



Marlyn Glen

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Speech in the Scottish Parliament

I welcome the opportunity to participate in this short debate on the proposed strategy, "Diversity Delivers".

I commend the consultation as an excellent first step towards ensuring that appointees to public bodies represent the make-up of the people of Scotland.

As a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee and of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, I twice had the opportunity to scrutinise the strategy and to question the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland.

I commend her enthusiasm for delivering diversity.

Scotland has a diverse civic society that we should celebrate.

We need to mainstream equalities in every aspect of public life, whether positions are elected or appointed.

It is only right to encourage people from low-wage backgrounds, women, ethnic minorities and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities to enter public life.

Public bodies are subject to the general legal duties to promote gender, disability and race equality, as well as to wider equality obligations not to discriminate on various grounds.

The present figures on public appointments make hard reading: women make up only 35 per cent of board members and only 17 per cent of chairs of public bodies.

It would be interesting to find out the make-up of the selection boards for those appointments.

In such a diverse Scotland, it is hard to believe that the best candidates are mostly white middle-class males.

I agree with the committee's report that a more proactive approach is necessary and should be evaluated over a longer timescale.

No targets have been set, for fear of tokenism, but that is still an important first step in ensuring that the necessary cultural step change occurs and that adequate monitoring takes place.

The commissioner explained that that is why the equalities strategy focuses on applications rather than appointments.

Achieving the desired changes is difficult because of the low turnover of appointees, reappointments and mergers.

The Scottish Parliament is right to have equal opportunities at its core and it is essential that Scotland's public bodies follow that lead.

When public funds are used, there should be a public duty to recruit talent from Scotland's diverse communities.

Equality training is particularly needed for those who deal with selection for and recruitment to public bodies.

It is essential that such organisations are aware not only of their responsibilities, but of how to implement them.

An absolute requirement is that chairpersons and selection panels have adequate training in equal opportunities, not just for selection, but for the work of public bodies.

I support the motion.

WEBSITE LINKS

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