

Written Ministerial Statement on Unconscious Bias Training

This government is committed to levelling up opportunity for everyone, no matter what their background. We are also determined to eliminate discrimination in the workplace. To meet those ambitions, we must ensure that policy and advice on equality is evidence-based, and is delivered in a way that means we can respond quickly to new insights.

Earlier this year, the Government Equalities Office commissioned the Behavioural Insights Team for a summary of the evidence on unconscious bias and diversity training. Titled 'Unconscious bias and diversity training – what the evidence says', the report highlights that 'there is currently no evidence that this training changes behaviour in the long term or improves workplace equality in terms of representation of women, ethnic minorities or other minority groups'. It also states that there is emerging evidence of unintended negative consequences.

The report is published alongside this response, and will be deposited in the House Libraries, today. In light of its findings, Ministers have concluded that unconscious bias training does not achieve its intended aims. It will therefore be phased out in the Civil Service. We encourage other public sector employers to do likewise.

Background

Unconscious bias training typically aims to raise awareness of the potential biases and cognitive shortcuts that may negatively affect decision-making and behaviour in the workplace. The intent is usually to reduce both explicit and implicit bias towards members of particular groups that share characteristics protected under law and change behaviour.

Although unconscious bias training takes a variety of forms, it is normally delivered as a discrete individual or group session that aims to set out the theory behind implicit bias, provide exercises that demonstrate how such biases might potentially affect behaviour, and suggest strategies to participants for avoiding that behaviour in future.

Such training sessions have been introduced by a range of organisations as part of a well-intentioned effort to build fairer and more inclusive workplaces. They have often formed part of a wider employer toolkit aimed at tackling discrimination and building inclusion.

However, in recent years a significant debate has emerged over their effectiveness and quality. Despite a growing diversity training industry and increased adoption of unconscious bias training programmes, a strong body of evidence has emerged that shows that such training has no sustained impact on behaviour and may even be counter-productive.

Lack of evidence to support positive change

To be successful in tackling discrimination, unconscious bias training should change behaviour. However, evidence suggests that attitudes and behaviours are each driven by different psychological systems, so a single intervention is unlikely to impact effectively on both. A systematic review of unconscious bias training examining 492 studies (involving more than 87,000 participants), found changes to unconscious bias measures were not associated with changes in behaviour (1). Formal assessments of bias (eg the Implicit Association Test) have also been criticised for failing to generate replicable results even when the same individuals have been re-tested (2).

Further evidence also suggests that unconscious bias training may even have detrimental effects. The Equality and Human Rights Commission found that evidence for its ability effectively to change behaviour is limited and "there is potential for back-firing effects when UBT participants are exposed to information that suggests stereotypes and biases are unchangeable." Instructions to suppress stereotypes may not only activate and reinforce unhelpful stereotypes, they may provoke negative reactions and actually make people exacerbate their biases (3).

Finally, there is no recognised way of assuring the quality of unconscious bias training and multiple interventions of variable content may be given that label. This has serious implications for organisations, who risk putting funding into poor quality and ineffective training.

Government conclusion

The Civil Service is committed to being an open and inclusive employer. Civil servants work on a range of complex policies every day; working inclusively means that they will make better decisions, solve problems more effectively and ultimately deliver better services to citizens. An individual's background must never be a limiting factor in the workplace. Our aspiration is clear: a Civil Service open to all, with individuals from a variety of backgrounds adding breadth and depth to our understanding of contemporary British society, providing greater challenge to received wisdom and fresh perspectives to the challenges we face as a nation – united by a commitment to the fundamental values of public life and service.

Efforts to ensure the Civil Service is representative of the whole population it serves, and that its workplaces are free from discrimination, must be based on clear evidence of what works, must uphold the merit principle for recruitment and promotion, and must represent value for taxpayers' money. This approach is the reason, for example, that the Civil Service uses clear, standardised assessment techniques for recruitment and tests the fairness of any such tools with diverse user groups before deploying them.

Given the evidence, now captured in the report accompanying this statement, an internal review decided in January 2020 that unconscious bias training would be phased out in departments. In addition, while there is clearly a role for training to support a more inclusive workplace and Civil Service, evidence also suggests that even the broader category of 'diversity training'

as a standalone exercise can undermine such efforts if it appears to be a “tick box exercise”. The Civil Service will therefore integrate principles for inclusion and diversity into mainstream core training and leadership modules in a manner which facilitates positive behaviour change. This new strategy will be published in the new year, and will reassert our commitment to being an inclusive employer with a stronger focus on engaging measurable action.

The government expects other parts of the public sector, including local government, the police, and the NHS, to review their approaches in light of the evidence and the developments in the Civil Service. We will continue to build the evidence on what works to make our workplaces fairer, and unite and level up across our country, with the reformed Equality Hub playing a key role.

The WMS is published on the parliament website [here](#)

[Uruguay, Namibia and US Virgin Islands removed from travel corridor list of exempt countries.](#)

- Uruguay, Namibia and US Virgin Islands removed from list of UK travel corridors following data showing a significant increase in confirmed cases
- two-week pause for any changes to the Travel Corridors list until 7 January when the regular process resumes, unless data from a country shows a significant increase in risk and requires urgent action
- travellers urged to continue to check the latest advice from the FCDO over the Christmas break

People arriving into the UK from Uruguay, Namibia and the US Virgin Islands from 4am Saturday 19 December will need to [self-isolate for 10 days](#) as the countries are removed from the [travel corridors list](#).

There has been a consistent increase in COVID-19 cases per 100,000 of the population in Namibia, Uruguay and the US Virgin Islands since late November, leading ministers to remove these from the current list of travel corridors.

In Namibia, new cases per week have increased by 334% over this time period. In Uruguay, new cases per week have increased by 295% over the same time period. In the US Virgin Islands, new cases per week have increased by 108% over the same time period.

At the same time, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has

updated its [travel advice](#) to advise against all but essential travel to Uruguay, Namibia and the US Virgin Islands. These changes reflect the latest assessments by Public Health England of the risk to travellers in each of these destinations.

Passengers arriving into the UK from countries not featured on the government's travel corridor list are now able to opt-in and pay for a COVID-19 test from a private provider 5 days after they were last in a non-travel corridor location, with a negative test result releasing them from the need to self-isolate. With the [Test to Release for International Travel scheme](#) now live, several thousand tests have been sold so far across the [13 providers on the GOV.UK list](#), which is being updated regularly.

Ministers have agreed a two-week pause to the travel corridor review process, to provide certainty for passengers and industry around travel plans over the festive break. The move will ensure that those who are planning to travel over the Christmas period do not face last minute disruption unless absolutely necessary due to increasing infection rates. There are no planned removals or additions until 7 January when the regular process will resume.

However, the government has made consistently clear it will take decisive action to contain the virus, including removing countries from the travel corridors list rapidly if the public health risk of people returning from a particular country without self-isolating becomes too high. This remains the case over the festive period, and we will continue to monitor the data on levels of imported infection and take urgent action if the data indicates the need to.

COVID-19 has profoundly changed the nature of international travel. Travellers should always [check the latest advice from the FCDO](#) over the festive break, given the potential for changing coronavirus infection rates to affect both the advice about travelling to other countries and rules about self-isolation on return.

All travellers, including those from exempt destinations, will still be required to show a complete [passenger locator form](#) on arrival into the UK unless they fall into a small group of exemptions.

Penalties for those breaching the self-isolation rules when returning from non-exempt countries are £1,000 for first offence, rising to up to £10,000 for subsequent offences, mirroring penalties for those breaching self-isolation following a positive COVID test or contact from Test and Trace.

[Humanitarian access to Tigray:](#)

Minister for Africa statement

Press release

Minister for Africa James Duddridge has called for unfettered humanitarian access to Tigray.



Minister for Africa James Duddridge said:

The UK remains deeply concerned about the situation in Tigray, following reports of continued violence, ethnic discrimination and dire shortages of food, water, fuel and cash.

People across the region will face further suffering, if the ongoing challenges humanitarian agencies have accessing Tigray do not improve.

We have repeatedly called on all parties involved to urgently allow unfettered access and for the independent investigation of alleged violations of human rights.

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Technology drives forward new network for search and rescue

Press release

State-of-the-art technology is bringing a new edge to the search and rescue

work of HM Coastguard.



Old copper-based cables are being replaced with fibre-based technology across 165 remote radio sites across the United Kingdom, starting with Weymouth on Wednesday 16 December.

Each radio site receives distress calls from UK waters and the replacement technology will bring improvements such as security and bandwidth.

Damien Oliver, Commercial and Programmes Director for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, said: "We are investing £175 million into this new national radio network, which is central in preventing the loss of life on the coast and at sea.

"At a time when getting outdoors is pivotal to people's mental health and wellbeing, it is essential that we can provide reassurance that we are here to respond to any emergency they may find themselves in, and this new network will enhance our ability to do that."

The new network is being built and maintained by Telent Technology Services Ltd. Peter Moir, Managing Director of Network Services at Telent, said: "This network may not be seen by many people, but it's literally a lifeline for someone in distress at sea. It's important that this network's capability continues to support Her Majesty's Coastguard in the vital lifesaving search and rescue work that it does."

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[Supervision of terrorists reinforced with new powers and closer collaboration](#)

- new laws to give police powers to search terrorism-risk offenders on

licence

- doubling of specialist probation officers tackling terrorism
- better intelligence sharing between police, prisons, probation and security services

The monitoring of convicted terrorists and others who pose a terror risk will be strengthened under plans laid out today by the government, in response to an independent review by Jonathan Hall QC.

While Jonathan Hall found well-established processes were already in place between police, probation and other agencies to manage terrorism-risk offenders, he made a series of recommendations to improve them.

Many of the suggested changes are already underway as part of the government's Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill. This includes plans to require terrorists under probation supervision to undergo polygraph testing and giving judges more discretion to decide a crime is terror-related, so that they can impose a tougher sentence.

The National Probation Service has also created a new National Security Division which will double the number of specialist officers dedicated to supervising terrorism-risk offenders and strengthen its work with police, prisons and the security services.

The government has also confirmed it will bring forward new legislation to give police the powers to search terrorist offenders on licence and obtain warrants to check they are complying with the terms of their release, for example by searching their home or seizing electronic devices. The legislation will also ensure offenders who pose a terror risk but were not convicted of a terrorist offence can be supervised like those who were.

Lord Chancellor Robert Buckland QC MP said:

Keeping our communities safe is the Government's first priority and recent atrocities in France and Austria have shown us that continued vigilance is needed.

Our security services, police, prison and probation officers epitomise public duty and these new powers and the Government's considerable investment will help them improve the tremendous, challenging work they do.

Home Secretary Priti Patel MP said:

This year we have witnessed horrific terrorist attacks at home and abroad, which is why we have taken significant steps to amend our powers and strengthen our tools to tackle the threats our country faces.

The British public should be in no doubt that we will take the

strongest possible action to keep them safe, and these new powers will further bolster the improvements already being made by the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill.

Last month's Spending Review committed over £900 million for Counter-Terrorism Police next year, following this year's 10% increase. It also unveiled plans for a world-leading Counter-Terrorism Operations Centre which will bring staff from the security services, counter-terror police and HM Prison and Probation Service together into one location enhancing their ability to discover and prevent attacks.

Jonathan Hall examined how police, prison and probation staff, the security services and others work together through Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) to reduce the risk that terrorists pose to the public.

Other changes outlined in the government response to his report include:

- The creation of a new category of MAPPA, specifically for terrorism-risk offenders.
- Clarifying data protection laws to reinforce that any organisation involved in the supervision of offenders through MAPPA can share information.
- Every terrorism-risk offender will now spend up to 12 months in an Approved Premises when released from prison on licence.

The [government's full response](#) can be found on GOV.UK.