

Unconscious Bias Guidelines for Managers and Staff

The College is committed to creating and embedding a diverse workplace, which is free from discrimination and bias. As part of the Colleges Athena Swan action plan, the college is further committed to attracting and retaining a diverse cohort of staff, by highlighting and providing training on the importance of unconscious bias, thus ensuring a fair and inclusive recruitment process and practice for all.

Removing bias from the recruitment process ensures the college supports diversity, equality and inclusion. Unconscious bias within the workplace and in recruitment practices can lead to potential legal consequences. Therefore, the following information provides guidance to employees on how to manage bias in these practices.

What is Unconscious Bias?

Unconscious or implicit bias is the mental processes that cause us to act in ways that reinforce stereotypes even when in our conscious mind we would deem that behaviour counter to our value system. Closely related to unconscious bias is affinity bias in which people tend to gravitate towards others who look, act, and think as they do.¹

It is natural for us to acknowledge we all have some unconscious bias whether we are aware of them or not. Remember that unconscious bias:

- Is natural,
- Is unintentional,
- Can affect decisions, and most importantly,
- Can be mitigated.

In recruitment, bias can be observed when the selection and interview panel expresses a preference for particular candidates. An example of this is expressing that one candidate is a better culture fit for the organisation than another candidate(s). Below provides guidance to those who are in or maybe involved in recruitment.

- (a) Competency based recruitment ensures that the right person is successful based on the needs and requirements of the role. However, evidence has shown that interview panel members should be aware of their position in making judgements and selections of people and the impact of their recruitment decisions. Selection of candidates must be based purely on the information provided throughout the recruitment process. Personal and subjective opinions should not play any role throughout the entirety of the recruitment process.
- (b) While the College's Recruitment and Selection Guidelines set out a fair and transparent process for every position, members of selection panels each need to be conscious of their own biases and prejudices.
- (c) Bias is demonstrated through quick or 'snap' judgements we make on other people. In our recruitment process, such judgements will be examined and challenged by panel members and Human Resources.
- (d) Where legal discrimination is limited on the nine protected equality grounds, people can demonstrate their bias against another person because of any characteristic, including the protected equality grounds.²

¹ Harvard Business School, Unconscious Bias. <https://www.hbs.edu/recruiting/insights-and-advice/blog/post/actively-addressing-unconscious-bias-in-recruiting>

² Maynooth University: Recruitment and Selection Procedures. https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/Recruitment%20and%20Selection%202018_1.pdf

- (e) When unbiased thoughts transition into unbiased actions, it's classed as discrimination, under Irish law. Workplace discrimination happens when a person thinks or has conscious awareness of biased decision-making. It doesn't have to be intentional to be discriminatory. ³
- (f) To mitigate any potential bias in the recruitment process, all line managers / panel members will be required to undertake unconscious bias training, which will be facilitated through Human Resources.
- (g) The college to mitigate unconscious bias will continue to use the shortlisting and rating templates.
- (h) All recruitment notes such as scores and feedback with the objective use of criteria will be retained as per this policy.
- (i) All panel members will agree to make each other aware if they notice stereotyping.

Protected Equality Grounds	Potential Grounds of Bias
Age	Income
Religion	Education
Race	Interests and Hobbies
Civil Status	Current Role
Sexual Orientation	Work Experience
Member of the Travelling Community	Appearance
Family Status	Accent
Disability	Family Background
Gender	Political Beliefs

Common Types of Unconscious Bias in Recruitment and Selection

What are the different types of unconscious bias?

There are so many types of unconscious biases found in the workplace. Some can relate to how personal opinions are viewed, like confirmation bias. Others may be directly related to a person's physical appearance, like gender bias. The below provides explanations on the difference types of unconscious bias in the workplace and you can avoid unconscious bias.

³ Peninsula Ireland, Unconscious Bias. <https://www.peninsulagrouplimited.com/ie/guides/unconscious-bias/#:~:text=An%20unconscious%20bias%20can%20mean,compensation%20fees%2C%20and%20business%20damages.>



Affinity bias

This is when you are drawn to people who share similar interests to you, like age or class. Sometimes, it's also known as similarity bias. Employees can avoid affinity bias by promoting equality and diversity within all areas of the college business including the recruitment and selection process.

Age bias

This is when you treat someone differently because of their age. It is also known as age discrimination. Employees can avoid age bias by ensuring all employees regardless of age, interact and create positive relationships.

Anchor bias

This is when you become fixated on an idea or point of view, and you cannot move away from it. Employees can avoid anchor bias by not relying on singular information or individuals without considering others. These types of biases should not be set as your final decision.

Attribution bias

This is when you try to understand why someone behaves in a particular way. You might make assumptions about them because of their appearance or characteristics. Employees can avoid attribution bias by keeping a neutral attitude towards everyone. And verify equal treatment through reviews and feedback meetings.

Authority bias

This is when you are expected to follow superiors without question—even if the leadership is questionable. Employees can avoid authority bias by promoting open communication. When everyone is given the opportunity to speak, they are more likely to share ideas and opinions.

Beauty bias

This is when you judge someone based on how attracted you are to them, ignoring competency or life experiences. This is not tied to one gender, as both female, male and transgender candidates can experience it. Employees can avoid beauty bias by solely judging candidates based on their talents and achievements.

Confirmation bias

This is when you verify your ideas before a situation occurs. People might follow their opinion instead of acknowledging the truth. Employees can avoid confirmation bias by keeping an open floor for everyone's ideas and opinions.

Conformity bias

This is similar to peer pressure which you might experience from those around you. Here, people follow a decision influenced by others, rather than follow their own opinions. Employees can avoid conformity bias by highlighting peer pressure as bullying. This type of conduct is unlawful and results in serious disciplinary consequences

Gender bias

This is when one gender is treated differently to another, which is illegal in Ireland. This is also known as gender discrimination. Employees can avoid gender bias by keeping employment opportunities open to all.

Height bias

This is when you treat someone differently because of their height. Anyone outside of societal norms for heights (like short or tall people) becomes affected. Employees can avoid height bias by eliminating physical factors (like height, weight, or gender identity) as a deciding factor.

Name bias

This is when you have prejudicial thoughts about a person based on their name. Employees can avoid name bias by not referring to candidate names during recruitment stages. This keeps all hiring decisions relevant to important factors, like qualifications and critical skills.

Overconfidence bias

This is when you hold more confidence in your abilities or skills than you actually have. In this case, you become disappointed as workplace expectations are often missed. Employees can avoid overconfidence bias by ensuring equal opportunities for all. It is important to keep away from the personas and characteristics of overconfident people.

Other biases

The halo effect and the horns effect are two more examples of unconscious bias. They are quite contrasting in nature.

The halo effect is when you place someone on a higher pedestal after learning something impressive about them. For example if you learned they studied at an elite school or worked at a top-ranking company. Employees can avoid these biases by reviewing candidates as a whole package.

The horns effect is when you negatively perceive a person based on learning something disagreeable about them. Employees can avoid these biases by being aware of their first thoughts or ‘*gut-instincts*’ during initial interactions.

Examples of Unconscious Bias

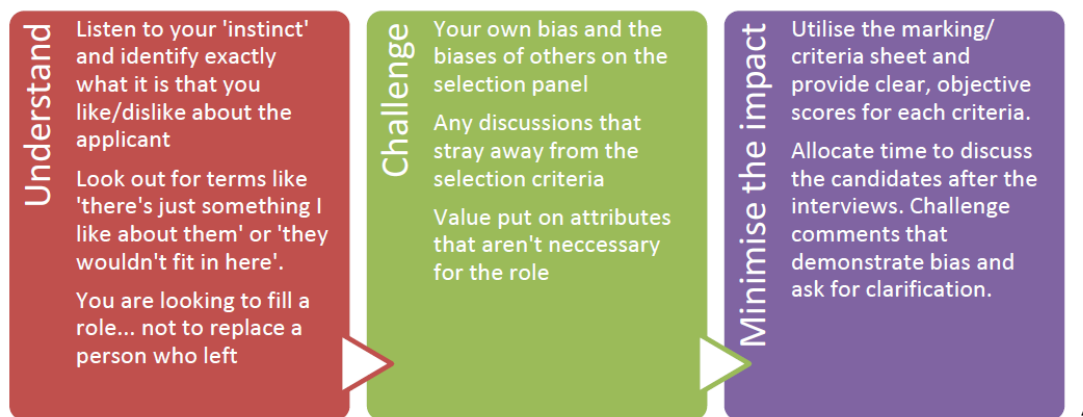
Here are some examples of unconscious bias in the workplace:

<p style="text-align: center;">Name bias</p> <p>A recruitment panel receive two job applications. The names of the applicants are John Smith and Mohammed Ali. The team make prejudgment on Mohammed Ali, as they prejudice their race and religion. In the end, they are drawn toward John Smith and offer them an interview.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Conformity bias</p> <p>A group of employees pressure a colleague to drink alcohol onsite. They argue that it is Friday and work hours are all most over. The employee is fully aware of the business’s ‘<i>no-drinking on site</i>’ policy. But they becomes swayed by his peers and joins in.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Affinity bias</p> <p>A manager conducts an interview process with three candidates. One candidate mentions they studied at a certain university, which happens to be the same as the manager. Both continue to talk about their experiences, and it is obvious this candidate benefits from the culture fit. The bias occurs when the other job applicants become completely isolated during the interview.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Gender Bias</p> <p>A male manager thinks men work harder. When he's recruiting for a new position, he chooses not to hire a female applicant and instead hires a man, even though the recruitment process showed the female applicant was the better applicant.⁴</p>

⁴ ACAS. Unconscious Bias. <https://www.acas.org.uk/improving-equality-diversity-and-inclusion/unconscious-bias>

How to manage bias in the recruitment and selection process

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Unconscious bias and the job description

When drafting College job descriptions, particular focus will be placed on removing gendered language. The Colleges priority is to ensure that the role attracts the right candidate with the right skills, experience and qualifications. To ensure this, the college will focus on creating inclusive job descriptions which are free from the inadvertent use of language which may affect how a person may perceive the role and their application. This includes language affecting gender, LGBT people, and people with a disability or candidates from a different cultural or ethnic background.⁶

Gender-proofing in the job description

When drafting job descriptions, line managers and Human Resources will pay attention to the language used. Research in recruitment has demonstrated that certain words have masculine or feminine connotations. For example, the use of ‘you/your’ and ‘they/them’ will replace ‘he/she’. This may have a negative effect to candidates applying for roles i.e. one gender may not apply for a position.

The below table contains a list of gender-coded adjectives:⁷

Masculine	Feminine
active	agree
ambitious	collaborative
assertive	committed
autonomous	compassionate
challenge	connect

⁵ Maynooth University: Recruitment and Selection Procedures.

https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/Recruitment%20and%20Selection%202018_1.pdf

⁶ University College Dublin – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Recruitment and Selection.

<https://www.ucd.ie/equality/support/tipsforinclusiverecruitment/>

⁷ University College Dublin – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Recruitment and Selection.

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champion

competitive

confident

courageous

decisive

determined

dominant

driven

fearless

independent

individual

lead

logic

objective

persistent

principled

self-confident

self-reliant

self-sufficient

superior

considerate

co-operative

dependable

empathic

honest

interpersonal

interdependent

loyal

nurture

pleasant

polite

responsive

sensitive

support

sympathetic

together

trust

understanding

enthusiastic

inclusive