

Mark Isherwood MS

Chair

Public Accounts and Public Administration

Committee

23 January 2023

Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee Inquiry into Public Appointments

Dear Mark

Thank you for inviting the Committee to respond to your inquiry into public appointments. The Committee considered its response at its meetings on 11 and 18 January 2023.

Welsh Ministers make a range of public appointments across all aspects of public life. These appointments are high profile and offer the opportunity to shape and inform many of the public services accessed by the people of Wales.

The Committee participated in three pre-appointment hearings since March 2022. The Committee's views are outlined under the relevant subheading below.

Pre-appointment process for Welsh Government public appointments

Since 2019, the Senedd has been invited by the First Minister to carry out pre-appointment hearings of major Welsh public appointments. This is intended to further improve the scrutiny and transparency of the public appointment making process. This scrutiny is normally undertaken in the form of a pre-appointment hearing of the preferred candidate, conducted by the relevant committee.

1. Based on experience to date, the Committee thinks the following documents should be provided as standard by the Welsh Government for pre-appointment hearings:

- Preferred candidate's application form, curriculum vitae and personal statement;



- An anonymised summary of the demographic profile of the candidates who applied for the post and who progressed at each stage of the recruitment process;
- A copy of the information pack provided to all candidates including job description and person specification; and
- Information on how and where the role was advertised.

2. This information is important in allowing committees to undertake a full consideration of the preferred candidate's qualification for the role they are applying for. It also ensures that committees are able to see how and where the post was advertised. For instance, to ensure a wide breadth of candidates would have been able to see any advertisement of the post.

3. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government and the Senedd seek to formalise the sharing of the information outlined above and agree what would be an appropriate time frame to deliver this information i.e. one full week in advance of the hearing.

Re-appointing existing postholders to major public appointments

4. On occasion, the Welsh Government will re-appoint existing postholders to public appointment roles. Such re-appointments are not subject to the pre-appointment hearing process. In some cases, where the initial appointment was made previous to 2019, individuals in those posts will not have been subject to pre-appointment scrutiny by the Senedd either.

5. In order to enhance the scrutiny and transparency of major public appointments, the Committee recommends that where re-appointments are made, the Welsh Government write to the relevant committee setting out the reason(s) for doing so. This would apply equally to appointments made before and after the commencement of pre-appointment scrutiny for major public appointments (i.e before and after 2019).

Diversity in public appointments

6. As outlined at the beginning of this letter, public appointments are high profile and offer the opportunity to shape and inform many public services in Wales. The Committee believes that public appointments should reflect the communities they serve.

7. Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments

8. In its report on the pre-appointment hearing for the Chair of Sport Wales, the Committee noted concerns that all candidates who applied for the role were from a White Background. In that report, the Committee stated that while it appreciated the steps taken by the Welsh Government to share the job advertisement with a very wide range of organisations, it recommended that the Welsh Government consider what further steps can be taken to increase the ethnic diversity of candidates for public appointments.

In its response to the Committee, the Welsh Government said:

"Sport Wales has made positive progress in recent years to improve the diversity of its Board membership. We agree, however, that more needs to be done to improve the diversity of candidates across all Welsh public appointments. The Welsh Government's Public Bodies Unit continues to take forward work in this regard through its Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments, and would be happy to provide a factual briefing for the Committee on the steps it is taking".

The Committee recommends that your inquiry explores the work undertaken by the Welsh Government's Public Bodies Unit through its Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments.

Accessible participation in recruitment

Ensuring that everyone is provided with a level playing field in terms of participating in recruitment processes is key in ensuring diversity in public appointments. In this regard, the Committee believes that the Welsh Government should ensure that those who are applying are able to attend interviews by a means which best suits their needs.

The pandemic has shown that business can be conducted effectively through a variety of platforms (be it virtual, in-person or on a hybrid basis). The Committee thinks that making automatic provision for interview by virtual attendance, should a candidate choose to do so, could make a big difference to certain groups of individuals i.e. individuals who may have to overcome additional barriers in order to attend an in-person interview.

Remuneration of some public appointments

A number of public appointments in Wales are remunerated; others aren't. It is expected that which roles are paid and unpaid is determined by the Welsh Government based on a set of established criteria (i.e. size of organisation, financial turnover, number of staff employed etc). However, the Committee is concerned by what could be an inconsistent approach in one organisation, and as such would recommend that a broader review is conducted in case there are other examples elsewhere in the public sector in Wales.

The role of the President of National Museum Wales is a salaried role; the Vice President position is unpaid. Vice Chair roles in other organisations are often remunerated, albeit at a reduced rate to the Chair rate, to recognise the difference in responsibility level. In the example referred to, the Committee considers that there is significant overlap in the knowledge, skills and experience required for both roles. Members are concerned that by not remunerating the role of Vice President, it could have an impact on the diversity of candidates who may apply for the role i.e. only those who can afford to do it unpaid will apply.

The Committee recommends that your inquiry investigates the reasons for different pay rates for different roles across Welsh public appointments. Members believe this work would further enhance the public understanding of why some roles are paid and others aren't. It may also identify any unintended consequences where some roles should be remunerated.

I look forward to seeing the outcomes of your inquiry in due course.

Yours sincerely,



Delyth Jewell MS
Committee Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.