



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Christina McKelvie MSP,
Minister for Equalities and
Older People
Scottish Government

Social Justice and Social Security
Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Via email only

Email: SJSS.committee@parliament.scot

20 June 2022

Dear Minister,

Disability and public appointments

At the Committee's meeting, whilst considering its work programme, it was noted that Dr Sally Witcher OBE's recent resignation as Chair of the Social Security Commission raises a broader point about the barriers faced by disabled people accessing public appointments in Scotland and support in sustaining these appointments.

The Committee welcomes the use of positive action to increase the diversity of public appointments. However, the Committee is aware of wider issues around retention of people from diverse backgrounds, particularly disabled people. Following appointment, the Committee considers greater emphasis should be placed in accommodating people's lived reality to help retain them in their appointed role. This the Committee believes would also help to encourage more people to continue to participate in public life.

The Committee acknowledges the Scottish Government's work in increasing the diversity of public boards and that Scottish Ministers have set an equality outcome that public appointments are more diverse and broadly reflect the

general population by 2021. The Scottish Government's [Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report 2021](#), set out some work that has been undertaken to increase representation of disabled people on public boards:

“To reduce the barriers that disabled people face, Inclusion Scotland and the Public Appointments Team delivered a Scottish Government-funded shadowing placement pilot project, Access to Public Appointments, from September 2019 to September 2020. Six disabled people had the opportunity to shadow six regulated public body Boards, learning and actions from this work will be put into practice in 2021.” (Public Appointments, page 38, para 2)

In terms of overall progress in delivering diversity, the Mainstreaming report notes:

“Diversity and inclusion is an integral element of the planning for all appointments and targeted engagement and communications seeks to address underrepresentation of particular characteristics on each Board. As a result we have seen improvements in the rate of applications from people from an ethnic minority background, disabled people and people under 50. The most significant improvement we have seen is that women now make up 50% of public appointees, up from 46% in 2017.” (Public Appointments, page 38, para 5)

We also note the Ethical Standards Commissioner (ESC) 2008 report [Delivering Diversity](#), which sets out equal opportunities strategy for Scotland's ministerial public appointments process and the Delivering Diversity progress report published in March 2019.

ESC's [Annual Report for 2020-21](#) sets out the most recent progress on diversity. Figure 19 shows that the involvement of disabled people in public boards dropped from 11.8 % in 2015-16 to 7.4 % in 2020-21 and has remained roughly static since 2017-18. According to Figure 18 (page 35), at 2020-21 the percentage of disabled people that make up Scotland's population is 19.6% (page 34), this is based on the 2011 census.

Having lived experience on public boards brings valuable insight to the public sector and helps public bodies meet the challenges they face. The Committee has seen this first-hand with the Commission's work.

The Committee would like to know what action the Scottish Government has planned to increase the participation of disabled people on public boards, so it is more broadly representative of Scotland's population.

As well as receiving information on increasing applications from disabled people, the Committee would welcome your views on whether additional support is required for disabled people following their appointment to sustain their role.

The Committee is fully aware of the need for impartiality in public appointments, but also feels that an individual's right to engage in civil society as a whole should not be impinged. It would be helpful if the Minister could clarify what the rules are around this point.

This letter is copied to Shona Robison, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government for information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elena Whitham', written in a cursive style.

Elena Whitham MSP
Convener
Social Justice and Social Security Committee