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8<sup>th</sup> December 2014

Dear Terry

Thank you very much for your letter regarding the review of the OBR that you and Kate commissioned from Kevin Page and colleagues at the University of Ottawa. I think that it was a very helpful and informative exercise.

With regards to the specific recommendations relevant to us:

- **'It is recommended that the survey of Parliamentarians be reissued before the end of this session of Parliament'**: I am not convinced that it would be worthwhile to re-run the survey of Parliamentarians that Kevin undertook, as I suspect that it would once again suffer from a very low response rate. But I do think that the recommendation highlights a useful broader question, namely whether we should do more to engage with Parliament beyond our regular evidence sessions with the Treasury Committee. There are ways in which we might be able to do this, for example by seeing whether it would be possible to hold our document briefings on the Parliamentary Estate so that interested members could attend more easily. We could explore this and other possibilities with the Committee and other members.
- **'It is recommended that additional backgrounders be included with the publication of major reports to aid the accessibility of the documents for non-technical readers'**: I am very pleased that the Review took a positive view of our non-technical *Brief Guide to the Public Finances* (which we have updated consistent with last week's Autumn Statement) and that the team wanted us to do more in this vein. I would be very keen to do so. We are already looking at a number of potential topics, for example more detail on public sector debt and the public sector balance sheet. I think that the best way to pursue this would be to produce the first version separately from the relevant flagship publication, because of time and resource constraints, and then to update it regularly alongside the publication.

- **'It is recommended that a formal fiscal community-wide staff development and rotation programme be established to maximise the talent pool upon which the OBR can draw':** At junior analyst level, posts at the OBR are generally held for between one and two years, so that staff do in effect rotate in and out of the OBR. At senior analyst level, posts tend to be occupied for longer. I think it would be helpful to have more formal and frequent discussion with our main partner departments regarding people that we and they feel could spend some time in the OBR as part of their career development. We could also make the likes of the IFS, IMF and OECD more aware of the types of jobs that are likely to come up over time. We should also consider ensuring that more jobs are advertised to all, rather than just within the Civil Service, although under current rules this does involve substantial transaction costs, both in money and time. Anything we did would probably need to complement our standard recruitment process, given our need to find experienced people at sometimes short notice. It is also important to avoid a succession of short-term secondments, given the time that has to be invested in transferring knowledge at each point of handover. This is an important consideration in a relatively small body like the OBR.

I look forward to discussing these issues further in due course.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bob regards, Robert". The signature is written in a cursive, informal style.

Robert Chote  
**Chairman**