



Department
for International
Development



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

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House of Lords
London
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DEAR COLLEAGUES

On Tuesday 10 March, during the debate on International Women's Day, I committed to write to address remaining points I was not able to answer in the time allocated.

Baroness Burt asked, in response to research outlining the rate of domestic abuse survivors who experience post interception, whether the Government would consider funding an 'address and collect' service - enabling applicants to have their post redirected to an agreed alternative address. The work by Citizen's Advice is an important reminder that vulnerable people may be put at risk or miss out on normal activities. Following on from reviews of individual cases, postal services have already modified some of the ways in which vulnerable customers are able to access post and the Government will continue to engage with them to ensure vulnerable customers are supported. As was referenced during the debates, the Royal Mail has already introduced a system to allow customers applying for a redirection of mail for personal safety reasons, to stop a notification from being sent to their original. We recognise the vital importance of domestic abuse survivors having access to their own post, without the risk of interception and will consider the proposals from Citizens Advice carefully.

Lord Bates asked for information on the number of female permanent secretaries across Government. The total number of women who have ever been in permanent secretary level posts is 40. There has not yet been a female Cabinet Secretary or female permanent secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or the Ministry of Defence. However, women are represented in a range of permanent secretary level roles; there are currently 11 serving female permanent secretaries and women have held other permanent secretary roles including Chief Medical Officer and Director General of MI5 previously. We continue to make every effort to ensure that our recruitment practices are inclusive, helping the Civil Service - at every level - to better reflect the society it serves. We are also working on developing a succession pipeline that will ensure greater diversity in our future senior leaders.

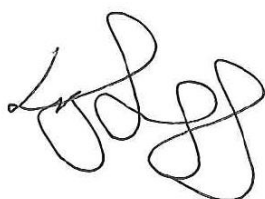
Baroness Cox raised the issue of aid for older women in remote areas and asked whether the Department for International Development would find ways to provide aid for small NGOs working in such challenging areas. DFID is committed to working with small and southern based civil societies to deliver progress towards the global goals. For example, the recently announced Jo Cox Memorial Grants included funding to women-led civil society organisations, the work in Kenya in particular will use data to pursue policy and budget changes on sexual and reproductive health and rights services and to increase public and political participation by women. My Department also recognises that older people experience a range of complex barriers and face multiple exclusions in developing countries across the globe. Ageing is an important factor in our efforts to leave no one behind and this is reflected in our departmental strategy papers. Both the Disability Inclusion Strategy and the Strategic Vision for Gender Equality take a life-course approach, ensuring the delivery of transformative change for people of all ages.

Baroness Rock called for more to be done to encourage and enable women to pursue careers in these industries. I agree with her that increased female participation in these industries is vital if we are to achieve more gender-neutral outcomes in our algorithms, and that education mentorship will be instrumental in this work. Baroness Rock also highlighted the need for children at every level of education to cultivate an interest in STEM. This Government wants to see more girls studying STEM subjects and is committed to improving the gender balance in computing, maths and physics, where uptake by girls is low. We are funding several interventions in this area including funding the Institute of Physics to deliver the Improving Gender Balance research trial; and the National Centre for Computing Education to deliver a number of Randomised Control Trials in Key Stages 1 to 4 to increase the number of girls taking computer science. We have also launched a £1.1 million Digital Skills Innovation fund for Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Combined Authorities for initiatives that aim to help women, disabled people, and residents in poorer wards get into digital roles or further training.

We welcome the breadth of innovative projects to build our nation's digital skills including the work of the Office for Students, who with £13.5m DCMS funding, launched a competition to find innovative bids from providers in conjunction with industry for degree conversion courses in data science and AI. At least 2,500 graduates will be created through the programme. This includes £10m for up to 1,000 scholarships to open up opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds. I have copied in the Chief Executive of the Office for Students, Nicola Dandridge CBE, to share more detail on their plans.

Lord Hussain asked on the Government's response to victims of violence in Kashmir. We work closely with state governments, law enforcement agencies, education authorities and NGOs to promote women's awareness of their rights and support survivors of sexual violence through the Indian criminal justice system.

I have copied all Noble Lords (and Ladies) who contributed to the debate, and I would like to take the opportunity to again thank everyone who took part in the wide-ranging and interesting debate on such an important subject. A copy of this letter will be placed in the House Library.



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