

Diversity of representation in public appointments

A study by Common Purpose

June 2009

commonpurpose 

About Common Purpose

Common Purpose is an independent, non-politically aligned, not-for-profit organisation that offers a wide range of open and customised programmes for leadership development. Participants do not sit in classrooms, but go out into their own communities and grapple with real life problems at first hand through a challenging mix of behind-the-scenes briefings, leadership insights through access to key players, real-life case studies, peer consultancy, problem-solving of real leadership challenges and group learning sessions. Common Purpose runs programmes for a wide range of different people, from school age leaders to very senior established leaders. Common Purpose programmes and activities all share the same long-term ambitions: better decision-making in all sectors, more effective solutions to common problems, more engaged and active citizens and, ultimately, stronger communities.

Acceptance on Common Purpose programmes is dependent on applicants demonstrating an interest in leadership. One aspect of Common Purpose programmes is to inspire a sense of civic responsibility, whilst giving graduates the knowledge, networks and motivations needed to make positive changes within their organisations and into the wider community.

The database widely represents a group of individuals who have already indicated an interest in civic leadership through application and participation on a Common Purpose programme and were therefore an appropriate target group to start this pilot study, and begin to shed some light on the perceived challenges and opportunities presented in moving from leading at a local level to holding a national appointment.

The Common Purpose database stores contact information of participants, graduates and contributors. The information is stored with the permission of the individuals and is regularly updated. The graduates stay connected and are kept informed of issues and events through the regular database management system.

**Copies of this report can be downloaded at
<http://www.commonpurpose.org.uk/resources/research.aspx>**

This report was commissioned by the Government Equalities Office and has been produced by Common Purpose. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the Government Equalities Office (nor do they represent Government policy).

Executive Summary

Common Purpose was commissioned by the Government Equalities Office to conduct an online survey of Common Purpose graduates who have been on civic leadership programmes in the last six years. Participants on Common Purpose courses by virtue of the application process for these courses form a useful proxy for local leaders or opinion leaders. There is no firm “pathway” in to national public appointments, but anecdotal research and discussions with public body board members and chairs has highlighted a common theme of local leadership and engagement being an important training ground and experience base for those who move on to national public appointments.

To understand better the likely potential pipeline of public appointees, a study of local civic leaders, whether or not yet in a formal public position, was proposed to explore attitudes towards public appointments, as well as motivations for, or barriers in applying for, public appointments. This study was designed as a pilot to explore whether there are issues that diverse groups of the population who are currently under-represented on the boards of public bodies are more likely to face. 659 Common Purpose graduates responded. The respondent group was not a fully representative sample of the whole of the population, but showed a good split across gender, geography, ethnicity and disability. The respondent group was however more biased towards the over 30s.

Key Findings

- **Awareness and interest:**

Despite a third of respondents saying they had not been aware of public appointment opportunities, nine out of ten would be willing to apply for a public appointment in the future.

12% of respondents said they were very aware, and around a third (32%) of the sample said they were not aware of any national public appointment opportunities. Just over half stated they had a little awareness.

- **Levels of engagement:**

- A third of respondents have held, or currently hold a local public appointment, suggesting a large potential pool of local leaders from which to encourage applications for national appointments.

Less than one in ten (8%) respondents currently hold, or have previously held a national public appointment or leadership position.

A third of respondents (33%; n=220), have held or currently hold a public appointment at a local level.

- **Motivations and Barriers:**

The desire to contribute to community and society is a key motivating factor for holding public appointments.

43% of respondents saw 'benefiting my community' as a main benefit of holding a public appointment; 37% said 'benefiting society'.

However board structures and formalities at a national level might prevent them from being as effective at bringing about constructive change as they would be at a local level.

- One interviewee stated that they would not apply for a national public appointment as they felt they *'were more effective influencing outside boards'* they felt national boards were *'risk averse, quietly nudging but not making significant changes'* (Female, 30+, white, Midlands).
- Another said they whilst they were active at a local level because they wanted to make change happen, they felt national boards were *'bogged down by process and committee'* (Male, 30+, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME), North of England).

For those who have never considered applying for a national public appointment, the **human touch** is critical to give them the encouragement to submit an application: factors that would be perceived to make the most difference are *'Having been invited'* (23%), *'Somebody suggesting I put my name forward'*, (21%) and *'Talking to someone who is already appointed'* (18%).

- **Experience of the application process:**

The application process itself can be alienating and off-putting:

'Forms that start off asking for professional and educational qualifications put off those with considerable experience but no formal qualifications' (Female, 30+, white, South of England).

'The focus on the person spec' is that board level experience is required' leading to only those already sitting on boards applying for the post (Male, 30+, BAME, North of England).

Survey respondents felt that looking for opportunities can be a lengthy and time-consuming process. More guidance about the best places to look would be useful.

Younger people (<30 years) are almost twice as likely to spot opportunities on the internet compared to those aged 30+. In contrast, younger people (<30 years) are almost half as likely to hear about opportunities in the national press.

BAME respondents appeared to be more likely than Whites to consider applying for a public appointment, but then either do not go through with the application or report that they applied but were unsuccessful.

Those who considered themselves to have a disability were twice as likely to apply and be unsuccessful in their applications for a national public appointment than those who did not consider themselves to have disabilities.

- **Advertising of Public Appointment opportunities**

Four out of ten (40%) of those who had applied for a national public appointment had done so after seeing an interesting advert.

38% had heard about public appointment opportunities in the national press.

Seventeen per cent of the younger age bracket (<30 years) spotted opportunities on the internet compared with one in ten (10%) of respondents aged 30+.

- **The case for diversity:**

Respondents felt that boards should reflect the diversity of the societies they are representing, to have a real understanding of different cultures and an appreciation and understanding of difference.

'To be fully effective, there needs to be a range of people in these positions, to reflect the community in which they are working, or society as a whole. The broader the background/ experience represented the better for everyone.' (Female, 30+, White, Midlands).

Diversity of representation would bring diversity of thought, fresh ideas, new perspectives and a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities that were available, leading to **better decision-making** and more innovation and creativity.

'Enables better informed decisions. Draws on a wider range of experience. Can in some instances lead to marginalised groups receiving a fairer result' (Male, 30+, BAME, South of England).

Diverse representation would lead to increased community cohesion, more positive role-models for those in traditionally less well represented groups, and greater confidence in agencies.

A move away from boards being seen as 'Establishment', wider accountability and representation would lead to people feeling more responsible for their societies and communities.

'If services are to be improved new thinking will be required and a break from the cycle of the same people doing the same things and getting the same results. There seems to be a culture of cronyism within the present system.' (Male, 30+, White, North of England).

Appointment to boards should be based on merit, on awarding the job to the best person and not either a result of an insular 'old boys' network of familiar faces, or on positive discrimination.

'Overall, a good appointee would make everyone else champion diversity without making it a chore' (Female, 30+, BAME, Midlands).

- **Sharing diversity data:**

Respondents who said they had disabilities were less willing to declare their ethnicity and disability data than those without disabilities.

Those from BAME communities are less willing to reveal their ethnicity and disability data than White respondents.

1. Introduction

The Government Equalities Office (GEO) and Cabinet Office are leading a new cross-Government project aimed at increasing diversity on public boards. New Government targets are focussed on increasing the number of women, those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds and disabled people in public appointments through an action plan that ensures best practice in recruitment, increases application levels through better outreach and support for potential candidates, and raises awareness of public appointments.

Common Purpose, an education charity specialising in leadership development, was commissioned by the Government Equalities Office to conduct an online survey of Common Purpose graduates who have been on civic leadership programmes in the last six years. The purpose of the study was to explore the attitudes towards public appointments, as well as motivations and barriers in applying for public appointments.

Indicative analysis of public appointments talent “pipeline” has suggested two key stages in an individual’s pathway through public life; firstly moving to a position of local leadership, and secondly using the experience gained as a platform to a higher profile national position.

Those engaged on public bodies locally are therefore likely to be an important feeder group for national appointments. There has been very limited research, especially in recent years, that addresses this issue of stepping from local to national engagement, and the ‘pipeline’ or pathway into national public appointments. There has also been little research into why diversity on boards at a local level does not appear to feed into participation at national levels; a critical area to understand if increasing numbers of people from under-represented groups are to apply for public posts.¹

1.1 Public appointments and public bodies

A public appointment is an appointment to the board of a public body. In the UK, there are currently around 18,500 men and women serving on the boards of over 1,200 public bodies.

Public bodies carries out functions on behalf of the Government, working within a framework set by Ministers but operating, at a day to day level, independently of Government.

Most public bodies are led by boards comprising non-executive chairs and other Board members. Public bodies operate at a local level, for example NHS Trusts, Primary Care Trusts, school and other educational establishments, or at a national level, for example the Charity Commission, Gambling Commission, and Arts Council England.

¹ For example, as at 1 February 2009 29.7% of chairs of local NHS boards were women, whilst women currently comprise a total of 33.3% of national public appointments. (Source: Appointments Commission report; public bodies 2008).

1.2 Aims and objectives

The aim of this research is to begin to examine attitudes and experiences of Common Purpose graduates in holding both local and national public appointments and to start to consider what the differences between holding local and national appointments may be.

The main objectives of the study were to begin to generate insight in four areas:

- Levels of awareness and interest in national public appointments.
- The pathway from local to national appointments and barriers/motivations in stepping from local to national engagement.
- Whether individuals have considered applying for national public appointments. If not, why not, and for those that did apply, what made them apply.
- Perceived benefits of diversity, and views on declaring diversity data.

1.3 Overview of method

An online questionnaire was emailed to all graduates who had attended a Common Purpose course between 2002-2008 from different sectors across England and Wales.

The questionnaire asked 12 questions about attitudes to and experiences of applying and holding public appointments at both a local and national level. Nine follow up interviews were also conducted with respondents who had expressed what were perceived to be richer and more detailed views in their online responses, providing the opportunity for a deeper insight into the issues they raised and the drivers of them. Owing to the small number of minority ethnic respondents, we grouped the BAME and Other respondents into a single group. More detail on the methodology can be found in Annex A.

As graduates of Common Purpose educational programmes, the sample group were assumed to have a level of awareness of issues of local governance and public appointments. The questionnaire assumed a certain level of understanding in respondents of the mechanics of public appointments. It did not seek to ascertain levels of knowledge of the public appointments process.

2. Research findings and analysis

2.1 Low awareness, high interest

Despite a third of respondents saying they were not aware of public appointment opportunities, nine out of ten would be willing to apply for a public appointment in the future.

Respondents were asked how aware they were of public appointment opportunities. Of the 659 individuals who responded to the survey, just over half (56%) self-reported they were 'a little aware' of public appointment opportunities, with 12% responding 'very aware', and around a third (32%) of the sample not aware of any national public appointment opportunities. Whilst the majority of respondents were only 'a little aware', or not aware at all, the survey indicated that there was a high interest in holding a national public appointment in the future. Nine in ten (92%) respondents agreed that they would be willing to apply for a public appointment in the future. Differences in levels of awareness of public appointments do not therefore appear to be reflected in levels of potential interest.

Those who lived in Wales, although only small percentage of the sample (4%, or 29 out of the 659 respondents) appeared to be more aware of opportunities than their English counterparts. 28% of respondents from Wales considered themselves very aware, compared to 13% of those from the Midlands, 9% from the North of England, and 11% from the South of England.

The largest differences appear to be when the respondents were split by age. The younger age bracket (<30 years) was less aware of public appointment opportunities than those aged 30 or over – see graph below. (The sample group was strongly biased towards an older age bracket, so whilst there are patterns that emerged amongst the 29 and under group of respondents these should be interpreted as indicative. It should be noted that the 29 and under group accounted for only 42 of the base of 659 respondents, a small 6% of the sample group.)

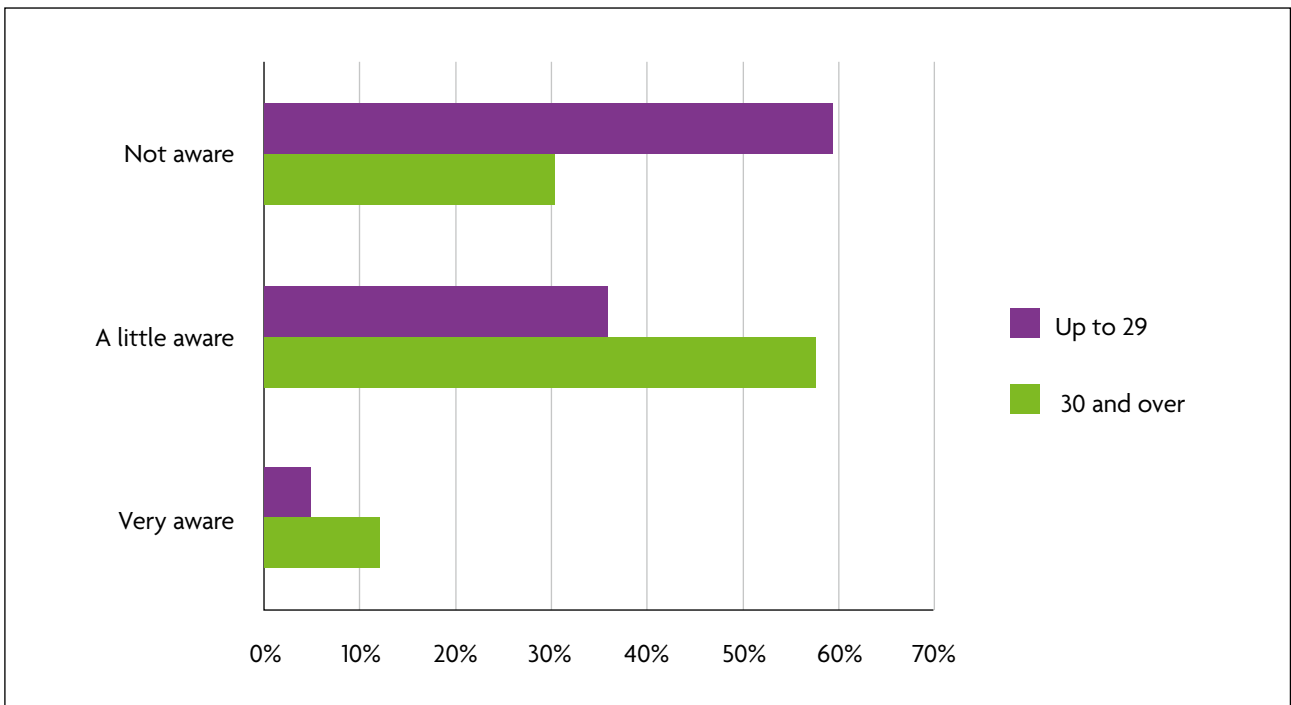


Figure 1. How aware are you of national public appointment opportunities? Split by age bracket

Of those respondents who reported that they had not considered applying for a national public appointment, three out of ten (28%; n=183) claimed they had not considered applying for a national public appointment as it had not occurred to them.

A further quarter of respondents (24%) had considered applying but had not. One in seven (14%) of the respondents to the survey reported that they had not considered applying for a national public appointment because they did not think they were qualified, and one in ten (10%) had applied but been unsuccessful (figure 2).

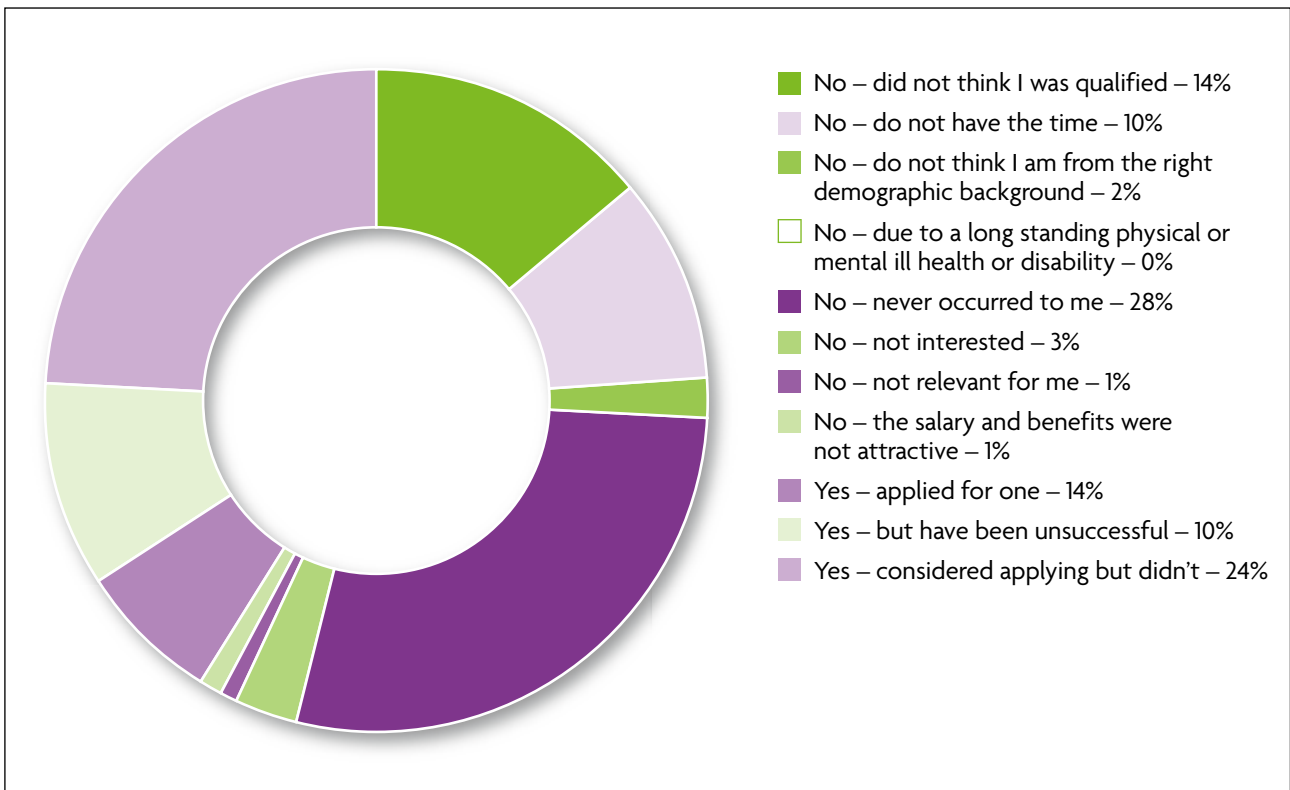


Figure 2. Have you ever considered applying for a national public appointment?

The proportions for each answer to ‘have you ever considered applying for a national public appointment’ question were broadly the same when the data was broken down by gender, but when broken down by ethnicity, disability and age, some differences became apparent.

Ethnicity

Three out of ten (31%) of the BAME group had considered applying but didn't compared with two in ten (21%) of the White group. A higher proportion of BAME respondents reported being less successful than Whites, almost two in ten (19%) of the BAME respondents applying and being unsuccessful compared with less than one in ten (7%) of White respondents (Figure 3). However Whites appeared to be more likely to think they were not qualified for a public appointment than BAMEs. Whilst 16% of White respondents had not applied because they did not feel they were qualified compared, only 1 in 10 (10%) of BAME respondents had not applied for the same reason.

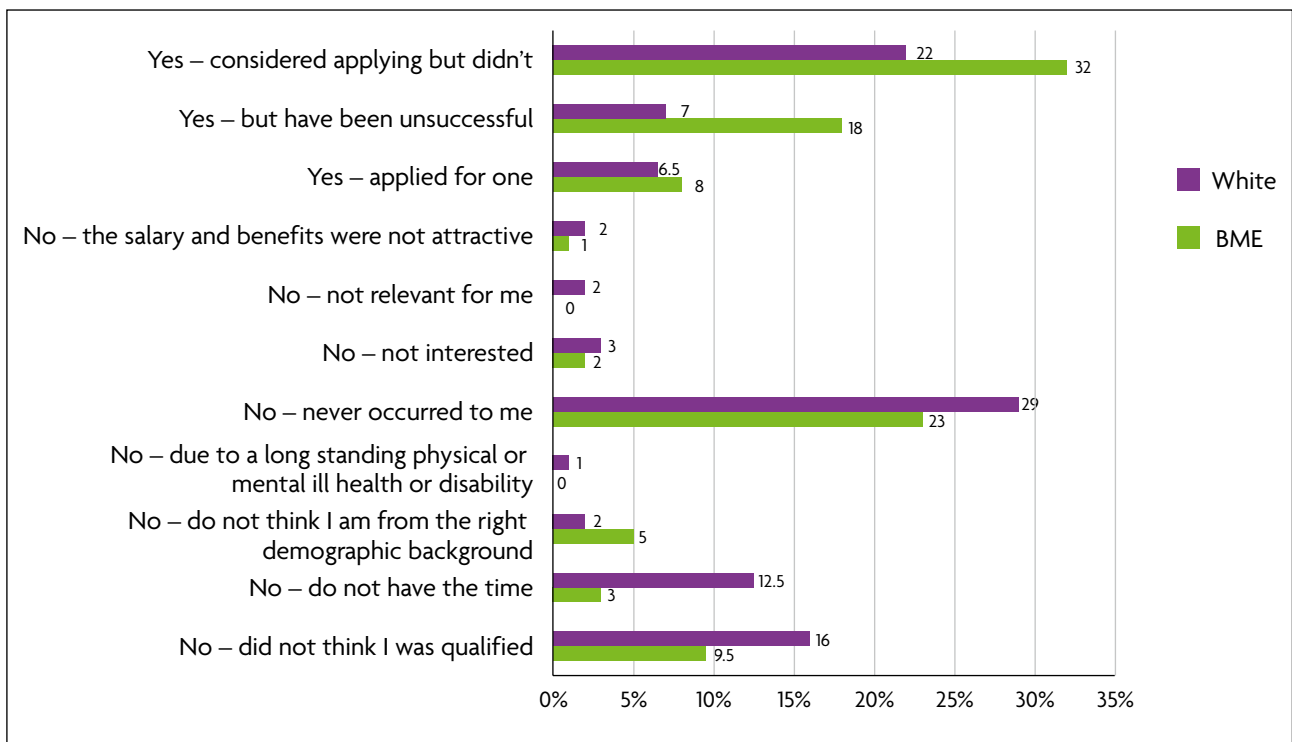


Figure 3. Have you ever considered applying for a national public appointment?
Split by ethnicity, aggregated.

Disability

Less than ten per cent of respondents (n=57) considered themselves to have a disability, which is lower than the estimate for the population as a whole. However those who did consider themselves to have a disability were twice as likely to apply and be unsuccessful in their application for a national public appointment than those who did not consider themselves to have a disability. Nearly two in ten (18%) who considered themselves to have a disability have applied for a national public appointment and been unsuccessful, compared with only one in ten (9%) respondents who do not have disabilities (Figure 4).

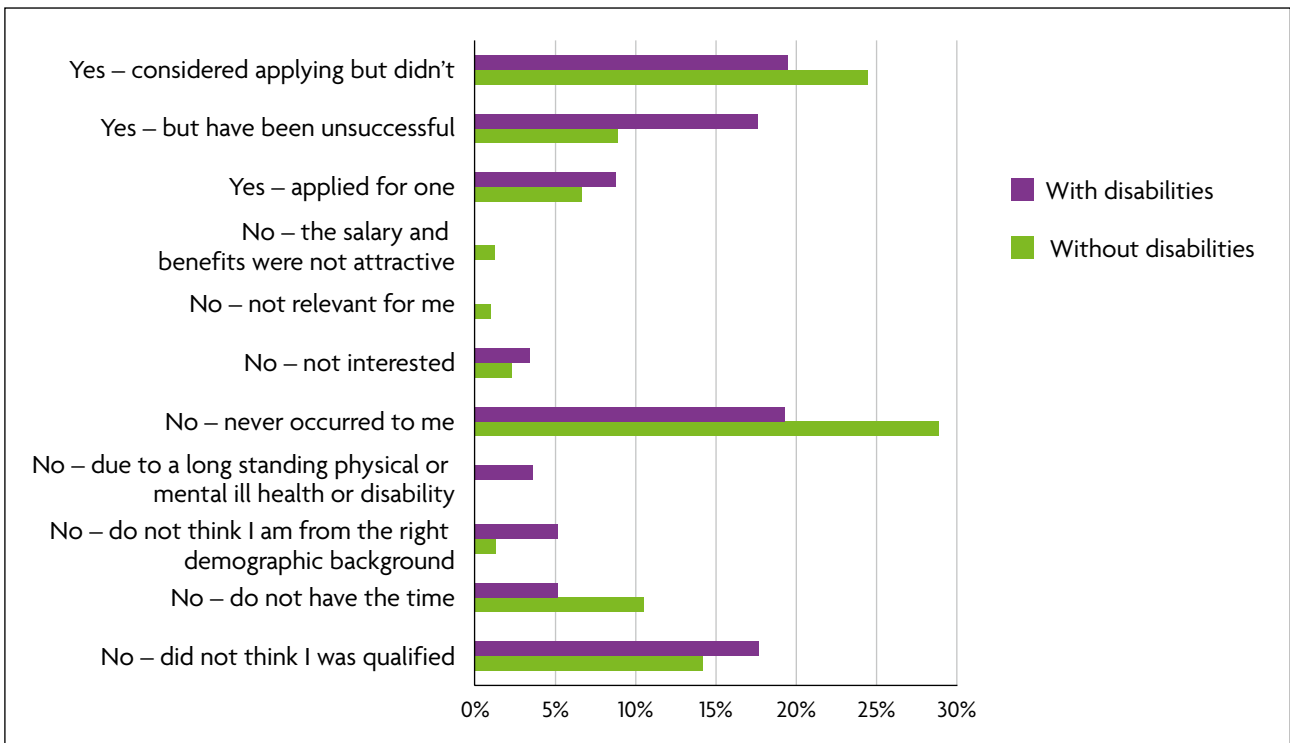


Figure 4. Have you ever considered applying for a national public appointment? Split by those who consider themselves to have a disability (purple), and those who do not (green).

Age

Despite small number of young people responding to the survey, the data indicated that young people (<30 years) are less likely to consider applying for a national public appointment compared with those aged 30+. Over half (52%) of respondents aged <30 reported that it had never occurred to them to apply, compared with just over a quarter (26%) of the 30+ group. As a result, in order to improve the diversity of different age groups on national boards work may need to be done to explore and address why young people do not think of applying for national public appointments in order to increase awareness of opportunities in this younger age bracket.

2.2 Levels of Engagement

A third of respondents (33%; n=220) have held, or currently hold a local public appointment, suggesting a large potential pool of local leaders from which to encourage applications for national appointments.

Respondents were asked if they currently held, or if they had ever held, a **local** public appointment or leadership position. A third of respondents (33%; n=220), had held or currently held a public appointment at a local level. They were asked to specify the nature of the post they held.

Respondents reported:

- being school governors, or sitting on the boards of other educational bodies, including universities and further education establishments;
- being local councillors;
- sitting on cultural boards, such as museums or arts organisations;
- sitting on the boards of Primary Care Trusts, local strategic partnerships and various faith advisory groups;
- sitting on probation boards or as magistrates.

Whilst one third of respondents currently hold, or have previously held a local appointment, when the group was subsequently asked if they currently held, or had held, a national public appointment or leadership position, less than one in ten (8%) responded positively.

A sample of the national level public appointments held included:

- member of Law Society,
- sitting on NHS complaints panel,
- sitting on the Human Genetics Commission,
- sitting on the boards of national cultural committees.

Respondents with disabilities have held more appointments than those without disabilities, and those who lived in Wales hold, or had held more appointments than those in England. However the differences were mostly small, and no one respondent group stood out as being particularly active.

2.3 Motivations

The desire to contribute to community and society is a key motivating factor for holding public appointments.

43 per cent of respondents saw 'benefiting my community' as a main benefit of holding a public appointment; 37 per cent said 'benefiting society'. These results were significantly higher than 'developing my skills' or 'enhancing my career' at 10% and 7% respectively. This suggests a willingness to engage on public bodies where the motivation is less driven by benefit to the individual and more by a contribution to better societal outcomes.

A third of respondents hold posts locally, but this is not reflected in higher numbers applying for or holding national public appointment. Less than one in ten (8%, n=52) respondents currently hold, or have previously held, a national public appointment.

Analysis of the results raises some key questions: are some respondents only be motivated to operate at a local level, and if so why? Do others, though interested in making the leap to holding a national appointment, feel unable to make this jump or are there indeed more significant obstacles or barriers?

Further analysis through targeted interviews suggested there are a number of systemic issues affecting the perception of national public appointments. There is also some history of negative experience with the system that has affected individuals' expectations of what it is possible to achieve.

The study begins to suggest that that there may potentially be an untapped pool of people of different backgrounds and ages, who are active at a local level, who might in the future be encouraged to apply for national public appointments if the experience of and perception of national public appointments is improved.

2.4 Barriers in moving from local to national

Some respondents perceive that board structures and formalities at a national level might prevent them from being as effective at bringing about constructive change as they would be at a local level.

With a key motivation for engaging on public bodies being to benefit society or community, the perceived distance between being on a national body and being able to see the difference you are making appears to become a de-motivating factor. The concern about the impact in moving from local to national engagement was a surprisingly consistent theme across those locally active and were interviewed by telephone after completing the questionnaire, such as school governors, parish councillors, and on the boards of PCTs. Board structures and formalities at a national level might prevent them from being as effective at bringing about constructive change as they would be at a local level.

One interviewee stated that they would not apply for a national public appointment as they felt they *'were more effective influencing outside boards'* they felt national boards were *'risk averse, quietly nudging but not make making significant changes'* (Female, 30+, White, Midlands), another said they whilst they were active at a local level because they wanted to make change happen, they felt national boards were *'bogged down by process and committee'* (Male, 30+, BAME, North of England).

The survey started to explore what would encourage those who had never considered applying for a national public appointment to find out more or apply for a post. The message from the results was very clear that people required a **human touch** to give them the encouragement to submit an application:

- *'Having been invited'* (23%)
- *'Somebody suggesting I put my name forward'*, (21%) and
- *'Talking to someone who is already appointed'* (18%).

These findings contrast with those who do hold a national public appointment, of whom four out of ten (40%) applied or considered applying as a result of an interesting advert. Whilst it is clear that interesting adverts in the national press are a good source of applications, this needs to be balanced with a **range of other methods** and actions to encourage applications from a wider range of individuals. One respondent wrote *'It would help to have a mentoring scheme to encourage participation...'* (Female, BAME, <30, North of England).

2.5 Experience of the Application process

Issues concerning the process of application and the accessibility of national public appointments surfaced during the survey. A sizeable minority of those who responded to the survey found that completion of the application forms was a daunting process. For those that hadn't previously applied, a lack of understanding of the application process itself appears to be a barrier. Over one in ten (13%, n=56) respondents who had never considered applying for a national public appointment said that clear information on how the application process works would encourage them to find out more or apply for a national public appointment.

A third of the respondents interviewed (3 out of 9) made reference to the difficulties surrounding the application procedure. One interviewee who acted as a mentor for those applying for both local and national positions said that many people she had encountered *'felt alienated by the recruitment process... forms that start off asking for professional and educational qualifications put off those with considerable experience but no formal qualifications'* (Female, 30+, White, South of England).

Another interviewee said *'the focus on the person spec is that board level experience is required'* leading to only those already sitting on boards applying for the post (Male, 30+, BAME, North of England).

The suggestion from the respondents is that the wording of application forms discourages application to boards from a broader group of potential Board members. Help and advice to complete the forms along with encouragement to put oneself forward for an appointment would be advantageous in broadening the diversity of boards.

The follow-up phone interviews indicated that some interviewees had a sense that national public appointments are often awarded to the same core group of people, often those who have already held board positions and were known to boards and selection panels. One respondent claimed to have applied for 20 positions without success and questioned their competency and ability to complete the forms correctly, but went on to wonder if it was because *‘the head hunters that are used actually are searching for white male usual suspects and people they already know, or don’t have competence in the subject they are recruiting for?’* (Female, 30+, BAME, Midlands).

A long term impact of this perception of the application process could be a loss of potential talent from particular groups. Individuals may lose confidence, feel themselves not to be competent, or from the wrong demographic group.

One respondent felt that positions were often filled before the application process opened. She commented: *“ALL the positions I have, have been ones where I have been asked to put my name forward, or in truth have probably been selected before the application went in.”* (Female, 30+, BAME, Midlands)

2.6 Advertising public appointment opportunities

The survey started to explore how the sample became aware of national public appointment opportunities. Four out of ten (40%) of those who had applied for a national public appointment had done so after seeing an interesting advert, and a similar proportion (38%) had heard about public appointment opportunities in the national press.

Age

Seventeen per cent of the younger age bracket (<30 year) spotted opportunities on the internet compared with one in ten (10%) of respondents aged 30+. In contrast, nearly four in ten (39%) of the 30+ group heard about opportunities in the national press compared with just over a quarter (26%) of the <30 group. To increase the number of younger people applying for national boards, it is possible that new avenues of advertising opportunities and ways of promoting national public appointments needs to be explored.

Ethnicity

There appears to be no noticeable difference between the way BAME and White respondents had heard of national public appointment opportunities.

Disability

Respondents with disabilities were more likely to see opportunities advertised in the national press. Nearly half (47%) of respondents with disabilities reported hearing about appointments in the national press compared with around four in ten (38%) respondents without disabilities. Disabled respondents were also more likely to report being aware of opportunities in general: 16 per cent of group with disabilities claimed that they hadn’t heard of any opportunities compared with 25 per cent of those without disabilities.

The issue of where to find out about national public appointment opportunities was explored further in the follow-up telephone interviews, where a third of the interviewees (n=3) said that looking for opportunities was a lengthy and time-consuming process.

Interviewees indicated that more guidance about where the best places to look would be useful and would help them to use their time efficiently. One interviewee suggested an internet site where all opportunities could be detailed, where applicants could enter their details and be 'matched' to appropriate opportunities, dependent on interest and ability (Female, 30+, White, Midlands).

2.7 The perceived importance of diversity

The vast proportion of respondents to the survey saw having individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds, sectors, ethnicities, different genders, political persuasions, experience and sexuality holding public appointments as important. The common themes that emerged from the responses can be summarised as follows:

- Boards should **reflect the diversity** of the societies they are representing, to have a real understanding of different cultures, and an appreciation and understanding of difference.

'To be fully effective, there needs to be a range of people in these positions, to reflect the community in which they are working, or society as a whole. The broader the background/experience represented the better for everyone.' (Female, 30+, White, Midlands)

- Diversity of representation would bring diversity of thought, fresh ideas, new perspectives and a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities that were available, leading to **better decision-making** and more innovation and creativity.

'Enables better informed decisions. Draws on a wider range of experience. Can in some instances lead to marginalised groups receiving a fairer result' (Male, 30+, BAME, South of England)

'Better decisions (more informed by wider range of perspectives and taken by people with a wide range of skills and experiences) and greater trust in those decisions by the public, if they can see that the decisions have been made or influenced by people who they can identify with or who appreciate their point of view.' (Male, <30 years, White, South of England)

- Diverse representation would lead to **increased community cohesion**, more positive role-models for those in traditionally less well represented groups, and greater confidence in agencies.

'Enriches the lives of our community and goes a great step forward, in terms of making a community cohesive.' (Female, 30+, BAME, Midlands)

'Greater representation of our diverse communities viewpoint, and having the opportunity to bring about positive change/empowerment of marginalized groups.' (Female, 30+, BAME, North of England)

- A move away from boards being seen as 'establishment', **wider accountability and representation** would lead to people feeling more responsible for their societies and communities.

'Different approaches to problems and solutions, different attitudes which help to tackle a much wider range of situations and issues. It would lead to a much more rounded approach and would have wider benefits in making the broader community feel engaged in decision-making processes.' (Female, 30+, White, North of England)

'If services are to be improved new thinking will be required and a break from the cycle of the same people doing the same things and getting the same results. There seems to be a culture of cronyism within the present system.' (Male, 30+, White, North of England)

- Appointment to boards should be **based on merit**, on awarding the job to the best person and not either a result of an insular 'old boys' network of familiar faces, or on positive discrimination, as one respondent wrote *'overall, a good appointee would make everyone else champion diversity without making it a chore.'* (Female, 30+, BAME, Midlands).

'Fundamentally I think it's about attracting the best people. To not be diverse means by implication the best talent is not in public office. From that also then stems themes such as effective community engagement, community cohesion etc.' (Male, 30+, white, Midlands)

'I believe most national public appointments tend to be white male middle class individuals who are already connected to politics in some way. However having a diverse mix of individuals in public positions can bring a greater understanding to cohesion and understanding the issues different communities face.' (Male, 30+, BAME, Midlands)

'Public appointments tend to be granted to those people who speak and understand the language and politics of that organisation which limits the responsiveness of that organisation to external and economic factors that often effect key issues such as the cash flow of the communities that they serve. A broader more representative set of appointees would challenge the culture and perhaps speed up responsiveness.' (Female, 30+, White, Midlands.)

2.8 Sharing ethnicity and disability data

Respondents who said they had disabilities were less willing to declare their ethnicity and disability data than those without disabilities.

The questionnaire asked 'If you were to apply/have applied for a public appointment, would you be willing to declare your ethnicity or any disability information?'. This prevented respondents from indicating they would chose to share either ethnicity or disability information separately, and the statistics generated by the survey would not reflect that some individuals would be willing to share one but not the other. One respondent chose to supplement their answer with *'I am prepared to*

declare my disability but not my ethnicity' (Female, 30+, white, North of England, with a disability) indicating that the some regarded the declaration of these two different pieces of data as different issues.

The majority of respondents (93%) reported that they would be willing to declare their ethnicity and diversity data if they were to apply or had applied for a public appointment.

There were differences by disability and ethnicity. 81% (n=46) of respondents who consider themselves to have disabilities reported that they would declare their ethnicity and disability data without any caveats compared with 94% of those without disabilities. Sixteen per cent (n=9) of those who considered themselves to have disabilities would declare their data but only with certain caveats.

Those from BAME communities are less willing to reveal their ethnicity and disability data than those who declared themselves as White.

The data shows that those from BAME communities are less willing to reveal their ethnicity and disability data than those who declared themselves as White. A small number of respondents (1%; n=7) to the questionnaire have indicated they believe that their ethnicity will have some bearing on the application procedure, *'I believe that certain positions are closed to certain ages and races'* (Male, 30+, BAME, Midlands).

Some of the themes emerging from the responses to 'yes, but only if...' were **fears that the information would be used in the recruitment process**, rather than just used to keep a record of equal opportunities data. A small number of respondents (n=6) wrote they would only declare this data if it did not impact on the candidate selection process in any way. One wrote they would be willing to declare data *'but only if it were not used for discrimination (positive or negative)'* (Female, 30+, BAME, South of England).

In contrast 3 respondents wrote they would be willing to declare ethnicity data if the information was used to positively recruit. One respondent expressed disappointment that although the data is asked for, it is not used for positive means. They wrote:

'I am fed up that both employers and public bodies have been collating equality data for years but in reality there has been little action... we have known for years with monitoring data that there is under-representation amongst certain demographic groups yet little action has taken place.' (Male, 30+, BAME, North of England).

Of those who answered 'no, because...' a small minority (2%, n=16) wrote that the information was irrelevant to the application process, and that this information should have no bearing on awarding an appointment to a particular individual, *'it shouldn't make any difference, I feel it should be about what I can bring to the post not whether I fill some demographic'* (Male, 30+, BAME, North of England).

3. Conclusion

This pilot survey of Common Purpose graduates showed some interesting trends, and the findings lean towards a need to ask further questions. To add value to the findings, there is a need for further research, in particular, among the younger age group (<30 years) from particular ethnic groups. Comparison of appointments of a similar nature in the public sector and in the private and not-for-profit sectors would also be interesting.

Issues were raised during the course of the survey regarding issues of sexuality, education and socio-economic class in the diversity of representation in public appointments that could require further research.

Whilst the data generated by the survey showed few differences in experiences by gender, some responses to the final question about the importance of diversity suggested that the different experiences of men and women might need some further investigation.

Annex A:

Detailed Methodology

Common Purpose conducted a study of a section of its graduate community, to examine levels of public awareness of national public appointment opportunities across England and Wales. To ensure a balanced sample, a questionnaire was sent to all graduates since 2003, not just those from under-represented groups. We asked profiling questions on the questionnaire to allow us to filter the responses by age, gender, region, ethnicity and those with disabilities.

The survey was sent to all graduates in England and Wales from the last 6 years. The questionnaire was sent out via a link in a personalised e-mail on Friday 27 February 2009, to 6378 recipients and the study suspended on Thursday 5 March 2009. Of the 659 responses, approximately 75% of these were completed during the first 3 days of the survey.

The survey consisted of 11 multiple choice questions, with a final qualitative question with text box, and several opportunities throughout the survey to expand or qualify on answers. The questionnaire can be found in Annex B.

All the questions had to be answered by each respondent, with the exception of questions 7 and 8. Respondents had to answer either question 7 or question 8, depending on their answer to question 6.

Nine respondents who had made strong statements regarding the process of application or challenges of the accessibility of National Public Appointments, or had indicated they would be interested in discussing the topic in more detail, were contacted and a short follow-up phone interview took place. These were informal conversations, where the interviewees were asked to expand on the answers they had given, and voice more deeply the issues they felt were particularly salient to the issue of diversity of representation. The interviewees were selected on the basis of a particularly strong response to questions in the survey, or those who had expressed a desire to expand on the answers they had given, and were not a randomly selected sample of the respondent group.

The sample group

Selecting the last six years of the graduate community we knew would provide a large enough sample group to give diversity of ethnicity, location, gender, age and disability. Common Purpose runs programmes in approximately 30 locations across England and Wales.

Profile of Respondents

The survey was sent to 6378 of our graduates. Of these approximately 15% came back undelivered, or with 'out of office' messages. The final response rate was approximately 12%.

The respondents can be broken down as follows. This is generally representative of our database as a whole.

	Respondents % (n)
Male	54% (n=358)
Female	46% (n=301)
29 and under	6% (n=42)
30 and over	94% (n=617)
Consider themselves to have a disability	9% (n=57)
Do not consider themselves to have a disability	91% (n=602)
Asian	10% (n=67)
Black	5% (n=36)
White	78% (n=514)
Other	6% (n=42)
Location	
North of England	36% (n=235)
Midlands	19% (n=127)
South of England	41% (n=268)
Wales	4% (n=29)
Total	100% (n=659)

For the purposes of analysis, we aggregated the respondents of different ethnicities in order to give larger group sizes. Black British and Black other respondents became one group, as did Asian British and Asian Other, White British and White Other, and Mixed racial origin and other. Of those who selected the 'other' option, a range of different ethnicities were detailed, including some who declared themselves to be either white, or from a BAME background. Responses to 'Other' included the following: Irish, Kashmiri, Welsh, Scottish, Jewish, Caribbean and Iraqi.

Limitations of method and sampling

There were several limitations that should be acknowledged when analysing the data and considering the findings.

Timing

Due to the quick turnaround time, the survey was only open for 6 days, from Friday 27 February to Thursday 5 March. This limited time for response meant that approximately 15% of the sample group were either unavailable to complete the survey, or had moved jobs and their e-mails came back undelivered with no time to follow up and resend the survey. Given the time restraints of the project this could not be avoided.

Responses were therefore biased towards those who were able to respond sooner, and those who are active on the 360 alumni website and those who have not recently moved roles or changed their contact details. The breakdown of respondents to those sent the e-mail suggests that this is a subject that resonates more with some groups than with others.

Mobility

Many graduates move around and the Common Purpose graduate database can take time to catch up with its graduates' movements. Some groups are more mobile than others, for example Common Purpose's Frontrunner programme for pre-career leaders has a high percentage of university students as participants, who leave university and change their e-mail addresses, restricting the number of responses from those in the younger age group.

Age

The Common Purpose database has a low proportion of under-30 year olds compared to the national average, and it is therefore harder to get a large sample of this particular age group.

Other variables are broadly in line with the national average.

Annex B:

Diversity of representation in public appointments survey

We are interested in finding out what experience different groups of people have of public appointments.

1. How aware are you of public appointment opportunities?
 - Not aware
 - A little aware
 - Very aware
2. Do you hold, or have you ever held, a local public appointment of leadership position?
 - Yes
 - No

Please specify.....

3. What would you see as the benefits of taking up a public appointment?
 - Developing my skills
 - Enhancing my career
 - Benefitting my community
 - Benefitting society
 - Other.....
4. Do you hold, or have you ever held, a national public appointment or leadership position?
 - Yes
 - No

Please specify.....

5. How have you heard about national public appointment opportunities?
 - Haven't heard of any
 - National press
 - Regional or local press
 - Internet
 - Word of mouth
 - Know someone who holds one
 - Was asked to apply
 - Other.....

6. Have you ever considered applying for a national public appointment?
- No – never occurred to me
 - No – not interested
 - No – don't have the time
 - No – didn't think I was qualified
 - No – not relevant for me
 - No – don't think I'm from the right demographic background
 - No – due to a long standing physical or mental ill-health or disability
 - No – the salary and benefits weren't attractive
 - Yes – but have been unsuccessful
 - Yes – considered applying but didn't
 - Yes – applied for one
7. If you answered no to question 6, what would encourage you to find out more or apply for a national public appointment?
- Seeing an interesting advert
 - Somebody suggesting I put my name forward
 - If I was invited
 - Talking to someone who is already appointed
 - Clear information on how the application process works
 - Seeing it as a career enhancing opportunity
 - Other.....
8. If you answered yes to question 6, what would encourage you to find out more or apply for a national public appointment?
- Seeing an interesting advert
 - Somebody suggesting I put my name forward
 - If I was invited
 - Talking to someone who is already appointed
 - Clear information on how the application process works
 - Seeing it as a career enhancing opportunity
 - Other.....

9. Has anyone ever asked if you were interested in applying for a public appointment?
- Yes
 - No
10. Do you think you would be willing to apply for a public appointment in the future?
- Yes
 - No
11. If you were to apply/have applied for a public appointment, would you be willing to declare your ethnicity or any disability information?
- Yes
 - Yes, but only if.....
 - No, because.....

If you answered 'yes, but only if...', or 'no, because...' to the previous question, please state a reason.

12. What do you see as the benefits of having a range of people from different backgrounds in public appointments?
13. Your gender:
- Male
 - Female
14. Which age bracket do you fall in?
- Up to 29
 - 30 and over
15. Where do you live?
- North of England
 - Midlands
 - South of England
 - Wales

16. What is your ethnic or cultural origin?

- Black British
- Black Other
- Asian British
- Asian Other
- White British
- White Other
- Mixed Racial Origin
- Other.....

17. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

- Yes
- No

A survey by Common Purpose

UK site: www.commonpurpose.org.uk

International site: www.commonpurpose.org

