

# The Ascent Prospectus - Candidates

Preparing the Next Generation of CEOs  
for Board-level Leadership

# Your Invitation to be Part of The Ascent

Current C-Suite leaders lack confidence in the next generation of CEOs. Meanwhile, aspiring leaders don't feel they're being given the right tools and training to prepare them to take the reins in the future.

This disconnect stems from multiple issues: the pace of technological change, evolving stakeholder expectations, the complexity of modern governance and a widening gap between traditional leadership development and the realities of today's boardroom.

However, with economic uncertainty and sociopolitical turbulence now the norm, and set to remain so for the foreseeable future, we urgently need to nurture and prepare future CEOs to robustly meet and intelligently respond to the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow.

It's something we see at Holmes Noble day-in-day-out, as executive search specialists with expertise both in the boardroom and with N-1 and N-2 candidates.

We feel we're in a position to tackle the issue head-on and finally resolve this disconnect, making a contribution to showing industry both that there's an incredible senior leadership talent pool out there and that boardrooms up and down the country have more to offer these candidates than they might realise.

It was from these foundations that The Ascent took shape, an annual scheme in which 12 aspirational professionals learn from 12 high-profile CEOs for a year-long programme to make them match-fit for high office and worthy contenders for board consideration.

This is about creating opportunities, building relationships and setting an example of how we can realistically futureproof the global business and industry landscape.

The inaugural Ascent programme will be launched in Spring 2026.

The reason you're reading this is that you've been nominated and successfully shortlisted for our in-person assessment.

Ahead of the next stage, please read through the full prospectus and come prepared with, and prepared to answer, questions relating to its contents.

We look forward to meeting you in due course and finding out more about you.

**Amy Speake**  
**Chief Executive Officer, Holmes Noble**

[holmesnoble.com](https://holmesnoble.com)

# The Ascent

## Mission

The Ascent exists to bridge the leadership confidence gap that threatens industry's future competitiveness. With 54% of UK CEOs concerned about the availability of key skills in their leadership pipeline, and 67% of high-potential leaders feeling underprepared for C-Suite responsibilities, we're addressing a critical market failure.

Our mission is straightforward: identify exceptional N-1 and N-2 talent, connect them with experienced C-Suite leaders and equip them with the strategic capabilities, networks and confidence to excel at board level within three to five years.

We're building a community of future leaders who will drive transformation across industry while demonstrating that the talent pipeline is stronger and deeper than many boardrooms currently recognise.

## Encouragement, Empowerment, Elevation

We understand the future C-Suite are incredibly busy people, often running at a million miles a minute and so engrossed in their day jobs it can be difficult to take the time to focus on themselves, their ambitions and aspirations.

The Ascent represents a unique chance to grow and develop senior leadership skills in a dedicated space, presenting the opportunity to step outside the daily routine and take time to focus on career development.

Not only that, it enables successful candidates to connect with likeminded people across adjacent sectors and grow their network; empowering them to reach higher and further.

## The Vital Statistics

12 CEOs chosen from across industry's leading organisations, each bringing decades of boardroom experience and an ambition to develop the next generation.

12 Class Members selected from exceptional nominations of N-1 and N-2 professionals on a clear trajectory to C-Suite and board-level roles.

12 Months of content, combining individual development, collective learning and real-world application.

Curated by Holmes Noble with specialist leadership development support from MRA Executive Coaching, ensuring world-class content delivery and assessment throughout.

# The Ascent

## What the Programme Delivers

The Ascent combines five integrated elements designed to accelerate leadership readiness:

1. The monthly Advice from Above Podcast Series features in-depth conversations with each CEO, exploring their leadership philosophy, career decisions and lessons learned.
2. Boardroom Bootcamp brings the entire cohort together in October 2026 for an intensive development day. Led by MRA Executive Coaching, this covers governance, strategic decision-making, stakeholder management and the realities of board-level responsibility.
3. Faith in the Future Research combines quantitative research (300+ senior leaders) with qualitative insights from cohort members and mentors to produce the definitive annual report on leadership development. Published January 2027.
4. The Alumni Community ensures The Ascent is the beginning, not the end. Members join an exclusive, growing network of future leaders with ongoing access to development opportunities, peer support and industry connections.

By the end of the programme we'll have established deep relationships with 12 future CEOs and built a peer-to-peer network which will help them reach the next level together.

More importantly, we'll have demonstrated that investing in future leaders before they reach the C-Suite delivers better outcomes for individuals, organisations and industry as a whole.



# How the Programme Works

The Ascent is built around five interconnected pillars that work together to accelerate the journey to board-level leadership.

## 1. Leadership Development Programme

Boardroom Bootcamp brings the entire cohort together for an intensive day of experiential executive development. A 'live leadership assessment' will create a learning experience to remember, bringing together delegates to test their capability, knowledge, leadership and psychological awareness within a Board scenario. Governance, stakeholder management and creative strategy will be key to success.

## 2. Knowledge Sharing and Peer Learning

The Ascent creates a community of exceptional peers facing similar challenges and opportunities:

- Quarterly cohort sessions where members share experiences, challenges and insights
- Informal networking events throughout the year, some with CEOs, others peer-to-peer
- Digital collaboration platform for ongoing discussion, resource sharing and mutual support
- Cross-industry perspective - learning from leaders in different sectors facing parallel challenges

The relationships that cohort members build with each other will prove as valuable as those with mentors.

## 3. Exclusive Network Access

Holmes Noble opens doors that would otherwise remain closed:

- Industry roundtables with senior executives from across industry
- Private briefings on market trends and sector developments
- Introduction to our extended network of board-level contacts, investors and industry influencers
- Alumni community access connecting The Ascent cohorts as the programme grows

We're developing capabilities and expanding professional networks at the level where careers are truly made.

# How the Programme Works

## 4. Profile and Visibility

The Ascent raises the industry profile of participants through carefully curated opportunities:

- Feature in the monthly 'Ones to Watch' series, profiling your leadership philosophy
- Contribute to the Faith in the Future research report, positioning you as a thought leader on the future of leadership
- Speaking opportunities at industry events and roundtables
- Media training and support for external profile-building
- LinkedIn and professional network amplification through Holmes Noble's platforms

By April 2027, both CEOs and cohort members will have significantly raised their profiles while contributing to a national conversation about leadership development.



# What Happens Next

The following pages detail exactly how the programme works, what we're asking from CEOs and cohort members, what both will gain and how to get involved.

Whether you're a participating CEO, nominating a high-potential colleague or preparing for your assessment as a shortlisted candidate, you'll find everything you need to make an informed decision about joining The Ascent.

## Programme Timeline

Quarter	Key Milestones
Q2 2026 (Apr - Jun)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nominations open</li> <li>• The Ascent announced</li> <li>• Programme launch</li> <li>• 'Ones to Watch' series launches</li> <li>• 'Advice from Above' podcast begins</li> </ul>
Q3 2026 (Jul - Sep)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Advice from Above' podcast continues</li> <li>• Faith in the Future research survey launches</li> <li>• 1st Quarterly cohort session</li> </ul>
Q4 2026 (Oct - Dec)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boardroom Bootcamp (October)</li> <li>• Faith in the Future research interviews</li> <li>• 2nd Quarterly cohort session</li> </ul>
Q1 2027 (Jan - Mar)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faith in the Future research report published (January)</li> <li>• Alumni community formally established</li> <li>• 3rd Quarterly cohort session</li> </ul>
March 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ascent Graduation Celebration Event</li> <li>• Class of '27 nominations open</li> <li>• 4th Quarterly cohort session</li> <li>• Year-end review and reflection sessions</li> </ul>

# The Commitment

Acceptance into The Ascent represents a significant professional development opportunity that requires dedicated commitment:

## **Time Commitment:**

- 4 quarterly cohort sessions with fellow Class members - 8 hours
- Boardroom Bootcamp in October 2026 (full day) - 8 hours
- Faith in the Future research participation (survey and interviews) - 2 hours
- 'Ones to Watch' profile development (interview and content review) - 2 hours
- Networking events and industry roundtables - 6 hours across the year

Total estimated commitment: 26 hours across 12 months.

## **Additional Expectations:**

- Attend the The Ascent launch event and graduation celebration
- Complete pre-work and preparation for development sessions
- Be open to feedback and willing to challenge yourself
- Contribute meaningfully to peer learning and cohort discussions
- Represent the programme professionally in all external engagements

## **A Note on Commitment**

The Ascent is offered to successful candidates for free, with no financial obligations. However, programmes like these only succeed when all participants bring their full engagement to the programme. We're building something meaningful: a community of future leaders inspired by experienced executives who genuinely care about developing the next generation.

# What We'll Achieve Together

The Ascent is building something bigger than a single year's development programme. We're establishing the foundations for how industry develops its future leaders.

## By the conclusion of the programme, we will have:

1. Established relationships with 12 future CEOs who will shape industry over the next decade. These aren't transactional connections - they're meaningful partnerships built on mutual respect, shared ambition and genuine commitment to excellence.
2. Created a CEO network committed to long-term talent development. The 12 founding CEOs becoming ambassadors for a new approach to leadership development, demonstrating that investing in future leaders before they reach the C-Suite delivers better outcomes for everyone.
3. Published the definitive research on leadership development. Faith in the Future will set the agenda for how industry addresses the leadership confidence gap, combining hard data with real insights from those living the challenge.
4. Generated national conversation about leadership pipeline strength. Through 36+ pieces of thought leadership content and 30+ earned media placements, we'll shift the narrative from concern about future leadership to confidence in the talent coming through.
5. Built an exclusive alumni community that grows stronger with each annual cohort, creating an ever-expanding network of exceptional leaders who support, challenge and inspire each other throughout their careers.

## But our real ambition reaches further:

We're creating a programme that aspiring leaders want to be part of and serving CEOs want to support. A mark of distinction that signals exceptional potential and serious commitment to leadership excellence.

Within three years, The Ascent should be the leadership development opportunity that ambitious N-1 and N-2 professionals aspire to join. The programme where being nominated is an honour and selection is a career-defining moment.

Within five years, we want boardrooms across industry actively seeking The Ascent alumni when filling C-Suite positions, knowing these individuals have been rigorously assessed, expertly developed and thoroughly prepared for board-level responsibility.

Fundamentally, we're building an institution that raises the bar for leadership development across industry.

The inaugural Ascent lays these foundations. Every subsequent cohort strengthens them. Together, we're creating something that outlasts any single participant and benefits industry for decades to come.



# The Selection Process

Selection for The Ascent follows the same rigorous methodology Holmes Noble applies when assessing board-level candidates. The process ensures we identify individuals with the capability, potential and mindset to excel at the highest levels of leadership.

**Stage 1: Application Review:**

All nominations and applications are reviewed against the eligibility criteria. Candidates who meet the threshold requirements progress to Stage 2.

**Stage 2: Assessment:**

Shortlisted candidates complete a assessment exploring their leadership philosophy, career aspirations, strategic thinking and understanding of the challenges facing industry. This provides insight into their readiness for C-Suite responsibility.

**Stage 3: In-Person Assessment:**

Final-stage candidates attend a structured interview with Holmes Noble's assessment team. Using our Seven Dimensions of Leadership framework, we evaluate strategic outlook, stakeholder management, resilience, communication effectiveness and cultural fit for the programme.

**Stage 4: Selection and Matching:**

The final 12 members are selected based on merit, potential and programme fit.

# Our Commitment to Fair Selection

The Ascent operates under strict principles of impartiality, inclusivity and non-discrimination. Every candidate is assessed solely on merit, potential and their ability to benefit from and contribute to the programme.

**Merit-based selection** - Candidates are evaluated against objective criteria using consistent assessment methodologies. Personal connections, organisational affiliations or demographic factors play no role in selection decisions.

**Diversity and inclusion** - We actively encourage nominations from underrepresented groups in boardrooms. The Ascent aims to reflect the diversity of talent across industry, recognising that diverse leadership teams drive better business outcomes.

**Transparent process** - All candidates receive clear communication about their progress through the selection stages. Those not selected receive constructive feedback on their application.

**Confidentiality** - All assessment information is handled with strict confidentiality. Candidate data is used solely for selection purposes and stored securely in accordance with data protection regulations.

**Independent assessment** - Selection decisions are made by Holmes Noble's assessment team based on evidence gathered through the structured process. No single individual has unilateral decision-making authority.

**Equal opportunity** - We welcome applications from candidates regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, neurodivergence, sexual orientation, religion or any protected characteristic. Reasonable adjustments are available throughout the assessment process for candidates who require them.

The Ascent succeeds when we highlight the very best leadership talent industry has to offer. Our selection process is designed to identify those individuals whilst ensuring every candidate receives fair, objective and respectful treatment.

# Get in Touch

To nominate a candidate or discuss the programme further, contact:

Amy Speake

CEO & Programme Director, The Ascent

Holmes Noble

Email: [amy.speake@holmesnoble.com](mailto:amy.speake@holmesnoble.com)

Phone: +44 (0) 7887 409 561

Nominations open in March 2026. We look forward to hearing from you.