



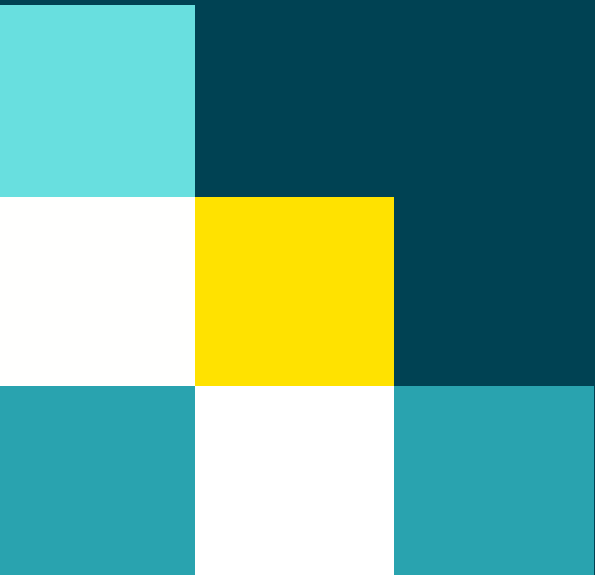
Wales Centre for Public Policy
Canolfan Polisi Cyhoeddus Cymru

Increasing workforce diversity across public services

Charlotte Morgan, Jack Price and Helen Tilley

Wales Centre for Public Policy

November 2024



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Summary

- This report summarises discussions from a roundtable held in April 2024 to provide the Welsh Government with evidence to help implement its vision of an organisation that fully reflects the diversity of Wales at every level. The roundtable brought together the Welsh Government, public services, and wider organisations to identify and share good practice relating to three key areas of recruitment:
 - Recruitment outreach;
 - Assessment methodologies; and
 - Positive Action.
- The importance of establishing trust with communities was highlighted as a fundamental aspect of outreach and engagement in recruitment efforts. It was noted that some communities may still hold generational distrust towards certain sectors or companies based on past experiences, underscoring the need for employers to engage not only with individuals but also with the communities they represent.
- Actions to build this trust include recruitment drives, listening campaigns, job fairs, and open days. Participants also suggested that it would be helpful for employers to seek out or create opportunities for organisations to undertake joint outreach activities.
- Using flexibility in evaluating candidates and moving away from a ‘one size fits all’ approach to recruitment were seen as crucial for making interview and assessment processes more inclusive. Simple changes such as providing candidates with interview questions in advance and offering flexibility in how applications can be submitted were recognised as good practice.
- Explicitly stating that reasonable adjustments are welcomed, and providing examples of what these adjustments could include, can boost the confidence of candidates who have an impairment to request adjustments. However, it was emphasised that organisations should consider integrating adjustments into their recruitment processes so that they occur automatically.
- Participants felt that it was important to assess their organisation’s maturity in inclusive recruitment policies when deciding whether to apply certain positive action tools. Positive action measures used by organisations included the Guaranteed Interview Scheme, progression buddy schemes, and Positive Action Outreach Officers.

Introduction

Black, Asian and minority ethnic people and people with an impairment are currently under-represented in the Welsh Government workforce and across the One Welsh Public Service. In response, the Welsh Government has set specific targets related to the recruitment and progression of minority ethnic people and people with an impairment at all levels, as well as women within the Senior Civil Service. Public bodies across Wales share similar aims.

To support these targets, the Welsh Government is seeking to identify and share good practices in the following areas of recruitment and progression:

- Identifying different approaches to job advertising, outreach, and communication of roles and organisational details;
- Identifying different interview and assessment models used by other organisations within and beyond the Welsh public service; and
- Understanding the potential uses of lawful positive action across a range of protected characteristics in recruiting and appointing candidates.

The Welsh Government asked the Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) to provide evidence to help implement its vision of an organisation that fully reflects the diversity of Wales at every level. WCPP has previously conducted evidence reviews and held roundtables focused on encouraging diversity in recruitment (Park et al., 2020; Taylor-Collins and Park, 2020; Hatch et al., 2021; Showumni and Price, 2021; Price et al., 2021). These reviews did not specifically address recruitment to the civil service or the wider Welsh public service, apart from high-level public appointments, but do include evidence transferable to these contexts.

To address existing evidence to the specific needs of the Welsh Government and to facilitate learning across the wider Welsh public service, we held a roundtable in April 2024, bringing together the Welsh Government, public services, and wider organisations to identify and share good practices related to the issues above. This roundtable took place in the context of the Welsh Government's existing commitments, including its adoption of the social model of disability, the recruitment commitments in the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, and changes already made to recruitment practices. This report summarises the roundtable discussion.

Policy context

The Welsh Government's Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021 to 2026 (2021) sets out a vision of an organisation that fully reflects the diversity of Wales at every level and is anti-racist and anti-discrimination of all types. Public bodies across Wales have set similar ambitions. The Strategy specifically sets ambitious targets for the recruitment and progression of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people and people with an impairment at all levels, and for women into the Senior Civil Service.

The roundtable discussion focused on three areas for which relevant Welsh Government objectives and background are presented below:

1. Recruitment outreach;
2. Assessment methodologies; and
3. Positive action.

Recruitment outreach

The Civil Service Commission Recruitment Principles (Civil Service Commission, 2018) state that before recruitment can proceed to advertising, the Panel Chair must approve an advertising strategy that ensures a strong and diverse pool of applicants is attracted.

- The Welsh Government's Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021 to 2026 (2021) includes a commitment to invest in targeted outreach to attract candidates less likely to apply for roles. It also includes a commitment to work closely with heads of profession across public, private and third-sector organisations to develop a strategy that creates a pipeline attracting applications from diverse groups over time.
- The Anti-racist Wales Action Plan (Welsh Government, 2022) commits the Welsh Government to produce outreach standards for recruiting managers, with annual progress reports to be published.

Assessment methodologies

Recruitment into the civil service, including the Welsh Government, is based on the Success Profiles Framework (UK Government, 2018). This framework is intended to be flexible, assessing candidates against a range of elements using various selection

methods. Recruitment within the Civil Service must comply with the Civil Service Recruitment Principles (2018):

- The Welsh Government's Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021 to 2026 (2021) includes a commitment to address methodological barriers in recruitment that may cause systemic structural disadvantage to candidates with impairments, including trialling alternative assessment options as a reasonable adjustment. For instance, the Welsh Government has been trialling the provision of questions in advance for all candidates in some schemes.
- The Welsh Government's Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021 to 2026 (2021) includes a commitment to become an anti-racist organisation, taking action in employment policies, practices, and recruitment methods to eliminate barriers contributing to race inequality.

Positive action

Positive action involves taking specific steps to improve equality in the workplace (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2019). It can be used to meet a group's particular needs, reduce a disadvantage they might experience, or increase their participation in a particular activity. An organisation must demonstrate that positive action is an appropriate way to achieve one of these aims.

- The Welsh Government's Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021 to 2026 (2021) includes a commitment to undertaking positive action in recruitment in several ways, such as using the equal merit (or tie-break) provision in the Equality Act 2010 to appoint a candidate from an underrepresented background when two or more candidates are equally appointable.
- The Welsh Government has also developed potential actions related to incorporating the value of lived experience into job descriptions, utilising Guaranteed Interview Schemes, outreach mentors, and establishing a Positive Action Group where under-represented groups can access specific training and recruitment awareness sessions.
- The strategy further outlines the Welsh Government's intention to expand and strengthen its Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Leadership programme to support more people from underrepresented groups in reaching their potential within the Welsh Government. It also commits to continuing the delivery of Women into Leadership courses in recognition of senior-level underrepresentation within the organisation.

- Additionally, the Welsh Government is exploring the use of the s13 (3) provision of the Equality Act 2010, which enables a disabled person to be treated more favourably than a non-disabled person in areas such as recruitment, to appoint disabled candidates to roles.
- The Anti-racist Wales Action Plan (Welsh Government, 2022) includes a commitment to implementing positive action in progression, recruitment, and interviews, increasing understanding of Positive Action as defined in the Equality Act 2010, and embedding it within their work.

Advertising and outreach

Job advertisements play a key role in conveying the nature of the role and have the potential to either discourage or attract candidates from diverse backgrounds. Outreach is equally important to ensure candidates from a wide range of backgrounds are aware of what employers are looking for. Throughout the roundtable, participants explored the following questions related to advertising and outreach:

- How have other organisations in the public and private sectors used advertisements and job descriptions to encourage diversity in recruitment?
- What has been most successful in engaging with under-represented groups to encourage individuals to apply for jobs in other organisations?

Below, we summarise the key themes that attendees highlighted as ways to become more inclusive.

Building trust with communities

The need for employers to build trust with communities was seen as a critical foundation for outreach and recruitment engagement efforts. In some communities, there may be generational distrust of the sector or company based on the lived experience of previous generations. As such, it is important that employers engage with not only the individuals they interact with but also the communities they represent. Participants stressed the importance of public services working with communities to identify employment challenges. Ensuring the employer is visible in the community emerged as a key point in discussions around building trust. Participants suggested the following strategies for employers:

Listening campaigns

This involves employers engaging with community leaders and members to better understand the challenges faced by the community, including employment-related

issues. Listening campaigns can then form the basis of a flexible approach to building relationships based on community needs. It was also considered important for employers to be visible at wider community events, such as celebrations, to build trust and foster meaningful engagement.

Recruitment drives

Recruitment drives can be a powerful way of building trust with communities while also offering support and confidence to apply for roles within an organisation. This could include facilitating face-to-face meetings between employers and community members in local buildings, where CV and interview skills support are provided. This both promotes the organisation and encourages community members to apply. Attendees highlighted that this approach is effective for assessing the impact of recruitment strategies.

Another approach that was discussed was inviting local community members to a company store on a designated day, where the employer conducts applications and/or interviews for short-term vacancies on the same day. The outcome was very positive. This has so far worked best with private companies, which have more flexibility in recruitment, especially at entry level.

Open days and job fairs

Hosting or attending events, such as open days and job fairs, can provide clarity about the application process, reduce uncertainties, and ensure that individuals from underrepresented groups are well-prepared. One organisation trialled an open day advertised exclusively within ethnically diverse communities, offering upskilling sessions and mock interviews. They shared that it was a success and something that they plan to repeat. Other participants noted that job fairs hosted in local communities have proven powerful and effective in encouraging applicants from underrepresented groups.

Outreach officers

Many organisations have a positive action team and specific outreach officer roles dedicated to building relationships with communities and supporting underrepresented groups into employment opportunities. This was also noted as an important aspect of employers being visible in communities and demonstrating a commitment to long-term relationships rather than focusing solely on recruitment.

Attracting applications

Paid bursaries

Where formal professional training is part of a job, paid bursaries can encourage more applications from underrepresented groups. For example, South Wales Police collaborates with local Welsh –universities – University of Wales Trinity Saint David, University of South Wales, and Cardiff Metropolitan University – which deliver the Professional Policing Degree (PPD) and fund a bursary scheme for ethnic minority students as part of its positive action initiative. The bursary offers up to £4,000 to cover pre-application, study through years 1-3 on a PPD, and then application to South Wales Police (South Wales Police, n.d.).

Accessible applications

Participants discussed simple, effective changes they made to better support candidates in completing applications. This included recognising that traditional online application systems might not be accessible for neurodivergent candidates or candidates with an impairment and offering candidates the option to complete and submit their applications as a Word document instead. When candidates submit applications in Word format, the organisation can upload them to the system on their behalf. Another suggestion was to offer candidates the option to submit answers via video instead of in writing.

The suggestion was also made to allow candidates to contact a member of staff if they are having any difficulties in completing the application, for instance, if they are unsure about a question's content or need guidance on how to approach it. It would be important to offer this supportively, alleviating concerns that applicants might be judged negatively for requesting assistance.

Using inclusive language in advertisements

The language used in job adverts and other publicity materials can significantly impact the recruitment of a more diverse pool of candidates. Concerns were raised about using a single category or term for 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' (or BAME) people, as this may obscure differences between ethnic groups and the unique recruitment challenges faced by each. This is particularly relevant where data or strategies are not disaggregated. There were also concerns that this terminology does not reflect all minority groups, such as those from multiple ethnic backgrounds. Some organisations have begun adopting the term 'ethnic minority backgrounds', which was considered by some within the roundtable to be more inclusive and recognises diverse and multi-ethnic groups. However, other terms, like 'global majority', were considered by some to be too vague and irrelevant to the British and Welsh context. The varied approaches to describing underrepresented groups used

by organisations at the roundtable highlight the importance of language that reflects diversity both within and across groups.

Committing to fair employment schemes

Schemes such as the Disability Confident employer scheme were highlighted by participants as positive for attracting a more diverse pool of applicants. The Disability Confident Scheme is a voluntary government initiative that helps organisations attract, recruit, and retain staff with impairments. All employers start at Level One, with three levels of commitments to progress through. The scheme includes guaranteed interviews for candidates with an impairment who meet the essential criteria for a job. The Community Jobs Compact, a reciprocal agreement between employers and communities to make recruitment practices more equitable in Cardiff, was also highlighted. Citizens Cymru promotes job opportunities in the community and encourages local people to apply. They then support applicants and signpost employers to relevant organisations.

Role models

Seeing diverse leaders throughout the selection and recruitment process was considered important for securing increased applications from candidates from underrepresented groups. Participants also noted the power of ‘seeing is believing’ and expressed that existing employees from underrepresented groups sharing positive experiences of working within an organisation can make a real difference in encouraging a more diverse range of candidates.

Interview and assessment methods

Following advertising and outreach, we discussed the interview and assessment process as the next stage in recruitment. Discussions on the day considered the following questions:

- What adjustments can be made to enable a fairer interview process in terms of physical adjustments; non-physical adjustments; and changes to interview and assessment styles?
- How can competency assessments be made fairer for candidates, particularly those who may struggle with traditional assessment techniques?

Roundtable attendees emphasised that flexibility in how employers receive applications and conduct interviews is crucial. Viewing the recruitment process –

from advertising and outreach to assessment methods and onboarding – through an intersectional lens was also a strong theme. Participants highlighted that focusing solely on race or disability is not effective in increasing diversity in recruitment. Instead of ‘picking and choosing’ certain characteristics, employers need to be fully inclusive in their language and broader support approach, ensuring that the support how disability and race intersect and the differences of the experiences of candidates.

We summarise the themes arising from discussions below.

Reducing bias

Name free shortlisting process

Several organisations noted that they had recently begun using ‘name-free’ applications, where candidates’ names and sometimes other details like places of education are redacted to reduce unconscious bias during the shortlisting process. While this approach was considered effective in addressing one barrier, several attendees raised concerns, noting that it can actually mask some of the biases rather than tackle them. There is evidence that hiring managers may ‘recode’ applications where names have been removed by focusing on details such as education or work histories outside the UK (if these are not removed from applications), writing styles, and leave patterns. There is also a risk that by asking hiring managers not to focus on stereotypes, you may actually be making those stereotypes more prominent.

Other attendees felt that name-free applications reinforce the idea that individuals need to hide or change their identity to fit in. Instead, the responsibility should be on the employer to break down those biases, for example, through in-house cultural literacy training, which is discussed below.

Accessibility

Providing questions in advance

Roundtable participants discussed providing core interview questions to all candidates at least 24 hours before the interview. One organisation mentioned that they had been reflecting internally on their recruitment process from different perspectives, driven by the need to ensure fair recruitment practices for neurodivergent interviewees.

In terms of outcomes of using this approach, several participants noted that in their experience, candidates are more likely to come to interviews ready and prepared with examples from their experience and feel much more able to engage with the panel. It also allows the interview panel more time to ask follow-up questions, delving

deeper into the candidate's character and experience. Both successful and unsuccessful candidates provided feedback that receiving questions in advance alleviated some of the usual stress associated with preparing for an interview.

Reasonable adjustments

The accessibility of interviews can be a significant barrier for a person with an impairment, particularly when the responsibility for requesting adjustments falls on the candidate. One suggestion raised to make candidates feel more comfortable requesting reasonable adjustments was sending out a video developed by existing staff alongside the candidate pack. The video would provide practical examples that explain what reasonable adjustments are available and that encourages applicants to request these.

Another organisation shared that their previous practice was to leave adjustment approvals to the hiring manager, but they were finding that there was an inconsistency as to which candidates received adjustments. In response, they have implemented a system where, if a hiring manager wants to refuse an adjustment request, it goes to a separate team within the organisation who review the application and adjustment request and can grant the adjustment. As a result of this and other inclusive recruitment policies, the participant said that the organisation reported doubling the rate of persons with an impairment who were successful at interview. The discussion evolved to explore the potential of offering these adjustments throughout the recruitment process by default. Participants noted that candidates often sound apologetic when requesting adjustments. To remove barriers around asking for adjustments, attendees felt strongly that standardising adjustments, such as providing questions in advance, would be a beneficial approach for organisations to adopt.

Cultural awareness approaches

Staff interview panel training

It was considered important that, alongside introducing changes to support interviewees, support is also provided for staff on interview panels, particularly where new measures are met with resistance. For example, one participant noted that providing interview questions in advance had been met with scepticism from managers, who were concerned about interviewees using Google or artificial intelligence to craft perfect answers. This highlighted an opportunity for additional training to improve managers' interviewing skills, particularly around feeling confident about asking follow-up questions and probing further into examples provided by interviewees.

Being responsive to different experiences and cultures whilst interviewing

Employers' understanding of differences, including cultural differences, and how to support people to feel confident during interviews was also discussed. One participant noted that this could be as simple as recognising that confident body language or direct eye contact may be challenging for certain cultures and neurodivergent individuals. Some participants suggested encouraging interviewees from cultural backgrounds that emphasise humility to 'leave their humbleness at the door'. However, it should be acknowledged that changing cultural norms is complex, and the onus should not be on applicants to change to fit into the organisation. Organisations must remain mindful of cultural differences and promote awareness of diverse cultural responses through interviewer training.

Deaf candidates also have unique interview experiences. British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters are not direct translators and may not understand jargon used at interview although the interviewee does. It is therefore important for employers to be aware of this and ensure that they are evaluating the candidate, not the interpreter, while providing opportunities for clarification and follow-up questions.

Deutsche Bank's autism graduate programme was cited as an example of good practice. Applicants undergo rigorous testing, but appropriate changes are made to the assessment style. Timed responses and group assessment centres are replaced with a series of questions, giving graduates one week to respond. These responses then form the basis of one-to-one discussions. Every successful applicant is then assigned a mentor, and line managers and colleagues receive specific training on working effectively with them.

Cultural organisational shift

Any efforts employers make to improve assessment methodologies should be underpinned by an organisational progression towards a culture shift. Participants stressed that the onus should not be on applicants to adapt to fit the organisation, but rather on organisations to be mindful of cultural differences and adjust their working culture to address unconscious bias in the workplace and throughout its recruitment process. For example, the approach of a private-sector organisation at the roundtable has been to provide in-house cultural training and resources to existing employees to tackle existing biases in their recruitment practices.

Although retention was not discussed in significant detail at the roundtable, it was highlighted that a focus on retaining staff within an organisation is equally as important as recruiting staff. A strong organisational culture can help to foster an inclusive atmosphere, helping people to stay in organisations rather than leave. Organisations can implement measures to support individual progression and promotion, such as mentoring or networking schemes, which can also help to promote cultural change within the organisation. Candidates from underrepresented

groups may also feel more confident in applying if they can see diversity reflected in an organisation's current workforce. More research drawing on the experiences and practices of organisations in Wales is needed to explore this, as, due to time constraints, this could not be explored in detail within the roundtable.

While the concept was not discussed extensively at the roundtable, WCPP followed up with a participant who advocated for using a 'social model of disability' approach when considering how to attract, recruit, and retain candidates within an organisation. This approach 'recognises that people with impairments are disabled by barriers that commonly exist in society... that all prevent disabled people's inclusion and participation in all areas of life' (Welsh Government, n.d.). It places the responsibility on organisations to remove societal barriers rather than expecting people with a disability to adapt or accept exclusion due to existing practices. Research suggests that adopting the social model of disability could assist in reducing unconscious bias towards applicants with a disability by changing social conditions and removing barriers to their participation in the workforce (Bunbury, 2019).

Positive action

In the last session of the day, roundtable attendees discussed positive action. Positive action refers to lawful measures that employers can choose to take to improve diversity and achieve equal outcomes for underrepresented groups. 'Positive discrimination' is not part of positive action, with the exception that the Equality Act 2010 permits more favourable treatment of people with an impairment to remove the barriers they experience.

We used following questions to guide the discussion on this subject:

- How have other organisations in the Welsh public service and the private sector used positive action in recruitment?
- How do other organisations understand the law as it relates to different protected characteristics under the Equality Act?
- How have you communicated the rationale for positive action to your workforce?

The discussion highlighted a sense of nervousness around using positive action tools, as various organisations have used them incorrectly, leading to legal action. The biggest challenge is understanding what positive action means in practice. Concerns were raised about how to apply positive action correctly, as it is often misinterpreted as positive discrimination, which is unlawful in the UK. Participants felt

that it was important to assess their organisation's readiness before deciding whether to apply positive action tools and expressed a desire for further guidance on their application. Thoughts and experiences of applying positive action tools were shared during the discussion and summarised below.

Progression buddy schemes

Candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds applying for specific roles in HM Prison and Probation Service Wales have the option of being partnered with someone who works within the organisation. This could be either a person in a similar role to the one the candidate is applying for or someone who has previously worked in that role before and who can therefore offer guidance and support. This support may cover areas such as applying for the role, performing a presentation, and/or developing interview skills.

Equal merit tiebreaker

Section 159 of the Equality Act 2010 allows an employer to use positive action when choosing between two or more candidates who are of equal merit. Using the equal merit tiebreaker, the employer can then opt to recruit the candidate that is from a group that is disproportionately underrepresented or otherwise disadvantaged within its workforce. This form of positive action is only permitted when it is a proportionate way of addressing the underrepresentation.

However, several attendees noted that their organisations had not used the tiebreaker tool due to few genuine tie-break situations arising, uncertainty about its impact, and the seemingly high burden of proof required to demonstrate that it has been used lawfully. Other organisations also felt the tool either would only impact a very small number of people and so therefore would not significantly increase diversity. Concerns were also raised about insufficient organisational maturity to adopt this tool successfully. Participants felt that it was more important that the employer seeks to focus on getting the interview culture and assessment process right to ensure a fair assessment process.

Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS)

Several participants mentioned that their organisations use a Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS) for candidates with an impairment. This means that if an applicant has an impairment and meets the minimum essential criteria for the post at the shortlist stage, they are guaranteed an interview. The interview panel members are not actively made aware that a candidate has indicated that they have an impairment; they only receive answers to the specific criteria set out in the person specification for the role. The GIS was highlighted due to mixed responses regarding its effectiveness. While some candidates support the scheme, others view it as box-

ticking and tokenism or believe it could harm their chances of securing an interview (Holmes, 2018).

Ringfencing posts for people with an impairment

The BBC runs a positive action employment programme, BBC Extend, for people who are deaf, disabled, or neurodivergent, as these groups are underrepresented in their workforce. The programme ringfences roles that only those defined as disabled by the Equality Act (2010) can apply for. These roles vary in type, length, and seniority. Although no participants had actively used ringfencing as a positive action method, some roundtable participants said that their organisation had considered it but decided against it due to legal concerns, even though other organisations have successfully put these schemes in place.

Positive action groups and training

Some organisations have set up Positive Action Schemes, enabling underrepresented groups to access bespoke training and advice through ongoing initiatives. For example, South Wales Police has established a Positive Action Team to carry out its positive action initiative in a holistic way (South Wales Police, 2024). Candidates or individuals seeking more information about the organisation or role can contact the Positive Action team directly for advice or bespoke upskilling sessions. Other aspects of these schemes include partnering with local community groups, targeting advertising at underrepresented communities, providing coaching and mentoring, and hosting events to raise awareness of recruitment opportunities. Positive action training has been made available to councils to support them in using this type of intervention. Other public services have introduced tools like inclusive language checkers. For instance, the Scottish Government has introduced the 'Principles of Inclusive Communication: An information and self-assessment tool for public authorities' (2011).

Lived experience

The question of whether and how to incorporate the value of 'lived experience' (such as having an impairment or from an ethnic minority) into recruitment through job descriptions or criteria was raised. This could be a crucial tool in attracting and appointing a diverse range of candidates.

Conclusion

The roundtable facilitated meaningful conversations between the Welsh Government, public services, and wider organisations on effective practices to increase diversity in recruitment across advertising, outreach, assessment methodologies, and positive action. It also identified a range of actions across these priority areas that public services in Wales can take to promote diversity within their organisations while also strengthening relationships with communities.

Building trust with communities should form the basis of any outreach conducted by employers. As part of this, employers must acknowledge and understand any generational (or other) mistrust that may exist and work with community leaders and members to address the specific challenges that communities may face in accessing employment. Actions to build this trust include recruitment drives, listening campaigns, job fairs, and open days. Participants also suggested reflecting on whether there are opportunities for organisations to undertake joint outreach initiatives.

Regarding assessment methodologies, flexibility in evaluating candidates and moving away from a one-size-fits-all recruitment approach was seen as key to making processes more inclusive. Simple changes, such as providing candidates with the interview questions in advance and being flexible about how candidates submit applications, were identified as good practices. Clearly communicating to candidates that requesting reasonable adjustments is encouraged, along with examples of what these adjustments could include can increase the confidence of applicants with disabilities. However, the discussion also highlighted that organisations should aim for an ‘adjustments by default’ approach, integrating adjustments into their recruitment process so that they occur automatically. A recurring theme in discussions on assessment methodologies was the need for organisations and public services to change their culture, rather than expecting the candidates to change to fit in with the organisation.

Discussions also focused on the practical application of positive action tools by employers. These included creating Positive Action Officer roles to liaise with communities, using the Guaranteed Interview Scheme, and considering ringfencing specific roles for candidates with an impairment – though none of the roundtable participants had adopted the latter. There were differing levels of applying positive action tools due to the perceived legal risk involved in their use. An important caveat for positive action raised by participants is that there is still a misconception that positive action is affirmative action. Consequently, whether an organisation

effectively adopts positive action measures depends on its maturity and the robustness of its equality and inclusion policies.

There was a strong appetite for follow-up discussions to provide public services and organisations with a platform to share ideas, best practices, and learn from each other. Roundtable participants highlighted retention of staff and the role of the organisational culture in both attracting and retaining staff as areas of interest for further exploration.

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Author Details

Charlotte Morgan is a Research Officer at the Wales Centre for Public Policy.

Dr Jack Price is a Research Associate at the Wales Centre for Public Policy.

Dr Helen Tilley is a Senior Research Fellow at the Wales Centre for Public Policy.

For further information please contact:

Charlotte Morgan

Wales Centre for Public Policy

+44 (0) 29 2087 5345

charlotte.morgan@wcpp.org.uk

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