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work and working lives*

A GUIDE TO INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT FOR EMPLOYERS

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A guide to inclusive recruitment for employers

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(1) **Introduction**

Employers aiming to be more inclusive should also embed inclusive practices in their recruitment process. Recruitment is about getting the most suitable candidate into a role and is crucial for organisations to deliver their goals. However, it is not always clear what makes a candidate 'suitable', and there is potential for bias to creep in when making these decisions. Recruitment can be a very subjective process, demanding that hiring managers make complex and high-stakes decisions, often in limited time. This all adds up to make it particularly susceptible to unconscious biases and there is strong evidence that marginalised groups face discrimination in recruitment contexts. We use the phrase 'marginalised groups' because it includes all forms of marginalisation by individuals, structures, and society. The term 'underrepresented' is not always accurate, since in some cases a marginalised group can be overrepresented but still disadvantaged, for example, women in nursing or education (where men are often in positions of leadership). 'Marginalised' captures the power differential, which applies to every context.

What is equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)?

Equality, diversity and inclusion go hand in hand, but the concepts have important differences.[1]

Equality ensures that every individual has equal opportunities, regardless of their background, identity or experience.

Diversity refers to the representation and recognition of people with different characteristics. In the UK, it is against the law to discriminate against someone with a 'protected characteristic'. These include: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation. In addition to protected characteristics, employers may also wish to consider diversity of other characteristics, such as socioeconomic background, as well as considering intersectionality, wherein people may have multiple, overlapping identities that can impact their experiences.

Inclusion is about going beyond representation and recognition, to valuing these differences and enabling everyone to thrive at work. An inclusive workplace is one where people feel they can perform to their full potential, and that they belong in the organisation without needing to conform or mask their identities.

For more on equality, diversity and inclusion, go to the CIPD factsheet on Inclusion and diversity in the workplace.

The CIPD guide to Building inclusive workplaces provides detailed insights on the value of inclusivity in the workplace and how it impacts employers.

While many HR professionals would be shocked by evidence of discrimination, increasing awareness of the biases that affect recruitment is unfortunately not enough to reduce their impact. Instead, recruitment processes should be redesigned to reduce the influence of bias. Clear, objective, structured, and transparent processes are fairer for candidates, supporting more equal outcomes, and enabling employers to attract more diverse talent pools and to select the most suitable candidates for the role. Even small changes to processes can have a big effect on who applies and who is selected, as well as improving the candidate experience.

This guide contains practical, evidence-based actions, aligned with international standards for inclusion and diversity,[2] which employers and hiring managers can implement to make the recruitment process more inclusive. We also include some case studies showing inclusive recruitment in practice, and provide some caution around common actions that may hinder inclusivity.

We provide recommendations for the four main stages of recruitment, including:

1   role design and the job advert

2   attracting diverse candidates

3   the application process

4   how candidates are selected.

In the final section, 'Monitoring and measuring', we outline how employers can monitor processes and outcomes by collecting high-quality data to evaluate potential sources of bias in the system and make continual improvements.

② Actions to make recruitment more inclusive

Stages of recruitment and key recommendations

1 Role design and job advert	Person requirements	• Make role requirements clear, specific, and behaviour-based. • Remove biased language from job adverts. • Caution: avoid mandating diversity statements. • Caution: avoid a requirement for 'cultural fit' or 'person–organisation fit'.
	Job specification	• Offer flexible working by default. • Make salaries non-negotiable and include them in job adverts. • Advertise the specific benefits and policies available.
2 Attracting diverse candidates	Target marginalised groups to apply	• Place job adverts where they are more likely to be seen by marginalised applicants. • Use targeted 'word-of-mouth' referrals. • Focus outreach efforts on marginalised groups.
	Making the recruitment experience inclusive	• Provide candidates with clear expectations, timelines, and communications. • Proactively ask applicants if they need reasonable adjustments during the recruitment process.
3 Application process		• Anonymise applications. • Caution: avoid asking candidates about the dates of their employment history.
4 Selection process	Sifting candidates	• Reduce bias in automated sifting. • Include more marginalised candidates in the shortlist. • Caution: avoid using social media to sift applicants.
	Interviews and assessments	• Make scheduling interviews easy, accessible, and flexible. • Use structured interviews. • Use skill-based assessment tasks in recruitment.
	Evaluate candidates	• Make decisions about candidates in batches. • Use calibrations for hiring decisions. • Caution: avoid mandating diverse interview panels.
	Post-offer	• Share and collect feedback from and to all candidates. • Proactively offer reasonable adjustments to all new joiners. • Encourage candidates to reapply.
5 Monitoring and measuring		• Set diversity targets for recruitment. • Collect high-quality data to monitor inclusion outcomes. • Analyse recruitment data to prioritise inclusion efforts.

(3) Role design and the job advert

Person requirements

Make the role requirements clear, specific, and behaviour-based

Clearly list the specific behaviours and competencies needed for a role. Instead of expressing requirements in terms of character traits, express them in terms of behaviours that can be evidenced (see Table 1 below for examples). We also recommend having as few requirements as possible and making sure they are absolutely necessary for the role. Particularly when advertising for existing roles, we recommend assessing the needs of the role as it stands today, rather than relying on previous adverts or specifications.

Table 1: Preferred language of behaviours and competencies

Instead of...	Try...
You are a natural leader.	You have held line management responsibilities.
You are a gifted communicator.	You have presented your findings to clients or at conferences.

This helps applicants understand what a role will involve and what is expected of them without inside information. Women and ethnic minority[3] candidates are more likely to apply for roles where the requirements are expressed as behaviours rather than character traits.[4] While it has not been tested, this approach should increase applications from other marginalised groups, such as neurodivergent candidates who may be more affected by lack of clarity around job requirements than others.[5]

Remove biased language from job adverts

Biased language refers to words associated with identity-based stereotypes, such as masculine or younger-age stereotypes. Language 'decoders' are available online to help identify stereotypically masculine language (for example words such as 'ambitious', 'hierarchy', 'decisive') and stereotypically feminine language (for example words such as 'compassionate', 'cooperative', 'empathetic'). Typically, they will make suggestions that create greater balance between masculine and feminine words; however, employers should mostly aim to reduce the number of masculine-coded words.

When women see job adverts with more stereotypically masculine words, they are more likely to assume that the team is predominantly male and that they are less likely to fit in.[6] At the same time, women anticipate greater belonging with stereotypically feminine words, while men are not affected.[7] Similarly, older people assume they are less likely to be selected for an interview or hired for a role advertised with stereotypically younger-age words, although it does not affect their willingness to apply.[8]

(!) Caution: avoid mandating diversity statements

Diversity statements in job adverts or company websites are intended to communicate that employers care about equality and diversity, and to encourage applications from marginalised groups. For example: 'Acme Corp values diversity and inclusion and welcomes applications from candidates with diverse backgrounds.'

The evidence about the impact of diversity statements for marginalised groups is inconsistent. Some evidence suggests that they make ethnic minority groups less likely to apply, while other studies find they make them more likely to apply.[9] Regardless, there

is no evidence that diversity statements increase the likelihood that marginalised groups, such as disabled candidates, will be hired.[10]

The same diversity statement can have different effects for different marginalised groups. In one study, a diversity statement that emphasised valuing difference was more effective for women, whereas valuing equality was more effective for ethnic minority applicants, demonstrating the difficulty of designing one statement to appeal to different groups.[11]

Most importantly, the impact of diversity statements depends on the actual diversity of the employer. If they do not reflect the real diversity of an organisation, ethnic minority groups may not expect to fit in or perform well in the role they are applying for.[12] Similarly, for women, these statements are effective only when they are backed up by visible evidence, such as more women on the executive board.[13] In other words, less diverse employers are more likely to find that diversity statements backfire.

Caution: avoid a requirement for 'cultural fit' or 'person–organisation fit'

This involves seeking candidates with a good 'cultural fit' to the employer, or what some employers term 'person–organisation fit'. While often not explained further, this may look for how closely candidates' beliefs and behaviours align with the employer's norms and culture. However, in practice, it often means how similar candidates are to existing employees.

Requirements around 'cultural fit' or 'person–organisation fit' are subjective and increase bias in hiring decisions. 'Fit' is often described in terms of how well a person's personal values align with those held by a company.[14] While often a predictor of performance, there is a danger that it can undermine diversity, particularly if 'fit' is taken to mean how similar a candidate is to those already working at an organisation.[15] This can be in terms of their experiences, how they present themselves, or what they enjoy doing outside of work.[16] However, only selecting people who are similar to ourselves can worsen an employer's inclusivity and diversity, as it replicates the existing workforce.[17] Organisations should use objective criteria for hiring instead of selecting for 'cultural fit'.

Job specification

Offer flexible working by default
Advertise jobs with specific flexible working options by default wherever possible. This means that all jobs are advertised with flexible options unless hiring managers make a valid case for 'why not' to HR. Offer flexible working from day one of a role, rather than requiring a certain amount of time to be spent on the job before these requests are considered. Make sure the flexible working options listed are as specific as possible, and consider flexibility in terms of number of hours worked, schedule for working them, and location of work, for example, 'Schedule: part-time, job-share, or full-time. Flexible working options: working from home, compressed hours, flexitime.'

Flexible working increases workplace diversity by making roles accessible to those with caring responsibilities (primarily women), disabled staff, and both older and younger workers.[18] It is particularly important to offer part-time options across all seniority levels, as part-time workers often get 'stuck' due to a lack of quality part-time roles – this is a key driver of the gender pay gap.[19] Offering homeworking options may also support more women to apply, as evidence suggests that women are more likely to leave their job to shorten their commute time.[20]

Creating a flexible default greatly increases the likelihood that a job will be advertised with flexible options, while still providing individual hiring managers with the choice to opt out.[21] Roles offered with flexible working on the jobsite Indeed attracted 19–30% more candidates.[22] Offering flexible working increases applications from both men and women, but improves the gender balance with even greater increases from women.[23] Compared with the statement 'flexible options available', specifying which flexible working options are available appeals to both men and women.[24]

Case study: Offering flexible working by default increases applications from women

BIT partnered with Zurich Insurance UK and discovered that part-time staff were 35% less likely to apply for promotions.[25] Interviews with part-time staff suggested that many felt they were unable to progress without increasing their working hours, because more senior roles were not explicitly open to part-time working. BIT worked with Zurich to implement a **new default so that all new vacancies would be advertised as available part-time or in a job-share, in addition to full-time**. Hiring managers were still able to opt out, but 78% of jobs that were advertised complied with the default.

The proportion of women applying to Zurich increased by 16%, and by 19% to senior roles.

In a second trial, BIT partnered with the John Lewis Partnership to run a randomised controlled trial where some John Lewis stores and Waitrose supermarkets were randomly assigned to **start advertising new managerial vacancies as part-time or open to job-share by default**.[26] Every hiring manager (100%) in the part-time default group kept the default. **The volume of applications increased by 50%** and applications became gender-balanced, as the **proportion of female applicants increased from 38% to 51%**.

Make salaries non-negotiable and include them in job adverts
Add salaries or salary ranges to job adverts and preferably make them non-negotiable. However, if pay is at all negotiable, state this clearly in the job advert and monitor outcomes from negotiations to ensure that marginalised groups are not unfairly penalised.

Publishing salaries on job adverts increases pay transparency and equality in pay.[27] It helps level the playing field, since marginalised groups are less likely to have connections with existing staff who could give them information about the actual salary on offer.[28]

Ideally, the salary on offer should be non-negotiable. Women are less likely to negotiate, and both women and ethnic minority candidates are penalised when they do.[29] Work environments where salaries are not negotiable have lower pay gaps between men and women.[30]

If the salary is negotiable, this should be clearly stated on the advert. Women are more likely to negotiate their salaries when the job advert states whether it is negotiable.[31] However, this should be approached with caution as marginalised groups are more likely to be viewed as 'too demanding' and less likeable if they negotiate, and to face worse pay outcomes following negotiation.[32] The onus is on employers to ensure that women and other marginalised groups are not unfairly penalised when they do negotiate.
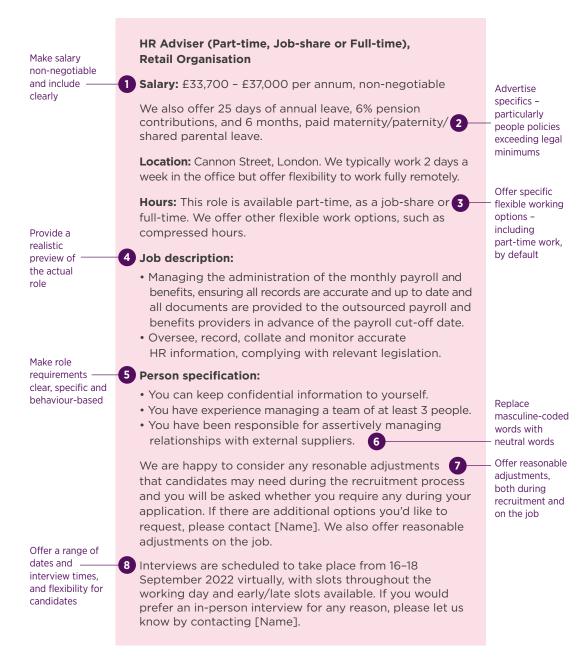
Monitor starting salaries, pay rises, and other forms of compensation such as bonuses, and monitor differences by characteristics; where evidence of bias is found, take action to correct any pay disparities.

Advertise the specific benefits and policies available
Include key benefits in job adverts, particularly benefits or policies that promote inclusivity and exceed legal minimums. These might include parental leave and pay, annual leave allowance, sick leave and pay including for dependants, and pension contributions.

Certain benefits have been associated with increased inclusion and diversity, for example, longer paid parental leave for both maternity and paternity has a positive impact on women's employment.[33] An online trial found that job adverts mentioning 'generous pension contributions' were associated with significantly higher likelihoods of older applicants applying.[34] The impact of advertising wider benefits has not been tested, but some evidence suggests it helps job-seekers find roles that suit their circumstances best.[35]

Elements of a well-designed job advert

Make salary non-negotiable and include clearly

HR Adviser (Part-time, Job-share or Full-time), Retail Organisation

1 Salary: £33,700 – £37,000 per annum, non-negotiable

2 We also offer 25 days of annual leave, 6% pension contributions, and 6 months, paid maternity/paternity/ shared parental leave.

Advertise specifics – particularly people policies exceeding legal minimums

Location: Cannon Street, London. We typically work 2 days a week in the office but offer flexibility to work fully remotely.

3 Hours: This role is available part-time, as a job-share or full-time. We offer other flexible work options, such as compressed hours.

Offer specific flexible working options – including part-time work, by default

Provide a realistic preview of the actual role

4 Job description:
• Managing the administration of the monthly payroll and benefits, ensuring all records are accurate and up to date and all documents are provided to the outsourced payroll and benefits providers in advance of the payroll cut-off date.
• Oversee, record, collate and monitor accurate HR information, complying with relevant legislation.

Make role requirements clear, specific and behaviour-based

5 Person specification:
• You can keep confidential information to yourself.
• You have experience managing a team of at least 3 people.
• You have been responsible for assertively managing relationships with external suppliers. **6**

Replace masculine-coded words with neutral words

7 We are happy to consider any resonable adjustments that candidates may need during the recruitment process and you will be asked whether you require any during your application. If there are additional options you'd like to request, please contact [Name]. We also offer reasonable adjustments on the job.

Offer reasonable adjustments, both during recruitment and on the job

Offer a range of dates and interview times, and flexibility for candidates

8 Interviews are scheduled to take place from 16–18 September 2022 virtually, with slots throughout the working day and early/late slots available. If you would prefer an in-person interview for any reason, please let us know by contacting [Name].

(4) Attracting diverse candidates

The next stage in recruitment is to attract a diverse group of applicants to apply, considering the channels used to publicise the job advert as well as the employer's longer-term outreach efforts.

Target marginalised groups to apply

Place job adverts where they are more likely to be seen by marginalised applicants
Tailor where the employer places its job adverts to try to reach marginalised groups. To reach women, particularly mothers returning from a maternity or career break, it would be useful to advertise on websites[36] that cater to them (for example Mumsnet). There are also job boards that focus on particular protected characteristics, such as ethnicity (for example BME Jobs or Ethnic Job Site), disability (for example Evenbreak) and sexuality (for example LGBT jobs), and for older workers (for example Restless).

Placing adverts in local clubs, community groups, at supermarkets, or in printed media makes it more likely that the advert will reach older applicants.[37] Targeted strategies aimed at women returning to the workforce or those belonging to groups with a particular protected characteristic have yet to be tested experimentally, but it is likely that they would have a positive impact.

Use targeted 'word-of-mouth' referrals
Encourage current staff to share vacancies with underrepresented groups in their networks. This could take the form of challenging members of a team to share a given vacancy with a certain number of people from a marginalised group (for example sharing a job posting with five women they know) to boost referrals.

Hiring through employee referrals has been criticised as 'anti-diverse' for marginalised groups.[38] However, referrals remain a popular recruitment avenue,[39] particularly in high-wage sectors.[40] If an employer is going to use this avenue to look for candidates, using *targeted* referrals can help with reaching marginalised groups – disrupting the tendency people have to refer people like them.

Case study: Targeted referrals increase applications from women

The Ministry of Defence wanted to attract more women to male-dominated departments. They ran a hiring challenge, where some hiring managers were asked to **challenge their team to share new vacancies with five women** they knew.[41] As a result, the **proportion of women referred** to male-dominated roles **increased from 40% to 54%**. These vacancies were also more likely to find a suitable candidate, suggesting that the quality of candidates was higher.

Focus outreach efforts on marginalised groups
In the longer term, visits to universities and schools may boost applications from marginalised groups and eventual hiring of these candidates as well. Outreach can involve visiting a school or university and hosting events, offering work experience or internship opportunities, as well as more general career support such as providing help with CV writing and interview preparation. Employers could also consider working with partners, such as charities that work with marginalised groups, to target those communities (for example the Social Mobility Foundation).

There is some evidence from the US that these outreach efforts are associated with larger numbers of candidates from marginalised groups in management positions.[42] Survey data also suggests that a high proportion of young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who participate in outreach programmes go on to apply and get hired by the same employer.[43] These studies do not tell us if the outreach programmes were a key factor in increasing inclusivity, or whether they are more likely to have been undertaken by companies that had other programmes in place to support marginalised groups. Despite the absence of high-quality evidence, outreach efforts are likely to support an employer's overall inclusivity goals.

Make the recruitment experience inclusive

Provide candidates with clear expectations, timelines, and communications

Share the timeline of the key recruitment stages in the job advert and in communications to candidates. Let candidates know how the recruitment process will work (for example how many interview rounds are likely, whether there are specific tasks involved), when decisions will be made, and how soon they can expect to hear back after submitting an application and following interviews.

An employer who is seen as being timely is also more attractive to candidates.[44] While this is not specific to marginalised groups, it is good practice for all candidates and is likely to be valued by candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds who may need to cast a wide search net to find jobs. Setting clear expectations can also support candidates with caring responsibilities or unpredictable work hours, who may have less time to prepare for interviews.

Proactively ask applicants if they need reasonable adjustments during the recruitment process

Instead of waiting for applicants to request reasonable adjustments to the recruitment process, explicitly and proactively ask all applicants if they would like to request any once applications have been submitted. One approach could be to send a survey with a checklist of options as well as an open-text box for any adjustments that are not captured by the options provided (see box below).[45]

Reasonable adjustments are often considered once a candidate has been hired for the role (see Action on offering reasonable adjustments to new joiners, below). However, offering these modifications during the recruitment stage can support a more diverse range of candidates to participate in the recruitment process. Although this has not been studied, we believe it is good practice to promote inclusivity.

Example of a checklist to send to candidates for reasonable adjustments during the recruitment process[46]

Do you require any of the following adjustments to the interview process?

- [ ] extra time during tasks or video applications
- [ ] assistance if the test or assessment is on a computer, such as closed captions
- [ ] option to interview without the camera on
- [ ] have an accessible car parking space reserved
- [ ] hold the interview at a specific time of day [please suggest]
- [ ] a British Sign Language interpreter

Anything else – please describe:

....

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⑤ Application process

Application form

Anonymise applications

Remove identifying information from CVs and application forms before hiring managers review them. This includes applicant name and contact details, and can also extend to removing 'cues', such as which schools or universities candidates attended. One way to do this is to ask candidates to fill out an anonymised application form instead of submitting a CV. Employers should avoid asking applicants about criminal record information during the application stage.

Women are more likely to progress through the recruitment process when their gender is obscured in the application process, although anonymising applicants may hinder an employer's ability to target women, since employers may not be able to set a target for the number of women to be shortlisted if all applications received are gender blind.[47] The evidence is mixed on whether anonymisation increases the likelihood that ethnic minority applicants are selected for interviews.[48] Anonymising CVs received by candidates can take time and lead to errors. One study found that using application forms with standardised questions makes it easier to evaluate multiple candidates against each other, without affecting applicants' willingness to apply.[49]

> **Case study: Anonymising job applications increases the chance that women will reach interview, and be hired**
>
> The Gothenburg city council in Sweden analysed pilot data on how anonymising job applications affects actual interview and hiring rates for women and ethnic minority candidates.[50] Applications were fully anonymised. This means that as well as removing the name of the applicant, all personally identifiable information was removed – for example, the name of the university attended or companies worked at. Making the application process fully anonymous made it more likely that women and ethnic minority candidates reached the interview stage. Anonymous applications also increased the chance of being hired for women, but not ethnic minority candidates.

(!) Caution: avoid asking candidates about the dates of their employment history

Avoid asking candidates about the dates of their previous roles (for example 2016–2020). Instead, encourage candidates to describe their employment history in terms of the length of time they spent in their role (for example four years), or remove reference to time and dates altogether and ask about examples of relevant experience.

Candidates returning to the labour market after a break face bias from employers.[51] This may particularly affect women who take time out for caring responsibilities.[52] A trial that sent CVs to around 9,000 vacancies in the UK found that replacing dates of experience with the number of years of that experience reduced bias against women returning to work and increased callback rates from employers by 15%.[53] It may also have a positive impact for disabled people, who are more likely to have gaps in employment, and older workers, who may find it harder to return to work following a gap.[54]

How using CVs can get in the way of inclusive recruitment

Lack of anonymisation
We can infer personal characteristics from the name – for instance, race and gender. This can trigger explicit and implicit biases. For example, candidates with black-sounding names are less likely to be invited for interview than candidates with white-sounding names.

Stereotype bias
She attended UCL and Cambridge University, so she must be a strong candidate.

Looking at the dates, she might be too young for this role.

Work experience

1 [Name]

2 Senior HR adviser, Management Consultants (September 2020–present)

• Led an HRBP team...
• Increased business productivity...

3 HR adviser, Google (September 2015–September 2018)

• Provided support to the HR manager...
• Reduced absence rates...

Education

• Associate Member of the CIPD
• CIPD Level 7 Advanced Diploma in HR Management at UCL (2014–2015)
4 • BA (Hons) in Business Management and Human Resources (2:1) at Cambridge University (2011–2014)

Professional courses

• Associate Professional in Human Resources
5 • Certificate in Human Resource Management

Employment gap
Employment gap is made more salient because experience is listed in terms of dates, rather than years.

Candidates returning to the labour market after a break face bias from employers.

Halo effect
Google is a well-known employer, so she must be good if she worked there.

Affinity effect
We prefer people like ourselves, eg have completed similar qualifications to us.

⑥ Selection process

Sift

Reduce bias in automated sifting
When using automated sifting methods, evaluate whether these are biased by comparing the results of an automated sift against a manual screening process for one round. This can help companies identify if the keywords and criteria used are subject to bias. For example, sifting based on postcode can introduce bias against certain socioeconomic or ethnic groups.

Automated sifting can take a variety of forms, such as using application tracking systems to search for keywords, or setting specific criteria around recency of experience or gaps in employment history. Screening for specific keywords introduces subjectivity and bias into the screening process – for example, if a hiring manager looks for masculine-coded words such as 'ambitious' or 'driven'. This has not been rigorously evaluated, but one report suggests that automated hiring systems may put some qualified candidates at a disadvantage, such as those with caring responsibilities or disabled candidates.[55]

Include more marginalised candidates in the shortlist
Ensure that more than one person from marginalised groups is included in the shortlist. Applications will have been sifted and marked against objective criteria on an anonymous basis at this stage. We would then recommend that HR (rather than hiring managers who

will be doing the interviewing) review the candidate characteristics for the highest-ranking applications and determine how long the shortlist needs to be to ensure marginalised candidates are included.

One study suggests that when there is only one woman or ethnic minority candidate on a shortlist, they are unlikely to be hired, while having *more than one* woman or ethnic minority candidate increases the likelihood that a candidate from that group will be hired.[56] Some evidence suggests that longer shortlists (for example with six candidates) are one way to ensure that there are more women on the shortlist.[57] For an individual employer or vacancy, how long a shortlist needs to be is unclear and would need to be tested.

❗ Caution: avoid using social media to sift applicants

Avoid looking through candidates' social media profiles to learn about them prior to the interview. This can include looking at their Facebook or Twitter profiles, or going through their LinkedIn profile to look at their CV before interviewing or shortlisting them.

Incorporating social media searches into the screening process undoes any efforts taken to anonymise the application process and to use objective criteria to evaluate candidates. This can result in candidates from marginalised groups being screened out (whether consciously or unconsciously). There is evidence that employers looking at candidates' Facebook pages while screening applications led to marginalised applicants of foreign origin receiving far fewer callbacks for interviews.[58] If needed as a pre-employment check for safeguarding or other reasons, this search could be undertaken by an external agency.

Interviews and assessments

Make scheduling interviews easy, accessible, and flexible
Employers should offer interviewees a range of dates, offer to accommodate them with earlier or later slots than the typical working day if needed, and offer reasonable adjustments as required. To the extent possible, the person arranging the interviews should not be on the interview panel, and should keep these arrangements confidential.

When arranging interviews, it is useful to consider that many candidates may have time and budgetary constraints, including caring responsibilities or existing jobs, that may not allow for unscheduled time off. Offering flexibility can support candidates to attend interviews without penalty. This could include offering virtual interviews, which may be easier for candidates as they reduce travel costs and times. However, some candidates may have limited access to the internet, computing devices, or a quiet space for an interview, in which case face-to-face options should also be offered. If candidates require flexible interviews or reasonable adjustments, this should not influence the assessment of the candidate at the interview. Employers should particularly be wary of offering both options but inadvertently favouring in-person interviewees over those who interviewed remotely.

Use structured interviews
Structured interviews involve asking a predefined set of questions, in the same order, to all candidates. Candidate responses are then scored using consistent criteria against a set of pre-agreed criteria for each question. For example, a question might test whether a candidate is knowledgeable about the risks of a particular process. They could then be scored based on how many risks they identified, whether they covered key stakeholders in their risk assessment, or similar factors.

Selection process

Using structured interviews is an effective way to minimise bias and ensure there is a level playing field for candidates from marginalised groups. They make it easier for the panel to make direct and fair comparisons between candidates, using objective criteria. There is high-quality evidence that there are no differences in interview scores for candidates based on gender or ethnicity when structured interviews are used.[59]

Elements of a well-structured interview

A structured interview should incorporate the following elements:

- **Develop a set of questions and scoring criteria for use in the interview.** During the interview, ask all candidates the same questions in the same order and score responses according to the objective criteria. This makes responses comparable and makes it less likely that decisions will be based on personal biases. Some evidence suggests that using a rubric which sets out the scoring criteria and how to judge each response increased the likelihood that black women will be selected for a role by 21%.[60]

- **Conduct interviews using a panel rather than a sole interviewer.** Having multiple interviewers in the same interview has been shown to lead to fairer and more accurate results than having multiple interviews with only one interviewer.[61]

- **Prepare interviewers for consistent interviewing.** Provide them with the questions and criteria ahead of time, and highlight the need for consistency in the interview. Encourage the panel to meet in advance to assign questions to individual members and take independent notes.

- **Interviewers should assign scores to each candidate response independently before discussing them as a group.** Discussing the candidates before this point means interviewers are more likely to be influenced by other interviewers' opinions, and potentially by the opinion of the most senior person there.[62]

To learn more: How to run structured interviews – an implementation guide

Use skill-based assessment tasks in recruitment
Skill-based assessments are a form of assessment that assess skills and abilities relevant to the role the employee is applying for. They can include work sample tasks, situational judgement tests, simulation exercises, or assessment centres. Skill-based assessments should resemble real tasks in the job as far as possible.

Skill-based assessment tests have been found to be better predictors of performance on the job when compared with traditional approaches such as tests, reviewing job experience, education, or unstructured interviews.[63] There is no difference in scores between men and women on skill-based assessment tasks.[64] However, care must be taken to design them well or they will result in an ethnicity gap.[65] To reduce the ethnicity gap, use a number of tasks to assess a variety of skills and abilities and closely simulate a real-life situation on the job.[66]

Designing a skill-based assessment

- Use tasks that assess a mixture of skills, for example technical skills and people management skills. This makes it more likely that a single task does not disadvantage some groups, while helping others.[67]

- Using tasks that simulate real-life situations makes it more likely to select candidates who go on to perform well and reduces the ethnicity gap.[68]

- Encourage candidates to reflect on why they want to apply for this role to improve performance. A randomised controlled trial with a UK police force found that prompting applicants to reflect on why they valued becoming a police constable led to a 50% increase in the probability of passing a situational judgement test for ethnic minority applicants and closed the gap with white applicants.[69]

Examples of work sample tasks

- For a customer-facing role, role-play a situation that requires the candidate to resolve a challenging customer interaction.

- For a role that requires data analysis, ask candidates to analyse a dataset and pull out key summary statistics and trends.

- For a role that requires stakeholder management and communication skills, ask candidates to write a brief email to a potential client.

To learn more: How to use skill-based assessment tasks – an implementation guide

Evaluate candidates

Make decisions about candidates in batches

This involves reviewing multiple candidates in parallel, rather than one-by-one, comparing them with each other before making a decision about an individual. For example, score all candidates' applications and then compare applications and scores to decide who will be invited to interview, rather than deciding whether to invite each candidate as individual applications are reviewed.

Batch evaluation may help reviewers to compare candidates according to objective criteria and their actual performance, rather than comparing them with stereotypes (such as gendered stereotypes).[70] Many employers do this in recruitment rounds with set dates, but it is worth considering how to do this if operating rolling recruitment (for example comparing all candidates who apply each month).

Use calibrations for hiring decisions

Calibration involves having multiple decision-makers come together to jointly review hiring decisions. For example, after a recruitment round, everyone involved could participate in a recruitment wash-up meeting to discuss each candidate and the different scores that hiring managers assigned to them. This helps to ensure that hiring managers' assessments are standardised.

There is some evidence that calibrations can help overcome bias by standardising and calibrating manager responses across employees.[71] They create accountability because

managers review each other's decisions and ask for justifications for them. When individuals know their decisions may be reviewed by others, they ask for more information to base their decision on,[72] and make less biased decisions.[73]

Caution: avoid mandating diverse interview panels

A diverse panel ensures interviewers represent a range of characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality, or disability. Mandating diversity in interview panels could involve asking for each panel to include a member of an ethnic minority or a woman by default.

Two studies show that more women on the panel makes no difference or potentially even reduces the likelihood that women are hired, while the other study finds that it increases women's hiring chances.[74] Similarly, some evidence found an association between having a diverse selection panel and the likelihood of an ethnic minority candidate being hired.[75] However, we cannot know whether the diverse selection panel had an effect on hiring, or if more diverse recruitment rounds tend to have more diverse selection panels.

At the same time, mandating diversity in panels could have a harmful effect on existing marginalised staff with low representation. For example, if the 'diverse' staff on the panel are more likely to be junior, it is unlikely that they will influence hiring decisions. If such staff are also heavily underrepresented in an organisation, their requirement to take part in interview panels could create a disproportionate burden on these groups. This is particularly a concern since tasks outside of one's job role are undervalued, especially when performed by marginalised groups.[76]

Post-offer

Share and collect feedback from all candidates
After a recruitment round, provide all interviewees with feedback on their performance. Make sure this follows a standardised format that aligns with the key objective requirements for the role. Avoid vague feedback and make it as specific as possible. Collect feedback from candidates on the recruitment process through an anonymous survey and ask about inclusion.

While this has not been studied empirically, providing clear feedback after interviews is likely to increase accountability for hiring manager decisions. When people know that their decisions will be reviewed, or that they would have to justify their decision to others, both gender and racial disparities decrease.[77] Collecting feedback anonymously would help to identify and resolve problems in the recruitment process, including inclusion challenges that may not have been obvious otherwise.

Proactively offer reasonable adjustments to all new joiners
Offer all new joiners reasonable adjustments that meet their individual needs. While reasonable adjustments (see box below) should be prioritised for disabled staff, non-disabled employees could also benefit from such job modifications.

While adjustments would benefit most employees, legislation only requires employers to do so for disabled staff.[78] Reasonable adjustments are particularly important for increasing the recruitment and retention of disabled staff.[79] A large-scale survey found that one in three non-working disabled people say that their barriers to work could be resolved with workplace accommodations.[80] Disabled employees who work in offices with accessible facilities (for example ramps, bathrooms, and other adjustments) are more satisfied with their employer and say they are more likely to stay there.[81]

What are reasonable adjustments?

Reasonable adjustments are workplace and job modifications that support disabled employees to perform their job roles.

Reasonable adjustments provided by employers can include (but are not limited to):[82]

- making adjustments to workplace facilities (for example accessibility ramps)
- allocating some duties to another worker
- enabling flexible working
- allowing absences for rehabilitation, treatment, or assessments
- purchasing specialised equipment (for example assistive technology)
- providing a support worker to assist
- providing transport to the workplace
- adjusting working hours
- phasing a return to work.

There is no set definition for 'reasonable'. Employers can conduct a health assessment that will give them an overview of individual staff members' needs.[83]

Encourage candidates to reapply

When a candidate narrowly misses out on being appointed, encourage them to reapply the next time there is a suitable vacancy. For example, following each recruitment round, call or email appointable candidates to specifically let them know how well they did and encourage them to reapply to other relevant roles.

Women are less likely to reapply for roles, particularly for senior roles, when compared with men.[84] If candidates were close to being successful, they are likely to be highly qualified already, and encouraging reapplications is a cost-effective way to boost inclusivity in the next round of recruitment.[85]

Case study: Encouraging unsuccessful candidates to reapply narrows the gender gap in reapplications

The Government of New South Wales in Australia analysed its recruitment data and found that women who had narrowly missed out on a senior role were much less likely than men to reapply within six months.[86]

Based on this finding, they tested whether having a recruitment manager email or phone unsuccessful candidates to discuss how well the candidate had done and encourage them to apply again would make a difference.

Results showed that the email or phone call helped close the gender gap, leading to a 27% increase in women reapplying. After receiving an email or phone call, both male and female candidates were more satisfied with the recruitment process and said they would be more likely to refer a colleague.

⑦ **Monitoring and measuring**

Set diversity targets for recruitment
Set targets for diversity across the recruitment pipeline, including the proportion of candidates from marginalised groups who apply, pass the sift, are interviewed, are made an offer, and are hired. Consider setting separate targets for different seniority levels or areas of the organisation. If using recruitment agencies or headhunters, share targets with them.

Targets can be an effective way for employers to achieve specific objectives, although these have not been evaluated within a recruitment context.[87] They focus attention on activities that will achieve the target, highlight gaps, and encourage problem-solving to achieve them.[88] The design of the target matters for the greatest impact, as set out in the examples and the box below.

It is difficult to achieve meaningful change with a vague target such as 'increase the proportion of women in senior roles'. Adding more specific details, including the baseline, percentage increase, and where you want to get to, as well as a specific target date, makes it more likely that a target will be successful, for example:

• Increase applications from women by 20%, so that 50% of applications are from women by January 2025.

• Increase hire rates for ethnic minority applicants by 50% – from 10% of hires to 15% of hires – by December 2026.

However, every employer is different and may face different challenges. Therefore, what it is you are aiming to change, and by how much, will vary for each organisation.

How to design an effective target

A well-designed target should be:[89]

• **Accountable:** targets should be specific and linked to a named individual, to promote motivation and accountability.[90]

• **Specific:** targets should clearly outline what the employer is aiming to change and how big the change will be.[91]

• **Time-bound:** targets with a deadline are more likely to be achieved.[92]

• **Challenging but realistic:** targets should shift the dial without being demotivating.[93]

• **Public:** public commitments that are visible externally makes the target more likely to be achieved.[94]

• **Monitored:** targets should be regularly monitored using a data-driven approach.[95]

To learn more: How to set effective targets – an implementation guide

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Collect high-quality data to monitor inclusion outcomes
Application forms should ask applicants to voluntarily provide their personal characteristics (for example gender, ethnicity, age, and so on). The form should be as easy to complete as possible and it should be made clear that responses will not be

shared with hiring managers. Follow ONS guidelines to make data comparable with UK Government statistics, although employers may wish to use a different set of response categories depending on their circumstances, for example if they have high numbers of international staff. However, avoid creating questions and response categories from scratch and instead seek them from reputable sources that have been tested and validated. Characteristics data should be stored along with recruitment outcomes, such as 'passed initial sift', 'interviewed', 'made an offer'.

Collecting and analysing recruitment data is crucial for progressing inclusion goals. Transparency and accountability cannot be achieved without data. Experimental evidence suggests that attempts to reassure applicants that sharing data is safe, secure, and valuable makes little difference to disclosure rates.[96] However, focusing on making the form simple and easy to navigate, as well as using appropriate questions and response categories, can make a big difference.[97]

> ### Case study: Increasing employee demographic disclosure
>
> Arup, an engineering consultancy, found that only 55% of their staff had fully completed their demographic data form. BIT worked with Arup to improve the form and process for completion. This included simplifying communications, sending targeted reminders, providing a direct hyperlink to the form, and improving the questions and response categories in the form. The percentage of staff with fully completed forms increased from 55% to 85%.[98]

Analyse recruitment data to prioritise inclusion efforts
Having collected applicant data, analyse it to identify gaps and prioritise inclusion efforts. Ask the following questions of your data:

- **Are certain groups less likely to apply?** Look at how the diversity of the applicant pool compares with appropriate benchmarking data such as the local working-age population.

- **Are certain groups less likely to pass the initial sift?** Compare the proportions of applicants who pass automated sifts, tests, or any other elements of the initial sifting process with the proportion in the applicant pool.

- **Are certain groups less likely to be invited to interview?** Compare the proportions of candidates invited to interview with the proportion among those who passed the initial sift.

- **Are certain groups less likely to be made an offer after an interview?** Compare the proportions of candidates made an offer with the proportion among those who were interviewed.

- **Are certain groups less likely to accept their offer?** Compare the proportion of candidates who accepted their offer or started on their first day with those who were made an offer.

- **Are certain groups less likely to be hired having applied?** Compare the proportion of candidates who are hired overall with the proportion in the applicant pool.

This final analysis will indicate whether candidates from different marginalised groups have an equal chance of being hired when they apply to the employer, while the prior analyses will identify where in the recruitment process any imbalance occurs, and whether to focus efforts on attracting candidates or the selection process.

If possible, try to compare like-for-like applicants. This might involve looking at data from applicants applying to similar parts of the organisation or using more sophisticated analysis techniques such as regression analysis.

Balancing specificity with meaningful results. As far as possible, it is preferable to disaggregate data by characteristic. For example, instead of analysing results for all candidates from an ethnic minority background, it is better to separately analyse results for, for example, black, Asian, mixed, and other ethnicities. It is also beneficial to drill down into each stage of the recruitment process and compare different role types (for example seniority, department, and so on). However, depending on the size of the organisation and the diversity of applicants, sample sizes can become too small to be confident in the findings. Analyse data at as granular a level as possible while maintaining statistical confidence. Collecting data over a longer time period and a larger number of vacancies can help to generate larger sample sizes.

Consider collecting qualitative data. For persistently small sample sizes, consider carrying out qualitative interviews to understand experiences. This might involve speaking to recent new joiners about their recruitment experience or inviting candidates to provide feedback. As in the Share and collect feedback from all candidates action, collect feedback about the recruitment experience from candidates. Ask explicitly about their inclusion experience, for example with questions such as, 'Would anything have made you feel more comfortable and/or supported during the recruitment process?' Employers with large sample sizes can also benefit from collecting candidate feedback.

Contextualise recruitment findings within the wider organisation. As well as looking at recruitment data, analyse organisational data to understand whether there are differences in pay, performance scores, bonuses, promotion rates, absence, and retention. For example, some employers may put a lot of effort into recruiting more marginalised candidates only to find that they are more likely to leave due to bias and/or discrimination internally.

Evaluate the impact of inclusion initiatives. Having prioritised where to focus inclusion efforts based on the data, use it to understand what works to improve inclusion. Ideally, there would be a comparison group that does not experience the initiative at the same time as a group that does in order to understand the impact of the initiative. Otherwise, other changes at the same time, like fluctuations in recruitment volumes, could hide the impact.

(8) **Endnotes**

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- make reasonable adjustments to allow candidates to participate in the interview or assessment process

- establish if candidates can perform tasks intrinsic to the work concerned, as long as questions are relevant to the role (for example, heavy lifting)

- monitor diversity in the workplace.

For more information see:

Pre-employment checks: Guidance for organisations

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