

Diversity week

Including people from diverse backgrounds contributes to the health and sustainability of a board, the wider organisation and the community that organisation is there to serve.

We kicked-off our 2020 Festival of Governance by including a diverse range of voices, listening to them and learning from their experiences.

LGBT allies

We started the week with an interactive development session led by [Stonewall](#). The session was to develop an understanding of LGBTQ+ identities and experiences in order to confidently advocate for more inclusive workplaces.

Through debate and insight we learned to understand why LGBTQ+ inclusion at work is important and about the benefits of creating a more inclusive culture on people and organisations.

We discussed and explored the meaning of the term ally and identified the first steps they might take to be more active and visible. Some of the thinking behind this includes:

- Uplift the most marginalised in society – linking to other voices and identities
- Look to understand the adversity LGBTQ+ face – educate yourself personally
- Make sure there is LGBTQ+ representation and voice wherever possible
- Consider how policies for colleagues and the community can reflect the LGBTQ+ voice
- Take immediate action: what will you do today, over the next month, and by next year?

Race – a glacial concept

The [Seacole Group](#) brought their knowledge and unique cultural intelligence to a seminar designed to help NHS boards govern effectively.

The group's vision is that NHS boards reflect the ethnic diversity of the patients, staff and



community they serve and their purpose is to strengthen black and minority ethnic (BAME) NED representation and voice on NHS boards up and down the country.

Sir Simon Stevens, CEO of the NHS, has pledged that 19% of staff will be BAME by 2025. So what can NHS boards do to be more effective?

- If you have a person with BAME characteristics who's a fully paid-up member of your board, their contribution must be valued equally – whether they're talking about race or any other matter. Diversity is not the same as inclusion – the job's not done just because you've recruited.
- Engage with reflective board development in preparation for a diverse board and organisation.
- Commit to a progressive plan that is sustainable over the long term and avoids quick fixes.
- Set stretching targets with data-driven deep-dives and attention to hotspots at a national level.
- Do not ask junior staff to hold senior managers to account – find better strategies.
- Offer shadowing and career opportunities to expose BAME staff to nuanced senior level leadership.
- The right people with the right experiences and skills need to be appointed in the right positions on boards – the inclusion of people from BAME backgrounds on boards needs to be successful and productive rather than tokenistic.
- If your board doesn't yet measure up in this area, the Seacole Group is there to help with input on plans and advice on recruitment.

Tools already in place to enable change include the [NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard](#), staff networks and the [NHS People Plan](#).

Board members were encouraged to really understand the people that contribute to their boards and the impact they have on the organisation.

Steps Drama actionable allyship

A live dramatised presentation of a typical meeting at a fictional NHS trust coached in real time by the participants to change behaviours. [Steps Drama](#) demonstrated the impact of bad behaviours and, with the participants, showed the impact that behavioural change can have.

We learned that an ally is someone who supports conversations about race and actionable allyship with colleagues; explores what is white privilege and systemic racism, and how they can manifest themselves; and understands what we can all do to be supportive, actionable allies.

We also learned as a group that no matter how diverse we think we are in thought, unconscious bias exists. If we accept that different people have different experiences, developing different opinions, priorities and bias, then we can see the gaps in the board's decision-making and address them – with the help of allies.

White privilege doesn't mean that as a white person you did not experience adversity and it does not take away from any of your achievements. It simply means that there are some specific privileges you have that aren't shared with people from non-white backgrounds.

So how can we be actionable allies?

- It's not good enough to agree but not speak up
- Understand micro-aggressions and be an active ally when you notice them
- Allow opportunities for less experienced people with BAME characteristics to shadow, be mentored or sponsored in a system that is inherently biased towards the status quo
- Not every issue that is about race needs to be diagnosed as racism
- Take your ego out of it, listen to what's being said and not thinking about how you feel about it
- Believe people's experiences – they are the experts
- Take responsibility for your own learning

Feeling old yet?

If you want to feel young, spend some time with an NHS board, where more than 90% of non-executive directors are 50 or older, together with 65% of executive directors.

There are reasons for this. As we said in our bulletin [Trusting millennials](#), boards value expertise gained through experience. But as we also said in that bulletin, COVID-19 and the NHS People Plan both underline the importance of getting input from a new kind of expert: people who learn and quickly adapt based on their own lived experience. And they tend to be younger.

During diversity week, GGI staged an internal debate about how we could include young voices and action in the work we do. So, what did we learn? First, boards need to sharpen their understanding of what young people can offer.

They need to embrace their fresh perspective but they also need to accept that young people will not be the finished article. The views they express might seem unpolished and naively single-minded but that also makes them fresh and uncompromised and therefore worth listening to.

Because of their lack of experience, young people might need more training than their older counterparts to make a useful contribution. But older members must also train themselves to listen to that contribution with open minds. There should be no conflict between innocence and experience.

It's also important to avoid tokenism. Don't invite a young person onto a board and expect them to represent their generation and speak about nothing but youth. Young people on boards should be treated just like their older colleagues – their views should be sought on everything.

As for GGI, we recognise the importance of offering meaningful work experience through internships – work that exposes young people to senior colleagues and gives them real responsibility. We note the recommendations from NHS child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) about how to improve and value the input of teenagers. And we applaud – and aspire to emulate – the way organisations such as [English National Opera](#), the [British Museum](#) and the [Salzburg Global Seminar](#) have targeted young people in their efforts to build a better, fairer world.

Our three lessons

At the end of much fabulous and rich conversation during diversity week, three key lessons shone through:

- Diversity is not the same as inclusion. Good boards will empower people, rather than assume they will adapt.
- Organisational fit is linked with a system that hasn't traditionally worked for everyone, consider recruiting people who don't fit.
- Never assume that you know everything – unconscious bias exists. This is why we need diversity and inclusion with active allies onside.