

Language Inclusive Recruitment Guide

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The content has been translated with DeepL Translator and adapted for an international audience with the permission of the original authors Gunta Ahlfors and Inka Saarela.

This comprehensive guide is designed to provide employers with practical strategies and insights on various aspects of language-aware recruitment. From determining the language level required for a job to conducting inclusive job interviews, this guide aims to equip employers with the knowledge and tools necessary to create an inclusive and diverse workforce.

This guide:

- emphasizes the importance of accurately determining the language level of a job for both candidate and employer,
- delves into the significance of incorporating diversity statements in job advertisements,
- provides insights on how employers can adopt an informed and inclusive approach when evaluating job applications that include foreign qualifications and work experience,
- emphasises the importance of recognising the value and relevance of these qualifications, ensuring that language skills and competency are accurately assessed,
- delves into the significance of open recruitment channels and explains how employers can leverage them to reach a more diverse talent pool,
- highlights the importance of embracing a wide range of platforms and resources to attract candidates from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds,
- offers a model for language-aware job interviews.

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Introduction

To thrive in the future, a successful employer must possess linguistic awareness and inclusivity. Language awareness encompasses the intentional use of language and active observation, promoting equal opportunities for all employees to advance and participate in workplace activities. Incorporating language-aware actions into diversity and inclusion efforts can lead to the recognition of a wider range of skills and an appreciation for diversity.

Overcoming unconscious assumptions, or unconscious bias, is crucial to making fair recruitment decisions based on a recognition and appreciation of diverse competencies. An employer's ability to recognise and value different skill sets will ultimately determine their success in recruitment.

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1. Breaking down the job description

The job description breakdown stage is crucial for making language-conscious choices. Assessing the language requirements of the job externally before starting the recruitment process can help determine the necessary language level and proficiency for different languages. To determine the language level of the job and to create more language-aware recruitment, support questions and language proficiency scales can be used. For instance:

Supporting questions to determine the language level of the job

- When is the language requirement for the new/newly created job description assessed?
- What languages are required to perform the task? List all languages.
- How much of the job requires the local language as a mother tongue? E.g. in reporting work.
- How much of the total working time does this take up?

Language-aware recruitment and workplace community

- Does the customer or partner require a native level of the local language for the job?
- Do spelling mistakes make it difficult to work?
- Is there a possibility of reorganisation in the job? If the job occasionally requires written or oral proficiency in the local language at the native language level, is it possible to delegate it within the team/working group?
- Language proficiency scale. The definition takes into account the written, spoken, and understood foreign languages. The following scale recognises that in learning a new language, the first language skills to develop are usually those that are understood, then oral, and often only finally written. When considering the language scale, the existing language scales in the workplace can be used as a basis and define them, for example, as follows:

1. mother tongue 2. excellent 3. good 4. satisfactory 5. no need for the task.

What is the language scale for the job? Make a grid/matrix of languages and the level of proficiency that is needed.

2. Language-aware job advertisement

A job advertisement that is aware of language refers to a well-crafted advertisement that takes into account how to attract a diverse range of highly qualified candidates. Before publishing the advertisement, careful consideration should be given to whether the language used might discourage potential applicants who do not speak the local language as their mother tongue. It is important to create an inclusive and diverse workplace culture that is reflected in the advertisement. To create a language-aware job advertisement, **supporting questions** can be used, like for instance:

- Is there a language requirement in the job advertisements?
- Is the language of the job advertisement in line with the job? Is the job advertisement e.g. in English, but the job actually requires a high level of native language skills?
- Is the language requirement clearly stated in the job advertisement? (fluent/good/excellent/satisfactory)?
- Has the content of the language requirements been discussed during the recruitment process?
- Should the language requirement of the post be raised in the job advertisement more prominently/at the beginning of the job advertisement?
- What kind of language is used in the advertisement? For example, does your choice of words encourage only a particular gender to apply for the job?
- If the advertisement has illustrations, do they communicate diversity or homogeneity, or maintain gender stereotypes, for example?
- Consider including a diversity statement. This demonstrates that the organisation appreciates diversity and encourages representatives of different minorities or under-represented groups to apply for the job.

Diversity statement

A Diversity statement and/or a language awareness clause in a job advertisement encourages individuals from diverse backgrounds to apply. For example, "The organisation values diversity and encourages applicants from a variety of backgrounds to apply, and "Applicants are encouraged to apply regardless of their mother tongue."

- Is there a diversity/language awareness statement? Should it be added to all job advertisements?
- Does the diversity/language awareness statement and the job advertisement reflect the real working culture of the organisation?
- Does the workplace pay attention to diversity and inclusion activities in the workplace?

Explaining the recruitment process

Each organisation has its own recruitment procedure that outlines the steps involved in the process. Providing information about the recruitment process helps job seekers understand the process and what to expect. The recruitment process can be explained step-by-step for clarity.

- Is the recruitment process made visible to the job seeker in the job advertisement?

Using open recruitment channels

The utilisation of recruitment channels is crucial in shaping the recruitment process and determining the pool of applicants. International talents often lack the professional networks of native individuals, which results in them being unaware of job vacancies. Moreover, a significant proportion of job openings are concealed and not advertised to the public. To attract international talents, it is essential to rely on open recruitment channels. They are the most effective way to reach out to international talents.

Furthermore, it is recommended to expand networks and establish contacts with groups that are under-represented in the organisation. This can involve building relationships with higher education institutions, organisations, and associations that represent diverse communities. Additionally, an organisation can leverage the networks of their current employees to reach a broader range of potential applicants. If recruitment services are used it is important to ensure that the service providers understand the value of diversity in the workplace. By diversifying recruitment channels and networks, an organisation can attract a wider pool of qualified applicants and increase the chances of hiring a diverse workforce.

- Are jobs always open outside the organisation?
- Which open recruitment channels are used?

Visibility of the salary in the job advertisement

Including salary information in the job advertisement communicates transparency to job seekers. International professionals may not be familiar with the local job market and may struggle to negotiate or apply for jobs without a clear understanding of the expected salary range. Furthermore, different countries may have different norms for discussing salaries, and not providing salary information may discourage international talent from applying. It is important to note that in some country's salaries are typically expressed as gross amounts, whereas in other countries net amounts may be more common. Providing clarity on this in the job advertisement can help avoid confusion.

- Does the job advertisement state the salary?
- Consider how clearly the salary is stated in the job advertisement. Is it expressed as a salary figure/reference to the wages in the collective agreement/ as a salary per job and as a personal bonus/monthly salary?
- Is the salary sufficiently clear for the jobseeker?

3. Recognition of international competences

In this context, recognising international competencies refers to an employer's capacity to acknowledge and comprehend education and training obtained from other countries. It also involves recognising an applicant's previous work experience and professional skills acquired from foreign countries, as well as assessing their proficiency in the local language. Acknowledging and assessing an applicant's competencies require more attention from the employer, as international competencies may not be as easily recognised in the local job market.

Foreign qualifications and work experience

Job applicants often have degrees, educational qualifications, and previous work experience completed mainly abroad in an international context. To assist recruiters in understanding the applicant's qualifications, work experience, education, and training, it is helpful to provide guidance on how to explain them.

An effective question to include in a job advertisement is, "How do you envision your education and previous work experience supporting you in this role? Please provide specific examples."

- Does the job advertisement ask the applicants to disclose their qualifications or work experience in more detail?

An informed and inclusive approach to reading job applications

The native language of the job seeker is not always the local language or English. Spelling mistakes do not automatically mean carelessness or lack of motivation. When assessing the applicant's skills, you should look beyond the typing errors and notice the essential professional experience - especially if the job application has been submitted in another language than the applicant's mother tongue.

- How do you deal with spelling mistakes in a job application?

Use of a photo in a job application

Recruitment decisions are influenced not only by the applicant's skills but also by various factors such as their name, age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, or physical appearance, which can lead to unconscious bias if not considered carefully. To promote diversity and inclusion, organisations should provide training to their staff on unconscious bias and its impact on decision-making. It is important to consider the use of photographs in job applications and how they may affect the recruitment process.

- What is your organisation's attitude towards the use of photography in job applications?

Pre-recruitment assignments

Pre-recruitment exercises can be a useful tool in the recruitment process to assess a candidate's skills. Video-based pre-assessments can provide international candidates with more opportunities to demonstrate their abilities. Pre-recorded videos allow job seekers to structure their thoughts and showcase their language skills in a relaxed environment, while also expressing their personality.

- Does the organisation have any pre-assignments in place for job applications?

The importance of local references

Do you ensure that the recruiting manager contacts foreign references when considering international talents? Is the opinion of a local reference more highly regarded even if they have not worked in the same job as the applicant, but rather as their teacher, trainer, or mentor? These are important topics for discussion within your organisation.

- Is the contact with foreign references during the recruitment process as frequent as with local references?

Aptitude tests

During the recruitment process, aptitude tests are often conducted to assess specific skills. When selecting the appropriate test, it's important to consider which skills need to be highlighted for the job in question. It's also important to consider the language in which the test is conducted and what it measures, particularly when job applicants have different mother tongues. Taking the test in a foreign language can affect the speed of response, and it may be useful to offer the test in the applicant's mother tongue as well.

- English is not the mother tongue of all international candidates. How is this taken into account in the aptitude tests?

4. A model for language-aware job interviews

Job interviews can be particularly nerve-wracking when conducted in a language other than one's mother tongue. To support international job seekers during interviews, a language-sensitive interview model can be used. This tool can be applied regardless of whether the interview is conducted in the local language or English, as not all international talents have English as their mother tongue.

1. No rush

- Allow enough time to respond and give the job seeker space and time to formulate their answers.

2. Language flexibility

- Allow flexibility in the use of language during the interview.
- Encourage flexibility and multilingualism in expressing keywords and concepts, such as the local language and English.

3. Clarity of communication

- The interviewer should dare to ask clarifying questions and take responsibility in the discussion to ensure that things are not unclear.

4. Clarity of the interviewer's language

In an interview situation, the aim is to use clear language regardless of the interviewer's position. Avoid idiomatic or abstract expressions that do not translate clearly into the other language

5. Avoid closed and leading questions

Avoid closed questions that lead the interviewee too much. Do not let the question itself answer for the applicant without leaving room for them to reply. This may be more likely to happen when the job seeker speaks a foreign language and the interviewer speaks their mother tongue.

- Open question: 'Tell us how your previous skills will support you in this role.'
- Closed question: "Do your skills support this role?"

6. Titles might vary

There are differences between countries and workplaces in terms of how responsible the job behind a title is. It is worth bearing this in mind when asking further questions about the applicant's skills. It is important to ask clear questions about the background of the skills.

- You were a project manager in your previous position. What did the job involve?
- What were you responsible for, how did you report on the work and what results were achieved?
- Did you have budgetary responsibility?
- What kind of decisions were you allowed to make independently in your work?
- How did you solve any problems you encountered?
- Please tell us who you worked with the most. What was the collaboration like?
- What is your particular interest in the job?

Conclusion

In conclusion, this guide has provided valuable insights and practical strategies for language-inclusive recruitment. By implementing the suggestions outlined in this guide, employers can foster a more inclusive and diverse workforce and implement language-aware recruitment that values diversity, fosters inclusivity, and ensures that language proficiency is appropriately assessed throughout the hiring process. Such an approach will not only benefit the organisation but also contribute to a more equitable and productive work environment.

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