

EDI Recruitment Checklist

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Why do we need this checklist?

Big organisations, like universities, like to think they are pretty good at recruiting the right people, whether it is for academic and research jobs, or those working in professional services and administrative roles. But what if we're not?

This checklist helps you to make sure you are reaching the widest and deepest pool of candidates. Recruiting from these pools will help to make the workplace inclusive and more accessible and in-turn make future recruitment from different backgrounds easier.

Further reading

- <https://www.stemm-change.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Recruiting-a-diverse-technical-workforce-smaller.pdf>
- <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/hr/diversity/guidance-and-resources/20210817-inclusive-recruitment-toolkit-nr.pdf>

Recruiting from a larger pool does not just help those candidates and makes things more inclusive, but that, actually, recruiting from a larger pool means that we get potentially better candidates and don't miss out on talent.

Mark Turner, Head of Research Software Engineering, Newcastle University, speaking at N8 CIR's Digital Research Infrastructure Retreat

Assessment

Before we start the recruitment process it may be worth taking some time to reflect on our current team and organisation. To create the best teams and recruit the best candidates we need to understand what we are already doing well and what may need improvement.

| What? | Why? | Done? |
|--|--|-------|
| Are we aware which minorities we might be missing out on in our current recruitment process? | Clarifying 'who is out there' will help check the recruitment process for hurdles, implicit exclusion and unconscious bias. | |
| Are we aware how our current way of working might exclude groups of people, and can we change that way of working? | Often, things are done in a certain, exclusionary way without an important reason. Reflecting, and potentially changing, this ahead of interviews will avoid putting people off. | |

For eons, organisations have either restricted or massively skewed their recruiting pool to a small and quite homogeneous portion of society. i.e they're not "hiring the best candidates regardless of background", they're hiring the best candidates *of a particular background*.

This is a great way to ensure you hire lots of mediocre people and miss lots of more talented people who aren't in the segment of the population you interviewed.

John Burn-Murdoch, via Twitter @jburnmurdoch

Recruitment Text

The recruitment text is your first opportunity to sell your organisation or team. The pandemic has changed the way many organisations work, remote roles mean that universities are competing with one another, as well as high-paying industry roles.

When preparing the text to accompany an advert, try and make sure it tells candidates everything they need to know about the role, and the team in which they'll be working.

Try and think like an 'outsider.' Things that you take for granted, flexible working, community activities or industry placements may be unique to your organisation, and something that candidates aspire to.

| What? | Why? | Done? |
|---|--|-------|
| Do we offer flexible working, part-time and job-share prominently in the advert? | Offering these will widen the field of potential applicants, is a way to recruit future full-time employees, and it shows potential candidates who might not even at this point need the flexibility that we as potential employer will support their needs. | |
| Do we avoid asking for mandatory travel, weekend work and overtime, if possible? If necessary, are we specific about how often and how likely this is to happen? | All of these will be a red flag for many people with childcare responsibilities. | |
| Have we reduced the list of mandatory skills to a minimum? | Asking for a Swiss army knife employee will put less confident applicants off. | |
| Do we avoid superlatives and phrases such as 'outstanding' or 'excellent' xyz skills? | Some people might be intimidated if each of the mandatory skills has to be 'excellent' or 'outstanding.' | |

Advertisement

Advertising and promoting the vacancies you have in your team does not have to be limited to your institution's website. You can make use of Twitter and mailing lists, as well as asking other organisations, such as N8 CIR and Women in HPC, to help. The more people who see your vacancy the more chance you have to recruit the best available candidate.

| What? | Why? | Done? |
|--|---|-------|
| Do we have a short version of the job essence that can be easily shared on social media and in networks? | HR might require extensive and unwieldy job adverts. We need to 'advertise the ad' so that people get interested and are willing to deal with the paperwork. | |
| Have we advertised in a wide range of communities and platforms? | We want to reach as many potential candidates as possible. Advertising in networks such as Women in HPC etc. can give the job ad attention from highly qualified minorities. | |
| Do we give the salary range? | As much transparency as possible on the salary will reduce the risk of underpaying minorities/women. Not displaying a salary in a job advert can prevent candidates from applying and can impact on trust. | |

By casting a wider net, you maximise the chance that you actually see all the best candidates.

You'll still see all the top candidates from the demographic you've always recruited from, but now you'll see the best candidates from elsewhere too. And their best might be better.

John Burn-Murdoch, via Twitter @jburnmurdoch

Pre-Interview

Preparation for an interview can take an enormous amount of time, from learning about the organisation that you're applying to, through to preparing for tests or presentations. All of these take time, one of our most precious commodities.

When thinking about the interview format try and think about how the challenges you prepare, to ensure your candidates have the technical skills you need, may actually be a barrier to some applicants.

Ultimately, we want to see the best candidates, not the people who are solely best at preparation and being interviewed.

| What? | Why? | Done? |
|--|--|-------|
| Do we avoid extensive pre-interview tasks, such as assessments etc.? | Candidates with caring responsibilities might have less time to fulfil these. | |
| Are we transparent about what will happen in the interview? Can we tell them areas that will be covered, or even share the set of main questions? | This will reduce potential anxiety for the candidates, and help them prepare. | |
| Have we made sure to ask the candidates whether they have any accessibility needs for the interview? | Some candidates might need or benefit from captions in an online interview, or have other accessibility needs. | |
| Can we pay for a hotel or quiet workspace for the candidate to use for the interview? | Candidates may live with with family or other people, making it difficult to focus. | |

On Friday afternoon, five questions and an assignment to present a detailed digital program strategy for multiple products arrived in my inbox.

Welp, there goes the weekend...And again, my partner made this possible by taking on more childcare and domestic duties over the weekend so I could prep.

A single parent couldn't make those timelines work, or wouldn't have been able to put their best foot forward...And statistically, they'd more likely to be a women, and more likely to not be white.

Doesn't sound like a great way to build a diverse team does it?

Spencer Daniels, via Twitter @spncrd

Interview

Interviews are tiring for panellists, and additionally stressful for candidates. Anything we can do to make things a little easier and put candidates at ease can only be a good thing. Taking reasonable steps to make the interview easier will help to show your organisation as compassionate and caring and appealing to candidates. Small things go a long way.

We also need to remember that ensuring our on panels are diverse in nature may place an undue burden on existing staff. If you only have one or two members of staff from minority backgrounds they may be disproportionately called upon. We need to ensure they have additional support so their core work is unaffected.

| What? | Why? | Done? |
|--|---|-------|
| Have we chosen interview times within core childcare hours (9.30-15.00)? | Offering these will widen the field of potential applicants and shows potential candidates that we can be a flexible employer. | |
| Have we ensured a diverse interview panel? | The process will benefit from the input of a diverse interview panel, provide different perspectives, and avoid unconscious bias. | |
| Have we established a mechanism to ensure that the burden of representing minority groups on the panel doesn't adversely affect those individuals? | When teams only have one or two members from minority groups, they are much more likely to feature on a panel, reducing the time they have for their core role. | |
| Have we scheduled breaks between interviews for the panellists' benefit? | Interviewing can be tiring. Ensuring breaks between candidates will ensure everyone receives fair and equal consideration. | |

Interviews also include a presentation element; Mark prefers these to a coding test as he feels that those don't reflect the way that RSEs actually work under normal circumstances.

The interviewees are given 10 minutes to speak about some code that they have written, these offer insight into the candidate's approach, the passion they have for the work, and their time-keeping.

Mark Turner, Head of Research Software Engineering,
Newcastle University, via <https://n8cir.org.uk>

Post-Interview

The bureaucratic process in academia can be slow. We need to ensure that we are able to respond quickly and support successful candidates in taking up an offer of employment. Working with professional services staff can help to streamline and accelerate processes.

We should also find ways to support unsuccessful candidates, a simple way to do this is to ensure that feedback is readily available.

| What? | Why? | Done? |
|---|--|-------|
| Can we make sure to get back to the interviewees within less than a week? | Good candidates will be gone quickly, especially if they need security, need to apply for visas, etc. | |
| Can we make sure that successful candidates will get their contract within two weeks? | Without a contract, candidates do not have planning security, cannot apply for a visa, cannot plan for moving (especially important if they have a partner/family) etc., and they might consider a less attractive offer with more security. | |
| Can we ensure that feedback is routinely available to candidates, without them having to ask? | Making feedback readily available will save candidates time and potential embarrassment of asking for it. Constructive feedback will help in future applications. | |
| Do we have a mechanism for gathering feedback from candidates? | This is an easy way of gathering useful information about how to improve processes for all candidates. | |

Job seeking, interviewing (and hiring!) is labour - we need to remember to treat it that way. We need to be conscious of who it privileges and who it excludes.

We can do better.

Spencer Daniels, via Twitter @spncrd