



20 August 2024

PRESS RELEASE

“Talent is everywhere, opportunity is not”

The Northern Ireland Executive needs to renew its commitment to improving diversity on public boards in Northern Ireland.

A recent analysis by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland shows that in 2021/22 only 6% of public appointments were held by people with disabilities, even though they make up 21% of the population.

Women were also underrepresented in both applications and appointments, and only 27% of chairs to government public appointments are women. Women also made up just 29% of applications for the highest-paid positions over £10,000.

Furthermore, data on the number of minority ethnic people in these roles is insufficient and needs improvement.

Geraldine McGahey, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland said: “There are around 1400 public appointments in Northern Ireland and diversity is crucial. Boards and their decision making will benefit from a variety of perspectives, experiences, and skills when they reflect the society they serve.

“We need significant focus to enable more disabled people to bring their talents and experiences into public decision making. There are specific barriers disabled people encounter, including physical and other accessibility issues, lack of capacity-building and wider support. We must address these to achieve more inclusive and representative decision-making. Appointing those with disabilities to our boards will inspire more disabled people to apply for other public sector roles.

“There also needs to be a stronger focus on meeting gender targets for board members and chairs.

“We would urge the Northern Ireland Executive to appoint a Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland and work with them to develop a cross-departmental plan to address underrepresentation and support greater participation,” concluded Ms McGahey.

Ends

Note to Editor:

- Further information on the Commission’s latest work on [Participation in Public Life](#) including our main findings.