Do WASPs still run Scotland’s public sector?

An analysis of diversity data on appointments made to the boards of public bodies in Scotland as at 2014
If liberty and equality, as is thought by some, are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in government to the utmost.

*Aristotle*
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Context

Vast areas of public life in Scotland are governed in a style of political patronage which seeks to maintain the pretence that there is a healthy counterweight between the vested interests of government ministers, civil servants, and public servants and the interests of the wider public, the service users. This takes the form of political appointments made by government ministers to the 574 seats on boards which run public bodies – such as Health Boards or Visit Scotland – and some of which attract payments to those so seated, often in excess of the pension paid to our senior citizens.

In recent years and in an attempt to maintain the myth that in Scotland the rule of WASPs [White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestants] has been broken, soft targets were established in a ‘Diversity Delivers’ strategy aimed at introducing a degree of diversity to these appointments.

However, as the Commissioner for Ethical Standards points out:

These figures show that Scottish Government did not achieve the targets set in Diversity Delivers.

This research report aims to provide a brief examination of protected characteristic data on current appointees and as published by government itself for the year 2014. The focus of this report is on just how equally people who are women, disabled, VME, LGB or Catholic can expect to get a seat at the tables of who runs Scotland.

Wladyslaw Mejka
Equality Here, Now

December 2014
Findings

The scale of patronage

There are 78 public bodies in all covered by these political appointments, each with a Board Chairperson and with 574 board seats spread across those 78 public bodies.

Gender

Scotland’s population, as established at the last census in 2011, provides us with a women:men split of 51%:49%.

Given that and the considerable noise generated recently by government around action on gender equality, one would expect to see something close to that population split being reflected in the allocation of board seats by gender. One might expect that but the reality, as seen in Chart 1 below, is all too depressingly familiar.

![Chart 1]
Instead of occupying the majority of the 574 seats, women have just 201 of the seats, or 35% of a share – 92 seats short of what would be necessary to reflect the proportion of women in Scotland.

This inequality is even more profoundly expressed when looking at who has been appointed to the position of Chairperson of these 78 boards. Instead of the majority of board Chairs being women, the data tells us that women hold Chairs in just 15 boards – 25 appointments short of what could be expected if gender discrimination had been eliminated from the culture of the public appointments system.
Disability

The census in 2011 found that the proportion of people identified as disabled in Scotland remains as it was 10 years previously, at 20% of the population.

Changing how society is structured to remove the barriers to disabled people being active citizens can only happen when disabled people are part of a power-sharing arrangement in that programme of change.

Where better to embed that power sharing than in ensuring a proportionate appointment of disabled people to seats on the boards of Scotland’s public bodies. The data suggests that government is not yet ready for tearing down the barriers in the way of disabled people, as Chart 2 below shows.

![Chart 2: Disabled people's share of seats on public boards](image)

Instead of taking 115 of the 574 spaces provided, disabled people have just 67 – some 48 seats short of what would be necessary to evidence barriers to disabled people have been removed at least somewhere in Scotland.
This inequality is just as profoundly evidenced when looking at those appointed to the position of Chairperson of these 78 boards. Disabled people take the Chair in just 6 boards – 10 appointments short of what could be expected if disability discrimination had been eliminated by government from the culture of the public appointments system.
Race

The 2011 census provides us with the knowledge that Visible Minority Ethnic [VME] people in Scotland now account for just over 4% of the population.

Eliminating racism from how institutions of society are structured and removing the barriers VME people encounter in accessing opportunities and services can only happen when VME people themselves are equal partners in a power-sharing arrangement charged with delivering that change.

Where better to embed that power-sharing than in ensuring the proportionate appointment of VME people to places at the board tables of Scotland’s public bodies. The data suggests that government is not in a hurry to tear down institutional racism in the public sector, as Chart 3 below shows.

VME people have just 16 of the 574 seats at the board tables – 7 seats short of what would be necessary to evidence institutional racism is being eliminated from Scotland’s public institutions.

Chart 3
This inequality is even more overtly evidenced when looking at those appointed to the position of Chairperson of these 78 boards. VME people take the Chair in just 1 of Scotland's 78 boards – 2 appointments short of what could be expected if race discrimination had been eliminated by government from the culture of the public appointments system.
Sexual Orientation

Government continues to struggle to establish accurate, good quality data on the number of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Scotland. Government’s most recent estimates are that LGB people account for around 1.4% of the population.

While work on the elimination of discrimination encountered in the daily lives of LGB people continues, the data provided by government suggests that power-sharing with LGB people at the board tables of Scotland’s public bodies has become a reality.

The data shows that there are 22 LGB people with seats across the boards, almost 3 times the number required to demonstrate a proportionate allocation of board seats. In leading the work of boards as Chairperson, LGB people occupy 1 of the 78 Board Chair appointments. In a strict arithmetical analysis that would be deemed a fair allocation.

![Chart 4 - LGB people's share of seats on public boards](image-url)
Catholics

The 2011 census confirms that Catholic people account for 15.9% of the population.

Eliminating sectarianism from how institutions of society operate and removing the barriers Catholic people encounter in accessing opportunities and services can only happen when Catholic people themselves are equal partners in any power-sharing arrangements asked to deliver that change.

Where better to embed that power-sharing than in ensuring the proportionate appointment of Catholic people to places at the board tables of Scotland’s public bodies. The data suggests that government is reluctant to see Catholics share too much power in who runs Scotland, as Chart 5 below shows.

![Chart 5: Catholic people's share of seats on public boards](chart.png)

Catholic people have just 46 of the 574 seats at board tables – 45 seats short of what it would be reasonable to expect if sectarianism had been excommunicated from Scotland's public institutions. The seats occupied by Protestants – 177 – is much closer to a proportionate allocation of seats, which would see Protestants in 186 seats, than is the case for Catholics.
Data on the appointment of Catholics as Chairs of boards was not available from government.
Conclusions

Government continues to protest that it wants to see a ‘fairer’ Scotland. The data examined in this research report suggests that while it may well protest that is what it wants, the reality of its actions in making appointments to the boards of public bodies in Scotland is evidence that its protestations have little substance.

Women, Visible Minority Ethnic people, disabled people and Catholics, are all missing in considerable numbers from real power-sharing in the board rooms of public sector Scotland. In contrast, Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people have been given access to power-sharing in numbers which ensures the voice of the LGB community is heard more equally than that of other equality communities in the decision making on how to run Scotland.

This begs at least two questions, both of which are beyond the remit of this research report.

Just how did the LGB community succeed in getting such unrivalled access to power-sharing where so many other communities have failed?

Government itself cannot be unaware of this double-whammy of inequality being experienced by people from the other equality communities, and yet has no coherent plan to remedy the hierarchy of inequality it has created and sustains. Why has government allowed this hierarchy of inequality in how it runs part of its business, the business of government, to emerge?