

# Public Appointments

March 2025



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Welsh Parliament

**Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee**

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# Public Appointments

March 2025



# About the Committee

The Committee was established on 23 June 2021. Its remit can be found at:  
[www.senedd.wales/SeneddPAPA](http://www.senedd.wales/SeneddPAPA)

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Current Committee membership:



**Committee Chair:  
Mark Isherwood MS**  
Welsh Conservatives



**Tom Giffard MS**  
Welsh Conservatives



**Mike Hedges MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Rhianon Passmore MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Adam Price MS**  
Plaid Cymru

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The following Members were also members of the Committee during this inquiry:



**Natasha Asghar MS**  
Welsh Conservatives



**Mabon ap Gwynfor MS**  
Plaid Cymru

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## Chair's foreword

Our inquiry into Public Appointments in Wales has exposed a series of failings in the Welsh Government's approach to sourcing and securing the widest breadth of quality and diverse candidates for public sector appointments.

As part of this inquiry, it became clear that not only were there failings in the Welsh Government's administration of the Public Appointments system but that the oversight of the Public Appointments Commissioner for England and Wales was not effective in improving the system. This specific matter has been detailed in our addendum to this report 'Public Appointments in Wales: A Commissioner for Wales?'

At the heart of these failings is the Welsh Government's underperforming Public Bodies Unit, which is tasked with overseeing public appointments in Wales. Its role and purpose has remained confusing and unclear, with evidence to suggest many public appointees or those seeking public appointment were unaware of its existence.

However, we found the issues with the Public Bodies Unit to be symbolic of far deeper problems within the machinery of the Welsh Government. We heard evidence to suggest that the objectives and key actions of the Welsh Government's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments (the 'Strategy')<sup>1</sup>, which was published in 2020 and had been a "ministerial priority"<sup>2</sup>, remained undelivered and expired when the strategy ended in 2023.

Our concerns were further consolidated when we discovered that the Welsh Government's Diversity and Inclusion strategy is over a year out of date and that there has been no evaluation, consultation, action, or even a plan to replace it.

Public appointments are important and should provide those from diverse backgrounds with an opportunity to contribute to directing and managing public services and become key part of the accountability and governance process. We hope the Welsh Government responds favourably to the recommendations contained in this report.

**Mark Isherwood MS,**

Chair of the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee

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<sup>1</sup> [Reflecting Wales in Running Wales Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales \(2020-2023\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Welsh Government - Written Evidence](#), 11 January 2022

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## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** We recommend the Welsh Government reviews its organisational structure to assess whether moving the Public Bodies Unit to the Expert Resourcing Hub is improving the visibility of the Unit and the engagement with it, and how. The outcome of this review should be shared with the Committee. .... Page 26

**Recommendation 2.** We recommend the Welsh Government provides the Committee with details on the progress and outputs of actions underway to build stronger networks and links to the Public Bodies Unit with other relevant Welsh Government departments..... Page 26

**Recommendation 3.** In providing an update in response to recommendation 2 we recommend this should include a diagram/chart to the Committee to visualise where the various responsibilities for public appointments (pay, recruitment, governance/engagement, pipeline development/mentoring, diversity and inclusion) sit within the machinery of Government and how these individual component parts link up with one another. This diagram/chart should show a named senior responsible official and the corresponding Ministerial responsibility for each of these components. The Government should also confirm which named senior official and which Minister leads on its public appointments policy overall..... Page 26

**Recommendation 4.** We recommend that the Welsh Government provides us with a clear statement on the five areas of development identified by the thematic review of public board recruitment. The statement should clearly state what actions have been completed or not, setting out how actions have been completed and, where they have not, why not. .... Page 26

**Recommendation 5.** We recommend that the Welsh Government rebrands and relaunches the Public Bodies Unit, setting out clearly its role and purpose and ensuring it is fully visible and interacts with the public. This should include more public-facing information about its role and remit, available to all candidates on the Welsh Government’s website.....Page 27

**Recommendation 6.** We recommend the Welsh Government prioritise increasing the visibility of the Public Bodies Unit, setting out clear actions to achieve this and timescales for when actions to achieve this will be complete. The Welsh Government should provide updates to the Committee on their progress in implementing this.....Page 27



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**Recommendation 7.** We recommend that the Welsh Government should, now that the former strategy has expired and no successor has been put in place, urgently have a dedicated, standalone Public Appointments Strategy and action plan in place covering diversity and inclusion in its broadest sense (including language and geographic location). It would not be acceptable, especially given that so many fundamental aspects of the 2020-23 strategy are yet to be delivered, to subsume this into the Anti Racist Wales Action Plan as has been suggested. However, we note that given the short remaining time of the Senedd Term the Welsh Government may wish to consider reinstating the current strategy until May 2026. We believe that it is not the content of the Strategy that is a problem, but more so the lack of delivery of its commitments..... Page 36

**Recommendation 8.** We recommend that the Welsh Government, as a matter of priority, sends this Committee a timeline setting out its intentions and hard deadlines for the review of its Diversity and Inclusion strategy and the development and implementation of a new one..... Page 36

**Recommendation 9.** We recommend the Welsh Government explain to the Committee why only one annual action plan and one annual report was published under the Reflecting Wales in Running Wales - Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales (2020-2023) and, in addition to which minister / official decided not to establish the diversity and inclusion governance group, to confirm which minister or official took the decision every year of the above Strategy not to publish the annual action plan and annual report, and why. .... Page 36

**Recommendation 10.** We recommend the Welsh Government provide certainty that the poor governance and administration of its Diversity & Inclusion strategy has not and is not being repeated in other policy areas. To provide this certainty the Welsh Government should provide a list of all the active strategies and actions plans that it has, together with what the reporting requirements are and whether or not they are being met.....Page 37

**Recommendation 11.** We recommend that the Welsh Government must urgently provide this Committee with a complete (not spilt into various correspondence) and comprehensive data set of diversity characteristics (including language and location), as it committed to in its 2020-2023 strategy, for all current - Regulated and Non-Regulated public appointments, for transparency and to inform future activity in this area, thereby creating the baseline promised in Action 1, Goal 1 of the Strategy. .... Page 49

**Recommendation 12.** We recommend the Welsh Government meets our request to publishes the reports “ to its board” referred to by the chief operating officer in paragraph 166 of this report..... Page 49

**Recommendation 13.** We remained unconvinced that enough is being done by the Welsh Government to develop a pipeline of talent for public appointments in Wales. We recommend that the Welsh Government improves its approach to encouraging and supporting individuals in applying for public appointments. This could include increased shadowing opportunities and taking a broader and more inclusive approach to promoting available appointments..... Page 59

**Recommendation 14.** We recommend that the Welsh Government’s Public Bodies Unit undertake work to improve its awareness of what constitutes a reasonable adjustment and take a proactive approach in providing applicants with multiple options in terms of the adjustments they require. We ask that an update on this work including details of options available be provided to us in 6 months’ time..... Page 59

**Recommendation 15.** We recommend the Welsh Government progresses its work to improve the accessibility of the public appointments recruitment process with greater pace and we ask for an update on the outputs of its work with the accountability group of the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan as soon as possible. ....Page 60

**Recommendation 16.** We recommend that the Welsh Government review its approach to providing feedback to unsuccessful applicants for public appointments and we ask that details be provided to us on how the Welsh Government will ensure feedback is consistent and standardised training is provided to recruitment panels on what constitutes good practice in this area. ....Page 60

**Recommendation 17.** Remuneration is clearly a barrier to more people applying for public appointments and we recommend an update on the progress and outputs of the Welsh Government’s review of Board Remuneration is provided to us..... Page 61

**Recommendation 18.** We recommend that where re-appointments are made, the Welsh Government write to the relevant committee setting out the reason(s) for doing so.....Page 74

**Recommendation 19.** We recommend that the Senedd Commission and the Welsh Government work together to develop a set of shared principles to govern the public appointments they are responsible for. These should include the role of

pre-appointment hearings, formalising the sharing of relevant information and an appropriate time frame to deliver this information i.e. one full week in advance of a pre-appointment hearing.....Page 75

**Recommendation 20.** . We recommend that the Senedd Business Committee consider whether the existing protocol, as agreed between the Llywydd and the then First Minister Mark Drakeford in relation to pre-appointment hearings, should be reviewed, updated and codified into Standing Orders. We believe that an appropriate body within the Senedd should have some oversight of the ad hoc arrangements that vary from appointment to appointment in terms of Committees involvement in Welsh Government led public appointments and the representation of Committee members on Welsh Government led appointments panels.....Page 75

## 1. Background

1. At the end of 2021, the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee (The Committee) called for contributions on how the Committee should approach the newly established public administration part of its remit.
2. The start of the sixth Senedd term saw the first dedicated public administration committee in the Senedd, through an extension made to the remit of the previous Public Accounts Committee.
3. The Committee was given responsibility for scrutinising matters relating to the machinery of government, including the quality and standards of administration provided by the Welsh Government Civil Service and Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies. Like its predecessor, it is also responsible for scrutiny of public accounts.
4. To help the Committee consider how best it should discharge this part of its remit and what its priorities should be, the Committee sought views on:
  - principles and best practice for scrutiny of public administration;
  - what information and evidence the committee will need in order to maintain effective oversight of public administration; and
  - priority issues it may wish to consider.
5. Several consultation responses referred to the need for there to be scrutiny of public appointments in Wales, with a suggested focus on efforts to increase diversity<sup>3</sup>. Consultation responses also suggested evaluations of the effectiveness of Public Boards and their relationship with the management of their organisations..

### Terms of Reference

6. At our meeting on 19 October 2022 we agreed to undertake an inquiry into Public Appointments in Wales. The following Terms of Reference were set out for the inquiry:

The Committee undertake an inquiry into the Welsh Government's approach to the public appointments process, including where this could be improved to

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<sup>3</sup> [Scrutinising Public Administration Consultation Responses](#), December 2021

increase the diversity of candidates for public appointments made by Welsh Ministers. Issues to be considered include the following:

- The role of the Public Bodies Unit and the effectiveness of its relationship with Public Bodies' Boards in terms of ensuring good governance and effective public appointment arrangements. This includes any ongoing support for board members.
- The views of those corporate bodies that receive public appointments on the public appointments process;
- The role the Commissioner for Public Appointments
- What are the main barriers to increasing the diversity of candidates for public appointments in Wales? How do these vary by factors including:
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Ethnicity
  - Disability
- How effective are current approaches being taken by the Welsh Government to encourage and increase the diversity of candidates?
- How can the public appointments process be improved to achieve this?
- How can the Welsh Government create a more transparent and open public appointments process?
- Are there examples of best practice elsewhere in the UK and internationally that Wales should learn from?

**7.** The Committee took oral evidence from the Commissioner for Public Appointments in England and Wales, the Welsh Government, and the Senedd Commission. The Committee also visited the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland, who acts as their Public Appointments Commissioner, and met with members of the Scottish Parliament's Finance and Public Administration Committee to discuss Public Appointments in Scotland.

**8.** The Senedd's Citizen Engagement Team gathered the views and lived experiences of people from different backgrounds who hold, have held or have applied for public appointments in Wales.

**9.** The Citizen Engagement Team conducted ten interviews between 6 and 17 February 2023. The object of the interviews was to understand the real and perceived barriers to increasing the diversity of candidates for public appointments in Wales.

**10.** The findings and recommendations of this work were presented to the Committee on 30 March 2023 and we took oral evidence from five current holders of Public Appointments identified through this process.

**11.** Our report reflects the level of detailed scrutiny that was needed to fully explore the processes and governance around Public Appointments in Wales. Through our scrutiny, we have uncovered a number of areas of concern and need for improvement and this report sets out our findings.

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## 2. The Public Bodies Unit

### Public Bodies Unit Oversight

**12.** The Welsh Government's Public Bodies Unit (PBU) oversees public appointments, including efforts to increase diversity. In evidence the Welsh Government states that the PBU "provides the framework for governance and accountability for all Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs)". The Welsh Government explained that the PBU is responsible for:

- Regulated public appointments to 50 organisations including NHS bodies, 34 Commissioners, companies and sponsored bodies;
- Providing a source of expertise on the recruitment of Chairs and Board members ensuring the governance code on public appointments is followed;
- Diversity and inclusion of public appointments;
- Pay and remuneration; and
- Quality assurance of adverts for public appointments and publication of roles<sup>4</sup>.

**13.** Furthermore, the PBU has limited direct contact with the bodies to which public appointments are made and instead works with Partnership Teams located in Government departments "to advise and facilitate the recruitment process"<sup>5</sup>.

**14.** Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, the PBU delivered 53 recruitment campaigns, resulting in 60 appointments and 73 reappointments made to 29 public bodies and health boards. This is an increase from the previous year where 29 recruitment campaigns were delivered, 52 appointments were made and 15 reappointments<sup>6</sup>.

**15.** In January 2022, the Welsh Government said the PBU had:

*"... assumed responsibility for shaping the policy agenda as it relates to public appointments. This has included making changes to the*

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<sup>44</sup> Welsh Government, [Written Evidence](#), 7 June 2023

<sup>5</sup> Welsh Government, [Written Evidence](#), 7 June 2023

<sup>6</sup> Welsh Government, [Written Evidence](#), 7 June 2023

*appointment process, from introducing additional assessment stages to implementation of pre-appointment hearing arrangements”<sup>7</sup>.*

**16.** During our inquiry, the PBU transitioned from the Welsh Government’s Chief Security Officer’s division to the newly established Expert Resourcing Hub. In further written evidence, we were told that the “primary goal is to streamline the delivery of effective and efficient resourcing and recruitment services”<sup>8</sup>.

**17.** This appears to be the second move of the PBU within two years. The evidence did not set out what the relationship is between the Public Appointments Teams and the PBU now, and where responsibility for inclusion and diversity of public appointments sits.

**18.** On 8 August 2024, the Welsh Government published the results of a thematic review on public body board recruitment<sup>9</sup>. In it, Board members surveyed said that greater clarity is needed on the role of the Public Appointments Team, the Partnership Team and PBU in Board recruitment.

**19.** We asked officials why the move had taken place and heard that “it was clear that the chief security office was not a natural home for the Public Bodies Team”, and that moving the team into a new centre of recruitment excellence:

*“allows us to provide synergy between the quality of service that candidates can expect to receive, whether they’re applying for a civil service role or whether they’re applying for a public appointment, underpinned by a common set of principles around open, fair and merit appointment”<sup>10</sup>.*

**20.** Officials stressed that there are different engagement mechanisms and controls over civil service recruitment, as opposed to public appointment recruitment. For example, there are different commissioners involved in both elements. However, we were told:

*“... there is a commonality in the recruitment stage, there’s a commonality in how we plan for a vacancy, how we look at the outreach and promotion of those roles, there’s a commonality in how we support individuals to sift, interview and evaluate and then*

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<sup>7</sup> [Letter from the Welsh Government](#), 11 January 2022

<sup>8</sup> Written Evidence from the Welsh Government, October 2024

<sup>9</sup> [Public body board recruitment: thematic review Outcome of a review of board recruitment practices and Board members’ experience](#), 8 August 2024

<sup>10</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 45

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*onboard, and there's a commonality now with the system, with Cais being the predominant recruitment system that we use across all recruitment"<sup>11</sup>.*

**21.** We note that the public bodies pay team now sits within the Welsh Government's pay hub. The hub includes the Welsh Government's pay hub, public bodies pay hub and payroll services. These services provide payroll support to a number of the Welsh Government's arm's-length bodies which helps link the Welsh Government pay remit to the arm's-length remits for public bodies<sup>12</sup>.

**22.** Furthermore, we were told that the public body engagement and governance team is now a part of Academi Wales, which has come under the people and places umbrella, so that the gap can be closed around some of the development, mentoring, buddying support that Welsh Government provides to those arm's-length bodies<sup>13</sup>.

**23.** The evidence provided to the Committee and the results of Board Members' surveyed as part of the thematic review on board recruitment identified concerns about the visibility of the Public Bodies Team and a lack of clarity about its role in the public appointments recruitment process. We asked officials to outline what action had been taken to address this and how the movement of the team to the Pay Hub will improve this.

**24.** The Chief Operating Officer explained that there were a several actions underway to build stronger networks and links to the Public Bodies Unit. We heard there is work being done internally with the Public Bodies Reference Group, which links the Public Bodies Team with the key sponsorship teams. There is also the public leaders' forum, which comprises of Chairs and Chief Executives, and meets twice a year. We were told that the PBU helps to organise that and :

*"... the public appointments process is, really, a collaboration between the public bodies team, who are really looking at the process and running the system; you've got then the sponsorship teams and the organisations themselves, who are then heavily involved in the recruitment of those appointments; and obviously, for a number of those, that also links into these are ministerial appointments, and*

<sup>11</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 45

<sup>12</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 47

<sup>13</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 47

*how they work with the Ministers to ensure we get the right people in the roles”<sup>14</sup>.*

**25.** We noted these actions aimed at generating better linkage within the different departments and units within the Welsh Government, but in terms of reaching out and ensuring better understanding amongst those who might be engaged in the process, we asked how confident the Welsh Government was that the changes they have made will facilitate that better external understanding and engagement.

**26.** The Chief Operating Officer explained that the work the team has been doing over the last year; including feedback to candidates, training of those that were in near-miss situations, the talent bank, the board apprentice scheme, were starting to have better impact in terms of the outreach that the team have been responsible for<sup>15</sup>. He added:

*“There's lots more to do. As I said, this is very much work in progress. I think there are one or two signs where we're starting to really move in the right direction, but there's more we can do. They're doing some work currently on things like the webpages—they're not ready yet, but will be, I think, early into next year—again, trying to ensure that we get the right information out there to prospective candidates, and to boards as well”<sup>16</sup>.*

**27.** We noted that the thematic review’s findings echoed the evidence we heard from stakeholders that application forms for public appointments need to be more user-friendly, that there is a lack of disability access support and that more needs to be done to diversify boards. We asked Welsh Government Officials what actions had been taken in response to these findings.

**28.** The Chief Operating Officer did not give a clear answer on what precise actions had been taken and instead explained how other ongoing work was linked to addressing some of the concerns raised.<sup>17</sup> The Director of HR added:

*“...our response to the thematic review, whilst we haven't written a detailed response yet, has been informed by some of the wider work*

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<sup>14</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 54

<sup>15</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 56

<sup>16</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 57

<sup>17</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 161

*that we're doing around the RedQuadrant review, recruitment and other issues".<sup>18</sup>*

**29.** We highlighted that another action, set out in the thematic review, is that the Public Appointments Team would work on a pilot to streamline the public appointments process to improve diversity. We asked officials to set out further details on this pilot and when it will be completed. The Director of HR told us the Welsh Government would start to move forward with that particular pilot in March/April 2025.<sup>19</sup>

**30.** The thematic review also says the public appointment web pages will be redesigned. We asked when this will happen and when the new web pages will be available. The Chief Operating Officer confirmed the plan is that the webpages will be updated by February 2025<sup>20</sup>.

### Visibility of the unit and its work

**31.** Several witnesses gave evidence to the Committee that they had limited engagement with or were not aware of the work of the PBU.

**32.** Dr Rosetta Plummer said she found the PBU “slow in response, lacking in strategic and process preparedness”<sup>21</sup>. This experience was echoed by the other witnesses, with former independent member of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, John Cunliffe, saying that he had never heard of the PBU during his time in a public role<sup>22</sup>.

**33.** Damien Bridgeman told the Committee that he had ‘absolutely’ no contact with the PBU during the application and appointment process.<sup>23</sup> He told the Committee that, on one occasion, he tried to speak to someone who took three and a half days to respond.

**34.** Chantal Patel explained to the Committee she hadn’t heard of the PBU and hadn’t heard about it from anyone within the partner organisations within which she worked.<sup>24</sup> The findings report from the Citizen Engagement team concluded that all participants felt PBU could do more to support applicants:

<sup>18</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 162

<sup>19</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 171

<sup>20</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 173

<sup>21</sup> RoP, 3 May 2023, paragraph 181

<sup>22</sup> RoP, 3 May 2023, paragraph 150

<sup>23</sup> RoP, 7 June 2023, paragraph 45

<sup>24</sup> RoP, 18 May 2023,

*“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”<sup>25</sup>.*

**35.** Participants who have held or currently hold public appointments felt that the PBU does not support applicants effectively:

*“When you phone the public appointments unit, you’re not made to feel particularly welcome when you ask them questions or as for things in an alternative format.*

...

*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”<sup>26</sup>.*

**36.** We questioned the Welsh Government on the visibility of the PBU, its customer-facing role and responsiveness. We asked officials to explain how the PBU engages with potential candidates for public appointments and what support it provides them.

**37.** The Welsh Government’s Chief Operating Officer told us the PBU “plays a key and fundamental role in the whole public appointments process”<sup>27</sup>. However, he stated:

*“... but it’s only one role and working very much in partnership with the panels, with the sponsorship teams, and also with the public bodies. In terms of its role in dealing with candidates and potentially those on public appointments, it’s done a number of things, especially around training for potential candidates”<sup>28</sup>.*

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<sup>25</sup> [Public Appointments in Wales: Engagement findings report March 2023](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Public Appointments in Wales: Engagement findings report March 2023](#)

<sup>27</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 44

<sup>28</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 44

**38.** He added:

*"... we've had a number of training programmes that the unit has been responsible for, and two specifically looking at potential candidates – one around the near-ready leadership programme, and also the future leaders programme. So, it's engaging with those"<sup>29</sup>.*

**39.** The Chief Operating Officer also told us about a job-shadowing programme, with funding for up to 15 individuals who are close to being appointed to boards but who don't presently have the experience or haven't yet been appointed to a board. They will be able to work with public bodies and sit on boards in a job-shadowing arrangement to help develop a stronger pipeline of candidates for the future<sup>30</sup>.

**40.** The respondents to the Committee's stakeholder engagement explained that "{if} we want a more diverse organisation across Wales, that's representative, that public appointments unit needs to be more public facing"<sup>31</sup>. We were also told that the PBU is slow to respond and is not "welcoming" when contacted.

**41.** We put this to Welsh Government officials, who said it was "disappointing" to hear these views and that these experiences were "certainly not what we would want them to have"<sup>32</sup>.

**42.** To address some of these concerns, the Chief Operating Officer explained that he was looking at the whole area of customer service and wanted to develop "more of a customer service mindset", where there would be service level agreements in place for responding to queries. However, he explained that they were "not in that position yet, but that's the work we're trying to look at doing within the chief operating officers group"<sup>33</sup>.

## **Appointments Strategy**

**43.** We explored whether the PBU has a strategy for upcoming vacancies. Some witnesses expressed concern that the PBU did not appear to have a strategic plan for, or awareness of, upcoming vacancies and how these would be filled.

**44.** During oral evidence, Dr Rosetta Plummer stated that the PBU did not appear to have a strategic plan for recruitment of public appointments coming to

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<sup>29</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 44

<sup>30</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 45

<sup>31</sup> [Public Appointments in Wales: Engagement findings report](#), March 2023, page 24

<sup>32</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 47

<sup>33</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 48

an end<sup>34</sup>. She said this could lead to “gaps in governance or insufficient time to properly on-board and induct people to hefty responsibilities”<sup>35</sup>.

**45.** Shereen Williams said her experience of a public body needing to make appointments “hasn’t been particularly positive”<sup>36</sup>. She explained the process has been “quite slow moving”, which is frustrating when current commissioner terms are coming to an end<sup>37</sup>.

**46.** Several witnesses referred to the need for a talent pipeline to fill vacancies on public boards<sup>38</sup>.

**47.** The [Governance Code on Public Appointments](#) allows, in exceptional circumstances, for Ministers to appoint a candidate without competition, following consultation with the Commissioner for Public Appointments for England and Wales. In the Commissioner’s Annual Report for 2020-21, the Commissioner said that “the Welsh Government used the exceptional provision in the code more often than Whitehall departments”. The Commissioner’s Annual Report for 2021-22 said that the use of exceptional provisions had reduced, compared to 2020-21, but remained higher than in 2019-20.

**48.** In his oral evidence to the Committee in December 2022, the Commissioner said:

*“I do note that the volume of casework from the Welsh Government where my view is sought for exceptions under the code is out of proportion to the number of public bodies in Wales. I have raised this point with the Permanent Secretary in my meeting with him in June. I think better management of competitions would reduce the number of these exceptional arrangements”<sup>39</sup>.*

**49.** The Commissioner advocated for better forward planning of recruitments, to avoid the need to reappoint members to avoid governance gaps and that “the relationship between the sponsor teams and the central public bodies unit need to work better”<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> RoP, 3 May 2023 paragraph 196

<sup>35</sup> RoP, 3 May 2023 paragraph 196

<sup>36</sup> RoP, 3 May 2023, paragraph 184

<sup>37</sup> RoP, 3 May 2023, paragraph 184

<sup>38</sup> [Public Appointments in Wales: Engagement findings report](#), March 2023, page 7

<sup>39</sup> RoP, 15 December 2022, paragraph 83

<sup>40</sup> RoP, 15 December 2022, paragraph 83

**50.** Concerns were raised about the length of time some recruitment processes take, particularly for decisions to be taken by Ministers on appointments. The Commissioner for Public Appointments said:

*"I think that delays in the appointment process are very, very harmful to the whole system of public appointments"<sup>41</sup>.*

**51.** The Commissioner said that this discourages candidates from coming forward. Similar findings were reached by the Citizens Engagement Team in their findings report. Participants stated that long and unexplained delays between an interview and a decision were a barrier<sup>42</sup>.

**52.** Dr Plummer told the Committee in oral evidence that there is a discrepancy between timelines put into adverts and the actual time it takes for a ministerial decision to be made<sup>43</sup>.

**53.** We asked Welsh Government officials whether the PBU has a plan in place to manage vacancies and recruitments, to avoid governance gaps. The Chief Operating Officer explained there is:

*"... a nice large spreadsheet of the appointments coming up for the next 12 months. Each one is then red, amber, green status against that, with the aim that, 12 months before the appointment is due to end, there is then contact made with the partnership team or sponsorship team, and the process being kicked off"<sup>44</sup>.*

**54.** We explored this issue further, asking the Chief Operating Officer what evidence was available to demonstrate how this approach would address the issue of vacancies, how it would anticipate levels of end of term turnover/recruitment activity for the year ahead and how many gaps/vacancies are there, as a proportion of all public appointments overseen by Welsh Government.

**55.** We heard that the spreadsheet held details of appointments upcoming for the next 12 months. He added that these are "probably in the region of a third to a quarter of the appointments"<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> RoP, 15 December 2022, paragraph 108

<sup>42</sup> [Public Appointments in Wales: Engagement findings report](#), March 2023, paragraph 27

<sup>43</sup> RoP, 3 May 2023, paragraph 249

<sup>44</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 50

<sup>45</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 54



**56.** We asked Welsh Government officials about the evidence we'd received from the Commissioner for Public Appointments regarding the use of exceptions, noting that he had discussed this issue with the Welsh Government in June 2022 and made recommendations for improvement. We asked what action has been taken to address his concerns.

**57.** The Chief Operating Officer told us there had been action, including the forward plan of appointments to reduce the need for extensions of appointments, which is one of the reasons why exceptions were being sought from the Commissioner. He stated they were:

*"... making sure the appointments process is getting better, around team training, around streamlining processes—when it makes sense to talk to the commissioner, and when, actually, we should do things ourselves—and also making sure there are the right links with the partnership teams and suitable guidance"<sup>46</sup>.*

**58.** He added:

*"As far as I'm aware, there are only a couple of occasions where we've had to contact the commissioner over the last year around exceptions, and that would be either, as I said, an extension over a second term, or for a direct appointment. And so, I think the number of occasions and contact on that more formal basis certainly reduced..."<sup>47</sup>.*

## Tailored Review Process

**59.** The PBU also has oversight of the programme of tailored reviews of Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs)<sup>48</sup>.

**60.** In January 2022, the Permanent Secretary told the Committee he hoped to evaluate the Welsh Government's approach to sponsorship, including the PBU, during the next financial year<sup>49</sup>.

**61.** He noted, during the pandemic, some more experienced members of the PBU had been redeployed stating:

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<sup>46</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 58

<sup>47</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 58

<sup>48</sup> Welsh Government, *Written Evidence*, 11 January 2022

<sup>49</sup> RoP, 26 January 2022, paragraph 86



*“... I would like during this next financial year to just be able to stand back and think about some of the things that we've done well, and things that need to be altered. But actually I'm really interested in seeing how we can more ensure that the unit is commissioned as intended post the pandemic”<sup>50</sup>.*

**62.** In October 2022, the Permanent Secretary wrote to us stating the evaluation of the work around ALBs and the work of the PBU had commenced. It had “completed its first stage and the final report is expected shortly”<sup>51</sup>.

**63.** In January 2023, the Permanent Secretary said:

*“I am strengthening the governance around the work of the public bodies work, which will be led by the Chief Operating Officer, Tim Moss. This will maintain oversight of, and ensure sign off, for both the Tailored Review programme and the Guidance for Wales”<sup>52</sup>.*

**64.** In evidence to the Committee on 29 November 2023, the Director General for Economy, Treasury and Constitution, Andrew Slade, told the Committee:

*“The programme (Tailored review programme), as I understand it, is effectively on pause while we work through this risk assessment process for each of the bodies, and I think the plan now, ...is that in each Senedd period there will be a risk assessment undertaken of each of the bodies, and then that will inform the tailored review programme—so, the extent to which you go forward into a more focused set of review arrangements for a particular body”<sup>53</sup>.*

**65.** Mr Slade said that the Welsh Government is adopting a risk assessment approach, where external teams would only look at certain issues within a public body rather than the public body as a whole<sup>54</sup>.

**66.** Mr Slade also identified that the Welsh Government was undertaking a review of public appointments and boards that would be published next year<sup>55</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> RoP, 26 January 2022, paragraph 14

<sup>51</sup> [Letter from the Permanent Secretary](#), 31 October 2022

<sup>52</sup> [Letter from the Permanent Secretary](#), 30 January 2023

<sup>53</sup> RoP, 29 November 2023, paragraph 37

<sup>54</sup> RoP, 29 November 2023, paragraph 53

<sup>55</sup> RoP, 29 January 2023, paragraph 76

The written evidence submitted by the Welsh Government did not provide any information on such a review. Mr Slade said:

*“There has.... been work on the board appointments process, which spans all of the bodies—it isn't just about particular ones—so that's a wider thematic review of how we do our work on public appointments. My understanding is... that that will report at some point early next year, and you'll get a copy of that report, and we'll make it publicly available”<sup>56</sup>.*

**67.** Mr Slade's evidence suggests one of the thematic reviews was on public appointments and board appointment processes more generally. However, the Committee had previously understood from correspondence sent to it by the Permanent Secretary that the review was specifically on board remuneration.<sup>57</sup>

**68.** We asked the Welsh Government's Chief Operating Officer to clarify what the status of the Tailored Review programme is, when the risk assessment process mentioned in Mr Slade's evidence will be complete, and what the next steps are in the assessment of the performance of Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs).

**69.** We were told that some of the aspects of the plan to evaluate the PBU had been taken forward stating:

*“So, one element of that in the previous plan was around a consultation around thematic reviews, which did go ahead, and that was a consultation with both public bodies and partnership teams around what were the key areas to look at. Out of that, there was a decision taken to look at thematic review around board recruitment as the first review, and then another one around sponsorship roles and skills. So, the thematic review around board recruitment has started, and we're mid process around that”<sup>58</sup>.*

**70.** On the risk assessment process, we were informed that a new self-assessment tool was being developed, called the Handy Risk Assessment Tool (HART), which the Welsh Government believe is a more appropriate model for the future. The aim is to review the self-assessment model early in 2023, pilot it and

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<sup>56</sup> RoP, 29 January 2023, paragraph 59

<sup>57</sup> [Letter from the Permanent Secretary](#), 13 December 2022

<sup>58</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 66

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then roll it out to organisations to form the risk assessment process for the future<sup>59</sup>.

## Our View

**71.** The Public Bodies Unit (PBU) has an important role in overseeing public appointments, including in promoting efforts to increase diversity but also by providing the framework for governance and accountability for all Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs).

**72.** We have raised concerns regarding the role of the PBU previously. We scrutinised the Welsh Government on its Tailored Review Programme, including the Final Report of the Tailored Review Panel Amgueddfa Cymru-Museum Wales<sup>60</sup>. We later considered matters relating to Amgueddfa Cymru as part of separate work to consider the findings of the Auditor General for Wales' Public Interest Report, '[Governance arrangements relating to an employment dispute at Amgueddfa Cymru](#)'<sup>61</sup>. This work also focused on some general issues relating to the Welsh Government's Tailored Review Process including a lack of proactivity, visibility and clarity around the role of the unit.

**73.** We remain concerned about the role of the PBU and the level or lack of oversight it has over the matters it is responsible for. The PBU has transitioned twice during our inquiry; firstly to the Welsh Government's Chief Security Officer's division and then to the newly established Expert Resourcing Hub.

**74.** In the meantime, the public bodies pay team has moved to sit within the Welsh Government's pay hub and the public body engagement and governance team is now part of Academi Wales. Both of these teams relate to public appointments, yet sit in different parts of the Welsh Government's organisational structure. While there are attempts to generate better links within the different departments and units of the Welsh Government, we are concerned that the oversight of public appointments remains complicated and unclear with too many components.

**75.** We believe the PBU has a pivotal role in ensuring greater engagement and diversity in public appointments and to date its presence and outputs in achieving this role have been underwhelming. The unit has lacked visibility and importance having been moved around the Welsh Government's organisational

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<sup>59</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 66

<sup>60</sup> Amgueddfa Cymru/Museum Wales, [Final report of the Tailored Review Panel](#), 13 July 2023

<sup>61</sup> Audit Wales Report, [Governance arrangements relating to an employment dispute at Amgueddfa Cymru](#) - National Museum Wales, November 2023

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structure, and doesn't appear to be given the value that it needs and deserves, in order for it to deliver its functions effectively.

**Recommendation 1.** We recommend the Welsh Government reviews its organisational structure to assess whether moving the Public Bodies Unit to the Expert Resourcing Hub is improving the visibility of the Unit and the engagement with it, and how. The outcome of this review should be shared with the Committee.

**Recommendation 2.** We recommend the Welsh Government provides the Committee with details on the progress and outputs of actions underway to build stronger networks and links to the Public Bodies Unit with other relevant Welsh Government departments.

**Recommendation 3.** In providing an update in response to recommendation 2 we recommend this should include a diagram/chart to the Committee to visualise where the various responsibilities for public appointments (pay, recruitment, governance/engagement, pipeline development/mentoring, diversity and inclusion) sit within the machinery of Government and how these individual component parts link up with one another. This diagram/chart should show a named senior responsible official and the corresponding Ministerial responsibility for each of these components. The Government should also confirm which named senior official and which Minister leads on its public appointments policy overall.

**76.** We welcome that a thematic review on public body board recruitment was undertaken, but we are frustrated by the lack of clarity on what the Welsh Government is doing to address the issues arising from it.

**77.** During oral evidence, we asked officials to set out in simple terms whether actions had been completed or not. From the lack of evidence provided, we could only conclude that the Welsh Government had taken little or no action in response to the findings of the thematic review.

**Recommendation 4.** We recommend that the Welsh Government provides us with a clear statement on the five areas of development identified by the thematic review of public board recruitment. The statement should clearly state what actions have been completed or not, setting out how actions have been completed and, where they have not, why not.

**78.** Several witnesses who gave evidence to the Committee said they had limited engagement with, or were not aware of the work of, the PBU. They called for its

visibility to be improved. Most of the public appointees we heard from had no interaction with the unit at all. We find this surprising and disappointing.

**79.** Although the Chief Operating Officer also found this disappointing and recognised more needs to be done to improve the visibility of the PBU, this remains a work in progress. We are not convinced enough is being done to put the PBU at the forefront of the public appointments process.

**Recommendation 5.** We recommend that the Welsh Government rebrands and relaunches the Public Bodies Unit, setting out clearly its role and purpose and ensuring it is fully visible and interacts with the public. This should include more public-facing information about its role and remit, available to all candidates on the Welsh Government's website.

**80.** There was no evidence provided that gave us any confidence that the work being done by the Welsh Government to improve the visibility of the Public Bodies Unit was leading to more positive outcomes.

**Recommendation 6.** We recommend the Welsh Government prioritise increasing the visibility of the Public Bodies Unit, setting out clear actions to achieve this and timescales for when actions to achieve this will be complete. The Welsh Government should provide updates to the Committee on their progress in implementing this.

**81.** The forthcoming changes to the Tailored Review programme are of significant concern to us, given the move towards a new self-assessment model to replace the previous programme. We raised these concerns in our recent report on the scrutiny of Amgueddfa Cymru's Accounts for 2021-22, in which we looked specifically at shortcomings in the tailored review process that failed to identify serious governance issues at Amgueddfa Cymru.

**82.** We were already concerned about the deliverability of the Welsh Government's Tailored Review programme, which originally intended to review every eligible body during the term of this Senedd but failed to do so. A move to a light touch assessment approach could lead to similar issues occurring at other bodies. Our report on Amgueddfa Cymru recommended that the Welsh Government update us once the rollout of the new self-assessment model for reviewing arm's length bodies is concluded. We further endorse that recommendation and look forward to the update.

### 3. Welsh Government Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments

**83.** In 2020, the Welsh Government published its Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments (the Strategy)<sup>62</sup>. Written evidence from the Welsh Government said that delivery of the strategy is a “ministerial priority”<sup>63</sup>.

**84.** The Strategy aims to:

- Create a more open and transparent process at all levels of decision making including advertising, recruiting and interview.
- Challenge barriers faced by protected groups such as limited remuneration, access difficulties, unconscious bias and others.
- Create systems that use all talents and respect difference and that are based on the lived experience of protected groups.

**85.** The Strategy covers the years 2020-2023, but also outlines the Welsh Government’s vision of the future in 2030 if the Strategy is fully implemented. The Strategy outlines 5 specific goals with a series of actions to achieve its aims.

**86.** The Strategy includes a chapter on governance. It says delivery of the strategy would be overseen by a Diversity and Inclusion in Public Appointments Governance Group. The Group is responsible for oversight, implementation and future development of the Strategy. It is made up of a range of representatives from Welsh Government including the Director of Governance and Ethics and the Director General for Health and Social Services; two Chairs of Arms Length Bodiess, one Chair from an NHS body, four independent senior leaders, two members of the Board Diversity and Inclusion Network and the Minister’s Specialist Equality and Disability Advisers.

**87.** The Strategy says the Board Diversity and Inclusion Network will be from protected groups and will develop its own remit to provide peer support, role models and empower board members from protected groups.

**88.** No witnesses to the inquiry have mentioned the Network in their evidence.

**89.** Annex 5 of the Strategy includes a series of high level KPIs. These include increasing the percentage of Chairs and Board members from protected groups

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<sup>62</sup> [Reflecting Wales in Running Wales Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales \(2020-2023\)](#)

<sup>63</sup> [Welsh Government - Written Evidence](#), 11 January 2022

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and socio-economic groups, increase the proportion of Board and Chair applicants from protected groups and socio-economic groups.

**90.** A Year 1 Action Plan for 2020-21<sup>64</sup> was published but no further action plans appear to have been published. The action plan included a number of specific targets for delivery in that first year but no update, outcomes or evaluation appears to have been subsequently published.

**91.** The Welsh Government's evidence did not mention if the Strategy will be reviewed, how or when nor what the process for the development of a new strategy will be or when it will be published<sup>65</sup>.

**92.** We asked Welsh Government Officials whether the Diversity and Inclusion strategy was still a ministerial priority. The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that the strategy "definitely" remained a priority for the (then) First Minister and the Minister for Social Justice<sup>66</sup>.

**93.** We noted that an action plan for Year 1 had been published that included targets for delivery in 2021-22. We queried whether all these targets had been met and the current status of the Action Plan.

**94.** We were told that 28 out of 44 actions had been met and unfortunately the pandemic had caused issues in the delivery of some of the remaining actions<sup>67</sup>.

**95.** We asked why an Action Plan was not published beyond Year 1. The Chief Operating Officer explained that the approach taken since Year 1 has been to look at the 25 actions that sit across the whole plan, rather than having specific detailed plans for each year, and looking at the actions needed against the five goals. He added:

*"We were just reviewing the other day the five goals and the 25 actions. I think that there are nine of those that are completed or closed, and I think that there are 16 that are ongoing at the moment. A couple of those actions are things that are going to be planned in the near future. So, there is progress, but we haven't followed the focus that was put for that year 1 plan into subsequent years"*<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> [Action Plan: Year 1: 2020-2021 Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales](#)

<sup>65</sup> [Welsh Government - Written Evidence](#), 11 January 2022

<sup>66</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 83

<sup>67</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 85

<sup>68</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 89



**96.** Whilst the evidence the Committee has received has been generally supportive of the aims of the strategy, several witnesses questioned the extent to which the strategy has been implemented.

**97.** In oral evidence, Chantal Patel said:

*“I think the strategy is right [...] but how are we going to hold people to account in order for that to be implemented? Are [Chairs and public appointees] taking that on board or are they seeing ethnic minorities as a quota? [...] The strategy is great, but is it being implemented? I could not give you a positive answer on that”<sup>69</sup>*

**98.** In the same session, Dr Doyin Atewologun argued that more could be done through metrics and mechanisms to ensure that targets and goals within the Strategy were being met<sup>70</sup>. Chantal Patel argued for the inclusion of a specific key performance indicator (KPI), owned by the Chair of the Board in question, to ensure that their board is diverse and is meeting diversity targets.<sup>71</sup>

**99.** Damian Bridgeman told us he felt progress to date in delivering the strategy was “really poor”<sup>72</sup>. He did not believe that delivery was led by a diverse enough group to help properly guide implementation and there was not enough accountability for actions not being taken ‘quickly enough’. He said the strategy felt like “tokenism”<sup>73</sup>.

**100.** Shereen Williams said that there has been no update on the outcome of the strategy and what has been delivered.<sup>74</sup>

**101.** The former Commissioner’s 2020-2021 Annual Report stated the pandemic will have affected the ability of the UK and Welsh governments to make progress on their diversity and inclusion aims.

**102.** We raised the concerns highlighted by witnesses that they have seen no evaluation or information on progress to deliver the Strategy. We asked Welsh Government Officials to clarify how progress has been monitored and measured and to explain why this has not been communicated to boards of public bodies or more widely.

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<sup>69</sup> RoP, 18 May 2023, paragraph 95

<sup>70</sup> RoP, 18 May 2023, paragraph 97

<sup>71</sup> RoP, 18 May 2023, paragraph 101

<sup>72</sup> RoP, 7 June 2023, paragraph 99

<sup>73</sup> RoP, 7 June 2023, paragraph 101

<sup>74</sup> RoP, 3 May 2023, paragraph 289



**103.** The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that there has been no formal evaluation of the plan adding:

"It has been something that we are looking at internally and looking at the actions around it. The team is monitoring it. It's about us looking, really, to deliver those actions. It was originally a three-year plan from 2020 to 2023. Obviously, as I said, the pandemic had disrupted some of the actions. It's something, as we get to the end of 2023, where we are looking at what we actually need to do in terms of what the next steps are, in terms of the plan and the strategy that we had. So, maybe at that point, we'd be looking at giving a summary of where we are at and doing a more formal evaluation in the future"<sup>75</sup>.

**104.** We referred to evidence gathered by the Committee that highlighted many of the issues identified in the [Reflecting Wales in Running Wales Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales \(2020-2023\)](#)<sup>76</sup> remain of significant concern. We asked Welsh Government officials if they were disappointed that these same issues don't appear to have improved during the three years since the Strategy has been in place.

**105.** The Chief Operating Officer said he was disappointed but expressed a view that significant progress had been made in a number of areas. He stated "...in terms of the outcomes and appointments, some of the statistics have definitely improved from when the plan was first put in place"<sup>77</sup>.

**106.** We were also told:

*"We've also improved the processes and the training programmes that we've done; we've had 208 people go through those training programmes. And so, I think there have been a number of things that we have done. Whether people haven't realised that or we haven't communicated that as effectively as we could—that may be some of the reason why people don't think there has been progress. I think there definitely has been progress, but there is a lot more to be done, and that's something we're really keen to drive forward"<sup>78</sup>.*

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<sup>75</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 91

<sup>76</sup> [Reflecting Wales in Running Wales - Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales \(2020-2023\)](#)

<sup>77</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 93

<sup>78</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 94

**107.** During our evidence session on 17 October 2024, we referred back to the evidence we had heard on 14 December 2023, when the Chief Operating Officer had said that of the 25 actions included in the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for public appointments, 9 had been completed or closed and 16 were ongoing. We asked for an update on how many have now been completed and which actions remained outstanding.

**108.** The Chief Operating Officer explained that internal analysis suggested that around 19 of the 25 actions have been completed, or have had significant work done on them and six are ongoing.

**109.** In relation to some of the actions that are not completed we were told there were some that related to specific targets for boards. Even though the Chief Operating Officer stated that “the obvious target is that our boards should be reflective of the people in the communities that we serve” the Welsh Government has not completed setting specific targets for that.<sup>68</sup>

**110.** The Chief Operating Officer explained:

*“There's further work that needs to be done on outreach. There were actions around outreach, but I don't think that is ever completed. There's more we can always do in terms of outreach. There are some actions that have happened, but there is a lot more we need to do to make sure we're reaching out to the right communities”<sup>79</sup>.*

**111.** He added some of the work has been done to analyse boards but it hasn't been completed and neither have actions to amend the website to a bilingual one-stop shop or an evaluation. The Chief Operating Officer concluded:

*“I would view that there are probably two thirds to three quarters of the things have been completed. Others, there is work in progress around them. So, there is progress. But, as I said, we can't sit here and say everything's been done and everything is fine and wonderful. No, it's a journey we're on, and we're making some progress, but there is more that we need to do”<sup>80</sup>.*

**112.** We again noted that the Strategy covered the period 2020-23 and asked officials if they could outline when the Strategy will be evaluated and how and when the results of any evaluation will be published.

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<sup>79</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 69

<sup>80</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 69

**113.** We were told that the plan is to evaluate the Strategy in spring 2025 when work is also planned to refresh the closely aligned ‘Anti-racist Wales Action Plan’<sup>81</sup>.

**114.** Looking to the future, we referred back to the evidence we heard on 14 December 2023 where officials told us the strategy is “very clearly a ministerial priority, especially around improving the diversity of appointments to boards”. We asked if this remained the case and officials confirmed that it was<sup>82</sup>.

**115.** The Chief Operating Officer explained some of the key measures come from some of the data and the improvements that have been put in place with the new recruitment system to collect that data<sup>83</sup>. He added:

*“There is more we need to do; there are some encouraging signs, but lots more we need to do to make sure we really do meet the principles, the conclusions and the outcomes from ‘Reflecting Wales in Running Wales’ and also the ‘Anti-racist Wales Action Plan’”<sup>84</sup>.*

**116.** Given the Strategy was originally only intended to be in place until December 2023 we asked what was happening next and what was the current status of the Strategy is.

**117.** While we did not get a direct answer on what the current status of the strategy the Director of HR told us:

*“... we need to, obviously, review the strategy; we've committed to review the strategy and we will do so by spring next year, working in conjunction with the race, disability and disparity evidence units of Welsh Government. There are key opportunities here to make sure that we align some of the data that we've gathered with some of the wider work that we're looking at across Welsh Government around how we promote an anti-racist organisation, which is why we keep coming back to the ‘Anti-racist Wales Action Plan’, because there is a lot of overlap here. So, the first element is looking at the data”.*

**118.** He added that one of the next steps would be to look at the possibility of committing to targets in the future, and these would be a ministerial decision. They will also need to build into this the conclusions of last year’s thematic review of the public body board recruitment, which outlined five key areas on how the

<sup>81</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 81

<sup>82</sup> RoP 17 October 2024, paragraphs 87 -88

<sup>83</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 89

<sup>84</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 89

Welsh Government can build a diverse talent pool, make recruitment practices more inclusive, train and support their staff, get more consistency in their practices, and pay and reimburse individuals<sup>85</sup>.

**119.** Taking into account the evidence heard about committing to targets, we reminded Officials that action point 5 under Goal 1 of the strategy states:

*"As data are improved, Welsh Government to consult on and if desired set overall targets across all Boards in Wales for BAME, disabled, LGBT+ and young people and socio-economic groups, recognising that individual Boards have varying specific requirements".*

**120.** We noted that the Chief Operating Officer had told us it would be a ministerial decision to set a target, but we were concerned that the consultation in terms of target setting had not happened.

**121.** The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that this consultation had not happened because Officials were waiting to finalise the work on the baseline information, and once they have the baseline information, then further work on targets can take place in the future<sup>86</sup>.

**122.** We were interested in the section in the Strategy on governance, which states:

*"There is a need for a governance approach to ensure ownership of the strategy, to ensure scrutiny and support and to hold the leadership to account. And this needs to include a full range of senior leaders and key stakeholders within the Welsh Government and beyond".*

**123.** Given our concerns about the lack of delivery in terms of some of the baseline objectives of the strategy, we asked Officials if they thought the clause, in terms of scrutiny and holding the leadership to account against the strategy's objectives, had been delivered.

**124.** We were told by the Chief Operating Officer that "there were things that we could do better from a governance or delivery perspective"<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 98

<sup>86</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 199

<sup>87</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 116

**125.** We highlighted that there was detailed information in the Strategy about a diversity and inclusion governance group for public appointments. There was information about the proposed membership and the terms of reference. We probed officials on this and it was confirmed that this group was never established.

**126.** When asked why, the Director of HR explained that he did not have that information or detail. However, he stated:

*"My understanding is that it was a product of circumstance, closely linked to the organisation co-ordinating efforts to other matters, including COVID, for example. Now, that doesn't excuse that the group wasn't established. However, I will make sure that we find out the reason why that wasn't the case, and as we do a lessons-learnt and as we review the strategy and the efficacy of the strategy and what we've delivered, this will clearly be a key point that we will want to focus on"<sup>88</sup>.*

**127.** We also asked whether the Senedd was informed about the decision not to establish the governance group. We were told by the Chief Operating Officer that:

*"... this is something that we will look into, as to whether there was a formal decision around it, or was it a circumstance of events that meant that that wasn't set up".<sup>89</sup>*

## Our View

**128.** We appreciate the significant amount of work to be done in this area and that some of the delays were caused by the pandemic. However, we think it is important to at least have an established timeline for the production of a replacement Diversity and Inclusion strategy. The previous strategy is already over a year out of date and it is unclear when a new strategy will be in place.

**129.** We are very concerned that the Director of HR stated in evidence to us that he was unable to commit to a timeframe for a new strategy. We welcome his reaffirmation of the Welsh Government's commitment to making sure they undertake the review of the strategy by spring 2025<sup>90</sup> but with no clear timescale or plan in place, we have doubts that this will be achieved.

<sup>88</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 124

<sup>89</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 128

<sup>90</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 102

**130.** We are concerned that no evaluation has been undertaken of the strategy and 6 of the actions included in the strategy for public appointments remain incomplete. Most worryingly of all, the target that boards should be reflective of the people in the communities that they serve has no specific targets set to measure success and the Welsh Government has yet to commence a consultation on setting new targets.

**131.** We are appalled that the Welsh Government's Diversity and Inclusion strategy is over a year out of date and that there has been no evaluation, consultation, action, or even a plan to replace it.

**Recommendation 7.** We recommend that the Welsh Government should, now that the former strategy has expired and no successor has been put in place, urgently have a dedicated, standalone Public Appointments Strategy and action plan in place covering diversity and inclusion in its broadest sense (including language and geographic location). It would not be acceptable, especially given that so many fundamental aspects of the 2020-23 strategy are yet to be delivered, to subsume this into the Anti Racist Wales Action Plan as has been suggested. However, we note that given the short remaining time of the Senedd Term the Welsh Government may wish to consider reinstating the current strategy until May 2026. We believe that it is not the content of the Strategy that is a problem, but more so the lack of delivery of its commitments.

**Recommendation 8.** We recommend that the Welsh Government, as a matter of priority, sends this Committee a timeline setting out its intentions and hard deadlines for the review of its Diversity and Inclusion strategy and the development and implementation of a new one.

**132.** We are concerned that the failure to establish the governance group could have been a contributory factor to the lack of delivery against the strategy's objectives. Having a strategy in place for a three year period with no thorough governance or monitoring of its implementation is of significant concern.

**133.** We are disappointed that it remains unclear whether the Senedd was informed of any decision not to establish the governance group.

**Recommendation 9.** We recommend the Welsh Government explain to the Committee why only one annual action plan and one annual report was published under the Reflecting Wales in Running Wales - Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales (2020-2023) and, in addition to which minister / official decided not to establish the diversity and inclusion governance group, to confirm which minister or official took the decision every year of the above Strategy not to publish the annual action plan and annual report, and why.

**Recommendation 10.** We recommend the Welsh Government provide certainty that the poor governance and administration of its Diversity & Inclusion strategy has not and is not being repeated in other policy areas. To provide this certainty the Welsh Government should provide a list of all the active strategies and actions plans that it has, together with what the reporting requirements are and whether or not they are being met.

## 4. Data on diversity

**134.** The Welsh Government’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategy<sup>91</sup> highlights the importance of diverse boards, which includes securing Board members from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The strategy’s year 1 action plan 2020-2021 includes several actions aimed at collecting data on different protected groups on Boards, including socio-economic background. It’s not clear what progress has been made on delivering these actions<sup>92</sup>.

**135.** The Strategy’s key performance indicators require the collection of data on diversity.

**136.** The Commissioner for Public Appointments told us that data is still being inputted manually and “the risks of human error are high as a result”<sup>93</sup>. The Commissioner said that Whitehall is currently planning to introduce a new application system where applicants will input data themselves. He said that without the Welsh Government taking similar action “there is a risk that we have a two-tier system developing in the data report” and that the Welsh Government data may become “less robust” by comparison.

**137.** In its written evidence, the Welsh Government states that the PBU are working with Knowledge and Analytical services and the Race and Disability Evidence Units in the Welsh Government to collect diversity data for boards of Regulated Public Bodies. It says questionnaires were issued in May 2023 and the initial assessment of the pilot would be published in summer 2023. Senedd Research has been unable to find an evaluation of any pilots. It is not clear how data was measured before this pilot and therefore how comparable data will be with any data gathered in previous years. Therefore, it is unclear how the effectiveness of the Welsh Government’s strategy will be measured.

**138.** We noted that the strategy raised the need for data relating to socio-economic groups to be gathered. For example, objective 1 of the strategy, which relates to data, states there is a need to:

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<sup>91</sup> Action Plan: Year 1: 2020-2021 Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales

<sup>92</sup> Action Plan: Year 1: 2020-2021 Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales

<sup>93</sup> RoP, 15 December 2022, paragraph 141

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*“Review, strengthen and extend current systems for gathering information...for example by identifying proxy indicators of socio-economic groups”<sup>94</sup>.*

**139.** Despite being three years on from the initial strategy, we were told by Welsh Government officials the data relating to these indicators had not been collected and work to gather the data had been delayed. We heard:

*“... it wasn't until last year that we were sending out the surveys to boards around their diversity work, and that work is now ongoing, at the analysis stage, and we expect that to report in 2024. Around that, I haven't got the information on all the characteristics that the data group is looking at”<sup>95</sup>.*

**140.** We were concerned by this delay especially given the strategy also notes:

*“Data for locality are also necessary, in response to the perception that many Boards are “Cardiff-centred”<sup>96</sup>.*

**141.** We are aware that people living outside of Cardiff and south-east Wales face challenges in applying for public appointments due to location, language requirement and, potentially, the rural nature of their home area meaning there are fewer opportunities. The strategy required the Welsh Government to gather details on the location of board members for this reason three years ago and it has not been done even though it was set out as a priority in the strategy.

**142.** The Chief Operating Officer reiterated that the data collection exercise has been delayed but agreed that making sure we have diverse boards that reflect the strategy is fundamental and location will be an important part of that<sup>97</sup>.

**143.** We were also interested in the level of representation on public boards from people who are from an ethnic minority background, who have a disability or who are LGBTQ+, as these groups have been historically underrepresented. We also wanted to understand how many of those holding public appointments are

<sup>94</sup> Reflecting Wales in Running Wales Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales (2020-2023), page 24

<sup>95</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 111

<sup>96</sup> Reflecting Wales in Running Wales Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales (2020-2023), page 24

<sup>97</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 115

Welsh speakers and the percentage of people on boards in Wales who live outside of Wales.

**144.** The Chief Operating Officer did not have this information available during our evidence session in December 2023 and agreed to provide details in written correspondence. However, the correspondence that followed confirmed that the following information has not been collated:

- Figures in terms of the number of Welsh speakers on public boards;
- Percentage of people who live outside Wales sitting on public boards in Wales;
- Details of whether the Welsh Government collects data on where Public Appointees live i.e. collect the first part of appointees' postcodes to map out any patterns in where Public Appointees live and whether some areas have a higher proportion of Public Appointees than others.

**145.** The letter states:

*"... information is not collated as part of the data we collect when making public appointments. As I explained at PAPAC, Welsh Government Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units have carried out a pilot study to collect baseline data from public bodies on the diversity composition of Boards. The pilot phase did not collect Board information on Welsh language skills or location/place of residence but this can be considered for future data collections. It is anticipated that the findings of the pilot study will be published during the first half of this year"<sup>98</sup>.*

**146.** The letter makes no mention of whether data relating to the level of representation on public boards of people from ethnic backgrounds, who have a disability or who are LGBTQ+.

**147.** We found this response to be very disappointing and we were compelled to write back asking for further information. As a Committee, we were certain that data concerning the Welsh language and the addresses of applicants and appointees are held by the Welsh Government and could have been assessed to provide further information to assist our inquiry.

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<sup>98</sup> Letter from the Welsh Government Chief Operating Officer to PAPAC, 29 January 2024

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**148.** We quoted to the Welsh Government the evidence it provided to the Committee, in which the Chief Operating Officer referred to the Welsh Government's Reflecting Wales in Running Wales diversity and inclusion strategy. We had quoted during that evidence session the strategy's commitment to:

*"Set up a robust system for collecting data on different protected groups on Boards; including socio-economic grouping, language ability, and geographical location".*

**149.** We noted in our letter that applicants are asked to complete an Appointments Monitoring Form, which includes an individual's ability to speak Welsh. Similarly, the Welsh Government application processes capture the addresses of all applicants and, subsequently, appointees.

**150.** This seemed to be at odds with the actions set out in the diversity and inclusion strategy. We asked Welsh Government officials to reconsider our letter and respond to our points.

**151.** We received a further letter from the Welsh Government on 15 March 2024 which set out that the pilot phase referred to previously is the work of the Welsh Government Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Unit, which involved contacting public bodies and asking for information on the diversity of composition of their boards. This work did not ask for information on Welsh language skills or location and will not be included in that report.

**152.** However, the letter also confirmed that the Welsh Government does collect applicant address and Welsh language skill information as part of the appointment process but, at the time of writing, this information had not been collated or analysed.

**153.** The letter explained that the Welsh Government was developing its capability, and its intention was to analyse the data relating to Welsh language and residencies, after a full year under the new system.

**154.** During our evidence session in October 2024 we revisited Action Point 1 of Objective 1 in the Strategy, which is to gather data from all current members of boards in Wales, to establish a baseline in order to influence actions in the future.

**155.** We note that the Welsh Government has now gathered that data, but it has not assessed it fully and is not ready to publish it until early 2025. To clarify, we asked whether the data that had been gathered for the baseline included not

only data on race, but also data on all of the other elements that the original strategy referred to, including language, geographical location and so forth<sup>99</sup>.

**156.** The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that there have been two surveys, one focusing on board member diversity and another on workforce data collection. However, he did not have the details on which characteristics the data covered, but committed to writing to the Committee to confirm the data captured in line with Action 1.1 of the Reflecting Wales in Running Wales strategy.

**157.** This information was provided to us in a letter dated 8 November 2024 which stated<sup>100</sup>:

*"Survey 1 focussed on the current approaches that organisations take to collect diversity information on both their Board members and their wider workforce. The survey included questions on whether organisations currently hold or collect any equality characteristic information from their board members and workforce, and if so, how that information is collected.*

*The survey focused on 11 equality characteristics, including socio-economic status and Welsh language skills.*

*Survey 2 collected information on the equality characteristics of Board members of regulated Public Sector Bodies and the Welsh Government itself. The survey asked Board members about their personal characteristics, including the following:*

- Ethnicity*
- Disability Status*
- Age*
- Sex*
- Religion or Belief*
- Sexual identity*
- Gender Identity".*

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<sup>99</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 105

<sup>100</sup> [Letter from the Director General and Chief Operating Officer Welsh Government to the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 8 November 2024](#)

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**158.** The letter also stated that Welsh language proficiency was not included in the original data collection process and this was due to the focus being directed towards specific priorities aimed at assessing key personal characteristics. The letter says:

*“We understand however, that Welsh language skills are an important aspect of representation on our boards. We are committed to addressing this gap and will incorporate Welsh language proficiency into future data collection efforts for board members. Additionally, if helpful to the committee, we are open to conducting a supplementary survey of current board members to capture Welsh language skills data without delay”<sup>101</sup>.*

**159.** The Welsh Government’s written evidence (October 2024) provides some data from the Cais system for applications between 17 July 2023 and 16 July 2024. However, it cautions that the data is based on applications, not individual applicants i.e. one individual could have submitted multiple applications for different appointments and their data would be captured multiple times, even though it is the same person applying for different posts. In relation to the data requested specifically by the Committee, the letter stated:

- 21.2% of the 391 applications made to regulated public bodies were from individuals with advanced Welsh skills and, of those, 27.3 % were appointed.
- The majority, 46.3% of the 391, applications made to regulated public bodies were from individuals who had no Welsh language skills and, of those, 40% were appointed.
- 33.7% of 190 applications made to unregulated public bodies were from individuals with advanced Welsh skills and, of those, 54.5% were appointed.
- The majority, 42.6% of 190, of applications made to unregulated public bodies were from individuals with no Welsh skills but of those only 31.8% were appointed.

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<sup>101</sup> Letter from the Director General and Chief Operating Officer Welsh Government to the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 8 November 2024

- 42.7% of the 391 applications made to regulated public bodies were from individuals located in South East Wales and, of those, 56.4% were appointed.
- The area within Wales with the lowest number of applications made to regulated public bodies was Mid Wales with only 4.3% of the 391 applications made coming from Mid Wales. 16.4% of applications made were by individuals from outside Wales and of those 7.3% were appointed. 11% preferred not to say where they were located.
- 37.9% of the 190 applications made to unregulated public bodies were from South East Wales and, of those, 27.3% were appointed.
- The area within Wales with the lowest number of applications made to unregulated public bodies was Mid Wales with only 8.9% of individuals coming from Mid Wales. Of those 13.6% were appointed. 14.2% of applications were made by individuals outside of Wales and 11.4% of those were appointed. 3.7% preferred not to say where they were located.
- 36.1% of the 391 applications made to regulated public bodies were from individuals who considered themselves to be from a lower socio-economic background and, of those, 41.8% were appointed.
- The majority of applications made to regulated public bodies, 41.2%, were from individuals who did not consider themselves to be from a lower socio-economic background and, of those, 43.6% were appointed.
- 28% of the 190 applications made to unregulated public bodies were from individuals who considered themselves to be from a lower socio-economic background and, of those, 20.5% were appointed.
- 54% of the 190 applications made to unregulated public bodies were from individuals who considered themselves to not be from a lower socio-economic background and, of those, 59.1% were appointed.

**160.** The written evidence does not provide data on those who made applications or who were appointed before July 2023 and therefore does not provide an accurate picture of the diversity of current public body Boards and appointees.

**161.** The pilot survey results by the Welsh Government's Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units, designed to collect some diversity data from public bodies, have not been published yet.

**162.** We noted from the Welsh Government's written evidence that, between July 2023 and July 2024, 27 per cent of people who were appointed had advanced Welsh language skills.

**163.** However, in response to a written question from Siân Gwenllian MS tabled on 21 August 2024, the Cabinet Secretary provided information on the number of public appointments applications made by Welsh speakers since 2019 as a percentage of all appointments; and the number of those applications by Welsh speakers that were successful, as a percentage of all the appointments made<sup>102</sup>.

**164.** We wanted to clarify if the Welsh Government was using information from the previous appointment system. If so, the Welsh Government's written response to the written question states that, since 2019, 41.8 per cent of applications for regulated public appointments were made by people who had Welsh language skills, and that includes advanced and foundational skills. Of those applications, 12.5 per cent were successful and, as a percentage of all the appointments that were made, those who had Welsh language skills only made up 5 per cent.

**165.** During the last year, if you include those with advanced and foundational skills, the figure is 60 per cent. We noted the significant difference between those two sets of figures, 5 per cent over five years with Welsh language skills at any level and 60 per cent in the last year. We asked if there had been any analysis made of the reason for that huge difference and was the data correct. We sought clarity on whether there was a specific intention to increase the number of Welsh speakers during the past year.

**166.** The Chief Operating Officer recognised the difference in the data and explained that one of the problems of the old system was that it relied on voluntary reporting. There was no requirement for people to fill in the fields, and this undermined the validity of the data.

**167.** We were told that, in the current system, all those fields are mandatory, so the quality of data gathered over the last year is more robust. It was clarified that no analysis of the historic data had been done.

**168.** We noted that the second step in meeting the Welsh Government's goal, as set out in its strategy as 'Goal 1: To gather and share data', is to set up a robust system for collecting data on different protected groups on Boards; including socio-economic grouping, language ability, and geographical location<sup>103</sup>.

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<sup>102</sup> [WQ93759 \(w\) Tabled on 21/08/2024](#)

<sup>103</sup> Reflecting Wales in Running Wales: Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales (2020-2023), page 25



**169.** To us, that means not just going back and getting the baseline, but collecting data continuously. We asked, based on the information provided in the written evidence, if the Welsh Government is now collecting data regularly and if it has established a robust system for collecting and analysing it.

**170.** We also wanted to establish whether the Welsh Government was achieving the ambitions outlined in the third step of Goal 1, to work with disability organisations to allow people to self-report on their status in terms of their disabilities.

**171.** The Chief Operating Officer reiterated that the new Cais system was robust for collecting data. However, the Welsh Government is not currently in conversations with bodies and organisations that work with people with disabilities in terms of self-identification on disability matters. We were told:

*“We originally procured a contract with Chwarae Teg and Deep Insight to provide advice, support and diversity and inclusion training, which we did promote to our networks, and that included disability organisations. In terms of the current work on capturing data and making sure that colleagues can self-report on their status with greater confidence, we do work with the internal Welsh Government disability and race disparity unit, who have expertise in how we look at statistical matters and how we report and gather data on that. I appreciate that's not quite the same, but there is more work that we need to do in this area, and that's absolutely something that we will return to”.<sup>104</sup>*

**172.** The fourth action point under Goal 1 required the Welsh Government to “commission ongoing evaluation and monitoring, using quantitative and qualitative data, on different aspects of progress made”, with the findings reported annually. We asked if this action had been completed and were told the Welsh Government has an annual report around its work on diversity and inclusion, and that comes to the board<sup>105</sup>. The Chief Operating Officer said he would have to check whether that gets published.<sup>106</sup>

**173.** We note from the data provided by the Welsh Government in its written evidence that 4.3 per cent of the 391 applications came from mid-Wales, and 16.4 per cent of applications were made by individuals from outside Wales, and, of

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<sup>104</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 186

<sup>105</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 192

<sup>106</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 197



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those, 7.3 per cent were appointed, and 11 per cent preferred not to say where they were located.

**174.** We asked officials whether they felt that the system catered towards making sure that there is diversity in public appointments and that appointments were being made to people who reflected Wales. We also asked what the Welsh Government was going to do to address the shortage of applicants from mid-Wales.

**175.** We were told the thematic review of the public body board recruitment highlighted more could be done in terms of training and support, including increasing training to help candidates navigate the recruitment process and advertise and share what's available. They acknowledged there was more to do in terms of outreach, particularly across different communities in Wales, to make sure that individuals are keen and willing to apply<sup>107</sup>.

**176.** The Director of HR explained that the recent move of the public appointments team to the wider recruitment hub would help share good practice between the Welsh Government's recruitment processes and those for Public Appointments. Approaches to boost outreach could include reaching out to local communities, drop-in sessions, presence at local job fairs, interactions with local schools and universities, and reaching out to key businesses and other contacts<sup>108</sup>.

**177.** The Committee is aware that the Senedd Commission's approach to increasing diversity in its public appointments has been successful. Although the Commission in its evidence to us explained that on balance the data they held on disability was poor, and they are now collecting data relating to social mobility and for example using gender-neutral candidate packs, refreshing their websites to use peer-led stories with real-life case studies, using bilingual advertising agencies and advertising on Women on Boards, a website for women interested in the public appointments process. We asked if the Welsh Government was looking at good practice at the Commission or elsewhere, that could be emulated.

**178.** The Director of HR explained that while he had not yet looked at the Senedd Commission he would personally speak to the head of HR at the Commission to understand further the processes they undertake.

**179.** However, he explained that supporting the public appointments team are a number of individuals with expertise elsewhere across the English and Welsh

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<sup>107</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 144

<sup>108</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 146

public sector. In particular, the Welsh Government has been working with colleagues who are supporting their health team with the workplace race equality index.

**180.** He added that the Welsh Government have also been looking at streamlining its public appointments process so that where an individual is passed by a recruitment board, but perhaps isn't the appointed candidate because there is another candidate who scored higher, they could then be considered for the next appointment without having to go through another process<sup>109</sup>.

**181.** One final point regarding data that we sought clarity on was whether the data collected includes regulated appointments, those that are unregulated and the third category of appointments, which doesn't come under any kind of procedure at all. We wanted to know whether the Welsh Government collected data across each category.

**182.** The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that data collected through the Cais system relates to the regulated appointments and any non-regulated appointments that go through the system and voluntarily follow the code. It does not include every single organisation that the Welsh Government is responsible for, but it does include those that fit within those categories<sup>110</sup>.

## **Our View**

**183.** Evidence showing the lack of data collected by the Welsh Government on the demographics of public board appointees is highly troubling. Despite its strategy setting out a need to gather and share data, it appears the Welsh Government did the exact opposite.

**184.** Data was not collected until 2023, despite the strategy being published in 2020. Even when this data was collected, there was essential data missing. At the time of our reporting, the data has not been assessed fully and no details about the data will be ready to publish until early 2025.

**185.** We concluded that, at best, the Welsh Government would be delivering action point 1 of objective 1 but very late in the process; five years late to be precise. At worst, it perhaps hasn't been delivered at all and we will have to wait to see what has been delivered in 2025. Either way this is not a good delivery record against an action point in a key Welsh Government strategy.

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<sup>109</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 157

<sup>110</sup> RoP, 17 October 2024, paragraph 209

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**186.** The Welsh Government’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments (the ‘Strategy’)<sup>111</sup> was published in 2020 and we were told that delivery of the strategy was a “ministerial priority”<sup>112</sup>.

**Recommendation 11.** We recommend that the Welsh Government must urgently provide this Committee with a complete (not spilt into various correspondence) and comprehensive data set of diversity characteristics (including language and location), as it committed to in its 2020-2023 strategy, for all current - Regulated and Non-Regulated public appointments, for transparency and to inform future activity in this area, thereby creating the baseline promised in Action 1, Goal 1 of the Strategy.

**Recommendation 12.** We recommend the Welsh Government meets our request to publishes the reports “ to its board” referred to by the chief operating officer in paragraph 166 of this report.

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<sup>111</sup> Reflecting Wales in Running Wales Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales (2020-2023)

<sup>112</sup> Welsh Government - Written Evidence, 11 January 2022

## 5. Improvements to the public appointments process

### Developing pipelines of talent

**187.** Many witnesses talked about the importance of developing pipelines of talent by offering mentoring or apprenticeship programmes to underrepresented groups. In her evidence to the Committee, Chantal Patel said there are good examples of board apprenticeship programmes which could be used to encourage people from underrepresented groups to apply<sup>113</sup>.

**188.** Shereen Williams told the Committee that public bodies should be asked to host taster sessions for potential applicants<sup>114</sup>. Dr Plummer agreed that creating pathways and pipelines for candidates is "really important"<sup>115</sup>.

**189.** The Committee also heard that, for mentoring and apprenticeships to work, other barriers to the application process need to be addressed. Dr Atweologun told the Committee that it is important that any mentoring schemes include an element of reciprocal learning so that those mentoring also learn from the experiences of the person their mentoring<sup>116</sup>.

**190.** In his evidence, Damian Bridgeman said that existing mentoring schemes needed to be better funded and that they should include qualified executive coaches, rather than sessions being run by third-sector organisations who may not have specific expertise<sup>117</sup>.

**191.** In its written evidence, the Welsh Government states the:

*"PBU is keen to work with our external partners to facilitate mentoring and shadowing opportunities for people from protected groups to help us build a pipeline of individuals who are interested in applying for a board position".*

**192.** It also says the PBU has worked with Partnership Teams to hold engagement events with Partnership Teams. It does not say if the actions included in its Year 1 Action Plan were delivered.

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<sup>113</sup> RoP, 18 May 2023, paragraph 111

<sup>114</sup> RoP, 3 May 2023, paragraph 194

<sup>115</sup> RoP, 3 May 2023, paragraph 207

<sup>116</sup> RoP, 18 May 2023, paragraph 116

<sup>117</sup> RoP, 7 June 2023, paragraph 52

**193.** We noted that the Year 1 Action Plan and Welsh Government Diversity and Inclusion Strategy included a number of actions in relation to developing a pipeline of talent, apprenticeship and mentoring schemes. We asked Welsh Government Officials if these had been delivered and how their success in increasing the diversity of applicants was measured<sup>118</sup>.

**194.** We were told a number of actions had been taken, including training programmes and a talent bank of 14 individuals who had been “near misses” in securing public appointments, who are being supported with future applications. The Welsh Government has also created a shadowing programme for 15 individuals to get experience sitting on boards and develop connections with board members and chairs through this experience. We heard that these individuals will be remunerated to remove any barriers to accessing this support<sup>119</sup>.

**195.** We queried how opportunities to get on the shadowing programme were being advertised and, for reassurance given our concerns about roles being generally Cardiff-centric, how the best possible candidates were being attracted to these roles.

**196.** During oral evidence, Officials did not have this information available and provided clarity, in writing, on the 15 individuals selected to sit on Boards to gain experience. The letter stated:

*“... these are all graduates of Welsh Government's Near Ready Leadership and Public Leaders of the Future programmes which were run by Chwarae Teg last year. We are in the process of onboarding the 15 applicants who have confirmed their interest and matching them with the Boards who are participating in the programme. We anticipate that the mentees will attend their first Board meetings in March”.*

## The recruitment process

### Application process

**197.** The Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) published a report on improving the recruitment process in November 2020. It found that the way in which interviews for posts are conducted can act as a barrier to underrepresented groups.

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<sup>118</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 169

<sup>119</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 170

**198.** The 2018 Lord Holmes Review into opening up public appointments to disabled people found that disabled people were more likely to have “non-standard CVs and education histories”. In workshops conducted as part of the review, participants said that:

*“Lived experience itself is a talent [...] wider experiences disabled [people] have are crucial to boards, particularly around problem solving and the willingness to think laterally”.<sup>120</sup>*

### **An “art” to public appointment applications**

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**199.** Evidence from multiple witnesses suggested there is a particular style used for public appointment applications that can act as a barrier to underrepresented groups.

**200.** Dr Atewologun told us:

*“The idea of the art of applying to public appointments reflects that there is a formal and an informal, or an explicit and an implicit way of successfully navigating or traversing some of these major thresholds.*

*The implication for diversity, inclusion and equity is that people who tend to belong to what we describe as the ‘in group’ have much more access to what the rules of the game are to help them navigate the public appointments process, and other processes, relative to people who belong to ‘outsider groups’ for whom only what is explicit is made available”<sup>121</sup>.*

**201.** Shereen Williams reiterated the view that “there is an art to applying for public appointment” and a “form of words you need to be using”, which could be preventing a more diverse set of applicants<sup>122</sup>.

**202.** Dr Rosetta Plummer told us:

*“... it’s all the subtleties that you don’t know... It’s understanding the particular nuance and lingo, being able to match the eight criteria*

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<sup>120</sup> Lord Holmes Review [Opening up public appointments to disabled people](#)

<sup>121</sup> RoP, 18 May 2023, paragraph 14

<sup>122</sup> RoP, 3 May 2023, paragraph 178

*being sought by the committee in your STAR examples on less than one-and-a-half sides, or two sides. The demands in doing that...<sup>123</sup>.*

**203.** On the WCPP recommendation that candidates could provide short 'bios' rather than traditional CVs, Dr Atewologun told the Committee:

*"I think it could make a difference, because longer bios give people an opportunity to tell their story more authentically and gives permission, in some ways, to provide a more rounded, less standardised format in terms of putting one's best self forward"<sup>124</sup>.*

**204.** Dr Atewologun added that evaluating the impact of introducing bios would be important, using both quantitative data as well as qualitative data on candidate's experiences of the process<sup>125</sup>.

**205.** Shereen Williams said that recruitment to public bodies should look to recruit and include criteria of "lived experience" so that the focus is on talent and diversity rather than skills which can be taught such as leadership and dealing with board papers<sup>126</sup>.

**206.** This was also supported by Chantal Patel who said:

*"You've got to be looking beyond whether you're seeking specific skills, but you're looking at talent that's going to be able to bring a different perspective on the make-up of boards"<sup>127</sup>.*

**207.** Damian Bridgeman suggested to the Committee that although applications mention that reasonable adjustments can be made, there is a lack of awareness in the PBU about what adjustments can be offered, with the onus placed on candidates to ask for specific things. He gave the example of screen readers and assistive technology, which quite often don't work with generic application systems, and of having to inform the PBU himself of what he needed rather than the PBU offering solutions<sup>128</sup>.

**208.** In its findings report, the Citizen Engagement Team said that "many participants felt that the accessibility and ease of use of the current application

<sup>123</sup> RoP, 3 May 2023, paragraph 179

<sup>124</sup> RoP, 18 May 2023, paragraph 16

<sup>125</sup> RoP, 18 May 2023, paragraph 16

<sup>126</sup> RoP, 3 May 2023, paragraph 187

<sup>127</sup> RoP, 18 May 2023, paragraph 60

<sup>128</sup> RoP, 7 June 2023, paragraph 41

software is a barrier”<sup>129</sup>. Examples of barriers included PDFs being difficult to use with screen readers, the inability to use Word documents, and also that the system doesn’t store applicants’ details for use in future recruitment exercises.

**209.** In its report on the recruitment process, WCPP recommended that underrepresented groups should be involved in the development of new recruitment systems. This view was echoed by participants in the findings report by the Citizen Engagement Team. Damian Bridgeman recommended that the development of recruitment software to include “people on that panel with lived experience of how the software landscape works with assistive technology”<sup>130</sup>.

**210.** Similar views were shared by Dr Atweologun who stated that, where possible, multiple options should be pro-actively provided to people<sup>131</sup>. She also emphasised the importance of having diverse interview panels to provide candidates with a “sense of safety, or belonging, or reduce stereotype threat that the candidate experiences”.

## **Inclusivity of the Recruitment Process**

**211.** The Welsh Government’s written evidence stated that discussions are underway on the following:

- Candidate packs - removing complex language which may only apply to people who have worked in senior public roles, including “lived” experience in the person specification and moving towards a behaviour-based approach;
- Developing guides for prospective candidates to improve chances of success;
- Developing guides and training for Partnership Teams when running a campaign
- Seeking feedback from candidates post-interview

**212.** The Year 1 Action Plan for the Welsh Government’s Diversity and Inclusion strategy contained delivery dates for 2020 and 2021. It is unclear whether actions were delivered or if the discussions underway, outlined above, are new actions in addition to those contained in the Year 1 Action Plan.

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<sup>129</sup> [Public Appointments in Wales: Engagement findings report](#), March 2023, paragraph 17

<sup>130</sup> RoP, 7 June 2023, paragraph 89

<sup>131</sup> RoP, 18 May 2023, paragraph 38



**213.** Given the wealth of evidence we have received showing the recruitment process to be anything but inclusive, we asked Welsh Government officials what action had been taken since 2020 to make the application process more accessible to candidates from underrepresented groups.

**214.** We were told there had been a range of actions put in place including “simplification of the packs and criteria for roles” and a guide for candidates to help them in applying<sup>132</sup>.

**215.** It was explained that more information had been provided to partnership teams on the recruitment process, along with pro-formas and templates to simplify and standardise the application process. However, it was also noted that further work was needed and the Welsh Government is engaging with an external expert through the accountability group of the 'Anti-racist Wales Action Plan', to do this<sup>133</sup>.

### **Post Application/Interview Feedback**

**216.** Several witnesses told the Committee about the importance of feedback to candidates to encourage them to make future applications and to help them develop.

**217.** Dr Atewologun explained that more training and guidance should be given to panels on the importance of giving good feedback stating:

*“I wanted to add that a lot of research shows that where there is no standard approach or consistent approach to giving feedback, giving feedback is.. poorer quality, it's less frequent, it is less consistent and it is less actionable. So I just wanted to emphasise that research indicates that more standardised feedback is good for everyone, but in particular is helpful in building a more diverse and equitable space”<sup>134</sup>.*

**218.** Dr Plummer did not think that enough is done to continue to encourage people to apply again if they miss out on a particular appointment and ensure they aren't “put off”<sup>135</sup>.

**219.** Damian Bridgeman gave a specific example where he had not received feedback and when he asked for it was told there were no records of his interview

<sup>132</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 179

<sup>133</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 180

<sup>134</sup> RoP, 18 May 2023, paragraph 73

<sup>135</sup> RoP, 3 May 2023, paragraph 230

process. He said that had hindered his development and ability to create a development plan with his mentor<sup>136</sup>.

**220.** The Welsh Government's Year 1 Action Plan (2020-21) for the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales includes a number of actions on feedback under Goal 4, including developing mechanisms for giving regular, strength-based feedback to all applicants and ensuring continuous learning from their feedback<sup>137</sup>. Goal 4 (a) looks to develop a strength-based and development-based approach to giving feedback to unsuccessful candidates.

**221.** We are concerned by the amount of evidence provided to the Committee emphasising the key role constructive feedback can play in ensuring that unsuccessful candidates from underrepresented groups aren't "put off" from applying in future and are given support to develop their skills.

**222.** We asked if consistent advice and guidance was provided by the Public Bodies Unit to recruitment panels on the important of providing feedback to unsuccessful candidates.

**223.** The Chief Operating Officer explained that "feedback is really important" and:

*"There is a standard process now where all outcome letters invite candidates to seek feedback, and that'll be written feedback from the panel or specific feedback from the chair of the panel"<sup>138</sup>.*

## Remuneration

**224.** The WCPP report states that a lack of or low level of remuneration for public appointments and limited flexibility of terms and conditions can hinder efforts to increase diversity<sup>139</sup>. Underrepresented groups, including those with multiple protected characteristics, may be disproportionately impacted, and it can also inhibit the participation of those with dependants and caring responsibilities.

**225.** The Welsh Government's Strategy also acknowledges that "a consistent barrier for many from protected groups is the limited remuneration for work which requires more time and commitment than it is "rewarded" for"<sup>140</sup>. It further stated that many felt that "only those on good salaries and good pensions are able

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<sup>136</sup> RoP, 7 June 2023, paragraph 54

<sup>137</sup> [Action Plan: Year 1: 2020-2021 Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales, page 13](#)

<sup>138</sup> RoP, 14 December 2023, paragraph 197

<sup>139</sup> [Wales Centre for Public Policy, Increasing diversity in public appointments through recruitment](#)

<sup>140</sup> [Reflecting Wales in Running Wales Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales \(2020-2023\)](#)

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to apply". The Strategy stated the Welsh Government was in the process of conducting a review of Board remuneration. It isn't clear if the review has concluded.

**226.** Evidence from witnesses suggested that the remuneration offered by many posts was not reflective of the time commitment required to complete the roles properly. Some witnesses also felt that their experience of the time commitment required in reality differed significantly from the initial commitment advertised in the job description.

**227.** Former independent member of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, John Gallanders, told the Committee:

*"... the appointment and the advertisement was based on four days a month. The reality is that it's two, three days a week if you're actually taking up the role in the manner in which you should do"<sup>141</sup>.*

**228.** John Cunliffe told the Committee that positions are not "remunerated in the proper manner for the time commitment Independent Members have to contribute"<sup>142</sup>.

**229.** Chantel Patel expressed similar views and stated that Board papers can be hundreds of pages long and that roles require a much greater commitment than attending a meeting only. Dr Atewologun agreed with the views about time commitment dissuading individuals from applying.

**230.** Dr Plummer told the Committee that:

*"I bet the public bodies unit wouldn't have the slightest idea how many hours we spend, or any board member spends".*

**231.** Shereen Williams agreed that advertised roles often don't include reading time or preparation time.

**232.** Dr Plummer felt that the lack of fair remuneration will mean that younger people may be dissuaded from applying:

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<sup>141</sup> RoP, 3 May 2023, paragraph 155

<sup>142</sup> RoP, 3 May 2023, paragraph 156

*“And that remuneration and time issue is a key issue that will constantly mean you’re going to get the old and grey, not the young or those with caring responsibilities”.*

**233.** Remuneration was specifically mentioned as a barrier for underrepresented groups in the Citizen Engagement Team findings report. Participants felt poor remuneration could be a barrier for those in full-time employment who would need to reduce working hours to take up a public appointment. Complications for people who claim benefits and sit on a board were also raised. Several participants felt that the remuneration offered by Welsh public bodies was lower than that offered in other UK nations.

**234.** The Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, International Relations and Sport Committee, in its response to this Committee’s inquiry, highlighted:

*“A number of public appointments in Wales are remunerated; others aren’t. It is expected that which roles are paid and unpaid is determined by the Welsh Government based on a set of established criteria (i.e. size of organisation, financial turnover, number of staff employed etc). However, the Committee is concerned by what could be an inconsistent approach in one organisation, and as such would recommend that a broader review is conducted in case there are other examples elsewhere in the public sector in Wales. The role of the President of National Museum Wales is a salaried role; the Vice President position is unpaid. Vice Chair roles in other organisations are often remunerated, albeit at a reduced rate to the Chair rate, to recognise the difference in responsibility level. In the example referred to, the Committee considers that there is significant overlap in the knowledge, skills and experience required for both roles. Members are concerned that by not remunerating the role of Vice President, it could have an impact on the diversity of candidates who may apply for the role i.e. only those who can afford to do it unpaid will apply”.*

## **Our View**

**235.** The evidence suggests there are some improvements that could be made to the public appointments recruitment process. Starting with the development of pipelines of talent which we note was included as an action within the Welsh Government’s Year 1 Action Plan and Welsh Government Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

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**236.** A number of actions to develop talent were taken forward including training programmes and the creation of a talent bank. However, we heard from witnesses that shadowing and coaching programmes are helpful in developing talent but Welsh Government Officials were unable to tell us how shadowing opportunities were being promoted and what the Welsh Government was doing to attract the best candidates and those outside of Cardiff.

**237.** We note that 15 graduates of Welsh Government's Near Ready Leadership and Public Leaders of the Future programmes are due to be matched with Boards and start attending Board meetings in March 2025. We look forward to receiving an update on the graduates progress.

**Recommendation 13.** Page We remained unconvinced that enough is being done by the Welsh Government to develop a pipeline of talent for public appointments in Wales. We recommend that the Welsh Government improves its approach to encouraging and supporting individuals in applying for public appointments. This could include increased shadowing opportunities and taking a broader and more inclusive approach to promoting available appointments.

**238.** We have serious concerns about the application process for public appointments and heard from multiple witnesses that the process itself presents barriers to underrepresented groups. Witnesses from underrepresented groups referred to the "art" of applying for a public appointment and how trying to match the criteria of the role specification in a specific way is preventing a diversity of candidates.

**239.** Many witnesses told us about the need for recruiting bodies to include "lived experience" and focus on talent and diversity so that different skills can be brought to the make of boards.

**240.** We are deeply concerned to hear from witnesses that the Welsh Government's Public Bodies Unit has a lack of awareness of what reasonable adjustments can be offered to candidates who need them. There appears to be a lack of proactivity by the Public Bodies Unit about what adjustments can be offered and we are concerned the onus has been placed on candidates to make suggestions and find solutions on what needs to be adjusted. Some candidates may not be confident in making these suggestions or know that they can which risks them either not applying for roles or unfairly disadvantaged during the recruitment process.

**Recommendation 14.** Page We recommend that the Welsh Government's Public Bodies Unit undertake work to improve its awareness of what constitutes a reasonable adjustment and take a proactive approach in providing applicants

with multiple options in terms of the adjustments they require. We ask that an update on this work including details of options available be provided to us in 6 months' time.

**241.** We are very concerned that despite the Welsh Government's intentions to make the public appointments process more accessible progress has been slow. The Welsh Government has acknowledged this and we note that Officials are engaging with an external expert through the accountability group of the 'Anti-racist Wales Action Plan'. However we believe action in this area is needed more urgently and efforts should be made to make the process more accessible.

**Recommendation 15.** We recommend the Welsh Government progresses its work to improve the accessibility of the public appointments recruitment process with greater pace and we ask for an update on the outputs of its work with the accountability group of the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan as soon as possible.

**242.** We believe that post application and interview feedback is vital to encouraging future applications and helping unsuccessful applicants improve their skills. We are disappointed that not enough is being done to encourage individuals to re-apply when unsuccessful. We heard specific example whereby candidates had not been provided with feedback even after they had requested it.

**243.** The Welsh Government's Year 1 Action Plan (2020-21) for the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales seemed well intended with a number of goals being set out for providing meaningful feedback. However, this does not chime with what we heard from witnesses and we are concerned about the lack of and quality of feedback being provided to unsuccessful applicants.

**Recommendation 16.** We recommend that the Welsh Government review its approach to providing feedback to unsuccessful applicants for public appointments and we ask that details be provided to us on how the Welsh Government will ensure feedback is consistent and standardised training is provided to recruitment panels on what constitutes good practice in this area.

**244.** The evidence we heard was clear that remuneration is a significant factor in increasing diversity in public appointments. Most witnesses told us that underrepresented groups were likely to be disproportionately impacted by low remuneration, and that it constrains the participation of those with dependants and caring responsibilities.

**245.** The Welsh Government also acknowledges that 'only those on good salaries and good pensions are able to apply'. The Strategy also stated the Welsh

Government was in the process of conducting a review of Board remuneration. It isn't clear if the review has concluded.

**246.** We also heard from a range of witnesses that remuneration for public appointments was not reflective of the time commitment required by these posts and the workload often differed from that set out in the job description.

**Recommendation 17.** Remuneration is clearly a barrier to more people applying for public appointments and we recommend an update on the progress and outputs of the Welsh Government's review of Board Remuneration is provided to us.

## 6. Public Appointments by the Senedd

### Senedd Public Appointments

**247.** The Senedd is responsible for a small number of public appointments in Wales<sup>143</sup>. These include:

- Crown appointments nominated by the Senedd, which include the Auditor General for Wales ('AGW') and the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales ('PSOW').
- Senedd appointments, such as the Commissioner for Standards and the Chair of the Wales Audit Office.

**248.** Standing Orders set out the Senedd's rules and procedures<sup>144</sup>. Standing Order 10 sets out the procedure for appointing individuals to public office, where the appointment has to be made by the Senedd, on the nomination or recommendation of the Senedd or with the approval of the Senedd. There are also specific Standing Orders that related to some of these public appointments such as the appointment of the Auditor General for Wales and the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

### Appointment process

**249.** A committee will usually be involved, although the appointment process will differ according to the role being filled<sup>145</sup>.

**250.** A committee will occasionally be responsible for conducting the recruitment process and advising the Senedd on the preferred appointment/nomination. A committee pre-appointment or pre-nomination hearing may take place before the Senedd considers the matter.

**251.** In describing the Senedd Commission public appointments process, the Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd explained:

*"The role of Senedd Commission staff varies according to the Senedd's role in any given recruitment process. So, for example, the Finance Committee, of course, is responsible for oversight of the Wales Audit Office and the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. Therefore, the role of the Finance Committee there involves nominating a preferred*

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<sup>143</sup> [Senedd Public Appointments](#)

<sup>144</sup> [Standing Orders of the Welsh Parliament](#), September 2024

<sup>145</sup> [Senedd Public Appointments](#)

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*candidate for Auditor General, and also for the role of ombudsman. It then also appoints non-executive members of the Wales Audit Office board and recommends the appointment of its chair. So, under those circumstances, what Senedd Commission staff do is provide a secretariat for those processes, occasionally a senior member of staff to help with the panel duties. We would advise on recruitment strategies, including the use of executive search agencies, if that was the committee's preference. It's a similar process then in supporting the standards committee, who have the responsibility of deciding on a preferred candidate for the standards commissioner role, which is then appointed by the whole Senedd. So, our role as Commission staff is basically one of support and administrative backup and advice. We support committees in the same way when they undertake pre-appointment hearings"<sup>146</sup>.*

**252.** The Chief Executive added that the Commission is more involved in two further categories of appointments i.e. members of the Independent Remuneration Board and the Commission's independent advisers<sup>147</sup>.

**253.** We asked if the Senedd Commission had any procedures in place to support committees in facilitating recruitment to Crown and Senedd appointments. The Chief Executive confirmed that the recruitment principles that the Commission employs across staff appointments are similar to the Cabinet Office principles. This includes incorporating the Nolan principles. The Chief Executive added that committee appointments are the committee's responsibility, but the Commission would supply the support that they want in any particular recruitment<sup>148</sup>.

## **Internal Audit review of Senedd Commission public appointments**

**254.** The Senedd Commission is the corporate body for the Senedd and is responsible for the provision of property, staff and services to the Senedd so that it can perform its function.

**255.** The Senedd Commission's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee<sup>149</sup> (ARAC) acts in an advisory capacity (it has no executive powers). Part of ARAC's role is to examine and provide assurance on "the adequacy of the management response to issues identified by internal and external audit"<sup>150</sup>.

<sup>146</sup> RoP, 2 October 2024, paragraph 146

<sup>147</sup> RoP, 2 October 2024, paragraph 147

<sup>148</sup> RoP, 2 October 2024, paragraph 149

<sup>149</sup> [Senedd Commission Audit and Risk Assurance Committee](#)

<sup>150</sup> [Senedd Commission Audit and Risk Assurance Committee](#)

**256.** The Senedd Commission’s internal audit plan 2023-24<sup>151</sup> noted that, in November 2023, internal audit would carry out an audit review “of the systems and processes in place to support Committees in their roles in relation to public appointments”. It indicated there are “reputational and value for money risks associated with this area if the process is not well managed and efficient”. The target was for ARAC to consider the results of the work by internal audit in February 2024.

**257.** On 19 February 2024, ARAC was told the public appointments audit was ongoing<sup>152</sup>.

**258.** In its Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24 (July 2024)<sup>153</sup>, the Senedd Commission confirmed it had completed an internal audit on public appointments. It noted that “no significant concerns were raised” in the internal audit reports during the year, although it said “where weaknesses or issues are identified, management continues to take positive action to address audit recommendations”.

**259.** Neither the ARAC nor Senedd Commission Annual Reports 2023-24 include any detail about internal audit findings, including the level of assurance given. Nor do they confirm whether internal audit made recommendations to the Senedd to improve its arrangements, whether these were accepted by management and if they have been implemented.

**260.** We noted that the Senedd Commission internal audit plan 2023-24 stated it would carry out an audit review of the systems and processes in place to support committees in their roles in relation to public appointments. We asked what was the outcome of the audit, and what assurance did it give that the systems and processes in place are fit for purpose and demonstrate value for money.

**261.** The Chief Executive informed us that the results of the audit were available in February 2024 and focused on the Commission staff’s role and whether there were any improvements that we could make there. She explained the assessment was encouraging, but there were some action points. These included clarifying the relationship between various Commission staff teams in the recruitment—committee clerks, the HR teams and the finance teams involved. Furthermore, the Commission needed to set clear key performance indicators at the outset and

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<sup>151</sup> Senedd Commission Internal Audit Plan 2023-24 [No Longer Available online]

<sup>152</sup> [Minutes of a meeting of the Senedd Commission Audit and Risk Assurance Committee - 19 February 2024](#)

<sup>153</sup> [Senedd Commission Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24](#)

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conduct formal evaluations after every recruitment to make sure lessons are learned<sup>154</sup>.

**262.** The Chief Executive and Clerk to the Senedd added that a key lesson was to formalise those lessons-learnt exercises and to make sure that the various teams that are involved in supporting committees in the appointments speak to each other about, for example, the role of executive search and other recruitment methods to enhance the diversity of the candidate set. We were pleased to learn that all of the recommendations arising from the internal audit review had been acted upon<sup>155</sup>.

## **Senedd Commission Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-26**

**263.** The Senedd Commission’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategy: 2022-26 (‘D & I Strategy’)(June 2023) says:

*“Where we outsource recruitment campaigns for Commission senior colleagues and for Public/Crown Appointments (for which we manage campaigns and appointments) we work with our executive search partners to widen the talent pipeline, alongside our usual advertising and outreach arrangements. We will collect and analyse diversity data with these campaigns to inform campaign design and where appropriate, publish this data, in line with data protection law”<sup>156</sup>.*

**264.** The Commission said that it will use data from its recruitment campaigns to identify whether it is making progress to ensure that talent pipelines for Public/Crown and senior appointments are “diverse and processes optimised for inclusion and reaching the widest audience (panel diversity, outreach and process design)”<sup>157</sup>.

**265.** The Senedd Commission’s Diversity and Inclusion: Annual Report 2023-24 notes that, in relation to public and Crown appointments, its Recruitment Team continues to work in “partnership with an executive search agency to diversify the talent pipelines and panels”<sup>158</sup>. Before the end of its Diversity & Inclusion Strategy,

<sup>154</sup> RoP, 2 October 2024, paragraph 152

<sup>155</sup> RoP, 2 October 2024, paragraph 153

<sup>156</sup> [Senedd Commission - Diversity and Inclusion Strategy: 2022-26](#), June 2023

<sup>157</sup> [Senedd Commission - Diversity and Inclusion Strategy: 2022-26](#), June 2023, page 34

<sup>158</sup> [Senedd Commission - Diversity and Inclusion: Annual Report 2023-24](#), page 16

the Commission said it wants to “collect and analyse data on recruitment diversity insights for public/Crown appointments run by the Senedd Commission”<sup>159</sup>.

**266.** We asked Senedd Commission Officials how would they assess the effectiveness, to date of the Commission’s Diversity & Inclusion Strategy in ensuring the talent pipelines for Public/Crown appointments are “diverse and processes optimised for inclusion and reaching the widest audience”. We also wanted to know in what circumstances would Commission staff recommend the use of executive search agencies for recruitment campaigns, how would they determine which one to use and is their effectiveness and value for money assessed.

**267.** The Chief People Officer explained that the Commission had only done four recruitment campaigns<sup>160</sup> so far and even though diversity data was collected on those it is not a lot of data to work from. However, she explained:

*“... what the data is telling us from those initial datasets is that there is a lot of room for improvement there, particularly in appointing women into these positions, those from ethnic minority backgrounds, and, in particular, disabled people”<sup>161</sup>.*

**268.** The Chief People Officer informed us that the Senedd Commission does use executive search agencies and how these are used is down to the individual committees. For example, if they are committee-led appointments, a value-for-money exercise is undertaken, for example we heard:

*“... for the last Audit Wales appointments that were undertaken, the decision was made not to use an executive search agency, but from the rudimentary—and it is rudimentary—data that we’ve got, it does demonstrate, it does show, that when we have used executive search agencies, it does provide for better outcomes in terms of progressing diversity through that process”<sup>162</sup>.*

**269.** In terms of the support provided to Committees, officials advise on the use of gender-neutral candidate packs, making sure that they are as inclusive as possible. We heard that the Commission was in the process of refreshing its intranet pages on public appointments so they will use peer-led stories using real-

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<sup>159</sup> [Senedd Commission - Diversity and Inclusion: Annual Report 2023-24](#), page 79

<sup>160</sup> These included two Audit Wales appointments, one Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and a Senedd Commission independent adviser.

<sup>161</sup> RoP, 2 October 2024, paragraph 162

<sup>162</sup> RoP, 2 October 2024, paragraph 163

life individuals to give prospective appointees an overview of what it's like to be on a board, to try and reach out to those candidates who wouldn't think that they could be on a board, so they are able to relate and identify<sup>163</sup>.

## The Finance Committee's role in Senedd public appointments

**270.** The Finance Committee is the responsible Committee for the oversight of the Wales Audit Office (Standing Order 18) and the PSOW (Standing Order 18A). In his response to this Committee's call for evidence for its inquiry on public appointments, the Chair of the Finance Committee clarified its role included nominating the preferred candidates for these roles (for appointment by the Crown), as well as appointing Non-Executive Members of the Wales Audit Office Board and recommending the appointment of its Chair.

**271.** To date, during the Sixth Senedd, the Finance Committee Chair confirmed they have been responsible for nominating the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (the 'PSOW') and appointing the Chair and Non-Executive Members of the Wales Audit Office Board. The Chair said these were "robust" appointments that "attracted a broad range of high quality candidates, and produced outcomes that gained cross-party support in the Senedd".

**272.** The Finance Committee's view is that the Welsh Government and Senedd public appointments should be "governed by a consistent set of principles." The Chair added:

*"A healthy democracy requires an open, transparent and fair process for appointment to senior public roles and...these values should be at the heart of how such appointments are made in Wales".*

**273.** To ensure the best candidates are appointed and "trust and integrity" in the Welsh public appointments system is maintained, the Finance Committee said it is essential that these posts "continue to attract high calibre candidates from a diverse range of backgrounds so that those appointed reflect the communities they serve".

## Our View

**274.** We note that the Senedd Commission is responsible for a small number of public appointments in Wales but these are very important and high-ranking

<sup>163</sup> RoP, 2 October 2024, paragraph 164

roles. We are pleased that the Commission has robust procedures in place to facilitate recruitment to these roles including application of the Nolan principles.

**275.** We are pleased that the Senedd Commission undertook an internal audit review of the systems and processes in place to support Committees in their roles in relation to public appointments and that the findings were encouraging. We are also pleased that where actions were required for improvement these have been implemented. We are also encouraged by the Senedd Commission's approach to Diversity and Inclusion in relation to its public appointments. We are confident that the Commission is monitoring data on recruitment diversity and is using this information to ensure its recruitment processes are wide-reaching and inclusive.

**276.** The support the Commission provides to Committees making public appointments is encouraging and we look forward to seeing the refreshed intranet pages highlighting case studies from public appointments.

**277.** We note the important role of the Senedd's Finance Committee in nominating the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (the 'PSOW') and appointing the Chair and Non-Executive Members of the Wales Audit Office Board as well as the Auditor General for Wales.

**278.** We acknowledge the point raised by the Finance Committee that the Welsh Government and Senedd public appointments should be "governed by a consistent set of principles." This is a view we share as we believe it would enhance transparency and public understanding of the public appointment process in Wales.

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## 7. Pre-appointment Hearings

### Background

**279.** Since 2019 the Senedd has been invited to carry out pre-appointment hearings to scrutinise some Welsh Government candidates for public appointments.

**280.** Making pre-appointment hearings a routine part of the appointment process for chairs of public bodies in Wales was a commitment made by First Minister Mark Drakeford in his manifesto for the leadership of Welsh Labour Party in 2018. It is intended to improve the scrutiny and transparency of the public appointment making process.

**281.** Pre-appointment scrutiny takes the form of a preferred candidate facing questions from the relevant Senedd Committee. The Committee will publish a report, usually within 48 hours of the hearing, setting out its view on the candidate's suitability.

**282.** Roles considered suitable for such scrutiny would usually be:

- of significant public interest;
- have a significant impact on the public; and
- contribute significantly to advancing equality and diversity of Wales.

**283.** Examples include the chairs of cultural bodies in Wales, health boards and the Commissioners for Children, Older People, the Welsh Language and Future Generations.

**284.** There is a protocol agreed between the Llywydd and First Minister in relation to pre-appointment hearings which includes a list of appointments that are subject (at committees' discretion) to pre-appointment hearings.<sup>164</sup> It also makes provision for committees to request to hold a pre-appointment hearing for posts that are not on the list but which the relevant committee considers to be of significant public importance or impact. The protocol provides that the Minister can agree or decline such requests.

**285.** As part of our consultation for our inquiry we sought the views of Senedd Committees on the pre-appointment process.

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<sup>164</sup> [Pre-appointment hearing by the National Assembly for Wales' Committees](#)



## Pre Appointment Hearing Process

**286.** The Health and Social Care (HSC) Committee told us that Committees' role in the public appointment process is limited stating:

*“While pre appointment scrutiny has an important role in transparency, it cannot and should not replace, or be seen to replace, a robust and transparent recruitment process. Therefore, we have been careful to ensure that the recommendations we have made in pre-appointment hearing reports are framed to reflect this limited role”.*<sup>165</sup>

**287.** The HSC Committee also suggested that to bring consistency across appointments, and ensure committees' roles are better understood, the Chairs' Forum should discuss this matter further with a view to agreeing standard wording that could be used when committees are content that they have not seen any reason why a candidate should not be appointed.

**288.** The HSC Committee also highlighted concerns regarding the Welsh Government's ability to attract sufficient suitable candidates. Their letter to us explained that their predecessor committee in the Fifth Senedd conducted a pre-appointment hearing for the role of chair of Swansea Bay University Health Board (UHB). The post had needed to be readvertised due to a lack of suitable candidates for interview.

**289.** In addition to reaching a conclusion on the suitability of the preferred candidate, the Fifth Senedd Committee raised three broader issues with the public appointments process:

- The need to expand the range of platforms or outlets used for advertising public appointment vacancies.
- The use of search consultancies.
- The need to identify, analyse and address potential barriers to prospective candidates.

**290.** In his response to the Fifth Senedd Committee's report, the then Minister for Health and Social Services agreed that it was disappointing that the post had needed to be readvertised, and noted that in February 2020 a new Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales had been launched which

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<sup>165</sup> [Correspondence from the Health and Social Care Committee](#), 27 January 2023



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would: “aim to build a robust public appointments pipeline through open, robust and potentially new types of public appointment assessment processes. In building the pipeline, targeted outreach work will be undertaken to raise awareness of the opportunities available to attract new talent. Mentoring, shadowing and training programmes will also be developed to support those interested in becoming board members”.

**291.** In the summer of 2021, the HSC Committee became aware of an advert for the Chair of Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB which made no reference to the potential for a pre-appointment hearing. The Committee understand this was because of concerns within Welsh Government about timescales. Ultimately, the recruitment did not attract a suitable field of candidates, and the Minister made an interim appointment instead. A written statement was issued in September 2021.

**292.** The HSC Committee held a post-appointment hearing with the interim Chair in November 2021. Following the hearing, the Committee wrote to the Minister expressing disappointment that an interim appointment had been necessary and raised a number of points relating to the public appointments process, including how the Welsh Government will ensure that similar roles attract a diverse range of high quality candidates in the future.

**293.** In her response, the then Minister said that she shared “the disappointment of the Committee in attracting individuals of a high calibre to apply for these very important roles which has led, in this case, to an interim appointment”. She went on to say that the Welsh Government is committed to undertaking public appointment exercises through fair and open competition in accordance with the Governance Code on Public Appointments, and has taken steps to extend the reach of public appointment publicity activity including targeting and engaging with diverse audiences.

**294.** She further advised that a Task and Finish Group had been set up to look at succession planning for senior leadership positions in the NHS in Wales.

**295.** The Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure (CCEI) Committee also highlighted concerns about the pre-appointment hearing process arising from the pre-appointment hearing they held with the Welsh Government's preferred candidate for the position of Chair of the National Infrastructure Commission of Wales (NICW) in September 2021.<sup>166</sup>

**296.** The Committee concluded that the preferred candidate was a fit and proper person to be appointed as Chair of the Commission. However, the Welsh

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<sup>166</sup> [Correspondence from the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee](#), 24 January 2023

Government provided the Committee with a note that stated, "A previous recruitment campaign to appoint a substantive chair, run in autumn 2019, identified a number of appointable candidates".

**297.** However, the Deputy Minister for Climate Change informed the Committee that there had not been an open application process for the role on this occasion. The Deputy Minister's rationale for this was that the Commission had "lost some momentum over the last year" and a lengthy recruitment campaign could "exacerbate uncertainty" over the Commission's purpose.

**298.** The CCEI Committee felt that roles like this should be subject to open recruitment unless there are exceptional reasons not to do so stating:

*"An open recruitment process will ensure that the pool of applicants includes the best candidates from a diversity of backgrounds. If more than one suitable candidate was identified through the recruitment exercise in 2019, it is uncertain why they were not given the opportunity to apply for this position on this occasion. Furthermore, several other appointable candidates may have emerged in the two years that had elapsed since the initial recruitment exercise".<sup>167</sup>*

**299.** The CCEI Committee also told us that during the pre-appointment hearing, the preferred candidate informed the Committee that he had already commenced his duties as Chair. While the Committee understood the urgency to appoint the Chair of the NCIW, it felt that the appointment being made before the pre-appointment hearing raised concerns about the integrity of the process.

### **Re-appointing existing postholders to major public appointments.**

**300.** The CCWLSIR Committee told us that on occasion, the Welsh Government will re-appoint existing postholders to public appointment roles. Such re-appointments are not subject to the pre-appointment hearing process. In some cases, where the initial appointment was made previous to 2019, individuals in those posts will not have been subject to pre-appointment scrutiny by the Senedd either.

**301.** In order to enhance the scrutiny and transparency of major public appointments, the CCWLSIR Committee wishes to recommend that where re-appointments are made, the Welsh Government write to the relevant committee setting out the reason(s) for doing so. This would apply equally to appointments

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<sup>167</sup> [Correspondence from the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee](#), 24 January 2023

made before and after the commencement of pre-appointment scrutiny for major public appointments (i.e before and after 2019).

### **Protocol Between the First Minister and Llywydd**

**302.** The Equalities and Social Justice (ESJ) Committee told us the arrangement agreed between the First Minister and the Llywydd in the Fifth Senedd of 2016-2020 should be reviewed explaining:

“To improve transparency and accountability, the agreement should be amended to more clearly articulate the role and purpose of hearings and pre-appointment scrutiny. Existing arrangements could be strengthened to foster a greater sense of shared ownership of the pre-appointment process”.<sup>168</sup>

**303.** The ESJ Committee also said it was noteworthy that equivalent guidance at the Westminster emphasises early engagement with Select Committees in ways that are absent in the Wales-specific agreement. These include dialogue with Chairs regarding the proposed timetable and approach prior to the commencement of a recruitment exercise and set out that:

*“The Department should consult the Chair of the select committee about the proposed selection process before a recruitment exercise begins. This includes sharing the description and person specification, a proposed outline of the timetable for the campaign and any relevant information about the proposed advertising strategy”.*<sup>169</sup>

**304.** On a more practical level the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations (CCWLSIR) Committee told us that based on their experience to date, the following documents should be provided as standard by the Welsh Government for pre-appointment hearings:

- Preferred candidate’s application form, curriculum vitae and personal statement;
- An anonymised summary of the demographic profile of the candidates who applied for the post and who progressed at each stage of the recruitment process;

<sup>168</sup> Correspondence from the Equalities and Social Justice Committee, 2 February 2023

<sup>169</sup> Cabinet Office, ‘Cabinet Office Guidance: pre-appointment scrutiny by House of Commons select committees.’

- A copy of the information pack provided to all candidates including job description and person specification; and
- Information on how and where the role was advertised.

**305.** The CCWLSIR Committee felt this information is important in allowing committees to undertake a full consideration of the preferred candidate's qualification for the role they are applying for. It also ensures that committees are able to see how and where the post was advertised. For instance, to ensure a wide breadth of candidates would have been able to see any advertisement of the post.<sup>170</sup>

**306.** The CCWLSIR Committee wished to recommend that the Welsh Government and the Senedd seek to formalise the sharing of the information outlined above and agree what would be an appropriate time frame to deliver this information i.e. one full week in advance of a pre appointment hearing.

## **Our View**

**307.** We are very concerned about the number of examples of whereby pre-appointment hearings have been held whereby candidates have been appointed without an open recruitment process. Of further concern was one example of a preferred candidate taking up post prior to the pre-appointment hearing. We believe this serious undermines the integrity of the process and does not allow for proper scrutiny of such appointments.

**308.** It is also worrying that there have been occasions whereby existing post holders have been reappointed and not been subject to the pre-appointment process. This lacks openness and transparency and we agree with the CCWLSIR Committee that this process needs to be changed.

**Recommendation 18.** We recommend that where re-appointments are made, the Welsh Government write to the relevant committee setting out the reason(s) for doing so.

**309.** We also note the concerns of the Health and Social Care Committee regarding the Welsh Government's ability to attract sufficient suitable candidates for public posts. These views align with the evidence set out in this report and the lack of action taken to extend the reach of public appointment publicity activity including targeting and engaging with diverse audiences.

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<sup>170</sup> [Correspondence from the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee](#), 23 January 2023

**310.** Despite the then Ministers response to the HSC Committee’s concerns, citing (in February 2020) the new Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Public Appointments in Wales, the findings of this report has clearly found there to many shortcomings in the delivery of many fundamental aspects of the 2020-23 strategy. Our recommendations within this report seek to address these issues. We have reservations regarding the current approach to the Senedd Committees’ roles in pre-appointment hearings for Welsh Government public appointments. We note that a protocol has been in place between the Llywydd and First Minister since Mark Drakeford became the First Minister but we think this needs to be reviewed, updated and formalised.

**Recommendation 19.** We recommend that the Senedd Commission and the Welsh Government work together to develop a set of shared principles to govern the public appointments they are responsible for. These should include the role of pre-appointment hearings, formalising the sharing of relevant information and an appropriate time frame to deliver this information i.e. one full week in advance of a pre-appointment hearing.

**Recommendation 20.** . We recommend that the Senedd Business Committee consider whether the existing protocol, as agreed between the Llywydd and the then First Minister Mark Drakeford in relation to pre-appointment hearings, should be reviewed, updated and codified into Standing Orders. We believe that an appropriate body within the Senedd should have some oversight of the ad hoc arrangements that vary from appointment to appointment in terms of Committees involvement in Welsh Government led public appointments and the representation of Committee members on Welsh Government led appointments panels.

## Annex 1: List of oral evidence sessions.

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed on the [Committee's website](#).

Date	Name and Organisation
<b>15 December 2022</b>	<b>William Shawcross,</b> Public Appointments Commissioner
<b>3 May 2023</b>	<p><b>John Gallanders, Former independent board member</b> Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board</p> <p><b>John Cunliffe, Former independent board member</b> Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board</p> <p><b>Dr Rosetta Plummer</b> Independent witness</p> <p><b>Shereen Williams, Chief Executive</b> Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales</p>
<b>18 May 2023</b>	<p><b>Dr Doyin Atewologun, Chief Executive Officer</b> Delta Leadership and Inclusion Consultancy</p> <p><b>Chantal Patel</b> Independent witness</p> <p><b>Tracey Burke - Director General, Climate Change and Rural Affairs</b> Welsh Government</p> <p><b>Emma Williams - Director, Housing and Regeneration</b> Welsh Government</p> <p><b>Stuart Fitzgerald - Deputy Director, Home and Places</b> Welsh Government</p>
<b>7 June 2023</b>	<b>Damian Bridgeman</b> Social Care Wales
<b>23 November 2023</b>	<b>Ian Bruce</b> Ethical Standards Commissioner for Scotland
<b>14 December 2023</b>	<p><b>Tim Moss, Director General and Chief Operating Officer</b> Welsh Government</p> <p><b>Kathryn Jenkins, Chief Security Officer</b> Welsh Government</p>

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<b>Date</b>	<b>Name and Organisation</b>
<b>17 October 2024</b>	<b>Tim Moss, Director General and Chief Operating Officer</b> Welsh Government <b>Dominic Houlihan, Director, People and Places</b> Welsh Government