



House of Commons
Public Administration
and Constitutional Affairs
Committee (PACAC)

Appointment of Rt Hon Lord Pickles as Chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments

First Report of Session 2019–21

*Report, together with formal minutes
relating to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 17 March 2020*

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner for England, which are laid before this House, and matters in connection therewith; to consider matters relating to the quality and standards of administration provided by civil service departments, and other matters relating to the civil service; and to consider constitutional affairs.

Current membership

[Mr William Wragg MP](#) (*Conservative, Hazel Grove*) (Chair)

[Ronnie Cowan MP](#) (*Scottish National Party, Inverclyde*)

[Jackie Doyle-Price MP](#) (*Conservative, Thurrock*)

[Chris Evans MP](#) (*Labour, Islwyn*)

[Rachel Hopkins MP](#) (*Labour, Luton South*)

[Mr David Jones MP](#) (*Conservative, Clwyd West*)

[David Mundell MP](#) (*Conservative, Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale*)

[Tom Randall MP](#) (*Conservative, Gedling*)

[Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP](#) (*Labour, Brighton, Kemptown*)

[Karin Smyth MP](#) (*Labour, Bristol South*)

[John Stevenson MP](#) (*Conservative, Carlisle*)

Powers

The committee is a select committee, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 146. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2019. This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament Licence, which is published at www.parliament.uk/copyright

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/pacac and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Iwona Hankin (Committee Assistant), Claire Hardy (Committee Specialist), Gabrielle Hill (Senior Committee Assistant), Sarah Ioannou (Second Clerk), Dr Philip Larkin (Committee Specialist), George Perry (Media Officer), Sarah Rees (Clerk), Dr Patrick Thomas (Committee Specialist), Rebecca Usden (Senior Committee Specialist) and Jonathan Whiffing (Second Clerk).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 3268; the Committee's email address is pacac@parliament.uk.

You can follow the Committee on Twitter using [@CommonsPACAC](#)

Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	The appointment of Lord Pickles	4
	Witness	7
	Formal Minutes	8

1 Introduction

1. On 24 February 2020, the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office, Chloe Smith MP, wrote to the Chair of this Committee to notify him that the Government's preferred candidate for Chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOBA) was the Rt Hon Lord Pickles. The five-year, non-renewable term of the current Chair, Baroness Browning, was extended after the recruitment, which began in summer 2019, and was paused due to the General Election.
2. The Committee took oral evidence from Lord Pickles on 17 March 2020 after receiving his CV and a questionnaire from him. The Committee would like to thank Lord Pickles for his evidence.
3. The Committee has concluded that Lord Pickles is a suitable candidate for Chair of ACOBA and wishes him success in his role.

2 The appointment of Lord Pickles

ACOPA and the role of its Chair

4. The predecessor Committee conducted an inquiry on *Managing Ministers' and officials' conflicts of interest: time for clearer values, principles and action*.¹ The Committee considered the Government's response to its report inadequate and felt that there were many areas of the business appointments system that had yet to be addressed.² This report considers Lord Pickles' suitability for the post of Chair and not the organisation, but the Committee would hope that the Chair will use his or her power to address some of the failings, or raise them with the Government when these are outside his or her remit.

5. The Chair of ACOBA is one of the posts agreed to be suitable for pre-appointment hearings because of its "important role in ensuring public trust in government by regulating exit from government". ACOBA advises the Prime Minister and others on the application of the Rules on the Acceptance of Outside Appointments by Crown Servants (also known as the 'Business Appointment Rules'). The Rules set out the circumstances in which civil servants, diplomats, members of the armed forces and others need to obtain Government permission to take up outside appointments within two years of leaving the service of the Crown. The Advisory Committee also provides advice to Ministers and former Ministers looking to take up outside appointments within two years of leaving office. Ministers are required to seek the Committee's advice for appointments, other than unpaid posts in non-commercial organisations, under the Ministerial Code. The Ministerial Code states that Ministers are "expected" to follow the Committee's advice.

6. Appointment was advertised as a five-year non-renewable term attracting a non-pensionable honorarium of £8,000. It stated that the Chair was expected to commit an average of 2–3 days a month to the role.

Process for appointing the Chair

7. The then-Minister for the Constitution, Kevin Foster MP, wrote to the previous Chair of PACAC, Sir Bernard Jenkin MP, on 18 July 2019, informing him that the process for recruiting a successor to Baroness Browning would begin shortly. Sir Bernard replied on 23 July, expressing some concerns based on the Committee's report on ACOBA. The Minister wrote back to Sir Bernard in September and the post was advertised from 23 September to 27 October (the original closing date was extended to broaden the field).³

8. Twenty applications were received. Four applicants were invited for interview. Following one withdrawal, three candidates were interviewed on 30 January by the Advisory Assessment Panel. The Panel was chaired by Mark Addison (former member of ACOBA and former Civil Service Commissioner) and comprised Helen MacNamara,

1 Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Thirteenth Report of the Session 2016–17, [Managing Ministers' and officials' conflicts of interest: time for clearer values, principles and action](#), HC 252

2 Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Fourth Special Report of the Session 2017–19, [Government Response to the Committee's Thirteenth Report of Session 2016–17: Managing Ministers' and officials' conflicts of interest: time for clearer values, principles and action](#), HC 731

3 [Correspondence between Chair and Interim Minister for the Constitution Kevin Foster MP](#) 18 July 2019, 23 July 2019, September 2019

Deputy Secretary, Cabinet Office, and Colleen Harris, a Senior Independent Panel Member. Two of those interviewed were deemed appointable by the Panel and their names given to the Prime Minister to make the final selection.⁴

Lord Pickles

9. Lord Pickles was appointed to the House of Lords in 2018 and holds the Whip as a Conservative Peer. He was the Conservative Member of Parliament for Brentwood and Ongar from 1992–2017, having previously served as a Member of Bradford City Council from 1979–91. He was Chairman of the Conservative Party and served in the Cabinet as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

10. Lord Pickles continues to hold a number of appointments, including Head of Delegation to International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, Parliamentary Chairman of the Conservative Friends of Israel (Lords), Co-Chair of the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation (unpaid Government appointment), UK Special Envoy on Post Holocaust Issues (unpaid Government appointment), Vice-President of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, and Non-Executive Director and Co-Chair of The Parliamentary Review.

11. In his pre-appointment questionnaire, Lord Pickles said that he had already been appointed by the Prime Minister as a political member of the Committee to replace Baroness Browning at the end of her term. He had seen the role advertised on the HM Government Public Appointments website.

Oral evidence

12. During the oral evidence on 17 March, the Committee questioned Lord Pickles about his prior experience and his suitability for the post of Chair of ACOBA, and his views on the future direction of the body. Topics covered during the session included:

- how he came to apply for the role;
- the changing nature of Civil Service careers, including movement between the public, private and voluntary sectors;
- how this role fits with his other roles;
- his ongoing relationship with PACAC and other stakeholders;
- his previous experience in the private sector;
- the Chair's role in increasing the diversity of ACOBA members;
- complaints upheld by the Advertising Standards Authority about The Parliamentary Review;
- the integrity of the business appointments system, and his role in being seen to be impartial;
- his plans to conduct a review of ACOBA;

4 [Letter from Minister of State at the Cabinet Office Chloe Smith MP to Chair](#), 24 February 2020

- what success will look like at the end of his term of office and what metrics would be used to measure that;
- how he will monitor monetary enrichment through privileged information;
- whether a non-statutory regime has enough influence and can ensure its advice is respected;
- how the system can inspire confidence; and
- the resources for ACOBA secretariat and producing an annual report.⁵

Conclusion

13. The Committee is satisfied that Lord Pickles is suitable to be appointed as Chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, and the Chair has written separately with more detailed feedback from the evidence session⁶. We wish him every success in his new role.

⁵ [Qq1–56](#)

⁶ [Letter from the Chair to Lord Pickles](#), dated 18 March 2020

Witness

The following witness gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 17 March 2020

Rt Hon Lord Pickles, Government's preferred candidate

[Q1–56](#)

Formal Minutes

TUESDAY 17 MARCH 2020

Members present:

Rachel Hopkins	Tom Randall
Mr David Jones	Karin Smyth
David Mundell	John Stevenson

Resolved, That, at this day's sitting, Mr David Jones take the Chair of the Committee.—
(David Mundell.)

Draft Report (*Appointment of Rt Hon Lord Pickles, Chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 13 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 24th March at 9.45 a.m.]