Ethical Standards Commissioner

APPLICANT RESEARCH 2018

NOVEMBER 2019

ESC

Ethical Standards Commissioner

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of surveys carried out during 2018 of applicants for public appointments in Scotland. It is the third year of undertaking surveys using a round by round rather than annual approach. As a consequence, any trends which have been consistent through all three years are highlighted. Some of these trends include:

➢ a belief that they have the skills, knowledge and experience required for the role is the highest motivating factor for people applying,

➢ that the advert and application pack sounding "like they were looking for people like me" strongly influenced the applicants' decisions to apply,

➢ feedback is provided for those who reach interview stage on a far more regular basis than for those who don't and

➢ around 50% of respondents consider the application process to be fair and transparent.

Where numbers are high enough to allow for reporting, analysis was carried out on the views expressed by those who reach interview stage and those who don't, first time applicants, women and underrepresented groups such as disabled applicants, black and minority ethnic applicants, applicants under the age of 50 and lesbian, gay and bisexual applicants. Where the views of these groups vary significantly from the view of the overall group this is highlighted. Some analysis has also been carried out on different forms of application and assessment method. Bespoke questions are asked of applicants following individual rounds when such methods have been employed by selection panels.

Based on the findings of the 2018 survey, recommendations are made about the provision of feedback; increasing the transparency of the process by providing links to the news release about successful applicants and; panels making greater use of guidance on appropriate assessment techniques. Suggestions are also made for panels who may wish to attract underrepresented groups based on the views of these groups about the appointments process.

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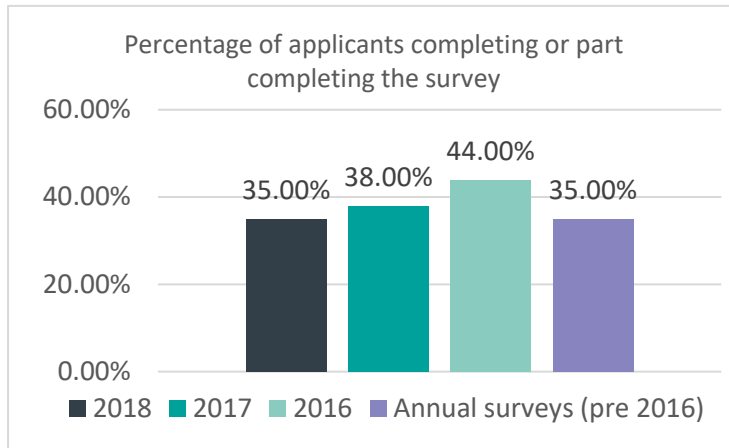
SURVEY FINDINGS

Figure 1 Response rates to the survey

"It's healthy that you're doing this (conducting the survey), it's a good thing. It's been left too late though."

The 2018 report invited a total of 2230 applicants across 60 appointment rounds to express their views on the process. 777 applicants chose to take up this offer (35%). 748 (33.5%) applicants completed the survey in full. 585 (78%) of applicants provided demographic data. The 2017 report had provided a recommendation to design and send the survey to applicants more promptly following their involvement in the process and as the response rate is continuing to fall, this recommendation is carried forward to this report.

Recommendation 1: Panels to decide on bespoke questions at the planning meeting (considering carefully what they might want to ask applicants with a view to learning lessons for the future) and inform the Commissioner's office. Survey will then be designed immediately following planning stage, ready for use.

Recommendation 2: the Scottish Government send the list of email addresses to the Commissioner's office as soon as the applicants have been notified of the outcome of their application. This means that applicants will have the opportunity to complete the survey as soon as they hear that they have or have not been successful whether this is after the application stage, after the assessment / interview stage or when offered the appointment.

The percentage of underrepresented groups responding to the survey is closer to the percentage of the Scottish population than the percentage of those currently represented on public body boards (other than for LGB[1]). Whilst recognising that the overall response rate was relatively small, this nevertheless provides a good opportunity to hear from groups that the Scottish Ministers have stated that they wish to attract to these appointments.
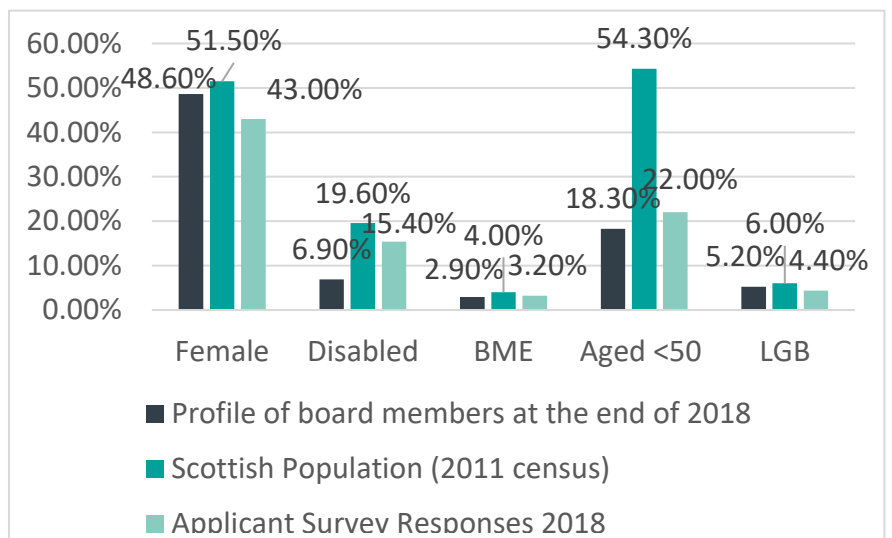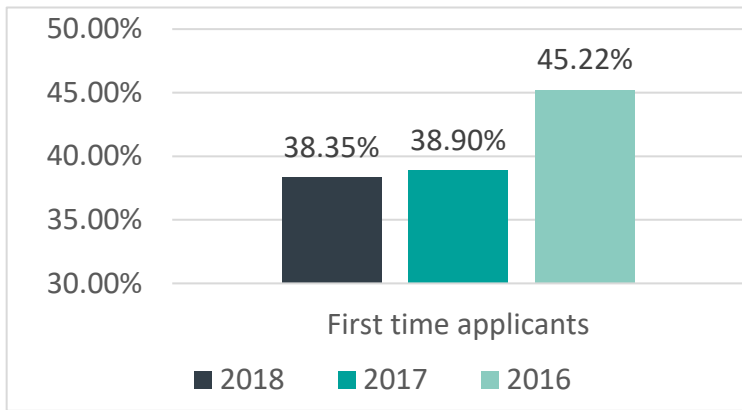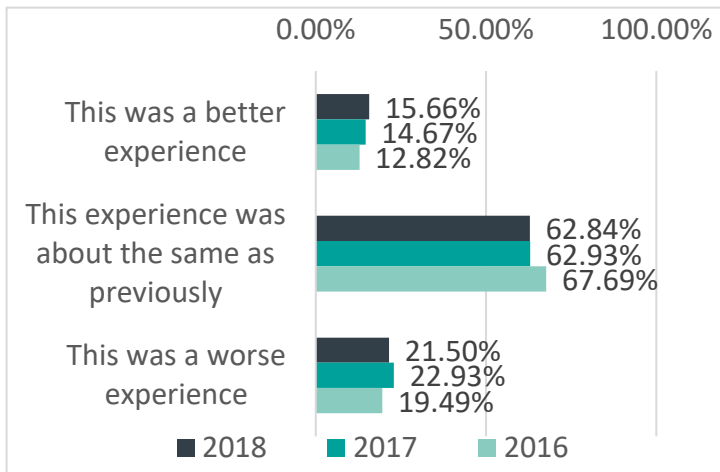

Figure 2 Survey response rates compared to Board profile levels and the Scottish population

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[1] Text amended 10/1/20 ("age" replaced by "LBG")

Of the applicants who provided their views, 38.35% were applying for a public appointment for the first time.

*Figure 3 Percentage of first time applicants responding 2016-2019*

"Very good overall experience and would encourage me to apply for other posts."

Figure 4 Those who had applied previously - how this experience compared to previous

People who had applied previously appear to be seeing small improvements in their experience with 63% feeling it was the same, 21% feeling it was worse and 16% feeling it was better. This is similar to results from the previous 2 years with slight increases in the "better experience" rating.

"I have applied for 2 posts, I believe that my application in both cases met the criteria. The applications were well written, however the process is cumbersome and very off putting. I would very much like to add value but I have been completely turned off by the process and the very difficult time I have had getting feedback. It needs to improve."

![Ethical Standards Commissioner]

The main reason that respondents give for applying is that they feel their knowledge, skills and experience are a good fit for the role. Over the last three years, BME applicants' and applicants under the age of 50's responses have consistently indicated that personal development is a higher motivating factor for them than it is for other groups. First time applicants, women and applicants under the age of 50 have consistently indicated that professional development is a motivating factor for them.

Figure 5 Personal development as a motivating factor
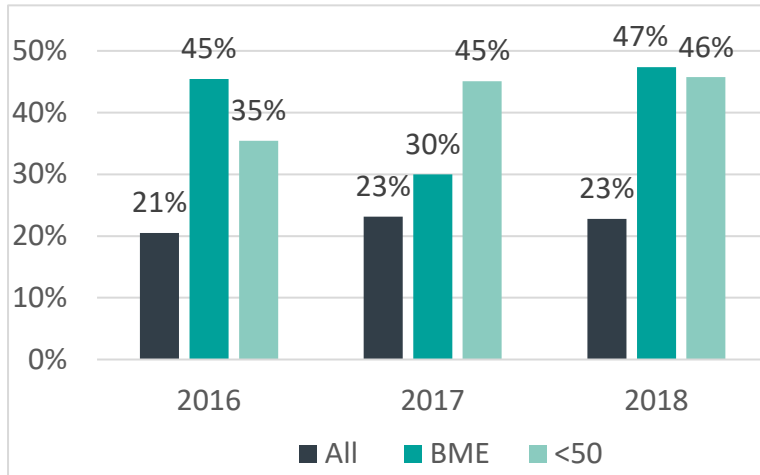
"I felt I had a lot of experience to bring to the role and would be able to take new learning back to the workplace."

I thought my experience might be welcome and my brain would get the required exercise!
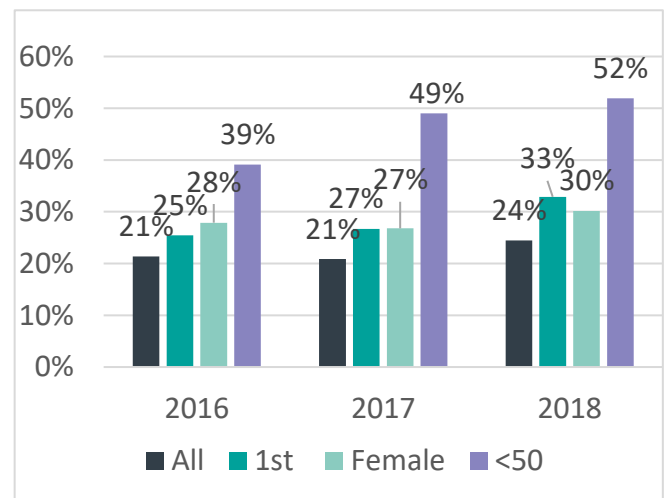

Figure 6 Professional development as a motivating factor

By far the most popular method for finding out about appointments over the past three years continues to be through Scottish Government channels (either via email or the appointed for Scotland webpage). This has remained steady at around 60% of respondents. As all appointments are publicised on the website there continues to be scope to use more channels to reach a wider audience of prospective first-time applicants. For example, the findings over the last three years show that personal contact and social media were consistently more likely to be how the respondent first found out about the appointment opportunity for first time applicants than for the overall group. This was similar for some other under represented groups.
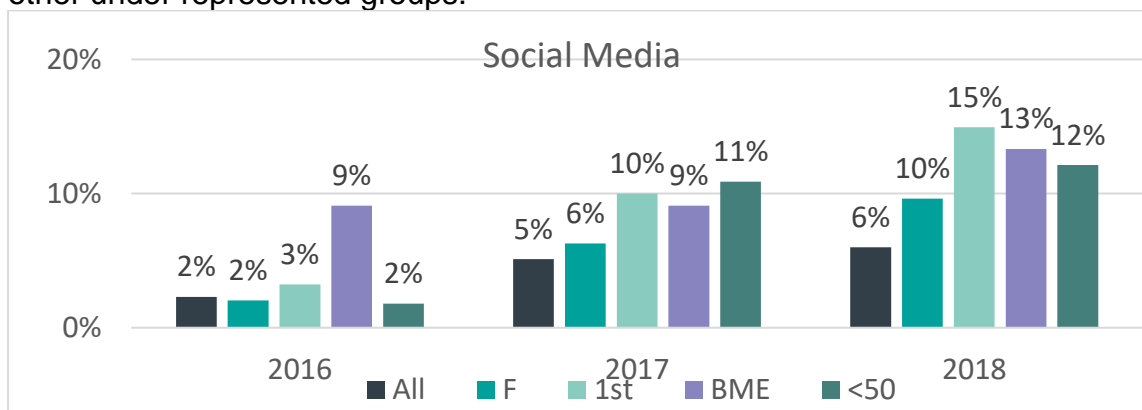

Figure 7 Social media was how the respondent first found out about the appointment opportunity
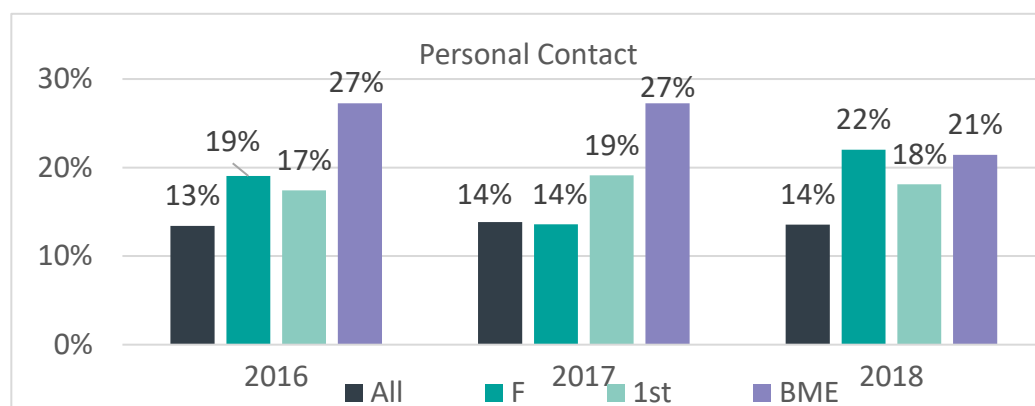
Figure 8 Personal contact was how the respondent first found out about the appointment opportunity

> "I want the ability to check multiple tick boxes because although you are researching the 'first' find out, the truth is people are more likely to do anything when they hear about it from multiple sources. Particularly if they are from out with the system."

When asked about appointment positions being advertised together, 86% of respondents confirmed that they found it clear and easy to understand what section needed to be completed but only 28% of respondents were encouraged to apply for both.

> "I was able to compare the two Boards and the work that they did and to compare the various requirements for both positions."

The factors in the publicity that influenced most people's decisions to apply were that the advert and application pack "sounded like they were looking for people like me". This result was consistent over all three years.
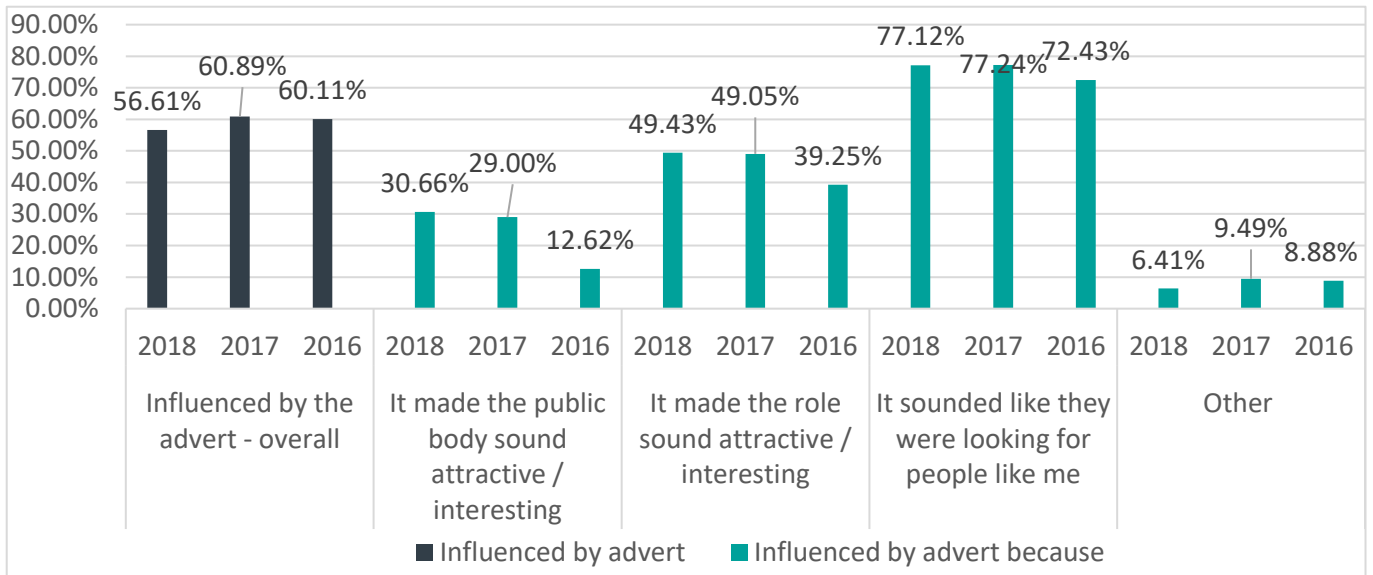
Figure 9 Factors about the advert which influenced applicants to apply
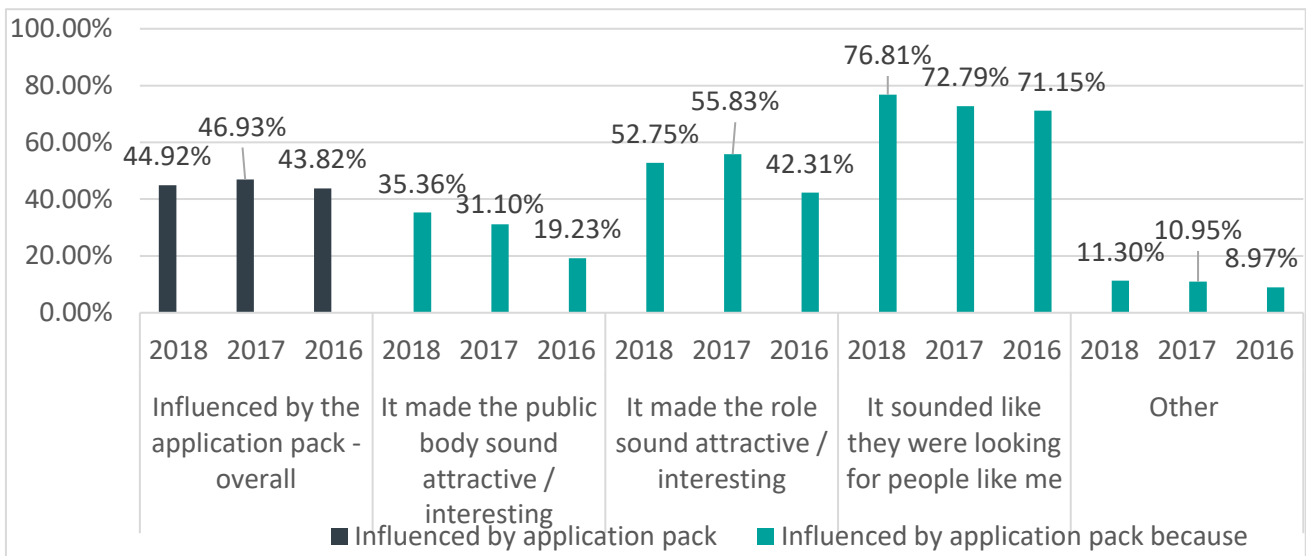
Figure 10 Factors about the application pack which influenced applicants to apply

Respondents have consistently found the application pack to be clear and helpful over the past three years and the time and effort needed to complete the application pack seems to be reasonable for the majority of respondents. There were no significant differences between underrepresented group results and the overall group when asked these questions.

"It was a good pack with clear timescales and suggested that the 'host' would be professional and courteous"

We have asked applicants over the previous three years whether they have been able to contact anyone to discuss their application, should they feel the need to do so. Between 15% and 18% of respondents state that they are not able to make contact. Between 61% and 67% of respondents did not feel the need to make contact. Everyone else was able to make contact either by telephone, email or in person.

9% of respondents stated that they were not able to see contact details in packs. Although this is a small percentage, it seems to be something which should be easily rectifiable by highlighting them.

"I didn't feel encouraged to contact anyone and wasn't sure what any contact was able to offer me over and above what was contained in the application pack."

Recommendation 3: Panels to review the prominence of contact details in packs to ensure that these are clear and easy to identify by applicants.
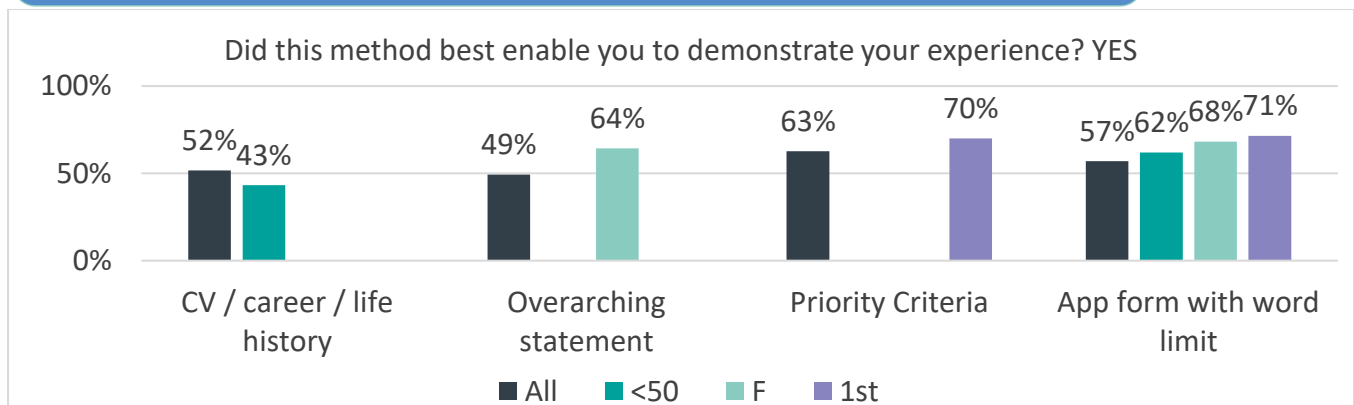
Figure 11 Percentage of respondents agreeing that this method best enabled them to demonstrate their experience (only showing where there were significant percentage differences from the overall group)

From bespoke questions asking applicants about different forms of application methods, we saw that the majority of respondents suggested that the traditional application form (with a limited number of words) was the best way to enable them to present their evidence against the criteria[2]. First time applicants responded more favourably to evidencing priority criteria (within a limited number of words), those aged under 50 seemed to be less keen on providing a C.V./career history and women were more keen on providing an overarching statement to demonstrate how they met the selection criteria.

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[2] Columns representing results for age <50, female and 1st time applicants added 10/1/20
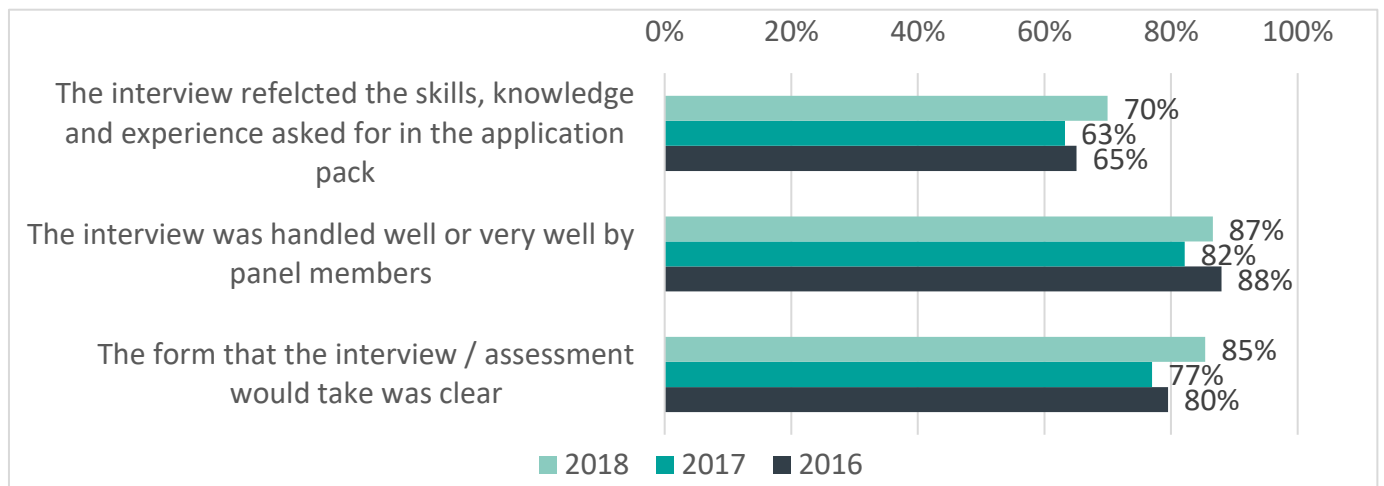
Figure 12 Respondent views on aspects of the interview experience

30.5% of respondents were invited to the final stage of assessment. The majority were very positive about two aspects of that stage. 85% felt that the form that the assessment/interview would take was clear. 87% indicated that the interview was conducted well or very well by the panel members. However, at not quite as high a percentage, 70% felt that the interview questions reflected the skills, knowledge and experience asked for in the pack.
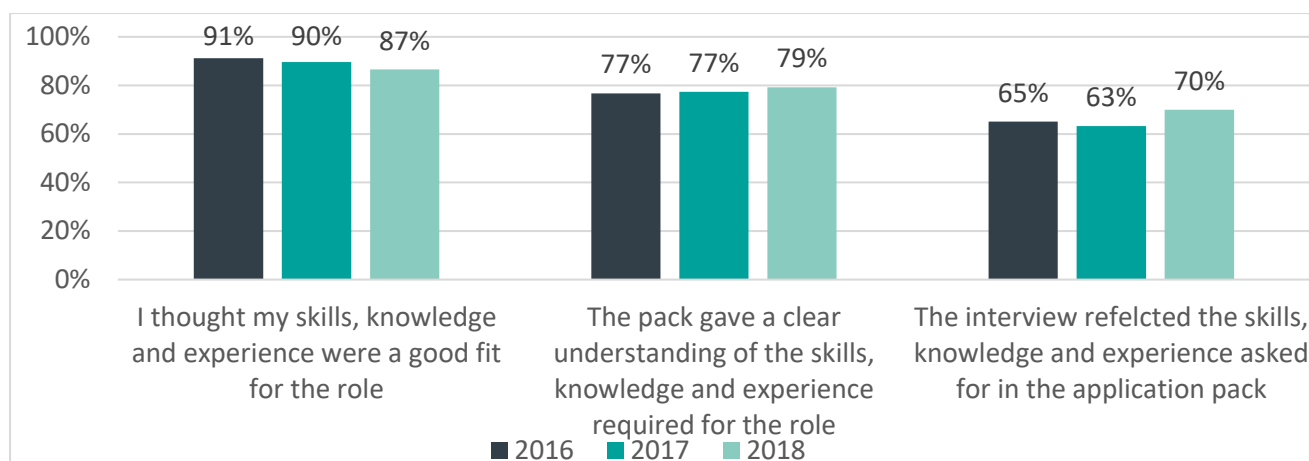
Figure 13 Respondent answers to questions relating to skills, knowledge and experience asked at different points through the survey

Although 70% of respondents agreeing that the skills, knowledge and experience asked for in the pack were reflected in the interview is a high percentage, it falls short of the percentage of respondents who were motivated to apply due to their belief that they had the skills, knowledge and experience required. From 2020 a further question will be added to the application and information section asking applicants whether they believe that the skills, knowledge, experience and values cited in the application pack were appropriate and relevant to the role applied for. This will help us to gain a deeper understanding as to why this drop occurs (for example, it may be that applicants do not believe that the criteria listed in the pack are clear because they don't agree that these criteria are appropriate for the role. In that case there may be an opportunity to help applicants to better understand how ministerial appointments work given that the requirements will always be defined by the minister). As a number of rounds (particularly NHS rounds) now include assessment of values alongside skills, knowledge and experience, from 2020 all questions which ask applicants for their views about skills, knowledge and experience will be amended to also include values.

> "The competency based approach seems too prescriptive and it left too little opportunity to discuss some of the particular skills and experience I have."

The results relating to how the skills, knowledge and experience translate (or not) to interview/assessment suggests that respondents believe that the process does not assess the skills, knowledge and experience for the role in the way in which they expected. The Commissioner has published on her website guidance for panels on how to appropriately assess and record the assessment of skills, knowledge and experience. The guidance shows panels how to align assessment methods with criteria for selection to increase the predictive and face validity of the methods that are chosen. This ensures that the people who apply are assessed appropriately and also that they understand and believe that the methods used to assess them are fair and appropriate for the role for which they have applied.

Recommendation 4: Panels to familiarise themselves with the Commissioner's guidance when planning appointments rounds, in order to ensure that applicants are clear about what they will be assessed on and how and why assessment is being conducted in this way.

Bespoke questions were asked about interview/assessment methods but due to smaller numbers of applicants reaching this stage, the responses provided limited statistical information. One result which was worth noting related to the views disabled respondents expressed about the time allowed for the various practical exercises, compared the views of the overall cohort who reached this stage as shown in figure 14. It seems that disabled applicants would benefit from more time to complete any practical exercises set.

Answering YES to the question "was the time allocated sufficient time to".......

	All responses	Disabled applicant responses
respond to a prepared question	87%	63%
make a presentation	100%	0%
consider a board paper	87%	50%
present your thoughts on a board paper	86%	50%
All exercises	87%	57%

■ All responses   ■ Disabled applicant responses
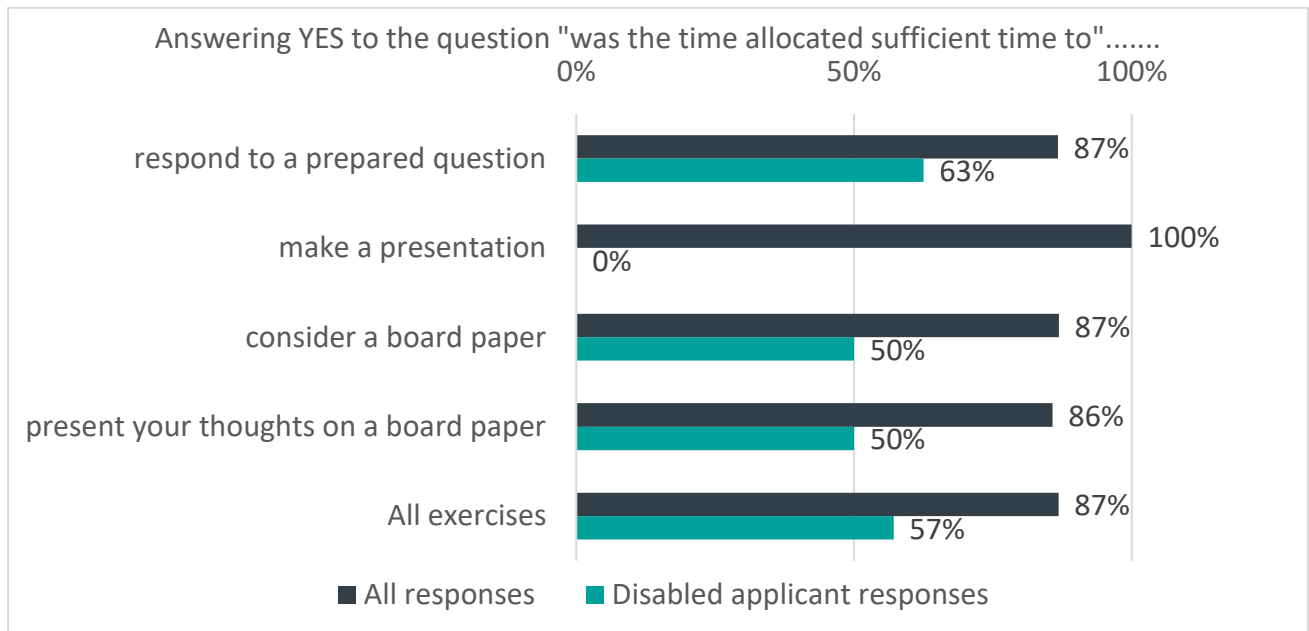
Figure 14 - views of disabled respondents compared to overall cohort on timing allowed for practical exercises

Applicant comments relating to the bespoke questions were informative.

"As an experienced non-exec, I thought that the exercise was true to life."

"It tested some of the specific selection criteria set out in the pack."

"Actors were very realistic and the scenario was believable. Both of these are vital to the success of this part of the process"

"The room was far too small and felt over crowded."

"I wasn't clear whether this question was designed to test my ability to think and act strategically, or whether it was designed to assess my managerial ability."

"really important current issue so great exercise"

Figure 15 Percentage of respondents who had received feedback comparing those who were interviewed and those not (2016-2019)
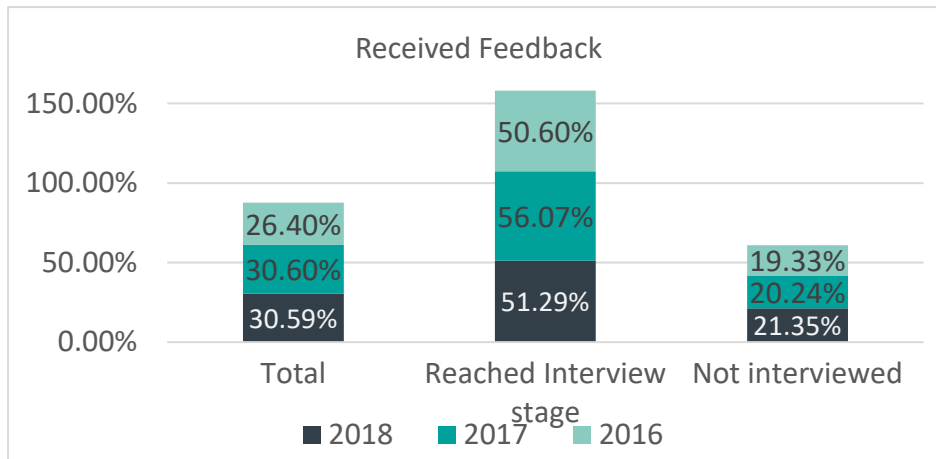
30% of respondents had received feedback. Consistently over three years, around 50% of those who reached interview stage received feedback and around 20% of those who were not interviewed received feedback.

The graph depicting respondents who found the feedback useful or very useful shows that, generally, applicants from underrepresented groups find the feedback process of higher value than the overall group (with the exception of 2018). This is important if Scottish Ministers are keen to continue to attract applicants (and attract repeat applications) from these groups. It is encouraging that the percentage of respondents reaching interview stage and agreeing that the feedback was useful or very useful has increased year on year, but disappointing that the reverse is true for respondents not reaching the interview stage.
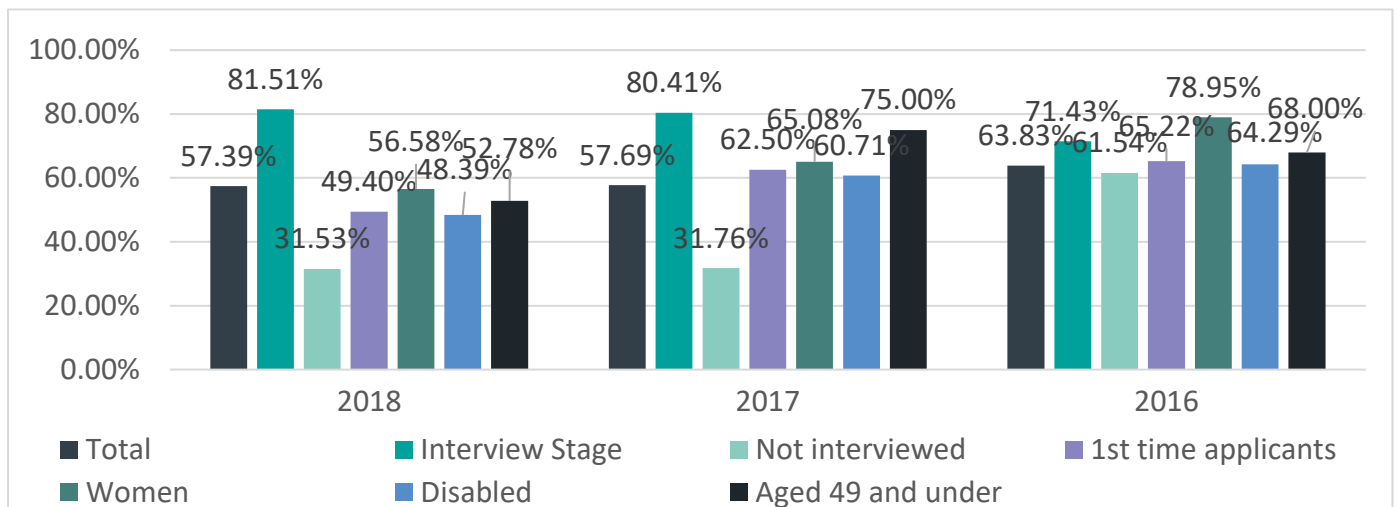

Figure 16 Of those who received feedback, the percentage who found it useful or very useful
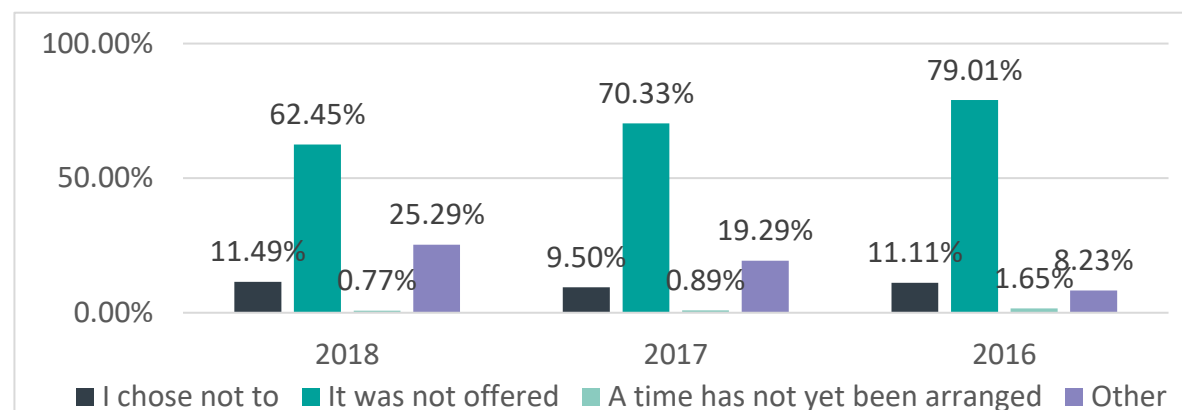

Figure 17 - Why applicants have NOT received feedback

Consistently over three years, the main reason for not receiving feedback, for those not interviewed, was that it was not offered. The main reason for not receiving feedback for those who were interviewed was "other" which often included not feeling the need to receive feedback due to being appointed.

> "I would have very much welcomed feedback, however my understanding was that no feedback was available to people who didn't make the interview stage."

> "I was offered the role & therefore feedback was not required"

> "I received a nice letter of rejection I wouldn't class this as feedback."

> "I received a reply regarding my application but it took months. It did not satisfy my questions regarding why I did not receive an interview."

> "The feedback wasn't directly from the adjudicators of the application - it was someone closely involved with the process. They provided feedback about the overall outcome but not my specific application. Their feedback was welcome but not useful as to why my application wasn't successful this time to get to interview."

Respondents were asked whether they intended to apply again. It is disappointing that over all three years fewer than 50% of respondents agreed that they would.

Comments from those who had not decided whether they would apply again could be helpful for Scottish Ministers in considering how to make the process more appealing to this undecided group.
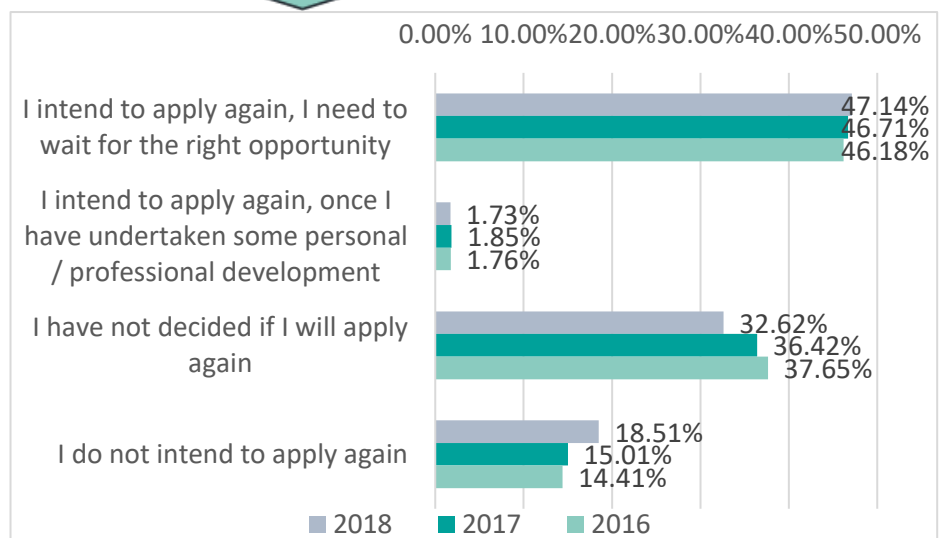
Figure 18 Applicant views on making further applications

> "Feedback was very poor in supplying details of perceived weaknesses. Details of the successful applicants were not given."

> "I am not sure if I will apply to future appointments. I feel that that the lack of acknowledgement of effort and interest shown by applying is discouraging."

> "I think a bit more information about the criteria you're looking for would be helpful"

31% of respondents did not feel that the application process was fair and transparent, compared with 28% and 29% in the previous two years.
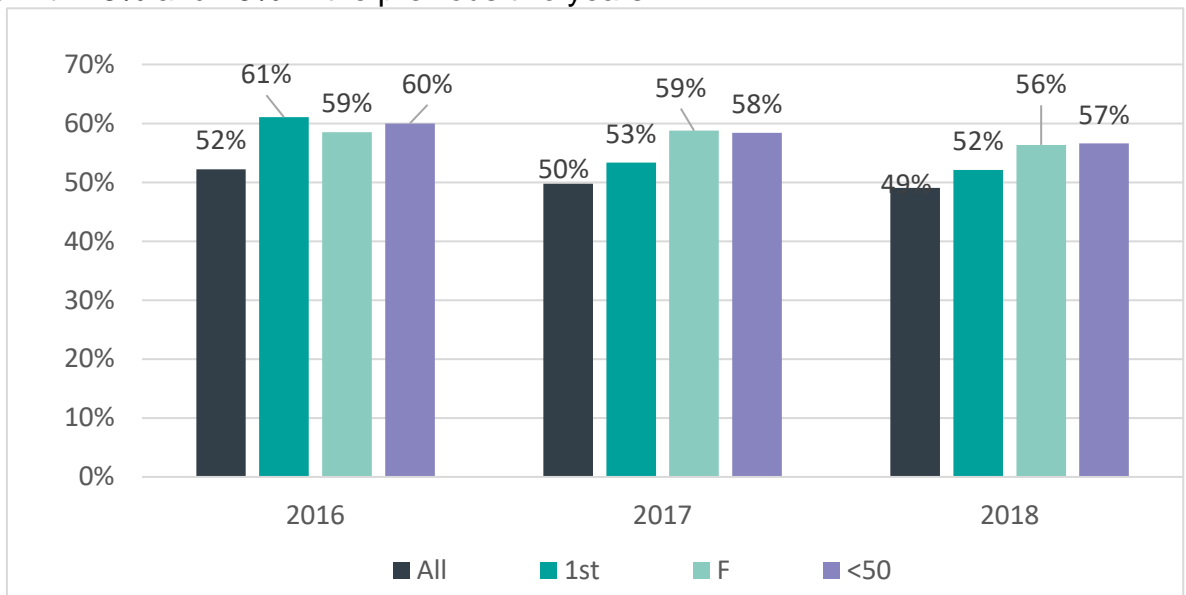
Figure 19 Percentage of respondents who DID feel that the application process was fair and transparent

It is interesting to note that, year on year, first time applicants, female applicants and those aged under 50 are more likely to consider the process fair and transparent than the overall grouping.

As the applicant views on the apparent fairness and transparency of the process continues to be of concern, from 2020 the survey question will be amended to delve deeper into the reasoning behind applicants' responses. This will attempt to uncover applicant's view as to why they consider the process to be fair and transparent only at application stage or interview stage, or not at all.

When correlating whether applicants found the process fair and transparent with the provision of feedback, those who were offered feedback and chose not to accept it were far more likely to state that they found the process fair and transparent (70%) than those who did not believe that they had been offered feedback (35.58%). In addition, for both those who were interviewed and those who were not, when feedback had been found to be useful or very useful, the respondents were also far more likely to consider the process to be fair and transparent (84.09% compared to 49.06% overall).
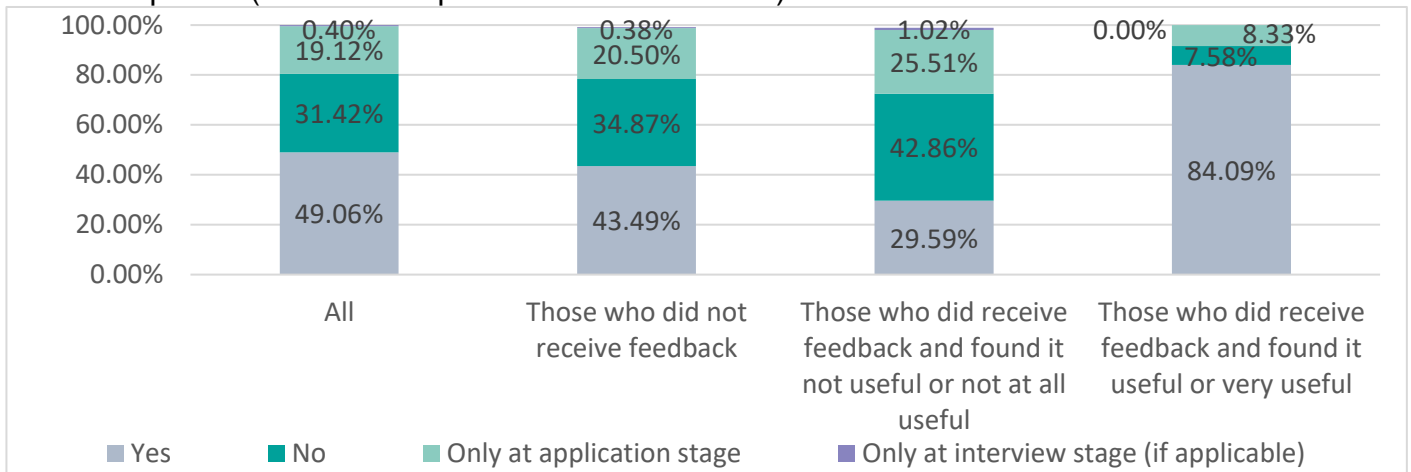
Figure 20 Percentage of all respondents (those interviewed and those not) about whether the process was fair and transparent
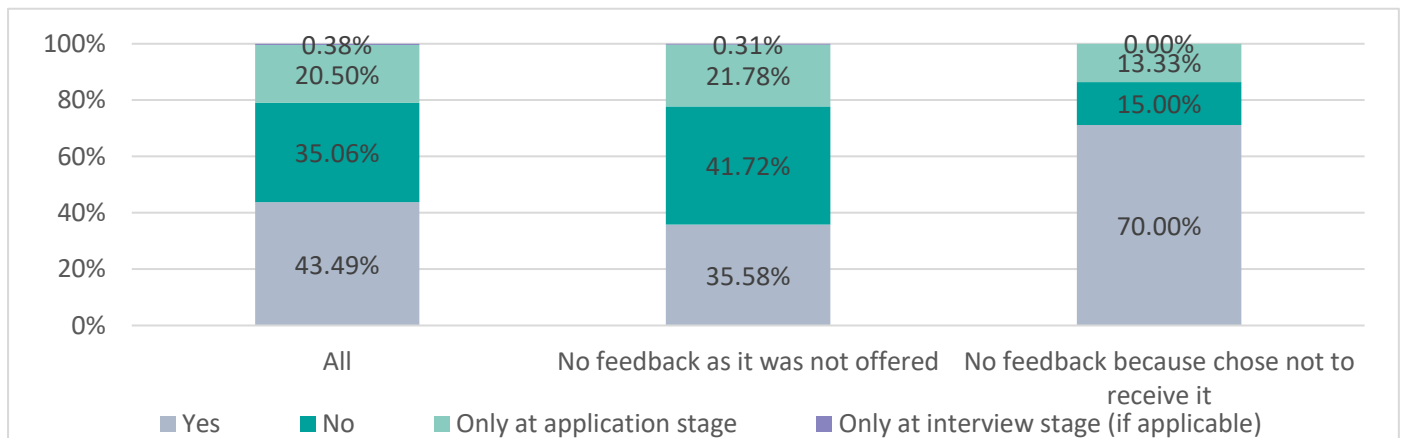
Figure 21 Percentage of respondents who did not receive feedback about whether the process was fair and transparent

Recommendation 5:(carried forward from the 2017 report) that a level of consistency is developed for the provision of feedback to applicants who specifically request it. This will rely on selection panels generating sufficiently detailed reasons for why applicants failed to meet the criteria to the extent required during shortlisting. Given the time and resource implications of this, it will not always be possible to provide in depth or lengthy feedback. Panels will need to take a view on how much of their reasoning it is realistically possible for them to record during shortlisting based on the number of applications received and the number of criteria assessed at the initial application stage. It should in all cases though be directly related to the individual application – indicating areas of strength and areas for improvement.

Recommendation 6: the offer of feedback to be more clearly stated in the notification of the outcome of the application, alongside a link to the appointed for Scotland news webpage where the profiles of all those who are appointed to boards are publicised. It is anticipated that directing applicants to this information should increase their trust in the transparency of the process. In the case of applicants not being invited to interview, an explanation that the announcement of the successful applicant will only be made at the conclusion of the round will have to be included.

Ethical Standards Commissioner

PANEL/BODY RECOMMENDATIONS

These are a set of recommendations which panels and public bodies may wish to consider when planning for future appointment rounds. They are based on the survey results from the preceding three years which seem to have shown significant differences for first time applicants and currently and historically under-represented groups. As a consequence, these results should be of particular interest and helpful to panels and public bodies who are keen to attract members from these groups in future. It should be borne in mind that these findings and recommendations are based on the results of the survey (i.e. only people who have made an application and have responded to the survey), and therefore do not take into account views which may be held by potential applicants or by people who did not respond to the survey.

First time applicants

- were significantly more likely to find out about an appointment opportunity via social media or personal contact than the overall cohort. This has been a consistent finding for three years and is understandable given that the appointed for Scotland website is primarily known to those who have applied previously and/or who are already "in the know". Therefore, public body boards should consider spreading the word about appointment opportunities via these routes to attract more new applicants. They have also been significantly more motivated by the professional development opportunities offered by the appointment. Panels wishing to attract more first time applicants should consider emphasising the professional development aspects of the appointment opportunity within the advert and pack.

Female applicants

- have indicated consistently over three years that they are significantly more highly motivated than the overall cohort by professional development and they have first found out about the opportunity through a personal contact by a significantly higher percentage than the overall group. From the 2018 findings of different types of application methods, they also responded more positively to overarching statements being the best method to demonstrate their ability than the overall group. Panels and bodies wishing to attract more female applicants should therefore consider using personal contact channels when advertising positions and emphasising the professional development aspects of the appointment opportunity – perhaps using female professional networking groups for example. Panels should also consider whether the criteria for selection lend themselves to initial application and assessment by way of a personal statement.

Disabled applicants

- have indicated consistently over three years that they are significantly more likely to find out about an opportunity through a personal contact than the overall cohort. Panels and bodies wishing to reach more disabled applicants should therefore consider using personal contact channels when promoting positions (for example by arranging outreach events for applicants in conjunction with disability support groups so that there is an opportunity for personal contact and discussion about the role or using any networks or relationships which the body itself has with the public to raise awareness of the opportunity). From the 2018 findings of different types of assessment methods, disabled respondents were significantly less likely than the overall group to consider the time allowed for practical exercises (prepared response to pre-set question, board paper

analysis, case study etc) to be sufficient. Panels wishing to attract more disabled applicants should therefore consider whether additional time should be given for any practical exercises set, or at least emphasise in packs and/or invitations to interview that reasonable adjustments (such as increased time for exercises) will always be favourably considered.

BME applicants

- have indicated consistently over three years that they are significantly more likely to find out about an opportunity through a personal contact than the overall group. They have also indicated consistently over three years that they are significantly more motivated by the personal development aspects of the role than the overall group. Panels wishing to attract more BME applicants should therefore consider using personal contact channels when advertising positions (for example by arranging outreach events for applicants in conjunction with BME support groups so that there is an opportunity for personal contact and discussion about the role or using any networks or relationships which the body itself has with the public to raise awareness of the opportunity) and emphasising the personal development opportunities presented by taking up a public appointment.

Applicants aged 49 and under

- have indicated consistently over three years that they are significantly more highly motivated by personal and professional development opportunities than the overall cohort. Therefore, emphasising the professional aspects/experience that the role would bring to an applicant's career history and the personal gain and sense of achievement that undertaking such a role provides could be useful. They were also significantly more likely to find out about an appointment opportunity via social media or personal contact than the overall cohort in two out of the three years and therefore it would be worth promoting opportunities via this medium when trying to attract applications from this group.

IN CONCLUSION

It has been positive to compare the results of the 2018 survey against the 2016 and 2017 reports and to see distinct trends appearing. When these are related to specific demographic groups consistently over time, it helps to illuminate aspects of the process that appear to be particularly helpful to, or present barriers for, applicants within currently underrepresented groups.

Although it is disappointing that the percentage response rate has dropped over the last three years, it is still encouraging that so many applicants are prepared to provide their views on how they found their experience. The results of all three years equates to the views of 1,749 applicant experiences overall.

The views of respondents about some of the specific aspects of application and assessment relating to individual rounds continue to be helpful in learning what works well for specific situations so that round by round learning can occur.

As in previous years, respondent comments are invaluable in helping us and the Scottish Government to understand and learn from viewpoints on all of the different aspects of the process.

APPENDIX 1 – ADDITIONAL APPLICANT COMMENTS

About motivation to apply for the position:
- I have been a public sector body Chair and separately sat on a UK NHS public body Board so felt there was something to offer there"
- I am looking for a part-time role so the hours required with this role were ideal for me.
- The "appeal" for applicants from the Chair and the "send a letter" approach was refreshingly different"

I was influenced by the advert because:
- Was detailed and informative, providing enough detail to enable me to make an informed decision and inspired by the opportunity.
- It emphasised women under 50 as being under represented.
- It indicated the changes needed in appointments and culture to improve the governance and performance of the body.
- The level of detail in the advertisement was useful; the role and organisation are not mainstream, but bespoke or complicated in nature.

I was influenced by the application pack because:
- It gave details of the role of the public body that I had not previously known in detail.
- The final para of the letter in the applicant info pack read "From my experience of chairing across a number of bodies I have all too often heard someone who would have been perfect for a role later tell me they did not apply because they thought others might be more qualified.   We need diverse thinking and different perspectives and talents to deliver our role. If you have got as far as reading this pack I would want to personally encourage you to take the next step and apply for this role."
- I liked the description of how applications were processed.
- Gave me confidence and better understanding of the process and type of candidate qualities.
- Role focused on experience and skills rather than qualifications which would have been prohibitive for me.
- I did not feel excluded - many such appointments are now clearly looking for specific backgrounds and expertise.

Reasons for not making contact to discuss the application in advance of submitting:
- Being uncomfortable with discussing or approaching anyone about my application … I rightly or wrongly felt that the application should stand on its own merits.
- By the time I was aware of the post I did not have time to contact anyone before the submission deadline.
- I felt contacting someone in advance would adversely impact my application as it would be seen as "needy" or it would disclose my autism to the assessment team when I do my best to cover this given that it has counted against me with every employer who has ever found out about it.
- I think that this was likely due to a lack of confidence and concern that being unable to complete the application without support, would deem me as a less desirable applicant. But this was likely a more internal anxiety and there was nothing say that this would be the case.

- I felt there was an administrative contact, but I was nervous of applying and really could have done with speaking to an existing board member or someone of that ilk, or one of my referees.
- I wasn't clear about the level of support the individual identified was to provide, so I didn't make contact and submitted the application individually.

Views on bespoke application methods:

CV / Career / life history:

- It was not clear whether {the public body} would prefer applicants without previous Board member experience, or with Board & public bodies experience. Wording in the application pack hinted that {the public body} would prefer applicants with no previous Board member experience (" - - would welcome applicants without previous Board experience who can grow into the role - - " or similar wording), which seemed illogical & indicated that I was wasting my time in applying, because I have wide public Board experience.
- This was very unhelpful - to be forced to submit such a short CV for a senior role of this kind - and even worse that it just had to be pasted into an online form with no scope for formatting.
- I have a portfolio career, fitting round caring responsibilities, and on a one page CV there is space for little more than job titles, which did not allow me to indicate how my wide ranging experience was relevant to the role. A covering letter would have worked better. There is a tendency for public bodies in Scotland to focus on the job title rather than the responsibilities and the skills developed in previous roles, which doesn't work well for those with non standard career patterns, particularly those under 50 who you claim to want to recruit.
- I think its best to allow the candidates to submit details on 2 pages. I find with a career of over 30 years it's impossible to convey this in one page. It led me to believe the preferred candidates were already pre-identified.
- Again, 400 words is a very limited word count, especially for someone who has had a number of roles over a period of years. An alternative approach would be to ask for a video summary.

Overarching statement:

- The criteria were somewhat limiting - for instance in selecting from wide range in a broad career, and also in appearing to drawing out how experience was relevant to future challenges. This felt too simplistically backward-looking, as if evidence of a historic experience was a definitive guide to future actions/behaviour. (This back ward looking evidential approach was re-applied almost verbatim in the face to face interview process)
- Writing an essay was a disincentive given the time required and the limited information provided on just how such a submission would be assessed objectively and comparatively. Having been an assessor and/or selector on numerous selection processes the concept of how to pitch an essay given the lack of knowledge of the assessors has a feeling of unfairness. If you are part of the Scottish government set it might be easier in likely knowing the judging panel but, like me, coming into

Scotland recently but its lots of relevant experience it is far more of a challenge. I almost didn't apply.

- However, was a real challenge that required a few drafts to draw out key salient points. However, it did help me develop a technique that results in me "writing less to say more". So really made me think about structure, content and how others would interpret.

Application form with word limit:

- Encourages concise writing but does not provide room for everything relevant. Being a board member requires skills in advocacy, analysis, forensic questioning and communication; plus character attributes such as honesty and courage. To show these qualities, you need room to tell stories.
- A limit is appropriate and 300 words is not unreasonable. A concise approach has to be adopted but that in itself will indicate how a candidate can work within guidelines.
- Can't effectively represent 30 years of experience in 350 words. If I give multiple example's I'm told not deep enough if I give one example I'm told breadth of experience inadequate - no win situation.

Application form with word limit for priority criteria:

- It asked you to focus on your skills and expertise in a particular area, which suggested they weren't interested in a broader coverage of your general skills/expertise.
- While I majored on a main criteria, I felt that it eclipsed other experience and seemed an odd process for anyone with a skill set that integrates different experiences and attributes, especially collaborative.
- This is the first time I have been asked to pick only one priority. I felt uncomfortable having to pick only one priority. This did not allow me to give evidence of my experience and skill for this appointment.

Views about the importance of values came across in the NHS rounds where this was used:

- The importance of the value set was emphasised in the documentation and it was clear that evidence of these values was essential because of the leadership behaviours required for the role.
- Documentation was clear and the values of NHS were already known to me through my previous post.
- Completely understand the importance of values in setting culture and ethos of the organisation but as a psychologist found the process by which they were measured didn't really provide a direct correlation with stated NHS values.
- But guidance on how you demonstrate behaviour is limited and lacking any real opportunity to get into the topic. This is an area that requires much more than an example and a 2 or 3 minute discussion if it is to be taken seriously. t felt totally tokenistic.
- It was clear why these values were important; but unclear what should be given as examples.

Views on the final stage of assessment / interview part of the process:

- This was my very first public appointment interview and I was a little surprised by the set up, however, everyone was wonderful and engaging. I felt it was an intelligence conversation between people of like mind and inspired to support the work of the organisation.
- The interview was extremely well structured with each interviewer fully prepared. The Chair also co-ordinated matters in a highly professional manner whilst the interaction was dynamic but controlled. In summary, challenging but thoroughly enjoyable.
- In many areas they looked for the evidence to support what I had put in the application and also stretched my thinking with the specific challenges of the role.
- But was surprised it was like a tick box exercise - question, answer, move on to next question. I am more used to a conversation in an interview and that was my previous experience for a public appointment. But I think I was probably the final interview of a long day.
- The questions asked about past events and how I responded yet at feedback I was criticised for not then telling the panel what I would have done had I been in a Chair's role.
- The quality of the panel, their experience and approach was precisely what the pack let me to believe would happen
- It was a very 'mature' and in-depth discussion, undertaken very professionally.
- I could compare the panel with another interview I attended; my view is that the panel for this post were exemplary.
- The interview panel were knowledgeable about the field and represented a good cross section of interested parties. I thought they were an excellent panel.
- I had a lot of fun at this interview and went away even more inspired by the interview panel. Thank you.
- All asked questions in different areas and building on each other and the answers that I had given. They clearly had prepared and knew each other well.
- Two were highly proficient, I found one to be less well equipped. I am now going to say something controversial, I think certain gentlemen, of a certain age from some backgrounds, still think that their role as an interviewer is one of command and conquer. Apply the steely gaze approach. Not helpful and certainly not engaging.
- The chairman asked me to state ways I could improve the work. When I gave him my view's he became incredibly prickly, annoyed in fact, red faced and angry that I suggested improvements. I concluded quickly that the chairman was not interested in recruiting a challenging professional to his board. The interview spiralled into a very defensive Chairman huffing throughout the interview. It was actually pretty embarrassing. I pointed out that I had been asked to critique and suggest improvements. My conclusion was that the position was pre-ordained for someone else and I was there to make up numbers and proved too challenging for this Chairman.
- On reflection I was asked at the end to articulate any information that would help the panel understand my application. This is really important not to prejudice dyslexic and dyspraxia candidates from being effectively evaluated and inclusive

- Overall well. However, I did feel one of the panel members showed her obvious frustration with me by verbally almost sighing and a touch of eye rolling. That was a dispiriting and negative experience. It was reflected in the feedback when one comment which clearly came from that member did not at all accurately reflect what I had offered in answer. Her attitude made me rather nervous and really was unsettling. I also had not been informed in advance that a stenographer would be present. Not an issue but another person in the room.
- I think in the setting where it took place was a bit daunting and reminded me of sitting in court which was pretty tough to sit with on top of the stress of an interview. But then to have such a large panel of people is very intense and also to find out that most or all of the panel are not involved in the Board I felt was not great. I think a less formal interview would help people to feel less nervous and you would get a better feel for people.
- They were all really engaging - it was a great interview. At the end I told them it had been like therapy for me!
- The panel members made me feel at ease, explained the process of the interview clearly in advance and asked fair questions.

Comments on feedback from those who did NOT reach interview stage:
- I asked for feedback and my request was acknowledged but it has not been received. I would have found it very helpful because I actually feel less reluctant to apply now because I am not sure what I could have done better.
- I received a nice letter of rejection I wouldn't class this as feedback.
- previously I have asked for feedback which simply says 'there was a strong field with exceptional applicant'. It doesn't really help for future applications.
- I received an email about the high number of applicants but not feedback specific to my application. To be fair given the number of applications I can appreciate why this didn't happen.
- Feedback that I was not called for interview. I was disappointed not to receive more detailed feedback. That would influence my decision whether to apply for a similar role. I would have liked to have been invited for a briefing on the work of the body for increased understanding and to ensure a better fit.
- Previous experience of asking for feedback from the sponsor team produced only generalities and platitudes and avoided engaging with the detail of my own application.
- I would have very much welcomed feedback, however my understanding was that no feedback was available to people who didn't make the interview stage.
- I simply received a mail saying I was not successful. However on previous occasions, when I have asked for feedback it has been extremely thoughtfully and thoroughly provided. A great testimony to your recruiters. Thank you.
- I received written feedback by email. It helped me learn about how I came across in the application form and what I could do to improve that. It also demonstrated that my application had been thoroughly assessed, which gives my confidence in the process.
- It merely told me that I was not being invited for interview and that there were about 30 applicants. No mention regarding strengths or development needs

- The response was extremely limited, even when a second letter was sent in response to my request for further details. The letters did not give me a clear idea as to how to improve my application for any further positions. The reasons given for my rejection were pretty anodyne.
- Helpful feedback showing that I had the skills but it was the strength of the competition in this pool. Encouraging and commented on a particular strength which was motivating.
- "This was the best feed back I've received from any of the 10 or so applications I've made. It was far better than any other feedback. Here are the crucial parts ""You may wish to note that in total we had over 39 applications ... Unfortunately, with such an encouraging response for only one position, this meant that there would be a large number of applicants who were disappointed ... the panel all agreed that the evidence you provided was sufficient to meet each of the criteria being tested at this stage ... Your examples were clearly written, however, ultimately, there were other candidates who provided stronger evidence overall against the range of criteria being sought."" This tells me that (a) there were not an unreasonable number of applicants and (b) had there been fewer applicants, I might have been interviewed. It encourages me to try again."

Comments about feedback from those who were interviewed include:
- I have been appointed to the role but have not yet taken up the position. I would expect any feedback to be given in the course of my first meeting with the Chair.
- I assumed feedback was available for unsuccessful applicants. I was successful and did not seek feedback.
- Pointless exercise - I got all the feedback I needed from the mannerisms of the Scottish government panel member during the interview itself.
- I was offered the option of getting feedback but no clear instruction about how to contact the relevant person.
- I have written twice already requesting feedback, apparently the panel have been unavailable to provide any feedback.
- I requested feedback and despite some emails advising that feedback had been requested I never heard anything further. I would have really welcomed feedback as I was really disappointed not to be appointed.
- It would have been very helpful to see in advance of the feedback interview the comments made by the interviewing panel especially in respect of shortcomings/development areas as the feedback interview left me feeling unclear about this aspect. I also had further questions following my reflections on the feedback interview which it would have been helpful to have raised, but I didn't feel that a further discussion was an option. In particular, I would like to have been told whether or not the panel considered me to be appointable.
- While I was unsuccessful in my application the feedback I received was very positive which has given me encouragement for any future applications. There wasn't however significant levels of information which I could take in terms of helping me understand what my development needs are. I greatly appreciated the time which was taken to complete such a thorough feedback.

- I was told I met the criteria but not as well as others. However, the feedback regarding need for further strategic experience is hard to act on without being given an opportunity for growth, and reinforces the difficulty in reaching improved diversity on boards when we have to demonstrate highly developed experience/skills to access strategic roles.
- Excellent feedback: well constructed, honest and rang true.

Comments about feedback made in the final comments section (therefore it is not known whether these respondents attended an interview or not):

- I would have appreciated feedback beyond 'there were more qualified applicants'. People's qualifications and experience for this sort of role are extremely wide and diverse, so I would imagine that some of my experience was lesser than other applicants and some was stronger - I would have liked some delineation of that.
- This was the first Chair's role I've applied for. It would help to have feedback on what aspects of personal development would improve my fit to any future Chair roles. Any recommendations for mentoring or network involvement would also be helpful.
- The application process takes a considerable amount of tine, which is justified, so if I was to apply again I would like the opportunity to receive feedback.
- After such a lengthy and, inevitably, personal application process, I think it would be only fair to offer feed back.

Some of the comments made by those who are currently undecided about whether to apply again in the future. These could be useful for panels to consider for future rounds.

- Feedback was very poor in supplying details of perceived weaknesses. Details of the successful applicants were not given.
- The explicit encouragement of applications from certain groups, with the stated aim of broadening diversity, gives the strong impression that those who do not fall into these categories have little hope of being appointed.
- It appeared that a set type of applicant is being sought. As indicated it does seem very self selecting with the same people or from the same background selected. Given the issues that have been faced whether in public or private sector and over issues from finance to bullying that seems surprising. From an external point of view though it does look that its more what you are than what you have done.
- It seemed arbitrary and geared towards the perpetuation of the selection of the same establishment or bureaucratic figures. Safe pairs of hands or other such criteria seeming to outweigh other skills or talents.
- The application process was quite time consuming, particularly when I was neither invited to interview nor provided any feedback. Perhaps a two stage application process would be more appropriate.
- I appreciate there may have been a lot of applications for this role so it would be difficult to tailor rejection letters. However it would have been helpful to understand if reason for rejection was due to current emphasis on age, sex, or other priority rather than relevant skills as that would have a bearing on any future applications. I do hold another appointment so once it comes to an end I will wish to give further consideration to other applications at that time provided I satisfy relevant criteria.
- I think a bit more information about the criteria you're looking for would be helpful.

- My concern is not about the process - which seems extremely professional and far better than anything I have experienced in my working life - but the outcome. When I began to look into applying for these positions, I was told by friends in senior positions in health, education, admin, not to bother, because the positions were all "shoe-ins". You advertise that you are seeking new people, diversity, people from "outside". But when I look at the appointees, none of them are from alternative professions, or might have different ways of thinking. Of course you want seasoned professionals, but I would argue that you also need people with opposite experience and thinking. I am not doubting the quality and sincerity of your recruitment, but I have concluded that you are not interested in people like me who are non-conformist, or part of the establishment. Thank you for the opportunity to be able to express my views.
- If there is any way that it is possible to make the interview more flexible and friendlier without losing the fairness, it would improve the chances of applying for more roles.
- This role appeared to be an ideal match for my skills and experience. Indeed, an existing board member recommended that I apply. However, as the feedback did not help me understand where I failed to put this across in my application, I would be wary of spending that amount of time and effort again in case it had the same result.
- I have applied for multiple roles multiple times for which I am more than qualified. I have only made interview once. I suspect I will be more successful when am nearer retirement age, vote conservative and change gender.
- I suppose the overwhelming feeling I got from the experience was that although I feel I would be a good and useful member of any board, that despite your intention to get more diverse board members, I did not feel that you were really interested in encouraging anyone except those who already fit that mould. If you really want diversity, then you need to find a different way to assess your candidates.

Some comments which may be useful for learning how the process could be made to feel more fair and transparent for applicants include:
- I don't see much evidence of boards becoming more diverse as a result of this process. They seem to be doing well in terms of gender balance now but not in other ways.
- I was very disappointed and also surprised not to have been selected for interview. I understood that there were 3 NED post available and whilst the number of applicants was large I could not understand why I would not have made it to the interview stage, albeit that I accept there could easily be other candidates whose skills, knowledge and experience fitted the existing skills of the board. Having not received any feedback, it is difficult for me to understand what I might have done differently to have made it to the interview stage. As a result, I do not feel that the process was fair nor transparent.
- I feel that the feedback process is severely deficient. I met or exceeded the criteria for the position but was not invited for interview nor was any feedback offered. I was left feeling that the processes were not transparent or fair. It would put me off applying for another position.
- I was disappointed to receive no offer of feedback in relation to my application. I also have a degree of scepticism as to what it is public bodies are actually looking for from applicants and whether despite all the statements of 'inclusiveness' these do not remain 'jobs for the boys' (and girls) already involved in the relevant areas through their careers/known to the bodies. It's difficult to know how to make a difference if there is no genuine way into the system.

- I have no trust in the process having been through it several times now and I keep being told I'm an excellent candidate but others pipped me this time. I don't believe the process has integrity and therefore distrust the feedback mechanism too.
- Despite multiple submissions, the routine response to requests for feedback is paraphrased as too many applications to respond to everyone, better candidates applied. Where I have had feedback, it's clear that whilst I met every specified criteria, others brought "different perspectives" meaning the applications were not judged against the specified criteria but other measures. I too have hidden depths, but I applied according to the instructions in the pack. I also feel it discriminates against candidates from non traditional backgrounds. What the government says it's looking for, is not what it is appointing - I have no trust in the process or the people behind it.
- It was not clear to me what the purpose of meeting the minister was. When I met her, she claimed not to know anything about my qualifications or experience. All I knew was that I had been assessed as appointable at the interview stage. It did not feel like a fair and transparent conclusion to what otherwise did feel fair.
- I would have appreciated feedback beyond 'there were more qualified applicants'. People's qualifications and experience for this sort of role are extremely wide and diverse, so I would imagine that some of my experience was lesser than other applicants and some was stronger - I would have liked some delineation of that. Also, the Glasgow event was cancelled at the last minute and not rescheduled whereas the Edinburgh event went forward - so some applicants had networking and information gathering opportunities which were withdrawn from me and those of us on the west coast at the last minute.
- The system is not fair the application process is favourable to a certain number of academics or candidates that had university education. The butcher the baker and the candle stick maker stand no chance. You should rename it appointed for the central belt.

Miscellaneous Comments:
Comments on Timetabling and administration
- The one thing which hasn't been covered in this survey is the clear decision dates which were set and the adherence to the timetable. I have applied for a number of public appointments in the past and this was by far the best handled process. Despite being unsuccessful in the selection process I would be very happy to apply for a future suitable appointment based on my experience on this occasion.
- The process was well conducted from beginning to end the help received from Public Appointments Staff was excellent.
- I did find the time taken to let me know outcome and obtain feedback very long, the published timetable was not followed and I don't feel this treats candidates well and sends a good message.
- Certainly, the central administration behind these applications is very effective.
- There were some computer problems submitting the application on line but thankfully there was someone available at 3.30pm on a Friday able to talk me through the submission process and advice about the correct information to allow submission without their technical advise I would not have been able to submit the application on time ,
- As always with surveys of this type - the questions posed do not allow for some key areas of feedback, e.g. the decision making process took far too long. It's important

that when you ask candidates to meet specific timescales, and there is no flexibility on these; that the appointing organisation should also meet the deadlines it committed to re the appointment timescales etc.

- I found the process as relaxed as anything like this can be, I didn't feel like anyone was trying to catch me out or trip me up. I found the questions thought-provoking and relevant. The turnaround time was also very good, and I appreciated not having to wait too long.

Suggestions for Improvement

- I would have liked the opportunity to have the interview in the regulator offices in Dundee; at least even though not appointed I would have gained knowledge of the organisation and engagement with the staff.
- When applying for roles online I would like to be able to see an initial outline of all upcoming questions.
- I think it might be worth considering the advertising phase of the recruitment process. I was not aware of the opportunity until a current board member pointed it out to me, within 24 hours of the closing date (which had been extended due to a lack of responses).
- Letter provided by shortlister came across as extremely condescending, including the line "is had to go through a similar process myself " referring to application process. This is not what one wants to hear just after receiving disappointing news from someone, and from someone who has gained employment in a field in was really keen to contribute to it felt patronising
- It really takes far too long to apply for roles such as this. Surely it could be possible to keep details of applicants for similar roles and try to match experience to roles.
- Irrespective of my personal position, I do believe that existing Non-Executive Directors or Members of other Health Boards - who are already fulfilling the requirements of that position satisfactorily - should automatically be given the chance of an interview.
- The Appointments for such Boards should be via an assessment centre and not a simply interview. This would allow for better assessment of how potential members react and use data/ information
- If one contrasts many tender processes, as exemplars, these often provide anonymised scores and commentary. This would have been more useful and transparent as a comparative gauge - even if negative.
- I feel that the application questions were really quite vague, and didn't offer enough of an opportunity to sell yourself. I note that representation from younger people, women etc are encouraged, but unless you know the 'right things to say' or have a more thorough application process, it's near impossible. I feel that an Applicant Drop In would be valuable for public appointments, that way there is more transparency and it's not just a case of 'jobs for the boys' or who you know...
- There was a bit of confusion at the end of the process between interview and appointment. This was because the minister wanted to meet with everyone in person. I was able to talk to her on the phone. She though I knew I had the post and was congratulating me but I hadn't been offered the post yet? I was told this was a second part of the interview which at the time did cause me some concern as I knew that it wasn't usual practice to do this.
- Thank you for giving me the chance to comment. If I were to suggest any way to make it easier for people from a non business background I would advise that you

have a half day session where you get to know them and give them scenarios as a board might be expected to and see how they operate without the pressure of an interview situation.

Other comments
- A very good job done by the Public Appointment Team. Not because I received the appointment, but even if I didn't - as my first application/interview this was a benchmark which inspired me to apply for other positions.
- This cannot have been an inexpensive process but I felt there was value built in to each of the stages to make them worthwhile. Thank you for the opportunity.
- I felt this was a very positive experience overall and while the outcome was not the one I wanted I did feel that the experience has been a positive impact on my personal and professional development.
- The process was well conducted from beginning to end the help received from Public Appointments Staff was excellent.