Improving Race Equality in Leadership and Representation

Background

The Welsh Government has made a commitment to publish a Race Equality Action Plan designed to tackle structural racial and ethnic inequalities in Wales (Welsh Government, 2020a). This policy briefing summarises one of six reports produced by the Wales Centre for Public Policy to provide independent evidence to inform the development of the Action Plan. It focuses on evidence and recommendations for action related to race equality in leadership and representation.

Introduction

UK-wide data suggest that people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds occupy 4.7% of senior leadership roles across the public, private, and third sectors, and only 2% of FTSE 100 company CEOs, despite accounting for 13% of the UK population (Green Park, 2020). We do not have equivalent data at an all-Wales level, but there are clear indications of racial and ethnic underrepresentation in leadership in Wales. For example, just 3% of those appointed to Welsh public bodies in 2018/19 were from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds, even though these groups comprise 5.8% of the population of Wales (Welsh Government, 2020b; Stats Wales, 2020).

While the diversity of leadership is important, it is equally important to take actions to ensure that all leaders, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, are committed to promoting inclusion and racial equality.

This policy briefing identifies actions to tackle racial inequality in and through leadership in Wales. It covers actions related to senior organisational leaders, middle leaders and also future leaders.

> **Proportionate representation of people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds helps ensure that policy concerns are heard and acted on, but will also help by providing a 'role model' effect, encouraging diverse democratic participation and aspiration.**

Leadership commitment and organisational culture

Research consistently shows that efforts to increase the diversity of leaders will wither on the vine of good intentions unless they are underpinned by visible and tangible actions from the top echelons of organisations, and a framework which allows for positive action (e.g. NHS England, 2019). In practical terms, this means taking steps to:

- Make leaders accountable for increasing diversity;

- Ensure 'buy-in' for increasing and promoting diversity right across senior management teams;

- Change organisational cultures to promote diversity and inclusion;

- Facilitate more diverse leadership at all levels of the organisation; and

- Facilitate a diverse and able pipeline of future leaders.

Recommendations

- Ensure that leaders in the public sector publicly commit to, and are held accountable for, increasing diversity and inclusion in their organisations, and encourage similar action in the private and voluntary sectors.

- Put in place interventions to increase leader and manager 'buy-in' for increasing diversity, potentially including a strategic framework; promoting diverse teams; organisation-wide or public reporting of race equality indicators; and linking targets to everyday challenges and experiences.

- Commit to creating more inclusive and diverse organisational cultures, recognising that this will take time; and building on the development of new values and models of leadership.

Career progression and support

Increasing the numbers of Black, Asian and minority ethnic leaders will require ongoing support for their career progression, as organisations tend to have internal succession management protocols in addition to external recruitment. Ensuring that people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are able to access progression pathways will increase their representation at management level and, over time, increase representation among senior leadership.

Recommendations

Ensure that professional development opportunities and progression pathways are clear, formalised, and well communicated across organisations.

- Endorse the use of mentoring, reverse-mentoring, coaching and minority ethnic staff networks alongside more structured forms of support for career progression, including early talent identification and specific target-setting.

- Make leaders responsible for better representation through measures like board-level sponsorship, or diversity objectives in annual reviews.

- Collect, monitor and report data on recruitment, retention and progression of staff at all levels by race and ethnicity, as well as other protected characteristics.

Recruitment

Changes in recruitment practices can be a valuable way to increase diversity within organisations. This can help to increase the 'pipeline' to senior leadership, but can also be used to recruit directly at senior levels. The EHRC provides some examples (EHRC, 2014).

For instance, the DVLA found an under-representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals in the organisation based on analysis of staff data. Findings from consultations with local ethnic minority groups suggested that potential applicants may lack an understanding of the competencies needed for DVLA jobs. In response, the DVLA hosted a job fair targeting Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals, as well as workshops to better inform people about the competencies required.

Recommendations

- Ensure that recruitment practices encourage and enable diverse entry to organisations, for example through plain English application packs which are widely advertised; blind recruitment practices; diverse shortlists; and diverse interview panels.

- Ensure that job person specifications and recruitment processes assess for commitment and ability to promote inclusion and diversity across all management and leadership roles, not just those in Human Resources.

- Invest in supporting and inspiring a 'pipeline' of diverse applicants through community, school, college, and university level engagement; and encouraging diversity at work experience level, including through stopping unpaid or unadvertised opportunities.

Political representation and leadership

Currently, two Members of the Senedd are from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background, and no Black, Asian or minority ethnic woman has been elected to the Senedd (Cifuentes, 2020). Proportionate representation of people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds helps ensure that policy concerns are heard and acted on, but will also help by providing a 'role model' effect, encouraging diverse democratic participation and aspiration.

Recommendations

- Consider whether the Welsh Government are able to amend the Equality Act (2010) to permit political parties to put 'BME-only shortlists' in place, as an attempt to increase ethnically diverse representation in the Senedd.

- Ensure robust and adequate data collection and reporting related to all stages of the recruitment and selection process for public and political positions.

  Take action which addresses systemic/ organisational-level barriers to participation in politics (such as unadvertised opportunities, or the perception that the state lacks the political will to change matters), as well as individual-level barriers (such as financial barriers).

- Put in place long-term engagement mechanisms, building on previous and existing practice such as the Assembly Member Shadowing Scheme, to address structural issues and increase participation in the political process.

Evaluating effectiveness

This paper has highlighted examples of approaches to increasing the diversity of leaders and their commitment to diversity and inclusion that could be implemented in Wales. However, there is currently a lack of robust evaluation of what works. It will be important to evaluate actions that are implemented as a result of the Welsh Government's Race Equality Action Plan, to establish a better understanding of which strategies are or are not working in a particular context, and if not, why.

Recommendations

- Evaluate interventions to provide a better understanding of what works, for whom and why.

References

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Find out more

For the full report see Showunmi, V., and Price, J. (2020**). Improving Race Equality in Leadership and Representation.** Cardiff: Wales Centre for Public Policy.

About the Wales Centre for Public Policy

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Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and Welsh Government, the Centre is

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