

## A4: **‘Lookism; is a candidates appearance a precursor for role suitability?’**

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The research looked at whether recruitment leaders’ experiences and opinions on a candidate’s appearance was a precursor to determining their suitability for a role. In addition, the survey went on to explore whether aspects of how candidates looked had a positive or negative impact, in practice, on whether they would be appointed.

The researchers sought to determine how ‘Lookism’ affected recruiters in an acute London Hospital.

The four main objectives were to discover:

- The perception of recruiting managers with regard to both positive and negative appearance factors considered during a recruitment and selection episode.
- What was recruiting managers experience of lookism in practice
- What were the appearance factors that had a positive or negative impact on the appointment of candidates at the institution in question
- To what extent, if any, could the findings be used to better support recruiting managers make sound and justifiable recruitment decisions

Respondents were asked to rank all factors – therefore it doesn’t necessarily mean that those attributes which scored lowest were actually factors that recruiting managers considered.

### Key findings

- 1 in 5 admit to taking appearance into considerations about suitability
- 13.9% Admit to favouring physically attractive candidates, but only if everything else is equal
- 88% deny rejecting a candidate based on appearance, but nearly 80% admitted appearance was important
- The five biggest ‘turn-off’s for recruiters:  
Respondents considered those characteristics that had a negative impact on decision making in the context of recruitment. The top five responses of those having a negative impact were recorded as (i) tattoos, (ii) smell, (iii) piercings, (iiii) clothing/shoes and (v) how much make-up a candidate wears. The five lowest responses recorded were (i) race, (ii) gender, (iii) assumed sexual orientation, (iiii) height and (v) age.
- The five most positive characteristics:  
The characteristics considered to have the most positive impact were recorded as (i) clothing/shoes, (ii) teeth/smile, (iii) hairstyle/colour, (iiii) age). There were three physical characteristics scoring the same; weight, how much make-up a candidate wears and smell. Those scoring lowest in this ranking order were (i) assumed sexual orientation, (ii) race, (iii) piercings, (iiii) gender) and (v) height.

There were strong findings in what recruiting managers viewed negatively, and this may be systematic of society and perceptions towards things like tattoos, and piercings. The conciliation service, ACAS have stated in their recent release that negative attitudes about visible tattoos are outdated, and fear that employers could be drastically reducing the pool of potential recruits

because so many young people now have tattoos. It (ACAS) said employers should be thinking about relaxing dress codes in general, and these findings support that.

It is encouraging that characteristics that are protected under the Equality Act 2010 did not feature negatively in respondents views when recruiting, yet equally, it is clear that training around Lookism requires further embedding in organisations, and taking the candid approach that this is about educating individuals and challenging perceptions, not taking a punitive approach.