



Board induction

Q&A

with our new Independent Non-Executive Directors,
Rosemary Boot and Sanjeev Sharma

Q What attracted you to the role of NED at U&C?

A **RB:** It brings together a number of areas of interest to me. I am interested in contributing to fulfilling the UK's need for housing and had previously spent some time working for a large social housing business. The Master Developer business model was something that I hadn't seen before and looked very compelling. I knew of and was impressed by Nigel and Robin and their track record. The other Board members were people that I respected and wanted to work with. I felt that I would be able to make a complementary contribution to the Board based on my experiences as an investment banker, in climate change mitigation, housing, care homes, utilities and future cities. I have also spent time as the Group FD of a growing business.

SS: Following my own research and the in-depth selection and interview process for the role, a number of factors make U&C very appealing.

Time and time again from my real estate contacts, including within my business (M&G Real Estate), there is very high regard for what Nigel Hugill, and Robin Butler, have achieved within the industry over 30+ years. This respect carries into what U&C stands for and what is regarded as its unique competitive position as a "Master Developer".

Not only are the Executive Directors and senior management team at U&C of some of the highest calibre, the significant experience and knowledge of the current Board was a huge appeal. I felt I would gain a great deal from the current Board and also be able to bring a different perspective as someone who is still in a full-time executive role within the industry.

Q What are your initial impressions of the Group?

A **RB:** The strategic sites are very impressive and the business model is working well. I think we have high quality, committed people who are ambitious for the success of the Group. The culture seems to be very open and supportive.

SS: Better than I expected, and my expectations were high to begin with. From the recruitment, selection process and induction, and through to ongoing Board responsibilities, the high standards and professional approach shown has been very impressive. I also feel that everyone's contributions are welcomed. The Group is extremely well managed, with staff clear about the business and its objectives and with a real enthusiasm to deliver to all stakeholders whilst providing a very much needed social purpose to the UK economy – housing. The general environment and culture is one of everyone "pulling together".

Q How valuable has the induction process been?

A RB: It has been invaluable to meet people and see the sites. Meeting people and seeing sites during the induction is vital to really “get under the skin” of the Group to enable me to contribute from an understanding of how things actually work on the ground.

SS: Extremely. The induction has been a very extensive, thorough and well organised process. This has enabled me to get to know and understand the business and therefore contribute far more quickly than would otherwise be the case. Everyone I have met has been welcoming, open and wanting to engage.

Q How do you feel that your background and experience equips you for your role at U&C?

A RB: See my response to the first question above. I am also a NED at a couple of other companies and there are benefits from sharing experiences of issues being considered at other boards, and audit and remuneration committees, not least with the recent changes to the UK Corporate Governance Code.

SS: I have worked within the real estate sector for over 30 years, across a number of organisations and in various roles. I believe this gives me a very good insight into the sector, as well as a broader perspective across a number of functions that would be of benefit to U&C. I have held senior roles in HR and operations, in large established organisations – NatWest Corporate Property and M&G Real Estate Limited, my current employer, which is one of the largest real estate investors globally with £33 billion assets under management). I am able to bring this to bear within U&C be that at meetings of the Board, or the Remuneration Committee, of which I am a member. I have been a member of the M&G RE board since 2001, during which the company has expanded considerably both in terms of product base and geographical spread, not to mention its focus on sustainability. I believe I have picked up invaluable insights into what is required of businesses and their people during such periods to sustain not only growth of new clients and opportunities but also to ensure existing clients and business continue to be managed to the highest standards.

Q What have you enjoyed the most about your role so far?

A RB: Meeting the people and visiting the sites. The quality of Board discussion and experiencing the Board dynamics.

SS: The diversity of the organisation, be that the nuances of each of U&C’s strategic sites, or meeting and getting to understand various stakeholders’ contributions and expectations of the business. Most of all, I am excited by the considerable opportunities that the business has for the future.

Q What skills and competencies make an ideal Non-Executive Director?

A RB: It obviously depends on the company, but the role of the NED is to provide an appropriate balance of challenge and support to the executive team, focusing on oversight and governance, and looking forward – considering strategy and possible bumps in the road, and having the right people and culture.

So the board as a whole needs to have competence in the areas of importance to the company, bringing diversity of opinion as well as a good mix of relevant experience from the directors’ previous and other current roles. A good NED needs to be a good listener and know how to contribute effectively in a non-executive capacity, as well as to know when to stick to an unpopular line!

SS: Having a broad set of experiences and skills to bring to bear rather than a narrow specialised background. Clearly any NED needs to understand the expectations of shareholders, other stakeholders and the Corporate Governance Code but it is very much about having an open mind, listening and being able to distil complex issues to support the strategy and objectives of the business.

Q What do you foresee the next 12 months will entail?

A RB: Personally I’m looking forward to getting fully up to speed and meeting more of the people. For the Group, probably balancing the progression of the existing strategic sites and continuing to prove the business model by identifying and bringing forward the next strategic sites. Also we may see the impact of Brexit on the housing market and whether it affects the resilience of our business model.

SS: With Brexit, anyone’s guess! However, for our sector, recognising the Government’s commitment to building 300,000 new homes a year means that a company like U&C clearly has significant demand-led opportunities and its unique position and reputation make it an ideal partner for both the Government, Government agencies like Homes England and others such as housing associations, house builders, etc. This will help to ensure that our focus is very much on making the most of the opportunities and growing the business whilst ensuring we deliver on our already substantial pipeline of sites that are at varying stages. The Board and senior management will clearly have a lot to focus on to ensure the business continues to deliver to all stakeholders.

Q What do you think makes U&C unique?

A RB: The listed Master Developer is extremely unusual – there’s a tension about the use of cash flows to grow the business vs paying dividends.

The degree of high level political support and also funding from Homes England.

The quality of the relationships with landowners and local authorities as well as housebuilders, which all depends on the quality of the team.

SS: Having some of the best strategic sites in the country and a reputation for high quality delivery.

The culture of the business and its entrepreneurialism that runs throughout the Company.

The quality of its partnerships, be that Government agencies, suppliers, housebuilders, etc.

The lack of real competition as an established, proven “Master Developer”.