

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.

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.

The research generated insight, guidance and case studies, for public body chairs to shape an inclusive recruitment process is freely available online PCF | (publicchairsforum.org.uk).

To share your experiences or contribute a case study please contact secretariat@publicchairsforum.org.uk.