

Ethical Standards Commissioner

CROWN ESTATE SCOTLAND: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY

A case study illustrating how proactive planning, clear materials and targeted outreach attracting strong applicants were used for an appointment round in 2025.



Proactive Early Engagement

The panel chair led an open and practical planning phase, during which the panel quickly established that they anticipated a high level of interest in the appointments and were able to plan for this accordingly.



Targeted and Proactive Outreach

A comprehensive outreach strategy was developed and implemented, which the panel considered to be a major contributing factor to both the high volume and high quality of applications.



Clear Materials

Flexibility in the early stages of assessment allowed applicants to showcase the breadth of their expertise and contributed to the unusually high standard of applications.



Panel Dynamics

A clear, collaborative panel dynamic, with members contributing actively to documentation and process design, helped to ensure that not only was the number of applicants very high, but the quality of applications was very strong, enabling the panel to identify excellent candidates across the priority criteria.

Background

This appointment round sought to identify up to five new members for the Crown Estate Scotland (CES) Board. The round attracted exceptionally high interest, receiving 193 applications, and resulted in the appointment of five able candidates who demonstrated strong evidence against the well-defined priority and essential criteria.

Crown Estate Scotland plays a central role in managing land, property and marine assets in the public interest, delivering significant economic and environmental value. The organisation's mission, set out in its Corporate Plan, focuses on carbon reduction, sustainability, and supporting rural, coastal and island communities. It was anticipated by the panel during their early discussions that CES's mission and strategic plans had the potential to generate a high volume of applications, and indeed their mission may have been a significant draw for potential applicants.

Overall, this round was characterised by a panel who invested time in planning, refining documentation, and adopting innovations to manage the expected volume of applications, and to enhance the applicant experience. These preparations contributed to a demonstrably successful outcome.

Early Engagement

The panel chair led an open and practical planning phase, during which the panel quickly established that they anticipated a high level of interest in the appointments. This prediction proved accurate.

Based on this early insight, the panel agreed to introduce a sift stage to support the shortlisting process. This approach proved essential: of the 193 applications received, 84 applicants were assessed at sift as providing good or exceptional evidence of meeting the priority criteria. The panel also felt that the standard of the initial assessments by the sifting team was very high and materially supported the panel's decision-making process.

The panel also invested in multiple iterations of the Appointment Information Pack. Panel members contributed refinements at each stage, ensuring that the material was clear, engaging and candidate-focused. The pack included explicit signposting to the CES Corporate Plan and Annual Report, enabling applicants to understand CES's mission, strategic direction, and organisational values.

Outreach

A comprehensive outreach strategy was developed and implemented, which the panel considered to be a major contributing factor to both the high volume and high quality of applications.

Outreach cont.

Key elements of the outreach strategy included:

- A short video from the CES Chair, which a number of candidates praised.
- Broad and proactive sharing of the vacancy through networks across government, the CES sponsor team and panel members.
- The use of search consultants, who successfully identified at least one of the appointed candidates, though the panel considered their overall impact challenging to quantify.
- Clear, accessible advertising linked to CES's mission, purpose, and strategic priorities.

The advert and supporting pack framed the opportunity in a future-focused and purpose-led manner consistent with the organisation's mission, including its focus on community regeneration, sustainability and climate action. This appeared to resonate strongly with applicants.

Assessment Methods

At the application stage, applicants were invited to provide evidence against any number of the six priority criteria they felt able to demonstrate, in addition to meeting all essential criteria. Many applicants submitted evidence covering multiple priority criteria, and some presented evidence for all six. This flexibility allowed applicants to showcase the breadth of their expertise and contributed to the unusually high standard of applications.

The interview included a short presentation exercise based on a board scenario, which the panel found to be effective in assessing candidates' strategic thinking and governance competence. The panel carried out five consecutive days of full-day interviews due to the volume of high-quality candidates (26 invited, including guaranteed interview scheme candidates*).

The panel had anticipated a large volume of applications and had decided during the early planning stages that a 'sift' would be helpful. This sift is an optional stage of assessment in which those applicants who clearly do not meet the criteria for selection are identified and can be sifted out of the process, saving the panel time during their own shortlisting activity. This sift was essential and well planned for – although the volume of applications did create time pressures. When the sift results were finalised only one day before the planned shortlisting meeting, the panel, supported by prompt communication from the PAA, agreed to postpone shortlisting by 2.5 days. This allowed the high-volume shortlisting task to be undertaken thoroughly and in keeping with the Code.

Applicant Survey

An applicant survey was carried out approximately one month after the announcement that appointments had been made. The survey had a strong response rate at 29% with 84% of responders providing demographic data. The diversity statistics provided were varied, with 46% female; 17% under 50; 4% ethnic minority; 11% disabled; 7% LGBT and 59% first time applicants.

**The guaranteed interview scheme offers all candidates consider themselves to have a disability and who meet the minimum essential criteria for the post, a guaranteed interview.*

Applicant Survey cont.

It should be noted that this only includes those who chose to respond and is therefore not necessarily a wholly representative view of those who applied, though particularly encouraging are the statistics for first time applicants which perhaps echoes the effective outreach efforts planned by the panel.

69% of applicants who responded to the survey felt that it sounded like the body was looking for someone like them, which encouraged them to apply. A further 53% felt that the advert made the role sound attractive, and 40% felt that the advert made the body sound attractive and interesting which encouraged them to apply.

93% of applicants who responded felt that the applicant pack contained all the details they needed to apply and the same felt that the requirements of the role were clearly set out in the applicant pack. 85% felt that the amount of information supplied at application stage was just right and 80% felt that the overall application process was clear.

In relation to the assessment methods used throughout the process, 75% of applicants who responded felt that first stage of assessment (i.e. application) was relevant to the skills, knowledge and experience outlined in the applicant pack (24% were neutral on the question). 29% of respondents were shortlisted for the second stage of assessment. Of those, when asked the same question (was the second stage relevant to the skills, knowledge and experience outlined in the applicant pack?), 69% responded positively, 19% were neutral and 12% disagreed that this stage of assessment was relevant to the skills, knowledge and experience outlined in the applicant pack.

Overall, the applicant survey findings suggest that the outreach strategy was effective in attracting a good proportion of first time applicants and helping many candidates feel the opportunity was relevant to them. The applicant pack appears to have been particularly effective, with very strong feedback on clarity, completeness and ease of understanding.

Successes

This round demonstrated several strong areas of good practice, including:

- Proactive early engagement, including forecasting application volume, refining materials, and agreeing to introduce a sift stage.
- A clear, collaborative panel dynamic, with members contributing actively to documentation and process design.
- A candidate focused information pack refined across multiple drafts.
- A strong outreach strategy, featuring personal messaging from the CES Chair and widespread promotion through relevant networks.
- Effective assessment design, including an interview presentation directly tied to the realities of board level decision making.

Collectively, these measures helped ensure that not only was the number of applicants very high, but the quality of applications was very strong, enabling the panel to identify excellent candidates across the priority criteria.

Key Learning: Managing High volume, high quality rounds

The panel identified several insights valuable for future appointment rounds:

- Early prediction of high application volume was crucial. The sift stage, recommended at the outset, proved an important element due to the significant number of applications received.
- Candidate centric communication, particularly drawing on organisational mission and strategic plans, materially increasing both volume and quality of applicants.
- Outreach efforts that combine organisational leadership (e.g., the chair's video), formal networks, and digital amplification were effective.

Outcome

Five candidates were successfully appointed following a rigorous and well managed process. The selection panel agreed that they had secured individuals who demonstrated strong evidence against all essential criteria and at least one priority criterion. The high calibre of final appointees reflects the success of the panel's planning, outreach, and assessment approach.

The successful appointment was announced on 10 November 2025.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/public-appointment-members-appointed-to-the-crown-estate-scotland-board-2/>



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appointments@ethicalstandards.org.uk



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