

# Empowering Diverse Communities into Employment: Findings and Next Steps Report

## Executive Summary

Through a conversation about empowering diverse communities into employment in the North Wales public sector, four overarching themes were identified by participants in terms of barriers to employment:

- [Language Barriers](#)
- [Qualifications and Experience](#)
- [Cultural Differences](#)
- [Access and Processes](#)

In response, a range of [steps to tackle these barriers](#) have been proposed and examples of [existing good practice](#) have also been shared. It is intended that public sector organisations use the valuable feedback and insights shared through this conversation with residents, service users and interested parties across North Wales to take actions to continue working towards making public sector organisations, as employers, more welcoming and inclusive of all the communities that they serve.

## Introduction

Work to engage on the theme of *Empowering Diverse Communities into Employment* took place between June and August 2023. The work focused on engaging residents, service users and interested parties across North Wales (both individuals facing barriers to employment and professionals working with individuals facing barriers to employment) as part of a conversation to make sure that public sector organisations are welcoming and inclusive of everyone in their recruitment and retention processes.

As part of this work the public sector was defined as any job funded by a local or national government. The organisations that make up the public sector are some of the largest employers across North Wales – offering a wide range of jobs including jobs in education, emergency services, the environment, healthcare, housing, social care and more. The purpose of these jobs is to provide a public service to the community and, as our communities across North Wales are more diverse than ever, that means making sure every public sector organisations as employers welcome people from diverse backgrounds.

The work is timely as, at the time of writing, many public sector organisations in North Wales are working on their Strategic Equality Plans for the period from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2028. The valuable feedback and insights that were shared through this conversation, alongside a range of other engagement and research activities, will help to inform the objective and action plan development that is currently taking place as part of this work. The information gathered will also support the implementation of recently released Welsh Government plans, such as the [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan](#) and the [LGBTQ+ Action Plan](#).

This work was carried out collaboratively by the North Wales Community Cohesion teams and members of the North Wales Public Sector Equality Network, and was supported by the North Wales Regional Skills Partnership and the North Wales Public Services Board Grant. We would like to thank the individuals and organisations who shared their experiences and insights with us, as we look to build on the valuable feedback that you shared in our work to ensure that public sector organisations reflect the diverse communities that we serve.

## Methodology (Workshops and Questionnaire)

**Workshops:** Two Zoom workshops (one afternoon session and one evening session) were held on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2023. The workshops were moderated by members of the North Wales Community Cohesion teams. The sessions were dedicated to hearing the views of the attendees and people at the workshops were invited to discuss a range of questions, including:

1. What barriers to employment exist in North Wales for people of diverse cultures and ethnicities?
2. What barriers are there for the LGBT+ community, or disabled or neurodivergent individuals?
3. How can we work together to overcome these barriers?

There were 31 attendees across the two workshops, including individuals who shared their personal experiences in terms of barriers to employment, representatives of community and third sector organisations, and public sector staff working with individuals facing barriers to employment. During the promotion of the workshops there were comments shared on social media posts which have also been incorporated into the key findings below as appropriate.

As well as individuals from across North Wales, participants at the workshops included representatives from organisations, including:

- North East Wales Multi-Cultural Hub (NEWHub)
- North Wales Ethnic Multicultural Association (NWEMA)
- Race Equality First
- Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB)
- VOICES Network (Refugee Support)
- CLPW CIC (Wrexham Portuguese Community)
- North East Wales Chinese Women's Association
- Chester & North East Wales Anglo-Polish Society
- UNIQUE Transgender Network

**Questionnaire:** An online questionnaire was created to support the discussions that took place at the workshop. The questionnaire was translated into ten languages prior to being hosted on the North Wales Regional Skills Partnership website and the questionnaire was promoted using a range of methods and networks, including promotion at the workshops. The questionnaire was open from late June 2023 to the end of August 2023.

In total, 8 responses were received and the qualitative responses have been built into the key findings section below. The topics covered in the questionnaire were similar to the

discussions that took place at the workshops, but the low response rate may highlight that a survey was not the preferred method through which to engage on this topic. A summary of the questionnaire responses has been attached alongside this report.

## Key Findings

Information has been drawn from the workshops, questionnaire responses and social media comments to inform the key findings section below. We have tried to ensure that the comments and feedback shared with us at the workshops are reflected as accurately as possible. After drafting an initial version of the report we shared a copy with workshop attendees for feedback, and received the following comments:

- *“Excellent feedback, you did capture every single important detail! Hope this can make a difference in the future and it can be shared with every employer and Welsh Government”*
- *“Thank you for sending the feedback summary. This is quite detailed and includes all the essential issues...It makes you realise how difficult it is for different communities to surmount these barriers and how it affects integration as well as wellbeing of the newcomers”*

The key findings section has been structured as follows:

1. Identifying barriers to employment for diverse communities in North Wales
2. Identifying how we can support diverse and inclusive public sector workplaces:  
Actions suggested during the engagement
3. Sharing Good Practice Examples

## Barriers to Employment

The first step we took was to ask participants what they saw to be the main barriers to employment for diverse communities in North Wales. The responses to the questions regarding barriers to public sector recruitment have been grouped into four overarching themes:

- Language Barriers
- Qualifications and Experience
- Cultural Differences
- Access and Processes

### Language barriers

On the theme of language barriers a range of issues were identified, including: Welsh language requirements in the public sector, confidence in language skills / perceptions of not having the language skills to meet the job requirements, and the need for training (and practice) opportunities to develop language skills further.

Specific feedback and responses received in relation to qualifications and experience being a barrier to employment were as follows:

- For a lot of minority groups, they don't feel their language skills are good enough for the requirements of the job
- Language is also a big barrier for workers trying to settle their families when they move to the area (school and community)
- Employers say that applicants need to speak Welsh to work in Wales but that is not always possible as many people can't speak Welsh – they are competing against companies who do not have that requirement and are not going to promote Welsh in the workplace so public sector has to remember - learning Welsh too is a barrier
- If we don't speak English and/or Welsh very well, which language do we learn to avoid having to learn 2 languages?
- When learning Welsh, you need to be around people speaking that language – the next generation will find it easier as our children are in schools learning English for school and Welsh and then their own native language at home but it's difficult for some who are hesitant as they never learned a foreign language and need to have a will of doing so – living in a different county we need to try even though we shouldn't forget who we are or where we came from but adjust to the new culture and environment
- There are chances for people to learn English and Welsh from scratch – free courses – but will be difficult for some – they may have never studied and learned in their own countries. This country is very welcoming and there are opportunities for everyone and you just have to open yourself to those opportunities
- Being a refugee, you don't choose the country you flee to – of course there are ESOL classes but we are taught grammar but what you need is language where you can apply for a job and socialise in that language – some jobs ask you to speak Welsh and you are just learning English so language barriers is an issue
- I've lived here 30 years now. Whilst recognising that English was so important – I couldn't find a proper job so I had to study and I tried but the language is still a barrier – similar situation as others
- People are taught abroad that the UK = English, so communities coming to Wales are often starting from nothing in terms of knowing about Welsh. With Welsh classes, places tried to run them before the pandemic and there was some success but it is difficult. Could there be a line (in adverts) about 'Do you have a second language?' as people coming to the UK often have 2 or 3 languages that they speak which can help to work with communities (e.g. Portuguese language doctor working with the Portuguese community) – so there's a real benefit to any second or third language that people can speak
- We want to see more adverts saying 'we welcome people with an ethnic minority background', that is really good – and explain what Welsh Desirable is - we know Welsh is desirable but our English isn't even good yet
- Most jobs in the council say Welsh essential or desirable – many ethnic minority people think they cannot be that person – even if they have the skills or can only say Bore Da, they won't apply
- Language is the main one as they only want Welsh speakers which is discriminatory – remove Welsh language barriers which stops English only speakers applying
- Not being able to speak Welsh is a barrier, even though an applicant may be perfect for the position advertised

- Welsh language requirement at the point of entry to the job. It feels unfair that young people coming out of school even now who are not fluent in Welsh (even when doing all that is required of them to learn) are automatically disqualified from any public sector job within the Council. If the goal is truly to increase the number of people speaking Welsh, why not offer on the job Welsh training?
- We didn't know what a GP was or council tax – there's no translation for that. So we had to learn by ourselves – luckily Facebook started and I put information on there and we helped each other and made connections. I started helping people what to do, how to get a National Insurance number, what to do with tax returns – I was learning – there were no Portuguese translations for it.

## **Qualifications & Experience**

On the theme of qualifications and experience a range of issues were identified, including: qualifications obtained outside of the UK not being easily transferrable, opportunities for work experience (e.g. for refugees who are unable to work for up to 12 months after arrival) and barriers around the right to work in the UK.

Specific feedback and responses received in relation to qualifications and experience being a barrier to employment were as follows:

- Some people have qualifications from their own country but can't rely on the same qualifications in this country
- The employer should support candidates with obtaining permanent visas as part of the application process
- Create opportunities for work experience – expose students/trainees to business language and what to do and not to do or say in the workplace
- Sometimes job adverts don't include the level of experience so makes it difficult to apply for that job.
- Share experience and how to do things like apprenticeships
- Refugees don't have the right to work until you have been in claim for 1 year or more – and then jobs need to be on the occupational list – what if that job doesn't suit you? You have no opportunities to develop your interpersonal skills or to acquire experience while they are learning.
- Work experience – it is very difficult to find interpreters – many UK refugees have to wait and this can take years and you can't work while this is going on. Also you can't bring your certificates to say what you are so sometimes it is easier to retrain rather than prove you have a skill. It makes it so awkward
- We often talk about equality which is not applicable in most situations as the starting point is not the same for everyone – the word that should be used is equity so that we are all given the opportunities to achieve the same – our previous experience should be taken into account.
- I used to be a primary school teacher in China but can't use that qualification in the UK so I had to find a simple easy job to do so that doesn't help school children. Lots of Chinese friends face the same things.

## Cultural Differences

On the theme of cultural differences a range of issues were identified, including: the barriers created by different workplace cultures and expectations (e.g. cultural behaviours, use of jargon), the ongoing need to address unconscious biases, and a lack of guidance and/or support when people arrive in the UK.

Specific feedback and responses received in relation to cultural differences being a barrier to employment were as follows:

- The culture you come from has an echo of the work culture you came from so work cultures are different – an applicant also needs to know the cultural requirements of the organisation, for example, someone with an Asian background may demonstrate workplace behaviours that they regard as a sign of respect in Asian culture but in the UK come across as lack of confidence – it is important to be aware of the difference.
- Religious practices can be a barrier, for example, a Muslim respecting Ramadan and other feasts impacting on eating and drinking which are alien to western culture – it is important to ensure understanding and that it is unfair to judge them on such practices
- Expand on cultural sensitivity – culture goes both ways – often an employer may have a misconception about the particular population they are trying to employ and vice versa so we need to learn on both sides
- The onus is often put on the employee to understand the cultural norm of the organisation but it is also the responsibility of the organisation to create an inclusive environment, for example, staff networks. It can be incremental small things that an organisation can do to create an inclusive atmosphere
- Use of jargon can be barrier – adverts can use very technical language – sometimes have no idea what they are looking for
- It is important to be able to be yourself in the work place – you bring yourself and your identity – shouldn't have to park half of you to the side when you enter the workplace. Need to feel welcome - cultural differences embraced – it's about bringing your own identity to work and opening the barriers to have an open dialogue about the issues – it's about visibility and inclusion
- Society has changed so much into the positive and into accepting others and I am so glad to see this positive difference in many ways in our lives. So we have that freedom of choice – who am I to say you mustn't live like that – I see that society has changed into acceptance and this is so important. It takes time and its happening now and I am so glad I am seeing it.
- No mandatory induction programme for new arrivals – refugees have to acquire information about living and working in the UK for themselves.
- The cultural issues have given rise to other related problems – under unconscious bias – in the fight against racism, bullying, harassment and promotions – we end up on jobs we don't like because they're the only ones left. We are a group of fighters but we do need to talk about it and go ahead with our lives.
- From a community cohesion perspective a lot of people come to live here and try to find other people from their own nationalities and one of the things we can work together is to avoid those groups being too isolated and look at how to expand those opportunities to interact more widely

- I've been trying to get our community (LGBTQ+) included in employment and other aspects of life for over 20 years, working on a basis of creeping inclusion, which means getting involved in all kinds of activities and working with all kinds of organisations. Eventually people get to know you and a lot of the barriers disappear – our experience has been that people from LGBTQ+ communities automatically think they will be discriminated against but as we progress and communities become more accepting some of those barriers are no longer real so it can be seen from both sides, so it's important that people have sensitivity training. It's more about equity and it's about having a sense of belonging to the community and part of everyday life. If you feel that you have that sense it is be easier to do interviews. Big organisations do special engagement to support people applying for jobs and they will help you fill in a form

## **Access and Processes**

On the theme of access and processes a range of issues were identified, including: the complexity of the application process, a lack of guidance and support for people who are new to the UK, and visibility of employment opportunities / jobs not being advertised in places that attract diverse applicants (e.g. only advertised via the organisation's website).

Specific feedback and responses received in relation to access and processes being a barrier to employment were as follows:

- It's ok to find easy jobs in factories but anything other – a huge barrier. If you look around you don't see any black people in banks or in the public sector – why is this? Because over the years we got qualified – so why? Don't know anyone who overcame that barrier until black lives matter happened and it was realised that racism is still happening and is a huge barrier. We can only overcome it with government support, with the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan - we have to do something to change - it doesn't even matter the colour of our skin as most of us are from Poland, Portugal – even housing – we are a barrier because of who we are
- Important to be aware of where to apply
- Application process can be very detailed and that can be its own barrier - ask applicants if our process is easy to navigate – are all the qualifications relevant and essential? Can a CV suffice? Make it streamlined and ensure the people you are seeking to encourage are not put off as it is difficult enough as it is.
- Employers need to go where we are – for example, places of worship, to advertise those vacancies – don't just rely on own websites or social media. Within the organisation, if you have a diverse workforce, set up chats and they will pass things on – build on social media aspects of what you have – don't reinvent the wheel
- It is not clear where to look for the jobs – there is a lack of guidance, particularly for people new to the country
- Often don't know how to fill in application forms – it's easier to allow a CV to be added. Employers need to make it easier for us to apply
- Don't know how to perform well at interview as different styles used in different countries, for example, STAR process (Situation, Task, Action, Result)

- Organisations need to learn how to interact with different communities and interact in the spaces that minorities occupy (eg, LGBTQ+) as they are much more confident when talking to respective employees
- Go to the schools for careers talks – big employers should open up more on promoting how to take on training programmes
- Increase visibility of employment opportunities for people currently on ESOL courses, work together with other Anchor Organisations to promote each other
- On general reflection, we have 2 areas to look at – one side is attracting and the other side is retention. A lot of examples are already happening within organisations to retain but the area to look at is to get the skillsets into organisations in the first place as an employing manager and that is where we are struggling, that's the key part of that conversation and then the retention comes later
- Fixed shifts and working hours outside of office hours (9-5) affecting the ability to find appropriate childcare, particularly for single parents and people new to the country who might not have a support network
- Jobs adverts are not reaching the communities - people go straight to the job agencies – not even the job centres – they do an induction on the next day so people are employed the next day and the agencies even have Portuguese people working there
- Supporting people who are neurodivergent and sharing interview questions in advance, and consider whether assessment centres are appropriate
- The interview process with unknown questions is incredibly difficult for many neurodivergent people who otherwise could be great at many jobs
- Twice I have applied to work in public sector, each time unsuccessful at interview. The role was given to someone already working for the council. Happens a lot, and feel that it's a tick box exercise
- The application process was long and very arduous - wanted salaries for all the jobs I've had which was difficult to remember. I very nearly gave up applying as the process was that bad

## **Other Barriers Identified**

Some of the feedback received did not fit into an overarching theme but did highlight other barriers to employment that people face. Specific feedback included:

- The need to support people's mental health
- Look at areas where there is a lot of employment and where productivity is needed – e.g. farming and driving, should be encouraging people from abroad and thinking about how the public sector can help with this
- Not receiving feedback on applications made - must have been because I had a foreign name and my accent/written word gave away my broken English
- First thing is names - if anyone applies for a job they will not be chosen because of the name on the application form, that is well proven in many studies, for example, the same applicant with an English name and a foreign name didn't have the same experience.
- Lack of childcare / Wrap around care for disabled children/adults, including school holidays. It's impossible. Fully flexible jobs with flexi hours and home/hybrid working

plus an employer that understands what it means to be a full time carer, that would be a refreshing change

- Until my children ended primary school I couldn't find a job which was hard as a single mum. Mostly, if we did factory work, then the mum stays at home and the dad works but many employers don't cater for single parents - men don't have the same barriers

## **What can we do to support diverse and inclusive public sector workplaces in North Wales: Actions suggested during engagement**

In the workshop, the final question asked was about steps the steps that participants would like to see to support diverse and inclusive public sector workplaces in North Wales and the list below reflects the responses received in relation to that:

- Provide emotional support for people because refugees have faced many traumatic experiences
- Focus on wellbeing, ensuring that workload pressures are manageable and sustainable and also that any risks around re-traumatisation are carefully managed and supported
- There should be some flexibility with the induction plan to allow responsibilities in the role to be taken on gradually if needed, and give additional space and time to meet with other people internally and externally
- Consider wellbeing and psychological support
- Maintain an on-going dialogue about any barriers to employment - to encourage any issues to be shared, so that employers are more aware of those barriers which should be a catalyst for change
- Anchor organisations (e.g. Local Authorities, Health and Ambulance, Police, Fire and Rescue, Universities and Colleges) should work together to create opportunities to enable people to get on to the employment ladder, including volunteering, apprenticeship, placements, shadowing etc.
- Key organisations to work with local universities to expand current opportunities offered to people from diverse background
- Some examples from wider UK initiatives include purpose built learning hubs in partnership with local health boards, Local Authorities and third sector businesses for pre-employment advice, training, guidance and direct links to the jobs available
- Public Sector HR leads share good practice e.g. the BCUHB welcome guide, ID lanyards etc., and share the development of different expertise with each other - also, to be more aware of the types of barriers highlighted here, and how best to tackle them
- Build links with colleges and ESOL classes to encourage employment attraction in relation to language barriers
- Provide extra language training (and promoting that language training can be offered)
- Staff equality networks are a great resource - for staff and employers - potentially link staff networks via North Wales Public Sector Equality Network events to share experiences/best practice etc. e.g. all the public sector disabled staff networks meet once a year for discussions and a social catch up etc. Potentially a separate network for all the network chairs to discuss issues, good practice etc.
- A diversity event across North Wales, inviting people and employers. It can be formal/informal but give opportunity for people to socialise and gain information

- Active/pro-active work to attract staff from diverse backgrounds through how we promote vacancies and to which groups as opposed to simply posting an advert online
- Consider advertising in different places (e.g. places of worship, physical locations) rather than just online or on an organisations own website
- Put the conversation out on the radio and other alternative communication methods
- Share jobs with community groups and leaders
- Understand that refugees wait years to get their status so their qualifications might be defunct – provide work experience opportunities during that time
- Change application forms, make use of alternatives (e.g. CVs, videos, cover letters) and offer application / interview support (including different formats for interviewing candidates)
- Provide constructive feedback for people who aren't shortlisted
- Promote volunteering opportunities in different fields / areas of expertise
- Make sure to mention in job adverts that we welcome people from ethnic and diverse backgrounds, and to include other languages as Desirable or Essential, similar to Welsh requirements
- Streamline the recruitment process to make the first hurdle easier to navigate
- Promote the benefits of working for a public sector organisation (e.g. providing an opportunity to put back into the community)
- Highlight the flexible working options that are available in public sector organisations
- Practical support around applying for jobs
- Be clear about the level of Welsh AND English needed for the job
- Maintain links with third sector organisations and charities who give specific support for specific health conditions to draw on their expertise

## Examples of Existing Good Practice

During the course of this work, conversations often turned towards examples of existing good practice that organisations have in place to help create inclusive recruitment processes and work environments. The list below highlights some of these suggestions:

- Staff Networks
- Buddy Systems for new recruits
- Diverse Cymru supported the creation of a Welcome to North Wales welcome pack for people unfamiliar with the UK and region
- Diverse Cymru cultural competency scheme (to help understanding of different cultures, providing opportunities to ask / tell)
- Celebration of awareness days
- LGBTQ+ rainbow lanyards and “You are safe with me” badges to raise visibility
- BCUHB talk to communities about staff treatment policies – as a two-way partnership which is all about working together to bring confidence to minority communities
- [Familiarisation Videos](#) (made for people who might find it difficult to access buildings, e.g. physical access, social anxiety, seen applied in social spaces but could be useful in workplaces)
- Consistently make information available to managers about neurodiversity, reasonable adjustments, Access to Work and the Social Model of Disability in an

ongoing information sharing process (with staff turnover there is always a demand and need for promotion)

- 20 Top Tips to make Health and Social Care Providers LGBTIQ+ Friendly (developed for Health and Social Care settings but could be transferable to a wider context)
- Race Equality First provide help and support in creating a CV / with job searching (Laura Kent - [l.kent@raceequalityfirst.org.uk](mailto:l.kent@raceequalityfirst.org.uk))
- Offering the opportunity to learn Welsh AND English
- Offer volunteering opportunities and step into programmes where people can come and do supported volunteering – e.g. “what’s it like to work in Betsi”
- North Wales Regional Skills Partnership: [Your Guide to Higher and Degree Apprenticeships](#)
- Support with filling in application forms – taking the opportunity to tell them about the organisation and support available to help people into the workplace
- [Career Wales – Support Finder](#) (Search for programmes that can help you improve your skills and work opportunities)
- [Business Wales Employers Brochure](#) – information about Welsh Government funded courses, including Community Employability Programmes and Apprenticeships
- Use the Community Cohesion teams who have good links with their communities (e.g. interfaith activities)
- Carry on the conversation in different formats and to consider progress / changes made – thinking about the ‘what’s next’ question - Anchor institutions (e.g. BCUHB, 6 Local Authorities, local universities) should work together to continue the conversation
- Setting up ESOL classes at alternative venues and offering shorter classes as an introduction to English so people aren’t intimidated by the college setting, initially working on building confidence to move to a longer course
- The value of shadowing to gain experience is really important
- A separate induction for international employees
- The importance of having people to trust (e.g. the Multi-Cultural Hub in Wrexham) really helps when there are questions or there’s a need to learn something new
- Highlighting how useful it is to have another language – we talk about making people feel welcome and connected and facilitating English and Welsh but also learning other languages (e.g. Portuguese, Mandarin) helps create that feeling of belonging
- The importance of line managers / role models – “I have been working in [the public sector] for more than 12 years and I have been so lucky with people I work with, especially my line manager who is now retired. She supported me greatly and I witnessed and learnt the best practice and attitude in work from her”
- Providing training to familiarise people with meanings of key things (e.g. acronyms) – and opportunities to ask stupid question, like what is a PIP
- Employers should work closely with employability providers of all sectors, including the public sector, third sector and voluntary sector organisations. Employability providers work directly with people who have received training and support to overcome barriers to work and are ready for the world of work – they also work directly with underrepresented communities and can support people into work (e.g. [Conwy Employment Hub – Case Studies](#))
- [Working Wales](#) and the DWP have direct access to people and could support with matching people to jobs, they also work with employers

## **Next Steps and Conclusion**

Having talked with residents, service users and interested parties across North Wales about barriers to employment and the steps that could make public sector organisations work for everyone, we need to make sure that the valuable feedback and insights shared with us are shared with others. By sharing this report with participants and through public sector networks across North Wales we want this work to be viewed widely, and appropriate actions to be taken to address identified barriers.

We also want this work to form part of an ongoing conversation, and need to consider how best to do this. While work to improve recruitment processes is a constant process, we propose that we revisit the topic within the next 12 months to provide an update on the actions that have been taken in response to the information that has been shared with us. Some of the feedback received was about making this an ongoing conversation and we will be working to consider how best to continue this conversation going forwards, without burdening participants too much and risking 'engagement fatigue'.

Overall, we now need to use the information that has been shared with us to shape how public organisations continue working towards being welcoming and inclusive employers for everyone. By adopting new actions, or promoting good practice that is already in place, we can ensure that the workforces of public sector employers reflect the diverse communities that we serve, and we can therefore better meet people's needs.