WHAT'S in a name? An added difficulty in getting a job if it's not Anglo-Saxon, research by the Australian National University shows.

A study into hiring discrimination sent 4000 fake curriculum vitae to employers in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, changing only the names of the applicants. It found call-back rates were higher for applicants with an Anglo-Saxon name.

"Sydney has the highest level of labour market discrimination for Chinese and Middle Easterners," one of the report's authors, economist Andrew Leigh, said. "There may be other stages of discrimination at the interview itself and in the workplace but we can't observe that."

Common indigenous, Middle Eastern, Italian and Chinese names were substituted across fictional templates to measure employer bias. Other factors such as qualifications, experience and gender were kept equal.

In Sydney a person named Fatima Hariri or Ping Lee had to apply for twice as many jobs as a Lisa Robinson to secure the same number of interviews.

People with distinctively Aboriginal names fared somewhat better. For every 20 job applications sent by Anglo-Saxon sounding counterparts, indigenous people had to fire off an extra five. Italian jobseekers had to send an additional three.

Discrimination was more acute in certain industries, the report found. For entry-level jobs in data entry, customer service, sales and waiting tables, employment prospects were worst for ethnic-sounding waiting staff.

Job prospects were particularly bad if the would-be waiter had a Middle Eastern name. They would have to put in 127 per cent more applications for the same number of interviews.

"That's potentially because being a waiter requires the most customer interaction," Professor Leigh said. "You might imagine an employer who was not themselves discriminatory but who was worried their customers were."

However, findings for data entry showed employers were not blameless. Again, Chinese and Middle Eastern-sounding job applicants were worst hit.

A man named Hu Chen for example would need to apply for 182 per cent of the jobs someone called Martin Johnson, the report found.

Source: The Sydney Morning Herald