



# Diversity Principles Framework

Guidance for executive search firms and higher education providers working together on board appointments

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## Foreword

This framework has been produced based on the recommendations stated in the published study – [Increasing the Diversity of Senior Leaders in Higher Education: The Role of Executive Search Firms](#) – conducted by Professor Simonetta Manfredi in 2017 addressing the role of executive search firms in promoting diversity in higher education. The framework has been adapted for board level positions based on the proposed framework from that paper, combined with the government’s [revised voluntary code for executive search firms](#).

Representatives from leading executive search firms, HR directors of universities and specialists collaborated together with Professor Manfredi and Advance HE to develop, review and shape the framework to ensure it reflects the needs and priorities of the higher education sector in regard to ensuring broadening diversity within sector boards.

The purpose of this framework is to provide hiring institutions and executive search firms with a guide for best practice when conducting searches for board level vacancies in higher education. The framework may

be used as guidance for increasing the representation of candidates from diverse backgrounds in individual searches, as well as providing initiatives that executive search firms can develop to support the higher education sector to grow a more diverse pipeline. The document is intended to be a practical resource to highlight the actions both universities and search firms can take to further diversity in the sector in partnership.

The Diversity Principles Framework is a joint initiative between Advance HE, the higher education sector and executive search firms working with the sector. The framework was developed to be used by all search firms working in higher education, but particular thanks is extended to Perrett Laver, Odgers Berndtson, Minerva Search, Saxton Bampfylde, Harvey Nash, GatenbySanderson and The Miles Partnership for their contributions.

The framework is not designed to be exhaustive and many firms will wish to develop additional strategies and schemes beyond the scope of this document to support the sector and provide diverse candidate fields to their clients.



## Diversity principles framework

This framework follows the life cycle of a typical search, identifying areas in which both the higher education provider (HEP) and the executive search firm (ESF) can address to ensure diversity is duly considered. The

framework concludes by addressing areas where HEPs and ESFs can support the sector to improve the pipeline outside the scope of individual searches.

	Higher education provider	Executive search firm
<h1>1</h1> <p>Promoting diversity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Develop an equality strategy highlighting the benefits of inclusive and diverse boards and outlining what positive action measures are proposed to achieve a diverse board.</li> <li>+ Publish a message from the Chair which states commitment to diversity and encourages diverse perspectives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Promote diversity and the firm's approach to redressing the balance of boards visibly on the website and in promotional material. This may include diversity statistics on their success rate of appointing diverse candidates on boards or a description of their approach and values.</li> <li>+ Advertise involvement in, and commitment to, this framework on the website and other public forums.</li> <li>+ Hold regular equality training for all level across the organisation and encourage sharing of ideas and best practice among colleagues.</li> </ul>
<h1>2</h1> <p>Procurement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ To ensure that the HEP's procurement process has due regard to equality. This can include questioning the ESF on their track record and approach in achieving greater diversity of applicants both in their written proposal and during a pitch (if applicable).</li> <li>+ To ensure robust assessment the HEP may consider assessing ESFs on their values and approach to diversity as well as their experience in producing diverse candidate pools.</li> </ul>	

## 3

## Briefing

## Higher education provider

- + Set realistic but stretching diversity targets in consultation with the ESF at the start of the search process.
- + Consider conducting a skills audit regularly to inform the brief to the ESF.

## Executive search firm

- + Challenge and advise the HEP to have due regard to the diversity of the board at the start of every search, considering the diversity composition of the current board.
- + Encourage boards to focus on potential candidates' skills and experiences, including transferable skills, rather than previous board experience to widen the pool of applicants.
- + Seek clarity on, and clearly define, the shared values and motivators the HEP expects from candidates.

- + Develop an open and candid partnership allowing for the ESF to challenge the HEP's approach to diversity and the HEP to hold the ESF accountable to diversity targets.

## 4

## Adverts

- + Consult widely across the institution, in so far as practicable, to draw on a wide range of perspectives when developing the job specification and advert. This may include equality and diversity experts in the organisation.

It is advisable that adverts:

- + Include contact details of the person in charge of the search so potential candidates can enquire about the position.
- + Ensure that job descriptions and person specifications do not over-specify for particular skills unnecessarily.
- + Explicitly encourage applications from candidates from underrepresented groups.
- + Use inclusive language and diverse marketing and images in advertising and further particulars to convey a commitment to diversity and inclusion to prospective candidates.

- + It is recommended that vacancies are openly advertised alongside the search to ensure transparency. Relevant advertising portals which may provide access to diverse candidates include Advance HE's Board Vacancies Portal, Women on Boards and KPMG Connect on Board.
- + Make use of Advance HE's guidance on producing inclusive job descriptions, person specifications and adverts.

## 5

## Longlist

## Higher education provider

- + If the pre-agreed targets have not been met then the HEP may wish to request the ESF provide an account of the measures taken in attempt to achieve the target.

## Executive search firm

- + Conduct a creative search which reaches a broad field of candidates. Methods may include making use of networks and portals which promote diversity.
- + When contacting candidates, transparent communication is advised and, where possible, potential candidates asked directly about their interest in the role rather than the use of ambiguous language which may mislead the candidate about the purpose of the contact.
- + It is advised that documentation should be provided to the panel for all candidates who have applied to the vacancy.
- + Collect applicants' equality monitoring data.

- + Good practice is for the assessment of candidates to be undertaken against the selection criteria and job specification to ensure a fair and robust process.
- + Where hiring committees are split over the suitability of a candidate from a protected characteristic under-represented in the organisation, the committee may wish to consider positive action by inviting the candidate to interview.
- + It is recommended that both parties hold a candid discussion about successes and challenges in attracting diverse candidates during the search in order to learn from these in the future.

## 6

## Shortlist

- + In cases where candidates with underrepresented protected characteristics have not been recommended by the ESF, the HEP may wish to challenge the ESF to provide reasons for this decision.

- + Good practice is for two equality trained consultants to interview candidates and assess them against the selection criteria. The purpose of this interview should be made clear to candidates.
- + Clear and constructive feedback provided by the ESF when candidates are unsuccessful can support candidates to develop and learn from the interview experience.

	Higher education provider	Executive search firm
<h1>7</h1> <h2>Interviews</h2>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Ensure interview panels include diverse members from groups which are under-represented in the board and leadership of the organisation. Where possible, panels should comprise 50% female representation and include representation from BME groups.</li> <li>+ Ensure that panel members have received equality training and that this is refreshed on a regular basis.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Provide guidance to the panel to avoid unconscious bias and ‘groupthink’ during the panel interview and throughout the selection procedure.</li> <li>+ Consider constructing interview questions that are guided by the selection criteria.</li> </ul>
<h1>8</h1> <h2>Candidate support</h2>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ The selection process should be designed with the candidate at the centre and be sufficiently flexible to accommodate for the candidate.</li> <li>+ It is recommended interview dates are identified as early as possible to allow candidates sufficient time to make arrangements. Where possible, attempts should be made to hold interviews during core business hours.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Provide guidance and mentorship to candidates including CV development and interview technique as well as informally guiding them through the selection process.</li> </ul>
<h1>9</h1> <h2>Onboarding</h2>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Provide opportunities to shadow boards as part of training or through apprenticeship schemes.</li> <li>+ Offer mentorship to new board members with the Chair or other experienced board members.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Develop a comprehensive and tailored training scheme and onboarding processes to support new board members, including additional support for those who are less familiar with the higher education sector.</li> </ul>

	Higher education provider	Executive search firm
<b>10</b> <b>Succession planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Consider working with ESFs on longer term engagements to identify future board members rather than only on individual searches which require candidates for immediate appointment.</li> <li>+ Collect equality data on current board members to identify under-representation on the current board.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Support HEPs to consider longer term horizons for appointing board members, including developing a pipeline of talent and conducting a talent audit. This will allow boards to identify and engage with future members with the required skills on an ongoing basis.</li> </ul>
<b>11</b> <b>Pipeline</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Nurture a pipeline of talent through developing initiatives such as mentoring, sponsored events and networking opportunities.</li> <li>+ Promote higher education boards among networks in other sectors and advocate for the professional and personal value of serving on a higher education board.</li> </ul>





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