Building Trans-Inclusive Scientific Workplaces

introduction

Trans people – a term we use here as an umbrella to encompass anyone whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth, including non-binary individuals – often face particular challenges in the workplace. Enabling the best science to be done means fostering workplace environments that retain and nurture diverse talent, to ensure scientists are able to work comfortably to the best of their potential.

Trans scientists make up a valuable part of our scientific community, and the IOP, RAS and RSC report *Exploring the Workplace for LGBT+ Physical Scientists* found that particular effort is needed to make workplace environments trans-inclusive.

This resource is made up of three sections, aiming at:

• Trans people

• Individuals looking to practice trans allyship

• Employers and managers seeking to make workplaces more trans-inclusive

Those wanting to work on trans inclusivity may however find it useful to read more than one section in order to gain a more complete picture.

Definitions of terminology can be found in our **glossary**.
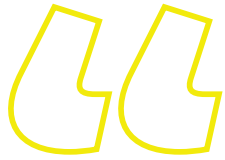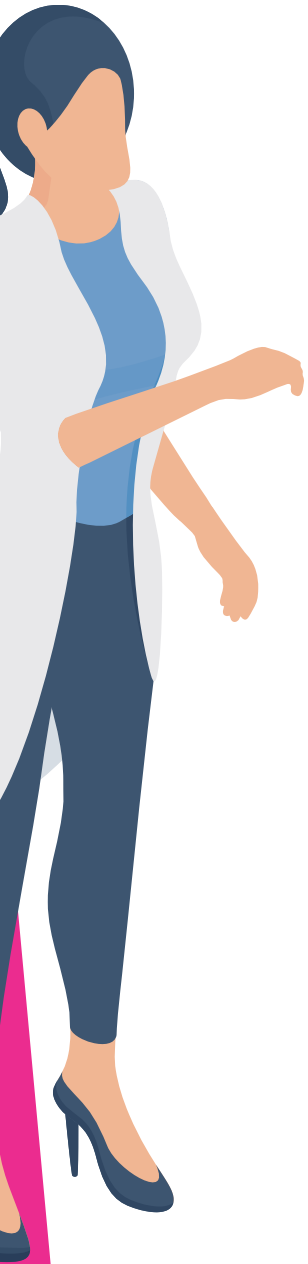
Trans people overall reported a much stronger feeling than other groups that policies were not inclusive of their needs, that their co-workers were not able to have considered conversations about trans issues, and that simple indicators of respect, such as using the correct pronouns, were not used.
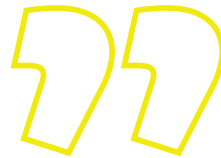
Read the *Exploring the Workplace for LGBT+ Physical Scientists* **report**

1. FOR TRANS SCIENTISTS
knowing your rights

Discrimination and harassment

Everyone should be treated equally and respectfully at work, regardless of gender identity or trans status. You have the right to an inclusive workplace free from transphobia and discrimination.

'Gender reassignment' is a legally protected characteristic in the UK under the Equality Act 2010. 'Gender reassignment' in the Act explicitly refers not only to medical interventions, but also to any other elements of gender transition you might undergo, such as changes in name, pronouns or gender expression. You do not need to medically transition in any way to be protected under the Act.

The Act protects against:

• Direct discrimination – treating trans people differently from cisgender people.

• Indirect discrimination – policies or practices that disadvantage trans people.

• Harassment – conduct that creates a hostile or offensive environment for trans people.

• Victimisation – negative treatment of someone who makes a discrimination complaint.

Protection under the Act extends specifically to transition-related absences from work. You must not be treated less favourably than you would be if you were absent because of illness or injury. Transition-related absences from work should not be used to your detriment, for example to deny pay progression or promotion.

It's also important to note that while religion or belief (or lack thereof) is also a legally protected characteristic, behaviours or actions motivated by religion or belief that constitute discrimination or harassment based on trans status are not legally protected.

Employers are legally liable for any action constituting discrimination or harassment by those acting on their behalf, unless the employer can demonstrate having taken all reasonable steps to prevent such actions.

For more information:

- **Equality Act 2010**

- **Equality and Human Rights Commission - gender reassignment discrimination rights**

- **UNISON factsheet on transgender workers rights**

Privacy and confidentiality

Data concerning your gender identity and gender history should be treated sensitively and confidentially, and you should be fully informed of your data rights in accordance with GDPR (in the UK and Europe). In the UK, if you've applied for a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC), it is a criminal offence for anyone who has gained knowledge of your gender history in an official capacity – such as an employer – to disclose this information without explicit consent (with certain exceptions). However, you don't need a GRC to transition at work; your employer should treat information regarding your gender history as confidential by default, since asking to see a GRC might be classed as discriminatory in itself under the Act.

You don't have to have a particular protected characteristic yourself to bring a complaint of discrimination or harassment under the Act. For example, if someone at work makes a transphobic joke or comment, anyone who hears it – cis or trans – can raise a complaint on the basis that this behaviour created a hostile environment for them, and was targeting a legally protected characteristic. This means that if you're not out at work, you don't have to out yourself to raise issues of discrimination and harassment.

For more information:

- **Gender Recognition Act 2004**

- **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**

Setting boundaries and seeking support

When it comes to discrimination and harassment, it's important to remember that it's the effect of the conduct or practice that counts – not the intention. Even the most well-meaning colleagues can perpetuate harmful attitudes or assumptions, and actions that feel small on their own can build up. Speaking up about a work climate that's negatively impacting on your wellbeing and ability to do your job comfortably shouldn't be seen as a last resort. You should also be entitled to support from a colleague or union representative in any relevant meetings.

The *RSC's bullying and harassment support service* can offer confidential advice and support for anyone in the chemical sciences affected by bullying and harassment.

Centring trans voices is a crucial part of allyship and developing trans-inclusive communities. However, if you're out at work, it can be a common experience to feel like you're endlessly answering questions and providing perspectives on trans issues. Although it's encouraging when organisations and individuals recognise that they need to be better informed, it's also important to be aware of the emotional load that fielding questions about your identity and experiences can bring.

Visibility can be draining at times, even when we've actively chosen to be visible. Setting and revisiting positive boundaries for your own wellbeing can be really beneficial; remind yourself that it's ok to say no, or to ask that your privacy be respected, without having to justify yourself. It can also be useful to point people towards existing resources (like this toolkit).

For further sources of support and advice on practising self-care, see our resource 'Empowering you as an LGBT+ scientist' →

2. FOR COLLEAGUES AND PEERS

practising effective trans allyship

Building inclusivity and diversity in scientific workplaces requires us to use our own privilege, to support marginalised people in the struggle towards ending the oppression they face. The *Exploring the Workplace for LGBT+ Physical Scientists* report found that almost half of all trans respondents had considered leaving their workplace because of the climate, with almost 20% of them considering this often. Effective allyship is a crucial ingredient in combatting this discrimination and creating more welcoming environments.

One of the most important principles of allyship is understanding that all of us are learning, and that allyship is more than a checklist of dos and don'ts. Allyship is not an identity label to be awarded or withheld, but a continuous process of building relationships based on trust, consistency and accountability with marginalised people.

Nonetheless, there are some key points to consider for practising effective trans allyship, and many of them are simpler than you might think.

For more information on allyship, see our resource on Practising active allyship

Avoiding assumptions: We all have a habit of making assumptions about gender based on appearance and other cues, but it's impossible to tell from looking at someone what their gender identity is, whether they are trans or cis (non-trans), and what pronouns you should use to refer to them. Assumptions might give you the right answer most of the time, but they can have a negative impact when you guess wrong – and a positive impact when you respectfully ask how someone would like to be referred to. Recalibrate the automatic assumptions you make. For example, when pointing out another person, refer to 'the person in the red shirt' rather than 'the lady in the front'.

Using pronouns: Use the pronouns that a trans person asks you to use when referring to them. If you are not sure what the right pronoun is, just ask – people would much rather tell you than be misgendered. Using the right pronoun is really important, because it shows people that you respect the validity of their experience. If you make a mistake, apologise, correct yourself, and move on. Actively practise referring to people with the correct name and pronouns when you're speaking with other colleagues, or just to yourself. Normalise introducing yourself with your own pronouns, to encourage a culture where pronouns aren't assumed from appearance and make sure trans people aren't singled out. Try this resource for practising pronouns you might be less familiar with.

Respecting boundaries: Asking questions is good, but avoid inappropriately personal questions. If you're not sure, ask whether someone would be comfortable talking about a particular topic. Don't ask invasive questions about someone's body, such as whether they've had hormone treatments or surgery. Don't ask for someone's pre-transition name or to see pictures of someone pre-transition. Don't ask non-binary people about their gender assigned at birth. Remember that questions you might consider innocuous could be more invasive than you realise, and some people may feel uncomfortable refusing to answer. It's always good to preface questions with a reassurance that they don't have to answer if they don't want to.

Keeping confidentiality: Never assume that someone's trans status, gender identity, or sex assigned at birth is public knowledge. Any information relating to a trans person's gender identity or history should be treated sensitively; just because someone is 'out' to you doesn't mean you can assume they are 'out' to others. Ask what name and pronouns you should use for someone around other groups of people, to ensure you don't unintentionally 'out' them. Don't refer to a person's trans status in any context unless they have explicitly said this is ok to do. Even when someone is out as trans, keep any information you may know about their gender history and transition – such as their deadname or surgical status – completely private.

Understanding language: Trans people have diverse preferences about the language used to describe them. The best thing to do is always to ask what terms are appropriate. When speaking in general terms, ensure you avoid language that might be offensive. Use 'cisgender' (instead of 'biological' 'natal' or 'normal') to refer to non-trans people. If you need to make reference to a person's sex assigned at birth, say 'assigned male/female at birth'; never say 'biologically male/female' or 'used to be a man/woman'. Consider whether the language you use in everyday life is inclusive of non-binary people (e.g. replace 'ladies and gentlemen' with 'guests', 'colleagues', or 'everyone'). See our glossary for more information on appropriate terminology.

Speaking out in support: Don't let inappropriate or potentially harmful behaviour go unchallenged. Politely correct others who use the wrong pronoun for someone, use offensive language, or perpetuate transphobia (e.g. through transphobic jokes). This might mean directly intervening, or addressing behaviour privately later on, depending on what you are comfortable with. You don't have to be trans yourself to raise a complaint about transphobic behaviour. Be a proactive advocate; circulate this resource to your colleagues. Look for where your workplace could be made more trans-inclusive and proactively speak up for change.

For more information:

- **Transwhat – allyship guide**

- **TUC - how to be a good trans ally at work**

- **GLAAD - a beginner's guide to being an ally to trans people**

3. FOR EMPLOYERS AND MANAGERS
building trans-inclusive workplaces

This section goes into more depth regarding some of the key features of trans inclusivity in the workplace raised in our resource *Embedding LGBT+ inclusivity in scientific workplaces: a guide for employers*. The *Exploring the Workplace for LGBT+ Physical Scientists* report found that many trans people, particularly non-binary people, aren't out at work, so don't wait to make changes until you know you have a trans member of staff in your organisation – be proactive. Making changes sooner rather than later can also be beneficial for recruitment.

Key initial questions

• Does your organisation's non-discrimination/equality and diversity policy explicitly cover gender identity and/or expression? Is this policy clearly signposted both internally and externally?

• Are illustrative examples addressing gender identity and/or expression, including non-binary identity, included as part of relevant training for new employees and for managers? Does this training equip individuals to proactively address discrimination where they encounter it?

• Are your policies, practices, and provisions inclusive of non-binary people throughout? Do all policies and communications use gender-neutral language? Are gender-neutral facilities provided?

• Do your employees know how to report transphobic discrimination and harassment, including on the 'microaggression' level, and feel secure and supported in doing so? Are anonymous reporting options available?

See our resource 'Embedding LGBT+ inclusivity in scientific workplaces: a guide for employers'. →

> *Transgender respondents reported significant numbers of instances where their correct pronouns were not used. They also had difficulties with deadnaming, and the continued use of their pre-transition name within organisational processes and software. In a scientific environment this has particular consequences; publication records, as well as impact and financial income reporting cannot be accurately allocated if the software and systems used to track this are not able to account for a change of name or gender.*

Inclusive admin systems

Recording gender

Discrepancies may arise for trans people between legally documented and self-identified gender markers. In the UK, for example, 'male' and 'female' are the only options for legal gender markers; for these to be changed on a passport or driving licence is simpler than on a birth certificate, though can still present financial or logistical barriers. This means non-binary people's legal gender marker will not match their gender identity, but also means that there may be discrepancy between any trans person's gender identity and their legal gender marker between different systems or documents. For example, a trans man's passport may read 'male,' but his gender marker as registered with HMRC and National Insurance may be 'female'.

Legal gender should be recorded sensitively and with awareness of these potential discrepancies, and should be considered confidential information which is referred to only when legally necessary (e.g. for payroll). Gender identity as self-defined by individual employees and inclusive of non-binary options should be considered primary, and should be referred to wherever gender may be relevant outside of these legally specific and confidential contexts.

It can be beneficial for administrative systems to record an employee's gender pronouns, although this should always be an optional field. Employees should not be referred to with gendered pronouns (i.e. he/him/his or she/her/hers) by default – such as in automatic reference to their registered or legal gender on a particular system – unless they have confirmed which pronouns should be used to refer to them.

Flexibility is key; systems should be designed so that a change of gender identity and/or legal gender marker is permitted and simple to carry out. Ideally where multiple systems or records exist these should be joined-up to ensure gender changes carry across all necessary systems. Where this is not possible, responsible staff should be trained to know what steps need to be taken to ensure systems all match up.

Recording names

Discrepancies may also arise between preferred and legal names. Name change in the UK is via deed poll and carries no cost legally speaking. However, many institutions are not aware of this and require solicitor-approved deed polls by policy, and there is a cost associated with name change on documents such as passports. This means discrepancies may arise between – for example – preferred name, bank account name, passport name, and name as registered with any other relevant institutions such as HMRC. Other countries have different name change requirements which often carry higher costs and/or administrative and legal burdens.

A person's legal name should be recorded sensitively and with awareness of these potential discrepancies, and should be considered confidential information which is referred to only when legally necessary. Past legal names should not generally be mandatory to provide; if they are required for background checks, this should be fully justified, GDPR compliance highlighted, and should be considered sensitive information.

Preferred names should be recognised to the greatest extent possible, e.g. in internal and external systems, email addresses, business cards, and directories.

Where honorifics or titles are used, employees should be explicitly asked which of these is appropriate for them; systems should not assign these by default corresponding to recorded gender. Ensure gender-neutral titles such as 'Mx' and 'Ind' are available, as well as the option to have no title.

Flexibility is key. Systems should be designed so that a change of preferred or legal name is permitted and simple to carry out. Ideally, where multiple systems or records exist these should be joined-up to ensure name changes carry across all necessary systems. Where this is not possible, responsible staff should be trained to know what steps need to be taken to ensure systems all match up.

A checklist:

Do your administrative systems allow:

- [ ] The provision of a preferred name to be used in all instances except those where legal names are necessary?

- [ ] Differences to exist between e.g. gender identity, legal gender as recorded on passport or other documents, and legal gender as recorded by HMRC?

- [ ] Gender to be recorded as 'non-binary' and/or 'other'?

- [ ] Individuals to record the pronouns which should be used to refer to them?

Have you considered:

- [ ] Where honorifics/titles are recorded, do available options include gender-neutral titles such as 'Mx,' as well as the option of no title?

- [ ] Are administrative systems flexible and linked up so that name, gender, title and pronouns are easy to change across all systems at once? Where multiple steps are required, are these clearly listed and understood by the relevant staff members?

- [ ] Is it necessary to ask for individuals to provide any past legal names during application or onboarding? Could this be avoided or made non-mandatory? If not, is it made clear why and how this information will be used, and is it treated sensitively and confidentially?

- [ ] Are all staff who need access to employees' legal names and gender markers, e.g. for payroll, made aware that this may be sensitive information for trans employees and must be kept confidential?
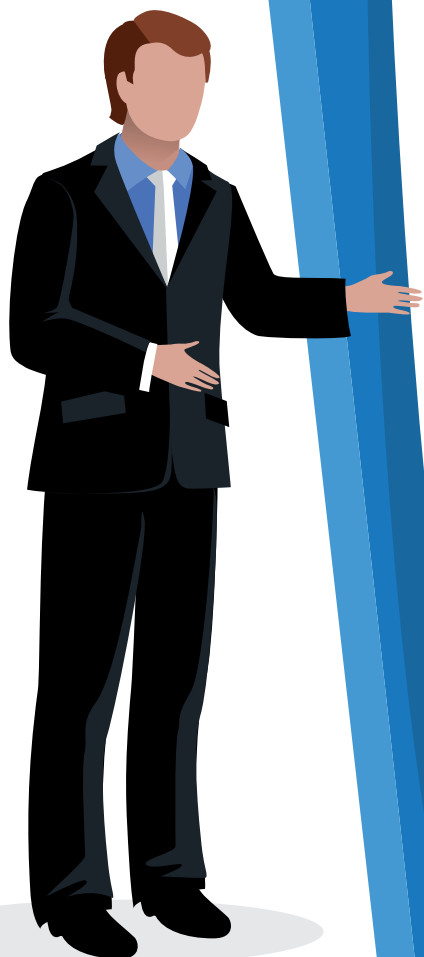
Gender transition guidelines/trans equality policy

Creating a set of guidelines to detail the steps, processes, and responsible individuals who can support an employee planning to transition can be beneficial in multiple ways. Gender transition guidelines – which might be created as part of a wider trans equality policy – provide a point of reference for all staff involved in supporting a transitioning employee. Having a policy or set of guidelines also sends a clear message to trans staff that your organisation is supportive and inclusive.

Some points that might be included in a gender transition guidelines policy or document:

• Signpost trans employees to their first points of contact. Ideally this should include both their line manager and an alternative point of contact in case they would prefer not to speak directly to their line manager in the first instance.

• Set out the process of creating a 'memorandum of understanding' or 'transition care plan' to discuss when and how an employee will transition at work.

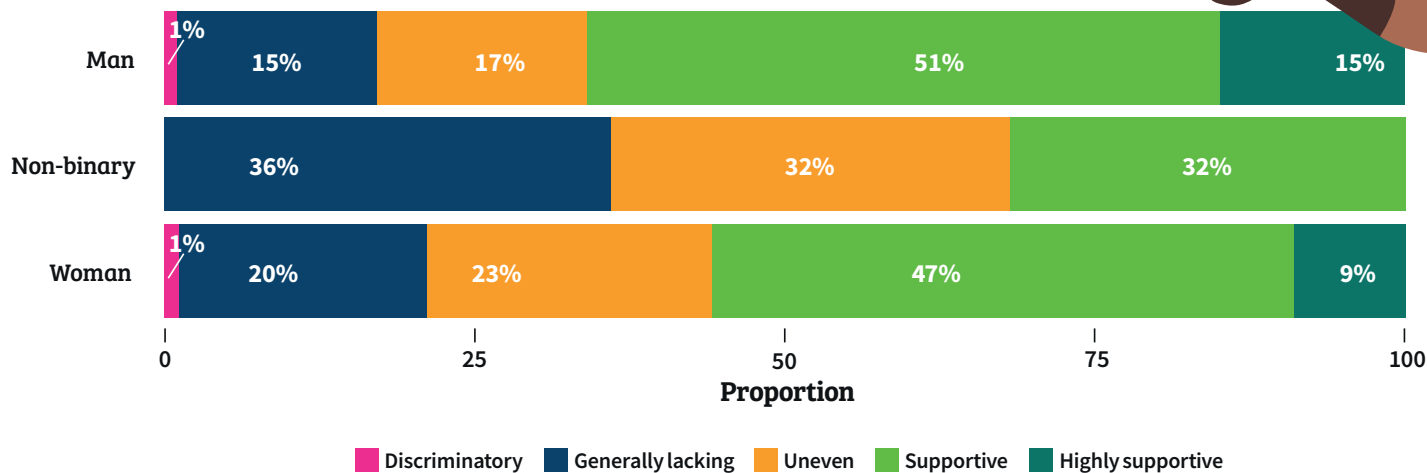This plan will usually include:

- expected timelines

- a list of necessary amendments to systems and records, and whose responsibility this is

- any change in use of gender-segregated facilities or adherence to gendered policy such as dress code (though ideally this would be gender neutral anyway)

- if and how colleagues will be informed

- any absences from work

- affirm the employer's legal responsibilities and how these will be met in practice. This might include providing training or guidance to colleagues to ensure a welcoming environment is created.

- how any discrimination or harassment will be dealt with. This plan should be reviewed every 3-4 months.

For further guidance on creating a policy or set of guidelines:

- **UNISON Model Trans Equality Policy (under 'Resources')**

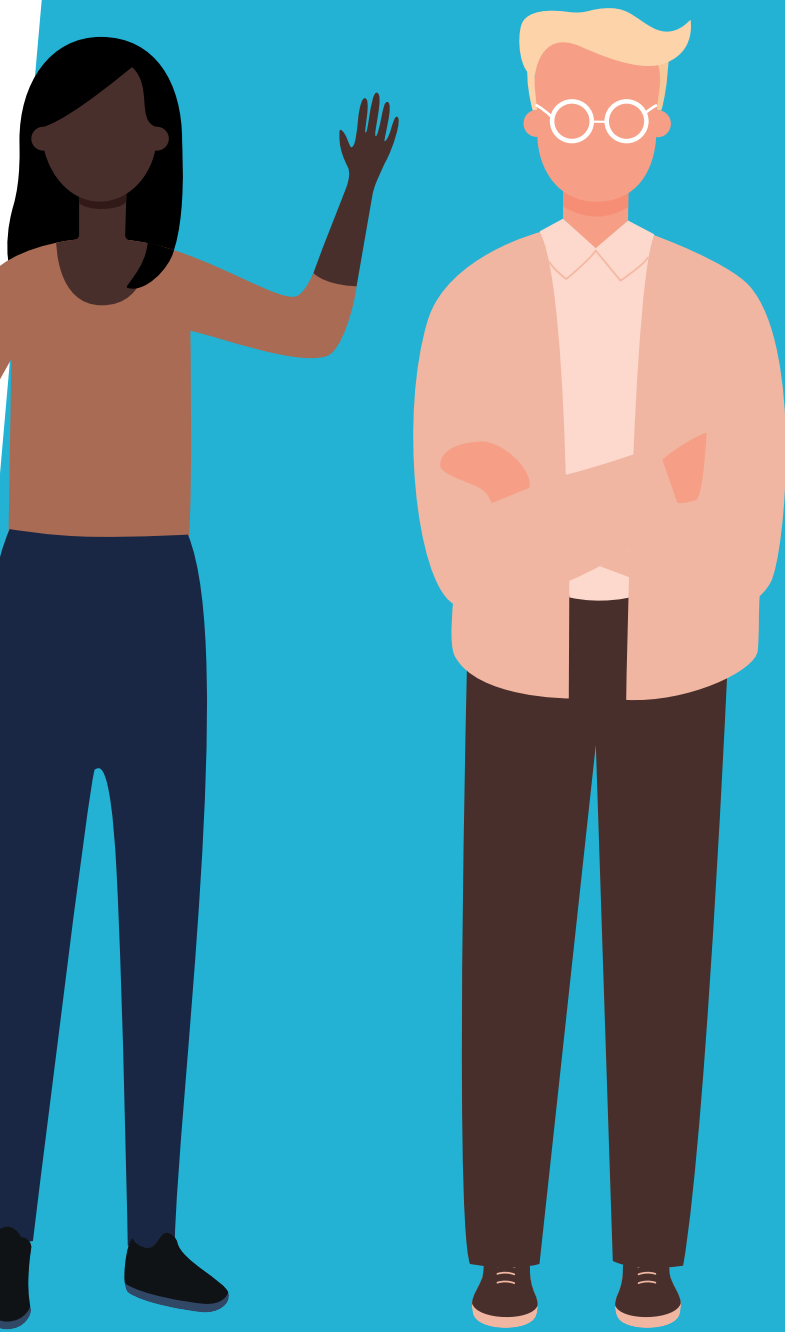- **NEU guide to creating a transition policy**

Gender neutrality

Respondent perceptions of how supportive institutional policies are to LGBT+ people, by gender

	Discriminatory	Generally lacking	Uneven	Supportive	Highly supportive
Man	1%	15%	17%	51%	15%
Non-binary		36%	32%	32%	
Woman	1%	20%	23%	47%	9%

Exploring the Workplace for LGBT+ Physical Scientists report

Dress codes are often gender neutral by default; however some organisations may have dress codes that specify two options, usually gendered male and female. This is sometimes true for formal events at educational institutions, such as graduation.

If this is the case:

- Could the two options be replaced with more generalised, gender-neutral guidelines?

- Alternately, could the options be renamed 'option one' and 'option two' as opposed to 'male/female option'?

- Could flexibility be incorporated for those who prefer to dress androgynously, including non-binary individuals?

Access to toilet facilities is a crucial issue for trans and non-binary people, as well as for gender-non-conforming individuals who can experience gender policing in gendered spaces. Questions around toilets may extend to other gender-separated facilities, such as showers and changing rooms.

• Does your workplace provide gender-neutral toilets and facilities? If not, could some or all existing gendered facilities be made gender-neutral?

  - This is simple to do for single-occupancy toilets. For multi-stall toilets it may be useful to indicate the nature of the facilities on the door sign, e.g. 'gender-neutral toilets: cubicles and urinals,' 'gender-neutral toilets: cubicles only.'

  - It is not ideal for the only gender-neutral facilities to be those provided for disabled access, as it can imply an equivalence between being trans or non-binary and being disabled, as well as unnecessarily impeding disabled individuals who require use of the accessible toilets.

• Are gendered and non-gendered toilets adequately signposted, including on any maps of the premises as well as on internal signage?

• Where facilities are gendered, is your workplace clear that trans people should be expected and made comfortable to use the facilities corresponding to their gender identity, not their sex assigned at birth?

  - One way to take a clear stance against gender policing in gendered spaces is to put up the **posters** from this toolkit.

  - Where toilets are gendered, are sanitary bins included in male facilities, so that trans men (and others who menstruate and use male facilities) are adequately provided for?

Gender-neutral **language** is important for all LGBT+ people, as it avoids exclusionary language about employees or their spouses and partners. Some suggested substitutions:

INSTEAD OF
"He or she,"
"his or her"…
USE
**"They,"
"theirs"**

INSTEAD OF
"Men and women"
USE
**"Everyone,"
"employees of
all genders"**

INSTEAD OF
"Husband or wife"…
USE
**"Spouse,
partner, or
significant
other"**

INSTEAD OF
Mother or
father"…
USE
**"Parent/
carer"**

INSTEAD OF
"Ladies and gentlemen"…
USE
**"Welcome
everyone,"
"guests and
colleagues"**

INSTEAD OF
"Chairman"…
USE
**"chair"
"chairperson"**

ROYAL SOCIETY
OF **CHEMISTRY**

**Taking concrete steps towards greater LGBT+ inclusivity
is a key part of fostering diverse and welcoming scientific
workplaces.**

This resource is part of the Royal Society of Chemistry LGBT+
toolkit, which aims to tackle the key workplace issues faced by
LGBT+ physical scientists. The toolkit builds on the findings of
the 2019 report *Exploring the Workplace for LGBT+ Physical
Scientists*, and includes resources to equip everyone to take part
in positive change: employers, colleagues, and LGBT+ people.

Whoever you are, you can make a real difference
towards LGBT+ inclusivity in science.
Find out more at rsc.li/lgbt-toolkit

To learn more about the terminology used in this
resource, see our **Glossary**

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