

HOUSE OF LORDS APPOINTMENTS COMMISSION

Nominations from women

A note by the Secretariat

Introduction

1. The Commission has noted that the number of nominations received from women has been low in relation to the numbers received from male nominees. In its first round, only 20% of nominations were from women; slightly lower percentages were received from women in the second and third rounds. Of the current shortlisted nominees, only 22% are women. More positively, the Commission has recommended nine women out of a total of 24 appointments.
2. The Commission may wish to note that as of July 2004 the percentage of women members of the House of Lords was only 17%. As the Prime Minister confirmed in July 2003, part of the Commission's remit is to broaden the expertise and experience of the House and reflect the diversity of the people of the United Kingdom. This paper examines ways the Commission may wish to address this part of its remit as regards women.

Encouraging more nominations from women

3. The Commission receives four times more nominations from men than from women. One conclusion is that the Commission needs to radically increase the number of women being nominated.
4. However, the Commission should consider whether its aim is simply to increase the number of nominations from women. It is suggested that it should seek to increase the number of *high quality, appointable* women nominees. Just getting high numbers of nominees in through the door does not necessarily mean that there will be a larger pool of quality nominations in the later stages of the process. In the past, the overwhelming majority of nominations have fallen at the hurdle of the first sift. For example, of the 3,000 nominations it received in its first round, about 90% were rejected at the first sift.

Ideas for attracting women nominees

5. If the Commission agrees that its aim is to attract more high quality nominations from women, it should not embark on broad-based publicity to attract female nominees but it could consider undertaking a more targeted exercise. Any publicity should clearly set out the published criteria and may also include case studies of the individuals the Commission has appointed.
6. The Commission may wish to invite the Secretariat to develop some ideas for attracting more high quality nominations from women. For example, the Commission could consider direct mailing of professional organisations or a system of "shoulder tapping" by Commission members. Contacts with

government departments and agencies could be used to stimulate nominations from women.

Sifting women nominees

7. The Commission may also wish to note that the proportion of female nominees does not dramatically improve over the progressive sifts in a round. This may simply be due to the fact that the Commission has not received enough high quality nominations from women.
8. Alternatively, it could be argued that the interpretation of the criteria by sift teams means that able women are not being recognised as such. In particular, the criterion of “a significant achievement” is usually understood in an absolute way. That is to say that there is a constant line of achievement that a nominee must exceed to pass this criterion; anyone who does not meet this standard is rejected. This does not take into account the different starting points of individuals, or the tangents they may have taken in their career/life. This is of particular relevance for individuals who have had unconventional careers (e.g. years of part-time working), caring responsibilities or simply those who have been socially or economically disadvantaged. (It would be true to say that the same considerations could apply to some men.)
9. It is open to the Commission to consider providing the sift teams with further guidance on the interpretation of its criteria. This may include advice that the criterion of a significant achievement should be considered relatively rather than absolutely. This may improve the numbers of women nominees in the later stages of the sift exercises.
10. The Commission has established the practice of specialist sub-committees of Commission members considering groups of nominees. For example, there have been Northern Irish, medical and ethnic minority sub-committees. The sub-committee system allows nominees in these categories to be given additional consideration by an individual who has an enhanced understanding of their background. This ensures that the strongest nominees within a group are brought to the attention of the Commission. The Commission may wish to consider if there is a case for women nominees to be treated in a similar fashion.

Conclusion

11. The Commission may wish to consider whether it should:
 - Invite the Secretariat to develop ideas for attracting more high quality nominations from women.
 - Provide more guidance for sift teams on the interpretation of its criteria.
 - Establish a sub-committee to consider nominations from women.

Commission Secretariat
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