



**The Commissioner for
Public Appointments**

Rt Hon Peter Riddell CBE
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Robert Halfon MP
Chair of the Education Select Committee
House of Commons

Via email

11 January 2018

Dear Robert

I wanted to update you about what I am doing as Commissioner for Public Appointments over the Toby Young controversy. When his appointment to the board of the Office for Students was announced at the beginning of January, I immediately started to look into the background. I have read the report to ministers on the recruitment. This indicates that Mr Young was judged as an appointable candidate by a properly constituted panel chaired by Sir Michael Barber, chair of the Office for Students, before being chosen by ministers.

The subsequent controversy has, however, highlighted flaws in the process. Jo Johnson, the then minister, told MPs last Monday that neither he, nor the department, were aware of the offensive tweets before the appointment was made. This was a serious failing of due diligence and I subsequently wrote a blog on my website discussing the issue, which is attached.

I am now seeking the full papers on recent appointments to the board of the Office for Students from the Department for Education so I can establish in detail what occurred and whether this was in line with the Government's Governance Code; what could and should have happened; and lessons for the future in handling appointments. I would stress that I am focussing solely on the procedures. The merits or otherwise of the appointment of Mr Young and other candidates is a matter for ministers, and not for me.

I cannot at present say how long this investigation will take but, once it is completed, I will write to you, and I will make public my findings.

I will put this letter on my website and am copying it to Dr Sarah Wollaston in her role as chair of the Liaison Committee, and to Benard Jenkin, as chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Peter Riddell
Commissioner for Public Appointments

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