Dear [Name],

February 2012

Public Appointments Commissioner for Scotland’s report, *Diversity Delivers-Three Years On*

Thank you for your letter dated 26 January 2012 and for the opportunity to comment on the findings of the Public Appointments Commissioner for Scotland’s report, *Diversity Delivers-Three Years On* (‘the report’).

The Scottish Government is committed to attracting and appointing a wider and more diverse range of individuals to public bodies in Scotland. Whilst much has been achieved to improve equality and diversity in public appointments, the Scottish Government remains focused on continuing to raise the profile of its diversity agenda regarding public appointments in Scotland. The Scottish Government Public Appointments Centre of Expertise has been active in engaging with stakeholders and has undertaken a range of outreach activity to promote awareness of the public appointment opportunities. These have focused on the specific equality strands of ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability, as well as working towards addressing the gender balance on the boards of public bodies. In the winter edition of the Institute of Directors in Scotland an article written by PACE was included to engage with individuals who have to date not considered applying for public appointments. In addition presentations have been given at a number of events and PACE plans to continue to identify events to promote public appointments.

As detailed in C1S of Annex 1 to the report, the Scottish Government established a centre of expertise to advise on and administer the public appointments process across the Scottish Government. This centre was established on 1 September 2011 and is working to deliver a centralised public appointments administration and advice for use across the Scottish Government. A significant amount of time and resources has been been directed towards developing systems compliant with the revised Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies, which came into force on 1 September 2011. Once fully operational, the centre will develop a centralised bank of information and knowledge, in particular from public body sponsor teams within the Scottish Government, which can be utilised to complete and build-upon actions in the Diversity Delivers strategy.

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The Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

By email
On the statistics themselves, we have seen improvements in some areas. Comparing the 2010 and 2011 applications across all equality strands except for LGBT there has been an increase in applications. In terms of those appointed, success has been mixed with increases for minority ethnic and LGBT applications as well as those age 49 and under. In an attempt to improve the diversity of appointments, the newly centralised team has directed much effort in actively engaging with individuals from under represented groups to publicise public appointments and encourage applications. To continue to progress the actions and at a faster rate, the Scottish Government has decided to merge the public appointments centralised team with the Human Resources diversity staff to ensure that their expertise is fully utilised in progressing the actions in the Diversity Delivers strategy. Officials have assured me that this will result in actions being progressed, in particular in piloting alternative approaches to application and selection and developing relevant training. This will include diversity training for panel members where a need is identified. The merger is taking effect from this month.

On specific points you raise:

To encourage more people to complete the monitoring form the Scottish Government has developed a new online application system. The system requires each applicant to complete the monitoring form and provides a 'prefer not to say' option for each question, should an applicant not wish to respond. This encourages completion of the form as applicants can no longer apply without first reading and completing the monitoring form. In addition the system provides that once an applicant has completed their monitoring information, the information is re-populated on the form for any future applications they make on the system, thus saving them time. The guidance notes for applicants on the new system will explain these requirements and the benefits associated with completion. The functionality of the system is now in its final testing stage and is expected to go live from April 2012.

Officials within the Public Appointments Centre of Expertise encourage at the planning stage, members of selection panels to adopt flexible approaches to application and assessment. These include the use and adoption of expressions of interest, telephone interviews, and the use of board papers for assessment. As the knowledge within the Centre of Expertise evolves, a bank of methods of assessment which can be more applicant friendly and appropriate will be fully developed and encouraged for use.

The Scottish Government is fully committed to promoting and improving diversity and equality across all public appointments, much has already been achieved as a consequence of the Diversity Delivers strategy. I can assure the Committee that the Scottish Government will continue to progress the actions and build upon them.

I trust this response addresses the points you have raised. Please let me know if you require any further information.

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