

PLAYING YOUR PART IN PUBLIC LIFE...

Jayam Dalal describes the Public Appointments process and the Government's commitment to encouraging and valuing diversity in public life. She is of Indian origin, has 4 Ministerial appointments and is an Independent Public Appointments Assessor.

The Asian community, particularly Indians are known for their high level of entrepreneurial skills and work ethics. Yet there is reluctance for members of the Indian community to put themselves forward for Public Appointments.

Why this anomaly? Is it because there is a lack of understanding or interest in these posts? Perhaps could there be a lack of trust in the appointments process? Surely that cannot be the case.

Public Appointments are made by Ministers to the boards of non-departmental public bodies [NDPBs] which act at arm's length from Ministers, although Ministers remain accountable for these bodies' performance. The types of public bodies include Advisory NDPBs, Executive NDPBs, Health bodies [NHS], Public corporations, Public Broadcasting authorities and certain utility regulators.

Public Appointments are widely publicised and advertised in the national press as well as the public appointments website www.publicappts-vacs.gov.uk. Members of ethnic minorities, as well as women are encouraged to apply, and this is often emphasised in the job description as well as the advertisement.

The time commitment varies considerably, depending on the particular appointment, but is normally from 1 to 3 days per month to attend board meetings, committees and other board events. The dates are usually given well in advance. Remuneration is also varied, some based on a daily rate and others pay an agreed sum per annum, while some are unremunerated. However all reasonable travel and incidental expenses are usually paid in full.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS] for example is responsible for appointments to a broad range of public bodies, covering a wide range of sectors, from gambling to galleries, broadcasting to the performing arts, film to sports. The organisations include the BBC, Arts Council England, Museums and Galleries, Olympic Delivery Authority and Lottery distributing bodies.

DCMS believes appointees to its boards should not only be the best people for the job, but should also be in touch with and reflect the communities they serve. DCMS wants to see more people from ethnic minority backgrounds on its boards. DCMS is currently engaged in a number of initiatives including the "Getonboard" campaign - to encourage more members of the public to apply to join a board.

The DCMS website carries details about public appointments as well as "Getonboard", together with details about the public appointments process and links to the organisations themselves. For further information please email: getonboard@culture.gsi.gov.uk or write to Simon Mitchell, Public Appointments Unit, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2-4 Cockspur Street, London, SW1Y 5DH.

In the 1990s there was scepticism and a lack of confidence in the appointment process for Public Appointments, which led to the establishment of the office of Commissioner for Public Appointments in 1995 [also known as OCPA]. This was established on the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, popularly known as the Nolan Committee. The Commissioner is appointed by the Queen and is independent of both the Government and Civil Service.

Furthermore since the appointment of the first Commissioner for Public Appointments in November 1995 there has been a rigorous process in place to ensure that the appointment process is fair, open, transparent and that appointments are made on merit. The current Commissioner for Public Appointments is Janet Gaymer CBE QC.

The Commissioner's role is to regulate and report on Ministerial appointments which fall within her remit. The overriding aim is to maintain the principles of selection on merit, while valuing diversity and promoting equal opportunity.

The Commissioner also publishes a Code of Practice which requires that Independent Public Appointments Assessors [IPAAAs] accredited by OCPA provide independent scrutiny of these Ministerial appointments. The involvement of an IPAA is a mandatory element of the selection process for every Ministerial appointment to those public bodies that fall within the Commissioner's remit. The IPAAAs are the guardians of the Commissioner's Code of Practice. This Code is accessible on www.publicappointmentscommissioner.org.

Furthermore with effect from 9th October 2008, the Commissioner was given a new power to promote diversity in the procedures for making public appointments within her remit. Janet Gaymer Commissioner for Public Appointments says that "the aim of the public appointments process is to ensure selection on merit after an open and transparent process, while encouraging equality of opportunity and valuing diversity".

The Commissioner and her team regularly present to organisations such as the Institute of Directors, and the Women's Insurance Network to encourage their members to consider applying for public appointments. The Commissioner also meets organisations interested in diversity including the Government Equalities Office, the Women's National Commission and the Fawcett Society.

In addition, the Commissioner monitors progress by requiring Government departments, and those responsible for public appointments processes, to collate information which is published in the Commissioner's Annual Report.

The 2007-08 Annual Report states that there were 202 appointments and reappointments of ethnic minority candidates. This forms 7.7% of the total and represents a fall from the previous year's proportion of 9.2% [355] and 2005-06's figure of 8.6% [250]. The full OCPA Annual Report is available on <http://publicappointmentscommissioner.org>.

The Commissioner is currently scoping a diversity and talent strategy, which is a two year project to identify a long term strategic approach to promoting equality of opportunity and diversity in public appointments processes within the Commissioner's remit.

Public Appointments are very rewarding and provide a positive public service, giving the opportunity to influence and provide a diverse perspective to a range of policies and services. So isn't it time that the Indian community should play an increased role in public life in the UK?

For information on current public appointments vacancies please visit: <http://www.publicappts-vacs.gov.uk/>. Additional information on the Commissioner's role is available on her website <http://publicappointmentscommissioner.org>.

The Indian community is also keen to set up a support network to encourage diversity in public appointments and for members of Indian origin interested in applying for Public Appointments. For further information please contact:

Mr Ajay Jobanputra, Vice President - Lohana Community United Kingdom, Email: VP@LCUK.org.uk

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. Jayam Dalal is an Independent Public Appointments Assessor accredited by OCPA [working with DCMS, BERR and Home Office]. She also has 4 Ministerial appointments including Vice Chair of Agricultural Wages Committee [DEFRA], Consumer Member on the Advisory Committee for Novel Foods & Processes [Food Standards Agency], Lay Member on the Residential Property Tribunal Service [DCLG] and the Home Office Representative on the selection panel for Independent Members for Sussex Police Authority. She also sits on the Disciplinary Committee for the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants. Jayam was born in Uganda, Kampala, did her schooling and early college education in India. She came to UK when she was 22 years old.

2. Mr Ajay Jobanputra, Vice President - Lohana Community United Kingdom, Email: VP@LCUK.org.uk Mobile: 07710 236 542
3. Simon Mitchell is Head of Public Appointments and Honours Unit at the Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2-4 Cockspur Street, London SW1Y 5DH. Website: www.culture.gov.uk .
Press Enquiries: tel 0207 211 6276 fax 0207 211 6270
4. Maggie O'Boyle, press officer, Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, email: Maggie@dfpress.co.uk. Website: www.publicappointmentscommissioner.org