

Race Equality in Recruitment, Promotion and Advancement – Good Practice Resource

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Disclaimer

This Good Practice Resource has been developed as an informational and good practice resource regarding race equality practices for HEIs. It is not intended to constitute formal guidelines, codes or policies prepared or adopted under Section 143 of the Higher Education Authority Act 2022.

Nothing in this Good Practice Resource should be interpreted and/or construed as legal advice or as displacing the statutory responsibilities, governance arrangements, or institutional autonomy of Higher Education Institutions. Higher Education Institutions remain fully responsible for ensuring compliance with applicable laws, including but not limited to matters relating to employment, equality, and data protection.

Contents

Part 1: Understanding race equality in employment	1
1. Introduction	1
2. Employment Equality Acts and Equal Status Acts	3
2.1. Positive action under the Employment Equality Acts	5
3. Racial discrimination and bias	7
3.1 Direct and indirect discrimination	7
3.2 Institutional discrimination	9
3.3 Recognising racial inequalities and discrimination	11
3.4 Intersectionality and compounded disadvantage	12
Part 2 Recruitment	15
4. Role design	15
4.1 Writing the job specification	17
4.2. Non-traditional applicants criteria	19
4.3. Fixed-term and precarious contracts	20
5. Advertising	22
5.1 Welcome statements	24
Part 3 Selection	26
6. Shortlisting	26
6.1. Assessment of international qualifications	28
6.2. Considering immigration status	28
6.3. Selection panels	29
7. Designing an assessment process for interviews	31
8. Visas and immigration	32
9. Job offers	34
9.1 Unsuccessful candidates	36
10. Onboarding and induction	38
11. Retention	40
11.1 Complaints, grievance and dignity at work	41
Part 4 Career Advancement and Promotion	43
12. Career advancement	43
12.1. Career Advancement for Academic staff	45
12.2. Career Advancement for Professional and Administrative Staff	46
13. Probationary review	47
14. Annual review and personal development planning	49
15. Promotion	50
15.1. Advertising rounds	52

15.2. Promotion Selection panels.....	53
15.3. Grading / scaling	55
15.4. Mentoring and preparation for promotion	59
15.5. Monitoring and data	61
15.6. Appeals and review.....	63
Appendix 1: Quick Reference Checklists.....	65
Appendix 2: Glossary of Terms	67

Part 1: Understanding race equality in employment

1. Introduction

This Good Practice Resource has been developed to support higher education institutions in considering evidence-informed approaches to staff recruitment, promotion and progression practices.

The research which underpins this resource has been funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) but this Good Practice Resource does not constitute a guideline, code or policy within the meaning of Section 143 of the Higher Education Authority Act, 2022. It relates to statutory and other obligations which are owned and/or owed by higher education institutions. Higher education institutions need to be satisfied at all times that they are in compliance with their own obligations and take their own advice in respect of such obligations.

It focuses in particular on the structural conditions that produce and reproduce racial inequality in academic and professional employment. It is addressed to those responsible for designing and implementing recruitment and promotion processes, including HR professionals, heads of department, members of selection panels, equality, diversity and inclusion leads, and senior leaders. It is intended to provide a Good Practice Resource that institutions can adapt to their own governance structures and institutional contexts.

Race equality in employment is defined in this Good Practice Resource as equal representation, equal experiences and equal outcomes for staff from minority ethnic backgrounds, consistent with the definition adopted by the HEA in its national survey¹. Race inequality correspondingly denotes unequal representation, unequal experiences and unequal outcomes for staff from these groups². This framing, drawn from the comparative equality literature, emphasises outcomes as the appropriate criterion of assessment rather than procedural intention. This distinction has significant implications for how institutions design, monitor and evaluate their employment practices.

¹ Kempny, M., & Michael, L. (2021). [Race equality in the higher education sector: Analysis commissioned by the Higher Education Authority](#). Higher Education Authority.

² University of Galway (2023), [Race Equality Framework and Action Plan 2023 – 2027](#), November 2023.

The Good Practice Resource's scope encompasses all staff from minority ethnic backgrounds including Irish Travellers, Roma, migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking people. It recognises that these groups experience racial inequality in different ways, at different intensities, and through different mechanisms.

The Good Practice Resource is a direct output of the national action committed to in the HEA Race Equality Implementation Plan 2022–2024. It was developed in response to the HEA Race Equality in the Higher Education Sector survey, which documented significant racial inequalities across Irish higher education.³ It identified patterns of differential experience, precarious employment and structural exclusion disadvantaging staff and students from minority ethnic backgrounds⁴. The report recommended clear, practical guidance on recruitment, promotion and progression practices across the sector.

A targeted consultation process was undertaken during the development of this Good Practice Resource to ensure that the Good Practice Resource was informed not only by the existing evidence base and policy framework, but also by the practical knowledge and lived experience of those working within, and affected by, recruitment and progression processes in Irish higher education. The consultation was designed to capture perspectives from a strategically selected range of stakeholders, including HR departments, EDI department and members of the university race equality network. It comprised two focus groups with EDI staff, one with members of university race equality networks, and six individual interviews with HR staff in phase one, and three focus groups with minority ethnic staff in phase two. These engagements were structured to facilitate both in-depth discussions and the sharing of experiential insights across different institutional roles. In addition, the development of the Good Practice Resource was informed by a comprehensive review existing toolkits produced by universities internationally, alongside a review of relevant academic books, peer-reviewed articles and published reports in this area. Feedback from the consultations and insights from the literature review were analysed thematically and integrated to identify the principal barriers, enabling conditions, and priority areas for institutional action addressed in the Good Practice Resource.

This Good Practice Resource is informed by the provisions of the Employment Equality Acts, under which higher education institutions may take positive action measures to address the

³ Kempny, M., & Michael, L. (2021). [Race equality in the higher education sector: Analysis commissioned by the Higher Education Authority](#). Higher Education Authority.

⁴ Royal Irish Academy and the British Council Ireland (2020), [Race, Ethnicity and Change in Higher Education](#).

underrepresentation of certain groups. The Good Practice Resource also sits within a wider and developing policy architecture. At national level, it is aligned with the National Action Plan Against Racism 2023–2027 (NAPAR), which commits the Irish government and public bodies to systematic action to eliminate racism and advance equality across all domains of public life, including public sector employment. It reflects and operationalises the HEA's Anti-Racism Principles for Irish Higher Education Institutions, launched at the first National Race Equality Conference in March 2023, through which institutional presidents committed to embedding race equality in institutional culture, strategy and practice. It is further aligned with the Athena Swan Ireland programme which requires institutions to identify and address the structural dimensions of race inequality rather than attending solely to individual-level interventions.

2. Employment Equality Acts and Equal Status Acts

Irish higher education institutions operate within a clear and enforceable legal framework governing race equality in employment.

The principal domestic instrument is the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015⁵, which prohibit discrimination in employment on nine grounds, including the ground of race. For the purposes of the Acts, the race ground covers race, colour, nationality, and national or ethnic origin. The Acts apply to all aspects of employment, including access to employment, conditions of employment, training and experience for or in relation to employment, promotion or regrading, and dismissal. Discrimination is defined as treating a person worse or less favourably than another person in a comparable situation on the ground of race, whether that differential treatment is direct or indirect. The Acts also prohibit harassment constituted by conduct related to the race ground, and victimisation of persons who have made or supported a complaint of discrimination.

Irish Travellers are also protected under a distinct ninth ground in the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015: membership of the Traveller community. Migrants and people of migrant background, including Roma, are protected under the race ground, which covers national or ethnic origin.

A critical feature of the Employment Equality Acts is that they apply to all stages of the recruitment process, not only to the final appointment decision. This has direct implications

⁵ [EMPLOYMENT EQUALITY ACT, 1998](#).

for the practices addressed throughout this Good Practice Resource. A criterion included in a person specification that has a disproportionate adverse effect on candidates of a particular racial group, and which cannot be demonstrated to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim, may constitute unlawful indirect discrimination. This applies regardless of the absence of discriminatory intent and regardless of whether the criterion was applied consistently. This statutory position has direct relevance to job design, person specifications, shortlisting processes, interview design, promotion criteria, and grading frameworks, all of which are addressed substantively in this Good Practice Resource.

The Equal Status Acts 2000–2018⁶ prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods and services on the same nine grounds. While these Acts are primarily concerned with access to services rather than employment, they have relevance to HEIs in their capacity as providers of education and in their relationships with students, contractors, and service users from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Under the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty⁷, established under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, all public bodies (including HEIs) are legally required to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and treatment, and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users, and all those affected by their policies and plans. Critically, this duty applies to institutional functions and policies, not only to individual employment decisions. It requires institutions to assess the equality and human rights implications of their practices, to collect and monitor relevant data, and to report publicly on how they are giving effect to the duty. Recruitment, selection, promotion, and career development processes are all institutional functions to which this duty applies.

Ireland is also bound by the obligations of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)⁸, a legally binding international human rights treaty that requires states parties to pursue active policies to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms, including in employment. CERD General Recommendation 30 (2004) underlines that the protections of the Convention apply to non-citizens as well as citizens.

⁶ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2020), [THE EQUAL STATUS ACTS 2000-2018 A guide to your rights if you are discriminated against in accessing goods or services](#), October 2020.

⁷ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2024), [Implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty Guidance for Public Bodies - Second Edition](#), December 2024.

⁸ United Nations (1965), [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#).

This provision is particularly relevant in the Irish HEI context, given the significant proportion of international staff in the sector.

At the European level, Council Directive 2000/43/EC (the EU Racial Equality Directive)⁹ prohibits discrimination on grounds of racial or ethnic origin in employment, education, social security, and access to goods and services. The Directive establishes the principle of equal treatment, provides for a shift in the burden of proof in discrimination cases where a complainant establishes facts from which discrimination may be presumed, and requires member states to ensure effective, proportionate and dissuasive legal remedies. It is given effect in Irish law through the Equality Acts outlined above but also supersedes them in the Irish courts. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which has the force of primary EU law, further enshrines equality before the law (Article 20) and non-discrimination on grounds of racial or ethnic origin (Article 21) as fundamental rights applicable across EU institutions and member states.

The Higher Education Authority Act 2022¹⁰ strengthens the HEA's statutory basis for promoting equality, diversity and inclusion across the Irish higher education sector. It enables the HEA to require institutions to provide disaggregated equality data and to set conditions related to equality and diversity in funding arrangements. This legislative development significantly strengthens the national accountability framework within which the higher education institutions are required to operate.

2.1. Positive action under the Employment Equality Acts

The Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015 permit higher education institutions to take positive action measures to address the underrepresentation of groups protected under the Acts, including the race ground. Understanding what positive action is, what it is not, and what conditions must be met for it to be lawful is essential for institutions seeking to move beyond procedural neutrality towards interventions capable of producing measurable change in outcomes.

Positive action refers to measures specifically designed to prevent or compensate for disadvantages experienced by persons in a protected group, in order to facilitate full equality in practice. Under Section 33 of the Employment Equality Acts, it is not unlawful to take measures specifically to promote equality of opportunity for certain groups where such

⁹ [COUNCIL DIRECTIVE 2000/43/EC](#), 19 July 2000.

¹⁰ [Higher Education Authority Act 2022](#), 31 November 2022.

measures are taken to prevent or compensate for disadvantages linked to one of the nine protected grounds¹¹.

Lawful positive action measures in the Irish HEI context include:

- Targeted outreach and recruitment advertising directed at underrepresented groups, including advertising posts through channels with strong reach among minority ethnic communities.
- Targeted development and preparation programmes for minority ethnic background staff considering promotion, designed to address structural barriers rather than to imply individual deficiency.
- Structured mentoring and sponsorship schemes with active outreach to minority ethnic background staff.
- Tie-break provisions: where two candidates are equally qualified following a fair, criteria-based assessment, selecting the candidate from an underrepresented group in order to address that underrepresentation.
- Targeted fellowships, scholarships, or funded posts designed to bring minority ethnic background researchers into the institution at the point of transition from postdoctoral to independent academic careers.
- Adjustments to eligibility criteria, such as extending promotion eligibility to staff on fixed-term contracts, where the existing restriction produces a racially disparate effect without legitimate justification.

Positive action is not the same as positive discrimination. Positive discrimination involves selecting a candidate from a protected group on the basis of their group membership rather than on merit. Positive discrimination is not permitted under the Employment Equality Acts. A selection decision that bypasses the published criteria in order to appoint a minority ethnic background candidate who does not meet the role requirements would constitute unlawful discrimination against other candidates. Positive action is legally distinct and is permitted by law, and protected by the EU Racial Equality Directive (Council Directive 2000/43/EC). The Directive explicitly permits specific, voluntary measures designed to prevent or compensate for disadvantages linked to racial or ethnic origin, ultimately aimed at ensuring full equality in practice.

¹¹ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, [THE EMPLOYMENT EQUALITY ACTS 1998-2015 A guide to your rights if you are discriminated against in the workplace or in seeking work](#), October 2020.

For a positive action measure to be lawful, it must be directed at a group that is underrepresented or disadvantaged, and it must be proportionate to the disadvantage it is designed to address. Institutions should document the evidence of underrepresentation or disadvantage on which each measure is based, and review the measure periodically to assess whether it remains appropriate and proportionate. This documentation also provides a record that can be relied upon if the measure is challenged.

The lawful approach is to ensure that criteria are genuinely merit-based, that structural barriers to meeting them are addressed through positive action, and that where candidates are equally qualified, underrepresentation may be a tiebreaker. Where positive action measures are incorporated into the processes described in this Good Practice Resource, for example, in targeted advertising, mentoring provision, or tie-break arrangements, this should be recorded in the relevant process documentation and communicated to all those involved.

3. Racial discrimination and bias

A substantial body of empirical research has demonstrated that racial discrimination in employment does not occur only, or even primarily, when a decision-maker consciously and deliberately treats a candidate less favourably on the basis of race. The evidence is consistent across disciplines and jurisdictions that most discrimination in contemporary institutional settings is structural, systemic and frequently invisible to those who perpetuate it. Understanding the different forms that racial discrimination and bias take, and the mechanisms through which they operate, is a prerequisite for designing processes capable of effectively addressing them.

3.1 Direct and indirect discrimination

Direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than a comparator in a comparable situation, and race is a causative factor in that differential treatment.¹² In recruitment, direct discrimination may take such forms as the rejection of candidates on the basis of name, nationality, accent or perceived ethnic background, whether the basis for that rejection is made explicit or operates implicitly. Research has consistently demonstrated that candidates with names associated with minority ethnic backgrounds receive significantly fewer callbacks for interview than candidates with equivalent

¹² The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2023), [PROTECTING MINORITY RIGHTS A Practical Guide to Developing Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Legislation](#).

qualifications and experience presenting names associated with the majority population, across a range of national and sectoral contexts^{13,14}. This effect has been documented in higher education as well as in broader labour markets. It operates independently of whether individual recruiters believe themselves to be acting fairly.

Indirect discrimination is typically less visible in its operation but more pervasive in its effects. Under the Employment Equality Acts, indirect discrimination is established where a provision, criterion or practice that appears neutral on its face places persons of a particular racial group at a particular disadvantage compared with other persons, and where the institution cannot demonstrate that the provision, criterion or practice is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim¹⁵. The principle of proportionality, derived from EU law, requires that policies that indirectly discriminate are appropriate to the legitimate aim pursued and go no further than is necessary to achieve it.

In the higher education context, indirect discrimination commonly arises at several points in the employment and promotion process. Person specifications that require continuous career trajectories, without provision for contextualising structural interruptions such as periods of precarious employment, visa restrictions or caring responsibilities, place candidates who have faced those barriers at a systematic disadvantage. Promotion criteria that weight research metrics (publication counts, grant income, citation impact) in ways that reflect accumulated institutional advantage rather than intrinsic scholarly merit operate similarly. Requirements for idiomatic English language fluency extending beyond what the role genuinely demands may also constitute indirect discrimination, as may the use of informal referral and recommendation networks as primary recruitment channels, where those networks are not accessible to candidates from minority ethnic backgrounds.

A critical feature of indirect discrimination in law is that intent is irrelevant to establishing a claim. What matters is whether the criterion or practice produces differential adverse impact on a protected group, and whether the institution can demonstrate objective

¹³ Bertrand, M. and Mullainathan, S. (2004) 'Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labour market discrimination', *American Economic Review*, 94(4), pp. 991–1013. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257%2F0002828042002561&ref=ceobias.com>.

¹⁴ Wood, M., Hales, J., Purdon, S., Sejersen, T. and Hayllar, O. (2009) *A Test for Racial Discrimination in Recruitment Practice in British Cities*. DWP Research Report No. 607. London: Department for Work and Pensions.

¹⁵ Michael, L. and Ogutu, G. (2024) [Organising for Active Inclusion and Anti-Racist Workplaces and Trade Unions](#). Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

justification. This has a direct practical implication because institutions cannot rely on the absence of discriminatory intent as evidence that their processes are fair.

3.2 Institutional discrimination

Institutional discrimination refers to the ways in which organisational structures, cultures and practices reproduce racial inequality independently of individual intent or animus. Unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping are key mechanisms. The concept has been applied extensively to higher education^{16,17}, where research has documented its operation across the full range of employment processes from recruitment through to promotion and retention.¹⁸

In the Irish higher education context, institutional discrimination is evident in several interconnected patterns. The HEA Race Equality survey report¹⁹ documented high levels of occupational segregation, with staff from minority ethnic backgrounds disproportionately concentrated in fixed-term, part-time and sessional contracts and significantly underrepresented in permanent, senior and leadership posts.^{20,21}

International evidence from neighbouring jurisdictions reinforces this picture. Black, Asian and minority ethnic background academics in UK higher education account for only 13% of professors despite constituting a substantially higher proportion of the overall academic workforce²², with Black academics making up less than 1% of UK professors. Minority ethnic background economists working in research-intensive universities were 45% less likely to hold professorial or managerial functions than their white counterparts.²³

¹⁶ Ahmed, S. (2012). On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life. In *On being included*. Duke University Press. Duke University Press.

¹⁷ Arday, J. and Mirza, H.S. (eds.) (2018) *Dismantling Race in Higher Education: Racism, Whiteness and Decolonising the Academy*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60261-5>

¹⁸ House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2021), [The Macpherson Report: Twenty-two years on Third Report of Session 2021–22](#).

¹⁹ Kempny, M., & Michael, L. (2021). [Race equality in the higher education sector: Analysis commissioned by the Higher Education Authority](#). Higher Education Authority.

²⁰ Leeson, L., & Maher, H. Transforming Gender Equality and Inclusion Within Higher Education in Ireland. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-3-031-89502-9.pdf>.

²¹ Bhopal, K., & Brown, H. (2016). Black and minority ethnic leaders: Support networks and strategies for success in higher education. *Leadership Foundation for Higher Education*.

²² Higher Education Statistics Agency (2024) *Higher Education Staff Statistics: UK, 2022/23*. Cheltenham: HESA. Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff>.

²³ Baltaru, R. D. (2024). Minority ethnic staff in universities: Organisational commitments, reputation and the (re) structuring of the staff body. *Sociology*, 58(1), 66-82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385231163107>.

Institutional discrimination can lie within:

- The design of promotion criteria that reward a career trajectory focused on sustained research output, significant grant income, and institutional leadership that is only achievable with access to well-resourced and supportive institutional environments. Where minority ethnic background staff have been concentrated in teaching-heavy or precarious roles, they are less likely to have accumulated this record, not because of differential capacity or commitment, but because of differential access to the conditions that make it possible.
- The use of student evaluation data in promotion assessments without adjustment for the documented racial bias in how students rate minority ethnic background academics. Where panels rely on these scores as a proxy for teaching quality, they incorporate a racialised judgment into what presents as an objective measure.
- The informal distribution of high-visibility leadership and development opportunities through collegial networks that remain predominantly white. Where access to assignments with opportunities for professional development, committee roles and senior sponsorship depends on informal relationships rather than a transparent process, it tends to reproduce the demographic composition of those already in positions of influence.^{24,25}
- The disproportionate burden of equality and diversity service placed on minority ethnic background staff. Because such staff are few in number and frequently called upon to represent, advise and support both their institutions and their minority ethnic background colleagues, they carry a service load that their white peers do not share. This work is rarely recognised in promotion criteria, and the time it consumes is time unavailable for the research and leadership activities on which promotion depends. This dynamic has been termed the "minority tax" in the literature²⁶

²⁴ Arday, J. (2022). No one can see me cry: Understanding mental health issues for Black and minority ethnic staff in higher education. *Higher Education*, 83(1), 79-102. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-020-00636-w>.

²⁵ Oldridge, L., Ridgway, M., Dahill, D., Gee, R., Nachmias, S., Olotu-Umoren, L., Pswarayi, J., Smith, S., Selby-Shaw, N. and Garrett, R. (2025) Career barriers and enablers for ethnically minoritised senior professional services roles in UK Higher Education. Nottingham: Nottingham Trent University. <https://ntu-repository.worktribe.com/OutputFile/2543708>.

²⁶ Rodríguez, J.E., Campbell, K.M. and Pololi, L.H. (2015) 'Addressing disparities in academic medicine: what of the minority tax?', *BMC Medical Education*, 15(6). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-015-0290-9>.

Addressing institutional discrimination requires, by definition, attention to the systems within which individual decisions are embedded rather than only to the quality of those individual decisions. This Good Practice Resource reflects this understanding, focusing structure on the design and governance of employment processes so that they are capable of producing equitable outcomes, rather than on the modification of individual attitudes as a substitute.

3.3 Recognising racial inequalities and discrimination

Recognition of racial inequality is a necessary but insufficient condition for addressing it, and the translation of recognition into sustained institutional action requires both robust data infrastructure and genuine organisational commitment at all leadership levels.^{27,28}

The most important categories of data for HEIs to collect and systematically analyse are disaggregated monitoring data on recruitment applications, shortlisting outcomes, appointments, promotions and leavers by ethnicity; staff survey data on the experience of discrimination, microaggressions, and institutional support; and complaints data disaggregated by grounds and outcome. The absence of this data, which characterises many Irish institutions where systematic ethnicity data collection has historically been limited, does not indicate the absence of inequality²⁹. The HEA Act 2022 and the HEA's associated data requests to institutions are designed to address this structural gap at national level.

Recognition of discrimination in institutional settings also requires an understanding of how racial harm presents in everyday organisational interaction. Racial microaggressions are defined as brief, commonplace daily indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults³⁰. They constitute one mechanism through which institutional discrimination is reproduced at the interpersonal level. They are extensively documented in the experiences of minority ethnic background staff in higher education. We often assume minority ethnic background academics to

²⁷ Kalev, A., Dobbin, F. and Kelly, E. (2006) 'Best practices or best guesses? Assessing the efficacy of corporate affirmative action and diversity policies', *American Sociological Review*, 71(4), pp. 589–617. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240607100404>.

²⁸ Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. In *On being included*. Duke University Press. Duke University Press.

²⁹ Royal Irish Academy and the British Council Ireland (2020), [Race, Ethnicity and Change in Higher Education](#).

³⁰ Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: implications for clinical practice. *American psychologist*, 62(4), 271. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271>.

occupy a junior position irrespective of their actual grade. Minority ethnic academics have their authority and expertise questioned repeatedly by students and colleagues in ways not experienced by white counterparts. Assumptions about national origin or immigration status in response to accent or appearance, and the systematic undervaluation of teaching and scholarship in areas of race and equality when pursued by minority ethnic background academics, are also consistently reported^{31,32}. These experiences are not incidental to career outcomes. They have a cumulative effect on wellbeing, research productivity, relationship with the institution, and ultimately on retention.

Recognising racial inequality is a necessary condition for addressing it, but recognition alone is not sufficient. Research on diversity work in higher education has identified a recurring institutional pattern in which equality policies are treated as ends in themselves rather than as instruments of change, where the statement of commitment substitutes for, rather than motivates, action.³³ The HEA Race Equality Survey found evidence of this pattern in the Irish context, documenting a significant gap between institutional commitments and the lived experiences of minoritised staff and students.³⁴ The Good Practice Resource is directed at closing that gap, by providing a Good Practice Resource designed to allow Higher Education Institutions to strengthen the employment processes through which equitable outcomes are produced, and to allow them to establish and continuously review and adapt as needed their own monitoring and accountability structures without which those outcomes cannot be tracked or sustained by them.

3.4 Intersectionality and compounded disadvantage

Staff from minority ethnic backgrounds may face compounded disadvantage where race intersects with other protected characteristics, including gender, disability, religion and belief, age, migration status, or membership of the Traveller community. These axes of disadvantage are not simply additive. They interact to produce specific and sometimes

³¹ Advance HE. (2021). Black Lives Matter and the student voice One year on, what can equality, diversity and inclusion practitioners in UK higher education learn from actions that followed the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020. Black Lives Matter and the student voice | Advance HE (advance-he.ac.uk).

³² Arday, J. (2022) 'No one can see me cry: Understanding mental health issues for Black and minority ethnic staff in higher education', *Higher Education*, 83(1), pp. 79–102. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-020-00636-w>.

³³ Ahmed, S. (2012). On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life. In *On being included*. Duke University Press. Duke University Press.

³⁴ Kempny, M., & Michael, L. (2021). [Race equality in the higher education sector: Analysis commissioned by the Higher Education Authority](#). Higher Education Authority.

distinct patterns of exclusion that are invisible if each characteristic is analysed in isolation.³⁵

In the higher education context, the available evidence points to several compounded patterns of particular relevance. The gender equality infrastructure developed through Athena Swan has highlighted the need for distinct analytical tools to address racial inequality.³⁶

For example, Black women academics face barriers that are neither fully captured by analysis of gender inequality among white women nor by analysis of racial inequality among Black men, including specific forms of erasure in collegial settings, differential scrutiny of their authority, and a near-total absence of senior role models.³⁷ Muslim staff face additional barriers related to religious practice (prayer facilities, fasting accommodation, calendar conflicts) that intersect with racial inequality to shape belonging and retention. Staff from migrant backgrounds may experience racial inequality compounded by language, cultural unfamiliarity with Irish institutional norms, and visa-related precarity that shapes every aspect of their employment relationship.

Those responsible for designing and reviewing processes should maintain active awareness that single-axis thinking can render compounded disadvantage invisible, and note that monitoring data and qualitative feedback can be used to identify where this is occurring.

- Person specifications, promotion criteria, and probationary review frameworks should be assessed not only for their impact on minority ethnic staff as a group but with attention to whether they compound disadvantage for staff who belong to multiple protected groups.
- Mentoring and sponsorship programmes should consider intersectional need in how participants are matched. A mentor who understands gender inequality in HE may not be equally equipped to support a Black woman navigating the specific combination of racialised and gendered dynamics she faces.

³⁵ Crenshaw, K. (1989). 'Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), Article 8. Available at: <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8/>.

³⁶ Porter, O., Kangataran, S., Duvvury, N., & Michael, L. (2025). The Emergence of an Intersectional Race Equality Agenda Within Irish Higher Education. In L. McIlrath et al. (eds.) *Transforming Gender Equality and Inclusion Within Higher Education in Ireland: Contemporary Perspectives* (pp. 367-389). Springer. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-3-031-89502-9.pdf>

³⁷ Rollock, N. (2019). Staying power: The career experiences and strategies of UK Black female professors. UCU. <https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/27819/>.

- Where a staff member declares personal circumstances in a promotion application or probationary review, the context provided should be read with an understanding that multiple structural factors may be operating simultaneously and that their cumulative effect may be greater than each considered individually.
- Data collection and monitoring systems should be designed, where possible, to capture intersectional patterns. Where the numbers are too small for cross-tabulated disaggregation without identifying individuals, institutions should ensure their qualitative monitoring (staff surveys, exit interviews, focus groups) is designed to surface intersectional experience.

Part 2 Recruitment

4. Role design

The design of a role, and the specification used to define the ideal candidate, is one of the earliest and most consequential points at which racial inequality enters recruitment. The field of candidates can be narrowed at a very early stage in recruitment to the exclusion of candidates from minority ethnic backgrounds if the job or role identified for fulfilment is associated with a narrow function, area of expertise or qualification. It is good practice to assess if the narrowing criteria are fair, and if the aims can be achieved another way, e.g. by asking for a similar type of qualification or broadening the area of expertise considered, or supporting the candidate to work towards a qualification once in post³⁸.

Person specifications that include criteria unrelated to genuine occupational requirements, or that overemphasise characteristics correlated with socially privileged career pathways, systematically disadvantage candidates from racialised minority ethnic backgrounds. Common examples include: requirements for prior experience in elite or well-resourced institutional settings; the use of "cultural fit" as a selection criterion; preference for continuous career trajectories that penalise those who have faced structural barriers; and overemphasis on informal networks and referrals in defining what "excellence" looks like. Separately, the framing of "essential" and "desirable" criteria can be used to narrow the field before any formal shortlisting has taken place, embedding exclusion at the point of design rather than selection.

Two patterns emerge here. First, person specifications that require continuous publication records, established international profiles, or sustained grant income without contextualisation disadvantage candidates whose careers have been shaped by structural barriers: visa restrictions, periods of precarious employment, caring responsibilities, and exclusion from the informal networks through which research collaborations and funding opportunities are typically brokered. These criteria are not race-neutral; they reflect and reward cumulative advantage. Second, the available Irish evidence suggests that minority ethnic background academics are disproportionately employed on temporary, precarious contracts, engaged to teach individual modules without full institutional profile, meaning they are structurally excluded from the pathways that lead to permanent appointment.

³⁸ Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2022), [A guide to inclusive recruitment for employers](#), November 2022.

Where job design perpetuates a distinction between research-active, tenure-track posts and contingent teaching roles, it reproduces this exclusion at source.

Before drafting the role design:

- Conduct a role analysis that asks: what does this role actually require, and what evidence exists that each proposed criterion is necessary for effective performance? Involve staff from diverse backgrounds in this conversation where possible.
- Review whether the role as currently designed reflects legacy assumptions about how academic or professional work is structured, and consider whether those assumptions could be revised.
- All persons specifications for posts at senior lecturer level and above, or for any role defined as leadership-facing, should be subjected to an equality-focused review prior to sign-off. This review may be undertaken by the EDI unit or by appropriately trained human resources personnel, depending on institutional structure.
- A brief record of the criteria-review process should be retained as part of the recruitment file.

When drafting the role design:

- Distinguish rigorously between criteria that are genuinely essential for the role from day one, and those that are desirable or could be developed in post.
- Avoid criteria that function as proxies for socially privileged pathways. This includes: requirements for a continuous publication record without acknowledgement of career breaks; network-based criteria such as "established international profile" that disadvantage early-career or geographically constrained candidates; and informal signals of fit such as "collegial manner" or "cultural alignment with departmental values" that are not defined or assessable.
- Where quantitative outputs (publications, grants, citations) are used, contextualise these against career stage, field norms, and any declared interruptions to the person's career trajectory.
- State clearly, in the job advertisement and person specification, that the higher education institution welcomes applications from candidates from racialised minority ethnic backgrounds and that criteria will be assessed with reference to context.

Where person specifications include criteria that cannot be demonstrated to be necessary for effective performance in the role, higher education institutions may be exposed to

indirect discrimination claims under the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015. Because the proportionality of any given criterion is assessed at the point at which it is set, a failure to conduct and document a criteria-review process leaves the institution without a defensible record if a claim is made.

4.1 Writing the job specification

A clear, compelling, and inclusive job description will influence the candidate's decision to apply for the role and help cast a wide net to bring in the best applicants from many diverse backgrounds.

Using biased language or unnecessary cultural requirements can limit the talent pool, leading to the loss of high potential candidates. Candidates from minority ethnic backgrounds may be dissuaded from applying for positions by the criteria set out or the language used in the job advert. This is already well recognised in respect of gender in recruitment, and similar patterns arise here³⁹.

Before drafting the job description:

- Identify whether each criterion is essential or desirable for the role.
- All job specifications for posts at senior lecturer level and above, or for any role defined as leadership-facing, should be subject to an equality focused review prior to sign-off, undertaken by the EDI unit or appropriately trained HR staff, as appropriate to institutional capacity.
- A brief record of the criteria-review process of job description should be retained as part of the recruitment file.

When drafting the job specification:

- Use gender neutral language in job descriptions, avoid colloquialisms, idiom, slang, figures of speech, and metaphors. Use active voice rather than passive, spell out acronyms the first time they are used, and use gender neutral pronouns (them/they).
- Consider only advertising the essential requirements for the role, specify equivalent or desirable experience as an alternative to a degree requirement, remove all unnecessary requirements including unnecessary education requirements and include criteria related to skill behaviours and values.

³⁹ The University of Edinburgh, [Diversifying Recruitment Guidance](#), January 2025.

- Write in a welcoming manner, and mention your institution's policy or commitment on EDI which will be of significant importance to candidates with a diverse background.
- Consider flexibility, think about adjustments that could be made during job design for candidates with physical or hidden disabilities such as hybrid working, and invite your EDI chair or champion to review the job description prior to advertising.
- Avoid superlatives or adjectives which could be subjective, use a language decoder to remove biased language and add additional information about equivalent qualifications required.
- Focus on transferable skills that are relevant to the position and be transparent about the type of experience which will be considered as part of the application.
- Be transparent about the types of experience which will be considered as part of the application, for example, will you accept experience gained in a different sector or outside the working environment?

Research has demonstrated that minority ethnic background job seekers were also less attracted to job ads targeting a trait they have negative meta-stereotypes about. For example, describing a candidate as naturally confident and assertive (dispositional wording) rather than able to present ideas clearly in meetings and engage constructively with colleagues (behavioural wording). The distinction between dispositional and behavioural wording did not significantly influence the observed effect. However, minority ethnic background job seekers who were qualified for a negatively meta-stereotyped trait decided not to apply when that trait was worded in a dispositional (vs. a behavioural) way.⁴⁰

When an academic post is specified at the level of a sub-field rather than a broader disciplinary area, it dramatically reduces the eligible pool. This means the post tends to reproduce the intellectual priorities of an already-homogeneous department and, in social sciences and humanities, but also in wider STEM areas, exclude the kinds of interdisciplinary, decolonial, or diaspora-focused scholarship that minority ethnic background academics are more likely to bring. A narrowly specified post limits the

⁴⁰ Wille, L., & Deros, E. (2017). Getting the words right: When wording of job ads affects ethnic minorities' application decisions. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 31(4), 533-558. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318917699885>

institution's ability to exercise this, even where it would be lawful and appropriate to do so, because the field of candidates who could plausibly be appointed is already so small.

Because minority ethnic background scholars in Ireland and the UK are statistically less likely to have held permanent posts and more likely to have had interrupted or non-linear careers, they may have had fewer opportunities to specialise in the particular area specified by the institution. A broader specification would admit a wider field of qualified candidates, including those whose expertise has developed across related areas, and give the opportunity for them to demonstrate their capacity to fill the relevant post. For professional and support roles, the equivalent is over-specification of sector experience requiring, for example, prior HE experience for a communications or finance role that could be filled from a wider labour market. This has a similar filtering effect, since minority ethnic background candidates are less likely to have been employed in the HE sector to begin with.

4.2. Non-traditional applicants criteria

Thinking about the journey as PhD, postdoctoral research, peer-reviewed publication record, grant income, the evidence shows that minority ethnic background scholars face structural barriers at each stage, including differential access to doctoral funding, supervisory networks, and the institutional affiliations that support research productivity. Person specifications written exclusively around this trajectory systematically exclude candidates who are qualified to do the job but have not had equal access to the conditions that produce these markers.

For academic posts, "non-traditional" typically means candidates who have come to academic careers via professional practice, community-based research, activism, or policy work rather than the standard PhD-postdoc-lecturer pipeline. Minority ethnic background scholars are disproportionately represented in this group partly because structural barriers make the conventional pipeline less accessible, and partly because community-engaged and applied research traditions have historically been undervalued by universities focused on academic-only careers.

For Professional and Managerial Support Staff (PMSS) posts, requirements for formal qualifications or prior HE sector experience as conditions of eligibility can exclude candidates who have developed equivalent competence through private sector, public sector or third sector roles. Since minority ethnic background candidates are less likely to

have been employed in higher education to begin with, these requirements function as indirect barriers even where no discriminatory intent exists.

Considering Non-traditional applicants criteria:

- For academic posts, person specifications should explicitly recognise non-traditional career pathways as qualifying experience. Where a conventional publication record is listed as essential, the specification should state that equivalent outputs (e.g.) policy reports, practice-based research, community-co-produced work, professional publications, will be considered on their merits.
- For PMSS posts, formal qualification requirements should be reviewed to establish whether they are genuinely necessary or whether demonstrated competence through equivalent experience should be accepted. Where qualifications are listed, the specification should state that equivalent professional experience will be considered.
- The language "or equivalent experience" should appear wherever a formal qualification or specific institutional background is listed, and panels should be briefed on what this means in practice before shortlisting begins. It is not sufficient to include the phrase without guidance on how to apply it.
- Requirements referencing institutional prestige or sector-specific experience should be removed unless a compelling, documented justification exists.

4.3. Fixed-term and precarious contracts

The disproportionate concentration of minority ethnic background staff on fixed-term, sessional, and hourly-paid contracts is one of the most clearly evidenced structural features of racial inequality in Irish and UK higher education. It is also one of the most consequential, because precarious employment shapes access to every process described in this Good Practice Resource: candidates who have been employed on rolling fixed-term contracts are less likely to have the continuous publication record, institutional profile, and senior advocacy that recruitment and promotion processes reward. Contract type is one of the primary mechanisms through which racial inequality is reproduced in higher education. Research examining the experiences of minority ethnic staff in UK HEIs found that participants described their contract conditions as significantly more likely to be precarious,

lacking the protections or advancement opportunities that accrue to permanent staff.⁴¹ The HEA Race Equality Report also documented this pattern in Irish institutions.⁴²

Institutions cannot address race equality in promotion without addressing the conditions in which minority ethnic staff are employed in the first place. This requires attention at the point of role design before a post is advertised.

At the point of role design:

- Before advertising any post on a fixed-term or sessional basis, institutions should assess whether the nature of the work genuinely requires a temporary contract or whether a permanent post would be appropriate. Fixed-term contracting for work of an ongoing nature is not only a race equality concern but a legal risk under the Protection of Employees (Fixed-Term Work) Act 2003. Where rolling renewals of fixed-term contracts have become a substitute for permanent employment, this should be identified and addressed.
- Where a fixed-term contract is genuinely appropriate, the institution should consider whether staff employed on it will have access to the development opportunities, promotion rounds, and career support described in this Good Practice Resource. Where they will not, the conditions of the contract are themselves a mechanism of racial disadvantage.
- Institutions should audit their use of fixed-term contracts disaggregated by ethnicity, and report the findings to their EDI committee. Where minority ethnic staff are disproportionately employed on non-permanent contracts, this should be treated as a systemic equality concern requiring a formal response.

During employment on a fixed-term contract:

1. Staff on fixed-term contracts should be explicitly informed of their eligibility, or ineligibility, for promotion rounds, and should not be excluded from career development support on the basis of contract type alone.
2. Where a fixed-term contract is renewed on multiple occasions, the institution should assess whether the staff member's contract should be converted to a permanent

⁴¹ Arday, J. (2022). 'More to prove and more to lose': race, racism and precarious employment in higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 43(4), 513–533.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2022.2074375>

⁴² Kempny, M., & Michael, L. (2021). [Race equality in the higher education sector: Analysis commissioned by the Higher Education Authority](#). Higher Education Authority.

one, in line with legal obligations, and whether continued fixed-term status is producing inequality in career outcomes.

3. Contract renewal decisions should be made through a transparent, criteria-based process, not left to supervisor discretion. Where renewal is denied, written reasons should be provided and the staff member should have access to a review or appeal mechanism.

5. Advertising

Job advertisements represent the first point of contact between employers and job seekers. By signalling characteristics expected of an ideal candidate, job ads “gatekeep” the labour force and configure its composition. Meanwhile, labour force composition can also shape the wording of job ads. Gender and racial segregation represent persistent and key forms of inequality in the labour market.

To ensure inclusivity and attract a diverse range of candidates and to not exclude or deter some candidates it is recommended to use inclusive language in job adverts and a variety of channels.

- Consult with the EDI team to check that the role and overall approach align with equality, diversity and inclusion principles and there is no unconscious bias in the process. HR should be also included in this consultation.
- Plan the recruitment approach in advance, including where the role will be advertised and how the application process will be structured, to ensure it is accessible and does not introduce unconscious bias for candidates with minority ethnic backgrounds or potential candidates which could apply from outside of Ireland and the EU.
- Provide details of the hiring manager and give candidates the opportunity to make contact to introduce themselves and ask questions during the application window.
- Choose relevant equality, diversity and inclusion criteria in relation to job grade in all of your adverts and include relevant award/accreditation logos or names.
- Some recruitment platforms include required fields which cannot be removed. In this case, we recommend asking a colleague (not included in the recruitment decision) to collate the applications and remove any irrelevant information before passing them on to the hiring manager. This way decisions will be based only on the essential criteria for the role.
- Ensure that the application period is sufficiently long to allow a diverse range of candidates, including those with limited networks or caring and any other

responsibilities, adequate time to become aware of the opportunity and submit application.

Where job advertisements include biased language, unclear or culturally specific criteria, or unnecessary requirements, candidates from minority ethnic backgrounds may be excluded or discouraged from applying, even where they are qualified. A lack of transparency around how experience is recognised, particularly for candidates with international or non traditional backgrounds can further disadvantage certain racial and ethnic groups. Complex application processes and the collection of unnecessary information increase the risk of unequal treatment and biased decision making.

Consider how formal advertising outlets can be supplemented through sharing in other media and platforms. It is important to note however that sharing via network-based social media, such as LinkedIn, can increase applications from a narrow networked base unless the wider discipline or sector is highlighted and invited through tagging or promotion.

Relationships between the higher education institution and external organisations are another source of potential recruitment and can be leveraged to increase the diversity of candidates. Proactively reaching out to diverse communities and networks can help broaden the talent pool and attract candidates from under-represented backgrounds. This may involve partnering with community organisations, attending diversity-focused job fairs, and leveraging social media platforms to connect with diverse talent⁴³.

Planning outreach activities:

- Identify which groups are underrepresented in previous recruitment rounds and plan targeted outreach towards minority ethnic groups rather than relying only on existing networks.
- Represent your existing workforce diversity at recruitment events. Representation of minority ethnic groups is one of the strongest ways to improve the diversity of applications.

⁴³ The University of Warwick, [Inclusive Recruitment Social Inclusion](#), 2024.

- Map out where and how the role will be promoted beyond formal channels, including local and national diversity networks, community organisations and platforms with strong minority ethnic and underrepresented user.
- Plan in advance how and where the role will be shared, including working with external organisations, using wider social media networks.
- Use higher education institution platforms to increase engagement. For example, a statement from the Head of School on EDI, updating websites with images of diverse people/employees, developing a dedicated EDI webpage, inclusive recruitment collateral, using social media platforms to target job adverts at underrepresented audiences.
- Advertise through local and national diversity networks and consider advertising in media which has a strong user base amongst minoritised groups.

5.1 Welcome statements

A welcome or inclusion statement is increasingly common in recruitment. It indicates to potential candidates that your recruitment process is welcoming, inclusive, and accessible to candidates from a wide range of backgrounds. It helps address under-representation and encourages equal opportunity for all applicants. Organisations increasingly make such statements in recruitment to highlight their commitment to diversity and to attract applicants from diverse backgrounds. Featuring the welcome statement in a highly visible position on the recruitment website or advert will be more effective than at the end of a job description document, which is where they often appear⁴⁴.

- Review your institution's current diversity and inclusion policies and identify key commitments you want to reflect in the statement.
- Consider how the language and tone of the statement can actively encourage application from underrepresented groups.
- Write the statement in plain, direct language that makes clear the institution genuinely welcomes applications from candidates from racialised minority backgrounds, rather than using generic diversity language that candidates may read as formulaic. Name the groups the institution is committed to supporting where possible, in line with the scope set out at the start of this Good Practice Resource.
- Position the statement prominently — at the top of the job advertisement or on the landing page of the recruitment portal — rather than at the foot of the job

⁴⁴ Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2022), [A guide to inclusive recruitment for employers](#), November 2022.

description document, where it is less likely to be seen by candidates deciding whether to apply.

- Ensure the statement is consistent with the institution's wider equality commitments and that the practices described in this Good Practice Resource are in place to support it. A welcome statement carries credibility only where the process it introduces is designed to deliver on it.

Some examples of welcome statements:

- UCD welcomes applications from everyone. We are committed to creating an environment where diversity is celebrated and everyone is afforded equality of opportunity. Learn more about Diversity at UCD.
- At the University of Galway, we celebrate diversity and believe that every candidate can bring unique perspectives, talents and approaches to our University community. We actively encourage applications from all backgrounds regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, family status, civil status, membership of the Traveller community, sexual orientation, disability or age. We value flexibility and recognise that a work-life balance is essential. We offer flexible working arrangements, including hybrid options, to accommodate the diverse needs of our staff. Our commitment to inclusivity extends beyond recruitment as we foster a friendly and supportive work environment, where all work styles are valued and respected. Join us in shaping a workplace that thrives on diversity, creativity and collaboration.

Part 3 Selection

6. Shortlisting

Shortlisting is a key stage at which racial inequality can enter the inclusive recruitment process, often through how applications are interpreted rather than through a formal criterion. While candidates may meet the essential requirements, decisions can be influenced by factors such as the perceived prestige of institutions, familiarity of qualifications, or assumptions about career progression. Candidates from minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to have non linear career paths, qualifications from less recognised institutions, or experience in precarious or teaching focused roles and may therefore be disadvantaged at this stage despite being suitably qualified.

Race equality is particularly affected by how information in CVs is read: names, educational backgrounds, employment histories, and gaps in experience can signal ethnicity, nationality or migration statuses, and can shape how candidates are ranked.

To mitigate this, shortlisting should be structured and evidence based. Candidates should be assessed strictly against the agreed criteria using a consistent scoring method, and decisions should be made by more than one reviewer. The removal of personal identifiers from applications can reduce the influence of bias by focusing attention on relevant skills and experience. In addition, the composition of both the panel and the shortlist should be considered: where diversity is absent, or where only one candidate from an underrepresented racial group is included, this should be prompt review of the process, including whether re-advertisement or further outreach is required to ensure a fair and inclusive results⁴⁵.

During the shortlisting stage, particular care should be taken to minimise both conscious and unconscious bias that may cause a candidate to be unfairly excluded from the process. Excluding any individual because of their race, nationality, ethnicity and colour not only disrupts the process but also undermines the inclusive recruitment and calls that integrity of the entire procedure into question⁴⁶.

Before starting the shortlisting process:

⁴⁵ King's College London, [Inclusive Recruitment at the IoPPN](#), August 2022.

⁴⁶ University College Dublin, [Hiring Managers Guide Inclusive Recruitment Practices](#), 16 October 2019.

- Engage with EDI team in advance of shortlisting to seek guidance on how the process should be conducted, including how to minimise bias and ensure that shortlisting decisions are fair, consistent and aligned with the institutional commitment to race equality.
- Ensure that a diverse shortlisting panel is in place and that more than one reviewer is involved. Where minority ethnic background staff are asked to participate in shortlisting panels, their contribution should be formally recognised in the workload allocation models and explicitly taken into account in promotion and career progressions processes.
- Ensure panel members have awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion, including unconscious bias.

When carrying out shortlisting process:

- Shortlisting should be conducted by more than one reviewer and where possible by a diverse panel e.g. gender, age, ethnicity and other protected characteristics. Panel members should be aware of their own biases, consider how these may affect how candidates are ranked, and challenge assumptions respectfully; appropriate training in equality, diversity and inclusion, including unconscious bias, should be undertaken in advance.
- A consistent scoring method should be agreed in advance and applied strictly against the published criteria. Candidates should be assessed on the required qualifications, skills and experience only, not on institutional background or assumption.
- As CVs often contain implicit diversity information e.g. name, address, education and career history, personal identifiers should be removed where possible so that decisions are based on skills and experience. Candidates should not be discounted due to gaps in employment, fewer publications or non-linear career pathways, which may reflect maternity, caring responsibilities, illness or other structural factors.
- The chairperson of the shortlisting panel should actively invite challenges from panel members on EDI and other considerations about the shortlist, rather than waiting for issues to be raised.
- If the longlist or shortlist is not diverse, the higher education institution should consider re advertising the post or widening the pool, including through recruitment agencies required to provide diverse longlists. Evidence shows that where only one candidate from an underrepresented group is shortlisted, they are unlikely to be appointed; a reserve list should be in place in case withdrawals reduce diversity further.

- Shortlisted candidates should be informed of the interview format and any assessments in advance, and reasonable adjustment should be made where required. Institutional commitments, including the disability confident scheme, should be applied consistently so that disabled candidates who meet the essential criteria are invited to interview.

6.1. Assessment of international qualifications

Candidates from racialised minority ethnic backgrounds living in Ireland may still be disproportionately likely to hold qualifications from institutions outside Ireland or the EU. Where hiring panels lack the knowledge or tools to assess these equivalently to Irish or UK awards, the evidence shows that there is a pattern of undervaluing and excluding them. Qualifications from institutions in the Global South are particularly vulnerable to this pattern. Qualified candidates can be screened out or ranked lower than their qualifications warrant. For PMSS posts, the equivalent risk arises where panels are unfamiliar with professional qualifications or sector experience gained outside Ireland, and default to treating domestic experience as the benchmark.

- All hiring panels should be directed to NARIC⁴⁷ Ireland's International Qualifications Database as a standard resource. Where a candidate holds a qualification not immediately familiar to panel members, a NARIC comparability statement should be sought before any assessment decision is made. This is a free service and should be treated as a procedural requirement, not an optional step.
- Person specifications and job advertisements should not express a preference for qualifications from specific countries or institutional systems. Where a qualification level is required, it should be expressed in terms of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications level, with a statement that equivalent international qualifications will be assessed on their merits.
- Panel members should receive specific briefing on the assessment of international qualifications as part of any pre-search equality training, not left to individual judgement.

6.2. Considering immigration status

Selection panels sometimes factor immigration status into shortlisting decisions, either because candidates have disclosed it voluntarily or because panels make assumptions based on name, accent, or perceived national origin. This is both unnecessary and problematic.

⁴⁷ Quality and Qualifications Ireland, [National Academic Recognition Information Centre](https://www.naric.ie/).

Whether a candidate has the right to work in Ireland, or can obtain it, is not a question for the shortlisting panel and should not function as a filter at this stage. Where it does, it shifts the basis of assessment away from merit and towards administrative convenience, in a way that disproportionately affects candidates from racialised minority backgrounds, particularly those with non-EEA status. Eligible candidates can be excluded before their application is properly assessed, even where a valid permit route exists. This is a form of indirect discrimination, and it is not mitigated by the absence of deliberate intent.

When carrying out shortlisting:

- HR units will ordinarily check that a candidate is eligible for the relevant work permissions related to the advertised role prior to sharing applications with the shortlisting panel.
- Questions about visa status, right to work, or nationality should not be raised at shortlisting or interview stage by panel members. These questions are for HR to address, at the appropriate stage, after a conditional offer has been made.
- Candidates should not be filtered out or ranked lower on the basis of assumed immigration complications. Where a panel member is uncertain whether a candidate would be eligible to work in Ireland, that question should be referred to HR rather than resolved informally through the shortlisting decision.
- Panel members should receive specific briefing on immigration status as part of pre-process equality training so that this boundary is clearly understood before shortlisting begins, and is not left to individual judgement in the room.

The proactive steps institutions should take before advertising a post, including permit eligibility assessment, right-to-work check timing, and contract alignment, are set out in section 8.

6.3. Selection panels

Selection panels without an adequate understanding of bias can end up making decisions based on familiarity rather than the criteria and this often means that candidates who look like previous hires or who come from familiar institutions and career paths are more likely to be shortlisted or selected. Candidates from racialised minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly those with international qualifications or different careers may be overlooked even when they meet the requirements of the role. On the other hand, it can also affect how candidates are treated during the process. Some candidates may be questioned more closely, interrupted more often or judged more harshly because their experience is less

familiar to the panel. These differences are not always intentional but they have real consequences and the result will be that the diversity of the applicant pool is not reflected in the final outcomes.

Panel training and diversity helps to build trust with candidates and support a more inclusive recruitment process, particularly for candidates from underrepresented backgrounds. Institutions should support ongoing learning through initiatives such as EDI workshops, safe spaces and learning communities and training that addresses implicit bias, microaggressions and structural inequalities.

Before panel selection:

- Ensure that the need for a diverse and balanced selection panel is identified in advance, including consideration of representation across gender, ethnicity, career background and other relevant characteristics.
- Confirm that all proposed panel members have completed appropriate training in employment equality, and non-discrimination and EDI, including unconscious bias (see further detail below).

Shortlisting:

- Ensure all panellists have undertaken appropriate training on employment equality, non-discrimination, EDI and unconscious bias within 12 months and understand how to assess candidates objectively throughout the process.
- Panels should be diverse and balanced representing a mix of backgrounds, including gender, ethnicity, career pathways and other characteristics.
- Panel members such as chair or designated EDI champion should take responsibility for monitoring inclusion, challenging groupthink and ensuring that bias is identified and addressed during the selection process.
- Panel members should remain alert to bias in how candidates are evaluated, including the use of research metrics such as journal and funding-based measures, and the chair should actively invite and encourage panel members to challenge to challenge assumptions and each other's judgment where necessary.
- The panel should meet in advance of reviewing applications to agree the selection criteria and ensure that all candidates are assessed consistently against both the required technical competence and relevant institutional values.
- Allowing panellists to discuss in full the scoring of each candidate; all panellists should have equal time to share their evidence based assessment of each candidate;

there is not a rush to consensus or attempts to influence others, and panellists should be prepared and encouraged to openly share their own views and to constructively challenge colleagues when there is a lack of evidence to support assertions.

7. Designing an assessment process for interviews

The purpose of this stage is to assess candidates consistently against the requirements of the role and to ensure that selection decisions are based on clear evidence, not overall impressions.

Bias enters interview scoring when criteria, scoring scales and evidence recording are not clearly defined in advance. Research shows that initial impressions formed early in an interview can shape how the rest of the interview is judged and can influence the final outcome. Candidates who are more confident, quicker to respond, or more familiar with interview settings often come across as stronger, even when their answers are not actually better. If panel members do not consciously separate listening from judging, and do not record their own scores individually straight after each interview, decisions tend to drift towards overall impressions rather than evidence.

The format of the interview and attention by the panel to consistency affects who is able to demonstrate their ability. If questions are overly long, unclear, asked differently to different candidates, or the format isn't explained in advance, some candidates are put at an immediate disadvantage, particularly those less familiar with the Irish system or with formal interview settings. It is advantageous to keep questions clear, ask them consistently, and give all candidates the same level of support and time. This ensures that interview performance actually reflects a candidate's ability rather than their familiarity with the process.

Before interviewing:

- Agree in advance how candidates will be scored and what counts as evidence for each score, so assessment does not rely on confidence, communication style or familiarity with interview norms.
- Be clear about what the interview is assessing and how different types of experience will be valued, so that candidates with international backgrounds or non-linear career paths are not disadvantaged in how their experience is interpreted.

- Where the selection process includes elements in addition to interview, agree the purpose, weighting and assessment criteria for each element in advance, and decide whether and how feedback will be provided.
- Have as diverse an interview panel as possible. This is both an opportunity to demonstrate that the institution is genuinely inclusive and a safeguard against decisions defaulting to familiar markers of "fit."
- Schedule interviews with enough lead time after the application deadline that international applicants have time to secure a visa; avoid a format where one candidate is the only person interviewed online.
- Give all applicants invited to interview details of the format and setting in advance, ask if they require reasonable adjustments, provide questions in advance where appropriate, and consider including an EDI-related question for candidates, particularly for senior roles.

During and after the interview:

- Ask the same questions, in the same way, of every candidate. Use plain English, avoid long or multi-part questions, and focus on the candidate's motivation as well as the specific criteria.
- Actively listen and give all candidates the same level of encouragement and support to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, for example through probing questions if an answer is incomplete. Only evaluate a candidate's suitability once the interview has finished, not while it is still underway.
- For online interviews: test the technology in advance for both candidate and panel, confirm the candidate can hear you, and make any agreed online reasonable adjustments.
- After each interview, panellists should take time for individual, quiet reflection to record their own scores and notes before any group discussion, and should be prepared to justify each decision with evidence. Keep secure records of scoring and decision-making for at least six months, in line with institutional record retention policy.

8. Visas and immigration

Visa and immigration processes are frequently treated as purely administrative requirements, separate from questions of equality. In practice, they function as one of the earliest mechanisms through which racial inequality enters the recruitment process. Access to Irish employment permissions is not evenly distributed. It is closely tied to global and

racialised patterns of mobility, and to the unequal distribution of wealth, geopolitical standing, and institutional affiliation across countries of origin. When hiring decisions incorporate assumptions about visa status, sponsorship requirements, or perceived administrative burden, even informally and without discriminatory intent, they displace assessment of a candidate's capacity to do the role. Immigration status becomes a filtering device that disproportionately affects candidates from racialised minority backgrounds, particularly those entering the Irish employment market from outside the EU.

Addressing this requires institutional action at the pre-advertising stage, not only at the point of shortlisting or offer. The question of whether the institution is willing and able to support a work permit application is a policy decision that should be made before a post is advertised, on the basis of the role's eligibility rather than administrative preference. The question of whether a specific candidate holds the right to work should be addressed by HR after a conditional offer has been made, in line with standard employment practice.

Before advertising the post:

- HR should assess whether the role would qualify under a Critical Skills Employment Permit, a General Employment Permit, or another available route under Irish immigration law, and should document this assessment as part of the recruitment file.
- The advertisement should state clearly whether the institution is willing to support a permit application. Blanket statements that the institution cannot sponsor work permits should be reviewed and justified: in many cases these reflect administrative preference rather than legal necessity, and they disproportionately narrow the field in ways that correlate with race and national origin.
- Person specifications and advertisements should not express a preference for candidates who already hold unrestricted work authorisation, unless this is a demonstrable legal requirement of the role. Where a permit route is available, restricting the post to candidates who do not require one closes off that route without legitimate justification.
- Deadlines and application windows should take into account that candidates applying from outside Ireland or the EU may face additional logistical constraints, and should not inadvertently disadvantage international applicants.

During the process and at offer stage:

- Right-to-work checks should be conducted by HR at the conditional offer stage, not by panels at shortlisting or interview. Aligning visa validity with the full duration of a fixed-term contract as a shortlisting criterion can exclude candidates who are legally eligible to work but whose permission is time-limited or renewable — a condition that disproportionately affects non-EEA applicants and is not relevant to their ability to perform the role.
- Where a candidate requires immigration support following a conditional offer, this should be handled proactively and without unnecessary delay. Administrative failures at this stage (lost documentation, slow institutional responses, unexplained requirements) send an early signal about how the institution values staff who have navigated complex routes to appointment.
- Relocation costs and logistical considerations should not be factored into selection decisions. Evaluating the financial or administrative burden of appointing an international candidate introduces considerations that are unrelated to merit and that disproportionately disadvantage applicants from outside Ireland and the EU.
- Institutions should develop a formal mechanism for recognising disadvantages related to work permit conditions and restrictions on travel, so that these structural factors can be taken into account appropriately in probationary review and career development, not used as grounds for exclusion at the point of recruitment.

9. Job offers

This is a stage in which earlier decisions can be reinforced or quietly reshaped. Even where candidates have been scored, panels can move away from the recorded evidence during discussion, place more weight on confidence, familiarity, or a sense of who is a better fit. Where panels are responsible for producing a ranked list of candidates, similar dynamics can influence how candidates are ordered and subsequently selected for job offers. These shifts tend to favour candidates whose profiles and presentation align with what the panel is used to seeing, and can disadvantage candidates from racialised minority ethnic backgrounds whose experience or communication style may differ. Keeping decisions anchored to documented evidence, and ensuring that all panel members contribute equally, is necessary to prevent this situation.

There are also specific points at this stage where racial inequality can be reproduced in less visible ways. References are often treated as factual, but they frequently contain differences in tone and emphasis that reflect racialised patterns in how candidates are described. Similarly, salary decisions can reproduce inequality where they are influenced by previous

pay or assumptions about a candidate's value, rather than requirements of the role. Candidates from racialised minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to have experienced lower pay or less stable employment, and these patterns can carry forward into new offers if they are not actively addressed⁴⁸.

The communication of outcomes is also part of how race equality is realised in practice. Where feedback is vague or delayed, candidates are left without a clear explanation of how decisions were made. This matters because candidates from racialised minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to question whether bias has played a role, particularly where the process is not transparent. Providing clear, evidence-based feedback, and encouraging future applications, helps ensure that decisions can be understood and challenged if necessary. Where this does not happen, the result is not only a lack of transparency, but a process that can reinforce existing racial inequalities even where earlier stages appeared fair.

The purpose here is to make a fair evidence-based final decision and communicate outcomes clearly to all candidates. This stage ensures that selection decisions are justified, consistent and implemented transparently. Good practice at this stage is as follows.

Before offering the job:

- Agree in advance that final decisions will be based on the recorded interview scores and documented evidence and not revised through informal discussion or preferences at the offer stage.
- Be clear before discussion begins how salary decisions will be made including how the higher education institution gender equality pay gap will be taken into account and how starting salary will be justified, or where roles are subject to fixed pay scales, how placement on the scale will be determined.
- Decide in advance how references will be used, including whether they are necessary before pre-offer checks, and how factual information will be separated from value judgement where bias may be present.

During the job offer process:

⁴⁸ Porter, O., Kangataran, S., Duvvury, N., & Michael, L. (2025). The Emergence of an Intersectional Race Equality Agenda Within Irish Higher Education. In L. McIlrath et al. (eds.) *Transforming Gender Equality and Inclusion Within Higher Education in Ireland: Contemporary Perspectives* (pp. 367-389). Springer. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-3-031-89502-9.pdf>

- Consider the higher education institution gender equality pay gap when offering a salary to a candidate.
- The salary should reflect the skills and knowledge which the candidate will bring to the higher education institution.
- If your request is for a starting salary above the second increment, justifications will be requested which should include support from the relevant head of department, dean, or director of professional service area and this will be reviewed by the recruitment manager.
- Consider whether it is necessary to take up references prior to final pre-offer checks.
- If it is necessary, be aware that gender and racial bias in references is well evidenced and take great care to separate facts from value judgements.
- Provide high level feedback and offer a future time and date for candidates to request more detailed feedback; encourage candidates particularly those who are underrepresented, to apply for future vacancies.
- Relay the outcomes to the successful candidate within the timeline determined during the interview process and agree salary and start date.

9.1 Unsuccessful candidates

A standard letter to unsuccessful shortlisted candidates should acknowledge the outcome and invite them to request feedback. Designate a named contact (usually HR or the chair) for feedback requests. Candidates may seek feedback from the selection panel, and there are various legal grounds for this request, but it is generally good practice to be able to provide feedback to a candidate about their performance and suitability as assessed by the panel.

Panels should ensure the following are documented and retained:

- Signed shortlisting records with scores against criteria
- Individual interview score sheets for each panel member
- Consolidated/agreed scores per candidate per criterion
- Any written notes made during interview
- The agreed mark scheme or scoring rubric used
- Records of any reasonable accommodation provided

These must be held securely and be immediately retrievable by Human Resources personnel at any time. The Human Resources unit may provide feedback on how long these should be

retained, and they are usually retained by HR. The legal minimum is one year for unsuccessful candidates, though many universities keep competition records longer.

Interview scores, assessor notes, and ranking data are personal data belonging to the candidate. Under GDPR (via the Data Protection Acts 2018), candidates who submit a data subject access request (DSAR) is entitled to receive:

- Their numerical scores against each criterion
- Any written notes made about them during the assessment process
- Their overall ranking (though not other candidates' data)

The university must respond within one month, with a possible extension of two further months for complex requests. Refusing or ignoring a DSAR is a breach with potential consequences from the Data Protection Commission.

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2014, public universities are FOI bodies. Candidates can request records of the competition under FOI, including scoring sheets and panel deliberation notes, subject to exemptions around third-party data. This is a parallel route to GDPR and slightly broader in scope.

Loose or informal scoring creates both legal exposure and an inability to respond to feedback requests meaningfully. This includes panel members mentally averaging, scoring retrospectively, or not recording notes.

An unsuccessful candidate in a job application process generally does not have the legal right to appeal a hiring decision, unless the rejection involved unlawful discrimination (e.g., race, gender, age) or a breach of statutory equality legislation. Otherwise, employers have the right to select the candidate they deem most suitable.

If a candidate believes they were rejected due to discrimination, they can challenge the decision under the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015 through a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission. Complaints of discrimination in relation to employment must normally be referred to the Workplace Relations Commission within 6 months. Decisions of the WRC under Employment Equality can be further appealed by either party to the Labour Court. Comprehensive, contemporaneous scoring records are the university's primary defence. Panels that cannot produce these are significantly exposed.

10. Onboarding and induction

Onboarding is the first sustained experience a new staff member has of the institution as an employer. For minority ethnic background staff joining a predominantly white department or institution, it is the point at which the gap between the institution's stated commitments and its day-to-day culture becomes immediately apparent.

Minority ethnic background academic staff in HE consistently report that institutions are not inclusive or supportive of their differences in terms of ethnicity, culture and religion, and that this undermines any sense of belonging as an equal member of staff or confidence in their professional identity. Onboarding is the earliest institutional intervention point at which belonging can be actively built or structurally neglected.

A generic onboarding process that does not acknowledge this gap, or that treats all new staff as arriving in equivalent conditions, may set conditions for early disengagement and exit. Early exit of minority ethnic background staff is disproportionately costly to institutions that have invested in diverse recruitment, and disproportionately damaging to the individuals concerned, who may have relocated, taken on precarious contracts, or made significant professional commitments.

Where onboarding does not explicitly address race equality, exclusion is reproduced through specific institutional practices rather than general culture alone. Where line managers have not received race equality training, the quality of onboarding becomes dependent on individual awareness, resulting in inconsistent support. Where no structured check-ins are in place, early concerns about inclusion, workload allocation, or integration remain unaddressed until they escalate into disengagement or decisions to leave. In practice, these failures show up through concrete signals: delays in visa and immigration support for non-EU staff, unequal workload allocation, and probation processes that rely on informal judgements.

Preparing managers and setting expectations:

- Line managers should complete race equality training before onboarding begins, so the quality of a new staff member's experience does not depend on individual awareness or confidence in addressing race and ethnicity in the workplace.
- Probationary review criteria should be scrutinised for the same biases as promotion criteria. Where assessments rely on informal judgements about fit, collegiality, or

cultural alignment, they can reproduce at the earliest career stage the same exclusions that affect promotion later.

Practical and administrative support:

- Enhance the pre-arrival and onboarding experience for international staff and, where applicable, accompanying families. Where a new staff member requires visa or immigration documentation support, this should be handled proactively and without bureaucratic delay — administrative failures here send an early signal about how the institution values staff who have navigated complex routes to appointment.
- Consider appointing a dedicated HR Liaison Officer for pre- and post-arrival support, and establishing a relocation financial aid fund for housing and visa costs.

Workload from day one:

- Review workload allocation for new staff with race equality explicitly in mind at the onboarding stage. Minority ethnic background staff are at risk of being informally assigned disproportionate diversity and inclusion responsibilities from the outset; set clear workload expectations and make clear that equality-related service will be recognised and compensated rather than extracted without acknowledgement.

Building belonging and connection:

- Onboarding should include explicit, honest communication of the institution's race equality commitments, including what the institution is doing, what remains unresolved, and what support the new staff member can expect. This signals good faith rather than performed diversity. A line manager can direct a new staff member to relevant EDI reports and offer to discuss race equality efforts within their own department.
- Offer new staff from minority ethnic backgrounds connection to relevant staff networks, peer communities, or affinity groups as part of induction. Where no such network exists, acknowledge and address the gap.
- Use a buddy system: pair the new employee with a more experienced colleague outside their reporting line, who meets them shortly after they start. A formal mentoring programme, where one exists, can follow once the staff member is settled in post.
- Build in a structured check-in at three and six months, focused specifically on the experience of onboarding rather than only task performance. This gives an early mechanism for identifying problems before they become reasons to leave, and

signals that the institution is genuinely monitoring whether its inclusion commitments are being felt in practice.

11. Retention

Minority ethnic background staff exit academic institutions at higher rates than their white colleagues, and they do so earlier in their careers. This pattern is not primarily explained by individual preference or external opportunity. In the UK, Black and minority ethnic academics were significantly more likely than white academics to have considered moving overseas, citing barriers to career progression, lack of mentoring and sponsorship, and non-recognition of their research as primary drivers.⁴⁹ The mental health consequences of these conditions, including experiences of isolation, microaggressions, and institutional indifference, as significant factors in early exit decisions.⁵⁰ Each of these is a feature of institutional conditions, not individual resilience.

The consequences of institutional failure are concentrated on the individuals who can least afford them: those who may have relocated, left more stable positions, or built professional commitments around an appointment that does not sustain them.

Retention is not a passive outcome of good recruitment. It is an active institutional responsibility that requires the same systematic attention as the processes described elsewhere in this Good Practice Resource.

Structural conditions for retention:

- Line managers are responsible for the day-to-day conditions that determine whether minority ethnic staff remain. Their awareness of racial inequality, their workload management decisions, and their active support for career development are the primary institutional variables in retention. Line manager accountability for retention outcomes, through appraisal and performance management, should be explicit.
- Belonging is not produced by events or statements. It is produced through the accumulation of ordinary interactions in which a staff member experiences their contributions as genuinely valued and their presence as genuinely expected. Institutions should identify the specific conditions in departments and units with

⁴⁹ Bhopal, K., Brown, H., & Jackson, J. (2016). BME academic flight from UK to overseas higher education: aspects of marginalisation and exclusion. *British Educational Research Journal*, 42(2), 240-257. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3204>

⁵⁰ Arday, J. (2022). The black professoriate: Assessing the landscape within British higher education. *On Education*, 5(13). https://doi.org/10.17899/on_ed.2022.13.4

high minority ethnic staff exit rates and address these directly, rather than relying on institution-wide inclusion initiatives.

- Where a staff member from a minority ethnic background is considering leaving, the institution should have a structured mechanism for understanding why — not to retain individuals at any cost, but to identify whether systemic conditions are the cause and whether they can be addressed.

Monitoring retention:

- Collect and retain data on staff exits disaggregated by ethnicity, including data on the timing of exit (within probation, within three years of appointment, at fixed-term contract end), the grade and type of role exited, and the stated reason for leaving.
- Conduct exit interviews or surveys for all departing staff, with specific questions designed to capture experience of inclusion, workload equity, career development support, and experience of discrimination or microaggressions. Ensure this process is structured so that minority ethnic staff do not feel that raising concerns will affect references or future relationships with the institution.
- Report retention data by ethnicity annually to the EDI committee, alongside recruitment and promotion data. Where differential exit rates are identified, treat this as an institutional finding requiring a formal response.

11.1 Complaints, grievance and dignity at work

Institutional commitments to race equality are tested most directly when a staff member raises a formal concern about discriminatory treatment. Race-related complaints present specific challenges that generic grievance processes are often not designed to address: discriminatory treatment in employment is frequently indirect, cumulative, or expressed through microaggressions rather than explicit provable acts; it commonly involves power asymmetry between complainant and respondent; and it may arise in the context of recruitment or promotion processes in which the institution has an interest in defending its own procedures. The risk of victimisation after a complaint is an additional deterrent to raising concerns. While victimisation is unlawful under the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015, it is widely reported and dealt with regularly at the Workplace Relations Commission in racial discrimination cases.

The following good practice requirements are specific to the race equality context and should be read alongside the institution's general dignity and respect policy and grievance procedures.

- Policies should clearly state that raising a complaint about racial discrimination will not affect their immigration status, employment contract, or references, and that victimisation following a complaint constitutes a separate breach of the Employment Equality Acts. This is not generic equality information; it addresses a specific and well-evidenced deterrent to reporting.
- Formal complaints of racial discrimination or harassment must be investigated by someone with no prior involvement in the events complained of, no reporting relationship with either party, and demonstrable understanding of how racial discrimination and microaggressions operate in institutional settings. An investigator without this understanding is likely to apply an evidential standard more suited to explicit misconduct than to the indirect, cumulative patterns through which racial harm typically presents.
- Where a complaint arises in the context of a recruitment or promotion process, the outcome of that process should ordinarily be suspended pending the conclusion of the investigation.
- Complaints data should be disaggregated by protected ground and outcome, and reported annually to the EDI committee. Where race-related complaints are disproportionately high, result disproportionately in findings against complainants, or are followed by complainant exit, these patterns require formal institutional attention as evidence of a systemic rather than individual failure.
- Following a complaint, line managers should be specifically briefed on the prohibition on victimisation and their responsibility to ensure the staff member's working conditions are not adversely affected. The risk of informal marginalisation after a complaint is raised is as significant a race equality concern as the original treatment complained of.

Part 4 Career Advancement and Promotion

12. Career advancement

Career advancement in universities operates through a combination of formal and informal processes. Formal processes include promotion rounds, regrading exercises and probationary reviews. Informal mechanisms are often invisible, and concern who is encouraged to apply, who receives mentoring and sponsorship, who is allocated high-visibility work, and whose contributions are named in rooms they are not in. For staff of minority ethnic backgrounds, it is frequently the informal layer that determines outcomes⁵¹. This is because formal criteria are applied through relationships and judgements already shaped by racial dynamics in the institution.

In neighbouring jurisdictions, Black, Asian and minority ethnic background academics remain acutely underrepresented in senior and professorial roles, and the gap between their representation in the overall academic workforce and their representation at senior grades has persisted despite decades of stated institutional commitment to equality. The pattern for professional and administrative staff is less visible, partly because data collection in this area is weaker. However, the available evidence points to the same dynamic. Representation among entry-level professional services roles has improved in recent years, but the picture has not changed at senior positions. Research on professional services staff experiences in the UK found that career pathway transparency, performance appraisal, and access to development opportunities were all sites of racialised disadvantage.⁵²

Two structural features of higher education institution career advancement are particularly significant for race equality and apply across both academic and professional roles. The first is additional workload which accumulates formally and informally for minority ethnic background staff. Institutions and departments routinely assign informal and formal overloads to staff of minority ethnic background, including disproportionate amounts of teaching, service, committee work, and mentoring of other minority ethnic background staff and students. These draw time and energy away from the work needed to fulfil promotion

⁵¹ University and College Union (UCU). (2016). [The experiences of Black and minority ethnic staff in further and higher education](#).

⁵² Oldridge, L., Ridgway, M., Dahill, D., Gee, R., Nachmias, S., Olotu-Umoren, L., Pswarayi, J., Smith, S., Selby-Shaw, N. and Garrett, R. (2025) Career barriers and enablers for ethnically minoritised senior professional services roles in UK Higher Education. Nottingham: Nottingham Trent University. <https://doi.org/10.17631/rd-2025-0023-drep>.

standards. Staff of minority ethnic background often take on disproportionate pastoral care, as students from racialised groups tend to seek their support, resulting in significant invisible, unrecognised workload, and service contribution.⁵³

When universities expect or ignore this additional labour and fail to recognise its effects in advancement processes, they contribute directly to the failed promotion bids of those whose files show a resultant gap.

The second is the sponsorship deficit.⁵⁴ Sponsorship is explicit advocacy for a person's opportunities, by senior staff who actively push for their advancement, even when they are not present. Sponsorship, unlike mentorship, is directly linked to career advancement: it connects staff to high-visibility opportunities and decision-making access rather than only offering guidance. As such it is a valuable complement to mentoring. Mentorship involves guidance and knowledge-sharing. Research in Australian universities found that mentors from privileged groups can pass on their own networks and ways of thinking, which can end up reinforcing existing patterns of advantage rather than opening them up.⁵⁵

Institutions that invest in diverse recruitment but do not address career advancement will experience early exit of minority ethnic background staff, at significant cost to individuals who have made genuine professional commitments and to institutions that have expended resources on diverse hiring⁵⁶. The pattern of recruiting diversely at entry level while failing to advance or retain minority ethnic background staff at senior levels is documented and recognised as a form of institutional bad faith, regardless of intent.

Further, the absence of career advancement data disaggregated by ethnicity, for both academic and professional staff, means that institutions cannot know whether their stated commitments are producing any change in outcomes. Monitoring is not optional: without it, equality commitments are expressions of aspiration rather than instruments of accountability.

⁵³ Maynooth University (2026), [Race Equality Action Plan 2026-30](#).

⁵⁴ Alexander, C. and Arday, J. (2015) Aiming Higher Race, Inequality and Diversity in the Academy, Runnymede Perspectives. Runnymede Trust. Available at: https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/374244/1/userfiles.soton.ac.uk/Users_slb1_mydesktop/Aiming_20Higher.pdf.

⁵⁵ Gatwiri, K. et al. (2025) 'Mentors and sponsors: Making a difference for racially and culturally minoritised academics in Australian universities', Australian Journal of Social Issues. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.360>

⁵⁶ Rollock, N. (2019). Staying power: The career experiences and strategies of UK Black female professors. UCU. <https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/27819/>.

12.1. Career Advancement for Academic staff

The annual review or personal development review is the moment at which career trajectory is either actively supported or quietly neglected. For it to function equitably, it must go beyond backward-looking performance assessment to include a forward-looking conversation about promotion readiness, development needs, and the barriers the staff member is experiencing. Line managers should be required to demonstrate, not simply assert, that they have discussed promotion pathways with all eligible staff, including minority ethnic background staff who may not have put themselves forward.

Institutions should provide formal mentoring for all academic staff from appointment, with attention to ensuring that minority ethnic staff can access mentors in their discipline and mentors with an understanding of racial inequality in higher education so that they can access support and advice as needed. This recognises that barriers to progression are not only individual but are shaped by how the institutions operate, and that mentoring has a role in addressing these structural conditions rather than simply supporting individuals to adapt to them. Beyond mentoring, institutions should introduce structured sponsorship. This will involve identifying senior staff willing to actively advocate for the advancement of specific colleagues and making this a recognised institutional role rather than an informal favour.

Assignments with opportunities for development include activities such as chairing committees, leading research bids, representing the institution externally, contributing to strategic workgroups. Informal allocation of these activities is a primary mechanism through which promotion cases are built and institutional visibility is established. Where this allocation is left to informal preference, it compounds existing disparities in networks. Departments should be required to demonstrate, through workload data, that these opportunities are distributed equitably across staff of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Postdoctoral scholars face a particular issue of precarity within the academic system. There are far more PhD graduates and postdocs than there are permanent professorships or tenure-track academic posts available. Positions are typically tied to non-permanent, externally funded research councils. When the grant ends, the contract ends, causing deep financial and professional uncertainty. Originally designed as a 1–2 year transitional phase, postdocs are now often trapped in semi-permanent holding patterns, often spending years

working on other principal investigators' (PIs) grants rather than developing their own independent research. This precarity particularly affects minority ethnic staff, as the HEA survey on Race Equality in Higher Education demonstrated.⁵⁷ Success in transitioning to a stable academic post often depends on informal networks. Ethnic minority scholars are frequently excluded from these social networks, and impacted by subtle biases and unsupportive departmental cultures. Between-group differences in network connections have the greatest power to account for hiring disparities.⁵⁸ To make contract renewals fairer for postdoctoral scholars and mitigate systemic inequalities, universities should shift from an ad-hoc, supervisor-dependent model to a standardised, transparent institutional process. Developing clear, rubric-based criteria for renewals based on research progress increases the transparency in the process and reduces the likelihood of bias affecting outcomes. In addition, universities can address the structural inequalities inherent in short-term funding that cause sudden gaps in employment and visa status problems by creating a university-wide emergency fund to cover postdoc salaries for 3 to 6 months between external grant cycles.

12.2. Career Advancement for Professional and Administrative Staff

Career pathway transparency is important for all staff in a university, but often less clear for those in non-academic roles. Progression pathways for professional services staff are often opaque, and institutional norms continue to privilege whiteness and middle-class resources, leaving talented individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds sidelined.

Unlike academic promotion, which has at least nominally public criteria, professional staff advancement often depends on informal visibility and undocumented assumptions about what leadership looks like. Where promotion pathways are in place, institutions should publish clear career pathway frameworks for professional and administrative roles, including the typical profile of someone advancing from each grade to the next, and should make these frameworks available to all staff from appointment.

For professional staff, formal advancement often depends on regrading rather than promotion. This process is rarely monitored for racial equity. Regrading is a mechanism that systematically advantages those with better access to institutional knowledge. Institutions

⁵⁷ Kempny, M., & Michael, L. (2021). [Race equality in the higher education sector: Analysis commissioned by the Higher Education Authority](#). Higher Education Authority.

⁵⁸ Shauman, K. A., & Huynh, J. (2023). Gender, race-ethnicity and postdoctoral hiring in STEM fields. *Social Science Research*, 113, 102854. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2023.102854>.

without race equality data are unable to track regrading applications and outcomes by ethnicity. In the absence of such tracking, universities should ensure that staff are actively informed of regrading possibilities rather than leaving it to individuals to navigate the process alone.

Annual appraisal for professional staff carries the same race equality risks as academic review but with less external accountability. Where criteria for advancement are not written down and openly shared, line manager discretion fills the gap and discretion is where racial bias most reliably operates. Appraisal outcomes including ratings, development plan quality, and acting-up or secondment recommendations should be monitored by ethnicity and reported to the EDI function or equivalent on an annual basis. Significant disparities should trigger a review of the managers whose appraisals are producing them.

Training budgets, secondments, acting-up arrangements, and external development programmes are all sites of informal allocation by line managers. Acting-up arrangements in particular, where a staff member temporarily covers a more senior role, are a means to permanent advancement that are often shaped line manager discretion⁵⁹. Access to these opportunities should be governed by transparent criteria and monitored by ethnicity.

Structured sponsorship programmes for professional staff should be considered as a formal institutional mechanism rather than left to the goodwill of individual senior managers. Employees are five times more likely to receive a promotion if they have four or more sponsors, with every sponsor translating to approximately a 10% increase in promotion likelihood⁶⁰.

13. Probationary review

Probationary review is the earliest formal point at which a new staff member's trajectory within the institution is assessed and recorded. For academic staff, it typically involves a review of progress against agreed objectives in teaching, research, and departmental citizenship within the first one to two years of appointment. For professional and administrative staff, it establishes whether the appointment will be confirmed and sets the basis for subsequent performance management.

⁵⁹ Rollock, N. (2019). Staying power: The career experiences and strategies of UK Black female professors. <https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/27819/>.

⁶⁰ McKinsey & Company (2025), [To climb to the top, women should focus on skill building](#), 7 April 2025.

Because probationary review comes early, before the staff member has had time to build the relationships, visibility, and track record that would give them standing in the institution, it is a particularly consequential moment for minority ethnic background staff. The criteria applied at probation carry the same race equality risks as formal promotion criteria, but with less external accountability and fewer structural safeguards.⁶¹ Probationary review is also the point at which the conditions set during onboarding, workload allocation, mentoring relationships, access to development opportunities, translate into formally recorded outcomes for the first time.

- Probationary criteria should be reviewed with race equality explicitly in mind before they are applied, using the same scrutiny as promotion criteria, asking whether each criterion is genuinely necessary, whether it may disproportionately disadvantage candidates from minority ethnic backgrounds, and whether contextual factors will be taken into account.
- Line managers conducting probationary reviews should have completed equality training that specifically covers differential patterns in probationary outcomes, before the review takes place.
- Probationary review conversations should include an explicit, forward-looking component, discussing career development, promotion pathways, and the support the staff member needs, not only a backward-looking assessment of whether targets have been met.
- Where a staff member is at risk of not meeting probationary criteria, early and structured support should be offered, with a record kept of what support was provided and when. This prevents probationary failure being attributed to individual performance where it reflects inadequate institutional support.
- Probationary outcomes should be disaggregated by ethnicity and reported to the EDI function annually. Where differential rates of extension, failure, or early exit are identified, these should trigger a formal review of the probationary process.

Probationary failure or early exit at the probationary stage is the earliest point at which the institution loses diverse talent. Where this occurs at differential rates among minority ethnic background staff, it represents both a human cost, to individuals who may have relocated, left more secure positions, or made significant professional commitments, and an

⁶¹ Masters-Waage, T., Spitzmueller, C., Edema-Sillo, E., St Aubin, A., Penn-Marshall, M., Henderson, E., Lindner, P., Werner, C. and Madera, J.M. (2024) 'Underrepresented minority faculty in the USA face a double standard in promotion and tenure decisions', *Nature Human Behaviour*, 8(11), pp. 2107–2118. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-024-01977-7>.

institutional failure to convert diverse recruitment into diverse retention. Because probationary outcomes are rarely monitored by ethnicity, this loss is often invisible in institutional data, compounding the pattern documented at later career stages.⁶²

14. Annual review and personal development planning

Promotion does not begin at the point of application. It is built over years through appraisal conversations, workload decisions, development opportunities, and the informal advocacy of line managers and senior colleagues. Where annual review is treated as a compliance exercise rather than a genuine career development conversation, it reproduces the conditions that produce unequal promotion outcomes, because the staff members who receive active career guidance through other channels, typically those with stronger informal networks, accumulate the evidence and visibility that promotion requires, while those who do not are effectively assessed against a standard they were never given the support to meet.

For minority ethnic background staff, this dynamic is compounded by the disproportionate service and equality work that consumes time that would otherwise go towards building a promotion case (described in Section 3 as 'the minority tax'). Annual review is the appropriate point to surface and address this imbalance, but only if it is structured to do so.

- Annual review conversations should include a mandatory forward-looking component covering promotion readiness, development priorities, and any barriers the staff member is experiencing, not only a review of the previous year's performance against objectives.⁶³
- Line managers should be required to demonstrate, not merely assert, that they have discussed promotion pathways with all eligible staff, including those who have not put themselves forward. Where a staff member is eligible for promotion but has not applied, the manager should be required to record why.
- Workload allocation should be reviewed at the annual review stage with race equality explicitly in mind. Where a staff member from a minority ethnic background is carrying disproportionate service, equality, or pastoral work, this should be identified and addressed before it creates a gap in their promotion evidence, not raised as a contextual factor after a failed application.

⁶² Rollock, N. (2019). Staying power: The career experiences and strategies of UK Black female professors. <https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/27819/>.

⁶³ Chávez, K. and Mitchell, K.M.W. (2020) 'Exploring bias in student evaluations: Gender, race, and ethnicity', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 53(2), pp. 270–274. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096519001744>.

- Development opportunities, training, secondments, acting-up arrangements, conference funding, research leave, should be discussed and allocated at the annual review stage through a transparent process, not left to informal request and line manager discretion.
- Annual review outcomes, including development plan quality and promotion discussion records, should be monitored by ethnicity and reported to the EDI function.

Where annual review does not function as a genuine career development conversation, the institution creates a system in which advancement depends on informal access to guidance and advocacy rather than on the formal processes it publishes. This access is structured by the same racial dynamics as every other element of the promotion system: those who already have it benefit, and those who do not, disproportionately minority ethnic staff, are left to navigate the promotion process without the preparation that makes it accessible. The promotion round then assesses the cumulative effect of years of differential support and presents the outcome as a reflection of individual merit.

15. Promotion

Universities in Ireland and across neighbouring jurisdictions have, over the past two decades, invested significantly in the formal architecture of fair promotion: published criteria, equality statements, gender balance requirements on panels, personal circumstances declarations, and commitments to unconscious bias training. Formal procedural reforms address what is visible and measurable at a single point in the process, e.g. the panel, the criteria, the application form. Promotion applications also require all candidates to present their achievements in the way that align with institutional expectation and senior academic norms.

Race equality in promotion and advancement however cannot be achieved through attention to any single stage of the process. It requires attention to promotion as a connected system, in which every element either contributes to or undermines equitable outcomes. This includes the transparency of advertising rounds through the quality of annual review conversations, the structure of probationary assessment, the availability of mentoring and sponsorship, the calibration of grading decisions, the composition and operation of panels, the accessibility of appeals, and the capacity of monitoring data to hold all of these to account.

A promotion process that is procedurally fair at the point of assessment but structurally unfair at any stage that leads to it will produce unequal outcomes and will do so while attributing those outcomes to individual performance rather than institutional conditions. These can be based in the multiple years of annual review, workload allocation, mentoring, and informal advocacy that precede any formal application, as well as in the direct preparation for promotion and interpretation of evidence that is shaped by racialised assumptions about merit and potential.

Evidence shows that for minority ethnic background staff, the annual review is less likely to have included a proactive conversation about promotion readiness, less likely to have addressed the disproportionate service and equality work that has reduced the time available for research and other promotion-building activities, and less likely to have resulted in allocation of the high-visibility opportunities that strengthen an application. Staff who leave at or shortly after probation do not appear in promotion statistics, and their early exit is not attributed to the probationary process. Where support for promotion preparation is available in principle but not actively resourced and targeted, those who benefit most are those staff with stronger networks, more confident self-advocacy, and fewer competing demands on their time. Minority ethnic background staff, who are more likely to be carrying disproportionate service burdens and less likely to have been actively encouraged to apply, disproportionately miss out.

The race equality problem in promotion is not located at any single stage of the process but is distributed across it. It is produced before applications are submitted, present in how applications are evaluated, and visible in outcomes data where institutions have chosen to collect it. There is robust evidence that cumulative disadvantages translate into measurable differential outcomes at the point of formal promotion assessment. In the Irish context, the HEA Race Equality Survey identified career progression as the domain in which the gap between institutional commitment and the lived experience of minoritised staff was most acute, with respondents consistently describing a disconnect between stated equality policies and the informal dynamics through which advancement decisions are actually made.⁶⁴ Research with Black female professors in UK higher education found that the route to professorship was characterised by opacity, inconsistency, and a near-total absence of the active sponsorship that white colleagues were more likely to receive through informal

⁶⁴ Kempny, M., & Michael, L. (2021). [Race equality in the higher education sector: Analysis commissioned by the Higher Education Authority](#). Higher Education Authority.

collegial networks.⁶⁵ Many participants described the decision to apply, and the preparation required to do so effectively, as a largely unsupported process navigated without guidance or encouragement. In the US, quantitative analysis of promotion committee decision-making showed that these dynamics produce measurable differential outcomes at the formal assessment stage, with underrepresented minority faculty receiving more negative votes and being held to a higher standard of scholarly productivity than comparable white colleagues.⁶⁶

On the panel itself, without calibrated grading, structured deliberation, and documented decision-making, assessment defaults to familiar markers of achievement that correlate with racial advantage. Candidates whose contributions do not fit the dominant model of academic success because they have worked in applied, community-engaged, or interdisciplinary settings, or because their careers have been shaped by the structural barriers documented throughout this Good Practice Resource score below required thresholds through a process that presents itself as objective. The discrimination is embedded in the interpretation of criteria rather than in their formal content, making it harder to name, challenge, or correct.

15.1. Advertising rounds

Advertising rounds for academic and PMSS promotions should be clearly structured, predictable, and transparently communicated across institutions, typically running annually or twice a year, subject to institutional funding and workforce planning. A well-defined, centrally-managed cycle ensures all eligible staff, particularly those from underrepresented and minority ethnic backgrounds, have equal awareness of timelines, criteria and submission requirements. Without clear communication, informal networks become the primary source of information, disadvantaging those newer to the institution, on precarious contracts, or from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Before advertising rounds:

- Publish promotion timelines at least 6–12 months in advance through multiple formal channels (HR portals, faculty briefings, internal communications).

⁶⁵ Rollock, N. (2019). Staying power: The career experiences and strategies of UK Black female professors. https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10075/Staying-Power/pdf/UCU_Rollock_February_2019.pdf.

⁶⁶ Masters-Waage, T., Spitzmueller, C., Edema-Sillo, E., St. Aubin, A., Penn-Marshall, M., Henderson, E., ... & Madera, J. (2024). Underrepresented minority faculty in the USA face a double standard in promotion and tenure decisions. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 8(11), 2107–2118. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-024-01977-7>

- Clearly define eligibility criteria, required documentation, and assessment standards in accessible language.
- Ensure alignment between HR, faculty and promotion committee on timeline and expectations.
- Provide targeted pre-application support (workshops, training) with specific outreach to underrepresented and minority ethnic background staff.
- Ensure deadlines do not disproportionately disadvantage staff with caring responsibilities, part-time contracts, or heavy teaching loads.

When running advertising rounds:

- Heads of Department should individually invite all eligible staff to apply, with particular attention to women and minority ethnic staff.
- Adhere strictly and consistently to published deadlines; avoid informal extensions unless formally documented and equally available to all candidates.
- Submit all applications through a central HR system, with clear confirmation of receipt and next steps.
- Maintain transparency about evaluation stages, timelines, and committee structures.
- Ensure promotion committees are diverse and trained in recognising bias, particularly in evaluating different career paths and contributions.
- Provide clear guidance on how achievements (teaching, research, leadership, service) will be assessed across disciplines.

Unclear or inconsistent advertising rounds risk reinforcing the inequalities they're meant to address: staff with weaker informal networks may miss deadlines or feel discouraged from applying, and where success appears to depend on insider knowledge rather than merit, this erodes trust, deters underrepresented applicants, and ultimately weakens staff retention and the institution's leadership pipeline.

15.2. Promotion Selection panels

Selection panels often formalised as Faculty Promotions Committees (FPCs) play a decisive role in determining who progresses within the academic system. Evidence from higher education in the UK found that most Black, Asian and minority ethnic background academics surveyed had reported facing barriers to promotion⁶⁷. These barriers included not being

⁶⁷ University and College Union (2016) The Experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic Staff in Further and Higher Education. London: UCU. Available at: <https://www.ucu.org.uk>.

fully informed on the application process for promotion, as well as a lack of support from senior colleagues and managers in seeking career progression. Research shows that as a result, Black, Asian and minority ethnic background academics were significantly more likely than white colleagues to consider leaving their institution or working abroad in order to advance their careers.⁶⁸ Bias affects not only how excellence is recognised but how underperformance is judged: below-average scholarly productivity is judged more harshly for underrepresented minority faculty than for white colleagues.⁶⁹

Panel composition matters, but is not sufficient on its own. A panel that includes minority ethnic background members but lacks structured processes for challenging bias, documenting decisions, or ensuring consistent interpretation of criteria can still produce discriminatory outcomes and can do so while providing institutional cover through its apparent diversity. Two risks require attention: panels that lack racial diversity default to the informal judgements of a homogeneous group, in which familiarity and network position carry undue weight; and panels that are diverse in composition but where minority ethnic background members are not genuinely empowered to challenge dominant interpretations reproduce the appearance of inclusion without its substance.

Before panel selection and review:

- Ensure transparent criteria for selecting panel members, including demonstrated commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion.
- Actively seek diverse representation across gender, ethnicity, discipline, and career pathways — not only minimum compliance thresholds.
- Provide mandatory training for all panel members on unconscious bias, inclusive evaluation, and equitable assessment of diverse career trajectories.
- Review panel composition annually to identify gaps (e.g. over-representation of certain disciplines or backgrounds).
- Establish clear role expectations, including responsibility to challenge bias and support fair deliberation.

⁶⁸ Bhopal, K., Brown, H., & Jackson, J. (2016). BME academic flight from UK to overseas higher education: aspects of marginalisation and exclusion. *British Educational Research Journal*, 42(2), 240-257. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3204>.

⁶⁹ Masters-Waage, T., Spitzmueller, C., Edema-Sillo, E., St. Aubin, A., Penn-Marshall, M., Henderson, E., ... & Madera, J. (2024). Underrepresented minority faculty in the USA face a double standard in promotion and tenure decisions. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 8(11), 2107-2118. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-024-01977-7>.

- Ensure all panel members are familiar with relevant equality legislation and institutional policies.

During panel operation:

- Assess all applications strictly against predefined, transparent criteria, ensuring consistency across candidates.
- Give equal weight to different forms of academic contribution (teaching, research, leadership, service), recognising non-linear and diverse career paths.
- Avoid over-reliance on informal indicators such as reputation, visibility, or personal familiarity with candidates.
- Ensure all evidence submitted is fully considered and not selectively weighted.
- Encourage structured discussion in which each member contributes and decisions are clearly justified.
- Actively identify and challenge potential bias in scoring, language, and interpretation of achievements.
- Maintain clear documentation of decisions to ensure accountability and enable future review.
- Support underrepresented candidates by ensuring their achievements are fairly contextualised and not undervalued.

Without careful structure and active management, selection panels risk reproducing the inequalities they are meant to guard against — over time producing homogeneity in senior academic positions, limiting diversity of thought, weakening institutional innovation, and increasing staff turnover among underrepresented groups, all of which damage the institution's credibility in advancing equality and its ability to build an inclusive academic leadership pipeline.

15.3. Grading / scaling

The grading and scaling stage of inclusive promotion requires particular attention to how scoring frameworks are designed and applied, as this is the point at which inconsistencies can directly affect the outcomes. Even where criteria are formally defined, variation in how evidence is interpreted especially across research and scholarship, teaching, service to college and institution, and engagement with the discipline can result in uneven scoring. This has implications for race equality, particularly where candidates from minority ethnic backgrounds may present different profiles of evidence due to unequal access to opportunities across career pathways.

Experimental research has demonstrated that faculty of colour receive systematically lower scores than white colleagues in teaching evaluations, even when all other course elements (such as content, assignments, communications, and structure) are held constant, suggesting that the scores reflect assessor perception of the instructor more closely than objective measures of performance.⁷⁰

At this stage, applications should be assessed strictly against clearly defined criteria within specified categories aligned to institutional priorities. Standardised performance descriptors such as “clearly unsatisfactory”, “insufficient evidence”, “clear evidence”, “strong evidence”, and “outstanding evidence” should be used with defined scoring ranges to ensure consistency in how judgements are made. Candidates should be required to achieve a minimum threshold of at least clear evidence across all criteria, alongside an “outstanding” score in at least one of research and scholarship or teaching. This ensures that grading decisions are based on comparable benchmarks rather than relative or subjective interpretations across panels.

Importantly, the grading system should recognise that evidence may not be evenly distributed across all areas. Applicants should meet a specified number of criteria, including all essential criteria, while allowing for differences in the type and volume of evidence presented. Criteria should also be applied in an interconnected manner, enabling the same evidence to contribute to multiple areas of assessment where appropriate.

It is also worth noting that promotion application assessments often take place outside not just the School, but the College/Faculty the applicant is part of. Disciplinary biases can also be racialised and gendered. Disciplinary differences need to be carefully considered from this perspective in the consideration of candidates for promotion.

Before grading and scaling in inclusive promotion:

- Require all panel members to participate in a calibration exercise at the start of each round, in which they apply performance descriptors to anonymised sample evidence and discuss any divergence before live scoring begins. This establishes a shared interpretive framework rather than leaving interpretation to individual discretion.

⁷⁰ Chávez, K., & Mitchell, K. M. (2020). Exploring bias in student evaluations: Gender, race, and ethnicity. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 53(2), 270-274. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096519001744>.

- Confirm in advance how contextual factors, career interruptions, teaching-heavy roles, periods of precarious employment, limited access to research funding or grant infrastructure, will be taken into account within scoring, and document this agreement so it can be applied consistently and audited.
- Confirm that evidence can be applied across multiple criteria where it is genuinely relevant, rather than being assessed in isolation. This prevents candidates whose contributions are concentrated in fewer but overlapping areas from being penalised for not fitting a segmented assessment model.
- Review whether required thresholds may disproportionately disadvantage candidates from minority ethnic backgrounds before the round opens, and document the basis on which thresholds are set.

During grading:

- Assess candidates against clearly defined criteria, including research and scholarship, teaching, service to the institution, and engagement with discipline and community, using standardised performance descriptors with defined scoring ranges applied consistently across all applicants.
- For academic promotions, require candidates to achieve a minimum threshold of at least clear evidence across all criteria, alongside an outstanding score in at least one of research and scholarship or teaching, while ensuring that the definition of these descriptors has been agreed and calibrated before scoring begins.
- Apply criteria in an interconnected way, enabling the same evidence to contribute to multiple assessment areas where appropriate, and supporting a holistic evaluation of academic profiles that reflects the actual shape of academic work rather than an idealised segmentation of it.
- Recognise explicitly that evidence may not be evenly distributed across areas due to structural differences in career pathway opportunities and that uneven distribution of evidence is not the same as uneven performance.
- Retain full scoring records including individual member scores and the reasoning behind them to enable meaningful audit and to provide a basis for appeals.

Panel members will apply scoring criteria differently, and those differences tend to disadvantage candidates from minority ethnic backgrounds in very specific ways. For example, where there is no shared understanding of what counts as clear evidence or outstanding, panels often default to familiar indicators of achievement such as access to large research grants, high-visibility leadership roles, or established academic networks.

These are areas where minority ethnic background staff are consistently underrepresented. As a result, their contributions such as high teaching loads, pastoral support, widening participation work, or collaborative research may be scored lower or seen as insufficient, even when they meet the intent of the criteria. Candidates can fall below required thresholds not because of weaker performance, but because the grading system is applied in a way that does not recognise how opportunity is distributed and this directly undermines race equality.

There are further consequences for scholars whose research relates to methodologies, research questions and scholarly communities associated with the Global South, with postcolonial and decolonial scholarship, and with community-engaged and practice-based research. The dominant model of research assessment in Irish and European higher education draws heavily on a narrow set of metrics such as publication counts in high-ranking journals, citation impact, competitive grant income, and institutional profile. These can reflect accumulated advantage rather than intrinsic scholarly quality, and these metrics have documented racial and geopolitical biases. Scholars whose work falls outside these metrics are not necessarily producing less rigorous or less significant scholarship.⁷¹ In the Irish context, HEIs operate in a postcolonial society with a well-developed tradition of decolonial and community-engaged scholarship. Minority ethnic academics, including for example Irish Traveller or African descent scholars, may be more likely to work across these traditions. Further, where a promotion panel does not include anyone with expertise in the candidate's research tradition, assessment defaults to proxy indicators (journal ranking, grant income, citation count) that do not require engagement with the substance of the work. This is an epistemological problem as well as an equality one.

What institutions should do:

- Review research assessment criteria in promotion processes to ensure that they are capable of recognising the full range of scholarly contribution (including applied research, community-engaged scholarship, policy-relevant work, interdisciplinary and decolonial research, and scholarship in languages other than English), and that criteria documents explicitly state this.

⁷¹ Masters-Waage et al. (2024) Underrepresented minority faculty in the USA face a double standard in promotion and tenure decisions. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 8(11), 2107-2118. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-024-01977-7> ; Masters-Waage et al. (2026). Evaluating multiple candidates simultaneously reduces racial disparities in promotion and tenure. *Nature communications*. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-026-69937-5>.

- Require that panels assessing research-heavy applications include at least one member with relevant disciplinary competence, or obtain an expert external opinion where the panel's collective expertise does not extend to the candidate's research tradition.
- Avoid using journal ranking systems or citation databases as a proxy for scholarly quality in promotion assessment. Where bibliometric data is submitted by a candidate, it should be contextualised against field norms and career stage, and the panel should be explicitly briefed that impact factor is not synonymous with scholarly significance.
- Recognise, in promotion criteria and panel briefings, that scholarship which has influenced policy, professional practice, or public understanding may have significant impact that is not captured by academic citation metrics. This is not a concession to lower standards but a more accurate account of what research excellence can look like.

15.4. Mentoring and preparation for promotion

Access to good quality preparation for promotion is not equally distributed. The informal guidance that shapes whether a candidate applies, what they emphasise in their application, and how they present their achievements circulates primarily through collegial relationships and line management. Minority ethnic background staff are less likely to have senior colleagues who actively encourage them to apply, less likely to have been given informal feedback on how their contributions are perceived, and more likely to be managing the additional burden of diversity and equality work that leaves less time for the preparation that a strong application requires.

Mentoring or coaching can be very useful for candidates including people of minority ethnic background. In addition, having a buddy or co-worker who can support the candidate and is outside of management structures can help someone settle into the organisation. Both coaching and mentoring are processes that enable both individuals and institutions to achieve their full potential. Coaching and mentoring share many similarities, so it makes sense to outline the common things coaches and mentors do whether the services are offered in a paid (professional) or unpaid (philanthropic) role.

Mentorship and sponsorship programs support relationships to flourish among workers from different backgrounds and are good for career mobility. Creating a buddy system for new hires in which more experienced employees help facilitate social relationships is a good

approach for fostering new relationships. Also, making conscious efforts to develop inclusive leadership practices amongst the people manager community is a key element of inclusion and cultural change.

Generic mentoring schemes that are available in principle but not actively offered to minority ethnic background staff, or that pair candidates with mentors who lack awareness of how racial inequality shapes academic careers, will not close the gap. Sponsorship, that is active advocacy by a senior colleague who names the candidate in decision-making spaces they cannot access, can directly affect promotion outcomes.

Without active preparation support and sponsorship, minority ethnic background candidates are less likely to apply, less likely to present their contributions effectively when they do, and less likely to receive the behind-the-scenes advocacy that shapes how their applications are received.

At institutional level, such underrepresentation is often interpreted as a pipeline problem (too few qualified candidates) rather than a structural problem in who is supported to come forward and how. This misdiagnosis leads to interventions that focus on building individual capability rather than addressing the systemic conditions that produce differential outcomes.

Before doing the mentoring / preparing:

- Establish a formal mentoring offer for all staff from appointment, with active outreach to staff from minority ethnic backgrounds rather than relying on individuals to self-refer.
- Ensure mentors are selected and trained with specific attention to their understanding of how racial inequality shapes academic and professional careers, not only their seniority or disciplinary standing.
- Provide mentors from outside the candidate's immediate line management structure, and offer cross-institutional or cross-sector mentoring where appropriate, so that the relationship is not constrained by the power dynamics of the candidate's own department.
- Allocate protected time for both mentors and mentees, and adjust workloads to make this time genuinely available. A mentoring programme that exists on paper but is not resourced in practice will be used least by those who are already most

overloaded, typically minority ethnic background staff carrying disproportionate service and teaching burdens.

- Distinguish clearly between mentoring as a support mechanism for candidates and sponsorship as active advocacy for advancement and establish both as formal institutional roles rather than informal arrangements.

During the mentoring relationship:

- Focus specifically on promotion readiness, helping candidates understand the criteria, identify the evidence they hold, and present their contributions in the terms the panel will assess, including how to contextualise career interruptions or non-linear pathways.
- Ensure mentors are equipped to help candidates articulate the value of contributions that fall outside traditional academic markers including teaching-intensive work, community engagement, equality and diversity leadership, and applied or collaborative scholarship.
- Support candidates to identify and address gaps in their evidence base ahead of the round, including by accessing development opportunities, stretch assignments, or high-profile projects that will strengthen their application.
- Mentors can address the minority tax directly: help candidates identify where they are carrying disproportionate service or equality work, and support them in having workload conversations with line managers before the promotion round rather than after a failed application.
- Provide support to all candidates in preparing individual circumstances including their protected characteristics, inequality, caring responsibilities, disability or other relevant circumstances that may affect their career progression opportunities. Mentors should help candidates present this information clearly and effectively so that it is appropriately considered within the promotion process.
- Provide structured and constructive feedback to unsuccessful candidates, with identifying areas for development, explaining the reasons for the decision and outlining practical steps clearly to strengthen their future promotion applications.

15.5. Monitoring and data

This section of the Good Practice Resource depends for its effect on one condition: the institution must know whether it is working. Without disaggregated data on who applies for promotion, who succeeds, at what grade, in which faculties, and by what margin, broken down by ethnicity and cross-referenced with contract type and gender, no formal equality

commitment can be evaluated and no accountability can be established. Data with institutional accountability structures is the mechanism through which formal policy become real change. The HEA Anti-Racism Principles commit institutions to recording staff data disaggregated by ethnicity and monitoring retention and career outcomes.⁷²

The ability to monitor outcomes by ethnicity depends on staff choosing to disclose this information. In practice, many staff do not disclose their ethnicity, often because they are unsure how the data will be used or do not trust that it will be handled confidentially. This means that institutional data may be incomplete or skewed. Universities therefore need to actively build confidence in data collection by clearly explaining its purpose, limiting access to identifiable data, and demonstrating that it is used to address inequality rather than to monitor individuals.

- Collect and retain data on promotion applications and outcomes, including applications, withdrawals, success rates, grades awarded, and panel scores, disaggregated by ethnicity at every promotion round.
- Report this data annually to the institution's EDI committee or equivalent governance body, and publish a summary in the institution's equality reporting.
- Where significant disparities in outcome by ethnicity are identified, in application rates, success rates, or score distributions, treat these as institutional findings requiring a formal response, not as statistical noise to be noted and set aside.
- Ensure data is sufficiently granular to identify patterns at faculty or department level as well as institution-wide, since institution-level averages can mask significant variation between units.
- Link promotion data to onboarding, annual review, and probationary records to enable analysis of the cumulative effect of institutional processes on the careers of minority ethnic background staff.
- Publish the institution's promotion data by ethnicity, in anonymised, aggregated form, as part of its annual equality reporting obligations under the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty⁷³.

⁷² Higher Education Authority (2023) *Anti-Racism Principles for Irish Higher Education Institutions*. Dublin: HEA. Available at: <https://hea.ie/policy/gender/race-equality/>.

⁷³ In line with HEA guidance, data involving small numbers should not be published where there is a risk of identifying individuals. In such cases, data should be suppressed, aggregated, or combined to protect confidentiality.

15.6. Appeals and review

All promotion processes should include an accessible and meaningful appeals mechanism. For minority ethnic background candidates in particular, who may have experienced informal discouragement, inconsistent assessment, or outcomes they believe reflect bias rather than evidence, the absence of a clear route to challenge a decision sends a powerful message about whose concerns the institution takes seriously.

An appeals process also serves an institutional function beyond individual redress: it is a mechanism for identifying patterns of procedurally unfair decision-making that internal monitoring may not catch, and for generating the documented record that enables the institution to identify and address systemic problems.

- Establish a formal, documented appeals process for all promotion decisions, published alongside promotion criteria and communicated to all applicants as part of the round information.
- Specify clearly the grounds on which an appeal may be made, including procedural irregularity, failure to apply criteria consistently, and failure to take declared personal circumstances into account, and provide clear guidance on what evidence an appellant needs to submit.
- Ensure that all grounds of appeal are addressed by the appeals panel.
- Ensure the appeals process is genuinely independent of the original decision-making panel, with no overlap in membership between the panel that made the original decision and the body reviewing the appeal.
- Set and adhere to clear timelines for acknowledgement, review, and decision at the appeals stage, and communicate these timelines to appellants in writing.
- Provide all applicants, not only those who appeal, with written feedback on their application, at a level of specificity that enables them to understand what was assessed, how it was scored, and what would strengthen a future application. Generic feedback that does not engage with the specific evidence submitted does not support equitable access to improvement.
- Monitor appeals by ethnicity, including who appeals, on what grounds, and with what outcome, and report this in anonymised and aggregated form to the EDI function annually. Where minority ethnic background candidates appeal at higher rates or with different outcomes than white colleagues, this should trigger a review of the original process.

Without a meaningful appeals process, the promotion system has no self-correction mechanism. Discriminatory outcomes that would be identified and reversed through a robust review process instead become permanent, shaping the career trajectories of the individuals affected and, in aggregate, producing the underrepresentation at senior levels that this Good Practice Resource is designed to help higher education institutions to address for themselves. For the institution, the absence of an appeals process also represents a legal risk: where a candidate believes they have been subject to indirect discrimination in a promotion process, the absence of an internal remedy makes external challenge more likely and less defensible.

Appendix 1: Quick Reference Checklists

These checklists are designed for use at each stage of the employment process. They summarise the key good practice actions described in the relevant sections of this Good Practice Resource and are not a substitute for reading those sections.

Checklist 1: Role Design and Advertising

- Role analysis conducted: each criterion evidenced as genuinely necessary
- Equality-focused review of person specification completed before sign-off (senior/leadership roles)
- Criteria distinguish essential requirements from desirable ones
- Non-traditional and equivalent experience explicitly recognised
- Language reviewed for bias; gender-neutral pronouns used
- Welcome/inclusion statement positioned prominently in advertisement
- Institution confirms willingness to support work permit applications where applicable
- Advertising plan includes targeted outreach to underrepresented groups
- Application window adequate for international and diverse candidates

Checklist 2: Shortlisting and Selection

- Diverse shortlisting panel confirmed; EDI guidance sought in advance
- Panel members trained in equality, diversity and inclusion within previous 12 months
- Personal identifiers removed from applications before review
- Consistent scoring method agreed and applied against published criteria
- International qualifications assessed via NARIC where required
- Immigration status not raised by panel; referred to HR at conditional offer stage only
- Shortlist reviewed: if not diverse, consider re-advertising or further outreach
- Interview format, reasonable adjustments, and question topics communicated to candidates in advance
- Post-interview scoring recorded individually before panel discussion
- Salary offer based on role requirements; prior pay not used as a floor
- Written feedback available to all unsuccessful shortlisted candidates
- Recruitment file retained securely (minimum three years)

Checklist 3: Onboarding and Probation

- Line manager has completed race equality training before onboarding begins

- New staff member informed of race equality commitments and support structures
- Connection to relevant staff networks or affinity groups offered at induction
- Structured check-in at three and six months includes experience of inclusion
- Workload allocation reviewed for equity; equality and diversity service recognised
- Probationary criteria reviewed for race equality implications before application
- Probationary review includes forward-looking career development conversation
- Support offered and recorded where staff member is at risk of not meeting criteria
- Probationary outcomes monitored by ethnicity and reported annually to EDI function

Checklist 4: Annual Review and Promotion

- Annual review includes mandatory forward-looking promotion and development conversation
- Line manager has discussed promotion with all eligible staff and recorded outcome
- Workload reviewed for minority tax; disproportionate service addressed before promotion round
- Development opportunities discussed and allocated through transparent process
- Promotion round advertised at least six months in advance through multiple channels
- Targeted pre-application support provided with specific outreach to underrepresented staff
- Panel diverse in composition; members trained within 12 months
- Calibration exercise completed at start of round
- Contextual factors recognised in scoring e.g. career interruptions, teaching-heavy roles, precarious employment
- Student evaluation data not used as direct proxy for teaching quality without adjustment
- All candidates provided with written, evidence-based feedback
- Appeals process accessible, independent, and communicated to all applicants
- Promotion outcomes monitored by ethnicity and reported to EDI function

Appendix 2: Glossary of Terms

Terms are listed alphabetically. Where a term is defined in Irish law, the legal definition takes precedence and is noted.

Anti-racism: An active commitment to identifying, challenging and changing the values, structures and behaviours that perpetuate racial inequality, as distinct from a passive commitment to non-discrimination.

Belonging: The experience of being genuinely included in an institutional community (valued, expected, and able to participate fully) rather than merely present within it.

Decolonisation: In the higher education context, decolonisation refers to the critical examination and reform of curricula, research practices, and institutional structures that embed or reproduce colonial epistemologies, or ways of knowing and standards of knowledge that privilege European intellectual traditions and marginalise others.

Direct discrimination: Treatment of a person less favourably than another in a comparable situation on the ground of race. Under the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015, direct discrimination on the ground of race is unlawful regardless of whether discriminatory intent was present.

EDI: Acronym stands for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, commonly used in Ireland. Sometimes replaced by DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion).

Equality impact assessment: A structured review of a proposed or existing policy, process or criterion to assess its likely effect on groups with protected characteristics, including race.

Ethnicity data: Data collected from staff and applicants on their ethnic background, typically using standardised census categories, used to monitor representation, track outcomes, and identify patterns of inequality across employment processes.

Implicit (unconscious) bias: Attitudes or stereotypes that operate at a level below conscious awareness and that affect judgements and decisions without the individual being aware of their influence.

Indirect discrimination: The application of a provision, criterion or practice that appears neutral but has a disproportionate adverse effect on persons with a particular protected characteristic, where that provision, criterion or practice cannot be shown to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim. Under the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015, indirect discrimination on the ground of race is unlawful. It does not require discriminatory intent.

Institutional discrimination: The reproduction of racial inequality through organisational structures, cultures and practices, independently of the intent or attitudes of individual actors. The concept encompasses unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and stereotyping embedded in standard operating procedures. It is evident in disparities between groups.

Intersectionality: A framework for understanding how multiple axes of disadvantage (race, gender, disability, religion, migration status, and others) interact to produce distinct patterns of exclusion that cannot be fully understood by examining each axis in isolation. Relevant to how promotion criteria, workload models and support structures affect staff whose disadvantage is compounded across multiple protected characteristics.

Mentoring: A structured developmental relationship in which a more experienced colleague provides guidance, advice and support to assist a less experienced colleague in navigating their career. Distinguished from sponsorship (see below).

Minority ethnic background: Used in this Good Practice Resource to refer to all staff from racial, ethnic, national or cultural groups other than White Irish, including Black African, Black Irish, Asian, Mixed/Multiple Background, Irish Traveller, Roma, migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking persons.

Minority tax: The disproportionate burden of diversity-related work carried by minority ethnic staff in institutions with low representation of these groups.

Occupational segregation: The concentration of particular groups in particular types of roles, grades or contract types, regardless of the formal openness of processes.

Positive action: Measures taken specifically to prevent or compensate for disadvantages experienced by persons in a protected group, in order to facilitate full equality in practice. Under Section 33 of the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015, positive action is lawful

where it is directed at a group experiencing disadvantage or underrepresentation and is proportionate to the disadvantage it addresses.

Protected characteristic / protected ground: A characteristic on the basis of which discrimination in employment is unlawful under the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015. The Acts identify nine grounds: gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race, and membership of the Traveller community. This Good Practice Resource addresses the race ground, which covers race, colour, nationality, and national or ethnic origin.

Racial bias: The influence of race-based assumptions, stereotypes or preferences on decisions and judgements, whether conscious or unconscious.

Racial microaggressions: Brief, commonplace, often unintentional verbal, behavioural or environmental communications that convey negative or derogatory messages about a person's racial identity. Examples include assumptions about a minority ethnic colleague's seniority or nationality, questioning of their right to occupy a particular role, and systematic undervaluation of their scholarly contributions.

Racialisation: The social process through which racial categories and racial meanings are attributed to groups, practices or institutions. Racialisation does not require biological difference; it is a social and political construct. For example, Irish Travellers are a racialised group whose experience of exclusion is structured by attributed racial characteristics regardless of their long-standing presence in Irish society.

Racism: Racism refers to individual prejudice and to the institutional and structural conditions through which racial inequality is produced and maintained. It encompasses explicit animus, unconscious bias, microaggressions, and the operation of institutional processes that produce differential outcomes for minority ethnic background staff without requiring the presence of individual prejudice.

Sponsorship: An active form of advocacy in which a senior colleague uses their own influence, networks and credibility to create opportunities for a more junior colleague including speaking for them in rooms they are not in, nominating them for roles and awards, and actively promoting their career. The absence of access to sponsors is a consistently documented structural disadvantage for minority ethnic background staff.

Structural inequality: Inequality that is produced and reproduced by the design and operation of social, institutional and economic systems, rather than by the attributes or choices of the individuals within them. Structural inequality in higher education employment refers to the ways in which standard processes (person specifications, promotion criteria, contract practices, workload models) systematically produce worse outcomes for minority ethnic background staff than for their white counterparts, regardless of individual intent.

Victimisation: Treatment of a person less favourably because they have made, supported, or indicated their intention to make a complaint of discrimination under the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015. Victimisation is itself unlawful under the Acts, independently of the outcome of the original complaint.

Whiteness: Refers to the institutional and cultural norms, standards and assumptions that are structured around white experience and that operate as unmarked defaults against which other experiences are measured. In the higher education context, whiteness is embedded in promotion criteria that assume particular career trajectories, in collegial cultures that favour particular forms of sociality, and in research assessment frameworks that privilege particular epistemological traditions.