Annex F | Summary of Previous Research on Diversity in Public Appointments

Cabinet Office Ministerial Working Group (2002)

1. In 2002 a Ministerial Working Group convened by Cabinet Office was commissioned to compile a list of 10 – 20 recommendations that would make a significant difference to the diversity of people holding public appointments. The group drew upon two pieces of research into women's attitudes towards applying for public appointments.

2. The first of these, from the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions, found the main barriers for women to be:

   - **lack of awareness** of the opportunities – difficulties in finding out about vacancies; a feeling that appointments were not for "people like them"
   - the **unattractiveness** of public appointments – the image of the public sector, a perception that public bodies are a collection of the great and the good, a protracted selection process
   - **lack of confidence** in applying – undervaluing their competencies compared with men, concern about their ability to do the job
   - **lack of available time** – balancing the demands of a busy life, the timing and location of meetings, getting time off from employers, care commitments to children or elderly relatives
   - the **lack of remuneration** for some posts and/or the inequitable levels of remuneration across different appointments (there were mixed views on this topic). Some people simply could not afford to take up a public appointment that was unpaid, or could not risk time away from their paid employment.[1]

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[1] Report of the Cabinet Office Short Life Working Group on Improving Diversity in Public Appointments , Cabinet Office January 2004 page 8

3. The second piece of research relied upon by the working group was carried out by the UK Government's Women and Equality Unit. This research identified similar barriers and perceptions among women, for example:

- the **lack of awareness** of opportunities

- the **perception that their gender and background would be judged negatively** by interview panel members

- the **intimidating image** of current public appointees

- **daunting interviews** involving large interview panels (particularly an issue for women with non-professional backgrounds).

4. The research also sought women's views on what might encourage them to apply. The key themes were:

- knowing where to find information about public appointments in general and about specific vacancies

- having the opportunity to shadow someone already holding an appointment

- having the opportunity to learn more about the area relevant to an appointment

- being part of a network.[2]

5. Broadly, the ministerial working group's recommendations for action were as follows:

- make it easier to find out about appointment vacancies

- improve the selection process by

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[2] Report of the Cabinet Office Short Life Working Group on Improving Diversity in Public Appointments , Cabinet Office January 2004 page 8

- making a single, specialised team within each department responsible for handling public appointments
- adopting a single, but flexible application form across all departments
- providing examples of CVs to assist those applicants with a less traditional career path for whom the production of a CV could be a challenge
- introducing compulsory interview training for senior civil servants and NDPB chairs who may be involved in the selection process
- copying the submissions to ministers about appointments to all the selection panel members, including the Independent Assessor

- support individuals in building skills to encourage the progression of talented individuals

- improve the experience of being a public appointee

- improve the image of public appointments.

6. Actions taken forward by the Cabinet Office included:

- updating their public appointments website to include information to assist applicants

- encouraging single, specialised departmental teams

- providing interview training for senior staff

- developing and piloting a shadowing and mentoring scheme for disabled people

- producing an information leaflet on the effects remunerated appointments may have on entitlement to benefits for disabled people

- introducing a public appointments website and producing regular newsletters to encourage participation in public appointments.

7. Cabinet Office publishes a summary of cross-departmental progress on diversity levels on its public appointments website.[3] Across the 23 Departments as a whole diversity levels between 2004 and 2006 showed a very slight decrease in women appointed from 35.9% in 2004 to 35.5% in 2006; BME representation also decreased slightly from 6% in 2004 to 5.9% in 2006. Representation from disabled people has increased from 3.8% in 2004 to 5.1% in 2006.

OCPA Short-Life Working Group on Disability (2003)

8. A Short-Life Working Group on Disability[4] was established in 2003 by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA) in London.[5] The group found that the barriers to disabled people participating in public appointments processes included

- **poor understanding** of disability issues and etiquette by the people conducting the process

- **low awareness** of the appointments process by people with disabilities

- **lack of confidence** in the appointments process by people with disabilities

- the reliance within the process on person specifications, advertisements and procedures which had been used in the past, without considering their appropriateness for the current post or their implications for disabled people

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[3] http://www.publicappointments.gov.uk/diversity.aspx
[4] Short-Life Working Group on Disability: Report, OCPA January 2004
[5] At the time the Commissioner's remit was UK-wide

9. As a result of the group's work various recommendations were made and a booklet[6] was produced to raise awareness of public appointments amongst disabled people and to provide information on the process. The progress made by departments in implementing the group's recommendations was published by OCPA in its 2004-05 Annual Report. Examples of best practice by departments included:

- increasing the availability of application packs in various formats

- the use of disability awareness training within departments

- offering potential applicants with a disability the opportunity to experience an interview process.

Committee on Standards in Public Life (2004)

10. As part of its Tenth Report the Committee on Standards in Public Life commissioned quantitative research on people's attitudes towards conduct in public life.[7] The research revealed that the public perception was that selection procedures based on merit were bypassed in favour of cronyism. A second survey undertaken in September 2006 found that there is still widespread belief in Scotland that people in public office commonly get their jobs through someone they know, instead of going through the correct procedures.[8]

OCPANI Short Term Working Group on Diversity (2004)

11. In 2004, the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland (OCPANI) convened a Short

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[6] *Disability: Public Appointments and You*, OCPA March 2004
[7] *Survey of Public Attitudes Towards Conduct in Public Life*, Committee on Standards in Public Life, September 2004
[8] *Survey of public attitudes towards conduct in public life 2006*, Committee on Standards in Public Life, Chairman: Sir Alistair Graham

Term Working Group on Diversity to look at why some people do not apply for public appointments and why some of those who do apply are unsuccessful. The group's 2005 Report[9] noted that the diversity of people appointed in Northern Ireland reflected the diversity of people who applied. This suggests that the principle difficulties did not lie within the process itself, but in attracting a more diverse pool of applicants. The group also noted that a frequent complaint was that the time commitment stated in the information pack substantially under-estimated the actual time required for the role. The group therefore recommended that departments explore ways to make it easier for potential applicants to understand and meet the commitments associated with a public appointment. Follow-up on the actions taken by departments to implement the recommendations is pending.

Scottish Executive (Reid-Howie) Report (2003)

12. In 2002, Reid-Howie Associates Ltd were commissioned by the (then) Scottish Executive to examine the public appointment process in Scotland, identify reasons for the current under-representation of a number of groups and make recommendations to produce a more diverse range of candidates. The report, published in 2003,[10] identified that barriers to participation by under-represented groups can be introduced where an appointment process:

- **does not consider equality/diversity issues fully** at specific stages, nor take positive steps to encourage participation

- uses **materials or information which may** (in its nature, content or volume) **discourage** under-represented groups

[9] *Report of the Short Term Working Group on Diversity in Public Appointments*, OCPANI July 2005

[10] Diversity in the Public Appointments Process in Scotland, Scottish Executive 2003

- uses **materials which** (in text, language and images) **present a particular image** of an organisation (for example as predominantly male, white, and so on)

- identifies, specifies or selects on the basis of **unnecessary skills and criteria** which are outwith the experience of many people from under-represented groups

- uses **formal, inappropriate and inaccessible language** and does not provide material in a range of formats

- uses **publicity methods** which are unlikely to attract under-represented groups

- uses **complex application materials/forms**

- uses a **selection panel which does not reflect diversity**

- uses **formal or otherwise inappropriate means of selection**

- conducts **interviews without sufficient preparation**

- adopts an **approach** which does not identify and address candidates' requirements

- adopts **interview and selection procedures** which may disadvantage candidates from under-represented groups

- provides **superficial feedback,** vague feedback or no feedback at all

- collects sensitive **monitoring information without explanation.**

13. The research also identified a number of wider contextual and cultural factors that were potential barriers to participation in public appointments. These included:

- the **level of awareness** about public appointments

- the **public perception** of public appointments, in terms of who is appointed and the perceived political nature of the process

- **low understanding** by public bodies of the issues affecting under-represented groups, leading to inappropriate assumptions about people's abilities and a failure to operate in an inclusive way

- the **culture and ethos** of public bodies and the Scottish Executive and their approach to equalities issues

- the **language and jargon** used in the appointments process being aimed at 'the professional'

- the **way diversity is measured and reviewed.**

14. Against this background, a number of rounds were identified in which good practice had developed to address such potential barriers to participation, including cases in which there had been:

- discussion of diversity at different stages of the process, with a view to identifying any positive action needed

- inclusion of positive statements and other information in the materials used, to provide encouragement to under represented groups

- attempts to ensure clarity and the use of appropriate language

- the specification of appropriate skills and the inclusion of a wide range of experience

- local advertising and the use of a range of publications and media

- the use of accessible, local venues for interviews

- the involvement of a diverse group of panel members

- the routine provision of appropriate feedback

- an increase in the development of ways to reflect in practice a commitment to equality and diversity.

15. Action undertaken by the Scottish Government as a result of this research included:

a) training for staff on diversity and equality awareness and on other aspects of the public appointments process

b) the production of a checklist for participants to encourage diversity at all key stages of the appointment round

c) guidance on how to promote equality in the public appointment process

d) reviewing and updating guidance on the public appointment process

e) the development of template documentation for public appointment rounds

f) the collection of monitoring information on successful candidates and the publication of this information on the Scottish Government website

Despite the above actions, there has been a general decline in the number of applicants over the last two years and no significant increase in their diversity.

	April 06 – March 07		April 04 – March 05		General Population [11]
	Number	%	Number	%	%
Total applications	1326		1703		n/a
Gender[12]					
Female	395	29.8	550	32.3	51.8
Male	930	70.1	1152	67.6	48.2
BME[13]	21	1.6	27	1.6	2
Disabled	82	6.2	98	5.8	20
Age					
Under 30	64	4.8	67	3.9	37.0
31-40	104	7.8	162	9.5	14.6
41-50	269	20.3	406	23.8	14.9
51-60	511	38.5	725	42.6	13.0
61-70	252	19	279	16.4	10.0
Over 70	21	1.6	27	1.6	10.6
Total	1221		1666		
Unspecified	105	7.9	37	2.2	

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[11] Data on Scotland's general population is drawn from:
- General Register Office for Scotland's Annual Report 2005 Fig 1.3 – population, age range and gender
- Census 2001 – minority ethnic data
- Disability Rights Commission Scotland – disabled population

[12] During the period 6 applicants declined to indicate gender

[13] This figure does not include applicants who described their ethnicity in their own words as we are unable to determine from the Scottish Government's statistics whether these descriptions fell within the BME category