



**The Commissioner for  
Public Appointments**

**Rt Hon Peter Riddell CBE**  
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Hon Bernard Jenkin MP  
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
Via email

26 February 2018

*Dear Bernard,*

I am glad to say that my inquiry into the appointments to the Board of the Office for Students is now complete and I enclose the report, including an annex on issues of due diligence, plus a copy of a letter to Sam Gyimah, the Universities Minister, on the appointment of the student experience member of the Board.

The inquiry has taken much longer than I hoped because it took several weeks for my office to receive all the relevant papers.

I reviewed all the evidence and I am satisfied that the Department for Education and Sir Michael Barber, Chair of the Office for Students, sought to appoint a diverse and balanced board on the basis of a fair and open competition. I do, however, have serious concerns about two aspects of the appointments which were either in breach of, or compromised, the Government's own Governance Code for appointments.

My concerns are over the inadequate level of due diligence over the appointment of Mr Toby Young and over the way the student experience role was filled. There are lessons to be learnt both in the department and in Whitehall generally and, at the request of the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the Government, I have made some suggestions about how to improve due diligence in a realistic and proportionate way in the age of social media.

These are covered in detail in the annex to the report.

As we discussed last week, I have also been asked to look at the appointment of Baroness Stowell as Chair of the Charity Commission. I have taken a close interest in the appointment and saw the report of the interview advisory panel before the appointment was announced. The report indicates that the panel judged her and two other candidates appointable in the normal way on the basis of a fair and open competition. The decision to appoint her was then taken by the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister. I will now be reviewing all the papers on the competition to see whether a fuller investigation is justified.

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I was not, as you know, involved in the pre-appointment process or in the decision by Matt Hancock to go ahead with the appointment despite the opposition of the DCMS committee. I believe parliamentary backing is important for trust in public bodies but that is a matter for appointees, departments and Parliament.

I will be happy to discuss anything further on either of these matters.

All best wishes  
yours sincerely  
Peter

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