

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: [Work of the Government Equalities Office](#), HC 356

Wednesday, 20 June 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 20 June 2018.

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Members present: Mrs Maria Miller (Chair); Tonia Antoniazzi; Sarah Champion; Angela Crawley; Vicky Ford; Jess Phillips; Mr Gavin Shuker.

Questions 128–194

Witnesses

[I:](#) Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt, Minister for Women and Equalities



Examination of witnesses

Witness: Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt

Q128 **Chair:** Good morning, Secretary of State. Thank you very much for joining us today, and thank you to everybody who is watching in the public gallery and also online. This session is part of our Committee's regular work in scrutinising the work of the Government Equalities Office and also the work of the Minister. In October of last year we took evidence on the work of GEO from the then Minister for Women and Equalities, and since then there has been a complete change in the team. Today is an opportunity to hear about your priorities and your new role, and also a chance for us to discuss some of the issues that we have identified in our recent report about the role of the Minister for Women and Equalities and how machinery of government changes affect the GEO.

We do have quite a lot of questions to ask, and I realise there are lots of us and one of you, so please grab a glass of water and we will start now if that is okay.

Penny Mordaunt: Yes, fire away.

Q129 **Chair:** I feel that I do not need to ask you to introduce yourself but just for the sake of completeness, please do.

Penny Mordaunt: Penny Mordaunt, the new Minister. I am delighted to be here.

Chair: Brilliant. That is wonderful. Angela is going to start our questioning today.

Q130 **Angela Crawley:** Thank you and welcome to your new role. Of course we are grateful to have you here, but you could forgive us for feeling that Women and Equalities is often the ball that no one wants to play with because it seems to get passed around from Department to Department. You are the first Secretary of State in a year and a half to come to this Committee, and we are thankful to you for coming.

We appreciate that you already had a full-time demanding job as the Secretary of State for International Development before taking on this role as well. How much time do you expect to be able to give to the brief on Women and Equalities?

Penny Mordaunt: I expect to give it a lot of time. I have thought a great deal since being appointed six and a half weeks ago about some of the issues that your Committee has looked at relating to the continuity, pace and clout that the GEO has, and I am sure we will discuss that later on.

There are some huge synergies between my other brief and the GEO, and I think they will help me be even more effective in both briefs. Just to give you an example, DFID is not just an international-facing



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Department, it is also a domestic-facing Department. We work with every Government Department on joint projects. I am scrutinising Single Departmental Plans for where the global goals are in there and obviously now I am looking at equalities objectives within those plans.

There is huge overlap between the work that I am doing in both briefs, but I do very much recognise that we need to provide some stability and pace to what the GEO does. I am fortunate that I have inherited a lean but very fit team. The GEO is a great organisation within Government, but we need to turbocharge it if we are going to meet the Prime Minister's ambitions on equality.

- Q131 **Angela Crawley:** There has been some debate in the history of the Women and Equalities brief about whether it sits better within the Department for Education or the Department for International Development, and I am pleased to hear that you have a focus on the domestic as well as the international. What case would you make for the benefits of the Government's current arrangements for equalities being within your brief and how will you guard against the risk of equalities being viewed as something that is relevant for the UK's work abroad and not at home?

Penny Mordaunt: I have always made the case that we cannot do work abroad unless we have our own house in order. I have seen that and it is very much the approach we are taking on things like the Global Disability Summit we are about to hold in my other brief. We are approaching that with humility. We are approaching that to learn as well as to share good practice that goes on in the UK. They are agendas that help each other rather than compete against each other.

There have already been some tangible benefits, I have to say. Prior to the G7 meeting, I attended the first Development Ministers G7 meeting in 10 years, joint with the Finance Ministers of the G7. What we were talking about was Britain's work on the gender pay gap, a feminist approach to budgeting and learning from others, Canada being a real trailblazer in this. There are huge benefits. You could probably say that about other Government Departments. I am very pleased that it sits with me. My other Department is delighted that it sits with me now and we will maximise those benefits. There is a wider issue about providing stability, a permanent home for the GEO, that I think would help it more in the long term.

- Q132 **Angela Crawley:** I think that would be welcomed. How will you ensure, for example, in the domestic policy of education in areas such as sexual harassment in schools, that relationship and sex education will not be jeopardised by the change in the ministerial team?

Penny Mordaunt: In the short term, I am very aware that there is a lot to get out the door, which I am sure you will want to talk about, so I am not planning on moving the GEO tomorrow. First we need to ensure that the things that need to be out there are done. I hope before summer



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recess they are out there and they are done well. Obviously, as a new Minister I am reviewing the work of the GEO, looking at your reports and taking soundings from other individuals and organisations to formulate my plans. I am not planning on rushing that.

That is one example of where the GEO is looking to focus and make a difference, but you could say that about any Government Department, which is why I think that the argument for the GEO being sited in the Cabinet Office is a strong one. That is obviously a hub for every Government Department and is the Department that looks at Government priorities and ensures that the Government are on track with its manifesto commitments and that other Departments are making progress on their single departmental plans.

Q133 Angela Crawley: You would agree then that quite a lot of disruption has been caused to the work of the GEO by the recent moves and changes in the ministerial team. How are you dealing with those logistical changes of staff? The ministerial team has been split across three Departments at present.

Penny Mordaunt: The first thing I would say is that I do not think it has disrupted the work of the GEO. There are some logistical issues about Ministers being able to announce things—obviously you need Ministers in post to be able to do that—but the GEO as an organisation has not taken its foot off the throttle. We have not announced things, and I am sorry for that, but I think that before summer recess we will rectify that. That is the first thing I would say.

The second thing is that this is my fifth Government Department or unit. Each is different in what is effective and how to get a battle rhythm within a Department to be really effective and to make sure everyone is keeping track of what things need to be done. I have set up some new systems to do that, which seem to be working well. We are developing that as well. I have also taken some advice from the Institute for Government about how to do this really well and how to try to get traction across Whitehall.

I would describe the GEO as a campaigner within Government. It is there driving the agenda. It is there holding people to account and formulating the tools to do that. Really, it is about getting Government Departments to ensure that, whether it is how they run their own show or the policies that they are developing and implementing, they have the equalities agenda at their heart.

Q134 Angela Crawley: Thank you. Your predecessor, Nicky Morgan, described the changes to the Department as “quite tricky and quite traumatic”. Given that your focus is obviously to provide some sort of harmony before the summer, how do you plan to ensure that the changes that are happening are not so problematic?



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Penny Mordaunt: You try to set that reassurance, as a new Minister. I have spent more time than I think previous Ministers may have over at the GEO. I have met everyone, I have done floor walks, I have spoken to people and I have instituted some more regular meetings to ensure that I am seeing teams on a regular basis. That is what you need, I think, to reassure people and to keep people motoring on these agendas. If you have been working on a policy issue and you are sceptical as to when it is going to come to fruition or get out the door, that is a very demotivating thing. It is a matter of providing reassurance to people that we are going to be upping the tempo of what we are doing, that personally I am very committed to this agenda, including the LGBT agenda, and that they have my full commitment to that.

Q135 **Chair:** Just before we move on to the next line of questioning, Minister, I was interested to hear you say that you want a feminist approach to budgeting. Have you involved the Treasury team in those discussions?

Penny Mordaunt: I was talking about the G7 Finance Ministers' meeting. That was hosted by Canada and this is how they do their budgeting. We were having some very interesting conversations and sharing experience from the G7 nations about how we do that. We obviously have the public sector requirements on us, which have a similar effect. Those were the sorts of things that the Chancellor and I were discussing with our counterparts.

Q136 **Chair:** Could I write to you with copies of correspondence that we have had with the Treasury on this issue? It might be helpful for you to understand the background and the problems we have experienced in this area. Would that be okay?

Penny Mordaunt: Absolutely. I would be keen to see that. I understand the approach that the Treasury is taking on these issues. That public sector duty, they think, is sufficient. I understand that that is their approach and I would expect that is what they have said to you in their letters.

Q137 **Chair:** But it is completely inconsistent with the approach of the Canadian Government.

Penny Mordaunt: Yes.

Q138 **Chair:** I was interested in the fact that you were talking—

Penny Mordaunt: That is precisely why those conversations are so helpful. We can see different approaches, how we are trying to square the same circle within our own nations, and learn from each other. My international-facing role is a complement to the GEO in that respect.

Chair: We will write to you.

Penny Mordaunt: Thank you.

Q139 **Mr Gavin Shuker:** Aside from behind you today, where are your staff?



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Penny Mordaunt: At this precise moment in time? They are currently based in the Department for Education.

Q140 **Mr Gavin Shuker:** Do they intend to move? Do you intend them to move out of DFE accommodation? If so, where?

Penny Mordaunt: Not in the short term. What we need to do is to publish—

Q141 **Jess Phillips:** They might go on to “Love Island”.

Mr Gavin Shuker: You don’t have to answer questions like that.

Penny Mordaunt: Not before the LGBT action plan is out the door.

They are there at the moment and what we need to do is establish some new working practices, which I want to instil. We need to get out of the door that list of things that I am sure you are going to ask me about and ensure that they are done really well. I, as a new Minister, want their airtime in my tenure to look at the things that we can do and what we need to do to turbocharge this agenda across Government.

In the long term, we do need to find the GEO a permanent home. I have had some discussions about that since I have been in post. As I say, your suggestion of the Cabinet Office is a very sensible one, but I will obviously want to talk to the GEO team and all the staff before setting those plans out.

Q142 **Mr Gavin Shuker:** Do you think that a move to the Cabinet Office should be a physical move of those staff or do you think there is an argument for Cabinet-level political responsibility lying with GEO at Cabinet Office?

Penny Mordaunt: Although “machinery of government” may sound all very dry, it does matter where you are located, and there is an argument for the GEO sitting together with the Race Disparity Audit team.

The other thing we need to do is to devise ways of pulling the equalities agenda together across Government. There would be massive benefits to doing that, in part because you have a lot of different areas asking the same FTSE 250 to do 12 different things. Better co-ordination with those asks will help business deliver more.

Clearly, silo working does not work when you are talking about individuals. I have to say that before taking this role I really did not appreciate, for example, the number of young black gay men who are homeless, and unpicking the reasons why that is the case. Silo working will not help us on this agenda. We need to pull that together.

There are other issues as well. The built environment is relevant to good practice in the LGBT agenda. It is relevant to the disability agenda and many other reasons as well. Also, I know we focus on stats, initiatives and all those things, but we are talking about people and as well as



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measuring pay gaps and all that sort of thing, we need to really be thinking about the impact we are having on individuals.

There is a massive benefit to pulling things together. There are various ways you can do that. What I am going to be driven by is the effect that we need to have across Government, as opposed to just setting up a body or another inter-Ministerial group. I am thinking about that and I have been talking to colleagues in Government. I have spoken to the Prime Minister about this because she has made it very clear that this agenda is personally important to her, and I am obviously taking the Committee's views into account on what should happen.

Q143 **Mr Gavin Shuker:** To paraphrase, do you view as part of your legacy from your tenure in this role establishing a permanent home for the GEO?

Penny Mordaunt: That is what needs to happen with the GEO, yes.

Q144 **Mr Gavin Shuker:** Can I ask you some questions on the budget? Obviously while it was at DFE, during those three years, the budget was subsumed into DFE accounts, making it very hard to get transparency on what was spending and what was allocated. Now we have moved to DFID, will you continue that practice or will it be listed as a separate budget line?

Penny Mordaunt: Again, I am giving this some thought. I have also been looking at what other equalities areas across Government have in their budgets as well. For example, one of the things that I have done in my six and a half weeks is to put some money towards supporting disabled candidates for the next 12 months while we sort out with political parties how they are going to support their candidates and get some good practice happening. That is a disability issue, but it is money that I have found.

I am looking at all those areas. Transparency is important, but as yet I have not made some decisions about how we are going to—

Q145 **Mr Gavin Shuker:** You cannot give us a clear answer on that. We PQ'd this last week. GEO's administration budget for 2018/19 was put by your Department at £5.3 million. The Home Office's departmental estimates show a line of £6.27 million. I do not know if you would be able to shed any light on that.

Penny Mordaunt: On the disparity?

Q146 **Mr Gavin Shuker:** Yes.

Penny Mordaunt: I think that this is down to what is included in "core". I think the lower figure would include what most people would understand as core, but then there are other services—the helpline and so forth—which are also counted into "core". Some other figures I have seen are £9.8 million. That potentially may be the disparity, but that is my guess on your figures. I would be happy to clarify that.



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Q147 **Mr Gavin Shuker:** It would be helpful if you would write to us with that. Just lastly, other than the Vote 100 centenary work and the Returners project, I am just wondering what the main pieces of work being funded from the programme budget are likely to be in the coming year.

Penny Mordaunt: In terms of my priorities, I have not sent those out yet. Clearly, in the example I cited before, there were some things that I will do differently. I have not made any announcements on that but I will obviously keep the Committee informed as I am setting those out.

Q148 **Chair:** Minister, I realise you are relatively new to the job, but can you give us an idea of when we might get some certainty on these issues of which Department and of budgetary transparency? You can see, and indeed you have accentuated, that there is real confusion over the budget and real anxiety about the Government's commitment in this area given that your people are in one Department, your budget is in another Department and you are in neither of those Departments. When are we going to get this sorted?

Penny Mordaunt: Those administration issues are easily resolved, and I would hope to do that over the next few weeks.

Q149 **Chair:** Before the summer?

Penny Mordaunt: I would think that would be possible, yes. In terms of the reporting lines for staff and all that, that is mapped out and done, as you would expect. On the wider issue of where the GEO would be housed and those other issues, that will take a little longer. What I will be guided by in that is that I do not want the workload of the GEO to be disrupted in any way. I will make a pragmatic decision about when we might do that, in consultation with others.

Q150 **Chair:** When you write to us, could you detail the budgets so that we are clear what your budget is, so that we can scrutinise it properly? At the moment we are not able to do that.

Penny Mordaunt: Yes. Okay. I would be happy to do that.

Q151 **Jess Phillips:** I know you have said that you have not identified what your priorities are with the programme budget, but broadly, what are your policy priorities as the Minister for Women and Equalities?

Penny Mordaunt: One thing that has struck me, coming into the Department, is that there has been some great work done and some world-leading work done. All plaudits to the GEO for that.

My sense is that we are focused on quite a narrow group of women. One of the first things I asked the Department to do was to set out some personas throughout a woman's life and to look at what we are doing to support women at every stage of their lives to become as resilient as possible, to reach their full potential and all of those things. I want to ensure that we have something to offer women at every stage of their life, including older women. Sometimes I think the issues that that group



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faces are some of the toughest because they are multiple. I am obviously preaching to the choir, but multiple caring, less financially resilient, access to healthcare; all sorts of things affect that group.

I am keen that not only the GEO has an understanding of that, but that people across Government do as well, and that some of the nitty-gritty things we need to do to ensure that we are really doing a good job are embedded in what we do and what Government Departments do as well. I am interested in, again, dry things, including how effective our equality impact processes are.

Jess Phillips: Not very.

Penny Mordaunt: They are produced at the end of the—again, you know the issues. Looking at that, how can I help the GEO to be effective and how can I help Government Departments to be really effective? It is ensuring that we have something for every woman.

Q152 **Jess Phillips:** In the new Single Departmental Plans, published in May this year, there appears to be no section that focuses on the work of GEO. As it is no longer written down anywhere, can you tell us now what GEO's objectives are?

Penny Mordaunt: Unlike the other bits of Single Departmental Plans, the equalities bits are looked at on an annual basis. In addition to the changes I have made in my other Department, which are ensuring that Whitehall is supporting the global goals, I am also looking now with my new brief at the details of Single Departmental Plans. If they need to be changed in any way, we will be able to do that fairly swiftly. Again, you will have to forgive me. Six weeks in, I am not able to say much more on that.

Q153 **Jess Phillips:** I suppose for us it is about knowing which measures we can possibly use to hold GEO to account if it has no obvious objectives. What sort of performance would you expect us to want to see?

Penny Mordaunt: Again, I have been looking at that. I have been looking at suggestions people have made, including the indicators that Anne Milton forwarded. Basically, what gets measured gets done. We do need to improve that. What I want to ensure is that they are meaningful in terms of delivering results for people.

Q154 **Jess Phillips:** You do still intend to provide analysis on indicators and things? As you said, it probably was Anne Milton when she had the job who said that GEO would provide that analysis on indicators, standards, targets and so on.

Penny Mordaunt: Anne Milton's work will not be wasted. I am looking at that. How I will do that I cannot tell you today, but it is something that I am looking at.

Q155 **Jess Phillips:** Was GEO involved in creating the equalities targets and things in the Single Departmental Plans?



Penny Mordaunt: The approach that has been taken in the past is that, if you like, GEO will set the essay question but Departments are given quite free reign as to how they will answer it. What I am keen to do is ensure that we are raising the game across Whitehall. The GEO could be a powerful convening tool in that.

Q156 **Jess Phillips:** Does it have teeth to go back and say, “No, Ministry of Defence, this is not good enough”?

Penny Mordaunt: It does, but I am not sure that has been deployed necessarily. Again, it is us having a clear view—and I think it will come from focusing on those personas—of what the obstacles are that people are facing in earning more and doing all those things that we want to see. What are the barriers to that? If the barriers to that are within the gift of Departments, GEO should have a clear view about what that is and it should be in discussion with those Departments about what they are doing or how improvements can be made. That is what we should be doing and I am looking at how we really become effective in doing that.

Q157 **Jess Phillips:** That is good to hear. It seems from some of the Single Departmental Plans that quite a lot of the focus is on here—God forbid that Westminster and Whitehall were self-obsessed—and how they plan to improve, for example, gender pay gaps in their own Departments, rather than looking at the women in the country. I suppose what you are saying about personas and looking at where Governments are failing will be a push for that.

Last week the Minister for Women—who is in a different Department, incidentally—gave us evidence about sexual harassment in workplaces, and we are glad to know that Government anticipate our recommendations on this subject, but it is not a new problem, as I am sure you are more than aware. What do you see as the Government’s responsibility for tackling sexual harassment in society and how are you showing leadership on this issue?

Penny Mordaunt: There are a number of ways that we can demonstrate that. Clearly, there is the law. I know there are some outstanding issues and questions about that. That is obviously one example. I think also—you mention self-obsession, but you do need to lead by example, whether it is here or in our ministries.

We need to have a co-ordinated approach to the organisations, whether they are businesses or other organisations that we want to improve. One of the roles of the GEO is to try to pull that together. If you have a big long list of things as a CEO or an HR director that you are trying to tackle, some things that are important to us will inevitably be at the bottom of that list. If you have a more co-ordinated approach—part of an approach to ensure that we have inclusive workplaces that everyone can thrive in—then the thing becomes easier to do. That is the role that the GEO has in this.

Q158 **Jess Phillips:** Do you think that currently Government Departments are



working together on trying to tackle women's safety at work, for example, which we all know now is a widespread problem?

Penny Mordaunt: I do, but some of that work I do not think is visible. Again, just speaking from my experience of working in a number of Departments, some of the forums that Departments have are the best example of cross-government working. In fact I go back into ministries that I used to work at to give talks, to encourage people and to also just share my experiences of working elsewhere in Whitehall. There is a lot of good work going on. There is more to do and things could always do with a better profile, but there are a lot of people in the civil service who are very committed to this agenda.

Q159 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** In March this year you launched the Department for International Development's Strategic Vision for Gender Equality. Why do the Government have a strategy for achieving gender equality around the world but not within the United Kingdom?

Penny Mordaunt: How long do you have?

Q160 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Seven minutes.

Penny Mordaunt: One of the things—again, to be very boring and dry about this—that has always interested me about the global goals is how we apply them, because ultimately the thing that we are responsible for in the UK is our own performance against the global goals. I have had some very interesting conversations, including with the former Prime Minister when this was all set up, about how you measure these things and the profile that they have in Government.

I think there is much more to do, and I am very ambitious for the GEO in terms of setting the agenda and the pace across Government. We are going to be doing a lot of work across the summer looking at pulling things together and setting out some new strategies. What I would say is that strategies are all very well, but it is the action that stems from them that is the important thing. I appreciate your point. I think that the work that the GEO has done has been of very good quality and has set a foundation, but we need to do more, and I know that the team at GEO is very ambitious to do more.

Q161 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** You spoke about having discussed measuring your success. How do you plan to measure your success in advancing equalities issues across the whole of Government, not just for women and LGBT people but for all protected characteristics such as age, race, disability, religion and belief?

Penny Mordaunt: Again, I have been giving a lot of thought to this and mapping who is responsible for things like age discrimination, health inequalities, all of those sorts of things, and what work those Ministers have been doing. There is a lot of good work. Again, it does not sometimes get the profile that it warrants, but there is great work done.



There are also great ideas and great work that with just a bit more oomph could be something really game changing.

Since I have come into post I have mapped that. I have looked at which issues those Ministers are dealing with and where the synergies and the tie-ups are. I have had a number of discussions about how we can pull this together in a way that is not going to be a talking shop but will actually deliver some impact, and also so that we can engage with the beneficiaries of those policies and have a much more regular and coherent dialogue about what it is that they want us to do. Again, I cannot say more on that today, but I understand the point, how we demonstrate what it is we are going to focus on and how people can hold us to account for that.

Q162 Tonia Antoniazzi: In our recent report we called for a Cabinet sub-Committee on equalities and a cross-Government equality strategy, both to be led by you, that would guide this work. Do you agree that these would be helpful? In their absence, what mechanisms do you have at your disposal for achieving influence across Government?

Penny Mordaunt: Again, these are the things that I have been looking at. Certainly a Cabinet sub-Committee is one thing that I have been discussing. There are a lot of inter-ministerial groups that touch on this, and in the short term I am looking at some very practical ways we can pull this together. In terms of the ideal, your point on a Cabinet sub-Committee is well made, but really what we want is every Secretary of State around the Cabinet table, and others, to have this as a priority, to have the correct profile in Departments and to have mechanisms for when they are producing policies and signing them off to ensure that it has been through that lens before it becomes law or before it is a policy announcement. Getting that to work really well is, again, very dry, but that will have a lasting impact on how well Governments of any hue do this.

Q163 Tonia Antoniazzi: How many GEO staff work on equality policy areas other than gender and LGBT? How is their work with the other Departments managed?

Penny Mordaunt: It is very pragmatic, and I think that although it is a small team, that is one of its strengths. It can move fast. The example I have, in the short time I have been there, has been the fund to cover the next 12 months for disabled candidates. That involved the ODI over at DWP. It involved the Cabinet Office and the Minister for the Constitution. We did that in about 10 days, and I was very impressed with how quickly and how responsively the GEO as a driving force and a convener could get things done. That is an example of where I see it working really well. What is important is the situational awareness for the GEO, knowing what Ministers are working on and what issues they are facing.

Q164 Tonia Antoniazzi: Equality objectives now appear in each Single Departmental Plan for the first time. How did this come about and does



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the GEO have any role in advising or monitoring them?

Penny Mordaunt: It does. Again, I think that could be strengthened. What I think Departments, Secretaries of State and Permanent Secretaries would probably like is a bit more challenge and some ideas generated for them. The Departments we have big asks of, in my short experience, have been very responsive. For example, on the gender pay gap issue they have been very keen to lean in and make that a priority. I think we would be pushing at an open door. There is clearly a repository of expertise in the GEO that is massively beneficial to anyone running a Department.

Q165 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** The majority of these objectives are internal in nature, focusing on the role of Departments as employers rather than policy or delivery. What guidance, if any, was given to the Departments about how to set their equality objectives?

Penny Mordaunt: Obviously, I was not around at the time, but I will give you my best assessment of that. I think that sometimes Departments are in danger of curbing ambition because they clearly want to deliver. Where you get people making huge advances is that you have some stretch targets in there and you allow people to take a bit of a risk; you allow people to set their sights high.

Again, my experience in terms of what has been happening on the policy front with some Departments is good. Across not just the core equalities issues I look after but across the whole piece, the Department of Transport has done some really good work and has been working very closely with the ODI, for example, doing good things. I am seeing more conversations happening between those key lead equalities areas in Government and other Government Departments, and more focus between Permanent Secretaries on these issues. It never hurts to create a little bit of competition there.

I think the reason why you see people focused on getting their own house in order is because they can completely control that. What we need to do is to encourage ambition and encourage the focus that we want on the things that we know are going to be transformative for people, whether they are using the train or trying to get into the world of work.

Tonia Antoniazzi: Thank you.

Q166 **Chair:** Just before we move on, can I be very clear? Will we have a strategy that we can scrutinise from you?

Penny Mordaunt: For equalities across the brief? Yes, you will have a strategy from me in terms of my priorities and so forth. Particularly on women, we are going to be doing a piece of work over the next few months to try to take a more methodical approach and also going back to what I said about everyone as opposed to particular groups of women. Obviously, on the LGBT agenda, you will have an action plan.



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Q167 **Vicky Ford:** My questions are on gender pay gap reporting, which is obviously an area where the UK led a lot of work getting the reporting. There are lots of questions on what then happens next. We have had the first set of annual reports. What work is being done now to analyse the data from that report, for example looking at different sector or regional comparisons?

Penny Mordaunt: Those numbers are being crunched, and we are also looking at what organisations are doing in terms of their own plans. One of the first things I did in the job was to ask for Cabinet colleagues to lean in on particular things and areas that will make the most difference. We are asking Government Departments to look at the data and what that very successful exercise yielded. We are particularly interested in focusing on those sectors where the biggest impact on closing that gap can be made. Those are the—

Q168 **Vicky Ford:** Is that looking at public sector Department sectors or is that looking at commercial or private sector businesses, or both?

Penny Mordaunt: It is both. Obviously, Secretaries of State will be looking at public sector, but it is also with private sector as well. The one thing I would say on this—obviously, the ONS is still the gold standard in terms of data on this—is that again, we are not talking about all women who work. We are talking about a slice of that. As well as looking at what that exercise enabled us to do, there is a piece of work that we are producing in terms of good practice for businesses and what they need to do next. I am also focused on what we could do to enable women to progress, to earn more, to do all those things, in small businesses, in the vast numbers of situations that have not been captured by the larger businesses.

Q169 **Vicky Ford:** Are you considering extending the reporting requirement to smaller companies, say 50 employees?

Penny Mordaunt: No, I am not suggesting that at the moment, but as well as looking at good practice for larger employers, we need to consider—again, it is not what we automatically do in Government because it is tougher—what other things we can do to ensure that ultimately the things that we want to correct by closing the gap are happening elsewhere. There are opportunities to do this. When we look across Government quite often people say, “It is impossible to communicate with small businesses. It is hard to track what is happening”. There are all sorts of ways to do this. Banking, for example. We do need to look practically at what we can do to reach every employer ultimately, and ensure that they have the right practices in place, even if they are a small company.

Q170 **Vicky Ford:** I want to come back to the practices. I want to get the reporting and then talk to you about practices. Just forcing companies to report has helped them focus on and address the cause of the gap. Are you considering asking them to break that pay gap data down into more



detail by age, whether they work part-time or full-time, and asking for that in more detail?

Penny Mordaunt: The advice that we will be providing and what we will ask of larger businesses that have participated in the reporting exercise will be guided by our assessment of what has come back from those organisations and how many of them are doing something about it. But it needs to be focused on practical actions that ultimately help their employees.

Part of that will be about their understanding of their own gap. I will give you an example. What we are asking to happen in certain areas in the public sector is a proper analysis of that. There will be things that are relevant to some organisations and less relevant to others. But ultimately the next step for any business is going to be—top line—to understand why, and we will say, “And here are some things that you can do to address that”.

We are crunching the numbers, we are going to produce some additional support for those businesses. I obviously want to see in detail what that data is telling me about what we need to do next on that particular strand of the gender pay gap.

Q171 **Vicky Ford:** Do you have a view as to timing of when you will be coming out with that next stage of recommendations?

Penny Mordaunt: Not yet, but it is obviously a priority. I would say that the Prime Minister has put a marker down. It will now be in about five months’ time that she wants the Cabinet to come back and report on this; all Secretaries of State.

Q172 **Vicky Ford:** One more question on that: in terms of enforcing and making sure that the data that was provided was accurate, does the EHRC have a role in monitoring the accuracy of the data? Who monitors that?

Penny Mordaunt: Obviously, if we had issues with the detail of the data, or there seemed to be things that were suspect, we would flag that. I look at this as a partnership. Ultimately what we are trying to do here is good for business. There has to be an element of trust in this, but for organisations that have clearly not adhered to their reporting requirements—and certainly in this particular exercise—the Commission would have a role in dealing with them.

Q173 **Vicky Ford:** How do you think we compare on this issue to other countries? Are you looking at international comparisons as well?

Penny Mordaunt: I will have considerable opportunity to do this and I can tell you that the interest it has generated internationally is phenomenal. Including from places that you think are advanced—like Canada—on this. Yes, we are getting lots of enquiries and the GEO is obviously communicating that to our counterparts in other nations.



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Q174 **Chair:** Can I just be really clear? When it comes to the accuracy of gender pay gap reporting data, who is responsible for enforcing against companies who are inaccurate?

Penny Mordaunt: In most cases, where there is deliberately misleading information or people have not fulfilled the obligations, then it will be the Commission. But clearly, we are closest to our data so we would have the greatest oversight. If we found anything in that that was causing concerns, I would expect to be informed about it.

Q175 **Chair:** You are policing the data and the EHRC will take action?

Penny Mordaunt: I would take a slight issue with that. This is a particular exercise that was done. I am six weeks in, but my understanding of our exercise versus the ONS data that is collected is that the ONS is the gold standard of assessing the whole situation. This is an exercise that needed to be done in good faith and clearly there are obligations on organisations for doing that.

If when we are looking at the data we discover issues with individual organisations or a particular trend, that is a problem that would be flagged to me and I will look at it. But if there are deliberate breaches or attempts to mislead, or some other aspect of not reporting against their obligations, then it is the Commission that would take that action.

Q176 **Sarah Champion:** It is very welcome that you are saying you are going to be a real champion for the LGBT community. I would like to focus you specifically on the transgender community and trans equality, if I may, for my series of questions. When will the consultation on the Gender Recognition Act be published?

Penny Mordaunt: It is my plan to publish that before summer recess.

Q177 **Sarah Champion:** That is very good to hear. A lot of the debate that has been played out on both social media and the media has been about balancing single sex services and single sex spaces, and the rights of transgender people. Will this issue arise in your proposals and how do you propose to deal with that?

Penny Mordaunt: Consultation is so important and our communications around the consultation are so critical. This is an important piece of work, and it needs to be done well. It needs to be done in a climate of respect and understanding and, ultimately, what we are trying to do is to ensure that everyone can thrive and go about their daily life and be supported to do that.

We have already, and we will continue, to provide reassurances about certain issues and the fact that we are not going to be suggesting any changes to the Act. That is absolutely the case. Beyond that, there is a raft of other issues and very legitimate questions that people are asking, which no doubt will come out in the consultation. We need to address people's concerns. But fundamentally, the discrimination and bigotry that



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the trans community faces is very much like what gay men went through in the 1980s. I said to a meeting the other day that none of us were in politics at that time, but we must ask ourselves whether if we had been we would have stood up for that community. I hope we would have. But that is happening now to the trans community.

We need to show leadership on this issue and ensure that misleading information, unpleasant things on social media or lectures or videos that are being broadcast are called out for what they are. I feel very strongly about that.

Q178 Sarah Champion: Your passion comes across. Will the consultation also include debate around the legal gender recognition of non-binary people?

Penny Mordaunt: We have waited a long time for a consultation. We should try to consult on the widest possible range of issues and clearly non-binary is one of those issues. I am very keen that we consult on that.

Q179 Sarah Champion: We have also been waiting a long time for the new transgender action plan, which was promised in July 2016. Do you have an update on when we are getting that and why it has taken so long?

Penny Mordaunt: You will not have to wait long for that either. It is going to be like buses. Yes, we need to get that out. Again, I have made reference to that. That is how we can be, as a GEO, but also other Government Departments can be held to account for that, so you will not have to wait long for that, or for the survey results.

In part, why this has taken awhile is twofold. First, we had an enormous number of responses to the survey, which is great. They give us a very good base from which to work. They showed the scale of some of the issues that people are facing. Secondly, the action plan is only going to be credible if it is comprehensive. It is also addressing the issues that people have been championing for a long time. I was very keen when I came into post that we should chase down all asks and that we should have something that was going to be substantial. But you will not have to wait long for that.

Q180 Sarah Champion: You also said that we would have the LGBT plan imminently. Does that protect the rights of trans people?

Penny Mordaunt: Yes. You will see when it is published, but it is a comprehensive plan. There is always going to be more to do and I suspect there will no doubt be issues that will come out through the consultation and other things in the future. But this is a good start.

Q181 Sarah Champion: Other than the gender recognition process, where do you think the greatest process going forward is necessary to secure trans equality in the UK or internationally?

Penny Mordaunt: It is a culture change, quite frankly. There are many things that we can do in terms of very practical things that are within



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Government's gift and healthcare's gift, and all sorts of other things. But ultimately this is about a culture change. We have been through this before—the example I gave earlier—and we do need to set the tone for the debate that we are about to have. We also need to show our complete solidarity with the trans community as we do it. This is so important and it is that cultural shift—again that is not going to appear on an indicator board, but it is one of the most important things facing us—GEO, but also the country.

Q182 **Chair:** How do you characterise that culture change?

Penny Mordaunt: There needs to be a greater understanding.

Chair: Understanding of what?

Penny Mordaunt: It is clear to me from some of the broadcast debates that we have that a lot of people do not know what the trans community is. They have all sorts of misperceptions, they do not know what the issues are that are facing them. They may not have personal experience of someone directly themselves and I think there are lots of myths to be busted, and that is why our communications around the Gender Recognition Act are important. It is a level of understanding and also empathy, quite frankly.

Q183 **Jess Phillips:** The UK submitted its state report to the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW, in November. The CEDAW Committee is due to publish its list of issues in July. What do you expect the most challenging issues for the UK to be?

Penny Mordaunt: We are currently going through the shadow reports for that, but I would expect Northern Ireland to feature heavily.

Q184 **Jess Phillips:** I will come on to that.

Penny Mordaunt: I thought you might. There will be some issues perhaps around the Istanbul Convention; welfare will feature I would imagine. Again, I would come back to what I said earlier about the GEO having situational awareness. We also need to help Government Departments with the implementation of policies that are already out the door and ensure that everything we do in future is looked at through this lens. That is what we should be doing as the GEO; that is our role.

I expect there are going to be no surprises in there, but my focus is going to be on looking at how we improve life for people in this country. It will be down to the nitty-gritty of those policies.

Q185 **Jess Phillips:** I think you are right. In which areas do you think the UK has made progress since our last CEDAW examination?

Penny Mordaunt: I am looking at those shadow reports; hopefully there will be some positive in there. Probably the most significant thing—I have seen it across Whitehall from the international dynamic—is that we have done so much on tackling violence against women and girls and it is



being done in a very methodical and cross-government way. Then there are the finance reforms, which are not necessarily high on other nations' agenda. We have made very good progress, and I pay tribute to the junior ministerial team in GEO who have done really great work on this, and to my predecessor. It was a handy tenure at the Home Office.

There is, undoubtedly, more to do and we should have continual improvement on this.

Q186 Jess Phillips: CEDAW has repeatedly raised the engagement between women in civil society organisations and the Government. Do you expect the CEDAW Committee in this cycle to be satisfied with the Government's mechanisms for working with civil society on women's issues? Do you think this has been improved?

Penny Mordaunt: I would probably say it is not their job to be. There is always more to do. One of the other things that I have asked the GEO to think about and one of the things that struck me is how we ensure we are doing the right things and our agenda is being set by the people we are ultimately here to represent. There are clearly lots of forums in which various things are being looked at. Obviously, the agenda is very heavily weighted towards the workplace and business, but what I am interested in is how we are communicating with that very broad range, those personas at each stage of a woman's life, and particularly I think we need to do more immediately for women who are older and ensure we are picking up their needs, which are complex. They are dealing with a lot. I am looking at how we can strengthen that, ensure that we are talking to women in all parts of the UK, looking at what forums there are at the moment and how we might better tap into them.

Q187 Jess Phillips: The thing that CEDAW will no doubt bring up, as you have already identified, is Northern Ireland. In the past, it has concluded that the devolution policy within the UK does not absolve the UK Government of their accountability under international law for violations of the convention, which sounds pretty strong. How do you plan to square the circle of the GEO's responsibility for the UK's international obligation on gender equality with the realities of devolution?

Penny Mordaunt: A good outcome is that we are able to do both. Obviously, the Northern Ireland Office—I will be looking at it as well—is looking at the implications of the court ruling and the judgment summary that sat alongside that. Clearly the situation is untenable. It is important to stress why the airtime given to this issue on the Floor of the House clearly focused—very understandably, because people want to put the strongest case forward to those who disagree—on women who had lost wanted pregnancies, whose lives were danger and so on, and the trauma of their travel. This is about every woman, whatever the circumstances that she found herself in.

Clearly, colleagues across the House are deeply uncomfortable. We allow local commissioning on healthcare to reflect the needs of different



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populations, which is a strength, but if we have people who are barred from accessing the fundamental support and healthcare that they need, that is not a tenable situation. That is well understood by all, including, as was evident in the debate, some representatives from Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland office is working very hard to encourage Northern Ireland to deal with this issue. Clearly, we do not have an Assembly now and that is not going to appear on the horizon soon. I hope that whatever happens next will be done in consultation with the people, and women in particular, of Northern Ireland. I know that the issue is very much in the forefront of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's mind.

This is complicated and difficult. It is about devolution. There will be all sorts of people saying it is about other things; it is not, it is about devolution. The views of the people of Northern Ireland may not necessarily chime with those of people elsewhere in the UK, but that is not a reason not to grip this issue and to answer the very legitimate asks of many women in Northern Ireland and their families.

Jess Phillips: There is a lot of healthcare all across the UK that does not chime with the views of the whole population of a country, but we still carry on doing it.

Chair: Vicky wanted to come in quickly, is that okay?

Q188 **Vicky Ford:** It was clear in the debate that, unless action was taken in Northern Ireland, some Members of this House would move to take action, especially through the Domestic Abuse Bill. Does that set a deadline and mean that we will see amendments tabled in this House to cause action there? Does that give a sense of urgency, do you think, to those who want to legislate in Northern Ireland?

Penny Mordaunt: The sense of urgency should be generated by the asks of the people of Northern Ireland. The point was made by a representative from Northern Ireland in that debate that women are waiting. That is what should be generating the pace on this. There will be many ways in which this could be done, but clearly I hope Northern Ireland will deal with this. If that is not going to be the case, I hope that by whatever means—I have stressed this, the House is very motivated to act on this and we will obviously have to see what the judgment says—it will be done in a way that takes into account the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland. I know that colleagues who are very concerned about this issue have thought very creatively about what can be done. What I want to impress upon anyone who is looking to try and address this issue is that it is done well which, for me, involves the people of Northern Ireland.

Vicky Ford: I should possibly declare that the Good Friday definition of the people of Northern Ireland includes me, having been born in Northern Ireland. I would not necessarily think that that definition is appropriate for this issue.



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Q189 **Jess Phillips:** I will declare my interest in that regard as well. Vicky has asked the question that I was going to move on to. Is there a good and sustainable plan for talking to the people of Northern Ireland, that will come before the Domestic Abuse Bill? Nobody wants to see this House act as a wrecking ball, but that is what we will do if we have to make this happen. Is there currently a working group, a working plan, to get to the position that Vicky talks about?

Penny Mordaunt: If we have a responsibility with regard to equality to the people of Northern Ireland then we have a responsibility to do everything we can to ensure the quality of whatever might happen. I am not leading on this issue, but I am following it very closely. It is the Northern Ireland Office that is doing this. It has a methodical plan of primarily encouraging Northern Ireland to take responsibility for this and to get representative Government back up and running.

Q190 **Jess Phillips:** We have seen last week that when a Bill is needed because of the behaviours of some of the members of our various electorates a Bill can be brought. The Government can bring Bills in front of us when they need to. Do you foresee that once this piece of work is being done in Northern Ireland the Government would put something in front of the House? I know you are not leading on it so it is difficult for you to say.

Penny Mordaunt: No, this is clearly a priority for the Secretary of State there. The Northern Ireland Office is working through this. I know that, as well as the technical issues about devolution, the Secretary of State feels very strongly that Northern Ireland people should be consulted on these matters. There are various things going on in parallel. I am obviously looking at that. If I think that something is happening that is not going to produce a quality result for the women it is going to serve, I will pipe up, as you would expect me to.

Q191 **Jess Phillips:** I don't doubt it.

Penny Mordaunt: What I would say is that the House expressed very strong views. People clearly understand that this issue needs to be dealt with. There will be various ways to resolve it, but our prime hope is that Northern Ireland will grip this.

Q192 **Angela Crawley:** Are you now the Minister responsible for leading on the Government's work on Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals?

Penny Mordaunt: Sorry, the question was am I?

Q193 **Angela Crawley:** Are you the Minister, yes?

Penny Mordaunt: I am—I sound like a broken record—as the DFID Secretary of State, but every Secretary of State is responsible for delivering the global goals for the UK but also supporting our work in enabling other nations. I am heading up the GEO, I have a key responsibility in that and I am held to account by you, but every Secretary of State is responsible for contributing to that effort.



Q194 **Angela Crawley:** As the Secretary of State for DFID then, what are you going to do to raise the profile of the Government's obligations under Goal 5 in domestic delivery across Departments?

Penny Mordaunt: I have set up an interministerial group for every Government Department and body that spends ODA funds. That would include the NSC, which deals with the cross-Government funds. We are providing training, we are providing tools; we are also providing a deeper understanding and coherence about what people should be doing, where they should be doing it and the best way to do it. We have clearly, across Government, various responsibilities that are split and I am responsible for money; other people are held to account for quality. My view is that we ought to be operating as one HMG, and if the expertise on this sits in my Department then I have to share that and get other Departments where they need to be. We have some related manifesto commitments on that and I am very focused on delivering that. Off the top of my head, we had the first meeting in March, and we are about to have another one before summer recess.

Angela Crawley: Thank you.

Chair: Great, that is wonderful. Any other questions? Thank you very much for your time today, Secretary of State; we really appreciate it. Sorry to have overrun. I think you have some diary pressures and we appreciate that. We look forward to welcoming you back before the Committee in the not-too-distant future, particularly given the amount of work that you are doing and the strategies that you are launching. I am sure we will want to talk to you about those further. Thank you very much.

Penny Mordaunt: Thank you.