



Women and Equalities Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 6123 Email womeqcom@parliament.uk Website www.parliament.uk

From the Chair

27 April 2021

Marcus Bell
Director, Equality Hub
Cabinet Office (by email)

Committee inquiry into the GEO: re your letter of 30 March

Dear Marcus,

Thank you for your reply of 30 March to my letter of 12 February relating to the Committee's inquiry. We were particularly grateful for your clear expression of the Women and Equalities Committee's key role in Parliamentary scrutiny of the Equality Hub, across each of its policy areas and constituent units, including the Social Mobility Commission. Parts of your letter of 30 March raise concerns, detailed below, to which we would be grateful for your further response.

We are grateful for the organogram you provided, which shows the key relationships between Equality Hub staff at the most senior level. We are concerned, however, that in answer to our request for broader staffing information broken down by contract type and grade, you stated:

"Currently we have redeployed a number of staff elsewhere in the Government, on a temporary basis, to assist with the response to the pandemic. We are also going through a process to combine the central functions of DU, GEO and RDU into one Hub. Given these two factors, we are not able to provide workforce data at this level at this time [...]"

We understand the need for staff redeployment in response to the pandemic, but it is concerning that you do not possess basic information about the grades and contract types of staff who remain in the Equality Hub. We would be grateful if you could let us know:

- **when such information is expected to be available, and when and where it will be published?**

We would also appreciate more information about the redeployment of 46 of your staff to help the pandemic effort:

- **From which of the Equality Hub’s units were these 46 staff redeployed? What are their grades?**
- **To which government departments have they been redeployed?**
- **Do you expect some or all of these people to return to the Equality Hub and, if so, when?**

It is concerning that you are unable to inform us which Cabinet Committees consider equality issues or how often these issues have been considered. As you know, Cabinet Committees’ remit are published as a matter of routine; however, it is not clear from the published information which, if any, of the current committees consider equalities matters. As such, it is reasonable for my Committee in its scrutiny role to request this information.

I draw your attention to written evidence submitted by the GEO to our predecessor Committee in 2018. This evidence provided our predecessors with information not only about the role of several Cabinet Committees in equalities issues but also relevant Inter-ministerial Groups.¹ I hope my Committee will not be denied the same level of openness and cooperation. I therefore ask you again to provide the information requested:

- **Which Cabinet Committee oversees the Equality Hub’s remit? How regularly are Equality Hub matters on the agenda of that committee or others?**

I was grateful for your reply to question 3 in my letter of 12 February, about the GEO’s work coordinating equality issues across government departments. We look forward to exploring these initiatives in more detail in oral evidence. In the meantime, we would be grateful for some basic information on the GEO’s/Equality Hub’s cross-government coordination role:

- **What staffing (numbers and grades) and financial resources are allocated to the Equality Hub’s cross-departmental coordination role?**

Finally, the importance of engagement with a wide range of Civil Society Organisations, whose interests are sometimes finely balanced or competing, was emphasised in our first oral evidence session in this inquiry on 14 April.² We would be very grateful if you could provide:

¹ See [written evidence submitted by the GEO](#), October 2018

² Oral evidence, 14 April 2021, for example [Q1, 5, 9, 23](#) [Tansy Hutchison]; [Q33](#) [Melanie Field]

- **A list of meetings with CSOs attended by each of the three GEO ministers in the last year; and**
- **A schedule of such meetings planned in the next 12 months and a description of how the schedule of ministerial meetings with CSOs is planned.**

I hope you will be able to provide all the information requested and look forward to developing a strong and effective working relationship. I look forward to your reply, which I would be grateful to receive **no later than Monday 17 May**, to help us prepare for the oral evidence session with the Minister for Women and Equalities on 25 May.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Caroline". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP
Chair, Women and Equalities Committee