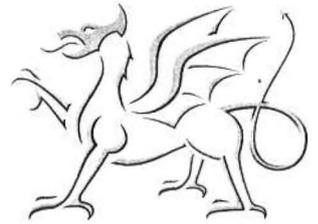


Andrew Davies AM/AC
Minister for Economic Development & Transport
Gweinidog dros Ddatblygu Economaidd a Thrafnidiaeth



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Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
 Welsh Assembly Government

Cardiff Bay/Bae Caerdydd
 Cardiff/Caerdydd
 CF99 1NA

Private Secretary/Ysgrifennydd Preifat
 Angela Williams
 029 2089 8772
 GTN: 1208 8772
 Fax/Facs: 029 2089 8130
 Angela.Williams@Wales.GSI.Gov.UK

Rosemary Butler AM
 National Assembly for Wales
 Cardiff Bay
 Cardiff CF99 1NA

4th April
~~March~~ 2004

Dear Rosemary

Business Women: Breaking the Barriers

During Tamsin Dunwoody-Kneafsey's short debate on 28 January you asked me to write to you with details of the mechanisms the Welsh Assembly Government has put in place to improve gender balance on the boards of Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (ASPBs). I apologise for the delay but I wanted to discuss some of the issues with my colleagues.

The Welsh Assembly Government is keen to make the boards of public bodies in Wales better reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. Building on the work of the Equality of Opportunity Committee the Welsh Assembly Government has developed an action plan "Mainstreaming Equality in Public Appointments" which aims to increase the diversity of public appointees. However, the plan also recognises that we need to ensure that when they are appointed, members and Chairs are able to take up their roles in modern, progressive boards which embrace equality and diversity in all aspects of their work.

We have a number of mechanisms in place, flowing from the action plan, which will encourage more women, and people from the other under represented groups, to apply for public appointments.

Lack of remuneration is generally recognised as a barrier to diversity. It means that only those who can afford to serve for expenses alone may do so. Following a thorough review a common remuneration scheme for all Assembly appointed chairs



and members of executive and advisory ASPBs has been introduced. Costs such as childcare or carer costs and the extra costs for people with disabilities (including taxi fares or companion's costs) are reimbursed where these are necessarily and additionally incurred in order to undertake public duties.

In April research was commissioned from Bangor University on what motivates people to take up public appointments and what differences there are between genders, ethnic minorities and disabled people. The research found that the main barriers to a public appointment for those from under represented groups were a lack of awareness of public appointments and of the right sort of experience, expertise and contacts. The research is still being evaluated but it is clear that there is work to be done in raising awareness of the role of public bodies and public appointments. The research finding will be used to help improve the way we communicate with under represented groups.

We are also working to build capacity among under represented groups. A "Board Member Development Scheme for Public Appointments" is being piloted in the Welsh Industrial Development Advisory Board (WIDAB) and NHS Trusts. It will give people from under represented groups an opportunity to sit on a board for a period of 6 to 12 months. They would receive induction training supplemented by training on generic issues tailored to their individual needs and be supported by a mentor on the board. Participants would be expected to take a full part in business although they would not have a vote. It is also important that participants should go through a selection process so they gain experience of completing an application form and going through an interview. The scheme will provide people from under represented groups with the skills and confidence they need to apply successfully for a public appointment. It is supported by the Commissioner for Public Appointments and is understood to be the first such scheme in the UK.

The Wales Women's National Coalition (WWNC) has, as one of its three key themes "Women into Public Life". As part of its programme WWNC held a seminar on public appointments in Brecon last March. The Commissioner for Public Appointments gave the keynote address and officials from Public Appointments Unit attended to provide general information and answer questions. We are continuing to work closely with the WWNC to raise the profile of public appointments among women in Wales.

More generally, details of every vacancy on ASPBs, health and other public bodies in Wales are sent to equality organisations and bodies representing under represented groups in Wales so that they can be disseminated among their members. To improve the effectiveness of this notification system we also intend to circulate, on a monthly basis, details of public appointment opportunities that are expected to arise over the next six months.

These mechanisms are working and the number of women appointed to ASPBs increasing. Between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001 a total of 88 appointments and re-appointments to ASPBs and NHS bodies in Wales within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments were made of which 30 (or 34%) were

women. Between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2003 the equivalent figure was 59 (or 41%).

I am copying this letter to Tamsin Dunwoody-Kneafsey, Jenny Randerson, Lorraine Barrett, Lisa Francis, Leanne Wood and Leighton Andrews, who all spoke during the debate, and also placing a copy in the Library.

Y
James

Andrew