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Our Ref: PS/1127

Lord Holmes of Richmond  
House of Lords  
London  
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Dear Lord Holmes,

As you know, my officials have been carefully considering the recommendations you made in your review *Opening up Public Appointments to Disabled People*. I know that my officials have been updating you on our progress, I hope those updates have been useful. I am pleased to now be able to write to you with the government's response to your review.

The government accepts the principle of all the recommendations that you have made and I set out below in more detail how the government proposes to proceed with each of them. The vast majority of actions will be implemented through the Public Appointments Diversity Action Plan (DAP), which has been updated by the government and is also published today. I am confident that this refreshed action plan is both stretching and achievable, and will benefit not only people with disabilities who wish to apply for public appointments but also other groups who are currently under-represented, so that we can improve the diversity - in its widest possible sense - of public appointees.

### **1. *Data and transparency***

As your review highlights through the data you were able to collate and summarise about public appointees who consider themselves to be disabled, much more needs to be done to ensure better collection and use of data. Better data is vital as it allows the government to measure progress and the impact of interventions. Further, publication of such data, which is now carried out by the government and the Commissioner for Public Appointments, allows for the government as a whole, as well as individual departments to be challenged about performance.

The government accepts the recommendation to overhaul the collection of data and has included actions 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.6 in the refreshed DAP to address this.

Work has already begun on making the diversity monitoring form more accessible, and we are developing a standard approach to the language used in application packs. We are working with the Commissioner for Public Appointments and departments to update and roll out an amended diversity

monitoring form which adopts the Business Disability Forum's inclusive terminology on defining disability. Increasing the numbers of individuals completing diversity monitoring forms will be an essential part of improving our data. As well as publication on the HM Government Public Appointments website of a subtitled British Sign Language translated video of a senior leader explaining why diversity information is collected as part of the application process and its importance (action 1.5) we will trial - in some appointments processes - asking applicants to complete a diversity monitoring form before their application is accepted (action 1.2). We recognise that trust and confidence in what the data will be used for, as well as personal data concerns, need to be considered. That is why the form will continue to include a "prefer not to say" option.

You recommended that, to help those who remain unsure how to complete the diversity monitoring form, that the government should provide a suggested definition and list of conditions via a link to a page on the HM Government Appointments or OCPA website. We agree that referring to a single definition of disability in all public appointments diversity monitoring forms will both help applicants to understand the information they are being asked for and, in turn, improve the consistency of our data. There is more work to do to decide the best option for this. As you noted, the government currently encourages the use of the social model of disability. We believe that this is the most appropriate approach to use but we will work with the Business Disability Forum and other stakeholders and publish a standard approach for public appointments by the end of October (action 1.4 in the DAP).

The government set out ambitions for ethnicity and gender diversity in public appointments in its 2017 DAP<sup>1</sup>. Setting an ambition on disabled public appointees, as opposed to a target as you suggest, would be consistent with our approach on gender and ethnicity. It is important that ambitions are stretching but also based on evidence. In line with your report, we aim to first improve the quality and transparency of the data we hold, and then to use that to consider a stretching ambition. Your suggested interim target of 11.3% is based on the civil service targets for the senior civil service. This number was derived using data about new entrants in the period 2014-2017 and all senior civil servants in post as at Q1 2017. This was based on individuals with known ethnicity/disability only and did not include the level of people who prefer not to say. At the time of the civil service targets being set, the reporting rate for disability was 82% in the senior civil service. We do not have comparable data or evidence on public appointments where, as you note, reporting rates are much lower (around 65%). Consequently, it would not be appropriate to set an ambition for public appointments at this stage. Many of your other recommendations about improving data collection and the application process will help us to strengthen the evidence base.

We will assess the quality of data in December 2020 based on progress on actions 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 when the government will take a decision about what its ambition on disability should be (action 1.8 in the DAP).

In addition, accepting your recommendation to explore a single online application portal and applicant tracking system for all departments to use for public appointments (action 1.3) means that we will be able to put better use of data - not just about disability, but a range of diversity characteristics and about the applicant experience in the process - at the centre of all improvements.

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<sup>1</sup> Our ambition by 2022: 50% of all public appointees should be female; 14% of all public appointments should be from ethnic minorities.

The DAP sets out actions to make our commitment to transparency a reality and the government also accepts that it is important that such data is linked to government accountability frameworks such as Single Departmental Plans and Permanent Secretary dashboards (actions 1.6 and 1.7 in the DAP).

## **2. *Attracting and nurturing talent***

In order to increase diversity in public appointments, we must increase the pipeline of candidates applying for them, paying particular attention to increasing awareness amongst under-represented groups, dispelling myths and disbanding barriers, encouraging those with the right skills from all backgrounds to apply, and helping candidates have a positive and fair experience through the process once they have submitted their application.

A comprehensive awareness strategy is vital to achieving this. The government will be working with partners to design an improved awareness strategy for how we highlight what public appointments, as well as individual roles, are about. This will incorporate actions to implement the recommendations in your review to showcase role models and make better use of multipliers, conduits and connectors (action 2.1 in the DAP). The government believes this will improve connection with a broad range of potential candidates from across the UK, including those with skills and potential from under-represented groups, professional networks and businesses. As part of this, we will seek opportunities to establish networks for under-represented groups, including people with disabilities, in public appointments, make the most of different media channels available to spread the word and showcase role-models from diverse backgrounds.

The government accepts your recommendation to improve the use of executive search for public appointments and has already issued guidance on the use of executive search firms in public appointments campaigns, as reflected in the refreshed DAP. The guidance encourages departments to consider using firms that have signed up to the voluntary [Standard Code of Conduct](#) that lays out steps for search firms to follow to promote gender and ethnic diversity, and/or the [Enhanced Code of Conduct](#) which is an accreditation based on a firm's track record of specifically enhancing gender balance. Departments should also consider using firms that have indicated that they follow the [Business Disability Forum's Charter for Disability Smart Recruitment Service Providers](#).

The government also agrees that there is great value in formal networks and mentoring schemes which can help potential candidates gain relevant experience and confidence and can support existing public appointees. The government believes that there is value in exploring this not just for disabled people but also for other groups. The DAP commits the government to piloting such schemes with select departments and arms-length bodies and then, with positive evidence, expanding them (action 2.4 of the DAP).

## **3. *Application process***

The government recognises that it is vital that the application process is as inclusive and accommodating as possible so as not to put off candidates with the skills and potential to carry out public appointment roles. Care must be taken at all stages to ensure that barriers are not placed in the way of candidates and that there is not inadvertent self-selection or discrimination so that the best are successful based solely on their suitability to perform the role.

The government accepts all of your recommendations about improvements to the appointments process (actions 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3). We have already begun working with other departments on the language used in application packs and we will work with departments to develop resources to help public appointments teams ensure that their treatment of candidates is as inclusive as possible. We are also exploring the feasibility of a commercial framework for supplying adjustments for interviews.

We agree that departments should be open to alternative means of assessment, which is already allowed under the Governance Code on Public Appointments and will work with other government departments to pilot different approaches to application and assessments (action 3.3 in refreshed DAP), acting as a hub to share learning.

Your recommendations set out aspirations for Disability Confident ratings. Most ministerial departments have a Disability Confident Level 3 rating. As part of that, they should therefore already be working with their public bodies to promote those organisations also obtaining a rating. We accept your recommendation that all bodies involved in the recruitment of public appointees should hold a Disability Confident rating. In May, the government announced that it wants to double employers' membership of Disability Confident to 20,000 over the next year. As part of this, the Cabinet Office will work with the Department for Work and Pensions - the lead department for Disability Confident - to both support other departments which sponsor public bodies also achieve a Disability Confident rating and departments with a Level 3 rating to fulfil their commitments as leaders of Disability Confident by encouraging their public bodies to join the scheme (action 2.3 of the DAP).

#### ***4. Interviews and beyond***

You set recommendations about the kinds of innovation that departments should be looking at in the interview and selection processes. We accept your recommendations that departments should consider more open and innovative selection processes, including more training for panel members, should ensure diverse panels (including disabled people) and that departments should be aware of the impact of poorly administered adjustments. This is reflected in the refreshed DAP at actions 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3. The government also agrees that those involved in interviewing key members of the Boards of public bodies, such as the Chairs, should contribute to the objectives of improved diversity (action 4.5).

#### ***Conclusion***

In your review, you also helpfully set out some additional areas for the government to consider, which while outside your terms of reference were relevant to improving the diversity and quality of public appointments. We agree that retention and remuneration are important issues and we will keep them under consideration whilst we progress with the actions in the DAP.

Finally, I would like to thank you once again for your ongoing engagement and support to improve both the quality and diversity of public appointments. Your review has prompted a re-think of our approach and provided some really practical suggestions on how we can improve our efforts to increase diversity in public appointments. The true test of commitment is not just words, but actions.

With improved data and transparency, this government and its successors will be held to account about the progress it is actually making.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Oliver Dowden". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

**Oliver Dowden CBE MP**