

Good Practice Example – Planning and Assessment

sportscotland: Appointment Round to Find a New Chair (2015-16)

Background

The round was initiated in July 2015 and designed to identify a new chair for sportscotland. The Commissioner designated the round as meriting high level oversight meaning that a Public Appointments Adviser (PAA) would take part as a full panel member. The same PAA had played an instrumental role in the development of the core skills (competency) framework for board members that was trialled on the [Creative Scotland](#) appointment round in 2015. The chair of the panel asked whether the framework could be further adapted specifically for a chair role and the PAA created a generic chair version as a starting point for this appointment round. The framework was used as a basis for early discussions with the appointing minister and this in turn gave the selection panel a very clear steer on what the minister wanted from the new chair of sportscotland in terms of priority attributes. These included 'promoting equality and social change through sport'. This clear steer informed planning by the selection panel and therefore the rest of the appointment round and eventual outcome. The panel membership included a civil servant as panel chair, the PAA and an independent member.

Planning

The planning phase ran from July through to September and involved the panel as well as the head of the Scottish Government's Public Appointments Team (PAT) and a PAT manager. The appointing minister's views were gained in discussion in August and the final planning meeting held in September. Based on the views of the appointing minister a total of four criteria were set, all weighted equally. Two of the criteria were specific to the role of sportscotland chair:

- Has a passion for sport and in particular promoting equality and social change through sport
- Has the capacity to work effectively across sectors, beyond the boundaries of sport

The minister felt these to be of particular importance to the work of and role fulfilled by the chair of this particular body. The remaining two criteria were more generic in nature and mainly combined the performance/governance and leading/influencing headings from the competency framework. In keeping with the way in which the framework has been designed, applicants were provided in the application pack with more detailed descriptors which set out what good evidence that the criteria were met would look like. The framework also included narrative explaining what would be tested and exactly when and how it would be tested. This ensured that the selection panel and applicants alike had a common understanding of what was sought and how the competition would be run.

The panel chair was very keen to ensure that the descriptors for the criteria enabled a broad cross-section of applicants to come forward with previous board level experience not considered to be important.

The panel agreed on a written application with selected descriptors from three of the criteria being tested for the first stage of assessment. Those shortlisted would be invited to an interview and would also be asked to prepare a response to a pre-set question along with a one-to-one interactive exercise. The panel gave a lot of consideration to how a more diverse applicant pool might be attracted and agreed on the use of a social

media package alongside extensive publicity and direct approaches by the sponsor directorate to encourage applications. Additionally, the role was publicised via the normal Scottish Government channels including direct email to organisations whose membership includes currently underrepresented groups.

Applications and shortlisting

Eighteen written applications were received – considered to be a reasonably good number for a chair role – and the majority of the applicants were completely new to public appointments.

Five applicants were shortlisted for interview. The panel also ensured that a number of those who weren't shortlisted but who nevertheless provided some good evidence against a proportion of the criteria would be contacted and encouraged to consider applying for future member positions on the board. The panel also asked the sponsor directorate to seek feedback from people who had been encouraged to apply but chose not to do so. This was with a view to designing the next appointment round for the body to make it more encouraging still.

Second stage of assessment

The second stage of assessment comprised an interview, a prepared response to a question and participation in an interactive exercise. The interactive exercise was based on a conversation to be held between the applicant fulfilling the role of body chair and an actor experienced in assessment centre work who was fulfilling the role of CEO. It was based on a scenario that was very relevant to the work of the body. Applicants were provided and asked to become familiar with a number of relevant documents well in advance of the interview. The exercise brief was given to them on the day of the interview with thirty minutes to prepare for the discussion. Detailed briefs on the exercise were compiled by the sponsor directorate and the PAA provided guidance to ensure that the exercise would be as effective as possible at assessing the relevant criteria for selection. The panel also agreed a 'model answer' and thought through the possible scenarios which might arise during the course of the exercise so that the actor could be guided on how he should respond. In addition, two meetings took place with the actor to provide further information and guidance. This type of exercise requires a significant amount of forethought and preparation on the part of those running it.

Applicants were also asked to deliver a response of up to five minutes' duration to the question 'what is your understanding of the role of sportscotland in delivering social change through sport'. They were fully briefed as part of the interview letter so that they had an opportunity to prepare in advance. This worked well and provided evidence of descriptors from two of the criteria.

The panel then conducted a follow up discussion with the candidates and further explored with them the evidence they had provided in their written application. One and a half hours was allowed for each interview and this enabled sufficient time for the exercise, prepared response and follow up discussion/questions – just over one hour for each candidate – with the remaining twenty five minutes being used by the panel to do a thorough sum up of their assessments. This is very important as it enables a clear

description of the suitability of applicants to be provided to the minister as well as clear, detailed and constructive feedback to be provided to all candidates.

Conclusion

The enhanced processes used for planning and design of this competition, the early proactive contact with the minister, the use of the adapted competency framework and the arrangements for assessment all contributed to a successful outcome. More detailed information on any of the materials referred to in this brief report can be obtained from Ian Bruce, the Public Appointments Manager in the CESPLS office:

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Find out who was appointed by following this link to the press release:

<http://www.appointed-for-scotland.org/media/16759/sportscotland-chair-news-release-final.doc>