



**The Commissioner for
Public Appointments**

Rt Hon Peter Riddell CBE
Commissioner for Public Appointments
G/07, 1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ
Telephone 020 7271 0835

E-Mail publicappointments@csc.gov.uk

Lord Bew
Chair
Committee on Standards In Public Life

13 November 2017

Dear Paul,

When I came to see the committee at a meeting earlier this year, I promised to keep you informed about developments on public appointments.

The Government's new Governance Code has now been in operation for ten months. However, because competitions under the old Code were still being completed for the first few months of 2017 and especially because of the purdah period caused by the general election in the spring and early summer, the new system has really only been fully working since the end of the summer holidays.

So it is still too early to reach any more than a tentative view about it. For instance, these disruptions have meant that it has been pointless until recently to monitor the agreed three month aspiration/target between the closure of applications and the announcement of an appointment. I have, however, told departments that the clock has now started on this from the beginning of September this year. I will be reporting later on how far departments meet this goal.

So far, there have not been major problems both because of the generally positive approach of ministers and departments and because of some safeguards I managed to negotiate a year ago. In particular, the requirement that departments consult, rather than notify, me on key issues such as seeking exemptions from competitions and appointing candidates judged to be unappointable by an interview panel has been very important in giving time and space for any problems to be defused.

Similarly, the selection of Senior Independent Panel Members to sit on panels, though no longer chair them, for significant appointments (chairs of bodies and the like) has gone relatively smoothly. The SIPMs have been largely similar in background to the former Public Appointments Assessors, and in several cases have been the latter.

UNCLASSIFIED

Consequently, there has been little change in practice from what happened under the old Code and any differences between me and departments over the length of exemptions from competition have generally not been significant and are listed on my website. I am, however, certainly not complacent about the situation and fully recognise that the concerns your committee raised over the new Code could still cause difficulties.

There have been some teething problems in achieving transparency, one of the main themes of Sir Gerry Grimstone's report of March 2016. The tracker on the Cabinet Office website which is supposed to provide real-time information on the progress of competitions has in too many cases not been kept up to date by departments. This issue is now being addressed. The Cabinet Office has responded both on this and on the need to improve the quality of the statistics on appointments. For the first time, we will shortly have data on the stock of appointments (that is the composition of boards) rather than just the flow (totals of new appointments and reappointments).

I have also been active in my role as champion of diversity in appointments, though this has mainly been to highlight trends and examples of best practice since I have no direct levers. I have had a number of discussions with the Cabinet Office which is shortly due to produce its Diversity Action Plan, which I welcome.

To examine what is happening in detail, both with the new Code and on diversity, I have recently had meetings with the Permanent Secretaries of departments which make appointments to public bodies. I enclose a copy of the letter which I have just sent them which discusses recent trends, obstacles to greater diversity and ways forward.

If these is anything more you would like to know, I would be happy to discuss it with you and the committee.

All best wishes
J
sincerely
Peter

Peter Riddell
Commissioner for Public Appointments

UNCLASSIFIED