


Greater Manchester

GM = EqAL

Equality Alliance

**Inclusive Language  
Subgroup**



Trans and  
Non-  
Binary  
Identities

# Preamble

- This guidance is the product of discussion and research by members of the GM=EqAl Inclusive Language Subgroup.
- It is part of a series created to help GM=EqAl members and staff be respectful and consistent in how we talk and write about the issues we work on.
- It sets out our agreed definitions and terminology around **TRANS AND NON-BINARY IDENTITIES**, both of which are covered by the protected characteristic of **gender reassignment**, and explains key concepts in line with the values of GM=EqAl.
- GM=EqAl is keen for others to share and adopt our language guidance, and welcomes dialogue with partners in order to keep evolving the documents along with our understanding.
- This guidance has been robustly generated but does not claim absolute authority on any topic.
- There is considerable overlap between these slides and our guidance on **SEX and GENDER**, located here: [bit.ly/3dGfgBN](https://bit.ly/3dGfgBN)

# Short version

## DO

- Share your pronouns and invite other people to share theirs
- Briefly apologise and correct yourself if you accidentally misgender someone
- Give the option on forms for gender options beyond 'male' and 'female'
- Use inclusive rather than binary gendered terms in everyday speech

## DON'T

- Guess at someone's gender identity and risk misgendering them
- Ask people directly about their gender identity or trans status (instead, use their pronouns as a guide)
- Refer to someone by their pre-transition name if they no longer go by it

# Key terms

- **Sex** is a categorisation based usually on observation of external genitals at birth. A person may be assigned **male**, **female** or **intersex**. Biologically speaking, sex is determined by a combination of bodily characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics.
- **Intersex** refers to people who may have biological attributes associated with both male and female bodies, or which do not fit with societal assumptions about male or female bodies. Intersex people can have any gender identity.
- **Gender** refers to social roles and behaviours associated with male and female, that have been learned, are changeable over time, and have wide variations both within and between cultures.
- **Gender identity**: describes a person's innate sense of their own gender, with labels including **male**, **female** and **non-binary** used, among others.

# Key terms

- **Transgender/trans**: an umbrella term that describes anyone whose gender identity doesn't completely match the sex (and corresponding gender) they were assigned at birth. Trans isn't a gender identity, it's a relationship to gender. Trans is Latin for 'crossing from one side to another', or another kind of movement to somewhere.
- **Cisgender/cis**: a term that describes anyone who identifies with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth. Cis is Latin for 'on the same side as'.
- **Gender expression** is used to describe how a person chooses to outwardly express their gender, within the context of societal expectations of gender.
- **Gender dysphoria** is used to describe the discomfort or distress some people experience because there is a mismatch between their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity. Dysphoria often arises as a result of people being subject to society-specific assumptions made (by others) due to their perceived gender.

# Key terms

- People who identify as being in some way outside of the man-woman gender binary (e.g. **non-binary**, **agender**, **gender fluid**, or **gender diverse**) might experience a fluid or fixed gender, multiple genders, a different gender, or no gender. They may or may not experience gender dysphoria and may or may not consider themselves to be trans.
- **Genderqueer** is used by some people who define their gender as outside of the gender binary. The 'queer' part of genderqueer is quite a politicised word, so this is generally a more political non-binary gender identity.
- **Transmasculine/transmasc**: A broad term to describe trans people whose gender, or gender expression, is mostly masculine.
- **Transfeminine/transfemme**: A broad term to describe trans people whose gender, or gender expression, is mostly feminine.
- Many people who do not conform to societal expectations of gender, do so without rejecting their sex assigned at birth. This includes cis women and girls who consider themselves, or are considered by others, to be 'tomboys', 'masculine' or 'butch'; and cis men and boys who deliberately or unconsciously pursue culturally determined 'feminine' behaviours or interests, and generally prefer not to be constrained by gender norms.

# Gender reassignment

- **Gender reassignment** refers to individuals who either:
  - Have undergone, intend to undergo or are currently undergoing gender reassignment (medical, hormonal or surgical treatment to alter the body). This process may take several years.
  - Do not intend to undergo medical treatment but wish to live permanently in a different gender from their gender at birth.
- Gender reassignment usually goes hand in hand with changing one's name and pronouns, dressing differently and starting to live as one's self-identified gender (**social transition**).
- Legal protection from discrimination is based upon having – or being perceived as having – a 'protected characteristic', as defined in the Equality Act 2010. Gender reassignment is such a protected characteristic. It is further interpreted in the Equality Act 2010 approved code of practice.
- Gender diverse and non-binary people are not specifically recognised in the Equality Act. However, in 2020, a Birmingham Employment Tribunal held that people who are gender fluid, non-binary or transitioning can have the protected characteristic of gender reassignment.
- The term 'gender reassignment' is nevertheless contentious and is one that many in the trans, non-binary and gender diverse community argue should be reviewed.

# Gender reassignment

- **Transition** refers to the process and/or the period of time during which gender reassignment occurs (with or without medical intervention).
- **Transitioning** can involve many different elements and stages, such as changing one's social identity, legal identity and/or gender expression and gender-affirming medical treatment (hormones, surgery) if desired or available.
- It is important to recognise that not all trans people undergo any kind of medical process as part of their gender reassignment. Some trans people are held back by long waiting lists and healthcare services that are extremely difficult to navigate; others simply do not want it.
- For some trans people, **gender-affirming surgery** is essential to their mental health and well-being, for others it is not at all.
- It is not acceptable to ask a trans person about their anatomy, or to challenge or question a person's identity on the basis of their (perceived) **transition status**.



# Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC)

- A GRC enables a trans person to be legally recognised for all purposes in their acquired / affirmed gender, and to be issued with a new birth certificate. Not all trans people choose to apply for a GRC. You currently have to be over 18 to apply.  
[www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/equality/reassignment/certificate.html](http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/equality/reassignment/certificate.html)
- You do not need a GRC to change the gender you are registered as at work, or to legally change your gender on other documents such as your passport or NHS records.
- It is a criminal offence under the 2004 Gender Recognition Act to disclose information obtained in an 'official capacity' (i.e. as part of a person's job or function) about the gender history of a person with a GRC.

# Inclusive language and practice

- In many situations, it is not really important to be sure of a person's sex or gender. It can be good to practice living with ambiguity!
- Using gender neutral language and they/them pronouns for people as standard before you know their gender or **pronouns** is a useful way to avoid **misgendering** them by mistake.
- It is considered more polite to ask for a person's pronouns than to ask about their gender. You can ask them privately "how would you like me to refer to you?" or "can I just check, what pronouns do you use?" It is then up to the person whether they give you just their pronouns, or tell you more about their gender.
- Once you know a person's pronouns it is important to use them (and to apologise and try again if you slip up).
- It is also important not to make assumptions about a person's sexual orientation – it is not generally possible to infer anything about a person's sex life or relationships from their gender identity or gender expression. Ensuring that you ask before using language that reinforces these assumptions, makes situations more inclusive for all.

# Inclusive language and practice

- Typically, we default to binary language without thinking, but small changes can really impact on whether or not non-binary people feel welcome. Some examples of how to substitute common phrases:

Binary language	Non-binary, inclusive language
Open to both men and women	Open to all genders
Ladies and gentlemen	Honoured guests
Dear Sir / Madam	To whom it may concern
Mothers and fathers	Parent, carers and guardians
Husband / wife	Spouse, partner
Brother / sister	Sibling

- Language around gender and gender identity is constantly evolving, and there are differences of opinion within **gender non-conforming** communities about their preferred terms and approaches.
- Don't worry about 'getting it wrong' – the important thing is to be open to be guided by people themselves as to how to talk to and about them.

# Other terms to be aware of

- **Transsexual** refers to (mostly binary) trans people who completely physically transition or want to do so. It is sometimes viewed as outdated and too focused on the medical aspects of transition.
- **Female to Male (FTM / F2M)**: usually synonymous with **trans man**, and sometimes used by **assigned female at birth (AFAB)** trans people to express a generalised version of their gender experience. Similarly, **Male to Female (MTF / M2F)** is usually synonymous with **trans woman**, and may be used by **assigned male at birth (AMAB)** trans people to express a generalised version of their gender experience. For many trans people these terms are seen as too focused on binary gender and as reinforcing the medicalisation of transgender bodies. Many trans women have never identified with being male, so using this term generally to mean trans women is discouraged (and vice versa).
- It is important to note that many terms have several definitions and trans/non-binary people will differ in their opinions about their use. Rather than assigning terms, such as those above, to trans people, it is important to listen to how they identify and mirror that language. Things are usually more nuanced than simply “never use these ones but those ones are universally okay to use”.
- **Deadnaming**: Using someone’s previous name, usually the name they were given at birth, rather than their current chosen name. This usually refers to intentional or malicious (rather than accidental) use of a trans person’s previous name.

# Personal pronouns

- Some languages, like Chinese and Persian, have a gender-neutral form for people built in.
- Languages which do not include gender neutral pronouns have attempted to create them, in the interest of greater equality and to include non-binary people.
- Non-binary people often use **they/them/theirs** pronouns but there are also **neopronouns** such as **ze/zem/zyr** – this is why it's important to ask.
- You can learn more about pronouns here:  
<https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns>

theirs	zim	their	
her	ze	she	his
xe	they	them	xim
hers	xey	him	he

# Personal pronouns

- It is helpful to lead by example and introduce your own pronouns, then give people space to optionally tell you theirs.
- Asking and correctly using someone's pronouns is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for that person (and it's not only trans people who get 'misgendered').
- People may have different levels of 'outness' regarding their gender identity in different contexts, so it is important to ask in a tone that is welcoming and inclusive, rather than intrusive. It is then up to the individual to share whatever pronouns they feel comfortable using in that situation, or to explain in which situations they would like those around them to use which pronouns.
- Everybody makes mistakes sometimes! The best thing to do if you use the wrong pronoun for someone is to say something right away, like 'Sorry, I meant [insert pronoun]'. If you realise your mistake after the fact, apologise in private and move on.
- It will take time for official systems catch up with where language is leading, for example by universal provision of forms which do not restrict gender options. See
- We can lead the way by adopting best practice, following guidelines on trans status monitoring from organisations such as LGBT Foundation:

<https://bit.ly/3xQoxN4>

## More information

- Andolie, M. (2019). 'Who do they think they are and what do they think they are doing: the construction and establishment of trans and non-binary or genderqueer identities in a trans youth group'. PhD Thesis, Goldsmiths: [research.gold.ac.uk/26170/1/EDU\\_thesis\\_MargueriteA\\_2019.pdf](https://research.gold.ac.uk/26170/1/EDU_thesis_MargueriteA_2019.pdf)
- Guide to being a trans ally: [s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/lgbt-website-media/Files/139d38ec-f6ce-4722-8945-8058be7da427/trans%20allies%20brochure%20v4\\_smallfile.pdf](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/lgbt-website-media/Files/139d38ec-f6ce-4722-8945-8058be7da427/trans%20allies%20brochure%20v4_smallfile.pdf)
- Glossaries of terms and phrases: [translanguageprimer.com](https://translanguageprimer.com)  
[www.brook.org.uk/your-life/gender-a-few-definitions](https://www.brook.org.uk/your-life/gender-a-few-definitions)
- Guide to including non-binary people, for service providers and employers: [www.scottishtrans.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Non-binary-guidance.pdf](https://www.scottishtrans.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Non-binary-guidance.pdf)
- More about gender transition: <https://www.brook.org.uk/your-life/transitioning>
- Mermaids resources for professionals: [mermaidsuk.org.uk/professionals/resources-for-professionals](https://mermaidsuk.org.uk/professionals/resources-for-professionals)

