



OFFICE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS APPOINTMENTS

G/08 Ground Floor, 1 Horse Guards Road SW1A 2HQ

Telephone: 020 7271 0839

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By email

18 July 2023

Dear Ms Ross

Thank you for your letter of 13 July responding to my correspondence about the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOBA) and government's Business Appointment Rules (the Rules).

In particular, I was concerned that during an interview on Monday 10th July's edition of BBC Radio 4's Today Programme, it was implied that you had received advice from ACOBA. Your response sets out clearly that you received advice from the department on a number of occasions for the two year period on leaving office as required under the Rules. At the time, your post at Ofwat was not graded at the seniority that requires independent advice from ACOBA. That has since changed.

The picture is very mixed and lacks transparency which can cause confusion. ACOBA is not responsible for advising all staff from all UK regulators on movement to regulated industry. There are around 90 regulators in the UK and many sit outside ACOBA's remit.

I accept your apology and believe it was not your intention to misrepresent the government's business appointment system or ACOBA's role - either in your case or more generally. It is clear to me that you simply misspoke and I now regard this matter closed.

In line with ACOBA's commitment to transparency, I will publish this exchange of correspondence to correct the record and make clear the process you followed on leaving office.

The Rt Hon Lord Pickles

**Correspondence from Cathryn Ross to the Rt Hon Lord
Pickles, 13 July 2023**



Cathryn Ross
Interim Co-Chief Executive
cathryn.ross@thameswater.co.uk

The Rt Hon Lord Pickles
Chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOBA)

SENT VIA EMAIL

13 July 2023

Dear Lord Pickles,

Thank you for your letter of 11th July regarding my interview on Monday 10th July's edition of the *Today* programme on BBC Radio 4.

When I left Ofwat I was subject to the business appointments process appropriate for my civil service grade, SCS Pay Band 2. This process required that I should seek departmental approval for external appointments for two years following my departure from Ofwat. In a letter dated 20th December 2017 I received approval from Defra to take up the post of Group Director of Regulatory Affairs at BT Group. I took up the post in January 2018.

In line with the rules, and as set out in the approval letter, I was required to apply for permission to take up any appointment meeting the then business appointment rules criteria for a period of 2 years following my departure from Ofwat. I subsequently received approval from Ofwat for a non-executive director role at the UK regulated business of National Grid plc in a letter dated 4th March 2019, and for a non-executive director role at the Institute of Customer Service, and to become a member (unpaid) of the advisory council of the Office for Product Safety and Standards. I received approval from Ofwat to take up the role of inaugural chair of the Regulatory Horizons Council (then working to BEIS) in letter from Ofwat dated 19th October 2019.

I joined Thames Water in June 2021, after the expiry of the period during which I remained subject to the business appointment rules. On June 2023, following the resignation of Sarah Bentley, I was asked to step up from my substantive role as Strategy and External Affairs Director to act as interim co-Chief Executive Officer, alongside Al Cochran, our Chief Financial Officer.

After my departure from Ofwat the role of Chief Executive was regraded to SCS Pay Band 3, meaning that the post-holder from that point onwards would be subject to the ACOBA process.

I did not intend to imply that my appointment at BT Group was approved by ACOBA during my interview on Monday morning and apologise if it came across in that way when I addressed the broader issue of the process governing business appointments for former civil servants.

I hope this letter clarifies my position and I apologise again for any confusion caused.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Cathryn Ross".

Cathryn Ross
Interim Co-Chief Executive Officer

Cc: Jenny Block, General Counsel, Ofwat

**Correspondence from Rt Hon Lord Pickles to Cathryn Ross, 11
July 2023**



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By email

11 July 2023

Dear Ms Ross

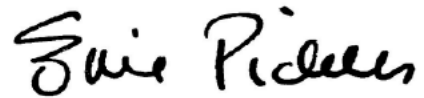
I am writing to you in my capacity as the Chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOBA).

I listened to and subsequently read a transcript of your interview on the Monday edition of BBC Radio 4's Today Programme in which you suggested that ACOBA had offered you advice on leaving Ofwat; this is not the case. You further suggested that all regulators are subject to advice from ACOBA on leaving office; this is also not the case. ACOBA is not responsible for advising on the movement of all staff from all UK regulators to regulated industry.

Ofwat is a non-ministerial government department which is covered by government's Business Appointment Rules (the Rules). ACOBA would only receive applications from Ofwat in relation to civil servants at Director General level and above. Applications from civil servant staff below this grade would be considered by the relevant government department, not ACOBA.

ACOBA has no record of receiving an application from you in the two years following your departure from Ofwat. I would therefore be grateful if you can inform me what process you did go through on leaving public office. I have copied this correspondence to Ofwat, which may also wish to comment on its approach to considering applications under the Rules.

I would be grateful for a response by Monday 17 July 2023, after which time we will publish our letter. In line with ACOBA's commitment to transparency, all correspondence on this matter will be published on the website.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sairi Pickles". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Sairi" and the last name "Pickles" clearly distinguishable.

The Rt Hon Lord Pickles