



Positively Governing Programme

September 2021-June 2023

the connectives

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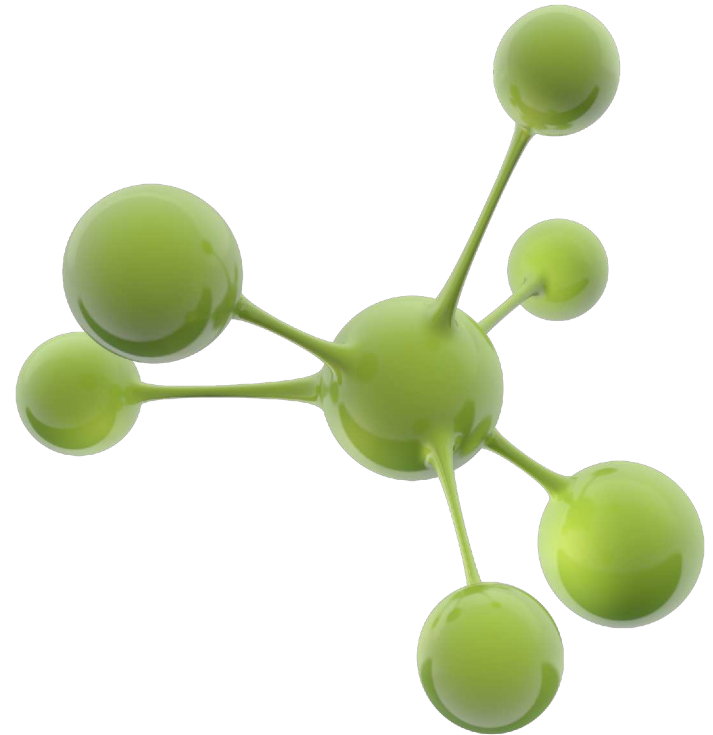
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INTRODUCTION

Tackling inequity, inequality and discrimination has always been core to our work. In the last few years, it has risen up the list of concerns of companies in every sector. Still, many boardrooms lack diversity, which can prevent them from fully understanding and serving the communities and customers they serve now and wish to serve in the future. The lack of opportunities for those who have faced discrimination to gain experience of being on Boards further exacerbates this issue as many organisations recruit for those with experience.

To address this problem, The Connectives designed and developed a programme to identify and recruit individuals with the core competencies associated with success in Board roles and who have lived experience of discrimination. Through experiential learning methods and workshops, the programme was designed to create confidence, competence and develop skills and knowledge – all of which is needed to add value to boards. This programme also sought to facilitate discussions around lived experience, to further enhance the diversity and richness of boardroom discussions.

The Connectives, as a social enterprise and investor, didn't want finance to be a barrier so there was no charge to those on the programme. We invested our expertise, experience, intellectual property and billable time - amounting to nearly £40k for which we did not charge anyone. A small donation was received towards any expenses we might incur from a housing group with whom we had worked for some years around stretching and improving governance and diversity.

This impact report will explore the programme's success and its impact on increasing diversity in boardrooms across various industries and sectors. The report will examine the experiences of those who have participated in the programme, as well as the perspectives of the clients and colleagues who have sponsored the programme. Finally, the report will discuss the future plans for the programme and its potential to create lasting change in the corporate world.

WHO IS THE CONNECTIVES?

The Connectives is not your average consulting organisation. We're a social enterprise with a mission to positively disrupt the way organisations and businesses think and do what they do, and measuring their success through positively impacting - people, prosperity, the planet and place.

Our lifelong commitment to, and work in, challenging discrimination and creating conditions for inclusion and diversity has been the driving force behind our investment into the Positively Governing programme.

With over 35 years of developing our Intellectual Property in the field of governance, including working with over 500 Boards and over 10k governors/trustees/NEDs we decided to invest in creating real and sustainable change.

The connections that we have built over the years gave us the opportunity to reach out to people we could count on to work with us to help provide an extraordinary experience - offering their boards - for observations, offering their time as mentors, and their expertise as guest speakers to enhance the work we facilitated around knowledge, skills, experience and competencies.

As a social enterprise, we trade in all 4 sectors and invest our profits and time in individuals, organisations and projects that can benefit from what we do, that can not afford to buy what we offer, but who can through their success provide evidence that there is a better way of doing business and doing good and doing well. We believe in growing prosperity by making a difference, and we have the expertise to transform culture, increase productivity, and improve performance.

WHAT IS POSITIVELY GOVERNING?

The Positively Governing programme is one of a number of interventions The Connectives developed to change the status quo. Working across many sectors (having undertaken hundreds of governance reviews and Board development programmes) we too frequently need to raise the lack of diversity at this level. Whilst many have agreed with us, too often they say "there just aren't the applicants out there".

So... we decided we needed to help change that. Over the last 2 decades, we have undertaken research, built tools and models – identifying the competencies that correlate with high-performing Non-Executive Directors, Trustees, and Governors. We know that organisations that recruit for competencies and offer training to develop knowledge and skills can access a wider pool of talent and we know experience isn't as relevant as people might think!

We began to recruit capable individuals with the right competencies to do a Board role well and who in addition brought lived experience that often isn't reflected in the board room. We developed a programme that would give people a chance to acquire critical knowledge and skills that would accelerate their ability to undertake Board roles. We created experiential learning opportunities so they had insight into and experience of Boards and we supported them to develop their conscious competencies. All this, added to their living experience of facing a range of forms of discrimination, meant we knew they would then ask different kinds of questions and add value in new and different ways to the organisations that recruited them.

We also committed to ensuring the programme was accessible to all, taking cost out of the picture and investing our own resources in the design and delivery. This ensured that individuals from all backgrounds did not face a barrier in participating and contributing their unique perspectives to the programme and by developing a strong bond with us and each other – this support would continue long after the programme.

Many of our clients, colleagues and friends also invested in the programme by offering time to be mentors, creating board observation opportunities, and acting as 'expert witnesses' around key subjects. Some even guaranteed interviews to programme participants in their next selection rounds, demonstrating a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion.

The Positively Governing programme intended to create lasting change in the governance in every sector by creating the evidence that:

- competencies outweigh experience
- greater diversity of perspective and experiences adds new and different value to Board discussions and decisions
- there are many people who have both and with the right support – there is a pool of talent waiting to be recruited

WHO WAS ON OR SUPPORTED THE PROGRAMME?



12

People on the
programme

10

BAME
background

7

Women

5

Under 35s

OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES

**5 people now
hold Board
positions**

**All participants
reported increased
skills, experience &
confidence to
apply for board
positions**

**2 people
are Chairs**

**Participants
reported improved
understanding of the
governance processes in
current employing
organisations**

**Several mentors
reported reflecting on their
own thinking around board
diversity and leadership,
triggering them to
positively act in their own
Board rooms**

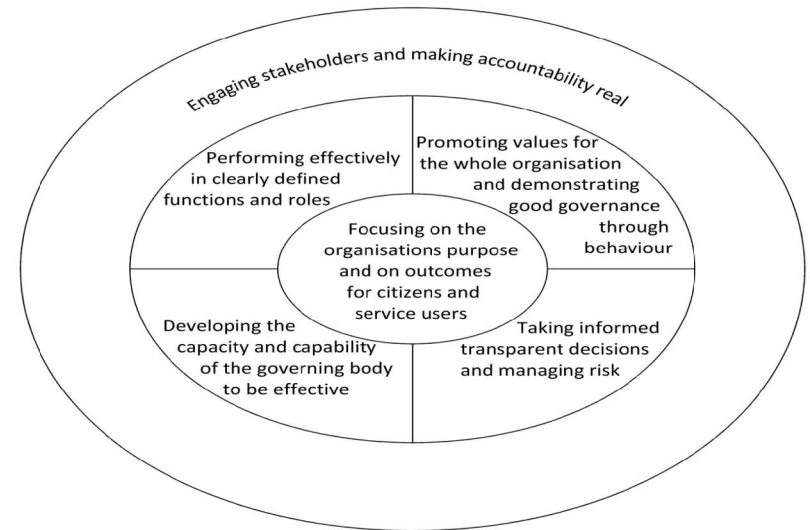
**Increased
appreciation of
individual diversity as
a valuable asset to
others**

WHAT WAS LEARNT ON THE PROGRAMME?

The programme provided participants with a solid foundation in a range of topic areas related to governance and the role of boards. Participants gained a comprehensive understanding of the role of boards, the decisions they make, the risks they consider, the outcomes they look for, and how they behave and influence. They learned about clear roles and responsibilities, modes of good governance required, and the importance of multi-level questioning.

A key part of the learning that was highlighted by the participants was the Langlands Code of Good Governance, the difference between assurance and reassurance, and the importance of triangulating information and expert input. They learned how to ask better questions, be curious, and positively disrupt. The course built confidence and encouraged participants not to be afraid to ask questions.

Additionally, participants learned about the skills, knowledge, experience, and competency framework, the importance of culture, and how to capitalise and maximise unique perspectives and lived experiences. The course taught participants how to lead productive meetings with active listening, empathy, and the right amount of healthy dissent. The structure of the course and order of learning made it easy to follow and provided participants with a clear understanding of how boards operate in different environments. Overall, the course demystified the role of boards and provided participants with the tools they need to be effective and confident board members.



Langlands Code of Good Governance

Presence and being visible is important, "Eyes in hands out"

Helped with my confidence, Never be shy to ask questions because we can't positively disrupt if we lose our curiosity. There are no wrong questions

BOARD OBSERVATIONS

Board observations are an essential tool for learning about being a non-executive director (NED) as they provide individuals with an opportunity to observe and gain insight into how boards operate. Here are some of the key benefits and importance of board observations when learning about being a NED:

- **Gaining critical insight:** Observing board meetings allows individuals to gain practical insight into the role of a Non-Executive Director, seeing first-hand how board meetings are conducted and how decisions are made.
- **Understanding Board dynamics:** Board observations help individuals understand the dynamics of the Board, the roles and responsibilities of each member, and the decision-making processes that are followed.
- **Exposure to different industries and sectors:** Observing Boards in different industries and sectors provides individuals with a broader understanding of the issues faced by Boards and how they are addressed.
- **Learning from experienced Directors:** Observing experienced Board members in action provides valuable insights into their approach to governance, their decision-making processes, and their interactions with other board members.
- **Deepening learning from training and facilitated discussions:** Board observations complement formal training on corporate governance and board dynamics, helping individuals to apply their learning in a practical context.

Overall, board observations provide individuals with a valuable opportunity to learn from experienced board members, gain practical experience in the role of a NED, and understand the dynamics of boards in different industries and sectors.



Being able to see a Board operate first-hand was incredibly beneficial, it gave me an opportunity to take my learning and see it play out in a real-life scenario. The board I observed were really welcoming, an overall great experience.



MENTORING

We were incredibly grateful to our amazing mentors that volunteered their time to provide mentoring to our participants. Having a mentor to guide individuals through the programme and beyond enhanced the impact on their overall experience and development.

Mentors, with their vast knowledge and expertise, provide invaluable guidance on corporate governance, boardroom dynamics, and leadership to help mentees on their journey to becoming effective board members. Additionally, mentors are able to offer practical tips, best practices, and valuable insights for mentees to successfully navigate this path.

Individuals were able to call upon their mentor at any stage within the programme and beyond for advice and support.



We would love to extend appreciation to our mentors. The sessions were enlightening, providing invaluable perspectives that would have been difficult to have gained otherwise. Encouragement and mentoring brought the confidence to take a leap of faith into the roles and in one case change a career to continue to develop.



My experience as a mentor is always more enjoyable when the time you spend together is a combination of learning, sharing experiences and laughter. What always delights me is that it's a reciprocal arrangement and I learn as much by these interactions as I hope I can share. A big thank you to Liz, Mags and all those involved as mentors and mentees. Together we do great things!



FEEDBACK FROM OUR PARTICIPANTS

Ben Andrews - Managing Director of Beyond Empower, a Community Interest Company helping places #DoltDifferently to support healthy, active lives for disabled people.

I recently completed the Positively Governing Course with The Connectives. For me, this course gave people who may not currently have the opportunities to sit on a Board the space and expertise to develop the vital skills, knowledge and competencies to operate as an effective trustee or non-executive.

It was also an opportunity for participants to explore and unpick the values and ethics of good Board members, as well as the anxieties of putting yourself forward for something you previously hadn't associated with – for whatever reason.

I think all who took part in the Positively Governing Programme got this and more from their engagement. For me personally, it has made me look inward at our own Board, having recently completed some Board development work to help us operate as we want to rather than just working through the motions as can often happen at Board meetings. It's also helped me look at myself as a Board member outside of my organisation too, now paying much more attention to Board role advertisements from the perspective of seeing myself on that Board.

The support and experience that The Connectives provided and the way the course was facilitated made it feel easy – despite covering a lot of complex models and different ways of working. I'm grateful to have been a part of the Positively Governing cohort, working and getting to know the brilliant trustees and non-executives of tomorrow (and now today for some in the group).

Lisa Jowrey - Communal Services Manager at Arawak Walton.

There are no words to express my gratitude to Liz, Mags and all at The Connectives for allowing me to take part in Positively Governing.

When I left school my career options were limited to secretary or typist – nothing else. In time I moved into other junior roles but with hard work and good people in my life I became a Manager at a housing organisation. I knew we had Board Members and that meetings took place every now and then but I didn't really know or understand what they did or were supposed to do.

With encouragement from a mentor I applied for a NED role with an organisation in Liverpool but wasn't successful. However disappointment turned into joy when I was given the opportunity to take part in Positively Governing. This gave me the information, skills and confidence that I needed to apply for other NED positions which I did and I am now a NED for an organisation that supports asylum seekers and refugees. If it wasn't for The Connectives this would never have happened. With their recognition and desire to help change the way Boards 'look', they gave up their time, shared their knowledge, organised guest speakers and mentors for me and others – for free - how kind and wonderful is that! Thank you. I see it now as my responsibility to be a positive example and encourage others from diverse backgrounds to become board members so that they are representative of the changing communities we now have.

Zahir Mulla - Finance Manager, Together Housing Group

The opportunity has allowed me to grow beyond my current professional career in terms of thinking beyond what I knew before the course. The course was tailored to arm one with knowledge & interpersonal skills to break the norms of a traditional board to really make a difference at board level. The impact it has had is that it has given me the confidence to be able to perform effectively in a board setting and is currently helping in my day-to-day role.

Kamal Hussain - Teacher, St Mary's C.E. Primary School, Moss Side

The Positively Governing programme has been absolutely incredible. It has provided me with both an overview of the theoretical framework of good governance and an amazing direct experience of it. I started my journey knowing very little about governance and what I did know came from film and media (Succession, Madmen etc). Within the first few sessions I had a clearer picture of what my role was and how I could begin to add value. Another major success has been the network of like-minded colleagues that has been created along the way. This course is designed for ethnic minorities and those with a social justice mission, who ordinarily would feel excluded from the world of Non-Executive positions. I have found the strategies and ways of thinking have helped me beyond just governance. I have begun emphasising and highlighting my competencies and using unique experiences as examples of skills and proficiency. I have seen my confidence and ability grow session by session.

Viren Gandhi - Senior Procurement and Contract Specialist, CGFP and the Commonwealth Games

I consider myself a senior commercial manager, with many years of experience in large Blue Chip and Public Sector Organisations, this has been mostly in the UK, but also in the continent having lived and worked in Belgium, Holland & Switzerland. The work has covered Senior management roles in Procurement and Supply Chain, mainly in a capacity to deliver positive change in business performance. Recently, I have decided to move into Part-Time working with the intention to retire in the not-too-distant future. However, while not working full-time, I would like to be involved in a NED type role which allows me to continue to share my experience in a part-time way, and also allowing me to stay mentally active. So this opportunity/program has given me a great chance to better understand what it means to have the Role of a NED as well as provide opportunities to access them.

I have found the course incredibly interesting and useful. From the structured approach of the Skills/Knowledge/Experience/Competence Matrix, which is a great reference point, to the many workshops and presentations which brought the role to life. Some of the specifics, include the various Governance structures; the need to continue to look for re-assurance and information triangulation (take a look); be curious and do not worry about positive disruption and the 3 levels of questions. It has also been helpful to understand that the role, no matter how large or small the organisation is, is a serious role and not to be taken lightly. As with many courses it also helped remind me of those things "I already know" particularly ensuring that you are productive in meetings ensuring to listen actively, provide empathy where required and maintain the right amount of "healthy dissent". Finally I am delighted to say that I am currently in a NED role with Regenda (though on Probation), and am convinced that the program helped me with gaining the role.

Sophie Priest - Social Value Consultant, The Connectives

I am truly grateful for my time on the course, as it has been an invaluable journey of growth and empowerment. Coming from a working-class background and being the first person in my family to attend university, I have always been driven by the desire to create a more equitable and inclusive society. Working with The Connectives over the past few years has reinforced the importance of these values in my professional life, so I jumped at the chance when I was offered the opportunity to take part in this programme.

I'd already taken on a NED position before taking part in this course but I felt very underprepared for the position and wasn't sure if my contributions to the meeting were the most productive. The programme was really well structured and helped to build up the necessary skills and knowledge that gave me more confidence during the meetings. So much so that after a year of sitting on the Board I was asked to apply for a Chair position at Childwall Sports and Science Academy's, Academy Governance Committee (AGC). Previously, I might have hesitated or doubted myself, but after the programme, I felt equipped and ready to take on the challenge.

One of the things that I think really enhanced the learning was the opportunity to gain real hands-on experience through board observations. Being able to witness firsthand how boards operate, make decisions, and navigate challenges was a great experience that I don't think could have been replicated in a learning environment. Also massive thanks to my mentor Maggie. She was amazing at guiding me through the programme and supporting me with any questions I had. Especially when it came around to interviewing for the Chair position.

I really share the values that Lived Experience in Boardrooms is crucial because it brings diverse perspectives, insights, and a deeper understanding of the needs and experiences of marginalised communities, enabling more informed decision-making and inclusive governance. This programme has highlighted how recruiting for competencies over experience is much more effective at delivering the changes required at the board level to make a positive step forward.



WHAT NEXT?

This intervention demonstrates that it is possible, with the right tools and expertise, to recruit people with the right competencies who have no experience of governing and enable them to secure board roles and be effective.

We are committed to measuring the impact of this intervention, we plan to closely monitor the progress made by all past participants, the changes to the boards they join and the impact upon the people those boards exist to serve. Past participants will be invited to serve as programme contributors, bringing their unique insights and experiences to further bolster the programme's credibility.

We are keen to develop and deliver further programmes working with any sector who is committed to taking action to diversify their boards. This might be cross sectoral in a geographic area or this might be within a sector where a number of people come together to invest and sponsor another programme from which their board will benefit. This increase in support will enable the Positively Governing programme to amplify its efforts, equipping even more talented individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to excel in board roles.

We believe the lasting impact created by the programme will transform boardrooms as we know them today to be more representative of the communities they serve.

If you want to see how this might work for you, your business or your sector contact us at info@theconnectives.com



OUR THANKS - BOARD OBSERVATIONS, MENTORS & EXPERTS



Our Mentors & Experts

Allison Thompson
Christine Aymes
Edna Robinson
Evelyn Asante-Mensah
Hazel Snell
Hormoz Ahmadzadeh
Ian Gleave
Jane Cordell
Jenny McGarry
Julie Cooke
Julie Vincent
Lesley Dixon
Liz Allen
Louise Parnell
Tracey Johnson

