



CPANI

The Commissioner
for Public Appointments
Northern Ireland

‘Guardian of the Public Appointment Process’

Under-representation and lack of diversity in Public
Appointments in Northern Ireland

January 2014



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Foreword

I was asked, in December, to give evidence to the Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Working Group hearings on the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 [UNSCR 1325], on the topic of women in decision-making in Northern Ireland since 1998 [the year of the Good Friday Agreement], with specific reference to public appointments. My input began with the fact that in 1998, 35% of the membership of public boards here were women and in 2011/12 the figure was 33%.



The statistics, on women and other under-represented groupings, are not improving. People under 30 years of age, people with a disability and people from the ethnic minority communities are rarely appointed to boards. Year after year, each of these categories makes up only one or two per cent of public board membership.

As the years progress [15 years to date since the Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland Act 1998] it is more and more difficult to expect the public to believe that UNSCR 1325, and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act which 'provides a statutory framework for underpinning mainstreaming of equality of opportunity', are being taken seriously by the policy-makers in the field of public appointments.

In addition, individuals and organisations in the business and third sectors have been vociferous in telling me that many of their people will not apply for public appointments because 'they are clearly not for them'; they are largely 'for men with a public sector background'. Whether or not this is an accurate analysis, it is certainly a widespread belief and is damaging to the image of the boards of public bodies, despite the good work they do.

Our public bodies play a major role in the lives of all of us. They deliver vital services and are accountable for the expenditure of vast sums of public money. The fact that 89% of the government estate is owned by its 'arms-length' bodies is a quick measure of their importance. It is also an indication of why good governance of their boards is vital. The people who express frustration to me about lack of opportunity to become involved, to serve, are people who wish to bring their energies and abilities to the board tables and to be part of the process of 'participative democracy' that we so often



hear about in rhetorical terms. We can move from that rhetoric to reality only if we apply ourselves properly to the task.

My view is that, whilst there are many good public appointments made, and the vast majority of the 1400-plus board members [who are appointed fairly and on merit] carry out their work effectively and with commitment, our public boards are missing out on skills, knowledge and perspectives that exist throughout the community. This is not conducive to optimal performance by our boards, is potentially unfair to many people who wish to serve and feel excluded, and helps to generate a largely undeserved bad reputation for public appointments.

That view is increasingly shared in communities and government systems around the world. There is a growing body of research and programmes of action in many countries. We must not be left behind in this work. We can learn from the published examples and we can generate and disseminate our own examples of best practice.

But first, we must give the proper degree of priority to the matter. There is political and administrative support for change, but that alone is not enough. We must now convert good intention into focussed effort.

As things stand, the required improvements will not happen. Some individual Departments are developing measures to effect improvement but, without an overall policy commitment, coupled with plans of action that are publically articulated, monitored and reported on regularly, this work is destined to remain fragmented and uncoordinated.

The need now is for the lack of diversity on boards to be tackled through clear policy directives, across Government rather than Department by Department, and for strong, targeted and persistent programmes of action to be developed and implemented.

I have produced this report with the intention of raising the profile of the diversity issue to the level where it belongs, and of stimulating the development of policy and action by Government.

I, and my team at CPA NI, can raise the issues and can facilitate discussion and research, but we cannot make the changes. That is for the policy-makers and the Departments to do. I look forward to playing my part in that process.

John Keanie

Introduction

1. This report follows on from the 'Interim Report on Diversity and Under-Representation in Public Appointments in Northern Ireland'. The Interim report, produced by the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland [the Commissioner] was developed primarily for the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service [HOCS] and the Permanent Secretaries Group [PSG] to ensure that the Commissioner's analysis and definition of the problem was shared by that senior team and the direction being proposed for tackling the problem was acceptable. The Interim Report was endorsed by HOCS and PSG in February 2013. Since then work has been under way, under the auspices of John Keanie the Commissioner, and his office [CPA NI] together with the Diversity Working Group [DWG – details below] to develop actions by which the Departments can improve the diversity of the public bodies for which they are responsible.
2. This report is being produced to make the Executive, the Departments and others aware of the 'Recommendations for Action' that have been developed [see Appendix] in the expectation that the Executive and the Departments will begin to implement the recommendations. It is unlikely that all of the recommendations will be seen by all of the Departments as being appropriate to, or workable by, them, but it is hoped that a sufficient range of the recommendations [many of which have come from the Departmental officials on the DWG] will be implemented and will begin to make a difference to the diversity statistics.
3. The Commissioner and his office, whilst recognising that it is for Government and its Departments to make the changes, are fully committed to providing support throughout that process in whatever way they can. With that in mind, they look forward to working cooperatively in the efforts that must follow this report.

The Diversity Working Group and the Approach to the Problem

4. The current Commissioner, in looking at previous attempts to tackle the diversity issue [which, unfortunately, have had little or no positive effect on the diversity statistics] noted two points in particular.
 - a. A Diversity Working Group set up some years ago consisted mostly of people from outside the Departments. The process was,



therefore, outsiders telling the Departments what they 'were doing wrong' and telling them how they might improve.

- b. The efforts in previous diversity initiatives focussed almost exclusively on 'outreach', i.e. on engaging with more groups and individuals to encourage them to apply for public appointments. Scant attention was paid to the actual processes used by Departments to recruit and select public appointees. This meant that, even though more people might be encouraged to apply for board positions, the processes used to select them have been left unchanged and the same type of candidates as of old have [or at least in the public perception appear to have] an unfair advantage in competitions for board places. In either case [real or perceived disadvantage] the effect is negative, putting people off and creating scepticism about public appointments.
5. In developing the current diversity initiative, the Commissioner has attempted to rectify the faults in previous initiatives, firstly by putting together and Chairing a DWG including 'public appointment and equality practitioners' from Departments, who are engaged in public appointment competitions regularly as part of their job, and by ensuring that there is a better balance between looking at outreach matters and looking at Departmental processes.
6. The Commissioner wishes to thank those involved in the DWG for their time, their effort and their ideas:
 - Paul Donaldson - Independent Assessor
 - Christopher Farrington - Department for Employment and Learning
 - Michael Ferguson - Department of Education [formerly Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister]
 - Sharon Fitchie - Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Paul Gamble - Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - Paul Grocott - Department for Regional Development
 - Lynne McElhinney - Department for Regional Development
 - Kieran McGrattan - Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure

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- Lynne Miskelly - Department for Employment and Learning
 - Pat Neeson - Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland
 - Gillian Shaw CBE - Independent Assessor
 - Catherine Synnott - Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Rachel Ward - Department for Employment and Learning

7. Thanks are also due to organisations and individuals outside Government, for ideas, challenge and encouragement. These included:

- 'Women in Leadership' Programme
- 'Women and Peacebuilding' Project
- The Northern Ireland Youth Forum
- Disability Action
- The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
- The Institute of Directors, Northern Ireland
- The Chairs' Forum
- CO3 [senior 'Third Sector' representatives]
- Recruitment Advisor of the Strategic Investment Board
- The panel of public appointment Independent Assessors

8. It is worth noting that these very different groups and individuals delivered a remarkably similar message. It was that the public appointments process requires urgent change. If Ministers and their Departments are really committed to fair representation in public appointments, then action is needed to overhaul the existing processes to make them more welcoming, flexible and effective.

Under-representation and lack of diversity - the facts

9. Statistics produced by the Office of the First and deputy First Ministers [OFMDFM], in the 'Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report' [i]- [See 'References', at end of report, for this and other publications quoted.] , show that membership of the boards of many public bodies in Northern Ireland does not reflect the make-up of the population they serve.

10. Women, young people, people with a disability and members of the minority ethnic communities are among those who are under-represented. The last figures available (published 2011/12) from OFMDFM, give the percentages serving on boards as:

Women	33%
Young people [under the age of 30]	1%
People with a declared disability	2%
Ethnic Minorities	1%

11. There is also much anecdotal evidence, from business organisations and individuals, and from third sector organisations and individuals, that people from these backgrounds, particularly younger people with modern skills and perspectives, and people who have gained a deep knowledge of social and economic challenges from their work in communities, are under-represented and are reluctant to submit themselves to a recruitment process that they see as 'not for them'.

12. Some people have asked, as this diversity initiative has progressed, 'Does it matter?', 'As long as we get 'safe pairs of hands' on to our public boards, why should we worry that they are not representative of the community they serve?'

13. The fact is that we, in Northern Ireland, are not alone in asking those questions or facing the challenge of changing the composition of our public boards. There is, literally, a world of examples of Governments, organisations, academics and 'ordinary citizens' asking the same questions and facing the same challenges; and the answers to the questions are invariably the same:

'It does matter', 'safe pairs of hands are not all that is required'. Boards with equal numbers of women and men are regularly shown

to outperform male dominated boards; boards with people with disabilities, boards with younger members, boards with people from the ethnic minority communities and boards with the full range of skills and perspectives that are found across the public, private and third sector, are shown to better represent and serve the whole community.

14. There is a large and growing body of research and many action plans for change, emanating from central Governments and local authorities in, for example, the UK, Canada, the USA and Australia.
15. There is also much research on private sector boards to demonstrate that diversity on boards is productive. This research is worth noting as it usefully quantifies some of the effects of diversity on boards. For example, the Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance and Financial Regulation, in a paper dealing with 'Gender Diversity on Boards' [ii] says, regarding the 'Effect of Women Directors', '.. the results of a 2012 study of nearly 2400 companies showed that from December 2005 to December 2011, large-cap[ital] companies with women directors outperformed peers with no women directors by 26% and small to mid-cap[ital] companies with women on the board outperformed their peers with all male boards by 17%'.
16. This study also referred to women 'professionalising' and 'improving the atmosphere' of boards, paving the way for women increasingly to influence corporate decision making.
17. It seems reasonable to assume that many of the principles, dynamics and drivers that lead to enhanced performance and effectiveness in the private sector are applicable to many public sector boards and that the impact of increasing the numbers of women and under-represented groupings is likely to be just as beneficial.
18. It is not intended that this report will be an in-depth analysis of the research; however it is plain to see, from the analyses and plans examined, that many similarities exist, with regard to board diversity, between Northern Ireland and other localities. There are therefore valuable lessons to be learned from the literature that is readily available. It is strongly recommended to Departments and others that they avail of this rich source of help.
19. One recent media article said that whilst there is cause to celebrate diversity in society, the UK 'will not be able to celebrate diversity on



the boards running public services', with, for example, only 5.5% of total board appointments last year being from ethnic minority backgrounds, compared to 7% in 2010, and 14% of the population being ethnic minority citizens. It goes on to quote the figure on NHS bodies as being 4.6% and continues 'This is clearly not representative of the contribution and expertise of ethnic minorities in our health service and should be a wake-up call that something is wrong with the recruitment process'. Compare the Northern Ireland statistics with this and it is clear that NI too has much work to do.

20. An example of relevant research, published in October 2009 by the Government Equalities Office, which commissioned the Cranfield School of Management to 'examine the issue of diversity on boards of directors in the private and public sectors' [iii], asked two main questions:
- a. 'Why are so few women and other under-represented groups on public and private sector boards?' and
 - b. 'What is being done in order to increase diversity on boards?'

The report developed three broad categories of explanation:

- a. At 'Individual level: no evidence was found that under-represented groups lack the skills or qualifications to be on boards. A perceived lack of opportunity for under-represented groups at board level may cause those individuals to lower their career expectations.'
- b. At 'Interpersonal level: diverse candidates lack social capital and are often excluded from influential social networks, affecting access to boards. In addition boardroom cultures can be inhospitable to individuals from under-represented groups.'
- c. Concerning the 'Appointment process: it is suggested that the problem is not related to the lack of available candidates, but to the process by which directors are appointed on boards. These processes allow the current power elite [dominated by white males] always to hire in their own image, thus failing to tap into a more diverse pool of talent.' This section identifies six 'obstacles that put women and other under-represented groups at a disadvantage:
 - a lack of awareness of available directorships

- language and the framing of directorships
- weak links between search consultants and minorities
- lack of diversity on current boards and nomination committees
- unclear selection criteria
- Unconscious bias in the selection process.'

21. There are many resonances in the Cranfield report with our situation in NI and whilst it is short on proposals for action it provides a useful starting point for the questions which any Department could begin with, in looking at how it makes its public appointments.

Frameworks for action

22. Whilst the Cranfield report did not provide proposals for action, there is no dearth of action plans in the international literature. The 'Diverse City' initiative of 'The Greater Toronto Leadership Project' [iv], which is well worth the attention of Government and its Departments here, has produced 'A toolkit for non-profit boards' and 'Ten tips to diversity on non-profit boards', which are:

- [1] Make a public commitment to diversity
- [2] Take a diversity audit of your board
- [3] Focus on the skills the board needs to meet its strategic priorities
- [4] Set explicit goals in the selection process and develop a strategy
- [5] Recognise a variety of experiences and expertise
- [6] Aim to create a critical mass
- [7] Encourage diverse board members to take on additional responsibilities
- [8] Train all board members on diversity issues
- [9] Mainstream diversity in the organisation's activities
- [10] Measure results of diversity by its impact



This approach is closely echoed in a report entitled 'Diversity Matters – Changing the face of public boards' [v], by the Maytree Foundation for the Canadian Government, in its 'Action Plan to Achieve Board Diversity':

- [1] Make board diversity your public policy
- [2] Collect information to make decisions
- [3] Set measurable goals
- [4] Recruit for diversity
- [5] Accommodate diversity on your board
- [6] Report on progress

23. Closer to home, in June 2013 the Cabinet office in the UK hosted a high-level networking event for senior women, published statistics on gender diversity in public appointments [37% of new public appointments made by Whitehall Departments in 2012/13 were women] and declared its support of efforts to raise the proportion of women on public Boards to 50% by 2015 [vi]. A quote from that paper highlights the central reason for diversity, in this case applied to women but of real importance to other under-represented groupings: '...women must be at the heart of our efforts to create employment and grow our economy. This must extend to roles in public life. It's not about political correctness – it's about good business sense.' The Cabinet Office has gone on to produce a short paper entitled 'Increasing Diversity in Public Appointments' [vii] dealing with matters such as raising awareness and monitoring progress.

24. So, it is clear that the problems of under-representation and lack of diversity on public boards are ubiquitous in Government systems and international in scope. It is also clear that many Governments have recognised and admitted this and are doing something about it. As illustrated above, there is a growing number of published examples which readers of this report should find useful. One further striking example is the paper entitled 'Increasing Gender Diversity on Boards: Current Index of Formal Approaches', from the Catalyst research organisation [Catalyst.org], which sets out the current and pending actions in a wide range of countries, for achieving greater diversity on legislative, regulatory and voluntary boards [viii]. That paper

begins as follows: 'Around the globe and across all avenues for change – from legislated quotas to an explosion of advocacy groups championing voluntary measures – efforts calling for actions to increase board diversity are approaching a tipping point. The demand for greater gender equality in the boardroom is higher than ever before, and most directors recognise the value of board diversity.'

25. In this context, it should be seen as imperative that, in Northern Ireland, we step up our efforts which have been relatively fragmented to date and mostly ineffective.

The CPA NI Diversity Initiative so far and what is now needed

26. So far, this diversity initiative has been developed at a fairly slow pace, mainly due to the necessity of ensuring that 'everyone is on board'; that all the main participants in the public appointments process accept the need for change and are committed to working towards that change.

- It is clear that the Civil Service, at the most senior levels, has supported the initiative.
- It is evident that many politicians are keen to see the sort of changes that will open up public appointments to more of their constituents who wish to serve on public boards but have not felt encouraged or able to apply for positions in the past.
- It is also evident that several Departments are working, individually, on the problem by, for example, setting targets or considering 'piloting' small changes in their processes.

27. It is important that the diversity initiative is now:

- Formally adopted at the highest levels, by the political and administrative leaders in Government
- given more priority,
- tackled on a Government-wide basis rather than relying on individual Departments making efforts in relative isolation, and
- stepped up in its pace and profile.



To summarise:

- We have the statistics that show we have problems of under-representation and lack of diversity on many of our public boards.
- We have a growing body of researched evidence showing that 'diversity is good'.
- We have the knowledge that the Governments of many other countries are tackling these problems and we have examples of their approach to the work.
- We have heard, from many organisations and individuals, that there is a demand for change and we know that people wish to serve but believe that the system is 'not for them'.
- We know that there is also a desire, within the political and administrative systems of Government in Northern Ireland, for change.
- We know the task is a difficult one and will not be accomplished quickly, but we now have some of the building blocks which Government and its Departments can use to begin making the changes that must be made: e.g.
 - The Canadian 'Diverse City' and 'Diversity Matters' high-level action plans, briefly summarised above, and several other published international examples of plans to help inform development of an overall plan that can be disseminated to all Departments and made public.
 - The recent establishment here of an inter-departmental 'Public Appointments Forum', set up to enable sharing of best practice in public appointment practices across the Northern Ireland Departments, which could serve as a vehicle for such planning and dissemination.
 - The ideas for change generated by the Diversity Working Group and outside organisations, summarised in the Appendix to this report.

Next steps

28. [1] CPA NI has generated this diversity initiative and provided leadership to date; it is now for Government to act. CPA NI will continue to provide support as the initiative continues, including involvement in pilot projects with Departments, some of which are already under consideration.

[2] The Commissioner has presented this report to the PSG. He has recommended that:

- the 'frameworks for action', and the 'recommendations for action' in this report should be used as the basis for developing an overall Government plan for achieving greater diversity in public appointments and for developing actions in each Department appropriate to each Department's requirements and capabilities.
- Work should begin on recommendations [1] and [2] as soon as possible, to set the strategic direction of a new Government initiative on 'Diversity in Public Appointments' and to make a clear public commitment to implement the necessary changes in the public appointment process.

[3] In response, the PSG has agreed that the report will be submitted to the Public Appointments Forum to work towards production of a submission to the Northern Ireland Executive.

Appendix: Recommendations for action

The Diversity Working Group, which finished its series of meetings in January 2014, produced a range of ideas that Government overall, and the individual Departments, should consider for increasing diversity in public appointments. Also, some of the groups and organisations that were consulted made suggestions for change, and a few of the recommendations are based on the reviewed literature.

The recommendations are listed below for consideration. There is no claim that they are exclusive and it is expected that, as the work is developed, other ideas for action will emerge. The recommendations range in nature from high-level, policy / strategic to detailed process recommendations. It is the strong belief of CPA NI that the effectiveness of the recommended actions will be greatly enhanced if they are set in the context of an overall government plan for diversity, publicly articulated. The Canadian 'Diversity



Matters' initiative is strong on this point; it says 'Our plan recognises that the responsibility for achieving diversity is a shared one between Governments and their [public bodies]'.

It is essential that, when making changes to public appointment processes, Departments must at all times continue to observe the Code of Practice for Ministerial Public Appointments in Northern Ireland and the Anti-Discrimination Laws. The Code can be found on the CPA NI website - www.publicappointmentsni.org.

It contains information on how to source the Anti-Discrimination laws. CPA NI is available at all times to assist with matters relating to the Code.

The recommendations, below, are loosely grouped in categories such as 'Strategic recommendations' and 'Awareness-raising':

Strategic recommendations

- [1] Make board diversity public policy and set measurable goals: - Specific public policy should be developed on board diversity, together with an overall framework for action by the Executive and Departments, and this should be articulated to the public, monitored and reported on annually.
- [2] It should be made clear to Departments and the public that the intention is to change the culture of the public appointment process with the aim of improving diversity and eradicating under-representation on public boards. Also, the culture and practices of individual boards should be examined to ensure that they are conducive to women and other under-represented groupings serving on them.
- [3] The recently created inter-departmental 'Public Appointments Forum' [the Forum] provides capacity for issues of under-representation and lack of diversity to be addressed across the N.I. Civil Service rather than on a departmental basis. The Forum should be tasked with ensuring that the new policy and framework at [1] above is articulated and disseminated across all Departments and it should be sufficiently resourced to carry out its work. It is also recommended that 'Diversity' should feature as a standing item on the agendas of the Forum.

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- [4] It is considered that the Forum might benefit from the inclusion of a challenge function, provided by an external member or members. This should be examined.
 - [5] It is believed that the establishment of diversity targets, set at overall and departmental levels, will lend focus and rigour to the diversity initiative. Work should begin on establishing such targets.
 - [6] Departments should conduct a statistical analysis of applications after each recruitment competition, to discern progress towards greater diversity. The departmental analysis should then be pooled for an overall picture. These analyses should inform the on-going development of policy and practice.

Awareness-raising recommendations

- [7] Mechanisms for raising awareness of public appointments are fragmented. Consideration should be given to a more centralised approach, perhaps using the NI Direct website. Vacancies should also be publicised through the public libraries network, which has proved successful in recent competitions. The nature of public appointment advertisements should be reviewed as they are seen by many to be unattractive to people outside the 'usual circle' of applicants. The imaginative use of technology should be more fully explored in the task of raising awareness.
- [8] The use of case studies should be developed, portraying successes by individuals from under-represented groups who have gained places on public boards.
- [9] All information on public appointments, e.g. 'Make your Mark: A Guide to Public Appointments in Northern Ireland', should be revised, in conjunction with CPA NI, to reflect the new policy and framework at [1] above, and should portray a proactive and focussed approach by Government to addressing under-representation and lack of diversity, whilst honouring and protecting the principle of selection on merit.
- [10] A pilot project to raise awareness amongst potential applicants/interested parties is currently being considered by CPA NI and a Department. The results of this pilot should be disseminated across the Departments.

Recruitment-process recommendations

- [11] Departments should include, in the 'Appointment Plan' which they produce for every public appointment competition, a section on diversity which sets out, for the Minister's approval, what steps [in outreach and process] will be taken to achieve the best possible spread of applicants and, ultimately, appointees. CPA NI will include this requirement in the Commissioner's Code of Practice.
- [12] The public appointment process has a tendency to be 'generic' in nature, i.e. focussed on making a 'public appointment' as opposed to appointing an individual to the board of a specific organisation, with its specific requirements of board members. Many examples have been cited, by panel members, of experienced candidates using 'stock answers' which they have developed to answer the commonly used questions in most public appointment competitions. Departments should focus the recruitment process more on the requirements of the particular organisation and its board.
- [13] Departments should examine the opportunity to reduce the number of statutory nominations to the boards of their arms-length bodies, opening up positions for a wider range of applicants.
- [14] Departments could consider interviewing a larger number of applicants where is appropriate to do so.
- [15] Departments, in populating boards, should be 'building teams' rather than 'filling slots'. This will lead to such measures as:
- conducting an audit of board skills and planning to recruit against identified needs, including the types of community-based skills and perspectives that are not well reflected in the standard set of competencies typically used in current public appointment processes.
 - if necessary creating different categories of board member, with specific application form questions and interview questions.
 - looking critically at job descriptions and person specifications to reflect this approach and widen the range of potential applicants.
 - looking critically at the criteria and not sticking to the 'tried and tested' criteria used frequently across public appointments.

- changing the written / verbal balance of the process where appropriate, e.g. it might be better, on the 'communication' criterion, to require the candidate to demonstrate his/her abilities throughout the interview or by means of a presentation rather than providing a written 'stock answer' on the application form.
- avoiding the clichéd questions; developing questions that draw out a proper demonstration of competency.
- reducing the number of selection criteria where appropriate, or asking applicants to fulfil some, not all, of the criteria, on the basis that the board does not need one homogeneous group of board members who replicate each other's skills and abilities.
- reviewing the use of 'knowledge' criteria, in which there are many examples of candidates 'cutting and pasting' website answers; instead make these criteria such that candidates have to give short presentations at interview.

Analysis recommendations

- [16] 'Multiple appointments' [when one individual is appointed to two or more boards] have been cited by consultees as reducing opportunities for others to secure public appointments. The statistics on multiple appointments should be examined and policy developed that will guide Departments and their appointment panels on how to handle the issue. Some restriction on multiple appointments would be seen, by many, as evidence of the culture change that is sought in public appointments.
- [17] Succession planning for board membership has been patchy in many Departments and arms-length bodies and should be improved. Recent CPA NI audits have highlighted this requirement. This work by Departments should include consideration of diversity and how succession planning can incorporate diversity planning.
- [18] Remuneration of board members does not exhibit consistency, with some board members being unremunerated. This is believed by many to be a disincentive to potential applicants. An audit should be conducted across the Departments to determine the full facts, and guidelines produced to assist Departments in dealing consistently and fairly with the matter.

Outreach recommendations

- [19] Departments should specifically encourage applications from 'non-traditional backgrounds'; they should include this in the application form and should target interest groups and sectoral groups.
- [20] Departments should consider use of the 'Guaranteed Interview' scheme which has had some success in bringing forward for interview candidates with a disability who demonstrate in the application form that they have the basic competencies for the board position. Also, with regard to applicants in receipt of various disability benefits, guidelines should be developed to address the problem of potential applicants being dissuaded from applying for remunerated posts because of the potential disruption to their benefits.
- [21] Departments should consider using a variation of the welcoming statement commonly included in advertisements for public appointments, to ensure that it is clear they are seeking the widest range of applicants, including applicants from the private and third sectors.
- [22] The content, language and style of candidate information packs should be reviewed, with input by CPA NI, in line with the new policy and framework at [1] above.
- [23] More support should be provided for individuals who are considering applying for public appointments. Short seminars and / or papers could be prepared to help potential applicants understand what public appointments are, how they get to know what opportunities are being advertised, how to understand the competency-based selection process and what panels are looking for, how to deal with the application and interview process and how to portray their skills and abilities as added to the board.
- [24] Very few younger people have been able to secure Board positions; senior officials and recruitment panels have often expressed reluctance to take the risk they see attached to placing relatively inexperienced people on boards, even when the skills and perspectives of a younger person might add value to the board of a particular organisation. A range of possibilities exist, for introducing younger people to 'board life', including 'Shadow boards', mentoring relationships for young board members, and internships.



Departments should consider developing such schemes, perhaps initially on a pilot basis.

CPA NI action recommendations

[25] The audits of CPA NI, which include examination of departmental efforts on diversity in each competition, should include examination of how the competition arrangements fulfil the requirements of the new policy and framework.

[26] CPA NI should ensure that Independent Assessors are trained and enabled to challenge pre-conceived ideas as to what is required of potential appointees and encourage recognition, at appointment panel level, of the benefits of diversity.

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