

Working with recruitment agencies to diversify candidates

The following paper has been produced by the ISC Diversity and Inclusion Group, which includes representatives from across member associations.¹

This document provides schools with a framework they can use when working with recruitment agencies on a vacancy - with the goal of diversifying the pool of candidates being put forward.

The school can work with the agency, or a number of possible agencies, to gauge how they deal with attracting a diverse candidate pool. Schools can use the framework below to develop a way forward that meets their own specific needs.

Framework document

This school believes that recruiting from a genuinely diverse field of applicants will be of benefit to the school, its staff, students, parents and to the local community.

Recruitment Agencies are requested to fulfil the following equity, diversity and inclusion brief, in accordance with the [Equality Act 2010](#), as they gather their proposed candidates:

- (a) All candidates are to be considered equally regardless of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation (subject only to any lawful exceptions under the Equality Act 2010).
- (b) Their search must include tangible efforts to reach into under-represented communities.
- (c) They must show a commitment to understand equity² as well as equality and to select candidates considering their potential, in addition to current experience and skills.
- (d) To commit to the values of equity, and in line with the Equality Act 2010, section 159, they will utilise positive action and consider any appropriate measures that can be taken within the parameters of the law to support under-represented groups. An example could be to offer all first-round candidates in under-represented groups an individual coaching session on general application and interview technique for roles in independent schools.

¹ The ISC's seven constituent associations are: Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools (AGBIS), Girls' Schools Association (GSA), Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC), Independent Association of Prep Schools (IAPS), Independent Schools Association (ISA), Independent Schools' Bursars Association (ISBA), The Society of Heads. The ISC's four affiliate associations are: Boarding Schools' Association (BSA), Council of British International Schools (COBIS), Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS), Welsh Independent Schools Council (WISC).

² Equity is about giving people what they need, in order to make things fair. It means giving more to those who need it, which is proportionate to their own circumstances, in order to ensure that everyone has the same opportunities; for example providing more support to a disadvantaged student so they can reach their full potential

Equality Act and positive action

The following is an extract from [‘Towards an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy’ \(AGBIS and Farrer & Co., 2021\)](#)

“Schools can lawfully implement “positive action” in the workplace.

Positive action describes the voluntary measures which organisations can take to improve equality for people who share one or more of the nine protected characteristics. It enables organisations to take action to tackle the particular disadvantage, different needs or disproportionately low participation of a particular group, provided certain conditions are met.

In the school context, such action could include targeted provision of resources or putting in place additional or bespoke provision for a particular disadvantaged group.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) give six general examples of positive action:

- placing job adverts to target particular groups, to increase the number of applicants from that group;
- including statements in job adverts to encourage applications from under-represented groups, such as ‘we welcome female applicants’;
- offering training or internships to help certain groups get opportunities or progress at work;
- offering shadowing or mentoring to groups with particular needs;
- hosting an open day specifically for under-represented groups to encourage them to get into a particular field; and
- favouring the job candidate from an under-represented group, where two candidates are ‘as qualified as’ each other.

The [EHRC Statutory Code of Practice](#) contains detailed information and worked examples of positive action in the workplace.

Note that positive discrimination (preferential treatment to benefit members of a disadvantaged or underrepresented group who share a protected characteristic, in order to address inequality) is unlawful where it does not meet the statutory requirements for positive action”.

Wider recruitment issues

Work with recruitment agencies should be part of wider efforts to recruit and retain a more diverse cohort of staff. For further advice see the [Recruitment Guidance Paper](#) produced by the ISC Diversity and Inclusion Group.

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