

Gender equality: non-binary inclusion

Our society has traditionally made restrictive binary (either/or) assumptions and expectations about gender. Common assumptions are that:

- everyone's gender identity (their internal experience of gender) is either male or female
- that this corresponds neatly to their assumed sex at birth (e.g. physical characteristics)

Common expectations now being challenged are:

- boys and girls will look and behave differently and have different interests/preferences
- this follows through into adulthood
- women will choose different jobs, have less aspiration and accept lower pay than men

Some of us grow up with or develop a strong sense that our gender identity is different to the sex assigned to us at birth. This often means a strong desire to permanently transition and live fully in a different gender.

Many of us believe that our gender identity is more complicated than simply being either male or female. The gender we feel and/or express is most likely somewhere in the middle, neither 100% female nor 100% male. We may have gender identities which are different to what others assume or fluid gender identities. And because the use of non-binary language is so limited, our gender identity may not confirm to any position on a female to male range, particularly if societies insist on labelling us one thing or another.

UK law currently only recognises two genders – male and female (though the Westminster Parliament's Women and Equalities committee has previously supported that this be changed). It is good practice to extend beyond existing law; non-binary identities should be acknowledged and included. UNISON recognises that an increasing number of people identify as non-binary.

Gender has always been important in UNISON. Our gender monitoring and rules on proportionality continue to address historic, institutional discrimination against women and women's under-representation.

However, where *unnecessary* gender divisions exist they should be removed so that organisations and activities become more inclusive for non-binary people. For everyone's benefit:

- Before asking for someone's gender, think: Why do you need to know?
- Avoid phrases which assume everyone identifies as female or male – e.g. 'good morning ladies and gentlemen'.

If collecting gender data is absolutely required, include options for non-binary people on forms. Either with a free-text answer or framing gender questions as:

Do you identify as: female male in another way.

Non-binary people may change their name, title and the pronoun used to describe them. Mx is a non-gendered title (like Dr, Prof or Rev) and is increasingly provided for as an option on data systems, including UNISON membership records and the DVLA.

Many non-binary people use the non-gendered pronoun 'they'. At first it may take time to become familiar with the use of different pronouns. But practice makes perfect and, if you respect other people's gender identity, they will respect you for trying. To avoid singling anyone out, some groups ask everyone to give their pronouns when they introduce themselves. Just say they/theirs, she/her, he/his along with your name, even if you think it's already clear. Try to remember who has pronouns different to those you might immediately assume in order to avoid offending them later.

Talking about gender

Gender identity: a person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned to them at birth

Gender expression: a person's external gender-related behaviour and appearance, including clothing which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned to them at birth

Transgender or trans person: a person whose gender identity does not conform to the sex they were assigned at birth. Inclusive, umbrella terms, including people who describe themselves as transsexual, cross dressing people and people with a more complex sense of their own gender than either 100% female or 100% male

Gender binary: the classification of sex and gender into two distinct and disconnected – 'opposite' - forms of masculine and feminine

Gender variance: gender expression that does not match norms of female and male

Non-binary person: a person who is not solely male or female. They may define themselves as both, neither, or something entirely different

Gender fluid / genderqueer / agender: some of the terms used by non-binary people to describe their gender

Sex: physical features including genes, hormones, internal organs and external features. Not binary.

Sex: assigned at birth and recorded on birth certificate. This 'legal sex' is rarely relevant. Currently binary in the UK. Changed by applying to Gender Recognition Panel.

Further information

Scottish Trans Alliance guide for service providers and employers on non-binary inclusion, based on findings of UK-wide research: scottishtrans.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Non-binary-guidance.pdf

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