05 August 2019

GENDER DIVERSITY IN MINISTERIAL APPOINTMENTS

I am replying on behalf of Alex Chisholm, in my role as Acting Permanent Secretary (whilst he is on annual leave) to ensure you receive a prompt response to your letter of 24 July regarding BEIS Public Appointments. I am also the Director General responsible for Partner Organisations (in my role as Director General, Corporate Services).

In March 2018, 4 women were Chairs of the then 47 BEIS Partner Organisations. As of July 2019, 4 women are Chairs of the 40 BEIS Partner Organisations (and we expect this to increase to 5 imminently). However, if you consider all 465 members of the Boards of BEIS' 40 Partner Organisations (not all of these are public appointments), women make up around 33% of the appointments held. Whilst there has been some improvement, it is disappointing there has not been further progress, but I can assure you that our ambition and determination to do so remains undiminished. Our new Secretary of State, Andrea Leadsom, has also identified this as a priority for the Department and is committed to making further progress.

We have taken positive action already: all our selection panels are diverse in their composition; where we use head-hunters we are stipulating the importance of attracting a more diverse field of candidates and are assessing their success in doing so; and if panels do not recommend diverse shortlists or appointable candidates they need to provide a Diversity report explaining their position. We recognise though that we need to go further.

As a result, we have recently reviewed our approach, including with input from a group of our Partner Organisation Chairs, to consider more impactful activities that can boost diversity on our Boards, not just in terms of protected characteristics but also in 'diversity of thought'. With the recent update to the Cabinet Office-led Diversity Action Plan, we have been engaging closely with Cabinet Office on our plans. They are keen to learn from us, and potentially develop for wider roll-out some of BEIS' initiatives, including our Board Mentoring Scheme and online application system.
I have set out below some aspects of our refreshed approach in line with the four new objectives in the Public Appointments Diversity Action Plan 2019:

**Improving data and reporting on diversity**

Better data will enable us to track progress and target interventions. We are updating Partner Organisations’ diversity data to re-baseline current performance and target particular areas for improvement. We are the first Whitehall Department to launch an online application process for public appointments, which will also assist completion rates on diversity information, as it requires applicants to complete the diversity return in order to submit their application, meaning we now have a 100% completion rate compared to the around 80% completion rate we were seeing when the return of the diversity form was voluntary. Whilst completing the return is now mandatory, individuals are given the choice of selecting 'prefer not to say' for any question where they do not wish to provide a declaration.

**Raising awareness and tapping into talent**

We are developing our media material and case studies to market roles through representative and professional networks and social media platforms. We are also building on our relationships with diversity networks and are planning to host our first diversity networking event. Beyond this, we are establishing with our Partner Organisations a new Board Mentoring initiative which aims to develop new talent by placing candidates as observers on the Boards of Partner Organisations for a period of time to enable them to learn about the role.

**Improving our recruitment processes**

We continue to work with head-hunters to attract more diverse candidates, particularly for roles in organisations where we know the diversity in the available pool may be particularly limited. We are also employing new tools to review job specifications and criteria to ensure they contain inclusive language and are applying behavioural insights techniques to our promotional material, including our adverts, candidate information packs and marketing brochure. BEIS has disability confident level 3 and are promoting this to our Partner Organisations who are expected to have at least level 1 by end of the year.

**Supporting and developing public appointees**

Whilst a key focus for us is to attract diverse candidates to apply for these positions, we also recognise the importance of providing support to them following their appointment. To that end, BEIS runs orientation sessions for Non-Executive Directors on Public Sector Corporate Governance and Public Sector Finance and our Partner Organisation Chairs are now offering an informal buddy scheme for new appointees.

All of the activities described above are being led by experienced and committed colleagues, who have the confidence and support of myself, the Permanent Secretary and Secretary of State to help make a real difference on diversity.

Sarah Harrison
Acting Permanent Secretary
Annex 1. Gender diversity in BEIS’ Partner Organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender diversity</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Other &amp; unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public body Chairs - March 2018</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public body Chairs - July 2019</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Year 2017-18 - shortlisted candidates</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Year 2018-19 - shortlisted candidates</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Year 2018-19 - applications</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>697</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current numbers on Partner Organisation Boards</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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