

Gender equality: non-binary inclusion

We live in a society that has assumptions and expectations about gender. Common assumptions are that:

- everyone's gender identity (their internal experience of gender) corresponds neatly to the sex they were labelled at birth
- everyone identifies as simply either male or female.

Common expectations are that:

- boys and girls will look and behave differently and be interested in different things
- this follows through into adulthood
- women and men are likely to follow different job paths – reflected in their pay!

Some people grow up with or develop a strong sense that their gender identity is 'opposite' to how they were labelled at birth. They have a strong desire to transition and live permanently in the correct gender for them.

Other people don't feel comfortable thinking of themselves as simply male or female. Their gender identity is more complicated. Some may identify as right in the middle between male and female. Others may feel mainly male, but not 100% male (or vice versa, not 100% female). Increasing numbers of people are identifying as non-binary or gender queer. UK law currently only recognises two genders – male and female (though the Westminster Parliament's women and equalities committee has recommended that this change). Good practice usually goes beyond existing law and it is good practice to acknowledge and include non-binary identities.

Gender is important in UNISON. We use gender monitoring and rules on proportionality to address historic, institutional discrimination against women and women's under-representation.

But doing away with *unnecessary* gender divisions makes organisations and activities more inclusive for non-binary people. It can also benefit everyone.

- Think before asking for gender. Why do you need to know?
- Avoid talking about gender as though everyone identifies as male or female - eg 'good morning ladies and gentlemen'.

If you need to ask for people's gender on forms, include options for non-binary people. This may be a free-text option 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 pronoun 'they'. It may take time to get used to non-gendered pronouns but it is important to respect people's gender identity. It is increasingly common for groups to ask everyone to give their preferred pronoun when they introduce themselves, along with their name. This avoids singling anyone out.

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

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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