



Event Summary

Implementation of Sir Gerry Grimstone's Review of Public Appointments

Public Chairs' Forum (PCF) seminar with Rosalyn Eales, Deputy Director, Centre for Public Appointments

16.00-17.30, 5 May 2016

Seminar Room, Institute for Government, 2 Carlton Gardens, London, SW1Y 5AA

The PCF were delighted to host a seminar with Rosalyn Eales, Deputy Director for the Centre for Public Appointments on the implementation of Sir Gerry Grimstone's Review of Public Appointments, which was published on 11th March 2016 and sets out key recommendations for the public appointments process. Rosalyn Eales forms part of the team in Cabinet Office who are leading on the implementation of this review, so this seminar was a great opportunity for Chairs to engage with her directly and discuss what role they can play in taking this work forward. This seminar was also attended by the Rt. Hon Peter Riddell, who has just been appointed as the new Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Rosalyn began the seminar by emphasising the importance of an effective public appointments process to ensure the highest standards of public service delivery and gave a summary of Sir Gerry Grimstone's key recommendations. These include:

- Ensuring public appointments are based on merit.
- Emphasising that appointments should be made ministers who are accountable to Parliament.
- The Commissioner for Public Appointments should provide independent assurance to the process.
- Understanding the value of the Chair to review the skills of the board.
- Encouraging diversity.
- Ensuring the advisory assessment panel has a strong independent element
- Introducing a range of assessment techniques.
- Improving customer satisfaction, for example introducing a 3 month time limit for the process (supported by better planning) and feedback for unsuccessful applicants.

The Government has welcomed Sir Gerry's findings and are committed to improving transparency, diversity, public confidence and ensuring Chairs are fully engaged in the process for board appointments and play an active role on assessment panels.

The Cabinet Office are working with the new Commissioner in drafting a new governance code for the process. While Cabinet Office are working with departments to ensure that they will have the capability to run appointments, Rosalyn is keen to promote a strong engagement between Chairs and ministers in the process and ensuring that conversations with Chairs are factored into departmental plans. Rosalyn invited Chairs to be advocates of this new approach to promote diverse appointments on their boards.

The discussion was then opened to the floor for comment. Members expressed concern for the appointments process in light of David Normington's critical comments of the recommendations and desire for the Minister for Cabinet Office to engage directly with Chairs on how the new process will work and their role. Other key themes in the roundtable discussion included:

Transparency

- Rosalyn defined 'transparency' as public disclosure surrounding timescales, political activity and the job description.
- Members highlighted the challenges in achieving transparency in the conversations between the Ministers and the Chairs. Attendees noted the importance of clearly identifying the role of the Minister, the Chair and all other parties involved in the process.
- The job specification should be built around the role by consulting a range of stakeholders and understanding the range of skills needed on a board.

- Peter Riddell advocated publishing a report of the completed processes online. Therefore if an appointment takes longer than 3 months, it can be easily challenged.
- Some members advocated the use of Select Committee hearings to achieve a strong level of public assurance, which were not commented on in the Grimstone report.

Succession planning and reappointment:

- Some members felt that there should be an exit report of retiring trustees to enable the recycling of useful skills.
- Members agreed that reappointment should be made on a case-by-case basis however, it was noted the presumption should not be *against* reappointment.

Use of Headhunters

- Some attendees felt that headhunters are very useful particularly when sourcing candidates to apply.
- Rosalyn confirmed that Cabinet Office are pooling potential public appointees and will be liaising with departments to produce a suitable list. However members questioned whether, as departments get smaller, they will have the capacity to fulfil the role of the headhunter.

Length of the process

- Members welcomed the three month deadline, which Peter Riddell confirmed will start from the competition opening date. However, it was also noted that sufficient preparation before the competition opening is necessary to meet this deadline, including framing the job specification, advertising the vacancy and educating all involved parties in departments on how the competition will operate.
- It was suggested that Chairs support the minister to ensure the competition is closed within three months by producing a start date the person has to be in place by.

Other

- While the report suggests that Chairs reviewing the board should have a strong independent element, this is not clarified in the report with a specific example. Rosalyn suggested using departmental NEDs and welcome Chairs to contribute their ideas of which individuals would be most useful to them.
- Members emphasised that Chairs should have strong engagement with Ministers at the end of the process too, particularly as there are elements to some public appointments that ministers are not involved with such as situational judgement tests; while they would receive a report, this is an area that the Chair could add value in supporting Ministers making the final decision. Chairs were keen to highlight that their desire is not to challenge the authority of the Minister but to support the Minister to make the best possible appointment.

Rosalyn agreed with importance of the Chair engaging with the Minister throughout the process as a key point in moving forward in the implementation of the review. The Public Appointments team welcome Chairs' feedback once the recommendations are implemented and their views on what works well as well as examples of best practice. Peter Riddell then concluded the seminar with a few closing comments about his new role and his intention to be a champion of good practice, transparency and ensuring a more public process.