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Evaluating Citizenship-Based Preference in Academic Recruitment: An Appointment-Level Analytical Framework for South African Universities

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Abstract

Debates about citizenship-based preference in South African university recruitment frequently rely on workforce composition, which cannot independently establish how applicants are assessed or why appointments occur. This methodological article develops an appointment-level analytical framework for evaluating whether recruitment opportunities and selection decisions differ by citizenship or recruitment status. A focused narrative synthesis integrates scholarship on academic mobility, personnel selection, mixed methods and South African higher education policy to identify the comparisons and evidence required for credible evaluation. The framework distinguishes vacancy design, advertising, eligibility, longlisting, shortlisting, interviews, offers, acceptance and commencement. Citizenship, permanent residence, work authorisation and recruitment pathway remain separate analytical categories, while candidate withdrawal, offer refusal and administrative delay are distinguished from employer rejection. For empirical application, the framework specifies an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design combining retrospective recruitment records, comparisons among applicants within the same recruitment episode, documentary analysis and explanatory interviews. Quantitative patterns guide qualitative examination of institutional reasoning concerning merit, skills scarcity, employment equity and internationalisation. The conceptual analysis advances three propositions: workforce composition does not independently demonstrate selection preference; adjusted differences within recruitment competitions require contextual interpretation; and statistical patterns and procedural evidence provide complementary grounds for evaluation. It further demonstrates how early exclusion, candidate choices, incomplete records and unmeasured differences can alter the interpretation of appointment outcomes. The article presents no original appointment dataset and makes no empirical determination about preferential recruitment. Its contribution is a transparent framework that aligns evaluative claims with appropriate comparison populations, documented decisions and acknowledged uncertainty. The article recommends stronger recruitment documentation, consistent definitions, scrutiny across recruitment stages and substantiated institutional rationales. It supports university governance and national oversight in evaluating recruitment fairness while examining the relationship between international recruitment and domestic academic capacity development. Empirical application is required to assess the framework's usefulness across institutional contexts, disciplines, academic ranks and contract types.

Keywords: *academic recruitment; citizenship-based preference; South African universities; appointment-level analysis; recruitment fairness; explanatory sequential mixed methods; academic labour markets; internationalisation.*

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1. Introduction

The recruitment of foreign academics raises questions about opportunity, institutional assessment and scholarly development. Staffing profiles identify employees but do not reveal applicants, vacancies or decision processes (Chika et al., 2019; Sehoole et al., 2019). Evaluating preference therefore requires comparisons within recruitment episodes and scrutiny of institutional reasoning. Parliamentary scrutiny raises concerns about compliance and academic workforce development (Parliament of South Africa, 2026a, 2026b), without establishing preferential treatment. Competing explanations include applicant-pool composition, specialisation, mobility and institutional practice. Preference can mean an explicit rule, an unexplained selection pattern or a decision-maker's inclination (Nzimande et al., 2025; Nkgapele & Mofokeng, 2024). Policy, statistical associations and deliberation records therefore support different conclusions. A rejection may reflect legitimate requirements, unfair assessment or unrecorded circumstances; interpretation depends on context and measurement (Jyothika & Sankar Ganesh, 2025).

This article develops a conceptual and methodological framework for evaluating preference at appointment level. A focused narrative synthesis connects recruitment stages, comparison populations and interpretive principles. It is neither a systematic review nor an empirical appointment study. Its contribution is to specify the evidence needed to distinguish selection from access, administration and candidate choice. The narrative synthesis links conceptual distinctions to the evidence needed for empirical evaluation. It does not claim exhaustive retrieval or systematic appraisal. This bounded purpose distinguishes a methodological contribution from a systematic review (Templier & Paré, 2015).

1.1 Problem statement

Parliamentary concerns about foreign representation at senior academic levels intersect with public investment in domestic talent (Parliament of South Africa, 2026a, 2026b). However, staffing totals reflect accumulated appointments, promotions and departures without showing how candidates are assessed. Internationalisation also does not independently explain each appointment involving a non-citizen (Knight, 2004). The research problem concerns the evidence needed to distinguish preferential selection from differences in applicant pools, eligibility, specialisation, administrative requirements and candidate choices. Without appointment-level comparisons and documented explanations, governance structures cannot reliably evaluate these mechanisms. The framework specifies how recruitment records and qualitative accounts support that evaluation.

1.2 Research objectives

Four objectives guide the framework and its empirical application:

1. To examine how vacancy design, advertising and eligibility criteria shape recruitment opportunities and applicant-pool composition by citizenship and recruitment status;
2. To assess whether shortlisting and offer outcomes differ by citizenship or recruitment status among comparable applicants competing within the same recruitment episode;
3. To distinguish the contributions of employer decisions, candidate withdrawal, offer acceptance and administrative requirements to observed appointment outcomes; and
4. To examine how institutional actors interpret and apply merit, skills scarcity, employment equity and internationalisation in explaining recruitment decisions.

1.3 Research questions

The study addresses four research questions:

1. How do vacancy design, advertising and eligibility criteria shape recruitment opportunities and applicant-pool composition by citizenship and recruitment status?
2. To what extent do shortlisting and offer outcomes differ by citizenship or recruitment status among comparable applicants competing within the same recruitment episode?
3. How do employer decisions, candidate withdrawal, offer acceptance and administrative requirements contribute to observed appointment outcomes?
4. How do institutional actors interpret and apply merit, skills scarcity, employment equity and internationalisation in explaining recruitment decisions?

1.4 Significance of the study

The study strengthens the evidential basis for evaluating recruitment preference. By separating opportunity, employer assessment, administrative requirements and candidate choice, the framework supports more precise interpretation than staffing totals alone. It assists university governance and national oversight in examining fairness and accountability while relating international recruitment to domestic academic development.

2. Literature and Analytical Foundations

2.1 Workforce Composition and Recruitment Decisions

Research on higher education staff draws attention to demographic differences in career outcomes (Ndjama & Van der Westhuizen, 2024). Workforce composition reflects recruitment, promotion, retention and departure; current recruitment concerns flow into particular opportunities. Existing representation therefore neither establishes continuing preference nor excludes unfair treatment within a competition (Liang, 2020).

Internationalisation involves institutional purposes beyond numerical participation (Knight, 2004). A research specialism, teaching contribution or network can inform recruitment, but its relevance requires evidence linked to the post. The framework examines approved criteria, panel deliberation and candidate comparison rather than treating internationalisation as a complete explanation for non-citizen appointments (Townes et al., 2025).

South Africa's Policy Framework for Internationalisation situates international engagement within higher education development and institutional responsibilities (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020). It provides a domestic policy context for evaluating rationales; policy endorsement does not demonstrate preference in an appointment.

2.2 Selection, Opportunity and Causal Interpretation

Causal reasoning separates observed differences from effects defined under explicit assumptions. Citizenship-related experiences can shape qualifications, mobility and application decisions.

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Adjusted associations therefore remain conditional comparisons rather than direct measures of intention. The framework examines selection and adjustment assumptions without claiming a pure citizenship effect.

Opportunity begins with vacancy design and advertising. Restricting analysis to shortlisted candidates can conceal earlier exclusion, while combining applicants without considering eligibility can distort comparisons. Explicit comparison populations distinguish employer decisions, applicant choices and administrative barriers (Townes et al., 2025; Petry et al., 2022).

Evidence from South Africa's informal labour market identifies discrimination against immigrants and associated job-search sorting (Abel, 2023). This is relevant contextual evidence, not evidence of university appointment preference. The distinction cautions against assuming either advantage or disadvantage across sectors.

2.3 Integrating records and explanations

Fetters et al. (2013) distinguish integration across mixed-methods design, methods and interpretation. In an explanatory sequential approach, recruitment patterns guide investigation of mechanisms, exceptions and disagreement. Interviews examine why patterns arise rather than merely illustrate a numerical conclusion.

The qualitative strand uses thematic analysis informed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Interview accounts remain situated evidence: panel members can reconstruct decisions, applicants can lack information, and policy can differ from practice. Comparing accounts with contemporaneous records supports explanation while retaining disagreement as an analytical finding (McLeod, 2024).

Reflexive thematic analysis treats interpretation as situated analytical work. Its quality criteria differ from coding-reliability approaches; agreement statistics for structured administrative extraction should not be imposed as a universal test of interpretive themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3. Concepts and evaluative questions

The framework asks whether comparable opportunities and decisions differ by citizenship or recruitment status and how those differences are explained. Applicant-pool composition, eligibility, shortlisting, offers and acceptance define its stages; discipline, rank and institutional context define relevant variation. Foreign applicants are not treated as a homogeneous group (Abel, 2023). Citizenship follows authorised records at the relevant time, allowing multiple citizenships where documented. Permanent residence, work authorisation and recruitment pathways remain separate fields. Birthplace, qualification location, surname and accent are not proxies for citizenship. Unknown status remains unknown unless an approved source resolves it (Carletti, 2023).

Offers, acceptance and commencement represent different decisions. Acceptance reflects candidate preferences as well as employer selection. Withdrawals and failed recruitment remain outcomes. Linking applications to both vacancies and recruitment episodes accommodate re-advertisement, sequential offers and multiple appointments (Ogunsola et al., 2023). Evidence of preference requires more than a raw disparity. Criteria, procedures and documented reasoning require examination alongside appropriate comparisons. Neither statistical significance nor its absence settles procedural fairness. Small samples, missing covariates and heterogeneous processes constrain inference; legal assessment remains decision-specific (Trautmann, 2022)

Audit and résumé studies address discrimination through controlled applicant comparisons (Adamovic, 2020). Retrospective appointment analysis addresses actual decisions with less control over unmeasured differences. Neither approach supplies an interchangeable estimate of the other's target.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research approach and design

The framework specifies an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design for empirical application. Quantitative comparisons of retrospective records identify recruitment patterns; interviews and documentary analysis examine associated mechanisms and institutional reasoning. The design links outcomes with context without treating either strand as independently conclusive (Toyon, 2021). Observable progression and context-dependent judgements require complementary evidence. An interpretivist qualitative orientation treats accounts as explanations shaped by participants' roles and information. These procedures describe the framework's empirical application, not completed data collection.

4.2 Research setting and temporal scope

South African universities provide the setting. Variation in mission, location, resources and discipline supports contextual comparison but does not establish national representativeness. Claims remain bounded by institutional coverage and the records available. A justified historical window defines comparable completed recruitment episodes and the policies applicable to them. Unresolved competitions remain distinct from completed decisions. The window and any changes require documentation before outcome analysis (Rodrigues, 2026; Berig et al., 2024).

4.3 Population and units of analysis

The principal population comprises applications to eligible academic recruitment episodes. Advertised vacancies and exceptional recruitment routes remain distinct. Visiting, honorary and unpaid roles, promotions and employment conversions require separate treatment because their processes differ (Mukwawaya, 2025). The framework links three units: the vacancy, the recruitment episode and the candidate application. These links accommodate re-advertisements, repeated applications and multiple appointments without equating each advertisement with a new post. Quantitative analysis compares applications within episodes. Policies and panel practices supply context. Qualitative accounts explain decisions without substituting for recorded outcomes.

4.4 Sampling and sample adequacy

Purposive institutional selection seeks contextual variation. A census of eligible competitions is preferred; where impractical, a sampling frame defines inclusion before outcomes are examined. Coverage and exclusions remain explicit (Jain, 2026; Nikolopoulou, 2022). Quantitative adequacy depends on informative competitions and events, not applicant counts alone. Limited status overlap or few offers can restrict precision despite a large dataset. Feasibility assessment informs model complexity; weak comparative information warrants descriptive analysis rather than unstable estimates. Qualitative sampling follows explanatory needs. Contrasting and discrepant cases guide recruitment of panel

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members, human-resources practitioners, academic leaders and applicants. Sampling seeks informative variation rather than statistical representation (Coker & Akande, 2025).

4.5 Data sources and collection procedures

4.5.1Vacancy and institutional records

Documentary sources include vacancy specifications, advertisements, policies, assessment forms and panel recommendations. Duties, criteria, rank, discipline, contract conditions and advertising channels define the opportunity. Dates, specification changes and re-advertisements reconstruct its sequence; remuneration and support are included where authorised and relevant (Oyadiran et al., 2023). Panel composition, declared conflicts, approved equity considerations and contemporaneous policies provide decision context. Immigration and employment equity requirements remain distinct; designated-group eligibility is not inferred from appearance or nationality. Research coding does not replace decision-specific legal assessment (Republic of South Africa, 1998, 2002; Cogger et al., 2025).

4.5.2Candidate records

Candidate records capture eligibility, assessed qualifications, relevant experience and progression. Measures reflect information available at assessment. Subsequent performance cannot retrospectively justify selection; publication counts and institutional reputation are not complete measures of research or teaching contribution. A coding manual defines how criteria enter the dataset and identifies limits imposed by contextual judgement or incomplete records. Coding represents documented assessment rather than constructing an artificial merit ranking (Egbuchulam et al., 2025). South African assessment scholarship also underscores the importance of context when interpreting assessment evidence (Laher & Cockcroft, 2013). This supports caution about comparability, without establishing that any hiring measure is biased.

4.5.3Explanatory interviews

Semi-structured interviews examine vacancy design, merit, scarcity, equity, internationalisation and recruitment outcomes. Questions connect initial patterns with documentary evidence. Invitations describe an explanatory inquiry without implying suspected wrongdoing (Coker & Akande, 2025). Contemporaneous records anchor interviews where authorised. Participants explain procedures without unnecessary disclosure about others. Retrospective accounts remain open to comparison and qualification; participant clarification corrects facts without controlling interpretation (Naeem et al., 2023).

4.6 Operationalisation and measurement

Citizenship, permanent residence, work authorisation and recruitment pathway are coded separately using authorised records. Biographical clues do not establish citizenship, and unresolved status remains unknown. The dataset distinguishes eligibility, longlisting, shortlisting, interview, offer, acceptance and commencement. Rejection, withdrawal, refusal and work-authorisation delays receive separate codes. Missing reasons remain visible rather than being inferred (Anandavathini & Raja, 2026).

Independent coding checks structured extraction and recorded application of criteria. Review without names or citizenship details is used where feasible, while recognising imperfect blinding. Uncertainty and disagreements identify issues for examination rather than establish a definitive merit ranking (McAlister et al., 2017).

4.7 Data quality and missing information

Quality checks reconcile applications, offers and commencement, link episodes without double-counting and identify authorised repeated applications pseudonymously. Missingness is classified by institution and stage. Missing scores are not zero, and undocumented rejection reasons are not assumed assessments of competence (Darko et al., 2022). Included and excluded episodes are compared using available information. Imputation requires defensible assumptions and cannot reconstruct deliberation. Sensitivity analysis examines dependence on exclusions and unknown status (Subramaniam, 2025).

Missing-data decisions require a prespecified rationale, examination of the observed missingness and transparent reporting of alternative analyses. Lee et al. (2021) provide an observational-research framework for this sequence. The principle informs recruitment analysis without transferring clinical findings to university hiring. A harmonisation record maps definitions, sources, dates and transformations across institutions. Cheng et al. (2024) explain the trade-offs involved in combining data; where equivalence is not defensible, separate analyses are preferable.

4.8 Quantitative analysis

Descriptive analysis reports applicant composition and stage-specific progression with explicit denominators and uncertainty. Small cells and competitions without status overlap remain visible. Coverage determines the scope of inference (Asongwe, 2023). Adjusted analysis compares applicants within recruitment episodes. Conditional logistic or other suitable models require compatible assumptions and event structures, including multiple or sequential offers. Covariates reflect justified pre-decision characteristics. Coefficients remain conditional associations rather than measures of intention or causal citizenship effects (Almajed et al., 2024).

Full-applicant and stage-specific analyses answer different questions. Conditioning on shortlisting or interview can introduce selection bias. Interview scores are not automatically neutral controls because assessment may form part of the mechanism under examination (Bunica, 2024; Lu et al., 2022). Prespecified comparisons examine rank, broad discipline and recruitment route where information permits. Sparse categories require substantive justification for combination. Repeated applications and institutional clustering constrain inference, particularly with few institutions; resampling is not an automatic remedy (Higgins et al., 2002).

Clustering requires explicit attention to the number, size and influence of clusters. MacKinnon et al. (2023) provide econometric guidance; its application remains conditional on the chosen model, so a general clustering citation does not validate a nonlinear specification. Sensitivity analysis varies eligibility definitions, withdrawal treatment and documentation restrictions. Interpretation considers overlap, stability, absolute differences and uncertainty. Residual associations invite investigation, while imprecise null estimates do not establish universal fairness (Lindmark, 2021).

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4.9 Qualitative analysis and integration

Thematic analysis develops through familiarisation, coding, theme construction and interpretive review. Attention centres on explanations of criteria, priorities and decisions. An analytical record separates documentary evidence, participant accounts, researcher interpretation and unresolved disagreement (Naeem et al., 2023). Reflexive thematic analysis retains researcher interpretation and positionality as part of knowledge production (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Transparent reporting describes analytical decisions, researcher roles and discrepant evidence rather than presenting themes as mechanically discovered categories (O'Brien et al., 2014).

Integration connects progression patterns with explanations. Shortlisting differences direct attention to eligibility and assessment; acceptance differences direct attention to conditions and alternatives. These are interpretive pathways, not findings (Yaqoob, 2023). Structured comparisons identify convergence, qualification and inconsistency across sources. Disagreement remains a finding requiring explanation rather than automatic resolution. Unresolved contradictions limit causal and procedural conclusions (Fetters et al., 2013).

4.10 Ethical considerations and research governance

Empirical application requires access agreements, ethics approval and a lawful basis for processing personal information. Administrative possession does not authorise research use. Data minimisation, secure storage and restricted access apply; pseudonymisation does not guarantee anonymity in small academic communities. Interview participation remains voluntary (Republic of South Africa, 2013; Kang & Hwang, 2023).

Researchers disclose institutional affiliations and separate research access from supervisory or governance authority. Reporting protects against identification through dossiers, small cells and contextual detail. Naming institutions requires a defensible purpose consistent with research independence (Mirza et al., 2023). Research remains distinct from disciplinary investigation. Serious concerns follow an agreed process consistent with ethics approval and applicable obligations. Reporting is proportionate to evidence and avoids unsupported allegations about individuals (Resnik, 2020).

5. Analysis and Discussion

The discussion develops conceptual implications rather than empirical findings. Its central concern is how distinctions between composition, opportunity, employer assessment and candidate response change the interpretation of recruitment outcomes.

5.1 Workforce composition and the interpretation of preference

Staffing profiles reflect accumulated recruitment, promotion, retention and departure. They neither establish preferential assessment nor exclude unfairness within a competition. The evidential question concerns treatment among applicants to defined opportunities. Parliamentary concerns establish the importance of accountability but require appointment evidence for evaluation (Parliament of South Africa, 2026a, 2026b). Applicant pools, selection reasons and recruitment stages connect workforce patterns to possible mechanisms.

Academic mobility involves career opportunities and institutional conditions beyond individual panels. Sehoole et al. (2019) contextualise these experiences. Appointment-level inquiry examines how mobility intersects with specific decisions without treating foreign academics as a homogeneous group.

5.2 Opportunity and exclusion before selection

Vacancy duties, specialisation, rank, contract conditions and advertising shape participation before assessment. Later-stage comparisons can therefore overlook earlier barriers to opportunity. Eligibility rules require scrutiny for relevance and consistent application. Their legitimacy cannot be inferred from the successful candidate's characteristics. Review reconstructs requirements across advertising, screening and assessment (Oyadiran et al., 2023). Similar offer rates among shortlisted candidates do not establish equal access if earlier screening differs. Conversely, different overall progression rates may reflect eligibility. Interpretation depends on the stage and comparison population.

5.3 Merit and the comparability of candidates

Competition for the same post improves contextual comparability without ensuring equivalent specialisation or experience. The meaning of a difference depends on how recorded characteristics correspond to the approved requirements. Academic merit includes research, teaching, supervision, professional expertise and service. No single numerical indicator fully captures these contributions. Convenient proxies can create apparent precision while weakening comparison (Egbuchulam et al., 2025). The recent personnel-selection review by Sackett et al. (2026) brings together developments in predictor validity, fairness and applicant reactions. It supports separating these evaluative dimensions: predictive usefulness, procedural fairness and candidate experience are related questions, not a single measure of merit. Independent coding clarifies the relationship between criteria and records but cannot reproduce full panel deliberation. Disagreements can reveal ambiguity, inconsistency or reasonable professional judgement; agreement does not establish a definitive merit hierarchy (McAlister et al., 2017).

5.4 Employer selection and candidate choice

Appointment combines employer selection and candidate response. Refusal, withdrawal and administrative delay remain distinct from rejection. Combining these processes in one appointment rate obscures their contributions. Withdrawal and refusal can reflect alternatives, contract conditions or delay. Candidate-dropout research supports attention to disengagement, but its mechanisms require contextual investigation (Anandavathini & Raja, 2026). Commencement differences can arise from acceptance or administration despite similar offers. Offers provide a more direct indicator of employer selection, interpreted alongside eligibility, assessment and offer sequencing.

5.4 Adjusted differences and the limits of inference

Models structure comparisons without resolving fairness. Their interpretation depends on coverage, measurement and assumptions. Logistic prediction in recruitment illustrates a different task from conditional comparison and does not validate a causal citizenship interpretation (Almajed et al., 2024). Controls require substantive justification. Interview scores can embody panel judgement; controlling for them can remove part of the mechanism. Restricting samples to later stages also changes the question and can introduce

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selection bias (Bunica, 2024; Lu et al., 2022). A residual association remains an unexplained model-dependent difference, not proof of intention. Unmeasured specialisation and coding inconsistencies can matter. Imprecise null results likewise permit consequential differences (Lindmark, 2021).

5.5 Institutional explanations and competing mechanisms

Participants occupy different institutional positions and hold unequal information. Their accounts explain criteria, priorities and decisions without independently settling fairness (Coker & Akande, 2025). Employment-interview research examines how design follows interview goals (Fetters et al., 2013). It informs scrutiny of the appointment interview, while mixed-methods integration rests on a separate methodological literature (Fetters et al., 2013). Scarcity requires evidence linked to the post: the specialism, recruitment effort, eligible pool and candidate comparison. A general shortage claim does not independently explain a particular offer.

Internationalisation involves more than participation counts (Knight, 2004). A non-citizen appointment does not itself establish its contribution. The rationale requires evidence of relevance to the research, teaching or institutional purpose.

Integration tests explanations rather than illustrates a preferred conclusion. Agreement strengthens an account; disagreement can reflect reconstruction, incomplete records or positional differences. Unresolved contradictions remain part of interpretation (Fetters et al., 2013).

5.6 Information quality as a governance concern

Incomplete eligibility records, criteria and reasons constrain scrutiny without establishing misconduct. Documentation quality determines assessability as well as research feasibility (Darko et al., 2022). Better records can reveal more problems than incomplete systems. Comparisons therefore separate procedural weaknesses from the ability to detect them. Missing information is not evidence of satisfactory practice (Subramaniam, 2025). Harmonisation requires definitions, provenance and timing, rather than identical labels alone. Separate citizenship, residence, location and authorisation fields prevent incompatible administrative categories from becoming substantive claims (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019; Sharma, 2025).

5.7 Implications for university governance and national oversight

Councils and management benefit from a decision trail linking requirements to screening, assessment and offers. It supports scrutiny of consistency and explanations of the relationship between recruitment and domestic capacity. National oversight distinguishes staffing profiles from selection evidence. Purposive coverage does not establish national prevalence, and group-level associations cannot determine every appointment's fairness. Transparency requires protected access and proportionate disclosure. Small communities can permit identification despite pseudonymisation. Institutional affiliations and supervisory relationships require explicit safeguards (Republic of South Africa, 2013; Kang & Hwang, 2023; Mirza et al., 2023). The framework permits findings that support concern, qualify disparities or reveal variation. Its contribution is to specify the evidence needed to distinguish selection from access, administration and choice.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

Citizenship-based recruitment preference requires evidence beyond workforce composition. Applications, eligibility, assessment, offers and candidate responses establish distinct questions that staffing totals cannot answer. The framework links these stages to appropriate populations and contextual explanation. Quantitative and qualitative strands jointly support scrutiny while incomplete records, unmeasured characteristics and institutional coverage constrain interpretation.

The article establishes neither preferential recruitment nor universal fairness. Its conclusion is methodological: transparent definitions, defensible comparisons and documented reasoning are necessary for credible evaluation. International recruitment and domestic academic development warrant examination without presuming that either undermines the other.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1Strengthen recruitment documentation

Universities should link vacancy requirements, advertising, screening, assessment, recommendations and offers in a complete decision trail. Changes, exceptional routes and departures from procedure require documented reasons.

6.2.2Standardise definitions and recruitment reporting

Institutions should define citizenship, residence, work authorisation and recruitment pathway separately. Reports should distinguish progression stages, state denominators and retain unknown status and missing reasons.

6.2.3Evaluate recruitment fairness across the full process

Reviews should cover vacancy design and early screening as well as final selection. Comparisons should reflect post requirements and distinguish rejection from withdrawal, refusal and administrative delay.

6.2.4Substantiate institutional recruitment rationales

Universities should substantiate merit, scarcity, equity and internationalisation rationales at appointment level. Where domestic capacity development is an objective, mentoring, supervision, knowledge-transfer and succession arrangements should be explicit and evaluated.

6.2.5Align oversight conclusions with the evidence

Councils and oversight bodies should distinguish representation, preference, statistical association and legal findings. Public reporting should specify coverage and avoid national conclusions unsupported by the sampling design.

6.2.6Support independent and ethically governed research

Universities should support authorised research through secure access and independent analysis. Researchers should disclose institutional relationships and report discrepant evidence, uncertainty and limitations. Empirical application should test the framework across varied contexts.

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