

## Diversity In Focus

### Unconscious Bias

November 2015

#### Welcome

In this issue of 'Diversity In Focus' we are looking at the idea of unconscious, or implicit bias, the effect it can have on the decisions we make, how that can impact on equality and what can be done to address it.

There is now a growing body of scientific evidence in support of the notion of unconscious bias, that our unconscious preferences are important factors in how we engage with others and make decisions about them.

Our brains are wired to instinctively categorise people based on a host of visible and obvious criteria. This is natural and necessary for us to deal with and process the amount of information on a regular basis and the majority of the time we are not even conscious we are doing it. The trouble is, we can also categorise people based on things like age, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, their religion, job title, accent, educational background or even professional group.

A range of studies have been undertaken that suggest in some cases what goes on in our unconscious can cause very real inequality of opportunities for people in the [workplace](#), [in education](#) and in [access to healthcare](#).

**So what can we do about it?** Well David Cameron has suggested removing names from [job applications](#) and [UCAS applications](#) will help to tackle unconscious bias against those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.



**Patrick Johnson Head of Equality and Diversity**

David Cameron outlines move to be implemented from 2017 as he aims to end 'unconscious bias' in application process



Guardian Monday 26<sup>th</sup> October - Photograph: David Cheskin

But is this enough and will it mean, as Cameron suggests ['that a young black woman knows she'll get a fair shot when she applies for the job of her dreams'](#)?

Or are anonymous UCAS forms [only a first step towards fair and discrimination-free university admissions](#).

Whilst it is a positive step in the right direction I believe more can and should be done if we truly wish to make real and lasting change for both staff and students. It's important to remember this problem not only effects Black and Minority Ethnic staff and

students it has the potential to affect us all at some point in our lives. Organisations need to make a long term commitment to equality for all that goes beyond rhetoric and identifies funding and resources to take action. We need to challenge ourselves and others when we are in positions of power where we are making decisions that affect people, their education or their careers.

As a first step we need to recognise that we all have the potential for unconscious bias and consider the effect these biases might have on our own practices. It's only by being aware can we put strategies in place to mitigate against them.

You can find out more on the training plan we've identified later in this issue. Training of course is only one element, to find out more about what the University is doing to tackle these issues you can visit the [Equality and Diversity webpages](#).

I like to believe that on the whole people generally want to be fair and do the right thing. We can all find out more about this subject and how we can all contribute to tackle the issue. The more we know the more we'll be able to:

1. **Recognise.** That we all have the potential for unconscious bias
2. **Be Aware.** Find out more and make ourselves aware of our own potential biases
3. **Consider Effects.** The effect that these biases might have on our own practices.
4. **Mitigate.** Think about what process can be put in place to mitigate the effects?
5. **Identify Triggers.** When we are tired, under pressure or even when we are hungry we can be less aware of our actions and there effects.

*Patrick*

**Patrick Johnson**  
Head of Equality and Diversity



If you would like to write an article for Diversity In Focus, suggest a topic, opt out of these messages or give any feedback, please contact [diversityinfocus@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:diversityinfocus@manchester.ac.uk)

**If you want gender equality you need to address your own unconscious biases first, according to the Guardian.**



When companies try to improve their gender diversity they tend to look at policies such as childcare and flexible working. They should be looking at their culture and beliefs instead [suggests Paula Parfitt from the Guardian in September 2015](#). It suggests that every organisation can make small changes to influence a big impact on gender diversity and to start with they should take action to battle stereotypes, call out unconscious bias and empower individuals.

This is not the first time the Guardian has written about the potential effects of unconscious bias and gender equality in the workplace. [Trang Chu wrote in May 2014 how women's unconscious beliefs](#) about career advancement could be holding them back from reaching the top. Trang, an executive coach and founder of Tallgrass Leaders believes to begin a real process of change, women also need to look at their own unconscious bias and move away from potentially damaging assumptions and beliefs. She believes companies must invest in their female talent and nurture them through the ranks.

Natasha Clarke presented a set of [insider tips for recruiters in May 2013](#). In this article she suggests recruitment experts should help coach women for interviews. Tips include creating a truly selective recruitment process, ensure that the process is objective, understanding and promoting the female employment mind-set, instilling and promoting confidence and a 'can do' attitude and to track and report on the process.

## **Will anonymous UCAS application forms tackle unconscious bias in the admissions process?**

[Dr Steven Jones from the Manchester School of Education](#) suggests the decision to remove names from UCAS application forms is a sensible move in tackling unconscious bias. However goes on to argue that concealing candidates' names does not go far enough if we want to ensure people from all backgrounds are treated fairly during the application process.

He cites [a report that looks at the personal statement and asks if it's a fair way to assess university applicants](#). If as the research on unconscious bias suggests that our brains are wired to instinctively categorise people based on a host of visible and obvious criteria then including where a student attended school or undertook a work placement has the potential to reproduce existing forms of privilege.

In addition to understanding and addressing our potential for unconscious bias when making decisions Dr Jones suggests 'we also need to think about more systemic issues, such as why offers are made on predicted rather than actual grades, how candidates' attainment can be suitably contextualised, and why personal statements are given more prominence than any evidence suggests they are worth.'

## **Understanding our own Potential for Bias**

The University have made a commitment to provide a series of unconscious bias training sessions for staff at the university who are in decision making roles. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and PSS Leadership Team (PSSLT) have both attended this training and a University wide roll out is due to commence in January 2016. This will include online implicit association testing that uses our response patterns to measure the strength of our group preferences, which when very strong can lead to prejudice. Those who have undertaken this confidential testing and found it an excellent tool to help them think more about the reasons why they make the decisions they do. Places have been allocated to each of the Faculties and the PSS and the Heads of Human Resources are coordinating this.



There will also be a set of lunch time sessions open to all staff and students that will provide a general introduction to unconscious bias. More information will be available on StaffNet.

In addition to this we have recently added a new module online training suite, [Unconscious Bias In the Workplace](#). This training can be accessed by any member of staff and looks at different scenarios played out in the workplace and is interspersed with analysis and comments from experts in the field.

[A new Unconscious Bias whitepaper guide 'How our biases affect our lives and work'](#) from Marshall eLearning explains what Unconscious Bias is, how it affects you and your employees, and strategies and tactics for overcoming your biases in the workplace.

## **Unconscious Bias against Disabled People is higher now than before the Paralympics in 2012 suggest a study by the ENEI**



[The report publishes in 2014 by the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion \(ENEI\)](#) found positive role models shown in the 2012 Paralympic Games have failed to reduce unconscious bias levels against disabled people. In fact, the study shows that unconscious bias levels have risen by 8% since the 2012. The research also shows disabled people to be the group that suffers from the highest amount of unconscious bias when compared with gender and ethnicity.

The report identifies 5 key recommendations and they include:

1. Measure the levels of unconscious bias of recruiters and key decision makers to raise awareness of bias.
2. Encourage recruiters to put forward more candidates with disabilities to break down stereotypes and build more role models.
3. Review positive action programmes and the process for agreeing reasonable adjustments.
4. Review the impact of disability initiatives such as 'two ticks' and the 'Disability Confident Campaign' to ensure they are producing long term and lasting effects on the experiences of disabled people
5. Use positive disabled role models to show the positive effect disabled people can have at work. Focus on their achievements at work and not on their disability.
6. Encourage honest discussions about disability in the workplace. Train line managers about different types of disabilities and how to talk to someone about their disability, giving them the confidence to have effective communication with different types of people.

## **Professional services firm Deloitte hides' university when recruits apply**

[A report by Sean Coughlan for BBC News](#) this change hopes to prevent "unconscious bias" and tap a more diverse "talent pool". For next year's recruitment round for 1,500 graduates and school leavers, an algorithm will consider "contextual" information alongside academic results.



It will take into account disadvantages such as attending an under-performing school or coming from a deprived area. As an example, Deloitte says an applicant getting three B grades at A-level could be seen as "exceptional" if the average for their school was three D grades.

There will be a "university-blind" approach to selection, so that the name of the university attended will not be known. The aim is to find students with "potential" and to prevent the recruitment process producing an intake from a narrow range of universities and social backgrounds.

"Improving social mobility is one of the UK's biggest challenges," said David Sproul, senior partner and chief

executive of Deloitte UK. But Mr Sproul said there was also a "business imperative", as firms needed "to hire people who think and innovate differently, come from a variety of backgrounds and bring a range of perspectives".



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HARASSMENT AND  
BULLYING, SEXUAL  
HARASSMENT,  
DISABLISM, RACISM,  
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AND TRANSPHOBIA,  
SEXISM AND RELIGIOUS  
DISCRIMINATION

### Report bullying, harassment or discrimination

Staff and students (and visitors) can report bullying, harassment, sexual harassment or discrimination online, anonymously or request support.

Find out more at [www.manchester.ac.uk/we-get-it](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/we-get-it) or click on the report and support button



### Take a look at our Diversity Calendar

It's a great resource when you are planning an event or if you'd like to know more about the activities that take place throughout the year.

The 2016 calendar is in production and a small number of hard copies will be available from January - to request a copy, please mail [equalityanddiversity@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:equalityanddiversity@manchester.ac.uk)



## Full URL links

<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/unconscious-bias-in-higher-education/>  
<http://www.brownpoliticalreview.org/2015/04/the-dangerous-mind-unconscious-bias-in-higher-education/>  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3140753/>  
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/26/david-cameron-conservatives-party-of-equality>  
<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/oct/26/ucas-name-blind-university-applications-racial-bias>  
<https://hewatch.wordpress.com/>  
<http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/equality-and-diversity/>

If you want gender equality you need to address your own unconscious biases first, according to the Guardian

<http://www.theguardian.com/women-in-leadership/2015/sep/01/the-three-things-holding-women-back-at-work>  
<http://www.theguardian.com/women-in-leadership/2014/may/01/unconscious-bias-women-holding-back-work>  
<http://www.theguardian.com/women-in-leadership/2013/sep/05/insider-tips-recruiter-avoid-unconscious-bias>

Will anonymous UCAS application forms tackle unconscious bias in the admissions process?

<http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/the-personal-statement/>

Understanding our own Potential for Bias

<http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/equality-and-diversity/training/unconsciousbias/>

<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=26064>

Unconscious Bias against Disabled People is higher now than before the Paralympics in 2012 suggest a study by the ENEI

<http://www.enei.org.uk/news.php/691/unconscious-bias-against-disabled-people-is-higher-now-than-before-the-paralympics>

Professional services firm Deloitte hides' university when recruits apply

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-34384668>

We Get It

<http://www.socialresponsibility.manchester.ac.uk/strategic-priorities/responsible-processes/we-get-it/>

Take a look at our Diversity Calendar

<http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/equality-and-diversity/>