**Covid-19: Supporting Transgender, non-binary and gender diverse learners**

The pandemic has affected all of our lives, from our home environments to where, and how, we work and study. For some people, that transition to home learning and working has an acute and specific impact. There are some practical steps you can take to better support trans and gender diverse learners and staff.

1. **Be mindful of the environment in which someone might be learning.** Students may be living in halls with new peers, with family or in insecure arrangements. They may be living with unsupportive people or may not be ‘out’ at home. This will impact upon their ability to fully participate in online learning and they may present quite differently to how they have in the past.
2. **Provide a range of participation options.** It may be challenging for someone to appear on video (concerns about gender presentation; reinforcing body dysmorphia; anxiety; unsafe home environment). Allowing interaction via voice chat, text/type chat, forum discussions will aid inclusion and will also benefit disabled, D/deaf, neurodiverse and autistic students. Unless absolutely necessary, please allow participants to leave their cameras off during sessions.
3. **Carefully consider how you use breakout rooms and groupwork.** It is not uncommon for trans and gender diverse students to experience hostility and harassment from peers. Provide opportunities for students to come forward with particular concerns about breakout rooms or group work and take their needs into account.
4. **Be aware of how names are presented during online meetings.** The opportunity to change the name that appears for you in a meeting, varies by platform. Zoom, for example, allows users to either permanently update their name within their account or to do so on entry. An official Microsoft Teams account, however, draws in the name a student or staff member has officially registered in their institution’s records. For a trans person, this may be problematic since they may be known by another name. Where changes cannot be made by individuals, clearly communicate to participants what name will appear and how they may change this in advance.
5. **Consider introducing pronouns**. Several online platforms allow users to update their names and add in further information. This is a great opportunity for those who are comfortable to do so, to add their [pronouns](https://www.mypronouns.org/) (she/her, they/them, he/his…). This raises awareness of gender diversity and is likely to prevent misgendering. Please note, some people may be outed by being forced to add their pronouns so always make it voluntary. It is also a good idea to avoid using gendered language (such as ‘ladies and gents’, ‘the girls’) wherever possible.
6. **Be an informed ally, able to offer support and advocacy**. Some trans and gender diverse learners and colleagues will have seen their existing mental health issues exacerbated alongside the emergence of new difficulties (temporary suspension of access to gender affirming healthcare or even longer waiting times, for example). There has also been a rise in transphobic hate crime in the last five years. Consider what you can do to be a visible ally of trans and gender diverse colleagues and learners; confront transphobic language and behaviour in the classroom and workplace; commit to learning more about gender diversity; join the [TransEDU Community of Practice](https://www.trans.ac.uk/ResourcesInformation/CommunityofPractice/tabid/7259/Default.aspx), a voluntary network of supportive colleagues who work in FE and HE and wish to improve support for trans and gender diverse people. The CoP meets 3 times each year; join by emailing transedu@strath.ac.uk.

**Sources of information and support**

* The [TransEDU](https://trans.ac.uk/) website
* Edutopia: [How to support LGBTQ students during distance learning](https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-support-lgbtq-students-during-distance-learning)
* College Development Network: [Resource Bank: online/blended delivery](https://www.cdn.ac.uk/delivering-curriculum-online/)
* Stonewall: [Covid-19 – How LGBT-inclusive organisations can help](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/covid-19-%E2%80%93-how-lgbt-inclusive-organisations-can-help)
* LGBT Health and Wellbeing: [Transgender Support](https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/services-support/transition-support/)
* LGBT Youth Scotland: [Our services for young people](https://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/our-services-for-young-people/)