

Diversity of governors in higher education

An overview of our current knowledge of diversity of governors in Higher Education

Dr Natasha Codioli McMaster

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Foreword

We are delighted to launch this report, the first of its kind to detail the diversity characteristics of UK Higher Education Institutions (HEI) governors using the enhanced HESA records for the academic year 2018/19. This is an important milestone for the sector and can help to track progress to benefit students, staff and wider society.

The evidence in this report shows us that progress has continued to be made with more appointments of women, however representation of those with other protected characteristics is limited. It is important to note however that we are not simply striving for numbers to fill places. This is about ensuring that our governance structures reflect modern society with its richness of lived experiences and talent in order for us to deliver our missions with conviction and authenticity, and navigate our position in the world.

Many if not all of our members have issues to address such as widening participation of students from different groups, ensuring fair degree outcomes, addressing pay gaps, supporting pipelines of diverse teaching and research talent, and connecting with and serving their wider communities. Boards need to be equipped with a range of perspectives to navigate and challenge on these issues to support progress being made. As a governor, it is appropriate to ask how the board will be strengthened in this regard and how members will be supported to build their confidence and capability to challenge on these matters appropriately.

By understanding our own composition of boards, and by comparing this to other sectors, UK HEI's begin to drive and track the systematic change in our diversity.

Victoria Holbrook, Assistant Director, Governance, Advance HE



1. What we knew, and what we didn't know

In higher education (HE), governing bodies (also referred to as the Council, Board of Governors, Board of Directors, Board of Trustees and the Court) are specifically responsible for the institution's policies, strategic direction and oversight of compliance with regulation and financial functioning. They consider the recommendations from senior management in carrying out this work, as well as overseeing the work of the senior management team (Advance HE, 2018).

Overall, there is consensus in the sector that increasing diversity of governing boards in UK HE would be a positive step, but questions remain about how effectively this is put into practice. Advance HE regularly publishes guidance and convenes discussions on increasing board diversity, including the Board Diversification Project (see Tester 2018; Tester and Manfredi, 2018). Furthermore, the HE Code of Governance (The Committee of University Chairs, 2020), written to support effective governance within UK HEIs, makes multiple references to diversity throughout. For example:

‘The governing body must promote equality and diversity throughout the institution, including in relation to its own operation.’

However, equal representation of people from different backgrounds, and with different identities, has been a longstanding issue in HE leadership positions (and across other sectors). It is important that institutions ensure everyone has equal opportunity to be appointed to the board regardless characteristics like gender, ethnicity or disability status. Boards with greater diversity may not only improve the running and effectiveness of the board, but also promote more challenging discussions and shine a light on alternative perspectives and experiences. Governing boards that reflect the characteristics of a Higher Education Institution's (HEI) staff and student body are also better placed to represent their needs and concerns. There is tentative evidence that better representation of women and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicity (BAME) people on boards can even increase the financial performance of organisations (Hunt, Prince, Dixon-Fyle and Yee, 2018).

While the equality characteristics of staff in HEIs are largely driven by historical hiring decisions and inequalities in access, particularly for the more senior staff, the same is not the case for governors who typically remain in post for fewer than 10 years. Compared to other areas of employment, tenure on governing boards is typically a shorter-term responsibility, offering the opportunity to address diversity concerns relatively quickly. However, since people recruited to governing boards are often from senior leadership positions they remain likely to have faced barriers to entry to these positions earlier on in their career.

Despite the interest in board diversity and relative ease of enacting timely change, little data existed related to the diversity of governors in the HE sector prior to this report. Until recently, open data about the identity characteristics of university board members were not even systematically collected by institutions, let alone analysed and interpreted.

1.1 WomenCount

An important exception to this lack of information about the diversity of HE boards is Norma Jarboe's (2018) research into the representation of women in leadership positions in HE, conducted in 2013, 2016 and 2018.

Diversity was assessed through classification of information and biographies of governors taken from individual HEI websites. For the 2018 study, for which research was conducted between May and June 2018, 173 institutions were reviewed in the analysis, including over 3,000 governors.

The composition of boards of governors in HEIs

Governors in HEIs consist of external and internal members, along with at least one student member (usually the President of the Students' Union). External and internal members have different appointment processes and tenures. There are also different levels of influence and responsibility on governing boards and in this respect, HEI boards are similar to those in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Chairs and vice-chairs oversee the running of the governing board, ensuring they are working effectively to lead the strategic direction of the organisation. They can also play an instrumental role in the recruitment of senior staff at the HEI (including the vice-chancellor).

HE board members are typically not paid for their time, although there are some exceptions to this. For an overview of HE governors pay and debates on this issue, see Alison Wheaton's (2019) discussion paper. Importantly, decisions not to pay board members may act as a barrier to diversity by restricting the applicant pool to people who are able to take on unpaid work.

In 2018, the WomenCount report estimated that the majority of governors (66%) were external members, 27% were internal members, and 7% were students (Jarboe, 2018).

Data from the most recent WomenCount report point to a steady increase of women on boards between 2013 and 2018. Women made up 32% of HEI board members in 2013 and 40% in 2018. Gender parity was almost achieved for student members in 2018, 48% of whom were women, compared to 43% of internal members, and 38% of external members. However, 57% of students in HE were women in the academic year 2017/18. There was less gender diversity at the highest levels of leadership of the board, however, this has also improved over time. In 2018, 27% of chairs were women, up from just 12% in 2013. It also remained the case that men made up the majority (67%) of new chair appointments between 2016 and 2018.

Gender parity suggests that 50% of board members are women. Given the small size of boards, and the fact that just one or a few additional board members can skew this

percentage considerably, many organisations opt for a more flexible target of 40-60%. Even if gender balance is defined as a 40:60 gender split, only 11 institutions out of 173 had ‘balanced boards’ in both 2016 and 2018.

Because data was collected through websites and information published in online biographies, which usually give an accurate indication of a person’s gender (if not through their name and presentation, through the use of gendered pronouns), data could not be collected for other identity characteristics less commonly disclosed on these platforms (such as ethnicity, age and disability status). To collect this data, surveys or systematic collection of self-reported data is necessary.

2. Insights from HESA 2018/19 returns

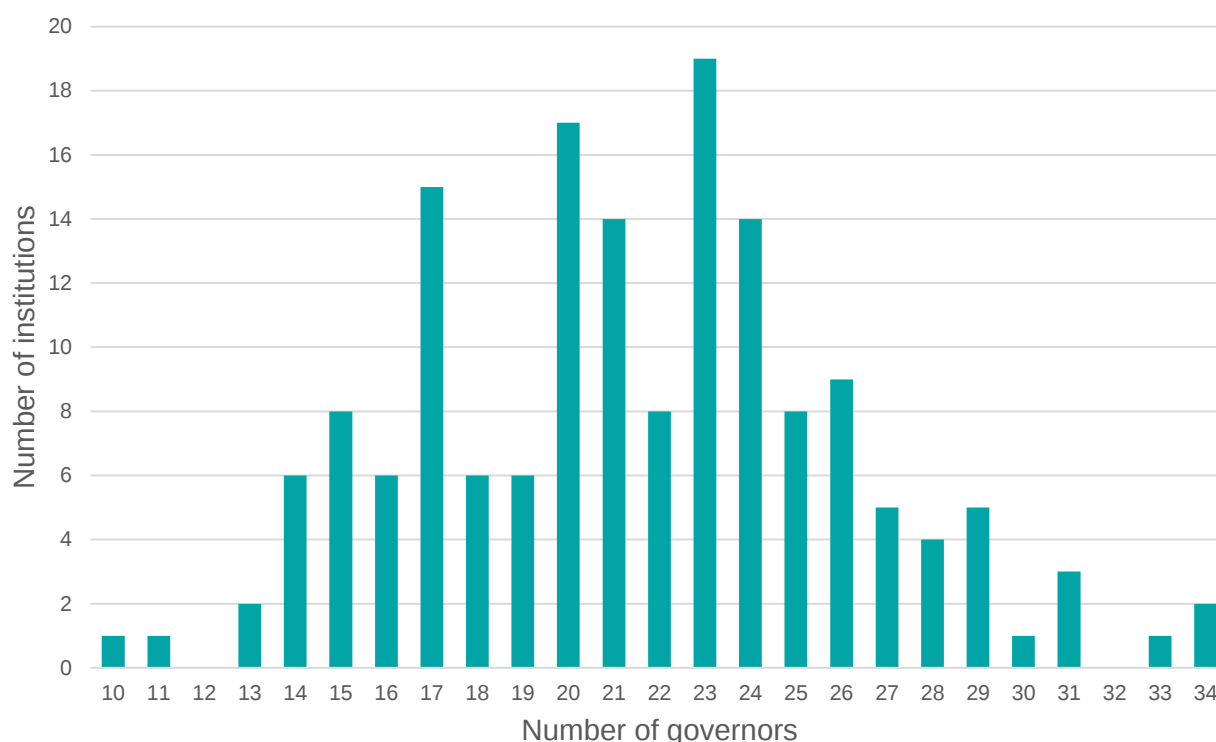
The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data is the primary source of information about the diversity of staff and students in UK HE. HESA data presents an annual diversity snapshot of the staff and student populations, analysis of which is published in Advance HE’s statistical reports (Advance HE, 2019a, b).

In the academic year 2017/18, the Office for Students ceased the collection of data about governors in HE. In response, during the same academic year, HESA included governors as eligible for staff data returns. However, data returns were very low in the first year of data collection. For the year 2018/19, HESA amended their data collection processes and achieved much higher returns. This had enabled a more comprehensive analysis of the diversity of governors both across the HE sector and within institutions, including analysis of identity characteristics beyond gender, for example ethnicity, disability and age, and intersectional analysis to identify more specific underrepresented groups.

2.1 Size of UK HEI boards

The average numbers of active governors sitting on the boards of these institutions was 21.5, with a range from ten governors at one institution, to 34 governors at two institutions. The majority of institutions had 20 or more active governors. Overall, 3460 governors were included in the data.

Figure 1: Number of governors on the boards of UK HEIs.



2.2 Equality characteristic of UK HEI governors

Data from the 2018/19 HESA returns show that the gender composition of UK HEI governing boards differed considerably from the staff profile. While women made up 54.6% of HE staff, just 41.9% of governing board members were women. This was similar to the findings from the 2018 WomenCount report, which estimated that 40% of governors were women.

White people were also overrepresented on governing boards compared to the overall staff composition. In particular, 8.1% of staff were Asian, compared to 5.3% of governors. On the other hand, while relatively low, the proportion of governors who were Black was similar to overall staff, at 2.6% compared to 2.7%.

The proportions of disabled governors and staff were similar, at 5.4% and 5.3%. However, this is much lower than the UK population estimates of 19% of working-age adults (Department for Work and Pensions, 2020). Proportions of staff in each impairment group were also similar across governors and all staff. Staff members and governors with a long-standing illness or health condition made up the majority of disabled people.

Overall, larger proportions of governors were in the higher age groups compared to all staff members. Around a quarter of staff were aged 26-35 (24.9%) and 36-45 (26.7%) compared to 3.0% and 9.6% of governors respectively. Over half of governors were 56 years old or over (53.9%) compared to just 17.6% of staff overall.

Finally, the proportion of governors who were UK-nationals was substantially higher than the overall staff population (93.2% compared to 79.0%).

Table 1: Equality characteristics of UK HE governors and staff.

	Governors		HE staff overall	
	N	%	N	%
Sex				
Female	1,445	41.9	240,215	54.6
Male	2,000	58.1	199,575	45.4
Ethnicity				
White	2,570	89.2	350,085	85.5
Asian	155	5.3	33,305	8.1
Black	75	2.6	10,945	2.7
Mixed	60	2.1	8,735	2.1
Other	20	0.7	6,315	1.5
Disability				
Non-disabled	3,270	94.6	416,845	94.7
Two or more disabilities, impairments or conditions	15	0.4	2,045	0.5
Specific learning difficulty	25	0.8	4,995	1.1
A long-standing illness or health condition	45	1.4	5,580	1.3
A mental health condition	20	0.6	3,285	0.7
A physical impairment or mobility issues	25	0.7	1,885	0.4
Deaf or serious hearing impairment	20	0.5	1,170	0.3
Other	35	1.0	4,145	0.9
Age				
25 and under	225	7.0	26,575	6.0
26-35	95	3.0	109,540	24.9
36-45	305	9.6	117,480	26.7
46-55	845	26.4	108,830	24.7
56-65	1,160	36.3	66,565	15.1
66 years and over	565	17.6	10,960	2.5
Nationality				
UK	2,795	93.2	345,600	79.0
EU	100	3.4	53,640	12.3
Non-EU	100	3.4	38,165	8.7

2.3 Intersectional relationships across governor equality characteristics

To fully understand the state of diversity in UK HE governing boards, it is also important to consider the intersection of equality characteristics of governing board members. For example, whether the equality characteristics of male and female governors differ widely, or whether people from underrepresented groups are primarily drawn from particular age groups or nationalities. The tables below consider the gender profile, followed by the disability and ethnicity profile, of staff member's equality characteristics.

Table 2 shows Governor equality characteristics by gender. The ethnic profile of governors was more diverse among women than men. 13.0% of female governors were from BAME backgrounds, including 6.1% Asian and 3.3% Black, compared to 9.2% male governors (4.8% Asian and 2.1% Black). A slightly higher proportion of female governors were disabled (6.0%) and were non-UK nationals (7.6%) compared to male governors (4.9% and 6.2% respectively). Women on governing boards also had a younger age profile compared to men. A fifth of male governors were 66 years or over (20.3%) compared to 14.0% of female governors, and 8.3% of female governors were aged 25 or under compared to 6.0% of male governors.

Table 2: Ethnicity, disability status, age and nationality of UK HEI governors by gender

	Women		Men	
	N	%	N	%
Ethnicity				
White	1,060	87.0	1,505	90.8
Asian	75	6.1	80	4.8
Black	40	3.3	35	2.1
Mixed	35	2.9	25	1.6
Other	10	0.7	10	0.7
Disability				
Disabled	85	6.0	100	4.9
Non-disabled	1,360	94.0	1,900	95.1
Age				
25 and under	110	8.3	110	6.0
26-35	45	3.3	50	2.8
36-45	160	11.9	140	7.6
46-55	375	28.1	465	25.2
56-65	460	34.4	700	38.0
66 years and over	190	14.0	375	20.3
Nationality				
UK	1,165	92.4	1,630	93.8
Non-UK	95	7.6	105	6.2

Table 3 outlines the ethnicity, age and nationality of governors by disability status. Gender is not included in this table because the disability profile of male and female staff was considered in table 2. A higher proportion of non-disabled governors were white compared to disabled governors (89.7% compared to 82.4%). While numbers of disabled governors from BAME background were small, 6.6% were Asian and 4.9% were Black, compared to 5.3% and 2.4% of non-disabled governors. As with differences by gender, the group traditionally underrepresented among governors (disabled people) had a younger age profile compared to the group traditionally over-represented (non-disabled people). In contrast, a lower proportion of disabled governors were non-UK nationals compared non-disabled governors (5.0% compared to 6.9%).

Table 3: Ethnicity, age and nationality of UK HEI governors by disability status

	Disabled		Non-disabled	
	N	%	N	%
Ethnicity				
White	150	82.4	2,420	89.7
Asian	10	6.6	140	5.3
Black	10	4.9	65	2.4
Mixed	5	3.8	55	2.0
Other	5	2.2	15	0.6
Age				
25 and under	35	18.1	190	6.3
26-35	15	8.2	80	2.7
36-45	20	11.0	285	9.5
46-55	35	19.2	810	26.9
56-65	45	23.6	1,115	37.1
66 years and over	35	19.8	525	17.5
Nationality				
UK	170	95.0	2,625	93.1
Non-UK	10	5.0	195	6.9

Table 4 outlines staff age and nationality by BAME/white identity. BAME governors had a much younger age profile compared to white governors. 17.2% of BAME governors were 25 or under, compared to just 5.2% of white governors. At the other side of the age distribution, 18.0% of white governors were 66 years and over, compared to 6.6% of BAME governors. A higher proportion of BAME governors were non-UK nationals, 18.9% compared to 5.5% of white governors.

Table 4: Age and nationality of UK HEI governors by BAME/white identity

	White		BAME	
	N	%	N	%
Age				
25 and under	130	5.2	50	17.2
26-35	55	2.3	25	8.6
36-45	220	8.9	50	17.2
46-55	670	26.9	90	29.0
56-65	965	38.7	65	21.5
66 years and over	450	18.0	20	6.6
Nationality				
UK	2350	94.5	235	81.1
Non-UK	135	5.5	55	18.9

Overall, a similar picture emerged that governors from groups traditionally underrepresented in leadership roles in Higher Education tended to have a younger age profile, particularly to be 25 years old or under. While the data does not include information about the role of each governor, this suggests that many of these governors are student members, who provide an important voice to decisions but have shorter terms and may have less power to influence major discussions. This is an important consideration for HEIs going forward; to ensure that not only are governing boards diverse and reflective of students and staff at the institution, but that governors in the most influential positions (particularly chairs and vice-chairs) are equally diverse.

Another trend observed was that governors from traditionally underrepresented groups are also more likely to be from another underrepresented group. Thus, while it may appear that the overall diversity of each equality characteristic is increasing, this is driven by the inclusion of a small number of individuals. These members hold the additional responsibility of representing voices of multiple groups of traditionally underrepresented people.

2.4 Governor equality characteristics at different types of institutions

Because the diversity profile of staff and students differ considerably across types of HEIs, it is important to consider whether there are pockets of institutions with particularly high, or low, representation of certain groups of individuals. The table below outlines governors' gender, ethnicity, disability status, age and nationality at each HE mission group. The diversity profile of HE governors was similar across all university types, with men, white people, non-disabled people, people in the higher age groups and UK nationals making up a larger proportion of governors compared to women, BAME people, disabled people, younger people and non-UK nationals. Representation of women and people from BAME

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backgrounds was lowest on Guild HE governing boards, however, these institutions also had the highest proportion of disabled governors and those aged 25 or under.

Table 5: Equality characteristics of UK HE governors by mission group.

	1994 Group		Guild HE		Million Plus		Russell Group		University alliance	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sex										
Female	100	42.7	175	39.1	175	42.4	640	42.1	245	43.3
Male	135	57.3	275	60.9	240	57.6	875	57.9	325	56.7
Ethnicity										
White	155	88.0	360	91.6	280	85.2	1,160	89.8	415	89.9
Asian	10	4.6	15	4.1	25	7.9	65	5.1	20	4.5
Black	5	2.9	5	1.3	15	4.8	35	2.8	5	1.3
Mixed	5	3.4	5	1.8	5	0.9	25	1.9	15	3.4
Other	0	1.1	5	1.3	5	1.2	5	0.5	5	0.9
Disability										
Disabled	10	3.8	30	6.4	15	4.1	85	5.7	30	5.1
Non-disabled	225	96.2	420	93.6	395	95.9	1,440	94.3	545	94.9
Age										
25 and under	15	7.0	35	8.9	30	7.5	95	6.5	35	6.4
26-35	5	3.2	10	3.1	10	3.1	40	2.8	20	3.9
36-45	20	10.7	45	11.5	35	9.1	140	9.6	40	7.3
46-55	55	30.5	85	22.1	95	25.2	380	26.3	155	29.2
56-65	70	37.4	130	34.1	155	40.0	505	34.9	205	38.7
66 years and over	20	11.2	80	20.3	60	15.1	285	19.9	80	14.6
Nationality										
UK	180	91.8	380	95.7	350	94.6	1,225	92.7	440	91.7
Non-UK	15	8.2	15	4.3	20	5.4	95	7.3	40	8.3

2.5 HEI level data

The tables above outline average equality characteristics across all HEI governing boards, and within university mission groups, but do not tell us anything about the spread of diversity across boards. Are there some HEI's with very diverse boards, and others with very homogenous boards, or is the diversity of boards consistent across the sector? To address this, the proportion of HEIs with boards meeting benchmarks of participation of women, BAME people and disabled people are presented in table 6.

Table 6: Number and proportions of intuitions meeting benchmarks of participation of women, BAME people and disabled people.

Benchmarks	N	%
40% Women or more	94	58.4%
50% Women or more	35	21.7%
60% Women or more	3	1.9%
No BAME members	34	21.1%
10% BAME or more	64	39.8%
No disabled members	57	35.6%
10% disabled or more	36	22.5%

In over half of returning institutions (58.4%), 40% of governing board members were women. However, this leaves 41.6% of HEIs with fewer than 40% women on their board. Just one in five (21.7%) HEIs had a board with 50% or more women, and three HEIs had 60% women or higher on their boards. While all HEI boards had at least one female member, a fifth (21.1%) of boards had no BAME members, and over a third (35.6%) had no disabled members. On the other hand, nearly two-fifths of HEI boards had 10% BAME members or higher, and 22.5% had 10% disabled members or higher.

3. Diversity of governors in the public, private and voluntary sectors

The extent that governors and senior leadership teams reflect the diversity of their organisations, and the populations they serve, is not just a concern for the HE sector. With varying degrees of success, the public, private and voluntary sectors have aimed to collect and analyse data about the identity characteristics of governors. These developments are often linked to initiatives that intend to bring about positive change, such as improved gender parity.

HEIs straddle multiple sectors, with the majority being registered charities, but regulated by and in receipt of funding from central government. HEIs also share similarities with the private sector, with student fees constituting a sizable proportion of their income and an impetus to keep student ‘customers’ happy and engaged. They are also often involved in the outsourcing of activities and other means of income generation.

This section outlines data collection approaches used to monitor the diversity of governing boards, and their findings, across the public, private and voluntary sectors. Across all areas reviewed, there were few examples of systematic approaches to the collection and reporting of diversity monitoring data about governing board members. However, this has not stopped researchers from collecting the data and analysing diversity in their sectors, through surveys and analysis of publically available information.

3.1 Public sector

3.1.1 Primary and secondary schools

Schools are typically much smaller than HEIs, yet they are closely matched in organisational systems, with representation of both students and staff and the primary goal of effective education.

The National Governance Association and Tes (formerly the Times Educational Supplement) have surveyed school governors across the UK since 2011. The number of board members they survey each year has steadily increased, and in the year 2019 they surveyed just under 6,000 governors, trustees and academy committee members (The National Governance Association and Tes, 2019). This has not only allowed an assessment of the diversity of governors in each year, but also analysis of pace of change over time. The survey was comprehensive and asked questions about board members’ characteristics including age, ethnicity, gender, disability, and occupation, and also about their position on the board, length of tenure and geographical area. Further questions were asked about motivations to join the board and perceptions of challenges, priorities and responsibilities of the school and its governing body.

Data from this research show that in 2019, 93% of school governing board members were White, 1% were Black, 2% were Asian, 1% were mixed ethnicity and a further 1% were from another ethnic group. The remainder chose 'prefer not to say'. Their report compared these findings with the 2011 census figures and the ethnic diversity of primary and secondary school students in 2018. In both comparisons, governing boards were less ethnically diverse: for example, in 2011 86% of the population of England and Wales were White; in 2018, 74% of primary and secondary school students were White.

Just 6% of school governors reported that they had a disability, much lower than rates among the working-age general population. For example, the Family Resources Survey found that 21% of people reported having a health condition or impairment (19% of working-age adults) in the year 2018/19 (Department for Work and Pensions, 2020). This is a particular area of diversity that is often overlooked, however the disparity in representation is one of, if not the, largest compared to all other groups.

In contrast, schools appear to have achieved gender parity, or in many cases a gender split favouring women on their governing boards. Like HEIs, schools have a relatively high proportion of female staff. Overall, 62% of governing board members were women, and 60% of chairs were women. The proportion of governors who were women was lower at the secondary school level, but boards remained balanced and generally reflected differences in workforce characteristics between primary and secondary school.

Age and level of occupation are somewhat intertwined as progressing in your career and developing the necessary skills to sit on a board takes time. People in younger age groups are therefore less represented on school boards compared to the general population, and managers and people from higher professional occupations were more highly represented. The point at which unequal representation of people from different age groups and occupations on governing boards becomes a problem is debatable, and not as simple as drives for ethnic and gender representation that match either the whole population or the population the organisation serves. For example, we would of course not expect a school to have a board with the same average age as pupils. But the important thing is that collection of this information allows schools to check progress against their own targets, to benchmark themselves against the sector and comparable schools, and to monitor change (or lack of change) over time.

3.1.2 NHS

The NHS has also collected data on the diversity of their governors through a survey in 2017, which gathered responses from 2,689 board members (NHS Improvement, 2018). Questions were asked about each individuals' protected characteristics, including sexual orientation and religion and belief. In their analysis of the data, the diversity of individual boards was assessed along with the diversity of all boards across the NHS.

Again, this is a sector with a high proportion of women in the workforce. Overall, 43% of board members were women, compared to 77% of staff in 2017. While NHS boards were

close to gender parity, they were far from reflective of their workforce. Only 31% of board chairs were women and only around a quarter of boards (26% of all boards surveyed) had more than 50% female governors.

The NHS also has a high proportion of BAME staff members compared to other organisations. Despite this, a higher proportion of NHS board members were White compared to both the population and NHS staff (92%, compared to 86% of the population in the 2011 England and Wales Census, and 82% of NHS staff members). Furthermore, 45% of boards included no members who identified as BAME. Board members in the NHS were also older on average (the average age of executive directors was 51.7), fewer members declared that they were disabled (5.3%, compared to 21% outlined above), and fewer were Muslim (1% compared to 4.4% in the 2011 England and Wales census) than the general population. Other religious groups were generally reflective of the population, and there was a slightly higher proportion of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) members (95% were heterosexual compared to 98% of the population according to the Integrated Household Survey, 2014).

The collection of data on six of the nine protected characteristics in the Equality Act (2010), enabled the NHS to more fully understand whether board members reflected the diversity of the population. The survey achieved high overall response rates (81% of their initial sample responded) and had consistently high response rates to individual survey questions (the lowest response rate was to questions about religion and belief, although 94% of respondents provided valid answers). Finally, reporting details about the numbers of boards that achieved diversity targets also enabled a better understanding of whether 'silos of diversity' existed or if targets were being met across the NHS.

3.1.3 Public appointments

HM Government's Public Appointments Diversity Action Plan (2019) outlined the gender, ethnicity, and disability data of the 6,000+ public appointments from the year 2013/14 onwards. Public appointments include appointments of chairs and non-executive directors on public body boards, as well as members of advisory committees. Data about gender, ethnicity and disability were known for 94%, 81% and 65% of appointees to HM government's central departments, respectively.

In 2018, 43% of public appointments to boards were women (although, just 31% of chairs), 90% were White (97% of chairs), and 5% of both board members and chairs were disabled. While the diversity of appointments by gender has increased - in the year 2013/14, only 39% of board members were women – similar progress in terms of ethnicity and disability is not apparent. A breakdown of appointments by gender is provided for each central government department and only the Ministry of Justice achieved gender parity (51% women). At present, data on other identity characteristics (such as sexual orientation or religion and belief) is not collected, and the intersection of multiple identity characteristics is not reported.

In 2017, the Scottish Parliament introduced a bill to ensure public bodies work towards 50:50 gender representation on boards by 2020, and for public appointments to broadly reflect the diversity of the general population by 2021. In the year 2017/18, 45.6% of board members were women, 7.9% disabled, and 3.2% from BAME backgrounds.

Overall HEIs shared many similarities with other public sector bodies in the diversity of their governing boards, but when considering the staff makeup of universities, the representation of women was lower than would have been expected, particularly when comparing governing boards of HEIs and schools.

Diversity of governors across the public sector varied considerably across schools, the NHS and public appointments. While the gender profile of schools was reflected somewhat in their governing boards, this was not the case for the NHS. Similarly, men made up the majority of HEI board members despite being the minority of staff.

In contrast, the proportion of governors who were white was similar across institutions; at 93% in schools, 92% in the NHS and 90% of public appointments. The corresponding HEI proportion was relatively similar, at 89%. Proportions of disabled governors were also similar across public sector bodies, at 6% for schools, 5% for the NHS and 5% of public appointments (although 8% of public appointees in Scotland were disabled), with the corresponding figure for HEIs 5%.

3.2 Private sector

Given the size, breadth and relative independence of organisations in the private sector, it is unsurprising that no systematic collection of identity characteristics of board members exists across all organisations. However, several research organisations have attempted to gather information about gender and ethnicity of governors, usually with a focus on organisations with the highest market value or turnover (eg companies listed on the FTSE 100 or FTSE 250).

The most recent Spencer Stuart annual board index, published in 2019, outlined board diversity of the 150 largest companies with a premium listing on the London Stock Exchange (FTSE 150) and was based on publically available information collected about board members from company websites and annual reports (Spencer Stuart, 2019). In 2019, 30.5% of board members were women, a much lower proportion than the public sector appointments outlined. This has increased over time and over 50% of newly appointed non-executive board members were women. The Hampton-Alexander review reported similar results, with 30.2% of FTSE 100 board members, and 24.9% FTSE 250 board members now women (Hampton-Alexander Review, 2019). The report authors additionally call-out 'One and Done' boards, which appoint just one woman board member and do not work to further increase diversity. Overall, these reports suggest that gender diversity on governing boards of HEIs is much more advanced than in the private sector. However, there is also a higher proportion of female staff in HE compared to the private sector overall.

Authors of the Parker review have tracked ethnic diversity of board members across FTSE 100, FTSE 250 and FTSE 350 companies over a number of years. Due to the lack of data about the ethnicity of private-sector board members, previous reports employed inventive (albeit problematic) approach to assess ethnic diversity by analysing board members' names, photographs and biographies to classify members as White European or not (Parker, 2017). The most recent report, however, used survey methods with a high response rate across eligible companies and showed that 11.3% of FTSE 100 directors were from ethnic minority backgrounds. This dropped to 5.3% when considering FTSE 250 companies. The ethnic profile of UK HEI governors, at 10.8%, is similar to the estimate for FTSE 100 directors but much higher than for FTSE 250 directors (Parker, 2020).

The data on private sector governing boards is of much lower quality than that for HEIs, and for such a broad sector, focus has prioritised companies with the largest market value. These companies fall well behind the public sector and HEIs in their representation of women on governing boards, but the recent evidence from the Parker review suggests that many companies have comparable representation of BAME people to HEIs. However, it is clear that there are large differences in representation depending on the companies chosen for comparison, and when a wider group of companies are considered representation of BAME governors in the private sector is relatively low.

3.3 Voluntary sector

Taken on Trust is the most recent study into the diversity of governing boards in the voluntary sector (Lee, Harris, Strickland and Presenti, 2017). The research was initiated by the Charity Commission in response to increased scrutiny following high profile controversies, particularly the mismanagement of the charity Kids Company. The research focused on registered charities in England and Wales.

Unlike the studies outlined in the public sector, a complete dataset of current acting trustees is maintained by the Charity Commission for England and Wales. Researchers were, therefore, able to circulate further survey questions to a random stratified sample of trustees listed on the database. Response rates were low, particularly when contrasted with the NHS survey discussed in Section 3.1.2. Just under one in five (19%) board members contacted completed and returned the surveys, giving a total of 3,617 responses. By sending the survey to a random selection of individuals rather than entire boards, the research team were unable to assess the composition of individual boards.

They found that just under two thirds (64%) of charity trustees, 71% of chairs and 68% of treasurers were men, and this gender imbalance was consistent across small and large charities. This is a much larger gender disparity than seen in UK HEIs and the public sector. This disparity is particularly stark considering the voluntary sector also has a relatively high proportion of women in their workforce.

In line with public and private sector boards, the majority (92%) of charity trustees were White. They were older on average, were highly educated and, despite over half being retired, had relatively high household incomes.

Gender diversity of the voluntary sector was in many ways more comparable to the private sector than the public sector and HEIs, particularly when considering the fact that women made up the majority of the voluntary sector workforce. Women made up just 36% of charity trustees, compared to 42% of HEI governors. As with all sectors discussed above, the majority of trustees were white, and this figure is comparable to that for HEIs (89%).

4. Summary and concluding remarks

As a first step in addressing issues related to equality, diversity and inclusion among UK HEI governing board members, it is vital to understand the extent and spread of the problem. Do governors represent their students, staff, and the population at large, are there any minority identity groups that are well represented, and are there pockets of good practice that other institutions can learn from?

Overall, data from the 2018/19 HESA returns suggest that, compared to many sectors, HEI governors are relatively more diverse. However, there remains a long way to go before the equality characteristics of governors align with those of other staff members and students. Governors from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds tended to be younger on average, and it's not entirely clear whether these governors hold the same level of power and influence on boards. Additionally, governors from underrepresented groups were more likely to be from another underrepresented group as well.

Analysis of the equality characteristics of the governing boards of sectors across the UK shows that, while a year ago UK HE fell well behind in standards of data collection and reporting, it is now one of the only sectors with comprehensive data on the characteristics of governors. This gives UK HE an important opportunity – to better understand the current state of diversity in the sector and to use this insight to drive improvement. By not having to rely on survey data or analysis of information published online, the sector can be relatively certain that estimates presented in this report are reflective of the true state of affairs. However, there remain some areas where information is lacking. HESA does not collect data about the membership status of governing board members, for example, whether members are students, internal or external staff, or whether they are chairs or vice-chairs. The power and influence of governors differ by these characteristics.

This report is the first of its kind to outline governor diversity characteristics using the enhanced HESA records. We intend to provide an updated analysis each year, and to track changes in the characteristics of UK HEI governing board members over time. This is especially important at a time when progress in equality and diversity is rightly at the forefront of minds and HEIs have made public commitments to make further progress to

benefit their students, staff and wider society. We hope that continuing to shine a light on this data enables us to work with the sector to highlight its good work and the areas yet to tackle.

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Contact us

General enquiries

+44 (0) 3300 416201
enquiries@advance-he.ac.uk
www.advance-he.ac.uk

Media enquiries

+44 (0) 1904 717500
communications@advance-he.ac.uk
www.advance-he.ac.uk/contact-us

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