1. **Introduction**

This document has been created to support hiring managers with shortlisting. It provides an overview of what good practice recommends and what our legal obligations are, in particular, by helping those involved in shortlisting to avoid discrimination.

Read the University’s recruitment policy.

2. **The purpose of shortlisting**

Where a job has been advertised and a number of applications for the role received, there is normally a need to carry out an exercise known as shortlisting. The shortlist represents those candidates who the University wishes to interview for the position.

How many people to shortlist for interview depends on:

- The number of people who have applied for the job
- The quality of the applications
- The type of job
- The resources available (including time) to conduct the shortlisting and selection processes

If the number of applicants is very small and all appear to be suitable for the post, it may be worth interviewing all of them. Otherwise selections will have to be made to reduce the quantity of applications to a manageable number.

3. **Using shortlisting & “filter” questions**

Shortlisting and filter questions can be used to help create a list of quality applicants.

**Filter questions:**

A filter question is a factual question requiring a simple yes or no answer (also known as “killer” questions in e-Recruit).

A filter question can be a helpful way of sifting applications and reducing the number to be reviewed if a large volume of applicants is anticipated. They are also useful where there is a fundamental criterion that is critical to the role, e.g. a particular qualification.

In e-Recruit, if the applicant gives the “wrong” answer and then proceeds with the application process, this is flagged to the hiring manager.

**Shortlisting questions:**

A shortlisting question reflects some key criteria from the person specification. The question invites the applicant to demonstrate how they meet the criteria, which in turn helps the hiring manager decide if the applicant is suitable to be shortlisted.

In e-Recruit, a minimum of 3 questions and a maximum of 6 questions is recommended as meaningful and manageable – for both the applicant and the shortlisting panel.
Questions should be phrased in a way that enables the candidates to expand/explain their skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example person specification criteria</th>
<th>Example shortlisting question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience of providing advice on administrative procedures to colleagues and external customers.</td>
<td>Briefly describe your experience of providing advice on administrative procedures to colleagues and external customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful experience of managing and developing staff.</td>
<td>Describe your experience of managing and developing staff successfully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to use influencing and negotiating skills to develop understanding and gain co-operation.</td>
<td>Provide an example of when you have used your influencing and negotiating skills to develop understanding and gain co-operation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consider using an opening first question that asks the applicant to describe why they believe they are the best person for the role/how they meet the key criteria of the role.

4. **How to shortlist**

Shortlisting should be carried out objectively and without discrimination, with decisions made based on the relevant facts as presented on the application form.

Those responsible for shortlisting should carry out the process objectively and consistently. More than one person shortlisting will help reduce any bias. Each member of the selection panel could individually rate the applications before a final shortlist decision is made together. (This process is facilitated by the University’s e-Recruit system.)

Compare each application with the [job description and person specification](#) to establish whether, on paper, the person has the type of background that is necessary or desirable for the job. This approach minimises the risk of bias because of gender, race or any other irrelevant factor. Personal information should not form part of the shortlisting process.

The criteria against which each application can be compared will include:

- Qualifications
- Training
- Work experience – type and breadth
- Level of responsibility and authority held
- Level of salary earned to date and/or expected
- Type and level of knowledge and skills
- Competencies
- Any special skills or aptitudes specific to the job

Avoid focusing too much on candidates' length of experience. This can result in indirect age discrimination against younger candidates, who will be less likely than older people to have long experience. Instead the focus should be on candidates' skills, competencies and type and breadth of experience.

It is good practice to keep a record of the reasons for the rejection of individuals at the shortlisting stage to ensure a fair and transparent process. Using a shortlisting assessment grid (automated in e-Recruit) supports a systematic approach to shortlisting by ensuring that the shortlisting panel records relevant evidence to support its decision. The overall decision should clarify the reasons why the candidate has not been shortlisted, for example “inappropriate experience”.

When making decisions about the final shortlist, bear in mind how much time there is available to interview all the applicants. This will determine how much flexibility there can be when deciding if borderline candidates meet criteria.

5. **Avoiding discrimination**

It is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of any [protected characteristics](#). Job applicants and employees are also protected where the discrimination is because of a protected characteristic of someone they associate with.
Discrimination is unlawful whether or not it is intentional. Steps should therefore be taken to ensure the shortlisting process is not discriminatory.

For example, it is likely to be unlawful to refuse to shortlist an otherwise suitable candidate

- Because they have disclosed they have responsibility for caring for a disabled child, parent or partner.
- Because their surname suggests their racial origins are in a country where English is not the first language.
- Because they are perceived to be “too old” or “too young” for the job.

6. **Positive action**

In certain circumstances, employers are entitled to use positive action to encourage a more diverse range of applicants to apply.

Where you consider that people with a particular protected characteristic are under-represented in the organisation or suffer a disadvantage because of their characteristic, steps can be taken to encourage participation or help overcome that disadvantage. For example, if a vacancy occurs in a team of 10 with only one woman, the advert could state that the employer encourages applications from women for this reason. However, the most suitable person must still be appointed for the job.

Equality law allows employers to treat disabled people more favourably. The University has permission to use the Two Ticks symbol logo to show we encourage people with a disability to apply for roles at Southampton.

7. **Avoiding assumptions**

Hiring managers responsible for shortlisting should try to recognise any views, opinions and attitudes they hold that could influence them when carrying out shortlisting. In particular, avoid generalised assumptions and stereotyping.

Examples of assumptions to avoid:

- A female applicant who had young children would be unable or unwilling to work long hours.
- Only male applicants would have sufficient physical strength to perform a heavy job.
- A candidate from a particular country or cultural background would not “fit in” to the organisation or the team.
- Older people are less productive and able to use technology than younger staff.

Disregard factors such as sex, family status, race, religion or age and select for interview those candidates whose work–related background matches the employee specification.

8. **Quality of applications**

It is common practice to draw conclusions based on the presentation of the candidate's application form or cv, in particular where there are spelling errors or a poor written communication style.

These conclusions may be entirely relevant in the case of a professional job. However care should be taken not to randomly exclude someone who may be suitable for the role:

- If the role does not require any written communication skills, a spelling error in the application form will be irrelevant.
- If the job applicant has a disability such as dyslexia, judging them on ability to present the written word could be discriminatory and unlawful.
- A well–presented document does not always indicate the degree of fluency of the applicant as a friend, colleague or professional agency may have helped prepare the application.

9. **Shortlisting disabled applicants**

As identified above, it is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of any protected characteristics.

Where a job applicant has disclosed they have a disability, it is important not to make assumptions about their suitability for the job with an uninformed judgement about whether the candidate could do the job effectively. For example, it will always be discriminatory and unlawful to automatically reject a job applicant
just because they are blind. If it was established that the person would be incapable of performing the job even after reasonable adjustments had been made, rejection may be justifiable.

It will rarely be lawful to reject a disabled candidate at the shortlisting stage unless it is blatantly obvious that they would be unable to perform the job (eg: if a blind applicant was applying for a job as a van driver).

Candidates who have stated as part of their application that they have a disability should be shortlisted for interview unless:

- They are clearly unsuitable for the job for an unrelated reason (eg: they lack the necessary experience)
- It is clear from the information provided that the type of disability would prevent effective or safe performance of the job.

If there are any legitimate areas for concern over what adjustments might be required, these can be explored with the applicant at interview. Once discussed the disabled applicant’s ability to perform the job be properly assessed, and the need for any adjustments to working practices properly considered.

Questions about disability or health should not be asked before making decisions about which applicants to shortlist. Exceptions to this may be appropriate to:

- Establish if reasonable adjustments are required to participate with the recruitment process
- Monitor diversity
- Support positive action
- Identify suitable candidates for a job where there is an occupational requirement for the post holder to be disabled

10. Communicating shortlisting decisions

The University does not automatically provide feedback to applicants who haven’t been shortlisted, due to the volume of responses. Hiring managers may wish to provide feedback directly to unsuccessful applicants and are welcome to do so.

Shortlisting decisions should be based on evidence that the applicant has met the requirements of the person specification and recorded. Therefore if a decision is challenged by an unsuccessful candidate, evidence is available.