

Lessons from the changing regulatory boardroom on ‘onboarding’: An Irish perspective

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Abstract

Regulation of nursing and midwifery in Ireland experienced an ideological shift with the enactment of the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011. This Act migrated board membership from traditional registrant-led self-regulation, to a non-registrant majority, colloquially ‘the lay-majority’. This paper reviews the experiences of board members on being part of this lay-majority, the concept of board member identity, and members’ experiences of onboarding. Interpretativist in nature, an insider, action research, mixed methods frame was deployed. Findings demonstrate the lay-majority concept was initially contentious for registrants. Data also highlights a disparity between members’ expectations and experienced boardroom realities. Finally, board members’ experiences of onboarding were of a process in need of improvement. The paper concludes by proposing a ‘lifecycle model of regulatory board member onboarding’. This model stresses the importance of board members’ understanding of the regulatory governance frame, and application of sociocultural approaches to learning as key enablers to becoming an effective board member.

Keywords: Board member identity, lay-majority, onboarding, professional regulation, public interest.

Introduction

The Nurses and Midwives Act 2011 (Oireachtas na hÉireann, 2011), exposed regulation of these professions in Ireland to an ideological shift in boardroom composition, transitioning from traditional professional self-regulation approaches, to one overseen by a non-registrant majority (Murphy, Gilligan & Watson, 2021). Regulatory matters are therefore no longer the exclusive realm of the ‘regulated professions’, now driven by a wider public interest, overseen by a diverse board. This composition, colloquially, the ‘lay-majority’, is not just an Irish phenomenon. Regulatory boards mandating protection of the public with increasing public membership is observed internationally (Benton et al., 2019).

This article recounts research that was collaboratively delivered within the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, where the researcher was one of the first cohort appointed under the 2011 Act. Using insider, action research, applying mixed methods, it explored narratives around the lay-majority within this board’s context and aimed to:

1. Gain insight into the rationale for lay-majority use.
2. Create a profile of board membership since enactment.
3. Compare board members’ lived experiences with expectations.
4. Gain insight into understanding board membership identity and improving onboarding processes.

Following this introduction, the paper outlines the research context and researcher’s positionality. This is followed by a review of the literature on the relationship between professional regulation and professional identity. Literature on board member identity, the lay-majority and onboarding are also highlighted. Discussion then progresses to the methodological choices taken, and a presentation of the research findings and learnings interpreted from these findings are shared.

The paper ultimately proposes a *lifecycle model of regulatory board member onboarding* as a means of addressing the findings and learnings from this research. Additionally, it questions the usefulness of traditional registrant elections as a means of board recruitment in the new regulatory environment. It also recommends an exploration of the creation of a national training programme for potential regulatory board members.

The paper concludes by stressing the need to communicate clearly any planned regulatory change and board member role description, and the importance of socialisation into the governance form, in the enabling of effective board membership.

Context and researcher positionality

As noted, the author was a first cohort appointee under the 2011 Act, having since served two terms from 2013 to 2022. As a non-registrant member, his experience comes from private- and public-sector activities with a quality assurance and education focus. When describing ontology, epistemology, methods and axiology, the researcher positions himself at the interpretivist, qualitative, sociocultural and collaborative end of the spectrum. He thus views the knowledge and learning from this research as 'situated' within practice of the context of Irish regulation (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 31). He also views the findings as 'temporal' of a time in regulatory evolution (pp. 149–55) and views an individual's board member identity as 'contextually mediated' within the practices of the board (Wertsch, 2008).

While legislation can change on political will, enabling the organisational and process changes that follow can be time-consuming, bureaucratic and bring unintended consequences. In the case of this research, the change process led to specific legacy issues and a sub-optimal onboarding experience. This research in proposing a new 'lifecycle model of professional regulatory board member onboarding' stresses the importance of board member identity, in encouraging members' trust in the boards' collective decision-making process. This is seen as paramount given regulatory boards' quasi-judicial functioning.

The literature

While challenging to summarise such broad literature within a single article section, it is prudent to outline four key areas relevant to this research:

- a conceptual relationship between professional regulation and professional identity
- the role of public protection and the lay-majority
- views on board member or director 'identity'

- views on onboarding aligned with the sociocultural approach to learning.

Professional regulation and its link professional identity

Concepts of professional identity stress an interplay of multiple factors, including demographics, personality and social constructs of the profession (Han, 2017). Professional identity is an interpersonal, relational and differential construct, leading an individual to be associated as a member of a profession (Trede, Macklin & Bridges, 2012). It is enabled through professional socialisation (Bridges, 2018), is evolutionary, and is constructed by learning to become and participate in the profession's context (Skinner, Leavey & Rothi, 2021).

For many professions, one aspect of professional identity is the concept of professional self-regulation. Some professions trace self-regulation back to medieval guilds (Nunes, Rego & Brandão, 2009). Self-regulation to some is the ultimate in professional autonomy (Wenghofer, 2015), to others, the ultimate in professional status (Leslie et al., 2021). Indeed, Leslie et al. (2021) suggest it gives professions a state-sponsored monopoly. With terms like, status, autonomy and monopoly at play in the literature, the importance to professions of self-regulation is clear.

With the rise in neoliberalism, professionalism as a concept became a commodity, and regulation's focus realigned from autonomous practice to levels of public trust (Knight et al., 2020). This is not suggesting regulation's primary focus has become public trust, rather an addendum, and, for some, a priority. What has evolved is a changing landscape some term a 'complex problem' needing novel regulatory approaches (Baron, 2015). Ultimately, professional regulation remains focused on establishing and maintaining the professions' register, and setting standards for professional practice and for continuing professional development (Byrne, 2016; Murphy, Gilligan & Watson, 2021), they just now do this through a different lens. This new regulatory model or governance form is sometimes called 'regulated self-regulation' (Chamberlain, 2016). Coming to the fore in the early twenty-first century, it manifested in visible changes in governance practice, particularly regarding who serves on boards and how they become board members. In the Irish nursing and midwifery context, these changes were encapsulated in the 2011 Act by a move to a non-registrant or 'lay-majority' of one.

The lay board member and their rise in the regulatory boardroom

Being classified a lay or registrant member, when viewed with a diversity lens, is just one of a multiple of factors defining composition within the stakeholder governance model. The stakeholder model having gained preference for enabling balance in the complex environment of today's public-sector boardroom (Horan & Mulreany, 2021). While there was some debate on the usefulness of mandated membership quotas (Ferreira, 2015; Issa & Fang, 2019), for this research, registrant and non-registrant quotas are clearly mandated in Part 4 of the Act.

Inclusion of the lay or public interest member is subject to criticism on grounds of:

- ambiguity of role (Pickard & Smith, 2001; Gremillion, Tolich & Bathurst, 2015; Chamberlain, 2016)
- lack of transparency in appointment (Richardson et al., 2019)
- a suggestion they lack medical-context experience (Johnson et al., 2019).

Within Irish nursing and midwifery, the professions' unions were clearly of similar opinions. At the consultation stage, they called out what they viewed as 'inadequate' board composition, and a fear 'relevant expertise and knowledge' would be lost (Irish Nurses Organisation (INO), 2008, p. 8), ultimately stating the proposed Act was 'fundamentally flawed' (p. 6). Given the self-regulation history of the professions and the quasi-judicial functions the board discharges, the unions' apprehensions were perhaps understandable and the negative narrative on the lay-majority that was created inevitable. Indeed, regardless of the terminology used, non-registrant, public-interest representatives or lay-members, the most avid proponent will struggle to find a cohesive evidence-based rationale for their use in practice. Regulatory boardroom research is sparse given its contextual and political complexity (Stievano et al., 2019). Regulatory evolution thus tends to stem from a contextual response rather than planned change (Gilman & Fairma, 2015), and such evolution has led to the growth of lay-memberships.

Those supporting lay-membership stress its role in protecting the public interest (O'Regan & Killian, 2014; Chamberlain, 2016; Benton et al., 2019; Richardson et al., 2019). The inference is that traditional self-regulation has in some way failed as demonstrated by high-profile

scandals in regulated sectors (Byrne, 2016; Price et al., 2020). Healthcare is no exception to such scandals (Canning & O'Dwyer, 2013; O'Regan & Killian, 2014). These scandals have led to what we term elsewhere as a changing ideological view on regulation, reflecting how professions are viewed at a given time by society (Murphy, Gilligan & Watson, 2021). The recent ideological shift focusing on public trust, accountability and a need for more transparent governance (Price et al., 2020; Leslie et al., 2021). Many healthcare regulators responded by changing the demographic of their boards to include greater lay-membership. As such, how members, registrants or otherwise, are recruited, inducted or onboarded is becoming an increasing concern in regulatory contexts. So too is what it means to be a board member and the concept of board member or 'director identity' (Withers & Hillman, 2008).

The concept of board member (director) identity

Following Withers and Hillman's (2008) research into board member or director identity, there has been increasing discussion in the literature. These discussions apply the concept of professional identity to board membership, suggesting that the profession a member most affiliates with has an impact on how they discharge board functions (Elms & Nicholson, 2020). For this research, the implication is that being a nurse or midwife means you naturally identify with their view while in the boardroom context and during decision-making. The same is true for management, academics and the general populace.

Identity theory centres around concepts of organisational identification, association and heterogeneity (Conroy, Becker & Menges, 2017). The focus is getting the balance right between organisational affiliation and board members' core function of holding the executive to account. Authors emphasise the importance of diversity in cognitive style (Trainor, 2020), leadership style (Alhossini, Ntim & Zalata, 2021), gender (Weck et al., 2022) as well as skills and perspectives (Oehmichen et al., 2017), and how these play out in boardroom decision-making. They also outline potential fault-lines, including subgroup formation, slow decision-making and conflict (Crucke & Knockaert, 2016).

Within statutory professional regulation, balancing cognitive or leadership styles and the ever-increasing list of diversity criteria to board membership is perhaps becoming a legislative challenge. The 2011 Act makes it clear that, what matters is being a registrant or not.

This in turn dictates how you become a board member: registrants elected by peers or lay-members applying via 'stateboards.ie'. This central applications process is receiving praise in the literature around transparency and accessibility (Watt & Perkins, 2020). However, what has evolved in practice for this research context is somewhat of a two-tier system of recruitment, with the election component still in operation for just under 50 per cent of appointees. It could be argued from an identity theory perspective that multiple routes to appointment may not only enable, but reinforce, fault-lines of subgrouping and make the concept of socialising into and becoming a board member more challenging. It could also be argued that depending on route to entry, members' have different and unique onboarding requirements (International Council of Nurses, 2014).

Socialisation views on onboarding

Induction and onboarding literature tends to take two distinct perspectives: recounting a process-driven, box-ticking approach or stressing the importance of socialisation and enabling of identity. The focus in this research, aligning with researcher positionality, is on the latter. Viewing onboarding as concerned with identity formation stresses socialisation into practice (Saks & Gruman, 2018); it is concerned with the insider enabling the inductee to acquire contextual knowledge (Harris et al., 2020); and it views the inductee as an individual with unique requirements (Caldwell & Peters, 2018; Becker & Bish, 2021). It stresses the importance of context, negotiation of identity within this context and even the need to 'unlearn' (Becker & Bish, 2021, p. 3). Such views align with the concepts of 'situated' learning (Wertsch, 2008), 'legitimate participation' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and 'community of practice' identity (Wenger, 1998).

The grey literature in the regulatory context, however, aligns with the box-ticking approach. Examples include the regulatory governance toolkit (International Council of Nurses, 2014), the *Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies* (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), 2016); and *Governance for Directors of State Boards* (Institute of Directors Ireland & Mazars, 2017). All stress induction's role but offer little on board member identity formation and socialisation. While some stress induction as an ongoing process, the literature is light on 'how to' and evidence-based rationales. Given that these form the basis of mandated approaches to onboarding in the public sector, it is perhaps unsurprising that the author's onboarding experience was far from optimal.

Methods and approach

This section aims to answer three key methodological questions as follows:

Why insider action research?

This researcher's positionality stresses sociocultural philosophies and interpretativist epistemologies. Such a stance led to the application of a research approach, embracing insider, mixed methods research, guided by action research frames. While this enabled researcher positionality and methodological alignment, in practice, inherent challenges exist for many in such approaches.

The concept of insider research can be polarising, with every argument for, faced with an equally forceful counter-argument (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2018). Insiders question outsiders' ability to understand contextual complexities, outsiders question insiders' ability to detach without bias (Darwin Holmes, 2020). For this research, being an insider was a dynamic process (Brown, 2021). Over time, the researcher moved from an 'embedded practitioner researcher' to a 'critical friend' (Fletcher, 2019), as his board term ended. Acknowledging 'insiderness' brought challenges, it also brought considerable access, trust and enabled co-created output as the research was delivered in collaboration with a subcommittee of the board serving as collaborative co-creators.

With the researcher's quality improvement background, action research seemed a natural fit bringing with it, three overarching principles and enabling the:

- embracing of subjectivity and multiple perspectives (McNiff, 2017)
- capturing of experiences, power, politics and relational identity (Coghlan, 2019)
- participants' involvement and engagement (Santos, 2016).

Such principles were central to ensuring board ownership of the project for the researcher, the subcommittee and the participants. Ownership is important as appointment to this board is a public process, and, as such, members' trust and integrity must be protected. Applying insider action research enabled this through research ownership.

Why mixed methods and how was this applied in practice?

Applying mixed methods enabled the recounting of multiple experiences and epistemological stances, thereby moving the project away from 'methodological binary' (Sendall et al., 2018, p. 5). Working

collaboratively with the committee through a series of action research cycles, a survey was designed to collect data. It focused on demographics, motivation and skills, understanding of the lay-majority concept, board-member identity, and experiences of induction. The researcher conducted initial analysis and standard statistical interpretation. This was shared with the committee for collaborative interpretation, leading to agreed conclusions and an interpretation report. As the action research cycles progressed, this report in turn led to the creation of what were retrospectively called grandparent codes that provided tramlines for discussions in focus groups and one-to-one interviews. Transcription, coding, initial analysis and interpretation of these were again performed by the researcher following the application of thematic analysis principles (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The outcome again feeding into the committee for consultation and agreement.

Through this iterative co-created mixed methods process, two internal reports were generated and presented to the board, outlining a board-member profile, learnings on board-member identity, the lay-majority concept and a working model of ‘a life-cycle model for regulatory board member onboarding’.

What was the cohort and response rate?

Board appointment is dictated by the Act, meaning the research had a predefined population. Between statutory enactment and the time of the research, 26 registrants and 27 non-registrants, had been appointed under 10 subcategories of section 22.1 of the Act. The target response for the survey was 50 per cent from each category, while the target for qualitative data was an overall target of 50 per cent. Table 1 summarises the response rates realised.

Table 1: Response rates

	<i>Survey methods</i>	<i>Focus groups/ Interviews</i>
Total response	43 (86.79%)	27 (51.92%)
Registrants	23 (88.46%)	15 (57.69)
Non-registrants	23 (85.18)	12 (46.15%)
Subcategories that achieved 50% or greater	10 (100%)	Not monitored

Given these response rates, we suggest the research and its findings are reflective of overall cohort opinion, and the research offers insight from all aspects of board appointment routes as per the Act.

Findings and results

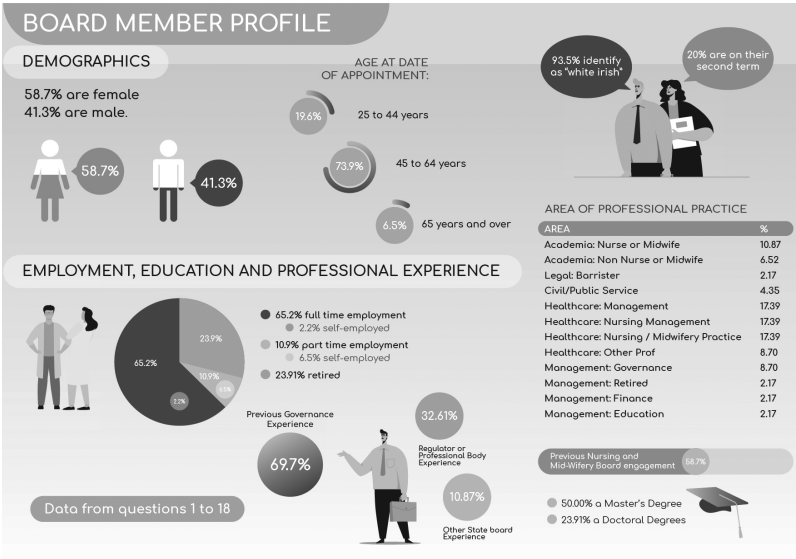
Findings and the associated learnings are now discussed under the following areas:

- a profile of board membership
- views on lay-membership and lay-majority
- expectations and experiences of membership
- views of board member identity
- views on onboarding.

A profile of board members and the learning that evolves

Compiling a profile of board membership was enabled via survey analysis. It provided insight into board member demographics as well as why they participate. An extract is summarised in Figure 1 with additional information in Table 2.

Figure 1: Board member profile (extract prepared from survey responses)



What evolves from Figure 1 and Table 2, is a picture of an educated (74 per cent to master's degree level and above), professionally experienced cohort (94 per cent), with a considerable majority having previous governance experience (70 per cent). This challenges the

Table 2: Board member profile demographics comparatives

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Response % (N)</i>	<i>CSO or similar source</i>	<i>Nurse & midwives register</i>
Gender female	59% (27)	51% (CSO, 2023)	84% (NMBI, 2022)
Age range ‘25 to 64 years’	93% (42)	53% (CSO, 2017)	94%
Ethnicity ‘white Irish’	94% (43)	88% (CSO, 2023)	68% (NMBI, 2022)
Related sectoral experience healthcare, academia or management	94% (43)	N/A	N/A
Education to postgraduate level	74% (34)	24% (DFHERIS, 2022)	N/A
Previous governance experience	70% (32)	N/A	N/A

Abbreviations: CSO = Central Statistics Office, DFHERIS = Department of Further and Higher Education Research Innovation and Science, N/A = not applicable, NMBI = Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland.

INO espoused inadequate, ‘fundamentally flawed’ board narrative (INO, 2008). Perhaps most interesting to the government department, to whom the board is accountable, is the data suggests members’ participation is driven by a mix of ‘protection of the integrity of the professions’ and ‘protection of the public interest’. A clear majority (70 per cent), leaning towards protection of the public, a reassuring sign given the boards-mandated object under section 8 of the Act.

However, there are profile indicators that need addressing in the area of ethnicity and diversity within the board. Diversity is a factor the board has cognisance of, as expressed by one non-registrant: ‘I think we have to have diversity... But if you over-look at it, you end up in a quagmire of having a bit of this, a bit of that and a bit of the other..., if you look there’s all kinds of diversity there already’.

What is not obvious from Table 2, but what flowed from discussions was the complexity of the board’s work and the diverse skillset it requires. One registrant summarises: ‘Yes, it is about nursing and midwifery, but it is about running a successful organisation that protects the public within the requirements of the Act’.

This quote demonstrates the complexities of professional regulation. Board members must blend contextual understanding of the professions, business and organisational management know-how,

an understanding of public service, a political competence and an understanding of professional regulation to discharge the board's quasi-judicial functions.

Learning one: Distilling learning from this, the inference from the board member profile is 'what gets measured – gets implemented'. Section 22 of the Act, mandates the non-registrant majority. This is consistently monitored and implemented in recruitment for the board and subcommittees. Similarly, nationally monitored gender quotas striving for a target of 40 per cent from the under-represented gender (DPER, 2022), is also achieved. However, factors such as ethnicity and other diversity criteria, not yet monitored, are not achieved.

Members' experiences stressed the need for boards to have an array of competences combining healthcare, education, legal, business and finance, civic duty and a multitude of other skills in the current professional regulatory governance frame. Such skills require a diverse board far beyond the standard professional self-regulation model. Communicating the need for this change is perhaps paramount to a successful change in boardroom membership. This research also supports those who espouse the merits of Ireland's centralised state boards recruitment portal (stateboards.ie), in delivering the required calibre of candidate and making boardrooms transparent and accessible (Watt & Perkins, 2020).

Views on lay-membership, the lay-majority and resulting learning

As alluded to earlier, the change in governance frame from self-regulation to the lay-majority was contentious for the professions and led to some volatile boardroom interactions. One registrant recounted: 'I hate using this word, but it was ... quite militant at times, in the early years under the new legislation...it was the union voice versus the board voice ... it was a challenging dynamic...'

However, over time this has dissipated and as suggested by another registrant speaking of the lay-majority: '... I think that debate has progressed...it's just taken now as almost the norm'.

Members suggested that this militant atmosphere stemmed from a lack of understanding of the concept of lay-membership and the role they are expected to play. These findings align with those published elsewhere concerning professionals' apprehensions around lay-membership and using it as a majority concept to demonstrate the public interest (Pickard & Smith, 2001; Gremillion, Tolich & Bathurst, 2015; Baum, 2016; Richardson et al., 2019).

Members suggested that the shared boardroom challenges they encountered around what the research termed 'legacy issues' drew the board closer together and resulted in operational changes to a consensus decision-making model. Indeed, one registrant, again attributes a war-like narrative described the experience as, '...you really felt you were in the trenches with people...'

This shared contextual experience, led 67 per cent to suggest they identified with the board as an entity in its own right, suggesting elements of board member identity had evolved. Another registrant respondent offered views on a shared identity and the complex unique position board members serve: 'Because you're in a very unique position...it is like being in the TARDIS... you have to identify with those people (the board), ...back into the day job, where they were very critical of things... and in your head, you're screaming, "I swear to God we are doing lots of things ... to try and change it"'.

The research suggests that regardless of being a registrant or not, almost two-thirds of respondents perceived no difference in the overall level of engagement between registrant and non-registrant. However, 52.17 per cent suggested that they 'noticed a difference between nurse/midwife and lay-members with regards to governance/corporate/strategic/business issues engagement', with registrants more likely to perceive a difference in engagement in fitness-to-practice issues by lay-members ($\chi^2 = 5.5758$, p value is 0.018211, $p < 0.05$). Some 91.3 per cent stated that they felt the term 'stakeholder board' was a more appropriate means of describing current board composition than a lay-majority.

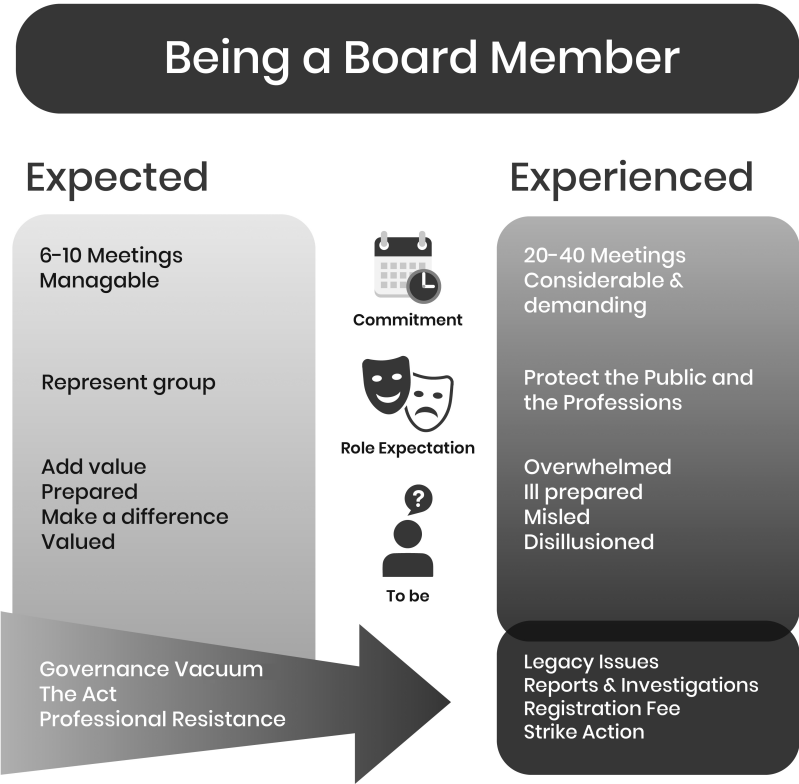
Learning two: There is a clear lesson from the discussions on lay-membership for regulators embarking on a similar change. Legislative change can and will happen, however expecting the preceding history of the regulator to evaporate with the stroke of the pen is unhelpful. Ensuring clarity of purpose and a rationale for regulatory change is critical. So too is making explicit the how, the why and the who of membership. If, like Wenghofer (2015), we appreciate the importance of self-regulation to the professions, then clarity around the rationale for moving from this governance form to a new one is the least that professions deserve. The need to better equip the board with relevant history of the previous governance frame and the insights gained from consultation is also important. Such a rationalised approach to professional regulatory evolution has been somewhat illusive due in no small part due to the complexities of the regulatory environment (Benton, Catizone & Chaudhry, 2017; Stievano et al., 2019). This

research stresses the need for clarity of communication and encourages legislators to meaningfully discuss and communicate anticipated change from the outset and ensure this communication is also shared with the new board once in place.

Board members’ expectations versus experiences and associated learning

The most animated discussions with members focused on the expectations of their role and the commitment it involved in practice. It became apparent there was considerable disparity, and for many an insufficient understanding of the role, and lack of clarity in communicating expectations was a concern (briefly summarised in Figure 2).

Figure 2: Members’ expectations versus experienced reality



Members expected to add value, represent a group as per their appointment route, as well as make a difference to the board. However, for many, the experienced reality was an emphasis and singular focus on protection of the professions and the public, a considerable and at times overwhelming workload and a feeling of being misled, disillusioned and undervalued. Some suggested it took them upwards of 18 months to settle into the role and add value.

Board members suggested that the misalignment between expectation and reality arose from an underestimation of required commitment, as well as lack of understanding of professional regulation's complexity. This quasi-judicial element bringing legally formal functioning and language that required members give considerable input into, for example, fitness to practice. The workload and uniqueness of the professional regulatory boardroom, is encapsulated by one non-registrant, serving on her first board: 'It was my first experience of a board. So I suppose that's to some extent irrelevant, because people who had been on boards previously, were saying this is nothing like any other board ...'

Even the most experienced board members shared this perspective, with some having to step down as recounted by another non-registrant, with considerable previous board experience stating: 'If you're retired, and had all the time in the world... it'd be a nice thing to be involved in... when you have your normal working life going on to get involved in this was just too much. I had to step down'.

It was clear that members come to the board with passion and commitment but perhaps some naivety, and the system did little to make them more aware.

Learning three: Learning here centres on role specification. The need for a regularly updated, board member role specification outlining a realistic overview of expectations for perspective members is paramount. Ensuring this is co-created with those who serve and those who have designated 'slots' under section 22 of the Act, seems a logical approach to development. It should be, regularly updated to reflect contextual changes, and drawn from members lived experienced rather than administrative aspiration. If members are expected to give 20-plus days (effectively 4 working weeks), plus considerable reading time, then it seems only fair they are aware of this in advance. In addition, having an understanding of professional regulatory evolution in the context of the professions that they regulate is one factor that was somehow not included for this cohort. Had they this prior understanding, their experience in the 'regulatory

Tardis', and the militant behaviour encountered may have been somewhat easier to understand and respond to.

Views and learning on board member identity

Board-member identity was approached cautiously by the cohort. When asked if being a regulatory board member should be a professional identity in its own right, 46 per cent concurred, while 28 per cent were unsure. However, when asked if they felt board members shared an identity, 61 per cent said 'yes' with 35 per cent unsure. Importantly, when asked to use a scale of '1 – representing their own or electing population to 100 – working as a collective in best interest of the board', the mean was 80, median 92, clearly showing a lean towards the boards' collective interest and identity.

Discussions identified contextual legacy issues as a driver to board unity. Issues such as external governance reports, the removal of the ability to set the annual registration fee, environmental factors such as nursing strikes and a changing political landscape, to a large extent pushed board members together. It could perhaps be viewed that these factors instilled, in this board, a collective identity built around protecting the board's own integrity, to in turn protect the public and the integrity of the professions they regulate.

Perhaps unsurprisingly the biggest negative identified within discussions on board membership identity was the fear of groupthink as summarised by one non-registrant: '... groupthink is a phenomenon that comes out of exaggerated cultural identity. And, so for that reason, I would kind of keep myself slightly aloof, from any kind of common identity...I'm not sure whether common identity is a good or a bad thing'.

While those in favour stressed the need for socialisation with board colleagues to enable a better understanding of why a person thinks a particular way in the consensus decision-making process. It also helped another non-registrant gain insight into the professions as they recounted: '...I got to know a lot of the nurses and midwives who didn't live in Dublin, because we stayed in the same hotel... so that's helped to build relationships and understand where people were coming from'.

When asked what activities would enable a better appreciation of the professional regulatory board member community, the need for stakeholder communication concerning the regulatory role, cross-regulator activities and collaborations, and a national pre-regulatory training programme were discussed. A total of 73 per cent of respondents suggested that such activities would encourage them to

join boards. This research supports similar work internationally as members unknowingly demonstrating an awareness of the perceived downside to organisational identification (Conroy, Becker & Menges, 2017; Veltrop et al., 2021). They also supported the professionalisation of the concept of professional regulatory board membership identity to some extent (Fantham et al., 2021).

Learning four: Diverse stakeholders bring multiple perspectives and competing voices. Reinforcing, clarifying and supporting the concept of 'regulatory board membership' as something that is valued by the professions, the public and the legislator is one mechanism that may help bring this diversity together. This board evolved a collective identity inadvertently, through conflict response and deploying a consensus decision-making approach. It seems somewhat inappropriate that mechanisms, that enable an appreciation of the concept of regulatory board member identity, were not in place from the outset. Indeed, it could be argued that the route to board membership be it nominated, elected or appointed brings with it baggage, perceptions and competing agenda. Having regulatory boards waste time engaged in power-plays and boardroom posturing seems at best counter-productive. Perhaps a single route to appointment and new approaches to onboarding is now a prudent step forward in regulatory evolution.

Views and learning on induction/onboarding

Respondents stressed induction's process focus (67.39 per cent) and that it enabled their understanding of the board's role (63.04 per cent). However, less than one in every two members (45.65 per cent) felt that it socialised them into the board. Members serving a second term were less likely to select 'Competent in understanding the boards role and remit as per the 2011 Act' ($\chi^2 = 4.2391$, $p = 0.039502$, $p < 0.05$), emphasising again that board members are joining without a clear understanding of what the board membership role is and what members are expected to do. Moreover, 36.96 per cent felt that the topics covered within induction did not address board objectives equally with fitness to practice being emphasised. When reflecting on induction, respondents suggested it was slightly more concerned with socialisation than box-ticking (Mean 55.15, Median 56.00) but was primarily concerned with knowledge transfer rather than enabling the inductee to become an insider (Mean 46.91, Median 50.00). Members overwhelmingly (80.43 per cent) suggested that induction should be ongoing rather than a one-off exercise.

Differences in responses between colleagues appointed '2018 and after', in comparison with appointees '2017 and prior', demonstrates that changes made to induction and onboarding have been successful. Changes included mentor/buddy systems, a focus on other regulatory functions such as education, and improvement in the approach and timing of induction. However, that acknowledged, perhaps the most alarming response was that just 11 per cent suggested that induction made them confident and comfortable to fully participate in board activity.

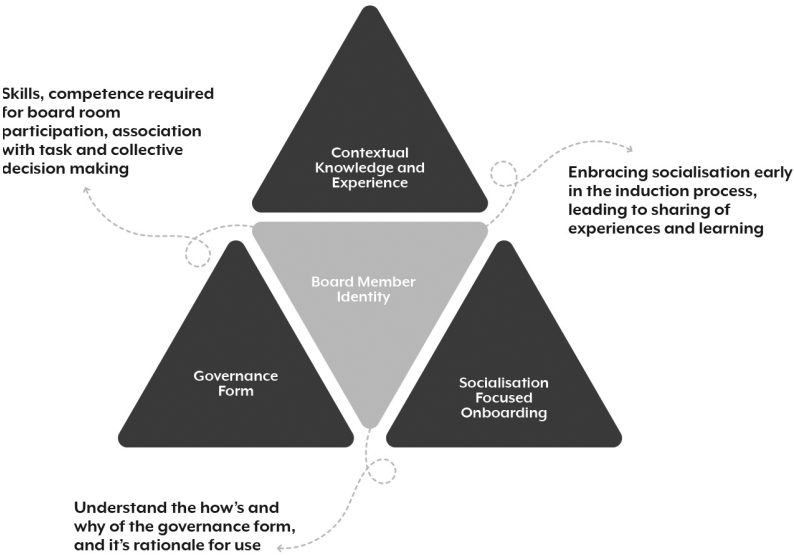
The cohort sees onboarding as an ongoing process starting before appointment and continuing throughout their term, emphasising the unique context which is new to all. One non-registrant participant offered: '... it's very hard to do a dry run on these things ... you learn a lot by roundtable stuff, but I think a buddy system going forward or that type of thing would be quite beneficial'.

With another registrant stressing the need for immersion into the board and the importance of being allowed to grow into the role: '... you don't know what you don't know. And so trying to take in all that level of information, and then use it, it's only like, four or five months down the road, you think "Oh, so that's what that was about"'.

For this cohort, becoming an effective regulatory board member is an evolutionary process. As summarised in Figure 3, regulatory board member identity is acquired through grounding in an understanding of the governance form, enabled by socialisation-focused onboarding and enacted through the skills and competences deployed within boardroom activity. Enabling this understanding within stakeholder groups will enable a more effective regulator and board member experience.

Learning five: Regulatory board members are expected to instantly make life-changing decisions with regards to professionals' practice. To do this they need to have trust in their collective decision-making process. This requires knowledge and information at a number of stages. Starting with a realistic role specification as outlined in Learning two, and continuing through initial onboarding, regular training and a means of enabling the member to grow into the role in a safe and effective manner. While there is a time and place for a box-ticking approach to onboarding, and to some extent the need to transfer knowledge en masse to a new cohort, this research suggests that the most effective onboarding was done by the board itself, through mentorships, reflection and an emphasis on socialisation.

Figure 3: Interplay between governance form, knowledge and skills, and socialisation-focused onboarding in enabling board member identity



Offering such an onboarding model through ‘the lifecycle model of professional regulatory board member onboarding’ will better equip new members from day one.

The lifecycle model of professional regulatory board member onboarding

Drawing on the research findings and the onboarding literature stressing socialisation models of education, ‘The lifecycle model of professional regulatory board member onboarding’, is offered as a means to guide regulators in onboarding activities. Presented as a ‘?’, the importance of viewing ‘being a regulatory board member’ as an evolutionary, identity-formation experience is stressed. So too is the need to acquire, evolve, and practice an array of regulatory skills and competences inside and outside the boardroom.

As summarised in Table 3 and Figure 4, the model offers a four-staged process. The concept views becoming a board member a temporal construct enabled over time through participation. Supported members to progress through the four phases of pre-appointment; early post-appointment; later post-appointment; and

embedded, enables becoming of more informed and effective board member. The emphasis is on acquiring skills and competence at a comfortable pace without overloading with copious amounts of policy and procedure. It focuses on making individuals effective board members in the first instance, then progresses them to being effective regulatory board members. Briefly the four phases are summarised in Table 3.

What Figure 4 and Table 3 propose is the application of sociocultural approaches to learning within regulatory onboarding. These can be applied as regulators deem contextually appropriate when changing membership. While members of the regulated professions normally share an identity as members of said profession, enabling them to build a new regulatory board member identity with lay-members is key to effective decision-making and public protection.

Being a regulatory board member brings statutory responsibility and quasi-judicial functioning. These will be new to the majority of individuals and bring with it a formal and at times legalistic confrontational environment. In addition, due to statutory appointment there is no overlap in appointment, thus the opportunity for board member knowledge transfer is reduced. Ensuring members are inducted on a staged basis commencing with standard governance elements, then later progressing to regulatory governance matters enables the creation of shared understanding of the context and confidence in the board decision-making processes. In this confidence, members are better able to discharge the formal regulatory function in a cohesive confident manner.

Future research and governance frame change

The research also highlighted areas for future research that may be of use to government departments and the legislature. Two items worth further consideration are:

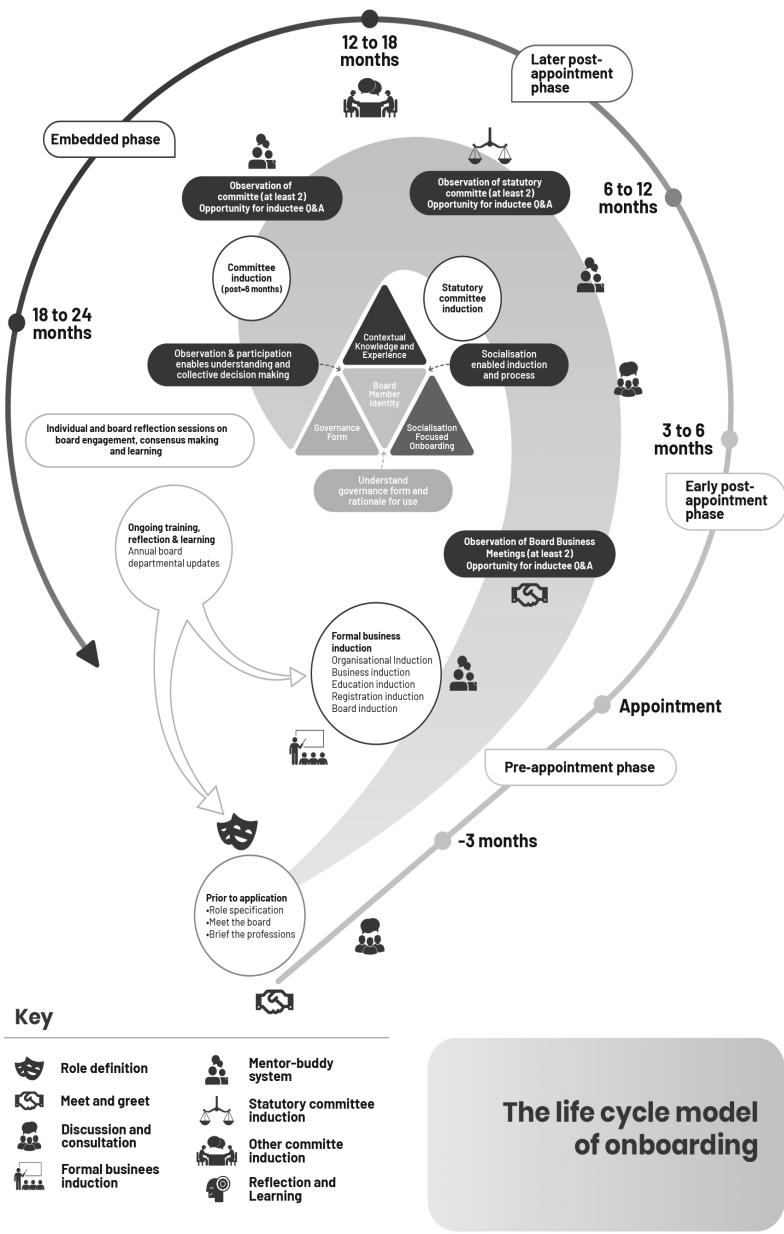
The creation of a centralised national training programme on being a regulatory board member. This could provide the state with candidates with the prerequisite skills needed within boardrooms. It could include an understating of regulatory evolution for various regulated professions, core principles of the quasi-judicial functions and the concept of board members' identity and acting on behalf of the board regardless of route to appointment. This may dramatically reduce onboarding time.

Table 3: The four phases of the lifecycle model of professional regulatory board member onboarding

<i>Phase ^a</i>	<i>Key activities</i>	<i>Rationale</i>
Pre-appointment	• Clarity of role • Communication with the professions and public • Board socialisation, social and cultural history • Formal business induction	• Focusing on becoming a board member through non-regulatory aspects such as finances, organisational strategy, etc., members grow together at a similar pace. They evolve a sense of belonging and a trust in their consensus-making process
Early post-appointment	• Statutory Committee induction begins	• With evolved understanding additional statutory work can be added to enable them to ultimately engage with fitness statutory functions
Later post-appointment	• Fitness to practice induction	• Given the lifecycle of membership and board transition, senior members can provide mentorship to new appointees to enable their understanding of the culture and quasi-judicial context and functioning
Embedded	• Additional committee inductions and debrief	• Organisational memory and learning are central to organisational development. Given much of the board decision-making process is carried out in camera, without members of the executive, it seems logical regular updates on board members experiences of boardroom activity are shared and recorded

^a All post-appointment phases are grounded in and enabled by the observation of meetings, mentor/buddy support, and reflection on personal and organisational learning.

Figure 4: The lifecycle model of professional regulatory board member onboarding



Perhaps more contentious is questioning if the time might be right for the abandonment of elections by the professions. To be clear, we are not suggesting registrants should not be included, rather the process should not be by election but as part of the centralised recruitment system as per others. Having a single, centralised process provides additional opportunity to clarify board members' roles and responsibilities, and enables a more inclusive board from the outset.

Conclusion

Professional regulatory board membership is a statutory role increasingly discharged by members of the public. This should not be taken to mean they have no experience of professional regulatory functioning, nor of the working context of the professions. With regulatory change on the horizon again in areas such as Canada and Ireland, the aspiration is that the learnings recounted in this research will raise awareness that:

Clarity in communicating the need for regulatory change is paramount to a successful outcome.

The role of and expectations on board members must be realistically documented and communicated to inform candidates on their role.

The concept of regulatory board membership as something that is valued by the professions, the public and the legislator must be reinforced, and valuing the concept of regulatory board member identity in a national training programme may assist in this regard.

Socialisation and engagement in a specific regulatory board are shaped by its unique governance frame. Board members should be empowered with the historical and contextual knowledge of this frame to better discharge their role.

Acknowledging the contextual limitations of this research, should not mean that its learning cannot be re-contextualised and 'tailored' to the aims' of other regulatory environs (Levitt et al., 2021, p. 368).

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