



The role of SCRA's Board Chair

The role of SCRA's Chair is a busy and diverse one, our current Board Chair Carole Wilkinson explains some of the key elements of the post...

The role of Chair has two broad components – internal and external. In terms of the internal element, actually chairing the Board meetings is a significant part of the role. Chairing a meeting at that level can be challenging as you have lots of different people with different backgrounds, experience and knowledge. Having previous experience of chairing large or strategic meetings is extremely helpful.

The Chair must ensure that everyone is included in the meeting, feels comfortable and is given the opportunity to have their say. However, you also need to stay focused and manage the discussion at times as the SCRA Board meeting agendas are usually very busy and there is a lot of business to get through.

Supporting Board Members is another important aspect of the Chair's role. Boards tend to have a mix of people with different skills, backgrounds and experiences and whether you have experienced Board Members or relatively new Board Members, the Chair has to ensure everyone is supported. It is also important that Board Members are allowed to develop and are given opportunities to expand their skills and knowledge, while ensuring that their current areas of expertise are put to good use. Regular performance appraisal and development discussions provide a helpful framework to ensure that support.

The Chair can also get support from fellow Board Chairs and there is a network which meets once or twice a year and that is a good opportunity to share experiences and learn from your peers.

The relationship between the Chair and SCRA's Principal Reporter is a critical one for good governance. There has to be a balance - you need to provide support, but you also need to be a critical friend. Challenge and support is probably the best way of describing it. Honest and open communication is also key.

The Chair also has a role to play in staff engagement. We have a very open and transparent Board and we regularly hold meetings in different offices across the country so staff can attend Board meetings and we also ask teams to talk to us about their work. The Chair, along with other Board Members routinely visit local offices to meet staff and we also attend internal meetings such as SCRA's Participation Group and Equalities Network. It is important the Chair is aware of feedback from staff.

The Chair writes a regular Board brief to share with staff the Board's activities and key considerations which is posted on the staff intranet. The Chair usually gives an input at SCRA's annual staff event.

The external elements of the role of Chair are equally as important and one of the critical relationships is that with the Scottish Government and the Minister. Our regular meetings allow us to provide updates on our work, for example Better Hearings and our research programme. Plus it gives us the opportunity to brief them on financial pressures or workforce matters and where possible influence strategic Government decisions that have a positive impact on SCRA. It is important these relationships are open, honest and supportive, but recognise times when there will be challenges.

Another key partner is Children's Hearings Scotland and there needs to be good communication between the Chairs of both bodies. Both Boards get together once a year to discuss areas of joint interest such as the Digital Strategy and our Property Strategy. These meetings also give us an opportunity to look at the work of Better Hearings and improving participation for children and young people in the Hearings System.

