

Trans Equality and Gender Identity

Glossary of terms

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(From the information included in the [Advance HE](#) guidance, [Jessica Lynn\(advocate\)](#) and [Trans Guidance for the Policing Sector](#))

To understand Trans and gender identity further, it is important to be aware of terms that may be used both socially and legally.

Terminology changes and its use can be highly individualised. It is important to be mindful of trends in language as people may associate some terms to be inappropriate, even if used by a particular community.

This glossary covers the terms used in this publication and elsewhere.

Acquired gender

A legal term used in the Gender Recognition Act 2004. It refers to the gender that a person who is applying for a gender recognition certificate (GRC) has lived for two years and intends to continue living in. **Affirmed gender** may be used when a person has Transitioned but has decided not to apply for a GRC.

Affirming

The unequivocal support for an individual person's gender identity or expression, regardless of the biological sex they were assigned at birth; the systematic support to ensure that Transgender people and communities are fully represented, included, valued and honoured.

Affirming Pronouns

Refers to the most respectful and accurate pronouns for a person, as defined by that person. This is also sometimes referred to as "preferred gender pronouns," although this phrasing is increasingly outdated. To ascertain someone's affirming pronouns, ask: "What are your pronouns?"

Agender

A person who does not identify as having a gender identity that can be categorized as male or female, and sometimes indicates identifying as not having a gender identity.

Allies of Trans People

Usually a cis(cisgender) or non-Trans person who supports members of the Trans communities.

Asexual and Aromantic

Asexual is a sexual orientation, but instead of describing the gender the person is attracted to it describes the lack of attraction.

Aromantic may experience sexual attraction but they experience little to no romantic attraction to other people.

Biological Sex

A person's combination of genitals, chromosomes and hormones, usually categorized as "male" or "female" based on visual inspection of genitals via ultrasound or at birth. Many assume that a person's gender identity will be congruent with their sex assignment. Everyone has a biological sex.

Bigender

A person who experiences gender identity as two genders at the same time, or whose gender identity may vary between two genders. These may be masculine and feminine or could also include non-binary identities.

Bi

Refers to an emotional and/ or sexual orientation towards more than one gender. Bisexual or Biromantic may also be used.

Butch

A term used to describe a masculine person or gender expression. Traditionally through specifically used by lesbians/gay women.

Cross-Dresser

Someone who wears the clothes usually expected to be worn by someone of the 'opposite' gender. Other terms include 'transvestite (now becoming a dated term and disliked by some) and 'dual role'. A cross-dresser is unlikely to have a full-time identity as a member of their cross-dressed gender and typically does not seek medical intervention.

Cisgender

A term used to describe people who are not Transgender. Cisgender is based on the Latin prefix cis which means 'on this side of'. The Latin prefix Trans means 'across from' or 'on the other side of'. The use of cisgender is debated within the Trans community and some people prefer the term non-Trans as it familiarises the use of the term Trans (see below).

Dead Naming

Referring to someone by their assigned name at birth, not their chosen name.

Dual role

A dual role person occasionally wears clothing and or makeup and accessories that are not traditionally associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Generally, dual role people do not wish to Transition and do not necessarily experience gender dysphoria. Some people prefer the term **alter ego**.

Historically the terms Transvestite and crossdresser were used to describe dual role people, but they are now considered to be outdated. While some people may use the terms to describe themselves, other people may find the terms offensive.

Femme

A term used to describe a feminine person or gender expression. Traditionally though specifically used by lesbians/gay women.

Fluid(ity)

Generally with another term attached, like gender-fluid or fluid-sexuality, fluid(ity) describes an identity that may change or shift over time between or within the mix of the options available (e.g. man and woman, gay, bi and straight).

Gay

Usually refers to a man with an emotional, romantic and/or sexual orientation towards men. Also, a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality – some woman define themselves as gay rather than lesbian.

Gender

Gender refers to the cultural and social distinctions traditionally associated with men and women. It consists of three related aspects: a society's constructed **gender roles**, norms and behaviours which are essentially based on the sex assigned at birth; **gender identity**, which is a person's internal perception of their identity; **gender expression**, which is the way a person lives in society and interacts with others.

Gender does not necessarily represent a simple binary choice; some people have a gender identity that cannot be defined by the use of the terms woman or man. It should be noted that currently, for the purposes of UK law, gender is binary – people can only be male or female. However, there is growing pressure from campaign groups for this to change in line with other countries including Australia, Bangladesh, Denmark, Germany, India, Nepal and New Zealand.

Gender expression

While gender identity is subjective and internal to the individual, gender expression refers to all of the external characteristics and behaviours that are socially defined as either masculine or feminine, such as clothing, hairstyle, make-up, mannerisms, speech patterns, names, pronouns and social interactions.

Typically, Trans people seek to make their gender expression match their gender identity, but this is not always possible. It is best practice to not assume someone's gender identity on the basis of their gender expression. If you are not sure, it is best to ask a person how they would like to be addressed.

Gender incongruence and gender dysphoria

Gender incongruence is a medical term used to describe a person whose gender identity does not align, to a greater or lesser extent, with the sex assigned at birth. Where this causes discomfort, it is known as gender dysphoria. **Gender dysphoria** 'is a term describing the discomfort or distress caused by the discrepancy between a person's gender identity (their psychological sense of themselves as men or women) and the sex they were assigned at birth (with the accompanying primary or secondary sexual characteristics and or expected social gender role)' (NHS, 2013).

Gender dysphoria is not considered a mental health issue but unmanaged dysphoria or the social stigma that may accompany it and any changes a person makes to their gender expression can result in 'clinically significant levels of distress' (NHS, 2013).

In order to qualify for NHS medical assistance to Transition, a Trans person in the UK must have a diagnosis of gender dysphoria. As not all Trans people have gender dysphoria this presents a significant barrier to accessing medical support and the provisions of the Gender Recognition Act.

Gender Fluid

A person whose gender is not static and changes throughout their life. This could be on a daily/weekly/monthly basis and will be different for everyone.

Gender Identity

A person's innate sense of their own gender, whether male, female or something else (see non-binary below) which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth.

Gender reassignment

The legal term used in the The Equality Act 2010 to describe the protected characteristic of anyone who 'proposes to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning the person's sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex' (Equality Act, 2010).

This is the protected characteristic that protects Trans people from discrimination, victimisation and harassment in employment, education and when using services. Importantly, the act requires no medical supervision or interventions for a Trans person to be afforded protection.

Gender recognition certificate

Gender recognition certificates (GRC) are issued by the gender recognition panel under the provisions of the **Gender Recognition Act 2004**. The holder of a full GRC is legally recognised in their acquired gender for all purposes. A full GRC is issued to an applicant if they can satisfy the panel that they fulfil all the criteria outlined in the Gender Recognition Act. Applicants can be UK residents or from recognised overseas territories who have already acquired a new legal gender. The act requires that the applicant is over 18, has, or has had, gender dysphoria, has lived in their affirmed gender for two years prior to the application and intends to live permanently according to their acquired gender status.

Not all Trans people have, or want a GRC. A Transperson may have legally changed their name and official documentation to match their affirmed gender, however, may decide not to pay the (large) fee in order to obtain a GRC, or they may have transitioned prior to the Gender Recognition Act and do not have copies of historic medical records required to send to the panel.

It is never appropriate to ask a Trans person for a GRC and it would be regarded as unlawful because it breaches their right to privacy. Once a person has obtained a GRC their gender history can only be disclosed where there are explicit exceptions in law:

- = in accordance with an order of or proceedings before a court or tribunal, when it is strictly relevant to proceedings.

- = for the purposes of preventing or investigating crime, where it is relevant.
- = for the purposes of the social security system or a pension scheme.

Gender variance

Gender variance, also referred to as gender nonconformity, is a behaviour or gender expression that does not match socially constructed gender norms for men and women.

Intersex

An umbrella term used for people who are born with variations of primary or secondary sex characteristics, which do not always fit society's perception of male or female bodies. Intersex is not the same as gender identity or sexual orientation.

Until recently, parents of intersex babies were encouraged to elect for surgery so that their child would conform to stereotypical male or female appearances. As a result, many intersex people can encounter difficulties as the gender assigned at birth may differ from their gender identity and surgery may have compromised sexual, urinary and reproductive function. Today, parents are advised to delay surgery until their child reaches puberty so that the child can inform decision-making. Some parents do not observe this advice and attitudes will vary country by country. Not all intersex people opt for surgery, and many will consider themselves to be intersex rather than male or female.

Some intersex people may decide to Transition to their self-identified gender and start to identify as Trans.

Legal sex

A person's 'legal' sex is determined by their sex on their birth certificate and the assumption made at birth is that their gender status (boy, girl) matches. For higher education institutions (HEI's) and colleges, a person's legal sex is only relevant for insurance, pension purposes and in rare cases occupational requirements. See section 2: policies.

For the purposes of everyday life (including banking, personal identification and travel), a person's legal sex may not be the same as their self-identified gender. For instance, a Trans woman can have identity documents such as a passport, driving licence and employment records based upon her gender as female, but still have a birth certificate which states that she is male.

A GRC replaces a birth certificate and therefore changes one's legal sex.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, Trans plus (LGBT+)

While being Trans or having a Trans history is different from sexual orientation, the forms of prejudice and discrimination directed against Trans people can be similar to those directed against lesbian, gay, bisexual plus (LGB+) people and historically the two communities have coexisted and supported each other. As a result, advocacy and support groups often cover LGBT+ issues. Trans people can also identify as LGB+ e.g. A Trans woman may also be a lesbian.

Lesbian

Refers to a woman who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women.

Microaggressions

Small, individual acts of hostility or derision toward Transgender or gender non-conforming people, which can sometimes be unintentional. Examples of microaggressions include the use of non-affirming name or pronouns, derogatory language, asking inappropriate or offensive questions and exhibiting looks that reveal distaste or confusion.

Misgendering

You misgender someone when you refer to them using a word, especially a pronoun or form of address, that doesn't correctly reflect the gender they identify with.

Neurodiverse/neurodivergent

A concept where neurological differences are recognised and respected in the same way as any other human difference.

Non-binary

Non-binary is used to refer to a person who has a gender identity which is in between or beyond the two categories 'man' and 'woman', fluctuates between 'man' and 'woman', or who has no gender, either permanently or some of the time.

People who are non-binary may have gender identities that fluctuate (genderfluid), they may identify as having more than one gender depending on the context (e.g. bigender or pangender), feel that they have no gender (e.g. agender, non-gendered), or they may identify gender differently (e.g. third gender, genderqueer, gender-neutral).

Research by the Scottish Transgender Alliance (2016) found that 65 per cent of non-binary respondents identify as Trans. Just as with Trans men and Trans women, non-binary people Transition and live their lives in various ways – which may or may not include medically Transitioning (i.e. taking hormones or having surgeries).

Outed

When a lesbian, gay, bi or Trans person's sexual orientation or gender identity is disclosed to someone else without their consent. This is considered a criminal offence.

Queer

Used as an umbrella term to describe individuals who don't identify as straight. Due to its historical use as a derogatory term, it is not embraced by all LGBT+ people.

Questioning

A person who is exploring or questioning their gender identity or expression. Some may later identify as Transgender or gender non-conforming, while others may not. Can also refer to someone who is questioning or exploring their sexual orientation.

Pronoun

A pronoun is a term used to refer to somebody, for example, she/her/ hers/herself or he/him/his/himself. Gender-neutral pronouns include:

- = they or them or their or themselves
- = che or chim or chis or himself
- = E or Em or Eir or Eirs or Emself
- = Per(person) or pers or perself
- = Xe or hir or hirs or himself

Real-life experience or experience

'Real-life experience' or 'experience' are the terms used by the medical profession and refers to the period in which an individual is required to live, work and study full-time in their affirmed gender before they can undergo genital surgery. Previously the requirement applied to hormone replacement as well as genital surgery. Some Trans staff and students may be asked by a gender identity clinic to provide confirmation from their institution that they are undertaking real-life experience or experience.

Self-identified gender

The gender that a person identifies as. The Trans community is campaigning for UK law to be based on self-identification as is currently the case in other European countries. ECU recommends that colleges and HEIs recognise a student or staff member's self-identified gender.

Sex

Sex refers to the biological status of a person as male or female in their physical development. Sex is judged entirely on the genital appearance at birth but internal reproductive organs, skeletal characteristics and musculature are also sex-differentiated.

Sex Assigned at Birth

The determination of a person's sex based on the visual appearance of the genitals at birth. The sex someone is labelled at birth. Some shortened examples can be AFAB (assigned female at birth) and AMAB (assigned male at birth.)

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation is different from gender identity. Trans people, like any other people, can have a wide range of sexual orientations beyond those recognised by the Equality Act including heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, pansexual, omnisexual and demisexual.

Trans and Transgender

Trans and Transgender are inclusive umbrella terms for people whose gender identity and or gender expression differs from the sex (male or female) they were assigned at birth. The term may include, but is not limited to, Trans men and women, non-binary people and dual role people. Not all people that can be included in the term will associate with it.

The terms Trans should only be used as an adjective, for example, Trans people, Trans man or Trans woman, not in a sentence like 'That person is a Trans'. However, a Trans person may say 'I am Trans'.

Trans history

A person with a Trans history will have Transitioned to their self-identified gender. Consequently, they may no longer identify as a Trans person, and simply see their Transition as one part of their history.

Trans man

A person who was assigned female at birth but identifies as a man or towards the masculine end of the gender spectrum. He usually uses male pronouns and is likely to Transition to live fully as a man. The terms 'female-to-male' or 'FtM/FTM' are shorthand for indicating the direction of a person's Transition but these terms can be seen as offensive. Other people may use these terms to describe themselves.

Trans woman

A person who was assigned male at birth but identifies as a woman or towards the feminine end of the gender spectrum. She usually uses female pronouns and is likely to Transition to live fully as a woman. The terms 'male-to-female' or 'MtF/MTF' are shorthand for indicating the direction of a person's Transition but these terms can be seen as offensive. Other people may use these terms to describe themselves.

Transition

Transition is the process of a person changing their social role in order to match their gender identity. Examples of Transitioning include telling friends, family and colleagues, changing names, asking people to use different pronouns and changing the way their gender is expressed. For some people, this may involve medical assistance such as hormone therapy and surgery.

Transphobia

Transphobia is a term used to describe the fear, anger, intolerance, resentment and discomfort that some people may have as a result of another person being Trans. This can result in discrimination, harassment, victimisation and hate crime.

Transsexual

Transsexual is a term that was traditionally used to describe a person diagnosed with gender dysphoria. Trans people have become increasingly uncomfortable with the use of this term preferring Trans or Transgender instead. While some people may find the term offensive, others may use it to describe themselves.