

Title: **Youth employment at SNH**

Date: **06 May 2020**

Purpose:	Decision for Board.
How does this link with our corporate priorities of improving biodiversity or delivering nature-based solutions to climate change	<p>Tackling the twin climate and biodiversity crises requires diverse and inclusive action. To achieve this, SNH must ensure that young people are represented and recognised within the organisation to maximise inclusivity of voice in strategic and operational decision-making.</p> <p>This will help SNH to a) futureproof its ability to assist in a green recovery and deliver a nature-rich future, b) successfully implement ReRoute and Young Scot recommendations and c) become a leader across the public sector and support the Scottish Government's youth employment strategy.</p>
Summary:	This paper reviews a number of key challenges facing Young Employees in SNH and identifies possible solutions and recommendations for SLT/Board to consider and approve.
Actions	To continue to understand and recognise the value of involving young people in decision-making at all levels of the organisation, and reflect this in future strategic and operational actions.
Recommendations:	<p>The Board is asked to consider and approve the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure SNH's commitment to meeting the Scottish Government's 5% of employees under the age of 25 target, reviewing progress on an annual basis. 2. A review of the current design and delivery of the graduate and student placements to ensure that actions highlighted within the paper are resolved and appoint the Young People Champion to oversee its delivery. 3. The Board is asked to a) confirm their support for SNH to explore ways in which a more formal role for a young person on the Board could be instituted, b) promote and influence this initiative through wider public duties and engagement with Scottish ministers and c) approve the review and renewal of the YEP Board Attendance Protocol.
Report Author(s): Sponsor:	Young Employee Panel Ian Gillies – Board Member
Appendices:	A) Number of employees under 25 (2020) B) Number of employees under 25 (pre-2020) C) Student and graduate placement summary and comparison D) YEP Board Attendance Protocol

Purpose

1. As we rebrand and establish a refreshed strategic direction for NatureScot through to 2030 and beyond, it is critical that we are able to maximise the use of our people and resources. Constituting 6% of SNH's workforce, young employees (<30 years of age) represent a small yet important component. This paper has been prepared to provide the Board with a strategic overview of several key issues facing young employees in SNH and an opportunity to discuss, identify and enact solutions to overcome them. Progression of the operational and strategic actions outlined within the paper will help to ensure young people are embedded within all levels of our work and decision-making, thereby enabling SNH to maximise the use of its resources through an intergenerational approach to ensure a green recovery from Covid-19 and to secure a nature-rich future.
2. These recommendations have been developed over the course of an unusual and challenging time, with the evolving COVID-19 crisis. The Young Employee Panel recognise the implications that the pandemic and the subsequent recovery will have for SNH's strategic direction and the resource constraints it will bring about now and in the future. Despite the challenging context in which our recommendations are made, we believe that they represent pragmatic and tangible opportunities for the organisation to make progress on. Thereby not only helping SNH to emerge from the health crisis as a more resilient, intergenerational, and dynamic nature conservation agency, but also an organisation seen to be providing support for young people who are likely to be disproportionately disadvantaged in the wake of this time.

Background

3. The value of young people as employees is widely acknowledged across SNH. It has been noted by staff that young people bring energy and determination, fresh insights and ideas, and new skills and attributes to the organisation (see [Young Scot Report](#), pg.20).
4. Rebranding to NatureScot provides a unique opportunity to set a new strategic direction in line with refreshed corporate priorities. In order to futureproof these refreshed corporate priorities, the YEP believe that our new strategic direction must adopt an intergenerational cultural approach of diversity and inclusion where young people are embedded across our work and decision-making. In doing so, we can become leaders in encouraging other public bodies toward a more integrated way of working across the sector, thereby influencing Scottish Government (SG) policymaking.
5. SNH's ambition to harness the benefits of an intergenerational organisation are clear. The Equality Impact Assessment of SNH's Workforce Plan 2018-22 (signed 8th March 2018) highlights that "The aging profile of SNH's workforce shows the importance of initiatives around youth employment and succession planning" and "talent management programme and performance management processes need to address the changing career aspirations of the older workforce."

6. Similarly, during the 2018 Year of Young People (YoYP), SNH made several specific policy commitments, such as an on-going commitment to work with young people, taking forward [ReRoute recommendations](#) through a new youth panel and adopting co-design principles and practices more widely. As SNH's legacy from the YoYP, the YEP, was formed. The panel is comprised of staff, aged 30 and under, in permanent and temporary roles across the organisation including areas such as policy, business planning and practical conservation. The remit of the panel is to act as a voice for young employees, ensuring strategic and operational decision-making is inclusive and representative. This has included Board meeting attendance, representing SNH at Parliamentary receptions, organising events at the staff conference, the YoYP Legacy event and the Climate Week Takeover, and finally inputting to strategic decision-making through the Action Learning Sets, Change Partners, the Climate Change Programme Board and commenting on the business plan and brand story. A particular success was increasing the student placement stipend to a living wage to ensure those from a less privileged background were not discriminated against.
7. Whilst the YEP recognises the youth employment initiatives undertaken by SNH since the YoYP, particularly amid budget restrictions, it is evident that there is still disparity between what the organisation has committed to strategically and what is put into practice operationally. With staff members under 25 years old only constituting 1.1% of SNH's workforce (as of March 2020), the extent to which such initiatives are being actualised is limited. Furthermore, with the majority (65%) of young employees on fixed term contracts, the extent to which the 'changing career aspirations of the older workforce' are being addressed is equally narrow. In light of this, the YEP believe that SNH is at risk of losing valuable skills and expertise and, more widely, reputational damage as an organisation lacking the diverse acuity needed to address the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis.
8. To help SNH realise these commitments, maximise the use of its resources, and futureproof its ability to secure a nature-rich future, a number of solutions and actions have been identified to address some of the key issues facing young employees in SNH. These issues and solutions have been developed through discussion with young employees across SNH through the Young Employee Network, and all employees through the SNH/Young Scot partnership. They should be discussed successively, with recommendations in relation to each issue approved by the Board.

Challenge 1 – Career development for an inclusive, intergenerational workforce

9. SG's youth employment strategy defines a 'young person' as some under the age of 25. As of the March 2020, employee's under the age of 25 only make up 1.1% of the total number of SNH employees (see [Annex A](#)). This equates to eight out of 717 people (including employees and volunteers), only two of which are permanent. A further 38 (5.3%) staff members are between 25 and 29, totalling 46 (6.4%) employees under 30 (including 7 Graduate Placements and 5 Student Placements). Of the 46, 16 are permanent with the majority (30) on temporary contracts. This is far fewer than the respective age groups at the other end of the scale, with 29 employees 65 and over (4%), of which 26 are permanent.

10. Due to the change from eBiz to Fusion, we are unable to show a continual trend of the age demographics across SNH. However, [Annex B](#) shows that from Q4 2015/16 to Q1 2019/20, there was no significant change in the percentage of employees under 25. There was a signal of improvement in Q2 2018/19 bringing our average up from 1.9% to 2.7% (due to the increased intake of Graduate Placements during the YoYP), however this steadily declined again.
11. The YEP, as well as staff more widely, express the need to increase the number of young employees in order to increase representation ([Young Scot Report](#) pg.27). As demonstrated above, SNH is not on track to reach Scottish Government's 5% of employees under the age of 25 by 2021 target. The closest SNH has been in recent years is 3.2% during the YoYP (2018). Whilst the employment of young people represents a systemic challenge across the public sector, and society more widely, it also presents SNH with an opportunity to lead and work with other public sector organisations to a) improve and influence what is on offer for young people and b) shape perceptions of SNH as an attractive place to work for young people.
12. As highlighted in the [Young Scot Report](#) (pg.28), succession and retirement planning has been neglected in recent years due to the way posts are assessed when vacated. There is a need to create new ways to increase the number of entry-level posts, beyond placements, to enable more young people to be brought into the organisation as well as opportunities for career progression within the organisation, such as planning placements with the aim of retaining staff and allowing volunteers to view internal vacancies.
- 13. Recommendation 1: The Board is asked to ensure SNH's commitment to meeting the SG's 5% of employees under the age of 25 target, reviewing progress on an annual basis.**
- 14. Action 1:** SLT to appoint People and Organisational Development (POD) to commission a talent management exercise that addresses how SNH will meet the 5% SG target and will consult with the YEP.

Challenge 2 – The structure and delivery of the student placements, graduate placements and apprenticeships do not currently provide sufficient value for SNH and young employees

15. SNH primarily recruits young people through student and graduate placements. These placements provide an exciting opportunity both for young people to enter the environmental public sector and for the organisation to gain new and skilled staff members. Furthermore, in light of declining budgets across the public sector, such placements are one of the few ways in which students and graduates can specific skills and experience. However, for several years, it has been noted that there are some issues in the way placements are designed and carried out, which means some of the intended mutual benefits are lost (summarises some of these issues can be found in [Annex C](#)).
16. The purpose and structure of the student and graduate placements is unlike many other graduate schemes in the public sector (see examples in [Annex C](#)). SNH

graduate placements are project-based, within different area or activity teams for one year, and student placements are based on nature reserves. While this structure gives young employees the opportunity to gain experience in project management in the environmental field and public sector, and an insight into SNH's work, it can also mean employees have very different experiences dependent on line managers and the capacity of a team to support a placement. The lack of consistency across placement structures can have significant impacts on the young employees' opportunity to learn, as well as SNH's capacity to benefit from new staff. In particular, different placement experiences will also impact on SNH's ability to retain young employees and the skills and knowledge the young employee will have gained over their placement.

17. Similarly, the various apprenticeships offered by SNH provide an opportunity to learn and gain qualifications while working. However, evidence suggests these are also not being delivered to their full potential due to restrictive frameworks and slow action. A strategic discussion regarding the specific interpretation and implementation of the apprenticeship framework alongside detailed planning, monitoring and reporting of each scheme is therefore pertinent to ensuring that such initiatives remain valuable and attractive for young people.
18. **Recommendation 2: The Board is asked to a) approve a review of the current purpose, design and delivery of the graduate and student placements to ensure that actions highlighted within the paper are resolved and b) appoint the Young People Champion to oversee its delivery.**
19. **Action 2:** SLT to appoint POD, in partnership with the YEP and young employees across SNH, to lead on the review of the current purpose, design and delivery of the graduate and student placements.

Challenge 3 – Futureproofing the Young Employee Panel and the representation of Young People in strategic and operational decision-making

20. By representing the view of young employees throughout the organisation, and providing fresh perspectives and innovative solutions, the panel have made invaluable contributions to both SNH's strategic direction and operational work. All YEP members are volunteers meaning we do not have dedicated time or resources for YEP related work. Restrictions posed by short-term contracts and the commitments of our day jobs make it challenging to ensure progress is made while guaranteeing succession on the panel members is maintained. Our work over the past year has been successful and highly valued amongst staff, with more and more staff members reaching out for our input. The work of the panel is also valued moving forward, highlighted in the OD framework outlining the 'development of the young employee panel and network' as an activity required to deliver transformation across various themes.
21. However, currently the panel has a split focus on strategic decision-making and advising on operational working. Due to a lack of allocated time and resources, and short-term contracts, this is proving to be unsustainable in the long-term. Whilst the panel acknowledge and value the support currently offered by POD, SLT

and the Board, and the successes they have facilitated, it is clear that if SNH is to continue to harness the benefits offered by the panel, further, more holistic support is needed.

22. This unsustainability is multifaceted and stems from two key issues, with subsequent solutions:

a. Lack of representation in governance – To ensure the SNH Board reflects the intergenerational nature of the SNH workforce and wider Scotland, echoing Young Scot, it is recommended that more is done to ensure an external young person is appointed to the board. The benefits of including young people on Boards are already recognised across the private and third sector. SNH has the opportunity to lead and influence how the public sector operates at a strategic level. Having a young Board member will ensure young people's perspectives are represented in SNH's strategic decision-making while freeing up the YEP to focus on operational work across the organisation. The YEP would work with this new Board member to ensure clear communications between the two areas.

In lieu of an external young person on the Board, effort must be made to ensure the YEP are as equipped as possible to be effective in Board meetings. This should include a review and refresh of the Board Attendance Protocol ([Annex D](#)) and improving communication with POD and the wider organisation.

b. Lack of time and resources for an expanding remit – The YEP is increasingly constrained due to its growing remit and lack of formal time and resource allocation. It is recommended that panel members have formal time allocations in their jobs, agreed by line managers through their Performance Development Conversations, to ensure they are able to provide the highest quality of support when required.

23. Recommendation 3: The Board is asked to a) confirm their support for SNH to explore ways in which a more formal role for a young person on the Board could be instituted, b) promote and influence this initiative through wider public duties and engagement with Scottish ministers and c) approve the review and renewal of the YEP Board Attendance Protocol.

24. Action 3: SLT is asked to ensure the review and renewal of the YEP Board Attendance Protocol in partnership with POD, the Board's Young People Champion and the YEP to deliver more effective and strategic Board engagement.

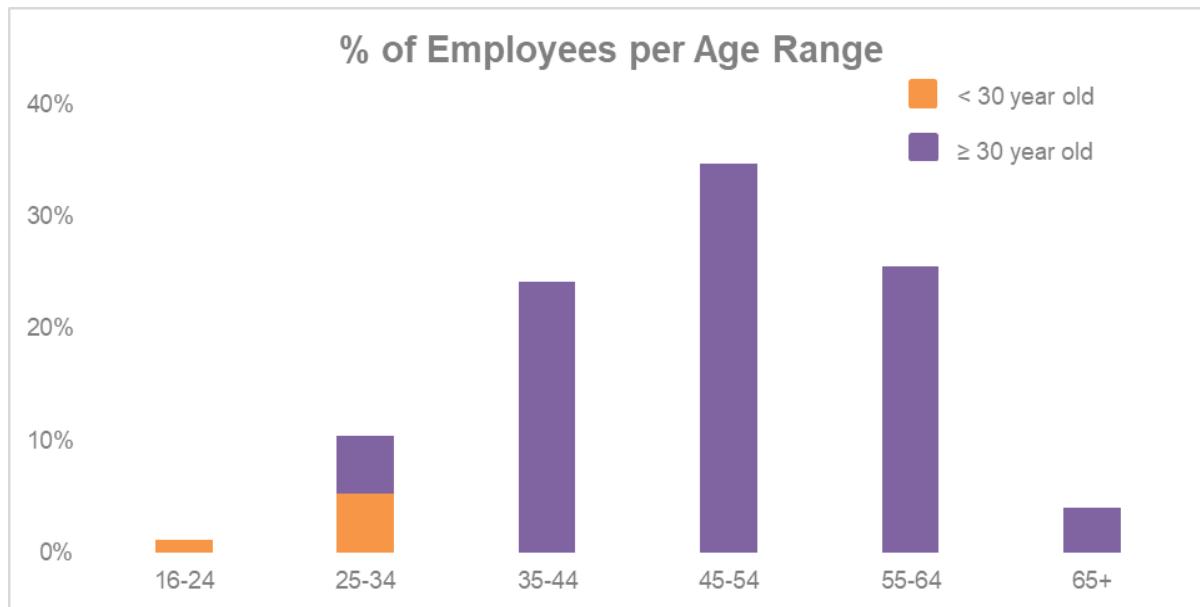
25. Action 4: SLT is asked to ensure YEP members are formally allocated the time and resources needed for effective and beneficial engagement.

Recommendations

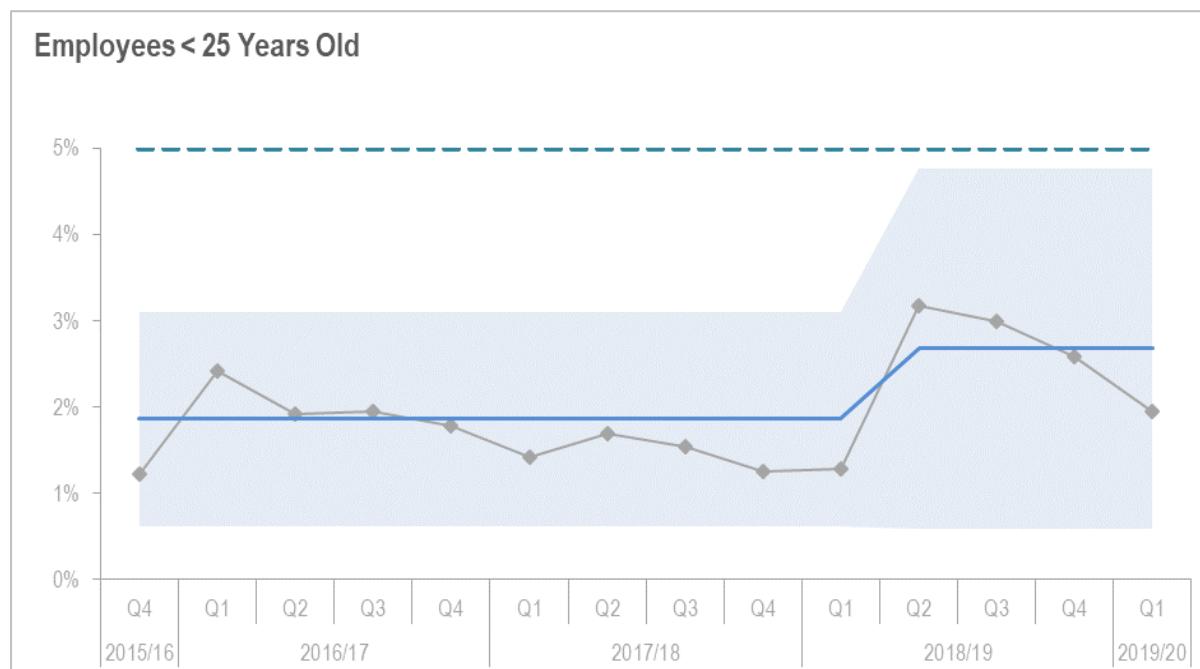
26. The Board is asked to:

- a. **Recommendation 1:** The Board is asked to ensure SNH's commitment to meeting the SG's 5% of employees under the age of 25 target, reviewing progress on an annual basis.
- b. **Recommendation 2:** The Board is asked to a) approve a review of the current design and delivery of the graduate and student placements to ensure that actions highlighted within the paper are resolved and b) appoint the Young People Champion to oversee its delivery.
- c. **Recommendation 3:** The Board is ask to a) confirm their support for SNH to explore ways in which a more formal role for a young person on the Board could be instituted, b) promote and influence this initiative through wider public duties and engagement with Scottish ministers and c) approve the review and renewal of the YEP Board Attendance Protocol.

Annex A – Number of Employees under 25 (Fusion data, 25th March 2020)



Annex B – Number of Employees under 25 (eBiz data)



Due to the annularity of Graduate Placements opportunities, there will always be slight fluctuations in the number young employees (with the peak being Q2 each year, when the annual intake of new graduates happens).

Annex C – Summary of the challenges for Student and Graduate Placements and proposed potential solutions. A more detailed breakdown can be provided on request if required.

	Challenges	Potential solutions
Placement structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is limited recognised or agreed structure to placements beyond the induction pack and evaluation. This allows for placements to be tailored to individual interests following discussions and regular reviews with line managers. However, where this isn't happening, projects and work plans can often be either overly constrained or non-existent. • Graduate placements carry out projects as opposed to core work, which may reduce their likelihood of securing a future role with SNH. • There is limited support for line managers and a lack of review process to ensure they are meeting their managerial obligations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The placement scheme is the primary way that SNH recruit young people. It would benefit the organisation to think about who they are tailoring these placements for and what the purpose of them is so that they can be as mutually beneficial as possible. • For example, if the purpose of the scheme is to train recent graduates and retain them as permanent SNH staff then the structure of the training could focus more on core work and rotate graduates through various activities. • Raise awareness of support available to placements and their line managers, e.g. contact details of 'graduate coordinator' (currently a member of staff in POD) included in induction pack and contact made with each graduate at the start of their contract. Frequent contact made with graduates to check in.
Recruitment process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the student placement has undergone many positive changes in recent years, e.g. moving from low stipend payments to a competitive salary, the current recruitment process favours young people who have been through the higher education system. However, the placement itself focusses on the development of practical skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Again, SLT need to consider the motivation for the student placement scheme. For example, if they wish to engage young people from less privileged backgrounds, the recruitment process could be revised to remove barriers to those beginning a career conservation.

Learning and career development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student placements receive core training, such as working with the public outdoors and practical accredited courses. Yet, there is no formal learning and development plan for graduate placements. • Lack of internal and external training culture for graduate placements. • Inconsistency in training opportunities between placements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need for clearer agreed guidance of possible training for both line managers and placements. • Specific remit for graduate placement management such as a cross-organisational graduate programme that will grant placements more flexibility and opportunity for skills development. • Graduate placements should include a core training program, e.g. project management training, policy training or Natura training. • Look into alternative ways of skills development and sharing for young employees.
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(Please note these challenges and solutions have been collected through consultation with current placements, as well as past placements including those who have stayed on at SNH and those who have left.)

SNH graduate and student placement comparison

We compared SNH's placement scheme to other graduate programmes offered by public sector organisations in Scotland including SEPA, Scottish Water, Scottish Government and the NHS. These programmes shared commonalities not seen in the SNH scheme such as a starting salary of £24,000 minimum, a dedicated and extensive support system and a clear development plan, with the aim of training graduates to retain them as permanent employees. A more detailed breakdown of the graduate programmes we reviewed can be provided on request.

SNH Graduate/Student Placements	Commonalities seen in other public sector graduate schemes
<u>Recruitment</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Job application, interview - Salary - £18,750 / 19,500 per year - 12 month contract 	<u>Recruitment</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Application/CV, online assessment, assessment day, interview - Start salary of £24,000 minimum

<p><u>Structure</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 day induction when all placements have started, can be several months into placements - Placed within one team throughout the scheme - Staff retention is relatively low and adhoc <p><u>Progression/ Development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Performance Development Conversations are informal and ought to identify learning needs - Training offered internally by learning and development team as for all SNH staff. - No figures on how many employees are retained in the organisation after undertaking a placement. <p><u>Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support provided by: Line Manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At least a 24 month contract <p><u>Structure</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If not training to be a specialist, scheme consists of rotations (usually 4x6 month periods) in different areas of the organisation - Programme structured with the aim of training graduates to be retained as permanent employees. <p><u>Progression/ Development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Receive a comprehensive training plan - Either an accelerated career path, training graduates to take on leadership roles after 2 years - Or training to become specialists and going into technical positions after 2 years <p><u>Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Buddy system linking up previous graduates with new graduates - Graduate coordinator/mentor that regularly checks on graduates
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Annex D - Board Attendance Protocol – Young Employee Panel

Protocol

1. Board papers are issued by Executive Office to Alison MacDonald (AMcD). AMcD will update the Young Employee Panel (group of elected young employees who represent the views of young people in SNH) of these and any future Board discussions, as per Board forward planner.
2. AMcD shares Board papers with the panel and asks for any input (as required) from the Young Employee Network (which is open to all SNH employees to share views, offer and receive support, share advice etc).
3. Any input is fed back to AMcD through the Panel reps and discussed at a Young Employee Panel meeting to highlight and agree any issues to be raised with the Board.
4. AMcD then forwards any specific issues(s) onto Ian Gillies (Board Member) that the Panel wish to take to the Board meeting.
5. A Panel rep is appointed (on a rotational basis) to attend the Board meeting.
6. AMcD will inform Executive Office as to named rep attending.
7. The Panel rep will meet with Ian prior to the Board meeting to discuss the papers.
8. The Panel rep will attend the Board meeting. The rep will take Ian's steer as to level of participation on specific items, as agreed at their meeting prior to the actual Board meeting e.g. to observe or directly contribute.
9. The Panel rep will then feed back to the full Panel at the next Panel meeting. Any actions will be followed up by the Panel reps through the Young Employee Network.
10. This feedback will then be included as part of the key messages from the Panel meeting.

Confidentiality

Although the Board papers are not in themselves confidential, they should not be circulated as they are only confirmed at the subsequent meeting.

There may be however, some discussions at the meeting that are confidential and where this is signalled by the Chair, all Panel reps are expected to respect the confidentiality of the discussion when reporting back to the full Panel, and leave the Board meeting during any closed session discussions. This will be at the discretion of the Chair, who would normally speak to the Panel member before the start of the meeting to indicate what is expected.