



PACAC (Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee)

House of Commons · London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon Lord Pickles
Advisory Committee on Business Appointments
Room G/8
1 Horse Guards Road
London
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18th March 2020

Dear Eric

Thank you for attending the Committee today as the Prime Minister's preferred candidate for the position of Chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOBA). I am sorry that I was not able to attend the meeting, due to self-isolation. The Committee was pleased to recommend your appointment and agreed to set out its feedback to you in writing, which I hope will form the basis for discussions between yourself and the Committee about the direction for ACOBA and your priorities as Chair.

The Committee was pleased to hear that you intend to carry out a quick review of ACOBA as you start your tenure as Chair. We understand that the speed of this review may depend on other factors, but the Committee would be grateful to receive a copy of this review when it is completed. You also said that you would also carry out an audit of decisions made within departments when they consider applications from less senior Civil Servants who leave to take up jobs in other sectors. The Committee would also be grateful for a copy of this audit and also your recommendations to address any deficiencies that this work exposes.

During the session, the Committee spent some time discussing the "smell test" of whether an appointment would be appropriate. You said that you believed that applicants (ministers or Civil Servants) should understand what is appropriate and what is not. The Committee is clear that this requires clear guidance, from ACOBA or from the department, and that ACOBA should then have a robust selection of metrics to measure whether this guidance is being followed, not just at the time of ACOBA's response but also months later.

My colleagues also asked you questions about your role in promoting diversity, in particular in relation to other members of ACOBA. You noted that there are two appointments to be made by the end of this year. Therefore, the Committee would be interested to receive an update from you when the recruitment is launched to detail the concrete steps you have personally made to increase applications from strong

candidates from underrepresented protected categories, and, in particular, women, people with a black and minority ethnic background, and people with disabilities.

Finally, the Committee questioned you about the need for the Chair of ACOBA not only to have personal integrity and good judgement, but also to be seen to be above reproach. We note your comments on the Advertising Standards Authority's ruling on *The Parliamentary Review* complaints, and the steps taken by that publication to make good its materials that had been judged to be misleading. We further note your statement that you had "got out of the habit" of accepting hospitality such as invitations to events by corporate sponsors. We commend this. In the interests of transparency, would you consider publishing in ACOBA's Annual Report, details of any hospitality you have received in the course of your duties in your various roles, while in the Chair of ACOBA?

I look forward to a constructive relationship with you and the Committee over the period of your term of office.

Approved by William Wragg MP and sent in his absence

William Wragg MP
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee