# RECRUITING FOR INCLUSION

## A guide for media organisations

# SUMMARY

On the 22nd, 23rd and 24th of September 2023, Inclusive Journalism Cymru partnered with PDR, Startup Migrants and the Institute of Welsh Affairs to host the Inclusive Media Development Lab.

The event, the first of its kind, was an intensive weekend of discussions, professional development opportunities and workshops hosted by journalists, entrepreneurs and creatives for people wanting to work in the journalism industry in Wales. This guide builds upon discussions held during that weekend, which led to an acknowledgement that there needs to be an equitable recruitment process for media organisations.

While there may be multiple ways to enter the media sector, the route to employment in mainstream journalism often seems to generate a career template ill-suited to a diverse, modern workforce.

The issue is not to find more deserving and talented individuals to join established newsrooms, but how to make newsrooms safer spaces for new recruits to join them, starting with the process of recruitment, and taking into account the variety of individual trajectories that may lead to a career in journalism.

Newsrooms have everything to gain from this transformation process, with better retention, a team and an output more representative of communities' experiences, and wider audiences. But recruitment must centre the well-being of recruits, rather than burden them with the emotional labour of change.

A closer look at the media sector in Wales, characterised by a staggering gender imbalance and, at large, a homogeneity of backgrounds, makes the case for change even more pressing: the recent Mapping the Welsh Journalism Sector report revealed the prevalence of white, heterosexual journalists, with over half coming from a household with at least one parent in managerial employments. With only a third of surveyed journalists in full-time permanent contracts, this is also a sector marked by a high level of structural precarity, leaving a large number of journalists more vulnerable by default.

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This state of affairs is aggravated by a lack of accessibility and a predominance of difficult working conditions, often characterised by low security and pay, and high stress and burnout, which meant that more than 65% of journalists surveyed had considered leaving the sector. The industry is therefore characterised by two key structural issues: a lack of diversity; and poor working conditions, leaving many in the sector in a state of endemic precarity, and leading to retention issues.

**This guide is based on discussions held between members of the Inclusive Journalism Cymru network. Words collected and edited by Marine Furet.**

Recruitment is only one of many steps that organisations can take to address these issues, but it is a significant one. This guide emerges from conversations held by early-career and marginalised journalists, in an attempt to make newsrooms less exclusive spaces, and more capable of attracting and retaining new recruits and creating "Institutions of Belonging".

It is not enough for newsrooms and media organisations simply to make vague or superficial "commitments" to inclusion, without engaging in the deep and sometimes difficult work required to make real and lasting systemic change. This guide provides a clear framework for change, and reflects the views of exactly the kinds of journalists the industry says it wants to attract. If you are serious about becoming better and safer employers, and (re)gaining the trust of employees and audiences, then this guide makes it clear what is required.

# BEFORE RECRUITMENT

## Building an inclusive workplace

Written by and for journalists in Wales, this guide outlines some of the ways to make recruitment a more inclusive and effective process, and more likely to attract and retain employees in the long term.

Even the most inclusive recruitment strategy can only come at the end of a thorough reflection on what working practices can make newsrooms welcoming, accessible and inclusive spaces where a broad spectrum of people would want to work. Merely advertising a job vacancy stating that 'all are welcome' to apply is not enough and can, in the worst cases, result in tokenising employment practices.

High profile bullying cases, precarious working conditions and the homogeneity of staff in newsrooms all reflect relationship structures that are, at best, discouraging and, at worst, a deterrent to new entrants. This is particularly true for candidates from backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in media organisations and marginalised by mainstream news.

The competitive nature of the sector breeds isolation. The financial precarity of the sector is a barrier to making newsrooms spaces where people from marginalised backgrounds can feel included and safe, due to a lack of safety net. Marginalised journalists are less likely to raise issues that might have an adverse impact on their career. This is further exacerbated by a highly competitive market that rewards personal achievements and individualised trajectories rather than collective advancement. Ultimately, this model consolidates the dominance of a homogeneous workforce and career progression trajectory.

In a climate of mistrust coupled with a cost of living crisis that has shrunk consumers' purses and their willingness to pay for accessing news, it is clear that media outlets need to rethink what they offer their readers, viewers and listeners. However, it should not be up to aspiring journalists to remedy an issue that they have done nothing to create or to repair the media's representation and trust deficit.

Inclusion often starts from the assumption that people must be brought in from the outside to fix "diversity issues", but this misunderstands the problem. The starting point for change must be an acknowledgement that it is newsroom leaders who have the responsibility, power and incentive to drive and deliver the transformation that is needed by journalism organisations, their employees and their audiences. However, inclusive recruitment cannot be the last word of the story either, and must be part of a range of measures which give equal, if not more, precedence to retention and development.

By helping their workers sustain and develop their careers, newsrooms can take steps towards combating structures of oppression and marginalisation, instead of replicating them. Countering the homogeneity of newsrooms has to result from intentional action, even as participants in the ongoing News for All project report thinking of journalism and media organisations in the same terms as they think of the police: that is, institutions which have a negative impact on their lives.

Meanwhile, the Reuters Institute's Changing Newsrooms survey conducted among newsroom leaders revealed that only 43% felt their workplace had a strategy to improve their diversity and highlighted a dearth of retention strategies.

In recent years, a number of Wales-based media organisations have advertised opportunities targeted at people from minoritised backgrounds, including, for example, candidates with a disability or from a marginalised racial background. This was based on a positive action framework, on the basis that people from these categories were absent from newsrooms.

## Positive action

"allows additional help to be provided for groups of people who share a 'protected characteristic' (for example, race, sex, or sexual orientation) in order to level the playing field. You can take proportionate action that aims to reduce disadvantage, meet different needs and increase participation." Source: UK Government

## Positive discrimination

"is unlawful in Great Britain. If an action treating a particular group more favourably does not meet the statutory requirements in the Act for taking positive action, then it is likely to be unlawful direct discrimination under the Act, irrespective of the motives behind taking it." Source: UK Government

These initiatives, however, risk falling short if they are not followed up by working practices that do not alienate or risk excluding the people they intend to reach. Anecdotally, a participant in the Lab shared the story of a friend who, upon joining a major media organisation, found they were unable to use the office facilities due to accessibility issues. Opportunities that present contradictions in terms – for example, a role intended for disabled candidates, but only available on a full-time basis – are a form of surface-level inclusion and tokenism. In fact, there is evidence that superficial 'diversity statements' from organisations can be <u>'counterproductive' and 'must be rethought as a matter of urgency'</u>. The same research also highlighted the prevalence of informal hiring practices, particularly at more senior levels, with only entry level jobs being <u>advertised openly</u>.

The Trusting News Guide proposes that newsrooms should hire by looking for <u>'dimensions of difference'</u>: they should identify what perspectives are missing from their staff, and what is therefore likely to be missing from their reporting. Before embarking on a recruitment journey, the first step should therefore be a thorough appraisal of your media organisation and working conditions.

# A MANAGER'S CHECKLIST

- Know who is in your newsroom, and understand where, and why it is failing to properly reflect and represent society

- Prioritise measuring retention and social mobility within your organisation to capture any glass-ceilings

- Map out and identify the 'dimensions of experience' represented in your organisation, and identity gaps

- Ensure you have effective processes to enable employees to express discomfort or discuss issues without fear of this having a negative impact on their career or wider wellbeing

# STEPS TO AN INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Recruitment can be an opportunity to renew the culture of your organisation, but it should start with a process of building relationships and designing an accessible user journey that reflects your values as a media organisation: for an opportunity to be seen by all, it needs to meet candidates where they are, prioritising connections and building trust.

This means looking outside traditional circles by mapping out the people who are currently underrepresented in newsrooms and reaching out to people from backgrounds and communities traditionally marginalised by media organisations.

Further, this means asking what conditions are currently getting in the way of people accessing those opportunities and what financial, geographical and social barriers currently exist to create a situation of systemic exclusion.

Inclusion and retention is a process of earning trust, which requires building in the necessary time to recruit, from advertising, designing the application process, to onboarding new recruits.

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# A MANAGER'S CHECKLIST

- Keep track of recruitment processes for previous roles: take stock of who applied and who did not, and assess the social homogeneity of previous applicants

- If previous roles have received applications from a homogenous applicant pool, work backwards to consider obstacles that may have discouraged other candidates from applying

- Advertise all opportunities at different career levels as openly as possible (not only entry-level ones)

- Advertise your opportunities in places the candidates you wish to attract are likely to see them, going beyond conventional recruitment platforms if necessary

- Hold outreach or Q&A sessions about the opportunity so that applicants can ask questions about the role and learn more about your organisation and its values. It makes sense to begin and continue relationship-building processes before and after you need to advertise jobs, so that you are visibly proactive and engaged with the process, and show a commitment to making your recruitment inclusive

- Plan ahead to make sure the opportunity can be advertised for a sufficient amount of time

# THE JOB AD

As a candidate's entry point into a company, job adverts are crucial for setting expectations around language and to show an understanding of the candidates or the candidate pool you are hoping to attract. Stigmatising language has been and continues to be present in mainstream reporting, with dehumanising effects.

The social model of disability is based on the assumption that people are disabled by social conditions rather than by their impairments or, as Inclusive Journalism Cymru member, Bethany Handley, puts it, 'disabled by design'. As part of this, it is worth considering which candidates may be unable to apply for a job opportunity because of the process you put in place.

In our discussions, participants also observed that wording such as 'hard to reach', for example, would likely alienate the communities it described, even in initiatives aiming to reduce inequality. In Wales, organisations like the Privilege Cafe have led the way by hosting discussions about the role of language - 'underrepresented', 'diverse' - in reinforcing marginalisation, instead encouraging an open discussion of social (in)justice in accessing opportunities. This covert language perpetuates traumatising and harmful structures for those it presents as a homogenous group of outsiders.

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Be transparent around salaries. Advertising jobs without a salary or using 'competitive salary' / 'DOE (Depends on Experience)' may constitute a barrier to recruiting applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds. According to the Social Mobility Foundation, professionals from a working class background are paid 12% less than their privileged peers for the same role.

The Trusting News Guide proposes that newsrooms should hire by looking for 'dimensions of difference': they should identify what perspectives are missing from their staff, and what is therefore likely to be missing from their reporting. Before embarking on a recruitment journey, the first step should therefore be a thorough appraisal of your media organisation and working conditions.

# A MANAGER'S CHECKLIST

- Be mindful of the language you use to avoid alienating candidates from marginalised backgrounds, and make your application pack as jargon free as possible

- Ensure your job application always quotes the salary for the role you advertise and that it is an equitable one. If the salary is negotiable, make this clear too

- If your opportunity is accessible, say it, and make your flexible working arrangements explicit if you have any

- Make clear how reasonable adjustments will be prioritised and delivered for disabled candidates, without putting undue burdens on them

# THE APPLICATION PROCESS

The application process should reflect the inclusive intent behind your recruitment process and is an opportunity to optimise an applicant's first experience of your organisation.

Language is key: the Public Interest Research Centre suggests being more explicit in your language can go a long way towards attracting a different pool of applicants. For example, consider being proactive and including examples of non-conventional, unwaged work experience that might fit the kind of competence you expect candidates to show.

An application form should be as simple as possible to complete and focus on understanding the skills and experience a candidate could bring to your organisation rather than being a test.

Remember that, by definition, an inclusive recruitment process is about finding and welcoming candidates with different perspectives and skills than the ones already present in your newsroom, so requirements and questions should reflect this, rather than simply replicating previous processes.

# A MANAGER'S CHECKLIST

- Avoid copy and pasting from past forms, and keep track of what opportunities attracted a more diverse pool of applicants, reflecting on what worked and what didn't

- Create your application form to make it as accessible as possible and minimise the amount of work required to fill it out

- Offer candidates an opportunity to submit their application in a different format where this will make your vacancy more accessible (for example, audio/video)

- Avoid unnecessary jargon and be as clear as possible. Devise your application to highlight candidates' skills rather than traditional qualifications

# THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

If you are serious about changing your organisation, take time to consider your interviewing process and avoid recruiting in the image of the past. This includes giving candidates advance information about the panel, sufficient time to prepare for the interview, and being transparent about your decision-making process.

Reframe your interview not as a test, but a process to give candidates the best opportunities to express their skills, perspective and knowledge. To this effect, implementing measures such as circulating questions in advance may help transform the process of interviewing. If your organisation is particularly homogeneous, it may also be worth building in time to include an external person in your shortlisting and interviewing panel.

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By the time you reach the interviewing process, you will hopefully have a less homogeneous pool of candidates, but it is worth considering the hidden barriers candidates may have to overcome at interview stage. This includes candidates' ability to attend the interview in the first place, and one way to include candidates in your organisation may be through addressing the costs faced by unwaged applicants through the interview process.

These difficulties are compounded for candidates who face multiple factors of marginalisation. For example, disabled people are more likely to face additional living costs due to inaccessible transport, accommodation, and to the lack of opportunities available to them. They continue to be more likely to be unemployed.

Accessibility needs also differ from one person to the next. As a result, at the interview stage, it is important to signal the steps you have taken to ensure that the interview process is as accessible as possible and pre-empt issues by checking in with candidates. Ahead of the interview, give the candidate the opportunity to state any access needs, including their pronouns and any further requests, such as an online instead of an in person interview.

Caring responsibilities may also be a factor. To attend an interview, a single parent may have to factor in caring costs and explicitly signalling, for example, that childcare costs are covered or whether your workplace is accessible (and noting available amenities) will be more attractive to candidates than a sentence like 'we welcome applications from people from background X'.

During the interview, also ensure you give the candidate explicit space to ask questions about the organisation.

# A MANAGER'S CHECKLIST

- Minimise barriers (geographical, financial, social) that prevent interviewees from attending interviews. If you expect interviewees to travel to interview, make support available, whether the role is permanent or not

- Make scoring transparent and consider the dimensions of experience and identities represented on your interviewing panel

- Make questions available in advance to make clear that the interview is not a test but an opportunity for candidates to showcase their talents

# AFTER THE INTERVIEW

An interview can be a fraught process and it is worth considering the well-being of both successful and unsuccessful candidates. Looking after participants' well-being is clearly an important part of a recruitment process because it likely reflects the kind of care that will be shown to them within the organisation if they are successful.

For example, it is worth factoring in time to check in with candidates and interviewees. Giving applicants a clear timeframe to expect a response and feedback; a clear pathway to reimburse costs they might have incurred; and ask questions about the process.

# A RECRUITER'S CHECKLIST

- Build in time to communicate with unsuccessful and successful candidates

- If you are able to offer debriefings to candidates who were not successful at the interview, make this clear, and set out a clear timeframe

- If candidates are reimbursed for expenses incurred when travelling to interview, make it explicit within what timeframe

- Ensure you direct successful applicants to any pastoral support available. If they are available, make sure structures of support are clearly signposted

# CONCLUSION

Our discussion at the Inclusive Media Development Lab allowed us to develop a number of themes and questions that could help newsrooms frame a recruitment process. It is impossible to exhaust the topic of recruitment and the structures of inequality that underpin it in traditional newsrooms. In a fragile landscape for the news sector, across Wales and beyond, there is an imperative for all media organisations to consider who it includes and excludes, if we are to have a sustainable media ecosystem.

As a competitive and highly complex industry, journalism remains 'an increasingly high emotional labour job' and this guide does not pretend to dispel the multiple pressures journalists face in their careers.

Equally, however, it is important to acknowledge that those pressures faced at the top and even by journalists in comparatively stable employment have a compounding effect on those who are currently the furthest away from centres of power and waged positions.

Centering equity when designing a recruitment process may be one step towards increased retention and greater diversity of backgrounds in newsrooms. For this, it may be useful to think of recruitment as a service, the quality of which sets expectations for applicants joining an organisation and is vital for the future of a robust, sustainable and representative journalism sector.

# A HANDY CHECKLIST

## Before recruitment

- Collect meaningful data about your organisation's workforce and identify gaps

- Reflect on past recruitment processes and their effectiveness in bringing in journalists from different backgrounds

- Implement working policies that adapt to your workers' needs and combat burnout culture

# During recruitment

- Make your vacancy clear, transparent and accessible, with a clear wage point (or payment), and signposting what makes your organisation accessible

- Advertise all opportunities at different career levels as openly as possible (not only entry-level ones)

- Make your vacancy easy to find and meet candidates halfway by sharing the opportunity outside traditional spaces, organising targeted Q&A and outreach sessions

- Make your application process pain-free: steer away from long and meaningless application forms and use jargon-free language. Prioritise tasks that help candidates show their qualities and skills

- Rethink your interview process as an inclusive space for candidates to showcase their talents: consider the background of your interview panel members; communicate with candidates ahead of time about the make-up of the interview panel, the questions and scoring

- Remove barriers to interview by offering candidates support to attend, even if recruiting for a temporary role, and give candidates space to express their access needs ahead of the interview

# After recruitment

- Ensure all interviewees are given due care, with feedback delivered in a timely manner

- Work on retention by signposting your new recruit to pastoral structures and processes early on

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