



# LGBTQ+ Inclusive Language Guide

This LGBTQ+ inclusive language guide explains how to use language respectfully and inclusively when working with and referring to LGBTQ+ individuals. By using inclusive language and by embedding it throughout delivering activities, policies, programs and services, we demonstrate respect in our community and recognise diversity.

LGBTQ+ is a frequently used, shorter version of a variety of longer acronyms that describe sexuality and gender identity-based communities. The letters stand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and the + indicates other categories such as Questioning, Asexual, Intersex, Pansexual, thus alluding to the variety of sexuality and gender-based identities that have been or are being defined (see Glossary section below). It is not necessary to utilise the full acronym, as new identities are constantly defined or updated. Individuals may identify with one or multiple letters of the acronym

Every university policy may affect LGBTQ+ EHU employees and students, and every service may have LGBTQ+ clients. As a public sector institution, we have a responsibility to make Edge Hill a safer and more inclusive place for people from diverse backgrounds.

Inclusive language, in the current context, represents a means of acknowledging and respecting the diversity of bodies, genders and relationships. This refers to both when we are communicating directly with someone, when describing someone who is not physically present, as well as throughout policies, services and virtual communications. This practical guide seeks to give an understanding of the key concepts and common terms for LGBTQ+ people.

Using LGBTQ+ inclusive language is an important steppingstone in constructing a welcoming and trusting environment and in addressing the prejudice and discrimination that LGBTQ+ people face. Words and expressions that discriminate against people based on their sexual orientation and gender identity are unacceptable. The enduring prejudice in society against LGBTQ+ people contributes to them feeling invisible, marginalised and inferior to others, and they often experience direct and/or indirect discrimination through the insensitive, language of others.

The language around sex, gender and sexuality changes constantly and it is an area that people hold strong and differing opinions about. Insofar as it is possible, this guide gives general advice on current thinking; however, it's always best to ask someone how they describe themselves and use those terms when referring to them.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### What can I ask an LGBTQ+ person?

Many LGBTQ+ people get asked a lot of questions about theirs and wider LGBTQ+ experiences or issues of terminology. While it's good to check in with a person's individual perspective, they shouldn't be expected to speak for communities they are not part of or necessarily represent the views of the ones they are. A simple guiding principle is not to ask something you would feel uncomfortable answering yourself. Considering that LGBTQ+ people experience significant discrimination, consider that they might wish to keep personal information even more private. Unless they explicitly declare that they are willing to discuss these issues, questions about body parts, medical history, relationship history and sexual activity are generally intrusive, rude and inappropriate.

### How should I use pronouns?

Pronouns are one way people refer to each other and themselves. Most people use 'he/him' and 'she/her' pronouns, but some use gender-neutral pronouns such as 'they/them', while others use neopronouns (e.g. 'xe/hir'). It is not ungrammatical to use the singular 'they' when referring to someone (e.g. 'they left their bag under the table'). If you're unsure of someone's pronouns, you can ask them respectfully, and preferably privately. Use a question such as "Can I ask what pronouns you *use*?". Do not ask "What pronoun do you *prefer*?"; a person's pronouns and identity are not a preference.

Some people's pronouns may be context specific. For example, someone might not use their pronouns in a particular environment or around particular people because they do not feel safe or comfortable to do so.

### How do I ask for pronouns when inviting people for a job interview?

As a marker of good practice, you may offer the option for a person to declare their pronouns and chosen or affirmed name prior to an interview, if the recruitment process does not include fields for these. For example: "Please feel free to let us know ahead of your interview details of:

- what pronouns you use
- what name you would like us to refer you by

**You may also normalise use of pronouns by including these in your e-mail signature.**

### What does the law say?

The Equality Act 2010 describes nine protected characteristics; discriminating against individuals that have one or multiple of said characteristics is unlawful. Directly relevant to the current context are the characteristics sex, gender reassignment and sexual orientation. For more details regarding the circumstances covered by the act, you may consult the Edge Hill Equality and Diversity Policy, the Guidance on supporting Trans and Non-binary Staff and Students, and the Equality Act.

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Language used to describe different LGBTQ+ people and by different parts of the LGBTQ+ communities changes over time and can differ across cultures and generations. There will also be differences in how people individually use or define particular terms. You may also encounter outdated or even offensive terms in medical, psychological or legal contexts.
- Ensure that the language you use to refer to people's sexual orientation and gender identity are accurate and appropriate. Acceptable and frequently used terms are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer, though some people may use more specific terms. Outdated and generally perceived as offensive terms are sometimes used by people within these groups as a means of claiming their identity but can be seen as derogatory when used by people outside of the group.
- Avoid creating invisibility. LGBTQ+ people are often rendered invisible in conversation, in public discourse and cultural and media representation. Language that reinforces the assumption that all personal relationships are heterosexual denies the reality of gender diverse relationships.
- Avoid stereotyping LGBTQ+ people. Placing limitations or expectations on individuals because they belong to a certain group is damaging, hurtful and discriminatory. Challenging queerphobic jokes and derogatory comments by speaking up and naming them as such contributes toward creating an environment inclusive of gender and sexual diversity.
- Avoid expressions that disparage or trivialise the diverse sexual experiences and desires of LGBTQ+ people.
- Avoid stereotyping that could be considered 'positive' but still places unfair expectation and limits on others.
- Practice makes perfect, so keep trying - it is perfectly normal to make mistakes and even members of the LGBTQ+ communities do not always use the correct terms. If you make a mistake, simply apologise and continue the conversation or amend your work, where this is applicable.
- Avoid asking people what terms they 'prefer'. Having a 'preference' can sound as if it is merely a choice and most people do not feel as if they have a choice in these matters. If you need to, you can simply ask what terms they 'use'.
- Don't ask if you don't have to: we all have a right to privacy. We should only have to bring as much of our private selves into workplace and education environments as we want and feel safe in doing so. Allow yourself to be led by how someone talks about themselves, their family and their relationships.
- Often LGBTQ+ people from different cultures or faith traditions have different family or workplace traditions around disclosure or 'coming out'. Do not assume every person who may be comfortable being 'out' in the workplace is 'out' in other settings – people have the right to disclose about their sexuality or gender identity in their own time and on their own terms.

## I. Gender

### GLOSSARY

#### Gender

One's identity as a man, woman, or neither. Gender is composed of socially and culturally constructed roles, behaviours and attributes considered appropriate for men and women in a given society and is often associated with one's assigned gender at birth. It also refers to one's internal sense of who they are. Someone may see themselves as a man, a woman, or neither (non-binary) and gender can be fixed or fluid.

#### Cis(gender)

A term denoting a person whose gender identity aligns with the gender they were assigned at birth.

#### Trans(gender)

An overarching term for individuals whose gender identity or expression differs from societal expectations of the gender they were assigned at birth. "Trans" is shorthand for "Transgender". Trans can be used as an umbrella term, but not everyone uses it to describe themselves. For example, a man who was assigned female at birth might refer to himself as 'a trans man', 'a man with a trans history' or just 'a man'. Additionally, people who identify outside of binary genders may not identify as part of the trans community either. Some, but not all, trans people want to transition (change) socially, medically, or both. Importantly, trans(gender) is an **adjective**, not a noun. As such, it is incorrect to refer to someone as being 'a transgender' – rather, refer to them as 'a transgender person'.

#### Trans-feminine/trans-masculine

Refers to people who were assigned a different gender to their perceived identity, but don't solely identify as women/men.

#### Misgendering

Refers to the experience of being labelled by others as a gender other than the one a person identifies with. This may manifest by using incorrect names, gender, and/or pronouns.

#### Deadnaming

Refers to the process of using the name of someone with a trans history prior to undertaking the process of transition. It is inappropriate to use a person's deadname even if you knew them prior to transition.

#### (Gender) Transition(ing)/Affirmation

Transition or affirmation refers to the process where a trans or gender diverse person takes steps to socially and/or physically feel more aligned with their gender. There is a wide range of ways this process differs between people. Some people may change how they interact with others, and others may change their appearance or seek medical assistance to better express their gender.

#### Gender reassignment, gender-affirming surgery

Surgical procedure(s) by which a transgender person's physical appearance and function of their existing sexual characteristics are altered to resemble those socially associated with their identified gender.

### **Gender dysphoria**

Gender dysphoria is a condition where a person experiences discomfort or distress because there is a mismatch between their biological sex and gender identity. It is sometimes referred to as 'gender incongruence'.

While biological sex and gender identity are the same for most people, this is not the case for everyone. For example, some people may have the anatomy of a man, but identify themselves as a woman, while others may not feel they're definitively either male or female. This mismatch between sex and gender identity can lead to distressing and uncomfortable feelings that are called gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria is a recognised medical condition, for which treatment is sometimes appropriate. **It is not a mental illness.** Some people with gender dysphoria have a strong and persistent desire to live according to their gender identity, rather than their biological sex. These people are sometimes called transgender or trans people.

**Gender incongruence** is the preferred sexual health classification of transgender and gender non-conforming people by the World Health Organisation (WHO). WHO describes gender incongruence as 'characterised by a marked and persistent incongruence between an individual's experienced gender and the assigned sex'.

### **Transvestite**

An outdated term referring to individuals that dressed in clothing stereotypically associated with their opposing gender. However, because the term 'transvestism' was categorised as a medical disorder, the term cross-dresser is now preferred.

### **Transsexual**

A person whose gender identity is different from their designated gender at birth and has taken steps towards physical transition so that their body is congruent with both their gender identity and the conventional concept of sexually male and female bodies. While some individuals may still refer to themselves using this term, it is generally viewed as medicalised and offensive.

### **FTM/MTF**

Acronyms referring to people undergoing binary transitions. FTM (female-to-male) refers to a person transitioning from being a woman to being a man, whereas MTF (male-to-female) refers to the reversed process.

### **Transphobia**

Prejudice, fear, hatred, or animosity towards transgender individuals.

### **Transmisogyny**

Refers to the intersection between transphobia and misogyny, where prejudice, bigotry and hatred is directed towards trans women and trans feminine people, expressly because they are women or feminine-identified and they are trans.

### **Non-binary**

An umbrella term that incorporates all gender identities that fall outside of the gender binary (i.e. 'man' and 'woman'), such as agender, genderqueer, gender neutral, or queer. As individuals identifying as non-binary are not cisgender, they theoretically belong under the wider trans(gender) umbrella. However, some individuals may not feel comfortable being referred to as trans and prefer to be referred to their specific gender.

### **Agender**

A person whose gender identity does not align with any gender.

### **Androgynous**

A person who does not identify or does not present as solely feminine nor masculine.

### **Bigender**

A person identifying as two genders (e.g. as both as a man and a woman).

### **Gender binary**

The viewpoint that gender only consists of two gender identities, male/female or man/woman.

### **Gender expression**

The way a person exhibits their gender identity through behaviour, clothing, and hairstyle. This may be in line with what is socially expected to be 'masculine' or 'feminine' but need not be so.

### **Genderfluid**

A person who does not identify with a single gender and who may vary their gender identity across time.

### **Genderqueer**

A term referring to individuals who identify as neither entirely male nor entirely female.

### **Gender non-conforming/Gender diverse**

A term which can refer to either individuals whose gender does not fit into the social expectations related to their assigned sex at birth or to gender expressions/presentations that deviate from social expectations of gender (for example, a person who identifies as a man but wears what is perceived as 'feminine' clothing).

### **Drag King/Queen**

Performers who dress as typically exaggerated versions of a chosen gender (be it woman, man, or neither) for entertainment.

### **Crossdresser**

An individual who dresses up as someone from another gender for enjoyment. A person need not necessarily identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community to engage in crossdressing.

### **Queer**

Although historically used as a derogatory term, queer is more commonly being used



by the LGBTQ+ community as an inclusive term to refer to individuals that belong to it. It can also be used as an umbrella term to describe one's sexuality and/or gender identity – meaning that the individual may have a less prescribed or defined sexuality and/or gender identity. For some people, especially older LGBTQ+ people, 'queer' has negative connotations, because of its past usage.

## **I. Sexuality**

### **Sexuality/sexual orientation**

A term describing a person's emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to members of the same or other gender. A person's gender does not necessarily mean they have particular sex characteristics or a particular sexuality, or vice versa.

### **Asexual**

An adjective typically describing individuals who do not experience sexual attraction. However, individuals within the asexual community (also referred to as the ace community) may experience one/multiple or partial sexual, aesthetic, romantic or sensual attraction.

### **Aromantic**

An adjective typically describing individuals who do not experience romantic attraction. However, individuals within the aromantic community (also referred to as the aro community) may experience one/multiple or partial sexual, aesthetic, romantic or sensual attraction.

### **Greysexual**

A term used to describe individuals that experience limited sexual attraction (either low or infrequent).

### **Gay**

A gay person is romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of the same sex and/or gender as themselves. This term is often used to describe men who are attracted to other men, but some women and gender diverse people may describe themselves as gay.

### **Lesbian**

Refers to a woman who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term.

### **Homosexual**

An adjective ascribed to individuals sexually attracted to individuals of the same sex. This term is now seen as outdated and can be perceived as offensive. Gay man/person/lesbian may be preferred.

### **Homophobia**

Fear, hatred or animosity towards people attracted to individuals of the same gender.

### **Bisexual/Polysexual/Pansexual**

A term used to refer to individuals attracted to more than one gender or gender identity. Although this is not necessarily representative of all individuals who identify

as bisexual, this may refer to them having a preference for only two genders, while polysexual refers to being attracted to multiple genders, and pansexual, all genders (or attracted to people irrespective of their gender).

### **Biphobia**

Fear, hatred, or animosity of bisexual people.

### **Closeted**

Someone who is not disclosing their true sexual orientation or gender identity.

### **Outing**

Exposing someone's sexual orientation and/or gender identity without that individual's permission.

### **Coming out**

The process through which a person discloses their sexual orientation and/or gender identity with others.

### **To be out**

To be open about one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

### **Heterosexism**

The perception that heterosexuality is superior to other sexual orientations.

### **Intersex**

An intersex person is born with variations to physical or biological sex characteristics such as variations in chromosomes, hormones or anatomy. Intersex traits are a natural part of human bodily diversity. Note, however, that not all intersex people use the term intersex. Some people, however, prefer it to DSD (differences in sex development), as the term is perceived to be overly medical/clinical.

Some intersex people/people with DSD may want to keep their legal sex as male or female. Other people see "intersex" as distinct from male and female. Intersex people do not necessarily identify as non-heterosexual.

### **Ally**

A heterosexual and cisgender person who supports equal rights, gender equality, LGBTQ+ social movements, and challenges homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.

### **Questioning**

A term used to describe someone who is unsure of or exploring their sexual orientation and/ or gender identity. People may not wish to have one of the other labels applied to them yet, for a variety of reasons, but may wish to be clear, for example, that they are non-binary or non-heterosexual.

### **Straight/heterosexual**

A person who has an emotional, romantic, and/or sexual orientation towards people of different gender to themselves. People may fit more than one of these terms. Heterosexual and cisgender people can be part of LGBTQ+ communities. For



instance, there are straight trans and intersex people.

### **QTIPOC**

An acronym used to describe queer communities of colour. The letters stand for Queer, Trans and Intersex People of Colour. Other acronyms used may be QTPOC or QTNIPPOC, where the N stands for Native.

### **Glossary of Terms**

For a full list of terms visit [Stonewalls Glossary of Terms](#)

## SUGGESTED LANGUAGE

Tips	Instead of ...	Try ...
Use gender-neutral terms.	guys, ladies and gentlemen Mankind Man-made	everyone, you all, teammates, colleagues humankind artificial, manufactured
Use gender-neutral pronouns and expressions.	she/he, her/him	they, them
Include gender-neutral titles.	only using “Mr, Mrs, Ms”	adding “Mx”
Use identity-first, person-centred language; avoid depersonalising people by referring to them categorically	the lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans- gender people; LGBTQ+ people
Avoid terms that presume a person of a particular gender holding a position.	cleaning ladies policeman	cleaning staff police officer
Use terms that include all relationships and avoid assuming heterosexuality as the norm.	girlfriend/wife boyfriend/husband mother and father	partner/spouse parents, caregivers
Recognise the diversity of gender identities.	“people of both genders”	“people of all genders/gender identities”
Avoid using patronising terms or expressions that may cause offence or perpetuate stereo- types.	“that’s so gay” “they’re experimenting”	“that’s silly/ridiculous/” “they’re gay/lesbian/bisexual/ trans”; “they’re questioning”
Avoid irrelevant gender descriptions.	a male physician a female professor	a physician a professor
Avoid terms that suggest a degree of voluntary choice when this is not necessarily the case.	sexual preference lifestyle choice	sexual orientation gender identity

Recognise and respect the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity.	Avoid using the 'LGBTQ+' acronym if you're only referring to sexual orientation or gender identity. Don't use 'straight' as the opposite of 'LGBTQ+' (transgender people can be any sexual orientation, including straight).	Only use 'LGBTQ+' when referring to both sexual orientation and gender identity-based communities.  Use 'straight, cisgender' or 'ally'.
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## References

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