characteristics. See details of other networks at Annex A.

Recruiting for Diversity

“This is not just about social justice; tackling inequality of opportunity in the workplace is also about organisational efficiency and patient care”¹.

Because if we're honest with ourselves, the NHS as an embedded part of society is both part of the problem and part of the solution. More systematic action is needed to tackle the underlying causes of health inequality. More intentional action is needed to deliver on the moral basis of the NHS - the pursuit of high-quality care for all.

In March 2020, Simon Stevens pledged actions to achieve a target of 19% BAME representation at every pay band within our organisation by 2025 – matching the makeup of the wider NHS.

In July 2020, [The NHS people plan](#) called for “Leadership diversity: Every NHS trust, foundation trust and CCG must publish progress against the Model Employer goals to ensure that at every level, the workforce is representative of the overall BAME workforce. From September 2020, NHS England and NHS Improvement will refresh the evidence base for action, to ensure the senior leadership (very senior managers and board members) represents the diversity of the NHS, spanning all protected characteristics”.

On 31 July, Simon Stevens & Amanda Pritchard’s Third Phase of NHS response to COVID-19 letter to the service required “Each NHS board to publish an action plan showing how over the next five years its board and senior staffing will in percentage terms at least match the overall BAME composition of its overall workforce, or its local community, whichever is the higher”.

Evidence shows that diverse boards make the best decisions.

- [NHS workforce race equality: A case for diverse boards](#)
- [Delivering through Diversity](#)
- [The diversity and inclusion revolution: Eight powerful truths](#)
- [Benefits of a representative workforce](#)

Diversity describes the many different characteristics that make individuals unique and embracing diversity is about respecting and valuing them. This includes characteristics which are given additional legal protection under equalities legislation, including age, disability; gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual

¹ Taken from A Model Employer: Increasing black and minority ethnic representation at senior levels across the NHS (NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) leadership strategy 2019)

² Sir Simon Stevens’ letter to NHS England/NHS Improvement staff - Black Lives Matter 2020

orientation, and other characteristics that do not have legal protection but are also beneficial to boards, such as diversity of thought, background and lived experience.

A diverse, inclusive, and compassionate board will not only reflect the communities you serve and the staff you employ but will have the breadth of perspective and leadership styles to make good collective decisions that can hold the confidence of patients and the public.

With fixed periods in office, non-executive appointments represent a regular opportunity to refresh and improve your board diversity. The simple steps you can take will make a meaningful impact on Board diversity and ensure opportunities are open and attract people from all backgrounds. Achieving diverse leadership in the NHS is a longstanding priority. A diverse board ensures your decision making is the best it can be to deliver on the NHS commitment to meeting the needs of all our communities.



Improved outcomes from open and inclusive recruitment practices will in turn drive greater diversity by creating role models for the future. Staff and patients seeing people like themselves in your leadership, improves morale and signals that your organisation values and encourages different perspectives and diversity of thought.

Consider how you present and support your board to attract the people you need.

Know what kind of diversity will benefit your board and what you already have - understand your position on diversity at board level. Review the extent to which your board is reflective of the workforce it leads - for example are you achieving targets for gender parity at board level? What does your organisation’s Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) and Workforce Disability Equality Standards (WDES) data tell you about the composition of your board?

Demonstrate your commitment to working towards meeting your organisations’ aspirational targets for representation across the workforce and at board level – including aspirational targets for increased black and minority ethnic (BAME) representation as outlined in the [Model Employer](#) strategy.

Think afresh about [reasonable adjustments, flexible work environments and inclusive practices](#) when new members are appointed to ensure all board meetings are fully accessible.

How is your board perceived? Candidates will look at online profiles of your board and organisation before applying for roles. Encourage your board to be open about their lived experiences and act as role models for others considering the role. Provide insights into the values of your board members and what motivates them to help candidates from all walks of life to identify with existing board members.

Raise the profile of networks like the Seacole Group and the Disabled NHS Directors* Network to ensure that people from diverse backgrounds are aware that there are networks, which actively support people in those roles.

Be pragmatic about time commitment - offering flexibility in terms of time commitment is key to improving the diversity of the talent you can attract. Not everyone will be able to commit the same amount of time, but they can still make a valuable contribution, bringing insights that would otherwise be lost. Boards can have non-executives with differing time commitments depending on experience and availability.



Promote and develop talented people for succession with associate NEDs and supportive programmes offered by NHSEI for [aspirant chairs](#) and tomorrow's non-executive directors through the [NExT directors](#) programme. **Don't let talent slip through your fingers.**

Offer a comprehensive induction to new non-executives including ensuring provision of any necessary adjustments, coaching, mentoring and peer to peer support, giving them the tools to flourish in the role. Ongoing training and development supported through regular reviews and [annual appraisals](#) will give new NEDs the confidence to become ambassadors for the trust and the NHS. NHSEI's [NHS senior leadership onboarding and support](#) offers resourcing and signposting to support across the system.

Boards that embrace equality, diversity and inclusion make better decisions for all patients and staff. Regularly provide refresher training on equality and diversity and inclusion for your board, both individually and as a group, and give your leaders the space to reflect and discuss this learning. Ensure all governors have similar training opportunities. [Challenge your own thinking by seeking out thought-provoking reading.](#)

Although you might not be a member of an under-represented group, your [allyship](#) can support them and is vital in driving diversity within the organisation.

Do your staff and community understand the non-executive role? Consider how you communicate this to your staff, membership, and local community?

Encourage the best and brightest candidates from all walks of life by making processes and paperwork open and accessible.

Timing

Start planning your recruitment as early where possible and give yourself time to get it right. Keep in mind the principles of openness and fairness as you start to schedule interviews and plan what assessment you will put candidates through and allow at least three months from advert to appointment.

Consider setting aside two or more days for interviews spread across different weeks so that candidates' availability doesn't exclude them. By doing so, you won't restrict the number of talented people on the shortlist because of time restraints or need uncomfortably long days interviewing.

Avoid interview dates on important religious events, and always include interview dates and other key dates in the information pack. Those with carer responsibilities may need more time to arrange cover.

Plan opportunities for candidates to engage with you prior to application, such as open sessions, 121 discussions with the chair or an open invitation to your board meeting. You may also consider presentations or stakeholder engagement sessions for shortlisted candidates. Be clear what, if any, part these interactions have in the selection process and include details and dates in the information pack well in advance.



Audience

Ensure **search consultants** are properly briefed and know the importance of collecting monitoring information at every stage of the recruitment process and insist on ambitious targets on diversity.

Be [Disability Confident](#) accredited and visibly “disability confident” on your information packs and offer interviews to disabled **candidates** who meet the minimum criteria.

Open and **accessible processes** will include **reasonable adjustments** throughout, and **positive language** in all correspondence, information packs and adverts. Review the extent to which your person specification is inclusive. Be clear about the expectations of the role and support opportunities on offer to successful candidates. Encourage applicants to be open about their motivations and lived experience as well as professional experience in their applications.



Fatima Khan-Shah

“Being Asian Muslim woman means my approach to an application and interview differs somewhat to other candidates in a number of ways. It’s really important to me to have the visibility of people like me in the photos of the advert. The way in which I am interviewed is also a significant factor. I am culturally not encouraged to proactively talk about my achievements or what I bring with my leadership. What my contributions are? Or just selling your self is discouraged and seen as arrogance. Sometimes I have also felt that being an open Muslim can sometimes leave you open to bullying and challenge which affects your confidence. In interviews, I’ve been asked about how I’d fit in. It’s so important that processes like these enable anybody whatever their heritage to shine the best light so people can make an informed decision”.

Consider the makeup of the selection panel to ensure you have a range of professional backgrounds that reflects the diversity of the local population and the candidate pool. Insist on balanced and representative selection panels. Ensure gender balance and BAME representation and where possible, perspectives from disabled and younger people, or LGBT communities. [NHSI’s non-executive talent and appointments \(NED\) team](#) may be able to help source suitable members. Draw on independent perspectives from outside the trust and experts to test specific skills requirements, as appropriate.

The [Seacole Group](#) is the network of BAME NEDs in the NHS and support trusts in accessing experienced Chairs and NEDs who can bring their knowledge and experience to selection panels as independent members. You can access this talent by contacting Dal Babu (Chair) of the group by emailing Info@Seacolegroup.co.uk or via your [NED Talent and Appointments Team](#) contact. Independent members are usually paid a daily fee of £350 pro-rata which your trust will fund and pick up with the individuals concerned on a case by case basis.

Consult **panel members** on the person specification – external challenge can help identify barriers and bias and open up opportunities from different backgrounds. Be clear about assessment stages and any weighting in either the selection processes or criteria to prevent any uncertainty or shifting of goal posts later.

Panel members should be ready to challenge stereotypes and any discriminatory practices. Ensure they are appropriately trained and have refresher training to avoid bias and unconscious bias.

Focus on a positive candidate experience by identifying pathways for unsuccessful candidates before you start. Identify how or where they can gain additional knowledge and experience appropriate and relevant to the role, and how you will provide this feedback.



Additional tools

The NHSEI's [chair framework for development](#) offers a model role description and person specification based on values, competencies and lived experience. Focus on ability rather than prior experience, wherever possible to broaden the potential pool of candidates. Link criteria to the trust priorities and objectives so that candidates understand the needs of the trust and its priorities. Limit criteria to a manageable number, be concise and avoid duplication as panels will need to assess each candidate against all the criteria.

Be open about your diversity targets in your recruiting materials using evidence based on your local population and workforce.

Engage your whole organisation including individual board members in networking the vacancy and, use diversity and engagement leads at your trust to promote the role across a range of diverse groups and umbrella organisations both locally and nationally. Work collaboratively with partners and stakeholders across different sectors to achieve a truly diverse field. Use social media widely, including Linked-In and Twitter, to reach broad groups and networks.

Engage with [NHSI's NED team](#) to access their growing talent database of board-ready "Future NHS Leaders" across the country interested in non-executive roles.

The Seacole Group can also share Chairs and NED vacancies with their growing membership to access their personal networks and help trusts ensure the best possible field of candidates for these important roles. There is a fee associated with sharing these opportunities which the Seacole Group will invest in their strategic objectives including mentoring talented individuals seeking to move into NED roles. You can access this support by contacting Dal Babu (Chair) of the Group by emailing Info@Seacolegroup.co.uk .

Fair processes and reasonable adjustments support those with a range of attributes and life experiences and will avoid presenting barriers to candidates.

Applications

Monitoring information should be collected at each stage, but not be shared with the selection panel. The panel should see aggregate figures across diversity strands at key stages



including prior to closing date, at closing, at long list and shortlist. Be confident enough to pause and reopen applications to additional candidates with the same person specification if you do not have a diverse and credible field of candidates.

Consider anonymising applications. With the right person specification you can create a long list using values, motivation and lived experience as well as skills and experience required.

Selection

Ask panel members to assess candidates independently before coming to a joint decision. This will avoid “group thinking” and save time shortlisting.

Document reasons for panel decisions at each stage and always outline feedback that is helpful and meaningful to candidates, thinking about next steps for them. Challenge any reason that talks about “fit” or “stronger candidates”.

Offer interviews to disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria. This is a core commitment for a “Disability Confident” organisation.

Interview more people - consider inviting 6 to 8 candidates for a single role, across two days of interviewing. You will discover far more talent this way. Ask all candidates whether they need any reasonable adjustment for the interview.

Is the location of the interview accessible for all candidates? Consider travel arrangements, step free access, good lighting, accessible toilets, adequate space to move around the room in a wheelchair, drinking water available, relative quiet space which is free from disruptions.

Spend time prior to the interviews to agree the basic questions and include a mix of value and competency-based questions. limiting technical questions. The questions should be framed in a way that draws out candidates' responses and different elements of the selection criteria; values, competencies, technical skills or experience. Avoid questions based on stereotypes or that favour candidates that have previous board experience. The panel should be clear about any weighting from the outset, including ability versus experience.



New non-executives don't have to be the finished article – the strongest candidate may not be the most experienced but may have most to offer in their values and motivation, greatest ability in terms of competencies and required skills, and new perspectives offered from a range of different life experiences.

After selection

Identify strong talent and “near miss” candidates and ask if you can share their personal information with [NHSI's NED team](#) for future support and development. That way the candidates and the whole sector may benefit.

Chair candidates might consider non-executive roles or the Aspirant Chair Program. Non-executive candidates might consider governor roles, CCGs, ICSs or be suitable [NEXT Directors](#). Offer unsuccessful candidates' feedback and other opportunities to get involved with the trust - they were interested enough to apply so engage with them going forward.

Panel debrief – how could we do this better next time? Sometimes learning is best picked up at this time and noted for the next recruitment round. Panels will have a view on whether your changes really did improve the candidate field, if there was a skill or experience deficit that needs to be targeted with specific advertising/outreach activity in future, and practical issues like whether the panel had enough discussion time to reflect on interviews or if adjustments or support for candidates could be improved.

The Seacole Group would like to thank colleagues in NHSEI and for their support with this guide.

Annex A

Intersectionality – Working with other networks

The Seacole Group is a network of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic NHS NEDs who together bring knowledge, skills, and our cultural intelligence to help the NHS govern more effectively.

We support similar networks in the NHS (and beyond) as we acknowledge that while our members are from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background, they also have other protected characteristics.

We have members involved in other networks including:

The **Disabled NHS Directors Network** includes members from all parts of the country and a wide variety of impairments. It is open to NEDs and Executives of NHS organisations. Anyone interested in joining the group should email Kate Smyth at kate.smyth@lthtr.nhs.uk or telephone (07831) 380160 (voice or text).

“As a Member of both the Seacole Group and the Disabled NHS Directors’ Network (DNDN), I believe it will be in our collective interests to collaborate and work in partnership when issues in common - intersectionality - arise. Ensuring we use resources efficiently, effectively and for maximum gain to improve equality and equal opportunity for both”.

(Fasial Hussain)

Health and Care Women Leaders Network is a free network for women working across health and care. To find out more and to get involved in the network, please email the team at women.leaders@nhsconfed.org.

NHS Muslim Women’s Network is a free network for Muslim women working in health and social care. To join the network or to find out more, email at nhsmuslimwomen@gmail.com

“The recipe of my development and success is when my race, faith and gender are in perfect harmony!” (Ruby Bhatti OBE)