

Feedback from David Welbourn, Public Governor from Governors Annual Conference 2019

Dear fellow governors,

I attended this national conference from NHS Providers aimed at providing networking opportunities at which governors could share ideas with fellow governors from other trusts, and hear from those involved in policy and influence at a national level.

Just a few headline reflections though.

Chris Hopson (CEO of NHS Providers) gave an update about the extent of the challenges and the agenda facing boards as they move into the NHS long term plan. An honest appraisal, he gave a balanced optimism and the critical nature of making integrated care succeed. The suggestion of a lack of a credible workforce strategy nationally was claimed as a much bigger threat than the difficulty of finances and the pace of change.

From conversations I had, it was clear that a number of governors elsewhere were not as openly embraced as I feel that we are – observations at committees are not always allowed. Our NEDs openly welcome engagement from governors – again not universally the case.

We had an excellent and very challenging session on addressing the lack of diversity at senior level nationally. I didn't note the exact figures, but they were quite stark. There is a very compelling case to address this. Where there is a representative diversity in senior positions, clinical outcomes fared better.

It is also a myth that fewer BME staff apply for senior positions but there is a lower success rate in getting onto shortlists, being interviewed and being selected. We were told very clearly that as governors, we have a strong part to play in helping improve BME representation by insisting that the candidates being considered for board roles have similar diversity to the overall community and workforce.

Gill Morgan, chair of NHS providers, even went so far as to recommend to us to reject a shortlist being put forward if it did not have an appropriate mix of ethnicity (and gender), and insist that interviews do not go ahead until a suitable balance of candidates has been put forward.

As governors rather than be unduly critical and dismissive of the good work they do we must exercise our responsibility to provide strong encouragement to the board appointments committee to consider a properly representative group of candidates.

With the search for a new Chair now underway, I encourage colleagues on the Appointments and Performance committee to follow this recommendation and press the case very strongly for a suitably diverse group of candidates to be considered.