

Guide to Inclusive Recruitment

The Department of Physics at the University of Strathclyde is committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive academic community. Recruitment plays a central role in shaping that community, influencing not only who joins the department but also whose perspectives, experiences, and research are represented.

This guide outlines practical approaches to inclusive recruitment. Its purpose is not to replace existing HR procedures, but to support staff in applying them in ways that promote fairness, reduce bias, and widen participation.

At its core, inclusive recruitment is about ensuring that decisions are made on the basis of relevant evidence, rather than assumptions or informal judgements. This is particularly important because recruitment processes are often complex and time-pressured, making them susceptible to unconscious bias.

Understanding Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Equality, diversity and inclusion are closely related but distinct concepts. Equality focuses on ensuring that individuals have fair access to opportunities. Diversity concerns the presence of difference within a group, including characteristics protected under UK law such as race, gender, and disability. Inclusion goes further, referring to the extent to which individuals feel valued, supported, and able to contribute fully.

1. Designing the Role and Writing the Advert

The design of a role and its accompanying advert strongly shapes who feels encouraged to apply. Seemingly small decisions such as how requirements are phrased or what information is included, can influence whether potential candidates see themselves as a good fit.

It is therefore important to define criteria carefully. Requirements should be expressed in terms of skills and behaviours that can be demonstrated, rather than personal qualities or loosely defined attributes. For example, specifying “ability to design and deliver undergraduate teaching” is clearer and more inclusive than asking for someone who is “passionate” or “dynamic”. This kind of clarity reduces ambiguity and makes it easier for applicants from a wider range of backgrounds to assess their suitability.

Language also matters. Research shows that wording associated with particular stereotypes (for example, strongly “masculine-coded” language) can discourage some groups from applying, even when they are qualified. Using neutral, precise language helps ensure that adverts do not unintentionally signal who is expected to apply.

Transparency is another key factor. Including information about salary, flexible working options and benefits helps to level the playing field, particularly for candidates who may not have access to informal networks or insider knowledge. It also signals that the department is attentive to different working patterns and life circumstances.

Finally, where and how roles are advertised influences who applies. Relying solely on traditional academic networks risks reproducing existing patterns of representation. Broader and more targeted advertising can help reach candidates from groups that are currently marginalised within the discipline.

2. Shortlisting Applications

Shortlisting is one of the stages most vulnerable to bias, as it involves interpreting complex information under time constraints. For this reason, a structured approach is essential.

Panel members should assess applications independently against agreed criteria before discussing them collectively. This helps ensure that initial judgements are not influenced by group dynamics or senior voices. Using a clear scoring framework also shifts the focus from general impressions to evidence-based evaluation.

It is equally important to remain aware of institutional commitments such as the Disability Confident scheme, which guarantees an interview to candidates who meet the essential criteria. This is not about lowering standards, but about ensuring that qualified candidates are not excluded due to barriers in the process.

Reviewing candidates in groups (rather than making decisions one-by-one) can further improve fairness. This allows panel members to compare evidence across applicants and reduces the likelihood of relying on stereotypes or implicit benchmarks.

3. Interviews and Assessment

Interviews are often treated as an opportunity to assess “fit”, but this can introduce subjectivity and bias if not carefully managed. A more inclusive approach is to treat interviews as a structured assessment of clearly defined criteria.

Providing candidates with clear information in advance such as the format, timeline and any required tasks, helps to reduce uncertainty and enables all candidates to prepare effectively. This is particularly important for those with caring responsibilities or less familiarity with academic recruitment processes.

Structured interviews are widely recognised as one of the most effective ways to reduce bias. By asking all candidates the same questions and evaluating responses against consistent criteria, panels can make more reliable comparisons. This approach has been shown to reduce differences in outcomes associated with gender and ethnicity.

Flexibility is also an important aspect of inclusion. Offering different interview formats (for example, in-person or online) and proactively arranging reasonable adjustments ensures that candidates are assessed on their abilities rather than their circumstances. These adjustments should be treated as standard practice and should not influence how candidates are evaluated.

In academic recruitment, additional assessment methods such as research presentations or teaching demonstrations are often used. These can be valuable, provided they are clearly linked to the role and assessed using transparent criteria. When designed well, such tasks can offer a more accurate indication of future performance than relying solely on CVs or informal discussion.

4. Decision-Making

Final hiring decisions should be grounded in documented evidence rather than general impressions. Concepts such as “fit” or “potential” can be useful, but only when clearly defined and linked to the requirements of the role.

Panel discussions play an important role in ensuring consistency. Taking time to compare scores, discuss differences in evaluation and justify decisions helps to create accountability and reduces the influence of individual bias. This process supports more equitable outcomes across candidates.

5. After the Recruitment Process

Inclusive recruitment does not end with the selection decision. Providing clear, constructive feedback to candidates supports transparency and can encourage strong applicants to apply again in future.

It is also good practice to reflect on the process itself. Gathering feedback from candidates and panel members can help identify unintended barriers and inform improvements for future recruitment rounds.

For successful candidates, discussing reasonable adjustments early on helps ensure that they are able to contribute fully from the outset. While such adjustments are often associated with disability, they can benefit a wide range of staff and should be considered as part of inclusive practice more broadly.

6. Responsibilities

All staff involved in recruitment share responsibility for upholding inclusive practices. This includes engaging with relevant training, applying guidance consistently, and contributing to a culture in which fair and evidence-based decision-making is the norm. Training for recruiters includes Unconscious Bias training and Recruitment and Selection training. Ensure these courses are completed and repeated every few years.