

Case Study

Establishing an apprentice scheme

How the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) created an apprentice scheme to aid the professional development of diverse aspiring non-executive directors (NEDs)

DBS, chaired by Dr Gillian Fairfield, is responsible for helping employers make safer recruitment decisions.

DBS has established a rolling apprenticeship scheme to enable aspiring NEDs to gain boardroom experience. With a small board of six members, at any time the DBS also has two apprentices joining board and committee meetings.

The opportunity

DBS sought to improve the ethnic diversity of its board, to bring a wider range of perspectives into boardroom discussions.

All DBS board members are appointed by the Secretary of State at the Home Office. Establishing an apprentice scheme enabled individuals with less exposure to boardroom situations to gain experience of how a public board operates.

The action

DBS worked with two organisations, Black on Board and Boardroom Apprentice, to enable aspiring NEDs to join board meetings for between six and twelve months. Apprentices from both organisations typically had prior leadership experience, which was supplemented by training on matters such as the role of the board, how boardrooms operate and public sector governance.

DBS met with candidates from Black on Board before confirming their position on the scheme. Those coming from Boardroom Apprentice were allocated a place by the organisers of the programme.

Each apprentice is given a 'buddy' on the board, typically the chair, to meet with regularly before board meetings to discuss the papers and their proposed contribution.

The outcome

DBS currently has a rolling programme of apprentices, who play an active role in contributing to board and committee meetings. Discussions have benefited from the addition of diverse perspectives and lived experience.

Apprentices from the scheme have gone on to join boards such as Barnardos' Northern Ireland National Advisory Board, citing their experience as a DBS apprentice as a key contributor to their onward success. Another has joined the DBS as an associate member of the board.



Watchpoints

Chairs who adopt this approach will need to be mindful of the additional administrative effort needed to run the scheme. Apprentices will require a full induction, security clearance and access to IT equipment.

Chairs may need to consider time requirements after the programme concludes, to ensure continued support for apprentices while applying for board positions.

To establish an apprentice scheme, it will be important for chairs to work closely with their relevant sponsoring department to ensure that they are well informed on the programme and agree the distinction between the status of non-executive directors and apprentices. Apprentices are not members of the board and do not have the same roles or responsibilities as public appointees.

Find out more

Diversity in Public Appointments (DiPA) was a research project conducted during 2022 – 2023, involving contributors from across public service, including members of the House of Lords, senior civil servants, public body chairs, and diversity experts.

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Case Study

Seeking age diversity on the board

How an organisation sought to appoint a Non-Executive Director (NED) who could bring a younger perspective to boardroom discussions

The opportunity

A public body that is responsible for delivering services for young people identified a skills gap on its board that was hampering its ability to view challenges through the eyes of a young person.

According to the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments' (OCPA's) 2021/22 annual report, fewer than half of public appointments are made to individuals under the age of 55.

The organisation set out to appoint a NED who could bring additional perspectives – either good knowledge of policy areas around children's services or practical experience of serving in youth communities.

The chair recognised that individuals with a practical understanding of the issues affecting youth communities could include those closer to that age group, so broadened the job criteria to enable young people with exceptional life experience and skills to apply.

The action

In setting out the job description, special care was taken to ensure that more weight was placed on life skills than on professional experience. For example, encouraging individuals who may have shown leadership at local level to apply, or those who have specific insights on youth issues or useful connections with youth groups.

During the assessment, the panel took into consideration candidates' potential and achievements to date. Data was used to evidence candidates' intellectual ability and performance in comparison to their peer group.

Upon appointment the chair provided one-on-one mentoring for the younger NED, as well as assigning them a coach. Boardroom inclusivity was a priority, focusing on ensuring that all members felt comfortable to contribute.

The outcome

The public body was able to appoint a younger NED with practical experience and understanding of the youth communities the organisation serves.

The chair focused on how they can get the best from the NED, exploring how their life skills can be utilised in service of the body.

The appointment has supported the board in their ambition to deliver a new policy approach, putting children at the centre of their work.



Watchpoints

Chairs are encouraged to assess candidates on their life experience and potential, looking at ways to bring diversity of thought into the boardroom.

Chairs might consider providing additional support to younger NEDs, to coach them in taking on a new set of responsibilities at national level for potentially the first time.

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Case Study

Recruiting associate board members

How the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care (PSA) created an associate board member programme to offer development opportunities to aspiring non-executive directors (NEDs)

The PSA, chaired by Caroline Corby, is accountable to parliament as the oversight body for health and social care regulators.

Early in 2022, the board embarked on a recruitment campaign to appoint an associate board member as part of their Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) action plan.

The opportunity

ED&I issues remain a concern for health care regulators, particularly the impact on fairness for registrants and outcomes for patients and service users.

As the oversight body, the PSA undertook an independent audit of its approach to ED&I issues and developed a comprehensive action plan for improvement, both within the organisation and in those they oversee.

As part of this, the chair wanted to increase the diversity of board members, in addition to helping the development of future potential public appointment candidates.

The action

In early 2022, the PSA began an associate board member programme, looking for people from a more diverse range of backgrounds and people who might not be ready for a public appointment, but who showed potential.

The PSA decided on a two-year programme, supporting the successful candidate through mentoring and rotating through board committees. It was also decided that the successful candidate would be paid the same rate as other PSA board members.

During the recruitment campaign the executive specifically targeted candidates as broadly as possible, paying particular attention to the person specification to make it as accessible as possible and to make it clear that they were not looking for applicants with lots of board experience.

In addition to the public appointments website the PSA used the following platforms to advertise the role:

- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) jobs
- The PSA's website, Twitter and LinkedIn accounts
- The Seacole Group
- National Council for Voluntary Associations
- Inclusive Recruiting
- Operation Black Vote
- Black Solicitors Network

The outcome

In May 2022, the PSA appointed its first associate board member. The successful candidate was appointed by a panel made up of board members, including the chair and an independent member. The associate board member can contribute fully to boardroom discussions but is unable to vote on matters due to the organisation's legislation.

The successful candidate increased the diversity of the board, bringing a unique perspective to boardroom discussions.

The PSA is planning to measure the success of the programme by judging the added diversity it brings to board discussions and, ultimately, whether appointed associate board members move on to become public appointees or NEDs in other roles.

Watchpoints

Chairs are encouraged to be proactive to ensure that adverts for the associate board positions are shared as widely as possible.

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Case Study

Accommodating flexible working

How the North Sea Transition Authority (NSTA) became the first public body to appoint a Non-Executive Director (NED) job share

The NSTA, currently chaired by Tim Eggar, works with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to regulate and influence the oil, gas and carbon storage industries.

In July 2022, the NSTA announced the first ever public body non-executive directors' job share. The Secretary of State for BEIS appointed Fiona Mettam and Vicky Dawe to jointly take on the role of Director of Energy, Development and Resilience.

The opportunity

As the sole shareholder of the NSTA, BEIS appoints a representative of the Secretary of State to sit on the NSTA board. As a NED, responsibilities include attending board meetings and liaising with various stakeholders.

In early 2022, the position of shareholder director became available. One of the candidates interviewed by the panel for the vacancy was part of a pre-existing job share. The NSTA chair's

previous experience of working with job shares in the private sector provided the board with confidence in their effectiveness.

The action

To enable the candidates to be appointed on a job share, the NSTA amended their articles of association to allow for an 'alternative director' to sit on the board. It was important to avoid setting a precedent to allow for the appointment of two NEDs with the expectation that only one would attend board meetings.

The outcome

Since appointing the directors there has been an energy crisis, which has added significant pressure to the remit of the NSTA. The two female directors have added greater diversity, enriching board discussions and bringing additional perspectives.

It was important to ensure that both directors were properly inducted to the board. The appointees' prior experience of working together meant they had clear channels of communication in place and could contribute to meetings equally, regardless of the timing of the board meeting.



The NSTA has invited BEIS to consider making a change to the Companies Act, to enable more executive directors to work on job shares.

Watchpoints

Chairs will need to consider governance arrangements carefully. NSTA supported a change in its articles of association to enable the appointment of multiple directors.

It is important that the directors are both kept equally informed and have equal responsibility to carry out their duty to the board.

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Case Study

Creating a succession plan

How the chair of the Port of Tyne (PoT) creates an annual succession plan to support efforts to recruit diversely to the board

The PoT is the statutory harbour authority responsible for ensuring the safe navigation and use of the River Tyne. Despite classifying as a commercial body, appointments to the PoT board are made by the Department for Transport's (DfT's) Secretary of State.

On an annual basis, the PoT chair, Lucy Armstrong, prepares a succession plan to be shared with the department, setting out the strategic direction of the board.

The opportunity

Succession planning enables the chair to support a spread of tenure, skill sets and life experiences on the board to ensure the organisation is able to deliver on its strategic objectives.

Tyne 2050 lays out the PoT's strategic ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030 and a test bed for green innovation by 2050. As such, during the recruitment for a new NED in early 2022, the organisation was keen to appoint a board member with knowledge and experience of the energy sector.

The action

To prepare the annual succession plan, the PoT chair begins with completing a skills audit and creating a skills matrix. Alongside this, the deputy chair circulates a questionnaire to board members, requesting input on their experience on the board and ideas for its future direction.

Working with the company secretary, the PoT chair drafts a long-term succession plan for both executive and non-executive positions. The plan is closely aligned with the organisation's business plan and outlines long-term strategic challenges faced by the port.

This document is then shared with the DfT sponsorship team, informing them of the skills gaps on the board. The 2022 plan outlined the chair's ambition to acquire two non-executive directors (NEDs) with specific knowledge of the energy sectors.

The outcome

Early in 2022, the PoT announced the appointment of two new NEDs: one with significant experience in the energy sector, the other coming from a global tier one manufacturer with both public and private sector expertise.

The PoT board currently hosts a large spread of tenure, with two NEDs serving under a year, two around 18 months, two for four years, and two for nearly six years.



Succession planning has enabled the chair to offer development opportunities to less experienced NEDs and mitigate the risk of losing organisational memory.

Watchpoints

Chairs are advised to be mindful of the time taken to recruit new NEDs and begin succession planning typically around 18 months before a vacancy requires filling.

Chairs can benefit from requesting input from board members on the strategic direction of the board and sharing plans openly with sponsoring departments.

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Case Study

Hosting an outreach webinar

How the Coal Authority planned and delivered a webinar to advertise two non-executive director (NED) vacancies, and received a higher volume of applications compared to previous recruitment rounds

The Coal Authority, chaired by Jeff Halliwell, exists to manage the effects of past coal mining on communities and the environment. In August 2022, they hosted a webinar to advertise two upcoming NED vacancies, now available to watch on YouTube.

The opportunity

The Coal Authority is governed by a board of four NEDs. In August 2022 they launched a recruitment campaign seeking to increase the size of the board to five members and improve diversity among the NEDs.

A key motivation to host a webinar was the opportunity to improve awareness and understanding of the mission of the Coal Authority. Not obviously described by the organisation's name, environmental sustainability is an important focus of its work.

The action

The Coal Authority decided to approach several jobs boards to advertise the webinar, using funds from its own budget. They mainly selected those that they had pre-existing relationships with and that targeted candidates with the diverse characteristics they were looking for. They have existing subscriptions with two companies, LGBT Jobs and Talos, which posted advertisements for the vacancy on several different jobs boards.

Staff were also encouraged to post about the webinar opportunity on their socials to reach wider networks. The executive also proactively shared the advert with key partners and stakeholders, requesting they promote the roles to their networks.

Those that attended the webinar were asked to provide their name and email address upon registration.

The format of the webinar consisted of presentations from the chair, chief executive and key colleagues across the organisation, highlighting various aspects of their work, followed by an opportunity for a Q&A session.

The webinar content largely focused on promoting the key values of the organisation: to be trusted, inclusive and progressive. They also discussed the publication of their recent business plan and progress to improve their customer journey.

Jobs boards used to advertise the position

LGBT Jobs:

- LGBT jobs
- Disability jobs
- Black and minority ethnic jobs

Talos:

- 360 Resourcing
- Total Jobs
- Reed
- Monster jobs

The outcome

The webinar was attended live by 36 viewers and subsequently streamed 86 times on YouTube. By the deadline for the vacancy the Coal Authority had received 93 applications, an increase of 51% from the last recruitment round.

In part, the board credit this increase to their focus on outreach work and the fact that they were advertising two vacancies at once.

Watchpoints

Chairs are encouraged to give consideration to how much public money they deem appropriate to spend on job advertisements. Caution is needed that donations are not provided to job boards to advertise positions, ensuring they bill for their services.

Those wishing to engage in outreach activities might find it useful to begin planning well in advance of the application deadline – the Coal Authority hosted the webinar eight months before the positions required filling.

Chairs may wish to consult their sponsoring departments about what data can be collected and tracked through to application.

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Case Study

Promoting boardroom inclusivity

How a public body supported a diverse non-executive director (NED) facing pressure from external groups

The opportunity

Following the recruitment of a NED from an ethnic minority background to a public body board, members began to observe over the course of a few meetings that the individual was not participating in boardroom discussions as they had done previously.

Members were keen to understand what was prohibiting the NED's ability to communicate their ideas as fully as they had done before.

It became apparent that the NED was facing pressure from external groups to act as their voice and try to influence outcomes on the board.

The action

Members first tried to create a safe environment for the NED to share their challenge, seeking permission from the individual to bring the matter to the attention of the chair and CEO.

The chair demonstrated their support for the NED by listening and providing reassurance of their independence.

The head of governance revised the organisation's on-boarding and reporting processes to take account of the individual's experience.

The outcome

The work undertaken on this matter created an awareness that individuals on boards may at points come under pressure from external groups to be their voice.

The public body established a clear process for individuals to share any pressures with the chair and CEO confidentially. Furthermore, the induction process for new board members was enhanced to highlight the support that was available for individual NEDs.

This provided board members with more confidence to share their lived experiences in boardroom discussions.



Watchpoints

As public body boards become increasingly diverse, greater awareness is needed of the risk that individual board members are viewed as a representative of a diverse community and can be exposed to pressure to deliver a singular view that may not reflect their personal views.

Chairs are encouraged take steps to ensure that members know the steps to report an issue to the CEO or chair confidentially.

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Case Study

Learning from an external recruitment specialist

How a national regulator enlisted the support of an external recruitment specialist following a failed recruitment campaign

The opportunity

In early 2022, a national public body published a new strategy stating its ambition to increase and maintain trust in its work as a regulator. As part of this, the chair sought to improve the ethnic diversity of the board to ensure that a range of lived experiences was represented on the board and to mitigate the risks of groupthink.

Following a failed recruitment exercise due to a lack of appointable candidates, the public body and the sponsoring department agreed to enlist help from a recruitment specialist.

The action

On re-running the competition, the chair ensured the sponsoring team was aware of the unequivocal commitment to improving diversity.

The sponsorship team was responsible for the procurement process, assessing agencies on their proven ability to attract diverse candidates.

The chair focused effort on engaging and energising the board to get involved with the recruitment process, encouraging them to seek out diverse candidates with priority given to their lived and professional experiences rather than prior board experience.

Board members set up conversations with individuals who had not previously considered themselves suitable to apply for public appointments, to explain the role of a non-executive director (NED) on the board and the skills that the chair was looking for.

The chair then created a live list of aspiring NEDs to share news of future vacancies with.



The outcome

Following the conclusion of the recruitment campaign run by the external recruitment specialist, two new NEDs were appointed, including the first board member from an ethnic minority background.

Board members are now actively seeking out diverse NEDs to support the organisation to stimulate a talent pipeline.

Watchpoints

The organisation has taken learning from the external recruitment specialist, now encouraging board members and executive staff to keep a list of potential future NEDs to form their own talent pipeline.

Chairs may wish to develop this as a new focus for board members, such that NEDs are expected to proactively seek talent throughout their tenure.

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Case Study

Utilising the equal merits provision

How the Parole Board for England and Wales launched a recruitment campaign in 2019 and improved the ethnic diversity of their 246 parole board members from fewer than 5% to 17%

The Parole Board is an executive non-departmental public body of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). It is responsible for making around 25,000 decisions per year on whether or not prisoners should be released from prison once they've completed their custodial sentence.

Separate to the managerial board, the Parole Board now includes over 300 members, appointed by the Secretary of State for Justice under the Criminal Justice Act 2003, to make assessments on these decisions. With a strong focus on diversity, equality and inclusion, the Parole Board is keen to appoint people (both staff and members) from a range of different backgrounds to represent the community that it serves and protects.

In 2019, Parole Board management and the MoJ public appointments team ran a recruitment campaign for new Parole Board members, making use of the equal merits provision to support their ambition to improve ethnic diversity.

The opportunity

In 2017, the seminal Lammy Review recommended that the Parole Board and the MoJ begin reporting on the proportion of prisoners released by offence and ethnicity.

As of 2018, only 5% of Parole Board members identified as coming from an ethnic minority background, with no black members. This contrasted

with the fact that latest figures show 25% of the prison population identified as coming from an ethnic minority background, with 13% being black.

In 2018, ministers agreed that the Parole Board and MoJ embark on a recruitment drive to improve the ethnic diversity of Parole Board members.

The action

Researching the avenues possible, and in discussions with colleagues in the then MoJ Project Race team, the public appointments team (with the Parole Board's agreement) decided to explore positive action for a future campaign as a way of addressing underrepresentation.

In discussion with the board, legal advice was obtained and it was decided that an equal merit approach would be adopted at both the sift and interview stages, if needed. This meant that if two candidates were assessed equally, the candidate who would add to the ethnic diversity of the organisation would be selected.

MoJ and the Parole Board shared proposals with Cabinet Office colleagues, before the public appointments team prepared advice for the ministerial team to agree.

The Parole Board decided on a regional approach, opening the campaign solely to applicants in the north of England. As well as helping to manage the overall volume of applications compared to a national campaign, the board aimed to improve the geographic balance of its membership to help ensure coverage across England and Wales. The executive worked to identify and engage with relevant groups to conduct outreach, holding regional and virtual awareness sessions with potential candidates, publicising the roles on local radio and creating a microsite to support the campaign with videos on the parole process.

Diverse assessment panels were established and, to support the regional approach, interviews were held in Leeds rather than at the usual venue in London.

Equal merit was used only at the sift stage to ensure that diversity was not filtered out during the assessment of applications.

The outcome

In August 2019, MoJ and the Parole Board announced the appointment of 53 new members, 48% of whom identified as coming from an ethnic minority background. This raised the board's ethnic diversity overall from fewer than 5% to around 17%.

As well as creating a more ethnically diverse membership, the recruitment also brought greater diversity in terms of members' professional backgrounds and experience.

Watchpoints

Chairs may wish to employ the use of equal merits when there is a specific underrepresentation on the board that requires addressing.

The process took nine months and required a lot of effort from all stakeholders. Chairs are encouraged to be mindful of resources required and engage closely with their sponsoring department to undertake this kind of project, so they can achieve the best outcome possible.

Chairs can help to mitigate the risk of unconscious bias against certain groups by seeking to put in place a diverse assessment panel.

Chairs may wish to consider seeking legal advice when trying to redesign recruitment procedures to ensure they deliver on their public sector equality duties, as well as wider employment laws.

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Case Study

Focusing on outreach activities

How the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) embed outreach into every recruitment campaign

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) sponsors 47 agencies and public bodies, more than any other government department. DCMS is focused on protecting and promoting Britain's cultural and artistic heritage and helping businesses and communities grow through investment in innovation.

The appointments team engages in a range of outreach activities to promote appointments to individuals throughout the UK who may not have ever considered applying.

The opportunity

DCMS' ongoing goal is to ensure that the applicant field for public appointments better represents the demographic makeup of the UK, which the department considers is vital for good governance.

The department is focused on attracting new talent to apply who may have never heard of public appointments before, to ensure that public body boards that they sponsor have the best talent, from the broadest range of backgrounds.

Committed outreach to potential applicants is particularly important for DCMS given the number of bodies based in London, where DCMS has sought to increase representation from people throughout the UK.

The action

Outreach is embedded in each campaign, through a core network of affinity groups and professional networks. These groups receive regular communications from DCMS on upcoming vacancies, with additional networks sought out specifically for each campaign.

The organisations are focused on the full breadth of diversity, from underrepresented groups to local enterprise partnerships in regions throughout the UK. DCMS works closely with the organisations themselves to grow lists of sector-relevant influencers and groups.

In addition, the appointments team plan awareness-raising events to encourage interest in appointments in general. For example, in June 2022 the Secretary of State hosted a roundtable in Blackpool which was widely shared on social media.

For specific appointments, DCMS has created video content to demystify the role and partnered with sector influencers to promote this. For example, the department joined with the Young Trustees Movement for a webinar to promote a role at the National Portrait Gallery.

Finally, the DCMS Public Appointments Network, which was established in 2022, is a newsletter to which anyone can sign up and receive DCMS' latest vacancies and future learning and development opportunities.

The outcome

DCMS carefully tracks all applicant numbers and diversity of the applicant feed in real time, so it can adapt outreach accordingly and update ministers on progress.

In 2022, applications increased threefold on the previous year. The DCMS appointments team believes this is evidence that hard work in approaching individuals and groups, and spreading the word on individual appointments, is just as important as larger communications interventions.

Success in this area has largely been a result of capability-building in the team and embedding outreach planning into every single recruitment campaign.

Watchpoints

Chairs can encourage staff within their organisation to work with the department on comms opportunities for roles, also spearheading independent activity such as social media campaigns, drop-in sessions to discuss the roles, or blog articles hosted on the organisation's website and channels.

Given departments often have no budget for advertising in this space, chairs may wish to set aside a budget for this to promote in media outlets of their choosing or on websites designed to attract diverse applicants.

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