HR consultancy responds to claims that ‘Muslim sounding names’ damage job prospects

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HR and diversity consultancy, The Clear Company, has responded to findings from a BBC investigation (http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0071mkv) which suggests that employers are less likely to consider applicants with ‘Muslim-sounding names’.

BBC’s Inside Out, which aired yesterday (Monday 6th February 2017), found a job seeker with an ‘English-sounding name’ was offered three times the number of interviews than an applicant with a Muslim name when applying for 100 roles detailing identical skills and experience.

A separate interviewee who featured on the programme explained how he had applied for over 30 positions to teach religious education at various state schools using his given name but was only shortlisted for interview after changing his name to ‘Harry Mason’.

Although the sample size was small, the findings correlate with a separate study by the Research Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship at the University of Bristol, which found that Muslim men were up to 76% less likely to have a job of any kind compared to white, male British Christians of the same age and with the same qualifications.

Commenting on the investigation, Kate Headley, Director at The Clear Company, said;

“While it has long been recognised that personal information on CVs can be a catalyst for unconscious bias, these findings are nevertheless nothing short of shocking. Despite the fact that it is against the Equality Act 2010 to discriminate against anyone at work because of their religion or beliefs, these studies suggest that that those with Muslim names have a distinct disadvantage when job-hunting.

“While the benefits of ‘name-blind’ recruitment were explored by the programme makers, it is important to note that initiatives such as this typically address the symptoms rather than the causes of bias in the hiring process. CV based shortlisting is one of the most common places where bias can have an adverse impact on inclusive assessment, not only in terms of religion, but also ethnicity, disability, socio-economic group, gender and age. While removing personal data from CVs is a positive step, it’s like using a plaster to cover a wound. After twelve years auditing recruitment processes for some of the UKs largest employers, we know that what lies beneath the surface of policy, process and behaviour is the real issue.

“Although recruitment is an assumed competency for hiring managers, few are actually trained in best practice. If an environment of real inclusion and diversity is to be created, it is crucial that employers invest in assessing their own recruitment processes and identifying what the real barriers to diverse talent are. The business benefits of organisational diversity are indisputable. Consequently, organisations which fail to recognise and address unconscious prejudice and bias in the workplace ultimately risk missing out on valuable skills, experience and expertise.”

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