

# **Guidance for sexuality and gender equality and inclusion in the workplace**

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# Purpose and scope of the guidance

This guidance has been developed by the Sexuality and Gender Equality and Inclusion (SGEI) Forum.

The SGEI Forum was established in November 2018 in order to help embed one of the [RCPsych's values and behaviours](#), that of **Respect**, and to 'promote diversity and challenge inequalities throughout the College'.

This document offers some guidance about how we can all be more respectful towards one another, advance sexuality and gender equality within the RCPsych and thereby foster a more progressive and inclusive environment not only for staff but also for visitors to the College.

The guidance does not supersede, and should be read alongside, other College policies and processes, including:

- College style guide (forthcoming)
- Digital and branding guidance (forthcoming)
- [Dignity at work](#)
- [Email acceptable use](#)
- [Equal opportunities](#)
- [Social media guidance](#)
- Tone of voice (forthcoming)

The guidance covers some everyday functions of office life, including writing documents, forms and emails, using images, having interactions and conversations, holding meetings and events, and using social media.

A fundamental part of how those functions are performed is the language that we use, and this is covered in the first section.

# Definitions and language

Language, if used in a positive and thoughtful way, is one of the main ways in which sexuality and gender equality and inclusion can be advanced. Below you will find some words and terms that are helpful to understand about sexuality and gender.

Language, if used in a negative or thoughtless way, can perpetuate gender stereotypes, and/or make people feel uncomfortable or distressed about their sexuality or gender. Therefore, please be mindful about the language that you use and:

- Avoid using pronouns and gendered descriptions that may conflict with an individual's personal experience of their gender identity
- Avoid using gendered nouns and verbs such as 'chairman', 'policeman/woman', 'mankind', 'manpower', 'manned', and so on
- Don't use gendered language when making general statements (for example, 'When talking to a patient, ask him....'). Plural use in this context is deemed acceptable ('When talking to a patient, ask them....') or you could make the entire sentence plural ('When talking to patients, ask them...')
- Avoid using language that is widely considered to be offensive to transgender people, e.g. 'sex change', 'pre-op', and so on.

The following link provides helpful advice:

<https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>

Some of the following words and terms are used in this document and others you may read about or hear in discussions about sexuality and gender. The definitions align with Stonewall and the UK government (where relevant).

**Ally** In the LGBTQ+ community, the word is used to refer to (typically) a straight or cisgender person who supports the LGBTQ+ community.

**Asexual** This word refers to a person who is not sexually attracted to anyone (although some people who are asexual may feel romantically attached to someone else).

**Bi, or bisexual** An overarching term used to describe a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards more than one gender.

**Binary** In terms of gender, this word refers to how gender can be categorised as being two distinct polar opposites, with male/masculine at

one end and female/feminine at the other. Increasingly this idea of a binary system of gender is being challenged.

**Cisgender** This word is increasingly being used to describe people who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

**Gay** This word usually refers to a man who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards men. It can also be a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality - some women define themselves as gay rather than lesbian.

**Gender** This word (not to be confused with 'sex' – see below) denotes those features or characteristics related to femininity and masculinity that are socially constructed. Increasingly people are thinking about gender as being not binary (man/woman, masculine/feminine, male/female), but on a continuum or spectrum, with variations along the continuum in how people perceive and express themselves. This is sometimes referred to as **gender fluidity**.

**Gender equality** Sometimes called 'gender parity' or 'sexual equality', this term means having equal access to rights, resources and opportunities across all sectors of society, regardless of gender.

**Gender identity** A term coined by a sexologist called Robert Stoller to refer to a person's own concept or perception about their gender. This concept is usually deeply held and resistant to change.

**Heteronormative** Relating to the belief that heterosexual orientation (underpinned by a binary understanding of gender) is the norm, or the 'default'.

**Heterosexual/straight** Refers to a man who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women, or to a woman who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards men.

**Homosexual** This might be considered a more old-fashioned or medical term used to describe someone who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards someone of the same gender. The term 'gay' is now more commonly used.

**Lesbian** Refers to a woman who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women.

**LGBTQ+** This initialism stands for 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer plus'. The plus sign encompasses other identities, such as 'questioning', intersex, asexual, ally and pansexual. The plus sign is used because the nomenclature and range of identities are changing and expanding and it guards against excluding any identities.

**Intersectionality** This word describes the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism and classism) combine, overlap or intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalised individuals or groups. The term was coined by American civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw in her analysis of the oppression of Black women.

**Intersex** This word refers to people who are born with naturally occurring variations in sexual characteristics (neither exclusively male or female).

**Non-binary** This term refers to people who do not identify as either male or female, or are gender fluid.

**Pansexual** Refers to a person whose romantic and/or sexual attraction towards others is not limited by sex or gender.

**Queer** This word is controversial because some people view it as an insult or as homophobic, but others have 'reclaimed' it and use it to denote a rejection of specific labels of romantic or sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

**Sex** This word is often used interchangeably with 'gender' but the two terms are distinct. 'Sex' refers to the biological differences between individuals, such as their genitalia and other sexual characteristics, which are produced by their chromosomes and hormones. Sex is usually assigned at birth, whereas a person's perception of their gender develops over time.

**Sexuality** This can refer to sexual orientation or the way one expresses one's sexual feelings.

**Sexual orientation** This term refers to sexual attraction or preference, and can range from being straight/heterosexual to being gay, and anywhere in between.

**Transgender** This word describes people whose gender identity is different from the sex assigned to them at birth.

If there are words and phrases not covered here, Stonewall is a good place to start: <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/glossary-terms>

# Documents

## *Letters/emails*

If you are going to write a letter or email to someone you don't know, it's best to avoid making an assumption about the person's gender or sexuality and signalling that through your form of address (use of titles such as Miss, Mrs or Ms). You might want to consider:

- Asking the person, where possible, which pronouns and titles they use
- Addressing the person by both their first and second names
- Bearing in mind that not everyone will be comfortable being assigned a traditional heteronormative pronoun – he/him or she/her. Some people may prefer to be referred to as they/them. There is some helpful advice about this at:  
[www.oxfordsu.org/wellbeing/student-advice/pronouns/](http://www.oxfordsu.org/wellbeing/student-advice/pronouns/)

For those who identify as non-binary or do not wish to reveal or be referred to by their gender, 'Mx' is a preferable title, but it is best to ask the person first if you are unsure.

## *Forms*

When you are setting up a form for the first time:

- Think about whether knowing someone's gender is relevant. If it isn't, make the field optional. If it is:
  - Make sure there are more than two options (male/female) for someone's gender – add 'non-binary', and consider adding 'prefer not to say' or a blank space for a person to self-identify
  - Explain why this information is required.
- Think about providing a space in which a person can add their preferred title and preferred pronoun. It is best not to provide options with boxes to be ticked but to enable people to self-identify.

# Images

If you are going to design or commission an infographic or other type of illustration, or use photographs:

- Make sure your illustrations and photographs represent diversity (if that is appropriate in the context)
- Make sure photographs in which men and women are shown illustrate a range of different roles and power dynamics where possible (for example, do not always use photographs in which men are seen to be in the more powerful role, such as a doctor, and women are in what are traditionally seen as more supportive roles, such as a nurse)
- Consider using:
  - gender symbols/glyphs – these are universally accepted and can be intertwined in different ways to represent different relationship or combined to represent unisex, gender neutrality, or relationships (see the examples below<sup>1</sup>)
  - other symbols or an icon related to another aspect of the content.



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<sup>1</sup> Please note that these icons require a licence for commercial or public use from [Noun Project](#). They are for illustration only.



# Interactions and conversations

Before you start any conversations in the workplace or at a work event, remember that:

- You don't have to understand someone's identity to respect it
- You can't always tell someone's gender or sexuality by simply looking at them
- There is no 'right way' to be a woman, a man, a transgender person, a non-binary person, etc.

When you engage a person in conversation in the workplace or at a work event:

- Use the language people use for themselves
- If you don't know what pronouns to use, ask
- Be careful and considerate about what other questions you ask about gender/sexuality: always remember that someone's gender identity/sexuality is their private information to share, or not
- Avoid making assumptions about the person's status (for example, if they are married, in a civil partnership, in a relationship or single, or whether they have or intend to have children)
- Don't make inappropriate or offensive comments to the person about their gender, sexuality or appearance, or make such comments about a person to others.

If you want to go further:

- Challenge sexist and/or anti-transgender remarks, jokes, and conversations in the workplace
- Support your colleagues who experience discrimination in their interactions with others
- Think about how you use gendered language.

Always remember the basics: be respectful, be kind, be polite.

# Meetings and events

When preparing for and running a meeting, be mindful:

- of how people would like to be addressed
- of how people would like to be identified on badges, identification cards and meeting papers
- when expressing opinions on potentially sensitive topics related to gender and sexuality.

You might also want to consider:

- your registration form, if using one (see the [above](#) section on *Forms*)
- encouraging equal contribution from all attendees.

If you are going to hire an external venue, you might want to consider ensuring:

- there are breastfeeding facilities or special rooms for parents to feed babies in comfort
- everyone has access to toilets and other facilities - everyone should be able to use bathrooms and other gendered facilities safely and comfortably.

# Social media

If you are going to tweet or post on Instagram, Facebook or LinkedIn using the College accounts, you might want to consider:

- Sharing multiple voices and perspectives: Try to ensure that the content you are sharing on social media is created by a diverse range of people and offers a wide range of perspectives
- Respecting the individual's wishes around their portrayal in the media (e.g. pronouns, names, etc.) and refer to someone's transgender identity only when it is relevant to the story.

If one of your posts receives an offensive comment that is misogynist, racist, homophobic, or hateful towards any group or person, remove that comment (on platforms that permit you to do so<sup>2</sup>) so that people know that you do not tolerate that kind of behaviour on your social channels.

Helpful guidelines on commenting on transgender news stories can be found at:

<https://www.allabouttrans.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/All-About-Trans-Simple-Tips-Nov-14.pdf>

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<sup>2</sup> You cannot remove someone else's comment on Twitter. You can hide people's comments on other channels.