

## Recruitment Case Study - Queen Alexandra College

Queen Alexandra College is a Specialist College in Birmingham, supporting people with visual impairment, those on the autistic spectrum including Asperger's syndrome, those with moderate to severe learning difficulties, physical difficulties and other needs. Based in Birmingham, it faces competition from other colleges in recruiting governors but nevertheless has a strong history of attracting people to the role. The board reviews its skills and diversity annually as well as whenever a vacancy arises or is due to arise.

Recently the college has taken a range of actions specifically aimed at improving the diversity of its board. Alison Lydon, Clerk to Governors, explains that the desire for diversity included ethnicity, representation, disability and gender and that this needed to be balanced against ensuring appropriate skills for governance. She acknowledged that over time this had proved a challenge e.g. in 2012 the board had a gender balance but four resignations, all female, two from a minority background and one disable, changed the diversity balance dramatically. The board agreed at this point to look for new ways to improve board diversity which included use of SGOSS (School Governors One Stop Shop); NCVO (the National Council for Voluntary Organisations); and with contacts at the Network for Black Professionals in Birmingham

It was also at this time that the board decided to provide an introductory meeting for interested parties, which comprised a meeting with the clerk and a tour of the college, giving them the opportunity to find out more about the role and if it was right for them. The Clerk describes this as helpful; a previous recruitment round had resulted in 17 applicants and the introductory meeting has prevented wasting potential college and applicant time on unfruitful interviews.

Initially from this six applicants were interviewed, two were initially appointed and a further two at a later date, and two were rejected. However this recruitment round did not achieve the diversity of appointments hoped for.

This year a further recruitment round was undertaken and a different recruitment approach was taken. This resulted from the Chair, Chris Bradshaw, contacting an expert in the field - Karl George OBE who is MD of The Governance Forum. He assisted directly by putting the details of the vacancies out to alumni of the Forum's training courses who have a strong diversity balance. The Chair notes that this approach ensured that not only was the college focusing on potential governors that would increase its board diversity, but also that these would be people with relevant skills and professional or business backgrounds. The board was willing to increase its size to assist in achieving its diversity aims (the board is now 17 and the intention is that this will reduce back naturally with expected attrition providing it maintains the appropriate range of skills).

Seven expressions of interest were received, five applied after the initial meeting and in May 2014 three members were appointed, two from the contact with Karl George's organisation and one (a female) through a local community organisation but with very relevant professional experience. This approach has led to overall improvements of 8% in the gender balance, 11% in ethnic minority balance, and a significant move to a younger age balance on the board.

Alison Lydon, clerk, notes that boards "have to be active to seek governors" and continue to work at it, also noting that "you don't know what you don't know" and this means that you also have to actively seek the support of others and gain from their knowledge and expertise and contacts.

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