

Ethical Standards Commissioner

APPLICANT RESEARCH 2019

JANUARY 2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of surveys carried out during 2019 of applicants for public appointments in Scotland. It is the fourth year of undertaking surveys using a round by round rather than annual approach. Disappointingly, the response rate to the applicant surveys has dropped year on year since the introduction of surveys being completed on a round by round basis and in 2019, 32% of applicants took part.

Any trends which have been consistent through all four years are highlighted in the report. 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,
- those who reach the interview stage generally have a good experience with more than 80% agreeing that the panel handled the interview well or very well,
- feedback is provided for those who reach the interview stage on a far more regular basis than for those who don’t and
- around 50% of respondents each year indicate that they intend to apply again when an appropriate opportunity arises.

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 under-reflected 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 for the first time on the views of applicants by household income and sector most recently worked in. 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.

For the 2019 survey, two recommendations are made for Scottish Ministers and the officials who run the appointment process on their behalf:

- 1 –consider the views expressed by the 443 applicants who took the time to respond to the survey. Publish a response to the survey, to include any actions that they consider appropriate, to respond to the feedback provided by these applicants; and
- 2 –consider how best to increase the percentage of applicants giving their views about the appointments process. Where the Ethical Standards Commissioner’s (ESC) resources allow, recommended measures will be supported.

SURVEY FINDINGS

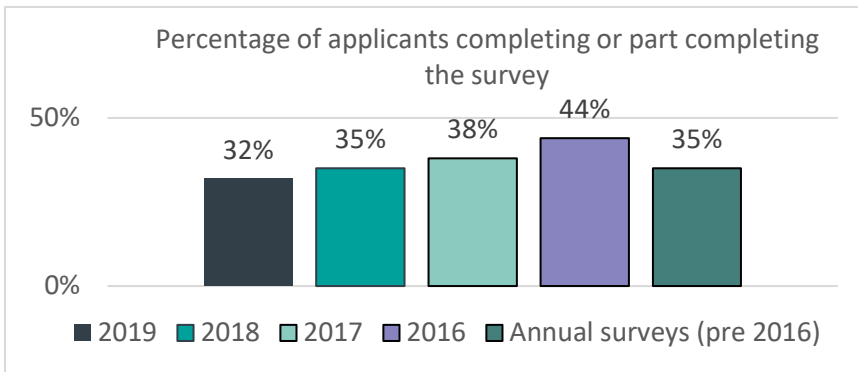


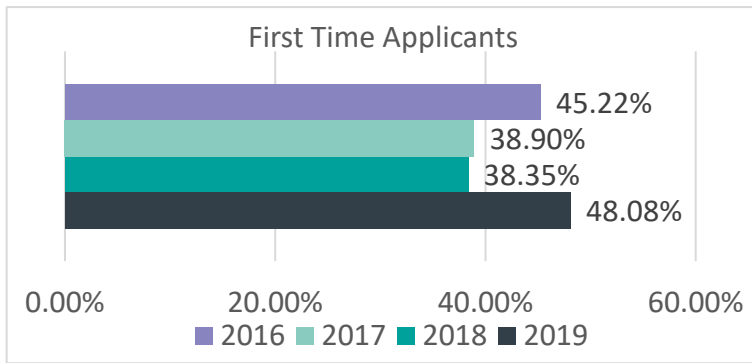
Figure 1 Percentage of applicants completing or part completing the survey

“I would like to thank you for affording me the opportunity to give some feedback. I hope that it might prove useful.”

The 2019 report invited a total of 1372 applicants across 48 appointment rounds to express their views on the process. 443 applicants chose to take up this offer (32%). 431 (31%) applicants completed the survey in full. 325 (73%) of applicants provided demographic data. The lower the percentage of applicants completing the survey, the lower the statistical validity of the survey findings. However, it is important to recognise that the views of the 443 applicants who did provide their opinion are still valid and important. The 2017 and 2018 survey reports both made recommendations that the Scottish Government consider providing the required information to the Commissioner earlier so that the survey could be run as close to the applicants’ concluding point in the process as possible. The recommendation was made on the basis that people are more likely to respond when the experience of applying was still fresh in their mind. These recommendations have not yet been taken up. This report therefore includes a general recommendation that the Scottish Government consider whether and if so how they would like to increase the percentage of applicants giving their views about the process. Where possible, the Ethical Standards Commissioner (ESC) will provide resources to facilitate any suggestions made.

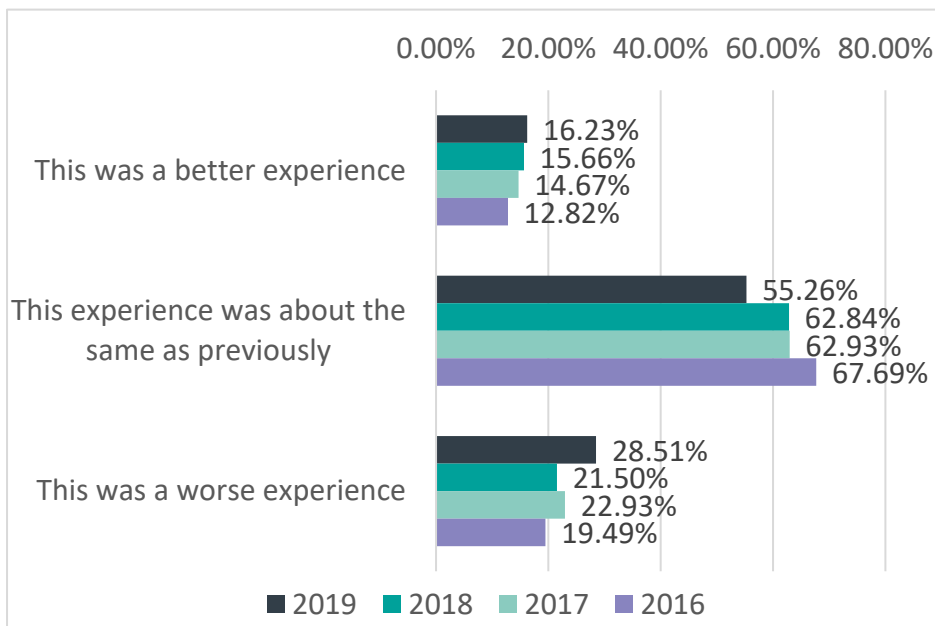
Recommendation : Scottish Government to consider how best to increase the percentage of applicants giving their views about the appointments process. Where the Ethical Standards Commissioner’s (ESC) resources allow, recommended measures will be supported.





Of the applicants who provided their views, nearly half (48.08%) were applying for a public appointment for the first time. The results of this survey will therefore provide a good insight into how people entering the process for the first time are viewing it.

Figure 2 Percentage of respondents who are first time applicants



People who had applied previously had mixed views about their experience with 55% feeling it was the same, 29% 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 alongside slight increases in the “worse experience” rating.

Figure 3 Those who previously applied - how this experience compared to previously

“My experience of applying for two public appointments has been frustrating however, the chance to contribute to Scotland's future remains something I am keen to do.”

“I thought this process was well set out and applied well. I had really decided not to apply for other such roles but this one matched my skills/experience so closely I decided to apply and am glad that I did. The interview panel was a delight - I felt they brought out the best in me.”

MOTIVATION TO APPLY

The main reason that respondents give for applying is that they feel their knowledge, skills and experience are a good fit for the role. In the 2019 survey analysis 90.29% of applicants indicated this as being a motivating factor for them.

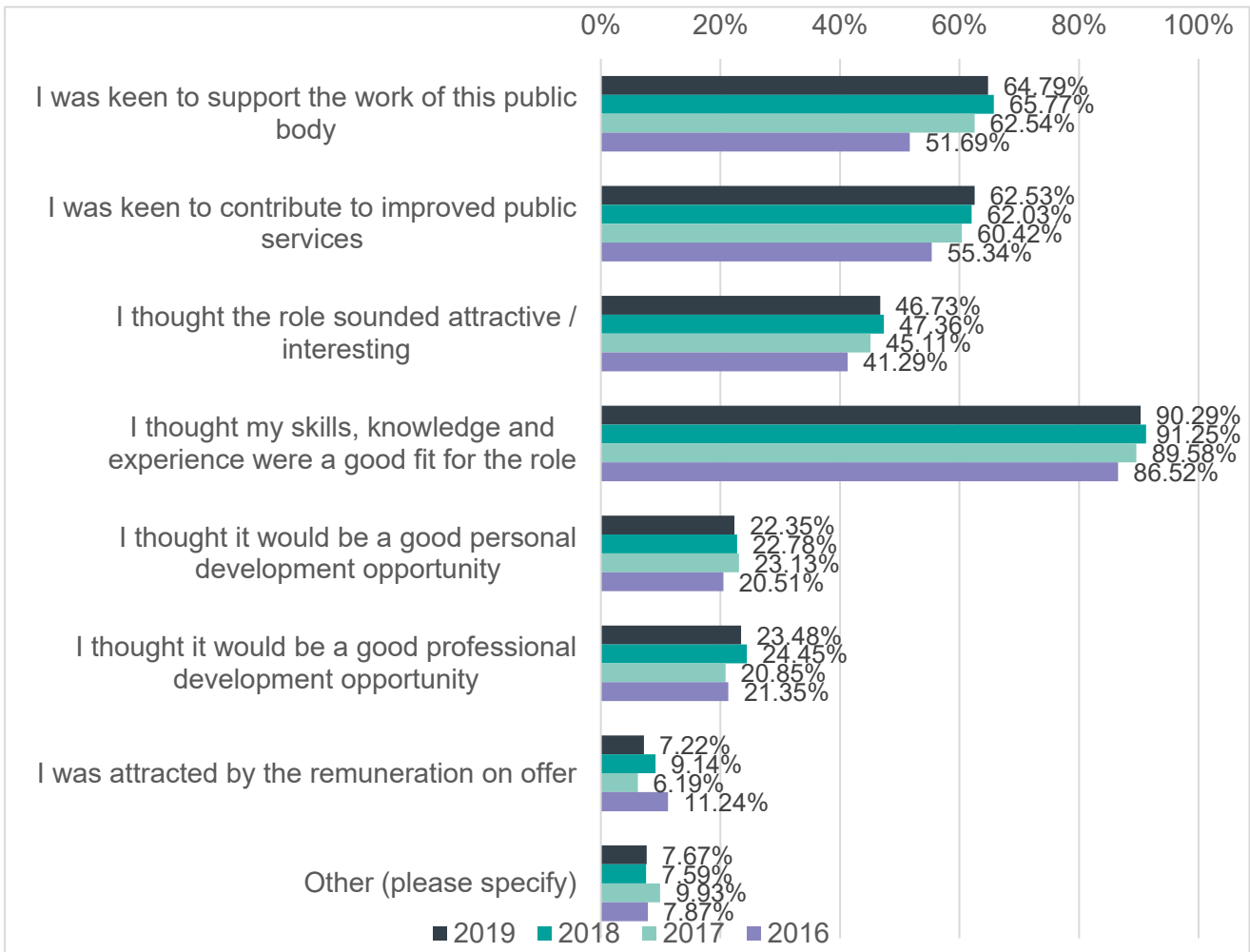


Figure 4 What motivated applicants to apply

Applicants under the age of 50 have consistently indicated that personal and professional development are significantly higher motivating factors for them than they are for other groups.

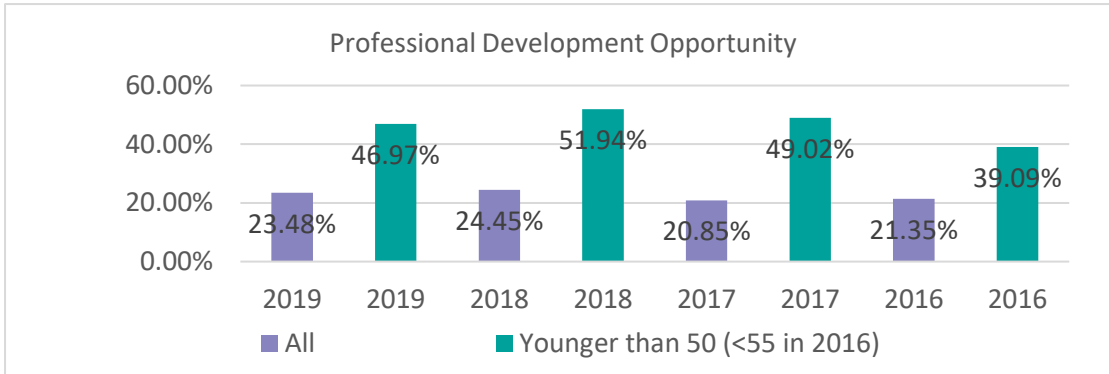


Figure 5 Percentage of applicants who cited professional development as a motivation to apply

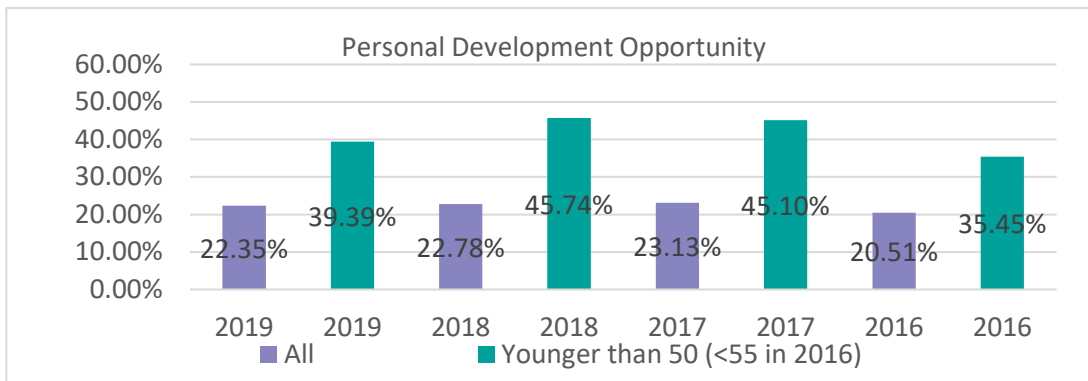


Figure 6 Percentage of applicants who cited personal development as a motivation to apply

Comments about what motivated applicants to apply can be found in the [Appendix](#).

HOW APPLICANTS FIRST FIND OUT ABOUT THE APPOINTMENT OPPORTUNITY

By far the most popular method for finding out about appointments over the previous three years was Scottish Government channels (either via email or the appointed for Scotland webpage). This had remained steady at around 60% of respondents. In 2019, this dropped to 52% which may be as a result of a large proportion of the responses in the 2019 survey report being from first time applicants. The findings over the last four years show that personal contact and social media are consistently more likely to be how the respondent first found out about the appointment opportunity in the case of first time applicants and some other under-reflected groups than for the overall group. The 2017 and 2018 survey reports recommended to panels who were trying to attract applicants within these groups to leverage these points of access, and it is heartening, particularly in the case of social media, to see that this seems to be bearing fruit.

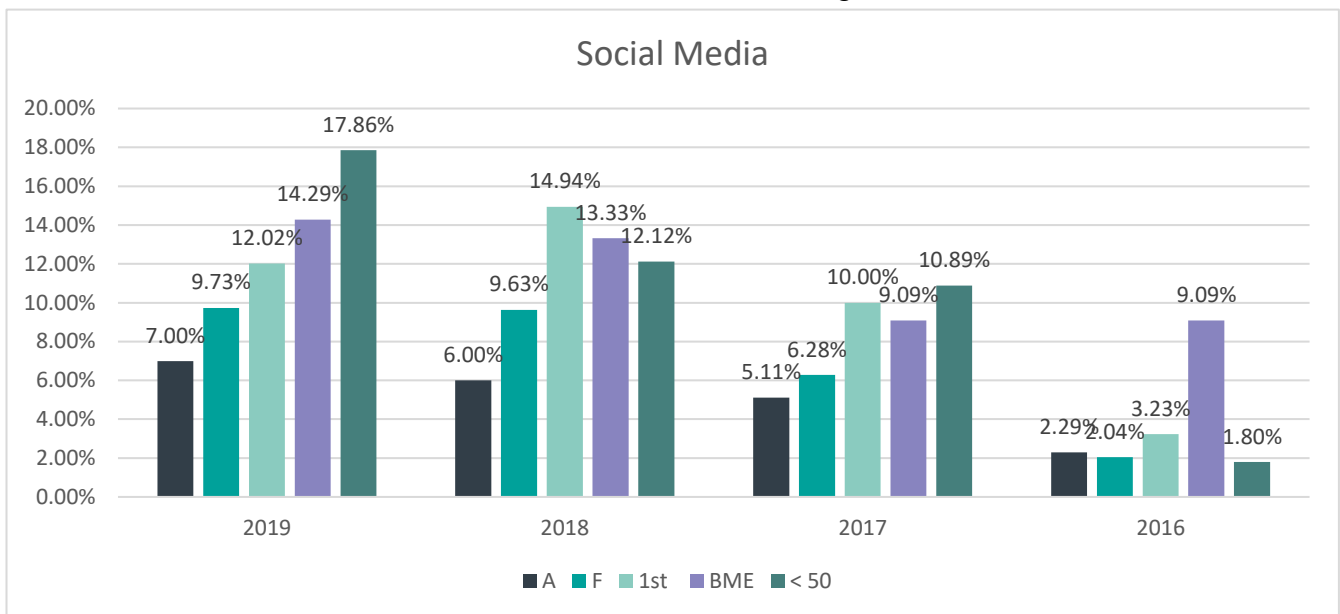


Figure 7 Percentage of applicants who first found out about the appointment opportunity via social media channels, (A = All, F = Female, 1st - first time applicants, BME = Black & minority ethnic applicants, <50 = applicants under the age of 50 (under 55 in 2016))

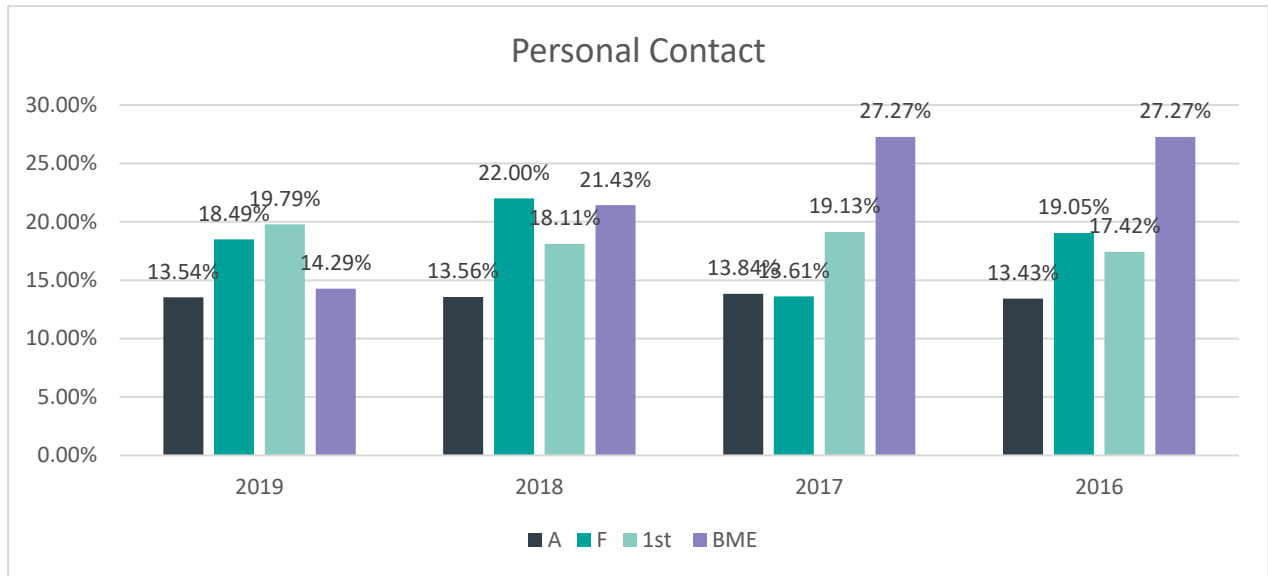


Figure 8 Percentage of applicants who first found out about the appointment opportunity via a personal contact, (A = All, F = Female, 1st - first time applicants, BME = Black & minority ethnic applicants, <50 = applicants under the age of 50 (under 55 in 2016))

When asked about appointment positions being advertised together, 87% of respondents confirmed that they found it clear and easy to understand what section needed to be completed but only 27% of respondents were encouraged to apply for both.

“I thought my skills could be appropriate for both positions.”



MAKING AN APPLICATION

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 four years.

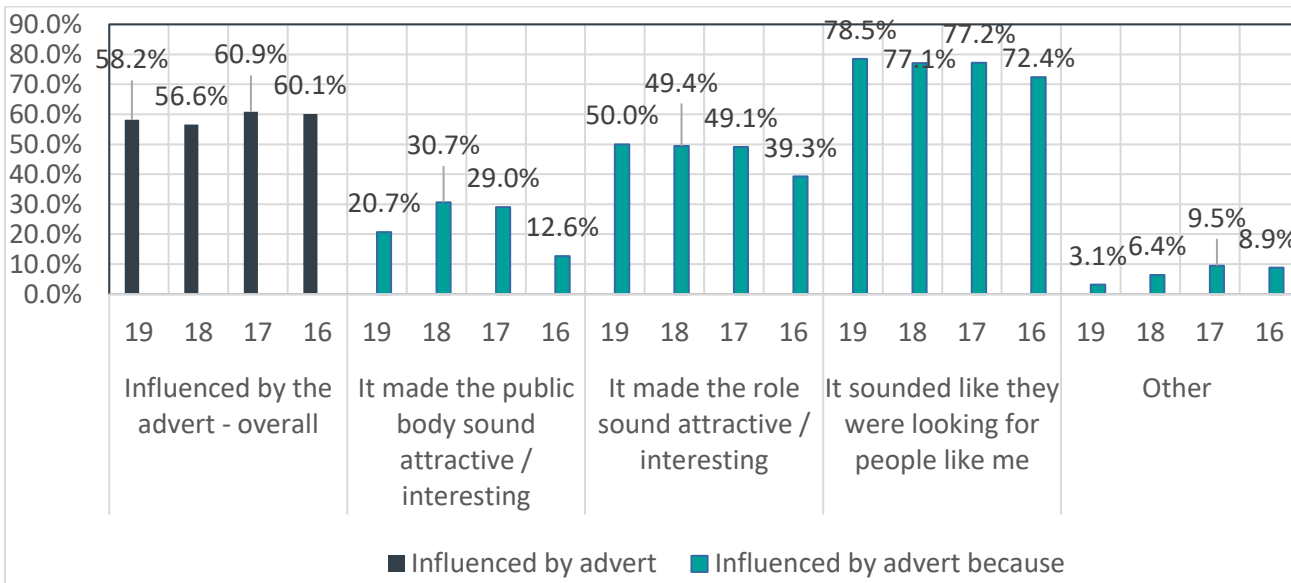


Figure 9 Applicants influenced by the advert

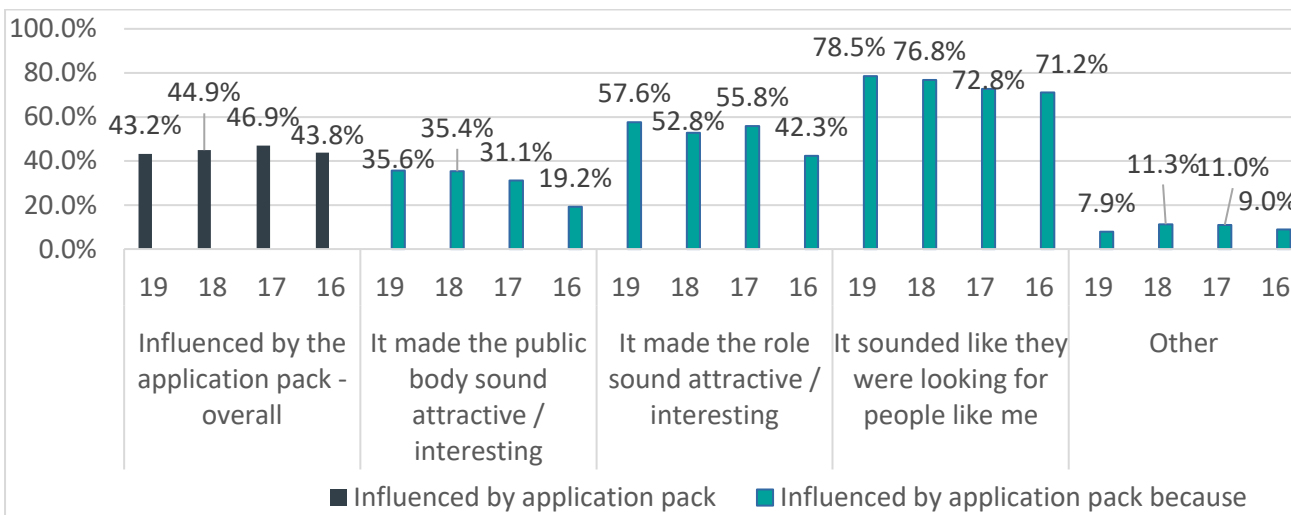


Figure 10 Applicants influenced by the application pack

Comments about what influenced applicants about the advert can be found in the [Appendix](#).

Comments about what influenced applicants about the application form can be found in the [Appendix](#).

Applicants responding to the survey in 2019 (who had provided demographic data) had some aspects of their experience analysed by their household income and sector worked (or most recently worked) in. This has been reported where significant variations were apparent and/or where it is considered that the results might be of interest.

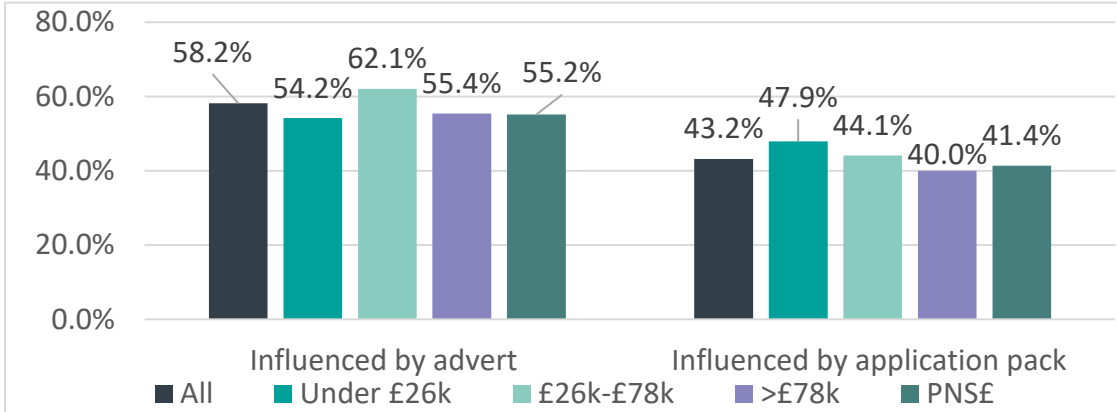


Figure 11 Applicants influenced by the advert and application pack by annual household earnings (PNSE = Prefer not to state)

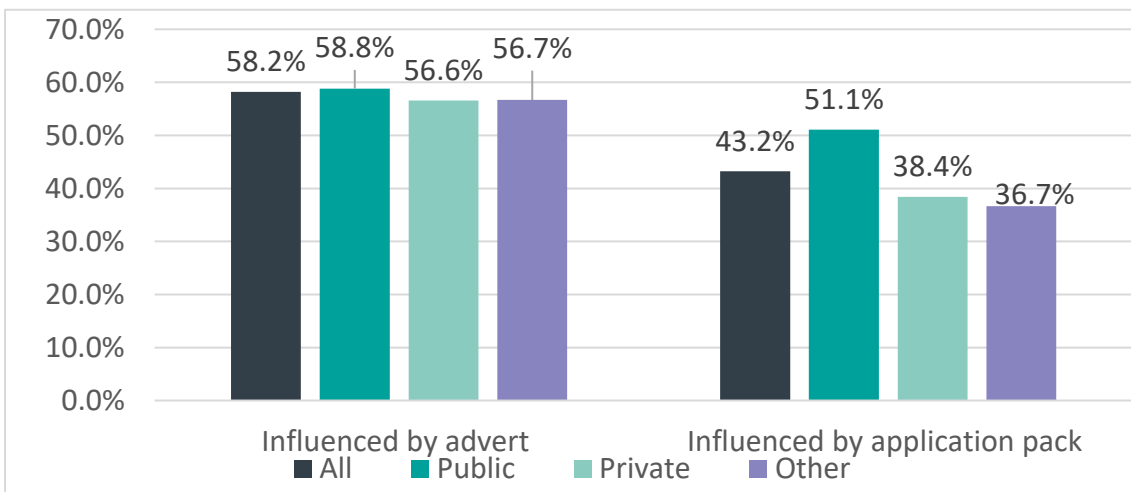


Figure 12 Applicants influenced by the advert and application pack by sector worked (or most recently worked) in

“Clear definition of role and expectations. The application form was just a series of paragraphs which were a bit confusing.”
(Private sector)

“I felt it allowed me to address the areas of my expertise that I wanted to highlight” (Public Sector)

Respondents have consistently found the application pack to be clear and helpful over the past four years and the time and effort needed to complete the application form seems to be reasonable for the majority of respondents. In the 2019 report 78.44% of applicants agreed that the pack gave a clear understanding of how to apply for the role. In comparison only 59.46% of disabled respondents agreed to this. However, this significant difference was not reflected in the previous 3 years and therefore may be an anomaly.

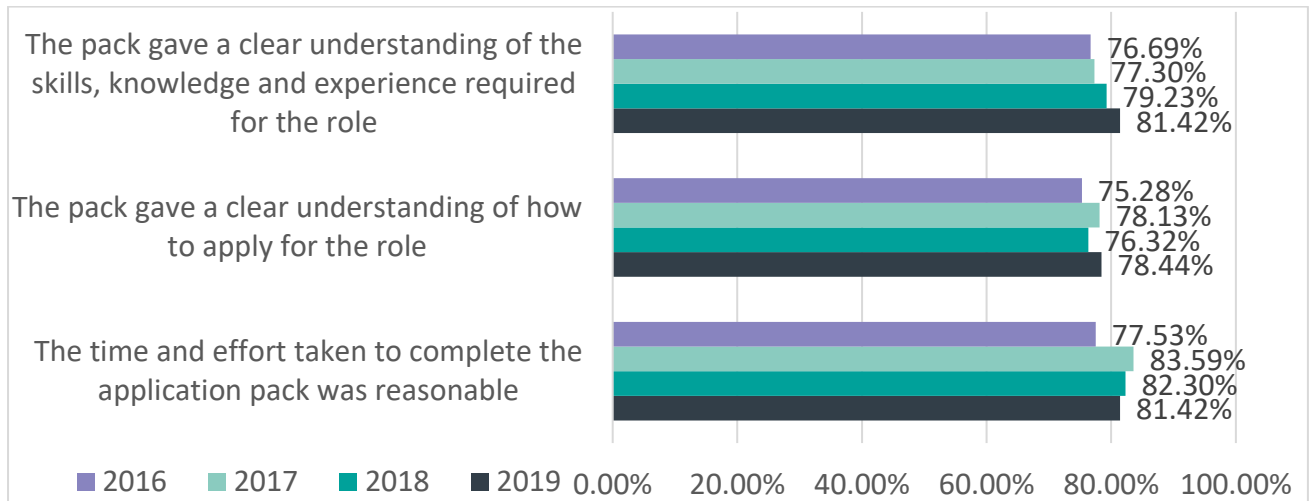


Figure 13 Applicant experience of completing the application

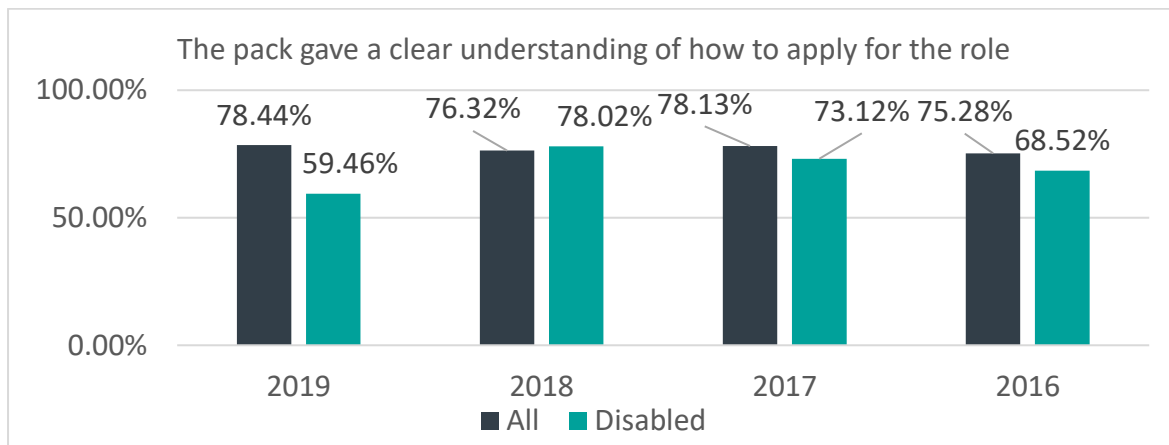


Figure 14 Disabled applicant view of applicant pack giving a clear understanding of how to apply for the role compared to overall applicant group

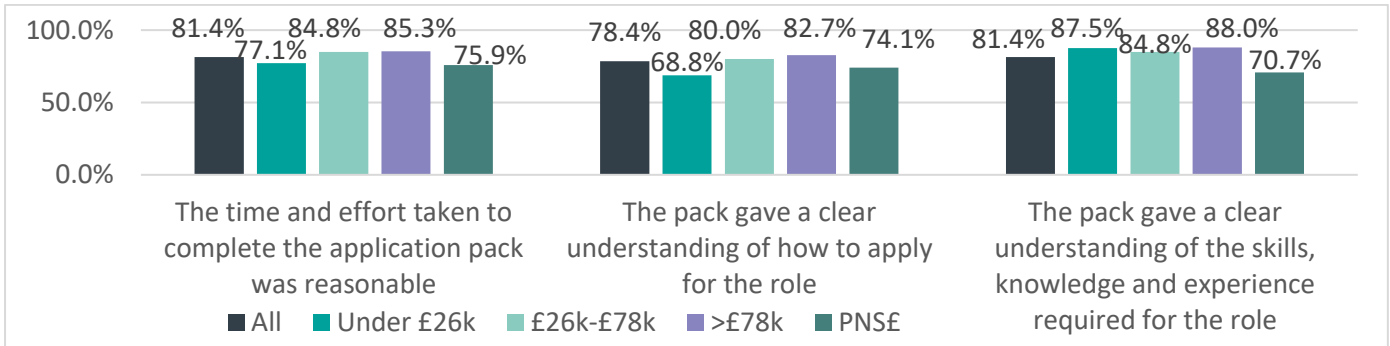


Figure 15 Applicant experience of completing the application by household income bracket (PNSE Prefer not to state)

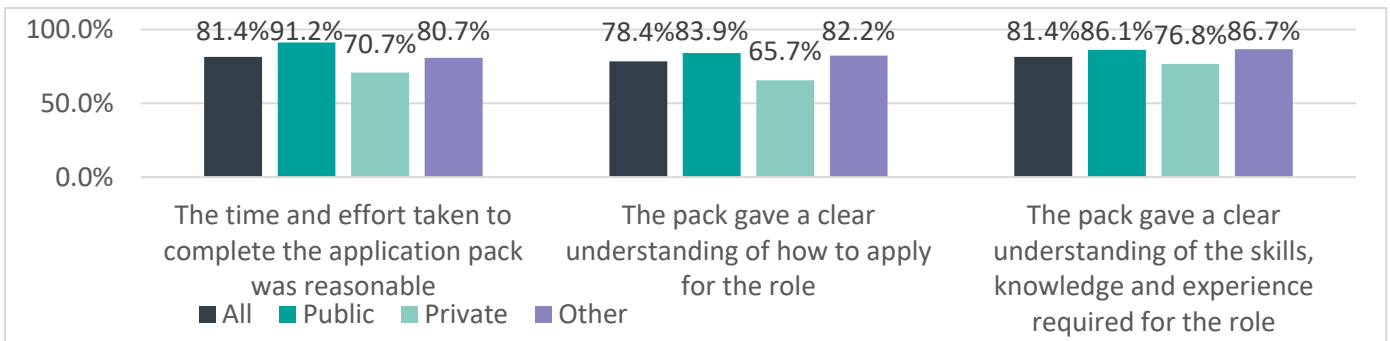


Figure 16 Applicant experience of completing the application by sector worked (or most recently worked) in

Comments about applying by those working (or most recently worked) in the public sector:

“Allowed to show skills built up over the years not only in education but also in volunteering and using reflective holistic writing”

“Good match between the experience and role described and my own.”

“Setting a word count ensures that it makes the applicant focus on the criteria being tested. If applicants have free hand to write their response this can lead to too much information some of which may be relevant, but other information be irrelevant”

“I think this method enabled me to demonstrate that I can be succinct in writing. I do think however it was difficult to demonstrate enough related experience by this method”



Comments about applying by those working (or most recently worked) in the private sector:

“Not enough space... why not send in a CV as per other jobs sites?”

“I found it extremely frustrating and quite disheartening. There seems to be a desire to improve diversity, but I feel that the process is not open to applicants with different backgrounds - I got the impression that it is geared towards public sector applicants who have specialised in one particular area, or those with connections who can tell you how to jump through the hoops. I have applied (successfully) for other posts recently and feel that the process could afford to be much freer and more flexible, while still being robust and fair. I worked in the public sector for years and understand the need for a proper process but I found this far too locked down, with the result that the application process was really off-putting.”

“Assessment of candidates' responses to the prescribed competencies needs to be at a much higher and more sophisticated level. From the feedback I received it is clear that what is expected is "I did this.... I did that....etc with a complete failure to comprehend the wider context and demands of the situation described.”

“It is helpful but without wider context I feel it unfairly favours those who know the system and how to articulate skills and experience to get to the next stage. I hadn't realised that the limited word count must also assume the reader knows nothing of the candidate, something which seems profoundly different from private sector application experience”

“I accept there may have been better candidates but I do not know why I was not successful. I feel that the effort I put into the application was disproportionate to the bland email response I received. I feel too much emphasis is put on diversity. I suspect that the successful applicants would be from the public sector, probably the NHS itself, which if so would do nothing for the most important aspect of diversity, the infusion of fresh thinking”

We have asked applicants over the previous four 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 60% 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.

When we looked at the response to this question, split by sector, we found that those working in the public sector were more likely to make contact to discuss their application, and those in the private sector were significantly more likely not to be able to make contact with anyone.

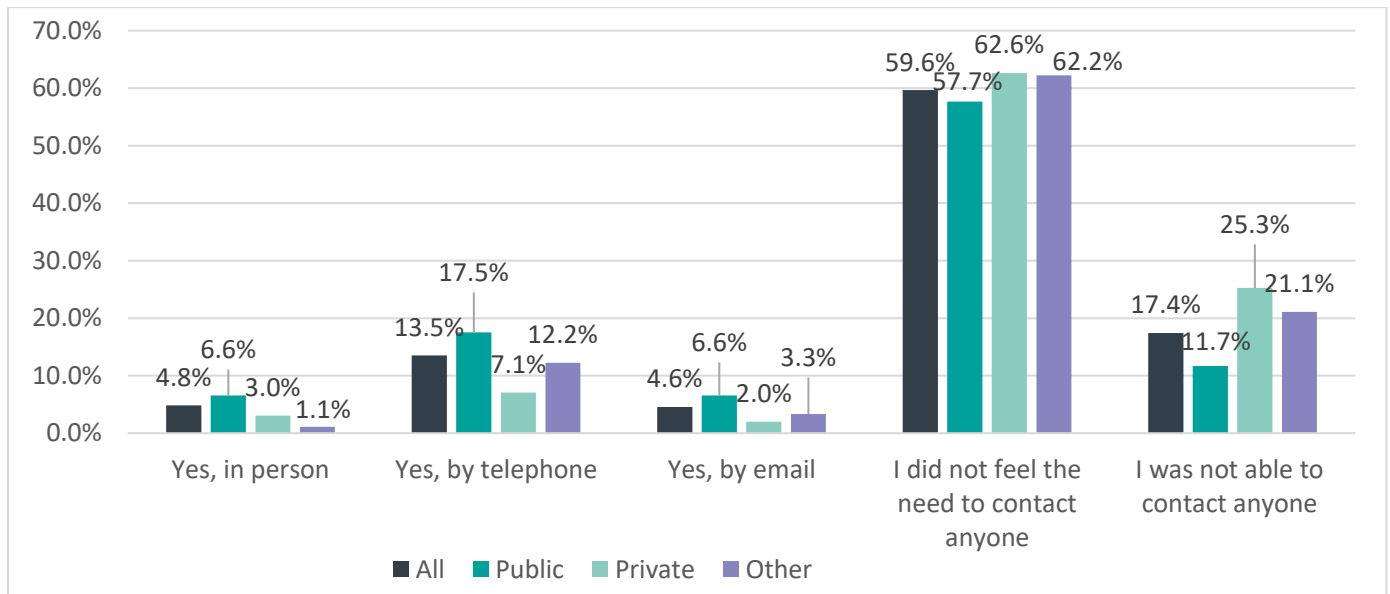


Figure 17 Percentage of respondents making contact or unable to make contact split by sector worked (or most recently worked) in.

Some comment from those working in the private sector about this include:

“I wanted to know if there were lead candidates already and how open they were to other industry experience. I also wanted to hear more about the challenges and what they felt was missing at board level - all to better tailor my application. I was not able to reach anyone who could help.”

“I am not sure I understand the question. There was a selection panel and I did not consider that it would be appropriate to attempt to contact them. I spoke to others about applying”

“I didn't know that was an option as I am not from the clique who always get these jobs.”

“The background material implied that speaking to anyone involved in the appointment process would create a conflict of interest.”

Further comments from applicants about whether they felt able to make contact about their application can be found in the [Appendix](#).

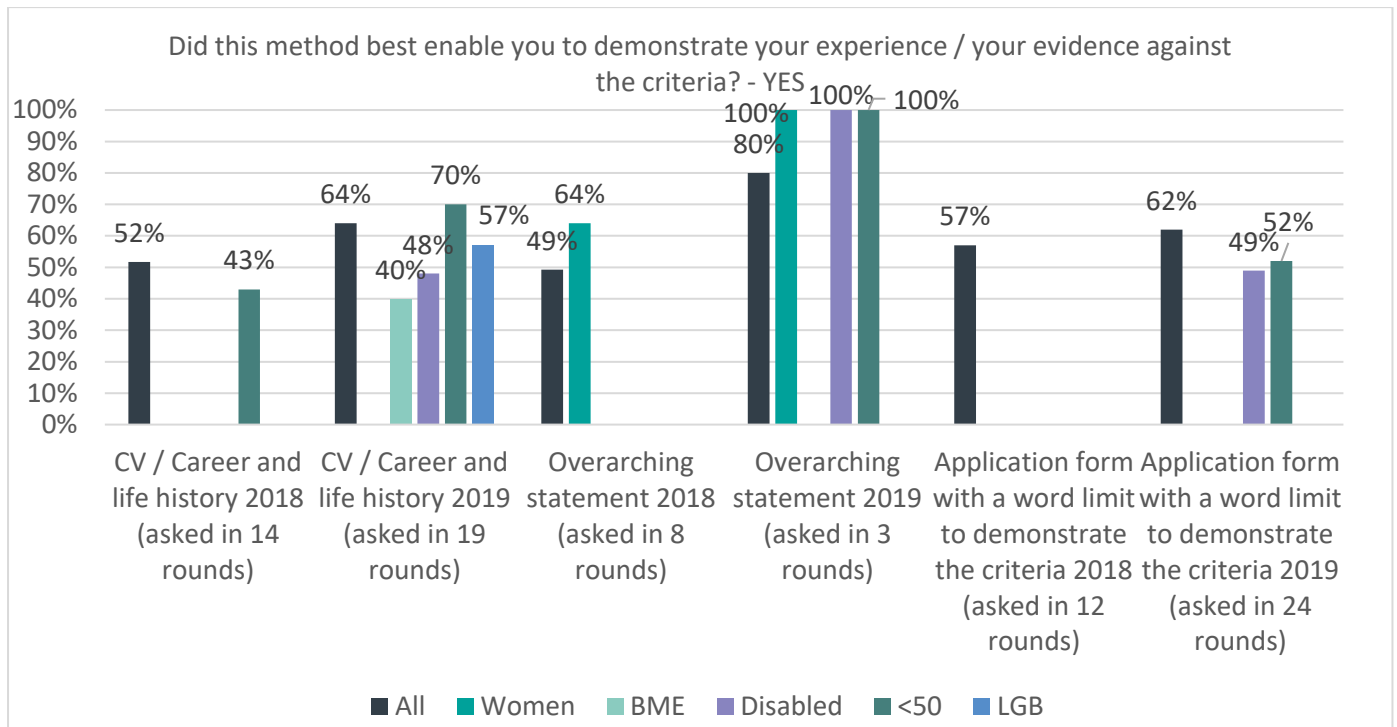


Figure 18 Responses about whether bespoke methods allowed applicants to demonstrate their evidence against the criteria (showing only where there were significant differences against the overall group)

Bespoke questions were asked of applicants about what they thought of aspects of their application experience which might be different from round to round (i.e. some selection panels may ask for a covering letter, some a CV or career and life history and some may ask for the more commonly used application form with a word limit to provide evidence against the criteria for selection). In 2018, it seemed that applicants found the application form the most suitable way to provide their evidence against the criteria sought, but in the 2019 report the overarching statement seemed to be the way most applicants agreed was most appropriate. When looking at under-reflected groupings there were no significant differences in comparison with the overall responses.

Comments about bespoke application methods can be found in the [Appendix](#).



FINAL / INTERVIEW STAGE OF ASSESSMENT

29.8% of respondents were invited to the final stage of assessment. The majority were very positive about two aspects of that stage. 88% 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. This is a trend which has been consistent over the previous four years and may indicate that there is a mismatch with content or face validity in the design and delivery of the assessment. i.e. from the skills, knowledge, experience or personal qualities listed as being required in the pack, applicants expect to be assessed in a certain way. When this does not match up to their expectations, either because the assessment method is different from how they expect a role of that nature should be assessed (face validity) or a mismatch between the aspect they are being assessed on and the assessment (e.g. being asked to give an example of a skill utilised when experience was asked for in the criteria) (content validity), they might feel that the interview questions do not reflect the skills, knowledge and experience asked for in the pack. Perhaps more concerning is the possibility, reflected in some of the comments received, that new requirements are being introduced at this final stage of assessment. This would be incompatible with the Code's requirement and with the need to be fair and transparent. It clearly also has the propensity to seriously undermine confidence in the integrity of the appointments process.

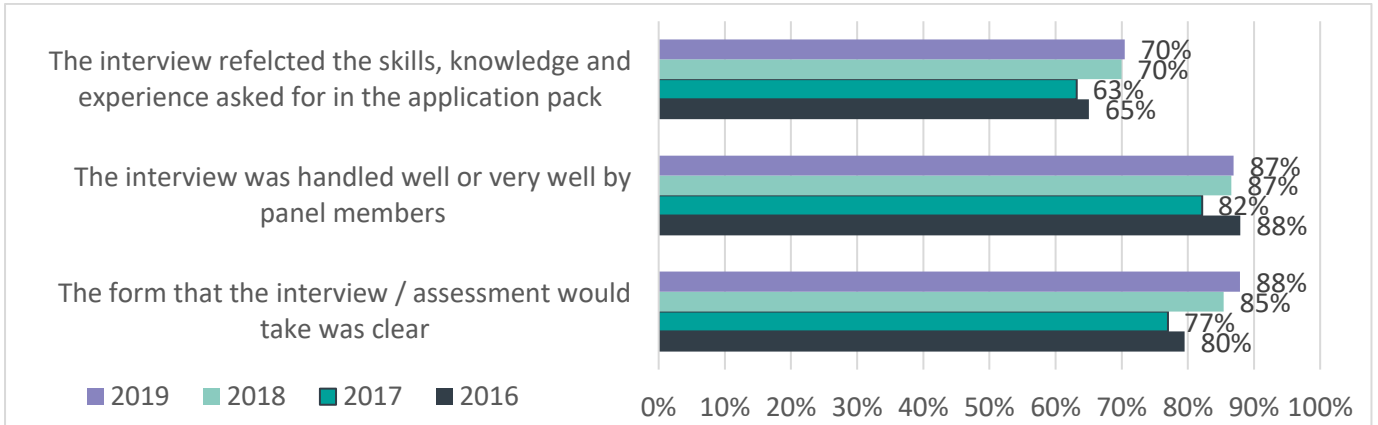


Figure 19 Applicant responses to aspects of the interview experience

“Some of the questions were not formulated in a way that was specific to the criteria (partially identified from feedback letter). I was asked how I dealt with papers for a committee and answered this. The feedback letter indicated I had not responded in relation to volume of papers for this board - which was not any part of the criterion, was not mentioned in the information pack, and would have elicited a different response from a generic response about committee or board papers.”

“There was an underlying desire from the interview panel for applicants to have experience on other boards - this was also mentioned during my feedback. However it was not part of the job requirements stated in the application.”

“I think they were framed in a way that only someone with the exact sort of experience would have been able to answer them. Not a competency or behavioural type of approach.”

Bespoke questions were asked about interview/assessment methods but due to smaller numbers of applicants reaching this stage, the responses provided limited statistical information. For most of the different interview/assessment methods, applicants were asked whether the instructions were clear, how they found the timing for the exercise and whether they felt the exercise was a realistic and effective way to assess the skills being sought for that role.

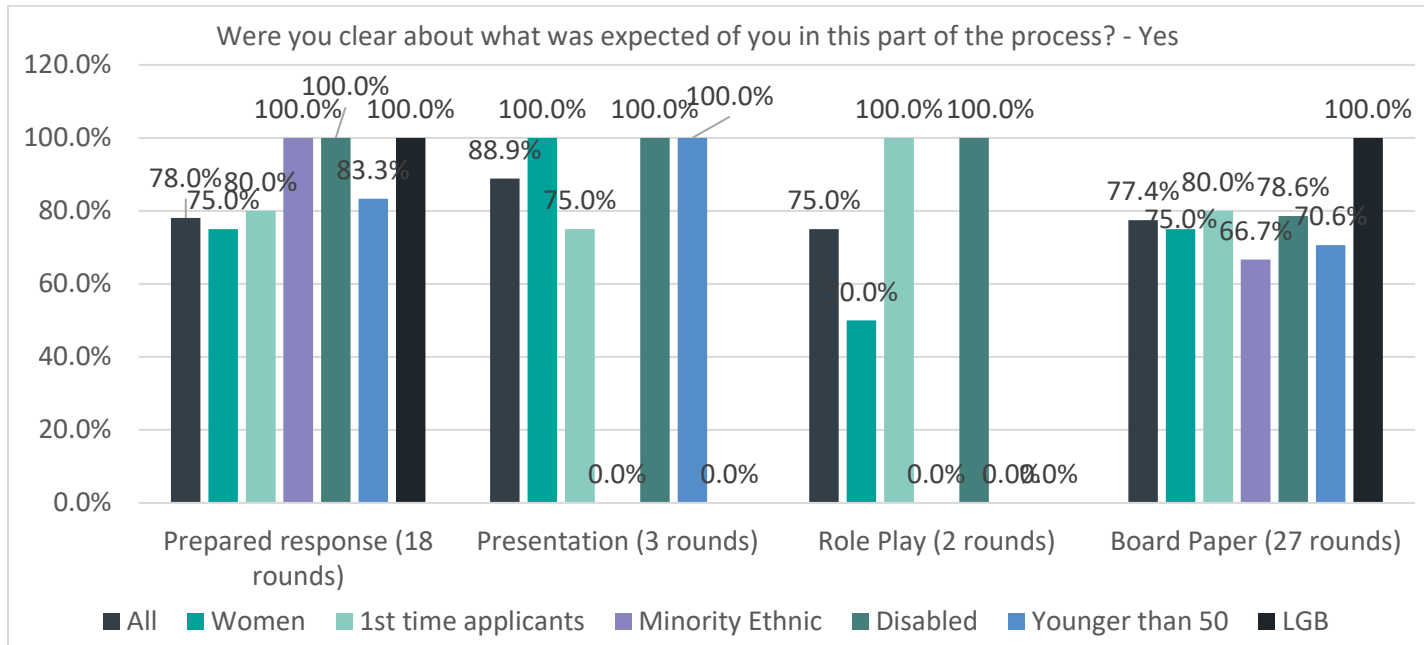


Figure 20 Applicant responses to bespoke assessment method questions - whether it was clear as to what was expected

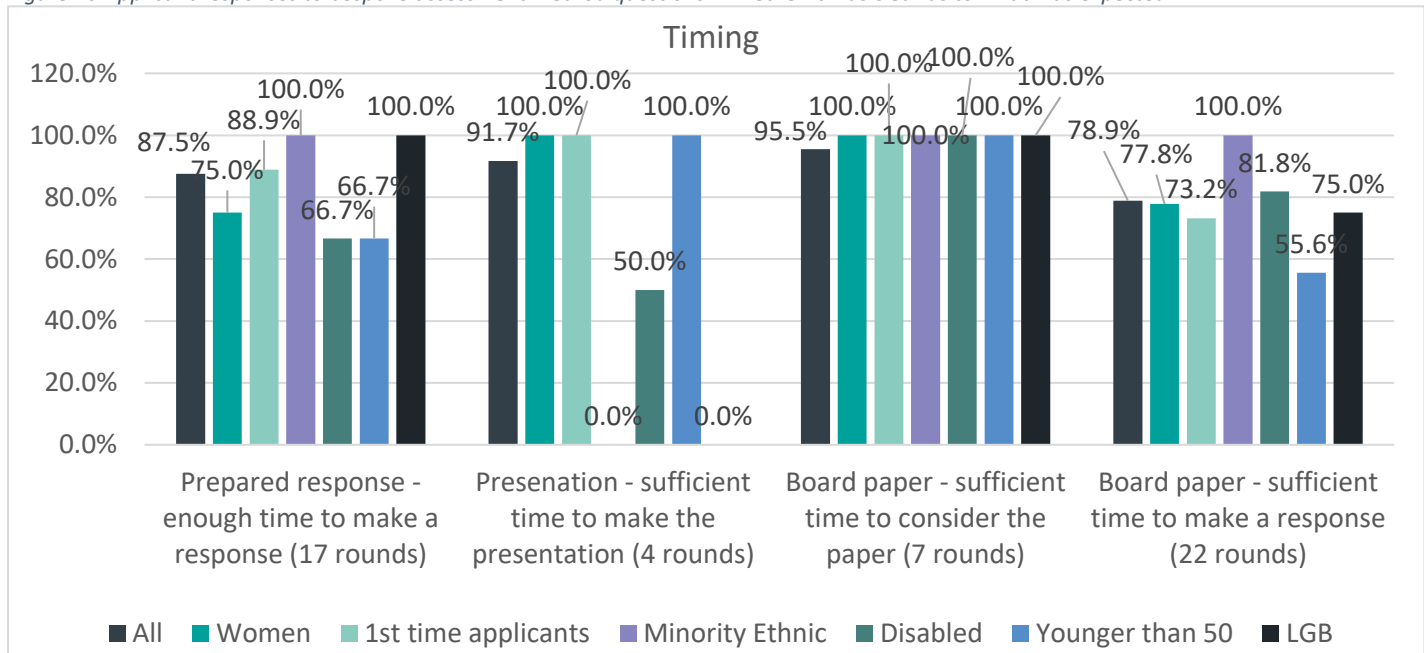


Figure 21 Applicant responses to bespoke assessment method questions - timing

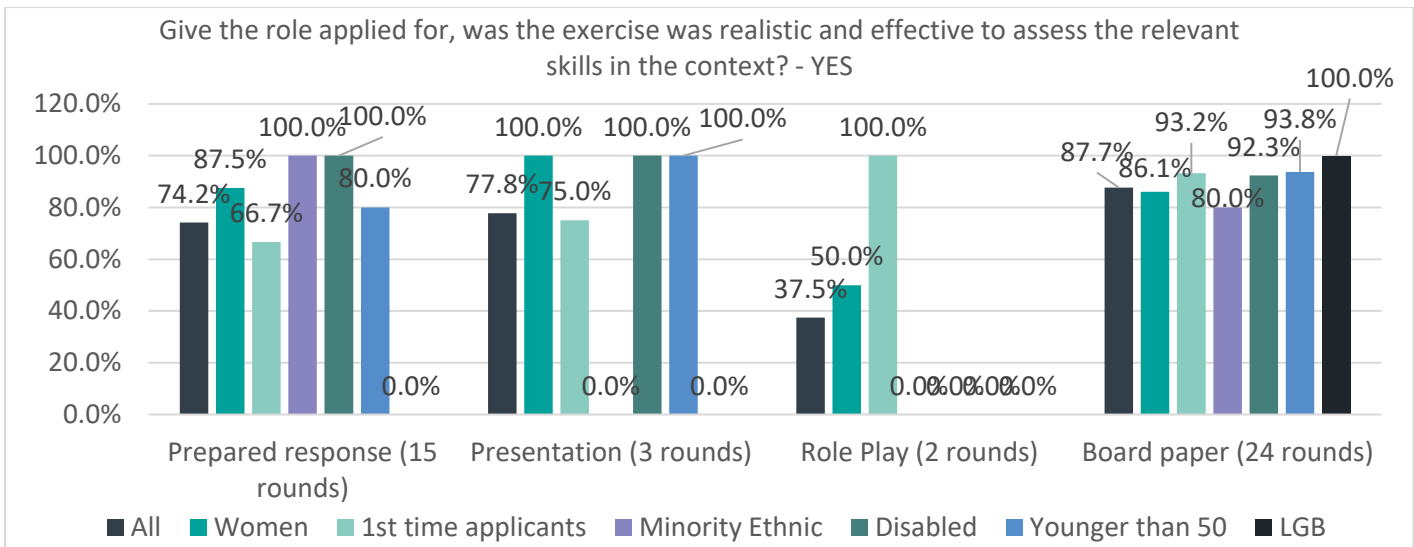


Figure 22 Applicant responses to bespoke assessment method questions - given the role applied for, was the exercise realistic and effective to assess the relevant skills in the context - percentage of respondents agreeing

Applicant comments relating to the bespoke questions were informative.

“As stated, I was asked to read and prepare a response. However, at interview, I was asked to make a presentation. This was not what was stated previously, not was it made clear that there was a strict time limit. Rather, I understood that the exercise would be discursive.”

“But it is now common practice to ask for this type of presentation. Whether the panel is seeking to assess presentational skills, the ideas presented etc is unclear and the priority given to all relevant elements (research undertaken, speaking ability, clarity etc) is unknown.”

“This was the kind of paper I would have expected to be presented to a Board, from which a member could consider the content and identify areas to pose questions, challenge and provide scrutiny”

“It presented a situation which is not uncommon and was "real time" where the candidate had to think as the role play developed.”

Other applicant comments about the second / interview stage of assessment can be found in the [Appendix](#).

12 of the surveys covered by the report were surveys of NHS bodies where applicants were tested on NHS values, alongside other criteria. In these cases, they were asked whether it was clear why the values of NHS Scotland played an important role in the appointments process.

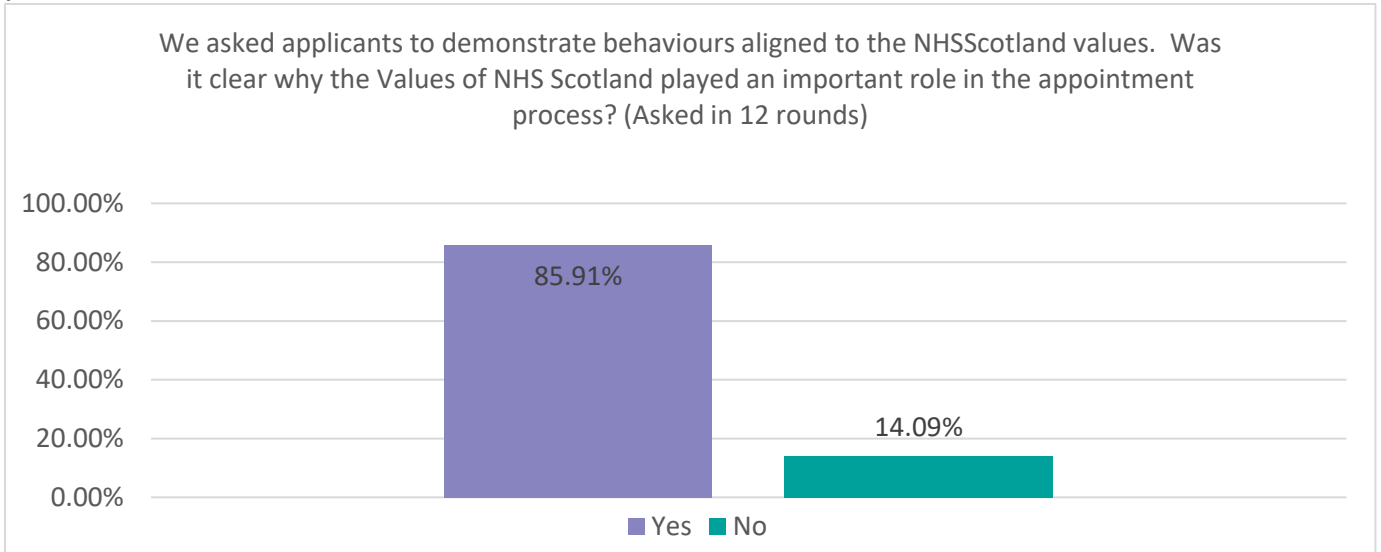


Figure 23 Applicant agreeing, or not that the importance of values was clear

Applicant comments related to values were informative:

“I think it did not matter that I demonstrated the values; I was told I had an excellent approach to the values...but was not selected for the position.”

“Yes, but some values are hard to depict in a few words; it is hard to evidence integral qualities - compassion, honesty. I didn't feel the application process was a good way to reveal values.”

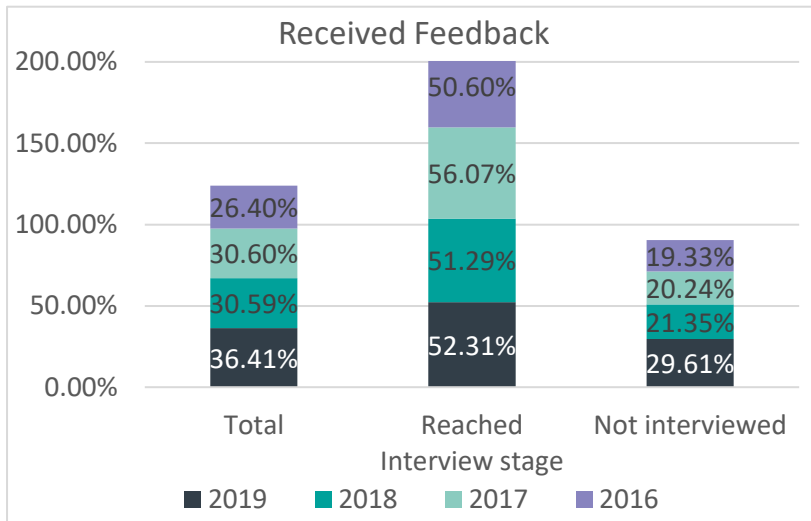
“NHS Scotland want to have these values at their core. Therefore it is important to appointees to the boards overseeing the culture understand the values.”

“Not explained what values were nor how they link to role of influence behaviour and performance. No example provided showing how to complete this using a competency based approach. It would have been helpful to be directed to examples or explanatory material.”

Additional comments about this form of assessment can be found in the [Appendix](#).



FEEDBACK



36% of respondents had received feedback. Consistently over the previous three years, around 50% of those who reached interview stage received feedback and around 20% of those who were not interviewed received feedback. In the 2019 report, 30% of respondents who were not interviewed, received feedback.

Figure 24 Percentage of respondents receiving feedback

The graph depicting respondents who found the feedback useful or very useful shows that, generally, applicants from under-reflected 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 (with the exception of 2019), but disappointing that the reverse is true for respondents not reaching the interview stage.

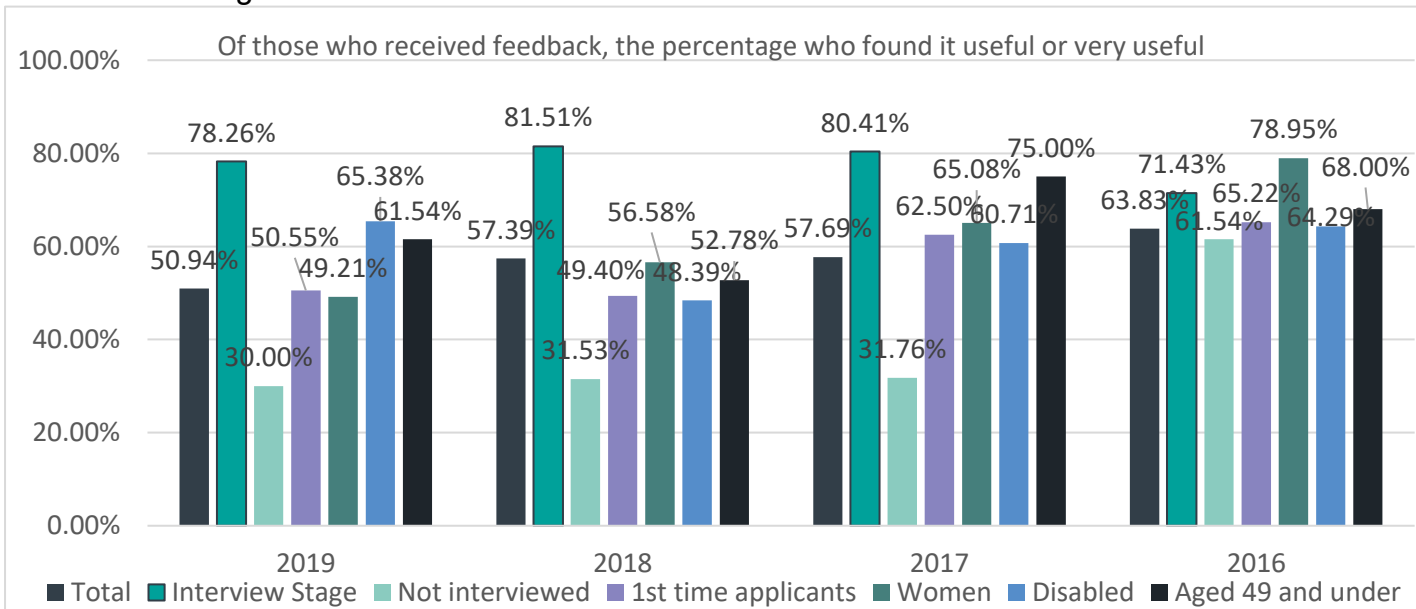


Figure 25 Respondents who received feedback - percentage who found it useful or very useful

When considering feedback by household income, it was interesting to note that those in the highest income bracket rated feedback as useful or very useful at a significantly higher rate than the overall group. And those preferring not to state at a significantly lower rate than the overall group.

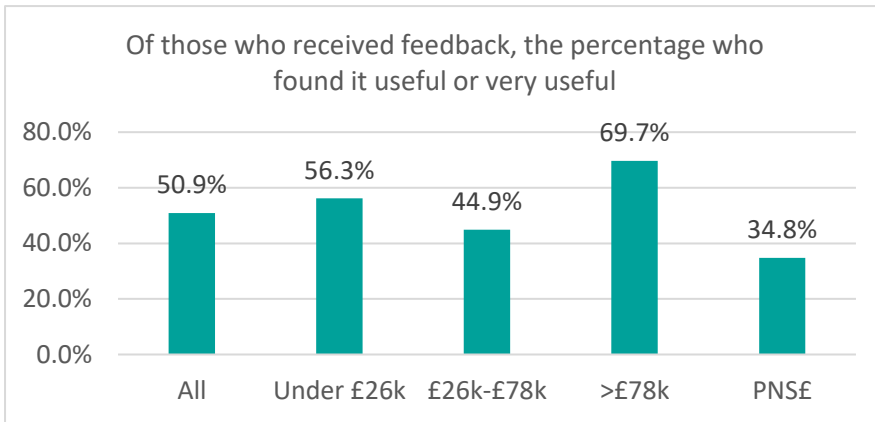


Figure 26 Respondents who received feedback - percentage who found it useful or very useful by household earnings bracket (PNSE =prefer not to state)

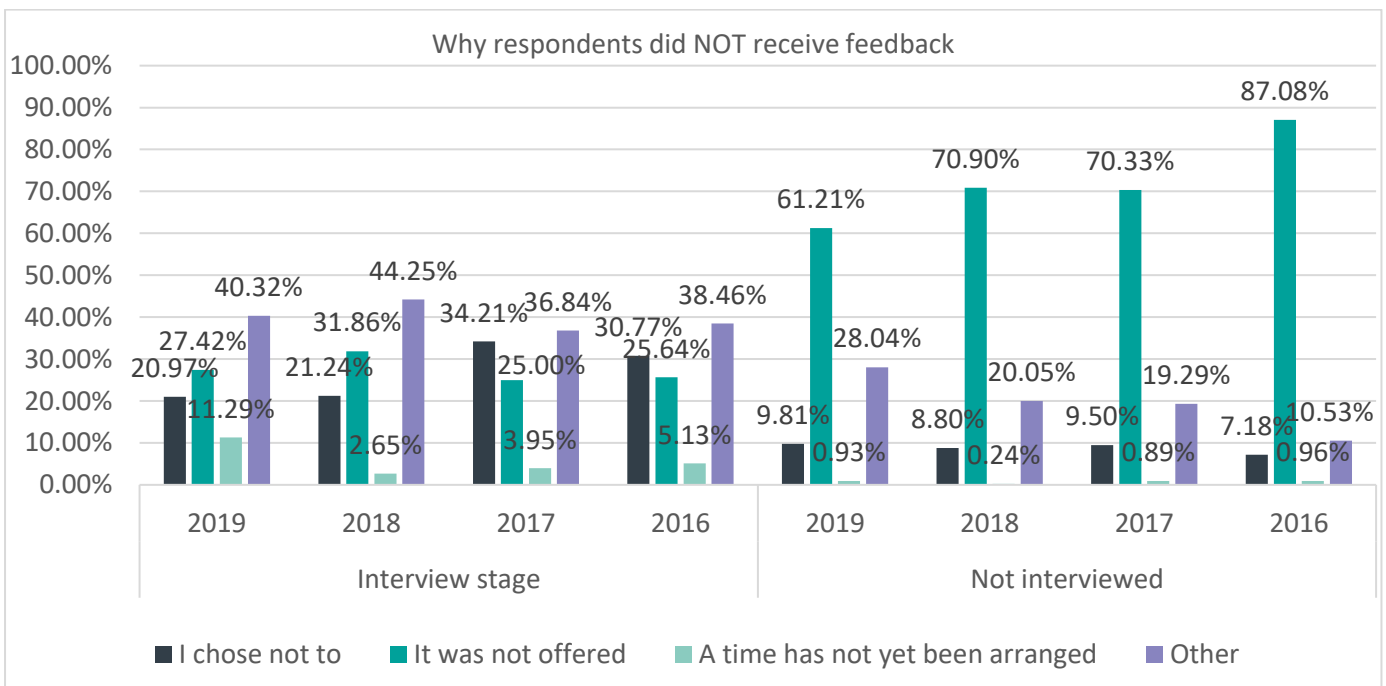


Figure 27 Applicants who did not receive feedback - why not

Consistently over four years, the main reason for not receiving feedback, for those not interviewed, was that it was not offered. Although the percentage stating this seems to have dropped over the course of the four years. The main reason for not receiving feedback for those who were interviewed was “other” which often included (from comments provided) not feeling the need to receive feedback due to being appointed.

When considering the reason for not receiving feedback by household income and sector worked (or most recently worked) in it was interesting to note that those in the lowest income bracket and those in the private sector were most likely to consider that they had not been offered feedback and both considered this at a significantly higher rate than the overall grouping.

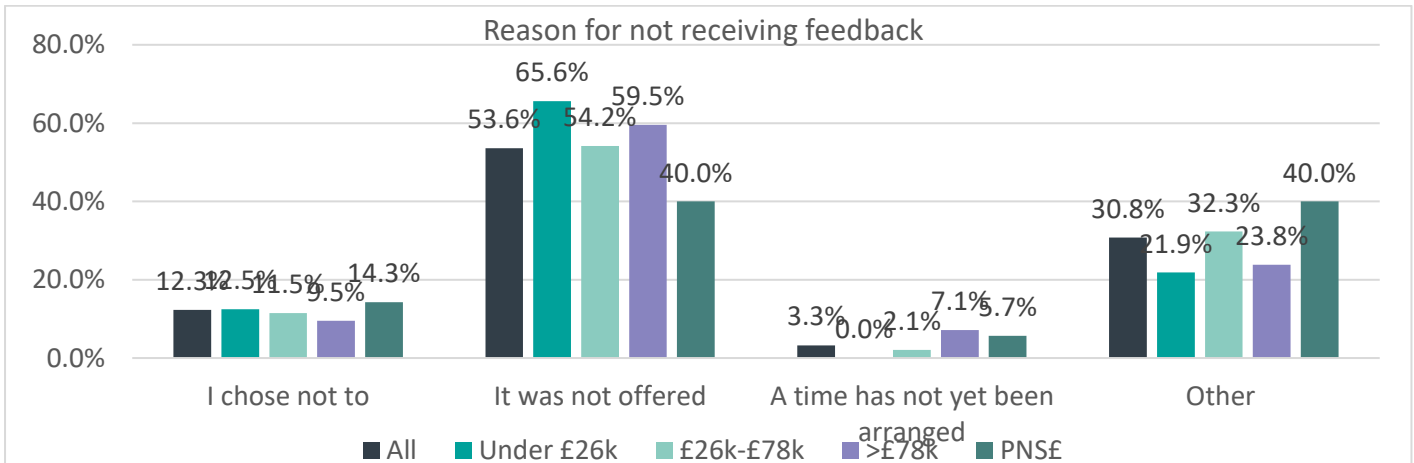


Figure 28 Applicants who did not receive feedback - reason why not split by annual household income bracket

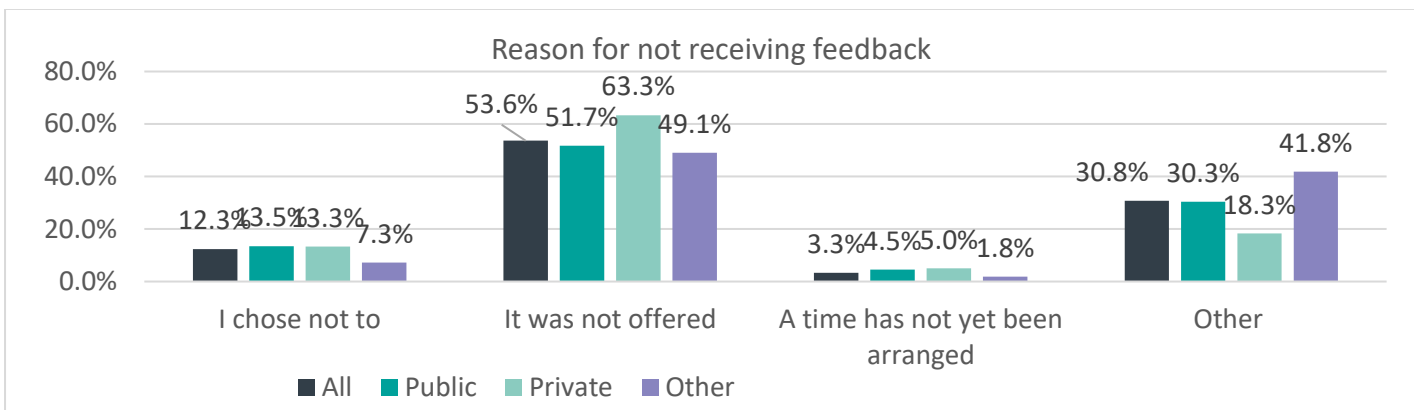


Figure 29 Applicants who did not receive feedback - reason why not split by sector worked (or most recently worked) in



Some comments about feedback from applicants within the lower income bracket include:

“Feedback request process unclear, so when I asked it was actually too late to get any feedback that could be turned into action.”

“I got a generic letter that stated unfortunately I had not been successful. The letter neither contained my name and looked very impersonal.”

Some comments about feedback from applicants within the private sector bracket include:

“I got basic feedback about other stronger applications with more relevant experience. My only confusion on this point is that on the one hand there is supposedly encouragement for people from all walks of life and different backgrounds/perspectives to apply but then as I understand it they pick someone from the public health background or who already board experience.”

“I was disappointed that I was not informed as to why my application was unsuccessful. I understand that had this application been made to a private/public body the reason would have been made obvious or the opportunity to ask the question would have been made clear.”

“It reminded me of my responses but I’m not clear if they were below acceptable range. All my responses were “acceptable “ what does this mean? Should they have been “excellent “? Or what? So do I take it none of the responses were ones I should use for future?”

“It was not clear from the feedback whether I had just missed out on the opportunity or whether my skills were not expected to be of assistance to a Board of this nature. Therefore I am no clearer on how I might structure my answers in order to be successful. Had I been given more positive feedback I might have thought it was worth all the effort in applying for a similar position in the future. It begs the question whether public appointments of this nature should each do their own recruitment or pick from a panel of people who have already gone through an extensive application process. I doubt I am the only person who thinks they are not prepared to put in all that effort to simply be turned down at the end with no key information on how to improve.”

Further comments about feedback can be found in the [Appendix](#).

INTENTION TO APPLY AGAIN

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

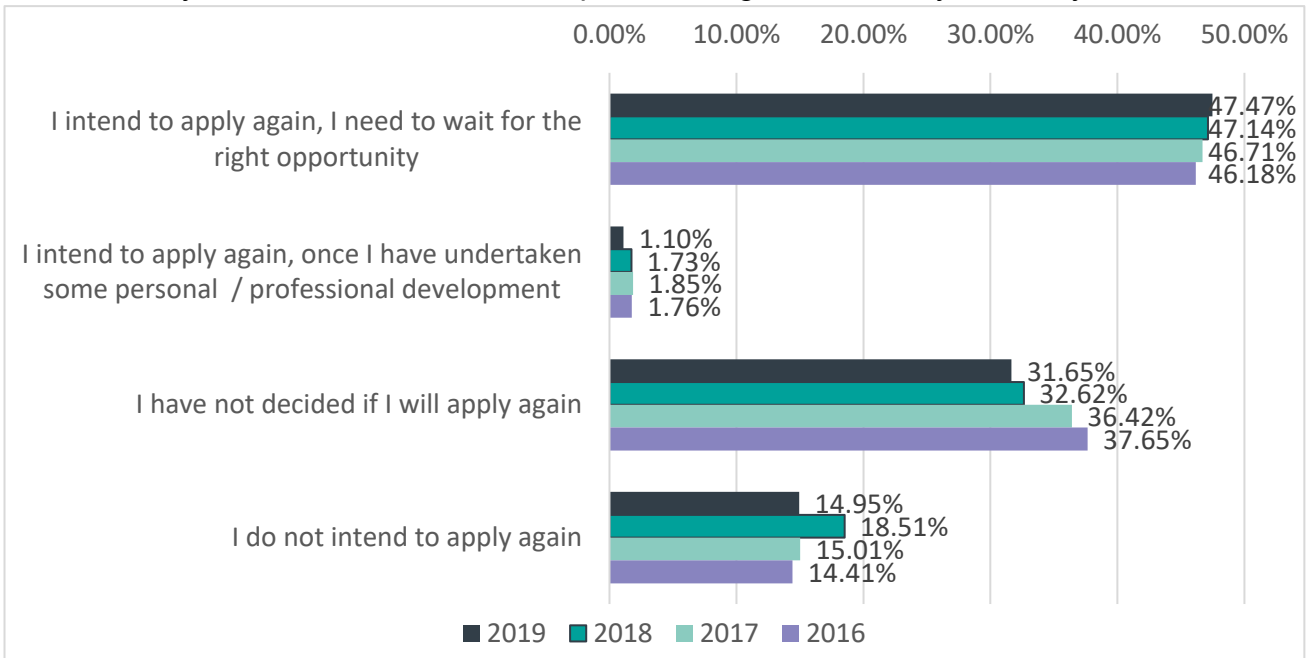


Figure 30 Whether applicants intend to apply again in the future

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.

“I have a concern it’s a ‘closed shop’ for people who know people at the relevant public body or know how to fill the forms with the correct buzzwords and jargon.”

“More detailed feedback would have helped considerably. There is a considerable time commitment to applications. Also, you have not asked about the process. The date for informing applications of the outcome was publicised but this did not happen. I had to chase for a reply a few days later. This was particularly disappointing.”

“I think that all candidates should be informed as a matter of course, via letter or e-mail, as to why they failed at interview, and that the winning candidate should be announced at that time too. Without knowing who had been appointed, I didn’t know whether requesting feedback would be at all useful, or if the successful candidate was simply far more qualified or experienced.”

Additional comments about whether applicants intend to apply again can be found in the [Appendix](#).

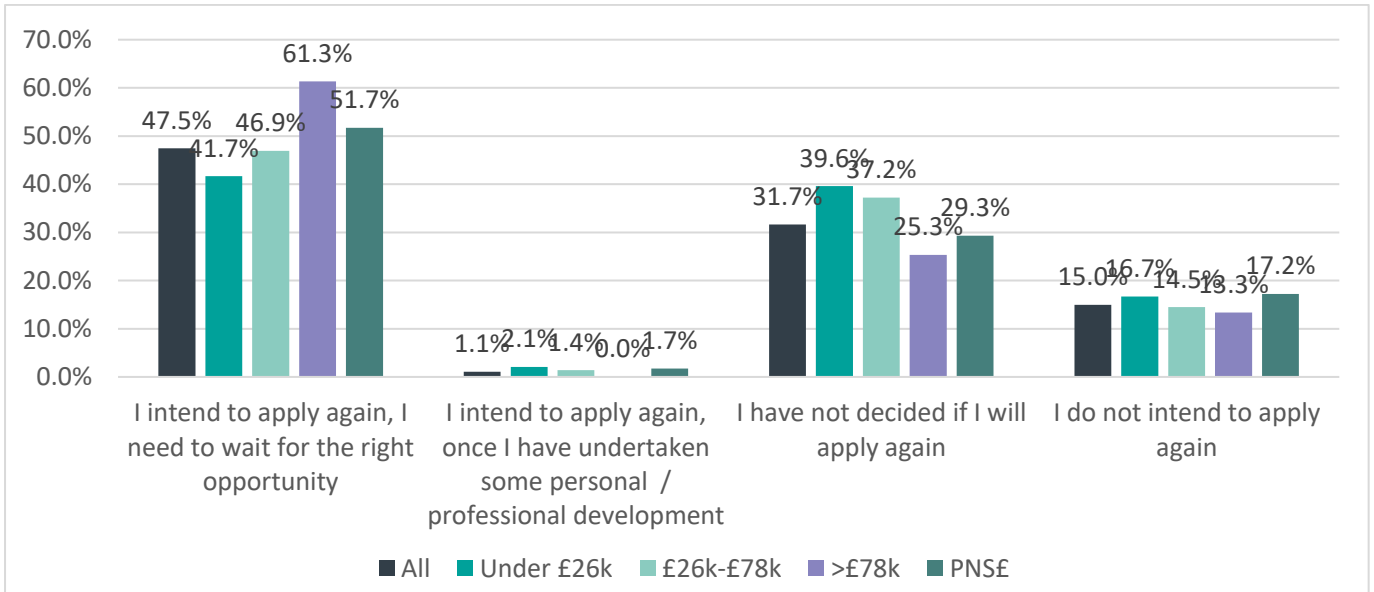


Figure 31 Whether applicants intend to apply again in the future by household income bracket

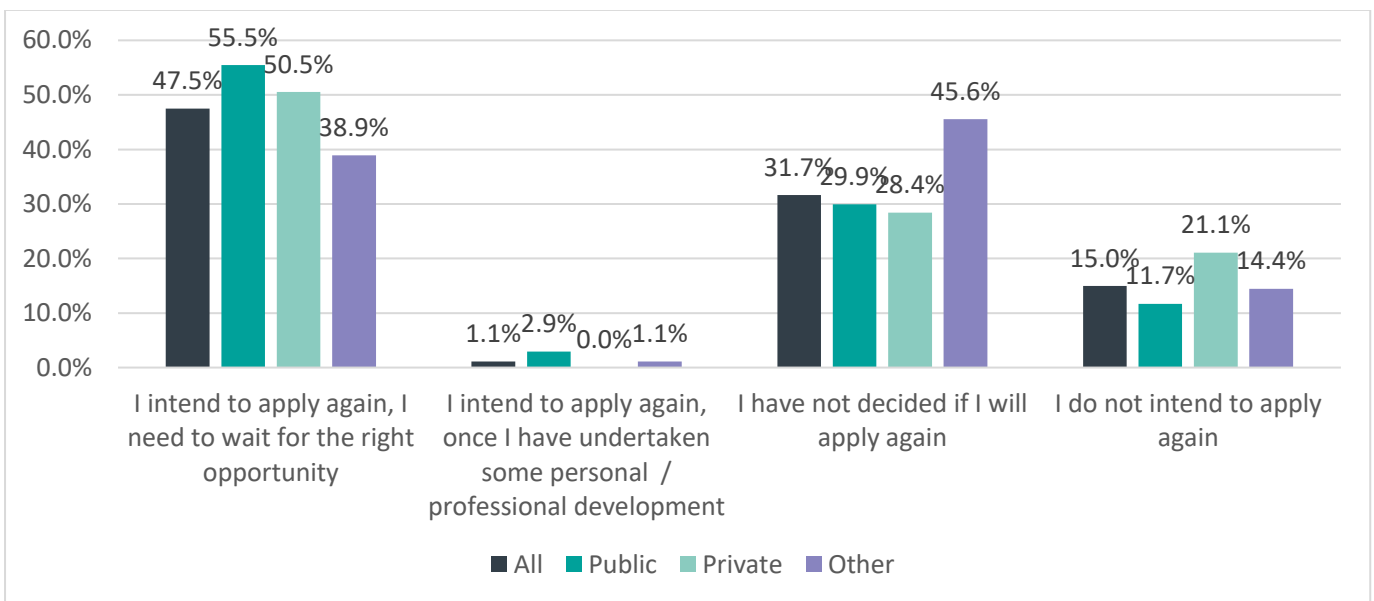


Figure 32 Whether applicants intend to apply again in the future by sector worked (or most recently worked) in

When considering future applications by household income and sector worked (or most recently worked) in, it is interesting to note that the highest earners and those in the public sector are most confident about making a future application. Those working in the private sector are most decisive about NOT making any future applications.



Comments from those working in the private sector:

“The appointments process continues to reward those who are most familiar with how the system works, or those who hire outside expertise when applying. The same faces will continue to feature across all of these positions -- limiting diversity of opinion, expertise and experience -- until that changes”

“There does not appear to be any point ... based on this particular application. I met all the criteria required (relevant, current and experienced) but this obviously wasn't enough to guarantee an interview. I got the feeling with this position that it had already been "spoken for" by way of "invited" applicants ... in other words, they know who they want beforehand and manoeuvre to ensure this happens.”

“I have subsequently been told by other NEDs that the first stage Scottish public appointments is not run by the individual organisation. So good candidates are often screened out because they are not an exact fit. If you don't use the precise words and phrases the admin people are looking for then you get screened out. I would only apply for a public appointment if I first met someone on the board and was able to understand the hidden trigger phrases. Applying without this knowledge would be a waste of my energy.”

Comments from those in the highest income bracket:

“Thank you for the opportunity to be considered for this role. I have applied for several similar at UK level and this was my first application in Scotland. It was a MUCH more positive experience.”

“Having been through this process several times over the years I thought this one was the easiest and best both in terms of the application and the interview and you felt part of the process rather than remote from it.”

“I don't have capacity to take on any others at present, but may well apply for another at some point in the future.”

Comments from those in the public sector bracket:

“Panel members were very nice and gave positive encouraging support during the interview. However Asking a person to define their definition of the word "integrity" and when the reply is given being asked if there was anything else to add suggests something important has been left out and could have been said to improve the answer. I found this confusing and checked on way home I had given the answer to its fullest capacity. I really appreciated the letter from the chairperson thanking me for applying for the position and the letter made my efforts feel greatly valued which was really beneficial even though I was unsuccessful. . . .”

“May apply for something else in the future at some point, but in the short-term I don't have time to commit to any other such roles having recently been successful with another application, alongside having two other similar non-executive commitments.”

FAIRNESS AND TRANSPARENCY OF THE PROCESS

Around 30% of respondents have stated that they consider the process NOT to be fair and consistent over the four years. It is encouraging to see an increase in 2019 of those who do consider the process to be fair and transparent.

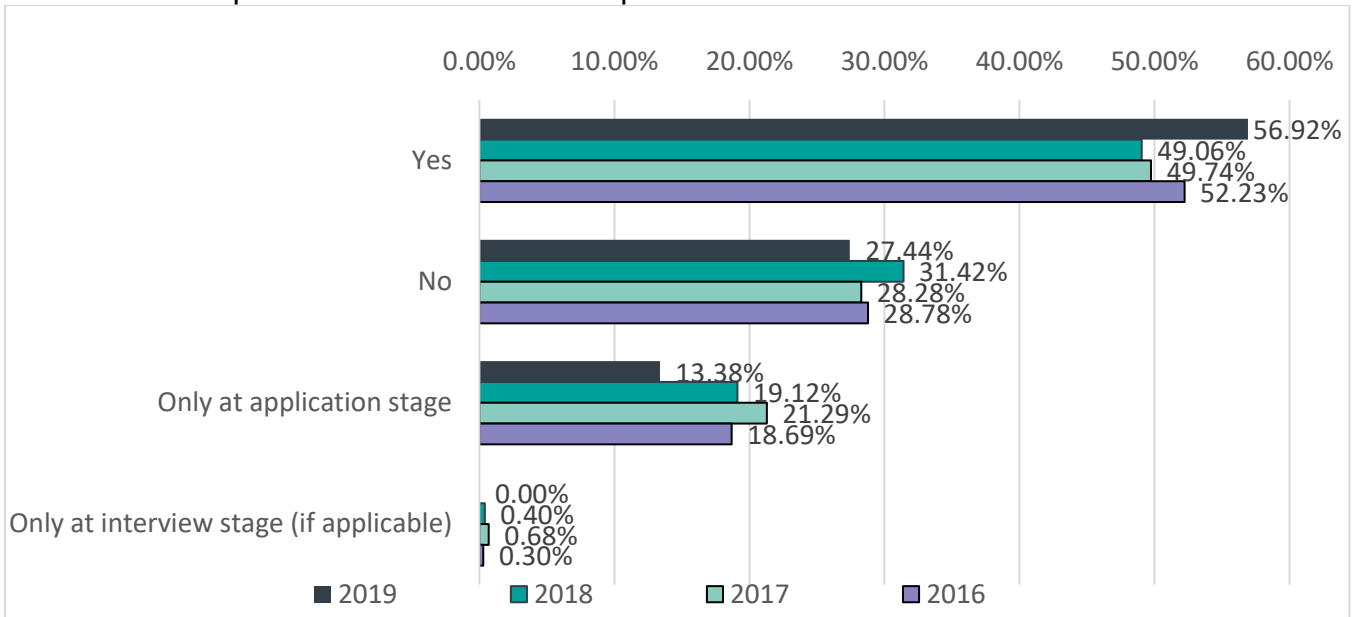


Figure 33 Overall whether applicants felt that the process was fair and transparent

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.

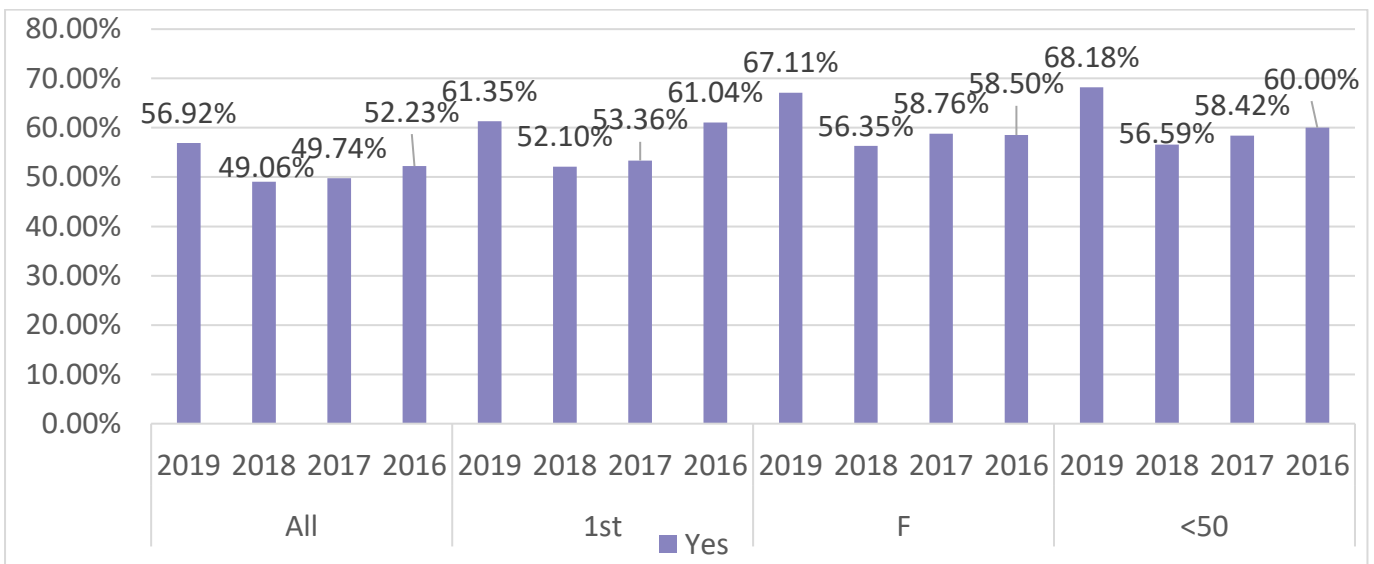


Figure 34 Percentage responding YES to whether they consider the process to be fair and transparent (1st - 1st time applicants, F - Female applicants, <50 - applicants aged under 50)

Comments about the fairness and transparency of the process provided by applicants can be found in the [Appendix](#).

When looking at whether applicants consider the process to be fair and transparent broken down by household income and sector worked (or most recently worked) in, it seems that those in the highest income bracket and those working in the public sector are most likely to consider that the process is fair and transparent than the overall group by a significant margin. Those in the private sector are significantly more likely to consider the process NOT to be fair and transparent.

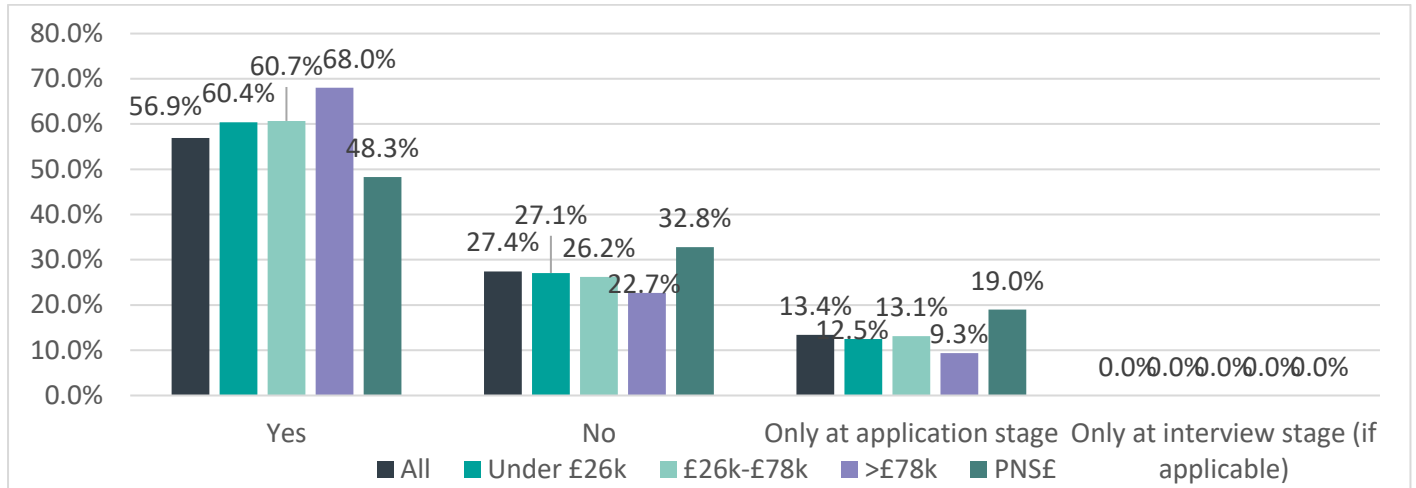


Figure 35 Overall whether applicants felt that the process was fair and transparent by annual household income bracket

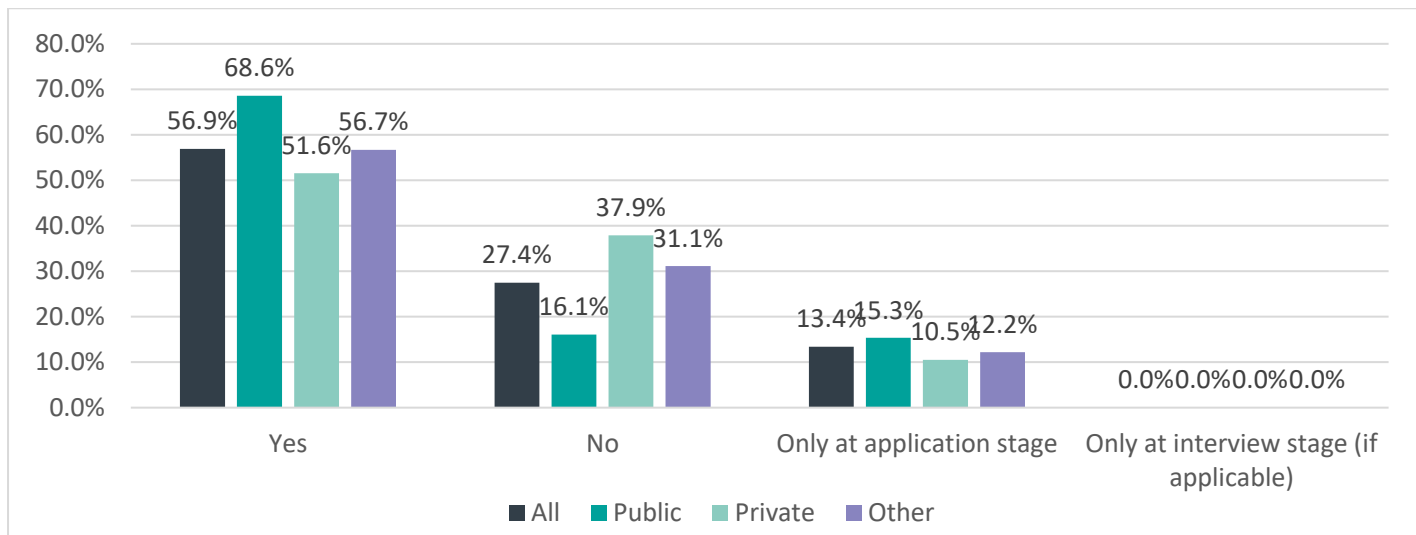


Figure 36 Overall whether applicants felt that the process was fair and transparent by sector worked (or most recently worked) in

Comments from those working in the private sector:

“I see no evidence of the appointment process delivering appointments from the communities of members of the public. Having reviewed the chairs appointed over the last 12 months most of the appointments have been people who I consider as existing experienced career chairs, some of them holding multiple chair positions, or a series of successive appointments across the public bodies sector.”

“I naively applied in the hopes I could help. After the process I feel the applicant was already chosen.”

“The process appears to be designed to recruit people with very specific skills and experience. This therefore excludes people representing the general public body with life experience and other experience in the business community.”

“It takes a considerable amount of time and effort to complete the application process by detailing my skills and experience relating to the job specifications only to be rejected as the first stage of selection. I have come to the conclusion that the process is designed to attract and select people with considerable professional career experience in the context of the post and the organisation. This leaves no opportunity for members of the public to be able to be considered for a ‘public’ appointment. This ignores the fact that members of the public where public services are delivered can have extensive experience of public services and community life. I feel that this should have at least equal priority in terms of selection against people who have years of experience as a chair of a public body. The present system only seeks to perpetuate and promote a minority group of ‘career’ chairs to the exclusion of the public majority.”

Comments from those in the highest income bracket:

“The process has been fair and transparent and, so far as I am able to see, well-organised. It was most helpful to receive an informal phone call from the chair, after the decision had been confirmed, and I also received a phone call from the Public Appointments Team to advise me of the outcome.”

“I think it was fair for me but I didn't feel that style of application would work well for lots of people with recent lived experience of living in poverty. It takes a lot of confidence and energy to draft the best possible 800 words. Both energy levels & confidence are usually undermined by living in poverty. This style of application seems like it would be a barrier to some of your desired applicants.”

Comments from those in the public sector bracket:

“This application was for an organisation that I am extremely interested in and had an immense amount of knowledge about and a level of competence fitting to the role, as fed back by my convener, colleagues and peers who encouraged me to apply. I think it was my best shot and, having been unsuccessful already this year in applying for a Board position, despite having 7 years of good corporate governance experience with very positive feedback on my performance, I feel that the Scottish Government is not looking for people like me. It is a great pity as I have so much to offer a corporate governance role. In addition, I have drawn the conclusion that a competency-based approach is not a reliable way of appointing people to public bodies, it merely identifies people who can talk well about themselves and who can put on a performance on the day irrespective of their true level of competence. The process is fundamentally flawed and I would recommend a complete review. It is clear that some who are successfully appointed fall well below the mark in their corporate governance roles yet it is too much hassle to remove them at the end of their first term so they are awarded a second term. This gives all the wrong messages to committed Board members.”

“Having applied for public appointments in the past (and been both successful and unsuccessfully) I feel this process was clear, focussed and engaged. Again only question is around need and value of psychometric tests and do wonder if they represent good value for money”

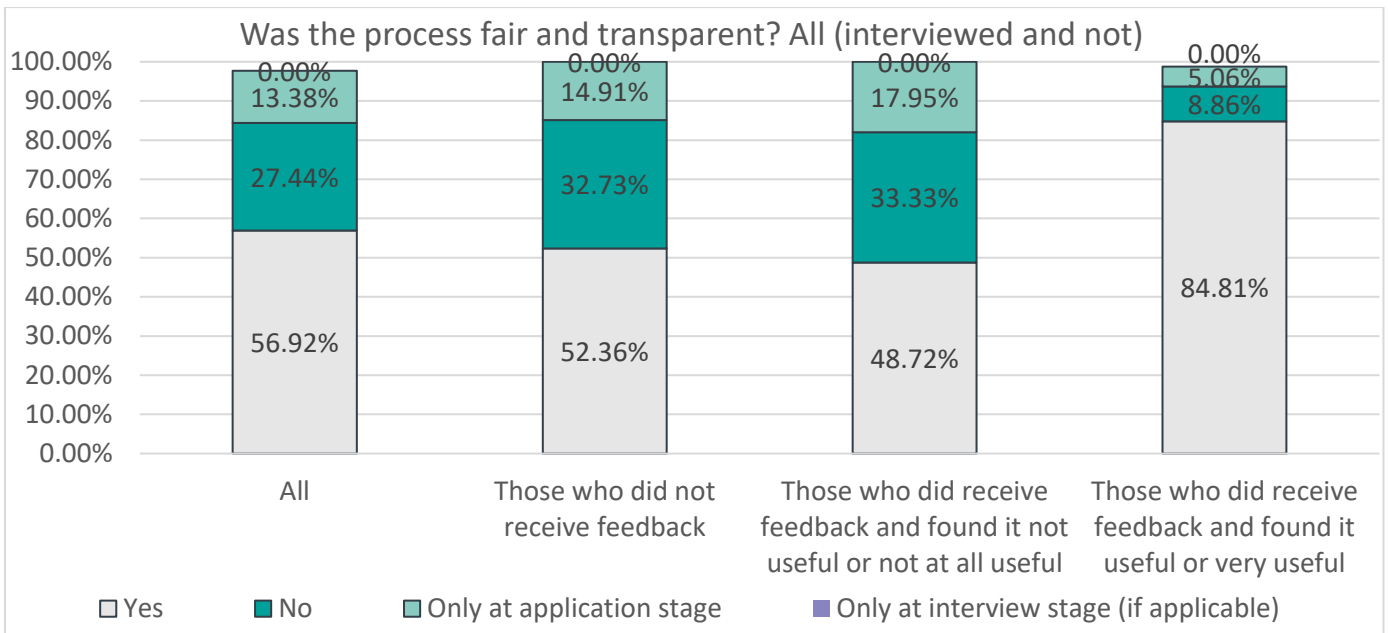


Figure 37 Correlation between those receiving feedback and not and whether the process was fair and transparent

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 (79.41%) than those who did not believe that they had been offered feedback (45.27%). 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 (84.81% compared to 56.92% overall).

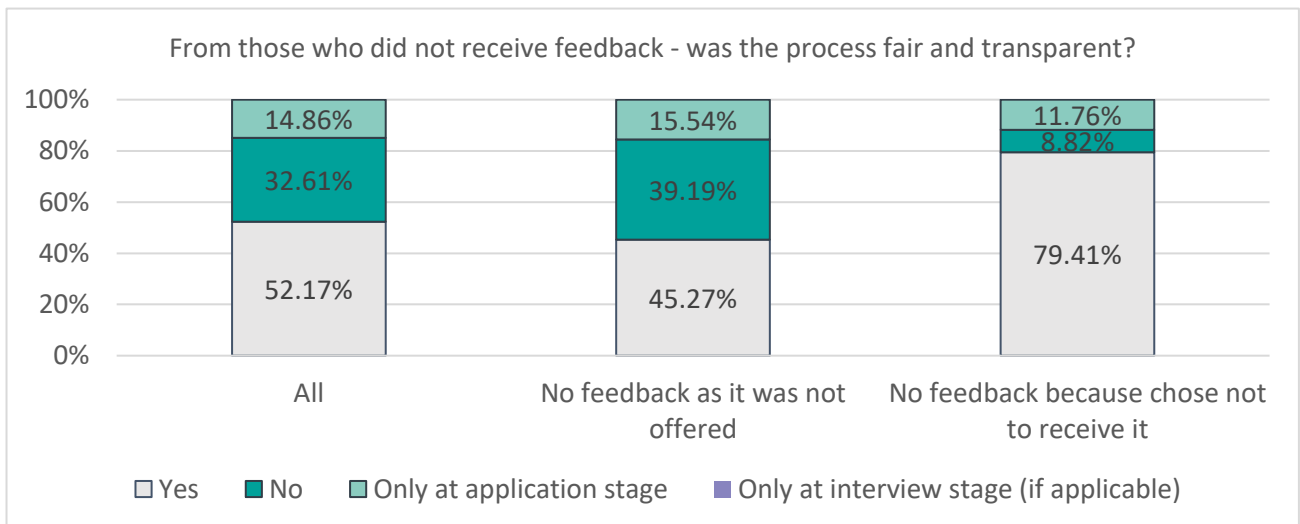


Figure 38 Correlation between different reasons for not receiving feedback and whether the process was fair and transparent

Recommendation : consider the views expressed by the 443 applicants who took the time to respond to the survey. Publish a response to the survey to include any actions that they consider appropriate to respond to the feedback provided by these applicants.

IN CONCLUSION

It has been positive to compare the results of the 2019 survey report against the 2016, 2017 and 2018 reports and to see some 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 under-reflected groups. It has also been interesting to consider the views of this group of applicants by income and sector worked (or most previously worked) in for the first time; an area of particular focus for the Commissioner.

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 four years equate to the views of 2,192 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 am retired - but re-firing - and enjoying some years of re-irement in my native land, after an adult/professional life in another country. Have a strong desire to give something back to Scotland, after gaining so much of my education here.
- I have direct personal experience of supporting three family users of relevant services and I thought that experience would be useful in helping to make a difference to the ongoing development and improvement of those services.
- To make sure that there was a more diverse representation on public bodies
- Location of meetings was more convenient than some other attractive opportunities.
- I have experience at a senior level across HR/Finance and supply chain. I thought it would be an excellent opportunity for me to share knowledge.
- I am a current member of the public body and felt that it was a natural progression opportunity after 6 successful years in the role.
- I thought it would be a good follow-on from what I am currently doing and was motivated by the strategic papers and info I read about the body.
- I was an executive director for many years in the NHS and thought my skills and knowledge would be valuable in this role
- Had worked with the Board Chair before and would have been happy to work with him again,

I was influenced by the advert because:

- I thought they were looking for people who could challenge the norm and bring new ideas to the role. I thought my international experience would bring freshness to the organisation.
- The time commitment was achievable

I was influenced by the application pack because:

- Good match between the experience and role described and my own.
- The details about skills required was helpful in identifying that it was something relevant for me to apply for
- The people working there sounded smart and interested in driving change
- The way the criteria were framed allowed for someone with my experience to apply without needing specialised experience though I now think that was possibly not the best approach given the specialist skills of the people who were appointed.
- Clearly detailed the difference between the 2 x different level of board member positions advertised.
- It provided a good level of detail on the background of the role.

Reasons for not making contact to discuss the application in advance of submitting:

- It is unclear what kind of contact would be appropriate. It is obvious that any person in the recruitment process would be constrained in what they could say.
- I did not feel comfortable with this given that I was already known to them. I did not feel that contact would have helped me.
- I choose not to contact as I had all the information I required from the pack.
- I had submitted a strong application which I didn't think would benefit from a direct communication.

- I didn't see the ad for the post until a few days before the closing date, therefore I was time limited in my application and there wasn't the time to contact anyway in your organization.
- I wasn't sure exactly how this process worked as it was my first time. In hindsight I should have sought advice in respect of my application.
- I was offered an informal chat with the current post holder. I took this opportunity and found it useful in assessing whether the role was right for me or not. However, this person was not involved in the recruitment process. I think that is right and proper.
- The wording was very uninviting.
- Contact details were for a panel member so I did not want to make an adverse first impression.
- I have done so in the past, and consider it to be a pointless waste of my time



Views on bespoke application methods:

CV / Career / life history:

- I don't think a CV covering only the last 10 years is sufficient - I feel it should cover one's whole working life.
- Not enough space to outline the relevance of previous positions to the application.
- This is better than most, because a CV at least allows people to say things that are relevant to the role.
- I think sending a CV is fine, but would have preferred to have been able to submit a document - not type my CV into a box with a 300 word limit. There wasn't enough space.

Application form with word limit:

- It depends on how the sifting panel interpreted the words.
- It was a challenge to reflect the relevant aspects of my previous roles but it felt like a fair method.
- I think this system is helpful in enabling one to focus on the important issues
- There is always a broader context which is limited by the narrow criteria and 300 word limit. This is difficult to convey.
- Some questions needed much more detail to provide a reasonable response, some needed less. It would be better to have a flexible word limit.
- The whole process of public appointments in Scotland needs a complete revamp. What is wrong with a two page covering letter and a CV?
- The criteria were highly generalised and dubiously relevant. It looks here, as it has looked in other appointments, that you are far more concerned to appoint people who can sell themselves with the right language than you are to appoint people who have knowledge, skills and approaches that are relevant to the task in hand. None of the criteria relate directly to mental health. This process is - or should be - about public service, not about selecting candidates for a showing of The Apprentice.
- About right. Not too onerous. My background was not public health etc new to looking at board roles so according to the feedback I ultimately was not picked due

to others having more relevant work experience, but the free text worked for me to have opportunity to describe personal/family experience that was relevant which wouldn't show in an employment history.

- I felt that I was able to give a good flavour of my experience but I am saying not sure as did not get through to interview
- I found this frustrating in three ways: (1) having to choose a competency, (2) answer in a very prescribed way, (3) in 300 words. I understand that the panel are looking for specific skills but I didn't feel that my skills really fitted into any of the areas mentioned and wondered whether or not to just give up at this point. I assumed that the application form was not meant to actively deter applications, so did the best I could. I realise it doesn't work that way, but I would have loved an opportunity to explain why I wanted the role (I really really wanted it!) and why I thought I was suitable. There were so many ways I could contribute to the body but there was no way of expressing that in the form as I didn't 'fit in'.
- The word count restricts the opportunity to properly respond using the STAR method
- 300 words isn't enough to get across your passion for why you wanted to join. If you're an older person who has a range of experience you can list that relevant experience but the application specifically said it was looking for younger people, who are more likely to bring passion than a long list of experience.

When asked if there was a method which would have allowed them to better demonstrate their evidence against the criteria:

- Proper unbiased selection criteria looking for best person for job as opposed to same old stodgy characters.
- The ability to submit a more detailed cv
- An enhanced personal statement would have been more flexible.
- CV and personal interview
- Face to face meeting

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

- It was obvious to me that the responsibilities of an NHS board member required an understanding and appreciation of the Values of NHS Scotland
- Scottish people should have a say in their own service to which they have to pay for and not have people who have never or may never be part of this service nor have no idea about SCOTTISH values.
- Within my roles as a corporate leader it is essential for your teams to understand and see evidence of values.
- No link made between values and the roles. Application stated values would also be assessed throughout other responses which meant trying to meet the criteria and the values and the communication approach which required quite sophisticated multi-tasking.
- It was clear how the NHS values underpin the work of the organisation and the expectation that Board members would endorse and reflect this ethos.
- Health Boards are accountable for what happens within each Trust, so the Values are very important.

- NHS Scotland want to have these values at their core. Therefore it is important to appointees to the boards overseeing the culture understand the values.
- I don't believe NHS Scotland actually practices or understands its own values.



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

- There was insufficient allowance for previous skills and positions held and their relevance to this appointment, especially in a case where a similar post had been held.
- I was asked what did I do about Leadership and I wasn't sure what that meant, it was such an open question. Was also asked about a scenario where I had challenged an Executive regarding an issue and was then asked if I would have done anything differently - the example I used illustrated a successful outcome so I wasn't sure why I would be asked about doing anything differently.
- There was an emphasis on projects which I had been involved in. I do not think that this is critical to the skills required by a Board Member.
- The interview was disappointing. I can understand the need for consistent formulaic questions...however I left the interview feeling that I hadn't been given an opportunity to demonstrate my true qualities and capabilities.
- Competency question in risk and delegation didn't align with ability to see big picture (section it is included with in feedback) but seems to have come from psychometric report. Didn't expect a question about values in the interview (perhaps a misreading on my part) and found it difficult to give a competency based response with one example covering all of the 9 values. Also, not clear how this related to the role.
- could have asked more about experience reviewing/analysing complex issues, and only one of four NHS values was discussed
- I was asked a question relating to my view on college regionalisation which didn't appear to be relevant to the competencies outlined in the application pack.
- The focus was on leadership. The questions assumed that one had have done an identical role in order to demonstrate competences. Very closed Qs were asked. It would have been much better to ask the candidate for experience or analogous situations (ie not the identi-kit version of the Qs asked), in which the desiderated skills were asked. This was a very 'male' approach. (Or this placed too much emphasis on the kind of posts more readily acquired by male and other candidates whose accumulation of such roles has not been diminished by substantial caring commitments. It is no answer to state that a woman was appointed; as that woman did not herself have these kinds of commitments. There was also an assumption that the acquisition of certain roles or positions could be equated with good leadership.
- The interviewer opening the interview advised that there had been a large number of high calibre applications and that I was very lucky to be invited for interview. This was far from welcoming, and had an undermining impact. Another interviewer used personal / political experience to frame a question in a manner that diminished important work on the rights of a vulnerable group. I found both these interventions surprising and it did not make me keen to pursue a position with this Board. I would

add, that the panel member who was Chair of the Board was professional and competent.

- I felt that the questions were so standardised that they did not tap in to my individual skills, knowledge and experience. Following the interview I revisited the competencies required for the role and was hard-pushed in some areas to see how the questions linked. I was also asked non-competency based questions about leadership style, etc, which I was not expecting. I was not asked about the NHSS vales. The interview was extremely brief with very little probing by the panel. I was finished before my allotted time and it felt as if they had had enough. I was the fourteenth (and last) interviewee on the third day over a three day interview period. I felt the panel were fatigued and had already made up their mind about candidates.
- I felt that the interview was challenging (in a good way) and that the panel was invested and considerate towards really understanding my ideas and where I could contribute.
- The questions at the interview undoubtedly followed a safe and clear pattern and they provided more than enough room to expand on your answers. The interview did not explain, however, how the panel would differentiate between candidates of similar experience or expertise. It was difficult to understand exactly what sort of person they were looking for - all other things being equal - and how you could convince the panel of any particular skills or abilities that you offered.
- It was very practical and realistic and actually excited me about what the potential role could be
- On psychometric testing, results should have been available in advance and that would have better prepared me
- It was not clear to me what was meant by “How would you deal with it during a Board Meeting?” I assumed I had not been involved in approving the report therefore provided a critical analysis. This was seen as negative.
- The 5 minute time limit prevented me from sufficiently covering all of the areas I would have wanted to seek assurance on as a non-executive director of a public body relating to aspects of vital importance to a corporate governance role. As a result I had to choose which aspects to present to the panel.
- I think it was relevant and at the same time I was surprised that the activity wasn't more challenging. In particular I expected to be challenged more on my answer and I think that challenging us in that way would have provided a great opportunity to see how people respond to challenge / conflict.
- Anyone sufficiently experienced and knowledgeable in this topic would be able to speak both passionately and objectively covering all pertinent points in the allotted five minutes with ease. I would expect anyone at this level to have the skill to communicate their priorities and insight in a clear and well thought out manner and persuade any audience of the merits or rationale they are conveying. I was authentic in my answer and brought in elements of research, impact and outcomes, as well as the voices of children and young people and adults I've supported in the past. I wholeheartedly believe in what we are trying to achieve across the care experienced landscape and more broadly as a nation, so found the 5 minutes easy to fill while also feeling a good dose of being 'put on the spot' which was a welcome challenge.

It allowed me to illustrate that I can think on my feet and communicate in an engaging manner with new people.

- The question was very closed. I ignored the '1 issue' instruction and would have struggled to talk for 5mins. Also the buzzer at 5 mins was off putting.
- It presented a situation which is not uncommon and was "real time" where the candidate had to think as the role play developed.
- There was no mention at the interview of the results of the psychometric tests so it was unclear of the extent to which it had influenced the panel. Or, indeed, of how you compared with the other candidates. Or of how the results influenced the panel's decision. The tests, which required instant responses by choosing one of a series of options, conflicted with the purpose of the application, which was for a role that required thought and reflection and the weighing up of options. The tests were based on simplistic responses rather than considered judgements.
- From the feedback letter it became clear that recency of experience was assessed in relation to interview questions asked although it was not any part of the criteria. It was therefore difficult to know how to prepare for criteria that had not been notified in advance.
- The panel were very supportive and encouraging.
- I think the fundamental principles of good interview technique were put to the side by the panel. The room was austere, the panel did introduce themselves but I was left to search around for a place to put my coat as no hanging place was available - I found a stool. There was no preamble to put me at my ease and I found two of the three panel members' approach to questioning and to observing me off-putting.
- I'd have liked to be asked why I wanted the job and why I thought I'd be good at it (although I appreciate this sort of question can be at odds with a competency-based interview)
- It wasn't clear why there needed to be somewhere around 7 people involved in the interview, even afterwards. One or two had no discernible purpose in being involved. The framing of the format of the interview was not consistent with how the interview was then run.
- The layout of the room was not ideal, it felt as though I could only really engage with one individual in the room. A smaller room with a better table layout would have been better.
- I think walking through a large open plan office to reach the interview room was not good practice. Could a room nearer the public entrance not be made available?
- I think the seating arrangement could during the interview could have been 'friendlier'. Panel members sitting behind a table and directly opposite the candidate is not, in my opinion, good practice.
- There was little eye contact throughout, too much scribbling on the assessment matrixes, no follow up question or acknowledgement of my presentation and no warmth or humour. Asking candidates to see themselves out is frankly rude to people who have made an effort to participate. Without a follow up discussion with the NHS Chair I would have turned the appointment down.
- I have been to enough interviews in my time to know when a panel has already made up its mind. It was clear from fairly early in the interview that there was already a candidate that had satisfied the requirements of the post and that nothing I said

would detract them from making that appointment. I would much have preferred the panel to have been honest about my chances and to gear the questions to any differences between the candidates. The feedback from the interview has convinced me that my assumptions were correct.

- I felt this was the best handled interview I have had at this level as I feel the panel took the time to properly explore my skills and provided extra questions to help me more fully demonstrate my skills and knowledge. I appreciated the extra questions and opportunity to provide more detail.

Comments on feedback from those who did NOT reach interview stage:

- A standardised letter was sent, which was as you would expect full of platitudes but lacking substance. Time constraints make this understandable.
- I did ask for feedback but none was offered- disappointing.
- I didn't know how to access this. It was my impression that a refusal didn't give feedback. Again it was my first time applying.
- As previous feedback on similar applications was so generic I did not feel that it was worth while asking for it.
- The chair person of the committee involved sent me the refusal but I was unable to find out about this person, who now knew all about me and my experience / qualifications etc.....
- The email appeared to be generic to all unsuccessful applicants and was not useful in pointing out personal strengths and weaknesses.
- I was informed that I did not have enough Change Delivery experience, although this was not expanded upon. Perhaps the meaning was Change Delivery was not clear as, from my perspective, this was perhaps my strongest section as it is what I have done very day for many years.
- From the people selected I do not feel the body is looking for people with experience of the service who know and can challenge the service.
- I was delighted to get feedback, which I had asked for, this helps me understand where my application fell down, and what to improve on next time. It was prompt and detailed.
- Very nice communication, but no real feedback
- The letter wasn't specific to me and my skills in relation to the role however, the letter from the chairman was one of the nicest letters that I have ever received as a result of a recruitment process (including successful ones). Taking the time and effort to respond and the way the letter was worded made me think very highly of the organisation and the way in which the board is run.
- No specific feedback re quality of submission, but welcome feedback re potential other avenues to pursue further involvement in a similar role
- Standard letter saying that they had received over 200 applications. Same one as I received the last time I applied for a public appointment



Comments about feedback from those who were interviewed include:

- I wrote for feedback but after 4 weeks I still have not received it. I have sent a reminder.
- As I was offered the post I did not feel the need to seek feedback on this occasion.
- Generic reply was sent and it would have been interesting to receive who was appointed and why.
- I asked for it at the time (following an e-mail asking me if I'd like feedback) but despite chasing three times subsequently, have not received any. I am not not even receiving a reply to my question of when I might expect to receive feedback. Thoroughly unprofessional.
- Useful in seeing how the panel assessed different parts of the interview and provided some useful feedback about style. Unfortunately, also demonstrated that additional criteria had been introduced at interview and particular slants had been applied (e.g. chairing was considered to be managing but not contributing to collective decision making).
- Uniquely, the Board Chair sent a personal letter to myself, explaining the reasons for their decision to reject my application. That was much appreciated.
- I have had feedback on my interview but no on the application form, which would be interesting
- I had to chase for feedback at least a couple of times and it took ages to arrive. I asked for pointers to let me know how to strengthen my application next time. I did not receive any specific information on how my interview could have been better nor what I should do next time. I did not feel encouraged to apply again in the future nor apply for similar roles particularly as I found the application process very time consuming and taxing.
- The feedback was useful in itself in terms of helping me see how I could have performed better on the day in terms of my answers, however it did not help me identify development needs. In fact, some of it was inaccurate, e.g. reference made to an organisation I have no connection with and sentences included that made no grammatical sense.
- I had two sets of post-interview contact. One review chat about the process and why I hadn't been appointed (useful) but as part of the other contact, it was recommended that I apply for a similar role in a different body, which I did, and for which I was subsequently appointed.
- While the feedback was useful, it took several weeks to receive this and it would have been more useful to have this closer to the interview.

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.

- I have a concern it's a 'closed shop' for people who know people at the relevant public body or know how to fill the forms with the correct buzzwords and jargon.
- I assume the process was fair and transparent. Having been contacted quite late in the process and therefore rushed to complete the application, I was disappointed not to be asked for interview. When my request for feedback received no response, I felt

mildly abused - as though I had been encouraged to apply to make up the numbers. That may or may not be the case. It doesn't really matter - chalked up to experience!

- More detailed feedback would have helped considerably. There is a considerable time commitment to applications. Also, you have not asked about the process. The date for informing applications of the outcome was publicised but this did not happen. I had to chase for a reply a few days later. This was particularly disappointing.
- Not the best experience, unfortunately all rather dismissive. Suspect not an entirely open, competitive recruitment process, which seems to be the norm in these situations. Pretty much a waste of time.
- Re the above question(29) I would agree that the process was transparent. In terms of the structure of the process it was also fair. However, the implementation was (in my view) compromised. Challenge in interviews is expected indeed welcomed but dismissive remarks are profoundly unhelpful. There was also a sense that, as a candidate, you were expected to simply state the criteria in your responses/examples rather than the panel assess this from discursive response . This was an unsatisfactory experience, quite unlike others I have had. Of course, personal responsibility is reflected upon and taken. I respond well to challenge but poorly to feeling undermined and insulted.
- As I said before, I always find it amusing that applications are invited from people from all walks of life....however the appointments don't seem to reflect all walks of life...
- I felt that the application process, with significant delays and poor communication about them (including promises of updates which were not fulfilled) was poor from the applicant's point of view.
- I have now applied for several roles without success, or any apparent progress towards being successful. Balancing the effort required to apply against this lack of progress, I'm not sure I can justify further applications.
- I feel that it was encouraged for young people to apply but when you look at all public board appointments they're never under 40. It's unclear what you're looking for from younger candidates if older people with a wealth of experience are always going to be recruited - you aren't going to get any diversity of opinion.
- In my letter saying I was not being chosen to participate further in the process, it was addressed to the applicant - no personalisation. I found that a bit off putting, unprofessional and bad mannered considering the time and effort that I made in my application.
- Very disappointed. I have boardroom experience, teaching experience, governance experience, public sector experience, direct personal experience of poverty, and yet did not get an interview. No diversity whatsoever. Oh was it because I am Chinese or gay? The Commission's new composition does not reflect the population. Quite disgraceful. Very much face fits and who you know!
- Obviously the application process takes an amount of time and effort, so not being selected for the shortlist was disappointing, as I feel with my skill set I would have been able to make a valued contribution to the committee. I did wonder whether the whole process works as a "closed shop" - i.e. whether it is even worth applying if you are not known within the system. I may apply for the "right opportunity" in the future.
- It took longer to find out if I had been successful than what I was told and no communication between times. It took too long to get the feedback from the

interview. I was led to believe you got your expenses for travelling through to Edinburgh for the interview.

- The application process for public appointments is extremely time consuming and given that no feedback is offered if unsuccessful for interview is disappointing. Candidates do not know what they need to do differently if applying for future roles.

Some comments which may be useful for learning how the process could be made to feel more fair and transparent for applicants include:

- If I had been advised who got the job and why, I could accept that the better candidate was chosen and I would have no scope for my conspiracy theory!! The process can only be fair and transparent when applicants are provided with feedback without the need to ask and advised who got the job and why. Applicants may learn from this feedback for future reference.
- I felt I had been screened out with a telephone conversation prior to application
- This is difficult to answer as I did not request feedback. I would need to know how my application was scored against the various criteria to judge whether the process was transparent.
- I've said no to Question 20 - but would have ticked "not sure" if that was an option. Obviously this was a disappointing outcome for me, and it would have helped to know which criteria I did not meet for short-listing. I did not realise that it was possible to request feedback - if this option had been communicated I would have used it - and then my answer to question 20 would have probably been "Yes"
- I am not surprised that many of these public boards and bodies are unable to demonstrate good governance when they appear to be made up of people who are selected from a pool of people who have made a career out of sitting on public bodies. This clearly fails to meet the desire to have public services being accountable to the public communities that they serve. How many retired local government chief executives, retired civil servants, and retired business people, all with substantial public pensions are currently serving on public bodies? How many ordinary members of the public, retired or otherwise serve on these bodies? It is the ordinary members of the public who have the experience of life in these communities, facing the challenges of rural life, public transport, limited financial support, limited access to public services, who have the real perspective of the reality of experience in relation to public services. Lived experience to me is of much more value than an academic qualification and years of experience sitting of boards and councils. I do not see 'lived experience' listed as a criteria for selection.
- I have marked No to question 20. This is only because feedback implied that that I was unsuccessful because I had not answered the questions in the required manner rather than because I was an unsuitable candidate. I followed instructions on the application form and had two friends check that I had answered the questions as asked. For one question I did not mention challenges facing the NHS and in another question I did not use a narrative format. I think discounting people for these types of reason goes against your objective of widening the type of people who sit on the NHS board because it will favour insiders who know exactly how to fill in the application forms, adhering to rules that are not stated or clear to outsiders. Having said that, the two people who were successful do look great so I wish them the best.
- I have no complaints about the fairness but would question the transparency in the absence of any feedback on why my application was unsuccessful. It was also difficult to discern why a third party agent was involved, particularly when they are

already likely to have a list of potential candidates with whom they may have a closer relationship than those applying without that existing contact.

- I have ticked “no” above because I do not have any awareness of how the sift was carried out or any weighting allocated to competencies. The candidate who was appointed seems a very strong fit for the role with specific relevant professional experience. I therefore wonder if the person specification was pitched too generally and I would not have applied if I had known this strength of specific experience was required. These applications take a great deal of time and effort and I think consideration should be given to being more specific about the nature of skills and experience required. I appreciate the aim of attracting a wide and diverse pool of candidates, but I think it is also important not to waste applicants’ time if they have no realistic prospect of being considered. A delicate balance! Best wishes to the successful applicant.
- I believe the interviewers were well intentioned but was surprised that with a public appointments manager present that new criteria were still introduced. I am not confident that this did not also happen at assessment of applications.



Miscellaneous Comments:

Comments on Timetabling and administration

- The links and clicks through were a bit clunky.
- Uploading pre formatted texts onto the digital application form resulted in a loss of all formatting. A note advising that this will happen would have saved some time for me.
- The process was delayed for many months with communication with candidates being very poor. Any delays should be communicated in advance with candidates given clear up-dated timescales.
- I believe the description of the role and the criteria were good. I felt the format of the form and the explanation on how to complete the form and add a cv were confusing.
- The form itself wasn't very accessible. For the CV it would have been better to upload a document.
- The timeline indicated on the initial application was not adhered to. I was not at any point offered an opportunity to claim for travel expenses. It was indicated that we would be reimbursed for travel expenses and as I was travelling from quite a distance this would have been helpful.
- The application portal on the website felt clunky and hard to navigate. I initially looked at it on my smartphone and it was hard to work out where answers should be filled in - the text boxes and questions didn't line up. It did display better on a computer - but not everyone will have a pc available to them, especially when you're trying to target people with lived experience of poverty or from backgrounds who don't normally sit on boards (such as younger people).

Suggestions for Improvement

- Disappointed applicants not offered an interview should be advised of how many were invited for interview (and interviewed) and how their qualifications/experience compared to those who were not. This would allow one to decide whether it would be worth applying in the future.

- Even on occasions where feedback is given, it tends to be very general. It might be useful for potential applicants to have some tutoring/mentoring in advance of applying.
- The only room for improvement comment I have is the length of time taken overall. The gap between interview and final offer was several months.
- It was unclear as to who would do the scoring and if they were the same people as those who would be doing the interviewing. More information on this would have been helpful especially as I was known to one of the interviewers.
- I think a further step in the process of informally meeting the actual applicants before final interview selection stage would be helpful
- It would also be helpful if candidates received some assurance that there is no discrimination on the basis of age in dealing with applications. The statement that the Scottish Government would like to encourage applications from people under the age of 50, whilst perfectly understandable, does raise concerns about the apparent treatment of older applicants.
- Applies to this and other processes -you don't know the word limits and whether they are the same or different until you go to the online application form and run through all the sections. Should be in the information pack. Here, word limit was 200 for each value cluster, 300 for each criterion and 300 for tailored CV. Seems a bit disproportionate.
- I made the decision to apply knowing that it might not be possible to give me an alternative interview date. However, I am conscious that time was spent reviewing my application. Would it be possible to create a mechanism for alerting those shortlisting to this so that they would set the application aside if there was no possibility of changing the interview date?
- I think that all candidates should be informed as a matter of course, via letter or e-mail, as to why they failed at interview, and that the winning candidate should be announced at that time too. Without knowing who had been appointed, I didn't know whether requesting feedback would be at all useful, or if the successful candidate was simply far more qualified or experienced.
- The application process was clear. Receiving a letter addressed to "dear applicant" and followed by the sentence "I wanted to write to you personally " did not give me confidence that those delivering the appointment process understood that dealing with people with dignity and respect may include using my name.
- I think it was fair for me but I didn't feel that style of application would work well for lots of people with recent lived experience of living in poverty. It takes a lot of confidence and energy to draft the best possible 800 words. Both energy levels & confidence are usually undermined by living in poverty. This style of application seems like it would be a barrier to some of your desired applicants.
- At no time in the process or following appointment have I ever been asked to produce evidence of my qualifications. On speaking to forum members who are also public appointees they have had the same experience. Unless you have a behind the scenes process in place for checking credentials of appointees I would suggest this is a risk that needs to be managed. It would only be a matter of time before some sort of adverse event hits the press and it turns out the publicly appointed "clinical psychologist" we've let loose for the past 3 years was in fact a disqualified airline pilot who talked a good game. (I'm sure there was a pilot who flew planes in the 80's and it was all just bluff). Who is responsible for the scrutiny? The public appointments team or the body the appointee is joining?? I think it would be a

mistake to rely on the trust and integrity etc of code of conduct. However, perhaps you are taking the position that qualifications form no part of the decision making on successful candidates and therefore you don't need to have evidence of them.

- It would be useful to have the details of the application form scoring sent back with the rejection email

Other comments

- I mainly applied because of my inexperience, being female and black and under 50 years of age! I thought that is what they were looking for only to be turned away with an excuse of higher calibre candidates being given opportunity they already have! I have never felt so insulted!
- I feel I have qualities / experience / ideas that would be very beneficial but didn't quite match the questions being asked.
- The process, which I have been through many times, is simply dreadful. It is massively time consuming, the skills it looks for are at best marginally relevant to the task in hand and in those circumstances where I have been interviewed it's been painfully obvious that the people selecting and interviewing work to generic criteria, don't know the subject area and when specialised issues come up they are not in any case permitted to depart from their scripts. I continue to apply because I have considerable expertise relating to public service and a moral duty to use it.
- Stop pre determining the candidates and remove discrimination toward young people and women as this is discrimination even if you put positive in front
- There is no way in to these positions for ordinary people. Volunteering is fine if you can afford to or don't have a disability that curtails your ability to become involved while also working. I thought I could bring something to what looked like a very interesting job, perhaps I wouldn't have succeeded but it would have been less disappointing had the appointees not all been the same faces, skipping from one charity/public body to another with ease. It stinks of elitism and I cannot see how they will bring any new viewpoints to the role. There's a fine example of inequality faced by people who are in poverty.
- I think the issue here was that the successful candidate in this case was well known and has sat on a number of boards. Not sure how that helps diversity of views.
- Overall, I was impressed with process, albeit I did feel the application was too lengthy. I asked for feedback, received it promptly, and this will assist in future applications, where I will definitely seek help, prior to completion. I do hope I get considered, for any future positions.
- It was a good experience and I felt it has helped me with my development.
- I thought this process was well set out and applied well. I had really decided not to apply for other such roles but this one matched my skills/experience so closely I decided to apply and am glad that I did. The interview panel was a delight - I felt they brought out the best in me.
- I thought the process was very well handled, the interview extremely professional and the competency based questions relevant and appropriate.
- Thank you for the opportunity to be considered for this role. I have applied for several similar at UK level and this was my first application in Scotland. It was a MUCH more positive experience.
- I have now applied for two public appointments in Scotland and the process for both I found easy and worthwhile.

