



House of Commons
Treasury Committee

**The appointment of
the Chair of the
Statistics Board:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Ninth Report of
Session 2006–07**

**Ninth Special Report of Session
2006–07**

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The Treasury Committee

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The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at www.parliament.uk/treascom.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Colin Lee (Clerk), Fiona McLean (Second Clerk and Clerk of the Sub-Committee), Adam Wales, Jon Young, Anna Leach and Jay Sheth (Committee Specialists), Lis McCracken (Committee Assistant), Michelle Edney (Secretary), Tes Stranger (Senior Office Clerk) and Laura Humble (Media Officer).

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Ninth Special Report

The Treasury Committee published its Ninth Report of Session 2006–07, *The appointment of the Chair of the Statistics Board*, on 23 July 2007, as House of Commons Paper No. 934–I. The Government response to this Report was received on 11 October 2007, and is appended below.

Government response

The Government is grateful to the Treasury Committee for the invaluable role it played at exceptionally short notice in ensuring that the House of Commons was able to consider and vote before the summer Parliamentary recess on the appointment of Sir Michael Scholar KCB as Chair of the Statistics Board. The Government announced on 17 July 2007 that Sir Michael was its nominee for this post. The Committee took oral evidence from Sir Michael on 18 July and published its report on 23 July recommending his appointment. The House debated the appointment on 25 July and endorsed Sir Michael’s nomination.

The nominee

1. On the basis of our examination of the role and functions of the new Statistics Board, the information available to us about Sir Michael Scholar and the oral evidence which he gave to the Committee on Wednesday 18 July, we consider that Sir Michael Scholar is a suitable nominee for the post of Chair of the Statistics Board and has demonstrated to us his commitment to the independence, integrity and importance of statistics. We therefore recommend him to the House. We note that he is taking on a six-day week: we expect that his position as Chair of the Statistics Board will be his primary commitment. (Paragraph 29)

The Government is grateful for this recommendation. Following the debate in the House of Commons on 25 July, Sir Michael took up his post as Chair-designate of the Statistics Board at the beginning of September.

2. No individual can possess all the skills required by the Board as a whole. We recommend that the first non-executive Board member to be appointed after the Chair should be the equivalent of a senior, independent non-executive member of a public limited company’s board. This post should be filled by a candidate from a commercial background and, in particular, with sound experience in corporate governance. (Paragraph 30)

The Government notes and has acted on this recommendation. The selection process for the other non-executive members of the Statistics Board has begun, and the need for the Board to include commercial and corporate governance experience has been made clear in the selection criteria.

Reflections on the process

3. We accept that the circumstances of the current nomination for the post of Chair of the Statistics Board are exceptional, coming so soon after the Government’s initial proposals for improving parliamentary involvement in public appointments and relating to a newly-established post. Nevertheless, if select committees are to be enabled to be properly equipped to consider nominations for major public appointments, it is vital for Ministers to provide initial information to a select committee about the proposed timetable for a particular appointment at the earliest possible opportunity, and then to ensure that the committee is provided on a timely basis with subsequent information about the conduct of the appointment process. (Paragraph 32)

The Government accepts this recommendation. Where a proposed appointment is to be subject to pre-appointment scrutiny by a select committee, departments will need to factor this into the planning process. This will help ensure that select committees receive early notification of relevant forthcoming appointments and that the timing of pre-appointment hearings are agreed with committees in advance. The Cabinet Office will be preparing guidance for departments on pre-appointment hearings. This will emphasise the need for early consultation with the relevant select committee.

4. We recommend that, in taking forward its proposals in *The Governance of Britain*, the Government accept explicitly that, in any case where a nomination for public appointment is subject to a vote in the House of Commons, that vote should be preceded by an opportunity for the relevant select committee to take evidence from the Government’s nominee and to report. (Paragraph 34)

The Government accepts this recommendation. The Government is currently consulting on which appointments should be subject to pre-appointment hearings by select committee. Each appointment will be considered on its merits and the final list of appointments will be agreed with the Liaison Committee. If an appointment was to be subject to a vote in the House of Commons it would be important to build in time to allow the Select Committee an opportunity to take evidence from the Government’s recommended nominee before the nomination is subject to a vote in the House.

5. The Government’s general proposals for select committee involvement in public appointments are based on the Government’s view that any opinions expressed in reports of select committees about nominees should be “non-binding”. The Government has proposed a vote of the House of Commons on the nomination of Chair of the Statistics Commission, but not on nominations to other posts. Given the Government’s commitment to strengthening the role of the House of Commons and its select committees in public appointments, the Government should consider whether such a vote should be required for certain other high-status appointments. We recommend that, in relation to such appointments, where a select committee comes to an adverse opinion on a nomination, that select committee should have the power to require that the nomination be the subject of a vote in the House of Commons or a debate in a General Committee. (Paragraph 37)

The Government’s proposals, as set out in *The Governance of Britain* Green Paper, aim to strengthen the role of the House of Commons in appointments whilst ensuring that the

appointments process remains proportionate and continues to attract high quality candidates. The responsibility for making an appointment rests with the Minister concerned. In doing so, Ministers may take account of others' views, including the views of Parliament, but the ultimate decision rests with the relevant Minister.