



Blood and Transplant

Report of a Review of the Effectiveness of the
NHS Blood and Transplant Board

March 2024

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1. Background

Best practice recommends that a thorough assessment of the board and its committees' effectiveness is conducted either annually or periodically. The evaluation should aim to carefully examine whether the composition, dynamics, operations, and structure of the board and its committees are suitable and effective for the organisation and its business environment, in both the short and long run. Furthermore, feedback should be given to enhance the board's strengths and identify key areas for performance enhancement and growth.

The Board, at its meeting on 28 November 2023 approved the practice of undertaking the board and board committees' effectiveness review every three years by an external organisation, with an internal self-assessment of effectiveness in each of the two intervening years.

The last internal Board effectiveness review exercise was carried out in December 2022 and results of the findings discussed at the Board meetings in January and March 2023.

The Board approved the questionnaire for an internal self-effectiveness review to be undertaken for the year to January 2024. This questionnaire mirrored the version used in the previous year's internal self-effectiveness evaluation, except for the section relating to the committees, which was omitted since the committees' self-effectiveness have been evaluated separately. Employing the same questionnaire will facilitate a direct comparison to identify any progress or otherwise that have occurred since the last assessment.

A review of the self-effectiveness of committees was not undertaken for the previous year due to the Board approving a new committee structure in September 2022 and the difficulties faced with recruiting non-executive directors at the time.

2. Review Process

The Board approved a self-assessment questionnaire, which was developed based on best practices, and circulated to all board members (both voting and non-voting) to complete.

The response rate was 90%, with participation from the Chair, all five non-executive directors (NEDs), all three Associate NEDs (ANEDs), and nine members of the executive team (two executive team members did not complete the questionnaire).

The questionnaire examined seven sections as follows:

1. The Role of the Board, its objectives and remit
2. Risk management
3. Performance management
4. Board effectiveness
5. Board meetings
6. Board composition
7. General section

Board members were requested to indicate their designation - NEDs, ANEDs, or executive directors. The purpose of this was to ascertain any notable variations in the responses given by the NEDs, ANEDs, and executive directors.

The questions were rated as follows:

1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

The findings from the review are presented in this report, which is based on the analysis of the completed questionnaires that were submitted.

3. Summary of Analysis

Appendix 1 provides a summary of the assessments carried out on the seven aforementioned sections, along with individual comments for each section.

It is important to highlight that all comments have been anonymised and any comments that could potentially reveal the identity of a board member, or roles, have been slightly altered.

It is also important to mention that while examining the report, it should be acknowledged that some of the recently appointed NEDs and ANEDs disclosed that due to their limited time on the Board, they have not witnessed sufficient evidence to formulate fact-based opinion. Consequently, they are unable to provide more specific comments on certain sections and some of their responses are based on their early perceptions.

Comparison has been made to the Board self-effectiveness review conducted last year. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that five board directors (comprising of three NEDs and two members of the executive team) who participated in the exercise for the previous review had left the organisation. Additionally, six new board directors (two NEDs, three ANEDs, and one executive director) joined the organisation during the review period. It is worth mentioning that the completed questionnaire from another NED, who departed during the 2023/24 period, was included as period under review covered his tenure.

It is crucial to note that with the changes in the Board makeup (including the introduction of ANEDs on the Board), even though the Board was asked the same questions, the comparison does not include precisely the same board members.

4. Conclusion

The outcome aligns with the previous year's assessment, indicating that the Board generally agrees on the aspects that are functioning satisfactorily and those that require improvement.

Despite 56% of board members acknowledging an increase in effectiveness since the last review (compared to 44% last year), additional efforts are necessary to ensure that all members have complete confidence in the Board's true effectiveness. These figures include the numbers that did not answer this question. If these numbers were removed, the percentage of board members acknowledging an increase in effectiveness would be 77% (compared to 62% last year).

5. Recommendation and Next Steps

The Board is asked to review the outcomes of its self-effectiveness review, and collectively agree what actions should be taken, including areas of prioritisation and timescales for delivery.

Following which, an action plan will be developed and presented to the Board at its next meeting.

As agreed by the Board, the next board effectiveness review will be undertaken by an external organisation.

Appendix 1 – Summary of analysis by section

Section 1: The Role of the Board, its objectives and remit

This section covered strategy, purpose and values, objectives, roles and statutory responsibilities.

This section largely aligned with the position held in the previous year, with an improvement seen on the Board having a clear set of objectives that are independent of those for NHSBT. 50% of board members either agreed or strongly agreed with this, in contrast to the 11% the previous year.

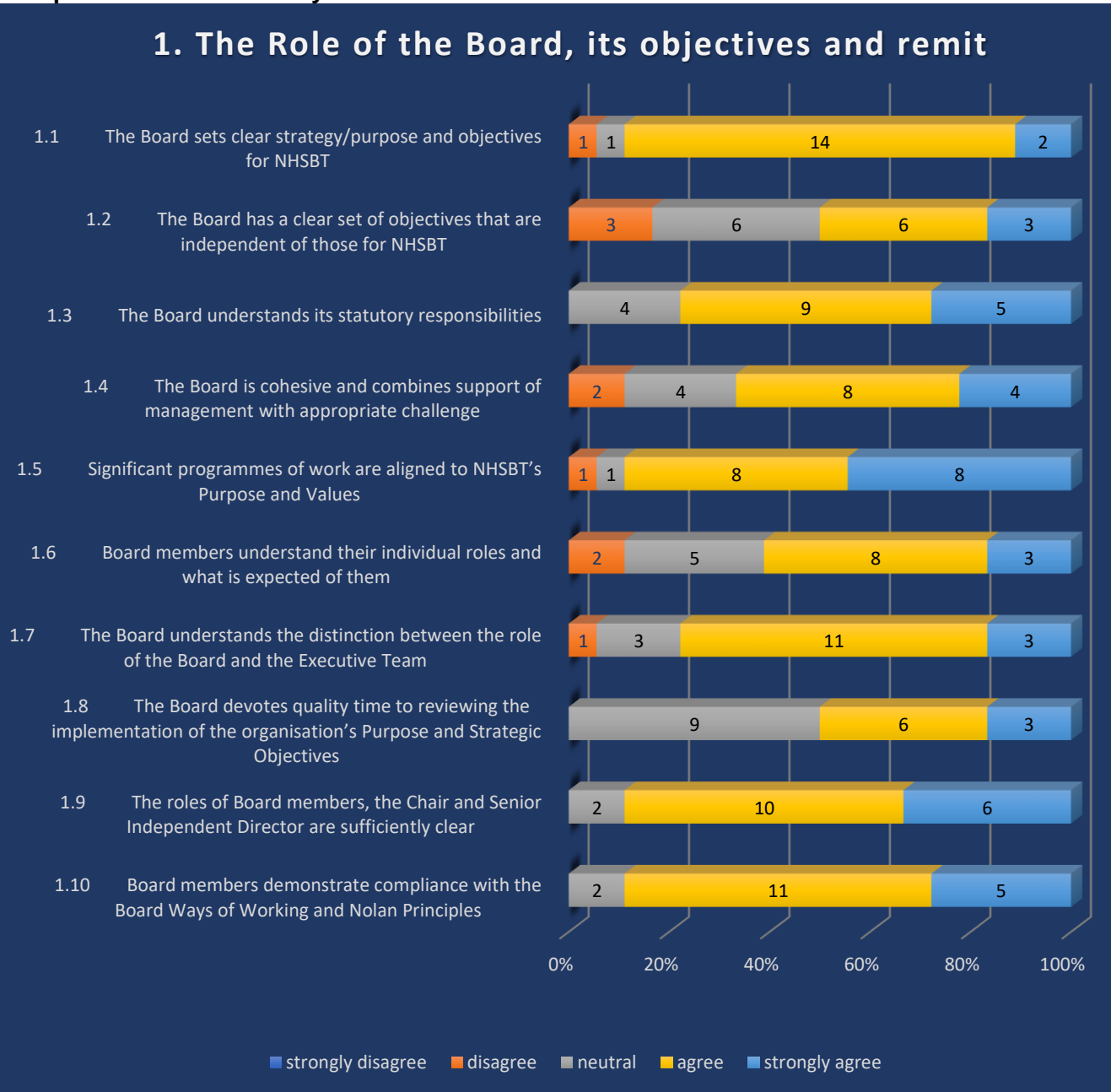
Conversely, the Board's understanding of the distinction between its role and that of the executive team deteriorated. For this review, 78% acknowledged this distinction, a decrease from 94% in the previous year. The ANEDs role may need to be reevaluated in light of some of the comments made.

The comments provided under section one are noted below.

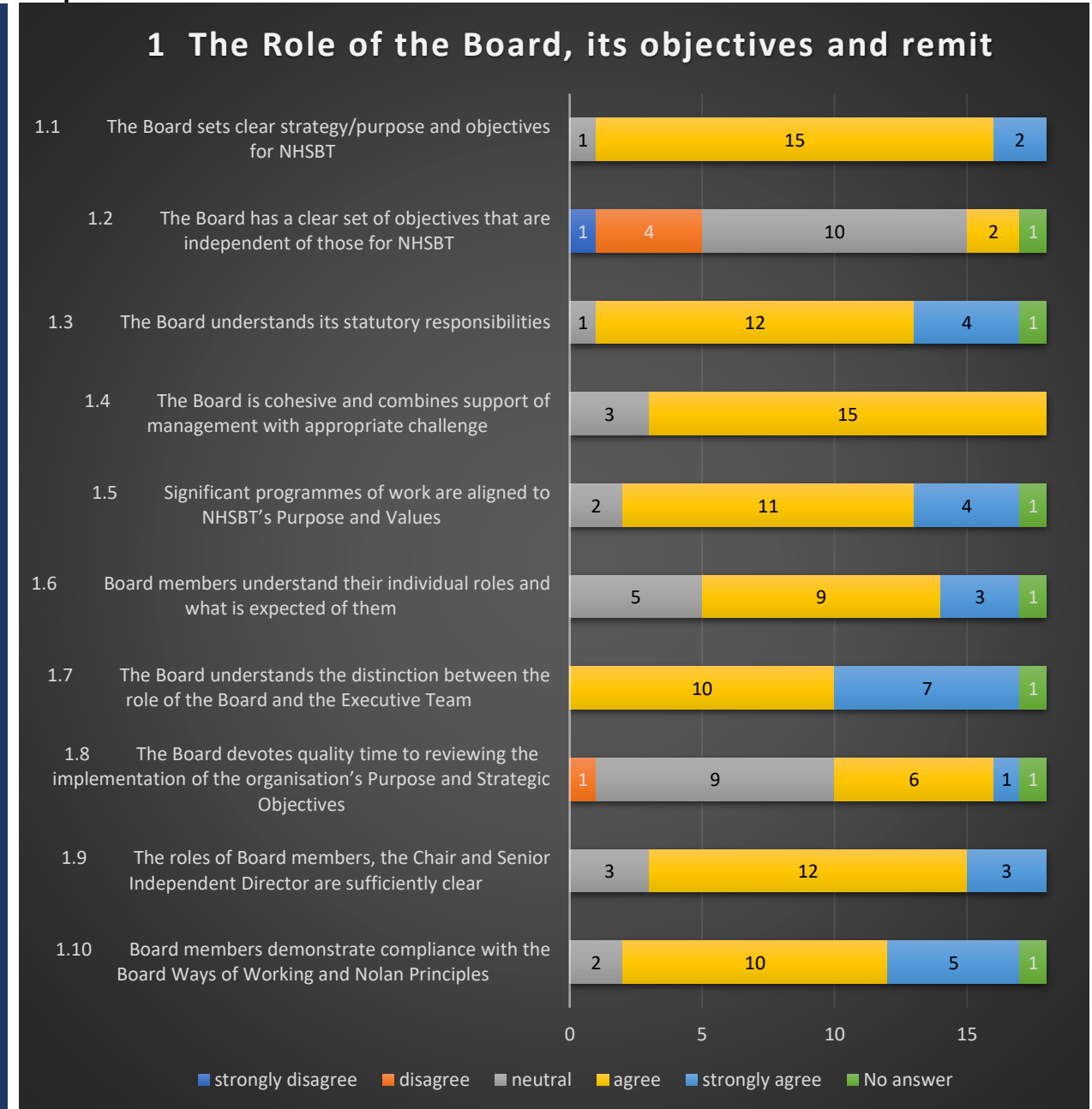
- Time spent on getting the new/established NEDs up to speed (with and without the Exec Team present) – the smaller core Exec Team re:
 - Roles and accountabilities
 - Ways of working with Exec Team
- On Strategy, the Board do not spend enough time thinking about the programmes of work that will transform the organisation. Most of the agenda is spent on “updates” or “sign-offs”. Can we say how many such programmes we have? If so, then we can schedule a review of each say twice a year. We do this for Blood Teach Modernisation but this is a poor example as it is not a transformational plan. It is a risk reduction/resilience initiative.
- Not enough is done to understand the root cause of underperformance/plans to rectify nor to address the effectiveness or risk management. I’d like to see us focus on at least one business area at each Board e.g. Blood or Platelets or Organs or Eyes or Stem Cells and set current performance in the context of 5 years plans. Similarly, I’d welcome taking one Strategic risk at each Board/workshop - I have been trying to get Cyber moving forward without success.
- New Board members require training on their role and the Constitution, their statutory responsibilities. This should be refreshed annually as things change.
- The board has been through some challenging times but is now operating very effectively.
- Incorporating a detailed explanation of the role of the associate non-executive director (Associate NED) into the onboarding process, distinguishing it from the roles of full non-executive directors (NEDs), is essential for clarity and effectiveness. This should include a clear job description and outline of where Associate NEDs best fit within the organisation, highlighting their unique contributions and the boundaries of their roles compared to NEDs. Such specificity ensures that all board members understand their positions and responsibilities, leading to more effective governance and strategic oversight within NHSBT.
- I think there may be some confusion on the role of an Associate NED.

The graphs below show a summary of the results for section one for the year under review (year to January 2024) and the previous year (2022).

Graph 1a - Year to January 2024



Graph 1b - Year 2022



Section 2: Risk Management

This section covered risk process, risk appetite, risk reporting and risk strategy.

In the previous year's review, this area performed the least, indicating a need for significant work on risk management to improve the Board's understanding, engagement, and participation. One year later, notable progress has been achieved, in contrast to some of the remarks noted below.

Previously, only 11% of board members agreed that the Board devotes sufficient time to determining the risk strategy of NHSBT. This percentage has now risen to 50%. Likewise, while only 28% of board members previously thought that the Board had a clear understanding of its risk appetite and factored it into decision-making, 61% now acknowledge that this is the case.

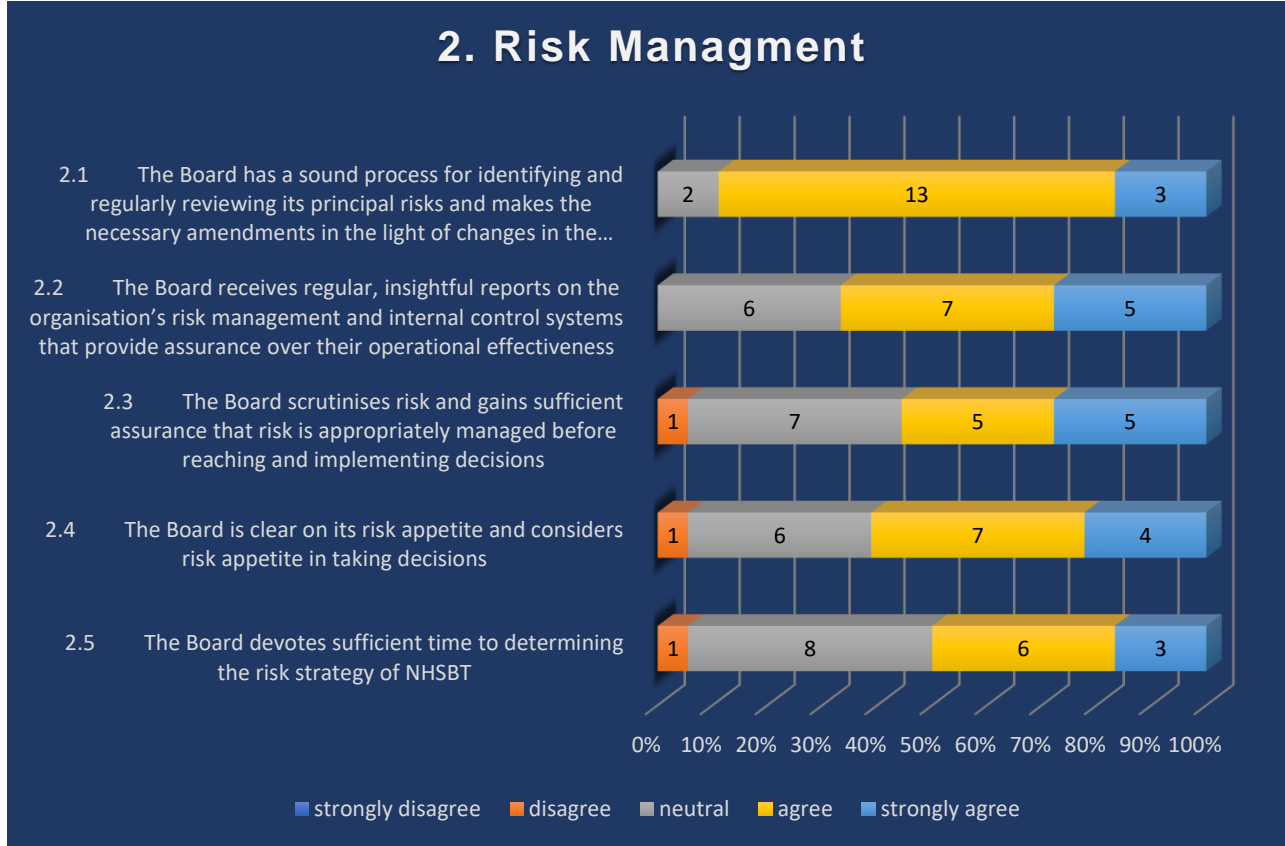
No board member disagreed that the Board has a robust process for identifying and consistently reviewing its key risks and implementing any required changes, unlike three members who dissented the previous year. Furthermore, 89% of the board members concurred with this, in contrast to 50% in the previous year.

The comments made under section two are noted below:

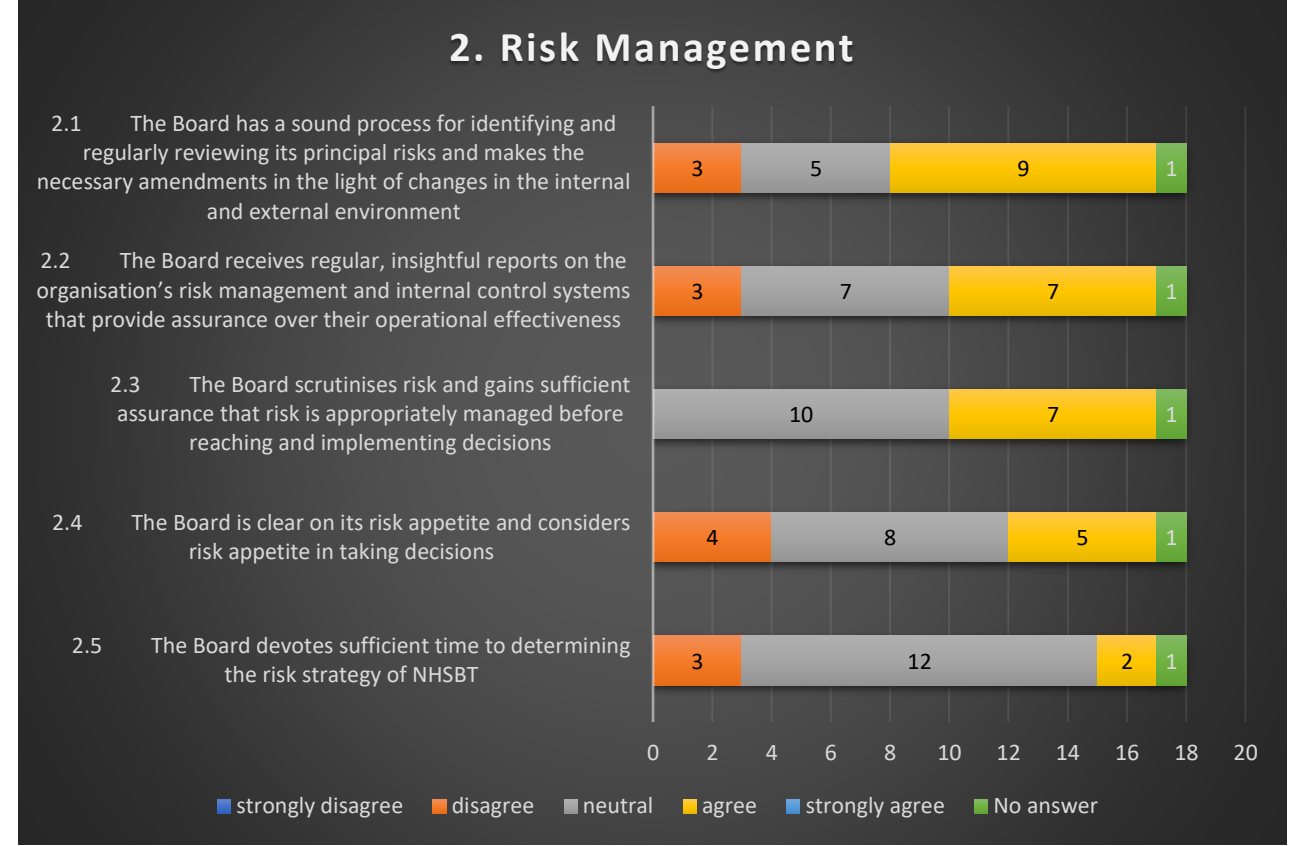
- I am still relatively new to the Board (less than 1 year). Although I had recently a deep dive session on Risk Management, I will need more time to rate these scores.
- A deep dive into the process and role of Board outside ARGC would re set the clarity and expectations as newer NEDs have joined.
- “This may sound self-critical, but for an organisation of this scale the Board’s interest and involvement in matters to do with risk is surprisingly low. In part the Board’s progress is limited by the slow pace of change within the Exec on matters to do with Risk. This is not a reflection on the individual charged with Risk responsibility rather the lack of a collective will to move up a few gears”.
- Integrating cybersecurity training into the onboarding process for NHSBT's board members is crucial, as well as ensuring devices are given to help safeguard sensitive information. Given the increasing prevalence of cyber threats, such training will equip board members with the necessary knowledge and awareness to oversee and advocate for robust cybersecurity practices within the organisation. This proactive approach ensures that the board can effectively guide and support NHSBT in safeguarding sensitive data and maintaining the trust of donors, patients, and staff, thereby mitigating risks and enhancing overall organizational resilience against cyber threats.
- This is done very well at ARGC. Question whether the full Board need something more on risk, possibly not as they cover it all off in sub-committees.

The graphs below show a summary of the results for section two for the year to January 2024 (current) and the previous year (2022).

Graph 2a - Year to January 2024



Graph 2b - Year 2022



Section 3: Performance Management

This section reviewed the Board's understanding of and responsibility for the performance of NHSBT.

This section largely aligned with the position held in the previous year, except for the fact that at least one board member registered disagreement on all but one question, a situation that did not occur in the previous year.

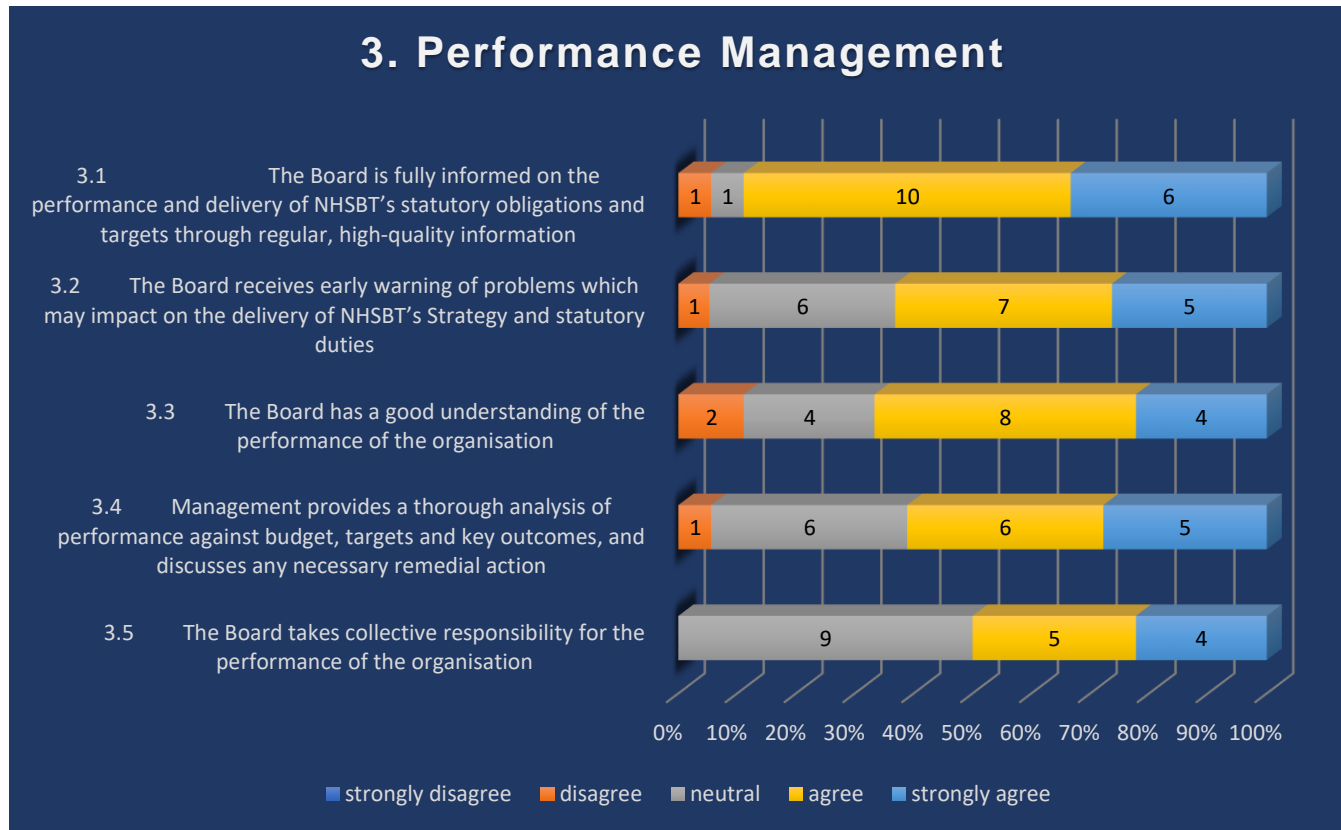
There was a decline in the number of board members who believe the Board was taking collective responsibility for the organisation's performance, as only half of the board members acknowledged this, in contrast to 72% in the previous year.

The comments provided under section three are noted below.

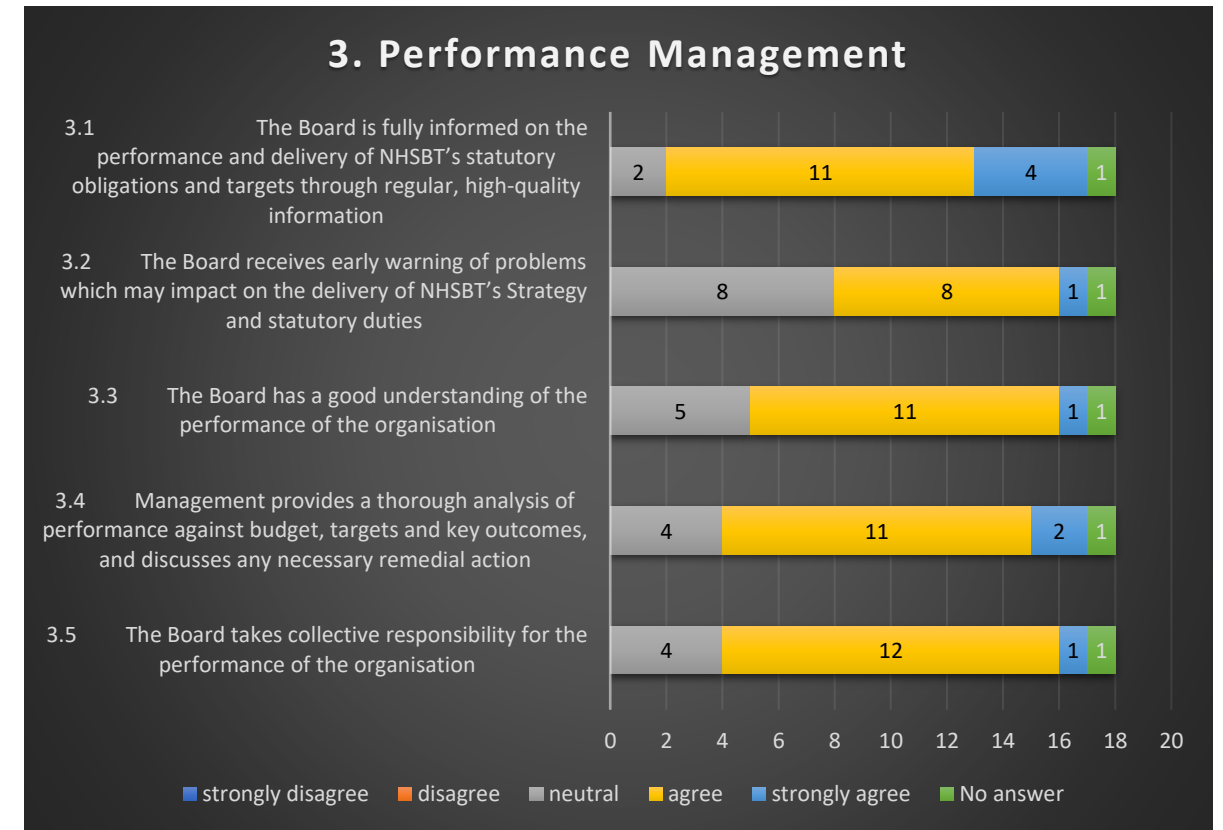
- A greater focus on the key KPIs and get well plans at Board meetings would escalate the KPIs impact – e.g., discussion on trends, which metrics do we focus on each month?
- There have been too many surprising shortfalls in performance – insufficient “heads up”. E.g. Blood resilience, Eyes, donor base make up etc
- As mentioned in the first section, we would do well to examine the effectiveness of remedial action. We tend to take things at face value and then are surprised when not all works out as planned.
- What I think would help is for the Exec to stand back and consider “which aspects of performance should we be discussing at the Board at the next meeting”.
- NHSBT must prioritise the development of a strong data analytics framework, with a particular focus on segmenting data in an easily interpretable manner. This approach will enable the board to identify gaps more efficiently and base decisions on a solid foundation of data intelligence. By leveraging segmented data analytics, NHSBT can gain deep insights into diverse donor behaviours, preferences, and trends, facilitating targeted strategies for engaging potential donors, optimising resource allocation, and enhancing overall organisational effectiveness. This data-driven perspective is crucial for adapting to the evolving healthcare landscape and ensuring sustainable blood supply chains.
- I think the Board would prefer more linking of performance to key outcomes.

The graphs below show a summary of the results for section three for the year to January 2024 (current) and the previous year (2022).

Graph 3a - Year to January 2024



Graph 3b - Year 2022



Section 4: Board Effectiveness

This section reviewed board skills mix, expertise and personalities; diversity; NED appointments; annual performance evaluation; induction and development; conflicts of interest and transparency.

This section largely demonstrated an overall improvement.

The declaration and management of conflicts of interest were executed properly, as agreed by all board members. 83% of board members strongly agreed, while the remaining 17% agreed, compared to 83% of board members either agreeing or strongly agreeing the previous year.

Furthermore, improvements were noted on the annual evaluation of the Board, Committee, and board members' performance; and the Board drawing up action plans following its performance evaluations. Notwithstanding this, there was barely any progress in the Board evaluating the effectiveness of its decision.

The number of board members who disagreed that the Board is working as a team, possesses the right combination of skills, expertise, and personalities, and has an appropriate level of diversity decreased by nearly 50% compared to the previous year. Similarly, there was a 67% increase in the number of board members who agreed with these statements compared to the previous year.

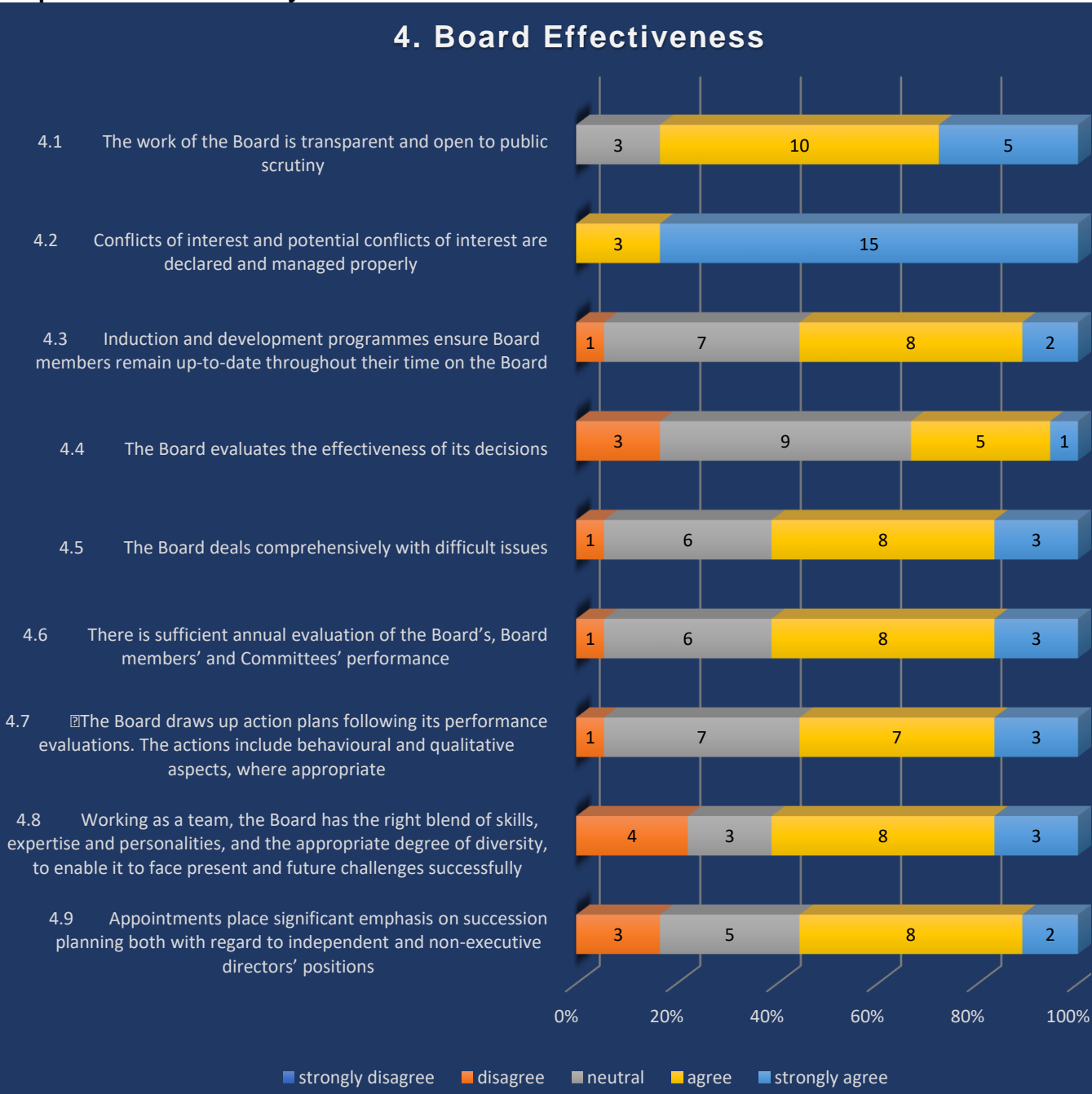
Despite the need for additional work on the induction and development programme (as noted in the comments), 56% of board members expressed their agreement or strong agreement regarding its effectiveness in keeping the Board up to date. This marks an increase from the previous year's 29%.

The comments provided under section four are noted below.

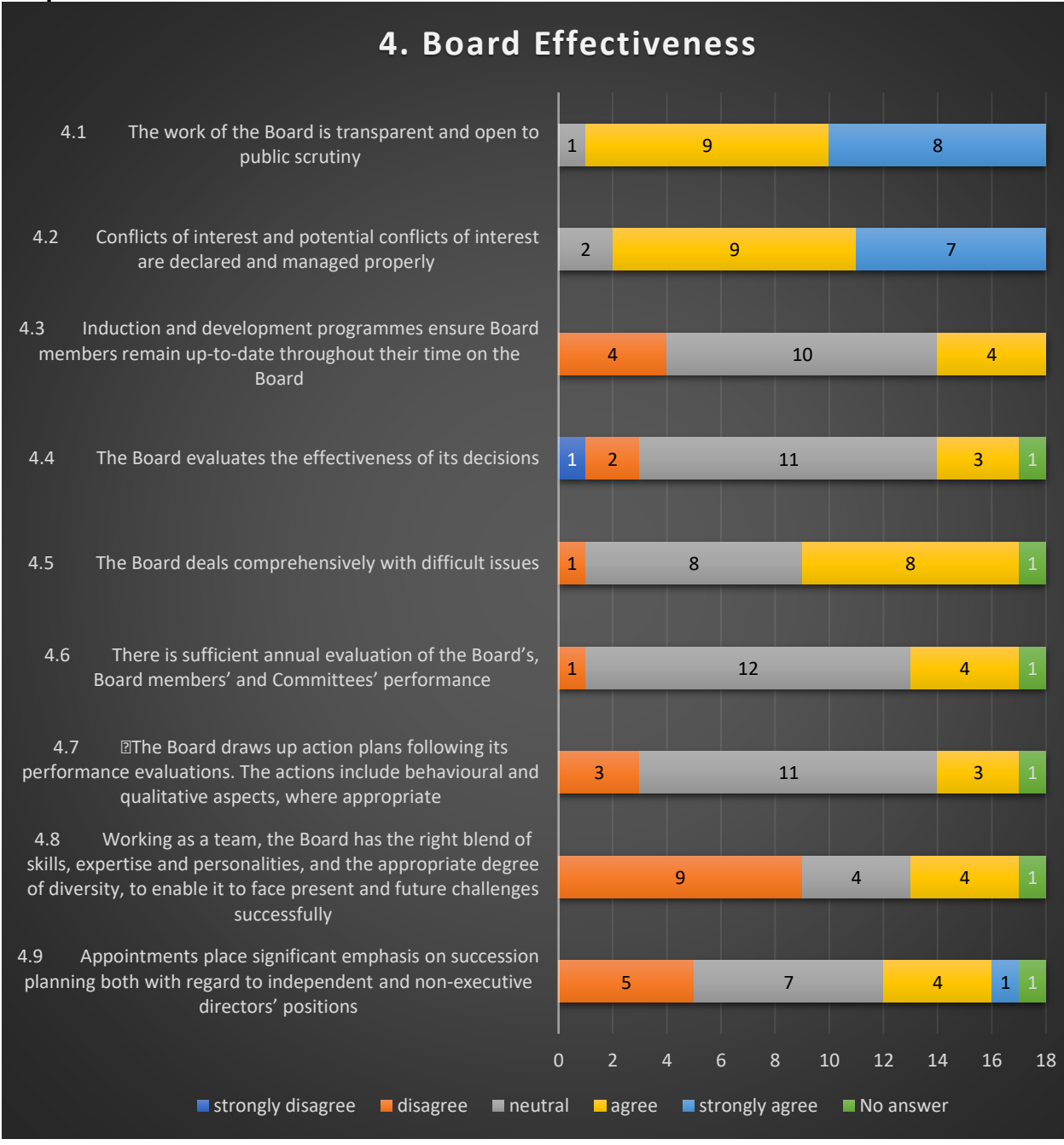
- I am still new at the Board (less than a year), hence the neutral ratings. The Chair does an excellent job to make sure the board is effective.
- Previously I have had an evaluation on my personal effectiveness on the Board through the Chair/NEDs to CEO, however this has lapsed more recently and there has not been a formal way of appraising exec Board members in the last couple of years.
- Marked neutral for many as not been through the effectiveness cycle and action plans yet.
- NEDs are not offered external programmes which would enhance their general understanding of either the Sector (NHS in this case) or their own responsibilities e.g., NED training on how to be an effective participant on a People Committee. This would not be hard to do and is required.
- Throughout this exercise, I have found myself repeating much of what I suggested last year to help the Board improve. This either means everyone disagrees with me, but failed to say so, or that we are not as good as we should be at following through meaningful actions from these evaluations. I have examples from elsewhere about how the Chair and Cosec work together to bring about Board improvement if that would be of help.
- We do not appear to have a list of Difficult Issues (question 4.5), but I like the idea. Can we have a go at this and test what work we have underway to address them. It's a great idea.
- We have more work to do on Succession planning at Board and Exec level. In the first instance, this could form part of the People Committee's remit, or a separate Appointments Committee could be established. Whilst we are informed "good news" is on its way, at the time of writing we remain under-powered as a NED team.
- Right blend of skills will be resolved when the new NEDs are appointed.

The graphs below show a summary of the results for section four for the year to January 2024 (current) and the previous year (2022).

Graph 4a - Year to January 2024



Graph 4b - Year 2022



Section 5: Board Meetings

This section reviewed board meetings administration, agendas, board minutes and opportunity to contribute at meetings.

This section showed relatively consistent results when compared to the previous year, displaying either a slight improvement or slight decline for the majority of questions. However, there was a significant drop in the clarity and quality of information in papers prepared by management, to instigate proper discussion and scrutiny. In the previous year, 83% of board members believed that the papers were of high quality, whereas only 56% shared the same sentiment in the current review. Furthermore, three board members disagreed that the papers were of high quality, whereas none had done so in the previous year. These findings align with some of the feedback provided below.

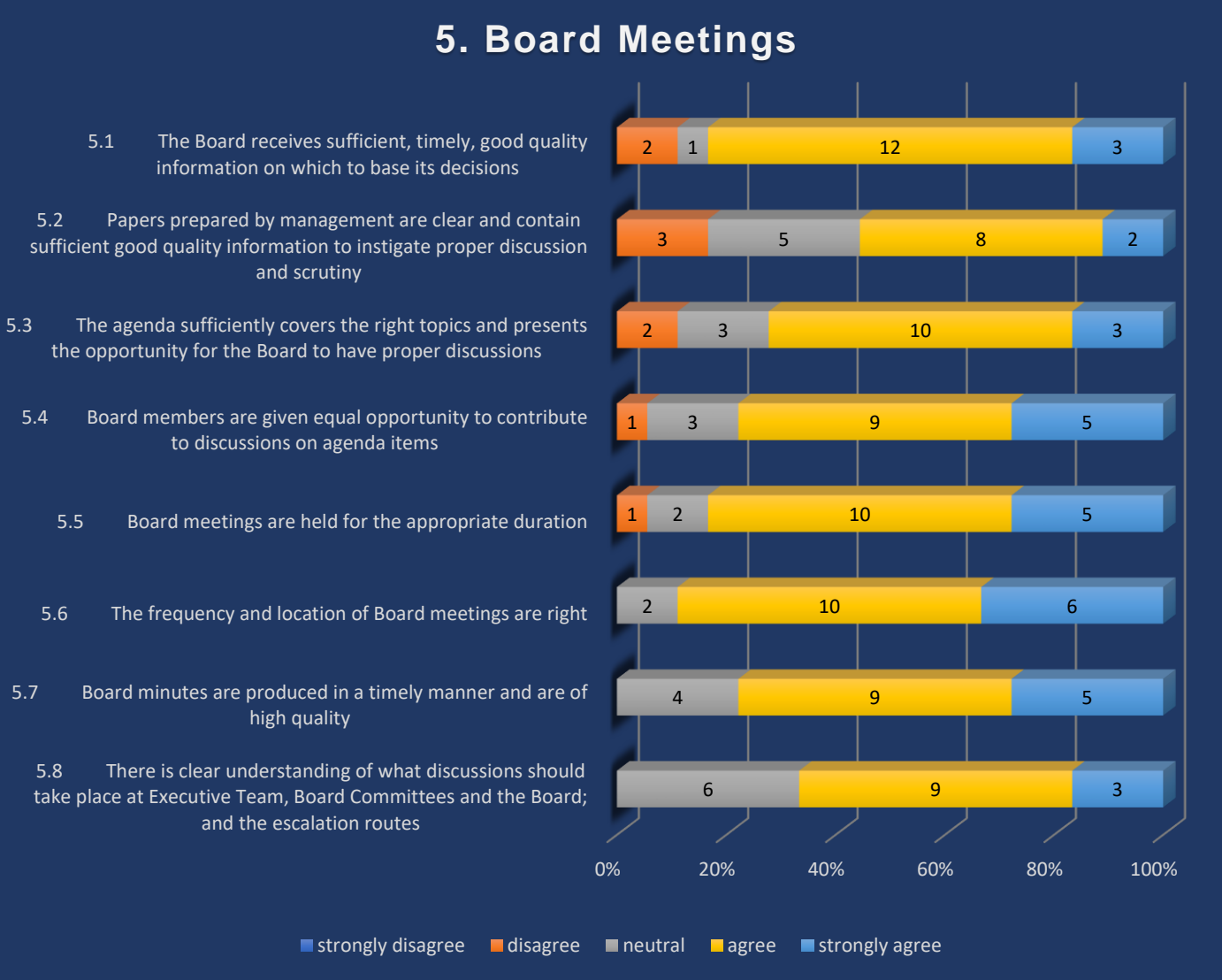
On the other hand, 78% of board members concurred that high-quality board minutes are prepared promptly, in contrast to 39% in the previous year. Furthermore, there was also progress noted in the agenda adequately addressing the relevant topics, providing the board with the chance to engage in meaningful discussions. 72% of board members perceived an improvement, as opposed to 44% in the previous year.

The comments provided under section five are noted below.

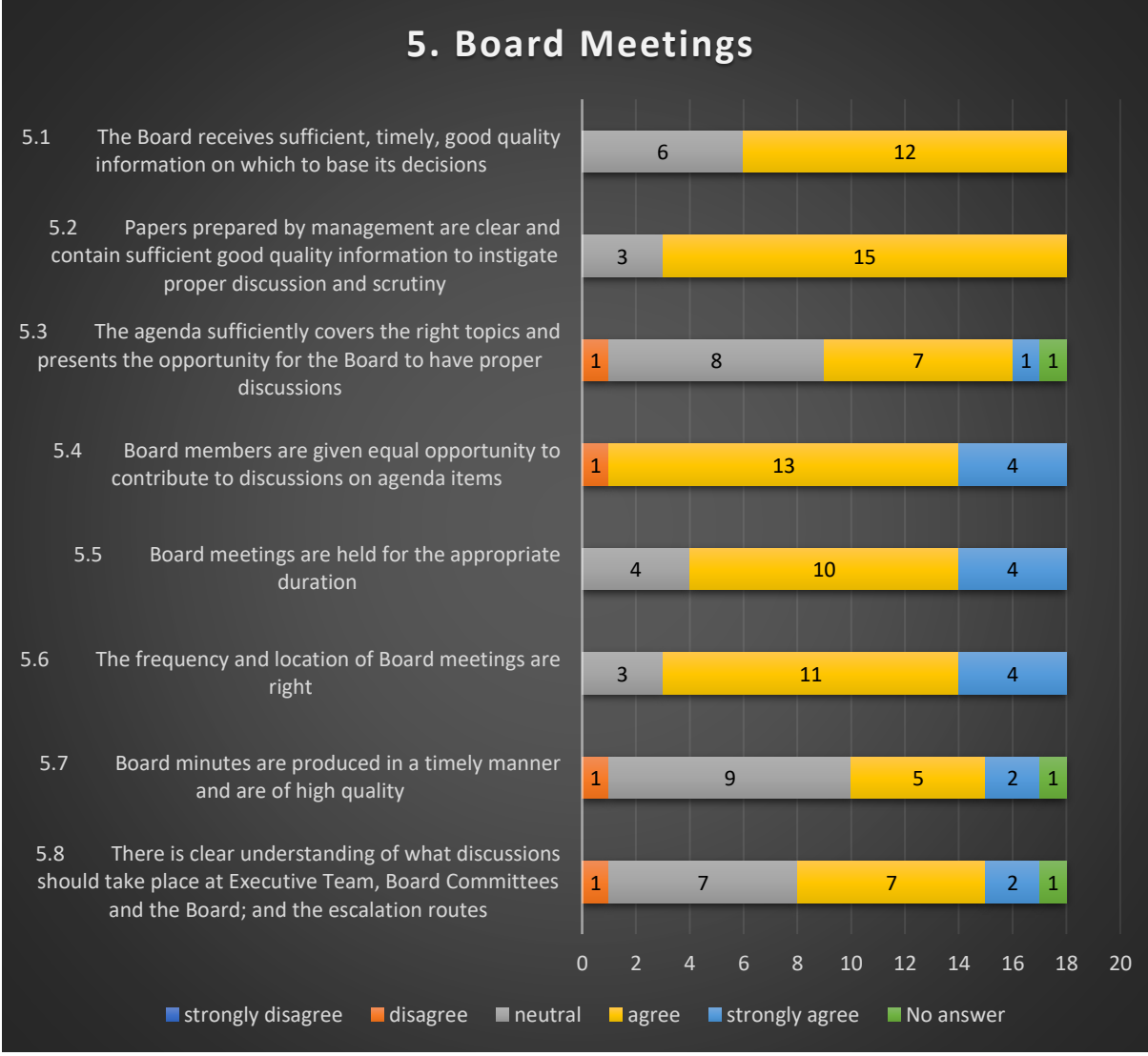
- In general, very good and open atmosphere. The Chair does an excellent job to make the meetings engaging and all board members can contribute. Board presentations could be more succinct and to the point. My suggestion is for the CEO to provide templates for board presentations to presenters and executives sponsoring an agenda item. This could also be about setting a maximum number of pages. This might require to set up support to presenters via the company secretary until the organisation gets to the expected level. Perhaps some agenda items which are both on private and public board meetings could be consolidated so we cover them only once. This would allow to create time during board meetings to dedicate a good section of the board meetings to strategy/innovation topics versus governance or update topics: perhaps 2/3rd governance/update versus 1/3rd strategy/innovation as a guideline?
- Some room for improvement has been discussed at last meeting. Be good to see the summary agreement reflected back by the Exec Team.
- The last set of Board papers were, I hope, a low point. To get the best out of NED experience, high quality papers are required which set out the problem, the options for change and a recommended, justified, way forward for debate.
- The Board discussed the agenda and timings after our last meeting. There remains work to be done and hopefully some of the other ideas above will also help to address what work we do/how we spend our time. At present the Board have a marginal impact on the work of the organisation – so either we are getting everything right or we are not being sufficiently helpful in setting direction.
- I think the last question (5.8) is a good one. It would be helpful to set out in diagrammatic form what gets decided/done at Exec and what gets done at Board. There seems a lot of overlap at present.
- Newer members of the Board are looking for different types of information in papers. We will need to evolve to be able to provide what is being asked for whilst also trying to keep papers short.

The graphs below show a summary of the results for section five for the year to January 2024 (current) and the previous year (2022).

Graph 5a - Year to January 2024



Graph 5b - Year 2022



Section 6: Board Composition

This section reviewed the composition of the board - skills mix, diversity, expertise, and right size.

There was noticeable improvement on whether the Board is sufficiently diverse, for example, in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. A significant increase was observed, with 50% of board members (compared to 6% the previous year) either agreeing or strongly agreeing that the Board is adequately diverse.

However, there was a decline in the number of board members who believed that the Board is of the appropriate size to ensure effective decision making. Only 44% agreed, compared to 56% the previous year, while an additional 44% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This aligns with the recurring comments about the Board being too large.

Despite the progress made in terms of diversity, concerns were raised specifically regarding the attention needed on ethnicity.

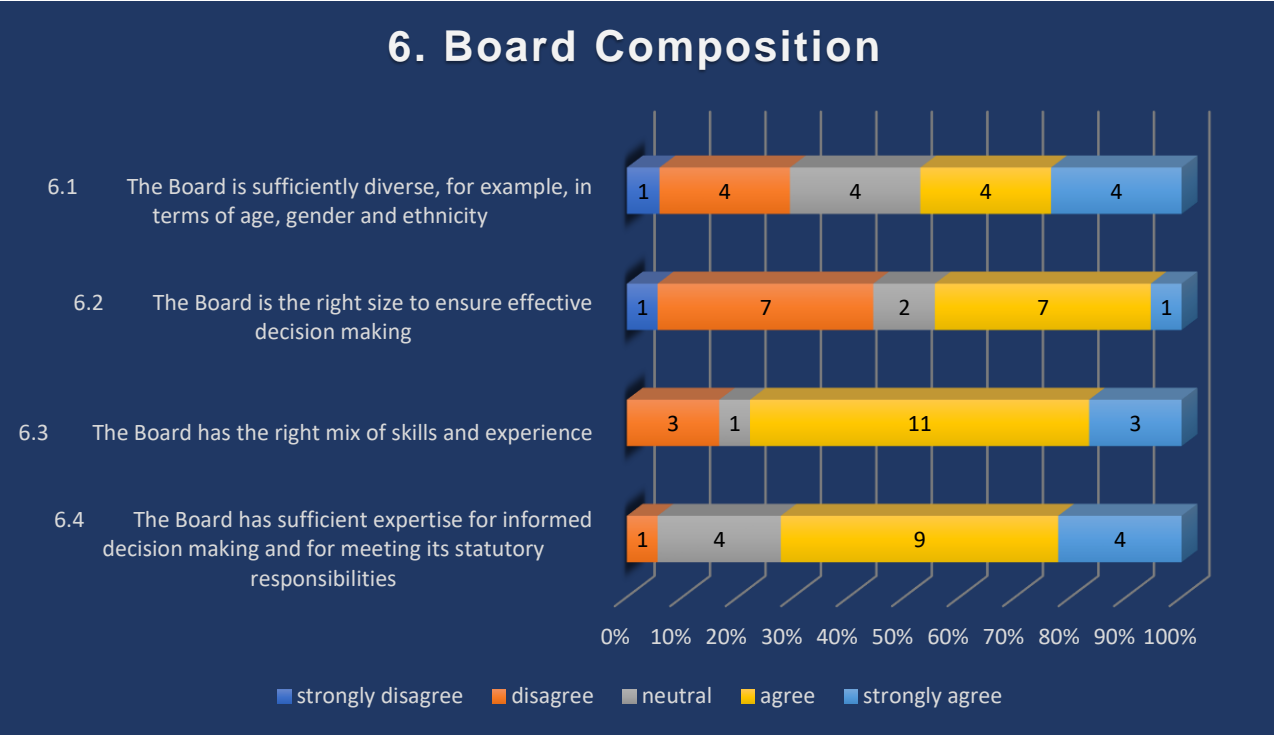
Progress was also observed regarding the board having the right mix of skills and experience. Four additional board members (compared to the previous year) either agreed or strongly agreed that the Board possesses the appropriate blend of skills and experience. Conversely, two more board members, compared to the previous year, disagreed with this notion.

The comments provided under section six are noted below.

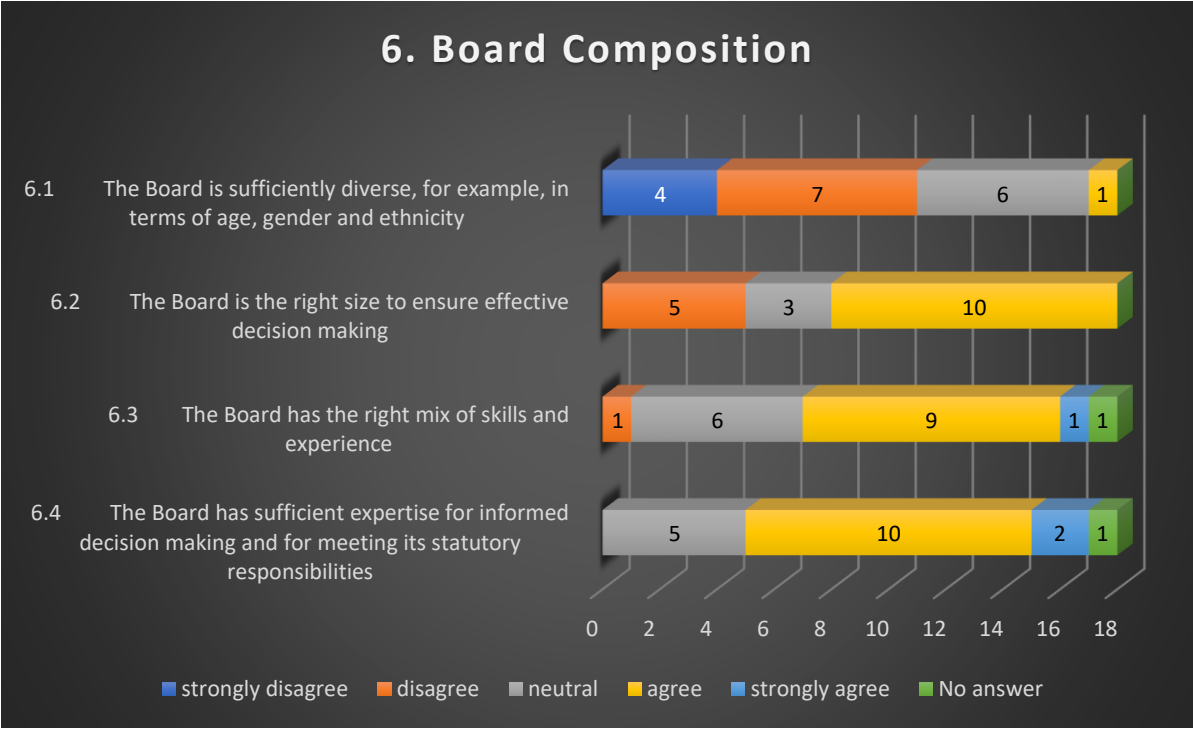
- As we are still to appoint 3 NEDs it is difficult to gauge sufficient expertise, skills and experience until they are in post.
- Excellent diverse representation. I believe the board is too big to allow for high quality discussions during board meetings and for everyone present at board meetings to contribute. There should be more clinical experience from the non executives on the board (I think this is being addressed).
- There is low diversity within the board from a BAME perspective.
- There is only one clinical NED on the board for an organisation which provides health care. New NED who is clinical is also medical. Does not reflect workforce.
- All of ET attend the board but only a certain proportion of ET are voting board members.
- The Board is huge and to me too large for purposeful discussion and decision making. It's not really very easy to have conversations and the governance of the NED only dinner recently I found unclear, as there was Board business discussed without some statutory Board members present, which I think is unusual in a unitary Board, but with Associate NEDs present. It is also unclear if Associate NEDs and some Execs are Board attendees (as per minutes) or Board members (as per website). It would be helpful to be super-clear and consistent on who the Board actually is....
- I also think it takes new NEDs a long time to get up to speed understanding what we do outside of blood. I wonder if we could help/consider this?
- As discussed, the Board is large for all topics. Topic specific Exec members and less additional others may increase the effectiveness.
- As commented above, at the time of writing, we do not have the skills, numbers and experience amongst the NED to be effective. The Board should have a view on the extent of Experience required for the majority of NEDs at NHS BT. There is nothing wrong with bringing on relatively new NEDs but that does need to be balanced with experience.
- The board is very large but necessarily so to ensure the right expertise is round the table.
- Ethnic diversity on the Board still needs attention. With the new NEDs and Associate NEDs and an expanded Executive I think the Board is edging towards being too big.
- Incorporating younger individuals into NHSBT's board could significantly enhance the diversity in age, fostering a more dynamic and innovative governance structure. Having younger individuals on NHSBT's board can be strategically beneficial, especially in efforts to attract a younger blood donor group. Younger board members can provide insights into the preferences, communication styles, and engagement strategies that resonate with their peers, facilitating the development of innovative approaches to donor recruitment and retention.

The graphs below show a summary of the results for section six for the year to January 2024 (current) and the previous year (2022).

Graph 6a - Year to January 2024



Graph 6b - Year 2022



Section 7: General Section

The General Section was designed to assess the performance of directors outside of board meetings, the level of challenge and support from NEDs, and the board members' understanding of the organisation in order to make meaningful contributions. Additionally, it evaluated the board members' perception of the board's effectiveness following the most recent effectiveness review.

Board members were to provide comments rather than assign scores; nevertheless, a few board members did provide scores. These scores were disregarded, as the questions were not designed to allocate scores.

Responses to the questions are outlined below.

<p>7.1 How well do Board members work outside of Board meetings?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Extremely well▪ Not much contact▪ Well. The board members join up together (execs and NEDs) when necessary or requested▪ NEDs appear responsive. There is little communication between Board meetings, which isn't necessarily an issue during times of high performance. It feels as though more interaction could reduce the level of detail we go into at Board.▪ Ad hoc but good when interactions happen.▪ Well▪ Good support between Exec and NEDs▪ Variable. An experienced, knowledgeable and skilful non-exec can be hugely helpful outside of the board and add a lot more value than the actual board meetings.▪ Well▪ Well, although NED availability is sometimes challenging.▪ Only been to few board meetings a limited interaction outside this.	<p>7.2 Are non-executive directors given the opportunity to support the executive directors?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Yes absolutely. This happens via committees or for specific topics▪ Yes (x3)▪ Yes, we are clear which NEDs are there to provide support and coaching to specific Execs.▪ I believe there needs to be more direct support pertaining to the clinical and Finance aspects of the organisation.
<p>7.3 Do executive directors feel they have the right support and challenge from non-executive directors?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Mixed. Often, challenge and support are excellent. Sometimes the non-executives get it wrong, and either give too much focus to lesser issues, or have expectations that do not reflect the context.▪ Yes (x4)▪ Limited clinical challenge	<p>7.4 Do you have sufficiently wide and deep understanding of the organisation to be able to contribute fully, and if not, what do you suggest to make this happen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ It takes time to learn which is normal. The induction programme was helpful to speed up the learning curve. The chair is easily reachable for questions and very supportive.▪ Yes (x6)▪ I have a growing awareness of the organisation and its operations, which feels wholly appropriate for a NED. The induction could include a video or deep dive session into the operations of the organisation as this would enable NEDs and Board members to have a broader view upon joining the board.▪ Further learning through deep dives & director overview or their orgs and objectives and delivery.▪ New to the organisation▪ Getting there

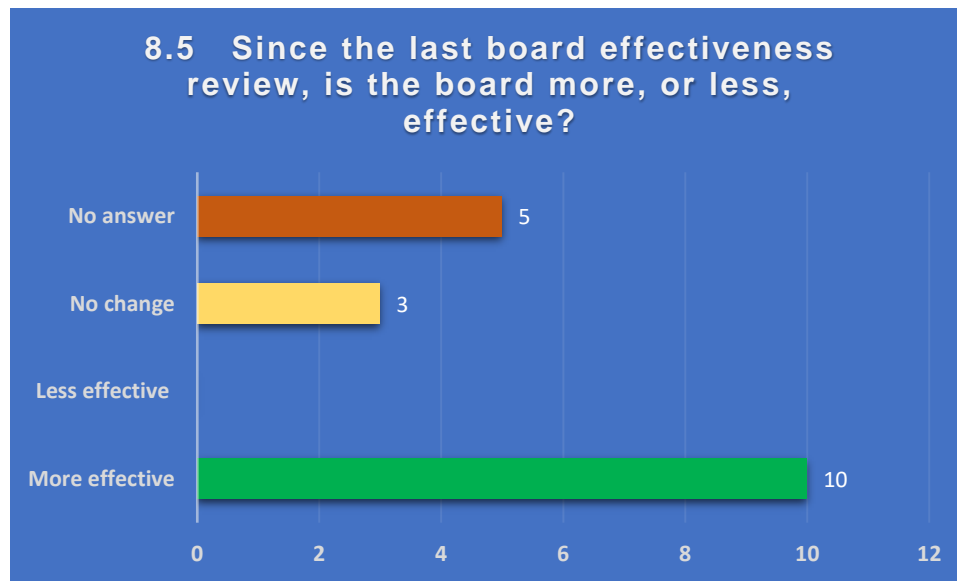
7.5 Since the last board effectiveness review, is the board more, or less, effective?

Of the 18 board members who completed the questionnaire, 10 expressed their belief that the Board had become more effective following the last Board effectiveness review (two more than the previous year). On the other hand, three members stated that they perceived no change, while five members did not provide a response. Among the 10 board members who believed in the increased effectiveness, two were NEDs, one was an ANED, and six were from the executive team. Two NEDs believed there had been no change, and only one member from the executive team shared the same sentiment. Additionally, one NED, two ANEDs, and two members from the executive team did not provide an answer. The primary reason for the non-response from the NED and ANEDs was attributed to the limited time these individuals had served on the board, as mentioned earlier.

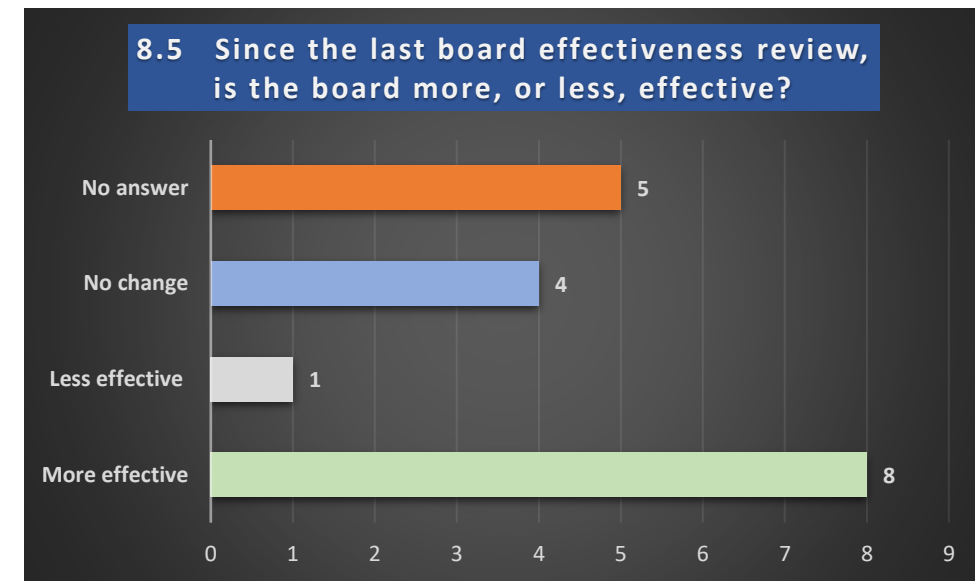
In general, the year under review showed improvement in comparison to the previous year, as no board member believed the board was less effective, and one less member indicated no change.

The graphs below show a summary of the results for section seven for the year to January 2024 (current) and the previous year (2022).

Graph 7a - Year to January 2024



Graph 7b - Year 2022



The comments provided under section seven are noted below.

- 7.5 left unanswered, as I have not had sight of the previous review.
- I have been a NED for less than a year.
- Unable to comment on 7.5 not in the organisation at the last board review.
- Excellent support and constructive challenge have been received from non-executive Directors.
- This encompasses business case review and working on Board seminar preparations.
- I have good conversations and support from specific NEDs outside of the meetings but I am confident that if I asked for help from anyone I would get it.
- Organisation memory is a concern due to the turnover of both NEDs and EDs – this hasn't been helped by the turnover of Company Secretary plus Assistant Directors. Often papers are detailed to set out the context in which a situation / strategy / plan has emerged. It is difficult to get the balance right.
- Can't comment on change.
- The board is too big and needs to be more strategic to transform and deliver real innovation.
- For much of the last 12 months, it must have been difficult for the execs to source the informal support they seek from NEDs on account of NED numbers and inevitably new arrivals having less organisational context. I hope we are now getting through this and that together we can be better at supporting our Exec colleagues.
- Most of the Board time is consumed by Blood and Organs and yet arguably most of the organisation's opportunity rests in Clinical Services and plasma. I'd welcome a better understanding of the growth opportunities and the transformation plans for Clinical Services e.g. we have begun to get a sense of what could be done in Pathology but the first phase of those plans is more about operational improvement than transformational.
- Overall, the board and its members are working well.
- Difficult to answer if more or less effective because the Board is changing a lot at the moment. I think the Board has all the right ingredients to be doing a great job.
- Unable to comment on 7.5 not in the organisation at the last board review.

