

Good Practice in Public Appointments

There is no one size fits all to producing diverse and effective boards, and the 2022 Code encourages new and innovative ways of running appointment rounds. It is important that approaches taken are tailored to the specific posts being advertised for, and where new ways of working have proven to be effective, good practice case studies can aid selection panels faced with similar circumstances – to use, learn, adapt and improve upon. Not every round will demonstrate good practice end to end, and instead we might observe ‘snapshots’ of good practice, where the panel have had a particular focus that has made a positive impact on the rest of the round. In some cases, these snapshots of good practice may have a clear and direct impact on the outcome of the round, and in other cases the activity might positively influence a particular phase of the round and those involved in the appointments process.

There are five distinct phases of the appointments process: succession planning, early engagement, formal planning, publicising the opportunity, shortlisting and assessment. Following this, if the round has been successful, the most able candidate(s) is(are) recommended to the appointing minister and, if appointed, a resulting news release is published. Additionally, at the end of each appointment round the ESC receives reports from the panel chair and, if applicable, the Public Appointments Adviser who is the ESC’s representative on panels. These reports detail why a round was or was not successful, as well as detailing other aspects of the appointment round that inform our continuous improvement activity. We also conduct applicant surveys for those applicants who have agreed to be contacted for the purposes of continuous improvement, to research the public appointments process from the applicant’s perspective.

These ‘snapshot’ case studies aim to review each phase and provide examples of what selection panels have done well within it. The case studies use appointment rounds concluded within the last 12 months and their associated end of round reporting material to inform their content.



Publicity in Context



Publicising Opportunity

Publicity is a crucial part of the public appointments process. If publicity is designed well, it should enable applicants to make an informed decision about whether they meet the requirements of the role and whether they should apply. It should encourage applications from people who would be well suited to the role. Selection panels should therefore consider the reach and visibility of their publicity strategy, including whether they will utilise any targeted approaches, particularly to encourage applications from people from under-reflected groups. Panels can, through the effective analysis and use of management information consider how best to design their publicity strategy to inform potential applicants about the body and

its work and attract them to apply.

In addition to describing the application and assessment methods to be used during the process, publicity documents will also ensure that applicants are fully informed about the selection panel members or any delegated assessment, so that they are aware of these prior to starting the application process and can declare any known relationship. A round's publicity will also ensure that applicants know they can request reasonable adjustments such as requesting information in alternative formats or support that might be available to help them to apply.

Publicity and the Code of Practice

C3 *All materials to be made available to prospective applicants such as publicity or advertisements about posts, details about posts, the assessment criteria to be applied, and the application forms (or equivalent) should be clearly and plainly drafted using simple, easy to understand, language. The objective should be to encourage the optimum number of people to apply for positions and for people to find it a comparatively easy exercise to submit applications.*

The publicity strategy during an appointment round is the process of making an appointment opportunity known publicly. Publicity can take many forms including online and social media, newspapers and radio, in person and through word of mouth. It may also include informing individuals or organisations of the appointment opportunity. The 2022 Code allows for a great degree of flexibility when publicising appointment opportunities as long as the Code's requirements for publicity are met (ref Code). This is so that the most appropriate and tailored approach may be taken on every occasion, depending on the board's needs. Selection panels are encouraged to be creative in their approaches to advertising appointment opportunities.

Several recently successful rounds have directly identified the strength of publicity as a key contributor to the overall success of the round. As a result, this review highlights some of the good practice we have identified during these recent appointment rounds and their publicity strategies.

1. Personalised Communication

Result: publicity clearly outlining the criteria being sought, allowing applicants to understand what is required of them and to picture themselves in the role.

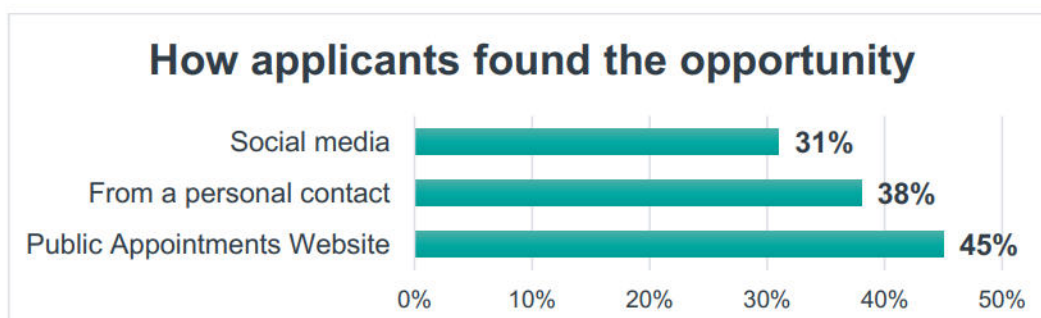


The four rounds analysed ensured that the agreed publicity strategy was specific to the role and body concerned, and that thorough consideration had been given to both the intended audience and the key messages to be conveyed through the outreach activity. Often this included body chairs personally writing or reaching out to target networks, and the use of social media in particular, with activities including:

- Cover letters in applicant packs, direct from the body chair
- Personalised letters from body chair to named stakeholders
- Informative, short bitesize videos from body chairs and board members
- Use of QR codes leading prospective applicants to relevant webpages / videos publicising the role
- Emails from the panel to their networks
- Recorded discussions from the body chair / board members to share with prospective applicants

Videos were used by several of the rounds. These tended to be short bitesize information pieces, where the work of the board and ask of applicants could be well-defined and communicated. The videos were also used as a way outlining the criteria being sought, with the aim of allowing applicants to move into the process with a clear sense of what would be required of them during the application process and what skills were being sought by the panel. This has the added potential of allowing applicants to picture themselves in the role, and empowering them to apply.

Applicant surveys are conducted at the conclusion of an appointment round for those applicants who have agreed to be contacted for the purposes of continuous improvement. The results of these surveys for the rounds analysed show that two of the top three ways that applicants found out about the opportunities was through a personal contact or social media.



It is also evident that considerable time, effort and thought was given to the stakeholder networks and bodies of interest that would be targeted as part of the round's outreach activity. The publicity strategies analysed considered:

- Networks which were particularly important to target due to the board's current skills gap
- Management information to identify effective approaches to publicity
- Identifying under reflected groups and how these might be reached through the publicity strategy.

2. Network Identification

Result: Clearly identified stakeholder networks and bodies of interest to promote awareness, including consideration of under reflected groups and how to reach them.



In practice, the selection panel for one round seeking a new chair agreed that their publicity should aim to reach a diverse audience and a range of networks. Groups reached included standard professional networks and governing bodies, but also targeted relevant youth networks. Additionally, having considered any barriers to inclusivity, the panel offered a Guaranteed Interview Scheme and communicated this in the applicant pack (though ultimately no applicants made use of this). The decision to approach a wide and diverse range of networks required effective communication of the skills required for the chair role, to ensure it was understood across all audiences. This was addressed primarily through the creation of a video by the outgoing chair and promoted on social media. This video was praised as particularly effective in the end of round reporting, as its messaging clearly reflected the criteria being sought. The publicity strategy for this round ultimately proved to be effective in securing quality applications, 17 of which were shortlisted, which is encouraging to see during a chair round as these traditionally attract low numbers of applications.

In another round, management information was used to encourage discussion on where traditional approaches to publicity had previously failed to generate interest in the past. This allowed the panel to understand and consider what might be done differently. One of the resulting aims of the round's publicity strategy was to reach under reflected groups, and in particular those from a minority ethnic background. The ESC's adviser encouraged the panel to research what worked well in other public appointment rounds seeking the same objective. Publicity was mainly promoted using social media, with a focus on areas with hard-to-reach groups. This included the panel contacting professional networks who aim to redress under-reflection, and who support opportunities for those from a minority ethnic background. Other activity included promoting the opportunity through the appointing minister's X account and blog posts. The end of round reporting reflected that the approach to publicity had been so successful that a case was made to the Commissioner to increase

the number of appointments being made, due to the strength of field, and that the number of applications received far exceeded expectations.

Finally, all rounds analysed took forward similar activity which included circulating the advert to organisations who support and promote activities to redress under-reflection in the workplace / on boards. Some of these groups include Age Concern Scotland; Black and Minority Ethnic Elders Group; Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations, Centre for Education for Racial Equality in Scotland; Citizens Advice Scotland; the Equality Network; the 2% Club; Women on Boards and Changing the Chemistry.

3. Clear objectives with applicant focus

Result: creation of communications plan outlining objectives, activities and timescales. Consideration of external factors such as school holiday or religious celebrations, so that applicants feel empowered to apply alongside their other commitments.



The selection panels also focussed on the applicant during the development of their publicity strategies. To maintain this applicant focus, panels:

- Ensured that the needs of applicants and target audiences were fully explored prior to the roles being advertised.
- Considered what may present a barrier to applying and what might be done to mitigate this.

For example, in one round the panel sought to ensure that their target dates took account of external factors, such as the Easter holidays, so that applicants felt able to manage their application alongside other commitments they may have (such as school or other holidays).

Another successful and effective activity for one round included the creation of a detailed communication plan, which had one well defined objective which was *to support the appointments process to ensure high quality applications for the vacant board positions*. The activities required to achieve this were set out in a matrix format, connecting the activities with implementation dates, publicity methods to be used and target audiences. Breaking down this information and activity also had the added benefit of ensuring that key messages were both identified and communicated to applicants as part of the round's outreach activity. Both the panel chair and the ESC's adviser commented in their end of round reports on how useful the communication plan had been.