

Recruiting for social mobility



IP INCLUSIVE

Working for diversity and inclusion in IP

Key suggestions

Here's a summary of key things you could do, at each stage in your recruitment process, to make it more accessible to recruits from less privileged backgrounds:

- Outreach:
 - Target at least some of your outreach activities at students from less privileged backgrounds, in less well-known educational establishments and on more vocational courses.
 - Work with relevant charities and outreach initiatives (including Careers in Ideas).
 - Offer support for those who need it en route into the IP professions: for example open days, work experience, mentoring and job skills coaching.
- Advertising:
 - Advertise in a wider range of forums.
 - Use more inclusive and accessible language.
 - Be objective about the job criteria: consider being more flexible about academic requirements as opposed to skills and longer-term potential.
- Interpreting the application documents:
 - Use an application form rather than a CV or personal statement.
 - Evaluate applications “blind” on criteria such as name, age, address and educational establishments attended.
 - Practise “contextual recruitment” (see page 7).
- Sifting and selecting prior to interview:
 - Provide unconscious bias training for selectors, and incorporate “nudges” at appropriate points in the selection process.
 - Ensure the selection is objectively based on the job criteria, eg using score sheets.
- Interviews:
 - Again, provide unconscious bias training and “nudges” for interviewers.
 - Look out for bias due to accent, self-confidence levels, social skills, physical appearance, English grammar, general knowledge and “cultural capital”.
 - Use a diverse interviewing panel, in particular as regards educational and socio-economic background.
 - Be flexible about interview timing, location and format; be prepared to offer financial assistance. Contact candidates beforehand to provide information about the interview process and discuss potential access problems.



- Evaluate for longer term potential as well as past achievements; test for skills rather than knowledge, and personality traits such as motivation and readiness to learn.
- Keep an open mind about extenuating circumstances and other relevant context.
- Downstream support, after the start day:
 - Understand your new recruits' backgrounds and current situations; offer practical support, including more flexible working arrangements, where you can.
 - Avoid assumptions about what people have already learned or been exposed to. Provide training and support in “missing” skills and knowledge, including potentially exam skills and general confidence levels.
 - Be sensitive when organising social and networking events, and about work-related travel.
 - Nurture an inclusive working environment where everyone feels comfortable and valued, no matter where they come from. Encourage role models from different backgrounds.

Read on for more detailed guidance and additional ideas...

Introduction

There are a number of reasons why you might want to help improve social mobility into the IP professions, and specifically into your own organisation:

- You believe it's the right thing to do, from an ethical viewpoint.
- You want access to more potential recruits.
- You want to improve the diversity of your teams, so as to introduce new perspectives and to boost productivity and innovation.
- You want your teams to better reflect, and more effectively communicate with, your overall client base.
- You want to widen the range of skills you offer and clients you can cater for.
- You'd like your bottom line to benefit from some or all of the above.

Whatever the reason, if you're serious about it then the chances are you will need to make some changes to your recruitment practices, from upstream when doing outreach to downstream when you're helping new people to settle in.

Below we suggest some things you could do at each stage in the recruitment process, to make it more accessible to recruits from less privileged backgrounds. This is not an exhaustive list, and nor will the ideas suit all employers, but we hope they provide a useful starting point. Many of them will also help you to enhance diversity and inclusion in other respects, for example with regard to gender and ethnicity.

This guidance has been created by IP Inclusive's Careers in Ideas task force, based on its "Upwardly mobile: recruiting without bias" workshop on 12 June 2019. Please feed back to us with your own suggestions and experiences, which we can share with the IP Inclusive community so as to improve recruitment practices – and the resultant diversity levels – throughout our sector.

Outreach

Careers fairs, exhibitions and conferences, informal talks in schools and universities – all can help raise the profile of your organisation and of the profession you represent. Think about focusing at least some of your outreach activities on attracting and supporting students from less privileged backgrounds.

- Visit schools and universities you've not previously worked with, rather than those where friends or family or colleagues already have links.
- Establish links with less well-known universities and colleges.
- Look in particular for under-performing schools or those in less privileged areas¹².

¹ You can find data on individual schools at <https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/>, including indicators such as exam performance, attendance rates, percentages of pupils with special needs or eligible for free school meals, and pupil destinations on leaving.

- Ask charities which schools and universities they're working with, where they could get you introductions.
- Check with the Careers in Ideas team (careers.in.ideas@gmail.com) for suggestions as to places we could target from a social mobility perspective. Incorporate the Careers in Ideas resources in your outreach activities, and signpost the website (www.careersinideas.org.uk).
- Contact not only careers and employment departments but also the people teaching subjects relevant to the role(s) you recruit for: this can bring additional business development benefits, as well as yielding candidates for a range of jobs within your organisation.
- Talk to students on more vocational as well as purely academic courses.
- Offer to provide an IP-focused talk as part of an existing course.
- Don't be shy about speaking to younger pupils: the earlier they hear about new career options, the better their academic and job choices downstream.
- Tailor your presentation for your audience: use media, props and stories that are likely to mean something to them (again, there are example resources available from Careers in Ideas). Visit beforehand to get a feel for the people you'll be engaging with.
- Offer incentives for potential recruits to get to know you better, and support for those who need it en route into the IP professions.
 - Open days, work experience placements, internships, mentoring schemes, or coaching (on for instance interview techniques, CV writing or more general communication skills) not only help candidates, but can also be great ways to identify, and retain, people with potential.
 - Consider providing bursaries or sponsoring achievement awards.
 - Work with relevant charities and community organisations to target your support to the right students.
- Take a good look at your corporate branding.
 - It's worth reviewing what your organisation looks like to potential recruits, particularly those from less privileged backgrounds. They will check out your website; they will look you up on Glassdoor (www.glassdoor.co.uk); they will ask themselves if they're likely to fit in.
 - Encourage them to contact your existing staff to talk about their work.
 - Explore additional or alternative ways of articulating your brand values. Labels such as "exclusive" and "technical excellence" may be discouraging certain applicants – and potentially certain clients as well. Could you also sell your services on markers such as approachability, pragmatism, client care, value for money, or innovation and creativity?
 - Remember that for some clients and recruits, diversity and inclusivity are themselves selling points.

Careers in Ideas hopes to publish more outreach guidance and resources in the near future.

² See also <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/polar-participation-of-local-areas/>, where UK regions are classified according to the POLAR (Participation of Local Areas) system, based on the proportion of their young population that participates in higher education.

Advertising vacancies

Where and how do you advertise for new recruits? Are you reaching people from less privileged backgrounds? Are you unintentionally discouraging them from applying?

- Advertise widely, in particular on social media (LinkedIn®, Twitter®, Facebook®); via online directories accessible to “job aggregator” search engines; through school or university careers advisers; in the local or national press; and/or in trade- or subject-specific publications (eg STEM publications for patent-related careers).
- Think about how you can reach people who have not even heard of your profession, let alone found their way to its commonly used jobs directories.
- Ask charities, and other organisations involved in outreach work, to help you target your vacancies to under-privileged groups.
- Be objective about the criteria you specify.
 - Prepare lists of both the *essential* and the merely *desirable* qualities of the candidate(s) you’re seeking. Keep these lists clear and concise. Be objective about what needs to be already there and what can be drawn out with training and nurturing. For example: are school or university grades really the best indicators of future potential in the role you have in mind? Do you have to rule out particular universities, exam grades or degree classifications? Is it essential that candidates are highly confident *before* they start? Does the role really require in-depth scientific *knowledge*, as opposed to a scientific approach?
 - It may help to think in terms of both a job specification (the skills required to do the job – again, taking account of training and development plans) and a “person specification” (the qualities you would expect of an individual suited for that job, for example a strong work ethic or an enquiring mind).
 - Limit your advert to the criteria you’ve identified. Set them out in clear and accessible language.
- Take care with the wording you use. Could terms such as “elite”, “high-flying”, “high calibre” or even “excellence” be off-putting to people from under-privileged backgrounds or lower-performing educational establishments, or to those not yet confident of their own abilities? What if anything do you gain by referring to a degree from a “good” or “top flight” university? Do references to fitting within an existing team leave recruits uncertain whether to apply?
- If you’ve made the effort to shape your branding in order to be more approachable, make sure that comes across in your job adverts too. Beware unduly formal or stuffy language. Avoid IP-specific jargon. Mention your diversity and inclusion credentials; refer to inclusivity-enhancing measures such as flexible working options, support networks and fairer recruitment processes.
- Consider including a brief description of the job you’re recruiting for: what it entails, day to day; the type of people it suits; the rewards it brings; the likely career path. Aim to attract candidates who are not yet familiar with the IP professions.

- Seek advice, from recruitment consultants and careers advisers, about advertising formats that are likely to appeal to the candidates they encounter.

Interpreting the application documents

When interpreting the documents that accompany job applications, try the following techniques to improve fairness.

- Collect initial data using a form rather than requiring a CV, personal statement and/or covering letter. Forms can be easier to evaluate against your job criteria, and easier to edit for “blind” selection processes (see below). They also reduce the self-congratulatory fluff that can find its way into personal statements and covering letters.
- Use online tests and/or pre-set tasks to assess candidates’ innate skills and potential – although remember that these need to be regularly refreshed, as they can become known among the online community, leading to plagiarism or assisted answers.
- Evaluate applications “blind”.

Selecting candidates “blind” means removing certain types of information from their application documents before the selectors see them. This helps to reduce the impact of unconscious biases, focusing the selectors instead on the objective job criteria. The most common form is removing names (which can lead to bias on the basis of gender and ethnicity for instance).

In the social mobility context, you could for example remove the names of schools and universities that candidates attended, their addresses, and/or their dates of birth (people may take longer than usual to achieve their academic qualifications if they left education after a less than positive experience at school). Some employers also blind out references to criminal convictions prior to the interview stage³, as not all convictions will be relevant to the particular role they’re recruiting to.

The downside to redacting information on social and/or educational background, however, is that it becomes harder to practise “contextual recruitment” (see below). You will need to tailor your approach to suit your objectives.

Clearly the concept of “blinding” falls down at the interview stage, but it can be valuable in drawing up a long- or short-list beforehand. If HR professionals or recruitment consultants are involved, ask them to do their initial sift blind, and to send you appropriately redacted candidate details from which to create your interview list.

- Practise “contextual recruitment”.

“Contextual recruitment” means taking account of a candidate’s background and personal story when assessing their achievements, in particular their academic qualifications. Three Bs at A-level may be

³ See the “Ban the Box” campaign at <http://recruit.unlock.org.uk/fair-chance-recruitment/ban-the-box/>

more impressive if gained at an under-performing school than at an elite independent school, for example. Poor academic results may be explained by a candidate having to cope with illness, trauma or difficult personal circumstances at a critical time in their education.

There are sophisticated software packages available to help with contextual recruitment (for example the Rare system: see <https://www.contextualrecruitment.co.uk/>); they compare candidate data – such as on geographical location, family background and education – with information on school performance, wealth distribution, crime rates and other socio-economic factors. This helps put the candidates' achievements into context, generating a re-calibrated assessment that can reduce the risk of inadvertently dismissing a talented applicant. Not every organisation can afford to use this type of software, but there are other ways to take account of context when interpreting job applications:

- Keep an eye out for second-rate grades from schools and universities that are under-performing or that serve more deprived areas (see the government databases mentioned above).
- Check for signs of extenuating circumstances, for example temporal gaps in the education, dips in performance or a promising start unrealised in final grades. These may be explained in covering letters; if not, ask – either at interview or before – and be prepared to think of the answers as *explanations* rather than *excuses*.
- If you require a standard application form rather than a CV and covering letter, include a text field for candidates to provide this type of contextual information (eg to explain gaps in their CVs or unusual subjects, grades or educational routes).
- Beware interpreting a busy or glamorous-looking CV as an indicator of a candidate's potential: things like sporting or musical prowess, interesting hobbies, extra-curricular projects and travel can be the result of a wealthy and privileged upbringing, and of opportunities afforded by aspirational schooling or parenting, rather than of a candidate's own resourcefulness.
- Equally, do not assume that candidates who have reached a "top-flight" university, or been to an independent school, always did so because of a privileged socio-economic background; many are there through hard work and determination, or because their families made sacrifices to help them progress, or through scholarships, bursaries or other support schemes. Try to find the "back story" rather than jumping to conclusions.

The Law Society has published guidance on using blind and contextualised recruitment processes in order to encourage social mobility: see <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/support-services/advice/articles/fair-recruitment-toolkit/>



Sifting and selecting prior to interview

Whatever processes you use to sift through job applications, whether at the coarse-filtering, long-listing or short-listing stages, there are several things you can do to try and remove bias against, or accidental loss of, people from less privileged backgrounds.

- Whoever does the selecting, make sure they are properly trained to be aware of and to minimise unconscious bias.
- Incorporate unconscious bias “nudges” or “primers” into the selection procedure (for example, a short session of unconscious bias training, a reminder about your D&I policies or some positive case studies, immediately before the evaluation and decision-making start).
- Ensure the selection is objectively based on the criteria you devised for the role. Ask the selectors to document and justify their decisions (eg using a “score sheet”); this often makes people more objective.
- Involve more than one person in the selection process, so that they can exchange ideas and perspectives, challenge one another’s decisions where appropriate and thus self-moderate.
- Also involve experienced HR professionals. It’s often valuable to get them to short-list and only bring in the fee earners at the interview (or even second interview) stage.
- If you use recruitment consultants to identify and/or filter candidates for you, make sure they adhere to your own equality, diversity and inclusion standards. Encourage them to widen the field. Ask them to provide long- or short-lists with a target level of diversity (you could, for example, ask for a certain minimum percentage of non-Oxbridge graduates).

Interviews

Similar comments apply here as to the upstream selection processes.

- Be aware of the potential impact of unconscious biases; ensure the interviewer(s) are appropriately trained, and reminded immediately before meeting candidates. The following in particular can cause biases to emerge:
 - Accent
 - Self-confidence levels (manifested, for example, in voice, body language or eye contact)
 - Social skills, for example small-talk
 - Aspects of appearance such as clothing, hair, makeup, piercings and tattoos
 - English grammar (remember this is not taught with the same rigour in all schools)
 - General knowledge and “cultural capital” (someone from a less privileged background is unlikely to have been exposed to as wide a range of cultural and educational experiences as someone from a wealthier background)
 - People you seem to have nothing in common with – *does that actually matter?*
- Focus on the objective job criteria and be prepared to justify your decisions accordingly.

- Look for longer term potential as well as past achievements. Test for skills rather than knowledge, and seek out qualities likely to lead to success, such as motivation and readiness to learn.
- Include tasks such as providing a presentation, handling an inbox, solving a problem, analysing data or interviewing an inventor; less confident candidates may feel more comfortable tackling a specific piece of work than making small-talk with an intimidating panel of professionals. Focus on the approach somebody takes to these tasks rather than the ultimate outcome.
- Use some form of psychometric profiling to learn about the person behind the CV and help you identify people who will fill gaps (eg in terms of thinking and working styles) in your existing teams.
- Avoid trying to recruit someone whose “face fits”: that’s no way to diversify your intake.
- Always use more than one interviewer, so as to encourage objectivity and allow for different perspectives. Make the panel as diverse as you can, for example with regard to gender, ethnicity, seniority, and educational and social background.
- If possible, include an HR professional on the interview panel: they may spot things that, for example, fee earners don’t.
- In the post-interview discussions, implement a rule that the key decision-maker (normally the new recruit’s line manager) gives their opinion last, to encourage a frank discussion and allow all views to be considered.
- Tell candidates in advance what will be expected of them at the interview, including who they will meet and why, the timings and procedures, the dress code, the types of questions they may be asked and the criteria on which they are being judged. Send travel information and explain what refreshments you’ll be providing. Offer some basic tips for getting the best out of the process. Job interviews are scary enough for anyone, and not all schools offer coaching in interview techniques; being able to plan can help candidates feel more confident and perform their best on the day.
- Contact them before the interview to discuss potential access problems, perhaps with the timing, location or expense of the interview. Be as flexible as you can: for example, consider offering telephone or Skype interviews where travel is an issue, and/or reimbursing travel costs.
- Take care over the image you project to interviewees. Who’s looking after them, showing them round, making them feel welcome? What are you doing to help them feel they’ll fit in? Modern recruits look for inclusivity and a healthy work-life balance; an unwelcoming interview experience could lead them to favour another employer.
- Uncomfortable as this may feel, try identifying in advance the candidates who could be at a disadvantage because of their socio-economic or educational background, so that you can ask appropriate questions and offer them support where needed.
 - Keep an open mind about potential extenuating circumstances and other relevant context (see above); listen well, including to things that are *not* said.
 - Make allowances for nerves. Applicants from less privileged backgrounds may be less confident. Help them to do their best and demonstrate their potential. Small

interviews, informal settings and the chance to meet several different team members – including some from their own peer group – can all help a candidate to feel more at ease.

After the start day: downstream support

Different people need different types of support when they start working with you, and indeed as their careers progress. It's important to bear this in mind if you want to get the best out of everyone.

- Try not to make assumptions about what people have already learned or been exposed to. Things you regard as obvious or second-nature may be outside someone else's experience.
- Offer training and support in areas not well covered in their education, for example foreign languages, communication skills, presentation skills or opinion drafting. Allow extra time for them to acquire "missing" skills and knowledge.
- Remember that students from lower-performing schools may be less familiar with high pressure qualification systems; they may need extra help with exam technique or general exam preparation skills.
- Find out what you can about your employees' home backgrounds, for example their living arrangements or dependents. Would flexible working or other forms of support be useful? Do they need financial help to begin with, perhaps for travel or childcare or even to buy work clothes? Will they find it difficult to study at home – and if so, can you provide them with the space and time to catch up at work?
- Be sensitive when organising social and networking events: not everyone can afford an expensive night out, or navigate their way around a banquet with six sets of cutlery, or enjoy a quiz that requires a significant amount of acquired general knowledge and other such "cultural capital". "Drinks after work" can exclude some people, and thus deny them opportunities to network and build relationships, both socially and in the business context.
- Be sensitive about work-related travel: not everyone is used to foreign travel (not everyone has a passport, in fact, or the support structures to allow them to travel away from home for long hours or at short notice.)
- Allow plenty of opportunities for employees to discuss these types of issues with their line managers or HR colleagues, in particular during the induction and probationary periods but also as their careers develop. Make this a standard part of performance reviews.
- Be aware that people from less privileged backgrounds may be less confident.
 - Help them to build that confidence with encouragement, clear and constructive feedback and practical support. Mentoring, coaching and even simple "buddy" schemes can help.
 - Look out for signs of "imposter syndrome" or low self-esteem.
 - Monitor how they're fitting into the team; be alert to danger signs such as teasing, cliques and "in-crowds" (and their associated language and in-jokes), inappropriate

levels of competitiveness or aggression, even outright bullying – and take appropriate action. Remember that banter can be a disguised form of bullying, and can easily alienate a person, especially someone with lower self-confidence.

- Encourage and lead team members to support a new recruit, whatever their educational, social, economic or cultural background.
- Nurture an inclusive working environment where everyone feels comfortable and valued, no matter where they come from, and in which it is OK to talk about problems that impact on performance at work.
- Encourage team members from different backgrounds, particularly those who have overcome difficulties, to share their stories and become role models for others.

The above tips naturally apply to all team members; they amount to little more than empathy, consideration and good management. The underlying message is not to assume that everyone comes from the same background or enjoys the same privileges, but instead – without being patronising – to ask, to listen, and to offer help. It never hurts to be open with your staff about the constraints they're working under and the support they might need from their employers and colleagues.

A few extra guidelines...

Beware positive discrimination

You may be keen to help people from less privileged backgrounds aspire to careers in IP. And it is perfectly reasonable to take steps to remove the barriers that they might otherwise encounter and to help you to evaluate, objectively, their potential as future team members.

Be aware, however, that it is not generally lawful to select for characteristics that are not directly relevant to the role you are recruiting to (ie to positively discriminate). Any recruitment process has to be fair for all candidates and decisions should be based on a range of relevant factors rather than, for example, considering so-called contextual factors in isolation.

It is usually acceptable to take “positive action” in the event that you have two equally qualified candidates, for example to select the one who, in view of the context, you think has more long term potential, or in some cases even to select the one that increases diversity or addresses imbalance within your team. This is where contextual recruitment may lead you to offer an opportunity to someone you believe has the requisite potential and deserves a bit of a break in life. But an employer needs to act proportionately, and must not have a *policy* of treating candidates with a particular protected characteristic more favourably.

Benchmarking & review

How well are you doing? Are your new, improved recruitment processes having any impact? Where in the system are problems occurring and how can you address them?

- Collect data on the educational, social and geographical backgrounds of your new recruits, in particular the schools and universities they attended.
- If people are willing, ask for more in-depth socio-economic data such as whether they are part of the first generation in their family to go to university, and where their parents worked.
- Look at every stage in the recruitment process: the people who apply in the first place, the long- and short-lists, the sub-set you select for interview and the ones you appoint.
- Take care over data protection however. Make sure candidates and employees know what data you will be collecting and how you will be using it; allow them to withhold information if they wish; and keep it anonymous wherever possible (you are looking for trends in the overall staff, not the characteristics of individual employees).
- Review your recruitment processes regularly. If there is a significant change in diversity levels at any point, for example between the applications received and the ones you short-list, ask yourself why, and what you could do to redress the balance.

The disclaimers

Whilst we hope you find them useful, please note that the information, guidance and ideas provided here are not intended as legal or HR advice. You should always seek independent professional advice on legal and HR aspects of your equality, diversity and inclusion policies.

IP Inclusive
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