

Top Tips for Union Officers about to serve on public bodies

These tips were contributed by trade union officers already serving as either SSC or LLSC board members

Before you apply/accept appointment

- If you don't have a passionate interest in the subject matter consider why you are applying.
- Have an interest and knowledge of the issues dealt with by the public body.
- Find out as much about the organisation as possible eg Web, Annual Reports etc
- Find out how the current Board members were appointed (not as difficult as it may sound many will be covered by the Nolan Principles), or you could ask the TUC nationally or locally to inquire on your behalf, RDA's are also sometimes helpful
- Never underestimate the skills you have developed through your union work. Employers and managing directors are not more intelligent than us; they have just been on a different journey to us

Preparing for your first meeting

- Check out the names & background of the Board/ Governing body membership (in particular to identify names likely to be familiar to us or our organisation, or those likely to be sympathetic to our aims)
- Arrange to meet the CEO and or the Board Chair before your first formal meeting; it gives a good opportunity to ask questions as well as to make an early impression
- Make a point of getting to know the staff, find out who's responsible for what, and remember you have a responsibility to them also

Accountability

- Make sure you actively keep in touch with your constituents, including those in other trade unions.
- Give a full commitment to the work and be accountable for your involvement

Time

- Build in more time than you think you will need when you agree to do these things!

Language

- Learn the jargon pdq
- Be ready to cut through the quanguage

Purpose

- to bring a **strategic** trade union perspective;
- Be clear on your purpose and role
- People should know why they want to be there and what they want to achieve.
- Don't get drawn into the detail of how the body (eg. A sector skills council) is being administered. Focus on learning and skills activities and outputs, not the legal minutiae of board members' fiduciary duties.
- To keep focussed on **our** role rather than become subsumed in the general work of the Council;
- Have two or three clear trade union objectives that you want to achieve

Participation in meetings

- Prepare before meetings.
- Don't be afraid to challenge, but do it constructively.
- Ask if you don't understand (arrange to see "officers" outside meeting to get a briefing on bits you don't understand)
- Don't panic if you feel you don't immediately get to grips - it takes time, build from what you know about
- Do not feel overawed and have your say
- Never be afraid to ask questions, no matter how simple they may appear!!
- Always emphasise that learning should be demand-led, not employer led
- There can be a temptation for the chief exec and chair of the respective board to try to marginalise the TU board director. It is imperative that you ensure that you challenge, from the outset, any attempt to marginalise and ensure that you are involved and copied into all key stage development documents and interim developments between board meetings. Ensure that you are in regular contact with the chief exec and chair and question any documents or developments that you don't understand or want clarification on. This practice ensures that you are taken seriously, and that you become an inclusive part of the organisation/board.
- There is nothing wrong with asking what? And why?
- Be enthusiastic, focussed and make sure others understand you mean business