



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO
Finding a Recruiting Partner Who
Consistently Delivers High Performers
To Your Public Sector Organisation

Introduction

There were more new recruitment companies registered in the UK last year than at any other time over the previous six years. Today the number is the highest it has ever been in the industry's history.

Many organisations in the public sector are reluctant to work with a recruitment company. While there may be several reasons for this, our experience suggests one of the main reasons is because HR departments and hiring managers are not always aware of the value a good recruiting partner brings.

Unfortunately, this can often be due to a poor previous experience and a belief that 'all recruiters are the same'. Yes, there are indeed differences in the service levels that different recruitment companies provide. The question is, 'how do you find a high-quality recruitment partner'?

In this document, we will outline how a good recruitment company adds value to public sector organisations, and how to find a company that you can partner with, who will provide long-term high performing candidates that will be a fit and match for a particular role and your culture.

Market Overview

The number of recruitment companies in the UK **has exploded in the last decade**, with 40,000 currently registered as trading.

Recruitment companies usually fall into the following categories: General and locally focused, database sector specialists, sector-specific with a geographical focus and search based sector specialist.

The explosion in the number of agencies presents a contradictory situation for organisations who are recruiting. It –

- Demonstrates confidence in the sector.
- Increases choices for clients.
- Over time it improves the overall quality of services available for organisations.

However, it presents a problem to organisations wishing to easily chose the right recruiting partner. Who do you choose and how do you decide?



The fast growth has also presented another problem – the best recruitment companies get buried among the huge number of organisations that are operating at a lower level. With a perception that ‘all recruiters are the same’ they are ‘tarred with the same brush’ so to speak.

It’s a recognised industry fact that many public sector organisations have a poor perception of the recruitment industry. However, recruitment companies who give a more in-depth service are seeking to change this perception.

Challenges Public Sector Organisations Face When Recruiting

Sometimes problems in the recruitment process come from within the client organisation, and not as a result of the recruitment company’s procedures.

Sometimes a recruitment consultant will be hired to find a candidate for a role for an organisation, only to establish that the hiring body actually needs two or more candidates in quite different roles to those the client had initially thought.

Other variables that organisations have often not agreed upon that can affect the level of service received are:

- The exact job description.
- The skills the candidate needs to possess.
- The characteristics and qualities of the person they are looking for that aligns with the organisation and team culture.
- Who the candidate will report to.
- The timeframe they have in which to find a candidate; from the beginning of the search to the proposed start date.

Talking about timeframes, this is often an area that has significant impact – why, you may be asking?

Timing Issues

At times an organisations **recruitment process** can take too long. In recruitment, speed is key – but this is something which many organisations forget as they go about their day to day work, and candidates are at risk of being lost – either in interest or to a rival organisation.

Recruitment companies often struggle to get a timely response from clients which means they are unable to respond to candidates who are waiting to hear if their application is to progress or not.

While a recruiting manager may think that a week is an appropriate amount of time to wait to give the first round of applicants a reply, in today's candidate driven market, this is too long.

Candidates will continue to progress applications for other positions rather than risk not being taken forward to the next stage.

A colleague shared a story recently:

An organisation they were talking to had struggled to fill a position in their team, and after several unsuccessful attempts, they labelled the position as 'hard to fill'.

On closer questioning, the hiring manager revealed they were habitually interviewing at least ten candidates before deciding who to take forward. He was losing candidates because of the time he was taking with his decision-making.

Do you have a role that you can't seem to fill with the right candidate? When was the last time you reviewed your recruiting process? Ask yourself;

- What are the gaps?
- Where are you losing time?
- How can you improve it further in a way that means you start to find the right type of candidates?



Taking these obstacles into consideration, there are four outcomes that come from a public sector organisation working with a recruitment partner.

- The recruitment company provides a poor service because they are given a poor brief.
- The recruitment company provides a poor service despite being given a good brief.
- The recruitment company provides a good service because they are given a good brief.
- The recruitment company provides a good service despite being given a poor brief.

Yes, that's right. Some recruitment companies will always provide a great service, even when they are not given a comprehensive brief to work from.

What Stops Public Sector Organisations from Working with Recruitment Companies?

There are several factors which contribute to organisations being disinclined to work with external recruiters. These include-

- Misconceptions of recruitment companies (as previously mentioned)
- Viewing a recruitment company as a cost rather than an investment in people
- Poor previous experiences

Value for Money

Organisations often say they choose not to work with a recruitment company because they cannot afford it. Your public sector organisation will have a budget for recruitment, whether you have outlined one or not.

Working with an external recruiter is an investment. The 'cost' is about what the impact on the team, department and organisation can be when a vacancy remains open for an extended period.

When a department and organisation for that matter isn't fully staffed, the impact on individuals can result in a decrease in productivity, increase in **stress** and reduced morale. The result of this over time is that the team ultimately deliver a poorer service to customers.

Many employers don't consider just how much of an impact a staff vacancy has on the organisation. What consequences does your team experience when you have unfilled positions for a significant period?

Your public sector organisation will not function efficiently if all of the members are loaded with extra duties on top of their own, no matter how well they seem to be coping on the outside.

If you think the budget your organisation should have for recruitment is £0, think again. The cost of not budgeting for recruitment itself **causes a financial strain on your company**. Leaving the calibre of potential employees for your organisation to chance is a risky move. Public sector bodies can only succeed when the right staff are in the right roles.

I have already mentioned that working with a recruitment company is not a cost; it's an investment.

If you find yourself disagreeing think of it like spending money on improvements for your home - while the initial cost might seem like an extra expense, ultimately, you are adding value to the property; hence it's an investment as you are ultimately building a higher value asset.

Previous Experience

You may be a HR manager or recruiting manager who has said 'never again' after working with a recruitment company in the past - what made you make this decision? Write down the reasons why and then look for a recruiting partner who ticks these boxes instead of leaving them blank.



If you found-

- 'They gave me poor candidates' - Why were they poor? Did they all meet the job specification you had outlined or did you feel that sent you everyone rather than a pre-selected list? Were they given the specification in detail?
- 'They took too long' - Did you give them an exact time frame in which to place the candidate?
- At the time, did you think they were too expensive? Was a successful candidate placed? How valuable has this been to your organisation this year?

Recently I was listening to a podcast and a CEO was being interviewed about his tech company's dramatic growth. The interviewer asked what did the CEO believe was the biggest factor in their recent success? The CEO answered;

"Recruiting our COO. This individual had doubled the size of the workforce and expanded into three new countries."

The CEO had worked with a recruiting partner to find and appoint the right COO.

I realise every new recruit won't have this impact but I'm sure you get the point.

What Types of Recruitment Company Can You Choose From?

Aside from the vast number of recruitment companies a business can choose from, crucially, there are different models.

The four main models are:

- **Temping:** Temp agencies only take on temporary client contracts and can only offer candidates jobs within a limited time frame.
- **High street:** These are larger, well-known agencies with nationwide branches.
- **Sector specialists:** These companies have chosen to specialise in several (or sometimes just one) specific sector such as Fintech, Law, or Biostatisticians.
- **Executive search:** These companies usually find the highest-level positions for companies who may need to recruit a position in highly confidential circumstances. Their clients know the value in investing in Exec Search services to ensure they get the best candidate for the role.

Location of the Recruitment Company – Regional, National, E.U. and Worldwide

While recruiting is now very much a global affair, geography can influence the service that a recruitment company provides.

When deciding which recruitment partner you want to work with, how important is their geographic location for you? Are you aware of where a recruitment company operates geographically or are you being drawn and influenced by their website because it states that they are an expert in the public sector?

So how does geography affect a recruitment company's service?

Take candidates for example: Some agencies are happy to proceed and represent candidates that they have never met in person, while others would never dream of doing this. (More on this in the next section). Understanding the importance of the location of the company you choose to work with should be a critical step in your decision-making process. Sadly, this is often overlooked.

How happy is your company to work with a recruitment consultant from Birmingham to find you a public sector finance candidate from a different county when you are based in Chester?

Do you want a relationship with your recruitment consultant where you can meet face to face, or are you happy to deal with them virtually? Be clear on what will work best for you, as the hiring manager, and your organisation.

Levels of Service Different Companies Give

Critically, the most important difference between 'good' and 'less favourable' recruitment companies is the level of service they give. If an organisation has reached the point where they have chosen to work with an external recruiter simply because they are the cheapest option, chances are they are not going to be best pleased with the level of service they receive.

There are several factors which vary between recruitment companies.

1. Fees

The reality is the more you pay, the better a service you will receive. If you pay less, don't be surprised when you get a scaled-down service. This is not to say that a recruitment company who offer a service for a one-off lower cost is a 'bad' recruitment company per se. In the current market, recruitment companies sometimes feel the need to reduce their fees to get contracts.

However, there is a vital consequence of this that we often find hiring managers do not always appreciate.

When a recruitment company is being pressured to reduce fees, it will affect the amount of time and effort that will go into the search for the perfect candidates for the client.

If you haven't outlined the amount you are prepared to invest in recruitment - now is the time. It is common for public sector organisations to begin conversations with consultants without having a clear amount they know their organisation is willing to invest.

Also, it's worth talking with your potential recruitment partners to check that the salary you are proposing for the vacancy position is right for the market to give you a more realistic idea about the percentage fee you will be investing.

2. How Detailed is Their Process?

The process is perhaps one of the most important factors to consider of all. Organisations think that all consultants follow the same process: this could not be further from the truth.

As recruitment companies are operating in an increasingly competitive market, they are being challenged to raise their standards and the value that their service brings.

What this means for you when choosing a recruiting partner is to consider how detailed you need your search to be? How detailed is the service of your current or former recruiting partner? How detailed have you believed these searches to be?

Harris Burns has over twelve steps in our recruitment process.

Understanding your organisation: We work with the key stakeholders to consider the organisations culture and specific context that potential applicants will operate within.

Understanding your role: We define and understand the specific responsibilities, skills and experience relevant to the role, with a particular focus on what the successful applicants will need to deliver.

Developing the talent pool: Supported by the latest recruitment technology our Consultants will develop the talent pool of applicants that “can” do the role by utilising a range of candidate attraction methods.

Designing the candidate attraction strategy and selection process: These will be discussed and agreed during the set-up phase.

Launch to social media and job boards: This will include:

- Jobsgopublic, WMJobs, Guardian, Indeed, Reed and where appropriate job boards for specific skills sets can be added.
- HarrisBurns.com
- Social Media - Twitter / LinkedIn
- Online Professional Network sites – LinkedIn
- Direct approach of individuals identified through traditional search across target organisations.
- Client and Consultant Networks / Referrals.

Initial conversations: All identified candidates will be approached, issued with a comprehensive information pack and spoken to by a Consultant so that we understand their motivation and ensure talented individuals remain engaged in the recruitment process.



Competency-based interviews: Longlisted candidates will be assessed utilising competency-based questioning to examine “how” they will operate and examine the individual’s motivations and career ambition to determine why they “want” the role to build a matrix assessment of their suitability.

Our Consultants utilise established competency frameworks to assess and compare the individual applicants but can switch to in-house models where available.

References and compliance: We check identity/nationality in accordance with UK Border and Immigrations guidelines and check qualifications appropriate to the job and collect referee details.

Agree a shortlist: On completion of the candidate interviews our Consultant will meet with the client to recommend and agree the shortlist of applicants that will progress to final interview.

Psychometric testing: These tests will be issued to shortlisted applicants to further enhance our understanding of their approach and preferred style of working and will be shared with a discrete group of stakeholders to include the line managers and key decision makers alongside support to understand and interpret the reports.

Final interview: Our Consultants facilitate the final interview process, collating and delivering developmental feedback to both successful and unsuccessful applicants and support the offer process.

Supporting offer and full on-boarding: we will continue to offer advice and support at each stage of the process.

3. Interviews and Candidate Qualification

The interview stage is one of the areas in which great recruitment companies can stand out from the crowd but more importantly, this is the stage that many organisations take for granted.

Many public sector organisations believe that their recruitment company is interviewing each one of their candidates before they submit their CV for consideration, but this is not always the case.

The interview process is vital to certain roles within some public sector organisations, but this can differ depending on the role and on the opinion of the organisations' hiring manager. While many recruitment companies believe that a phone call or video calling is enough to screen a candidate before being sent for an interview with a client, others don't.

Do not assume that your consultant's process includes face-to-face interviews; ask them if it does.

Be clear what elements you want as part of the candidate screening process you are investing in.

4. Advertising the Vacancy

Once a public sector hiring manager has briefed their recruitment consultant about the position they need to fill, they presume the vacancy will then be posted online in the usual places.

However, some recruitment companies do not advertise the job online and instead, rely on the contacts they have in their talent pool. Not posting the job online is a cost-saving measure, although the agency often portrays this as having complete confidence in their own talent pool.

With the exception of executive search, not advertising the job online is a big mistake; as it limits the scope for undiscovered talent. It does not benefit the client in any way; it simply makes the sifting process easier for the consultant.

While you may have perceived all recruitment companies were the same and offered the same service, I hope you are beginning to see where the differences are and why different fee levels are charged.

What Are the Different Models of Recruiting?

Recruitment companies work with a variety of different models. Some companies stick to one type such as contract, or search, while others will provide a variety of services determined by their client's needs - this is an issue which we will cover later in this section.

Below are the different models offered by recruitment companies.

Contingency Search

A contingency search is offered on a 'no win - no fee' basis. No fee is transferred to the recruitment company until the candidate starts their new position.

Retained Search

A retained search allows the recruitment company to demand an up-front fee in return for exclusively searching for a candidate for the role - no in-house recruiting or other agencies are involved.

Executive Search

An executive search is usually only used by organisations to fill senior-level roles. Some regard it as the most prestigious type of search and, consequently, it holds the highest fee.

Temp Agencies

Temp agencies deal only with temporary contracts of employment, and their fee is subsidised by the public sector organisation paying a higher hourly rate overall.

Contract

These agencies deal only with contractor employment, which is on a longer time scale than temp work but not as permanent as fixed contract.

Guaranteed Service

Some recruitment companies offer a guarantee on the candidates they provide. Recruitment companies offer this to their clients to give them 100% confidence in their candidates. Most reputable recruitment companies will offer a guarantee of some type.

Due to the degree of competition, some recruitment companies have developed their services levels and value-added offering to a point where the standard is similar to an executive search quality service, yet clients pay at contingency rates.



Remember, a public sector client might believe that they have struck a great deal with a recruitment company after negotiating a lower fee, but they do not take into consideration the effect this has on the overall quality of the search.

The result is that not as much time and effort will go into the search for a candidate, and the overall result is a dissatisfied client. It may sound harsh and think of it this way: a 10% fee will only produce a 10% service.

Choosing Your Recruitment Company

Once you realise that not all recruitment companies are the same, it is time to decide on one which meets your needs.

Now that you know what to look for make sure you are thorough in your screening process.

Ask the consultant how many steps their recruitment company follows throughout their entire process, and to give details of each step. If they cannot answer or the answer is ten or less, this company is not likely to add the level of value you may be expecting to your public sector organisation.

Any recruitment consultant can tell you that they specialise in your field, and why wouldn't they if they want your business?

What you must ensure is that they can deliver on their promises.

Only a scrupulous process conducted by yourself will be able to give you the confidence you are choosing the right recruitment partner. Ask the consultant about times when they have placed candidates in your field. They should be able to talk confidently about issues close to the public sector.

You can garner information from a recruitment company in other ways; before or during your first conversation with them. Check their website for social proof, such as case studies and testimonials; only reputable companies will be able to provide these.

A recruitment company's online presence can tell you a lot about the way they conduct their business. How long ago did they last post on their website or social media? Are they regularly updating or is it sporadic? If they cannot keep their public profile up to date, how well do you think they will be searching for your new candidate?

Not All Recruitment Companies Are the Same

In the past, you might have believed that all recruitment companies follow the same model, and the only thing that changed was the fee.

The reason why this commonly held misconception has persisted in the recruitment sector is purely due to the speed at which the industry has grown.

There are so many recruitment companies to choose from, public sector organisations rarely have the time to spend vetting different ones, much like they don't have the time to hire employees for their own business.

Holding the false belief that all recruitment companies are the same may lead you to decide to work with the company with the lowest fee, to reduce costs for your organisation.

But any fee at all is too much if you're not receiving the service you expect, or need, for your public sector organisation to thrive.

Choosing to work with a mediocre recruitment agency will provide you with inferior candidates, which ultimately is harmful to your team and organisation.

Benefits of Working with the Right Recruiting Partner

Working with the right recruiting partner for your organisation is beneficial in the following ways:

- A consultant working in your field will have in-depth sector-specific market knowledge.
- They take care of the lengthy task of evaluating CVs. Some job postings receive 100s of applications, and it can be logistically difficult for a smaller HR department to sort a large number of CVs successfully and efficiently.
- Speeding up the process means you waste less time (and in turn, money) due to your organisation organisation not being fully staffed.
- They have access to more candidates, including passive candidates who would not have seen your job posting because they are not looking for a new job currently.
- They guide you through the whole process and are experts at dealing with offers and counter-offers.

Working with the same recruiting partner over time helps them to understand the needs of your organisation better. This way, they will always be on the look-out for the talent they know will be perfect for your organisation and will have the right candidates lined-up or in mind.

To help you choose the right recruiting partner for your business we have compiled a quick checklist. (see page 12). Before using this, here are a few things we suggest you have clarity on first.

How to Choose the Right Recruitment Partner

Before you work through the checklist, there are several factors to consider before choosing your recruiting partner.

- What is your budget?
- Do the agency values match yours?
- Are they a specialist public sector company, or will a general agency meet your needs?
- Are they aligned to any professional bodies? Which ones?
- How many stages does the recruitment company include in their recruiting process?

- What does their fee include exactly? Remember – low fees generally do not guarantee a high level of service.
- How much, and what kind of social proof (testimonials and case studies) do they provide on their website from satisfied clients?
- How do the organisations you contact work with their candidates? Email only? Phone? Video calls?

Checklist

	Y	N
Here is a checklist of the most crucial points to consider when choosing your potential recruiting partner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
For each question, answer yes (Y) or no (N) and tally up your score at the end.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our public sector organisation has decided to partner with a recruiting partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our recruiting partner is a specialist in our sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The recruiting company has demonstrated their expertise in our sector through social proof. We have seen case studies, testimonials, plus their website and social media reflects this.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The company will visit our premises to ensure they fully understand a vacancy, our recruitment goals and the structure and ethos of the team/department the candidate will be joining?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The company /agency will work with me to create a detailed job description?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The company /agency will consult with me to ensure the remuneration package fits with the market, the candidate we aspire to employ and our company budget	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The company /agency will create and agree a detailed person specification for the role	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All stakeholders involved in the interview process have agreed the job and person specification	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The company /agency will advertise the role on a variety of channels we have agreed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Y	N
The advert the company /agency will be optimised for online job searches?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The company /agency will interview candidates face to face or via phone/video before submitting their CV to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The company /agency will undertake relevant skills testing and/or personality profiling of candidates and provide me with the results	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The company /agency will manage all the logistics of arranging interviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All stakeholders have agreed dates for the interview process	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have provided the company /agency with dates and time scales for the whole interview process	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The company /agency invest time briefing and support candidates in the preparation process	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The company /agency provide candidates and ourselves with articles and reports that support and educate both parties through the recruiting process and beyond	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The company /agency will manage the communication with candidates throughout the interview process	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will the recruitment company provide a draft of interview questions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can your recruiter sit on an interview panel as an independent advisor?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We provide the recruitment consultant/s with relevant feedback for candidates at each stage of the process so that the consultant can fully represent our organisation and brand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The company /agency will manage the offer process and deal with any salary negotiations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The company /agency will handle any counteroffer situations on our behalf	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The company /agency offer a candidate guarantee if the candidate doesn't work out	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The company /agency will keep in contact with the successful candidate and ourselves during the onboarding process to ensure a successful transition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Y	N
We enjoy a collaborative relationship with our chosen recruitment partner and regard them as an integral and valuable member of our team	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We gain invaluable market knowledge from our recruitment partner that we don't get access to elsewhere	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our company are very clear on the value that our recruitment partner/s bring to our organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Your Results

How well did your organisation score? If you answered more N than Y, now is the time to think about what you are expecting from your recruiting partner, and more importantly, if you are getting the value you want and expect from the fee that you are paying.

Working with the right recruitment partner will add value to your public sector organisation; choosing the right one is the best step you can take to ensure your organisation is only delivered high performers.



HARRIS BURNS

About Harris Burns Ltd

Set up in 2017, Harris Burns is a specialist recruitment business and talent partner with a strong knowledge and understanding of the Public and Not for Profit Sector.

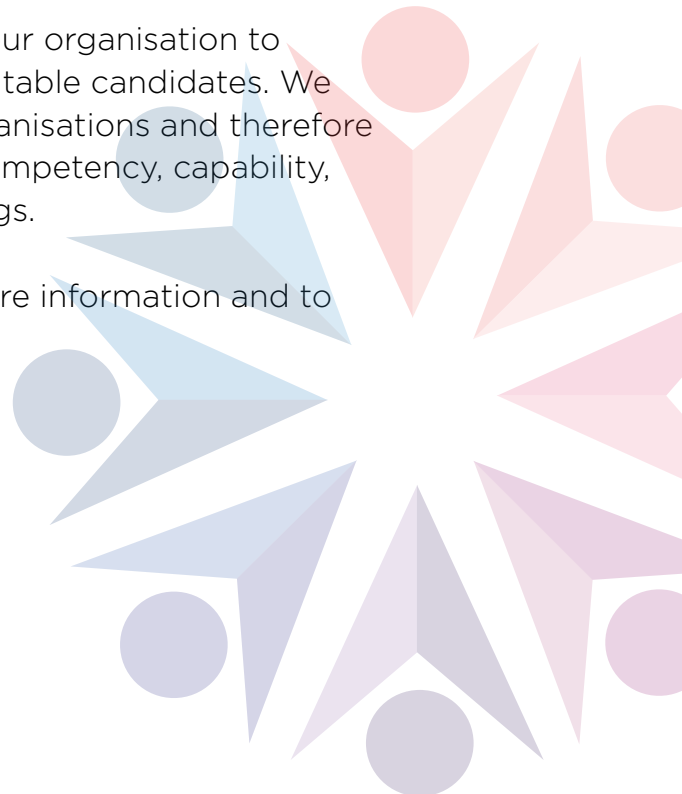
Our highly experienced, specialist consultants each have extensive knowledge of the market, proven track records and an established network.

We provide a wide variety of recruitment solutions to clients and candidates alike.

Our aim is to provide you with a seamless recruitment process with a view to becoming an extension of your business. Our consultants bring with them proven experience and are able to utilise their networks to find 'passive' individuals, not widely available to other agencies.

We take the time to understand the dynamics of your organisation to put us in the best position possible to search for suitable candidates. We understand how key placements can transform organisations and therefore all our consultants explore candidates' individual competency, capability, attitude and suitability through face to face meetings.

Please visit our website at [Harris Burns.com](https://www.harrisburns.com) for more information and to view our latest **blog posts**.





About Heather Clarke

With over 20 years experience in the recruitment market, Heather has extensive experience covering executive permanent appointments across a variety of specialisms.

She has an in-depth understanding of public sector organisations and has developed a client portfolio ranging across the whole of the NHS, Social Housing, Charity, Education and NDGB sectors.

As a trusted recruitment partner, Heather thrives by gaining a detailed understanding of her clients situation and constantly look to attract candidates who would fit into these organisational cultures and really live the values. Developing excellent client and candidate relationships and working with an honest and professional approach is of the highest priority.

Heather has personally recruited for clients across Midlands region for roles including: Chief Finance Officers, Directors of Finance, Directors of Nursing, Director of Strategy, Chief Operating Officer, Deputy Director of Finance, Head of Information, Head of Procurement, Head of Commissioning etc.

Your Next Actions

Connect with us in multiple ways

You can connect with either of us on various social channels including **LinkedIn, Facebook** and **Twitter**.

To book a private conversation about your career aspirations contact us at **info@harrisburns.com** or call 01952 743243

Best wishes for an amazing future career

Heather

