

Glossary associated with the Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Policy

This glossary gives definitions to some key terms used throughout this policy, it has been informed by ACAS and Equality Human Rights Commission.

Terminology	Description or example
Adverse impact	Identified where a policy or practice has a less favourable effect on one or more groups covered by equality law than it has on other groups.
Age	A person belonging to a particular age (for example 32 year olds) or range of ages (for example 18 to 30 year olds).
Anticipatory Reasonable Adjustment	Actions taken in anticipation for service users who may experience barriers to access, aimed at removing or reducing a substantial disadvantage they might have. These are pro-active for a group of service users.
Biological Sex	Biological sex refers to whether a person is female or male. For the purposes of the Equality Act 2010, following the Supreme Court judgment in <i>For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers</i> (2025), references to sex mean biological sex.
Bullying	Bullying is unwanted behaviour that is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting, or an abuse or misuse of power, which has the purpose or effect of undermining, humiliating, denigrating or injuring the recipient. Bullying may be a single serious incident or a pattern of behaviour that can occur face to face, in writing, online or through other forms of communication.
Cisgender or Cis:	Someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. Non-trans is also used by some people. This term is used to distinguish from trans or gender-diverse identities. Cisgender individuals are also protected under the Equality Act 2010 under the characteristic of sex.
Dependant	A dependant is a spouse or civil partner, parent, child, someone who lives in the household as part of the family, or someone who “reasonably relies” on the employee for assistance in making care arrangements if they fall ill or are injured.
Differential impact	Identified where a policy or practice affects a given group or groups in a different way to other groups. Unlike adverse impact, differential impact can be positive or negative.
Direct Discrimination	Occurs where a person is treated less favourably on the grounds of being a member of a particular group than a person who is not from that group would be treated in the same or similar circumstances.

Direct Discrimination based by Association	'Discrimination by association' is a type of direct discrimination. It's also known as 'associative discrimination'. It means discriminating against someone because of their connection with either: • someone who has a protected characteristic – for example a family member, friend or colleague • a group of people who have a protected characteristic Discrimination by association does not apply to the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership, nor pregnancy and maternity. This is because under the legislation, unlike other forms of discrimination, the legislation states there is no perceived discrimination and no discrimination by association because of marriage and civil partnership, nor pregnancy and maternity. It must be in the form of direct discrimination.
Direct Discrimination based by Perception	Discrimination by perception involves unfair treatment based on mistaken assumptions about protected characteristics. It happens even if the individual does not actually possess that characteristic. This type of discrimination does not cover the characteristic of marriage and civil partnership, nor pregnancy and maternity. Like associative discrimination, perceptive discrimination does not apply to the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership, nor pregnancy and maternity, and it must be in the form of direct discrimination.
Discrimination arising from a Disability	Occurs when a disabled person is treated unfairly due to their disability. This unfair treatment is unjustifiable. It differs from direct and indirect discrimination.
Disability	A person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. This also includes progressive conditions such as cancer. The social model of disability recognises that people are disabled by the way that society is organised and seeks to remove barriers to inclusion.
Diversity	Diversity is about respecting and valuing the differences between people. It is also recognising and understanding the mix of people and communities who use services and their different needs.
Equal Opportunities	Equal opportunities, or equality of opportunity, may be defined as ensuring that everyone is entitled to freedom from discrimination. There are two main types of equality encompassed in equal opportunities. The term has mostly been replaced by Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in recent years.

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	A systematic process used to assess the potential or actual impact of a policy, practice, procedure, service or decision on people who share protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. It helps identify where the proposals may result in discrimination, disadvantage or unequal outcomes, and where the opportunities exist to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. Any EIA should be evidence based and proportionate to the nature and potential impact of the proposal. Where relevant, it should consider legitimate aims, alternative approaches, potential mitigations and the impact on all affected protected characteristics.
Ethnicity	Ethnicity relates to a person's cultural background, national origin, common sets of ancestry, traditions, language, history, society, religion, or social treatment. Ethnicity is protected under Race under the Equality Act, 2010.
Gender	Gender refers to the social roles, behaviours, and attributes that a particular society considers appropriate for men and women. It includes both gender identity (how individuals perceive themselves) and gender expression (how they present themselves to others). Gender is commonly used to describe the social and cultural roles, behaviours and expectations associated with women and men. The term is also used in everyday language to refer to gender identity. However, “gender” is not itself a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. The relevant protected characteristics are sex and gender reassignment.
Gender Identity	Gender identity refers to a person’s internal sense of their own gender. Gender identity is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. However, people may be protected through the protected characteristic of gender reassignment and through other provisions of equality law, depending on the circumstances.
Gender Reassignment	A protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. A person has this protected characteristic if they are proposing to undergo, are undergoing, or have undergone a process (or part of a process) to reassign their sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex. Medical treatment is not required. Case law has confirmed that this protection can extend to some non-binary and gender-fluid people where the statutory definition is met.
Gender Critical Belief	A gender-critical belief is a philosophical belief about the importance of 'biological sex' and the relationship between sex and gender. Such beliefs may qualify for protection under the Equality Act 2010 where they meet the legal criteria established by case law.
Gender Recognition Certificate	A certificate issued under the Gender Recognition Act 2004 that legally recognises a trans person in their affirmed gender, allowing them to update their birth, marriage, and death certificates, and impacts tax and pension administration. Following the April 2025 Supreme Court ruling, a GRC does not

	change a person's sex for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010. Consequently, service providers may still exclude GRC holders from single-sex spaces where doing so is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.
Gender-Neutral Facilities / Universal Access Facilities	Handwashing and toilet facilities contained within a fully enclosed, self-contained room lockable from the inside, designed for use by one person at a time regardless of sex. Following the May 2026 EHRC Code of Practice, universities are encouraged to provide these alongside communal single-sex spaces to ensure trans and non-binary individuals are never left without safe, accessible facilities, mitigating risks of indirect discrimination.
Harassment	Unwanted behaviour that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creates a degrading, humiliating, hostile, intimidating or offensive environment. The Equality Act 2010 outlines three types of harassment: • Related to protected characteristics • Sexual harassment • Less favourable treatment due to harassment Bullying behaviour qualifies as harassment if it fits these definitions. For behaviour to qualify as harassment, it must either intend to or actually create an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment. Whether conduct is considered harassment depends on the recipient's perception, the context of the incident, and whether it is reasonable to view the conduct as offensive.
Indirect Discrimination	Refers to operations that disadvantage people of different 'protected characteristics'. Indirect discrimination is illegal if it cannot be justified as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.
Inducing, Instructing or causing Discrimination	It is illegal to cause discrimination and you should not tell anyone to discriminate, harass, or victimise others. This applies even after relationships end, e.g. with ex-employees.
Institutional Discrimination	When organisations fail to serve everyone fairly. This typically stems from their policies, procedures, and culture, leading to indirect discrimination.
Intersectional / Intersectionality	A framework used to analyse how different forms of identity and inequality (such as biological sex, gender reassignment, race, disability, religion, and socio-economic status) overlap and intersect. In a university context, this concept helps in understanding that an individual's lived experience cannot be fully evaluated through a single protected characteristic in isolation.

Legitimate aim	A lawful objective that may justify certain policies or practices under the Equality Act 2010 where they are a proportionate means of achieving that aim. Legitimate aims may include privacy, dignity, safeguarding, health and safety or the effective delivery of services, depending on the circumstances.
Marriage and Civil Partnership	Marriage is a union between a man and a woman or between a same-sex couple. Same-sex couples can also have their relationships legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'. Civil partners must not be treated less favourably than married couples (except where permitted by the Equality Act)
Microaggression	Microaggressions are subtle comments, behaviours or actions that may communicate negative assumptions, stereotypes or exclusion towards individuals or groups. Whether behaviour amounts to unlawful harassment depends on the facts of the case and the legal tests set out in the Equality Act 2010.
Positive Action	Positive action helps overcome disadvantages faced by specific groups with protected characteristics. It is legal and optional, unlike positive discrimination. Positive action can be used e.g. where • Disadvantage: The group faces unique disadvantages. • Different Needs: They have different needs from others. • Low Participation: Their activity participation is low. These actions must be based on reasonable evidence and be proportionate to their goals.
Pregnancy and Maternity	Pregnancy and maternity is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. Protection applies during pregnancy and throughout the statutory protected period following childbirth. It is unlawful to treat someone unfavourably because they are pregnant, because of an illness related to pregnancy, because they have given birth, or because they are on maternity leave. A woman who is breastfeeding may also be protected from discrimination under the sex provisions of the Equality Act 2010 depending on the circumstances.
Proportionate	An action is proportionate if it is an appropriate and reasonably necessary way of achieving a legitimate aim, taking account of whether less restrictive alternatives are available.
Protected Characteristics	Protected characteristics are personal attributes or characteristics that are safeguarded by law to ensure fair treatment and prevent discrimination. It's important to recognise that everyone possesses one or more protected characteristics, and discrimination based on any of these characteristics is prohibited by law. Protected characteristics include: Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or

	Belief (including non-belief), Sex and Sexual Orientation
Race	A race includes individuals identified by their colour, nationality, ethnicity, or national origins. It may encompass multiple racial groups, like Black British.
Reasonable Adjustment	Where a disabled person is at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with people who are not disabled, there is a duty to take reasonable steps to remove that disadvantage. Reasonable adjustments are changes an employer makes to remove or reduce a disadvantage related to someone's disability. For example: • making changes to the workplace • changing someone's working arrangements • finding a different way to do something • providing equipment, services or support Reasonable adjustments are specific to an individual person. They can cover any area of work. What is reasonable depends on each situation. The employer must consider carefully if the adjustment: • will remove or reduce the disadvantage – the employer should talk with the person and not make assumptions • is practical to make • is affordable • could harm the health and safety of others
Religion and belief	Religion refers to any religion, including a lack of religion. Belief refers to any religious or philosophical belief and includes a lack of belief. Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition.
Sex	A protected characteristic under the Equality Act. In accordance with the Equality Act 2010 as interpreted by the UK Supreme Court in <i>For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers</i> (2025), sex means a person's biological sex (female or male), for the purposes of applying the Equality Act and related University policies. A person's sex may or may not align with their gender identity.
Single-sex spaces / services	A service or facility provided for one biological sex where the conditions in the Equality Act 2010 are met. Examples may include toilets, changing facilities, residential accommodation or other services where a legitimate aim such as privacy, dignity or safety justifies single-sex provision and the approach is proportionate.
Separate-sex service or facility	A service or facility provided separately for women and men where this is permitted under the Equality Act 2010 and is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.
Sexual orientation	Sexual orientation refers to a person's sexual or romantic attraction to people of the same sex, the opposite sex or more than one sex.

Trans	Trans is an umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity differs from the sex recorded at birth. Individuals may use a range of terms including transgender, trans man, trans woman, non-binary, gender-fluid and others. Not everyone whose identity falls within this broad umbrella will have the protected characteristic of gender reassignment under the Equality Act 2010.
Victimisation	A specific legal term under the Equality Act (2010) and specific to the workplace. It means treating someone worse for complaining about discrimination or harassment. <i>The law says victimisation means 'suffering a detriment' because you've done or intend to do a 'protected act'. A 'protected act' means taking action related to discrimination law. This includes:</i> <i>• making a complaint of discrimination or harassment</i> <i>• supporting someone else's complaint</i> <i>• gathering information that might lead to a complaint</i> <i>• acting as a witness in a complaint</i> <i>• saying something or giving evidence that does not support someone else's complaint</i> <i>The law also protects a person from victimisation when someone else thinks the person has done or intends to do any of the things above.</i> <i>'Detriment' means someone experiences one or both of the following:</i> <i>• being treated worse than before</i> <i>• having their situation made worse</i> It differs from bullying.