

**Diversifying Recruitment Guidance**

# Introduction

The University is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) for all, and these principles are at the heart of our institution’s values and strategic vision:

*“We are diverse, inclusive and accessible to all” - Strategy 2030.*

Diversity of thought, perspectives, experience and skills brings demonstrable benefits to our work and to our decision making, as well as to our ability to build a truly inclusive institution. The University’s Equality Outcomes 2021-2025, published here [Strategy and Outcomes | The University of Edinburgh](https://www.ed.ac.uk/equality-diversity/about/outcomes), commit the University to increase the diversity of our staff, including at senior grades, in leadership roles and on key decision-making bodies.

This guidance is intended to support you to create a recruitment strategy that attracts and fairly considers a talented, diverse pool of candidates. It should be used to inform your reflection and decision-making so that you can recognise how and where biases and inequalities can arise, and take steps to mitigate these.

This guidance should be used alongside the University’s wider recruitment guidance which includes policies, training courses and practical information. This guidance will be revisited and revised, informed by the experience and reflections of those working to diversify staff recruitment at the University. We encourage and welcome feedback via email to [equalitydiversity@ed.ac.uk](mailto:equalitydiversity@ed.ac.uk).

## Starting out

* Consider the diversity of your department/area and identify any underrepresentation, based on clear evidence. You may wish to consider the staff demographic data contained in the Equality Diversity Monitoring and Research Committee reports published here [EDMARC reports](https://www.ed.ac.uk/equality-diversity/about/reports/edmarc), and supplement this with more granular departmental data.
* Include your staff in the recruitment exercise. Communicating to your staff throughout the process enables you to promote the transparency and integrity of your recruitment strategy, demonstrating that considerations for diversity have been adopted, decisions have been reached fairly, and bias has been mitigated. This can help to grow the understanding and confidence of your staff in the recruitment process, may help to grow your pool of internal candidates in the future, and will enable you to draw on your staff’s expertise and networks as appropriate.
* Make sure all those involved in recruitment understand the difference between lawful positive action and unlawful positive discrimination.
  + Positive action in recruitment can include: actively seeking candidates from underrepresented groups and encouraging them to apply; setting diversity targets and challenging yourself to achieve these; taking forward candidates from disproportionately underrepresented groups over other candidates of equal merit.
  + Positive discrimination in recruitment would occur in: appointing an unqualified or less qualified candidate solely because they have a protected (equality) characteristic; and setting quotas (versus setting targets) for appointment of candidates with particular protected characteristics.

## Reaching and Attracting Diverse Candidates

There is full guidance on writing a job description and advert in the Recruiter’s Guide:

[Recruitment Guidance (EASE log on required)](https://www.ed.ac.uk/human-resources/recruitment-guidance)

## Job description

* Reflect on whether particular educational qualifications and/or length of experience in a similar role are truly necessary for the job. Criteria such as these can exclude certain groups, such as those underrepresented/disadvantaged in higher education or in the field of work, and those who have taken career breaks. Consider whether the essential skills required for the job can be evidenced in different ways.
* To demonstrate the University’s commitment to EDI and the expectation that staff will contribute to EDI goals, you should consider reflecting this in the essential or desirable criteria, as appropriate to the role. You should aim to include a related criterion in the job description for all senior leadership roles.
* Be mindful that the words we use in job adverts can encourage some applicants and discourage others. Consider using a tool, such as this one [Bias Decoder | Totaljobs](https://www.totaljobs.com/insidejob/gender-bias-decoder/), to identify words that may impact negatively on the diversity of your applicant pool.

## Advertising

* Consider the platforms and the professional and social networks that are available to you and how you can use these to reach diverse audiences. Include staff in creating the plan for advertising and ask them to promote the job opportunity through their own networks.
* Make use of social media features such as tagging and Twitter threads to highlight opportunities that may be attractive to underrepresented groups, and ask other UoE social media accounts to retweet or share. Opportunities to highlight may include: hybrid working, mentoring and development programmes, local EDI Committees and related activities, staff support networks such as Disabled Staff Network, Edinburgh Race Equality Network, Staff BAME Network, Staff Pride Network, and knowledge networks such as GenderEd and RaceEd.
* Consider including a statement in your job advert to encourage applications from underrepresented groups. For example: “We welcome applications from all qualified candidates, and wish to particularly encourage applications from women and from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic candidates, who are underrepresented at this level”, tailored as appropriate for your context.
* You may wish to engage a recruitment and/or media agency to reach diverse audiences.

## Selecting a diverse candidate pool

## Creating your Recruitment Panel

All panel members should have completed the two training modules:

[Recruitment and Selection Essentials](https://www.ed.ac.uk/human-resources/learning-development/courses/other-courses/elearning/recruitment-selection-law)

[Challenging Unconscious Bias](https://www.ed.ac.uk/equality-diversity/training/modules)

It is also recommended that panel members complete the module:

[Equality and Diversity Essentials](https://www.ed.ac.uk/equality-diversity/training/modules)

* Create as diverse a panel as possible. Having a diverse representation of staff on the panel promotes inclusivity, will support a diverse candidate pool and should enable a fair and inclusive decision-making process. You may wish to consider including more junior colleagues on the panel to improve diversity and inclusivity, and/or colleagues from other departments.
* For academic research recruitment, ensure that the panel members are mindful of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA). Panellists must be aware that bias is deeply ingrained in research metrics, and should avoid using journal and funding-based metrics as a proxy measure of the value and quality of individual research.
* One panel member should be appointed as EDI Champion, to pay keen and close attention to potential bias in the selection process. Nonetheless, all panel members should remain alert to instances of bias and be prepared to challenge each other; it is often easier to spot bias in others than in ourselves.

## Shortlisting

* As a panel member, you should have a clear understanding of the assessment criteria and how to complete the scoring record used to evaluate applications, noting evidence-based comments for panel discussion.
* Work independently and give yourself adequate time, focus and comfort. When we are under pressure, tired, distracted and even hungry, the likelihood of making biased decisions increases.
* Be aware of your thought processes:
  + Are you starting with a feeling, assumption or decision and then seeking evidence to support it and/or overlooking information that contradicts it? You should be keeping an open mind and using evidence to reach a decision.
  + Are you favouring any experience of studying and working at particular institutions or publishing in particular journals? This is known as prestige bias and serves to disadvantage candidates with diverse backgrounds and experiences.
  + Have you allowed a single strength or weakness, or your impression of a candidate to influence your ratings across all criteria? Pay particular attention to candidates who you have rated high or low across the board and consider if this ‘halo/horns effect’ has impacted your ability to differentiate between distinct criteria.
  + Are you confident that your scoring is based solely on comparison with the assessment criteria and not by comparison with other candidates?
  + Be prepared to justify the conclusions you have reached to progress or reject candidates. Ensure your comments cite specific evidence to support your decisions.
* In panel shortlisting discussions, articulate aloud how you reached your decision to reject or progress each candidate. This helps to reduce bias by providing a greater sense of accountability. Challenge constructively by asking each other for specific examples to support an assertion.
* Keep secure records of your scoring and decision-making for 6 months before destroying.

## Interviewing

This section focuses on standard interviewing. Where there are elements to the selection process in addition to interview, consider the purpose, weighting and assessment criteria for each element. Where the wider staff community is involved in specific elements, such as candidate presentations, be clear about if and how you will use feedback. Prepare your staff to be objective, to assess against clear criteria, and to challenge their own and each other’s biases.

* Think about how you can create an interview which is inclusive and supportive of people’s different needs. All applicants invited to interview should be given details of the interview format and setting, and asked if they require any reasonable adjustments to accommodate disability.
* Interviews should have a consistent structure and timings, with comparable questions asked of all applicants. Exceptions may be made to accommodate disability. Ensure that all candidates receive the same level of positive encouragement and support to enable them to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.
* Consider what it is that you want to assess, and the most appropriate way to assess this. If you don’t need to assess the ability to think quickly, you may wish to enable a richer and more considered discussion by providing candidates with an overview of the interview questions in advance. Disabled candidates may request the exact questions in advance, which is often a very reasonable adjustment to the selection process, and you should aim to provide these at least 24 hours in advance. In such cases, you may also wish to provide the other candidates with an outline of the questions.
* Panellists should use plain English wherever possible and avoid abstract and/or ambiguous language. All candidates should expect to easily understand the questions that they are asked. Ask individual and concise questions rather than long questions with multiple parts.
* Be conscious of your thought processes, asking yourself the same questions as you did during shortlisting. Additionally consider whether your judgment has been impacted by common biases such as: relying heavily on first impressions; drawing conclusions based on prior beliefs and expectations; affinity bias (preferring candidates like ourselves); assumptions about departmental or team ‘fit’; the temptation to consider skills that fall outside of the role’s criteria.
* To highlight and promote the University’s commitment to EDI and the expectations of this being upheld by all staff, you should consider including a related question for candidates such as “If you were successful, how would you embed EDI in your work and in your behaviours?”, as appropriate to the role. You should aim to ask candidates for all senior leadership roles how they would contribute to the University’s EDI goals.
* After each interview, panellists should have a period of quiet reflection to record their scores and comments. Avoid communicating cues or signals that may influence and shape the approach of fellow panellists.
* Consider whether it is really necessary to take up references prior to final pre-offer checks. If it is necessary, be aware that gender and racial bias in references is well-evidenced, and take great care to separate facts from value judgements.
* Be prepared to justify each decision to advance or eliminate a candidate. Keep secure records of your scoring and decision-making for 6 months before destroying.

## Deciding on the right candidate

* Sufficient time should be built into the recruitment schedule to allow panellists to discuss in full the scoring of each candidate.
* In decision-making discussions, all panellists should have equal time to share their evidence-based assessment of each candidate’s strengths and weaknesses in relation to each of the criteria. Within this dynamic, it is important that there is not a ‘rush to consensus’ or attempts to influence/cajole others into following the consensus. Panellists should be prepared and encouraged to openly share their own views, and to constructively challenge colleagues when there is a lack of evidence to support assertions.
* All panellists should be made aware that, as at any stage of the selection process, it is permissible in law to prioritise candidates from disproportionately underrepresented groups over other candidates of equal merit.

## Giving meaningful feedback to unsuccessful candidates

* Consider how you can give feedback to unsuccessful applicants. Can you prioritise applicants from underrepresented groups for more detailed feedback that will help them to achieve recruitment success in the future?

## Diversifying the future

Reflect on how you can improve the diversity of your network overall. Recruitment is only one of many interconnected elements of diversifying within your area, and improving other elements will both enhance, and be supported by, diversifying recruitment.

Consider how you can plan ahead for the future, enable a greater reach, stimulate potential and widen opportunities to engage underrepresented groups in the long term. This may include:

* Nurturing diverse future candidates, for example through EmployED internships, or national mentoring schemes for your discipline/area of work.
* Connecting and engaging with diverse colleagues and peers at conferences and meetings, and inviting potential future colleagues on visits to the University.
* Seeking out opportunities for public engagement and outreach with underrepresented groups.
* Actively diversifying your research and teaching portfolio into areas in which underrepresented groups are working.

## Related University guidance

[Recruitment Guidance](https://www.ed.ac.uk/human-resources/recruitment-guidance)

[Recruitment Training, Legislation and Policies](https://www.ed.ac.uk/human-resources/recruitment-guidance/need-to-know/recruitment-training-legislation-policies)

[Equality, Diversity & Inclusion](https://www.ed.ac.uk/equality-diversity)

## Useful external guidance

[Equality Act 2010: What Do I Need To Know? A quick start guide to using positive action in recruitment and promotion (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85014/positive-action-recruitment.pdf)

[Minority ethnic recruitment toolkit - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/minority-ethnic-recruitment-toolkit/)

## [San Francisco Declaration of Research Assessment (DORA) information](https://sfdora.org/about-dora/)

This guidance was published in November 2022.