Wilkes Academy
OF PERFORMING ARTS

Independent
Non-Executive Directors

Candidate Brief

NORMAN BROADBENT

Welcome

Thank you for expressing an interest in joining our Board of Directors.

Founded in 2013, Wilkes Academy in Swindon has quickly become one of the country's leading performing arts colleges. We are committed to delivering the finest 'triple-threat' musical theatre and dance training available. You may already have seen our graduates dazzling on screen, on the West End, performing globally on cruise ships, and working amongst some of the world's leading music artists,

The College is currently undergoing a period of strategic transition and growth, including progression toward Office for Students (OfS) registration, expansion of its higher education provision, and increased institutional maturity. As part of this evolution, we are looking to professionalise our governance arrangements with the addition of three new Independent Non-Executive Directors.

I hope the pages that follow will demonstrate just what a vibrant and exciting community this is; ranging from our incredible students to our wonderful staff and teaching faculty, and our extensive network of external partners, including casting directors, agents, and choreographers.

By adding your expertise to our Board, you would be supporting us to equip a new generation with all the skills and techniques necessary to succeed and thrive in one of the most competitive yet fulfilling industries there is.

I hope you will apply and that I will get to meet you in due course.

Professor Liz Barnes CBE
Chair of the Board of Directors

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About Wilkes Academy

The College's current programmes include a BA (Hons) in Musical Theatre, an Extended Diploma in Performing Arts for 16–18-year-olds, and an Industry Preparation Year. These are delivered in an inclusive, diverse and supportive environment, where students gain the skills, techniques, and industry knowledge needed not just for immediate success but for sustained, versatile careers, with the potential to adapt to a variety of aligned professions.

Wilkes Academy's Swindon location combines comparatively affordable student living with excellent transport connections. London is less than an hour away by train, providing ready access to auditions, workshops and the wider professional performing arts industry, while Swindon also offers direct rail connections to Reading, Oxford, Bath, Bristol and Cardiff.

The campus has been developed specifically around the needs of intensive practical performance training. Facilities include spacious dance studios incorporating more than 1,000 square metres of Harlequin flooring, a dedicated aerial and gymnastics training space, and separate large teaching spaces for acting and singing. Students also have access to study and tutorial areas, welfare and support facilities, kitchens, and social space.

Organisation Overview

Wilkes Academy operates as a company limited by shares, delivering higher education programmes under subcontracting and validation arrangements, while progressing toward greater institutional independence.

Financially, the College demonstrates sustained growth and improving performance. Income looks set to increase from £4.9 million in the current year to £6 million by 2029/30. Student numbers are forecast to increase by 2% from 526 to 536 over the same period, as the College is already oversubscribed. Surpluses after tax are forecast to steadily rise from £123,000 in the current year to approximately £400,000 by 2028-29. Whilst there are forecast cost increases, these are more than offset by the additional income and the need for fewer scholarships as the business matures. The conversion of the surplus after tax to cash is high, and as a result the cash position is forecast to continue to strengthen each year from £506,000 forecast on 31 August 2026 to £1.5 million by 31 August 2030. However, the lagged nature of the student loan funding means that, at certain points in the year, cash needs to be more closely managed.

Overall, the net assets of the business are forecast to increase each year, strengthening the College's financial resilience and supporting sustainability and future growth.

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Wilkes Academy Limited

Corporate structure

Company number: 08290301

Ownership and Control

Founders and shareholders
Jonathan Wilkes – 37.5% of shares and Person with significant Control
Nikki Wilkes – 37.5% of shares Person with significant Control
Suzanne Mole – 25% of shares

Private Company limited by shares – England and Wales
Wilkes Academy Ltd
Higher and Further Education Provider – Swindon – No parent company or subsidiaries

Governing Body

Board of Directors
Governing body – responsible for strategy, financial health, compliance and public interest governance.
Professor Elizabeth Barnes – Chair & Independent non-executive
Nikki Wilkes – Executive and shareholder director
Suzanne Mole - Executive and shareholder director
Sara Mills-White – CEO and Executive Director
Vacancy – Independent non-executive director
Vacancy – Independent non-executive director
Vacancy – Independent non-executive director
Vacancy – student director

Academic Board | Audit and Risk Committee | Remuneration Committee

Diagram - Structure of Corporation

Mission and Strategic Objectives

Wilkes Academy's mission is:

"To empower students to grow as intelligent, versatile professionals—creative, self-aware, and equipped to meet the artistic and professional challenges of the future."

Over the period 2026–2031, in line with its strategic plan, Wilkes Academy will:

- Expand higher education provision and reduce reliance on further education
- Strengthen governance and achieve full OfS alignment
- Improve student outcomes and satisfaction
- Broaden access and increase diversity
- Diversify academic provision
- Enhance its physical infrastructure
- Maintain strong industry links and graduate employability

Key Personnel

Prof Liz Barnes
Chair of the Board of Directors

Sara Mills-White
Chief Executive & Accountable Officer

Vacant
Independent Non-Executive Director x3

Nikki Wilkes
Director, Co-Founder & Executive

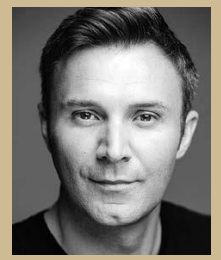
Suzanne Mole
Director, Co-Founder & Executive

Dr Robert Marsden
Executive Director of Curriculum

Clare Roberts
Chief Finance Officer

Dean Parsons
Executive Director of Student Experience

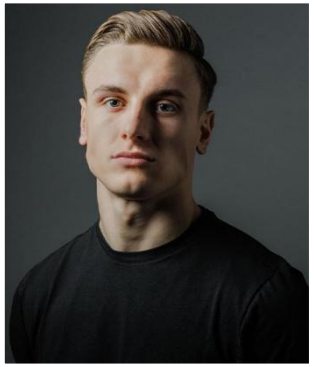
Alison Benson
Clerk to the Board of Directors



Jonathan Wilkes
Founder & Honorary President

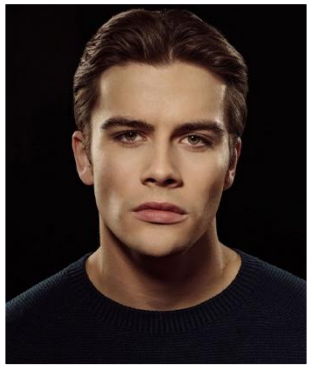
The College's wider team includes a distinguished faculty of leading West End performers, esteemed industry directors, world-renowned choreographers, experienced professionals, and academics. The College also regularly welcomes guests.

Alumni Destinations



Spencer Darlaston-Jones
Take That Tour, HMS Pinafore, 'Fred Astaire', MJ The Musical, 'Romeo' – Newsies, Tap World Champion

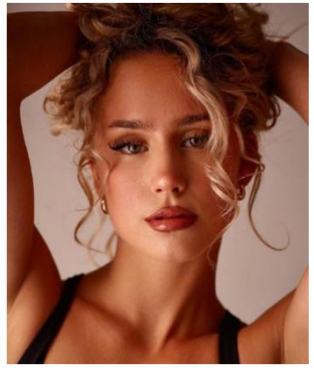
Jaydon Vijn
'Rum Tum Tugger' – CATS, 'Hydra' – Starlight Express, Wonka (2023), Wicked - The Musical



Charlie Goddard
Take That Tour, Wicked: For Good (2025), Perrie Edwards, Anne Marie, BAFTA's, Wicked (2024), Barbie (2023), Mabel

Olympia Curry
Book of Mormon, Festival of The Lion King, Cinderella, Littlemix

Joel Ekperigin
Magic Mike Live – UK Tour, Magic Mike's Last Dance (2023), Magic Mike Live, Thriller Live

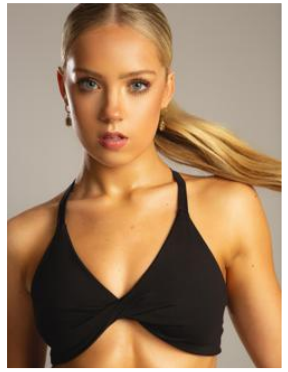


Ruby Hood
Big Night of Musicals, Perrie Edwards, MTV EMA's, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang Tour, Steve Madden, Kallis Visby

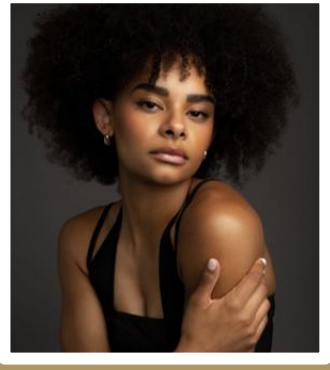
Lydia Rodford
Capital Radio Presenter

Alana Rose-Dixon
The Pussycat Dolls – PCD Forever Tour, Katy Perry, Jazeek Starboy Tour, Running Man (2025), Better Man (2024), Christina Aguilera, Dua Lipa, Barbie (2023), Matt Pokora, Rita Ora

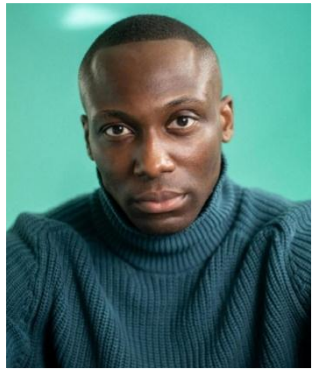
Matt Jordan
A$AP Rocky, Sabrina Carpenter, Anna Vissi, Better Man (2024), Christina Aguilera, SZA, Magic Mike Live



Sienna Lily Walker
Dirty Dancing UK Tour, Come What May Tour, Girl Group (2026), Diamonds & Dust, Grease – Royal Caribbean



Emily Rose
The Karate Kid The Musical – UK/Canada Tour, Girl Group (2026), The Wizard of Oz – Royal Caribbean



Jamie Bell
Better Man 2024, Joy Awards, DI Ray (ITV), League of Legends Opening Ceremony, Kylie Minogue, Eurovision, Glastonbury Festival, Commonwealth Games

Patrons & Scholarship Providers

Wilkes Academy has established relationships with some of the leading figures in the performing arts industry. Its patrons include the renowned Ant & Dec, Arlene Phillips, and Louise Dearman. Scholarship providers include P&O Cruises, and Dancer Inc.

Ant & Dec
British Television Presenters

Arlene Phillips
World-renowned Choreographer & Theatre Director

P&O Cruises
Scholarship Providers

A Changing Regulatory Landscape

In common with many other independent Higher Education providers across England, Wilkes Academy submitted an application in June this year to become registered with the Office for Students (OfS). The reason for this step is a significant change in the regulation of the HE sector. The College does not have its own degree-awarding powers, so delivers its BA provision through a partnership arrangement with the University of Staffordshire. Under new Department for Education rules, English providers must be registered with the OfS if they:

- deliver HE on behalf of a registered provider;
- have 300 or more HE students; and
- want incoming students to continue to have access to student finance.

Achieving and maintaining OfS registration will require the College to demonstrate that it meets a range of regulatory requirements relating to areas including academic quality and standards, student outcomes and experience, management and governance, financial sustainability, consumer protection, safeguarding and harassment, freedom of speech, and regulatory reporting.

This represents an important next stage in the College's development. As Wilkes moves towards direct regulation by the OfS, strong independent governance and effective Board oversight will become increasingly important. The College is therefore taking a number of steps to strengthen its governance arrangements and ensure that its Board has the breadth of skills and experience required for the next phase of its development.

Independent Non-Executive Directors

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The College adopted new Articles of Association on 25th August 2026, marking its formal transition from a *founder-led* to a *Board-led* model of governance. Professor Liz Barnes CBE DL, the former Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of the University of Staffordshire, has been appointed as the new independent Chair of the Board of Directors.

Three new committees have also been created: a Remuneration Committee, an Academic Board, and an Audit and Risk Committee. Having completed a formal Skills Audit, the College is now commencing the appointment of three further Independent Non-Executive Directors with the following areas of expertise:

Finance, Audit and Risk

Ability to read and interrogate management accounts and financial statements; understanding of budgeting and financial risk; capacity to provide oversight of the external audit and the Audit and Risk Committee's internal assurance programme; ability to critique budgeting processes and financial controls; understanding of risk management principles; ability to interrogate the Risk Register and satisfy themselves that the College's risk appetite and controls are appropriate; ability to identify emerging risks not yet captured in formal reporting; sufficient expertise to chair the Audit and Risk Committee.

Higher Education

Understanding of the OfS regulatory framework (including Conditions E7, B1, B2, B4 and the public interest governance principles), the CUC (Committee of University Chairs) Code of Higher Education Governance, and the duties of directors of a registered higher education provider, as well as student experience.

Business Operations and Professional Services

Experience of setting and delivering effective organisational strategy; capacity to assess whether the College's plans are realistic, well-resourced, and likely to achieve their stated aims; ability to challenge the executive constructively on performance against plan; experience of commercial and business development activity, including identifying and evaluating new income streams, assessing business cases, and understanding the financial and operational risks of growth; capacity to scrutinise commercial proposals and hold the executive to account for the performance of income-generating activity.

Role Description

These positions have the potential to make a hugely positive impact on the development of the College at this pivotal point in its development. The independent NED role is voluntary and unremunerated, with reasonable expenses covered.

The expectations of a higher education governing board are codified in the Code of Governance produced by the Committee of University Chairs, the requirements of the Office for Students, and the Nolan Principles of Public Life. The specific requirements relating to the operation of the College's Board are set out in its Articles of Association.

In essence, the Board, collectively and under the leadership of the Chair:

- Sets the strategic direction of the College, through an effective planning process, and ensures the performance of the College is adequately assessed;
- Approves the College's strategic objectives, Risk Register, and Key Performance Indicators;
- Reviews and holds the Executive to account for delivery of the strategy, including any revisions or extensions in response to internal and external developments;
- Ensures the College exercises efficient and effective use of its resources for the furtherance of its mission;
- Safeguards the College's assets and long-term financial viability, and ensures that proper mechanisms exist to ensure financial control and the prevention of fraud.

Term of Office

The Independent Non-Executive Directors of the Board will be appointed for a term of three years, renewable for up to two further terms of three years each.

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Role Description

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Time Commitment

The Non-Executive Directors need to be available to prepare for, and attend, meetings of the Board and any relevant committees and subsidiary companies on which they sit.

The approximate core time commitment is expected to be around 1 to 1½ days per month, including attendance at meetings, presentations and graduation ceremonies and preparation time to read meeting papers. Most of this activity will take place during term-time, and a portion of it can be undertaken outside of normal working hours. The Directors will be encouraged to involve themselves in the life of the College and its wider community, depending on their individual interests and availability.

At times, requests might also be made to Directors to be available for consultation or advice via email or telephone.

Main Duties

- Playing an active role in ensuring that the necessary business of the Board is carried out efficiently, effectively and in a manner appropriate for the proper conduct of public business;
- Making rational and constructive contributions to debate;
- Making your knowledge and expertise available to the Board and the College as opportunities arise;
- Sitting on at least one of the Board's committees;
- As far as possible, attending all meetings of the Board and the committees/subsidiary companies of which you are a member;
- Ensuring that the Board acts in accordance with the College's internal rules and regulations and seeks advice from the Secretary/Clerk to the Board in case of any uncertainty;
- Attending at least two of the College's graduation ceremonies each year;
- Supporting the College at other events.

Expected Standards

- Making full and timely personal disclosures for recording in the Register of Interests maintained by the Secretary/Clerk to the Board;
- Declaring any interests in respect of the business to be covered at each Board and committee meeting;
- Accepting collective responsibility and abiding by decisions properly made;
- Not representing or seeking to secure the benefit of any particular constituency;
- Not lobbying for individual gain or advantage, or being bound in any way by mandates given to you by others;
- Exercising your responsibilities with independence and discretion;
- Respecting confidentiality, personal data and commercially sensitive information;
- Participating in appropriate training events organised by the College or by relevant leadership organisations, and a formal annual performance review process undertaken by the Chair of the Board.

Person Specification

Candidates will be expected to demonstrate a fit with one or more of the areas of expertise shown on page 10. Prior governance experience, in any setting, would be highly desirable.

In addition, the College is seeking the following skills, capabilities, and attributes:

- A personal interest in, and passion for, the transformative power of higher education and/or the performing arts;
- A willingness to engage positively and openly with students, staff, the public, and other stakeholders;
- High levels of personal integrity, and a commitment to acting fairly and impartially in the interests of the College as a whole, using independent judgement and maintaining confidentiality as appropriate;
- High levels of emotional intelligence and a proven ability to build trusted and effective relationships while contributing constructive challenge;
- Proven ability to work effectively in a team which has both executive and non-executive members;
- An understanding of strategic planning and resource management;
- An interest in organisational culture;
- The ability to analyse, review and weigh up complex issues and conflicting opinions;
- Clarity of both written and oral communication;
- The energy, curiosity and commitment to make an active contribution to the work of the Board.

Appointment Process and How to Apply

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Applications should consist of:

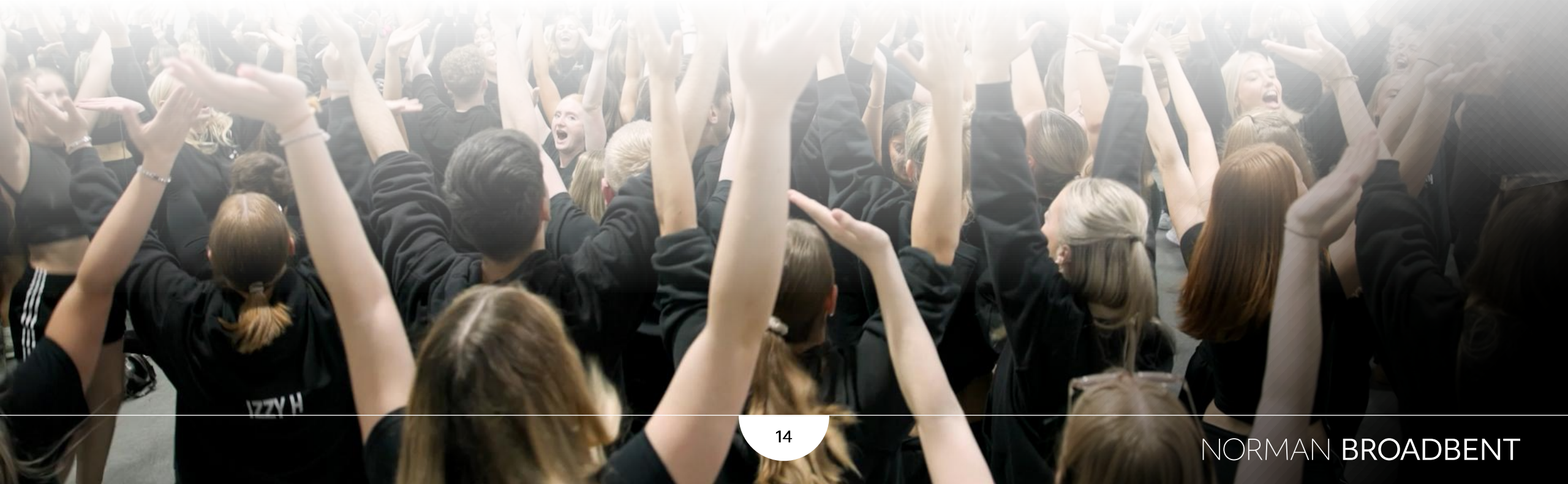
- A concise covering letter (ideally no longer than two pages), addressing the criteria in the Person Specification;
- An up-to-date curriculum vitae;
- Names and contact details of three referees (although referees will only be approached towards the final stage of the process, and only with your express permission).

These can be emailed to kayley.west@normanbroadbent.com. The deadline for receipt of applications is midday (GMT) on Friday 6th November.

Longlisted candidates will be invited to meet with Norman Broadbent during early November. A final shortlist of candidates will then be taken forward to face-to-face interviews with the Chair of the Board of Directors and the Chief Executive.

Appointments will be made subject to receipt of satisfactory references.

The College is committed to equal opportunities in employment and welcomes applications irrespective of gender, race, disability, colour, ethnic origin, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, religion, trade union activity, age, and/or medical condition.



Contact Us

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ABOUT NORMAN BROADBENT

Founded in 1979, Norman Broadbent is an established executive search, interim management, board advisory, and leadership consultancy firm. With over 45 years of experience shaping leadership across diverse sectors and functions, we have a proven track record of success supporting SMEs, major brands, household names, and global organisations both in the UK and internationally.

NORMAN BROADBENT

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Your Voice, Our Commitment

ED&I in the boardroom is a priority for Norman Broadbent and the organisations we partner with. We are committed to reducing barriers and fostering governance arrangements where individuals from all backgrounds have equitable access to opportunities.

As part of this commitment, we collect anonymous data to help us track our progress and inform our approach. Our Data Team will be in touch via email with a short, anonymous ED&I monitoring form.

Your input will support us in creating a more inclusive and representative hiring process.