

RMIT's Guide to Diverse & Inclusive Student Recruitment

Finding the hidden gems

Are you recruiting the best talent by attracting and assessing culturally diverse students?

Are you...

- Aiming for a better performing workplace where creative, resilient employees can innovate and problem-solve?
- Looking to hire diverse students and graduates?
- Supporting students struggling to make a positive transition into the workplace?
- Looking to improve diversity ratios in the workplace?
- Struggling to engage and retain diverse students/graduates?
- Hiring into a culture of unconscious bias and internal resistance?

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Acknowledgement of Country

RMIT University acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University. RMIT University respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present.

RMIT also acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia, where it conducts its business.

Forward

The opportunity for equitable access to employment options after completing a program of university study is the right of all students regardless of backgrounds or biographies. While Australia performs strongly in graduate outcomes generally (QILT, 2021) this workforce participation is not always evenly distributed across all student populations, notable differences have been recorded between equity marked cohorts and their peers from non-equity groups (Li et al, 2017; Tomaszewski et al, 2019). This is particularly significant for students with disability who are more likely to be unemployed after their degree completion and also make up only 2 per cent of students participating in graduate employment programs (Eckstein, 2022).

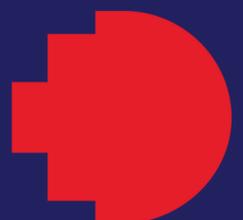
Undoubtedly higher education institutions have a key role to play in ensuring that all students are able to access a 'level playing field' when seeking out job opportunities but achieving this goal requires collaborative approaches. Such collaboration is evidenced in this Guide to Diverse and Inclusive Student Recruitment developed by Lisa Williams and Katie Adler from RMIT's Industry & Global Experiences team. Having recognised a gap in understanding about how employers can implement crucial, but relatively straightforward, refinements to recruitment, transition and retention strategies, the team has worked with employers to develop a series of clearly translatable and applied knowledges to the field of inclusive employment strategies. Applying a critical but informed perspective to recruiting and supporting graduates from diverse backgrounds, can ultimately lead to changes that are essential to ensure equity across the graduate landscape.

Of particular note in this resource is that the authors take a 'strengths based' approach. For those of us who work closely with equity bearing students, we know that the range of life experiences and associated capabilities these cohorts possess, can positively inform and indeed enrich the workplace. However, in popular discourses these experiences are sometimes unintentionally constructed as obstacles or deficiencies, a 'problem' that the workplace or employer has to 'solve'. The team successfully disrupts this assumption and instead, this publication clearly articulates the merits of a truly diverse workplace. The use of short but deeply descriptive personal vignettes guarantees that student voice is embedded within this resource to ensure a level of authenticity and applicability. The recommendations and strategies provided then effectively 'translate' situations into actionable strategies that can be put in place to better provide equitable practices across the employment field.

Both the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) and the Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA) are delighted to have supported this worthwhile work via the Australasian Spotlight on Equity grant provided to the team at WAHED 2021.



Professor Sarah O'Shea
Director, National Centre for
Student Equity in Higher Education
(NCSEHE)



Introduction

Like all tertiary institutions, RMIT is regularly approached by external organisations and businesses seeking students and graduates for employment opportunities. They often seek candidates from specific cohorts to comply with internal diversity targets or Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) requirements.

Increasingly, employers are also seeking to diversify their workplace in recognition of the positive social and economic outcomes that this achieves. Indeed, there is compelling evidence that diverse workers can understand and bridge differences within groups, and that a widening of the talent pool to reflect the communities served results in improved business performance, new perspectives, and more effective and innovative teams.^{1, 2, 3}

However, while the composition of Australia's student population is changing and becoming increasingly diverse, this is not yet reflected in professional or leadership roles in the Australian workforce.

Together, we share a vision, and a responsibility, to support future generations and our businesses, by creating a workforce that values and enables diversity and inclusion.

RMIT + Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Tapping into tertiary education's diverse student population is one way to increase this valuable cohort within your organisation, and fulfil any Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) requirements. RMIT is proud to be a leader in diversity and inclusion (see the blue box below) and is committed to supporting businesses and organisations to access our diverse student talent, resources, expert advice, and inclusive opportunities to help you drive a positive impact.

This Guide has been created by RMIT's Industry & Global Experiences team to help create fairness, transparency and ultimately successful student outcomes for diverse students. In pulling together many great resources and from our own experience of working with diverse students closely over the last 5 years to produce this Guide, our aim is to help prospective employers understand some of the unique barriers that diverse student cohorts may face, and to encourage you to refine recruitment, transition and retention strategies to support both the student's and your organisation's success in this endeavour.

For our purposes here, 'diverse students' include low socio-economic status (LSES), Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander, Humanitarian students (including refugees and students seeking asylum), non-English speaking background (NESB) and students with disabilities, as these groups represent a large and easily identifiable proportion of the students that our team has been specifically supporting over many years.

There are no 'quick fixes' to developing supportive DEI strategies. All organisations have their unique context – a set of goals, values and business drivers, and will already be somewhere on their own DEI journey.

These guidelines are aspirational and forward-looking by nature. By bringing together a range of information and practical considerations and reflections, this Guide is designed to share our vision, experience and thoughts with like-minded industry partners, and enables you to pick & choose ideas that will help move your recruitment practices and working environments forward to become more conducive for diverse applicants and employees.

At the very least, we hope that this Guide will inspire further debate and action.

3rd



Global ranking in the 2021 Times Higher Education Impact Rankings

2nd

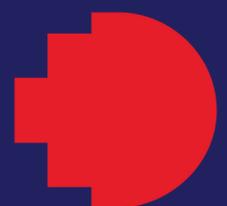


Ranked globally in reducing inequalities (SDG10)

5th



Ranked 5th globally for Decent work & economic growth (SDG8)



Key Definitions

Diversity and Inclusion

The Diversity Council Australia describes diversity as being “the mix of people in your organisation” and “...all the ways in which we differ” and inclusion as being about creating a workplace environment that enables ‘this mix to work’ – for both organisations and employees.⁴

Diversity refers to “worker participation, empowerment, and the degree to which employees feel they are valued, connected with, and utilized in the workplace. A culture of inclusion is one in which individuals feel that they belong, are respected for their uniqueness, and are psychologically safe.

Inclusive workplace cultures are supported by policies, procedures, and actions that are consistent with fair treatment across all social groups” (p15).³ Above all, inclusion will only truly occur when the behaviour of others consistently demonstrates genuine acceptance and respect.

Equality

Equality refers to the premise that all human beings are born free and equal. All people have the right to be treated equally and deserve the same level of respect. This means that laws, policies and programs should not be discriminatory.⁷

Work Integrated Learning (WIL)

An educational approach that uses relevant work-based experiences to allow students to integrate theory with the meaningful practice of work as an intentional and assessed component of the curriculum. Defining elements of this educational approach require that students engage in authentic and meaningful work-related tasks and must involve three stakeholders: the student, the university, and the workplace/community.⁶

Other common terms for 'WIL' include placement, practicum, co-operative education, fieldwork, clinical placement or internship.

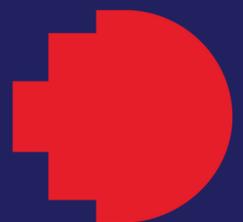
Socio-Economic Status (SES)

SES refers to the social or economic position of an individual within the larger society.

In Australia the socio-economic status of students in higher education is determined by the geographic location of their home residence.⁵

Equity

Equity refers to fairness and equality in outcomes, and “is what happens when all members of a diverse population of employees have equal opportunities and support to succeed and grow.”⁸



Diverse Students at RMIT

RMIT University runs an active outreach careers program to empower diverse students to build on and articulate their strengths and capabilities for future career success. Staffed by post-graduate qualified Career Consultants, the Industry & Global Experiences team supports approximately 9,000 students who belong to one or more of these cohorts:

- Low socio-economic status background (low SES)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- Humanitarian students (Refugees or students seeking asylum)
- Students living with disabilities, chronic physical/mental health conditions and/or injury.

These students continue to experience lower outcomes including university completion rates, graduate employment outcomes and participation in Work Integrated Learning (WIL).^{9, 10, 11, 12}

Many of these students experience financial hardship, often requiring them to work more hours in part-time jobs in addition to keeping up with their studies.^{13, 14, 15}

Students with sub-optimal technology may also be significantly disadvantaged and the need for online learning has exacerbated this since early 2020. Added to these challenges has been the global COVID pandemic over the last 2 years, which has affected all of us in different ways. The Smith Family points out, "We don't want our students to lose sight of their goals and dreams because of this crisis.

It's so important to support their aspirations and to make sure what's happening now doesn't impact their longer-term futures. They've all got such great potential."¹⁶



13.89% of RMIT's domestic students are from a disadvantaged background



4,936 (RMIT domestic and International students) identify as having a disability



316 Indigenous students across HE + VE at RMIT



32.9% of RMIT's domestic students speak a language other than English at home

What Challenges do Diverse Students face?

These snippets provide some insights into common stories from students.

Students from low socio-economic status backgrounds

“My name is Jess, I’m a 20-year-old Civil Engineering student and want to work on Victoria’s major infrastructure projects after I graduate. I live in a small apartment with my parents, grandmother and 3 siblings. It can sometimes be difficult to find a quiet place to study at home, or to have job interviews as I share a room with 2 of my siblings.

My financial situation is what really stresses me out. Without the financial assistance from RMIT and other organisations such as The Smith Family, I wouldn’t be able to complete my studies. Being able to use the money to purchase a laptop that I wouldn’t get without sponsorship has been the biggest help to access the information and resources I need for learning online. I still work a lot of hours at Coles to support my family and sometimes I find it hard to manage my time, especially when I have a lot of assessments due.

I need to find a WIL placement next semester, but I don’t know anyone who works in civil engineering or anyone who can help me. My mum doesn’t work, and my dad is a taxi driver, so, I really don’t know much about professional workplaces, nor even been in one. I’m stressed about having to give up my hours at Coles to do an unpaid placement. I’m worried about my future and don’t feel confident that I can compete against other students, especially those with loads of extracurricular activities on their resumes that I don’t have time to do.”

Studies reveal that:

- Recent research by the Diversity Council Australia revealed that workers who perceived themselves as ‘lower-class’ were less likely to experience workplace inclusion. This included being less likely to report that they feel valued and respected by colleagues, that they have the same opportunities as others with comparable skills and experience and that their contributions to success were recognised.¹⁷
- Compared to workers from more advantaged backgrounds, they were more likely to report experiencing exclusionary behaviours in the workplace, including discrimination, feeling ignored and being left out of social gatherings.¹⁷
- Low SES students often arrive at university having had less access to Graduate Capitals, including social capital (networks or professional role models who can connect them to opportunities, including jobs and WIL placements), cultural capital (many are unfamiliar with the professional workplace and its unspoken rules and norms) and economic capital (financial hardship, impacting on their ability to afford technology, outfits for interview etc, conference attendance / professional membership or unable to give up paid part-time work to undertake unpaid WIL placement/internships).^{13, 27, 28}

Students living with disabilities

“My name is Guy and I have Autism and Anxiety.

While University studies have had their difficulties, with the support that RMIT offers with my Equitable Learning Plan I have been able to complete my Bachelor’s and am about to graduate with a Masters in Cyber Security.

Employment has been a different story: it has been difficult to get interviews with limited work experience, and what experience I do have is short lived as my manager did not understand my Autism. If I do progress to interview, my Autism can’t be hidden and never feels understood. The responses I give are direct and honest but perhaps lack the interpersonal touches of other candidates.

After engaging with RMIT's Equity Learning Service Careers Consultant and GradWISE, I started to disclose my Autism and requested reasonable adjustments to help me in the recruitment process. They coached me to advocate for myself and manage my anxiety, and also referred me to supportive organisations with roles seeking Neuro-diverse staff.

Since this additional support, I've completed an internship with the Bureau of Meteorology, gained a cyber security placement to meet my Masters’ requirement and have been offered a place on the ANZ 2022 Graduate program.”

Other facts:

- Undergraduates with a reported disability had a full-time employment rate of 58.7% compared to 70.0% for undergraduates with no disability.¹⁸
- 45% of people with a disability in Australia are at risk of poverty.¹⁹
- Disability was found to be the most common form of discrimination – making up 37% of complaint cases, following the Australian Human Rights Commission’s review in 2016 of complaints brought under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992).³
- According to research undertaken by the Victorian Department of Premier & Cabinet, the common stereotypes associated with people with disabilities mean that many organisations & businesses are unwilling to consider hiring them.³
- A Job Access report counters these stereotypes by demonstrating many positive benefits of employing someone with a disability, including less absenteeism and fewer sick days or accidents at work, the same level of productivity (with reasonable adjustments), and providing a positive contribution to an organisation's culture and strengthening of its' brand.²⁰

Humanitarian students

“Hi, I’m Amal and a third year Marketing student. I’m a refugee from Afghanistan and arrived in Australia 4 years ago with my mother and three siblings.

I had real culture shock when I arrived and had to make a lot of adjustments to my new life here, including learning English. Many of my classmates and teachers can’t relate to my experience. I need to find an internship for my Business Co-op year. I’ve sent off hundreds of applications but I’m not getting any interviews. I sometimes wonder if this is because of my name and the fact that I went to school overseas.

Although I have worked in customer service roles back home, I don’t have any local experience to put on my resume and it seems that this is what employers are looking for. My English language skills aren’t great, but I have a passion for digital marketing and feel that I can bring a lot to a company.”

Studies reveal that:

- Respondents born in non-English speaking countries were significantly more likely than those born in Australia to experience race-based discrimination in the workplace.³
- They are also more likely to experience unemployment or have roles with lower pay and more unfavourable working conditions.³
- Australia's Muslim population experiences almost twice the average national unemployment rate despite equivalent or higher education qualifications.³
- Applicants with ethnic names and international education are disadvantaged in the application process and three times less likely to receive interviews.³
- Employers show a clear preference for local experience.³



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students

"I'll complete my uni studies soon and I am excited to start a new career in Social Work. Because my previous work consisted of casual retail work, there are some things I'm feeling concerned about. Firstly, I am worried that people will say or think that I only got the job because I am Aboriginal rather than because of my qualification, my skills and abilities. I hear that many employers require a Police Check as part of their hiring process and that the circumstances around me getting a police record when I was much younger, will be ignored. I don't have any close friends or family who work in a professional setting so I'm unsure about what to wear and don't want to spend money on the wrong clothes.

I want to work for someone who understands that Indigenous people may need time off to attend Sorry Business or other culturally significant events, and for them not to assume that I'll do the Acknowledgment of Country or speak during NAIDOC week or RAP launches just because I'm Indigenous. Working in a culturally safe place is very important for me but I think it will be difficult to easily assess this during interviews. Some of my friends have been told by colleagues that they don't look Aboriginal enough!"

Other facts:

- Indigenous undergraduates continue to have lower university completion rates. Only 40.5% of Indigenous students who commenced studies in 2012 had completed a degree by 2015 compared with 66.4 percent of their non-Indigenous counterparts.²¹ However, those that do complete their studies go on to have a higher full-time employment rate (77%) than non-indigenous graduates (69%), according to 2021 GOS figures.²⁹
- There is evidence of wage gaps and narrower fields of employment for Indigenous graduates in comparison with their non-Indigenous counterparts.²²
- In a study of over 1000 Indigenous employees in professional workplaces, 59% reported experiencing appearance racism – receiving comments about the way they look or 'should' look as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.²³
- 28% work in a culturally unsafe workplace.²³ Create a culturally safe workplace by conducting Cultural Awareness Training for staff and commit to all staff completing this.
- With Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders being overrepresented in the criminal justice system, students may have incidents which come up on Police Checks. If certain flags would prevent them from being employed, it's important this is communicated upfront so students can either opt-out or flag these early in the process.
- Indigenous employees may not be comfortable being asked and expected to represent all Aboriginal & Torres Straits Islander people by giving public speeches or introducing themselves during NAIDOC/RAP events. Help create a culturally safe environment where they are consulted individually and asked if they would like to participate.

Practical Strategies for Organisations to Consider

There are many strategies that an organisation can incorporate into their hiring process to create the change that is needed to promote diverse, equal & inclusive practices and reduce biases. Inclusive hiring needs to consider intersectional challenges and encompass more than just gender, race or sexual orientation.

We have compiled this list from a number of external resources as well as from RMIT's diverse student feedback gained from two design thinking sessions held with diverse cohorts and industry in mid-2021 and from earlier student focus groups. This list is not a definitive one but provides a range of strategies which are discussed more fully in Appendix 1.

Again, it's about using your expertise and judgement as to which strategies will suit your own circumstances, and importantly, by implementing some of these ideas you'll benefit all staff in your organisation – not just the diverse employees.



Recruitment Strategies

Unconscious Bias

- Unconscious Bias Training helps reduce different bias typically encountered throughout the hiring process – similarity bias, confirmation bias, stereotyping and group-think
- Adopt Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools

Attraction / Job Advertising

- Target advertising across a range of places and different mediums
- Consider the Equal Opportunity Act 'Special Measures'
- Explore third party organisations (see Appendix 2)
- Adopt bias-free language
- Use inclusive language
- Demonstrate a diversity-friendly environment
- Offer 'reasonable adjustments'
- Demonstrate flexibility
- (Digital) Accessibility
- Include a diversity statement
- Share salary/compensation and flexibility details for WIL placements
- Reduce the number of required competencies to attract more females and diverse groups

Selection

- Use a contextual recruitment tool
- Resume de-identification
- Include diversity as a factor of merit or key selection criteria
- Evaluate applicants holistically, including diverse backgrounds, life experiences & individual strengths
- 'Cultural Add' rather than 'Cultural Fit'
- Hire talent over experience
- Consider the extent to which a student's GPA is relevant

Application Process

- Use pre-hiring skills assessment
- Provide clarity around role responsibility and clear selection criteria
- 'Blind' candidate screening
- Take a holistic approach to the evaluation of formal qualifications vs. other experiences
- Provide students with enough time to prepare & submit quality applications
- Follow a logical, relevant, short and transparent application process
- Testing
- Ensure testing is inclusive
- Consider non-timed testing

Interview Process

- Assemble a balanced interview panel
- 'Blind' Interviews
- Strengths-based interview questions
- Ask questions that reflect your organisation's DEI position & policies
- Provide supporting information or coaching to allow diverse interviewees the greatest chance to excel
- Independent interview evaluation
- Constructive feedback post-interview
- Recognise that applicants are experiencing a range of feelings
- Be mindful of your own cultural lens

Transition & Retention Strategies

Onboarding & Transition

- The creation of a safe, friendly & welcoming environment AND a safe space for employees to bring their whole self to work
- Consistent, systematic & structured onboarding processes
- Reasonable Adjustments for people with disabilities
- Clear & consistent communication
- Make mentoring a standard part of staff induction & ongoing development
- Help with 'cultural fit', celebrate the 'cultural add'
- Accessible education on the tools and resources available to employees
- A formal job shadowing program when new employees first arrive
- Guidance and support on how to give feedback
- A safe environment that encourages new employees to speak up & share their opinions
- Regular and timely feedback
- A clear career progression roadmap
- Opportunities for regular, informal catchup & events
- Employee benefits to be clearly communicated

Retention

- Post-induction catchups and well-being check-ins
 - Address sexist, racist or classist jokes or phrases
 - Be aware of microaggressions
 - Ensure the inclusivity of informal networking, social opportunities and other events
 - Focus on workplace readiness (cultural safety) rather than worker readiness
 - Recognise identity strain
 - Recognise and remunerate cultural load
 - Formal career development programs
 - Complaint procedures
 - Formal appreciation & recognition programs
 - Attentive listening & mutual respect
 - Emotional intelligence training
 - Inclusivity training
- 

Partnering with RMIT

RMIT's Industry & Global Experiences team partners with organisations to understand both their business needs and recruitment strategies while driving employment opportunities for RMIT's students.

The Career Success team works closely with the organisation's hiring managers and talent acquisition teams to help identify diverse student applicants for specific opportunities. We can:

- Connect you with talented, diverse students & graduates
- Push opportunities out to specific diverse student cohorts
- Share insights for successfully evolving your DEI strategies
- Provide mentoring (& other) opportunities to build your employee's professional development
- Connect you to the wider RMIT community

Hiring RMIT's Diverse students

In an effort to create positive experiences and improved outcomes for our students, and a successful hiring result for organisations, we request 3 things from Employers . . .

1. Provide a clear job advertisement including, as a minimum,
 - detailed information about the organisation,
 - the role & type of employment (casual/on-going/full-time, paid, etc),
 - the competencies required by applicants, or Key Selection Criteria,
 - your organisation's diversity statement,
 - your willingness to make reasonable adjustments,
 - details of how to apply,
 - at least two full weeks before applications close (preferably longer).
2. Provide constructive feedback to all diverse student applicants – whether it's about the quality of their resume/cover letter, their interview technique, or anything else. This helps provide a positive and supportive experience irrespective of their ultimate success.
3. Complete a brief evaluation to allow us to understand how far RMIT students proceeded in your hiring process. From this, we are able to provide additional support to students as required, and more generally to measure the impact of our service on diverse students' employment outcomes as well as allowing your organisation to more easily track DEI metrics.

In turn, the Career Success team will help facilitate the process by . . .

1. Actively reaching out to diverse student cohorts with details of your position(s) and can selectively do this for any opportunities requiring applicants studying a specific qualification.
2. Requesting students send their applications directly to the Career Success team.
3. Forwarding applications onto your organisation by an agreed date.

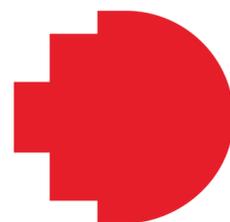
Please reach out to RMIT's Career Success team for more information: careersuccess@rmit.edu.au

Additional Opportunities

- When recruiting diverse students for part-time or casual roles, consider if students could fill your roles across both a range of academic levels (Vocational Education or Higher Education) and a spectrum of disciplines.
- Support the future workforce by providing Work-integrated learning (WIL) placements (sometimes known as internships, cadetships etc) specifically for diverse students.
- Mentoring students allows your employees to build their own professional development and a sense of purpose while providing invaluable information and connections for students.
- Share your organisation's videos or resources on our websites and platforms.
- Attend events specifically designed for equity cohorts eg. RMIT's Indigenous Careers Fair, RMIT's Diversity & Inclusion Community of Practice, and Design Thinking sessions with diverse cohorts.
- Promote your organisation by offering donations or scholarships to continuing students:
 - Financial donations received are pooled into a general 'Equity & Access' fund to support diverse students with technology, accommodation or Study Support scholarships.
 - Named Scholarships promote your organisation directly and can be for any disadvantaged student or support for students studying a specific program. Both these options are tax-deductible.
 - Industry Scholarships are those that support students with their area of study through financial assistance and, ideally, a paid WIL opportunity as well.
- Prizes can be awarded by organisations to students for a variety of achievements, with the option to reward students who've completed their studies as well as continuing students.

RMIT's Disciplines of Study

College of Business & Law	College of Design & Social Context	STEM College	College of Vocational Education
Accounting Business Information Systems Economics & Finance International Business Management Marketing Law Logistics & Supply Chain Management (HR,MBA, EMBA)	Architecture & Design Art Design Education Fashion & Textiles Global, Urban & Social Studies Media and Communication Property, Construction & Project Management	Computing Technologies Engineering Health & Biomedical Science Science	Built Environment & Sustainability Business & Enterprise Creative Industries Future Technologies Social Care and Health



Unconscious Bias

- Unconscious bias can emerge as a major barrier to recruiting diverse employees. Recruit Smarter explains unconscious bias as “judgements & assessments formed outside our conscious awareness, based on our beliefs and past experiences and those of the community or culture in which we live” (Page 3).³ Evidence suggests that students from diverse backgrounds must submit significantly more applications in order to secure an interview, and this is likely partly due to the unconscious bias of the hiring team. In the words of one RMIT student, “Don’t assume young people aren’t knowledgeable and old people can’t adapt”.
- Unconscious Bias Training helps to understand the different types of bias we typically encounter – similarity, confirmation, stereotyping, and group-think. With training, your hiring managers and HR team will better understand situations in which their decision making may be influenced by unconscious bias and be able to apply learned strategies for responding proactively.
- Adopt Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools to reduce bias and increase diversity of candidates included in the early stages of screening.

Attraction / Job Advertising

- Target advertising across a range of places and different mediums to help increase applicants and new hires from specific groups, particularly those groups underrepresented in an organisation. This might include engaging with advocacy groups or advertising in community media.
- Equal Opportunity Act ‘Special Measures’ - The Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission’s Equal Opportunity Act 2010 contains ‘Special Measures’ which can be applied if certain criteria are met, that “... allows and encourages people and organisations to treat people differently in specific situations if those people or organisations are taking action to address genuine equality for disadvantaged groups.” This may allow your job ad to specify particular groups you are targeting, but we recommend seeking legal advice to ensure you comply with the strict criteria:²⁴
- Explore third-party organisations to assist in getting access to internships & other opportunities designed to attract diverse cohorts. Some options include:
 - Career Seekers – helps those with tertiary qualifications find work in the fields they trained for back in their home countries, and supports undergraduate students obtain and complete internships in their study breaks.
 - GradWISE - a graduate program developed by WISE Employment in conjunction with Australian universities, to empower graduates and tertiary students living with a disability, mental or physical health condition to succeed and thrive in graduate jobs and entry-level employment.
 - AFL Sports Ready - provides traineeships, cadetships, direct employment and educational opportunities across a range of industry sectors.
 - The Smith Family – a not for profit tackling the cycle of financial disadvantage of identified Australian children by supporting their school and tertiary education to ultimately deliver benefits to them directly, but also their family.

Links to these organisations can be found in Appendix 2.

- Adopt bias-free language in job advertising to prevent potential applicants from disengaging. With a choice of training applications & systems for employers to access, e.g. Seek’s Laws of Attraction suite of research & advertisement construction tools, Textio and other software apps, employers can easily identify and remove language bias in job ads and position descriptions.
- Use inclusive language to create a sense of being accepted, valued & respected unconditionally. Avoid language such as ‘winner’, ‘excellent’, ‘degree from a top 10 university’. Use plain language. Use gender-neutral language. Use non-judgmental language.
- Showcase & demonstrate a diversity-friendly environment via organisational values, policies and codes of behaviour, e.g., flexible work, diversity networks, mentoring support, RAP, trained harassment & referral workers, opportunities for training & PD, career development, etc.

Appendix 1

- Show your willingness to consider applicants with disabilities by offering to make 'reasonable adjustments' throughout the recruitment process, so that the impact of their disability is minimised. And make this offer easily accessible!
- Demonstrate flexibility, & in light of our recent covid experience, reassess how flexible you could be around location and the requirement to adhere to office hours for any particular role. You could perhaps extend opportunities for applicants from regional, rural and remote areas or those with personal commitments by considering location flexibility and providing employees with the required technology to enable their participation. Does an applicant really need a driving licence or could they get to work via public transport?
- (Digital) Accessibility - Ensure your organisation's website and recruitment portal are accessible to candidates with disabilities. This includes reviewing your recruitment processes and assessing any additional software or platforms you might ask candidates to use for virtual assessment centres, psychometric or personality testing.
- Share salary/compensation and flexibility details for WIL placements - Unpaid internships/WIL placements can cause additional financial stress for students and for some, this then becomes an unviable option. By offering a paid and/or flexible placement, a broader spectrum of candidates will be able to apply.
- Including a diversity statement in the job ad encourages people from different backgrounds to apply, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with disabilities. Here are some examples we've picked up from a quick search of current job opportunities:
 - ✓ Our people are passionate, welcoming and inclusive. We welcome applications from everyone, including people with disabilities, mature age and young job seekers, members of the LGBTI+ community, and people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Melbourne Water welcomes and encourages applications from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. (Melbourne Water)
 - ✓ HSBC is committed to building a culture where all employees are valued and respected and where opinions count. We take pride in providing a workplace that fosters continuous professional development, flexible working and opportunities to grow in an inclusive environment. (HSBC)
 - ✓ At Uniting, we welcome and celebrate everyone regardless of lifestyle, ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation and gender identity and proudly create a safe and inclusive environment for staff and clients. (Uniting)
 - ✓ With PwC, you'll belong to an inclusive community where differences are both embraced and the underlying driver in everything we create together..... We're committed to building and maintaining a diverse workforce because we know it's only by working together that we can realise the potential of our people, clients and society around us. We're living this commitment through initiatives including our Reconciliation Action Plan to increase Indigenous employment and employee-led diversity networks promoting cultural, disability, LGBTI and gender equality. At our core we're a people business, which means you'll be supported not just in your professional development but your personal growth as well. (PwC)
 - ✓ At Wilson, we are building a workforce that is representative of the community we protect. We welcome people from diverse backgrounds and are committed to supporting our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples with employment and career opportunities. We have an inclusive culture where innovation and teamwork are encouraged. (Wilson Group)
 - ✓ As a purpose-led, performance-driven organisation, Blackmores Group strives to create remarkable employee experiences through supporting a diverse and inclusive culture, creating leadership that inspires high performance, and providing everyone with opportunities to achieve their professional, personal and wellbeing goals supported by our flexible work practices and family friendly policies. (Blackmores Group)
 - ✓ It's important to us that VicRoads is not only as diverse as the community we serve, but also values the differences we all bring to our workplace. (VicRoads)
 - ✓ We encourage applications from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, all members of the LGBTQI community and people with disability. Should you require any specific support or adjustments please talk to us and we will be happy to accommodate. (Murdoch Children's Research Institute)
 - ✓ At CBRE, our unwavering commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion begins with you. We are strengthening our inclusive culture, so everyone feels safe, valued and heard. Because when you belong, we all succeed. (CBRE)
 - ✓ The City of Melbourne is an equal opportunity employer committed to providing a safe working environment that embraces and values child safety, diversity and inclusion. We recognise the value of the diversity and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to the heritage of all Australians. We are proud to take a lead role in reconciliation, being the first local government to have a Reconciliation Action Plan endorsed by Reconciliation Australia. (City of Melbourne)

Selection

- Using a contextual recruitment tool to understand an applicant's particular background is a growing trend. It essentially uses big data to calibrate the level of disadvantage and to measure which applicants have outperformed their peers. This combination has resulted in some organisations reporting an uplift of around 60% in diverse applicant hirings.²⁵
- Resume De-identification ('blind recruitment'). By removing all information on a resume that is unrelated to an applicant's capacity to undertake and be successful in the specific role, it's possible to eliminate the selection team's unconscious bias. Typical information removed might include the applicant's name, postcode, age, gender, name of school or university attended, hobbies or personal interests.
- Consider including diversity as a factor of merit or as a key selection criteria for selection purposes.
- Consider how diverse backgrounds, life experiences & different strengths could offer beneficial alternative pathways that successful candidates may have taken and how they can bring new and innovative ways of thinking to your workplace, e.g. resilience and persistence. Think beyond recruiting for certain existing experiences.
- Flip the perception of 'Cultural Fit' to that of 'Cultural Add' and consider what benefits, insights and different perspectives culturally diverse employees could bring to your organisation.
- Hiring talent over experience will provide a much better ROI over time.
- Consider whether a student's GPA is relevant or decide upfront what weighting you will assign to this one aspect when selecting candidates, bearing in mind that many factors can impact a GPA.

Application Process

- Consider using a pre-hiring assessment as an alternative approach to more traditional job applications and assessments for an indication of candidates' suitability. Sometimes it might be more appropriate to assess who can actually do the job! Not all roles benefit from a written job application process and sometimes practical approaches, e.g. gamification or work simulation-based exercises, could be considered to ensure a fairer basis for comparison across a broad range of cohorts. HR technology tools that assess skill levels are available either generically or can be customized for your business.
- If a written application is required, ensure the process is efficient, logical, relevant, short and as transparent as possible. Ensure there is clarity around role responsibility and clear selection criteria against which applicants can respond.
- 'Blind' candidate screening. Biases can be reduced by changing elements within your hiring process. For example, a screening process could include a skills test where candidates respond to different question types (multiple-choice/media/software) that replicate real tasks they would be asked to perform if they successfully landed the job. Again, Artificial Intelligence can help here by ranking candidates based on their performance, without knowing their personal information and so provide a level playing field at this early stage in the process, based entirely on merit.
- Consider and agree to the weighting given to formal qualifications, grade levels & extracurricular activities (many of which are associated with higher class backgrounds), versus other employment experiences e.g., part-time work or caring for a family member. Many lower SES students do not have the time or access to wider opportunities. Perhaps a more holistic approach which encourages applicants to construct their applications using the sum of their lived experiences would be more appropriate.
- Provide applicants with enough time to prepare & submit quality applications – tight deadlines can prevent diverse applicants' ability to submit a better quality application because additional time may be needed to check when English is not their first language, or written English is not a strength.

Testing

- Ensure testing is inclusive - Feedback from students is that more and more organisations are using some sort of formal assessment or psychometric tool as part of the hiring process. Accessibility to these assessments can be problematic for diverse students; for example, cultural and linguistically diverse applicants from non-Anglo cultures might be unfamiliar with this type of testing and could be additionally challenged by a language barrier. These assessments are typically developed for a core group – neurotypical & those from a western culture.
- Timed tests are particularly challenging for applicants where English is not their first language. How important is this aspect of your testing?

Ideas for creating a more equal testing environment and alternatives to testing could include:

- ✓ Simulating scenarios where candidates can demonstrate their technical skills and soft skills (judgement/problem solving/collaboration, etc) by working through a typical project that they might encounter in the role. This could be done virtually or in-person at an assessment centre, using various mediums.
- ✓ If you choose to include testing as part of the process, ensure that the decision to reject a candidate isn't based solely on the test results but is viewed in conjunction with other elements of their application and performance.
- ✓ Allow candidates to prepare for testing by providing background information and coaching tips and an opportunity to practice, prior to the actual test.
- ✓ Offer a translation of the test into non-English languages if this is appropriate. Some tools will offer a separate language ability assessment which then automatically makes an allowance for the level of language barrier. Check whether your tool has this functionality.

Interview Process

- Assemble a balanced interview panel reflective of broader diversity in the organisation and wider community, including gender balance, ethnic background, etc.
- Conduct 'Blind' Interviews. With the huge uptake by organisations of remote interviewing due to covid restrictions, blind interviews, certainly during the initial selection, become easier to achieve. Options here include voice-masking technology, chatting with candidates over instant messaging, and recording interview answers. Specialist software can be incorporated into your recruitment system.
- Broader Interview questions – along with the standard competency questioning that evaluates a candidate's ability to do the job by looking at past achievements, consider
 - ✓ Strengths based interview questions will probe their understanding of, and their ability to articulate, their Strengths. "Strengths-based interview questions are all about predicting your future potential, what you are particularly good at and what inspires you." (<https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/interviews-and-assessment-centres/strengths-based-interviews-jobs-and>) A strengths-based approach is more inclusive for those applicants without extracurricular activities, or work experience to draw upon (which are typically easier for more advantaged students to obtain). The UK's Institute of Student Employers reported that 50% of its graduate recruiter membership used some form of strengths-based evaluation in their recruiting process in 2019.²⁵
 - ✓ asking some inclusive interview questions that reflect your organisation's stance and policies in this area but also to assess whether there is alignment between the candidate's values and motivations, and those of the organisation. (<https://coachdiversity.com/blog/hire-for-diversity-and-inclusion-with-these-interview-questions/>).

Appendix 1

- Allow interviewees the greatest chance to excel by providing supporting documentation or even coaching to help prepare for interviews and increase their confidence level. This might include providing a copy of the questions, a response matrix outlining how they should respond to interview questions and supporting them to map their skills, capabilities and experiences.
 - Independent interview evaluation - Each hiring team member should be encouraged to score candidates independently before the discussion to avoid group thinking and shared biases. Allow sufficient time for discussion in your post-interview evaluation.
 - Provide unsuccessful candidates with constructive feedback post-interview. If the volume of candidates prevents individual feedback, consider sharing a response detailing common reasons for candidates being dropped at this stage, sent to all interviewed candidates being rejected.
 - Recognise that applicants are experiencing a range of feelings including anxiety, nervousness, self-consciousness, scepticism & sometimes irritation because they've applied to so many jobs! For many, it'll be their first job. The ability for candidates to reach out and speak to a point of contact within an organisation can be very reassuring.
 - Be aware of your own cultural lens, your comfort level with differences and your own biases and stereotypes when interviewing. Verna Myers, in her LinkedIn learning module 'Fair and Effective Interviewing'²⁶ explores how these areas can impact how we interact with and evaluate candidates, but also the kind of impression we are making on candidates on behalf of our organisation.
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Practical strategies for Transition and Retention

Onboarding & Transition

- The creation of a safe, friendly & welcoming environment AND a safe space for employees to bring their whole self to work. More and more organisations advertise their employees' ability to bring their whole self to work, which is commendable. Still, many students mentioned they also want to feel a sense of belonging from the start and of the importance of a friendly and welcoming environment.
- Consistent, systematic & structured onboarding processes, including a structured induction plan, all of which are communicated upfront to new employees.
- Reasonable Adjustments. Consider what practical, physical adjustments can be implemented for people with disabilities, and if financial help is needed to fund assistive technology or office enhancements, reach out to Job Access. Reflect also on what human-centred provisions will support both managers and the team to work effectively and help the new employee's well-being and ability to perform at their best.
- Clear communication is a common theme highlighted by graduates commencing with an organisation when they are likely to be feeling uncertain about their future, under pressure, stressed, lost and often excluded. They need clear and consistent communication from leadership during this time – although not too much information at once. They want reassurance that “it's okay that I'm not okay”, reassurance that they can 'speak up', and have small, actionable goals that they can quickly meet.
- Make mentoring a standard part of staff induction & ongoing development, particularly supportive when paired up with someone who may be familiar with the challenges that diversity brings and who can provide advice and guidance on how to navigate the workplace.
- Help with 'cultural fit' but also celebrate the differences (the concept of 'cultural add')! Graduates are concerned about feeling excluded from the broader team. They want connection through communication, opportunities to meet other teams and managers, and to understand their role in the business, the common language, what to wear, etc.
- Accessible education on the tools and resources available to employees. Also, a clear communication of the company values, policies and procedures, and workplace safety.
- A formal job shadowing program when they first arrive.
- Adequate job training with practical examples. Graduates find that it is often too theory-based and would prefer more practical real-life examples.
- Graduates need guidance and support regarding how to provide feedback and how to have difficult conversations with their managers and peers. They feel they don't have the skills to do this and do not feel comfortable attempting it. They mentioned that the stress of handling conflict in the early days can be significant and that they want to feel supervised and supported in that moment. Many suggested providing new employees with clear avenues for providing feedback - including anonymous feedback channels - to promote feelings of safety.
- Reticence. A common theme was a reluctance to ask questions and to speak up when graduates first join an organisation. They need to feel understood and comfortable to share their opinions safely. They reported that new employees often feel unsafe to speak up if there are issues, despite knowing that there are formal procedures in place to do so. They wanted leadership to promote the feeling of safety, where they would feel comfortable speaking up and importantly, have access to mentors or more experienced peers to talk through any issues with.
- In the early stages of employment, provide regular and timely feedback on their performance and progress.
- A clear career progression roadmap from the outset of their employment.
- Opportunities for regular, informal catch-up events to connect & share ideas with other new graduates and employees of around the same age would be welcomed. If online, this could be social breakout rooms with group activities.
- Employee benefits to be clearly communicated upfront.

Retention

- Post-induction catch-ups and check-ins to ensure the ongoing wellbeing and performance of new employees.
- Address sexist, racist or classist jokes or phrases (e.g. 'bogan') using widely-understood avenues of address.
- 'Microaggressions' – little comments conveying derogatory or negative thoughts and attitudes - can cause insidious problems if left unchecked.
- Diversify informal networking/social opportunities/events. Consider if current activities require certain types of etiquette or unwritten codes of behaviour that may not be inclusive, e.g., high costs, dress code requirements, etc.
- Focus on workplace readiness (cultural safety) rather than worker readiness. Holding regular touchpoints with diverse staff allows you to ask them how safe the workplace is for them to identify at work.²³
- Recognise identity strain and educate non-Indigenous staff about how to interact with Indigenous colleagues in ways that reduce this.
- Recognise and remunerate cultural load as part of an employee's workload. Articulate and recognise this element in job descriptions.
- Formal career development programs that transparently articulate goals, options and pathways for individuals.
- Complaint procedures - use widely-understood avenues of address.
- Formal appreciation and recognition programs to acknowledge and celebrate achievements.
- Attentive listening and mutual respect shown by all employees to all employees. Graduates want to feel visible and valued.
- Emotional intelligence training for leaders and employees.
- Inclusivity training for all leadership and staff that continues to develop a shared understanding of the issues. Team building activities that include everyone.



Additional Reading & Resources

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[Coach Diversity Institute](#)

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[Diversity Council Australia](#)

[GradWISE](#)

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[Harvard University - Implicit Bias tests](#)

[Job Access](#)

[Institute of Student Employers \(ISE\) – Four Fundamentals for inclusive assessment \(2021\)](#)

[McKinsey & Co. – Delivering through diversity \(2018\)](#)

[McKinsey & Co. - Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters \(May 2020\)](#)

[McKinsey & Co. – How to build an inclusive workplace \(2021\)](#)

[Pride in Diversity](#)

[SEEK's Laws of Attraction](#)

[The Smith Family](#)

[Workplace Gender Equality Agency \(WEGA\)](#)

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