

The Bevan Foundation and South Riverside Community Development Centre

'We need more than words': community responses to
the Race Equality Action Plan

July 2021

About the Bevan Foundation

The Bevan Foundation is Wales' most innovative and influential think tank. We develop lasting solutions to poverty and inequality.

Our vision is for Wales to be a nation where everyone has a decent standard of living, a healthy and fulfilled life, and a voice in the decisions that affect them.

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About South Riverside Community Development Centre

South Riverside Community Development Centre (SRCDC) is a registered charity established for the purpose of benefiting the communities in the Riverside, Canton and Grangetown areas, and aims to:

- advance the education of the public in matters related to mental, physical, cultural, and social welfare; and
- relieve poverty.

You can find out more about SRCDC here: <https://www.srcdc.org.uk/>

The following consultation response has been delivered in partnership by the Bevan Foundation and South Riverside Community Development Centre. You can find out more about this partnership here:

<https://www.bevanfoundation.org/current-projects/lived-experience-migration-wales/>

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Author Dr Claire Thomas (Bevan Foundation)

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Bevan Foundation, 145a High Street, Merthyr Tydfil CF47 8DP

info@bevanfoundation.org

www.bevanfoundation.org

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Summary

In March 2020 the Welsh Government set out its commitment to develop an action plan to tackle issues of racism and race equality. Events including the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on BAME communities, the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement accelerated the urgency for action and a draft Race Equality Action Plan which was published for consultation in March 2021. The draft plan¹ sets out the vision for an anti-racist Wales by 2030 and includes actions and goals across 13 policy areas plus a number of cross cutting goals.

The consultation

The Bevan Foundation and South Riverside Community Development Centre carried out a consultation with members of the community to gather feedback and views of the draft plan. A total of 16 people took part in the three consultation events with some attending multiple sessions. A further ten people attended four online sessions with some of those attending multiple sessions.

Key findings

Overall participants were hopeful that the action plan would lead to meaningful change for people who have faced racism and discrimination. They particularly welcomed the opportunity to take part in this consultation and were encouraged to see the voice of lived experience sitting at the heart of the development of the plan. The goals and policy actions reflected the actions that they felt would make an impact, although they gave more priority to language and digital skills and advice.

While feeling hopeful, participants expressed their scepticism around whether the Welsh Government was committed to achieving this wide-ranging plan and to what extent they have the resources, power and influence to deliver such ambitious actions. Sadly, many feel racism, prejudice and discrimination are deep-rooted in our communities; existing between and across ethnic groups. Creating a society which is 'anti-racist' and free of these behaviours will take courage, leadership, resources, and a commitment to achieving change. It will involve difficult conversations and tackling entrenched attitudes in society in an extremely short and limited time frame.

Participants want to see the changes outlined in the plan, but their preference is for a plan which is achievable and will lead to action and impact rather than just bold words.

As part of this consultation, participants identified a number of key recommendations to ensure the plan meets their needs and the needs of ethnic communities and which tackles the right issues to achieve meaningful change.

Values, Vision and purpose

1. The development of the plan and its values, vision and purpose is viewed as an extremely positive step forward, and overall the actions are considered to be the right ones to achieve change.
2. The vision needs further clarification to set out what an anti-racist Wales means and whether the vision includes tackling racism faced by all people from all backgrounds and ethnicities and those who have migrated.
3. The final plan needs to set out how impact will be measured. Failure to have a 'baseline' to assess progress against could undermine trust in the plan and understanding what progress is being made.
4. The final plan needs to contain details about the financial resources which will be available to support the delivery of the actions.
5. Rather than be too ambitious, the plan should include outcomes which are realistic and within the power of the Welsh Government.
6. Racism, discrimination and race equality need to be considered alongside a strategy on cohesion, belonging, cultural diversity and acceptance.
7. Lived experience sits at the heart of the development of the plan and should also be included when examining its impact. However, the process needs to be open and transparent about who the people with lived experience are and who they represent.
8. The overall plan tends to focus on the public sector, but less on what actions will be taken to help reach into the private sector and wider society.
9. It is hoped the final plan will be more accessible to the reader, possibly presenting the main document as outcome-focussed with a separate/appended technical note which contains the detailed action.
10. Action on language and digital skills and access to advice and support should be overarching goals, as barriers in these areas will have a negative impact across policy areas.

Health

11. Participants welcomed the proposed action to increase workforce diversity by removing barriers to enter the workforce or train to work in the NHS.
12. Given the NHS is one of the largest employers in Wales, participants feel that more direct forms of recruitment and engagement around the career opportunities would help more people take-up positions in the NHS.
13. Language can be a barrier for people who want to work in the NHS. The NHS should look at providing more recruitment opportunities and support to those who face these barriers through language-style apprenticeships and community or in-house English courses.
14. Mental health is one of the key issues facing people from BAME communities and should be given higher priority and greater focus in the plan.
15. There is a concern that the plan lacks details on the level of resources which will be available to achieve these goals and it will be at a time when

the NHS faces huge pressures from COVID-19 and recovery from the pandemic.

Education

16. Schools have made positive progress to teach and celebrate diversity, but there could be further opportunities to include parents as part of these celebrations.
17. More emphasis on career opportunities should be available at an earlier age through schools and further education.
18. Higher education could do more to support students and tackle racism.
19. Women from BAME and migrant communities should receive more support to allow them to study and train through better childcare provision and community-based learning.

Housing and accommodation

20. While it is important to improve equality and diversity in the social rented sector, participants welcomed the need for an action plan to tackle issues in the private rented sector where many BAME and migrant communities live.
21. Affordability and poor quality are the key issues facing those who only have access to private sector accommodation.
22. There is a preference for social housing, yet many cannot access this type of housing, particularly in inner city and high demand areas like South Riverside.

Employment, income and entrepreneurship

23. The lack of employment and progression opportunities is a key barrier. Employers should be encouraged to engage directly with communities about recruitment and career advice.
24. Targeted self-employment support including access to finance would be beneficial.
25. There is a concern that the plan address issues across the public sector but lacks detail about how to improve opportunities across the private sector.

Criminal justice and hateful attitudes

26. Actions to increase understanding of people's lived experience of the criminal justice system was welcomed but the police could do more to improve their relationship with different communities, particularly those who migrate from countries where the criminal justice system is very different.
27. The 'Hate Hurts Wales' campaign was felt to be tokenistic and will have a limited impact compared to direct forms of engagement including training sessions on hate crime and hate crime reporting.

28. The action to improve awareness and training to reduce violence against women was viewed positively. However, there is a sense that it will be challenging unless communities themselves also take positive action.

Support for grassroots organisations

29. Provide more support and resources for grassroots organisations to support and deliver actions contained within the plan.

The term 'BAME'

30. The use of the term 'BAME' is unhelpful and for some people can be degrading. While some accept that while inequalities exist a term is necessary to protect people within that group, however people's personal preferences should be respected and, as far as possible, individuals should have the option to self-describe.

1. Introduction

1.1 Establishing a vision for an anti-racist Wales

For many years race equality organisations and race equality forums have called for a standalone strategy on race. In March 2020 the Welsh Government set out its commitment to develop an action plan. However the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on BAME communities, the death of George Floyd and the development of the Black Lives Matter movement accelerated the urgency for action.

In response to these events, the First Minister set up a Black and Asian Minority Ethnic COVID-19 Advisory Group to examine the role of health and socio-economic factors in the pandemic. The socio-economic sub-group report² contained a number of recommendations which stressed the need for radical action. Taking forward the recommendations, a Steering Group was set up to develop a Race Equality Action Plan for Wales which was co-chaired by Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna and Dame Shan Morgan (the Permanent Secretary of the Welsh Government).

1.2 Development of the Plan

The draft plan³ sets out the vision for an anti-racist Wales by 2030. Guided by an evidence review undertaken by Wales Centre for Public Policy⁴, the plan has been co-produced with input from equality organisations, academics, stakeholders, policymakers, organisations and representatives and importantly people with a lived experience of racism and discrimination.

The document is comprehensive and sets out the actions and goals across 13 policy areas and five cross cutting goals (as shown below)

Goals – Policy Areas:				
Leadership and Representation	Housing and accommodation	Income and Employability (I&E)	Social partnership and Fair Work (I&E)	Entrepreneurship (I&E)
Health	Social Care	Education, including higher education	Crime and Justice	Culture, Heritage and Sport
Local Government	Welsh Language	Environment		
Cross cutting Goals:				
Data	Engaging and funding communities	Impact assessment for better policy design	Services for individuals experiencing racism	Role of informal volunteering

A consultation on the draft plan was launched in March 2021 and ends on the July 15th.

1.3 The Consultation

The Bevan Foundation and South Riverside Community Development Centre have been working in partnership on a project which aims to develop the way that people with a lived experience of migration can shape policy-making in Wales⁵. As part of this work we have engaged with community members to examine the draft Race Equality Action Plan. The partnership was also awarded a Welsh Government community engagement grant to run three additional consultation events.

Through our previous experience of conducting online activities we were conscious that community members can find it difficult to participate in online events, particularly if they require language support. Therefore, to ensure they could participate fully, events were held in person at the South Riverside Community Development Centre.¹

A total of 16 people participated in these discussions.² Everyone who attended the centre was given a £25 gift voucher as a token of thanks for their time and to cover any expenses incurred.

Additional events also took place over Zoom and over 10 people contributed over four separate occasions.

This report provides the findings from the consultation. Names used in this report have been anonymised to protect participants' identities.

¹ Activities were carried out at the centre on the 15th and 22nd of June and 6th July. All Coronavirus regulations were followed to ensure the safety of the participants. Due to the restrictions on the use of space a maximum of 12 people could take part in the events at any one time (including facilitators).

² Each session focussed on individual policy goals. Some participants attended all three separate events.

2. The vision, purpose and values

2.1 Introduction

The plan focuses on a set of actions to achieve an anti-racist Wales, on the basis that previous strategies, approaches and legislation (Equal Opportunities Act, 2010) have not delivered meaningful changes to improve the lives of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people. The plan and its actions have been co-constructed with multiple stakeholders and people with a lived experience of racism and discrimination, as well as academics, policymakers, organisations and representative groups.

Vision: "A Wales that is Anti-racist by 2030."

Purpose: "To make meaningful and measurable changes to the lives of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people by tackling racism."

Values: "Open and Transparent, Rights based, and Lived experiences as core to all policy making."

2.2 Vision: A Wales that is anti-racist by 2030

The vision of an anti-racist Wales was welcomed by participants and met with enthusiasm and hope for the future. The plan demonstrates the commitment from the Welsh Government to recognise the issues facing people and to take action to affect change, with some describing it as 'heaven'.

It is huge work, it will affect the lives of many ethnic minority people in Wales and it is breakthrough ... the Race Equality Action Plan comes after a lot of suffering ... a lot of problems (Samiah)

The vision, the values and principles is what everyone wants; it is just basic human rights. You are not talking rocket science. We are in a good position to show the rest of the world what we can do! We are just asking to be treated the same but we should treat people as individuals and respect diversity and help promote it and progress it. All of it is challenging; the Race Equality Act was 2010 and now we are in 2021 and we still cannot reach that. We cannot make any change without policy change (Chhaya).

While the vision was met with optimism, participants feel that progress towards this vision will be fraught with challenges and barriers. Sadly, some feel racism, discrimination and prejudice is will always be present throughout communities, institutions and service providers. Some said it is simply a fact of life – an inherent part of human nature:

There will always be someone who will look down on you because of our colour or background (Vedanshi)

... but discrimination is part of human behaviour we need a lot of community action to tackle it (Samiah).

Participants questioned what an anti-racist Wales would look like and whether it would include tackling prejudices which exist within and between ethnic groups:

There is racism within communities. The Asian community can be racist towards other ethnic communities. Grangetown is predominantly Pakistani origin and they have their own prejudices (Dinesh).

They also queried how the plan aims to tackle prejudices which are formed through people's experiences of war and conflict, or those derived from individual interactions or experiences.

Racism and racist behaviour can also take many different forms or levels. Living in a diverse area like South Riverside most participants said they had not experienced direct or overt forms of racism. Indeed, many described their community positively and said they feel a sense of belonging and safety. However, they acknowledged that their experience is the exception rather than the norm, and people's experience can be quite different in other parts of Wales. Some typical comments included:

I haven't experienced racism but I think that is because I am here [Riverside] with the different communities ... when I lived in Canton with all the English people they were constantly saying why am I parking here, why is my bin there ... but when we came here we had neighbours and we started to communicate and we will be invited for coffee, now I feel settled (Raqiya)

It doesn't happen here because we are so multicultural, we tend to get on. It is only when you come from outside and they don't like it because there are lots of 'dark' people and they move out. We know each other and we are tolerant, we have Diwali, we have Eid but it is when you get outside of this; I was coming back from West Wales and a gentleman in his 80s said "you black ..." and we were in a petrol station. My cousin said "what did you say" and he said that we shouldn't be living here and the lady in the shop asked him to leave and said we won't have that in there – she was a white lady. We don't see this here in our community (Dinesh)

This is why Riverside is a nice place to live because there is a bond. I live in Grangetown which is not the same but I come to Riverside because it is welcoming (Inaya)

I lived in Nottingham and then Cardiff and I found it much more friendly in Cardiff. It is about where you live and if you have already been exposed to different cultures it is easier ... there is more acceptance but if you go to

north Wales you can see the looks on people's faces, you can see the head turns. It depends where! (Hiba).

While participants' experiences of living in South Riverside was overly positive, they argued that racism is not just about overt racism attitudes, it was the 'little' remarks, the barriers to jobs, the assumptions or the lack of knowledge about people's culture and identity which affected their daily lives:

We don't face racism like people do in other parts of Europe, what we face is barriers, barriers to jobs, little remarks (Kaif)

I had it the other day, a man said to me I should not listen to my husband to cover up – it is my choice, it is not my husband telling me (Hiba).

They argued that it is these things, which do not necessarily constitute a hate incident or crime, which affect their daily lives and is the type of behaviour which will be so difficult to change. Given these issues some questioned how achievable it was and importantly how you would measure progress considering this behaviour mostly goes unreported or undocumented.

2.3 Purpose: To make meaningful and measurable changes to Black and Asian Minority Ethnic people by tackling racism

While participants did not disagree with the purpose, there was a concern that some outcomes proposed in the draft plan are over-ambitious, not realistic and are not measures of change. They feel that some also have the potential to undermine the strategy if they fail to be delivered. Some examples of outcomes that participants questioned are listed below:

First BAME First Minister by 2030

This outcome led to some discussion amongst participants who viewed it positively but feel it had slightly missed the point and the outcome should be focussed on achieving representation across all different levels of politics and society. They questioned to what extent a single person in authority would be representative of all different peoples' views

Having the first BAME First minister is important, but having more people as leaders at a local level is important like fire, police, doctors and having roots in there and trying to change it at that level. Maybe that is more realistic? Maybe that is more meaningful? (Praktash)

It does not mean that if the First Minister is not from the BAME community that the person does not represent our needs, we need more opportunities to feed into decisions at the micro and macro levels. We need the people on the ground to be able to achieve their aspirations (Samiah)

It doesn't matter about their colour, whether they are black or Asian it just needs to be a fair person who is doing the job properly and meeting people's needs – whoever those people are (Jia).

Hate crime in media and social media no longer occurs

Again, participants said they viewed this positively, but feel that the Welsh Government alone could not achieve this as it requires action at a UK and international level.

Achievable action rather than empty promises

Unfortunately when discussing the outcomes, some participants referred to empty promises and a sense that the action plan is an attempt to pacify people, rather than tackle the 'everyday' real issues:

I cannot believe that they can achieve an anti-racist Wales in nine years and that makes me angry. I feel like going to the Government and saying don't lie to us and say something that you are not going to do (Ridhi)

We need to tackle discrimination across all the sectors in health, in education or in public services and we need to raise awareness of discrimination of the people who work there. For instance when you go to the health centre they can treat you very bad because you are black. We need to tackle it and every single day in your life (Samiah).

Some participants were keen to stress that the Welsh Government needs to ensure that they are capable of achieving the vision they set out in the final action plan as failure to deliver could further alienate people from ethnic minorities:

They need not to drop the ball on any of these priorities ... after putting out this action plan it will just cause more unrest ... people are watching; they are informed! (Chhaya).

Racism, race equality and cohesion

While discussing the concept of 'anti-racism' further there was a sense that it needs to be combined with ideas of cohesion, belonging and acceptance. Participants want to live in a Wales free of discrimination, but they also want to live in a society which is cohesive and celebrates difference and culture. They want to be able to retain their own cultural identity without fear of not fitting in or belonging. They want opportunities to share their culture, heritage and language with others and find common ground and values, rather than be expected to adapt to Welsh culture. Some explained the personal loss they have experienced because they felt they needed to lose elements of their cultural identity, as the following example highlights.

Ridhi is 56 and lives in South Riverside. Originally from India, she explained that she feared her children would not be accepted or would be bullied for wearing a turban in school and decided to adopt what she perceived as more British norms

of behaviour. She feels a sense of loss as her children and grandchildren have completely disengaged with their heritage:

What gets to my heart is there are boys from my culture who cannot wear their turban for fear of being picked on. How can he or any others go into school or the workplace and feel comfortable? I made my boys have their hair cut but you are supposed to wear a turban but because we were living in the UK I was trying to meet those needs. If I could turn the clock back I would. I had only done that so they wouldn't be picked on and now I feel like the biggest hypocrite ... we teach our children in the temple that you should wear a turban and a scarf and as soon as they walk out of the door that is forgotten ... our children must think we are jokes.

Most agree that racism and discrimination can be reduced if people are helped to integrate, as one participant said:

People are afraid to ask or scared of offending people. There needs to be more open discussions between grassroots organisations and wider communities and service providers so people can understand each other ... the main thing is integrating people and making sure they understand their rights (Chhaya).

2.4 Values: Open and transparent, rights based and lived experience are core to all policy making

Ensuring lived experience sits at the heart of policy-making was welcomed by participants who described it as a huge step forward, and they were particularly pleased to have an opportunity to feed into the final plan. They hoped that this signalled a real opportunity for communities to have a real voice in policy which affects them:

At least they are getting the BAME people involved, they are not making decisions with other people. That is one step ... it is just scratching the surface (Kaif).

However, a slight concern is the lack of information about who took part in the development of the plan, and to what extent they themselves were representative:

I think it is really important – getting those people involved and that way they will get further and hopefully they are asking the right people – but I would like to know who these people are? Are they representative of us? (Jia).

2.5 Supporting the vision

Many participants said the vision was focused on achieving change in the public sector. They agreed this is important but felt the vision lacks details about the extent to which it can achieve change across the private sector and society as a

whole. To achieve an anti-racist Wales they feel that society as a whole needs to be on board with this vision.

Participants also wanted to know how the plan would be resourced and impact measured. There was no appetite to see figures within the plan, but it would be important to see the scale of the resources available to support the actions:

The resources will be needed. We don't need to see the numbers it is then about the impact (Vedanshi)

Are CEOs of companies going to agree with this? (Chhaya)

I think they have gone a long way but it is about continuing this work. They need to review what they have done and the outcomes (Jia).

2.6 An inclusive approach to racism and discrimination

Participants questioned to what extent the plan aims to tackle the racism and discrimination faced across communities and ethnic groups. Many participants had migrated to Wales and feel the plan is focused on improving equality for more established communities rather than about everyone who experiences racism:

Is it just a tick-box or will it have an impact on people? It seems like big slogans. There needs to be action especially with COVID-19 and those who are new migrants who came in the last two years. Can you imagine moving to this country for two years and then going into lockdown, without knowing the system or without any support (Hiba)

It is very ambitious. But maybe this is targeted at 2nd and 3rd generation, not people who have just come here? (Samiah)

Most participants said they wanted to see a focus on people who have newly migrated to Wales (from any ethnic background) who face barriers accessing health, housing, education and employment. They feel outcomes for 'new' migrants can often be poorer compared to more established communities and feel the plan needs to be inclusive of the barriers they face. One participant explained her own experience of migrating to Wales and trying to access healthcare:

It is not good for someone coming into the country– when you first come into the country you do not know much about the system ... I was totally used to a different private system. I didn't like waiting for investigations I felt like they thought I was demanding too much. If I could pay for it I would! It takes a while when you first come to register with a GP and how it works. You are not having a good service in that time. There are certain things you cannot access during out of hours care. When you are on a work visa you don't have access like if you were a refugee or asylum seeker, where you will have support workers who will help you – you are just left by yourself. (Chhaya).

2.7 Accessibility and the action plan

Most participants found the document 'too large', 'vague' and 'difficult to comprehend'. Some had attempted to read the full and summary versions and, although the latter was shorter in length, they found both overwhelming and the 'easy read' version too simplistic.

Some explained they had found it difficult to meaningfully engage with the document because they were not familiar with some of its contents (e.g. skills employability programmes). Therefore they found it challenging to assess some of the details around how the actions will be delivered:

The document is too large and the other thing is it is vague; I am lost. For my level of English it was difficult for me to comprehend, to get to the point (Kaif).

Most participants found the consultation sessions helpful and hoped the final action plan would be more accessible as they feel it is important that people from BAME and migrant communities engage with this plan or at least have an awareness of it. When disseminating the final plan, participants feel it would be helpful if the Welsh Government could come out to communities like South Riverside to provide information and answer questions about the plan.

A final version of the plan could be more accessible if it is based on the outcomes expected with a possible timeline. The detail of how the outcomes will be achieved could be included as a separate or appended 'technical' document which could be available to those who want to understand this level of detail.

3. Policy areas and goals

3.1 Introduction

Within the draft action plan there are 13 policy areas and five 'cross cutting' goals. Given the amount of information contained within each of the policy goals participants were asked to pick the top three they wanted to discuss during the sessions. The top priority was health followed by housing and accommodation, education and employment and income. The sessions were focused around these policy areas, but additional activities were held to discuss some of the other policy areas including criminal justice and hateful attitudes. The sessions also included a discussion on the use of the term 'BAME'.

This section provides an overview of the feedback from participants.

3.2 Language, digital skills and advice and support

Reflecting on the policy areas most participants feel English and digital skills should also be included as a 'policy goal'. Although access to language provision/ESOL is contained within some of the policy areas they feel strongly that language skills are vitally important and lack of them can act as a barrier to accessing rights, to access services such as health and education and can lead to poor outcomes in employment and a lack of opportunities to integrate. Some typical comments included:

Language is the biggest barrier; if you come from other countries and you are learning the language and cannot communicate. If you don't have someone representing you – you won't get what you require (Dinesh).

It results in poverty because families rely on one income because the woman cannot get a job because she doesn't have any English ... even with a cleaning job you will need some training to know the difference between the water and the chemical or how this chemical is dangerous, lifting heavy objects (Kaif).

One participant relayed the experience of a friend who had been living in Wales for five months and had to visit her GP for health advice. Lacking the language skills she felt the GP had not listened to her issue, yet this changed when she went back to the GP with a translator:

... she went to the GP and they told her to go to a private clinic. She asked me about this and I told her about someone who works in health and is a translator. She went with her to the GP and they are now doing tests and investigations. They knew that she didn't know about things here and they pushed her out (Samiah).

Some participants explained a lack of language skills can put pressure on families, particularly children when they have to translate on their parents' behalf at the GP or hospital or when parents cannot help with schoolwork.

Lack of access to good quality language courses

Accessing language support and learning opportunities can be difficult and some participants reflected on how vital language was in all aspects of their lives in Wales. One participant explained how she initially felt when she first migrated to the UK and good quality English teaching was beneficial:

I used to live in London. I went to a college and I could communicate in proper English in six months because it was a top notch college – it wasn't ESOL ... At that time it was like I was deaf and dumb ... you have to pay to have that kind of course and at that time it was free. We need a proper course to do speaking and writing (Kaif).

Most participants were aware of ESOL classes and some had experience of attending them. However, there was a consensus that language learning is currently under resourced and there needs to be a greater variety in the types of support available. They explained that while some people would thrive in these formal learning environments, others would feel uncomfortable, particularly if they had low levels of literacy or no experience of sitting exams.

Some also feel the current system is not inclusive of all levels of learning and can lead to poor outcomes:

We work in childcare and we see parents who do the ESOL classes and they have been in the class for two years and they can still not speak in proper sentences – poor quality and less hours – two hours here and two there (Kaif)

What's happening is they are doing level one and level two and then they don't know about taking it further – they haven't got that (Jia).

Offering community-based support with childcare

Childcare and location are said to be considerable barriers for many of those who want to learn English, and most participants strongly supported more community-based provision. They feel the benefits of providing more support would be particularly empowering to women:

It is the access to childcare. The big issue is the childcare and they want to go to the local area and somewhere near them – they couldn't go to the college and they won't travel they need somewhere where it is convenient. They don't like it and they will give it up straight away (Alia).

Digital skills

Most participants feel that migrants in particular face difficulties accessing their rights and services because of the lack of English, combined with not having the access to and skills to navigate online systems. The pandemic has also highlighted the very real digital divide. Some participants shared examples of how they or others have been adversely impacted:

If people come here and they do not have digital skills then it becomes very hard and there is not much support for that. Think of the children who had to be home schooled , the parents didn't have the language skills or the technology skills ... I know someone who was not able to access any of the free school meal vouchers because it was all online. Another parent he came here in March 2019 with four children. He had some funds but was affected by the benefit cap. In March 2020 this expired and he didn't receive a letter and we went into a lockdown and then he was told his rent wasn't going to be covered and I had to do many phonecalls to help him sort this out as I couldn't do all this online (Hiba)

Technology access has created a divide and there are some people still looking at their phone thinking what button do I press ... some people do not read and write in English (Vedanshi)

Most participants agree that in the first instance service providers in areas like health, education and other forms of support should not assume people can just 'go online' but to offer alternative types of support. They also feel that people should be offered digital skills training alongside English language provision.

Access to advice and support services

Most participants feel strongly that access to good advice and support is vital for helping people overcome barriers in accessing services like health and education, particularly for those who have migrated to Wales and do not understand the 'system'.

For instance, there was a sense that many people in the community do not know about how the benefit system can support them in work which leads them to accept fewer hours or fear working at all. It is felt that support and advice to maximise income would empower some:

We don't know how working will affect our universal credit. We are not sure that if we do not know if we work more hours if we will be better off. We ask each other and we don't know (Alia).

However, it is argued that many people simply do not know where to go for help and advice:

There is advice about where you can go for support but people don't know about this. It is on Cardiff Council website (Vedanshi).

Participants did not advocate for a separate advice service for BAME or migrant communities but feel existing services could be given additional resources to make organisations/offices more accessible, have a representative workforce and could be better advertised.

One example of good practice were the hubs in Cardiff which are said be accessible and have a diverse workforce.

3.3 Policy area: Health

Most participants agree with the actions set out in the plan, and felt that this is a key policy goal which needs particular focus:

Without health we are in a box, we cannot do anything ... health comes first (Rihi).

The workforce and attitudes to race

Participants support the outcome to ensure the NHS workforce is representative of the population it serves but feel there are considerable challenges to achieve this. It was argued that despite the need for more staff and vacancies there are considerable barriers facing people who want to train to or work in the NHS. One participant reflected on her own experience of placement and the reason she left the course:

I had a very bad experience. I worked with a district nurse and all of them were white and all were from Ely and there is high discrimination. One of them asked me what I was doing there because it was usually white people doing this job. It was like this everyday – it was a very bad experience. I stayed at home and I could not sleep very well because of the way I was treated. If that happens to people it is very bad and could really affect them ... that may be a barrier (Samiah).

The participant went onto explain that she did not feel comfortable to challenge this issue, and argued that it is also the role of the university to work together with the NHS to tackle this behaviour:

There is an equality and diversity officer at the university but when I talked to them about it the manager said that I would have to sit in a meeting with those professionals ... I remember I talked to my friend who said that we have this experience, particularly in nursing, that you have women from Sudan or Somalia and they face discrimination on placement. In university it is okay, but it is when you go on placement and you have a mentor. I notice

for the Welsh girls it is very easy but for us it is very difficult. I stopped nursing and I went back to my studies (Samiah).

Participants feel more could be done to ensure people who experience this are supported to address the situation (rather than be put in situations where they have to confront perpetrators) but to ensure universities and those organising placements are able to support students who face this. Also, training on unconscious bias, racism and discrimination should form part of continual professional development and course requirements.

Enabling a more diverse workforce through direct communication and language

Some participants feel there is a need for a more direct approach to recruiting people from ethnic minority backgrounds. There was a sense that the community often has a very narrow interest in terms of possible health professions which can often include GPs or surgeons with fewer exploring wider professions such as physiotherapy or physiotherapy. It is felt that while the NHS recruits from abroad, more could be done to communicate directly with communities in Wales to encourage them to think about other professions:

So many ethnic minorities they want to be doctors or surgeons but they don't want to go into nursing or midwifery or physiotherapy. If more people from the community wanted to join those professions it would be more representative ... there are so many ethnic minority GPs but not enough nurses, I have never seen an ethnic minority paramedic. There needs to be more directed to other professions in health. There is a general interest in these areas from our youngsters but there needs to be a more general drive and encouraging people to be able to take these roles. We are recruiting from the Philippines and from India but there are the ethnic minorities here (Praktash)

Language was also viewed as a barrier and participants said that many people who have the skills to work in the NHS do not have the right level of language required. Most feel that it is in the interest of the NHS (particularly considering the workforce shortages which exist) to provide language support to potential employees. Some offered examples like 'language-based apprenticeships' or the NHS supporting community-based or in-house classes. While there is no data to suggest how many people the NHS could attract and support in this way, participants did have a number of examples and personal examples to share:

People with degrees are not able to practice here because of the language. I know someone who was a practicing doctor in Ukraine and he is not able to practice here because of the language barrier. I don't object having this high standard but there is no support to get people there, there are some charities but not by the government. They always say that the NHS needs staff but they are losing people because they don't provide support with

language. Our big employers are missing out on this potential. In Cardiff they have the reach where they can get an assessment and do ESOL classes in Cardiff and Vale College but that's the only thing I can refer to. If someone says they have a childcare issue I wouldn't know what to say. I know if you get child tax credit you can get some money towards childcare but if you are not a taxpayer you cannot get it (Hiba).

One participant explained that she has a degree in childcare and psychology and has been here eight years but has not worked, although she would like to work in health.

I was working in Sudan but I haven't worked here. Language is difficult for me. I understand when people are speaking but I have trouble speaking. I need help to access an English course.

Prioritise mental health support

While mental health support is mentioned in the full draft version of the plan, most participants feel strongly that it should be given greater attention as a policy area in its own right.

Participants said that many people from ethnic minority communities are dealing with mental health issues, particularly those who have migrated to Wales from countries which have a structure of communal living. They said adapting to a more individualistic society can be extremely difficult, particularly if they migrate without family or social networks in place. There is a sense that this isolation can often lead to feelings of loneliness and can have a negative impact on mental health:

We come from a country where we all live together and there wasn't as much mental health, but here the life is individualist so the people live separate lives and that has an effect on mental health. Here [Riverside] they have the community centre and have social relationships which reduces mental health ... the more isolated they are the more mental health problems exist (Samaira).

While rates of poor mental health are perceived to be high, people are not coming forward to seek help either because they do not understand or they fear the stigma that is present in many communities, or they do not know where they can access support:

There is a lot of people who have mental health problems and if you come from Africa and a Muslim country there is a lot of stigma. Some people think it is a curse and it is not. Even in Islam it is a normal ailment and you can get better but some people will believe it isn't. A lot of people don't know what their rights are when it comes to mental health. After lockdown there needs to be an event that highlights it ... we have to educate people (Najeeb).

Unfortunately, when people do seek support they often find that they are unable to access this in their first language. Participants called for a focus on awareness raising and for more tailored support in first languages as it can be extremely difficult to talk about mental health in a second language:

To seek help for mental health in my culture is still sort of a taboo. It needs to be better advertised ... the people I support, a lot of them came from war torn countries and they cannot access support in their own languages and I don't think people know much about it (Hiba).

Participants strongly feel that more needs to be done to raise awareness of mental health issues within BAME and migrant communities, particularly since the pandemic has exacerbated them. Additionally they feel that where possible support and counselling should be provided on an appropriate language.

Health and the barriers

Overall, participants feel the challenges to achieving these health outcomes are almost insurmountable. The NHS currently faces significant pressures as a result of the pandemic and there is a sense that the outcomes for ethnic minorities will not be given priority over these wider issues. As one participant explained:

Resources are limited in the NHS. My mum died and I was on the waiting list for nine months for bereavement support because they are short-staffed and they are always short-staffed. Why should anyone wait nine months for that support? It is absurd. Things like physio appointment and I had to wait six months ... forget seeing your GP when it comes to specialist appointments you just don't get them. It has been over eight months and I am still waiting for a gynaecologist appointment. Access is based on those who have the loudest voice and ethnic communities do face language barriers - I would like to ask them 'how are you going to get the resources to improve access for everybody? Not just for ethnic minorities. We need more than words (Chhaya)

3.4 Education

Similar to health, access to education was viewed as extremely important and 'what you rely on to get through life'. Participants welcomed the proposal to improve the experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners and teachers and improve understanding of diversity and racism in the education sector.

Many living in the South Riverside area talked positively about the local school's approach to celebrating diversity and religious dates. Most believe that this kind of education will have a longer-term impact on perceptions of other cultures and religions and feel it is vitally important that this continues and is expanded to attract parents into these celebrations:

The school has a whole day of celebrations for other religions and it is so good to see this ... they haven't been inviting the parents, that isn't

happening but the kids are going home and talking about it. They know about the Chinese new year, they know about Diwali (Inaya).

While there is good practice in schools, participants argued that there should be more representation of diverse communities as school governors and parent teacher associations. They indicated that more could be done to develop training opportunities and encourage more people from ethnic minorities to come forward for these positions.

While reflecting positively on education overall, there was a sense that higher education in Wales still needs to do more to support BAME people, with some saying they would much prefer to send their children to University in England (as there is a perception they are more inclusive):

If my son goes to University I would rather him study in England – not Wales. Because of my experience of going on placement. One of my friends said it is better to go to England because it is very racist here (Samiah).

Most said they would like to see more scholarships for BAME people and people from migrant backgrounds.

Educational opportunities for women

Many participants said that is crucial to provide women with opportunities and support to access education. Living within the Riverside community there was a feeling that many women end up staying home and looking after children because there is a lack of educational opportunities or training.

There is not much support for children who have English barriers and there is not much support for the mothers. When people come to this country they say that you need to learn English and the man will go out and learn English and the woman is stuck at home with the children so there needs to be a creche facility to help integrate the women more, not relying on people (Hiba)

So the women have very little English if at all, but can you imagine if they did and what impact that would have on their children (Ridhi).

Participants feel that more community provision and better childcare opportunities would help more women into the job market.

3.5 Employment and income

All participants agree that more could be done by the Welsh Government and others to improve employment opportunities for BAME people and migrants. They welcomed the outcomes outlined in the plan:

It is one of the most vital areas. Income and employment opportunities and financial empowerment ... this is important for everyone but harder for people who face barriers from an ethnicity point of view ... Economics is so important ... it determines your wellbeing, your usefulness to society (Praktash).

However, they feel there is significant work to be done, particularly as many people from ethnic minority backgrounds are currently in jobs which they are overqualified for without opportunities for progression.. Some fear that it is a particular issue facing young people.

... you have people who are overly qualified for the work they are doing. We have youngsters being turned down because of how they look or how they speak ... if you do get a job it is usually for less money. We have the same qualifications but I get less money than the others (Dinesh).

Some supported the use of quotas and positive discrimination:

Positive discrimination is a good strategy. To encourage employers to hire more Black and Asian Minority Ethnic people who are also qualified ... I have studied all my life but I have found discrimination and it is very difficult for me. In England it is different because it is multicultural but why can't this be the same in Wales? (Samiah)

However, most agree that more could be done to improve the way employers recruit rather than through a quota-based system.

Recruitment strategies

There is a sense that changing the way employers connect with the community would be a powerful way to increase opportunities. One participant gave the example of health care companies who made a concerted effort to reach out to the community when they were looking for care staff. Through this direct action by employers many people in the local community now work in the care sector. They suggest that job fairs and other forms of recruitment can be off-putting to members of the community and a more direct recruitment strategy would be beneficial.

Many participants said that more could be done to improve the take-up of apprenticeships amongst young people who would benefit through more financial incentives like grants.

Encouraging and supporting self-employment opportunities

Some participants feel that more could be done to support those who want to become self-employed and start their own business. They explained that many people from BAME and migrant backgrounds are interested in opportunities for self-employment but struggle to meet the high reliability criteria to borrow money (in some cultures borrowing finance at high interest rates is prohibited) and lack the skills and confidence to take it forward:

Ethnic minorities face issues because the eligibility criteria is so high that the vulnerable communities are left behind. If they want to start a business – where do they go? Where do they get help? Where do they do their business plan and who gives them finance (Praktash)

Some suggested that more targeted business advice and support could be available to help people to establish their business. One participant discussed a small training programme which is open to BAME women and has been successful. They felt that schemes such as these should be more readily available:

Over the course of the pandemic around 160 women started training on self-employment ... it is a six week programme for 18-30 and women of all ages. We help them develop a business plan ... once they have gone through it they are aware of the dangers and the pitfalls ... where they fall down is access to finance and that is where the biggest pitfall is and where they get the finance from without interest as part of their religious and cultural values ... at the small business level it is not possible for them to earn and pay interest and that means it stifles the growth. We are doing it at a very small level but this needs to be a key programme. Some of those who finished the course in October are now coming back with a polished business plan ... (Praktash).

Improving opportunities across the private sector

There was some concern that the actions are focused on the public sector and lack detail about how opportunities across the private sector would be improved and to what extent the Welsh Government has this power.

3.6 Housing and accommodation

Participants view housing and accommodation as a key priority. The lack of social housing in the South Riverside area means their main issues are based on the behaviour of private sector landlords. Many participants shared their own experiences of expensive poor-quality housing, unresponsive landlords and not being able to assert their rights. Some typical experiences and comments included:

Lack of suitable houses and we have to get private housing and the landlords don't do repairs ... it is not adequate and expensive ... I ask them to repair things and sometimes they just ignore it. In our culture we are kind and we don't like to complain. I am on the housing waiting list (Hasifa)

If they find someone that is sort of suitable then do they want to challenge landlords when they are scared (Vedanshi).

Participants who live within the South Riverside area said they are faced with a housing dilemma; the area is diverse and therefore they feel comfortable living there, however there are no possibilities of obtaining social housing (some had been on the waiting list for up to 10 years) and it is a desirable therefore expensive place to live. To some, it feels like there is a price to pay for diversity:

Riverside is like heaven to people like us because it is multicultural but it is expensive to live here. The services are good here for people like us but you have to pay more money for that (Kaif)

There is a massive housing issue in Cardiff. It comes back to poverty, if you find a house for £800 and the Council will only pay £650 based on your needs that is an issue and some landlords won't take people on benefits. If you try and go on the housing waiting list for social housing then there is a long waiting list. Riverside is a high demand area for social housing (Hiba).

Lack of information about accommodation rights

Unfortunately, BAME communities and migrants are said to be at a particular disadvantage when it comes to housing and accommodation. There is a sense that landlords take advantage of their lack of knowledge about their rights and/or their lack of English:

But then that is an issue, some landlords will see they don't speak English, they don't know their rights and they take advantage. They can say your rent is this much but to them they don't know if that is a lot (Vedanshi).

3.7 Criminal justice, hateful attitudes and community cohesion

Criminal justice

Access to justice is viewed as a key priority and positively most feel that if they reported a crime or sought help from the police, they would be treated equally. However, some participants feel racial profiling is still an issue and some had personal experiences which they felt could have been handled more sensitively. In relation to one incident which had occurred in the community some weeks before, they felt the family involved were at a disadvantage because they did not know about their rights and they did not have the proper support to aid them in their dealings with the police. Participants welcomed the action to better understand people's lived experience of the justice system and think that more could be done by the police to improve relationships between themselves and the community:

There is the perception that there is racial profiling ... when there are groups of black or Asian youths it seems to be that the police will arrest them and take them back to the station straight away whereas if it was a white boy they would give them a warning and send them on their way. The police need to work on this issue. They need to be able to explain why they are doing it, especially when the parents do not understand what is happening (Chhaya).

Participants feel there should also be education, particularly to those who have migrated to Wales and have a different experience about the role of the police, on the role of the police and the criminal justice system.

Taking action on violence against women

Many participants welcomed the commitment to tackle violence against women including Female Genital Mutilation and domestic abuse. There is a strong view that women living in Wales continue to suffer these crimes and that rates of domestic abuse have gone up during the pandemic. Participants predict it could be challenging to provide support as many women will not come forward for fear of repercussions and a general lack of awareness about their rights as a woman:

If they leave, and they may have children, where are they going to go? They are totally on their own. They must feel very frightened. In the Sikh community they won't come forward because they don't want to air their issues in public; they are very private (Dinesh)

It is taking the first step. Women have to come to seek help in the first place. People talk – the community talks and this is an issue of being in a tight community (Kaif).

Some participants feel that action to address these issues needs to come from the communities themselves. However there is also a view that the Welsh Government could provide more help and support and encourage more open

discussions about these issues. This includes providing more training and support to those working in frontline services:

It is not just the government that has to change but it is the communities themselves that need to change their harmful practices but they could make help more available in the same way they have a domestic abuse helpline. Teachers should have training on this. I know midwives and social workers know about it and will report it. The Government cannot change them – but they can make help available ... they could open up debate about this issue to have more open discussion about these issues (Chhaya).

And awareness needs to begin at a young age in a school environment:

It should be taught at a young age. Some children are born in this country but are born into that culture so if they have the possibility to recognise that their household is doing things they are not supposed to do ... we need to come in at an early age ... at school it is completely different to what your home can be like; it is like being in two different worlds – it is about getting in at a young age (Maria).

They added that it is important that organisations which have a trusted relationship with people from ethnic backgrounds receive adequate funding to enable them to work with communities on these issues.

Hateful attitudes

Considering hateful attitudes and hate crime, participants feel that many people simply accept hate as a part of their daily lives, that they don't see this behaviour as a crime and hence reporting is low. Even when people feel they have been a victim of a hate crime they can often feel reluctant to report it either because they do not understand the system, they fear the police or they simply do not want to complain.

... not everyone is aware of hate crime and understand what it is, they are so used to it they have come to expect and accept it ... they don't know that it is acceptable ... there is also a lack of awareness about age or gender related hate crime (Chhaya)

People from my community, they don't like to go to the police, they are not confident to complain about things which happen to them. We face abuse outside in the shops or domestic abuse and we don't like to complain about it (Alia).

Participants were generally unaware of the recent Welsh Government actions to tackle hateful attitudes, although one participant was aware of the 'hate hurts'³ campaign. On finding out more about the campaign most agree that this approach can seem 'tokenistic' and feel that actions like this can be costly with

³ <https://gov.wales/hate-hurts-wales>

very limited impact overall. They feel that these campaigns do not give clear pathways to reporting, they do not tell you what to expect when reporting and what support you may receive. Participants argued that direct training sessions have more of an impact, particularly for those who have experienced hate crimes:

I didn't know what a hate crime was until I went on a course. I knew what hate was and what a crime is but I didn't know what my rights were ... it makes me more aware of what is happening to me and others and I know it is a crime and a serious crime ... if you are aware then it makes you more powerful (Kaif).

They welcomed the goal to improve wider awareness of hate crime. One participant relayed an incident of couple on a bus journey who were racially abused and spat at. The bus driver took some time before stopping the bus and helping the passengers. It was argued that more could be done to raise awareness about how the wider community can support people who are victims of a hate crime and to provide training to workers in public facing public professions who should also be accountable for their actions:

People should be free of prejudices if they are working for the public sector and public facing jobs. You cannot change people but they should be aware that they cannot bring their personal prejudices into work (Chhaya).

Overall, there were calls for harsher punishments for those who commit hate crimes and the police should be publishing what happens to the perpetrators as a result of committing a hate crime.

3.8 Additional issues: Support and funding of grassroots organisations

Participants called on the Welsh Government to consider how they interact with and fund third sector organisations who they feel are often better placed to deliver some of the actions contained within the draft plan. They argued that often smaller charities will miss out on funding because they do not have the resources which bigger organisations have. Yet they have access to 'on the ground' 'local' BAME networks and will have the trust and confidence of those they seek to support.

They were concerned that the funding model adopted by the Welsh Government is typically based on short timescales which often limits the impact and reach of projects.

4. The use of the term 'Black and Asian Minority Ethnic'

The use and appropriateness of the term 'Black and Asian Minority Ethnic' caused much debate and often polarised those who were for and against the use of the term and those who were indifferent. For those who would like to see an end to the use of the term, they feel that its use only serves to segregate people further.

I don't like it. It is a term which segregates you. You are trying to integrate everybody but then you go and label people. That has an adverse effect on what you are trying to achieve. This is an issue across the board. Other groups feel this in the same way; it is derogatory but there is more focus now because of what is happening now. It makes me feel separate or different. It is them and us! Where do Polish people come into it? They are an ethnic minority too- they are white (Dinesh)

At the end of the day we are all human beings and it feels like you are being put into a sub-standard group ... when I found out what it meant it changed my whole attitude. When I first came here ... I thought I was equal like everybody and I hadn't faced any of this ... when I found out I felt like someone was putting a label on me ... we are all equal. Yes we are a minority but we should be treated equally (Chhaya).

Others feel that the term 'BAME' (or a different term) is necessary until a time when white privilege no longer exists and people are treated as equal. However, even those who agreed that a term is required could not suggest a suitable one. Some alternative terms like 'people of colour' were discussed at the events, however some disagreed with this based on the fact that white could also be seen as a colour and preferred terms to be based on skin colour:

I have only just realised what it means and that it means Asian. We would refer to each other as black or white – how else are you supposed to say it? Why cannot it not be the natural colour. If someone called me a brown girl I wouldn't be offended because I am (Jia).

Overall, participants feel that, wherever possible, people's preferences should be used.

5. Conclusion

The draft plan and the opportunity to take part in the consultation were both welcomed by participants who feel it is an extremely positive step forward, particularly in the context of the pandemic and Black Lives Matters movement. They also appreciated the amount of work and effort that has gone into developing such a comprehensive document.

Overall, the vision, value and purpose of the plan were supported with some describing it as 'heaven'. There was however pessimism over the extent to which the vision of an anti-racist Wales (as set out in the plan) could be achieved by 2030. It was felt that the pervasiveness of racism combined with the challenges, barriers and level of resources needed to achieve change across all areas of the plan. Given these concerns, most agree that while the overall strategy is welcomed there needs to be a focus on the key priority areas and those which will have the greatest impact on their lives and their communities which includes language provision, health, education, housing and employment.

Most participants agree that what will make this plan different to strategies and legislation that went before it is the extent to which it can demonstrate it's impact. Therefore, it is crucial that the Welsh Government clearly sets out the indicators and a baseline it will use to measure success against.

Finally, while supporting a Race Equality Action Plan, there is also a sense that people want more concerted and targeted efforts to improve integration and cohesion. Those who took part said that as part of the vision of an anti-racist society they also want to live in a country which supports cultural diversity, which creates opportunities to share their cultural heritage with others and brings people together to develop a sense of belonging.

References

¹ Welsh Government (March 2021) Race Equality Action Plan: An Anti-racist Wales [accessed via <https://gov.wales/race-equality-action-plan-anti-racist-wales>]

² First Minister's BAME Covid-19 advisory group report of the socioeconomic subgroup (June 2020) [accessed via <https://gov.wales/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-bame-covid-19-socioeconomic-subgroup-report>]

³ Welsh Government (March 2021) Race Equality Action Plan: An Anti-racist Wales [accessed via <https://gov.wales/race-equality-action-plan-anti-racist-wales>]

⁴ <https://www.wcpp.org.uk/commentary/creating-an-anti-racist-wales/>

⁵ <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/current-projects/lived-experience-migration-wales/>