 Critical Recruitment during the Covid-19 Lockdown

**OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT AND PROVOST (EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION)**

During enforced remote working, remote recruitment practice (for all categories of staff) will deliver a differential impact upon various groups. This checklist guide is for all recruiting managers and their HR Business Partners to consider.

The principles of fair recruitment are:

* Recruitment on basis of actual merit – objectively demonstrated,
* A justifiable and evident decision-making process (recorded transparency; consistent approach for all candidates; heightened awareness of unconscious bias in yourself and others),
* Strict adherence to non-discriminatory practice: understanding and accommodating reasonable adjustments (including childcare responsibilities),
* A fair and consistent application of the [UCL Recruitment Policy](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/human-resources/recruitment-and-selection-policy)

Customarily, penalties in the labour market are experienced by people from ethnic minority backgrounds, women and disabled people, which will be heightened now because of remote interviewing. Differing experiences of, or responses to, mental health during lockdown is of concern.

In a remote interview, be particularly aware of the following:

* There may be technical issues beyond the interviewee’s control, it may be advisable to have a practice run to ensure comfort with and workability of technology.
* To mitigate any technical issues, it is recommended to ask the question “in person”, but also to type the question into the chat box, so the candidate can still see the question.
* The format may feel uncomfortable for the interviewee,
* Some interviewees may have children present as they do not have access to childcare,
* People may be experiencing bereavement, or caring for loved ones who are sick,
* Be understanding that interviewees may dress more informally in a home setting
* At all times be sensitive of potential barriers to a usual standard of performance and allow yourself patience to understand individual constraints, which may be at play,
* Be aware of your own state of mind and how this might affect your thinking during the interview and/or decision-making,
* Question cultural stereotypes you may have. The potential for this may be heighted as you may have greater access to a candidate’s domestic context
* Your unconscious bias and that of others on your panel: understand the types of bias you will be prone to: the “Halo Effect”1, Stereotyping2, Priming3, Confirmation Bias4 and Homophily5.

What adjustments have you made, to take into consideration the needs of applicants for interview preparation?

* Ask about individual reasonable adjustments.
* Basic guidelines to be followed without asking for adjustments, would be for example, to mute microphone and switch off video if not speaking; if speaking, switch on video and microphone, but still type out the question in the chat box.
* If necessary, you should use closed captioning and indicate that access to BSL interpreters, or palantypists may be possible, as these can be provided in a virtual setting.
* Individual pressures faced by interviewees will differ. Parents may be home-schooling, or caring for young children without access to childcare.
* Is the technology available to all interviewees to take part remotely?
* Do they have a quiet, stress-free space in which to be interviewed?
* Offer flexibility over interview time slots, outside of core hours when children are in bed?
* Provide interview questions for pre-recorded responses (for their allocated spot),
* Reflect on the time made available to prepare, in and around domestic constraints. Your timeline may not be flexible or sufficient.
* Consider impact of any required tests, or presentations and the length of interviews.
* Shortlist only strong and likely appointable contenders (to minimise unnecessary pressure to prepare for a remote interview when a candidate is potentially fringe).
* Who is on the panel, is the panel sufficiently diverse?
* Consider the use of an external member of panel to monitor fair recruitment practice (use of a [Fair Recruitment Specialist](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusion/equality-areas/race-equality/fair-recruitment-specialist-initiative)).

What should I be aware of when considering candidate responses?

* Be aware of not reading so much into body language, when remote interviewing.
* Work to clear model answers, which can be flexible enough to allow for originality but they must be measurable,
* Ensure all key requirements for a job are somehow tested in the interview – so, do use follow-up questions to hone in on specific details.
* People are more likely in face-to-face situations to provide longer answers and are therefore more likely to hit the criteria.
* Be clear regarding what answer, to a skills-specific question, constitutes a 3 instead of a 2?
* Objective metrics are key and these can be weighed according to their importance,
* Slow down the speed of your decision-making,
* Reconsider the reasons for your decision,
* Adjust scoring based upon this final discussion, prior to collating scores for each candidate after your deliberations are complete,
* Do not discuss impressions until all final scores are added up,
* When providing feedback, indicate how a fair decision was reached, under these difficult circumstances.

1 **Halo effect** is where our perception of one personality trait influences how we view an entire personality, i.e. being highly influenced by first impressions. If we immediately see someone in a good light, it is hard to darken that light. Over-evaluating certain attributes and undervaluing others. An example would be someone who is an extremely confident presenter, we might unconsciously assume they have more expertise in their subject than they really have.

2 **Stereotyping is** a generalised impression, or exaggerated belief, which allows for little or no individual differences, or social variation (e.g. Americans are loud). Influenced by media, social network, peer groups and significant others, etc.

3**Priming** concerns how question are asked, or set out – having responsive body language (or not).

4 **Confirmation bias** is being selective in the information we listen to and what we disregard. Incorrectly recalling information. We subconsciously prefer information which confirms what we know and believe and are more likely to overlook information, which challenges or contradicts.

5 **Homophily** is self–replication – We have a natural tendency to prefer people who are like ourselves. Similarity breeds connection and reinforces our own importance – faced with a candidate who reminds you of your younger self, it can validate your experiences.