

Disrupting bias during the promotions process

edi

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Team

*'Implicit or unconscious bias happens by our brains making incredibly quick judgments and assessments of people and situations without us realising. Our biases are influenced by our **background, cultural environment and personal experiences**. We may not even be aware of these views and opinions, or be aware of their full impact and implications'.*

Advance HE definition

This guidance is focused on how Faculty Promotion Committee (FPC) members can disrupt the influence that unconscious bias may have on decisions and move towards a consciously inclusive approach to promotions.

Please watch this video:

What is unconscious bias and why does it matter?

Biases do have consequences and they can influence our decisions. They are perfectly normal, and we all have them. Some examples relevant to our academic promotions process are:

Affinity bias – where we might favour those who are more like us.

Halo effect bias – where we see only the good about a person because of a personal connection or affinity with them.

Confirmation bias – where we seek facts or interpret the evidence before us to confirm our pre-existing beliefs or assumptions.

Perception bias – the tendency to form stereotypes and assumptions about certain groups that can interfere with an objective assessment about individuals in those groups.



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Additional resources:

[EDI Learning Resources](#)

[Employment and Careers | Advance HE](#)
(advance-he.ac.uk)

[The opportunity cycle - Delta](#)
(deltaalphapsi.com)

[Staying Power The career experiences and strategies of UK Black female professors](#)

If you need this guidance in an alternative format please email the central EDI Team:
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These biases are developed over a lifetime of media exposure and real-world experience, and they will inevitably influence our day-to-day decisions. None of us can be trained to be 'bias free' but we can be aware of how our biases can influence the decisions we make and integrate principles for equity and inclusion into people processes. When considering applications for promotion we can recognise that bias is likely to influence our decisions; avoid making rushed or instinctive decisions when assessing a candidate's suitability for promotion; and ensure that our decisions are objective and evidence-based.

The importance of an evidence-based approach

How committee members consider and evaluate the evidence provided is critical to adopting a fair and impartial approach to each case. Simply stating that a candidate is 'not ready' is not enough. Focus on the reasons why they are not ready and be clear on where these reasons originate. This will then inform constructive feedback and also help to provide clear direction to unsuccessful candidates in terms of areas for further development.

FPC members should also avoid filling in the gaps or making assumptions. It is only by adopting an evidence-based rationale for decisions that we can minimise scope for bias to influence our reasoning.

Conscious inclusion

Conscious inclusion is about recognising our unconscious biases and purposely changing behaviours to be more inclusive. When considering candidates for promotion, pause to reflect and consciously question the reasons for your decision to prevent bias from influencing this process by checking that your decision is fair and evidence-based. Avoid assuming that all candidates will have followed the same career path: adopt an approach that recognises the differential career trajectories for majority and minority colleagues and how these might be influenced by bias and barriers in the workplace.

The Role of Chair

As individuals we sometimes hold back our unique perspectives – particularly opposing views – for many reasons, including fear of challenging someone of higher status, giving way to a perceived expert or to avoid conflict with a colleague. The Chair can help overcome these barriers by setting the scene at the beginning of the FPC to create an environment that can help mitigate room for bias and unlock the diversity of thinking that leads to inclusive decision-making.