



House of Commons
Education Committee

Appointment of the Chair of the Social Mobility Commission

Fourth Report of Session 2017–19

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 11 July 2018*

The Education Committee

The Education Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Education and its associated public bodies.

Current membership

[Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP](#) (*Conservative, Harlow*) (Chair)

[Lucy Allan MP](#) (*Conservative, Telford*)

[Michelle Donelan MP](#) (*Conservative, Chippenham*)

[Marion Fellows MP](#) (*Scottish National Party, Motherwell and Wishaw*)

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[Lucy Powell MP](#) (*Labour (Co-op), Manchester Central*)

[Thelma Walker MP](#) (*Labour, Colne Valley*)

[Mr William Wragg MP](#) (*Conservative, Hazel Grove*)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/education-committee and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Richard Ward (Clerk), Katya Cassidy (Second Clerk), Anna Connell-Smith (Committee Specialist), Chloë Cockett (Committee Specialist), Tommer Spence (Inquiry Manager), Jonathan Arkless (Senior Committee Assistant), Hajera Begum (Committee Apprentice), Gary Calder (Senior Media Officer) and Oliver Florence (Media Officer).

Contacts

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The recruitment process

Background

1. The Social Mobility Commission is an independent statutory body, created by the Life Chances Act 2010 as the Child Poverty Commission, and renamed the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission by the Welfare Reform Act 2012. Its name was changed to the Social Mobility Commission by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. The Commission has a duty to assess progress towards improving social mobility in the UK and to promote social mobility in England.

2. The appointment of the Chair of the Social Mobility Commission is subject to a pre-appointment hearing. The previous Chair of the Social Mobility Commission, Rt Hon Alan Milburn resigned in early December 2017, alongside the three other Commissioners. On 14 December 2017, the then Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Justine Greening MP, wrote to the Chair with a copy of the proposed information pack for applicants.

3. We commented on that information pack, saying that the requirement for a “proven, credible track record of commitment to improving social mobility, and an in-depth and up-to-date understanding of the issues relating to this area” should be front and centre of any new recruitment, rather than the second point under essential criteria. We requested the reinstatement of the criteria from the previous recruitment pack which spoke of gaining the confidence of the Commission’s stakeholders. We also noted that the role description for the Chair includes “*potentially* [our emphasis] being asked to advise Ministers on particular issues” and said that

We hope that as the Government seeks to tackle social injustice, Ministers will regularly use opportunities to seek advice from the Commission (or any similar vehicle).¹

4. On 23 January, we held an oral evidence session with Alan Milburn, Baroness Shephard and David Johnston, during which we questioned them on the work of the Commission, the reasons for their resignations and how the Commission could be strengthened. We published our report on *The future of the Social Mobility Commission* on 22 March 2018, alongside a draft Bill to strengthen the Commission.² The Government published its response on 23 May 2018, choosing not to adopt our recommendations.³

5. On 30 January 2018, the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP, wrote to us to inform us that the Department had updated the recruitment pack with our suggestions on the role specification.

6. The recruitment campaign was launched on 5 February 2018, with a closing date of 25 February. The closing date was extended to 30 March “to ensure a strong field of candidates”. The recruitment panel was chaired by Emran Mian (Director, Strategy and

1 [Correspondence from the Chair of the Education Committee to the Secretary of State for Education](#) (Rt Hon Justine Greening MP) regarding the appointment of the Chair of the Social Mobility Commission, 21 December 2017

2 Second Report of the Education Committee, Session 2017–19, *The future of the Social Mobility Commission*, HC 866

3 Government response to the Education Select Committee report into the future of the Social Mobility Commission, May 2018, CM 9619

Social Mobility, Department for Education), and comprised Nick Markham (lead non-executive director, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) and Ruby McGregor-Smith (non-executive board member, Department for Education).

7. We were informed by the Department that the vacancy attracted 21 applications, from which four candidates were shortlisted by the panel. One candidate withdrew ahead of interview. The three remaining interviews were conducted on 3 and 17 May and the panel recommended one appointable candidate.

8. Prior to holding the session, we sought further information from the Department on the process followed. We were told that officials agreed a list with the Secretary of State of eleven potential candidates from whom applications would be encouraged, of whom four were telephoned directly by the Secretary of State, the remaining seven being contacted by officials. The Government's preferred candidate was the only potential candidate contacted by the Secretary of State to apply. One of the seven candidates approached by officials applied. Six applications were received before the deadline was extended and fifteen were received after the deadline was extended.

The position of Chair of the Social Mobility Commission

Role and person specification

9. The Chair of the Social Mobility Commission is an appointment made by the Secretary of State for a term of no longer than five years. The job description for the Chair states that it is seeking a candidate with “a proven, credible track record of commitment to improving social mobility, and an in-depth and up-to-date understanding of the issues relating to this area” Candidates should also have “experience of working effectively with business” and “a track record of: building excellent relationships with a range of audiences; strong leadership; negotiation; persuasion; communication; advocacy; diplomacy skills; and of challenging and influencing high-level decision makers in a range of public, private and voluntary organisations.” The description also sets out that candidates should have “the ability to think strategically about wider social mobility issues” and “personal integrity, with commitment to maintaining high standards in public life and promoting sound corporate governance”.

10. The role description says:

Box 1: Role description for Chair of the Social Mobility Commission

Role description

This is an exciting opportunity to fundamentally shape the social mobility agenda. The Chair leads the Social Mobility Commission, shaping its direction and priorities, and ensuring that it fulfils its remit, as set out in legislation.

You will:

- utilise the knowledge and experience of the other Commissioners, actively engaging them with the business of the Commission;
- oversee major research reports and publications, including the Commission’s Annual Report, which is laid before parliament;
- build effective working relationships with a range of stakeholders, including Ministers, senior government officials, experts in the field of business, and employers (including engaging Ministers in the Commission’s priorities and, potentially, being asked to advise Ministers on particular issues);
- be an advocate for the social mobility agenda, holding to account and challenging key institutions and employers and helping to drive a culture change across businesses and other organisations; and
- be the public spokesperson for the Commission, regularly speaking at events.

Source: Department for Education

Dame Martina Milburn CBE, the Government's preferred candidate

11. The Government's preferred candidate, Dame Martina Milburn CBE, has more than 20 years' experience managing organisations. She has been the Group Chief Executive of the Prince's Trust since 2004. She has previously been the Chief Executive of BBC Children in Need (2000–2004) and of ASPIRE, the Association of Spinal Injury Research, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (1993–2000). Dame Martina's CV is appended to this report.

12. In line with the guidance drawn up by the Liaison Committee on the conduct of pre-appointment hearings, our questioning sought to test the professional competence and personal independence of the candidate. We questioned Dame Martina on the following areas:

- the role of the Chair and the candidate's priorities;
- how her previous experience has prepared her for the role;
- the role and remit of the Social Mobility Commission; and
- the challenges facing England in terms of social mobility.

Conclusion

13. On the basis of our pre-appointment hearing, we are satisfied that Dame Martina Milburn has the skills and experience to be an effective Chair of the Social Mobility Commission, and endorse her appointment. We welcome Dame Martina's understanding of and commitment to improving social mobility.

14. Notwithstanding our conclusion on the candidate's professional competence, we regret the poor initial response to what should have been regarded as an important and attractive public appointment. It should not have been necessary for the Department to solicit applications, and was unwise of the Secretary of State to do so personally, as it could have the effect of compromising any Chair's personal independence. In our view, a Commission strengthened in line with our recommendations would have attracted a stronger field of candidates; we hope that the Commission grows in strength and influence under Dame Martina's leadership.

15. While we were pleased to hear Dame Martina's plans for quarterly reports and regular access to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State, we were concerned by her apparent preference for speaking out in public only as a matter of last resort. Dame Martina spoke of being an 'agitator', and we will look for evidence of her agitating for improving social justice in public as well as in private on a continuous basis. We will regularly monitor the Commission's independence and effectiveness through our programme of accountability hearings.

16. *We recommend that Dame Martina sets out her priorities and a strategy for improving the Commission's impact upon taking up post. Given the Commission's relatively limited resources, we encourage her to concentrate the Commission's work on championing social justice rather than duplicating the work of other organisations and think tanks which produce reports and share best practice.*

17. *We welcome her commitment to ensuring that Commissioners will be drawn from around the country and will include people from disadvantaged backgrounds. We recommend that at least one Commissioner is a current apprentice. We welcome her commitment to having an apprentice as part of the Commission's secretariat. The Commission as a whole should have the capacity to champion social justice and influence policy.*

Appendix 1: Posts which are subject to pre-appointment hearings by the Education Committee

HM Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills

Children's Commissioner for England

Chief Regulator, Ofqual

Chair of the Social Mobility Commission

Chair of the Office for Students

Appendix 2: Correspondence between the Secretary of State and the Chair

Letter received on 14 December 2017 from the Secretary of State (Rt Hon Justine Greening MP) to the Chair

You will be aware that the role of Chair of the Social Mobility Commission is being opened up to a competitive process, following the end of Alan Millburn's term on 12 July 2017.

The Chair of the Commission is an extremely important role and I am writing to you to set out our plans for recruitment and our vision for the person we are looking for. Enclosed with this letter I have included our draft role description and person specification.

This government's mission is to make Britain a country that works everyone, and to tackle injustices that mean not everyone has access to the same opportunities. Our Social Mobility Action Plan sets out the steps we are taking and will take to make our country one where equality of opportunity exists for the first time. The work of key partners, such as the Social Mobility Commission, supports us in achieving our ambitions and focusing on a common goal of equality of opportunity.

The Commission plays a crucial role in furthering the social mobility agenda, and the role of Chair is an opportunity to fundamentally shape this agenda. The Commission has made a real contribution to this debate over the last five years, and this is an opportunity to build on this good work—conducting new research, providing expert advice, and going further to build a broad coalition for social mobility—particularly with business.

You have previously expressed an interest in the Commission providing advice on social justice. The Commission's remit, which is set out in legislation, is broad enough to allow the Commission to do this, and indeed the Commission is able to provide advice to Ministers on the very broad range of topics that might touch on these areas.

The Chair of this important body will be an influential and credible voice on social mobility. They will demonstrate a real commitment to and existing track record of improving social mobility and have a proven record working at senior level and providing outstanding strategic leadership. In addition, they will have experience of working with business, in order to support the department's goal of building a coalition for social mobility with business and beyond, particularly to deliver on our ambitions of high quality post-16 education choices for all young people and everyone achieving their potential in rewarding careers.

To begin this process, my department will launch the recruitment campaign for the Chair role in early January 2018. Providing you with the recruitment pack is the first step in this process and I would also like to invite the Committee to undertake a pre-appointment hearing once I have chosen a preferred candidate. I will ask my officials to contact your clerk to explore suitable dates as soon as possible after our appointment process has ended.

I am grateful for your consideration of this proposal and look forward to the Committee's involvement in this very important role. I am sure you will share my high expectations of the positive benefits that the Social Mobility Commission and this role can bring to the social mobility agenda.

Letter received on 22 May 2018 from the Secretary of State (Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP) to the Chair

I am writing to inform you of two developments concerning the Social Mobility Commission. First, we will be publishing our response to the Education Committee's report on the future of the Social Mobility Commission on Wednesday 23rd May. A copy of this response is attached to this letter. Second, I am pleased to inform you that alongside the publication of this report we will be announcing that Dame Martina Milburn is the government's preferred candidate to be the next Chair of the Social Mobility Commission. I would be grateful if you keep this confidential until the official announcement is made.

Martina is a candidate with a proven track record of leadership on social mobility and social justice as demonstrated by her work as CEO of the Prince's Trust and previously as CEO of the BBC Children in Need Appeal. During her time leading the Prince's Trust the organisation has supported more than 60,000 disadvantaged young people, with a focus on the barriers that enable such students to succeed in education and work. This has included through 'Achieve', a programme tackling educational underachievement that helps young people at risk of being excluded from school, through the Trust's mentoring campaign 'Don't Give Up-Give Back' and its Mentor of the Year awards, and through its 2017 mental health strategy focusing on improving young people's emotional wellbeing and resilience.

This appointment shows our commitment to the future of the Commission. I understand that the chair of the Commission is subject to a pre-appointment hearing with your committee and my officials will be in contact with your clerks to facilitate this at your convenience.

I would like to thank you for the work that you and your committee have undertaken in giving consideration and recommendations to support the work of the Commission. There is a consensus between the government and your committee on the importance of the Commission and I look forward to the next chapter of its work unfolding.

Appendix 3: Details of the recruitment process

Job description

This is an exciting opportunity to fundamentally shape the social mobility agenda. The Chair leads the Social Mobility Commission, shaping its direction and priorities, and ensuring that it fulfils its remit, as set out in legislation.

You will:

- utilise the knowledge and experience of the other Commissioners, actively engaging them with the business of the Commission;
- oversee major research reports and publications, including the Commission's Annual Report, which is laid before parliament;
- build effective working relationships with a range of stakeholders, including Ministers, senior government officials, experts in the field of business, and employers (including engaging Ministers in the Commission's priorities and, potentially, being asked to advise Ministers on particular issues);
- be an advocate for the social mobility agenda, holding to account and challenging key institutions and employers and helping to drive a culture change across businesses and other organisations; and
- be the public spokesperson for the Commission, regularly speaking at events.

Person specification

The successful candidate will be responsible for fulfilling the Commission's functions, including by building and maintaining effective working relationships with Ministers, the Deputy Chair, other members of the Commission, and the Secretariat, to ensure the remit of the Commission is fulfilled fully, promptly, and properly. Candidates must be able to demonstrate the following experience and skills:

- A proven, credible track record of commitment to improving social mobility, and an in-depth and up-to-date understanding of the issues relating to this area.
- Experience of working effectively with business, in order to support the department's goal of building a coalition for social mobility with business and beyond, and supporting our ambitions of high quality post-16 education choices for all young people and everyone achieving their potential in rewarding careers.
- A track record of: building excellent relationships with a range of audiences; strong leadership; negotiation; persuasion; communication; advocacy; diplomacy skills; and of challenging and influencing high-level decision makers in a range of public, private and voluntary organisations.

- The ability to think strategically about wider social mobility issues, working with a range of individuals, communities and organisations to set strategic direction for achieving social mobility within the wider policy context to achieve results, for example, in housing, education, or family support.
- Personal integrity, with commitment to maintaining high standards in public life and promoting sound corporate governance.

Terms of appointment

Time commitment

The Chair will be expected to prepare for Commission meetings and liaise with the Secretariat outside meetings. The Chair will be expected to spend approximately three days per month on Commission business: this will be agreed between the Chair and other members of the board.

Remuneration

This post is unremunerated. However, reasonable expenses will be reimbursed, including travel expenses and subsistence. As a post holder appointed for a limited duration, the Chair will not be eligible for compensation upon the ending of the appointment.

Recruitment panel

The selection panel was chaired by Emran Mian (Director, Strategy and Social Mobility, Department for Education), and comprised Nick Markham (lead non-executive director, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) and Ruby McGregor-Smith (non-executive board member, Department for Education).

Diversity information

21 applications were received for the post and 20 candidates completed a diversity form when they applied. Of those 20 candidates, 11 were male (55%), 9 were female (45%), 5 were non-white (24%), 6 were aged under 45 (30%) and none had a disability.

Appendix 4: Details of the candidate

The candidate did not declare any political activities in her application. She declared the following interest prior to interview:

- Non-executive director of the National Citizen Service

The candidate's CV was provided by the Department to the Committee.

Dame Martina Milburn DCVO CBE

An experienced Chief Executive and Board Director, with more than 20 years' experience of managing complex organizations.

Board / Committee roles

Current:

Director – Prince's Trust Trading Ltd

Director – Prince's Trust International

Non-Executive Director – National Citizen Service and member of Remuneration committee; responsible for the administration of £300m of public funds

Non-Executive Director – Capital City College Group

Trustee – Prince's Trust Canada

Trustee – Prince's Trust Australia

Employment History

Group Chief Executive, The Prince's Trust, 2004 to present

Prince's Trust International/Prince's Trust Australia/Prince's Trust Canada/Prince's Trust New Zealand

Previous Roles

Chief Executive, BBC Children in Need, 2000–2004

Chief Executive, Aspire & Aspire National Training Centre, 1993–2000

Journalist, 1976–1993

Previous Boards

Member – RBS Micro finance board

Member – ASDA CSR board

Member – BBC CSR board

Commissioner – Commission For Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning, set up by David Cameron to improve skill base in line with corporate needs

Chair – No to Knives Coalition, set up by Gordon Brown to tackle violent crime

Vice-Chair–Step Up to Serve, campaign to increase community volunteering, patrons include HRH The Prince of Wales and all three party leaders

Trustee – The Media Trust, served on board with CEOs of Google, Sky and Channel 4

Director – BBC Children in Need Ltd

Member – Disasters Emergency Committee, liaising with broadcasters re global disaster appeals, dispersing millions of pounds raised.

Co-Chair Youth Action Group–set up with Tim Loughton, also served with Nick Hurd and Rob Wilson

Trustee – Prince of Wales Foundation USA

Awards

Awarded Dame Commander of the Victorian Order, 2017

Hon. Fellow Regent’s College, 2017

Evening Standard–The Progress 1000 London’s Most Influential People, 2016

Awarded CBE for services to charity in the New Year’s Honours, 2013

Inspiration Award for Women, 2013

Twice nominated as “Most Admired Chief Executive” in the Charity Awards

Nominated for a “First Woman Award”, 2013

Other

Trained mediator and mentor

Regular Chairman of conferences and debates

Member of the Needlemakers Livery Company

Formal minutes

Wednesday 11 July 2018

Members present:

Robert Halfon, in the Chair

Lucy Allan Lucy Powell

James Frith Thelma Walker

Draft Report (*Appointment of the Chair of the Social Mobility Commission*) proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chair's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 17 read and agreed to.

Four papers were appended to the Report.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

[Adjourned till 17 July 2018 at 9am

Witnesses

The following witness gave evidence. The transcript can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Wednesday 11 July 2018

Dame Martina Milburn CBE, Government's preferred candidate for Chair of the Social Mobility Commission

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2017–19

First Report	Fostering	HC 340
Second Report	The future of the Social Mobility Commission	HC 866 Cm 9619
Third Report	The Government's Green Paper on mental health: failing a generation: First Joint Report of the Education and Health and Social Care Committees of Session 2017–19	HC 642
First Special Report	Children and young people's mental health—the role of education: Government Response to the First Joint Report of the Education and Health Committees of Session 2016–17	HC 451
Second Special Report	Apprenticeships: Government Response to the Second Joint Report of Session 2016–17	HC 450
Third Special Report	Multi-academy trusts: Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2016–17	HC 452
Fourth Special Report	Exiting the EU: challenges and opportunities for higher education: Government Response to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2016–17	HC 502
Fifth Special Report	Primary assessment: Government Response to the Committee's Eleventh Report of Session 2016–17	HC 501
Sixth Special Report	Evidence check: Grammar schools: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2016–17	HC 623