



# **GUIDELINES FOR INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION AT MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**

**Developed by: The Equality & Diversity team in collaboration with  
Marketing, Communications & Development**

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## SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF GUIDANCE

Manchester Metropolitan University is proud of its increasingly diverse community and is committed to advancing equality and diversity as key features within all its activities. We recruit growing numbers of international students, and there are significant numbers of students who are disabled or mature or from minority ethnic communities. The staff community is equally diverse with a wide variety of traditions, cultures and values. The Equality Act 2010 introduced positive duties to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations, therefore, it is important that the words we use respect the identity of the person or people with whom we are communicating to and whom we refer to.

Preferred language is constantly in a state of flux, so it is essential that we use communication that is inclusive in order to avoid the risk of unwittingly patronising, offending or excluding colleagues, students or visitors through our use of it.

This Inclusive Communication Guideline supports the University's [Equality and Diversity Policy](#) and is for use by both staff and students. It aims to provide the tools to help you become more aware of the many different practices that may be required when dealing with a modern diverse society.

## COMMUNICATIONS

It is vital that the University's commitment to equality and diversity is reflected across all communications. This includes everything from letters, faxes, printed publications and marketing materials to websites, videos, emails, social media and even telephone and face-to-face conversations. The language used in these communications has an impact on the recipient, their perception of MMU and may be repeated to other people. The use of discriminatory, prejudicial or exclusive language indicates a lack of professionalism and encourages the exclusion, devaluing and stereotyping of groups or individuals. Discriminatory or exclusionary language may be directed at many different groups with protected characteristics identified by:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage & Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy & Maternity
- Race & Ethnicity
- Religion & Belief (including lack of belief)
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

It is important to remember that 'language' does not just mean the words you say. It can include visual representations and body language. The written or printed word in particular may have a far greater impact because of its permanence and the likelihood of it reaching more people.

## TERMINOLOGY

The sections below are based on good practice used in case law or by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) and the Higher Education Funding Council. The terms suggested in the boxes illustrates some examples of words/phrases that are best avoided and offers alternatives. It is obviously not exhaustive.

### AGE

Ageism can be defined as 'application of assumed age-based group characteristics to an individual, regardless of that individual's actual personal characteristics'<sup>1</sup>. Age discrimination can be experienced by anyone, at any age, young and old.

As an example, in an interview the panel may assume that 'older' candidates are less able to learn new skills or 'younger' candidates are less likely to be committed to the organisation. Such assumptions may mean that the panel members fail to consider the individual's skills, experience and personal characteristics.

DO SAY	AVOID
Mature / Older / Elderly person/people	Old / Pensioners / Senior Citizens / OAP / Geriatric
Young Adults	Kids or Children

### DISABILITY

The 'social model' of disability, which MMU supports, locates the disability within the physical barriers and negative attitudes in society rather than a person's impairment. In the medical model, disabled people are seen as the problem. They need to change and adapt to circumstances (if they can), and there is no suggestion that society needs to change.

It is important to avoid characterising disabled people as a victimised group. Avoid expressions that turn adjectives into nouns e.g. 'the disabled' which depersonalise, or which define people in terms of their disability, such as 'epileptics'. It is helpful to use positive images of disabled people in case studies etc. in order to illustrate that disability is incidental to the activity being undertaken.

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<sup>1</sup> John MacNicol, *Age Discrimination: an historical and contemporary analysis* 2006:6

Bear in mind the needs of disabled people in the design of written material. In producing typed text consider the size and shape of the typeface to ensure that the maximum number of readers can see it clearly without assistance.

**TIP:** Disability organisations suggest that a font size no smaller than point 12 should be used routinely, with a type face that is round and simple (sans serif) such as the 'Arial' font used in this guide.

This will help those with visual loss or dyslexia to read the text, as smaller and more elaborate fonts are more difficult to read. High contrast text/images with uncluttered backgrounds are best. Try to avoid text superimposed on images. Glossy paper and coloured print also make reading more difficult for everyone. Written materials, where requested should be available in alternative formats e.g. on disk for those unable to read print and in advance of the meeting or lecture.

All web based material should be accessible to the technologies used by some disabled people and conform to the good practice guidelines on accessibility to disabled people.

If you would like advice on the production of material which will be accessible to people with sensory impairments (Braille, tape recording, the use of sign language interpreters etc.), please refer to the [Learner Development Service's Alternative Formats guidance](#) or for general information on alternative formats for printed promotional materials, please contact the [Marketing, Communications and Development team](#) who will be happy to help.

For further advice and support, an [Etiquette Guide for Line Managers of Disabled Staff](#) has been devised (refer to Appendix 2 of the Checklist).

DO SAY	AVOID
<b>Disabled Person</b>	<b>Handicapped / invalid / retarded / spastic / The Disabled</b>
<b>Disabled People</b>	<b>People with disabilities</b>
<b>Deaf without speech</b> <b>Hearing impairment without speech</b>	<b>Deaf and dumb</b>
<b>She has... which affects her....</b> <b>She has arthritis which affects her mobility</b>	<b>Victim of...</b> <b>Suffering from...</b> <b>Afflicted by...</b>
<b>A wheelchair user</b> <b>Person who uses a wheelchair</b>	<b>Wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair</b>
<b>They have mental impairments or learning difficulties</b>	<b>They are mentally handicapped</b>
<b>Accessible toilet and accessibility</b>	<b>Disabled toilet and disabled access</b>
<b>“We have six people coming to the event and one is a wheelchair user.”</b>	<b>We have five people and a wheelchair coming to the event</b>

<b>Has...</b>	<b>Suffers from... / Afflicted by...</b>
<b>Mental health condition</b>	<b>Mad / mental / Mentally ill / Psycho</b>
<b>Seizures</b>	<b>Fits/ Spells / Attacks</b>
<b>Partially sighted / Visually impaired or blind person</b>	<b>Can't see / Sight problem</b>
<b>Deaf</b> hard of hearing / hearing loss partially deaf / partially hearing hearing-impaired	<b>Deaf and dumb / deaf mute</b>
<b>Specific needs</b>	<b>Special needs</b>
<b>A person of a small stature or person with restricted growth</b> (NB 'dwarf' is still preferred by some)	<b>Midget /dwarf</b>

## **GENDER**

The English language has traditionally tended to assume the world to be male unless specified otherwise and therefore it is important to be sensitive to ways in which the use of sex neutral words can actively promote equality. Using 'he' to refer to an unspecified person is now generally considered unacceptable and it is preferable to use '(s)he', 'she/he' or 's/he' or 'he or she' and vice versa. A disclaimer that 'he should be taken to include she' looks like the token gesture that it is.

Use gender-neutral language; women are also often referred to in terms of the title conferred by their marital status – 'Miss' or 'Mrs'. As you will often not know a woman's marital status, it is safer to use the title 'Ms', which may not always be their preferred title, but will not be inaccurate.

Approximately half of the people in paid work in Britain are women and a minority of households now take the form of a traditional nuclear family. It is important to reflect this in case studies and teaching materials and you should consider showing women in jobs, hobbies and roles traditionally ascribed to men and vice versa. Use 'partner' instead of spouse routinely, to avoid assuming that everyone is a heterosexual couple or part of a 'traditional' family.

Sex has traditionally been associated with the words for particular roles for example 'foreman', 'housewife' and 'chairman'. The test is always to ask yourself whether you would describe someone of the other sex in the same way and so using the word "chairman or "chairwoman" to advertise a post on a committee or board would not be advisable.

MMU accepts that individuals, once recruited into a position, should have the flexibility to make a personal decision about their own title of either "chairman" or "chairwoman" but the gender neutral title of "Chair" or "chairperson" is preferred.

<b>DO SAY</b>	<b>AVOID</b>
<b>Police Officer</b>	<b>Policeman</b>
<b>Chair, Chairperson, Convenor</b>	<b>Chairman/woman</b>
<b>Spokesperson</b>	<b>Spokesman</b>
<b>Supervisor</b>	<b>Foreman</b>
<b>Workers</b>	<b>Workmen</b>
<b>Doctor</b>	<b>Lady Doctor</b>
<b>Nurse</b>	<b>Male Nurse</b>
<b>Cleaner</b>	<b>Cleaning Lady</b>
<b>Layperson</b>	<b>Layman</b>
<b>Craftsperson</b>	<b>Craftsman</b>
<b>Staffed</b>	<b>Manned</b>
<b>Human Resources (HR), Workforce, Labour force</b>	<b>Manpower</b>

## **RACE & ETHNICITY**

When it comes to cultural classification or ethnicity both of these factors are always self-defined and one individual's opinion may differ from another.

The term 'ethnicity' is used to refer to the sense of identity which derives from shared cultural characteristics such as language, religion, history or geographical location. Everyone has a race and belongs to an ethnic group, whether they are in the majority or minority. The term 'ethnic' to describe someone's racial origin is therefore meaningless. BME stands for black and minority ethnic. 'Minority ethnic' refers to those people/groups other than the white British majority.

The term 'black people' refers to Black British, African-Caribbean, African, or African-American people. Opinion is divided amongst British Asians about whether they consider themselves as 'black' and for this group the term should be considered a matter of self-definition. 'Asian' and 'South Asian' in the UK is used to refer to people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and their British Asian descendants. 'South East Asian' includes people and their descendants from the Far East.

Also, the term 'black' does not adequately cover other groups from the Middle East, North Africa or people from mixed origins. Generally, it is best to avoid over-generalisation and, where it is appropriate, to refer to an individual's country of origin if you know it. It is important to use the term 'immigrant' appropriately - in the UK it is sometimes used inaccurately of British Nationals born in this country.

<b>DO SAY</b>	<b>AVOID</b>
<b>Black</b>	<b>Coloured</b>
<b>Chinese / Japanese / Far East Asian</b>	<b>Oriental</b>
<b>Multi Ethnic Community</b>	<b>Ethnic or Ethnic</b>
<b>Mixed Race or Mixed Heritage</b>	<b>Half Caste</b>

<b>Irish Ethnic Origin</b>
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<b>Paddy</b>
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Traditionally, Black was used to describe someone who was of African descent. Politically, it can also encompass those who have Asian ancestry. However, not everyone with Asian heritage defines themselves as Black. In circumstances where it is necessary to refer to someone's race or ethnicity, and you are uncertain about the terminology to use, ask them how they wish to be described.

## RELIGION & BELIEF

You should be respectful of people's religious beliefs and be aware that some terminology may offend. The most commonly used inappropriate terms in the UK tend to refer to Christianity. You should be respectful of, and sensitive to, the way in which we refer to the religious beliefs and customs of all faiths.

DO SAY	AVOID
First Name / Forename / personal name	Christian Name
-	'Jesus Christ' or 'God' as an outcry in sentences

For further info and to complement the religions covered in our [MMU Diversity Calendar](#) there are a series of information giving [factsheets](#) on 12 featured religions.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

The dominant societal bias towards heterosexual lifestyles fosters assumptions that attraction to people of the opposite sex is the 'norm' and a different orientation towards people of the same sex is therefore unacceptable.

As equal members of society lesbians and gay men should be described in terms that do not demean them, sensationalise their lives or imply deviance. The term 'homosexual' is generally not used now, as it has medical and derogatory connotations and is often considered only to refer to men.

To avoid any misunderstanding people should stick to using the words lesbian, gay or bisexual - even though they may hear LGB people choosing to speak about themselves differently. Care is needed however. Some women, for instance, may refer to themselves as gay women rather than as lesbians.

If you are dealing with an individual, and you need to refer to their sexual orientation, but are unsure, the best guide is to ask politely what word the person prefers and make certain that they are comfortable having this referred to before going any further.

Refer to the [MMU Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Factsheet](#) for further info. It contains information for staff and students at MMU on LGB people in order to help raise awareness and understanding and sets out the definitions, the legal context and ways in which to meet people's needs.

## TRANSGENDER

'Trans' is an inclusive term for those who identify themselves as transgender, transsexual or transvestite. The word 'trans' can be used without offence to cover people undergoing gender transition; people who identify as someone with a different gender from that in which they were born, but who may have decided not to undergo medical treatment; and people who choose to dress in the clothing typically worn by the other sex. This term should only be used as an adjective.

DO SAY	AVOID
Trans / Transgendered person	She-male / queer
Gender reassignment	Sex change
Transsexual	Tranny / queer

Refer to the [MMU Transgender Factsheet](#) for further info. It contains information for staff and students at MMU on Transgendered people in order to help raise awareness and understanding and sets out the definitions, the legal context and ways in which to meet people's needs.

## GENERAL ADVICE

- Avoid loaded terms such as *crippled*, *blacklist*, or *black mark*, either by using a neutral synonym or re-wording the sentence;
- Mention gender, ethnicity, disability or sexuality only if it is relevant in context;
- Use adjectives for a person's qualities: 'She is diabetic' rather than 'She is a diabetic'. This avoids referring to someone as if one or a few of their characteristics define the whole person;
- Use people's chosen way of describing themselves, including their preferred titles; and
- Use language that refers to diversity in a positive way.

## INCLUSIVE TEACHING, LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

In the setting of examinations, it is particularly important to avoid any ethnic, sex, religious or inappropriate cultural bias in questions. The two most common pitfalls in producing culturally inclusive teaching and learning materials are omission and stereotyping. By the inclusion of particular material, an author defines what is important and this can have an influence on the reader's view of the subject.

In case studies, training and teaching materials for both students and staff, it is important wherever possible to reflect the diversity of contemporary society by including people of different ages, ethnic groups, gender and cultures in a range of



different roles, characteristics and lifestyles. A broader perspective on a topic can often improve the material for all users and those from an ethnic minority are able to better identify with it, as their own heritage and culture are shown to be valued.

**TIP:** Make sure your cultural references are appropriate and comprehensible for your audience (for example, avoid references to UK television programmes unfamiliar to international students).

Stereotyping, making assumptions and the attribution of particular characteristics to all members of a particular protected characteristic, carries the danger that those from minority groups are viewed by those in the majority, as different from the 'norm' and therefore deviant in some way.

Language reflects the core values of our institution and society and its positive use can help the celebration of diversity.

MMU's Centre for Learning & Teaching (CeLT) have produced [good practice guidelines for supporting disabled students](#) to ensure an inclusive learning environment for everyone at MMU.

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## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Contact the Equality & Diversity Team:

**Tel:** 0161 247 6494 **Email:** [Equalities@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:Equalities@mmu.ac.uk)