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Rt Hon Harriet Harman QC MP
Chair, Joint Committee on Human Rights
Committee Office
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Dear Harriet,

I welcomed the opportunity to give evidence on Wednesday, 8 February, as part of the Committee's Inquiry on Human Rights and Business, and I said I would write to you to follow up on several points.

Levels of staffing in BEIS

As I indicated in my oral evidence, business and human rights are part of the responsibilities of the Department's corporate responsibility team. This team currently comprises three members of staff. Two are permanent members, whilst the third is a senior level staff member from business, who is temporarily attached to the team until the end of March to assist our corporate responsibility work. This team sits within our larger business frameworks unit, which advises me on policy across corporate responsibility and governance.

Staff continuity

The Committee asked me whether it was true that a key senior official has been redeployed away from business and human rights work and whether this signalled reduced engagement from the Department with this agenda. I said I would look into this. It is correct that a member of staff, although not a senior civil servant, moved from this area in 2015. However, this was a routine redeployment within the business frameworks team. It reflected no diminution of our commitment to the national action plan on business and human rights. Our business frameworks team subsequently led our preparation of legislation last autumn to transpose the EU non-financial reporting directive. This now provides a fuller framework for strategic reporting by business, with accompanying guidance aligned with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human rights.

We have maintained a measure of continuity in our corporate responsibility team for its work on business and human rights. Of two permanent members of staff, one was involved in preparation of the National Action Plan in 2013, and he has remained working on this important agenda since then.

Training

Within our current corporate responsibility team, the more experienced member of staff has attended a number of business and human rights-related events, including the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights, and built up a level of knowledge and experience in this field as a result. The other team member joined recently. We keep the training of all staff under review in the light of development needs.

I hope this is helpful. I will write further on other matters raised during my evidence session in due course.

Best wishes
Margot

MARGOT JAMES MP

Minister for Small Business, Consumers & Corporate Responsibility