Guide: Inclusive Language at Kent

Kent is a community made up of staff and students from highly diverse backgrounds, with different interests, beliefs and world views. It is important that all members of that community feel respected and valued, and that they can both speak in a way that does not consciously or unconsciously discriminate or harass someone else, and also feel secure in the fact that they will not be harassed in turn.

A key part of creating that environment is ensuring that everyone is away of inclusive language and how to use it effectively. This short guide will take you through some of those key principles. Appendix 1 at the end will give you more information about the legal framework in which we operate.

As a bare minimum, all members of the University community have a responsibility to create an environment which is free fromharassment, bullying, unlawful discrimination and victimisation. What we strive for is an environment which encourages rich debate and idea exchange in a respectful, open and friendly manner that allows people to learn from each other in a productive way.

What is Inclusive Language?

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 arecommunicating or to whom we are referring. A simple test is to consider if the phrase you are using will make anyone feel 'othered' or not included within the discussion.

Why use inclusive language?

Using inclusive language gets much more out of a conversation, increases productivity and helps build successful relationships with others. However it is also important to remember that language changes and evolves, individuals have different levels of confidence with language and mistakes happen. 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. Using a degree of common sense and assessing if something has been said maliciously or with the intent to harm is highly recommended. If you do get it wrong, correct yourself, apologise and move on.

Below is are some practical examples. This guide is non-exhaustive but should help to build confidence using inclusive language.

Any staff member or student who feels that someone has been using language in a way that is purposefully designed to discriminate, harass or bully another person or group should report to the University via the Report and Support tool. Non-anonymous reports will trigger an investigation and access to support for the individuals impacted. Anonymous reports will be logged for tracking and information purposes.

Inclusive Terminology

The information below has been based on a guide produced by the Chartered Insurance Institute and amended based on the requirements of the University. The information and terminology covers a wide range of examples and is applicable to the Higher Education sector. Language is fluid and changes rapidly, as well being intensely personal to an individual. **The best course of action is always to ask someone or a group how they want to be referred to and this should always take precedence over any recommendations below,** which are more useful for report writing, sending emails, generating forms, creating communications or marketing materials or addressing groups of people.

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	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 recent guidance.

Advice	Don't Use	Instead
Avoid blanket terms.	The disabled, the handicapped	'disabled/non-disabled people' 'neurodivergent / neurotypical
Avoid using terms that imply normalcy/being healthy when referring to people without disabilities.	Normal, healthy, able-bodied person	disabled/non-disabled people' 'neurodivergent / neurotypical'
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 Cancer or dementia victims	Person who uses a wheelchair People living with cancer or dementia
Use identity first language	Person with autism	Autistic person
Avoid generalisations	Everyone is a little bit on the spectrum	Person on the autistic spectrum / autism is a spectrum condition

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.

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

To stay up to date with currently terminology refer to the Stonewall Glossary of terms

Advice	Don't Use	Instead
Use gender neutral terms rather than those that make sex distinction	Chairman / Chairwoman	Chairperson
Use gender neutral pronouns and expressions.	Anyone who wants his work evaluated Welcome ladies and gentlemen	Anyone who wants their work evaluated Welcome to friends and colleagues 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 (unless that is the individuals preference)	They, them, theirs (e.g. Charlie 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.	Mr, Miss, Mrs, Ms (on their own and non-alphabetical)	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 A male nurse	A Scientist 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](#)

Advice	Don't Use	Instead
Avoid terms that suggest a degree of voluntary choice	Sexual preference Lifestyle choice Choose to be gay	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. Sexual health clinic or sexual health and wellbeing clinic
Recognise diverse family formations.	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. 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 cisgendered' or 'ally'.

Marriage and Civil Partnership

The Civil Partnership Act 2004 ('the CPA 2004') came into force on 5th December 2005. Following a Supreme Court ruling in 2018 this legislation was amended and the Civil Partnership (Opposite sex Couples) Regulations 2019 enabled opposite sex couples to form a Civil Partnership. This amendment came into force on 31st December 2019.

The CPA 2004 enables same and opposite sex couples to form legally recognised civil partnerships. Civil partners assume many legal rights and responsibilities for each other. Many of these rights and responsibilities are the same as those enjoyed by married couples.

The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 makes the marriage of same sex couples lawful. Therefore, as a result of the 2019 amendment to the CPA 2004 we now have a legal regime that allows both same sex marriage and same sex civil partnerships so there is greater choice for couples to decide on the tradition of marriage or the more modern civil partnership approach.

Civil partnerships can be converted into a marriage (currently still only same sex ones) through a declaration before a Superintendent Registrar. Marriages cannot be converted to civil partnerships.

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 spouse / 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?

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
Avoid outdated terms.	Coloured. Minority Ethnic groups BAME unless referring explicitly to data	Racially minoritised Global majority Black heritage Asian Diasporic heritage

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

Advice	Don't Use	Instead
Avoid using Christian-centric terms, not only on ground of respect but also for practical reasons. The term 'last name' should not be used as it could be confusing to Asian groups who place their family name first. 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 Chosen / preferred name
Use legally correct terminology.	Faith Religious discrimination	Religion or belief Discrimination on grounds of religion or belief

Appendix 1: The Legal Framework

Bullying harassment and discrimination

Bullying and harassment is behaviour that makes someone feel intimidated or offended. Harassment is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010. Bullying itself is not against the law, but harassment and discrimination is. This is when the unwanted behaviour is related to one of the following:

- age
- sex
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sexual orientation

<u>Bullying</u>

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 unsubstantiatedcriticism

<u>Harassment</u>

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

<u>Discrimination</u>

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