



**The Commissioner for
Public Appointments**

Rt Hon Peter Riddell CBE
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Chris Skidmore MP
Via email

21 April 2017

Dear Chris,

I just wanted to write before Parliament is dissolved to inform you how I intend to carry out my monitoring role under the Government's new Governance Code as the first full reporting year has now started. In particular, I want to look more closely at what departments are doing to increase the diversity of candidates applying for, and receiving, public appointments.

I am pleased to hear from your officials that the Cabinet Office intends to update its diversity strategy later this year. I am sure there will be a large overlap in our approaches.

Meanwhile, I wanted to set out how I intend to monitor departments' practices and performance- analysing and reporting on what steps departments are taking.

I will be looking at, amongst other points:-

1. What steps are being taken to encourage applications from under-represented groups who are not familiar with the public appointments process and do not follow announcements on the Cabinet Office website? How far are departments using social media and other forms of communication to reach such groups?
2. How far are departments assembling lists of potential candidates among such groups whom they are seeking to support and encouraging to apply? Are departments developing mentoring and shadowing schemes to nurture potential board members from under-represented groups, as NHS Improvement has begun to do successfully?
3. Are departments working with chairs of public bodies on succession planning to look at groups of appointments of members over a period of, say, a year or so. Appointing four or five people allows a greater opportunity to pick a more diverse group than single appointments.
4. How diverse are interview panels? And have they had training in tackling unconscious bias?

Much of this monitoring is not about compliance with the details of the Governance Code and is more qualitative than quantitative, but I also want to highlight examples of good practice as well as where departments are not performing.

In addition, as we have previously discussed and largely agree, I will be seeking to address current inadequacies in the quality of data on both the flow of new appointments and the stock or composition of boards. My officials are working with your team in the Centre for

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Public Appointments to secure improvements, and my annual report for 2016-17 will show whether there has been progress on the level of returns on diversity data.

My officials have also noted a number of problems with implementation of the welcome new transparency arrangements. There are a worrying number of inaccuracies and some departments do not appear to be as assiduous as they should be in updating the site about what is happening with competitions. This is intended to be, and should be, a simple task. My officials are working with yours to address these problems and the election period provides an opportunity to sort them out before competitions are resumed after June 8th.

Finally, I would like to say that, now the new Governance Code is operating, I look forward to continuing to work with the Cabinet Office to ensure that we have a fair and open public appointments system which seeks to encourage a wider range of applicants to fulfill these important roles.

I intend to put a copy of this letter up on my website.

All best wishes

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Peter', followed by a long, sweeping horizontal stroke.

Peter Riddell
Commissioner for Public Appointments

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