



A FAIRER guide to recruitment



The Global Inclusion Company

Background

For an organisation to be inclusive, processes must be in place before employees undertake an interview – long before they start a job. Get it right and employees will thrive, as will your business, but neglect inclusion at this stage of the employee lifecycle and you can wave goodbye to innovative, creative teams that go beyond the mediocre.

If you want to attract and retain the best performers, it is crucial to tap into a broad pool and be reachable to unobvious talent. The reasons are clear: if you want innovation and productivity, you need to avoid the groupthink that tends to occur when employees belong to a too-similar demographic.

Another consideration is that your employer value proposition (EVP) must cater to your employees and reflect reality. In Hays What Workers Want 2024 survey, 44% of the 12,000 employees surveyed left their post within the first year of their new job because the EVP sold to candidates was a poor match for the reality. This underlines the fact that your recruitment process must authentically represent your company culture.

But recruiting inclusively is not simple. Accessibility company Recite Me carried out research that showed that 94% of recruiters say that attracting diverse talent is their priority. However, people may not wish to disclose their background, which can make it tricky to be fully across just how diverse and inclusive your business is, making it even more important to get your recruitment strategy right.

That said, 55% of those surveyed by the 'What Workers Want' study stated that they would be more open to sharing their personal diversity data during the application process if the employer provided specifics about how the information would be used. Also, 42% would share more information if they could be certain that the information would be used responsibly. But a significant number of employees (21%) said there was nothing an employer could do to encourage them to share more.

Whatever information employees choose to share – or not – there is a legal imperative for businesses to recruit fairly: the UK's Equality Act 2010 stipulates that hiring must be non-discriminatory. But this is easier said than done.

For example, when it comes to interview practice, there's plenty of room for improvement. Research by the CIPD found that only 28% of UK employers trained all their interviewers on their legal obligations and objective interview practice. And fewer than one-fifth took steps to remove bias through testing the wording of job adverts or checking that tests were valid, reliable and objective.

Clearly, there is a way to go for many employers when it comes to fair recruiting. In this guide, we take you through the steps to follow so you can be sure that your recruitment is fair and inclusive and provide you with the evidence as to why it is worth getting it right.

The evidence

The benefits of inclusive recruiting are myriad – your business will reap dividends in terms of innovation, productivity, loyalty and reputation. And you'll have a workforce that is content, desirable and competitive within your market.

Research by McKinsey showed that companies with a greater number of women on the board financially outperformed their bottom-quarter peers by 39%. Another finding in 'Diversity matters even more: The case for holistic impact', was a strong case for ethnic diversity over time, with a 39% increased likelihood of overperformance for those in the top quartile, when it came to ethnic representation, versus the bottom quartile.

One danger area to be aware of, and one that needs action if it is to be avoided, is unconscious bias. Left unchecked when recruiting, it's likely unconscious bias – which we all have – will scupper the inclusivity of your organisation. Recruiters are essentially gatekeepers to DEI and it is only by being open to all when hiring that you will reap the rewards – financial and innovation-wise – that come from minds that think in fresh and original ways.

FAIRER Consulting MD Dan Robertson says, “The first impression of a candidate is often formed by reading their CV or reviewing their social media and LinkedIn profile. Once formed, these impressions govern future interactions, impressions, and decisions. In a selection and interview context, hiring managers will too often be governed, unconsciously, by these first impressions.

“Confirmation bias – a form of unconscious bias – works by often leading us to ignore future information that counters our first impressions. For candidates with high levels of similarity to the corporate culture, confirmation bias works to their advantage; for candidates with lower levels of similarity, confirmation bias will have a greater negative impact on their hiring chances.

“Corporate decision-makers too often look for candidates who will ‘fit into’ existing work patterns and styles and working. This clearly has negative implications when seeking to hire diverse candidates and those with different work styles, thinking patterns and career histories.”

Alongside confirmation bias, is affinity bias and anchoring. The former has a wider impact than other types of bias, influencing someone’s likeability and our perceptions of candidate competencies. Appearance, education, accent and work history all influence, even if at a micro-level, our ultimate decision of who we hire. Anchoring occurs when a first impression is made, and follow-up judgments are made with the ‘anchor’ in mind. This occurs when a recruiter has a firm, fixed idea of who they want to hire, leads to biased decision making.

The 2023 Parker Review of the UK’s FTSE 100 revealed that only 18% of director positions are held by directors from a minority ethnic group. When it comes to the FTSE 250, ethnic minority directors made up 67% of directors but only 28 FTSE 250 companies had two or more minority ethnic directors.

In practice

While every organisation is different, there are several steps that organisations must take when recruiting. We take each in turn, while acknowledging that the nuances of your business may mean you need to tweak your approach to the point in question.

The job advertisement

Writing inclusive job descriptions is an essential part of reaching a diverse range of applicants. Here are a few key things to keep in mind:

- **Focus on what the role involves**

Be specific about tasks and responsibilities. Instead of asking for a ‘strong leader’, explain what the person will do – for example, ‘lead a small team and coordinate quarterly projects.’

- **Use balanced language**

Certain words can subtly influence who feels the job is right for them. Words such as ‘competitive’ or ‘independent’ may appeal more to men, while ‘supportive’ or ‘loyal’ may feel more relatable to women. Aim for neutral, task-focused wording where possible and be open about the fact that you are committed to hiring equitably.

- **Be mindful with imagery**

Any visuals used in the advert should reflect the diversity of your workforce. Avoid using stereotypical images – for instance, only showing men in senior roles and women in caring positions.

- **Show what inclusion looks like in practice**

Go beyond the standard equal opportunities line. Mention flexible and agile working if practical, staff networks, employment resource groups (ERGs) and explain how the

business supports equity and belonging. You may wish to include links to videos where employees share insights into the company's culture.

- **Review regularly**

Language evolves, and so do expectations. Revisit your job descriptions periodically and seek feedback from colleagues and ERGs. Tools such as the Gender Decoder, Textio or Unitive can detect biased language and will help increase applications from a wider pool of candidates.

- **Beware inheriting bias**

While taking a job description and person specification off the shelf is tempting, the details will evolve over time and you risk inheriting the biases of the person who drew up the description, which may lead to you using dated language and tropes.

- **Do your due diligence**

Consider whether the role is currently held predominantly by people from one group – for example, the same gender, age bracket, ethnic background, or socio-economic status. If so, take care to not unintentionally reinforce existing patterns.

- **Speak to ERGs**

ERGs are often well placed to advise on where job adverts will be seen by underrepresented communities – and they will understand what messaging will resonate. This helps to avoid relying on familiar routes when recruiting – LinkedIn, personal contacts, industry networks. While these channels can feel fast, cost-effective, and reliable, they often reflect the circles we already move in and reinforce a narrow talent pipeline.

- **Consider outsourcing your recruitment**

Think about working with recruitment partners who specialise in inclusive hiring. These firms have experience reaching candidates who may not otherwise see or feel confident

applying for your roles – and can help challenge the kind of groupthink that slows progress.

Shortlisting applicants

- **Avoid bias when shortlisting**

Put structured, criteria-based assessments, diverse panels, and anonymised CVs in place. As mentioned above, unconscious bias can mean hiring managers are drawn to candidates who match an existing team or company culture based on surface-level traits.

This bias, where we assume someone is suitable because they resemble others already in the role, means we may start looking for details in a CV or application that reinforce our first impression – while overlooking information that contests it. The result? Some candidates are fast-tracked to interview while others, often from less represented backgrounds, never make it beyond shortlisting. Also, if you use AI to sift applications, remember that it is not infallible.

- **Shortlist proactively**

You may wish to introduce mandatory shortlisting of underrepresented and minoritised groups. Evidence from analysis of the Rooney rule in the US shows that a minority candidate is more likely to be appointed if they get an opportunity to present their skills at interview.

Interview process

- **Train hiring managers and interviewers**

As mentioned earlier, affinity bias can play a big role in shaping interview outcomes. First impressions – shaped by factors including accent or appearance – can subtly influence judgement. As the conversation unfolds, shared interests or a candidate's communication style may further affect how they're perceived. Training can help interviewers recognise and challenge these automatic preferences.

- **Keep interviews structured and skills-based**

Focus on the key skills needed for the role and use the same format and questions for all candidates. When deciding who progresses, compare candidates in batches rather than reviewing them individually. Always assess them against the same set of clear, job-related criteria to help keep the process fair and consistent.

- **Use a visibly diverse interview panel**

Aim to include a mix of genders, ethnicities and age groups on your interview panels. This sends a strong, positive message to candidates about your organisation's commitment to inclusion – and helps ensure a wider range of perspectives during the assessment. Structured panel interviews are also a useful way to reduce the impact of affinity bias.

- **Be proactive in offering adjustments**

Offer adjustments as standard – this may include extra time to answer questions, sending interview questions in advance, using live captions on video calls, choosing accessible venues for wheelchair users, or arranging for an interpreter. Keep in mind the needs of neurodivergent applicants, as well as those with mental or physical health conditions. Being proactive shows candidates that inclusion isn't an afterthought.

Selection

- **Use a consistent scoring system and review scores before discussing candidates**

Using a clear, pre-agreed scoring system – and reviewing scores before holding a debrief – helps to reduce bias by focusing discussion on evidence, not instinct. It ensures each candidate is assessed against the same criteria and supports fairer decision-making.

- **Make hiring decisions when you're alert**

Avoid making decisions when you're tired, under pressure, or rushing – it's in those

moments that bias is most likely to creep in. Schedule debriefs or final discussions for times when you and your team are fresh and able to think clearly.

- **Challenge your thinking**

Having someone in the room whose role is to question assumptions and ask for evidence for decisions helps keep the recruitment process grounded and fair. Encouraging this kind of constructive challenge can lead to more balanced, inclusive decision-making.

The job offer – and beyond

- **Be clear about what's next and signpost support**

Once you've hired someone, act promptly to put any agreed adjustments in place.

Reinforce your organisation's commitment to being inclusive and supportive. Make sure the new hire knows where to turn for help, who their key contacts are, and what the next steps will look like.

- **Feedback**

Take the time to offer constructive feedback to candidates who weren't successful – and thank them for the effort they've made. Invite all candidates to share their views on the recruitment process, especially around inclusion. Their feedback can help you spot any unintended bias and improve the experience in future. Every interaction shapes your employer brand – not just with current staff, but with everyone who encounters your hiring process.

- **Treat onboarding as a vital part of the inclusion journey**

Onboarding shouldn't be an afterthought – it's a continuation of the inclusive culture you've promised during recruitment. Make sure it's thoughtfully designed, with the same attention to accessibility, fairness, and representation. A poor onboarding experience is one of the most common reasons new starters walk away. According to a Hays study, 38% of professionals either left or nearly left a new job because onboarding was poorly managed.

FAQs

Here is a selection of questions around inclusive recruitment often asked by our clients and other interested parties. If your query is not covered here, [please get in touch](#).

Q: I want diverse interview panels, but don't want to be tokenistic. How can I manage this?

Focus on meaningful representation rather than just appearances. Invite panel members who bring diverse perspectives and are empowered to contribute to decision-making. You could ask for a pool of volunteers who want to develop their interviewing skills but ensure that you are defining 'diversity' broadly and clearly. Remember that diverse interview panels are *not* a replacement for bias mitigation and structured assessments.

Q: What is the difference between inclusive recruitment and equitable recruitment?

Inclusive recruitment ensures everyone is welcome and can participate in the process. Equitable recruitment goes further by recognising some groups face systemic barriers and providing targeted support or adjustments to level the playing field – for example, alternative assessment formats.

Q: Is it appropriate to ask candidates if they require adjustments?

Yes, it's best practice, so proactively include statements and questions.

Q: How can I make the recruitment process more inclusive for neurodiverse people?

Things like providing interview questions in advance, offering alternative ways to demonstrate skills, clear questions, and avoiding high-pressure timed assessments are all ways of making processes more inclusive for neurodiverse people. But nothing is more important than asking candidates directly if there are any adjustments that would help them.

Q: When should I ask for diversity data? Do I even need to ask for diversity data?

Ask at the interview stage and/or after interviews, ensuring it's voluntary and anonymous and only used to improve processes. Collecting this data helps identify gaps and measure progress, but it must comply with data protection laws, such as GDPR.

Q: How do I measure the success of equitable recruitment efforts?

Track data across the recruitment funnels – not just limited to diversity of applicants, interviewees and hires – and don't forget about experiences and retention rates.

Q: I'm using a recruitment agency. How can I ensure they are supporting our inclusion goals?

Ensure that they are aware of your inclusion objectives and ask for evidence of their practices. Hold them accountable by reviewing diversity data on their submissions and ask for regular updates.

Case study

FAIRER was commissioned by a global leader in the automotive industry to design and facilitate a programme designed to identify gaps, risks and recommendations for creating an inclusive and respectful workplace for black, Asian and minoritised ethnic employees.

Following an expansive getting-to-know-you exercise, FAIRER designed and delivered the below projects:

- **Inclusive recruitment audit and gap analysis**

We carried out an initial inclusive recruitment audit and gap analysis to identify areas of good practice and bias within end-to-end recruitment policies and processes.

- **Recruitment deep dive attrition analysis**

We followed up the initial recruitment audit with a deeper dive granular analysis of the attrition rates at each stage of the application, sift, shortlist, assessment, and interview process.

- **Positive action development programmes**

We advised the organisation how to understand the purpose and value of positive action development programmes, supporting the retention and progression of those from under-represented groups.

- **Reverse mentoring launch**

We facilitated the launch of the organisation's reverse mentoring programme, focusing on its value and purpose, and delivered training for those volunteering as mentors and mentees.

- **Race and ethnicity listening circles**

We held a series of listening circle sessions and one-to-one interviews with employees from black, Asian, or other non-white backgrounds to capture key themes, issues, and concerns.

Outcome

At each stage of the programme, we analysed responses and findings and presented these back to the organisation alongside our recommendations for a restorative approach to fostering a respectful, inclusive, and cohesive workplace.

If you have any questions and to find out how FAIRER Consulting can help your organisation to recruit inclusively, [please get in touch](#).



FAIRER Consulting

To find out how we can support
your diversity and inclusion
aspirations please contact us:

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