# Academic Recruitment at Imperial – case studies and toolkit

## Contents

Academic Recruitment at Imperial – case studies and toolkit ..... 1

**Introduction ..... 1**

**Case studies ..... 2**
Department of Chemical Engineering ..... 2
Business School ..... 4
Department of Bioengineering ..... 4
Faculty of Medicine ..... 5

**Additional tools ..... 6**
Textio: a language tool ..... 6
Advert strategies to encourage under-represented candidates to apply ..... 7
Dealing with Unconscious Bias ..... 8
Role of Consuls as observers of unconscious bias and good EDI practice ..... 11

**Appendix 1: Chemical Engineering culture and behaviour review ..... 12**

**Appendix 2: Faculty of Medicine 2019 Lecturer advert ..... 14**

## Introduction

The challenges of promoting a culture at Imperial that has equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) at its core are many and complex. It is not just a matter of changing mindsets. Culture is impacted by process as much as by the absorption of values, so it is important that we consider every opportunity for improvements in how we do things.

One important opportunity is in the recruitment of new staff. Our current demographics, particularly on the academic side, show that we have struggled to recruit and retain staff that are truly representative of the diverse populations in which we search for talented people.

To help recruiting departments think through this process, we have collated some examples of good practice that have been demonstrated to work well. We also include suggestions of tools that can be used in writing adverts to encourage a more diverse pools of applicants and procedures to prevent biases creeping in at short-listing and interview stages.

The case study presented first is based around an approach developed within the Department of Chemical Engineering, though ideas and initiatives from other departments (and universities) are included. We would be happy to include additional examples that were overlooked in compiling this document. Further information can be found online on the College's Recruitment webpages. For assistance or advice, please contact the College's Recruitment Hub.

*Professor Stephen Curry*

*Assistant Provost (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion)*

*October 2020*

# Case studies

## Department of Chemical Engineering

For Chemical Engineering, a step that greatly informed its recruitment processes was a department-wide culture and behaviour review. This brought together the academic and professional staff to discuss and agree their values, what they wanted to achieve together and how they wanted to do that (see Appendix 1).

The workshop did not actively consider the department's approach to recruitment, but it did provide the context in which recruitment processes were re-thought. In mid 2018, the department was looking to do a cluster-hire to make four new academic appointments.

They were particularly keen to see if they could use this as an opportunity to improve the gender balance among their academic staff. Following the key steps in their process outlined below, the department appointed 3 women and 1 man. Of the 11 candidates interviewed, the panel felt that 7 of them were appointable.

**Key steps**

1. Take care with the **language in the advert**, consciously trying to make it gender-neutral. This was done with the aid of an online language-checker. The College now also has a subscription to another tool, Textio, which you can log into using your College email address (no password required). Such tools should not be used mechanically.

2. 'Know your pool': ask colleagues to **encourage people in their network to apply** and to think about EDI when making invitations. Using this approach Chemical Engineering attracted a long-list of ~150 applicants for four positions; of these 40% were women. The short-list for interview contained six women and five men.

   This practice should now be widespread since 'Know your pool' is a College policy, but its efficacy likely depends on the details of implementation. It may not be as well-known as it should. The policy is mentioned explicitly on this Faculty of Natural Sciences webpage, but otherwise can be hard to find on the College website. We are working with the HR Recruitment team to remedy this.

3. Spend a few minutes **talking about unconscious bias** (see additional tools) before shortlisting and made sure to have a **diverse shortlisting panel**.

4. Organise the interview day so that the **activities fit into core working hours**. This avoids creating any barriers to candidates who may have caring responsibilities.

5. Change the **style of questioning**. The Department of Chemical Engineering shifted away from an adversarial style to a more engaging and inquisitive style. A typical list of questions is:

   ***Research***
   *Outline your key research strengths and your unique capabilities*
   *What would you bring to our department?*
   *Where do you see yourself in 10 years from now? What would your keynote lecture in 10 years, time be?*
   *Where would you apply for funding?*
   *Why a chemical engineering department?*

***Resources***

*What size and type of research group would you like to have?*
*What is your supervision style?*
*What other resources do you need for your research?*

***Teaching***

*Talk us through your approach to teaching*
*What sorts of courses would you envisage teaching in our dept?*
*Do you anticipate using any innovative teaching methods?*
*Describe a teacher who inspired you?*

***Leadership and management***

*Give some examples of when you led and developed others*
*What would you say are your strengths and weaknesses in relation to leadership?*
*Values question (see below)*

***Other***

*How do you see your time split between research/teaching/admin at steady state?*
*Is there anything else you would like to add which you have not had an opportunity to do?*
*Do you have any questions for us?*

6. Spend time talking about the **Department's values** and ask how candidates have embodied them in the past. For example asking:

   *Choose a couple of the values below and give example(s) of how you have demonstrated them:*

   *Trustworthy, Inclusive, Creative, Respectful, Supportive, Collaborative, Engaging, Excellent, Resourceful, Daring, Challenging, Responsible, Sharing, Professional, Efficient, Approachable, Open-minded, Innovative, Embracing team-work.*

## Business School

The Business School has recently significantly increased its numbers of women professors by paying attention to a number of factors:

1. For internal promotions, it is important to ensure that potential candidates are aware of the process and consequences of promotion. Reassurance from the Dean that promotion would not mean becoming burdened with service work enabled a candidate who was ready for promotion to overcome their reluctance to put their name forward.
2. Department-wide commitment to the 'Know your pool' policy, re-enforced by strong messaging from the Dean.
3. Recognition of the importance of family and working to help candidate's partners find work in London
4. Panel diversity – ensuring that there is at least one woman on the interview panel.
5. Department-wide commitment to unconscious bias training.

## Department of Bioengineering

The head of department, Professor Antony Bull, is closely involved in encouraging candidates to apply. He writes:

"In Bioengineering, we make personal phone calls to candidates from under-represented groups. I started this about three years ago – initially for gender diversity only, now for all under-represented groups.

Interestingly, our experience is that those I speak to will only apply when they are ready (i.e., I give advice) and so pretty much all are shortlisted and interviewed. I also speak to candidates if they are unsuccessful.

I do not personally speak to anyone from groups that are not under-represented but do offer meetings with any internal departmental candidate (postdocs or fellows).

This all takes a lot of my own time but is certainly a priority for me. I have now personally recruited as HoD 23 academic staff (out of a total of 45), so this is probably the most important thing that I do."

## Faculty of Medicine

In 2019 the Faculty wanted to recruit up to 20 new lecturers across all departments, agnostic of a specific scientific area. This was a highly complex recruitment campaign, as departments needed to be involved whilst maintaining Faculty level control of the process. The process was coordinated by Dr Desmond Walsh, Director of Research Strategy, and his team.

The advert produced was run through similar software to Textio, but also written in a much less "stuffy" way compared to the usual Imperial Lecturer adverts (see Appendix 2). The importance of looking at the language used was raised early in the process. The advert was run in science journals and the Faculty asked its communities to share with their networks. Additional awareness was raised through learned societies who had strong EDI and early career researcher groups, e.g. the British Society of Immunology.

The Faculty received 215 applications covering all areas of our science. These were allocated to departments for shortlisting, according to the preference indicated by each applicant. The Faculty provided clear shortlisting criteria and instructions, so that all departments were working to the same benchmarking. The Faculty gave clear direction on gender balance and EDI within the departments. In total, 56 candidates were shortlisted, with 55 accepting interview slots across all eight departments.

Interviews were held over 6 non-consecutive days with roughly 8 interviews per day. To ensure consistency and appropriately skilled and diverse panels across all interviews:

- The Faculty established a core panel which was present for all interviews – constituting of Vice Dean Research, Vice Dean Institutional Affairs and the Head of the PDFC
- Relevant departments were able to select up to three additional representatives. The Faculty provided guidance and prompted changes if required to ensure the departmental representatives maintained the diversity of the panels.
- A Consul was included according to Imperial guidelines.
- Panel members had undertaken unconscious bias training.

The core panel guided the questioning, using an open questioning style to promote a discussion rather than a combative Q&A session. Having someone from PDFC was extremely helpful in this respect and the core panel guided the non-core members in how to conduct the interview.

The recruitment campaign resulted in 49% female applications, 55% female shortlisting, and 47% female offers. The campaign also highlighted the need to work hard on other aspects of EDI.

Key learnings for the Faculty were:

- Get the advert right.
- Push departments to recognise EDI principles in the shortlisting and for their panel representatives.
- Support the shortlisting and interview panels as much as possible – time is precious so best to provide quality guidance on how best to shortlist and interview.
- Have a friendly face/voice on the phone when dealing with candidates. These were early career researchers facing a major interview, so having a friendly face on welcome to settle them in, give water and just help them to orientate themselves.
- Not all panel members need to be a subject matter expert. Having non-experts brought a new dimension as they were able to lift their heads above the scientific detail and look at the broader aspects expected of a new lecturer. Non-experts can also help with the diversity of the panel.

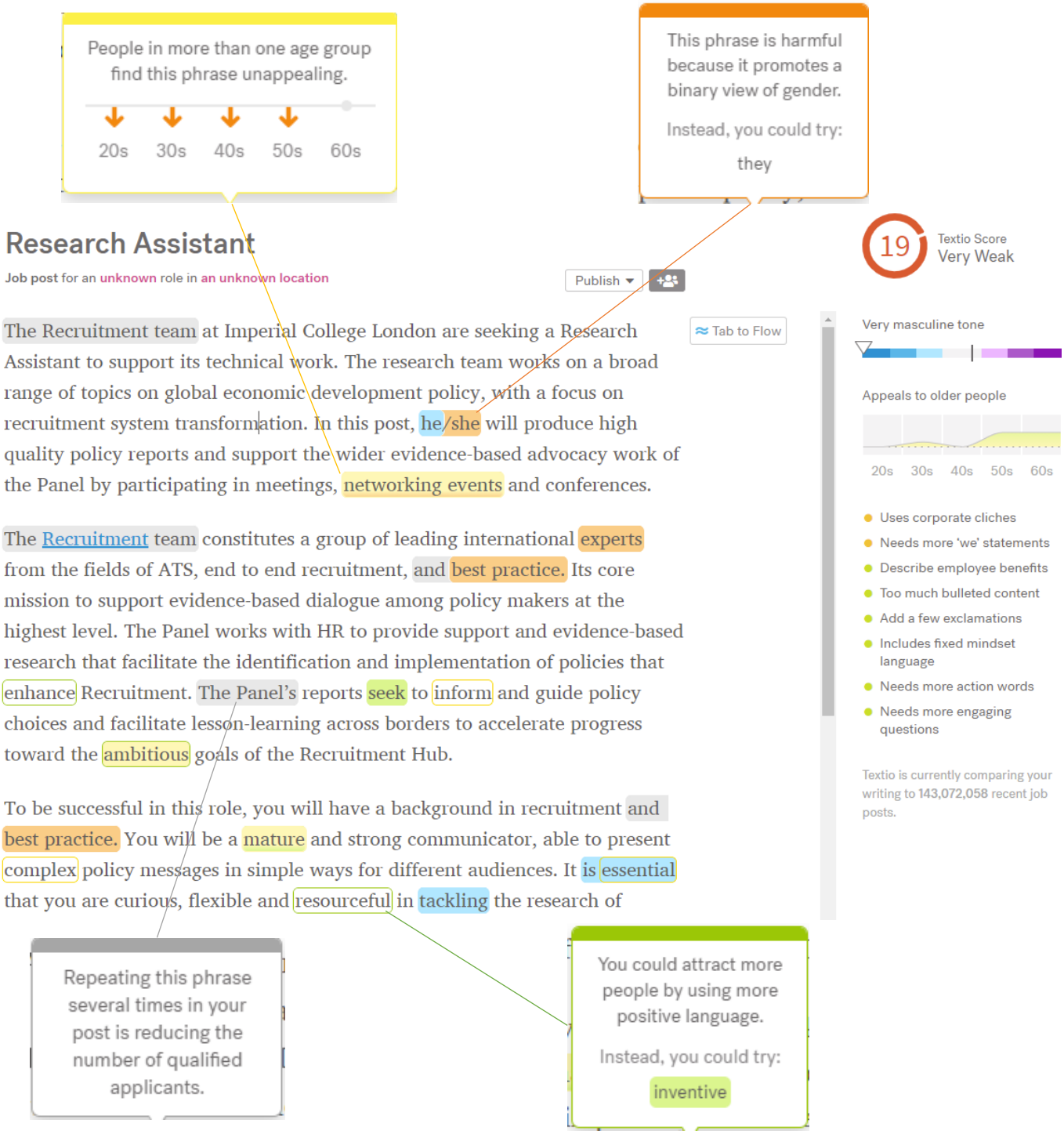
# Additional tools

## Textio: a language tool

All staff have access to the College's subscription to Textio, a tool that can be used to assist in writing adverts, job descriptions and person specifications. It helps to identified repeated or clichéd phrases which should make your text more engaging. But Textio will also highlight phrases that may appeal differently to men and women. Obviously, we do not want to introduce bias.

The College has provided guidance on how to access and use Textio.

Below is an example of a job advert with the changes that Textio suggests. Not all these suggestions will be appropriate for your purposes, but the tool should help you to remove unintended biases. For further help, please contact the College's Recruitment Hub.



## Advert strategies to encourage under-represented candidates to apply

Here are extracts from a couple of examples of adverts for engineering lectureships at the University of Cambridge that were designed to encourage female applications. Similar strategies could be used to encourage applications from other under-represented groups. Key features are highlighted in red.

### Liz Acton University Lectureship and Fellowship in Engineering

(Note that the lectureship is named after a woman)

Applications are invited for the Liz Acton University Lectureship and Fellowship in Engineering. This is a linked post offered in association with Murray Edwards College, and the successful applicant will be elected to an Official Fellowship of that College.

Applicants should hold a PhD in Engineering or equivalent and be able to demonstrate an outstanding research record in an area related to Mechanical or Civil Engineering, including applied mechanics, turbo-machinery, materials, fluid dynamics or structures. We encourage applicants who will strengthen our current research activities in these areas. The post also involves research and other activities aimed at promoting women's participation and achievement in Engineering. The successful applicant will have a genuine interest in, and commitment to, developing the role of women in Engineering, and an interest in establishing innovative, evidence-based programmes that will target women at all levels (school and college, University and beyond).

The successful candidate will take up the appointment on …

The University values diversity and is committed to equality of opportunity.

### University Lecturer in Fluid or Solid Mechanics

Applications are invited for a University Lectureship in Fluid or Solid Mechanics in the Department of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics (DAMTP) to commence on 1st October 2018 or sooner by agreement. This is a linked post jointly funded by Churchill College and shall be held in conjunction with a Fellowship at Churchill College. Applicants should hold a PhD in Mathematics or equivalent and be able to demonstrate an outstanding research record in an area lying within the broad research activities in fluid and solid mechanics in DAMTP. The successful applicant will have a genuine interest in and commitment to developing the role of women in Mathematics and will need to demonstrate the potential to be a strong role model to female mathematicians.

Applicants will be expected to give undergraduate and masters-level lectures, taking feedback from students and providing them with career or pastoral advice, and perform other usual departmental duties such as those associated with examinations. They will be expected to investigate new areas of research and funding opportunities, and submit grant applications. They will also be required to write papers for publication, attend conferences, network with national/international colleagues and give presentations.

[…]

The University of Cambridge values diversity and is committed to equality of opportunity. We welcome applications from everyone irrespective of gender but, as women are currently underrepresented within this field, we would encourage applications from female mathematicians. Appointment will be based on merit alone.

## Dealing with Unconscious Bias

This briefing note can be used as an aide-memoire prior to short-listing or interviews to reduce the impact of unconscious biases. Imperial also has an online unconscious bias course for staff.

### RAE Briefing for Membership, Grant and Appointment Panels and Committees

Adapted, with grateful thanks, from material produced for Royal Society by Uta Frith, based on guidance issued to recruitment panels by the Scottish Civil Service.

**Introduction**

All panels and committees for selection and appointments at the Royal Academy of Engineering should be carried out objectively and professionally.

The Academy is committed to making funding or award decisions purely based on the quality of the application and merit of the individual. No funding applicant or nominee for awards, Fellowship, Foreign Membership, election to a post or appointment to a committee should receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of: gender, marital status, sexual orientation, gender re-assignment, race, colour, nationality, ethnicity or national origins, religion or similar philosophical belief, spent criminal conviction, age or disability. Equally, all proposals or nominations must be assessed on equal terms, regardless of the sex, age and/or ethnicity of the applicant. Proposals must therefore be assessed and graded on their merits, in accordance with the criteria and the aims and objectives set for each award scheme or call for funding.

The Academy provides research funding to individuals to support high quality engineering research, with the expectation that these individuals can reach their full potential. The Academy therefore expects all organisations hosting Academy Research Fellows and Research Professorships to provide supportive workplace structures to ensure equality and diversity within the scientific workforce. Evidence of a commitment to improving the culture in this area, such as Athena SWAN accreditation, may be considered in making awards.

This short briefing is meant to alert you to potential difficulties around unconscious bias and prompt you to consciously revisit them before deciding. Think of them as the safety instructions that you are given every time you are on an airplane. You may think you know them already, but it is good to rehearse them just in case.

**What is unconscious bias?**

Unconscious bias is when we make judgments or decisions on the basis of our prior experience, our own personal deep-seated thought patterns, assumptions or interpretations, and we are not aware that we are doing it. The irony is that prejudice and discrimination are inevitable by-products of the efficiency of human cognition.

Making decisions about candidates is hard work and depends on being able to judge them entirely on their merits. Each and every one of us tends to believe that we are fairer, and less prejudiced than the average person. Research has shown that this is an effect of a self-serving attribution bias, one of many unconscious biases that we draw on in order to make fast decisions. Importantly, we have both a positive bias towards our ingroup, and a negative bias towards an outgroup. We are familiar with members of our ingroup and feel on firm ground when judging their excellence and trustworthiness.

We perceive a pleasant fluency of action when we experience familiarity, and this makes us feel confident and in control of our decisions. With unfamiliar members of other groups, we are on less sure ground. It often seems like taking a high risk to select such a candidate. Actually, in the case of

both familiar and unfamiliar candidates, it is very difficult to shut out unconscious preferences and fears. We are often unaware that we redefine merit to justify discrimination.

For example, orchestras used to be all male, but this is no longer the case. A study of auditions showed that if candidates were invisible to the appointment panel, performing behind a screen, the panel was enabled to decide on merit only, and this resulted in women being selected equally.

**How does unconscious bias manifest itself?**

We are born with a predisposition to prefer the sort of people by whom we are surrounded and to learn from them. Then, through development, our attitudes are shaped by cultural values both implicitly and explicitly, through listening to everyday talk, or reading stories. Our unconscious brain is constantly processing and sifting vast amounts of information looking for patterns. When the unconscious brain experiences two things occurring together (e.g. many male senior managers or many female nurses), it begins to expect them to be seen together with the result that other patterns or combinations start to feel less 'normal' and more challenging to process. If left unchecked this can easily lead us into (at best) lazy stereotypes and (at worst) prejudicial or discriminatory behaviours.

**Who is affected by unconscious bias?**

We are all affected by unconscious bias. The ability to distinguish friend from foe helped early humans survive. The ability to quickly and automatically categorise people according to social and other characteristics is a fundamental quality of the human mind that helps give order to life's complexity. Although we all like to think we are open-minded and objective, research shows consistently across all social groups that this is not the case. We are heavily influenced in ways that are completely hidden from our conscious mind in how we view and evaluate both others and ourselves.

**The relationship between unconscious bias and behaviour**

A significant body of work now shows there is a direct link between unconscious bias and actual behaviour – both in face to face situations and in paper-based analysis or assessment. We are likely to have unconscious preconceptions about people's competence, interests and behaviours. It is particularly when under time pressure or other stress that our hidden biases automatically come into play and take over the control of our actions or judgments.

Some now classic experiments in the US showed that white interviewers sat farther away from black applicants than from other white applicants, made more speech errors, smiled less genuinely and ended the interviews 25% sooner. Such actions were subsequently shown to diminish the performance of any interviewee treated that way, whether black or white. Another study examines the theory that women are perceived less favourably when they demonstrate leadership attributes often associated with men.

**How do we identify unconscious bias?**

It helps to be aware of its existence. Once we accept that we will all quite naturally use subconscious mental shortcuts, then we can take the time to consider them and reflect on whether such implicit thought processes are inappropriately affecting the objectivity of our decision-making.

A striking demonstration of hidden bias is provided by Implicit Association Tests (IAT).

The test measures the speed with which you associate values of different concepts. For example, you are given the task of sorting pictures of men to the left and women to the right. You are also given words to sort into categories of science related or arts related. It turns out that you are faster to sort these words if science words are to be placed to the left where men have been placed and

arts words to the right where women have been placed. The reason for this is that you unconsciously associate science with men and arts with women. If it's the opposite way around, your performance is more effortful and therefore slower.

There are such strong cultural stereotypes that they feel truthful, when research has shown over and over again, that they are not. It is a sad fact that women's careers in science are blighted by such stereotypes. Another way of putting this is that we unconsciously discriminate in favour of things that feel 'natural' and 'right' as opposed to those that are less familiar but might actually be correct. The very act of taking the IAT (which you can do online) can force hidden biases into the conscious part of the mind. It can be a sobering experience.

**What can we do about unconscious bias?**

First, there is no point in being defensive. You can never access your own unconscious cognitive processes, but you can achieve more fairness and improve the quality of your decision-making if you have a commitment to question cultural stereotypes. This means slowing down the decision process and being vigilant. Second, it has been shown that we are far more able to see the operation of bias in others than in ourselves. We can therefore help each other out in detecting and calling out bias.

We have learned to be vigilant of tribalism as far as our affiliation to particular Universities is concerned and ask people to declare conflicts of interest and leave the room while the relevant decision is made. It is impossible to do this if the whole panel is from one University, of one sex or of one type of cultural background. This is one of the reasons that we need diversity on committees and panels.

It is hard to deal with what we might call suspicion of the unfamiliar. This includes the suspicion that women and people from different cultural backgrounds might not be quite such excellent scientists. But to make decisions on the basis of merit and excellence we should not fear the unknowns. The very act of realising that you have hidden biases can enable you to mentally monitor and attempt to ameliorate any hidden attitudes before they are expressed in your decision and even minor changes in behaviour can be helpful.

**Five Action Points**

- When preparing for a committee meeting, interview or selection panel, try to slow down the speed of your decision making.
- Reconsider the reasons for your decision, recognising that they be post-hoc justifications.
- Question cultural stereotypes that seem truthful. Be open to seeing what is new and unfamiliar and increase your knowledge of other groups.
- Remember you are unlikely to be fairer and less prejudiced than the average person.
- You can detect unconscious bias more easily in others than in yourself so be prepared to call out bias when you see it.

## Role of Consuls as observers of unconscious bias and good EDI practice

In recruitment and promotion interviews for academic staff, one of the College Consuls will be present. One of their important roles in these processes is to ensure that biases or deviations from good practice can be challenged in real time. All panel members should be made aware of this role.

The College's team of seven Consuls help to assure that due process is followed, fairness is maintained and EDI concerns are addressed in all academic appointments and promotion panels.

As set out in Ordinance D6 on College Consuls, the Consuls, who are all senior and highly experienced Professors, are elected by the senior academics in each of the College's three main Faculties. They serve three-year terms, on a 0.5FTE basis, and are trained to understand potential difficulties related to EDI, including Unconscious Bias.

The Consuls are engaged in a wide range of staff and student related issues, including Chairing panels to investigate and adjudicate on appeals, complaints, sexual harassment charges, ethical, disciplinary and other matters. The Consuls work independently of, but in tandem with, the College's senior Executive. They retain a power of veto on all appointments and promotions, intervene to maintain high standards, and challenge those who fail to meet Imperial College's high expectations and principles regarding EDI.

***Additional (awaiting implementation):*** *use of the interview summary form to capture a very short report from the Consul or Chair of the panel on the conduct of the interviews, indicating if any inappropriate questions were asked or comments made and describing how these were dealt with.*

# Appendix 1: Chemical Engineering culture and behaviour review

For the Department of Chemical Engineering an important first step prior to reviewing its recruitment processes was a department-wide culture and behaviour review. This brought together the academic and professional staff in the department to discuss and agree what they wanted to achieve together.

There are of course, many ways in which a department might want to conduct such a review. Indeed, it should not be regarded as a necessary pre-requisite for good recruitment practice. But an exercise of this type can be an effective way to boost departmental cohesion and this is something that can help to make it a more appealing place to work.

The Chemical Engineering review was run largely as a pair of one-day workshops. The first of these sought to discuss the present state of the department and to consider the desired direction of travel. The discussion was framed by four questions:

- How is the Department as a place of work?
- What is good?
- What is not?
- What do we want to be saying about the Department in a year's time?

In the second workshop, having determined what type of dept people wanted to work in, they tried to figure out how they would achieve that. The broad questions asked were:

- What do we do more of?
- What do we do less of?
- What do we do differently?
- What do we stop doing?
- What do we start doing?

The main business of the workshops was preceded by discussions to decide 'rules of engagement' for the process that aimed to foster an open and honest discussion. There was also an effort to agree a set of departmental values. As a result of these discussions, the department agreed that the process would:

- Be bottom up and consensus based
- Provide an honest appraisal of the Department
- Consider the workshop a safe and open space for discussion
- Not seek to apportion blame
- Talk not about people, but about processes, culture, behaviours, procedures, expectations, communication

The agreed values (which were informed by Imperial Expectations) were:

- Excellence in all we do
- Passion about creating chemical engineering of the future
- Pride in our department and our achievements
- A sense of community
- Caring for all members of our community
- Commitment to our mission

Though these are fairly abstract, an effort was made to use the value to construct a more concrete set of questions for the discussions in the workshops (particularly the second one):

- What type of department do we want to work in?
- What do we do to get there?
- What are reasonable expectations of each other:
    - In terms of our work?
    - In terms of how we communicate with each other?
- The dept is a fast-paced place with time pressures
    - We know things will go wrong
    - What is reasonable and what is not?
- Do our processes exacerbate stress?

The workshop discussions were summarised in the vision of the department that combined high aspirations with a supportive working environment to make Chem Eng "a place where honest conversations take place up and down the hierarchy", with "a no-blame culture where lessons are learnt from mistakes and near misses."

Diagrammatically, the summary was expressed as:

# Appendix 2: Faculty of Medicine 2019 Lecturer advert

Please complete and forward the draft to your Recruitment Administrator together with the job description, person specification and further particulars (if required). Please attach any other relevant documents and/or provide website links e.g. Department/Division website you wish to include.

Our Tips show what to include or recommend for each section. For additional guidance, please refer to our Recruitment Policy Page and view the advertising section in order for us to obtain maximum impact in the external market.

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**Job Advertisement Title:** Faculty of Medicine – 20 non-clinical Lectureships

**Salary:** £50,681 - £65,620 per annum

**Location:** Campuses are at South Kensington, St Mary's, Hammersmith, Charing Cross, Chelsea and Westminster, Royal Brompton, White City

**Job Summary**

Are you a dedicated, enthusiastic, and talented early-stage scientist seeking to establish your own group? The Faculty of Medicine at Imperial College London is recruiting up to 20 non-clinical Lectureships to join its world-class academic community. Excellent research, education, communication and team-working skills will be required, together with leadership potential. These posts will be permanent, subject to a satisfactory 3-year probation review.

This recruitment is part of a suite of developments underway within the Faculty to support academic opportunity in key areas of our science. The Faculty is also planning towards the opening of extensive new academic and translational facilities at the College's new White City Campus and adjacent Hammersmith Campus, unlocking new opportunities for colocation and collaboration between scientists from across the College. Taken together, these developments offer an outstanding environment for non-clinical scientists working in the broad area of medical sciences to establish themselves within a world-leading STEM university during an exciting period of development.

The major research interests of the participating departments cover metabolism, cardiovascular and respiratory science, surgery, cancer, immunology, inflammation, infectious diseases, brain sciences, public health, epidemiology and basic genetic, biomolecular and cellular sciences. In addition, the MRC London Institute of Medical Sciences, which is an MRC Institute and forms the larger part of the Institute of Clinical Sciences, is part of the Faculty of Medicine. Imperial College also has internationally-recognised expertise in several cognate areas including bioengineering, data and computational sciences, material sciences, physical, life and environmental sciences, global health and business. The College supports and hosts a suite of cross-Faculty research networks and centres and collaborative working is strongly encouraged. Aligned to Imperial's 'Learning and Teaching Strategy', the Faculty is developing its educational portfolio through curriculum review and technology enhancement – providing rich and varied opportunities for our academic community to create and deliver world-class, science-led education.

The Faculty is committed to supporting diversity in science and to enabling the careers of women, ethnic minorities, and those with family or other commitments. We aim to support and mentor young scientists and have a range of support in place to deliver this. Imperial has an excellent Athena SWAN record and strong outreach and public engagement programmes, which all successful appointees would be expected to participate in. The College champions a supportive and respectful ethos set out within its 'Imperial Expectations'.

**Further Information**

Interested individuals are encouraged to make informal enquiries to the relevant Head of Department as listed in the full job description [link].