



**The Commissioner for  
Public Appointments**

**Rt Hon Peter Riddell CBE**  
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Rt Hon Mrs Maria Miller, MP  
Chair, Women and Equalities Committee  
House of Commons  
London SW1A 0AA

12 October 2017

Dear Mrs Miller

Congratulations on your re-election as chair of the Women and Equalities Committee. Now that your committee is operating again, and given your remit, I thought it might be helpful to draw your attention to the most up-to-date information on diversity in public appointments which was published over the summer, set against the background of the Government's recently produced Race Disparity Audit. I enclose both my annual report for 2016-17 and the accompanying statistical bulletin.

Some of the headline trends are positive, others less so. In particular, the marked rise during the first half of the decade in the number of women appointed and reappointed to public bodies has been sustained and was 45.5 per cent in 2016-17, compared with just 34 per cent five years earlier. That reflects a continued commitment by ministers and departments, and the Cabinet Office. Moreover, 48.5 per cent of new appointments were to women. However, the number of women appointed as chairs is still disappointingly low. At 28 per cent in 2016-17, it was higher than the 23 per cent in the previous year, but slightly below the figure for 2014-15. I hope that the marked rise in the number of women appointed as members of boards in recent years will be reflected, before long, in an increased number of female chairs.

I have been looking at whether there are obstacles and biases in the system discriminating against certain candidates and appointees. I am pleased that the Cabinet Office and departments are simplifying the application process to focus more on skills than a conventional tick box of experience in various roles which favours men. A positive trend is shown by the fact that, while more men than women apply for positions (60 against 40 per cent), the proportion of women selected for interview is higher. Some 28 per cent of women who applied were selected for interview, against 21 per cent of men. Moreover, the success rate of women at the final stage is high so that 17 per cent of women who applied for a public appointments role were successful, against 10 per cent of the greater number of men who applied.

This suggests that both the quality of women who do apply is higher than that of men and that the process is not biased against women. In particular, women often form half or more of interview panels.

The picture for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) candidates is more positive than often portrayed, but still far from satisfactory. The proportion of appointments and reappointments made to BAME candidates was 9.2 per cent in 2016-17, against their 14 per cent share of the overall population in England and Wales. Moreover, just over 10 per cent of new appointments were made to BAME candidates. The news is less favourable on chair appointments. Just seven out of 136 appointments and reappointments of chairs were made to BAME applicants, that is slightly more than 5 per cent of the total.

In contrast with women, and non-BAME candidates, there is a measurable lack of success amongst BAME applicants making it to the interview and appointment stages. There is a clear risk of disillusionment with the process and with public commitments to diversity unless more progress can be demonstrated here, I have been meeting individuals and groups to try and identify some of the obstacles. There are clearly problems of information, not knowing what is involved in public appointments and a sense of exclusion. Moreover, it is necessary to tackle claims that many candidates lack the right skills and experience by developing mentoring and shadowing schemes as NHS Improvement has successfully done for some local NHS trusts.

I am not sure how useful the overall category BAME is since there are big differences between various ethnic groups in the level of appointments- higher, it has been reported to me, for those with Indian and Pakistani backgrounds than for those with Bangladeshi and Afro-Caribbean origins.

The position for disabled candidates is improving slowly but again not sufficiently. The total number of appointments and reappointments made to people declaring a disability was 6 per cent in 2016-17, the second highest level in the past five years, As with BAME applicants, more work needs to be done to attract not just more applications, but also high quality candidates who are more likely to progress right through to the interview stage. One encouraging feature is that more than two-fifths of disabled candidates who reached the interview stage went on to be appointed.

As Commissioner, I am seeking to encourage diversity in other ways with more younger people appointed and a more even social and geographic spread. For the first time, appointees aged under 45 accounted for nearly 15 per cent of the total, against well over 60 per cent coming from the 56 and older age groups. One obstacle to younger people applying is that many posts on public bodies are either unpaid or paid a relatively small amount, This is an issue for government departments but one that has to be addressed if people in mid-career, or the self-employed, as opposed to the retired or those near retirement, are to apply.

On geographic spread, the picture is less London and south-eastern centred than might be supposed, even leaving aside that the devolved governments and executives in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales make appointments to public bodies in their territories. Many public bodies are locally focussed, such as Independent Monitoring Boards (looking after

prisoners' welfare), Parole Boards and NHS trusts. Together they account for well over a half of all public appointments.

The primary responsibility for improving diversity lies with ministers and departments who make the appointments. The Cabinet Office is taking a leading role in encouraging greater diversity and my office works closely with it. My role is primarily as a regulator and publisher of statistics submitted by departments and I am trying to improve the quality of the statistics so we have a clearer picture of what is really happening. In particular, I want to supplement the current flow figures (of appointments and reappointments made) with stock figures (a snapshot showing the overall numbers of women, ethnic groups etc on boards).

I am also seeking to identify and publicise best practice on diversity, both inside Whitehall and externally, and will be saying more on this later in the autumn.

I would be happy to discuss any of these points, or others in my annual report and the statistical bulletin, with you and your committee. As you know, my primary parliamentary accountability is to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee and I will copy this letter to the Hon Bernard Jenkin MP, its chair, and put it up on my website.

Yours sincerely *and best wishes*

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peter Riddell". The signature is written in dark ink and includes a horizontal line underneath the name, with two short dashes at the end of the line.

**Peter Riddell**  
Commissioner for Public Appointments