

AVOIDING DISCRIMINATORY LANGUAGE IN RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

(September 18)

The Equality Act 2010 allows positive action¹ in favour of under-represented groups, but in the absence of a 'Genuine Occupational Requirement' it is illegal to require a person of a particular gender, race, age, etc for a role, even if that group is under-represented in the recruiting cohort. The University has several approved positive action statements designed to encourage applications from individuals from under-represented groups; please consider whether women (or men) are under-represented in the recruiting area at the grade being advertised and complete the Post Approval Form (PAF) accordingly in order that the appropriate statement can be included in the advertisement. A statement encouraging applications from BAME cohorts will be included in all adverts given the University's current staffing profile.

- Protected characteristics stipulated in the Equality Act are: age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership and gender reassignment. Language discriminating against any of these should be avoided in job advertisements and further particulars, and requirements framed neutrally. For example:
 - Instead of saying you are seeking someone 'flexible' (which may deter those with caring responsibilities), stipulate working hours so potential applicants can assess whether they might meet these requirements, given their personal circumstances.
 - Consider whether the ability to speak and/or write excellent English is really necessary to the role (for instance, it may not be necessary for a domestic assistant).
 - Where the ability to communicate in a particular language *is* a requirement, frame that requirement as a skill (for example, 'fluent in Italian') rather than a nationality ('Italian').

¹ The Equality Act 2010 sets out two type of positive action, general and specific. General positive action provisions allow an employer to take steps to encourage people from an under-represented group to take advantage of opportunities for employment. Taking such steps is subject to certain conditions, including having the objective to reduce the under-representation in the employer's workforce. The steps can include measures to encourage or train people from an under-represented group to apply for jobs.

- It is illegal to stipulate upper or lower age limits. Avoid terms which imply you are seeking someone of a particular age (e.g. 'youthful', 'dynamic', 'enthusiastic', 'mature' or 'experienced'). Similarly, although you may wish candidates to demonstrate experience of certain roles, avoid asking for numbers of years of experience; instead, ask candidates to evidence abilities.
- Avoid phrases which might deter disabled applicants (e.g. 'active', 'physically fit'). Instead, specify particular skills and abilities, e.g. 'ability to lift equipment up to 5kg'. Where a role requires travel, use 'driving licence required' *only* where driving a vehicle is necessary; in other cases, note instead that the 'ability to travel between sites in a timely manner is essential'.

GENDERED LANGUAGE

The use of words with male or female connotations in job adverts can discourage applicants (see examples in Annex 1),² so please frame advertisements, further particulars and person specifications as neutrally as possible. For instance:

- Use inclusive pronouns – 'you' rather than 'he' or 'she'.
- Avoid describing your ideal candidate with superlatives such as 'expert', 'superior', 'world-class'.
- Ensure essential requirements really are essential (research indicates women are unlikely to apply for a position unless they meet all essential criteria; men are likely to apply if they only meet 60% of them).
- Specify levels rather than specific degrees where you can, and/ or use phrases such as 'degree in X or a cognate subject' where appropriate.

Where appropriate, specify skills and attributes with 'feminine' connotations (such as 'team work', 'good listener', 'creativity' – eg: 'creative problem solver' –) as well as those with 'masculine' connotations (such as 'leader', 'confidence', 'self-reliance').

You may wish to run your text through this gender decoder tool, which assesses text for gender bias (<http://gender-decoder.katmatfield.com/>).

In addition:

- specify support structures (e.g. induction, training, mentoring) especially in areas where women (or BAME candidates) are under-represented and potentially isolated.
- Utilise particular networks, and social media, to extend your applicant pool.

² Gaucher, Friesen and Kay (2011)

Annex 1

Examples of words that may have masculine and feminine connotations (adapted from Gaucher, Friesen and Kay (2011))

Masculine connotations

Ambitious
Assertive
Autonomy
Challenging
Competitive
Confident
Decisive
Determination
Independent
Leadership
Principled
Superior
Self-confident
Self-reliant

Feminine connotations

Committed
Cooperative
Empathetic
Interdependence
Interpersonal
Responsive
Sensitive
Supportive
Sympathetic
Understanding