COMMENT NEWS REVIEW

CULTURE STYLE TRAVEL

APPOINTMENTS

Executive job search site

job search site

FINDQ

Specified

Specified

Salary

Search all Jobs

Chief Operating Officer

Chief Executive

Anglia- £65,922 - £81,618 pa

Upload your CV and

find your perfect job with our executive

Jobs Cars

Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership Director Bournemouth University - Bournemouth - Salary Not

Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals (NNUH) - East

States of Guernsey - Channel Islands - Salary Not

Property

Holidays

SEARCH

DRIVING

SINGAPORE FLIES

ROLLS INTO ASIA

An old RAF airfield is the base for Rolls-Royce's push east

## THE SUNDAY TIMES

THE SUNDAY TIMES

NEWS | SPORT | BUSINESS |

HOME / PUBLIC / APPOINTMENTS

**FEATURES** 

## Catch 22 for women Neds

How can female executives join a board? Cranfield thinks it may have the answer with a list of 100 hopefuls

A Print

Carly Chynoweth Published: 8 September 2013



non-executive director (Ned) in a public company, she receives a consistent response:

When Christine Tacon asks chairmen for advice on securing her first role as a

get plc board experience. There seems to be less interest in candidates whose experience has been gained in other ways, said Tacon, who was managing director of Co-operative Farms before

moving to a portfolio career. This, she thinks, is because there are so many people looking for Ned appointments that companies feel they can hold out for "safe" candidates rather than take a risk on

someone who is interesting but does not fit the standard mould.

number of public appointments, including being a Ned at the Met Office and the government's Groceries Code Adjudicator, or supermarket ombudsman. "There is a big pool of talented people who are interested, so companies have a huge amount of choice. They are looking for people who are perfect." Hunada Nouss, chief financial officer of the Children's Investment Fund Foundation

and a former director of the Department for Work and Pensions, can tell a similar

"I have had meetings and dinners — I am not getting the cold shoulder — but there is an enormous swell of people looking for Ned positions now," said Tacon, who holds a

regarded myself as a round-peg person. "And there are more people looking for opportunities. I have male friends who tell me that it is quite tough out there and that, unless you are on the A-list, you are fighting to get noticed."

story: "It's very much that headhunters go for round pegs in round holes, and I've never

Kate Grussing, managing director of Sapphire Partners, a search firm, agreed: "There are many more women seeking board roles . . . [and] boards are being far more specific with the criteria they are giving headhunters about the competences they are looking for. That's a good thing that is being driven by better board evaluation."

creatively about how and where they might be found. That is one of the reasons why Cranfield University's International Centre for Women Leaders publishes an annual list of 100 Women to Watch, said Professor Susan

However, this does not mean recruiters should look for those skills only in the usual

places, she added. More can be done to encourage chairmen and recruiters to think

Vinnicombe, the centre's director. The list contains the names of women who sit on FTSE 100 executive committees or hold very senior positions in other organisations. "These women are an immediate pool of talent who deserve serious consideration." "We did not want companies just to recycle women who were already there, as happened in Norway when it brought in a quota," said Vinnicombe, who was a

comprise 25% women directors by 2015. "But search companies were telling us that there were not enough women available, which got us very irritated." The list appears to have had some success in getting recruiters' attention, or at least in identifying women who are of interest to boards, with seven women from the 2012 list securing a first board appointment - six in Ned roles and one in an executive

member of the Davies steering committee which recommended that FTSE 100 boards

This number "isn't exactly great", said Vinnicombe. "It is a bit disappointing when you set it alongside other evidence that two-thirds of the women appointed to the FTSE 100 recently were new to its boards but the majority had held board appointments elsewhere - for example, in companies listed abroad. People aren't really looking beyond the usual experiences; they still want that safety factor."

The best chairmen are open to candidates from less obvious backgrounds, said Grussing. "When headhunters or chairmen say that they have looked and there is just no one out there, they have to look harder. You have to bring a lateral perspective. For example, someone might not have chief executive or finance director experience on a plc board, which is always the dream background for a Ned, but they might have done it at a huge division or subsidiary of a big, complex multinational, which I would argue is pretty compelling experience."

Apart from being "a goldmine" of names, the list of 100 Women to Watch could also

Grussing. "Chairmen and headhunters are by their nature risk-averse - you want

add a stamp of approval to women who might be perceived as less obvious choices, said

prudent people on boards - so [the realisation] that the women have appeared on the list does give them a degree of comfort," she said. On Thursday, the women on this year's list, including Tacon and Nouss, will be celebrated in an event at the House of Commons. Grussing is a big supporter of the event, but she also wants to make sure that people do not focus so sharply on Ned

issues that questions about the number of women appointed to executive directorships

"It's high time for some of the oxygen from this debate to be devoted to the women who

are going to be our future chief executives and chief financial officers," she said. "If I had the choice between contacting a woman for a Ned role or a chief executive role, I would counsel her on the steps to take to become chief executive."

Angela Morrison, chief information officer at Direct Line and one of this year's 100

### Women to Watch, took a one-year career break between leaving JSainsbury and joining the insurer two years ago.

Put your head over the parapet

get drowned out.

directorship.

another executive role, and all the feedback I got was in favour of executive," she said. The role she took includes a seat on the company's executive committee, and Paul

"During that time I looked at whether I should consider plural opportunities or take

another plc board. She has had some interest already but does not want to rush into things.

"You have to be very selective about the role you take," Morrison said. "It needs to be

the right fit for your skills and you need to know that you will get along with the others

Geddes, her chief executive, is supporting her in her search for a Ned position on

on the board." Being on the list of 100 Women to Watch has raised her profile but she is not relying on that alone. Networking, she believes, is vital in ensuring that people know you are

"My advice to other women is to be bold," she said. "Make sure that you do things that get you recognised. Women tend not to do that. But if you want to be up there, you have to put your head above the parapet and take a few risks."

14 July 2013

B Print

## 31 March 2013

RELATED ARTICLES

Baby, we can work it out

Don't wait to be hunted - be the hunter

interested in opportunities.

7 October 2012 Golden skirts in a dilemma 30 September 2012

Root out the old boy network

Women, stop being invisible 1 April 2012

Boards fumble sex agenda

26 February 2012

- Contact Us
- Useful contacts Syndication
- Display advertising Classified advertising

### Terms of use

- Terms and conditions Privacy and cookie policy
- Corrections

Site Map

Site Map

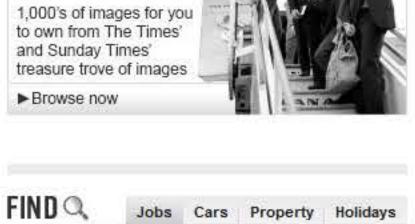
# About us

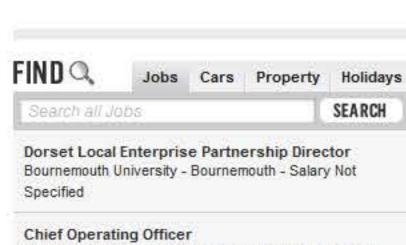
- News UK
- News Corporation FAQ

### Director of Estates & Buildings The University of Edinburgh - Edinburgh- Competitive









Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals (NNUH) - East

States of Guernsey - Channel Islands - Salary Not

Anglia- £65,922 - £81,618 pa

Chief Executive

Specified

Director of Estates & Buildings The University of Edinburgh - Edinburgh- Competitive Salary

### Getting started Thinking of setting up a business abroad? Don't go

SPONSORED EDITORIAL

anywhere without consulting this guide

City Business



- Other sites The Whisky Club
- Sunday Times Wine Club Crossword Club

Encounters Dating

 The Sunday Times Bookshop Sunday Times Driving

Registered in England No 894646