De-biasing strategies

What is implicit bias?

Implicit bias refers to mental processes of perception, memory, judgment and reasoning, also known as cognitive bias. Cognitive biases arise because our human decision-making processes are not just factual or objective, but are influenced by a variety of factors such as heuristics (common sense intuition/ based on what we know), motivational and emotional (personal experience) and social influences (media stereotypes). Although most of us hold personal values that are in opposition to prejudice, we are strongly influenced by our culture and the way that stereotyped attitudes and biased representations are reinforced through our daily interactions. These stereotypes are learned at a young age, and create automatic bias that can affect our behaviour, even when our conscious values oppose it (Devine, 1989).

Why use this tool?

To de-bias our University, Devine (2012) asserts we need:

1. Intention to acknowledge our unconscious bias,
2. Attention to when stereotypical responses or assumptions happen,
3. Time to practice new strategies designed to “break” automatic associations.

Through this combined effort as a University, we can improve degree attainment for all of our students.

How should it be used?

Before using this tool, all course team staff members should have completed the UAL ‘Breaking Bias’ e-learning module.

This intervention requires the course team to individually dedicate time to implement a range of strategies to break any unconscious habits of implicit bias. It can be used in combination with the UAL Creative Mindsets project resources to engage students and staff in an active dialogue.

“This tool has been developed by Vikki Hill, drawing on the work of Devine (2012)
Step 1:
Introduce the strategies

Patricia Devine (2012), Professor of Psychology proposes adopting the following 5 strategies based on research, which are mutually reinforcing. It is beneficial to introduce and discuss the strategies during a team meeting or away day.

• **Stereotype replacement**
  Recognise responses that are stereotypical. Label them as such, reflect on why the response occurred, and come up with a replacement response.

• **Counter-stereotyping imaging**
  Create an opposite image in your mind to make a positive association with a counter-stereotypic image. This strategy makes positive exemplars salient when challenging a stereotype’s validity.

• **Individualisation**
  Make a conscious effort to avoid making quick decisions based on stereotypes – get information about individual people in a group rather than generalising about group-based attributes.

• **Perspective taking**
  Imagine you are that individual; how might it feel to be affected by negative stereotypical thoughts and actions? This empathy reduces automatic group-based evaluations.

• **Increase opportunities for contact**
  Seek out opportunities to engage with marginalised groups in a positive manner to alter associations.

Step 2:
Adopt strategies to break habits

As a team describe situations (either real or imagined) whereby students have (or could) experience implicit bias. Then ask the team to consider how the de-biasing strategies could be applied to address these situations. As a team, document the responses either on Padlet or Google Docs, to produce a database of strategies and suggestions.

Individual team members could keep a personal diary to provoke deeper reflection.

“Interesting and thought provoking, some of the questions I felt really made me think about something I’d never considered.

Workshop participant
List of resources:


- From Implicit Bias to Unconscious Non-Bias interview with Dr Gurnam Singh: http://mindsets.port.ac.uk/?p=1339

- University of Wisconsin reference list: https://fairplaygame.org/resources/


- UAL Breaking Bias e-learning module: https://learningspace.arts.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=34

- UAL Creative Mindsets: http://ualcreativemindsets.myblog.arts.ac.uk

Academic Enhancement Model Toolbox

De-biasing strategies is one of a series of worksheets brought together by the Academic Enhancement Model (AEM) team, part of the UAL Teaching and Learning Exchange. The current series includes:

- Creating inclusive briefs
- De-biasing strategies
- Eliminating inequality in formative assessment
- Internationalising the curriculum
- Reducing referrals and resubmissions
- Rethinking industry engagement

To request digital versions of the worksheets email AEMsupport@arts.ac.uk

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