

Next steps

This information is the foundation on which we are developing strategies for recruiting and retaining women. We believe that they will make a real difference to the involvement of women in public appointments. Here are just some examples of how the survey is informing the positive actions we will be taking in 2009:

- Women told us about the publications they read and the messages that motivated them to apply for their public appointment. This will be used to inform advertising concepts and strategies for the future. Our latest advertising concept was initially trialled with female focus groups to ensure that it was likely to be effective with our target audience
- The research highlighted concerns about language and terminology in the marketing materials used for public appointments. Further work is being undertaken to develop and test different styles of language and terminology that will address these concerns in a positive way
- The survey has shown that the main reason women resign is time commitment pressures. The Commission is currently working with Chairs from a number of public bodies to capture models of time commitment management and good practice. These experiences will be used to build a toolkit and develop guidance for Chairs on how workloads can be managed effectively and reduced without compromising assurance within organisations
- The women who participated in the survey were asked whether they would be willing to talk to local or national media about their role as a non-executive and take part in focus groups to test out messages and advertising concepts for attracting women. Almost 90% were keen to help. The Commission now has a pool of willing participants who can be engaged in further work around developing initiatives to encourage women to apply for public appointments

“ I am thoroughly enjoying and benefiting from my public appointment and would like to see more women on board. ”

Want to know more?

We would be delighted to share more information with you about the work we are doing on all strands of diversity and to update you on our progress. Please contact:

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Are there any women on board?

A review of recruiting and retaining women in public appointments in 2009

The Appointments Commission is the only organisation in England dedicated to public appointments, recruiting and selecting the best possible people to non-executive roles in all areas of public life.

“ I am pleased to see this issue being addressed as I believe public bodies are in danger of becoming totally male domains. ”



We work across all government departments and handle more than 1,000 appointments each year, representing around one third of all public appointments.* We are very good at what we do but recognise that we must not become complacent. If we are to achieve our aim of identifying the best possible people for these important local and national roles, we have to ensure that the pools of candidates from which appointments are made are as wide and diverse as possible.

Despite a number of initiatives aimed at improving the diversity of our candidates, we have observed a marked decrease in the number of applications from women in recent years. We have also identified that among those who are appointed, women are more likely to resign from their post. At the end of 2008 we took urgent action to start to reverse this trend.

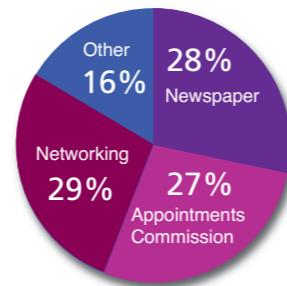
The first step was to ensure that we really understood how to make public appointments appeal to women and how to get our message out to them. We conducted a survey of all of the women holding public appointments in the health and social care communities. We asked for their views on why women do not apply for public appointments and why they thought proportionately more women than men are resigning from their positions.

We wrote to nearly 900 women up and down the country and received over 400 responses. These replies gave us invaluable information that will help to shape our future recruitment and retention strategies.

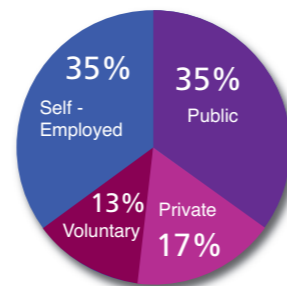
Key findings

- Over half of the women that responded were drawn to public appointments because they wanted to make a difference and just over 40% wanted to “give something back”
- The least relevant reasons for applying were the remuneration paid and because it would help their career
- Two thirds felt that more women resign than men because the time commitment is too great
- The vast majority of non-executives that responded either work part-time or not at all. Only 35% are in full-time employment
- Two thirds of female public appointees who are in employment, work in the public or voluntary sector. Of those who are not currently in employment, nearly 60% used to work in one of these sectors
- Nearly 60% of respondents believe the key reasons that women don't apply are that they don't see the adverts and/or they lack confidence in their own abilities
- Just over a quarter of respondents found out about the vacancy for their public appointment as a result of direct contact from the Appointments Commission or by visiting our website

How did you find out about the role?



What type of employment are you in?



Why are women deterred from applying for public appointments?

“ A lot of the women I talk to have never considered this type of role, but interestingly it is the men that I talk to that go on to apply. ”

We were pleased to learn that the majority of women are confident that our recruitment and selection processes do not deter women. Many commented, however, that the language and tone of advertisements and the way criteria are written can discourage women from applying for public appointments. In addition, the length of the process from application to appointment was viewed as overly long, potentially causing candidates to lose interest. Some of the other comments and emerging themes that provide more insight on this issue include:

- Women will often have taken time out of the workplace, in particular for maternity leave. They are therefore less likely to have accumulated the required experience to meet the standard person specification, in particular where board level financial or commercial experience is being sought. Advertisements and person specifications are not sympathetic to this career trajectory
- Even if they do meet the criteria and competencies, women have a tendency to under-value their skills and experience, questioning whether they have sufficient seniority for the role. This can lead to them downplaying their experience in an application form or deciding not to apply at all
- There tends to be too much focus on past experience rather than on potential
- Advertisements and candidate criteria are often perceived to be very ‘male oriented’, with a focus on board level commercial or business experience within large commercial organisations. The value of a public sector background is often ignored
- Adverts should state more clearly that women are being encouraged to apply. Usually there is some small print to this effect but it has the appearance of a box ticking exercise rather than a genuine declaration of intent
- Women tend to be drawn in by ‘softer’ descriptors such as sharing and inspiring rather than harder-edged business and commercial jargon

Why do women resign?

Our survey shows that too often the reality of the time commitment required to effectively fulfil the role far exceeds the original expectation and advertised commitment. Any increase in real time commitment disproportionately affects women, who are often juggling other commitments such as child care or running the family home. Other issues identified thought to contribute to a higher proportion of women resigning than men were:

- Gender imbalance - if a woman is serving on a board with colleagues who are predominately men, she will be liable to feel exposed, undervalued and have difficulty in having her (different) point of view heard. In these circumstances they are more likely to resign. Improving the balance of public bodies will have a positive effect on the retention of women
- The culture created by the Chair (either male or female) - if the culture is ‘macho’ and the women feel that their opinion counts less or is not taken seriously, they are more likely to leave
- Failure to achieve personal objectives - the vast majority of women apply for public appointments because they want to make a difference. If they feel that the role is getting bogged down in bureaucracy and too removed from the people they were appointed to serve, they are likely to become disillusioned

“ I have worked on boards with only one woman, which can be tough, but with two many more things become possible. ”



* Public appointments regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments