

*From the Chair*



**OFFICE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS APPOINTMENTS**

G/7 Ground Floor, 1 Horse Guards Road SW1A 2HQ

Telephone: 020 7271 0839

Email: [acoba@acoba.gov.uk](mailto:acoba@acoba.gov.uk)

Website: <http://www.gov.uk/acoba>

24 April 2018

You approached the Committee for advice about taking up an appointment as Chief Executive Officer of Benevolent AI.

The Committee's role and remit

It is the Committee's role to advise on the conditions that should apply to appointments or employment under the Government's Business Appointments Rules for Former Ministers (the Rules), which apply to former Ministers for two years after they leave office. The Rules seek to counter suspicion that:

- a) the decisions and statements of a serving Minister might be influenced by the hope or expectation of future employment with a particular firm or organisation; or
- b) an employer could make improper use of official information to which a former Minister has had access; or
- c) there may be cause for concern about the appointment in some other particular respect.

When the Committee considers applications it must have in mind that Government has judged that it is in the public interest that former Ministers with experience in Government should be able to move into business or into other areas of public life, and to be able to start a new career or resume a former one. It is equally important that when a former Minister takes up a particular appointment or employment, there should be no cause for any suspicion of impropriety.

Chief Executive Officer, Benevolent AI

You informed the Committee that you propose to become Chief Executive Officer of Benevolent AI, which describes itself as a world leader in the development and application of artificial intelligence for scientific innovation. The company applies their technology in human

health and other bioscience applications and refines and develops its technology to replicate initial success across wider applications and industries.

This would be a full-time paid role. As Group Chief Executive, you would lead all business units and functions reporting to the founder and Executive Chairman. You explained that you do not expect the appointment will include any contact or dealings with your former departments or Government more generally.

You informed the Committee that you had no official dealings with your prospective employer or its competitors during your time in office and had no access to commercially sensitive information about any competitors. You noted that you have had no previous involvement in the pharmaceutical sector.

There is no record on the publicly available transparency returns on Gov.UK of you having held any external meetings with or having received hospitality from Benevolent AI during your period of office.

DCMS noted that Benevolent AI is one of the department's stakeholders and should you take up the CEO role, DCMS might expect you to be invited to roundtables and other meetings with officials and possibly ministers. It confirmed that DCMS has no contractual relationship with Benevolent AI.

DCMS said the Committee should be aware that the previous CEO of Benevolent, Jerome Pesenti, co-authored the AI review (Growing the Artificial Intelligence Industry in the UK), which reported in October 2017. This was an independent review, which reported on how the Artificial Intelligence industry can be grown in the UK. DCMS worked directly with Jerome Pesenti, rather than Benevolent AI, during this time.

DCMS is not aware that you had access to commercially sensitive information or unannounced government policy given you left the department over a year ago.

The Permanent Secretary for DCMS has no concerns about the appointment.

The Home Office commented that given the difference between the department's work and that of Benevolent AI, both in technology and subject matter, it is unlikely that Benevolent AI would stand to gain any unfair advantage from your appointment.

#### The Committee's consideration

The Committee<sup>1</sup> noted that you had an established and varied career in the technology industry, working for prominent technology companies, such as Google and Facebook, before taking up a Ministerial appointment, which spanned approximately two years between 2015 and 2017.

---

<sup>1</sup> This application for advice was considered by Sir Alex Allan; Jonathan Baume; Lord Michael German; Terence Jagger; Baroness Helen Liddell; Richard Thomas and John Wood. I recused myself from this application in line with ACOBA's published Code of Practice. This letter contains the Committee's advice, arrived at without my input and which I am signing and sending in my capacity as Chair of the Committee.

When considering your application the Committee took into account that you had no official contact with Benevolent AI during your time in Ministerial office and neither DCMS nor Home Office have raised any reservations about the appointment. The Committee has assessed that the risk of this appointment being perceived as a 'reward' for decisions made or actions taken while in office is low.

The Committee noted that as Benevolent AI is one of DCMS' stakeholders it is possible that you will be invited to attend meetings with officials and Ministers. It considers that this would not be inappropriate, subject to the lobbying restriction set out below.

The Committee concluded that it is unlikely that you will have access to commercially sensitive information or unannounced government policy given you left DCMS over a year ago and ten months have passed since you left the Home Office. The risk that Benevolent AI will gain an unfair advantage as a result of your time in office is therefore low.

Taking into account the specific facts in this case, in accordance with the Government's Business Appointment Rules, the Committee advises the appointment be subject to the following conditions:

- you should not draw on (disclose or use for the benefit of yourself or the persons or organisations to which this advice refers) any privileged information available to you as a Minister;
- for two years from your last day in Ministerial office, you should not undertake any work for Benevolent AI or its subsidiaries or partners that involves providing advice on the terms of, or with regard to the subject matter of, a bid or contract relating directly to the UK Government; and
- for two years from your last day in Ministerial office, you should not become personally involved in lobbying the UK Government on behalf of Benevolent AI or its subsidiaries or partners. Neither should you make use, directly or indirectly, of your contacts in Government to influence policy or secure business or funding on their behalf. This does not preclude routine contact on matters aligned with Government policy.

By 'privileged information' we mean official information to which a Minister or Crown servant has had access as a consequence of his or her office or employment and which has not been made publicly available. Applicants are also reminded that they may be subject to other duties of confidentiality, whether under the Official Secrets Act or otherwise.

The Business Appointment Rules explain that the restriction on lobbying means that the former Crown servant/Minister *"should not engage in communication with Government (Ministers, civil servants, including special advisers, and other relevant officials/public office holders) – wherever it takes place - with a view to influencing a Government decision, policy or contract award/grant in relation to their own interests or the interests of the organisation by which they are employed, or to whom they are contracted or with which they hold office."*

I should be grateful if you would inform us as soon as you take up this appointment, or if it is announced that you will do so, either by returning the enclosed form or by emailing the office at the above address. We shall otherwise not be able to deal with any enquiries, since we do not release information about appointments that have not been taken up or announced. This could lead to a false assumption being made about whether you had complied with the

Ministerial Code. Similarly, I should be grateful if you would inform us if you propose to extend or otherwise change your role with the organisation as depending on the circumstances, it might be necessary for you to seek fresh advice.

Once this appointment has been publicly announced or taken up, we will publish this letter on the Committee's website and include the main details of the application, together with the Advisory Committee's advice, in the regularly updated consolidated list on our website and in the next annual report.

The Baroness Browning

Baroness Joanna Shields OBE