

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS



What is Unconscious Bias?

Unconscious bias is a form of prejudice that can arise in any situation and is often underpinned by your attitudes about others based on certain protected characteristics such as race, sex, religion, disability, and sexual orientation. Your values, beliefs, expectations and standards are shaped early in life by friends, family and may also be reinforced by the media and social media. As you go through life your surroundings and experiences continue to shape your unconscious bias.

Within the first seven seconds of interacting with a stranger, you make an average of 11 judgements about that person. You then subconsciously continue to gather data to justify and maintain these judgements*.

The following short video by the Royal Society introduces the key concepts of unconscious bias - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVp9Z5k0dEE>



* Unconscious bias - line manager training

Different types of unconscious bias

Affinity bias

Affinity bias occurs where individuals favour people who are similar to themselves. This can create a tendency to recruit individuals who display attributes and/or qualities that match those of the panel.

Anchoring Bias

This is where a person relies too heavily on one trait or a piece of information.

Benevolence bias

Benevolence bias occurs where managers overcompensate or overprotect those who are different. For example a hiring manager does not offer a tour to a candidate who finds it difficult to walk out of compassion, but they failed to consider the individual would have liked this and/or other arrangements to get around campus could have been made.

Confirmation bias

Confirmation bias is also referred to as “halo or horns” bias and occurs where actions and decisions taken by the panel are tailored to confirm what they already think.

Gender bias

The tendency to prefer one gender over others.

Name bias

A preference for someone based on their name, which reflects on your decision making and judgment.

Status quo bias

This type of bias occurs where a person feels more comfortable with candidates who will maintain the status quo of the team.

Truth bias

This bias occurs where people ignore information that conflicts with their views and beliefs. There is a tendency to forget or ignore information that dispels people’s beliefs and values.



The importance of tackling unconscious bias in recruitment

Having a diverse workforce brings together individuals with a range of skills which can enhance a team's performance by bringing different views, enhancing creativity, innovation and problem solving.

When recruiting for a role you need to ensure you are appointing the candidate with the right skill set, knowledge and experience as opposed to someone who is the "right fit".

Bias in recruitment creates inequality and can lead to:

- A limited pool of candidates
- A lack of diversity in the workplace
- Underrepresented groups feeling unwelcome
- A lack of creativity, innovation and problem solving

Ways to manage unconscious bias in the recruitment process include:

- Being aware that we all have unconscious bias
- Being aware of what your biases are and how it can affect others
- Following the recruitment and selection guidance

- Advertising a job vacancy in at least two different places to reach a wider audience
- Reflecting the diversity of candidates in panel compositions wherever possible
- Avoiding irrelevant questions about an individual's background
- Having a break between interviews to discuss whether any biases may be at play
- Address any biases you may have about a candidate and challenge other members of the panel around any biases
- Be transparent in the scores you provide and ensure you are scoring in a consistent manner
- Take sufficient notes and discuss with panel members after the interview
- Justify decisions with evidence

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Author:	Sam Swinton, Head of HR Operations
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The University is committed to creating a work environment that embraces equality, diversity and inclusion. It is important to address any negative biases that may lead to discrimination and to ensure the recruitment process is carried out in a fair and consistent way.

By acknowledging and addressing unconscious bias that yourself or others have, you are helping the University to attract and retain the best professional and academic talent irrespective of any visible or invisible differences.

An internationally renowned university, UEA is ranked in the UK Top 30 (The Times/Sunday Times 2024, Guardian University Guide 2023 and Complete University Guide 2023) and the World Top 50 (Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2023), where it ranks in the World Top 100 for research citations (Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2023), reflecting the international excellence of its research environment. The University holds UK Teaching Excellence Framework Silver status.

