

Equality and Diversity terminology guide

The aim of this terminology guide is to help Cambridge City Council staff understand key terms relating to equality and diversity and use them appropriately. However, it does not include guidance related to all terms around equality and diversity.

The terminology guide is to be used as guidance only. Opinions and views on particular terms may differ and meanings of words may vary depending on the context in which they are used. If you are unsure of the appropriate term to use, where possible, ask the community group or individual how they wish to be identified.

Cambridge City Council provides a training programme around Equality and Diversity that can help you understand the context of different terms and their evolution over time.

A

Accessibility

The ease with which all customers can gain access to our services. Also, see separate definition for disabled access.

Agender

A person who does not identify with any gender. See separate definitions for cisgender, gender, gender identity, gender fluid, gender neutral language, non-binary gender, sex, and transgender.

Asexual

A person who experiences little or no sexual attraction. They may experience romantic desire, and may have sex, but it is not a motivating factor in their relationships.

Asylum-seeker

An asylum-seeker is someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed. Also, see separate definition for refugee.

B

Babies/toddlers

A child up to 12 months can be described as a baby. A toddler is generally aged one or two.

Bisexual

A person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to multiple genders. For example, a person attracted to men and women.

Blind or severely sight impaired

See separate definition for sight impaired. Generally, to be considered blind or severely sight impaired, a person's sight has to fall into one of the following categories, while wearing any glasses or contact lenses that the individual may need:

- Visual acuity of less than 3 / 60 with a full visual field.
- Visual acuity between 3 / 60 and 6 / 60 with a severe reduction of field of vision, such as tunnel vision.
- Visual acuity of 6 / 60 or above but with a very reduced field of vision, especially if a lot of sight is missing in the lower part of the field.

See separate definition for sight impaired (or partially sighted).

BAME

Black, Asian and minority ethnic; BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) and minority ethnic people are also alternative terms that are used. There has been criticism that the terms 'BAME', 'BME' and 'ethnic minorities' have been used in ways to ignore the intricacies and nuances of multiple cultures. We should be careful not to group specific ethnicities' experiences as BAME experiences, if they are particular to that ethnic minority or some ethnic minorities.

C

Carer

The legal definition of a carer (in the Care Act 2014) is of an adult who provides or intends to provide care for another adult (an adult needing care). An adult is not to be regarded as a carer if the adult provides or intends to provide care under or by virtue of a contract, or as voluntary work. For more information on the Care Act 2014 [visit gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

Changing Places toilets

Changing Places toilets meet the needs of people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, as well as people with other physical disabilities such as spinal injuries, muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis. These toilets provide the right equipment including a height adjustable adult-sized changing table, a tracking hoist system, adequate space for a disabled person and carer, a peninsular WC with room either side and a safe and clean environment including tear off paper to cover the bench, a large waste bin and a non-slip floor. See separate definition for disabled access.

Cisgender

Cisgender refers to people who identify as the sex to which they were assigned at birth - refer to 'cis women' or 'cis men'. Also see definitions for agender, gender, gender identity, gender fluid, gender neutral language, non-binary gender, sex, and transgender.

D

Deaf

'People who are deaf' can be used to talk about people with hearing loss, especially when it is severe or profound (unable to hear anything below 70Db). Ask people what term they prefer to be applied to them, as some people may prefer the term hearing impaired. Also, many deaf people whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language (BSL) consider themselves part of the Deaf community. They may describe themselves as Deaf with a capital D to emphasise their Deaf identity.

Deafened

This refers to people who were born hearing and became severely or profoundly deaf after learning to speak. This can happen suddenly or gradually. It is also known as acquired profound hearing loss.

Deafblindness

A person is regarded as deafblind if their combined sight and hearing impairment cause difficulties with communication, access to information and mobility. This includes people with a progressive sight and hearing loss.

Dementia

We should take care to refer to a person or people with dementia, or living with dementia, not as a “dementia sufferer” or “victims of dementia”.

Dementia is an umbrella term that refers to various conditions. Some of the more common types of dementia include Alzheimer’s disease, vascular dementia, Lewy Body dementia, and fronto-temporal dementia (e.g. Pick’s disease). Respect people’s choices about how they identify themselves, for example as someone with Alzheimer’s disease rather than dementia.

Disability

Whenever possible, it is preferable to describe the barriers that disabled people experience rather than impairments linked to a person's medical condition: hearing-impaired people or people who use our services who may experience communication barriers. It is important to remember that people can have hidden disabilities – not all disabilities have physical signs.

We aim to use positive language about disability, avoiding outdated terms that stereotype or stigmatise, and we explore this in Disability Awareness Training that we provide as part of the Equality and Diversity Induction.

Disabled access

Use this term when referring to disabled accessibility, as 'accessibility' has a wider meaning. Some examples of disabled access include level access to buildings, disabled parking and accessible toilets (or Changing Places toilets – see separate definition). Also, see separate definition for accessibility.

Domestic abuse or domestic violence

Any incident, or pattern of incidents, of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. Please see our [policy on Supporting Customers Affected By Domestic Abuse](#) for more information on what domestic abuse encompasses and how to support customers. See separate definition for sexual violence.

E

Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs)

As a public body we have a duty to demonstrate that we have taken into account the needs of all groups covered by the Equality Act 2010. An EqIA allows us to demonstrate how the duty has been taken into account.

Equal marriage and marriage

Equal marriage, or simply marriage are preferable terms to 'gay marriage' or same sex marriage.

F

Faith and belief

Use 'people of faith', 'people of belief' or 'faith communities' when referring to groups of people with a shared faith or belief.

First name, forename or given name

Use first name, forename or given name (which in many cultures comes after the family name). Do not use Christian name.

G

Gay

Refers to a man who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards men. Also, a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality - some women define themselves as gay rather than lesbian. Gay is also often used as an umbrella term for the whole LGBTQ+ community.

Gender

The socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate that are often expressed in terms like masculinity and femininity. It is often assumed from the sex in which a person was registered at birth. Also see definitions for agender, cisgender, gender identity, gender fluid, gender neutral language, non-binary gender, sex, and transgender.

Gender fluid

Refers to a person whose gender changes between multiple gender identities. For example, a person who identifies as a man on some days but as agender on other days. Also see definitions for agender, cisgender, gender identity, gender neutral language, non-binary gender, sex, and transgender.

Gender identity

A person's internal sense of their own gender. This does not have to be man or woman. It could be, for example, non-binary. Also, see separate definitions for non-binary people and transgender. Also see definitions for agender, cisgender, gender fluid, gender neutral language, non-binary gender, sex, and transgender.

Gender neutral language

Use gender-neutral language where possible, only including references to gender when necessary. Refer to 'they' rather than 'he/she', 'everyone' not 'ladies and gentlemen', 'people' not 'mankind', 'chairperson' or 'chair' not 'chairman' or 'chairwoman', 'workforce' not 'manpower', 'staffed' not 'manned'. Also see definitions for agender, cisgender, gender identity, gender fluid, non-binary gender, sex, and transgender.

Gypsies

Upper case because Gypsies are recognised as an ethnic group under the Equality Act 2010. Also see separate definition for Travellers.

H

Hate Crime

Hate crimes are any crimes that are targeted at a person because of hostility or prejudice towards that person's:

- disability
- race or ethnicity
- religion or belief
- sexual orientation
- transgender identity

This can be committed against a person or property.

A victim does not have to be a member of the group at which the hostility is targeted. In fact, anyone could be a victim of a hate crime.

Hate incident

Hate Incidents can feel like crimes to those who suffer them and often escalate to crimes or tension in a community. For this reason the police are concerned about incidents and you can use this site to report non-crime hate incidents. The police can only prosecute when the law is broken but can work with partners to try and prevent any escalation in seriousness.

I

Interpreter

An interpreter works with the spoken word. Also, see separate definition for translator.

Intersex

Intersex is an umbrella term for people with sex characteristics (hormones, chromosomes and external/internal reproductive organs) that differ to those typically expected of a male or female. Intersex people may identify as male, female or non-binary.

J

K

L

Learning difficulty

There are many different types of learning difficulty, some of the more well known are dyslexia, attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyspraxia and dyscalculia. A person can have one, or a combination. A learning disability is different from a learning difficulty as a learning difficulty does not affect general intellect.

Learning disability

A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities (for example household tasks, socialising or managing money) which affects someone for their whole life.

Lesbian

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

LGBTQ+

LGBTQ+ is the abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other identities; it is not normally necessary to spell it out. People might also use LGBT+.

M

N

Non-binary

An umbrella term for people who identify in some way outside of the man-woman gender binary. Non-binary people may regard themselves as neither exclusively a man nor a woman, or as both, or take another approach to gender entirely. Different people may use different words to describe their individual gender identity, such as gender fluid, agender or genderqueer. Also see definitions for agender, cisgender, gender identity, gender fluid, gender neutral language, sex, and transgender.

O

Older people

Note that some older people would be offended to be referred to as elderly people so use older people wherever possible.

P

Pansexual

A person who is attracted to people regardless of their gender

Pensioners

Only use this term when you are referring to pensioners and not as an indication of people being older per se. E.g. Pensioners are entitled to winter fuel allowance.

Pronouns

Some people use they/them/their to be referred to as rather than he or /she etc. There are many more sets of pronouns. If someone has not told you what pronouns they use it is best practice to ask. Our Safer Spaces and Transgender Awareness Training provides more information on pronouns.

Protected characteristics

It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of a protected characteristic. There are nine protected characteristics that are age, disability, gender reassignment (or transsexuals), marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Communities we work with will not necessarily agree with the use of these legal definitions and who is included in the definitions. To look up definitions of the protected characteristics see [The Equality Act 2010](#) or the [Equality and Human Rights Commission website](#).

The protected characteristics are terms that are used in law, so they are the terms that you should use in policy documents, committee reports, Equality Impact Assessments and legal documents.

Q

R

Refugee

The definition of a refugee according to The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is:

“A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being

outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

In the UK, a person becomes a refugee when government agrees that an individual who has applied for asylum meets the definition in the Refugee Convention they will ‘recognise’ that person as a refugee and issue them with refugee status documentation. Usually refugees in the UK are given five years’ leave to remain as a refugee. They must then apply for further leave, although their status as a refugee is not limited to five years.

Also, see separate definition for asylum seeker.

Roma

The term Roma includes Romany people of Eastern and Central Europe and the Middle East.

S

Sex

Assigned by medical practitioners at birth based on physical characteristics. Even if not all characteristics match one of these two, the vast majority of babies are assigned male or female. Also, see definition for gender and intersex.

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is the general term used to describe any kind of unwanted sexual act or activity, including rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse, and many others. See separate definition for domestic abuse.

Sight impaired

Another word for sight impaired is partially sighted. UK law defines this as "substantially and permanently handicapped by defective vision caused by a congenital defect, illness or injury".

The optical profession has defined this further by using a value that can be measured by standard testscore. To be considered as sight impaired (partially sighted) a person's sight has to fall into one of the following categories, while wearing any glasses or contact lenses that they may need:

- Visual acuity of 3 / 60 to 6 / 60 with a full field of vision.
- Visual acuity of up to 6 / 24 with a moderate reduction of field of vision or with a central part of vision that is cloudy or blurry.
- Visual acuity of 6 / 18 or even better if a large part of your field of vision, for example a whole half of your vision, is missing or a lot of your peripheral vision is missing.

See definition for blind also.

Suicide

Say that someone has “taken their own life” rather than “committed suicide” because suicide has not been a crime in the UK for many years and this old-fashioned term can cause unnecessary further distress to families who have been bereaved in this way.

T

Titles

It is safest not to refer to people in correspondence by using titles (such as Miss, Mr, Mrs, Mx etc.) unless people write to us and use a title to sign off. Instead of asking people what title they use, ask if they want us to record their title.

Transgender/trans

An inclusive umbrella term used to describe anyone who feels that the gender that was assigned to them at birth incompletely describes or fails to describe their relation to gender. . Non-binary people may or may not consider themselves to be trans – see separate definition for non-binary people.

Many transgender people do not identify as transsexual (a term that is used in the Equality Act 2010) and prefer the word transgender. This is because the term transsexual has historically been associated with pathology. Try to ask or find out which term a person prefers.

Also see definitions for agender, cisgender, gender identity, gender fluid, gender neutral language, sex, and transgender.

Transition

The steps taken by individuals to live in the gender with which they identify. These steps will vary but may include choice of dress, changing names, medical procedures and telling other people.

Translator

A translator works with the written word. Also, see separate definition for interpreter.

Travellers

Upper case because Irish Travellers are recognised as an ethnic group under the Equality Act 2010. New age travellers can be lower case because new age travellers are not an ethnic group. Also, see the separate definition for Gypsies.

U

V

W

X

Y

Young people

Typically refers to people aged 16 to 24

Z

Written sources used to develop this document

- BBC style guide: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/en/collections/news-style-guide>
- Gov.uk (including https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721725/GRA-Consultation-document.pdf)
- The Guardian/ The Observer style guide: <https://www.theguardian.com/info/series/guardian-and-observer-style-guide>
- The Kite Trust's definitions around gender and sexual orientation used in Transgender Awareness training
- Refugee Council: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/the-truth-about-asylum/>
- Transport for London's style guide: <https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/suppliers-and-contractors/digital-design-toolkit/editorial-style-guide>