

NON EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIME COMMITMENT¹

This case study describes an approach to tackling the thorny issue of reducing the demands on non-executive directors' time while allowing them enough time to undertake their core roles.

The case study has been written from the perspective of the Chair of the PCT.

NHS Gloucestershire

NHS Gloucestershire is committed to the vision of 'Achieving Excellence in Health for the People of Gloucestershire'. It serves a local community of 602,000 people and employs 3,000 staff (including those who work in its provider arm, Gloucestershire Care Services). Gloucestershire is a big, complex and geographically dispersed area covering six Districts.

Although Gloucestershire as a county is not deprived overall, there are significant areas of deprivation with differences in life expectancy of seven years for women and eight years for men between areas of affluence and deprivation. Locality focus is therefore a real priority for the PCT.

This case study describes our approach to reducing the demands on Non-Executives time.

Like most PCTs, we have seen our NEDs drawn more and more into the 'knitting' at the expense of reviewing the pattern. The impetus to do something about this had two main drivers: the desire to develop the board as a really effective team as part of the World Class Commissioning programme and the realisation that non-executive directors were working really hard and committing a lot of time, but not always concentrating this effort in the right areas. As a result there was not enough time for strategic discussions and the locality focus was not as well developed as it needed to be.

The PCT chose to work with Manchester Business School's Health Policy and Management Department to develop and refocus its board. As part of this process, board members systematically analysed what they wanted from non-executives and

¹ Case Study drawn from Appointments Commission Bulletin and Chair Interview.

where they could add most value, using an 'Appreciative Inquiry'² approach. The PCT serves a large, complex geographical area and we had to consider very carefully the NEDs' involvement in local issues. When we analysed this we found that the ambassadorial and visiting elements of the role are really valued and enable the crucial link to the coalface that keeps a NED informed.

If we narrowed and refocused this element of work better, we could make it the main focus outside formal board work. The board agreed four aims for its refocus for non-executives:

- To keep and strengthen the locality focus as the main element of non-strategic activity
- To form a stronger prime link to the locality director
- To remove everything other than policy/strategy focus from non-executives' portfolios
- To ensure that NEDs stop routinely attending meetings and fora which do not require a NED presence.

To take the pressure off the non-executives, the PCT is recruiting lay workers. Lay involvement in operational activities brings real value to a trust, so the national and local tendency over the years has been to ask NEDs to take on a whole layer of activities and roles to ensure competent lay involvement. NEDs usually enjoy these and appreciate this opportunity to contribute.

However, it can soak up NED availability and draw them away from the strategic activities which only NEDs can do. Our alternative is to recruit a pool of people from the local community who can be trained and supported in taking on certain roles, such as sitting on Dispensing and Professional Support Panels. This may also prove to be a useful source of candidates for the non-executives of the future.

Progress and outcomes

The Trust rolled out its new approach from 1 December 2008.

Lay workers were recruited through a formal and open recruitment process, encouraging a diversity of applicants. This process included holding open days to provide information on the new roles, with information stalls on each of the tasks that lay workers would be asked to do. The specific tasks identified included lay roles on:

² Appreciative Inquiry, an organisational development approach developed by [David Cooperrider](#) and Suresh Srivatsva.

- Dispensing Panels (Pharmacy)
- Interventions Not Normally Funded - Appeals panel
- Maternity Services Liaison Committee
- Professional Support Panels
- Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) visits to GP practices.

The Lay Workers are paid for their work, based on the rate of pay for Non-Executive Directors, with an expectation of them undertaking 10 days a year for the PCT. There is a clear understanding that they are not guaranteed any work. Each Lay Worker is asked to build up expertise in one or two areas. They are properly appraised, and are asked to report in to the Director of Human Resources.

The early feedback is that the reshaping of roles between the non-executive and executive directors and the locality focus is bringing real benefits. Initially NEDs, although very supportive of the approach in principle, were reluctant to give up some of these roles. It was also important to support and encourage the NEDs to develop the locality element of their role – such as attending Local Strategic Partnership meetings, and visiting GP practices. Now an executive director is assigned to each of the six localities, in addition to their functional responsibilities, and they work in partnership with the NEDs to achieve this focus.

The PCT now has a much stronger series of strategic days, engaging the whole board.

However, there are undoubtedly adjustments that will be needed to ensure that we have achieved the right balance. It is really important, as a Chair, to keep adjusting, listening and adapting the approach. For example, there may be a need for more direct NED involvement in patient and public engagement than is now the case.

The board will be formally evaluating progress with Manchester Business School and is prepared to make changes where necessary as this new way of working develops.

What we've done isn't rocket science and it's just one of many possible approaches that trusts could adopt. I think what is important though is to take a very systematic approach to the issue, to think it through as a team and to agree a set of aims. Then you need to stop thinking about it and actually do it, evaluating and adjusting if necessary.