

Ethical Standards Commissioner

**Research on Time Commitment,
Remuneration, and other
aspects of the role of
Public Appointees in Scotland**

(Summary Version)

October 2025



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RESEARCH RESULTS: SUMMARY



91% of respondents feel as motivated today as when they first applied.

Highlights



25% response rate; 49% from the Health and Social Care Directorate, 37% chairs or vice chairs.



100% feel their reappointment was handled in line with the Code requirements.



81% had a 'very good' or 'good' experience with the appraisals process

Key Issues



64%

Feel time commitment is higher than advertised



41%

Concerned about Remuneration



55%

Not asked to provide feedback on Induction

Views on public appointments and regulation

"If I look back, when boards were large with unregulated positions, some people were there with motives, around status and ego, I don't see that on any of the boards that I'm on or work with."



Views on barriers to appointment

"I didn't come into this to make money. I have done many voluntary roles which I have done with no remuneration. One in particular I loved and was probably the best experience I have had in my professional career. But what bothers me is the lack of transparency regarding time commitment and remuneration."



The Ethical Standards Commissioner (ESC) conducted research into the roles of chairs and board members of regulated public bodies during 2025.



This summary report contains the high level results of the research against its objectives and our subsequent recommendations to the Scottish Government. The full report, including a full and comprehensive analysis of the survey results and focus groups discussions, and context to the previous research that took place in 2020, have been published here: [Full report and analysis](#) (see end of document for full hyperlink).



The Commissioner is extremely grateful to all the respondents who took the time and made the effort to provide their views by taking part in the research. Their participation will contribute to the continuous improvement of public appointments in Scotland.

Summary Findings

Objective 1: Establish whether from the perspective of people appointed, the role descriptions included in applicant information packs are accurate. Expectations and treatment (e.g. time commitment, remuneration, support going into the role, reappointments and board culture) should be consistent from applicant pack to appointment – meeting the principles of respect, openness, transparency and integrity.

Expectations and treatment in relation to the time commitment of board members, and additional duties once in post, are not consistent from applicant pack to appointment. This was a shared experience across all respondents, from chairs to vice chairs to members, and across all demographic groups who took part in the research.

Views on remuneration also reflected this. Although, generally, board members are not motivated by remuneration, there is a disparity between time commitment and payment offered; additionally, research participants felt that there is a lack of clarity on remuneration policy and are unclear about the types of expenses or financial support available to them. This suggests that applicant packs are not fully transparent or clear about what financial support is available to public appointees once in role.

Research participants also felt that the induction experience was variable, that they typically do not have an opportunity to feed back on the process and that it can take up to 12 months to fully understand what is required of them in their role. Many participants expressed that their applicant packs simply stated that an induction would be provided but did not know what to expect from it. Despite not having defined expectations about the induction process, surprise at the volume of material provided during induction, along with surprise about how self-led the identification of their training and support needs are, emerged as themes during the focus groups. Many participants also suggested that regular forums for shared communication and relationship building with other board members would be highly valued and beneficial to them. It may not be the case then that applicant packs are incorrectly outlining the support received once in role, but simply that they are lacking in sufficient information for applicants' expectations to be effectively managed from application to appointment.

High levels of dedication to public service were evident throughout the research. Indeed, every interviewee / focus group member expressed strong commitment to the work that they do on their board. The experience of the reappointments process was also generally reported as positive, and board culture did not emerge as a concern throughout the research.

Objective 2: Understand the impact of certain aspects of these roles such as time commitment, remuneration and expenses and whether these can create barriers to taking up these roles for people from currently under-reflected groups.

The findings of the first objective have clear diversity implications. The research results suggest that issues around Time Commitment, Remuneration and Support in Role act as barriers to individuals from under-reflected groups taking up roles. In particular, individuals currently still in employment and those with additional responsibilities, such as caring responsibilities, may be at a significant disadvantage in undertaking a board role, due to:

- inaccurate time commitment shared in applicant packs
- low or unclear levels of remuneration and
- those who are potentially new to governance roles not fully understanding how to seek out support they might need once in role.

The potential impact of a lack diversity on board may not be immediately apparent to ministers, particularly if current public appointees show high levels of motivation and commitment to their work. However, much research exists to show that varied perspectives achieve better scrutiny and decision-making. If those currently under-reflected on boards are unable to take up positions, or take them up only to realise that the conditions are different to what has been described in applicant packs, it may then impact the board reaching its full potential in relation to good governance.

Our research was restricted to those who are currently in post, and did not include those who have already demitted post early. From the views gathered through the research, it is possible to deduce that at least some public appointees will have resigned early or chosen not to take up an offered reappointment due to these conditions. This will of course lead to additional time and costs associated with a further appointment round, as well as additional induction support needed for the new appointee, which might not otherwise have been required.

Objective 3: Understand the extent to which the Commissioner's statutory functions are understood.

Research participants demonstrated generally sound understanding of the Commissioner's statutory functions and their rights under the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland.

The following document presents the summary findings of the research against the main themes explored in the research, and includes the full recommendations made to Scottish Ministers as a result.



Time Commitment

Research participants felt that applicant packs under-reflect the time commitment required for board roles, and that they are not transparent enough about the additional work often required once appointments are made, especially in relation to attendance at sub-committees or additional board work. The disparity between advertised and actual time commitment may have implications not only for board member retention,

but also for attracting a diverse range of applicants. A difference of 32 days a year, or just over 2.5 days a month, is a significant concern for the Commissioner as it is clear that this is not currently accurately reflected in packs. Additionally, there may be an impact on the willingness of potential applicants from a range of backgrounds, including those currently in employment, who have caregiving responsibilities or other responsibilities within their communities, to apply for roles if the time commitment is under-reflected. The Code of Practice is rooted in the principles of transparency of the process and respect to applicants, which is essential to ensuring that public appointments are available and accessible to the widest pool of applicants. The current disparity between the advertised and actual time commitment impacts all those applying for public appointments, and in particular those who, once in post, realise they do not have the flexibility required to undertake the additional time.

The impact of time commitment to board members in the Health and Social Care Directorate also emerged as a significant concern. 70% of survey respondents from the Health and Social Care Directorate felt that time commitment was a concern, compared to 51% of overall survey respondents. When considered alongside the comments left in the survey relating to sub-committee attendance and the time impact of this, and the comments made in the focus groups relating to IJBs in particular, it is clear that the current model of board membership and IJB membership for those in territorial health bodies is problematic. The Scottish Government may wish to consider therefore whether membership of IJBs is fully and accurately reflected in applicant packs.

The survey and focus groups revealed that appointees are appreciative of the remuneration they receive; however, it emerged that some appointees feel undervalued by the way their work is currently recognised. The remuneration policy, including how it is decided and applied across different public body boards, also appears to not be well understood by appointees.

This suggests the current information available to board members and potential board members about

remuneration may not be sufficiently circulated to or understood by them. While the Public Sector Pay Policy is a matter for the Scottish Government, the applicant pack and communication to potential applicants has a role to play in this process. Applicant packs should include clear explanations of what the successful candidate can expect once in the role, including the remuneration, expenses and financial support once in post. Even where remuneration is not the primary motivator for applicants to board roles, clear communication will enhance the transparency of the process and increase trust in it. When considering the mutual desire between the Scottish Government and the ESC to ensuring that public appointments are accessible to a wide and diverse pool of candidates, this is even more important; transparency of process allows for individuals to consider their own circumstances from the outset of the appointments process, and to make informed decisions about applying for positions.



Remuneration



Reappointments

100% of reappointed survey respondents felt that their reappointment was handled in line with the Code requirements, and of all respondents 83% were aware of the Code requirements regarding reappointments. For those on their first terms, when asked if they would consider reappointment if offered the opportunity, 66% commented that they would and 26% indicated that they are unsure. Only 7% indicated that they would not (and 1% preferred not to answer).

Views are varied on the support received by appointees once in role. One main theme emerging from the research was that individuals felt that when they self-identified their own training and support needs, they tended to have a more positive experience, but that this is only effective if someone knows that they can or should do this. This has the potential to be an issue for



Support in Role

those new to governance roles in particular. To address this, and in keeping with ensuring that the appointments process is transparent and manages the expectations of individuals coming into roles, applicant packs should include, or link to, detailed information about what support is available once in role. This would be considered and identified by each body and board, and for each new role emerging. Clearly outlining the support that will be offered to individuals and encouraging them to self-reflect and identify their own needs to discuss with the Chair / Appointing Minister during induction may in turn attract a wider pool of applicants to public appointments.



Barriers

Responses to the survey and focus group discussions reflected many concerns observed elsewhere in the report including:

- advertised versus actual time commitment published in applicant packs
- transparency around additional work or attendance required at sub-committees
- transparency of remuneration
- clearly communicating and identifying individual support needs once in role and
- establishing networks or forums for shared learning and support across other board members.

Observations, comments and recommendations have been made in each of these respective areas within the report, alongside comments on the implications of these concerns to diversity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, the responses to the survey conducted by the Commissioner and the focus groups run on his behalf demonstrate that Scotland's public appointees are motivated, engaged and passionate about the work that they do and the bodies they represent.

However, the research findings also reveal that the reality of board work is different to what is advertised in applicant packs. This is particularly so in relation to the expected time commitment of public appointees, which was of significant concern to most of our participants. Participants were also evidently engaged and motivated to participate in public life despite low levels of or no remuneration but did indicate a disparity between the time commitment required and the remuneration offered. Additionally, experiences of induction and support in role were variable although a number of participants offered views on how additional support can be communicated during the application stage, and offered once in post.

The impact of these findings to diversity, achieving wider diversity of thought and on good governance and decision making, is clear. Applicant packs under-reflecting the time commitment required for board roles, or packs that are not fully or appropriately transparent about the additional work often required once appointments are made, will have a significant impact on appointees who will experience inconsistencies in their expectations from application to appointment. At worst, this may result in appointees leaving their positions earlier than they would otherwise have done - indeed, we should acknowledge that although 91% of our participants felt as motivated today in role as they did when they first joined, our research did not include those who have been public appointees and since left their positions. Clarity of what is to be expected in post will aid and enhance the accessibility of public appointments.

Where appropriate the concerns raised by a number of different groups have been addressed in the overall recommendations and within the full report. However, it is noteworthy that the levels of engagement in our research from chairs / vice chairs and members of the Health and Social Care directorate provided unique perspectives into their experiences of public appointments. For the chairs / vice chairs that we engaged with, the expectations placed on them, particularly regarding availability, appears to result in added pressure and increased time commitment in the role and indeed this theme emerged as a significant concern for them.

As a result of the research findings, recommendations have been made by the Commissioner with a view to improving the accessibility and transparency of the current appointments process.

General Recommendations

Recommendation: The Scottish Ministers should review the findings in this report, including all comments made by current board chairs and members, and provide a public response, inclusive of any actions that it intends to take as a result.

Recommendation: Scottish Government to consider establishing a process for analysing and understanding reasons for individuals resigning before their term is complete, and of those who decline offers of a second term. This could be similar to an exit interview and is with a view to understanding how many and who might be withdrawing from public appointments because expectations and treatment once in role are different to what was outlined in the applicant pack.

Time Commitment Recommendations

Recommendation: Time Commitment Review. Scottish Ministers to review the current time commitment of board members and assess how accurately this is reflected in applicant packs. The Scottish Ministers should work with Boards to conduct a time commitment review; to ensure that applicant packs clearly outline the expected time commitment of individual roles, and to provide support to selection panels so that they are suitably able to identify and establish the expected time commitment during the appointment planning phase.

Recommendation: Scottish Government to review the applicant pack template to ensure there is appropriate space and prompts for selection panels to consider, review and communicate any additional work, such as attendance at sub committees, so that this is clear to prospective applicants.

Recommendation: Scottish Ministers to work with Board Chairs to ensure that appropriate discussions are taking place when the time commitment of a public appointee changes at any point during their appointment term, including discussions concerning sub-committee attendance.

Support in Role Recommendations

Recommendation: Scottish Government to review the current applicant pack template and to update this so that selection panels can clearly communicate the support that will be offered to successful candidates once in post.

Recommendation: As part of the induction process, the Scottish Ministers to work with board chairs to consider the early discussions that take place with new appointees, to highlight how skills or training needs will be identified, and to ensure that potential applicants are aware that these discussions will be available to them once appointed. Where the appointment is for a chair position, the Scottish Government should ensure these early discussions are held directly with the new appointee.

Recommendation: Scottish Government to review the 2017 Appraisals Guidance document with a view to updating this where appropriate and ensuring that board members have access to it.

Recommendation: Scottish Government to consider how to ensure the appointments feedback process provides individuals with information on how closely they met the criteria for selection, assisting with the self-identification of areas that they can improve their skills and knowledge in once appointed.

Recommendation: Scottish Government to consider establishing a process for analysing and understanding reasons for individuals resigning before their term is complete, and of those who decline offers of a second term. This could be similar to an exit interview and is with a view to understanding how many and who might be withdrawing from public appointments because expectations and treatment once in role are different to what was outlined in the applicant pack.

Remuneration Recommendations

Recommendation: Remuneration and Financial Support Awareness. Scottish Ministers to review how remuneration and financial support is communicated in applicant packs so that, from application to appointment, board members are aware of the amount and frequency of pay, how pay decisions are made, how expenses are reimbursed and what financial support is available to appointees. Ministers might consider developing a separate pay policy for public appointees, clearly setting out the expectations for board roles (including any expenses) to help achieve a greater level of clarity for board members, and potential board members if linked to in applicant packs.



To read the full report and analysis of evidence please visit:
<https://www.ethicalstandards.org.uk/publication/research-time-commitment-remuneration-and-other-aspects-role-public-appointees-scotland-2025>



To contact us please email:
appointments@ethicalstandards.org.uk



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