



Recruiting for a rare skill set

Case study with Royal College of Surgeons England (RCS)

Karen Haynes writes: At a transformational time for the Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCS), FJWilson has helped fill the new post of Head of Learning Innovation. In this interview, Director of Learning **Louise Goldring** gives an insight into the RCS – and her experience of working with FJWilson.

KH: *What kind of organisation is the RCS?*

LG: The RCS is both a registered charity and professional membership organisation. That gives it a really interesting dynamic.

We have over 27,000 members in the UK and abroad. Our learning programmes develop and maintain members' skills and knowledge throughout their surgical career – from medical school through to retirement. We also run events for our members and widening participation programmes with schools.

As a membership body, we're continually asking: What can we do for our members? What education do they need? Being responsive to our membership enables us to prioritise new ideas.

Our charitable purpose to advance patient care underpins the ongoing conversation about the education we provide. Everything we do impacts – directly or indirectly – on the patient experience. Better surgeons make for safer patients!

KH: *What's it like to work for the RCS?*

LG: The RCS employs about 250 people. I really like working for an organisation this size. It's large enough to have good structures and processes. But also small enough to know where to go for specialist expertise – colleagues just along the corridor. It makes for a culture with a real breadth of thinking.

This is an exciting time for us. The RCS is mid-way through redeveloping our Lincoln's Inn Fields site (our London home). [Project Transform](#) is creating a modern, light and flexible



facility to provide the best possible education, examination and research facilities for the profession.

The project has brought about a fundamental rethink of the learning function: how do we want to be seen? What do we want our new space to be?

We've reviewed the sustainability of our existing programmes. We've rebalanced the courses we offer in-house versus those we franchise, and we've withdrawn from some areas where others are well placed to step up.

A lot of strategic thinking has gone on. We want to be thought leaders in surgical education. So our learning strategy now has much greater focus on research and innovation. This means understanding the evidence base for everything we do. And developing new and strengthened partnerships with universities and companies in medical education.

KH: What implications has this all had for your team?

LG: Project Transform has opened up lots of interesting opportunities for different skill sets to come into the team.

For example, we hired an interim manager who had high-level experience in university research administration. With their input we scoped the new function and the post needed to head up our thought-leadership strategy.

KH: This is the role where you involved FJWilson?

LG: Yes – the Head of Learning Innovation role. We wanted candidates with quite a rare combination of skills.

The appointee needs to lead and bring together our in-house educators, understand their skill set and direct their personal development. And at the same time, be a horizon-scanner who can grasp educational research and understand the implications. As well as understanding all forms of learning – face-to-face, online, or blended. So it's a big role and one that we were expecting to be something of a recruitment challenge.



KH: *How did you come to work with FJWilson?*

LG: After we'd advertised the vacancy on the open market for a short period (as we usually do) FJWilson approached us.

I remembered that FJWilson had got in touch about another vacancy a couple of years back. That had stuck in my mind for two reasons. First, because of the care they took to understand our requirements – asking really good, challenging questions.

Second, I was struck by their integrity. After scoping the brief, FJWilson had explained they couldn't meet our needs on this occasion. Unlike some other agencies I've experienced, FJWilson would only put forward candidates when absolutely confident of their potential fit.

So when FJWilson approached us this time round I was ready to explore their offer. In the end we engaged them on an exclusive basis for this vacancy.

KH: *And how did that turn out?*

LG: Very well. We had the briefing conversation with Fiona [Wilson] and Anth [McKeown]. They asked so many questions! It felt quite a lot of time to spend on a briefing – an hour or so – but it saved us so much time later. In teasing out what we were looking for and what we were *not* looking for in a candidate we had to make our implicit knowledge explicit. This was really useful when it came to planning the interview stage.

FJWilson brought the same attention to detail to their running updates. These gave us real market insight; both the kinds of people approached and information such as the balance between 'active' and 'passive' candidates.

In all, FJWilson identified around 80 possible candidates. Three were interviewed; one was appointed. FJWilson's updates during the resourcing phase not only reassured us that recruitment was on the right track, but added value not possible from an internal recruitment approach.

FJWilson has successfully assisted us in fulfilling a recruitment need. We are very pleased with the quality of the team and the positive contribution that FJWilson have made to the recruitment process in this instance.

I would definitely recommend their service, as the full team were committed to ensuring our team were engaged and highly satisfied throughout the process.