



Toolkit for Inclusive Recruitment

Una Europa Diversity Council



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About Una Europa Diversity Council

Una Europa's Diversity Council has been established as a permanent entity dedicated to supporting Una Europa in its mission to embed diversity in every aspect of its collaborative efforts. The Diversity Council plays both a consultative and operational role, ensuring that diversity and inclusion are integral to all levels of decision-making and activities within Una Europa.

The Council is composed of professionals from both academic and administrative fields, representing the diverse perspectives and expertise of Una Europa's 11 universities. The primary goal of the Diversity Council is to promote equity and social justice for all, with a special focus on minoritised groups. The Diversity Council is working towards creating a diverse and supportive environment that upholds the values of Una Europa.



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Content of the Toolkit



As part of its commitment to fostering inclusive environments, the Diversity Council of Una Europa is translating its insights and research of their last summit in 2023 into practical, accessible resources for Una Europa members. This toolkit is a direct outcome of those efforts, developed within the Una Europa Diversity Working Group *Guidelines for Leadership and HR*. With this toolkit, Una Europa aims to support higher education institutions (HEI) in implementing more inclusive recruitment practices. The toolkit begins by situating inclusive recruitment within the broader context of HEI, highlighting its importance and impact. It then provides a practical guide outlining specific strategies to enhance inclusivity throughout the recruitment process.

Recognizing the diversity in governance structures and institutional policies across Una Europa HEI, this toolkit offers a flexible framework that allows for adaptation based on national and regional contexts, as well as the specific organizational structures available within each institution. The primary audience for this toolkit includes individuals involved in recruitment processes—such as senior academics and senior administrative staff—who may not necessarily be HR professionals, alongside diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) allies within higher education institutions. For more in-depth guidance on specific actions, users are encouraged to consult their institution's DEI officers or HR services, where applicable.

Introduction

Recruitment in HEI is not merely a procedural task; it is a strategic and ethical imperative essential for sustaining academic excellence, fostering innovative research, and advancing social justice (Jonge Academie, 2023). As institutions of knowledge production and societal influence, HEI have a profound responsibility to ensure that their recruitment processes reflect and uphold the values of equity and the inclusion of diverse perspectives. This demands a recruitment process that actively fosters an environment where individuals from varied socio-cultural, economic, and intellectual backgrounds are not only included but also valued and empowered (LERU, 2019). It requires a collective engagement across the academic community—academic staff and administrative staff—working collaboratively to create institutional conditions where equity and the appreciation of diversity are central to the university (Birnbaum et al., 2021; LERU, 2019).

The representation of diversity across all levels of the institution is essential—not merely as a symbolic gesture but as a commitment to recognizing and valuing the knowledge and experiences of those from underrepresented backgrounds. For students, seeing themselves reflected in the academic and support staff affirms their identities, fosters a sense of belonging, and contributes to their academic success (Jonge Academie, 2023; Derks et al., 2007; Hausmann et al., 2009; O'Keeffe, 2013; Walton et al., 2023). The importance of diversity in academic environments extends far beyond representation. Diverse perspectives enrich research methodologies, expand the scope of inquiry, and challenge intellectual orthodoxy (Ely & Thomas, 2001). When recruitment processes are structured to value different perspectives and backgrounds, the university becomes a site where intellectual pluralism thrives. This diversity enhances the quality of academic work by encouraging interdisciplinary approaches, fostering innovation, and ensuring that research outcomes address the needs of a broader and more varied population.

Conversely, recruitment practices that fail to prioritize equity and diverse perspectives risk reproducing narrow worldviews and limiting the social and intellectual relevance of academic knowledge. HEI have a unique opportunity to foster excellence by embracing diversity and ensuring equitable access to academic and professional success. However, persistent systemic inequalities continue to create disparities in achievement and career progression. These challenges often stem from deep-rooted societal biases and structural barriers that disproportionately impact historically marginalized groups (Agirdag, 2020; Bunce et al., 2019; Dar & Ibrahim, 2018). Addressing these issues requires intentional and inclusive recruitment practices that not only reflect the diversity of society but actively dismantle barriers to equitable participation.

A recruitment process centered on equity recognizes that diverse perspectives enrich the intellectual, social, and cultural of HEI. Rather than treating diversity as a superficial commitment, this approach actively prioritizes a broad range of identities, life experiences, and intellectual traditions. By doing so, it redefines merit and excellence to reflect the richness of multiple epistemologies, experiences, and viewpoints, rather than assimilating candidates into pre-existing norms.

Moving beyond administrative checkboxes, a diversity-valued approach fosters structural change, creating equitable opportunities for all individuals to succeed and contribute meaningfully to academia (Zanoni et al., 2010; Essanhaji, 2023). Fostering diversity means recognizing the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) skills and experiences in recruitment and institutional development. Prioritizing these competencies ensures that HEI not only reflect the diverse societies they serve but also cultivate environments where all individuals can thrive and historically excluded voices become genuinely integrated into academic discourse.

The pillars of an inclusive recruitment framework

Nonetheless, the presence of a diverse workforce alone is insufficient to guarantee equity, genuine participation, or the recognition of diverse perspectives. An inclusive recruitment process must be embedded within an institutional environment that actively supports and sustains the values of equity, and the inclusion of varied identities and experiences. Such an environment is shaped by three interconnected pillars: a continuous bias consciousness on all levels, recognizing the added value of participatory input, and an organizational dedication towards inclusive leadership. Each of these pillars plays a distinct but complementary role in fostering a recruitment environment that reflects equity. When these three elements work in concert, they create the conditions for a recruitment process that actively values and amplifies diverse perspectives while fostering equity at every stage of the process.

First, bias consciousness addresses the hidden assumptions and systemic inequalities embedded in recruitment processes, ensuring that decision-making reflects a critical awareness of the ways bias operates. Bias consciousness refers to an ongoing, critical awareness of how implicit and explicit biases shape recruitment decisions and institutional practices. In the context of university recruitment, this concept extends beyond recognizing individual prejudices to encompass the ways structural inequalities and cultural assumptions become embedded in organizational processes. Biases are not merely the product of individual attitudes but are deeply ingrained in the standards used to define excellence, merit, and professional potential (Essanhaji, 2023). Without deliberate efforts to interrogate and address these biases, recruitment processes risk reinforcing existing inequalities and marginalizing candidates whose experiences or knowledge do not align with dominant institutional norms. Fostering bias consciousness is an ethical imperative. HEI hold a responsibility to work toward creating more equitable environments. Bias-conscious recruitment practices are not simply about preventing discrimination; they reflect a deeper commitment to fostering epistemic justice—ensuring that diverse forms of knowledge and lived experiences are recognized, valued, and included in the academic community.

Second, participatory input democratizes recruitment practices by involving a broad spectrum of institutional stakeholders, affirming the value of diverse voices in shaping policies and fostering collective ownership over decision-making inside the recruitment process. Participatory input refers to the deliberate inclusion of all academic and non-academic staff in the design, implementation, and evaluation of recruitment processes. This participatory approach challenges hierarchical models of decision-making that prioritize the perspectives of those already in positions of power. Instead, it affirms the importance of collective knowledge and experiences. It recognizes that those who experience the effects of institutional policies are best positioned to identify and address structural barriers (Ahmed, 2012). Participatory input facilitates a more nuanced understanding of merit. When diverse stakeholders contribute to the development of recruitment criteria, there is a greater likelihood that the definition of excellence will expand to encompass a wider array of skills, experiences, and intellectual contributions. This expanded definition helps to counteract the tendency to prioritize conventional or hegemonic forms of expertise while recognizing the value that diverse perspectives bring to research, teaching, and institutional leadership.

Decision-making processes are not neutral but reflect and reinforce existing power relations. By including diverse voices in recruitment decisions, HEI can identify and dismantle the hidden assumptions and exclusionary practices embedded in these processes. This participatory model also shifts the focus from recruitment as a top-down, administrative task to a collaborative process that reflects the collective wisdom and lived experiences of the entire academic community. Beyond its structural benefits, participatory input enhances the legitimacy and credibility of

recruitment practices. When institutional stakeholders are actively involved in shaping recruitment policies, they are more likely to view these policies as transparent, fair, and aligned with the university's stated commitments to equity and the valuing of diversity. This sense of collective ownership fosters trust in the recruitment process and strengthens the university's ability to attract and retain a diverse pool of candidates. It also ensures that recruitment policies remain dynamic and responsive to the evolving needs of the academic community.

Third, inclusive leadership, meanwhile, ensures that these principles are not only endorsed in policy but are modeled and sustained through practices that promote a culture of belonging. Inclusive leadership refers to the active and sustained commitment of senior staff in HEI to fostering an institutional culture where diverse perspectives are recognized as assets and where all members of the academic community are empowered to contribute meaningfully.

Inclusive leadership is fundamentally relational and reflexive. It requires leaders to engage in ongoing self-examination of their own biases and assumptions while fostering environments where critical dialogue and dissent are welcomed. Rather than positioning themselves as neutral arbiters of institutional values, inclusive leaders recognize their responsibility to challenge the power structures that reproduce exclusion and to prioritize the voices and experiences of those who have historically been marginalized (Ahmed, 2012). Policies and practices alone are insufficient to create meaningful change if they are not supported by leadership that actively champions these values. Inclusive leaders use their authority to ensure that equity and diversity are not seen as peripheral concerns but as core institutional priorities (LERU, 2019).

Guidelines for Recruitment

Developing an inclusive recruitment process is not merely a gesture of goodwill—it is a fundamental step toward building a university community that is just, inclusive, and resilient in a rapidly changing and diverse world. Each stage of the process must be intentionally designed to reflect a commitment to attracting and selecting candidates from a broad range of backgrounds. By doing so, institutions not only create fairer opportunities but also foster an academic environment where diverse perspectives and experiences can truly thrive.

This document outlines a set of practical guidelines that support the development of an inclusive hiring culture. These are structured across three key phases of the recruitment journey: pre-recruitment, selection, and post-recruitment. The first phase, pre-recruitment, focuses on the groundwork needed before publishing a vacancy. It highlights the importance of assessing current diversity levels within departments, involving employees in shaping shared DEI goals, and crafting inclusive job advertisements that actively reach and resonate with a diverse audience. This phase also calls for a critical reflection on how job descriptions are written, which requirements are truly essential, and how recruitment panels are composed to ensure diverse viewpoints are included from the outset. The second phase addresses the selection process itself and provides concrete strategies to ensure fairness and reduce bias during candidate evaluation. This includes the use of structured interviews, clear and consistent assessment criteria, and practices that are sensitive to diverse identities.

Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of offering reasonable accommodations for candidates with disabilities and creating a welcoming, respectful interview setting where all applicants have an equitable chance to present their strengths. The third and final phase, post-recruitment, shifts the focus to reflection and ongoing improvement. It encourages institutions to provide meaningful feedback to candidates, evaluate the effectiveness of their recruitment strategies, and collect data to monitor progress toward diversity and inclusion goals. By embedding reflection into the process, institutions can identify areas for growth, ensure transparency, and stay accountable to the values they aspire to uphold.

Taken together, these guidelines aim to support a systemic, sustainable approach to inclusive hiring—one that moves beyond compliance or isolated initiatives and works instead toward structural transformation rooted in fairness, equity, and belonging.

Guidelines for Pre-recruitment

- **Assess current diversity:**
Assess current diversity within departments, faculties, units, etc. This involves both looking around in your current team, as collecting demographic data to understand who is represented—and importantly, who is underrepresented—within different areas of the organization. Key dimensions may include race, gender, disability, age, and socioeconomic background. For instance, while an organization may appear diverse at a surface level, deeper analysis might reveal that certain departments lack representation from minoritized communities, or that leadership roles are disproportionately occupied by certain demographic groups.
- **Engage employees:**
Involve employees in discussions about potential diversity goals. Facilitating these discussions allows employees to share their experiences, voice their perspectives, and contribute to defining goals that are meaningful, relevant, and aligned with the university's values. It also ensures that goals are grounded in the real needs of the community, not just broad aspirations. By creating spaces where staff feel heard and valued, organizations can cultivate a stronger, more connected culture—one where equity and inclusion are seen as shared responsibilities rather than top-down directives.
- **Assign diversity champions in your university:**
Diversity champions are colleagues who are trained in inclusive recruitment practices and play an active role in ensuring fairness at every stage of the process. These individuals are responsible for monitoring the recruitment experience, advocating for equity, and challenging any biases or assumptions that may arise. They provide support to hiring managers and interviewers, offer guidance on inclusive evaluation methods, and help create an environment where all candidates feel respected and considered based on merit.
- **Establish a diverse recruitment panel:**
Set up a diverse recruitment panel, with diversity champions, who focus on ensuring inclusive practices during recruitment. A diverse panel is one that reflects a range of identities, backgrounds, and perspectives—such as gender, ethnicity, disability status, age, and more. This diversity not only brings broader perspectives to candidate evaluation but also helps reduce the risk of unconscious bias influencing hiring decisions. Additionally, it sends a strong message to applicants that the organization values and embodies inclusivity. To ensure effectiveness, all members of the recruitment panel—not just diversity champions—should receive training in recognizing and mitigating unconscious bias.
- **Craft inclusive job descriptions and advertisements:**
Creating inclusive and accessible job descriptions is a key step in attracting a diverse pool of candidates. Language should be welcoming, clear, and free from jargon. It's important to use inclusive language throughout, avoiding assumptions about identity or experience that may discourage qualified applicants from applying.

Equally essential is ensuring that job postings are digitally accessible. This includes publishing them on websites that follow accessibility standards, such as using high-contrast colors, readable fonts, and screen-reader compatibility, so that everyone, including those with visual or cognitive impairments, can access the information easily.

Including a well-crafted diversity statement in the job description can also have a significant impact. It should clearly communicate the institution's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and explain how the specific role contributes to those efforts. Being specific demonstrates that equity and inclusion is a lived value of the HEI and can help applicants see themselves as part of the HEI's mission and future.

Examples:

- *We welcome candidates with varied educational and career paths. If you feel your experience aligns with the role, even if it doesn't match every listed qualification, we encourage you to apply.*
- *We are an equal opportunity employer committed to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace. We encourage people of all backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives to apply, even if you do not meet every listed qualification. If you are excited about this role and believe you bring valuable skills and experiences, please apply.*
- *We aim to increase diversity in research and teaching and therefore explicitly invite applications from people from underrepresented groups.*
- *We encourage people who are affected by structural or individual discrimination to apply.*

- **Avoid unnecessary qualifications:**

Limit job requirements to those that are truly essential, avoiding unnecessary criteria that may exclude qualified candidates. This requires a critical evaluation of the listed qualifications, as it's a common misconception that this means lowering expectations or weakening required competencies. On the contrary, the goal is to find the best match for the role and ensure that potential candidates are not excluded early in the process due to overly strict or irrelevant criteria.

When writing a job description, it's important to determine which competencies are essential for the position and which can be developed on the job. Eliminate any qualifications or informal criteria that do not directly relate to the function. This helps prevent the exclusion of valuable candidates based on rigid requirements that may not even be relevant to the role. A thorough evaluation should ask:

- A) What criteria are absolutely necessary for this position?
- B) What do these criteria mean in the context of the role?
- C) Are DEI competencies included in the candidate profile?

By questioning the assumptions behind each requirement, you can ensure that personal experiences and diverse skills are recognized, leading to a fairer evaluation of all applicants.

For example, avoiding the "native speaker" requirement can open opportunities for candidates who may not have grown up in a particular linguistic or cultural environment but are still highly qualified and fluent. Unnecessary requirements can perpetuate inequities, favoring those with privileged access to specific educational or career paths.

- **Valuing DEI qualifications:**

When crafting job descriptions and assessing candidates, explicitly acknowledge DEI-related experience as a valuable qualification. This includes recognizing both formal and informal contributions to equity and inclusion, such as community engagement, advocacy, or leading inclusive initiatives. Treat lived experience and non-traditional career paths as meaningful assets. Make sure DEI skills are not just listed in the posting but also meaningfully considered in evaluation criteria and interviews, signalling that they are essential to the role, not optional extras.

- **Utilize bias control tools:** Incorporate tools and practices to minimize unconscious bias in application review and decision-making, such as CVs without photographs, anonymized CV screening or structured interview protocols. These tools help ensure that candidates are evaluated based on their skills and experience rather than on assumptions tied to identity, background, or appearance, leading to fairer and more equitable decision-making.

- **Expand outreach to diverse candidates:**

To reach a more diverse pool of applicants, go beyond traditional platforms and actively engage with networks, platforms, and community groups frequented by minoritized candidates. Use targeted outreach through niche websites and social media and involve current staff and students in sharing vacancies within their networks. Personalized outreach by directly contacting relevant organizations or individuals can be more effective than generic communication.

Guidelines for Selection

- **Fostering an inclusive environment:** Fostering an inclusive environment during the selection process is crucial for setting the tone of respect and belonging from the very beginning. A welcoming atmosphere helps candidates feel at ease and better show their true abilities. Interviews should start by introducing all panel members and briefly explaining their roles, helping to build trust and reduce stress.

Examples:

- Throughout the conversation, avoid assumptions about a candidate's name pronunciation, gender, or background.
- The physical or virtual interview space should also be made as accessible and comfortable as possible, considering needs such as wheelchair accessibility or sensory-friendly settings.
- Small gestures, like offering water, can further contribute to creating a respectful and supportive environment.

- **Structured interviews with similar questions that focus on the qualifications:**

Structured interviews are a key element of an inclusive recruitment approach. By asking all candidates the same set of role-specific questions in the same order, they create consistency and allow for more objective, comparable evaluations.

To organize a structured interview, it is important to first develop clear, role-relevant questions and to agree in advance on how answers will be evaluated. These interviews should be guided by clearly defined and standardized assessment criteria to ensure a fair and transparent selection process. This means identifying not only which qualifications, competencies, and experiences are essential for the role, but also determining how these will be assessed: what counts as sufficient, and how different types of experience (including informal or non-traditional backgrounds) will be recognized.

During the interview, the structure must be identical for every candidate: the same introduction, the same questions, and only clarifying follow-up questions where necessary. After each interview, candidates should be assessed immediately against pre-set criteria, focusing on skills and competences rather than subjective impressions. Therefore, equally important is the interview context itself. Scheduling adequate time between interviews allows panel members to reset, reflect, and enter each conversation with fresh focus. This prevents fatigue bias, supports consistency, and shows respect for each candidate's effort and presence.

Example:

- Develop a list of standard questions related to the role. All candidates should answer the same questions in the same order.

- After each interview, ask panelists to individually record scores and provide brief commentary before any group discussion. This prevents stronger voices from improperly influencing the panel and ensures a fairer evaluation of each candidate.
- **Allowing reasonable accommodation:** Providing accommodations during the interview process ensures that candidates with disabilities are evaluated based on their skills, without being hindered by systemic barriers. Candidates should be asked in advance if they have any specific needs, such as preferring an online interview setting, needing a wheelchair-accessible room, or a quieter space for sensory sensitivities.

Flexibility is essential to create an inclusive environment. It can also help to prepare useful documents in advance to support candidates during the interview. Moreover, it is important to allocate equal time to each interview to avoid rushed judgments, while staying flexible if a candidate, for example someone with ADHD, needs a short break to refocus.

Example:

- Offer options such as extended interview time, or access to assistive technology for candidates who request accommodation. If the interview involves a test or presentation, provide materials in accessible formats (e.g., larger fonts, screen reader compatibility, etc.).
- Send an email in advance outlining the interview format, duration, and any tasks or materials required (e.g. a case study or presentation). Ask if the candidate needs any adjustments, such as extra time, a virtual option, or accessible resources. Repeat the interview process when starting the interview.
- **Selection with sensitivity to cultural and social class differences:** Selecting candidates with sensitivity to cultural and social class differences is key to ensuring an inclusive evaluation. It is important to recognize that communication styles can vary: some candidates may understate their achievements due to cultural norms of modesty, while others may be more direct. Similarly, differences in social background can influence whether a candidate speaks in a more colloquial or a highly formal style. Evaluators should focus on the content of responses rather than the delivery style. For roles that involve international communication, it is equally important to value clarity over accent when assessing language skills.
- **Acknowledge the effort and keeping applicant informed:** Recognizing the time and effort candidates invest in the application process helps build trust and shows respect. Keeping them informed throughout, whether selected or not, contributes to a positive and fair experience, and reinforces the organization's commitment to equity and inclusion.

Examples:

- Send a prompt acknowledgment email confirming the receipt of the application.
- Provide a clear timeline that outlines the stages of the evaluation and selection process.
 - Keep candidates in the loop by proactively updating them at key stages of the process. If delays occur, communicate them to minimize uncertainty and frustration
 - Inform candidates at each stage of the process such as acknowledging application receipt, shortlisting, interview scheduling, and final decisions. Clearly communicate the anticipated timeline for evaluations, such as "you will hear back from us within two weeks of the interview".

Guidelines for Post-Selection

- **Setting up constructive feedback mechanisms to candidates:**

Providing candidates who are not selected with personalized and actionable feedback shows respect for their effort and engagement. Rather than offering generic or vague responses, specific feedback helps candidates understand their strengths as well as areas where they can improve. This approach not only supports their personal and professional development but also fosters greater trust in the fairness of the hiring process. Offering thoughtful feedback is particularly important in supporting diversity efforts, as it encourages candidates from underrepresented backgrounds to remain engaged and confident in pursuing future opportunities

Examples: Share general feedback on key skills, e.g., your experience in project management is strong, but we were looking for more familiarity with X tools.

- **Regularly evaluate and revise hiring strategies:**

To ensure continuous improvement in inclusive hiring, it is essential to regularly assess the effectiveness of recruitment strategies. This involves not only reviewing the outcomes of the hiring processes but also critically examining each step to identify potential biases and barriers.

Examples:

- Periodic review of job advertisements to ensure language remains inclusive and qualifications are not overly restrictive.
- Evaluating the composition and functioning of recruitment panels is crucial to ensure that diversity of perspectives is reflected and that members are sufficiently trained in bias awareness and inclusive practices.
- Adjust outreach strategies and reflect if the job ads are posted on platforms that reach underrepresented groups. Are vacancies reaching diverse communities, or is the outreach still limited to conventional networks?

- **Collection of data to track diversity metrics throughout the hiring process:**

Collect and analyze data throughout the hiring process to identify trends, measure progress, and improve strategies for increasing diversity. Data-driven insights help refine pre-selection processes to ensure fairness and equity.

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