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BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH UK  
EQUALITIES, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION  
AND INTERSECTIONALITY (EDII)  
DOCUMENTATION

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We are keen to share our approaches with others. If you use these documents to create similar guidance for your own teams and projects, we would be grateful if you would let us know by email to [sancha.martin@ed.ac.uk](mailto:sancha.martin@ed.ac.uk) and referencing BR-UK specifically as a source by including the following citation in the final version:

Cox, Martin, Phoenix *et al.* "BR-UK: Approaches to Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Intersectionality. [<http://dx.doi.org/10.7488/era/5453>].

# Position statement: Our commitment to Equalities, Diversity, Inclusion and Intersectionality (EDII)

## Background

Embracing EDII principles is central to achieving a fairer, more just and thriving society. Adopting and fostering an inclusive environment improves the well-being of individuals, institutional success and the progress of communities and nations. The UK research community lacks diversity, particularly of minority ethnic groups, and visibly so in relation to racialised minorities. The Equality Act 2010 provides the legal framework for ensuring that for nine protected characteristics everyone has equal opportunities and is treated with respect and dignity regardless of their background, identity and/or characteristics.

In BR-UK Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Intersectionality (EDII) refers to treating all those who contribute to our research and impact generation as valuable members of a team and of the research community and treating all those with whom we work with respect. Additionally, BR-UK recognises the importance of equity when planning or reviewing equality, diversity, inclusion and intersectionality.

## Scope

This position statement applies to all members of BR-UK, whether directly funded from the ESRC “BR-UK: Behavioural Research UK Leadership Hub” award [ref: ES/Y001044/1] or not. We will also apply EDII principles within our Commissioning Fund.

This is a living document that will be subject to review and updates as frequently as needed and at least once per year. All BR-UK members and ESRC representatives are welcome to review this statement and suggest updates at any time which that be taken under advisement by the EDII Group.

## Our Commitment

The BR-UK Leadership Hub is committed to recognising and highlighting EDII as part of leading best practices in behavioural research and its translation.

We recognise that equal representation across a range of backgrounds and characteristics enhances the working environment. A broad range of research contributions makes for a fairer scientific environment that produces better outputs that can be of direct use and relevance for societal issues, including those which directly affect minority and or underrepresented groups.

We aim to create a transparent organisation and network with the principles of EDII embedded in their work and practice. Our EDII practice will be enabling and dynamic, regularly reviewed and updated throughout the lifetime of the Hub.

## Definitions

We have adapted the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) [definitions](#) of EDI and defined these as:

<b>Equalities:</b>	Providing equal access to resources and opportunities to all individuals and all groups.
<b>Diversity:</b>	Having diverse research approaches and people from a broad range of backgrounds and levels that reflect wider society.
<b>Inclusion:</b>	<p>Welcoming and treating equally individuals and groups from all backgrounds and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Engaging with each person as an individual and valuing all colleagues</li><li>• Supporting a sense of belonging that is respectful of people for who they are</li><li>• Providing an environment where people feel supported to enabled to work toward their goals</li></ul>

Our definitions of intersectionality and equity have been defined as below:

<b>Intersectionality:</b>	Understanding that no social identity, characteristic or background exists in isolation from others and that disadvantage cannot be understood without analysing and understanding the ways in which everybody is multiply positioned.
<b>Equity:</b>	Providing resources based on individual needs to ensure fair and equal outcomes.

## Our Vision

The BR-UK EDII vision is to:

- create a research environment that values all colleagues in word and action and provides equitable opportunities for all to learn and to progress their careers and that has policies, procedures and processes which are accessible, clear, transparent and fair.
- value people across all communities and groups BR-UK will work alongside.

We want to ensure that those within our team and all those we interact with externally can expect to:

- Feel safe
- Be respected
- Feel worthy
- Be treated fairly
- Be listened to
- Be treated as an individual
- Be supported to learn, develop and progress
- Be supported to balance work, life out-of-work and other responsibilities (e.g. caring roles)
- Have a clear understanding of what is expected in their roles, and how 'success' is assessed

- Have clarity about who is available for advice and help, and when they can be consulted
- Achieve highly, whatever their background

## Points of Action

We set out nine initial points of action and monitoring to actively promote EDII throughout BR-UK practice:

1. All BR-UK members will be required to review and confirm their understanding of our approach to EDII in our governance, operations and research activities. This will ensure that there is a shared recognition of the importance of EDII at all levels within the Hub and wider programme.
2. We will monitor EDII annually using a confidential method to assess the diversity of the BR-UK team across the protected characteristics defined in The *Equality Act 2010*. We are committed to ensuring equality across a wide range of dimensions of EDII including socio-economic status (or social class), neurodiversity, geography and caring commitments.
3. We will establish an EDII group which will meet approximately three times a year to:
  - consider how we partner with wider science, policy and practice communities including various minoritised groups,
  - communicate our work and our findings in ways which are inclusive and broad ranging,
  - widen expertise in science-related EDII issues and embed these in research practice.
  - provide advice and assistance to members of the Hub as and when needed.
  - Bring together learning from all parts of BR-UK.
4. We will collaborate and share goals, practices and critical engagement with large cross-institutional research groups that have developed EDII policies and practices, as a starting point, we will partner with the NIHR Policy Research Unit for Addictions (Kings College London and Sheffield University). We will exchange insights, knowledge and experience of new methods to improve EDII, meeting once per year to present goals and progress, and discuss strategies for improvement. Each group will suggest and review progress towards EDII goals for the other group each year.
5. BR-UK will undertake a benchmarking exercise to collate information on EDII characteristics related to the research team members within the first three months. This data will be anonymised and available only to the Hub Manager at the individual level and to the EDII group in aggregated form. This will be benchmarked against the field and discussed by the EDII group who may suggest recommendations. Further data will be collected about researchers, partners, and external individuals affiliated with BR-UK (such as the International Scientific Advisory Board) or attending BR-UK events (webinars or bi-annual meetings) in due course.

6. Project Leads will aim to ensure that participation in BR-UK research includes those most affected by the issues being studied (ensuring inclusion of a diverse range of characteristics). This may be achieved through public participation or other means. The EDII Group will be available to review and advise on research planning. Overall, the data BR-UK produces must stand up to scrutiny in terms of its representation of and implications for different population groups.
7. We will endeavour to ensure that (i) our public involvement and engagement will be with people from diverse backgrounds and include representation across the protected characteristics, and (ii) our research methods are inclusive of marginalised communities to ensure diverse participation. To achieve this, we will, where resources allow, provide the support required for equal participation such as providing a translator or childcare costs, and consider the times and places we meet regarding commitments and access. Each Work Package and Theme will report on how they facilitate the public involvement and engagement of people with relevant characteristics in each project from the point of design to completion.
8. We will consider the multiple ways EDII can be incorporated in our Commissioning Fund, for example, when we are considering those who receive the funding and or the types of projects and the sectors of society which these project impact. A member of our EDII group will sit on the Commissioning Fund team, and we will include specific questions about EDII in applications for this fund.
9. We will provide an online open-access report annually that will outline our goals, progress, where improvements can be made and plans for the next 12 months.

## EDII: General Approaches and Guidance

### Background

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies and practices are central to UKRI concerns and hence will be monitored for the Behavioural Research UK Leadership Hub (BR-UK). We have also added a focus on Intersectionality, recognising that, because individuals can belong to multiple social categories at the same time, may experience different systems of oppression or have assumed privileges, we cannot have 'one-size-fits-all' solutions. We also recognise the need for equitable support for those undertaking, engaging or learning from BR-UK's activities. Providing equitable treatment and access can enable individuals to progress from where they are to where they could be.

This internal guidance is a dynamic document, that is designed to help all of us recognise what we are aiming to do and how we propose to achieve it.

### Purpose

The purpose of this Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Intersectionality (EDII) policy is to create inclusive and equitable workplaces and practices that treat people fairly, make them feel included and that consists of groups of people who ideally represent the diversity of society. This is one of a suite of EDII guides that aim to provide an indication of how we should interact with members of public, stakeholders, research participants, and advisors who are concerned with our research. EDII should be embedded throughout our systems, culture and processes. All members of BR-UK are responsible for setting the tone and culture of our activities, interactions and projects in ways that are inclusive and sympathetic.

For the policy to be vibrant and dynamic, rather than simply represented on paper and given token attention, everyone within BR-UK needs to be familiar with our approach to EDII and feel committed to it. Since commitment is unlikely to be built unless we create an understanding of why it matters, and why the ongoing effort it requires is worthwhile, this internal guidance document is designed to indicate areas to consider in our general day to day activities and the potential ways we might address EDII issues and challenges as they arise. This document is complimented by an internal BR-UK webinar on the expectations of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the BR-UK Leadership when it comes to EDII.

### Responsibility

All BR-UK members have a responsibility to:

1. Read and be familiar with the BR-UK expectation around EDII outlined in these Guidance Documents.
2. Think proactively about barriers and challenges that make it difficult to implement EDII policies.
3. Identify actions that can be taken to apply EDII principles effectively and meaningfully.
4. Identify ways to appropriately evaluate outcomes and impact (such as identifying metrics for success).



5. Engage with opportunities to maximise the impact of EDII and remove barriers to implementation.
6. Review and revise work plans to ensure EDII principles are incorporated in all aspects of our work – including research and operational activities – whether currently under way, in planning, or in dissemination of completed work.
7. Implement, revise and learn from successes and failures. This approach allows BR-UK to learn what does (or does not) work, for whom, and in what contexts or situations and will help develop a robust evidence base about diversity and intersectional inclusion.
8. Share learnings with others both internally and externally.

## General Guidance

Measure, Review & Refine: data & monitoring considerations
Complete an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) for BR-UK policies, functions, practices, research and activities including delivery of Ask BR-UK and funding opportunities if possible. A template is available <a href="#">here</a> .
Benchmark progress against other institutions and share learning.
Network with others to maintain current knowledge of best practices.
Encourage feedback and input to the EDII policy and review often to ensure it is appropriate and reflects current best practice to ensure BR-UK is an inclusive and safe space for all team members and welcoming to different publics and stakeholders.
Consider which groups are systematically and historically absent from projects or BR-UK activities.
Regularly review working group(s) membership to ensure diverse representation. Everyone is encouraged to request support from the EDII Group (and others) at any time.

People
Ensure all new team members are familiar with BR-UK's approach to EDII and policies including the BR-UK Code of Conduct and Position Statement on EDII.
Encourage all team members to complete EDI(I) training which is provided by their employer in addition to any training and information provided by BR-UK.
Senior colleagues/team leaders must ensure to discuss workload, demands and wellbeing issues with all team members (especially ECRs) routinely, including timing of meetings etc.
Include EDII objectives in personal development plans and provide information on mentoring opportunities.

## People Continued

Ensure that BR-UK and individual projects contribute to capacity building and do so in an inclusive way.

Recognise that whilst team members may work flexible or variable hours, this should not encourage others to respond to work communications or requests outside of their agreed working hours.

Understand that in order to treat people equitably, it is important to understand their individual support needs.

## Staff/Team Recruitment

Members of recruitment panels must complete EDI(I) training prior to participating in interviews.

Advertisements must include a statement that applications are welcome from diverse groups including underserved populations. They should clearly communicate BR-UK's commitment to diversity and inclusion in job postings including those shared on the BR-UK website and social media channels. Where possible, include underrepresented groups in the recruitment process.

Standardised interview questions should be provided in advance to all interviewees. This may include supplying documents in alternate formats to ensure equity of opportunity.

Each BR-UK Partner Institution will monitor and review their recruitment processes to identify whether those from diverse backgrounds submit applications, are selected for interview and/or are successfully appointed. Where the processes are (re)producing unequal outcomes, teams and their institutions should reduce or remove barriers where possible and should alert the EDII group so that possible solutions can be more widely discussed. The possibilities of 'blind' reviewing should also be considered.

## Meetings and Events

When promoting/organising events:

- ensure to highlight that everyone is welcome.
- consider accessibility needs of individuals to ensure equitable opportunities to engage and interact during the meeting including:
  - opportunities for hybrid options and ways to ensure these enable meaningful and positive engagement for all attendees.
  - when selecting venues for workshops or meetings, collate specific information on accessibility (i.e., step free access, dietary requirements)
- encourage the inclusion of pronouns in documents, name badges, presentations etc but understand that some people may be uncomfortable doing so and will prefer not to.
- collect information on dietary requirements to accommodate all needs.
- consider the travel options and costs associated with attending the meeting – recognising that public transport and/or the most sustainable options, may not be the most appropriate for everyone.
- Check the BR-UK calendar of events to identify potential clashes that may reduce participation/attendance such as school holidays or religious events.

Meetings and Events Continued	
Internal Meetings	Workshops and Events
Aim to hold meetings between 10am and 3pm as these are generally core working hours.	Develop and promote the BR-UK Inclusion Fund policy to enable attendance and participation of those from the third sector, underserved groups or those who require additional funds to attend (such as caring responsibilities, disability needs or low income).
Avoid meetings on Mondays and Fridays (and/or other specific days team members do not routinely work).	Ensure that a diverse group of attendees/ participants are invited/ encouraged to attend. This may include highlighting that we welcome diverse participants or those that require additional support at events in any promotional materials.
Develop practices to ensure that attendees feel welcome.	Consider the diversity of speakers at events.
Encourage all participants at meetings to engage and contribute.	Provide closed captioning/subtitle options for participants during events and provide transcripts of videos published publicly for others to catch up "on demand" later.
Incorporate time to network and for reflection	Monitor EDII characteristics of those attending events by collecting data on personal and professional characteristics.

Research Activities
Adopt and implement open science principles to share our approaches and outputs widely whilst acknowledging any limitations within studies or the reasons for not sharing research (such as where the data may inadvertently identify people in qualitative research).
Consciously consider sampling and recruitment processes for research participants to ensure a wide range of diverse participants are included.
Actively consider EDII approaches and opportunities for inclusion throughout the research lifecycle including when developing ideas, drafting of funding applications and protocols, team set up, undertaking the research, disseminating etc. Ask others to review to identify gaps or omissions.

Communication
Ensure that any promotional material, social media or website content includes images that represent diverse individuals or groups, uses inclusive language, and is provided to diverse groups. Refer to the BR-UK Inclusive Communications section for guidance.
Subject all documents, publications, presentations and other materials to an accessibility check prior to publication to remove any barriers to access to information.

Communication continued
Provide alternative formats for printed documents (such as larger text or alternative language) to provide equitable access to BR-UK activities and findings.
Identify and make use of diverse communication channels and networks including those targeting underrepresented groups, people who are neurodiverse, living with mental health conditions or other disabilities.
Ensure the BR-UK website is compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act.

BR-UK Services and Funding
The teams developing BR-UK services (such as Ask BR-UK or the Rapid Review function) and funding opportunities (Inclusion and Commissioning Funds) should be drawn from across BR-UK and must be composed of diverse individuals.
The basis upon which teams take decisions must be transparent and clearly recorded.
Calls for applications to access services or funding should minimise barriers and maximise opportunities for those from diverse backgrounds, including underrepresented populations, to request access to these offerings.
Ensure communications around these opportunities is shared widely and broadly across networks and groups.
<p>In the case of the Commissioning Fund:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ require requests for funding to include an explanation of how EDII has been considered and addressed in the research project cycle (i.e. from proposal development to dissemination of research findings)</li> <li>○ Enable early career researchers to be co-investigators (including co-principal investigator) on applications</li> <li>○ Include statement(s) to note that applications from diverse applicants are welcome</li> <li>○ Ensure a broad diversity of peer reviewers.</li> </ul>
Review applications and requests to access BR-UK services blindly and ensure peer review of such requests is carried out by a diverse group of individuals – including those with lived experience of the topic being covered if possible.
Include an option for applications to be submitted in alternative ways that take into account any potential barrier (such as limited access to a computer/software etc) to ensure equity of the application process. This will require applicants to identify individual support needs in advance of the application deadline.

# EDII: Inclusive Communication Guide

## Background

All Behavioural Research UK Leadership Hub (BR-UK) members should try to create an inclusive environment. Inclusive writing avoids stigma and stereotypes. It fosters belonging and respects all groups. Writing inclusively means using language that is respectful and accurate. It should consider the diverse experiences and identities of others. People will have their own preferences as to how they would describe themselves and how they wish to be described. People should not feel obliged to discuss or explain their personal traits and/or characteristics.

This document is one of a suite of Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Intersectionality (EDII) papers created by the EDII working group to support the active implementation of EDII principles and approaches across the BR-UK Hub. This specific document sets out an approach to inclusive language across a range of topics but it is not exhaustive.

## Scope & Purpose

Everyone in the Behavioural Research UK Leadership Hub should be treated equitably and respectfully in all interactions and communications. Everyone should feel empowered to challenge and avoid offensive terms, discrimination, and stereotypes. This applies to all communication formats and platforms.

This document gives guidance on adopting and using inclusive communication. This guide is not definitive or exhaustive. We will review and update it often. Language around inclusivity is constantly evolving and there are valid limitations and critiques of different terms. New terms will emerge as communities advocate for more inclusive language. We should all be open to correcting our language.

You can propose changes to this document at any time. Please contact the Behavioural Research UK Leadership Hub Manager via email to [sancha.martin@ed.ac.uk](mailto:sancha.martin@ed.ac.uk). Links to further reading are included at the end of this document.

## Guidance

When talking or writing about people, follow these simple, important principles:

- Always ask, never assume
- Write for context
- Write with care, kindness, and respect.

### General

Avoid jargon and unnecessary complexity. This includes reducing the use of acronyms, initialisms or abbreviations where they are uncommon, unnecessary, ambiguous or only used once. Some readers may not understand them, and they can be hard for screen readers to process. For example, "EDII" should be written as "Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Intersectionality".

If you must use an acronym or abbreviation, spell it out the first time it is used. Afterwards, you can use the acronym on its own. For example, on first use, write “Behavioural Research UK Leadership Hub (BR-UK)”. It may help to spell out acronyms on first use in a new page or section. This will ensure all readers understand their meaning.

Spell and pronounce names correctly. If you don’t know how to pronounce someone’s name, ask. Respect cultural variations in names and avoid Anglicizing or abbreviating them for convenience.

When asking for someone’s name, ask for their “given name” and “last name”. This is preferable to “first name”, “Christian name” or “family name”. If you are writing about a specific person, ask them what term they would prefer to be used, if any.

When giving examples, ensure equity and diversity in the names, roles, and scenarios you present.

- Use a variety of names that reflect different cultures and backgrounds.
- Avoid reinforcing pre-existing stereotypes.
- Avoid tokenism. Don’t show just one person from a marginalised group in examples. Ensure diversity in gender, race, ability, and age.
- Acknowledge that not only marginalised groups experience difficulties.
- Rotate scenarios to include diverse relationships. Use same-sex couples and different ethnicities.
- Be conscious of imagery and metaphors that may have discriminatory origins.
- Avoid using colour-related metaphors like “blacklist” or “whitelist” which can have racial implications. Instead, use terms like “blocklist” or “allow list.”
- Avoid phrases that demean or exclude any group, such as “blind to the truth” (ableist) or “turn a deaf ear.”
- Avoid colonial language in general – for example, avoid calling meetings powwows, referring to the principal investigator as Chief Investigator or referring to Commonwealth countries as “ours”.

## Accessibility

Write clearly. Use accessible language. Avoid jargon. Format text for easy reading. This means thinking about the language used, the structure of the text and the way information is presented.

- Use plain and straightforward language that is easy for all readers to understand.
- Use clear headings and list headings in a logical way.
- Put meaningful words first: for example, “Accessibility Guidance” not “Guidance on Accessibility”
- Use numbered or bulleted lists to display information, if appropriate. They are easier to scan and understand than blocks of text.
- Use bold text for emphasis or headings, rather than italics or underlining as this can be easier for dyslexic people to read.
- Provide alternate versions of documents where possible to ensure equitable access to the information you are sharing.

To increase accessibility when writing for the web:

- Incorporate alternate text, include captioning in videos and correctly tag content.
- Format headings using heading styles (such as “heading 2” or “heading 3”), rather than just using bold text. Correctly styled headings mean that people using screen readers can navigate your content.
- When adding hyperlinks, make sure the link text describes what it is linking to. This is clearer for screen reader users and also helps all readers who are scanning a piece of text.
  - For example, use “For further guidance on writing accessible web content, check our [“writing for the web resources”](#) rather than “For further guidance on writing accessible web content, “click here”.
  - Use unique text for hyperlinks with different destinations.
  - Try to use the same text for links that go to the same destination page.

## Ageism

Only refer to a person’s age if it is relevant to the context in which you are writing. Language should not make assumptions about abilities or preferences based on age. If you are writing about a specific person, ask them what term they would prefer to be used, if any.

- Avoid using age-related terms to describe people or groups unless relevant. For example, don’t call a work team “young” or “mature”. Also avoid terms like “senior”, “middle-aged”, “elderly”, “pensioner”, “OAP” and “senior citizen”.

- When writing about people in older age groups, the term “older people” is generally preferred. Don’t use euphemisms or patronizing terms for older people. Avoid phrases like “silver surfer”, “golden years”, “over the hill”, “80 years young”, or “of a certain age”.
- Avoid using generational labels (“Generation X”, “Baby Boomers”, “Millennials”) where possible. They can reinforce negative stereotypes. Some international audiences may not understand the terms.
- Don’t assume older adults lack tech skills or generalize by age. Avoid patronising or infantilizing individuals on the basis of age.

If you refer to a specific age group, be as precise as possible in eligibility requirements to avoid confusion. For example, use “16-24” rather than “young people”. Definitions of age groups like “children” and “young people” vary by context. They can differ across organisations and countries.

The NHS defines age groups as below. But, UK law, via the Children Act (1989), defines a child as under 18 and a young person as 16 or over but under 18.

- Children: 4 to 12 years
- Teenagers: 13 to 19 years
- Young people: 16 to 24 years
- Adults: 19 years and older
- Older people: use “over-65s”, “over-75s”.

## Cultural, racial, ethnic and national identities

Important note: We have used the term “*race*” in this document in the context and understanding that the concept of race is a social construct with no biological meaning. A person’s race is not derived from genetics or biology. It arises from social and historical factors.

Respect and acknowledge cultural, racial, and ethnic identities. Do not conflate race with ethnicity. Be specific when referring to ethnic backgrounds. Avoid stereotypes. Do not assume someone’s nationality from their name, ethnicity, religion or appearance, and vice-versa. Remember that some people identify with more than one ethnic group or a mixed ethnic group.

- If you are writing about or to a particular person, use the language with which they identify themselves. If you’re unsure, ask them what they would prefer.
- Refer to people by their self-identified race or ethnicity (e.g., “Black,” “Latino,” “Indigenous”). Avoid assuming cultural norms or experiences based on appearance or accents.
- Only refer to people’s ethnicity only if it is relevant to the context in which you are writing.



- Avoid and challenge offensive terms, racial slurs, and stereotypes.
- Avoid using broad terms such as “people of colour”, “Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic” or “BAME”. Be as specific as possible when referring to a person or group’s background or heritage.
- Do not use racial or ethnic terms as nouns, such as “Blacks” or “Asians”. Use adjectives instead: “Black”, “Asian”, or “people who identify as Black”.
- Avoid terms that generalise or stereotype people from different races or cultures (e.g., avoid referring to Asian people as “Oriental”).
- Do not assume the racial or ethnic background of an individual based on their accent.
- Don’t appropriate culture in language. Avoid using terms or symbols from a culture you’re not part of in a trivialising way.
- Capitalise names of all ethnic groups – for example, “Black”, “South Asian”, “White”, “Irish Traveller”, “Chinese”.
- Use “White” rather than “Caucasian”.
- Do not hyphenate compound adjectives or nouns such as “African Caribbean”, “African American”, “Black British”.
- Use “people of mixed heritage” or “people of mixed background” rather than “mixed race people”.
- Be aware of cultural and geographic bias and try to avoid reflecting this where possible. People in other countries may not celebrate the same holidays, take part in the same customs, or experience the same seasons as those in the UK.
- If you need to describe a person’s nationality, ask them what term they would prefer.

## Disability

One should not tie a person’s worth to their disability. Not all disabilities are visible. So, don’t assume someone’s ability based on their appearance or actions. People with disabilities should not feel obliged to discuss or explain them. People can have many disabilities. For example, a mental health condition and a physical impairment.

Consider whether to use person-first or identity-first language. Person-first language puts the person at the start of the phrase: “a person who is blind or people living with chronic conditions.” Some may prefer this language. It may help them feel less defined by their disability. Identity-first language puts the disability at the start of the phrase: “a blind

person.” Some may prefer this language. They may see their disability as key to their identity. Some people may not identify with the label “disabled.” “Disabled person” is also preferred by some from a social model of disability perspective. This recognises that the person is disabled by barriers in society, rather than locating the disability within the person.

- Different groups and individuals will have their own preferences. If you are unsure which approach to take, ask the person who is being described.
- Recognise that some people identify with their disability with pride.
- Avoid negative or disempowering language, such as describing disabled people and/or individuals as “victims”, “suffering from”, and do not assume disability with illness, frailty, or poor health.
- Avoid patronising language or attributing characteristics such as “inspirational” or “brave” to a person purely based on their disability.
- Use “non-disabled” instead of “able-bodied” to describe people without disabilities.
- Do not use the name of a disability as a noun like “a schizophrenic” or to describe a group of people such as “the blind” unless the person prefers this.
- In any writing, avoid slang terms that are offensive or ableist – for example, describing a person as “OCD” or “bipolar”, or describing something as “dumb”, “crazy” or “lame”. Some people do embrace such wording (i.e. [Mad Pride](#)) so be led by the person if they do prefer this.
- Avoid slang that links a disability to a negative trait. Examples are “falling on deaf ears”, “turning a blind eye”, and “the blind leading the blind”.
- Avoid framing health condition as an issue or a problem. Use the terminology “mental health conditions” rather than “mental health problems” or “mental illnesses”. If describing an individual, use terms that people prefer – if you are not sure what these are, ask them.
- When writing about conditions like autism, ADHD, or dyslexia, use “neurodiverse” or “neurodiversity” depending on that person’s preference. Individuals may be described as “neurodivergent” or “neuro-atypical”. A person who is not neurodivergent is “neurotypical.” Again, not everyone will identify with these descriptions, so check with them.
- “Neurodiversity” is a characteristic of a population rather than of individuals, and individuals should not be described as neurodiverse.

- When writing about the adaptations, tools, and mobility aids that people use, be specific. Use exact terms. Avoid using language like “special software” or “special desk”. Instead, you could use “assistive software” or “wheelchair accessible desk”.
- When writing about accessibility arrangements, place the word “accessible” first (accessible toilet, accessible websites and apps for example).

## Gender identities and gender-neutral language

Sex and gender are two different concepts that are often used interchangeably. Whilst sex is defined based on biological characteristics. Gender is a social and cultural construct. Gender identity refers to a person’s internal sense of self, whether they see themselves as male, female or another gender.

- Do not assume someone’s gender identity based on their appearance, name, or role.
- In forms or surveys, offer gender options beyond male and female (e.g., “non-binary,” “prefer not to say”).
- Use “they” for a generic person. Use “woman” and “man” as nouns. Use “female” and “male” as adjectives. When referring to trans men or trans women, just use “man”/ “men” or “woman”/ “women”.
- When appropriate, ask people for their pronouns and honour them and refer to “pronouns” instead of “preferred pronouns”.
- Avoid gendered job titles: Replace “chairman” with “chair” or “chairperson”.
- Use titles equally. Use the same form for both genders (e.g., Dr Smith, not Mr. Smith Ms. Jones, not Mrs. Jones).
- Avoid unnecessarily gendered language. For example, you could use:
  - “everyone”, “people”, “team”, “colleagues” or “folks” instead of “guys” or “ladies” to address a group
  - “humankind” or “humanity” instead of “mankind”
  - “artificial”, “synthetic” or “unnatural” instead of “manmade”
  - “attending”, “staffing” or “stationed at” instead of “manning” a stand or “manpower”.

## Family Structures

Recognise that families come in many forms. Be mindful of different family structures (e.g., single parents, step parents, divorced parents, LGBTQ+ parents, foster families, carers and/or others).

- Bear in mind that, not everyone may have living parents or be in touch with their parents. These audiences may feel excluded by messaging around parents.
- Those who have experience of care may feel excluded by messaging around parents.
- Where appropriate, consider using gender-neutral terms, rather than those that make any sex distinction. For example, use terms like “parent/guardian” rather than “mother” or “father” when discussing family roles.
- Consider alternative terms such as “parent/carer”, “child/dependant” or “partner/spouse”.
- Be aware that people may have different relationships with their parents. For example, some may care for their parents or may be estranged from them.

## Physical Appearance

Appearance-related discrimination occurs when a person is made to feel excluded or ignored if they have (or are perceived to have) a visible difference to others. Severe disfigurement is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act and as such those who are disfigured or have a visible difference may have the legal right not to be discriminated against.

Visible differences may be acquired during someone’s lifetime, they may be born with the difference, or it may be a condition that develops gradually over time. Examples include alopecia, birthmarks, burns, scars and vitiligo.

It is important to consider other observable characteristics where a non-judgemental, respectful and inclusive approach is important, such as that of body weight, shape or size. Weight-based stigma, particularly obesity stigma is common in society, and it is important to avoid negative stereotypes and discriminatory language on this topic.

Visible differences may also include other optional changes to a person’s appearance including tattoos or hair colourings.

- Only refer to someone’s visible difference if it is relevant.
- Use factual and non-judgemental language. Do not insert unnecessary or offensive adjectives. For example, if someone has a physical scar, state only that they were scarred in an accident, not “horribly” scarred.
- Person-first language should be adopted when discussing obesity, unless describing an individual that requests otherwise. Common examples include phrasing such as ‘a person living with obesity’, ‘rates of overweight and obesity’, ‘x % of children had obesity’ etc., moving away from terms like ‘obese’.

## Religion, faith and belief

The terms “religion”, “faith”, and “belief” can mean different things. People may relate to one but not the others. Some people may also use the term “spirituality”. “Belief” also includes humanism, atheism and other non-religious beliefs and philosophies.

According to the 2021 Census in England and Wales, 46% of people described their religion as Christian and 37% stated they belonged to no religion. There are many religions that are minorities in the UK, but minority religions will differ across different countries.

- Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Judaism and Buddhism are all classified as minority religions in the UK by the Office for National Statistics but may be majority religions in other countries.
- Other minority religions in the UK include Jainism, Neopaganism and the Bahá'í Faith.

Mention religion only when relevant. Don't assume beliefs from appearance or names. If you are writing about or to a particular person, use the language with which they identify themselves. If you're unsure, ask them what they would prefer.

- Do not exclude non-religious people from messages or conversations about belief.
- Capitalise the names of all religions and religious groups. Religious figures, deities, holy texts, holidays and titles are also usually capitalised.
- Consider how to write about religious people. For example, you could use “a person who practises Sikhism” rather than “a Sikh”; “Muslims” or “people who practise Islam” rather than “Islamic people”.
- Bear in mind that not everyone celebrates Christian holidays, but they may celebrate other religious holidays. Be mindful with ways on how to greet people during religious events.

## Sexual Orientation

A person's orientation refers to their sexual and romantic attraction, or lack of attraction, to other people. It is usually not relevant to refer to people's sexual orientation when writing about them. Only refer to people's sexual orientation if it is relevant to the context in which you are writing

- Do not assume a person's sexual orientation based on their appearance, behaviour, or current or past partners.
- Avoid assuming heterosexuality as the norm.

- Do not identify someone as a member of the LGBT+ community without their consent.
- Use “sexual orientation” rather than “sexuality” or “sexual preference”.
- Use terms relating to sexual orientation as adjectives, rather than nouns. For example, use “bisexual people” rather than “bisexuals.”
- The acronym “LGBT+” is often used to refer to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans communities. The “plus” is inclusive of other groups. Recognise that individuals and groups may use alternative acronyms, and these can be used if preferred.
- Use “LGBT+” to refer to a broad community but be specific if you are writing about a particular group, such as bisexual women or gay men.

### Socioeconomic and Educational Assumptions

Socioeconomic status includes many factors, like education, income, and occupation. When measuring only one of these factors, be specific about which one is being measured and refer to socioeconomic status or factors when referring to more than one. Educational disadvantage may overlap with economic disadvantage, but they are not always related.

- Avoid language that assumes a certain level of education, income, or social status.
- Use terms like “people experiencing homelessness” rather than “the homeless.”
- Recognize different educational backgrounds by explaining complex terms or providing context.
- Be as specific as possible where you need to define a particular group.
  - For example, use “household income of £40,000 or below” instead of “low income”.
  - Avoid low socioeconomic status or low social grade, when referring to people who work in routine or manual occupation, and high when referring to people in professional managerial occupations. These classifications were never designed to be high versus low, but instead to describe the occupations people are in. It is better to describe them by how they are measured (e.g., occupational grade C2DE).
- Remember that “underrepresented” has a different meaning to “disadvantaged”.
  - The term “disadvantaged” can be appropriate in some situations but be aware that people categorised as such may not see themselves as disadvantaged. The same is true with vulnerable.
  - If you are specifically writing about “educational disadvantage” or “economic disadvantage”, use the more specific term (see above).

- Do not treat people differently because of their citizenship/country of birth. Avoid using any terminology which reinforces accent or place-based stigma. Do not make assumptions about people because of their accent or where they were born, live or have lived.
- When writing about general groups, remember that not everyone has the same opportunities, resources and experiences.
- Avoid using class labels such as “working-class”, “middle-class” or “upper-class”, unless someone personally identifies with them or in a quote.
- It is better not to use terms like “class blindness” or to assume that they refer to something positive. People may appreciate full recognition of class inequalities and struggles. And, as noted above, to use the term “blindness” in this way goes against the spirit of the point made above regarding disability.

## Additional Reading

For additional information or guidance on writing inclusively, the following sources were helpful when constructing this guidance and may be of interest.

- [Inclusive language | The University of Edinburgh](#)
- [Inclusive writing guide | Style guides | University of Bristol](#)
- [A guide to creating inclusive content and language \(learningforinvolvement.org.uk\)](#)
- Additional information on terminology to describe [Disabilities and conditions - NHS digital service manual \(service-manual.nhs.uk\)](#)
  - [Readability Guidelines website](#)
  - [Hemingway Editor](#) can help check your writing to make it more concise
- The gov.uk website has a list of
  - [terms to use and avoid when writing about disability.](#)
  - [list of ethnic groups on the gov.uk website](#)
- A list of ethnicities for data collection or reporting (for example, providing choices in a form), you can use [this list from the Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\)](#).
- A full list of definitions relating to sex, gender and sexual orientation is available from [Stonewall's list of LGBTQ+ terms](#).
- Read more detail about the difference between sex and gender in [an article from the Office for National Statistics](#).
- Information on visible differences is available from Changing Faces.
- More information can be found in “[Weight bias and obesity stigma: considerations for the WHO European Region](#)”.
- [Read more about the social model of disability.](#)
- Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021. [The religion of usual residents and household religious composition in England and Wales, Census 2021 data.](#)
- Learn about accent bias from the ESRC-funded research from Queen Mary university of London and the University of York. “[Access Bias in Britain](#)”