

Calling Conservatives: New public appointments announced. Housing Ombudsman – and more

Four years ago, the TaxPayers' Alliance reported that "in the last year, five times more Labour people were appointed to public bodies than Tories".

Since then, the figures have varied, and some Conservative members or supporters have been selected to fill important posts.

Nonetheless, it remains the case that, since it took office in 2010, our Party has punched beneath its weight when it comes to public appointments. One of the reasons seems to be that Tories simply don't apply in the same number as Labour supporters.

To help remedy this, every fortnight we put up links to some of the main public appointments vacancies, so that qualified Conservatives might be aware of the opportunities presented.

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Department of Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy – [Small Business Commissioner](#)

"We are seeking to appoint the UK's first Small Business Commissioner. This is a new statutory role covering the UK and established under provisions within the Enterprise Act 2016. The Small Business Commissioner will enable small businesses to resolve payment disputes with their larger customers and avoid future issues by encouraging a culture change in how businesses deal with each other. They will provide general advice and guidance to small businesses to prevent disputes occurring in the first place, direct them to existing support and help them resolve their complaints about payment issues."

Time: Full-time.

Remuneration: £120,000-£130,000 per annum.

Closes: 27 March

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UK Research & Innovation – [Board Members](#)

"The UKRI Board will be expected to support the set-up of the organisation, providing clear strategic direction and oversight, promoting the importance of UK Research and Innovation and supporting the senior leadership team of the organisation to embed new ways of working across UKRI... As well as the above requirements which would be expected for all UKRI Board Members, there

are specific roles on the Board that will require additional expertise, and a larger time commitment to UKRI.”

Time: 20 days per annum.

Remuneration: £9,180 per annum, plus £459 per diem for extra days.

Closes: 31 March

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Intellectual Property Office – [Chair of the Steering Board](#)

“The Intellectual Property Office Steering Board is responsible for advising the CEO and Minister on the overall direction and policies of the IPO. It ensures the IPO delivers on its strategic priorities and that resources are allocated effectively for their delivery. The Steering Board also regularly reviews the management and performance of the IPO and ensures high standards of corporate governance are maintained at all times. The role of Chair is an important one and demands effective strategic leadership of the Board and the ability to speak on its behalf. The Chair will work closely with the full-time Chief Executive, who is the IPO’s Accounting Officer.”

Time: 22 days per annum.

Remuneration: £450 per diem up to £10,000 per annum, plus “reasonable expenses”.

Closes: 31 March

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UK Hydrographics Office – [Independent Non-Executive Director \(Digital\)](#)

“The UKHO Board meets regularly to review business performance and progress, ensure good governance and to consider the strategy to move the business forward. Fellow non-executive board members bring a variety of experiences and this appointment complements that range of skills. You will provide expertise to consider and challenge the technological information and knowledge management aspects of our complex, challenging and niche business. The navigation market is undergoing major changes to its international regulatory model, the global maritime economy and the level of competition in provision of data is escalating.”

Time: 30 days per annum.

Remuneration: £18,000 per annum plus expenses.

Closes: 31 March

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Independent Monitoring Board – [National Chair](#)

"We are looking for an outstanding individual to lead the IMB operation through a period of internal reform and change; and at a time when strengthened independent scrutiny is an important part of the Government's prison safety and reform programme.

The recent White Paper on Prison Safety and Reform set out plans to 'strengthen the governance arrangements and accountability for IMBs, to support them in providing high quality scrutiny' and the successful candidate will work closely with the Deputy Director IMB Secretariat lead to put the new governance arrangements and processes in place."

Time: Eight days per month.

Remuneration: £400 per diem plus expenses.

Closes: 03 April

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Central Arbitration Committee – [Chair](#)

"The CAC is an independent statutory authority with specific functions relating to trade unions and employers. The most significant function of the CAC is adjudicating on the recognition and de-recognition of trade unions for collective bargaining in the workplace. This is carried out by applying the underpinning UK trade union recognition legislation when considering a union's application for collective bargaining in a workplace, whilst seeking agreement between a union and the employer where possible. The incoming Chair will also set the strategic direction of the CAC by monitoring developments in employment law, reviewing the CAC's case work and its performance, and identifying risks and succession planning."

Time: One day per week.

Remuneration: £25,357 per annum (full-time equivalent), annual increases.

Closes: 10 April

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Marine Management Organisation – [Chair](#)

"The non-executive Chair of the MMO will lead the Board, set the overall strategic operational direction of the MMO, ensure good governance and with the Board, hold the Executive to account. The Chair will be responsible for: providing effective leadership and strategic direction to develop a cohesive and focused Board which recognises the need to work collaboratively with the Defra group, wider Government, other delivery bodies and stakeholders to deliver Government objectives effectively and efficiently..."

Time: Eight days per month.

Remuneration: £40,459 per annum.

Closes: 18 April

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Department for Communities and Local Government – [Housing Ombudsman](#)

“The Housing Ombudsman has responsibility for investigating complaints against social landlords in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman Scheme. Housing is an important part of everyone’s lives and issues relating to our homes can have a huge emotional impact. The Housing Ombudsman plays an important role in ensuring the fair resolution of disputes, aiming to resolve problems quickly and efficiently. Rented housing plays a vital role in the nation’s housing and we are keen to see that tenants experience good standards of service regardless of whether their landlord is a local authority, housing association or private landlord.”

Time: Full time.

Remuneration: Up to £120,000 per annum.

Closes: 23 April

Press release: New charity investigation: Child Survival Fund

The Charity Commission, the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales, has opened a statutory inquiry into [Child Survival Fund, registered charity number 1116070](#).

The charity’s objects include to relieve poverty, distress and suffering amongst children and young persons throughout the world.

The inquiry, which was opened on 9 February 2017, will look at the administration, governance and management of the charity by the trustees, in particular the extent to which the trustees have:

- complied with an action plan issued by the Commission in January 2016, which set out certain steps required to be taken by the trustees to resolve issues of concern about the charity’s management and administration
- acted in the charity’s best interests and acted in accordance with their legal duties
- responsibly managed the charity’s resources and financial affairs, particularly with regard to the charity’s significant debts, fundraising costs and the proportion of fundraising income applied directly for charitable purposes

- acted with reasonable care and skill in respect of its fundraising agreement with a US based direct mailing agency and associated risks to the charity's property
- adequately managed risks to the charity and protected the charity's reputation, especially with regards to the conduct and transparency of fundraising activities conducted by the charity or on its behalf

The Commission has a history of regulatory engagement with the charity regarding concerns over high fundraising costs and a significant debt owed to the direct mailing agency. The Commission undertook proactive monitoring of the charity amid further concerns about the charity's fragile financial position and the trustees' apparent failure and inability to address ongoing issues within the charity. Further, the trustees have failed to provide reassurance to the Commission with respect to an action plan issued to the charity in January 2016, which was designed to address these concerns.

It is the Commission's policy, after it has concluded an inquiry, to publish a report detailing what issues the inquiry looked at, what actions were undertaken as part of the inquiry and what the outcomes were. Reports of [previous inquiries](#) by the Commission are available on GOV.UK.

The charity's details can be viewed on the Commission's [online charity search tool](#).

Ends

PR 24/17

Notes to editors

1. [The Charity Commission](#) is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work, see our [annual report](#).
 2. Search for charities on our [online register](#).
 3. Section 46 of the Charities Act 2011 gives the Commission the power to institute inquiries. The opening of an inquiry gives the Commission access to a range of investigative, protective and remedial legal powers.
 4. The Commission's decision to announce the opening of a statutory inquiry is based on whether it is in the public interest to do so and with consideration of our objective to increase public trust and confidence in charities.
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The SNP isn't listening to teachers or parents on education

John Swinney made a big speech on schools last week.

The SNP Education Secretary said the “data” told him that “the status quo was not an option”, and then expressed his disappointment that “there is a strong body of opinion that does not accept the need for change and what is perhaps most worrying is that body of opinion is from within Scottish education.” Most coverage described this as an attack on the “complacent educational establishment”.

In doing so, commentators fell into a double trap. To oppose Mr Swinney's proposed changes to schools is not to oppose any change at all. The overwhelming response to his “Governance review” is that they are the wrong changes.

Secondly, this analysis accepts that the status quo is something John Swinney has stumbled upon. In fact, today's status quo in schools is the legacy of ten years of SNP government.

That status quo is declining budgets, 4,000 fewer teachers, 1,000 fewer support staff, a teacher recruitment crisis, and dysfunctional government bodies (Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority). Yes, change is needed alright. Just not John Swinney's changes. For example, the SNP plans to centralise the setting of school budgets, and create unaccountable “regional boards” for a purpose which it cannot explain, except to say it wants to “strengthen the middle”, whatever that means.

In Dunbar, in my constituency, the local primary has over 1,000 pupils, while a few miles away, Stenton school has 19. The idea that a civil servant with a formula knows enough about such diverse schools and the communities they serve to get their budget right is simply laughable. That decision has to be taken locally. What is more, if a head teacher or parent council think the budget is wrong, they can argue their case locally, and they do. Good luck trying that with a faceless bureaucrat in the Scottish Government's offices in Victoria Quay.

When Kezia Dugdale raised this at First Minister's Questions, Nicola Sturgeon was outraged. After all she is devolving £120m of Pupil Equity funding direct to schools. That is true. But the core budget for schools is over £4billion. Only in the world of the SNP could centralising £4bn and devolving £120m be presented as “all power to the head teachers”.

This is not the only “through the looking glass” aspect of the position into which John Swinney has manoeuvred himself. He described his Governance review as “...a vision of empowerment and devolution.” It is full of declarations about teachers and parents “knowing best”.

Mr Swinney’s problem is that the responses to his review from head teachers, teachers, parents and communities almost all reject his reforms, and tell him that what is needed is more resource, along with reform of Education Scotland and the SQA. John Swinney’s speech was clear – he intends to ignore them. They will be empowered, against their better judgement if need be. The Education Secretary is telling head teachers, teachers, and parents that they do not know best – he does.

We should not be surprised. When the Scottish Parliament’s education committee gathered evidence from hundreds of teachers that they had lost any faith in Education Scotland and the SQA, Mr Swinney simply rubbished the committee’s work as statistically invalid. Instead, he said, he would base his views on the teachers he spoke to when he visited schools. Happily, this “balanced sample” seemed very happy with everything he is doing. It is presumably only “bad” teachers and parents who have responded to his governance review with malice aforethought, and he intends to ignore them.

John Swinney loves to talk about how much he respects teachers. As well he might. They are the only thing keeping our schools going through the SNP’s ten years of incompetence and budget cutting. If he won’t listen to them his respect is just empty talk.

The status quo for teachers in Scotland is ten years of under-resourced curricular reform, lower salaries than colleagues in other countries, less preparation time, and the largest classes anywhere in the developed world. Nothing John Swinney is currently proposing will change that status quo, fashioned by him himself over his eight years as finance secretary.

All of this was laid bare in a recent parliamentary debate, where Holyrood defeated the government and passed a motion roundly condemning their handling of education. Last week’s speech tells us that John Swinney is not just ignoring parents and teachers, but parliament too.

That will of parliament, so sacred when it comes to an independence referendum, would seem of no import with regard to our children’s future.

Iain Gray is Scottish Labour's Education spokesperson. This article originally appeared in the Herald on March 29th 2017

First Minister Carwyn Jones – “We’re committed to a sensible Brexit that secures Wales’ future”

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“Today signals the end of months of speculation and the start of a critical period of negotiation which will shape our future relationship with Europe and the wider world.

“We remain committed to the priorities set out in our white paper, Securing Wales’ Future, which puts full and unfettered access to the Single Market first and foremost.

“Our white paper sets out a sensible negotiating position for the UK as a whole, and has already influenced the UK Government’s approach in important areas including maintaining full access to the Single Market, upholding existing employment rights and the importance of transitional arrangements.

“While we have often been frustrated with the processes by which we’ve arrived at this point today, we must now concentrate on the job in hand. We stand ready to work constructively with the UK Government to secure a deal which protects Welsh businesses, our economy and the future prosperity of Wales.

“If, as negotiations progress, we believe our priorities are not being championed or our representation falls below a level we find acceptable, we will not remain silent. We will not allow Wales to be side-lined – we will be outspoken and our voice will be heard.

“As a leader of a country which voted to leave the EU, we are wholly focused on securing Wales’ future. We will step up to the plate and do all we can to deliver the best possible outcome for Wales.”

News story: Women’s health tech firm

attracts £4.8 million investment

A funding round by 'fem-tech' business [Chiario](#) has attracted £4.8 million of external investment. This is to support the development of 3 more smart products addressing female health and wellbeing and help it expand into 25 countries.

Joining the round are [Octopus Ventures](#), a leading tech investor and [Allbright](#), a venture capital fund that invests in female entrepreneurs, amongst others. It brings Chiario's total capital to £9.6 million.

Innovate UK [awarded Chiario a grant](#) in its start-up phase, as it sought to leverage the latest developments in wearable technology and create a connected pelvic floor exercise tool, [Elvie](#).

Exciting moment for tech for women

Tania Boler, chief executive and co-founder, said:

Women and consumer tech have never been a very exciting space for investors. There's been an assumption that women aren't early adopters of tech, which we're trying to prove isn't correct.

Now is an exciting moment for tech for women. There's a big feminist movement and a paradigm shift in technology and health.

Elvie is a kegel exercise tracker for the pelvic floor. Weakened pelvic floor muscles can cause more than half of all women's bladder, sex or prolapse problems. Women can use their smartphones to find out how to strengthen their muscles and monitor progress.

Within 6 months of the device going on sale Chiario was making a profit. Last year the company reported direct sales of £800,000. It has recently struck deals with major retailers including John Lewis and Amazon.

Most promising startups

Chiario is part of Tech City UK's [Upscale](#) programme of 33 most promising startups. It has also received celebrity attention, with its product having featured on Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop website and been included in high-profile gift bags at the Academy Awards.