



DO THE RIGHT THING:

achieving equity in racialised
representation in public and
political life in Wales

**EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY**

'Do the Right Thing: achieving equity in racialised representation in public and political life in Wales', aims to illuminate the experiences, understanding and perceptions of racialised people living in Wales in relation to public and political life and to make recommendations for change.

“ It's not a fight for just 'BAME' people, it's society all inclusive, and I think it's about changing those hearts and minds of people to acknowledge 'BAME' communities and 'BAME' representation, ... not because we bang on about it, but because it's the right thing to do. ”

(Survey Respondent)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Race Alliance Wales

Race Alliance Wales is a new initiative, established in December 2018, which aims to provide a self-directed space where Black, Asian and other ethnically minoritized¹ organisations and individuals can come together to discuss experiences as ethnic minorities in Wales, share information, and develop new ideas and solutions to the growing challenge of racism in Wales.

For more information please visit:
racealliance.wales

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We would like to thank the racialised people living in Wales who took the time to contribute their thoughts, feelings and experiences.

This paper is dedicated to all the people before us, around us, and ahead of us, who have fought and continue to fight against racism. With a special remembrance to those who have died at the hands of it. This is about real people, real lives. To our ancestors, and to our future generations, this is for you.

¹We have used different terminology to 'BAME' in the continuation of this report. Please see the full report for details on this.



INTRODUCTION

This research paper is part of Race Alliance Wales' 2-year work programme which has received funding from Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. Supported by the Race Alliance Wales Development Workers, between July-September 2020, four peer researchers conducted research concerning Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME²) representation in public and political life in Wales, aiming to explore the experiences and views of racially diverse individuals living in Wales.

132 individuals from a diverse range of racialised backgrounds took part in the research via a landscape survey, one-to-one interviews and focus groups. These were individuals who were either already involved in or aspired to enter public or political life in Wales, as well as general members of the public. Through the research, they shared their experiences, stories, and proposed solutions in relation to the lack of representation of racialised communities in public and political life in Wales. This research study is the first peer-led, community-based research into this topic in Wales.

Public Life refers to the boards of public bodies regulated by the UK Commission for Public Bodies. Public life board members are appointed, not elected, and are usually, but not always, unremunerated. Political Life refers to positions in which an individual must stand for election and then be elected by the electorate, for example as Councillors within Local Government or Members of the Senedd. Currently there is a serious lack of racialised representation in Wales across Public Bodies, Local Government and Welsh Parliament.

When asked the question 'In terms of public and political representation – what's important to you? What would you like to see?' The prevailing answer from most contributors to our research was, simply, a fairer, more diverse and representative public and political Sector, a Wales where institutional racism has been eradicated and racialised people hold equal power to their White British counterparts.

According to the 2011 census, the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic population of Wales made up 4.4% of the population. However, those who selected White British or any of its denominations sat at 93%, suggesting that numbers are significantly higher and are estimated to be closer to 7% of the population. Despite this demographic change, the corridors of power and influence, continue to represent a sea of white faces, and the Wales we live in is not reflected in these positions.

Welsh Government has committed, through its Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 to make Wales a fairer place to live and work and to increase representation in Wales:

'By 2024, we will have increased the diversity of decision-makers in public life and public appointments, identifying areas where further action is needed to ensure greater balance of diversity among decision-makers and identify and investigate mechanisms to redress inequality'.

(Welsh Government, 2020)

This commitment is a firm one and is supported by some promising initiatives such as mentoring programmes to raise awareness and understanding and increase opportunities for racialised individuals to enter public and political life. However, even when programmes exist, the perceptions, understanding, and barriers facing racialised individuals can prove detrimental to aspiring to, entering, and sustaining roles in public and political life.

² We have moved away from using this term due to it not sitting comfortably with most people and have instead opted to use the term 'racialised', acknowledging the process of active racialisation by the perceived White majority in the world. More explanation is given in the full report.

FINDINGS

Our paper clearly illuminates the significant and complex **barriers** which racialised people in Wales have faced when considering or seeking public or political roles. This includes:

Institutional and systemic racism

Many respondents referred to the toxicity of racism discouraging aspirations to enter public or Political life, with over 60% of survey respondents viewing institutional racism as actively discouraging them from entering public or political life. Most of the respondents shared examples of what they saw as an overarching culture of racism within many organisations. Most also noted the mass of white faces seen in most realms of power in Wales. Many stated they had never been interviewed by a non-white person, unless it was a 'BAME-led' organisation. Respondents shared experiences of nuanced, intangible and covert racism such as being told in patronising and condescending ways things like they were 'lucky to be in their position'. Some were left with feelings of active gaslighting –

'Sometimes you are being picked on so much that you think that there is something wrong with you or I'm going crazy, but there's not. When you listen to everyone, it's not'.

Respondents often felt tokenised in professional spheres, they were expected to represent all racialised people, one was openly told they were a 'diversity appointment'. Many shared experiences of overt racism, bias and active exclusion in professional and educational settings, including evidence of unequal pay.

Discrimination in employment

Racialised people disproportionately experience socio-economic deprivation in Wales, leading them to experience further barriers to obtaining public and political positions. Many respondents explained that their upbringing and family was working class and they faced pressure to be a 'good immigrant', to not rock the boat or criticise the systems here in Wales. The majority of survey respondents – 94% - said they had faced discrimination in certain areas of life, including 69% who said they had faced discrimination

in employment. One respondent who was a public/political life aspirant noted that discrimination has been 'embedded into systems since the dawn of time'. Many respondents reported being passed over for promotion despite having the relevant skills and experience, finding it easier to obtain positions in England over Wales.

Modifying personal dress/behaviour/language

Many respondents had experienced stereotypes, assumptions and tropes, particularly in the form of microaggressions. One respondent was told '[you're] not like others - why can't others be like you?' Some respondents (29%) stated they had changed their appearance, with many censoring opinions and hiding elements of their personal life when pursuing professional opportunities (47%), in order to fit and belong in Wales, for example females actively deciding to not wear traditional clothing. Others spoke of dumbing themselves down, of not wanting to upset white people, and of being left feeling 'whitewashed because of ... what I've had to do to fit in'. 69% reported discrimination due to their name or background, with 46% saying they had changed the way they speak.

In terms of racialised people's **understanding and perceptions of public and political life:**

Disenfranchisement, apathy and political malaise

The majority of respondents felt they are not valued, their needs are ignored, as well as the overwhelming feeling that public and political realms just don't care about racialised communities in Wales. Most also expressed a lack of trust and faith in institutions of power in Wales. More than half of survey respondents felt their needs were not met by Welsh Parliament, Local Government or Public Bodies in Wales. Many felt that those involved in public and political life only acted in self-interest, with most engagement seen as lip service to racialised communities, with endless reports but no changes on the ground. In Wales there is a clear 'them and us' divide. Even those with clear aspirations to join public or political life, strongly felt that the more they learnt about these sectors, the more inaccessible the spaces clearly became.

Lack of understanding and complicated processes

Many felt they had a very superficial understanding of public and political life, with a number of anecdotes evidencing lack of knowledge about what public and political life entails. Many felt the processes to appointment, both politically and publicly, were unclear, opaque, inaccessible and complex. Nepotism and gatekeeping were felt to be at the root of a lack of racialised representation with the same people occupying positions on various public body boards and local councils.

'We are experiencing a plague of institutional racism, heightened police violence, a lack of Windrush implementation, even BAME organisations do not hire and pay Black managers. There is a devastating level of racial inequality in Wales and nobody wants to deal with it or speak out because of a) anti-Blackness, b) fear of being shunned in Welsh public life and c) Wales' habit of butchering BAME communities politically for personal gain'.

(Respondent)

Low confidence due to absence of networks and encouragement

The majority of respondents lacked confidence, encouragement and networks to pursue public and political life, with many recognising that 'it's not about what you know, it's about who you know'. Some survey respondents reported feeling that public

or political life was just 'not for me', but for the elite and wealthy – not the children of migrants. Many expressed concerns around time and financial commitment when entering public and political life. The lack of stable income, and consistent working hours, can discourage those with socioeconomic deprivation, families and children to pursue opportunities.

'It's stressful times, in an election you probably won't win, to throw everything at it, takes a lot of toll – a lot of voluntary work, not paid work, leaflets, door knocking – a lot of time taken. With young kids, balancing that and work is not easy for anyone to do, particularly for females from ethnic minorities'.

(Respondent)

Most survey respondents shared their view of the stark reality that political parties don't represent racialised communities in Wales, and all interviewees viewed it as nearly impossible for a racialised person to get elected as an independent candidate.

Lack of positive role models

A shocking 43% felt that there were no or not enough positive racialised roles models in these arenas in Wales, with many looking to England, or even internationally, for inspiration. The majority of visible role models were reported as not necessarily positive or were regularly vilified. Role models are few and far between, impacting aspiring young people in the future.

Negatives of support schemes

Despite a range of support schemes in place to encourage marginalised people to pursue public and political positions, many didn't know these schemes existed. There was felt to be an element of gatekeeping in accessing support schemes, as many felt that you could only get onto them if you were involved in the third sector or knew the right people. Some schemes were said to have little impact upon racialised individuals, with some feeling they were given tokenistic 'tick box' spaces.

Covert and Overt Racism

Racial bias was experienced across the board by those aspiring, entering and engaged in public and political life. Examples shared including hearing negative comments around Black Lives Matter and being assumed to be selling something or handing out takeaway menus when canvassing and leafleting. Some categorically stated that White people in Wales are just not ready to see a Black First Minister or an increased rate of racialised representation. Contributors all recognised the fear of online and direct abuse, threats and attacks faced by racialised people in the public eye. In addition, the overt fused into the covert, with continued anecdotes of microaggressions and tokenism including being told that they could not stand for election as a second racialised person, one being enough, or that they would 'split the BAME vote.'

'I feel like sometimes I'm too brown for the white vote and I'm too white for the brown vote.'

(Respondent)

However, it is not all negative, and we also explored what the main motivators were for racialised people in Wales aspiring to public or political life:

Some aspirants stated that they wanted to be successful and further their careers, seeing how these positions have benefitted other people's professional careers. A few respondents listed their reasons being to learn, observe, and develop understanding, with an explicit desire to understand why it is so difficult to bridge the gap. 40% of survey respondents personally knew someone in public and/or political life in Wales and felt inspired to join the fight for justice in Wales for racialised communities. Many wanted to bring change to the system and society, challenge the status quo, and make the world a better place for their children. Others reported simply that their aspiration was due to them actively being asked to join, headhunted or co-opted onto a board.

'System doesn't work for BAME people and never going to change if no one does anything'.

There were also specific supportive mechanisms or enablers to support racialised people to access public and/or political positions:

Mentoring, coaching and shadowing were mentioned as one of the most helpful things for progression into public and political life with benefits including increased experience, knowledge of processes and gaining skills and networks. Most people who had obtained a position in public or political life had undertaken an extensive amount of volunteering with community-based organisations, which had opened doors for them. A number detailed the importance of active encouragement, networks and sponsorship as vital to pursue and obtain positions, as well as active allies. Other suggestions made included anonymised recruitment as well as diverse panels which were felt to make applicants feel more comfortable and less suspicious of covert racism. The importance of access to funds for professional development, and of financial

sponsorship and backing for campaigning for political positions was also widely acknowledged. Repeated calls were made for more flexible working arrangements especially in political roles – including job sharing and working from home – in order to manage family and caring responsibilities alongside professional pursuits.

Coming through loud and clear in our research is the reality of tangible and intangible barriers experienced by racialised people aspiring to public or political positions. We also heard what works and what helps in supporting and encouraging individuals to consider or enter public or political life. Despite some promising initiatives in place, we are still facing the prospect of an overwhelmingly white sea of faces in public and political life. What else needs to change and be implemented to hasten the speed of a racially and otherwise representative public and political sector in Wales?

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our research, we would make the following recommendations to increase representation in an anti-racist Wales³:

Braver and bolder: Commit to broader societal changes needed in Wales

1. To combat lack of understanding of public and political life, education in Wales must improve its provision of socio-political education, via formal as well as informal means such as community-led education.
2. Public and political bodies must increase their engagement initiatives with racialised communities across Wales to create a two-way and meaningful stream of communication, avoiding lip service and tokenistic engagement.
3. Employers, together with the support of unions and other independent bodies should commit to actively tackle racism in employment, to enable racialised people to access senior positions, utilising their skills and pathways to public and political life.
4. Concerted effort to decolonise systems and processes in Wales to increase socioeconomic equity, including ensuring racialised people are paid for their input – whether monetary or providing professional credit for contributions made to research, roundtables, stakeholder engagement events and reports.
5. Active sanctions must be legislated for media platforms who do not modify racist hate speech and content, and the enactment of the 'Online Harms White Paper currently being considered by UK Central Government;
6. Demonstration from public and political bodies of their commitment and understanding of the value of diversity in representation, including publicly demonstrating a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of racism and discrimination, including institutional, systemic, covert and overt.

Show us you care:

Encourage racialised communities and individuals into public & political life

7. Increase the range, scale, accessibility and inclusivity of formal programmes and initiatives such as mentoring, coaching, shadowing, internships and professional networks.
8. Increase provision of programmes run by racialised people, for racialised people, which provide an assured sense of trust and thereby ability to engage and get the most benefit from these programmes.
9. Improve mentoring programme differentiation, catering to people with different levels of understanding, knowledge and experience. This must include specific provision for migrants, young people, and women.
10. Increase funding for these variety of support schemes to improve their delivery in line with above, ensuring each has adequate and sufficient resourcing.

Use your power:

Modulate processes to ease racialised communities and individual's entry into public and/or political life

11. Processes need to be more transparent, centralising available opportunities alongside detailed advice on how to complete applications, to combat applications being a job in themselves.
12. Processes must actively value people's lived experience alongside professional and educational backgrounds, evidencing that racialised people are taken seriously, recognising their wealth of skills and knowledge in the process.
13. Utilise positive action, implementing where legally provided for, quotas, targets, and place reservations for racialised people, as per Section 104 of the Equality Act 2010. Also ensure that all panels involve a racialised representative, and that recruitment processes are fully anonymised.

³ We heavily suggest reading at minimum the conclusive remarks in the full report which provide more details as to why and how these recommendations should be implemented.

14. Address the terms of positions, placing limits upon the number of times an individual can stand for a position, and offer flexible working including job sharing for all public and political roles. Make available Access Funds for all marginalised individuals to utilise for their campaigning.
15. Diversity action plans must be developed for all public and political bodies. This must include publishing equality monitoring data (enacting Section 106 of the Equality Act to mandate political parties to do so), public audits, reviews and monitoring with independent investigations and clear sanctions when evidence is found of institutional, systemic, covert or overt racism.
- Remove the smokescreen:
Public and political bodies must demonstrate their equality, diversity and inclusion**
16. Public and political organisations must be open to regularly and publicly sharing their failures as well as their successes and demonstrate integrity by exemplifying and measuring changes that have been made. Organisations' implementation of the Public Sector Equality Duty should be more effectively measured, monitored and scrutinised, with clear sanctions in place.
17. Provision of ongoing, high quality and broad sweeping equity, diversity and inclusion training and education, for all staff and representatives, led appropriately by marginalised people, encompassing intercultural sensitivity, anti-racism including issues around gender rights, trans rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, and rights for socially disabled people; and understanding the roots of historic and present-day systems of structural inequality, power and privilege.
18. People in public and political life in Wales must embody the fight for the rights of racialised people, as well as the rights for people of different genders, trans rights, LGBTQIA+ rights and rights for socially disabled people, moving away from single strand approaches to genuine intersectional equality.
- In the meantime, under the current status quo, what can we as racialised people, with an aspiration to public and political life do:**
19. Maintain your personal motivation and have a clear vision. Develop your resilience, be confident, know you can do it, even though it may be tough.

20. Be safe. Ensure you have supportive people and allies around you, both at home, in public and at work.
21. Take time to plan things, taking advantage of opportunities when they come your way.
22. Proactively involve yourself in the community, take opportunities to join other boards, especially those outside of your professional field.
23. Join political parties and get involved with local meetings.

And for those who obtain public and political positions –

24. Extend the arm of power and privilege to others. Do not pull up the drawbridge behind you. Commit to mentoring, succession planning, coaching and shadowing opportunities.
25. Stand up for our rights and we shall stand behind you. Provide us with the role models we need to inspire the next generation.

'Have a thick skin, don't take things personally, and stay strong through the process – don't be ashamed to seek support when you need it – build alliances and friends. It's not an easy journey by any means. But you can go by your truthfulness, by your steadfastness, being honest, having great integrity, staying positive, moving forward, never stopping or giving up, you can achieve. We can achieve.'

(Politician)

For a copy of the full report see:

www.racealliance.wales/research

or email: info@racealliance.wales

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