

# Eliminating Bias in the Hiring Process



## The Level Project

Accelerate Equality. Accelerate Success.

### What's included?

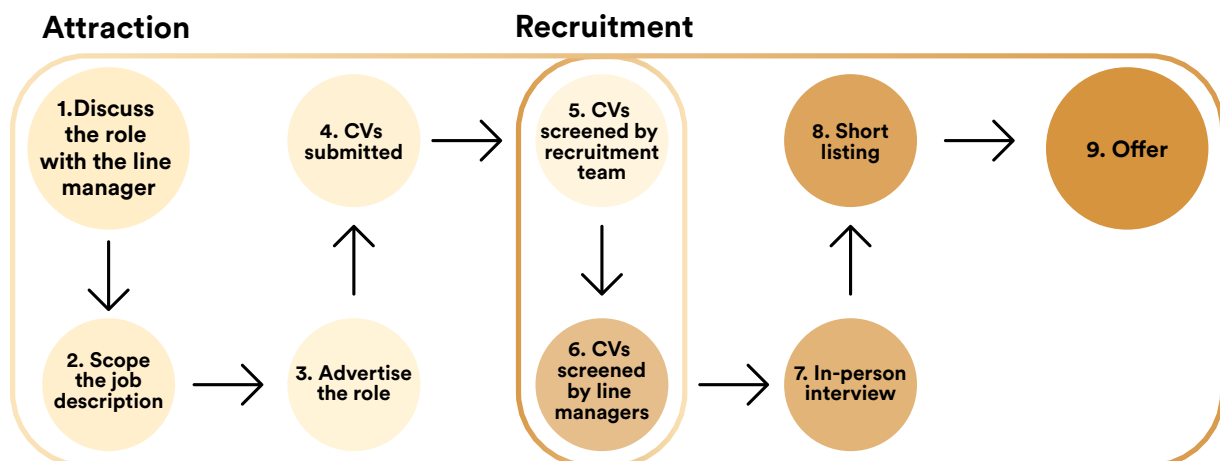
This document focuses on eliminating bias in the hiring process. It can be used as a follow-on to work suggested in “[Reviewing your Policies and Procedures for Bias](#)” or as a stand-alone piece of work.

### Introduction

Before completing any review of process or procedure for bias, a review of your data will help you to identify where the balanced representation of genders may be evident.

Support on reviewing hiring data is available in the resource “[Data Analysis Template](#)”. If, having completed that review, you have identified a challenge in a specific part of your hiring process, then use the specific step outlined in this document. However, you can also complete a full review of your process using this document and the review of your process can be repeated annually to implement continuous assessment and progress.

Start by capturing your existing hiring process. **A typical process may look like this:**



# The Level Project

Eliminating Bias in the Hiring Process



This work falls into two broad areas of activity:

1. Attraction
2. Recruitment

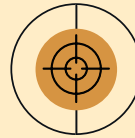
Each of these pieces of activity has opportunities for bias to influence a gender-balanced outcome. We will review each step to determine how you might offset this risk.

## Attraction – how do we attract people to our organisation?

### 1. Discuss the role with the line manager

Your first action will typically be a discussion with the line manager about the role they are filling. This conversation is an opportunity to understand the role, focusing on the skills that the line manager is looking for in a new hire for the role.

- **Review existing gender balance.** Discuss with the manager their existing team gender profile and use this as an opportunity to reinforce any company objectives in relation to diversity and inclusion and a balanced workforce if applicable.
- **Allow time for balance.** Set realistic timelines with the line manager for filling the role. It may take more time to source female candidates as women are more likely to review a broad range of factors before applying to move or change jobs, make sure to build this time into your recruitment plan.



## FOCUS ON WHAT YOU NEED

Typically, job descriptions have been developed over time. They may have gone through one or two different line managers and have, as a result, gathered a set of criteria that most of the people now in these roles would not satisfy! In fact, a lot of job descriptions become a manager “wish list” rather than a list of criteria that are required to do the job. Focus on what a candidate needs in order to do the job and then develop the rest.

- **Focused job criteria.** Discuss “need to have” versus “nice to have” requirements – keeping the job description focused on “need to have” requirements will attract more female candidates. Take a pragmatic view on requirements such as length of previous experience and educational level – do you really need a graduate with three years of experience for this role?

### 2. Scope the job description

This may be conducted in collaboration with the line manager but may also be completed by human resources for review by line manager.

# The Level Project

Eliminating Bias in the Hiring Process



Follow these key points:

- **Stick to a short skill-focused description of requirements.** Encourage managers to focus on the “need to have” versus “nice to have” requirements for the role. Women are less likely to apply for a role where they don’t fit all criteria so keeping the criteria to a minimum will attract more female candidates.
- **Check to ensure you are using gender-neutral language.** Research has shown that certain words are more likely to attract men than women: “For example, words such as competitive, dominant or leader are associated with male stereotypes, while words such as support, understand and interpersonal are associated with female stereotypes.”<sup>1</sup> Use the free tools available to help you to check your language, for example, Gender Decoder.<sup>2</sup>
- **What to include?** Include your organisation’s commitment to diversity and inclusion, and to flexible working if applicable, and provide links to relevant statements on your website, for example, Working Families, a UK organisation that advocates for employers to include “Happy to talk flexible working” on their job advertisements.<sup>3</sup>

## 3. Advertise the role

Where and how you advertise the role will impact the type of candidates that apply for the role.



## BE AUTHENTIC

While it is good practice for your website to reflect the community in which you operate and represent your aspiration for your employee base, be careful that the visuals and graphics on your site represent an authentic view of your industry and organisation. A disconnect between your public messaging and the internal state of play will lead to expensive turnover when candidates realise that what they were “sold” during the recruitment process does not match the reality.

- **Review your materials and your website.** Does your website include gender-balanced visuals? Update your visuals and materials to be gender balanced, however, this should also be an accurate reflection of your workforce and an authentic reflection of your intention to enhance gender balance.
- **Broaden where you place your job advertisements.** Consider engagement beyond your usual locations if you have found in your data review that they are not yielding balanced candidates. You might

<sup>1</sup> harvard.edu: Evidence That Gendered Wording in Job Advertisements Exists and Sustains Gender Inequality.

<sup>2</sup> gender decoder

<sup>3</sup> workingfamilies.org.uk: happy to talk flexible working

# The Level Project

Eliminating Bias in the Hiring Process



also consider working with organisations that support women in your industry to sponsor or host events.

- **Employee referrals.** Don't rely only on employee referrals to fill roles, as they tend to refer people from within their own networks; our networks tend to be full of people like ourselves, so recruiting solely from referrals could lead to a lack of diversity within the workplace.

## 4. CVs submitted

If you have not already conducted a data review, use this point in your process to review the gender balance in CVs submitted.

- **Monitor applications against roles.** Check if initiatives are working by tracking which job descriptions are yielding the best results for gender balance and whether your new avenues for advertising are yielding the right results.

## 5. CVs screened by recruitment team

There are several ways in which bias can influence the screening process. In as far as possible, implementing a consistent process that mitigates for bias will strengthen the process. It is also recommended that you conduct a data analysis for each point on the overall pipeline to identify where potential blocks occur. If, for example, you receive a gender-balanced number of CVs but that balance is not still evident after the screening process, here are some items to review:



## AVOID A FOCUS ON "FIT"

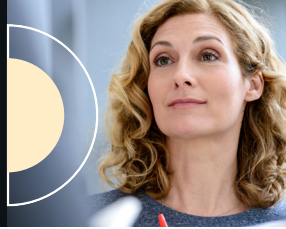
Listen for people speaking about "fit". Typically, a focus on finding a "fit" for the existing team dynamic, or for the organisation, leads to interviewers looking for someone like themselves and puts candidates that don't satisfy this requirement at an immediate disadvantage. It also leads to teams populated with the same type of individuals who will struggle to find new and different ideas.

- **Remove identifying characteristics.** Some organisations use this opportunity to remove names from CVs, which are a primary indicator of gender. A candidate number would then be used to track the CV through manager screening, leading to a more balanced outcome at this stage.<sup>4</sup>
- **Provide anti-bias training.** Prioritise training and information for those doing screening to ensure that they are aware of how their bias impacts their assessment.
- **Take a broader view of breaks.** As women are often more likely to take an extended break for caregiving, ensure that your screening process does not discount a candidate because of breaks in their career timeline. These breaks don't mean that the candidate does not have the right skills

<sup>4</sup> [www.irishtimes.com](http://www.irishtimes.com): business work flying blind why anonymised cvs can deliver better candidates

# The Level Project

Eliminating Bias in the Hiring Process



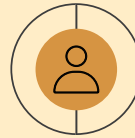
for the job; indeed, often these breaks can lead to the development of alternative skills. Some degree of training is required with all candidates, so your screening process should not screen out those that have followed a non-traditional path.<sup>5</sup>

- **Focus on skills.** Having identified the skills required to do the job when designing the job description, the CV review should target those identified job skills on the CV.

## 6. CVs screened by line managers

As with screening by the recruitment team, the screening of CVs by line managers is open to bias and your objective should be to mitigate for this bias as much as possible in your system and process design. An analysis of the gender representation before and after this step will also inform how much work this requires.

- **Provide anti-bias training.** As a prerequisite for being part of the hiring process ensure that line managers have been trained in understanding and mitigating for their own bias.
- **Build in “just-in-time” reminders.** It is impossible for individuals to complete unconscious bias training once a year and believe that this will solve the problem of bias. As well as redesigning your process it may also be useful to provide “just-in-time” reminders to line managers at key points in the employee life cycle. An alert at this point – “this is how bias impacts selection” – will remind managers of what they have learned.



## BEST PERSON FOR THE JOB

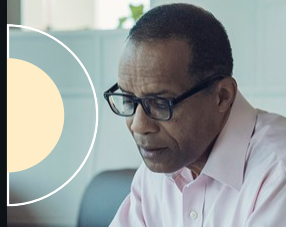
Often, managers and leaders will take pride in “always hiring the best person for the job”. Your system of attraction and selection should help them to understand unless you take specific actions, at each point in your hiring pipeline, the “best person” may not even make it in front of them. They may have been eliminated at an earlier point in the process or may not have even applied for the role because they do not see themselves reflected in your industry or, more specifically in your organisation.

- **Remove CVs.** For some organisations, removing CVs from the recruitment process has led to a more unbiased assessment. This is usually done with a form, online or offline, which is completed by the recruitment team. This form only selects the information from the CV that relates to the skills that have been agreed with the line manager. The process removes non-relevant data from the application process. It also removes any bias related to how the CV is formatted as well as affinity bias related to a candidate attending the same school or college as the

<sup>5</sup> Taking a more holistic and skills based view will also support those with disabilities who might not follow a traditional career path

# The Level Project

Eliminating Bias in the Hiring Process



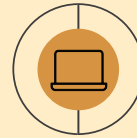
line manager or having an interest in the same hobbies. It also focuses the review of CVs and subsequent interview on the skills required for the job.

## Recruitment – How do we hire people?<sup>6</sup>

### 7. In-person interview

There are specific, tried-and-tested techniques that support this part of the hiring process as well as those that should occur at each stage. As before, use your data to determine if this is the area where your gender balance is decreasing and focus on the parts of the process that are leading to decreases in female representation first. Specific techniques for this stage in the process include:

- **A balanced interview slate.** Make a commitment to only proceed to interview stage when there is a gender-balanced slate of candidates. A balanced slate is more than one woman on a slate and is closer to a two in five mix. In fact, research has concluded that “If there’s only one woman in your candidate pool, there’s statistically no chance she’ll be hired.”<sup>7</sup> At a minimum, start by prioritising this mandate at a senior level in your organisation.
- **Consistent process for interviewing.** If the line manager has identified the criteria for the job, then the interview process should focus on those criteria, and be consistent in the questions asked of each candidate by every interviewer.



## BE AWARE OF BIAS IN THE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

Help interviewers to understand that the increase in virtual interview engagement brings its own bias challenges. For example, candidate assessment cannot be impacted by whether they have good broadband connections or by their living arrangements and family circumstances. Neither is everyone privileged enough to have their own, fully equipped home office. When preparing the candidate for interview, if possible, ask them if they would like an option to come on-site to use your facilities – they can still be in a separate room from the interviewer – or if there are any other ways you can support them. This practice will also support those who have additional needs and may not otherwise ask for the help and support they need.

- **Individual scoring before group assessment.** If using more than one interviewer, ensure that the scoring of each candidate against the agreed criteria occurs before the opinions of interviewers are collated. This is more likely to result in impartial assessment and avoids

<sup>6</sup> [www.catalyst.org](http://www.catalyst.org): break the cycle hr experts eliminating gender bias from the recruitment process

<sup>7</sup> [hbr.org](http://hbr.org): if theres only one woman in your candidate pool theres statistically no chance shell be hired

# The Level Project

Eliminating Bias in the Hiring Process



the groupthink bias, which results in a group of individuals prioritising reaching a consensus over making a good and balanced decision.

- **Balanced interview panel.** If possible, ensure candidates are interviewed by a gender-balanced panel. This helps the candidate to see themselves reflected in your organisation.
- **Hold managers accountable.** Make sure line managers understand that they will be expected to provide evidence to justify their hiring decisions. In fact, requiring a manager to provide evidence for all talent decisions will help to eliminate subjective assessment and gut instinct decisions, which are laden with bias and create an expectation.

## 8. Short-listing candidates

Short-listing and agreeing a final candidate are the points at which the work conducted on reducing bias should see results. Use data to verify the gender balance in progress through this stage to final offer. Work with the line manager to assess:

- **Validate the balanced slate and panel.** Confirm that the slate was balanced and that all candidates went through a similar interview process, with a balanced slate of interviewers.
- **Review interviewer assessments.** Review assessments completed by all interviewers to determine the group scoring for a candidate. Use this score to drive the recruitment decision.

- **Provide good feedback to unsuccessful candidates.** Candidates will speak about their experience with your organisation to others. This step is very important considering the level of social media interaction now and sites such as Glassdoor, which are providing a platform for feedback from candidates.