Handbook on quality and diversity in recruitment

Equality and inclusiveness are in Aalto's core values, supporting our community's wellbeing, creativity and excellence.

Ilkka Niemelä, President
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Contents

High-quality recruitment

Each recruitment is a strategic opportunity to reshape our community. Therefore it's important to use time and effort to ensure a high-quality process.

The following techniques will enable the most suitable candidate being selected, while providing everyone involved a rewarding experience:

- solid project planning

- careful selection of the recruitment committee members, keeping diversity in mind

- clear and joint understanding of the role and what we have to offer for candidates

- creating an attractive job advertisement

- widely marketing the position and using proactive sourcing methods if needed

- active, considerate and equal communication with candidates

- assessing the candidates based on predefined criteria, using standardised evaluation methods

In this handbook, we will discuss the techniques that support equal hiring. They are in fact the same techniques that enable high-quality recruiting in general.

Following these recommendations, you will foster excellence and diversity simultaneously.

Why foster equality and diversity in hiring?

Promoting equality and diversity is valuable as such - but it is also an essential part of recruiting top talents. Attracting the broadest possible candidate pool and evaluating candidates fairly enhances our chances of attracting top talent and making excellent recruitments.

- In order for us to be world-class in research and education we don't want to miss a big part of the brain pool.

- Developing research fields requires diverse skills and people. Varied backgrounds in research and teaching staff enable looking at challenges from varying points of view.

- A diverse faculty is better equipped to support learning of and being role models for diverse students.

- Diversity is proven to feed creativity and innovation and to improve teams' abilities for solving challenges.

- Diverse talent attracts diverse talent – if we do not systematically use means to attract diverse talent, we keep renewing the old talent pool that is lacking a part of potentially brilliant minds.

The definition of diversity may also vary and depend on the context. We encourage the reader to consider what diversity means to them individually and what diversity means to their unit.

Further reading

Aramovich, N. & Chrobot-Mason, D. (2013). The Psychological Benefits of Creating an Affirming Climate for Workplace Diversity. Group & Organization Management, 38, 659–689.

About unconscious biases

Our unconscious biases affect our decision making, including decisions about hiring. Biases can even be at odds with our own conceptions of ourselves and our conscious values.

As human beings, we naturally assess and judge others in a quick, unconscious way. These judgements are influenced by our unique backgrounds, cultural environments and personal experiences. In short, we tend to favor those who are most like us. This is why unconscious biases are problematic in recruitment: they easily lead us to make decisions on insufficient grounds.

We cannot remove biases. We can, however, acknowledge they exist and seek to counteract them with recruitment practices that ensure fair evaluation of all candidates and selecting the most suitable person for the job. We will review these practices in this handbook.

"Bias can creep in when advertising positions, in the composition and working methods of selection committees and in the language itself of evaluations."

Gvozdanović & Maes, 2018

Videos

For a quick overview about the topic, watch a video 'Understanding unconscious bias' by *The Roayl Society*: youtu.be/PYaK1WphTuk

If you have a bit more time, watch a video 'Recruitment Bias in Research Institutes' by *Institució CERCA*: youtu.be/g978T58gELo

Further reading

Pritlove, C., Juando-Prats, C., Ala-Leppilampi, K. & Parsons, J. (2019). The good, the bad, and the ugly of implicit bias. Lancet (London, England), 393(10171), 502–504.

Gvozdanović, J. & Maes, K. (2018). Implicit Bias in Academia – a Challenge to the meritocratic principle and to women's careers - And what to do about it. LERU Advice paper.

Moss-Racusin, C., Dovidio, J., Brescoll, V., Graham, M., & Handelsman, J. (2012). Faculty's subtle gender biases favor male students. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 109(41), 16395–16396.

Prearrangements to support equality

It is your responsibility as recruiting supervisor or committee chair to ensure a fair quality process for all candidates and reduce the effect of unconscious biases.

Make sure the recruitment committee is diverse and thereby benefits from various perspectives. The composition of the recruitment committee also demonstrates workplace diversity to candidates and contributes to their engagement in the recruitment process.

However, diversity of the committee is not enough to ensure a bias-free process. Begin each recruitment with an orientation to implicit biases and a discussion about the themes discussed in this handbook. Also, consider naming an "equality observer" who is a faculty member but not part of the committee, to monitor for and point out bias-led discussion.

"[...] having female members on selection committees does not guarantee a bias-free procedure. What is needed is informed evaluators capable of avoiding the bias trap."

Gvozdanović & Maes, 2018

Further reading

Bagues, M., Sylos-Labini, M. & Zinovyeva, N. (2014). Do gender quotas pass the test? Evidence from academic evaluations from Italy. LEM Papers Series, Laboratory of Economics and Management (LEM), Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, Pisa, Italy.

Zinovyeva, N. & Bagues, M. (2011). Does Gender Matter for Academic Promotion? Evidence from a Randomized Natural Experiment. IZA Discussion Paper No. 5537.

Isaac, C., Lee, B., & Carnes, M. (2019). Interventions That Affect Gender Bias in Hiring: A Systematic Review. Academic Medicine, 84(10), 1440–1446.

Profiling the position

Clear understanding of the position will steer the recruitment process all the way to the final selection, ensure a fair quality process and reduce the effect of unconscious biases.

Develop a clear position description – without explicit criteria stated up front, we tend to unconsciously resort into criteria that supports personally favored candidates.

At the same time, **avoid making the position profile too specific**, as there are indications that too many requirements might discourage some highly qualified applicants from applying.

Consider the following when defining the position profile:

- Key responsibilities and expectations?

- Ideal background: education, academic background and accomplishments, other expectations about experience?

- Goals: what should the person accomplish during the first year? What about long term?

- What kind of competences do we expect? E.g. collaboration, leadership potential.

Further reading

Wille, L. & Derous, E. (2018). When job ads turn you down: how requirements in job ads may stop instead of attract highly qualified women. Sex roles, 79(7-8), 464-475.

Creating the advertisement

To attract the best candidates, pay attention to the words and the visuals you use in the job advertisement.

- **Make the job ad welcoming to all candidates**. Whenever possible, avoid using words that are often associated with certain gender (e.g. competitive or supportive). Select gender and minority inclusive photos in which diverse professionals are portrayed in active roles.

- **Use Aalto's job advertisement template with a diversity statement**: "We believe that people from diverse backgrounds can together reach the best results. Diversity is part of who we are: for example, over 40% of our academic faculty comes from outside Finland. We warmly encourage qualified candidates from all backgrounds, especially minorities, to apply, as we want to ensure our community's diversity and inclusiveness in the future as well. We are committed to equal and transparent recruitment procedures."

- In addition to telling what we require, **remember to describe our strengths as variedly as possible**. Tell about the department's success, excellent facilities, workplace culture, position's meaningfulness and societal impact.

- **Ask several people to review** the job ad text and the visuals.

When job advertisements were constructed to include more masculine wording, participants perceived more men within the occupations and women found these jobs less appealing.

Results confirmed that applicants' perceptions of belongingness – not perceived skills – affected the job's appeal.

Gaucher et al., 2011

Further reading

Gaucher, D., Friesen, J. & Kay, A. (2011). Evidence that gendered wording in job advertisements exists and sustains gender inequality. Journal of personality and social psychology, 01(1), 109–128.

Marketing the position

Attracting a wide pool of candidates requires marketing the position widely and using proactive sourcing methods.

- **Market the position in many different channels**: all physical and online environments where the ideal candidates spend their time.

- **Avoid relying too heavily on networks**, as they tend to strengthen the existing status quo and limit the candidate pool.

- **Personal, proactive outreach** is not only the best way to attract the best candidates, it's also the single most effective tool for building and diversifying the pool. Develop the list of potential candidates using several sources and use Aalto Talent Search. Make the list of potential candidates as large and diverse as possible, or list only candidates from underrepresented groups.

When these men use their social networks to search for candidates, the likelihood increases that a male candidate will be invited, nominated, and selected.

One reason these men gatekeepers are more inclined to invite and nominate men candidates, is their perceived similarity and identification with men.

van den Brink, 2014

Further reading

van den Brink, M. & Benschop, Y. (2014). Gender in Academic Networking: The Role of Gatekeepers in Professorial Recruitment. Journal of Management Studies, 51(3), 463.

Evaluation

Use of standardised evaluation practices and tools will lead to better recruitment decisions, as the effects of biases decrease and chances for objective evaluation of merits increase. This is also important for fostering equality.

- **Schedule enough time for screening, both individually and among committee**. Time pressure is one of the worst enemies of valid evaluation. Use the same level of scrutiny for evaluating each candidate's application material.

- **Throughout the process, evaluate candidates systematically in regard to predefined criteria**. To ease this, use a screening template when screening the applications, and templates for interviewing and assessing candidates (see examples attached).

- **Be aware of similarity bias when screening the applications**. Many studies have shown that irrelevant information about candidates tends to affect how we evaluate merits. We all have tendency to favour those alike us, e.g. those with a degree from our own alma mater.

- **Read review letters** critically; reviewers are subject to same biases we all are, at times reflecting stereotypic views of demographic groups.

- **Are you the chair?** Rethink minority candidates so that they are not accidentally overlooked - studies show that women and minorities do not necessarily get evaluated fairly in traditional recruitment processes.

- **Gain additional information** by using psychological assessments, reference checks and work samples.

Further reading

Knobloch-Westerwick, S., Glynn, C. & Huge, M. (2013). The Matilda Effect in Science Communication: An Experiment on Gender Bias in Publication Quality Perceptions and Collaboration Interest. Science Communication, 35(5), 603–625.

Steinpreis, R., Anders, K. & Ritzke, D. (1999). The Impact of Gender on the Review of the Curricula Vitae of Job Applicants and Tenure Candidates: A National Empirical Study. Sex Roles, 41, 509–528.

Interviewing

Find out about candidates' strengths in regard to pre-defined criteria and spark their interest. Only a structured interview setup functions as a valid assessment tool.

- **A structured interview is a prerequisite** – otherwise the validity of the interview findings is close to zero.

- **This means that all interviews should be held with the same format**. Draw up an interview template: a common set of questions used with each candidate. Reliable interviews are based on a standard interview question template (example attached), with additional follow-up questions. Ask the questions in the same order, to enable comparison between candidates.

- **Use enough time to interview**. If an interview lasts less than 1 hour, there is the risk of us relying on first impressions too heavily.

A major finding in interview research a few years ago is that interviewer judgements based on structured interviews are more predictive of job performance than those from unstructured interviews.

Macan, 2009
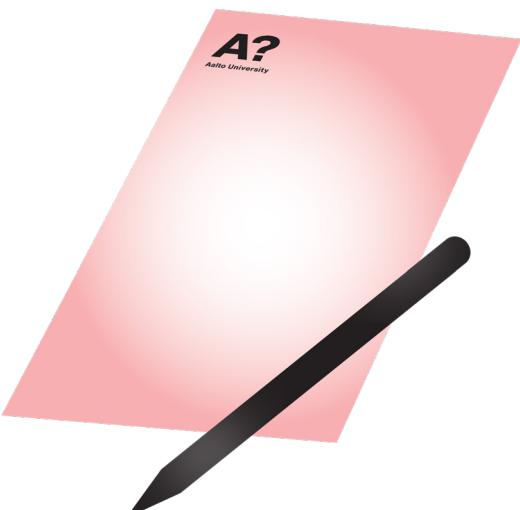
- **Good interview questions**:
  - Derive from the selection criteria.
  - Focus on candidate's concrete earlier achievements – the best predictor of success in the job you are interviewing for.
  - Are open-ended.

- **Stick to professional in interviews**: Do not ask personal questions related to e.g. family status or ethnic background: these are not related to succeeding at work but might affect evaluation. Keep in mind that common hobbies, for example, can increase the "likability" of a candidate and make objective evaluation of merits and potential harder.

- After the interview, **take time to evaluate the candidate** by using the evaluation template (example attached), and justify your evaluations out loud to your colleagues in the recruitment team. Use the same amount of time for discussing all candidates to ensure no one is overlooked.

"Your job is not to hire someone who you like or who has similar personal interests. Rather, it is to hire a colleague who challenges students and enhances the faculty in novel and innovative ways."

*Harvard University "Best Practices for conducting faculty searches" Handbook*

Further reading

Macan, T. (2009). The employment interview: A review of current studies and directions for future research. Human Resource Management Review, 19, 203–218.

Key learnings

Overwhelmed with all of the information and recommendations? Here are the main points crystallized.

1) Encourage everybody involved in the recruitment process to read this manual and discuss its themes together.

2) Be aware of unconscious biases – by recognizing them, and using techniques to counteract them, you can ensure attracting and selecting the best candidate for the position.

3) Develop a clear, but not too specific position description.

4) Make the job advertisement welcoming to all candidates, and market the position widely.

5) Evaluate the candidates in regard to predefined criteria using standardised evaluation practices.

6) When interviewing the candidates, use a structured approach and stick to questions that are related to predefined criteria.
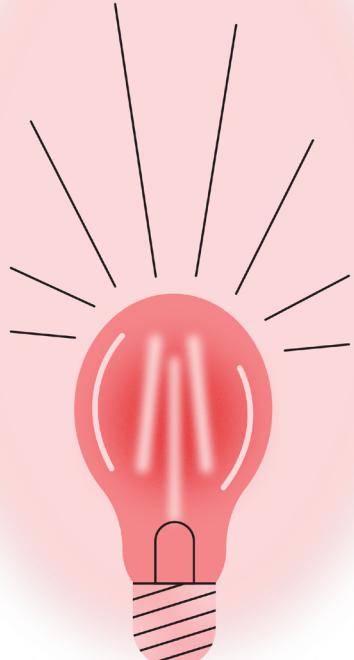
Attachments: templates for standardised evaluation

Evaluating candidates systematically in regard to predefined criteria will lead to better recruitment decisions, as the effects of biases decrease and chances for objective evaluation of merits increase.

To ease this, you can use templates for standardised evaluation. HR will give you the templates in your next recruitment. You can also find them on the Aalto University website at aalto.fi/en/services/recruitment-at-aalto. See examples on the following pages.

Screening template
When reviewing job applications, use the same level of scrutiny and the predefined criteria for evaluating each candidate's application material.

Interview template
Reliable interviews are based on a standard interview question template, with additional follow-up questions.

Candidate evaluation template
After the interview, take time to evaluate the candidate in regard to the predefined criteria. Use the same amount of time for discussing all candidates to ensure no one is overlooked.
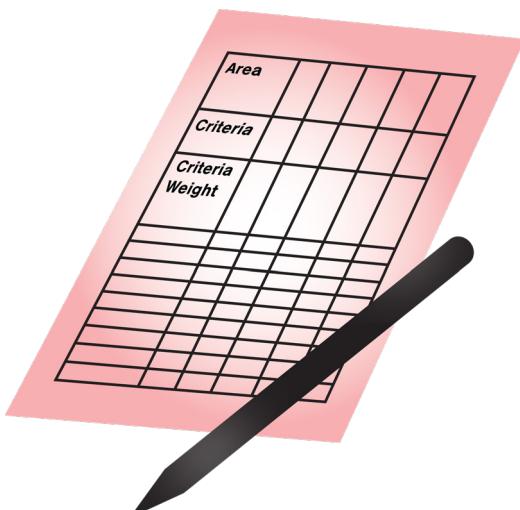
Screening template – example

	MOTIVATION		EXPERIENCE AND BACKGROUND		COMPETENCES	
Area	What are the unique factors in the position and Aalto that the candidate should be motivated about?		What kind of education, academic background and accomplishments and other work experience does the ideal candidate have?		What kind of way of working and collaborating does the position require? Will be evaluated mainly later in the recruitment process.	
Criteria Edit the criteria according to the position. Please note that the criteria written here are examples.	**Example** Clearly stated motivation for the position and Aalto	**Example** High level of ambition for building academic and societal excellence	**Example** Academic accomplishments: • Excellent academic track record • Successful research career	**Example** Work experience from the industry	**Example** Leadership: • Experience from versatile management and leadership positions • Strong motivation to lead others and help them grow • Servant leadership style	**Example** Collaborativeness and networks: • Strong collaboration, interaction and negotiation skills, willingness to work together • Good networks in the industry, capacity to build networks further
Criteria weight Select a suitable distribution of weight of each criteria (total: 100). Please note that the weights written here are examples.	15	10	20	10	15	15
Candidate 1						
Candidate 2						
Candidate 3						
Candidate 4						
Etc.						

(Additional Example columns for innovativeness under COMPETENCES:)

Innovativeness: • Willingness and track record in challenging the conventional and creating something new — weight 15

Interview template – example

Please edit the interview template's criteria, questions and schedule according to the position.

1. Welcome and brief introductions + opening words by committee chair / hiring manager (ready by xx.xx)

2. Telling something about the position, team, project etc. (ready by xx.xx)

3. Interactive interview (55 minutes; ready by xx.xx)

CRITERIA Please edit the criteria according to the position	QUESTIONS Please edit according to the position	ANSWERS, NOTES
Motivation for the position and Aalto Ready by xx xx Interviewer:	• Why did this position spark your interest? • Why would you like to work at Aalto University? • How do you expect Aalto University as an employer to differ from your previous employers?	
Experience, comptence Ready by xx xx Interviewer:	• How would you describe your professional experience and strengths in relation to this position? • How would you describe your experience in X? • What kind of achievements have you had in Y? • In relation to the position, which areas are less familiar to you? • We are an international community. Are you comfortable in using English as the working language? How about other languages?	
Leadership and management Ready by xx xx Interviewer:	• What kind of leadership experience do you have? • What motivates you in leadership positions? • Which parts of being a leader or manager do not feel that motivating or natural to you? • What kind of experience do you have in strategic management? • Please describe a challenging situation you have faced in your previous leadership position. How did you handle it?	
Collaboration, networks, stakeholder management Ready by xx xx Interviewer:	• What are your strengths? • What are your development areas /weaknesses? • How would you describe your existing networks that are relevant in this position? • How do these stakeholders know you as a collaboration partner? • How would you describe your strenghts in networking and collaboration? • How are you as a team member? • What do you wish from your team?	
Working style, decision making style, pressure tolerance Ready by xx xx Interviewer:	• What kind of working culture suits you the best? • How would you describe your decision making style? • What kind of things or situations do you find frustrating at work? How can others see it if you are frustrated? • What kind of things or situations cause you (negative) pressure? • How would you describe the balance between work and other life?	
Candidates questions closing the interview Ready by xx xx Interviewer:	What kind of questions do you have in mind? Informing the candidate about the next steps (HR)	

Candidate evaluation template – example

Please edit criteria and their weights according to the position.

Area	MOTIVATION		EXPERIENCE AND BACKGROUND			COMPETENCES	
What are the unique factors that the candidate should be motivated about?	What kind of education, academic background and accomplishments and other work experience does the ideal candidate have?					What kind of way of working and collaborating does the position require?	
Criteria: What does the criterion mean in this position? Edit the criteria according to the position. Please note that the criteria written here are examples.	**Clearly stated motivation for the position and Aalto**	**High level of ambition for building academic and societal excellence**	**Academic accomplishments** • Excellent academic track record • Successful research career	**Work experience from the industry**	**Leadership** • Experience from versatile management and leadership positions • Strong motivation to lead others and help them grow • Servant leadership style	**Collaborativeness and networks** • Strong collaboration skills and willingness to work together • Good networks in the industry and capacity to build networks further	**Innovativeness** • Willingness and track record in challenging the conventional and creating something new
Criteria weight: **How important is the criterium?** Select a suitable distribution of weight of each criteria (total: 100). Please note that the weights written here are examples.	15	10	20	10	15	15	15

Candidate evaluation template – example

Please edit criteria and their weights according to the position.

Please rate on scale of: 1 = fair, 2 = satisfactory, 3 = good, 4 = very good, 5 = excellent

Criteria and weight Please edit according to the position	Motivation (15)	Academic accomplishments (20)	Experience (20)	Leadership (20)	Collaborativeness (15)	Innovativeness (10)
Candidate 1						
Candidate 2						
Candidate 3						
Candidate 4						
Etc.						

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