

# Public

## Comment

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## Britain's Hindu community ignored by public sector boards

Mahatma Gandhi said 'to be the change that we wish to see' and his words have taken on a new meaning and inspiration for the country's Hindus, who wish to get involved in the running of public services

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Dilip Joshi and Lopa Patel

Public, Tuesday 2 February 2010 13.03 GMT

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Lopa Patel

Britain's public sector boards are ignoring the talents of the country's Hindu community. That's the assertion of the Hindu Council UK taskforce, which recently launched its public appointments strategy.

The culmination of two years' work, the strategy aims to increase the number of Hindu men and women sitting on boards of Britain's public bodies, including such bodies as the NHS, regulatory bodies and commissions.

The aims of the new strategy are:

- to inform opinion formers, boards and recruiters of the highly-talented pool of Hindu candidates available, many of whom are successful in the private sector, but invisible in the public sector [http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/bmac/2010/jan20/item06.pdf]
- to encourage members of the Hindu community to regard a public appointment as a form of 'sewa' (selfless good works), a fundamental tenet of the religion
- to inform the Hindu community of the range of public bodies - particularly those in sectors not traditionally favoured by Hindus
- to extend the remit of the strategy beyond just public sector bodies to include the civil service and judiciary in the future, using the successful models developed for public appointments as a starting point
- to lobby politicians, civil servants and opinion formers for a "level playing field" in future, where merit triumphs over traditional recruitment practices

### **Re-appointments in Public Sector discriminating against Hindus**

The taskforce also undertook research that showed that re-appointments in the public sector are a barrier to Hindus getting their first public appointment. Most of the UK's non-departmental public bodies (ndpbs) reappoint board directors far too frequently; pay them too much and sign them up for far too long, creating a lack of opportunity and an obstacle to equality.

Taskforce representatives recently met the Government Equalities Office (GEO) and representatives from the Cabinet Office and other departments and made a number of the recommendations, including:

- a "one term" rule for appointments to a public body. As most public appointments are for three to four years at a time, this would open up opportunities for "new blood" and new skills, benefiting women, the disabled and ethnic minorities
- a complete stop of all five-year appointments
- a limit on public appointments positions that an individual can hold to a maximum of two roles concurrently
- legislation to bring all public sector appointments under the regulation of the Office of the Commissioner of Public Appointments (Ocpa), rather than the current level of 30% of appointments
- 'fast tracking' of applications from under-represented sectors to interview stage to overcome barriers created by the applications process
- use of OCPA-accredited Independent Assessors for public appointments' interviews to be

mandatory

- diversity training workshops to be mandatory for boards of public bodies
- closer scrutiny of public appointments, job descriptions (role definitions) and reappointments with quarterly production of statistics
- extensive promotion of public appointment vacancies so that more people were made aware of the opportunities available

The taskforce now aims to build close links with potential Hindu candidates; access government-sponsored public leaders training and development courses; establish a mentoring scheme and work with the GEO to highlight potential barriers and improve progress.

Our inspiration came from Mahatma Gandhi's words 'to be the change that we wish to see' and we are actively seeking the participation of political leaders, the civil service, key individuals like the London mayor and organisations themselves in an open dialogue and constructive development of plans to improve representation in the public sector.

*Dilip Joshi is leader of the Hindu Council UK taskforce, Lopa Patel is founder of British Asian Lifestyle portal Redhotcurry.com*

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