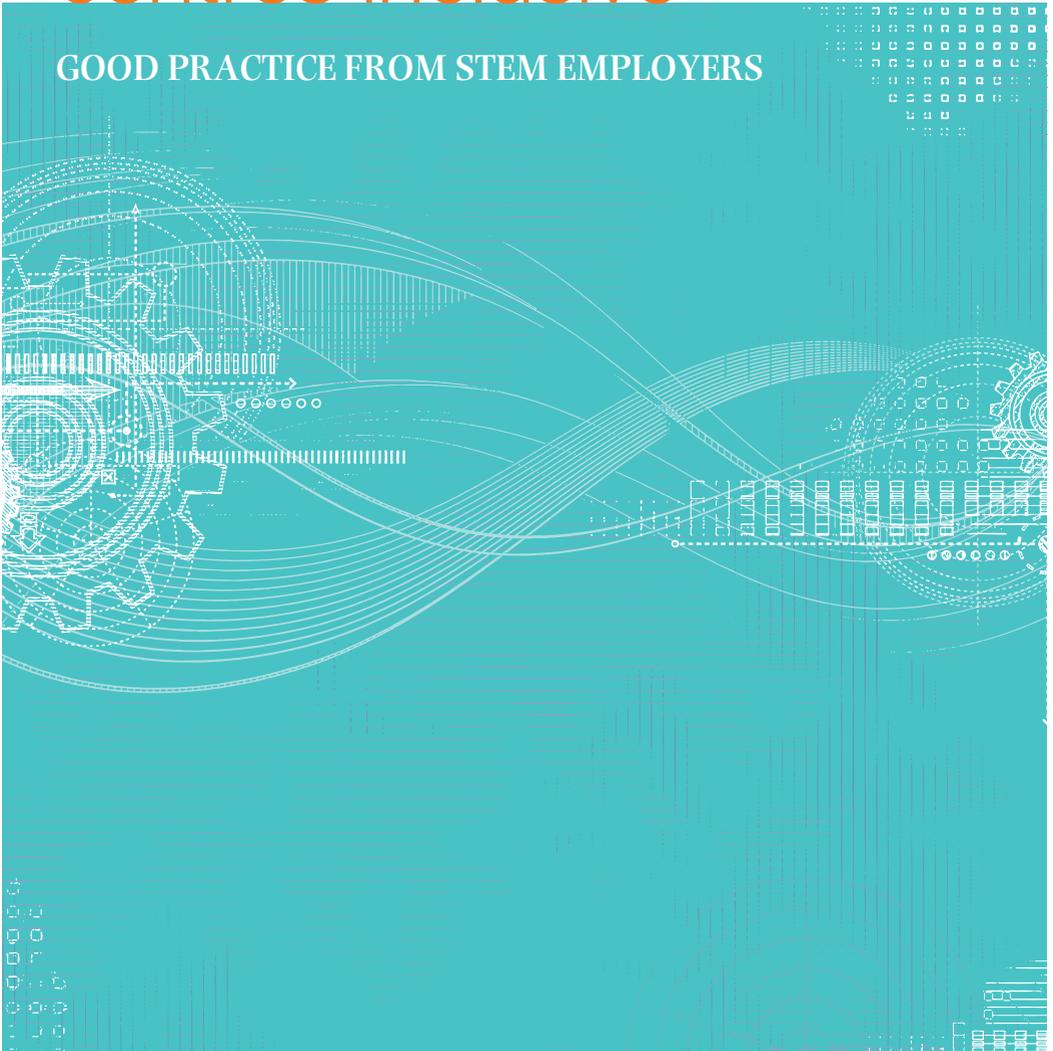


# Making assessment centres inclusive

GOOD PRACTICE FROM STEM EMPLOYERS



# Assessment Centre Good Practice



## Introduction

This good practice has been compiled from contributions from a wide range of employers and gender inclusion experts. The recruitment process varies among employers but there are common elements. This guide has been produced in response to employers asking for ideas and innovations to help them review their processes and anecdotes of poor experiences from job seekers.

**Fact** Around three quarters of men and women undergraduate engineers aspire to a career in engineering or technology

**Fact** Half of men and two fifths of women make that transition

**Fact** Teams from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences can be more innovative, creative and productive

**HOW CAN YOU HELP MORE WOMEN UNDERGRADUATES REALISE THEIR ASPIRATIONS?**

**HOW CAN YOU MAKE SURE YOU ARE RECRUITING THE BEST TALENT?**

Assessment centres provide an important part of recruitment. Reports of lower confidence of women in team work, of women being shouted down in group work and marginalized in team activities were raised in the Set to Lead project. This may mean that they don't perform to their best ability at assessment centres. This guide has drawn out good practice from employers who have sought to address issues raised about differences in performance by gender.

# 74%

of men and 72% of women undergraduate engineers aspire to a career in engineering or technology

# 50%

of men make that transition

# 39%

of women make that transition

## Elements of an Assessment Centre

- :: ᵏ Presentations
- :: ᵏ Tests: *literacy, personality, diagrammatic, reasoning, technical competency*
- :: ᵏ One to one or panel interviews
- :: ᵏ Group work and exercises
- :: ᵏ Role playing activities

ASSESSMENT CENTRES PROVIDE AN  
IMPORTANT PART OF RECRUITMENT



## General Good Practice

**Fact** When you are focused on one thing you can ignore other important information going on right in front of you.

**Act** Remind ALL assessors about inclusion and fairness principles and that it is their responsibility to make fair judgments. Reiterate what this means at the start of every session: do this in person and not by email. In a preparation session, show assessors videos such as the basketball game and gorilla to prompt them to be aware.



## ROLE MODELS ARE IMPORTANT

### Making quality judgements

When making your judgement, take care not to fall foul of the following 'biases':

**Exercise Effect:** The tendency to generalise ratings across competencies within each exercise, rather than evaluate performance against each competency individually.

**Central Tendency:** Giving candidates '3s' to avoid the need to justify more extreme scores during the wash-up.

**Hypothesis Testing:** A tendency to rapidly form an impression on the basis of early behaviour, and then spend the rest of the exercise searching for confirmatory evidence.

**Recency Effect:** Being influenced by the last observations made, while disregarding contrary evidence observed earlier in the exercise.

**Errors of Calibration:** Tending to consistently mark candidates too harshly, or too leniently for what is required in the target role.

**Fact** In groups or meetings with a minority group, the minority group must work extra hard to get their point across and be listened to. This is especially true for women in male dominated meetings or groups.

**Fact** When in a minority a person cannot behave in an authentic way and that person may be subject to subtle stereotyping or soft bullying that will constrain their contributions.

**Act** When welcoming candidates to your assessment centre set out the standards of behaviour expected in your workplace and the standards that are expected to be exhibited during the assessment – for example, politeness and respect towards all other participants. Tell them that you will be assessing these behaviours – and then do so.

## YOU DON'T TOLERATE BULLYING AT WORK. DON'T TOLERATE BAD BEHAVIOR IN YOUR ASSESSMENT CENTRE

**Act** For group exercises, ensure that women are in groups with a reasonable number of other women – aim to have 25–30% – rather than spreading the women evenly throughout the groups.

**Act** Consider the pros and cons of having single sex teams.

**Fact** You don't tolerate bullying at work. Don't tolerate bad behaviour in your Assessment Centre.

**Act** Ensure behaviours of male assessors towards female candidates are professional and respectful and vice versa.

**Act** Ensure that someone on the panel is assigned to make note of any bullying behaviours.

**Act** During observations monitor how the male candidates listen to the female candidates.

**Fact** Role models are important.

**Act** Ensure that there are a reasonable number of female assessors present. This may result in individual female assessors having to attend more assessment centres so this needs to be recognised in any workload models in use.

**Act** Make sure the images you show of your business indicate that women are a part of your workplace.

**Act** Ensure that all candidates have the opportunity to meet female employees – technical where possible.





ENSURE THAT YOU ARE CLEAR  
WHAT BEHAVIOURS/SKILLS  
YOU ARE ASSESSING

## Interviews

**Fact** Every individual has their own biases and everybody will have some unconscious bias.

**Act** Make sure each candidate sees a range of male and female assessors so that individual biases can be averaged out. This is particularly important if you use 1:1 interviews.

**Fact** Women tend to have lower career confidence than men.

**Act** Encourage female candidates.

**Fact** An interview panel of all women or all men can be intimidating.

**Act** For larger panels, try to have a balance of men and women on every panel. For smaller panels try to include at least one woman and one man.

## Tests

**Fact** Sometimes assessment tests have inbuilt gender biases.

**Act** Ensure that your assessment tests have been rigorously tested for gender biases.

**Act** Make sure that the results of tests are analysed by gender to check whether in general men or women do better. Remember that correlation does not necessarily mean causation but if you find any issues you should investigate them further.

## Group work

**Fact** Gendered roles can dominate in group work. While in technical roles women are likely to encounter teams where the majority of members are male and be in a minority during group work. Group work assessment should be designed to identify the strengths and the potential of individual candidates so that you can appoint the most talented staff.

**Act** Spend time thinking about the makeup of groups.

**Act** Ensure that you are clear what behaviours/skills you are assessing and try to design group work to minimise the effects of other factors such as gender.

**Fact** Research shows male students can dominate and domineer in group and project work.

**Act** Offer a fairer opportunity to each individual candidate by ensuring all candidates are briefed about respecting their fellow candidates.

**Act** Monitor participation for boorish or domineering behaviour.

**Fact** Inclusion and respect are important elements at work.

**Act** Add into group work or role play exercises some diversity-related incidents.



WITHIN ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY COURSES, A HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN THAN MEN GET 1ST CLASS DEGREES

## Monitoring

**Fact** Women are in a minority among engineering and technology graduates.

**Fact** Female engineering and technology graduates are less likely than male engineering and technology graduates to work in engineering and technology roles.

**Fact** Within engineering and technology courses, a higher percentage of women than men get 1st class degrees.

**Act** Find out the percentage of women in your potential pool of applicants and check whether your applicants are a representative sample of the potential applicant pool.

**Act** Be proactive in your efforts to attract female applicants. For example, ensure that careers fair teams include female employees, make sure that female employees are profiled in your recruitment literature, make sure that your family friendly policies are highlighted, tell potential candidates how your organisation facilitates career breaks for women and men.

**Act** If you collect data, use it. Make cross year comparisons and anonymise it to avoid breaching data protection.

**Fact** Everyone is a product of their environment and will display some biases whether they are aware of it or not.

**Act** Monitor the proportions of men and women at every stage of the recruitment process and act if there are any significant issues identified.

**Act** Assess the same behaviours or criteria twice and make comparisons. Actively look for gender differences and gender biases.

**Act** When you are making comparisons between men and women – look to see what the gender of the assessor was. Women can be biased against women too.

EVERYONE IS A PRODUCT OF THEIR ENVIRONMENT ...

## About Set To Lead

This good practice guide from the HE STEM 'Set to Lead' project has been informed by contributions from 25 employers, a dialogue with academics and a survey of 4,500 undergraduates. The project explored the difference in transition between engineering and technology undergraduate study and relevant employment. The project has produced resources on leadership, producing information on models and materials used in industry and developed scenarios from leading employers.

*Set to Lead* was led from UCL in association with Katalytik Ltd.

This Guide has been written by Jan Peters of Katalytik and Sean McWhinnie of Oxford Research and Policy.

[www.katalytik.co.uk](http://www.katalytik.co.uk)  
[www.engineering.ucl.ac.uk](http://www.engineering.ucl.ac.uk)



## Fact Gateway

Evidence to support the facts in this document can be accessed through a wide range of literature. The references below provide a gateway to this evidence base.

**Brian Nosek** a podcast on unconscious bias in science and math  
<http://projectimplicit.wordpress.com/category/gender-stereotypes/>

**Virginia Valian** on unconscious bias and the lag in achievement in science and engineering between men and women  
<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/genderequity/>

**Judith Glover** Effective recruitment strategies in IT and communications  
[http://www.equalitec.org.uk/downloads/Effective\\_recruitment\\_strategies\\_and\\_practices.pdf](http://www.equalitec.org.uk/downloads/Effective_recruitment_strategies_and_practices.pdf)

**Wendy Faulkner**  
[http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/4862/FaulknerGendersinEngineeringreport.pdf](http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/4862/FaulknerGendersinEngineeringreport.pdf)

**Opportunity Now**  
[http://www.bitcdiversity.org.uk/research/on\\_inclusive\\_leadership/index.html](http://www.bitcdiversity.org.uk/research/on_inclusive_leadership/index.html)

**Caroll Seron**  
<http://www.futurepaths.org/index.shtml>

**McKinsey, Women Matter Reports**  
[http://www.mckinsey.com/features/women\\_matter](http://www.mckinsey.com/features/women_matter)

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