



Others are setting up initiatives to help candidates from diverse backgrounds to get a seat at the board table. This is the specific aim and focus of social enterprise Board Apprentice. Lawyer Robert Hunter, a partner at Edmonds, Marshall, McMahon, set up City Disabilities after experiencing progressive hearing loss during his career. City Disabilities is a free mentoring scheme for disabled professionals, connecting them with experienced mentors from the private and public sectors.

The majority of the experts we interviewed for this review spoke about the importance of the people at the top of the organisation setting the right tone. The title we chose – Leading from the front – reflects our collective confidence in the power of the business community to bring about meaningful change. That starts with the individual, so ask yourself what you can say or do today that can make a difference tomorrow.

Board Apprentice: Driving board diversity

Board Apprentice is a not-for-profit social franchise dedicated to increasing diversity, and as a result quality, on boards globally. They do this by widening the pool of board-ready talent and developing tomorrow's board members today.

"We identify and place high-calibre, diverse candidates as 'board apprentices' on boards for one year, allowing them to gain first-hand experience through observation of the workings and dynamics of a board," says Board Apprentice Global's UK Advisory Board Chair Dowshan Humzah.

"Apprentices emerge with the practical experience and understanding necessary to further qualify them to take on board roles. Over 50% of our apprentices find a board position within a year. We would like to see every board providing a 'seat' at the board table for an apprentice to learn by observation and being mentored."

Board Apprentice adopts a broad definition of diversity that goes beyond visible diversifying aspects such as gender, ethnicity, age and physical disability to include less apparent aspects such as: personality, sexual orientation and neurodiversity. "I like to refer to it as diversity of POETS - Perspective, Outlook, Experience, Thought, Sector and social background," adds Humzah. Two autism-focused charities - Autistica and Autism Jersey – are amongst the organisations that are exploring autism at the board level through apprenticeships.

The benefit of the scheme is not just in growing the number of eligible board candidates from diverse backgrounds. Host boards improve their diversity and inclusion awareness and impact, and Board Apprentice has observed a strong tendency for host boards to take increasingly diverse apprentices the more times they participate.