

**Title:**

**“But I treat all students the same!”  
Raising awareness of unconscious bias in teaching and learning**

**Presenter:**       **Professor Debby Cotton and Dr Jennie Winter**  
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**Session Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

Knowledge Based Learning Outcomes:

- Describe unconscious bias
- Explain its potential impacts with respect to internationalisation of teaching and learning
- Reflect on the implications of unconscious bias for their own work

**Session Outline**

This session will focus on unconscious bias and explore its importance in terms of an internationalised student experience. Unconscious or implicit bias can be defined as ‘stereotypical associations so subtle that people who hold them might not even be aware of them’ (Jolls & Sunstein, 2006). The effects of unconscious bias may be exhibited through ‘micro-behaviours’. However, the impact on certain groups (which may include international students) can be very serious. Just to give one example, there is evidence that requests for information on doctoral study are ignored by academics at a higher rate if they are from women and minorities (Milkman et al., 2014). In addition, student interactions (in group work etc.) may be influenced by unconscious bias (Cotton et al., 2013a), and it may impact on marking where this is not anonymous (Fleming, 1999). Yet recent research at our university indicated a lack of awareness about the potential impact of unconscious bias on interactions between students and staff (Cotton et al., 2013b) – and this is most likely the case in other institutions. In the light of an increasingly internationalised student cohort - and persistent differential in achievement between male and female students and between white and BME students – this is a very important issue which educational developers should be addressing directly in their work.

Key issues to be considered in this session will include:

- What is unconscious bias?
- How does it impact on our work, and that of teaching staff and students?

- What steps can we take to reduce the impact of unconscious biases on teaching and learning?

We will share some resources from a recent project on unconscious bias in HE, including a 7 steps guidance document for academics. Participants will be able to evaluate the guidance provided and share good practice from their own institutions.

### Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The outline of the workshop is as follows;

Timing and task	What facilitators do ..	What participants do ..
5 mins - introductions	Brief introduction to session and facilitators	Brief introduction (or show of hands for different roles, depending on numbers)
5 mins – quick quiz	Show photos of different types of students. Collate responses (may use personal response system if technology allows)	Quick-fire response to quiz on which university they believe the pictured students attended
10 mins – Overview of unconscious bias	Brief presentation on research evidence around unconscious bias generally and in HE	Listen attentively!
15 mins - Review and feedback on '7 steps' resource on unconscious bias developed at Plymouth to enhance teaching and learning practices.	Provide copies of the resource. Guide and join discussions as needed.	Group discussion of resource and other activities which are undertaken at their institutions.
10 mins – feedback and ideas sharing	Lead feedback session	Comment on resource and share other ideas from discussion on tackling unconscious bias

### References

Cotton, D.R.E., George, R. & Joyner, M. (2013a) Interaction and influence in culturally-mixed groups. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*. 50 (3): 272-283.

Cotton, D.R.E., George, R. & Joyner, M. (2013b) *The gender and ethnicity attainment gap research project*. PedRIO paper no. 2. Available online at: <https://www1.plymouth.ac.uk/research/pedrio/Documents/PedRIO%20Paper%202.pdf> (accessed 23/10/14)

Fleming, N. (1999) 'Biases in Marking Students' Written work: Quality?' In Brown, S & Glasner, A. *Assessment Matters in Higher Education: Choosing and Using Diverse Approaches*. SRHE & Open University Press.

Milkman, K. L., Akinola, M. and Chugh, D. (2014) What Happens Before? A Field Experiment Exploring How Pay and Representation Differentially Shape Bias on the Pathway into Organizations. *Social Science research Network*. Available online at: [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2063742](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2063742) (accessed 23/10/14)