



Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
and Minister for the Cabinet Office
Cabinet Office 70 Whitehall London
SW1A 2AS

William Wragg
Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs
Committee
House of Commons
London, SW1A 0AA

Our reference: MC2020/04271

29 April 2020

Dear William,

It was good to speak to you earlier today. You wrote to me on 5 March, following your Committee's oral evidence session with Peter Riddell, the Commissioner for Public Appointments. As I said when we spoke on 17 March, your letter made a number of good points which I wanted to make sure we considered carefully. Under the current circumstances, it has not been possible to respond to you as quickly as I would have liked.

Diversity in public appointments is important to public trust and confidence in public bodies. We want to see greater diversity in all its forms: people from different walks of life, with a range of experiences and backgrounds, who have worked in different sectors, and from every part of the United Kingdom. The boards of our public bodies are at their most effective and take better decisions when they reflect the society they serve, with members who bring different perspectives and challenges to the oversight of our critical public services.

While there is always more to be done to ensure that those holding public appointments are drawn from as wide and diverse a pool of people as possible, the government is making progress. The latest figures show that as of March 2018, 43% of appointees are female - compared to 39% in 2014. Data for last year will be published in due course.

The Commissioner for Public Appointments' last annual report also shows an increase in new appointments to women - up to 48.4%. However, as referred to in his evidence to the Committee, the headline numbers on appointments to women fell last year. This was due to a much lower percentage of reappointments being to women, conditioned partly as a result of the existing appointments coming up for reappointment versus a new competition. I am pleased to note that the Commissioner's report shows the progress in appointments made to those who declare that they come from ethnic minority backgrounds. These increased to 11.9%, compared to 8.4% in the previous year.

Taking your specific questions in turn:

What steps is the Government taking to ensure that improving the diversity of public appointments is properly seen as a priority across all Departments?

The Diversity Action Plan, published in June 2019 set out steps that the Government, across all departments, is committed to taking in order to improve diversity. The actions - covering data, awareness raising, recruitment and talent management - will impact diversity in its broadest sense. We will be refreshing this plan in due course. This will reflect the manifesto on which this government was elected, including the Prime Minister's focus on levelling up, for example through promoting regional diversity (a point you also raise in your letter) and diversity of thought.

The Cabinet Office works with all departments to provide forums to share good practice, highlighting where departments, such as those to which the Commissioner refers, are doing well and encouraging others. As a starting point, better and more timely data is important. Data will be published broken down by department so performance can be closely monitored and scrutinised.

The Government's published ambitions about diversity in public appointments have been reflected in Single Departmental Plans for 2019/20.

Is a review of the system of remuneration something that the Government would welcome?

The Government committed in its Diversity Action Plan to undertake further exploratory work to consider the impact of remuneration on public appointment roles, recognising that a clarified and consistent approach to pay, adjustments and expenses may attract, and continue to support, stronger and more diverse applicants. There are varying types of roles with different levels of commitment, responsibility and approach to remuneration. Departments, in consultation with HMT as appropriate, consider what appropriate remuneration is for each role but Cabinet Office will provide advice. We will, of course, consider any work that the Commissioner undertakes in this area carefully.

Does the Government plan to do more to ensure that a proportional number of people from devolved regions are being appointed to head UK-wide bodies?

Diversity in appointments from across the UK is an important aspect of this government's agenda, both in relation to appointments from across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and from different regions in England.

The Government's 'Places for Growth' programme, which encourages the movement and creation of jobs outside London, will also help to promote regional diversity within public appointments. As part of this work, new arms-length bodies should be based outside London, unless they can demonstrate a business necessity. I want to ensure we place sufficient focus on encouraging this aspect of diversity when the Diversity Action Plan is reviewed, for example, considering whether a board apprentice scheme, such as that in place in Northern Ireland, could be trialled on a regional basis in England. Looking beyond the current Covid-19 lockdown, there may be scope for all boards and bodies to explore (i) regularly holding meetings online, and/or (ii) regularly holding meetings away from their headquarters. Both developments could have a positive impact on this measure of diversity.

The Commissioner's last annual report showed that 72% of appointments and reappointments were made to those based outside London and the South East. However, it is important to adjust this for NHS Trusts and regional Ministry of Justice appointments. This figure will also reflect some appointments made by the Welsh Government, for whom the Commissioner is also the regulator of appointments. A better breakdown of this information will be provided when the Cabinet Office publishes the latest data for appointments made by UK Government ministers.

I look forward to continuing the work of previous Cabinet Office ministers and to working with my ministerial colleagues across government and the Commissioner, on this important agenda.

With every good wish,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael Gove". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" and the last name "Gove" clearly distinguishable.

**Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
and Minister for the Cabinet Office**



PACAC (Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee)

House of Commons · London SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 3268 Email pacac@parliament.uk Website www.parliament.uk/pacac

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office
Cabinet Office
London
SW1A 2AS

Thursday 5th March 2020

Dear Michael,

On Wednesday 4 March 2020 we held an engaging and helpful oral evidence session with the Commissioner for Public Appointments, Rt Hon Peter Riddell. As part of that evidence session, we discussed the level of diversity in public appointments and I am writing to you to follow up some of the points raised during that evidence session. The transcript of the session is available on our webpage and I have asked Committee staff to ensure your office has access to a copy.

The Commissioner informed us that there is differing practice between Departments on improving diversity figures. For example, Mr Riddell praised the seriousness that Departments such as DCMS, BEIS, Justice and Health are taking improving diversity but suggested that “the problem is with other Departments: they don’t have the networks.” I would be grateful to know what steps the Government is taking to ensure that improving the diversity of public appointments is properly seen as a priority across all Departments. (Q24)

Mr Riddell has suggested that something that may improve diversity is a review of the financial support that is provided for people who take up public appointments. It appears that the current system has grown in an entirely *ad hoc* way which creates a bias in favour of older people who are able to look for part-time or unremunerated roles because of other incomes, such as pensions. In his annual report the Commissioner stated there should be a review of the system of remuneration. Is this something that the Government would welcome? (Q37-38)

We also discussed regional diversity, the Commissioner explained that he was struck by how poor the figures for the north-east were in his annual report and we raised the subject of how to ensure that there is a proportional number of people from devolved regions, such as Scotland, being appointed to head UK-wide bodies, rather than appointments being drawn from the “London bubble”. Does the Government plan to do anything to ensure that a proportional number of people from devolved regions are being appointed to head UK-wide bodies? (Q33-34)

Yours ever,

William Wragg MP

Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee