

## Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias can be understood as unconscious thinking that evaluates one group and its members relative to another group even when that thinking does not align with our stated beliefs, values, or commitments.

Everyone has unconscious biases. The brain receives information all the time from our own experiences and what we read, hear or see in the media and from others. The brain uses shortcuts to speed up decision making and unconscious bias is a by-product. There are times when this sort of quick decision making is useful, for example if faced with a dangerous situation, however it is not a good way to make decisions when dealing with our engagement and interaction with others.

We need to be aware that unconscious bias

- is natural
- is unintended
- can affect decisions
- can be mitigated

Where unconscious bias is against a protected characteristic, it can be discriminatory and therefore it is important that we guard against both conscious and unconscious bias in our decision making.

Conscious thoughts are controlled and well-reasoned. Unconscious thoughts can be based on stereotypes and prejudices that we may not even realise we have. Stress or tiredness may increase the likelihood of decisions based on unconscious bias.

We have to be vigilant and constantly challenge the biases that are being laid down in our own heads. We may not have chosen the biases we have, but that doesn't mean it isn't our responsibility to do something about it.

Some of the ways that you can minimise the negative impact of unconscious bias are to:

- Be aware or conscious of your own biases
- Be honest with yourself about the stereotypes that affect you
- Be mindful, respectful, curious and supportive of difference
- Be conscious of the words you use and your physical reactions when interacting with others
- Deliberately slow down decision making
  - Pay particular attention to your choices when you are feeling tired, rushed or stressed, as these situations tend to activate our biases
- Challenge and question stereotypes
  - Focus on the positive behaviour of people and not negative stereotypes.
- Monitor each other for unconscious bias
  - In order to reduce the effects of unconscious bias, it is important to question biases in yourself and to be curious and raise awareness in others.

[Project Implicit](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html) from Harvard is a particularly useful online resource for uncovering bias. It presents you with several tests and makes deductions based on your answers/reactions to certain situations. We would encourage you to take a number of the different tests that the site offers and reflect on your responses as you continue to seek to minimise the negative impact of unconscious bias. You can read more about Project Implicit here:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>

