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Increasing diversity in public appointments through recruitment

Megan Park, Jack Price, and Emma Taylor-Collins
Wales Centre for Public Policy
November 2020

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Contents

Summary

- This report has been prepared to support the Welsh Government's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for public appointments, with a focus on how recruitment strategies can be more inclusive. In particular, this report addresses how ethnic minority and disabled candidates can be better supported to apply and be successful in public appointments.
- While there is not a 'one size fits all' approach to increasing diversity through recruitment practices, there are some common strategies which can support candidates from underrepresented groups.
- Any approach taken will need to be cognisant of how inequalities intersect, and specific strategies based on the (multiple) inequalities individuals may face may be required to attract and appoint those from underrepresented groups.
- Systemic issues that are wider than the recruitment process have an impact on the diversity of public appointments. This includes public perceptions and awareness of public appointments as well as challenges at an organisational and individual level in talking about race and disability.
- A broader conceptualisation of the experience candidates need in order to be shortlisted and appointed could make it more likely that candidates from underrepresented groups will apply.
- A lack or low level of remuneration for public appointments and limited flexibility of terms and conditions may hinder efforts to increase diversity. Remuneration also needs to be handled carefully to avoid stigma around claiming payments.
- Raising awareness through information events, training, advertising, and role modelling can help increase diversity in public appointments. It will be important to target these approaches, use language sensitively, and avoid reinforcing stereotypes about underrepresented groups.
- While unconscious bias in shortlisting and appointing exists, tackling it at an individual level might not be a productive means to increase diversity.
- Interview techniques may disadvantage some candidates and unfairly advantage others, and issues related to accessibility and who sits on the panel can affect this.
- Transparent selection processes and candid feedback for unsuccessful applicants may help to encourage candidates to reapply (successfully) in future.

Introduction

The Chief Whip and Deputy Minister has asked the Wales Centre for Public Policy to provide evidence on how recruitment processes can help to improve diversity in public appointments in Wales. Public bodies are organisations which are funded to deliver a public service, from local health boards to national park authorities. The Public Appointments Team (PAT) in the Welsh Government has recently been established to coordinate all public appointments, providing an opportunity to review recruitment processes. In early 2020 the Welsh Government released a strategy for improving diversity in public appointments in Wales. The vision behind this strategy is to ensure that 'decision making in Wales utilises all the talents, voices and lived experience of the peoples of Wales, and is more inclusive so as to achieve better outcomes for all citizens' (Welsh Government, 2020a: 17).

What 'increasing diversity' means and why it matters

'Diversity' is a complex and contested term, but in organisational studies it is broadly used to refer both to workforce demographics and to 'inclusive' behaviours, policies, and culture within an organisation (Point and Singh, 2003: 751). For the purposes of this report, increasing diversity in public appointments means that the boards of public bodies reflect the range of demographics and protected characteristics of people in Wales.

In particular, the Welsh Government is interested in how Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)[1] candidates and disabled candidates[2] can be better supported to apply and be successful in public appointments. These groups are currently underrepresented on boards in Wales.

Increasing diversity in public appointments is important for several reasons. Since the work of public bodies can have a significant influence on citizens' lives, it is important that the boards of these bodies represent the people they serve and understand the issues affecting them. Diverse boards also maximise the available talent and expertise and help to avoid 'group think', which can happen if boards are made up only of those from similar backgrounds (Sealy et al., 2009: 5). The focus in this evidence review is on how diversity can be increased, rather than on why it is important to increase diversity, but a more detailed case for increasing diversity in public appointments is outlined in the Welsh Government's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

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[1] See Atewologun, Tresh and Warmington (2020) for an explanation of the problems associated with this term and advice on its usage.
[2] There is a long-standing debate about terminology, particularly whether 'disabled people' or 'people with a disability' is more appropriate; see Disability Wales (2020) for an explanation of this.

While there may be some common strategies which can support candidates from underrepresented groups to apply and be successful in roles such as public appointments, as outlined in this report, there is not a 'one size fits all' approach. The aim of increasing the diversity of candidates who not only apply but are also successful reflects the Welsh Government's focus on equality of outcome rather than equality of opportunity. To date, systemic inequalities have prevented equitable outcomes for members of underrepresented groups and therefore intervention or positive action is required to reduce or mitigate the impact of these inequalities. Specific strategies may be required to attract and appoint individuals based on the inequalities they experience. An understanding of how these groups experience other forms of inequality based on the intersection of disability, race, gender and other characteristics will need to inform this.

The underrepresentation in public appointments of those from ethnic minority backgrounds (including those with disabilities) and majority ethnic people (i.e. White) with disabilities cannot be viewed in isolation from the inequalities and systemic discrimination experienced by these groups in everyday life. As Ogbonna (2020) argues, 'given that there is such a close association between organisational culture and societal culture, it follows that, without radical intervention, the racism and discrimination in the wider society will be mirrored in work organisations', including on the boards of public bodies. Improving diversity in public appointments can go some way towards creating a more equal society but must also be coupled with efforts to address these wider inequalities in all aspects of Welsh life.

The Welsh context

Around 100 appointments each year are made by or on behalf of Welsh Government ministers to the boards of over 54 public bodies (Welsh Government, 2020a). The most recent data (Commissioner for Public Appointments, 2019) show that almost two thirds (63.5%) of public appointments and reappointments were made to women in Wales (up from 30% in 2009-10). However, while 6% of the Welsh population is from an ethnic minority background, only 3% of appointees were from ethnic minority backgrounds. Those who are disabled are particularly underrepresented. Although 22.5% of the population in Wales is disabled, only 5.1% of appointees in 2018-19 were disabled. The representation of other characteristics among appointees, such as socioeconomic status, age, sexuality, or intersecting protected characteristics, are not currently reported on. This may be because the number of appointments according to these characteristics are too few in Wales for the data to be anonymous. All data are held by the Welsh Government and annually reported to the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Review questions and method

This rapid evidence review addresses the following question:

How do recruitment processes affect the likelihood that candidates from a range of diverse backgrounds will apply and be successful in a public appointment?

The findings will inform the Welsh Government's plans to trial new approaches to public appointment recruitment as outlined in the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (Welsh Government, 2020b).

This rapid review involved a literature review drawing on academic and grey literature on increasing diversity in public appointments, though there is limited research specifically focused on public appointments. As such literature on recruitment to private sector boards and organisations in general is also drawn on where there is transferable evidence. This review explores how recruitment of candidates from underrepresented backgrounds can be affected by system-wide issues, role design, advertising and awareness, shortlisting processes, interview techniques and how the appointment decision is made.

System-wide issues

Systemic issues that are wider than the recruitment process have an impact on diversity in public appointments.

The extent to which the Welsh population is aware of public appointments and understands their function and importance may be limited, which may restrict the pool of potential applicants. For example, a 2010 study found that only one third of UK adults understood what public appointments are (Cameron and Skinner, 2010, in Flinders et al., 2011). In addition, negative media depictions of public appointments including scandals around expenses and political patronage may risk putting candidates off from participating (Flinders et al., 2011). In the context of local government positions, the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee have called for greater efforts to educate young people about public appointments. The Local Democracy Week held annually in Bridgend is an example of efforts to do this (ELGC, 2019).

Another systemic barrier to progress on increasing diversity is an unwillingness or lack of confidence within organisations to discuss diversity and inclusion issues. Sir John Parker states that 'race and ethnicity are the most difficult things to talk about in the United Kingdom, for good and bad reasons – they are just too hard and too sensitive' (Parker Review Committee, 2020). Atewologun et al. (2020) argue that many employees and senior leaders are not 'diversity fluent' and are not able to articulate proficiently differences in career outcomes for different groups. The diversity policies of over half (52%) of FTSE 250 companies do not explicitly mention race or ethnicity (The Parker Review Committee, 2020) and there are concerns that many business leaders have failed to champion ethnic diversity in their organisations (CMI and BAM, 2018). Similarly, the Holmes Review (2018) on opening

up public appointments to disabled people found that low disability awareness amongst panel members was a barrier to increasing representation.

These challenges might reflect a general tendency to view the issue of representation on boards (both public and private) through the lens of gender rather than that race or disability. As Sealy et al. (2009) note, existing evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to increase the diversity of boards predominantly relates to gender. While some of this evidence may be transferrable to race, disability and other characteristics, there is a lack of evidence examining whether and under what circumstances this is the case. In many instances, interventions targeted towards women may not address the barriers faced by other groups. Issues such as the accessibility of job packs and the availability of adjustments affect disabled candidates of all genders and will not be resolved through gender-based approaches. In addition, an approach based solely on gender may not be effective in increasing the representation of a diverse range of women including ethnic minority women and disabled women (Foster, 2019).

Role design

The way in which roles are designed is largely separate to the recruitment process but may also play a significant role in attracting a diverse range of candidates.

A narrow understanding of 'experience' may present a barrier for candidates from a diverse range of backgrounds. Many adverts for board positions stipulate that applicants should have senior level leadership or previous board experience. A recent example is an advertisement for the Wales Commissioner of the Equality and Human Rights Commission which lists 'senior level leadership experience and the ability to work collaboratively and chair at Board level' as an essential criteria (Cabinet Office, 2020). Requiring this kind of experience has been identified as a barrier to increasing diversity and can be particularly problematic for young people and those from underrepresented backgrounds. Recommendations have been made to instead focus on skills, competencies and lived experience (Flinders et al, 2011, Arts Council England, 2017, Holmes Review, 2018). Requiring previous board experience limits the pool of applicants to those already holding board positions, making it difficult for emerging leaders to gain experience.

The focus on seniority has been ascribed to a reluctance to take risks. A recruitment consultant reported bringing a diverse range of candidates forward at the request of ministers in the UK Government only to find that they were rejected by officials 'who apply a narrow and risk-adverse definition of merit' (Flinders et al., 2011: 135). The pressures faced by public bodies and boards, particularly those subject to higher levels of scrutiny and regulatory oversight, are likely to play a role. Regarding NHS England, there are concerns that risk-aversion has led to the 'recycling' of senior NHS leaders and a lack of willingness to draw on talent and expertise from outside the service (Warmington, 2018). Flinders et al. (2011) have

pointed to the advantages of drawing on talent from different sectors, including the value of having lay members on boards with a scientific or technical focus. However, this approach will not necessarily result in the representation of underrepresented groups and other measures to increase the representation of ethnic minority and disabled people should also be taken.

Pay and conditions

A lack of or a low level of remuneration attached to public appointments can also hinder efforts to increase diversity. Public appointments in the UK are generally unpaid or can require full-time work for part-time pay (Flinders, et al., 2011). Across the UK, there are significant gender, ethnicity, and disability pay gaps. In 2018, the median pay of disabled employees was £10.63 an hour compared to £12.11 per hour for employees with no disability (ONS, 2019a). There is also a significant pay gap between Bangladeshi (£9.60 per hour) and Pakistani (£10.00 per hour) employees when compared to White employees (£12.03 per hour) (ONS, 2019b). These figures do not take account of the likely inequalities across the distribution, and there is evidence that progression to senior leadership is slower and more limited for ethnic minority individuals (Saggar et al., 2016). The impact of low remuneration may be further exacerbated for those who are part of two or more affected groups and for those with additional unavoidable expenses relating to health conditions or disabilities.

As a result, underrepresented groups, including those with multiple protected characteristics, may be disproportionately impacted by a lack of remuneration. The Holmes Review (2018) concluded that the lack of remuneration, funding for adjustments, and expenses are more likely to exclude disabled applicants. However, the question of whether and how any remuneration or expenses interact with the benefits systems will also be of importance to applicants on low incomes or in receipt of disability related benefits (Holmes Review, 2018). Low remuneration is also likely to inhibit the participation of those with dependants and caring responsibilities, and the processes surrounding remuneration may make some feel uncomfortable claiming. Councillors in Wales can access a care allowance in addition to their salary of £13,600. However, some do not feel comfortable making use of this owing to the intense scrutiny around expenses (ELGC, 2019).

Beyond remuneration, the terms and conditions may also impact on the attractiveness of the appointment to candidates. The OECD (2009) identified a lack of flexible working conditions as a barrier to diversity in the public sector. The availability of flexible working opportunities may be particularly attractive to disabled candidates and those with caring responsibilities. There are many examples of high performing senior leaders who work part-time, job-share, and have taken career breaks. Timewise, a flexible working consultancy, highlights successful examples of flexible working at a senior level in its Power 50 awards. Previous winners include those who use increased flexibility to spend more time with their family, care for family-members, or manage health conditions. The Equality, Local Government and

Communities Committee has highlighted a successful example of a job share between two councillors at Swansea Council (ELGC, 2019).

Other factors such as the availability of remote working and the timing and location of board meetings may also present a barrier. The ELGC (2019) has emphasised the importance of technology in allowing those with caring and work responsibilities and those from rural locations to access council meetings. The timing and location of board activities may also play a role. Meetings scheduled in the daytime may present a challenge to those in employment and could privilege retirees and those without caring responsibilities (Flinders et al., 2011, ELGC, 2019). The Scottish Government has recommended that job advertisements should be clear on the time commitment anticipated, whether telephone and video conferencing are supported, and when and where the board meets (Scottish Government, 2019).

While it is possible that some of these barriers have been alleviated in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, the question of the extent to which increased remote working will persist remains. There is a significant distinction between remote working being permitted and being a common and accepted practice for all. Remote working practices have been subject to stigma in the past, with some organisations and individuals viewing working from home with suspicion (Knight, 2017). The extent to which the pandemic will have a lasting impact on perceptions of home working remains unclear.

Advertising and awareness

The advertising of public appointment opportunities is an important aspect of securing applications from a diverse pool of candidates. Advertisements can take various forms, including news articles, social media posts, informal networking, and events. This section will consider the evidence on difference methods of advertising before considering how language influences representation.

Information events

Information events are increasingly used to publicise the availability of board positions, to demystify the application process, and to encourage applicants from a diverse range of backgrounds to apply. In Scotland, a network aiming to increase board diversity, Changing the Chemistry, runs board information events with public bodies such as the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency and South of Scotland Enterprise. Events provide information on the benefits of being a board member, the work of the organisations, and what the appointment involves. The NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde have similarly promoted board positions through open meetings held in a community venue in Glasgow, attracting a more diverse applicant pool (Ethical Standards Commissioner, 2016).

Providing information about the application process can remove uncertainties, allay fears, and ensure that individuals from underrepresented groups are better prepared (Singh, 2008). Events of this kind can also provide a platform for board members from underrepresented groups to share their experiences and encourage attendees to apply. However, some have cautioned that such events should be designed with care to avoid the risk of reinforcing stereotypes about underrepresented groups. Events focusing on support and training may risk implying that these groups require additional training to access board roles (Sealy et al., 2009). Focusing on what candidates could do differently may risk framing diversity in public appointments as being the responsibility of individual applicants and diminishing the responsibility of organisations to make wider systemic changes.

Advertisements

Job advertisements play an important role in communicating the nature of the role and have the potential to either discourage or attract candidates from a more diverse range of backgrounds. Where jobs are advertised has emerged as a particular issue for diversity and inclusion and the Holmes Review (2018) criticised the UK Government for an over-reliance on the Centre for Public Appointments' website.

To increase the reach of adverts, recruitment campaigns can be targeted at more specialist or community-orientated media. The Appointments Commission has reported placing adverts in a range of media including Good Housekeeping and media for specific ethnic groups with the aim of dispelling myths about public appointments (Flinders et al., 2011). The City of Toronto translated adverts for board positions into a range of languages, placed adverts into media for minority ethnic groups, and disseminated information about the positions at community events such as the Toronto Pow Wow, an annual cultural celebration for First Nations communities (Maytree, undated).

Public bodies in the UK have experimented with using different online media, aiming to attract younger candidates. The Social Mobility Commission has used alternative ways to advertise for board positions, using news articles in outlets such as the Huffington Post to attract applications from younger people (Holmes Review, 2018). The Scottish Housing Regulator used Twitter to advertise a board position to young applicants and reported receiving a higher number of phone enquiries about the role than expected (Ethical Standards Commissioner, 2017). However, more evidence is needed about the potential limitations of targeted advertising strategies on social media. There are longstanding concerns around social media creating 'echo chambers' and job adverts placed on social media platforms may not necessary reach a diverse audience.

Networks

The use of informal networks has been recognised as a potential challenge to increasing diversity on boards in all sectors. There are longstanding concerns that boards in the public,

private and voluntary sectors predominantly recruit through informal processes (such as being invited by another board member) rather than through open advertisements. Inclusive Boards (2018) found that most charity trustees are recruited through an informal process and only 5% of board members responding to their survey reported responding to an advert. Similarly, Ogbonna (2019) finds that many organisations use social networks as part of their recruitment processes which may disadvantage ethnic minority individuals who are less likely to be part of those networks.

In contrast, targeting more diverse networks may have positive effects in terms of diversity (Holmes Review, 2018; Tipper, 2004; Scottish Government, 2019). In Australia, Belgium, Ireland, Japan and the Netherlands, partnerships with recruitment agencies in the voluntary and private sectors are used to reach a larger pool of potential applicants for roles in the public sector (OECD, 2009). Others recommend using more specialised networks such as Disabled Persons Organisations and voluntary networks orientated towards increasing board diversity (such as Changing the Chemistry). Cranfield University's Women to Watch supplement showcases a diverse range of women well suited to positions on corporate boards and in 2019 focused on minority ethnic women (Cranfield University, 2019). Examples of similar networks in Wales include those coordinated by the Women's Equality Network, Chwarae Teg, the Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team (EYST) and Disability Wales. Advocates of this approach emphasise the potential 'multiplier' effect of tapping into new networks as they in turn can encourage those in their networks to promote the opportunity further (Holmes Review, 2018).

Some organisations have used additional informal measures to reach target groups, whether by reaching out to talented individuals from underrepresented groups or by tapping into more diverse informal networks. The Scottish Government (2019) has highlighted the value of individual approaches for attracting a more diverse range of candidates. Individual approaches were found to be a useful method for attracting women to roles who might self-select themselves out of an application process based on misconceptions of what the role requires. Tipper (2004) recommends using employee referrals to increase diversity by asking employees from underrepresented groups to recommend others in their networks. This approach will be limited if there is a limited number or lack of employees from underrepresented groups or if those asked to make referrals do not have diverse networks themselves.

Others have engaged consultancies and executive search agencies to recruit a more diverse range of candidates. Organisations might engage with agencies with specific expertise on diversity and inclusion. Building connections with Disabled Persons Organisations, for example, can raise employer awareness of disability and provide expertise and support in making adjustments (Equity and Diversity Directorate, 2011). There are concerns, however, that more generalist executive search agencies may not necessarily engage with a diverse group of potential applicants. A potential solution to this concern is to use a contractual

clause on diversity and inclusion when commissioning external recruiters (Holmes, 2018). For example, when the National Australia Bank engages with external recruitment agencies they are required to demonstrate that they comply with the Bank's Diversity and Inclusion Policy, have their own diversity and inclusion policy, and provide appropriate diversity training for their staff (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016). CMI and BAM (2017) found that only 33% of responding private companies set diversity requirements for recruitment agencies and head-hunters but the majority of those considered it to be an effective method, with 25% stating it was 'very effective' and 50% 'fairly effective'.

Role models

Being able to see examples of a diverse range of leaders has been found to be important in securing increased applications from candidates from underrepresented groups. Clearly, this will only be a viable solution if there are already leaders from these groups in the organisation. A survey of HR and Diversity Managers in the private sector found that a lack of a diverse pool of role models was perceived as the biggest challenge in promoting ethnic minority talent (CMI and BAM, 2017). However, many organisations use web images which represent only one ethnic group (typically White employees). This was found to be the case for 53% of FTSE 100 companies (CMI and BAM, 2017). Spotlighting role models from ethnic minority backgrounds in publicity was felt to be effective, with 70% of managers stating that it was a 'very effective' or 'fairly effective' method.

This finding is supported by academic evidence on the effectiveness of using photographs depicting diversity in job advertisements. Research from the US found that potential applicants from African American or Hispanic backgrounds were more attracted to job adverts when photographs display ethnic diversity (Avery, 2004). However, this effect was mediated by the extent to which participants believed that they were similar to the people represented. This could mean that representations of diversity will not necessarily encourage individuals from all underrepresented groups to apply. In addition, there seems to be a preference among organisations to display images of Black employees sometimes to the exclusion of other minority ethnic groups (CMI and BAM, 2017). This could present a barrier to encouraging those from a wide range of minority ethnic groups to apply.

The importance of role models extends beyond visual representation. The use of narrative or storytelling to showcase the experiences of leaders from underrepresented groups is also favoured by some organisations. Sainsbury's has created career mapping tools which depict a diverse range of employees at all levels of the business and are shared at external careers events (CMI and BAM, 2017). Lloyd's Bank has argued that using only positive messages and using statistics and facts is not as effective as telling stories to which a diverse group of applicants can relate. They have shifted their strategy to a more story-based approach which focuses on individuals and have found this approach has led to greater engagement (CMI and BAM, 2017).

Language

The language used in job adverts and other publicity materials may also impact on the recruitment of a more diverse group of candidates. There is evidence to suggest that the language used in job packs and adverts has a gendered impact, but there is limited evidence around the impact of language used on potential applicants with disabilities across ethnicities or those from an ethnic minority background without disabilities. Gaucher et al. (2011) conducted experimental studies to test the impact of gendered wording in job advertisements. They found that job adverts in more male dominated occupations used more words associated with male stereotypes such as 'leader, competitive and dominant' and that women found these jobs less appealing. The Scottish Government (2019) recommends that the language used in adverts for public appointments should be considered carefully for gender bias and this should also be the case for racial and disability bias.

Statements detailing the organisation's commitment to equal opportunities and diversity have also been found to be effective in some instances. A US study found that Black applicants were more attracted by advertising referencing identity-conscious staffing and affirmative action plans (Avery, 2004). The Scottish Government (2019) has recommended including an explicit statement naming the target groups who are being particularly encouraged to apply. In some cases, recruiters have been encouraged to reaffirm their commitment to choosing the 'best' candidate for the role when implementing diversity measures (e.g. Tipper, 2004). However, such statements risk conflating increasing diversity with the lowering of standards and therefore reinforcing bias against underrepresented groups (Parker Review Committee, 2020).

Other aspects of the language used in job advertisements have also been raised as potential concerns. The Arts Council England (2017) recommends limiting the number of criteria to ten or only those which are essential to the role. They also recommend being clear about the level of skill required and detailing how each criterion will be assessed in the application process.

Shortlisting

Unconscious bias

'Unconscious bias' (sometimes referred to as 'implicit bias') refers to beliefs and attitudes that are held, and used in judgement, prior to or without conscious awareness of those beliefs. These associations can be biased in the sense that they might lead us to associate certain qualities with a person based on other associations we make about that person. These biases can be present whatever one's 'conscious' (or explicit) beliefs and attitudes.

A common way to measure unconscious bias is the Implicit Associations Test (IAT). This aims to measure implicit bias by asking participants to discriminate between two 'target-concepts' (e.g. White and Black people), and then to measure attributes relating to those target-concepts (Greenwald et al, 1998). For each there would be a task to associate positive or negative ideas with these target-concepts. An unconscious bias would be displayed if the respondent was faster to associate positive ideas with one category than the other, or vice-versa.

Recent research has used unconscious bias to attempt to understand persisting inequalities. While much of this research has focused on race, other forms of bias have also been considered, including disability. Owing to the focus of this review, the evidence discussed below relates primarily to employment and recruitment.

Experiments suggest that unconscious bias operates in the recruitment process. Candidates in the US with stereotypically Black names are less likely to receive a callback for job interviews than those with stereotypically White names, given similar CVs (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004). In the UK, research has found a similar effect for applicants with Muslim names compared to those with Christian names (Abubaker and Bagley, 2017), though there are limitations to this study, as with other CV-dependant studies, that make it difficult to measure the true extent of the phenomenon. Nonetheless, while difficult to quantify exactly, research in the UK and US does consistently show poorer outcomes for minority candidates in the hiring process, and it would be surprising if this were solely owing to statistical churn or chance.

Some research has suggested that unconscious bias might be triggered by a combination of factors rather than a single cue: for instance, Purkiss et al. (2006) found that bias is more prevalent when an interview candidate (in the US) had both a stereotypically Hispanic name and accent than when they had only a Hispanic name or a Hispanic accent. This may indicate that racial or ethnic bias might be increased the more clearly the applicant sits in a perceived 'outgroup' from the interviewer. This points to broader social questions about integration and assimilation that are beyond the scope of this review.

There is less evidence about the extent of unconscious bias in organisations against disabled people, despite known employment underrepresentation. The legal definition of disability includes both mental and physical impairments, and it is possible that this makes evaluating bias more difficult: for instance, people may have different attitudes to different types of disability (e.g. physical vs mental). This should not be overstated, however: there are some indications that implicit attitudes towards people with mental illnesses are not dependant on the exact diagnosis, instead, respondents seem to unconsciously place individuals into binary 'people with/without mental illness' categories (Schlier and Lincoln, 2019).

Some research suggests that adopting the 'social model' of disability could assist in reducing unconscious bias towards disabled applicants by changing the social conditions and removing barriers to the participation of disabled people in the workforce (Bunbury, 2019).[3] This model would, on Bunbury's account, need to be supplemented with a firm recognition of difference rather than attempting to assimilate disabled people into the workforce; this would, he argues, have effects on unconscious bias further down the line. Bunbury's paper is not experimental, however, and it could be argued that adoption of the social model alone will not suffice to increase representation. The Welsh Government adopted the social model in 2002 as the basis for its work on disability, but it would appear that this has only had limited success in increasing representation and reducing bias.

It is important to acknowledge that, while IATs and other forms of unconscious bias training may help individuals recognise certain predispositions, they should not be seen as an effective measure for reducing prejudice or for increasing positive attitudes towards diversity and inclusion. Reviews of evidence show at best a very weak effect on attitudes following unconscious bias training. Though training can be effective for awareness raising and for reducing implicit bias, it is unlikely to eliminate bias and there is limited evidence that training (much of which is limited to information giving or awareness raising) can change behaviour (Atewologun et al., 2018). There is also a risk that such training might 'backfire' if it promotes the idea that implicit attitudes cannot change, or that they are difficult to change (CIPD 2019; Atewologun et al., 2018). This is a real risk, as evidence suggests that, while implicit attitudes can be changed, it is in fact difficult to change them substantially (Forscher et. al., 2019). People may become more accepting of their biases if they believe that they are unlikely to be able to change them.

Likewise, evidence suggests that there may only be a very weak relationship between implicit attitudes and explicit actions or behaviours. Carlsson and Agerström (2016) argue that the IAT does not successfully predict discrimination outcomes. In other words, a higher level of measured implicit bias does not correlate with a higher level of observed discrimination. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Forscher et. al. finds 'no evidence that changes in implicit measures mediate changes in behaviour' (2019: 543), suggesting that even when implicit biases are successfully changed this does not appear to translate to changes in individual behaviour.

Taken together, this suggests that while unconscious bias exists, tackling it at an individual level might not be a productive means to increase representation. More work will need to be

[3] The social model of disability '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 2020a; emphasis in original). This places the onus on society to adapt to the needs of people with impairments rather than asking them to adapt to society.

done to understand the extent of unconscious bias in the recruitment process and reliable remedies beyond personal interventions.

Anonymous applications

If interventions at the individual level are not effective in reducing levels of unconscious bias, however, there are still measures that can be taken to reduce the impact of such bias. Anonymising applications by removing personal details (prominently name, but also sections such as personal interests or education) helps mitigate the impact of everyday bias and is often seen as facilitating hiring from a broader and more diverse pool of applicants.

Anonymous applications appear to equalise the rate at which those from ethnic minority backgrounds receive callbacks to the same level as majority groups in most cases (Rinne, 2018). However, there are insufficient data to analyse how this translates into job offers. Rinne's analysis also indicates that the effectiveness of anonymous applications will depend on initial conditions: where the aim is to reduce discrimination, it is useful, but if the aim is explicitly to increase representation (e.g. through using a protected characteristic to choose between equally-qualified candidates) it may be more limited.

Some of the studies cited show that anonymised applications might be less effective where hiring practices already promote diversity. A study for the Australian Government found that minority candidates were disproportionately interviewed for executive-level positions under traditional hiring practices, and that introducing anonymous hiring actually decreased the proportion of minority candidates reaching interview (BETA, 2017). While positive discrimination is unlawful in the UK, this does suggest current shortlisting and hiring practices will need to be taken into account before introducing any significant changes.

While anonymous applications will be of more immediate benefit in tackling gender and race discrimination, extending this to disability presents a different challenge that policymakers should be mindful of. Additionally, there are some data to suggest that — at least in the case of gender — hiring managers might recode anonymised applications based on implicit signals such as writing style and leave patterns (Foley and Williamson, 2018). This may be in part because asking people not to focus on stereotypes can make those stereotypes more salient (Foley and Williamson 2018). While this is a risk with regard to gender, it is likely to be generalisable to race (e.g. if a candidate's education or experience is outside the UK) or disability (e.g. non-standard work history and/or breaks in employment).

More thoroughgoing attempts to anonymise applications include Applied, a product from the UK's Behavioural Insights Team. Applied promotes job-specific skills-based questions for job applications rather than traditional CVs, the answers to which are grouped by question rather than individual. This allows for initial assessment based on skills rather than experience, and could address some attempts to recode individuals based on their CV details. Self-published research suggests that using Applied resulted in a more diverse group of candidates passing

through initial sifts, although the sample size was too small to show statistically in terms of ethnic minority and disabled applicants (Glazebrook, 2016). While software of this sort might be useful, adoption for public appointments will depend on the balance that the Welsh Government wishes to strike between job skills and prior experience in the area, which may be considered an important prerequisite.

It is important to note that, while anonymising applications can increase representation, it will require a sufficiently large and diverse pool of applicants to have any benefit. Additionally, it cannot deal with any explicit or implicit bias that may be present at the interview or job offer stage, which will need to be mitigated in different ways.

Interview techniques

Interview format and accessibility

The way in which an interview is conducted may disadvantage some candidates and unfairly advantage others. Particularly for senior appointments, interviews are likely to focus on certain forms of work experience and presentational styles with which some individuals from underrepresented backgrounds may be unfamiliar. The Holmes Review into opening up public appointments for disabled people notes that this can take three forms:

1. Many disabled people have non-standard work histories and might not have experience in formal interviews;
2. Candidates on the autistic spectrum, or those who communicate through British Sign Language, might find communication challenging; and
3. A focus on sector knowledge and competence can exclude those who come from outside the sector, but who might nonetheless have the skillset needed to take on the role. (Holmes, 2018)

In addition, the interview process may include some informal or semi-formal elements that form part of the overall candidate impression but which are not considered part of the interview process. For instance, the way in which candidates make small talk, speak, or present themselves at interview could have an impact on their likelihood of receiving an offer. Dadas (2018) describes how expectations around the social element of interviews can have an unequal effect for ethnic minority or disabled candidates in academic job interviews. Like academic appointments, public appointments too tend to involve entry into a relatively small, tight-knit group with specific cultural norms and expectations. The core question is therefore whether candidates are expected already to operate within these norms prior to interview, whether they might be inducted into them post-appointment, or whether a more expansive set of norms and values might operate better while being more inclusive.

Dadas recommends that interview panels operate in an open and 'generous' way. This might include changing expectations around how candidates interact with members of the interview panel, recognising that expecting interview candidates to operate within dominant organisational norms can exclude candidates who are not familiar with, or who sit outside, these norms. Removing this expectation would allow for a more diverse set of candidates to be considered on their merits.

More broadly, Dadas suggests that interview panels might allow interviewees an element of choice over the way in which their interview is conducted and the medium through which it is conducted — rather than holding remote interviews over the phone, for instance, some candidates might prefer videoconferencing. Offering a range of (role-appropriate) interview methods could enhance candidate performance and, in particular, could enhance the accessibility of the interview process (Dadas, 2018). Interviewees might also be given questions ahead of time, to allow them to plan answers, which could be particularly important for candidates who do not work well under pressure — including those who experience anxiety (Dadas, 2018). These changes would need to be considered within a broader consideration of the types of skills interview panels are looking to test, and whether a dialogical or cross-examination style is deemed more appropriate (Dadas, 2018). On the other hand, one study suggests that a structured interview style could increase fairness among all candidates (Brecher et.al. cited in Lindsay et. al. 2017).

Accessibility of interviews can be a major barrier for those who are disabled, particularly when the onus is felt to be on the disabled person themselves to request adjustments or to make arrangements for access. This can be particularly damaging where adjustments are not well-implemented, causing discomfort or stress (Holmes, 2018). Holmes makes a series of recommendations on appropriately implementing adjustments, including contacting interviewees well ahead of time to plan and ensuring that adjustments to meet non-physical disabilities are also implemented (Holmes, 2018). Likewise, Dadas suggests that panels should pro-actively contact interviewees to make adjustments rather than wait for individuals to request them — perhaps through an independent third party who is not connected to the panel but who can ensure that needs are met (Dadas, 2018). While accessibility is commonly conceived in terms of physical infrastructure, both Dadas and Holmes emphasise the importance of non-physical accessibility: ensuring that candidates are not disadvantaged by cultural or communication issues is also important. This could mean, among other things, ensuring that interviews are held in a non-threatening space, to put people at ease.

The Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS)

GIS (now part of Disability Confident) offers an interview to disabled candidates who meet the essential criteria for a post at the sifting stage if they request it by ticking a box on the application form. While this should assist candidates to get past the initial stages of the process, and could promote those who might not otherwise get through the sifting process,

opinions appear to be mixed on its effectiveness. While some candidates are broadly supportive, others are more hostile (seeing it as a form of tokenism) or believe that it might actually harm their chances of achieving an interview (Holmes, 2018). Anecdotally, Holmes reports that some recruiters suggest that candidates have been hired as a result of GIS who would not otherwise have been shortlisted. To improve the perception of the scheme among applicants, it should be made clear that the purpose of GIS is to allow candidates to show their aptitude rather than to promote tokenism. Additionally, to avoid scepticism and frustration, feedback could be offered to candidates who do not meet the minimum criteria for interview.

Who sits on the panel?

Part of these wider access considerations includes considering who sits on interview panels. Having a representative who shares characteristics with the interviewee is not just a question of representation, but could help the rest of the panel to understand specific needs. The Holmes Review noted that including a disabled panellist could bring a range of benefits including better awareness of possible access and awareness issues and increasing confidence in interviewees (Holmes, 2018). There is a similar awareness that having ethnic minority panel members can increase the success and confidence of ethnic minority applicants, and at the UK level Senior Civil Service interview panels are now required to have at least one panellist with a disability or from an ethnic minority background (Cabinet Office, undated).

It may be difficult to achieve diversity on all interview panels owing to the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities and people with disabilities on existing boards. Alternative strategies might be borrowed from onboarding processes, recognising that these might not translate perfectly. For instance, candidates might be invited to meet informally with one or two existing board members in order to understand the roles, background and expertise of those with whom they will be working. This could give interviewers and interviewees the opportunity to identify areas of commonality, which can lessen the impression of difference (Atewologun, undated).

While these are commonly agreed upon by practitioners and in the grey literature, there does not appear to have been extensive academic research into the effectiveness of these measures. Anecdotal evidence does suggest that interview panels involving underrepresented groups are valued and could be part of a series of measures to support both ethnic minority and disabled candidates at the interview stage.

Making the appointment

Selection process

Part of the selection process will involve reflecting upon the impression of the candidate at each stage of the appointment process, and changes to the application, shortlisting and interview process will, ideally, feed into the appointment process and result in successful candidates being more representative of the population of Wales.

To support this process, the UK Government Centre for Public Appointments (CPA) proposed ensuring that information on the existing diversity of boards was made available to Ministers during the appointment process (CPA, undated). Care should be taken to avoid ingroup bias in appointments (e.g. the appointment of people 'like' the panel members). Where two candidates are of equal merit, it is lawful under the Equalities Act 2010 to appoint a candidate from an underrepresented group over the other candidate.

More diversity on appointment panels is also likely to increase the number of ethnic minority candidates and disabled candidates who are deemed 'appointable'. This should, over time, increase the proportion who are eventually appointed.

An alternative proposal, to avoid problems with 'cronyism' and appointment through networking, is for public appointments and board appointments to be decided through lottery (Carson and Lubensky, 2009). This process could be implemented at any stage of the process, including after initial interviews, but would be particularly suitable where there is a pool of candidates with a similar skill level. While this would, over time, ensure sufficient diversity, it also takes an element of control away from interview panels and organisations and may be unappealing for this reason.

Feedback for unsuccessful candidates

It is very important that all candidates, regardless of background, be given as thorough feedback as possible after the appointment process has concluded. The Holmes Review noted that candidates who were interviewed under the GIS were often provided with unsatisfactory feedback, possibly as a result of a 'culture of fear' around being accused of discrimination (Holmes, 2018). This should be avoided. Candour in feedback will help unsuccessful candidates to understand how and where they can improve for future applications, providing valuable information. This will be particularly valuable for those coming to the process from outside the 'traditional' pool of applicants, who might lack the networks and support systems other candidates have. It is also important that strong but unsuccessful candidates should be encouraged to apply for other roles where suitable (CPA, undated).

While feedback is important, it is equally clear that it will not ensure success at reapplication unless wider inequalities and biases are addressed. This should therefore form part of a suite of measures to address discrimination at all stages of the hiring process.

Recommendations

Increasing diversity in public appointments will help to ensure that decision making in Wales reflects the people of Wales. The recruitment strategies used in public appointments are an important part (but not the only part) of achieving this aim.

Any approach on its own is likely to be insufficient to address underrepresentation on boards and a suite of measures is recommended:

- Improving practices around remuneration for public appointments and increasing the flexibility of terms and conditions may help efforts to increase diversity by encouraging candidates to apply for positions.
- Unconscious bias might affect the shortlisting, interviewing and appointment process, but it is not clear to what extent unconscious biases translate into behaviours, and interventions to reduce biases on a personal level might not be effective. A more productive method may be to remove or reduce the possibility of unconscious bias arising through techniques such as anonymous applications, although these have their own limitations.
- The interview process could be made more inclusive by using a wider range of interview formats and ensuring that interviews are conducted in an accessible way. Accessibility does not only refer to physical adjustments, but can also mean more inclusive environments and more approachable interview styles.
- Diversity among interview panellists could facilitate the appointment of candidates from underrepresented groups, although there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of this. Strategies to address this for boards without members from underrepresented groups would also need to be sought.
- Ministers should take the existing diversity of boards into account when making hiring decisions, and this information should be made available to them.
- Constructive feedback should be offered to all unsuccessful candidates and ‘near miss’ candidates should be encouraged to apply again in future.

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Author Details

Megan Park is Research Apprentice at Wales Centre for Public Policy.

Jack Price is Research Officer at Wales Centre for Public Policy.

Emma Taylor-Collins is Senior Research Officer at Wales Centre for Public Policy.

This report was peer reviewed by Dr Doyin Atewologun and Dr Fatima Tresh (Delta Alpha Psi).

For further information please contact:
Emma Taylor-Collins
Wales Centre for Public Policy
+44 (0) 29 2087 5345
info@wcpp.org.uk

Wales Centre for Public Policy
Canolfan Polisi Cyhoeddus Cymru