

Public Appointments in Wales:

Engagement findings report

March 2023



Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Background..... | 4 |
| Engagement..... | 4 |
| Participants..... | 4 |
| Recommendations..... | 5 |
| 1. A pipeline for future candidates..... | 7 |
| Lack of awareness and knowledge..... | 7 |
| Engagement with underrepresented groups..... | 8 |
| Training and development..... | 9 |
| Mentoring..... | 10 |
| 2. Recruitment..... | 11 |
| Advertising..... | 11 |
| The Application..... | 12 |
| Application software..... | 12 |
| Constructive Feedback..... | 13 |
| Interview..... | 14 |
| Transparency: Interview and appointment..... | 15 |
| 3. Getting Boards on board..... | 17 |
| Embracing diversity..... | 17 |
| Accessibility..... | 19 |
| Supporting new Board members..... | 20 |
| Proactive advocacy..... | 20 |
| 4. Remuneration..... | 21 |
| Remuneration barriers for underrepresented groups..... | 21 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Timeliness..... | 21 |
| Competitive remuneration..... | 22 |
| 5. Welsh Government: Strategy and support | 23 |
| Welsh Government’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments..... | 23 |
| Public Appointment and Honours Team..... | 24 |
| Visibility of and access to current Board members..... | 25 |
| Data on current, potential, and unsuccessful Board members | 26 |
| Annex 1: Interview Questions | 27 |
| Annex 2: Participant demographic..... | 28 |

Background

As part of the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee's inquiry into Public Appointments in Wales, the Citizen Engagement team proposed a qualitative approach to engagement, comprising of a series of interviews with people that have held, currently hold, or have applied for public appointment positions. This paper sets out the findings from those interviews.

Engagement

The Citizen Engagement Team conducted a series of **ten interviews** between 6 and 17 February 2023. The objective of the interviews was to understand the real and perceived barriers to increasing the diversity of candidates for public appointments in Wales. The Committee was also keen to hear how this could be improved.

The Committee commissioned the Senedd's Citizen Engagement Team to gather the views and lived experiences of people from different backgrounds, including age, gender, ethnicity, and disability, who hold, have held, or have applied for public appointments in Wales.

A list of the questions asked of participants can be found in **Annex 1**.

Participants

The Citizen Engagement Team recruited participants through a screening survey shared with over 60 public bodies and organisations.

Ten participants were selected for interview. Of the ten participants six identified as belonging to an underrepresented ethnic group, eight attended state school with six having received free school meals, and two identified as disabled.

A full demographic breakdown of the participants can be found in **Annex 2**.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the programme of engagement.

Recommendations

Participants gave their views on what actions could be taken by the Welsh Government and public boards to remove barriers faced by underrepresented groups and improve the diversity of candidates for public appointments in Wales.

Recommendation 1. The development of a centrally coordinated, Wales-wide mentoring programme to provide training on becoming an effective mentor to serving Board members and connect potential mentees with mentors. Mentors from underrepresented groups should be connected to mentees from similar underrepresented groups.

Recommendation 2. Public appointments should be advertised more widely and consider group-specific advertising.

Recommendation 3. Public appointment application forms should use simple language and clearly outline the commitments and responsibilities. The application form should be available in a variety of formats and languages.

Recommendation 4. People applying for public appointments should be able to submit a video application.

Recommendation 5. The public appointment application software and website should allow applicants to download and upload information as Word documents; edit applications for subsequent appointments; and require personal data to be submitted only once. Any new application system should be piloted by underrepresented groups to ensure accessibility.

Recommendation 6. Constructive, bespoke, specific, and developmental feedback should be given to all unsuccessful applicants. Boards should ask for feedback from applicants to improve the appointment process and experience.

Recommendation 7. To improve transparency, explicit ministerial guidance should be developed to outline timeliness of appointment, Ministerial conduct, and communication with recruitment panellists.

Recommendation 8. The Welsh Government should consider alternative models to develop diverse representation on Boards, such as that used by the Welsh Youth Parliament.

Recommendation 9. Boards should provide members with the necessary technology to take part effectively in hybrid meetings.

Recommendation 10. Public boards should consider developing a buddying system where experienced Board members pair up with newer Board members, to help upskill them on Board and strategic matters.

Recommendation 11. Welsh Government should make funds immediately available to Board members to pay for services or purchase goods necessary for them to carry out their role effectively.

Recommendation 12. The Welsh Government should create and maintain a publicly available and easy-to-access website hosting the membership and contact details of all board members.

Recommendation 13. The Welsh Government should collect and maintain comprehensive data on potential and unsuccessful applicants to develop ongoing communication and training with potential “rising stars”.

Recommendation 14. The Welsh Government should collect and maintain comprehensive data on current Board members to develop and review meaningful targets for Wales to improve Board membership.

Engagement findings

1. A pipeline for future candidates

Participants agreed that more needs to be done to improve the pipeline for future candidates for public appointments. Participants felt that more could be done to remove barriers to knowledge and awareness; engagement with underrepresented groups; training; and mentoring to develop candidates from underrepresented groups.

Lack of awareness and knowledge

1. Participants agreed that there is a general lack of awareness of what public bodies exist and what they do:

People don't know about public appointments or what a public appointment is. There's an assumption that...it's another job.

Only after my first application did I see all the different appointments, I didn't realise that there were so many opportunities...When the door opened I realised that there was this whole other world, then you think, how do people get into these roles if they don't even know about them?

2. It was agreed that this lack of understanding of what a public appointment is and what it involves is a barrier for many underrepresented groups:

The crucial bit for me is the barrier to people understanding what a public appointment is. If you're a carer or have child-caring requirements, this can still fit into your life and you can find a public appointment that can fit around your life. So, it's about having access to that information.

Engagement with underrepresented groups

3. Participants felt that more needs to be done to persuade people from underrepresented groups that public appointments are for them. A barrier to this is seeing un-diverse public body boards (Boards hereafter):

Board members tend to be from a certain demographic and background. This tends to be white, older retired people, or who are in senior leadership positions already. So, If you're a young person you might not consider a public appointment as something you could go into.

4. Several participants agreed that more could be done to engage with potential candidates and encourage people from underrepresented groups to apply for Board positions.

We need to link people's concerns or passions with public duty. For example, crime and the way in which police behave is a big issue for ethnic communities. That has pushed people to apply to certain boards as they want to make a difference. I hear that these sorts of issues are motivating younger people to consider public appointments.

...a small documentary could be made. It could follow someone who has a public appointment. Using a video advertising campaign where disabled people like myself could be followed on WhatsApp or Snapchat for a day. Using that type of modern media. People get a snapshot of this ivory tower of so-called public life.

5. However, participants were clear that engaging with underrepresented communities should not be tokenistic and should take place regularly:

People still talk about communities that are hard to engage, because that's a narrative that's been given but nobody ever talks about why communities like mine have shut down and don't want to engage. It's because it's tokenistic. People are coming to us at the eleventh hour because they have a tick box, and then we never hear from them, until they need to tick another box.

We shouldn't just wait for Ramadan before going into a Muslim community, but engage with that community 365. Similarly, with Black, African, and Caribbean communities.

- 6.** Some participants gave examples of good practice, where Boards have successfully engaged with potential candidates.

...on our website, we had role models that people could contact for advice. We also had high-profile females be speakers at events, it was a way of saying to women "ok, so you want to get on...here are the people who have succeeded, and they are willing for you to contact them". That was highly successful.

We did a drop-in day. Welsh Government advertised the positions, and the applicants were then given a day to visit...and meet with the chief executive and some key people. Various Welsh Government members also attended and spoke at the event and responded to questions.

Training and development

- 7.** Participants described the need to develop people who are interested and have potential but are not yet ready to apply for a public appointment.

In a recent recruitment exercise it seemed that some of the applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds might not have had the expertise or the skill set that we needed for the role. I wonder whether they are jumping the gun a bit.

To increase the diversity of candidates we need to consider...taking somebody from a basic interest to having the skills.

- 8.** Participants recognised that effective training should support people from underrepresented groups in growing their potential and should provide guidance on how to navigate the public appointments recruitment system. But concerns were voiced over the need to embrace diversity rather than negatively assimilate candidates:

I see the role of workshops as being to assimilate us into a pattern. They are very badly done. They are often done by white people and the message is "we are having to teach you"...I think that the current workshops are a waste of money and time. We

need workshops where we're clearly looking at developing people's strategic thinking...and what can they contribute to a board. It's all very well working on a board and being presented with board papers or an annual plan, but what's your contribution to that journey?

Mentoring

9. Participants spoke of the positive impact that could be had from mentoring, not only to enable people to feel credible as Board members but to develop "potential stars". It was suggested that more could be done to train current Board members in becoming effective mentors and connecting them with mentees:

Not everybody is right to be a mentor but certainly, there should be the expectation and the obligation on all board appointees that they may be called upon, supported and trained to offer mentoring.

If someone is thinking about public appointments it would be good to offer the names and contact details of people who are happy to be contacted to talk about the process. People who have gone through the process may not be connected with Welsh Government.

10. Participants recognised the need for a more efficient, coordinated, and Wales-wide mentoring programme to support people from underrepresented groups in growing their potential to eventually secure a Board position:

I don't feel that [mentoring schemes] are connected enough. Like the schemes are separate...Public bodies need to run their own mentoring schemes, which should join up with all other mentoring schemes so that they are all singing from the same sheet.

11. Participants also suggested that mentors should have a general understanding of the inequalities experienced by underrepresented groups, whether through proximity to that group or their own lived experience.

2. Recruitment

Participants agreed that the current recruitment process does not advertise effectively and submitting applications can be "clunky". Participants felt that more needs to be done to improve the application system, feedback process, and transparency of appointments to increase Board applications from underrepresented groups.

Advertising

12. Participants agreed that more needs to be done to advertise board appointments more widely to broaden the pool of candidates and attract people from underrepresented groups:

...we definitely don't do enough to mine faith groups, people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, or obtain a wider-reach through social media to attract younger folk. Any competition is only as good as the competitors who take part.

...if you're not willing to cough up the resources to advertise then you're going to get the same group of people applying over and over again.

13. Several participants suggested that the style and language used when advertising board vacancies do not reach out to underrepresented groups or demonstrate Inclusivity:

The style of language used in adverts, does it have boring civil service text or does it include a few pictures of what that role might involve, the people on the board, or the people the potential board member might come in contact with? This could try and convey that visual dimension to illustrate diversity and inclusion - how you could 'belong'.

The Application

14. Several participants described the application process as a "game", where it is essential to understand and use the required language to be successful:

I always tell people that there is an art to applying... There is a way of writing applications to get through the sift. Your class and socioeconomic background also have an impact; some people are writing an application but not saying the right things so that the sifters can't tick their box and shortlist you.

15. Participants felt that application forms are long-winded and unclear. Potential candidates should be able to understand what is expected of them in clear and simple language and application forms should be made available in a variety of formats and languages to encourage people from underrepresented groups in applying:

If you really want to engage with an audience that is underrepresented, even from a socioeconomic standpoint, it's important that you speak their languages...The application doesn't need to be more than one page and should have very simple standard language. It should be available in different languages, available in braille, and accessible to visually impaired people.

16. Many participants felt that video applications would be an effective tool in enabling people from underrepresented groups to submit application forms:

The Children's Commissioner was recently advertising for an advisory group, and you could submit your application by video. Some people aren't good at writing things but can process and present information well.

If you use a video application, the selection panel get to see what a person is like, you're not just reading a basic piece of paper.

Application software

17. Many participants felt that the accessibility and ease of use of the current application software is a barrier:

The website...is not accessible. Everything is put in PDF documents, which is difficult if you have to use assisted technology and ask someone to help type when applying for public appointments. You have to be able to use the software. The software is very clunky.

- 18.** Participants agreed that it is essential that people can download and upload Word documents; can edit applications for subsequent appointments; and should only have to submit personal data once:

The Welsh Government system isn't dreadful but my goodness they could do better in terms of manipulability. As a candidate, you desperately want to be able to re-use your unsuccessful application in other applications not just have to re-enter it all again! You want to be able to download a Word version of what you have submitted in your application. Very simple things that the current system doesn't allow.

You find yourself being asked the same questions, maybe three times through a recruitment process, from various bodies. Come on, try and make the process better!

- 19.** Some participants understood that any new application system would benefit from being piloted by underrepresented groups to ensure accessibility:

There is talk of a new system, let's just not let the geeks invent the system but let's have real applicant guinea pigs really road-test it.

Constructive Feedback

- 20.** All participants agreed that feedback for unsuccessful candidates was poor. Participants explained that feedback was rarely given, and when requested it consisted of a few sentences:

I've applied for nearly 30 roles and I've only ever received feedback once, which was one sentence saying that I didn't meet the criteria. How does that help me improve? I wrote to and spoke with a member of the Welsh Government Board, whom I had built a working relationship with. I asked the person to ask the public appointments unit why I've never had feedback, the answer was "nobody can tell me why you've never got feedback!". That's quite alarming, isn't it?

21. The tone of feedback was also deemed to be a barrier and more encouraging language combined would ensure that candidates continued to apply:

We must try and be more explicitly welcoming to encourage [underrepresented groups] to continue to apply...Because there will be lots of rejections along with successes.

22. Participants described the effectiveness of bespoke, specific, and actionable feedback, explaining that it is an essential tool in improving and developing candidates:

If you can't get feedback how are you supposed to improve on your interview and application, or put a training plan in place for your next appointment...if you don't have that experience how are you supposed to learn?

How unsuccessful but appointable candidates are handled needs to change. We need to make sure that those people who have applied get feedback...the letters to them need to be more explicit to support, nurture, and encourage.

23. Participants agreed that feedback is a two-way approach and that boards should consider asking for feedback from applicants to improve the appointment process and experience:

We should be asking for feedback from applicants...asking them two things every time they've applied: what is one thing we could have done better? What is one thing you think we did well?...to gather some useful data?

Interview

24. Some participants felt that it is important to have underrepresented groups on the interview panel:

I remember applying for one particular board...The board was very male, chauvinistic, and white. It was the worst experience that I have had...I wish I hadn't applied, primarily because the experience was so awful that it actually put me off applying for anything at all because I had such a bad experience.

25. Participants had a range of views about guaranteeing interviews for people from underrepresented groups. Some participants felt that more needs to be done to develop future candidates, and others suggested that applicants from underrepresented groups who meet the minimum criteria should be guaranteed an interview:

We gave [one group of Asian women] help with the application form and interview tips. We knew they didn't have the necessary requirements but nevertheless, we thought we were part of an experiment to positively encourage people from ethnic minorities to go forward for public appointments and be interviewed. But they didn't even get an interview. Welsh Government raised the people's expectations...and they've been dashed. That doesn't really send the right signal to their community. That was a shame.

Transparency: Interview and appointment

26. Some participants questioned the transparency and fairness of selecting candidates for interview:

I have applied for lots of public appointments. When I put down that I've got a disability I don't get through to the interview. I know of two public appointments that I went for that I evidenced all criteria and should have got an interview under the guaranteed interview scheme, but I didn't get an interview.

For me to consider applying for a public appointment again, after my experience, I think the system would need to be fair. It's geared toward a particular type of person. If you are a person of colour...the system doesn't really want, you.

27. Long, and unexplained, delays between an interview and a decision were cited as a barrier along with the ministerial selection of successful candidates:

My first public appointment experience was a bit of a shock. It was very slow-moving compared to the industry that I had worked in, it was very bureaucratic.

28. For some public appointments the ultimate responsibility for appointments rests with Ministers. Ministers can ask panels for prioritisation. Some participants felt that there is a lack of transparency in the appointment process and

described how the credibility of the appointments system can be brought into question:

I was pretty confident in [the process] until one of the ministers recently decided that there was an issue with governance and completely bypassed the process and appointed two or three board members. What about all the people who had applied? Surely the better thing would have been to point out the advert for the vacancy to the men who ended up getting appointed and encourage them to apply. Even though it's quite within the minister's power to appoint, it knocked my confidence in the process a bit.

By fiat that minister decided to appoint three white non-Welsh speaking males all from South Wales. One of whom was previously the minister's SPAD. I appreciate it's allowable for a year through special permission from the commissioner, but this was badly done, badly done indeed.

I find it incredible that some people get appointed knowing their political affiliations and involvement. I think, how did you get through the sift? You wonder how did that happen and is this a hidden political appointment? This does happen but is this right for public appointments?

29. It was suggested that more explicit ministerial guidance is needed to outline timeliness, conduct, and communication with recruitment panellists:

If public bodies are going to instil confidence with a robust, credible, transparent, and unbiased appointment system, then it must not only be robust and beyond reproach, but must be perceived as such.

30. One participant suggested that the public appointments system adopt a format similar to that used by the Welsh Youth Parliament. Twenty of the 60 Welsh Youth Parliament Members come from partner organisations, to ensure the representation of diverse groups of young people:

I quite like the current arrangements that the Welsh Youth Parliament have in place where some spaces are allotted for specific bodies to nominate their candidate. I think that's really good

3. Getting Boards on board

Participants spoke of the need for Boards to develop initiatives to retain people from underrepresented groups. Participants agreed that Boards could do more to break down barriers by embracing diversity; improving accessibility; supporting new Board members; and proactive advocacy.

Embracing diversity

31. Participants agreed that embracing diversity is essential in breaking down barriers for underrepresented groups. However, participants recognised that this is not an easy task:

Diversity makes people uncomfortable. If you have a culture of people operating within their own type, then diversity means that their narrative has to be challenged.

32. Some participants were concerned over terminology, understanding cultural differences, and inadvertently offending someone:

In a meeting I recently attended, someone said that they were asked where they were from. If someone asked me that question I wouldn't be offended because I wasn't born here, I would just answer. I wouldn't perceive any slight at all from that question. But people at the meeting were really offended about being asked that particular question. I was a little bit confused about that. I wouldn't put an agenda behind that as to why someone would ask me. We all have to work with people...Making working relationships work for the common good.

33. Participants were clear that to embrace diversity, Boards must address the issue of tokenism and othering:

There's that tension between how board members think we should behave and how we think we should behave because there is a cultural impasse.

Sometimes...you have a group of people who want diversity, but when the diverse person comes in with all of their ideas the group says "no, we don't want your ideas we want to visibly look diverse, but not actually be diverse."...It's a tokenistic view and it's hard for ethnic minorities when they are the only ones; when they are 'othered'.

34. Participants described how negative assimilation can hinder individuals from underrepresented groups in bringing their culture and lived experience to the Board, often having to acquire the existing attitudes and approach:

It takes all sorts of people and those currently serving must be open to the exchange of information from different backgrounds and experiences, if we're going to encourage people from underrepresented groups to join the traditional style of boards.

35. Participants spoke of the positive impact embracing diversity can have on the Board's effectiveness:

I think that the LGBT+ community is an example of an underrepresented sector that has increased markedly and successfully in its representation. And once people from any underrepresented group become board members, they begin to more freely articulate their range of life experiences more.

36. However, it was made clear that embracing diversity and underrepresentation requires balance:

We must be careful that we don't put off white, able-bodied males and females from applying for public appointments. Because if we're not careful it will be perceived that the pendulum is swinging. It would be wrong, for example, to have an all-female board, it goes too far the other way. So it's about getting a mix of people from all sorts of different backgrounds, education, and qualification.

Accessibility

37. Participants felt that the switch to hybrid meetings could break down barriers for people with disabilities and people from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds:

Having virtual hybrid meetings is a real help and asset in attracting people. Rather than actually having to jump in their car, some people may not have a car or afford the fuel. If you have a physical disability, you haven't got to go to a meeting and can do it from your home.

38. It was suggested that Boards should provide members with the necessary technology to take part effectively in hybrid meetings and that it should not be expected that members have the financial means to buy or use their own kit:

We provide our members with laptops and connectivity boosters if necessary...public bodies should be prepared to support their board members in this way.

39. Participants also recognised the need to ensure that reasonable adjustments are in place to remove or reduce a disadvantage related to someone's disability:

We had site visits to ensure that we had the right sort of transport. We made adaptations to the conference table so that they were able to access the keyboards and such. With their help, we rigged up technology to enable a microphone to function properly. We scheduled regular breaks to take account of the disability. We welcomed a carer. The board member was fantastic and came at things from a totally different angle, quite rightly banging the drum on accessibility. They taught me an awful lot about the barriers that people with disabilities encounter day to day, just getting up in the morning and getting out can take hours. I think that was a very humbling experience.

40. However, participants also described the barriers faced by Board members with disabilities when trying to implement reasonable adjustments:

People did question the need that I have for assisted technology, it made me think about whether I should carry on. Within the first year of my public appointment, I wrote, in

secret, my resignation letter twice. Because I was thinking about whether I was good enough. That's how the organisation made me feel. I didn't hand them in because I wasn't going to be beaten by the system. I believe that if you want to change the system you have to do it from the inside. You have to put that cape on and change attitudes from the inside.

Supporting new Board members

41. Participants spoke highly of a buddying system where experienced Board members pair up with newer Board members, to help upskill them on Board and strategic matters:

It's all about lived experience, that exchange of experience, and how it pincers into your work life. A...buddying scheme could offer a partnership with someone who has been on the board for a few years with someone just coming in...Creating real hegemony is important, as creating a sense of belonging. That people's lived experience and professional abilities are listened to.

42. Concerns were raised about the support given to new Board members:

[Someone] contacted me as she had come across some behaviours that she felt were unacceptable and wanted to know how to handle them. I gave her my advice... But she got no joy at all. I would say that what's emerged recently about the WRU is exactly what she encountered. So, she resigned and that was her last foray into public appointments.

Proactive advocacy

43. Several participants spoke of the importance of proactive advocacy in building connections with underrepresented groups. Participants agreed that the way they conduct themselves both on the Boards and outside of the board room is important:

We all have lots of roles where we come in contact with people who are not the usual suspects; we could – and should - be more proactive in our advocacy, and WG could directly and explicitly require that of us.

4. Remuneration

Participants discussed the barriers faced by underrepresented groups in terms of remuneration. Participants recognised that more could be done to understand the barriers faced by underrepresented groups; improve the timeliness of reimbursements; and improve the competitiveness of Welsh Government remuneration.

Remuneration barriers for underrepresented groups

44. Participants felt that people in full-time employment would need to reduce their working hours or get a leave of absence from their employer to fully participate on a Board:

Board service is not pensionable and has no associated holidays. Some people are forfeiting real material benefit. If your board role is taking 40-45 days a year, your leave of absence from your employer would mean that you lose your employee benefits. That leads to a serious loss of pensionable service, loss of holiday leave, and other pro-rata employment benefits. If you're someone at the early stage of your career that's significant.

45. Complications for people who claim benefits and sit on a Board were also cited as a barrier:

Some people will be on benefits, and if they start a public appointment they can't carry on claiming benefits. So we have to deal with the fact that nobody on benefits will be able to apply for a public appointment.

Timeliness

46. Several participants described the length of time taken to reimburse Board members as a significant barrier:

I sourced [reasonable adjustment support] myself and asked them to pay the invoice. The initial response was for me to pay it and claim it back. Sometimes that can be a barrier, we don't all have the money sitting in our banks, especially at the moment. Let's have a pot of money there that can help immediately, rather than wait for things to be signed off and wait for the person to foot the initial bill and claim it back.

Competitive remuneration

47. Some participants felt that attracting talent from underrepresented groups will be difficult when the Welsh Government remuneration for public appointees is poor in comparison with other legislatures:

I know of examples where talent won't consider Welsh Government appointments because the remuneration levels aren't commensurate with what the central government offers. Everyone's desperate for diverse candidates but why would I offer myself to a Welsh body when I'm offered more by the central government?

5. Welsh Government: Strategy and support

Participants had different views on the efficacy of Welsh Government diversity and inclusion strategies. However, participants agreed that more needs to be done by the Welsh Government and Public Appointments Team to successfully implement change, support Boards, and gather data.

Welsh Government's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments

I'm going to be bold and say that there needs to be a root-and-branch reform, otherwise we are not going to be able to achieve what Welsh Government wants to achieve, a public appointments system that reflects the people of Wales.

48. Some participants spoke highly of the Welsh Government's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments.¹ But questions were asked about the effectiveness of the policy implementation:

I think that the strategy is brilliant, its goals are great and the 2030 vision is there. Let's be positive it's really good. My questions would be how will it be resourced, and given resource pressures, how well is it being supported, nettled and monitored as a strategy

I don't hear the minister saying to the chairs, "how are you delivering on diversity, or the diversity and inclusion strategy?" There isn't that acute and intense scrutiny on chairs... We talk about assurance, but we don't delve deeper into why we're not making inroads.

49. It was also believed that the Welsh Government's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments fails to recognise some underrepresented

¹ <https://www.gov.wales/diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-public-appointments>

groups such as people from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds and neurodivergent people.

50. It was suggested that not only should the Welsh Government engage with Board members from underrepresented groups to support and implement its strategy, but that people leading and implementing the strategy should have lived experience:

It would be a really good idea for the Welsh Government to meet with board members from diverse backgrounds and hear about their board experience.

It's very difficult to have a diversity and inclusion strategy that is not being led by someone with that lived experience. With all due respect, if I were to stand up and talk about disabled rights I should have a disability, or direct contact or proximity to someone who has a disability, that I would understand through them.

Public Appointment and Honours Team

51. All participants, who spoke about the Welsh Government's Public Appointments and Honours Team, agreed that it could do more to support applicants:

It feels like the public appointments unit is in the basement of the Welsh Government and nobody wants it to be found. If we want a more diverse organisation across Wales, that's representative, that public appointments unit needs to be more public-facing.

52. Participants who were interested in applying for a public appointment for the first time spoke about the lack of training and support offered by the Public Appointments and Honours Team:

I contacted the Public Appointments Team to find out more about their training courses. The courses are mentioned when you sign up for their Talent Bank. I received a one-sentence reply, telling me that "Public Appointment isn't running any course but you could check with Academi Wales".

53. Participants who currently hold or who have held a public appointment feel that the Public Appointments and Honours Team does not support Board members effectively:

When you phone the public appointments unit, you're not made to feel particularly welcome when you ask them questions or ask for things in an alternative format I'm quite able to ask for things to be done in certain ways, so I will ring up and ask for things in Word format. But most people won't do that. especially if they think that it will go against them when applying for an interview. People will make do.

Whenever you phone the public appointments unit you might be lucky to get a phone call back. It would be good if you were given a direct point of contact, somebody that you could go to, somebody you could build a rapport with over time.

Visibility of and access to current Board members

54. It was highlighted that there is no publicly available and easy-to-access website hosting the membership and contact details of all Boards. Participants agreed that not having an easy-to-access contact database of Board members is a major shortfall:

Access to a database of board members is another area that needs looking at. I'm sure most of us would be happy for our pictures to be on a website, to give a more representative view, a more friendly facing view to applicants.

There isn't a single accessible database of everyone who holds a public appointment, that's shocking.

55. In December 2022, Mark Isherwood MS, the Chair of the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, wrote to over 60 public service boards and organisations. The letter invited people that have, or currently hold public appointment positions, those that have applied for positions but have been unsuccessful, as well as those that are interested in applying, to take part in the inquiry. It was asked that the recipients share the invitation with people who would be interested in taking part:

The Committee's process for contacting me for this interview only reached me through happenstance through one of the boards I'm on. Why didn't the invite get to me through all my

other boards? Interesting! I wasn't even told about it as a senior independent panel member.

Data on current, potential, and unsuccessful Board members

56. Participants agreed that there does not seem to be comprehensive baseline data on current, potential, and unsuccessful Board members:

There doesn't seem to be a list of people holding public appointments, a list of potential applicants, or a list of unsuccessful applicants. There doesn't even seem to be a list of public appointments!

57. Participants felt that without this data is impossible to develop meaningful targets for Wales to improve Board membership:

We also need to identify those boards which are the least diverse and focus efforts on an action plan. I think that health boards are probably more diverse. But we don't know for sure. Do public boards submit any diversity data? All the data collation is pretty poor quantitatively and qualitatively, to be honest.

58. Many participants felt that potential “rising stars” are being lost due to the lack of monitoring and data collection of potential applicants:

Do we know who has applied for what, a database of potential yet unsuccessful applicants? In an ideal world, everyone who applies would be added to a database and every time a new appointment comes up they would all be notified.

Annex 1: Interview Questions

1. What do you think are the main barriers to increasing the diversity of candidates for public appointments in Wales?
2. What can be done to overcome the barriers?
3. How effective are current approaches being taken by the Welsh Government to encourage and increase the diversity of candidates?
4. How can the Welsh Government create a more transparent and open public appointment process?
5. Are there examples of best practice elsewhere in the UK and internationally that Wales should learn from?
6. Do you have any other suggestions on how the public appointments process can be improved to achieve diversity?

Annex 2: Participant demographic.

10 participants were selected for interview. Below is the demographic breakdown of the chosen participants.

| Demographic | Data |
|--|---|
| Location | <p>A mix of both rural, urban, and suburban was achieved. Participants lived in the following local authority areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Carmarthenshire ▪ Swansea ▪ Vale of Glamorgan ▪ Rhondda Cynon Taff ▪ Newport |
| Age | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Five participants were aged between 26 and 45. ▪ Five participants aged between 46 and 75. |
| Ethnicity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Four participants identified as white, ▪ Three participants identified as Black, Black Welsh, Black British, Caribbean, or African ▪ Two participants identified as Asian, Asian Welsh or Asian British ▪ One participant identified as other. |
| Gender | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Two of the participants were male. ▪ Eight participants were female. |
| Disability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Two participants identified as disabled. ▪ Learning and physical disabilities were represented. |
| Highest qualification of parent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Three participants' parents had no qualifications. ▪ Two participants' parents had GCSEs or equivalent. ▪ Five participants' parents had degree qualifications or higher. |
| School attended | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Two participants attended private or grammar school. ▪ Eight participants attended a state school |

| Demographic | Data |
|----------------------------|--|
| Free school meals | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Six participants received free school meals. |
| Public appointments | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Six participants have either held or currently hold a public appointment.▪ Four participants have either applied for a public appointment but were unsuccessful or have never held a public appointment but are interested in applying. |