



Chairperson

Information Pack

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Welcome

Dear Candidate

On behalf of the Specialisterne NI Team I am delighted that you have expressed an interest in the role of Chairperson of the Board of Trustees. Specialisterne NI is a social enterprise which contributes to Specialisterne's international goal of 1 million careers for autistic people. With autistic people and employers, we create solutions that reduce the barriers for autistic people to be part of communities, and to enjoy careers.

As my tenure as Chair of Specialisterne NI draws to a close, I'm filled with immense pride at the progress we've made in championing the talents and potential of neurodivergent individuals in Northern Ireland. But the journey is far from over, and it's time to pass the baton to someone new who will continue to ignite change and empower our community.

As Chairperson, you'll lead a dedicated team of volunteer board members, work with a thoroughly dedicated group of professionals and our neurodiverse community to co-create research and evidence informed programmes that enable participants to maximise their career potential.

If you're someone who thrives on a challenge, who sees opportunity in difference, and who believes in the transformative power of neurodiversity inclusion, then I urge you to consider applying to become the next Chairperson of Specialisterne NI and to shape its future.

If you possess the vision, the energy, and the unwavering commitment to making Northern Ireland a truly inclusive space for all, then this could be an ideal opportunity for you.

I invite you to take some time to read the information pack intended to enable you to understand what we do and who we are looking for. If you believe you have the credentials, commitment and experience to become the Chairperson of the Specialisterne NI Board of Trustees, please submit your interest via our recruitment partners, Engage in the first instance.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully
David Crozier CBE
Outgoing Chair

SPECIALISTERNE
Passion for details



Who we are

Specialisterne is a social organisation, founded in Denmark in 2004 with current representation in over 26 countries, dedicated to the labour inclusion of people with autism and other diagnoses within neurodiversity. 10,000+ neurodivergent individuals have been hired in roles ranging from Test Automation and Software Engineering to Animal Husbandry.

There are 550 employees in the network with expertise across project management human resources, psychology, social work, marketing, communications, and talent management.



Specialisterne NI is a not-for-private-profit community interest company. As part of the international Specialisterne network, we partner with leading employers internationally to work towards the goal of one million careers for autistic people and people with other neurodivergent conditions. We are committed to creating practical solutions to the high unemployment levels of people who are autistic or who are otherwise neurodivergent. We apply recruitment, neurodiversity and business sector knowledge to join up the dots and create a picture where neurodivergent people bring a different perspective to business.

Established in 2014, Specialisterne NI took a co-design route to address unemployment and under-employment, initially of autistic people. Together with autistic people we have developed a community model of employability for and by autistic people. We are now expanding the community model of employability to include neurodivergent people who are autistic and people who have dyslexia, ADHD, OCD, Dyspraxia, or Tourette's Syndrome. Ongoing listening to neurodivergent people means that programmes continue to adapt to provide the additional supports that help neurodivergent people secure rewarding careers.

Our name Specialisterne derives from the Danish, “**the specialists**”, and so is the name of the Danish foundation and the original concept developed by Thorkil Sonne. The Specialisterne brand belongs to the Specialisterne Foundation, which strives to help create **one million careers for neurodivergent people** through social entrepreneurship, business, and public sector engagement, with the aim of achieving a global mindset shift. The Specialisterne Foundation is associated with the United Nations.

[Reading this online? Find out more by accessing our video below:](#)



What we do

At Specialisterne NI, we use a range of innovative initiatives, such as play- based activities whereby participants build Lego Mindstorms Robots to showcase each individual's approach to a task and team-working. By building Lego Robots in small teams, participants demonstrate skills in completing a systematic task, as well as self and team management.



We then share what we see with participants and where appropriate use this information to match participants to job roles. When completing the assessment for a current employee, we use the information to help the employee perform at their best in the workplace.

Our blog article, "[How Lego is helping people on the Autistic spectrum build a bright future](#)" gives more information on this.



Communication Coaching

Having supported people with social communication differences across a broad range of work environments and industry sectors, we are able to coach employees to find optimum ways of communicating in the workplace. With the employee's permission we can coach Managers, Team Leads or colleagues to work more effectively with team members who have social communication difference.

How we help employers



Recruit



Assess



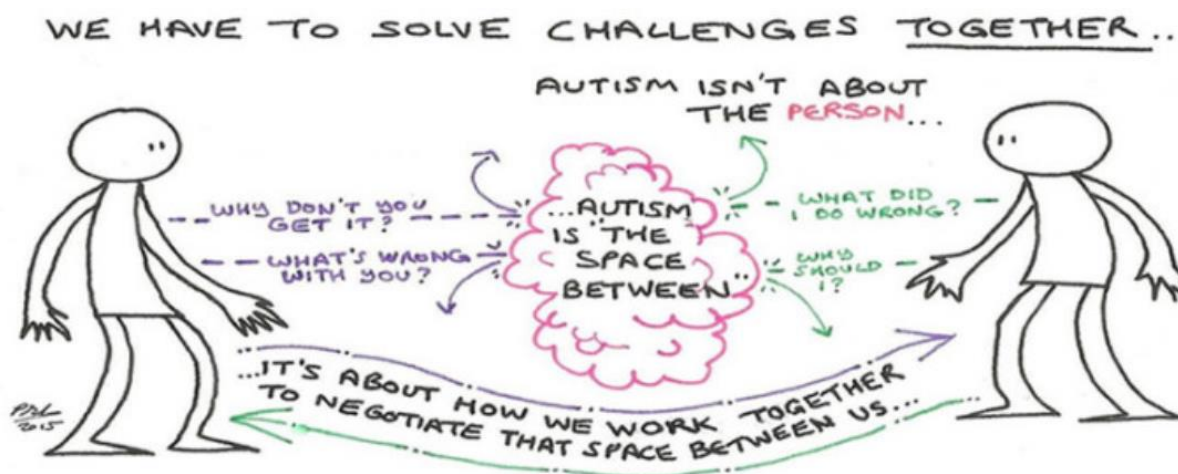
Train



Coach

We support businesses on how to interview, manage and work alongside people who are autistic and/or who are otherwise neurodivergent, and to create environments where neurodivergent people can experience wellbeing and thrive. We support managers to develop the knowledge of what it is like to be neurodivergent at work so that managers can include neurodivergent people effectively in teams. Our focus is on developing the voices of neurodivergent people, and so we support neurodivergent people to connect with each other in work, and to inform workplaces. We support neurodivergent people to work at their best from entry to senior management levels. By doing so we help employers increase their:

- Understanding of social communication differences in the workplace.
- Awareness of different world experiences which may contribute to employee performance.
- Confidence to give feedback to employees with social communication difference.



Our team works with actors to role play true-to-life situations. According to Learning Development theorists Moreno (2012) and St George et al (1999) drama-based learning using the sophisticated improvisational skills of professional actors helps develop the empathetic communication skills of participants with their colleagues, clients and customers. We think it's more fun too!

Strategy

VISION

A world where people have the same opportunities in the job market.

MISSION

- Provide training and employment to neurodivergent people.
- Disseminate the value of neurodiversity in the workplace.
- Disseminate our knowledge and share our best practices.

VALUES

RESPECT We strive to create a work environment that embraces diversity and respects the requirements of individuals, their needs, and their abilities.	ACCESSIBILITY We share knowledge and experiences and collaborate openly with our external partners.	TRANSPARENCY We keep our promises and work towards clear goals.
ADAPTATION We listen, learn and support each other.	SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALABILITY We strive to replicate the Specialisterne model and multiply its social impact in an economically sustainable way.	

Meet the Board



David Crozier CBE
Outgoing Chair

David was appointed Chair of Specialisterne NI in 2020 and will be stepping off the board upon successful recruitment of a new successor. He is currently the Chief Executive Officer of Software NI and was previously Head of Strategic Partnerships and Engagement at QUB's Centre for Secure Information Technologies (CSIT).

He was awarded a CBE in the Kings 2024 New Years Honours list for services to the economy and has significant global technology, policy and domain expertise developed over his 25-year career.



Roisin McDermott
Treasurer

Roisin is a Business Mentor and Trainer with over 20 years of experience in supporting entrepreneurship. She joined Specialisterne NI at the start of their journey after she had been engaged as a Social Enterprise Mentor and helped write the first business plan! Roisin joined the Women in Business team in 2022 after 14 years running her own consultancy business Seed Mentoring. She was one of the key founders of Women in Business 21 years ago and was previously a Board member. Women in Business support women in the workplace and in small business to thrive in their careers.

She has worked for several years with business startups, social enterprise founders and female entrepreneurs. She was previously Manager at East Belfast Enterprise where she worked for 10 years. During this time, she led the financing and build of a £3million business centre City East, to create incubation and office space for local business in Belfast. She has worked with the charity Leonard Cheshire helping graduates with disabilities into employment and improved her understanding of neurodiversity from the students during this time.

Roisin also coaches a local girls' football team and enjoys hiking, football, keeping active, and life with teenagers and a cockapoo!



Fiona Dowds

With a background as the Head of People and Organisational Development at The Law Society of Northern Ireland, I bring extensive experience in Human Resources Management across various sectors. My expertise lies in Recruiting, Learning and Development, Employee Engagement, Organisational Development, and Change Management. I hold a Master's degree focused on HRM from Ulster University. I am recognised as a Fellow Member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and volunteer as a Mentor for Women in Business NI.

I am committed to leveraging my skills and experience to advance the mission of Specialisterne NI, empowering autistic and neurodivergent individuals in the workforce and contributing to our continued success.



Conor Gillespie

I have been working as a Barrister for over 25 years, working to better understand how justice systems deal with people who have vulnerabilities advocating the need for a more commensal psychological led approach. My expertise includes pre-trial and trial advocacy for vulnerable witnesses, the development of and presentation of training and learning toolkits assisting individuals and organisations with their legal problems.



Ian James
Weatherup

Co-founder and owner of Corvus People. Global Executive Recruiter in the Tech, Distribution and Engineering sectors up to C level. I have 25 years providing recruitment solutions to organisations in UK, Ireland and USA.



Leeanne Hamilton

I am passionate about neurodiversity in the workplace. As a leader in the pensions industry, I have worked with many autistic or non-neurotypical people. What often makes them so good at their jobs is that they offer different perspectives.

My daughter is exceptional, she is direct, tenacious and persistent at solving problems. But as selection processes focus on soft skills such as eye contact and small talk, she is unlikely to reach her career potential.

I want to help to change perceptions and highlight the benefits that hiring people with different ways of thinking can bring. That is why I am on the board of Specialisterne NI and to help them in their work towards a goal of 1 million careers for autistic people.



Brian Byers

My roles in Ulster University have been varied but have always focused on employability and career development. I currently manage Employability Services across our campuses but have also led in areas such as employer engagement, curriculum development, the management of our University Skills Award (Ulster EDGE Award). At present there is lot of focus on maximising the use of technology in a way that meets the needs of our large and diverse student community.

From a personal perspective, as a parent of a 10-year-old boy who happens to be autistic I can't wait to be part of the development of services and activities that will help him and his peers to fulfil their potential and critically, to feel more connected with each other. Having gone through the struggle of helping him access the right and appropriate education I now look towards his future and what opportunities and obstacles he and his peers will face and that's why I feel so passionate about what Specialisterne has and is continuing to do. I am not sure there is a stronger motivation to support the work of Specialisterne than that.



Jonathan McMurray

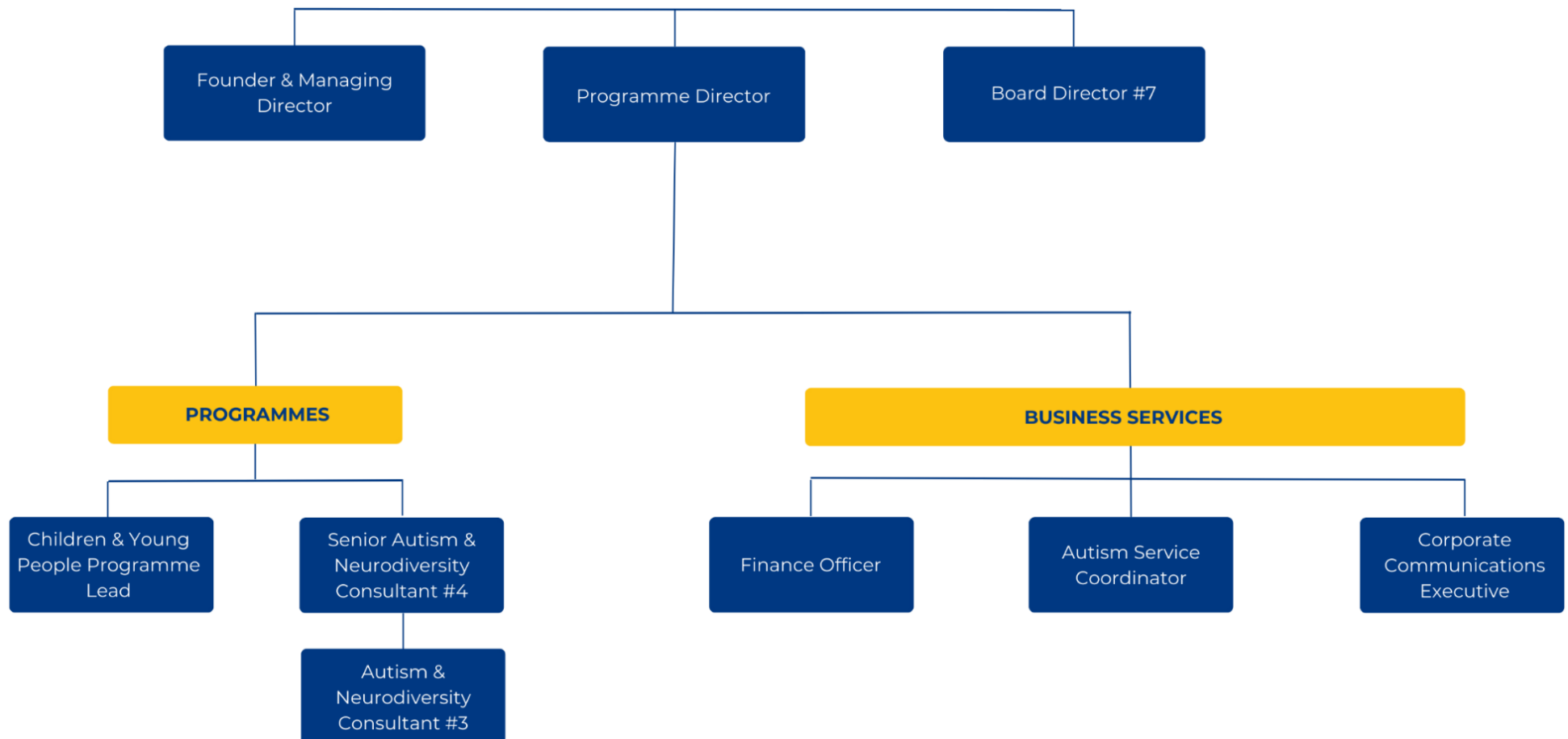
I am a Data & AI consultant working in Belfast. Having a diverse career path prior to this, in the last decade had a run of three jobs that ended very unsatisfactorily. The last experience was so bad it made me question if problems with the toxic dynamics I experienced were in part informed by a neuro-diverse condition. In sharp contrast, other jobs that allowed me to be myself and work in my own style had gone excellently well. At age 36 I was diagnosed with ASD. Whilst this diagnosis brought challenges - even formal adversity on occasion, ultimately it helped me understand and take care of myself better.

I believe very strongly in the benefits to - and even excellence in - the workplace that all neuro-diverse people bring. I also have a personal experience of the blocks and barriers that can be imposed to flourishing in the workplace. In my work with the board, I hope to extend the excellent work that Specialisterne does, which I have personally availed of. I am now happy and thriving and seek to help others do the same. I am a proud daddy to two boys.



How we're organised

We have a team of dedicated professionals who are passionate about Autism and skilled in recruitment consultancy, assessment and career support.



Meet the team



Sharon Didrichsen

Founder and Managing Director

Sharon is Founder and Managing Director of Specialisterne NI. Sharon initially joined Specialisterne in Dublin, and formed part of the Specialisterne team which pioneered the international Autism at Work movement, before bringing the model to Belfast. Sharon is an UnLtd Do it and Build it Award Winner, has completed MSc Autism, the Young Foundation Accelerator programme and is Social Return on Investment Practitioner trained. Sharon has supported employers and autistic and neurodivergent people who are in work or who are starting out on careers for 10+ years, from entry to Managing Director levels. Sharon has recently completed research into the words of autistic people which are included in peer reviewed research across 32 countries and emergent themes related to wellbeing and working as an autistic person.



Elaine Stephens

Programmes Director

Elaine is Programmes Director at Specialisterne NI. Elaine joined Specialisterne in 2015 after five years of supporting neurodivergent students at Queen's University and South Eastern Regional College. Elaine holds a Masters in Autism and has a strong passion for working alongside the autistic and neurodivergent community.

Meet members of Specialisterne NI's Employability, Social and Schools teams



Charlotte Majury

Senior Autism and Neurodiversity Consultant

Charlotte has a MSc in Applied Psychology and Mental Health Therapies and has worked for Specialisterne since May 2022. Charlotte is enthusiastic to use her skills to help, inspire, and be inspired.



Megan Currie

Senior Autism and Neurodiversity Consultant

Megan has a MSc in Applied Psychology, Psychological Therapies and Mental Health and a BSc in Psychology supporting autism related research projects as a research assistant. She worked as a support worker for Autistic and Neurodivergent adults and individuals with a Learning Disability before joining Specialisterne NI in 2022.



Stuart Kelly
Senior Autism and Neurodiversity Consultant

Stuart holds a BSc in Psychology and previously worked supporting those with mental health conditions and disabilities before focusing his knowledge to neurodiversity and joining Specialisterne January 2022.



Dione Kelly
Senior Autism and Neurodiversity Consultant

Dione has a BSc in Psychology and worked previously in supporting those with autism, learning disability, and mental health before joining Specialisterne in 2022.



Eithne McQuade
Autism and Neurodiversity Consultant

Eithne holds a Bachelor of Education in English as well as a Master's in Education in Special Educational Needs and Inclusion. She previously worked as a Special Educational Needs teacher before joining the Specialisterne team in July 2023 as an Autism and Neurodiversity Consultant, working both on the Adult's and Children's teams.



Charlotte Bradley

Autism and Neurodiversity Consultant

Charlotte studied an undergraduate degree in Psychology and then completed a Master's in Applied Developmental Psychology in 2023. She joined the Specialisterne NI team in January 2024. Charlotte loves working with people and helping them in any way she can.



Gabrielle Geddis

Autism and Neurodiversity Consultant

Gabrielle has a MSc Applied Developmental Psychology and has previously worked as a 1-1 SEN assistant in a primary school before joining Specialisterne NI in 2023.



Maggie Lockhart

*Children and Young People
Programme Lead*

Maggie Lockhart has a Psychology degree and a specialisation in Autism Spectrum Disorder. She joined Specialisterne in 2019, bringing her international experience and passion for working with neurodivergent children and young people.



Valencia Yeo

Corporate Communications Executive

Originally from Singapore, Valencia completed an MSc in Psychological Science at QUB in 2022. With years of corporate experience and as a Support Worker for autistic and neurodivergent individuals, she combines her diverse skillsets to support the corporate team.



Monica Owen

Autism Services Coordinator

Monica has BSc in Psychology with Human Resource Management, QCF Level 5 Diploma in Health and Social Care (Adults' Management) and QCF Level 5 Diploma in Health and Social Care (Adults' Residential Management). Monica has worked at management level in learning disability and mental health services across Northern Ireland since 2017 and joined Specialisterne in Nov 2022. Monica has experience in the development and governance of services and has a passion for providing equality and opportunity for autistic and neurodivergent individuals.



Ann McPherson
Finance Officer

Ann has an Advanced Diploma in Accounting (ACCA). She worked as a Finance Officer in Government for over 20 years prior to taking up her post with Specialisterne in August 2023.

Ann has qualifications in Management of Grants and Public Sector Procurement, she provides guidance and support to the Specialisterne team.



Finances

Here's a snapshot of our latest published financial accounts at March 2023. Further details on our financial accounting may be accessed by clicking on the links below to our annual reports.

		2023		2022 as restated	
	Notes	£	£	£	£
Fixed assets					
Tangible assets	3		13,154		8,219
Current assets					
Debtors	4	106,273		79,966	
Cash at bank and in hand		117,240		150,936	
		223,513		230,902	
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	5	(188,993)		(209,938)	
Net current assets			34,520		20,964
Total assets less current liabilities			47,674		29,183
Provisions for liabilities			(2,700)		(1,717)
Net assets			44,974		27,466
Reserves					
Income and expenditure account			44,974		27,466
Members' funds			44,974		27,466

[Annual Report March 2023](#)

[Annual Report March 2022](#)

[Annual Report March 2021](#)

Chairperson Role Profile

Accountable to:

Board of Directors

Key Relationships:

- Board of Directors
- Key Stakeholders & Core Funders
- Specialisterne NI Senior Management Team

Time Commitment:

Conducive to post. Requirements may vary according to Specialisterne activities.

Remuneration:

Reasonable expenses

As Chairperson, you'll lead a dedicated team of volunteer board members, work with a thoroughly dedicated group of professionals and our neurodivergent community to co-create research and evidence informed programmes that enable participants to maximise their career potential.

You'll be a champion for our neurodivergent community, ensuring their voices are heard at all levels of society and Government and their needs met. You'll be a strategic thinker, a passionate communicator, and a tireless advocate for a future where neurodiversity is celebrated, not stigmatized.

The Chairperson is responsible for providing strategic direction for Specialisterne NI, and leadership to Board of Directors, Chairs of Working Groups, and the Senior Management Team. The Chair will support the long-term goals for development of Specialisterne NI, it's objectives and activities, to ensure the delivery of added value actively and promote the value of Specialisterne NI's contribution on our neurodivergent community.

Key responsibilities and duties:

- Provide strategic leadership and direction to the Board of Directors and facilitate the effective operation and management of the Board.
- Develop and communicate to the Board on management strategy, plans and performance.
- Facilitate the Board's interaction with the Specialisterne NI's Senior Management Team, communicating matters raised by the Board, shareholders and other stakeholders.
- Act as a resource / sounding board for the Managing Director.
- Chair the AGM and Board meetings and ensure they are conducted in an efficient and effective manner.
- Actively network with key partners, and other stakeholders, promoting Specialisterne NI activities and establishing stakeholder needs.
- Facilitate the Board's efforts to create and maintain measures that accommodate feedback from key stakeholders.
- Ensure all activities are conducted in accordance with Specialisterne NI's Health and Safety and Equality of Opportunity Policies.
- Undertake any other duties as required, that are within the competence of the post holder, and conducive to the effective delivery of the role and Specialisterne NI's objectives.
- Undertake and attend any training deemed necessary under the above general conditions.
- Conduct all activities with confidentiality and in accordance with the requirements of Data Protection Legislation.

Chairperson Specification

Qualifications, Experience & Training

- Three years relevant experience, at Director level, with a proven track record delivering measurable results in their field, gained within the last five years.
- Exposure to or involvement with Public Sector organisations at a senior level.

Specialist Knowledge

- Knowledge of the economic environment within which Specialisterne NI operates.

Skills / Aptitudes

- Knowledge of Neurodiversity.
- Exceptional leadership skills
- Highly developed communication skills including influencing and negotiation skills, with a proven ability to network and develop relationships with a variety of stakeholders.

Disposition

- Genuine commitment to promoting and improving Specialisterne NI and making NI an inclusive place for all.
- Ability to develop relationships with external bodies.

Personal Circumstances

- Able to devote appropriate time and commitment to the requirements of the position.

Desirable

- Previous experience in a Chair / Board position.

Eligibility

Candidates must disclose any information about their personal or professional life which in the Trustee Board's perception could bring Specialisterne NI into disrepute, including removals from previous governance roles, current or previous membership of organisations which may conflict with the aims, principles and values of the organisation, or behaviour which might be seen to undermine public confidence and trust.

Candidates must also disclose if they have been convicted of a crime, which debars them from acting as a company director, or they are an undischarged bankrupt or disqualified to act as a company director.

Candidates must disclose any information, which could give rise to a perception of conflict of interest with their role as Specialisterne NI Chairperson. This will not necessarily result in an inability to serve on the board.

Candidates must be over the age of 16.

By submitting an application for this position, you are consenting for your personal information to be processed and used for the duration of this recruitment campaign.



The application process

For a confidential discussion about the position in the first instance, please contact Engage Director Patrick Minne, patrick@co3.org 07792 509003.

1. Candidates are asked to provide a full CV by email to Engage by noon, Monday 29 July 2024 to apply@engageexec.co.uk
2. Engage will submit your application to the Specialisterne NI Board panel who will shortlist candidates.
3. Shortlisted candidates will be invited to meet the panel for a two-way discussion about their candidacy on Tuesday 6 August 2024.
4. The full Board will vote to ratify the selection of the successful candidate.

Please address any enquiries relating to the advertised position to Specialisterne NI's recruitment partners:

Patrick Minne
Engage Executive Talent



Tel: 07792 509003
Email: apply@engageexec.co.uk

www.engageexec.co.uk

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Enquiries unrelated to this recruitment can be addressed to:

Specialisterne NI
The Skainos Centre,
239 Newtownards Road,
Belfast BT4 1AF

Tel: 028 9073 9601

Web: www.specialisterneni.com

Specialisterne NI is a Community Interest Company that is not for private profit.

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