Dear Mr. Field

Re: Committee inquiry into in-work progression

Thank you for writing to your CEO, Mike Coupe, and requesting that we provide you with details of our policies for progression and promotion, particularly with regard to the lowest paid colleagues. I have been asked to respond on Mike’s behalf and welcome the opportunity to update you.

**Over £100m invested in colleague pay last year**

Last year we invested over £100m in a new pay deal for our store-based colleagues, increasing the base rate of pay from £8 to an industry-leading £9.20 per hour. On average this meant a 9.3 per cent pay increase for colleagues and followed three consecutive years of above-inflation pay increases prior to that.

We expect the best from our teams and that is why we offer a leading rate of pay, in order to help run the best shops, with differentiated customer service, in a highly competitive industry.

We are also committed to ensuring that colleagues working side-by-side in store, performing the same role, are paid at the same rate. For example, where some retailers pay younger colleagues or apprentices at a lower rate, in line with the National Minimum Wage rate set for apprenticeships, we pay all our apprentices a minimum £9.20 base rate, substantially above the legal requirement, as soon as they commence their training.

**Sainsbury’s Group apprenticeship programme: helping to progress talent inside the organisation**

Over the last few years we have grown our apprenticeship offer from two to 35 distinct programmes, ranging from in-store craft bakery roles to analytics and software engineers. This offer is integral to our ability to promote and progress talent within the organisation. In particular, we find that level two apprenticeships, which are predominantly store-based, serve as an excellent gateway to other qualifications and jobs within the business. This is because they help colleagues re-connect with learning, boosting their confidence through supplementary maths and English training, while helping them reassess their career opportunities at Sainsbury’s with a growth mindset.

Indeed, we have a number of level 2 apprenticeship colleagues who have harnessed these programmes to support their development into more stretching and complex roles. Examples include: Baker to Network Engineer; Baker to Convenience Store Manager; Fish Counter Assistant to Food College Lead; Grocery Online Team to Software Developer; and Warehouse Colleagues that are now progressing into Driver roles.

We are committed to investing in apprenticeships at all age groups and levels throughout our business, offering them to all colleagues who demonstrate a willingness to learn, in order to help drive social mobility. Indeed, 85 per cent of colleagues on programme with us at the moment are over 24 years old - many of them being older colleagues - and we therefore see our apprenticeship offer as a key plank in a much broader commitment to lifelong learning.
Take Lauren Waind as one among many great examples of social mobility at Sainsbury’s: Lauren joined the business as a customer service assistant at our Aylesbury store when she was a student and has now been promoted to HR Change Manager. The Level 3 Team Leader Supervisor Apprenticeship served as an excellent gateway for Lauren’s next qualification, Level 5 HR Consultant, which is supported by CIPD and helping her to move up the management rungs and boost her pay.

We are also committed to supporting social mobility among external candidates. Over 20,000 people have received placements with Sainsbury’s through our You Can programme, which provides employment opportunities for those who face barriers to employment – such as colleagues with disabilities or criminal convictions. Specifically, this has involved working with Community Interest Companies such as A Fairer Chance, whose objective is to reduce worklessness, in order to place ex-offenders in our stores.

**The most inclusive retailer where people love to work and shop: supporting flexible working in our business**

At Sainsbury’s we want to be the most inclusive retailer where people love to work and shop, which means progressing talent from all backgrounds and making diversity and inclusion a fundamental part of our culture. In recent months we have responded to insight from listening to our ethnic minority colleagues about career progression and have run Black colleague Lunch & Learn development sessions. We are now piloting a BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) development programme to help create more ethnic minority progression through our talent pipeline.

Having a robust flexible working policy in place is also an important part of our commitment to helping everyone fulfil their potential, and we can demonstrate numerous examples of where flexible working practices are in operation: from offering term-time contracts to colleagues who want to stay with Sainsbury’s but don’t want to work during the main school summer holidays, to providing our own distinct Carers policy.

Concerning the latter, to our knowledge we are one of the few big companies that provides a distinct Carers policy, comprising a package of support for colleagues with caring responsibilities that includes giving them time off to go to appointments, changing working hours to fit around caring commitments and permitting extended career breaks for longer or more intensive periods of care. This policy is informed by 15 years of working closely with Carers UK, learning from their expertise and co-developing initiatives such as the “Jointly” app, a tool which provides free digital information for colleagues who are carers and gives them access to features such as calendars, medicine records and contacts lists, in order to help make their caring duties that little bit less stressful.

We also operate a remote working policy, in order to ensure that colleagues based outside of major cities are not disadvantaged in their professional development or pursuit of more specialist roles.

Hopefully the examples I’ve provided you with illustrate not only our commitment to great pay for all colleagues, and the opportunities available for progression and acquiring new skills, but also a culture of flexible working that helps to balance work commitments with other responsibilities.

Thank you for taking the time to write to us and don’t hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Dorman, HR Director – Corporate, Sainsbury’s Group