# Inclusive Language at Kent

The University of Kent has a multi-cultural and diverse environment and is committed to developing a working and learning culture that encompasses dignity, courtesy, respect and consideration for all.

All members of the University community have a responsibility to create an environment which is free from harassment, bullying, unlawful discrimination and victimisation.

## Bullying harassment and discrimination

Bullying

An intentional act that causes harm to others.  May not be related to a protected characteristic, bullying tends to be a large number of incidents (individually trivial) over a long period comprising constant unjustified and unsubstantiated criticism

Harassment

Conduct that annoys, threatens, intimidates or causes fear in another person and/or creates a hostile environment. Harassment tends to have a strong physical component and is usually linked to gender, race, disability or physical violence

Discrimination

Treating an individual or group differently due to a particular characteristic that they possess

Due to its diverse environment at the University of Kent, Its staff and students have a wide variety of traditions, cultures and values.

Therefore it is important that the words we use respect the identity of the person or people with whom we are communicating or to whom we are referring.

Some examples include:

• Terms such as 'non-white' or 'non-European' for example are problematic in that they define race from a 'white' or 'European' perspective.

• Avoid the term 'Christian name' – rather use 'first name, given name, forename or personal name'.

## Unconscious Bias

Our background, personal experiences, societal stereotypes and cultural context can have an impact on decisions and actions without realising.

Implicit or unconscious bias happens by our brains making incredibly quick judgments and assessments of people and situations.

Our biases are influenced by our background, cultural environment and personal experiences.

We may not even be aware of these views and opinions, or be aware of their full impact and implications.

Being aware of the situation that you are in will guide you to what words and actions are appropriate. At work inclusive language is a requirement, using inappropriate language about colleagues or even in passing conversations is unlawful

in some settings. The behaviour can lead to undesirable consequences such as suspension or termination in line with University procedures. Ensure you are familiar with the Dignity at work procedure.

## Impact of unconscious bias

Research has found that unconscious bias can heavily influence recruitment and selection decisions. Several experiments using CV shortlisting exercises have highlighted bias by gender and ethnicity.

A study of science faculties in higher education institutions (Moss-Racusin *et al* 2012) asked staff to review a number of applications. The applications reviewed were identical, apart from the gender of the name of the applicant.

Here, unconscious bias impacts not only on the recruitment decision, but the salary of the individual and the amount of development that is invested in their ongoing progression.

The experiment found that Science faculties were more likely to:

- Rate male candidates as better qualified than female candidates
- Want to hire the male candidates rather than the female candidates
- Give the male candidates a higher starting salary than the female candidates
- Be willing to invest more in the development of the male candidates than the female candidates

Other examples of Unconscious Bias in a University setting

- Shortlisting CV's based on names or international qualifications
- Offering an older person an alternative to a digital assignment
- Assuming an understanding of jargon or lingo based on appearance

**Test yourself!  You can test your own unconscious bias via Project Implicit**

**https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/**

## Everyone is biased

We need to accept that we are all biased AND we are all affected by bias

What can we do about it on an individual level?

- Break the links in our processing – reduce our level of bias
- Ensure policies and processes are designed to mitigate the impact of bias wherever possible
- Check and monitor the use of language and terminology in ourselves, our teams and the wider community

## Combating bias

- Challenge stereotypes and counter stereotypical information
- Use context to explain a situation
- Change perceptions and relationships with people not 'in our group'
- Be an active bystander – name or acknowledge an offense, point to the 'elephant in the room', interrupt the behaviour, publically support an aggrieved person, use body language to show disapproval, use humour (with care), encourage dialogue, help calm strong feelings, call for help
- Learn about those that are different from you and respect those differences
- Reach out, interact, talk and befriend those that have a different background to you.

## Getting it wrong

Fear of getting it wrong or offending can cause confusion as to what are acceptable terms to use. There are terms which are now well known to be offensive, displaying insensitivity and ignorance on the part of the speaker.

However, it has to be remembered that terms are evolving and developing all the time and what is in common use at a particular time may be seen to be unacceptable at another point in time.

## Inclusive Terminology

The guide attached has been based on a guide produced by the Chartered Insurance Institute and amended based on the requirements of the University [1] The information and terminology covers a wide range of examples and is applicable to the Higher Education sector.

By educating yourself and monitoring thoughts, it will help to change your language and behaviours. People may interpret and draw inferences from the language that you use. When interacting with people, you want to be an open, respectful and informed individual instead of a disrespectful person.

This guide is a point of reference for staff and students to help identify appropriate language and provides practical examples of preferred terms and phrases for both verbal and written communication.

Language will continuously evolve with changes in culture and society please contact the EDI team for any amendments.

---

[1] inclusive-language-guidelines.pdf (cii.co.uk)

## Age

Only use the age if it's relevant. If you need to be specific and describe the difference stages of life, give the actual age.

| Advice | Don't Use | Instead |
|---|---|---|
| Avoid general terms as these imply that people of certain age groups or generations are a homogenous group, failing to recognise people's individuality. | The elderly, the old, pensioners. The young | Mature individual, elderly person/people Young person, young adults Over-65's etc Teenagers 16+ |
| Avoid using the terms 'girls', 'boys' when referring to colleagues or employees, as these refer to young children. | The boys/girls in the office | The men/women in the office Our colleagues in the office |
| Avoid using language that stereotypes or implies that a particular age group is more or less able or has stereotypical characteristics by virtue of chronological age. | The young and vibrant team A mature workforce | An effective and vibrant team An experienced workforce |

## Disability

Use Positive Language and do not label people with their disability. Always think about accessibility for all, digital and physically

The National Autistic Society has also conducted a study around the language specifically used to describe autism, which can be found here: https://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/describing.aspx

Suggested language

| Advice | Don't Use | Instead |
|---|---|---|
| Avoid blanket terms. Always put the person before the disability. | The disabled, the handicapped | 'disabled/non-disabled people' |
| Avoid using terms that imply normalcy/being healthy when referring to people without disabilities. | Normal, healthy, able-bodied person | 'disabled/non-disabled people' |
| Use positive language rather than descriptions that emphasize limitations. | Disabled toilets/lifts Toilets/lifts for the disabled | Accessible toilets/lifts |
| Avoid negative terms that overextend the severity of a disability. | Wheelchair-bound, confined to a chair<br>Cancer or dementia victims | Person who uses a wheelchair<br>People living with cancer or dementia |
| Avoid terms which equate the person with the ability or disability. | Schizophrenic Autistic child | Individual with schizophrenia<br>A child who is 'autistic', 'on the autism spectrum' or 'with autism'.<br>'Autistic' or an alternative being 'on the autism spectrum'. |
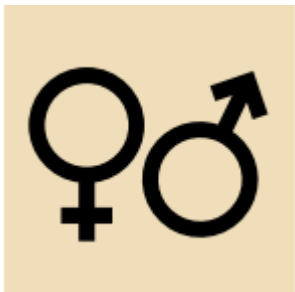
## Sex

It's very common for people to confuse sex, gender, and gender identity, despite being very different things

Only mention sex, gender or sexuality if they're relevant, for example, to signpost people and help them get the health information and access to treatment they need:

Biological sex is determined as female or male at conception and observed at birth. A very small number of people have variations of sexual development (VSD) or differences of sexual development (DSD), but they are still either male or female.

Gender is a set of expectations from society, about behaviours, characteristics, and thoughts. Gender is usually considered binary (male or female), but can also be viewed as a spectrum, instead of being anchored on biology, it's more about how one is expected to act, because of one's sex.

Gender identity refers to an individual's internal sense of gender, i.e. being a man, a woman, neither of these, both. This can be man, woman, transgender, cisgender, non-binary, genderqueer/gender fluid or agendered.

Where it is not clear what, if any, gendered pronouns or nouns are appropriate for an individual, we ask and respect their wishes: what are your pronouns.

The following provides a glossary of common terms associated with sex, gender and gender identity. To stay up to date with currently terminology refer to the Stonewall Glossary of terms

List of LGBTQ+ terms (stonewall.org.uk)

**Suggested Language**

| Advice | Don't Use | Instead |
|---|---|---|
| Use gender neutral terms rather than those that make sex distinction | Man, Mankind Workmanship<br>Man the desk/phones Man-made | Humans, Humankind Quality of work/skills<br>Attend the phones<br>Artificial, manufactured, synthetic |
| Use gender neutral pronouns and expressions. | Anyone who wants his work evaluated<br>Welcome ladies and gentlemen | Anyone who wants their work evaluated<br>Welcome to friends and colleagues<br>Welcome to everyone |
| Use person-centred language. | The transgender | Trans people |
| Respect the preference of those people who want to be referred to by gender neutral pronouns. | She, her, hers and he, him,  his | They, them, theirs (e.g. Xena ate their food because they were hungry.) It is correct to use in the singular. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Official forms should include a comprehensive list of titles, sorted alphabetically rather than following any perceived hierarchy. | Prof, Dr, Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms, Mx, etc | Dr, Miss, Mr, Mrs, Ms, Mx, Prof, etc [blank] |
| Avoid titles that imply the usual job-holder being of a particular gender. | Cleaning ladies and Policeman | Cleaners and Police officers |
| Avoid irrelevant gender descriptions. | A female scientist<br>A male nurse | A Scientist<br>A Nurse |

## Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation refers a person´s physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to another individual. This could be towards people of the same sex, opposite sex or both. Sexual orientations include asexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, pansexual, questioning and straight

To stay up to date with currently terminology in relation to sexual orientation please refer to the Stonewall Glossary of terms

List of LGBTQ+ terms (stonewall.org.uk)

**Suggested language**

| Advice | Don't Use | instead |
|---|---|---|
| Avoid terms that suggest a degree of voluntary choice when this is not necessarily the case. | Sexual preference Lifestyle choice | Sexual orientation |
| Use person-centred language. | Lesbians, gays, bisexuals | Lesbian, gay, bisexual people |
| Use language that does not assume heterosexuality as the norm. | Invite your boyfriend/husband Family planning clinic | Invite your spouse/partner.<br>Sexual health clinic or sexual health and wellbeing clinic |
| Recognise diverse family formation. | Mother and father | Parents, caregivers |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Recognise and respect the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. | Don´t use 'LGBTQ+' if you are only talking about sexual orientation.<br>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.<br>Use 'straight cisgendered' or 'ally'. |

## Marriage and Civil Partnership

Since 2005, in the UK same sex couples have been able to form a legally recognised relationship and in 2020 same sex couple were able to form legally recognised relationships, known as a civil partnership. Couples who form a civil partnership have a new legal status – that of a 'civil partner', where the couple gains rights and responsibilities similar to that of a marriage. It is good practice to use language that reflects this new legal status.

**Suggested language**

| Advice | Don't Use | Instead |
|---|---|---|
| When asking about marital status, it is better to ask about a person's relationship status or about their marital/Civil Partnership status | What is your marital status? | What is your relationship status? |
| | | What is your marital/civil partnership status? |
| | | single |
| | | married/civil partner |
| | | divorced/dissolved  civil partnership |
| | | widow/widower/surviving  civil partner |

## Race, ethnicity and nationality

The UK is a racially and culturally diverse place and it's important not to assume that a person's appearance defines their nationality or cultural background. It's recommended to only use a person's race, ethnicity or nationality to identify or describe them if it is directly relevant to the point you are making.

If you don't know – Ask – How do you describe your ethnicity?

**Suggested language**

| Advice | Don't Use | Instead |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Use adjectives rather than nouns when it is necessary to refer to someone's race. | Asians, Blacks, Whites | Asian people, Black people, White People |
| Avoid irrelevant ethnic descriptions. | The Asian doctor | The doctor |
| | Mixed, Mixed Heritage, Mixed race | People of White and Black Heritage |
| Avoid outdated terms. | Coloured.<br><br>Minority Ethnic groups | Avoid saying BAME people instead spell out the acronym Black Asian and Minority Ethnic people.<br>Ethnic Minorities<br>Minority groups |

## Religion and Belief

'Religion or belief' is the preferred term in use in equality and human rights legislation, including in the Equality Act 2010. The definitions of religion and belief under the Equality Act 2010 are:

Religion - any religion or reference to religion, including a reference to a lack of religion.

Belief - any religious or philosophical belief or reference to belief, including a reference to a lack of belief.

Only refer to people's religion if it's relevant to the information we are communicating

Suggested language

| Advice | Don't Use | Instead |
|---|---|---|
| Avoid using Christian-centric terms, not only on ground of respect but also for practical reasons.<br>The term 'last name' should not be used as it could be confusing to Asian groups who place their family name first.<br>Surname is not unacceptable. However, this word may originate from sire-name, or the name derived from one's father. | Christian name Surname, Last name | First name, given name, Family name |
| Use legally correct terminology. | Faith<br>Religious discrimination | Religion or belief<br>Discrimination on grounds of religion or belief |