

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND UNCONSCIOUS BIAS AWARENESS FOR ACADEMIC PROMOTION

PURPOSE

Monash is committed to a fair and transparent promotion process, ensuring that principles of equal opportunity are applied in relation to the promotion process and that where applicable, candidates' achievements are to be evaluated relative to the opportunities available. To assist promotion committees in upholding the principles of fairness, free from any form of discrimination, this guide promotes awareness for committees assessing promotion applications in applying equal opportunity principles and mitigating effects of unconscious bias.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY GUIDELINES

Committee members must ensure that they do not discriminate either directly or indirectly when assessing candidate applications for promotion.

Discrimination is treating or proposing to treat, an individual unfavourably because they have a protected attribute*. Example: denying promotion on the basis that an academic seems too young to be promoted to the next level.

Discrimination can also involve imposing a requirement, condition or practice that operates to disadvantage a person (or group of persons) with a protected attribute, and it is not reasonable. Example: denying promotion to part-time or contract staff might constitute indirect discrimination because a higher proportion of women hold part-time or contract positions.

*The full list of protected attributes under anti-discrimination legislation is outlined in the Equal Opportunity Policy. Examples include sex, gender identity, race, disability, marital or parental status, age, sexual orientation.

ASSESSMENT RELATIVE TO OPPORTUNITY

Fair and equitable assessments must be made according to the promotion criteria on the basis of the candidate's achievements relative to opportunity. Achievement relative to opportunity is an evaluative framework in which there is a positive acknowledgement of what a staff member can or has achieved given the opportunities available to them. The approach shifts the focus to the overall quality and impact of achievements rather than the quantity, rate or breadth of particular achievements which in many instances are directly related to time available rather than talent, merit or excellence.

Supporting guides are available for:

- [Candidates](#); and
- Staff involved in [assessing applications](#) where an achievement relative to opportunity is required.

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Unconscious or 'hidden' bias refers to patterns of perceptions that are shaped by one's personal experiences, values and culture. Unconscious bias is natural and everyone has it. This is because the human brain is 'wired' to speed up information processing and decision making through the utilisation of mental short-cuts born out of automatic associations, not dissimilar to stereotyping. The result of this process is the development of assumptions about people and situations, which are not always accurate.

Unconscious bias can be about race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, age and parental status, just to name a few. It unwittingly permeates workplaces, affecting decision-making processes, including recruitment, promotion and development.

Most prevalent types of unconscious bias that directly impact academia include:

- **Affinity bias:** The tendency to warm to people who are more like us
- **Halo effect bias:** The tendency to only see the good about a person because of a personal affinity for the person
- **Perception bias:** The tendency to form stereotypes and assumptions about certain groups that can interfere with an objective assessment about individuals in those groups.
- **Confirmation bias:** The tendency for people to seek information that confirms pre-existing beliefs or assumptions.

Examples of unconscious bias affecting women:

- Science professors at research intensive universities rated applicants for a laboratory manager position more highly and offered them a higher starting salary if the name of the application was male (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012).
- When a scholarly journal introduced double-blind peer review, there was a significant increase in the number of papers published with female first authors. A similar journal in the same field did not experience the same pattern (Budden et al., 2008).

Mitigation of bias is complex. The detrimental effects of unconscious bias can be partly reduced through raising awareness (especially self-awareness), seeking diverse composition/membership of committee (decision-making) panels and equipping staff with competencies of inclusive leadership.

Promotion committee members should be encouraged to discuss their own biases before reviewing or interviewing candidates, keep a check list of how they mitigated their own biases and foster a fair and transparent process by calling out incidents of bias.

Inclusive Leadership training is available to Monash staff via myDevelopment and all committee members are encouraged to participate.

SELF-PROMOTION

Some people tend to be modest about their achievements and reticent in promoting themselves. Committees should be alert to this possibility, although it is the responsibility of heads of departments to ensure that staff receive appropriate assistance in preparing their applications.