



Heriot-Watt University

Gender Transition Guidance

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 'Transitioning' or gender reassignment describes the process of changing from one gender to another. Gender reassignment is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 which prohibits unlawful discrimination, victimisation or harassment. Heriot-Watt has a range of policies and procedures in place to ensure the protection of employees (www.hw.ac.uk/hr) and students (www.hw.ac.uk/students/student-policies.htm).
- 1.2 As outlined in our Equality and Diversity Policy Heriot-Watt University is committed to equality and diversity in an environment that promotes a Culture of Inclusion for All. This holistic approach helps us maintain an open and accessible working, living and learning environment where all are supported to reach their full potential. This guidance is one of the ways we help to make sure we maintain a Culture of Inclusion for All, focusing on providing a person-centred approach to both employees and students who disclose their transition.
- 1.3 This guidance has been developed with input from across the University community including our trade unions and student union. Extensive use has been made of resources made available from Advance HE¹ (under the previous Equality Challenge Unit organisation), ACAS² and transgender support organisations³. The guidance is intended to provide information for those undergoing transition and for staff responding to individual needs. Central to the guidance is that the University's response is led by the individual.
- 1.4 This guidance and the accompanying Gender Identity Policy is relevant to our UK campuses, however, as a global University we have a duty of care across all our jurisdictions. We take the wellbeing and right confidentiality of all our staff and students extremely seriously and will take all precautions to support the University community

2. Disclosing transition or the intention to transition

- 2.1 Making the decision to disclose to the University is potentially one of the first formal processes an individual is taking forward. Any employee or student making the decision to disclose their transition should be treated with respect and understanding.
- 2.2 Some individuals may choose not to disclose. The University is committed to providing support as an individual presents and will do so as directed by an individual. There will be no pressure exerted on individuals to disclose and assumptions about an individual's status will not be tolerated. In creating this guidance the University is hopeful of creating an environment where individuals feel able and supported to disclose.
- 2.3 On some occasions there may not be a formal meeting where the disclosure takes place. It will be helpful to encourage the person to have a scheduled discussion in a private, safe space at a dedicated time to allow the individual to discuss their circumstances more freely. Individuals may wish to be accompanied by someone of their choice at any meeting and this should be accommodated. Such meetings may take place with a line manager or HR contact for employees. Students may wish to speak with their Academic mentor or a contact from Student Wellbeing Services. Individuals may speak with the University's Equality and

¹ www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance-resources/inclusive-environment/providing-support/trans-people

² www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=2064

³ www.scottishtrans.org/resources

Diversity Partner as a first point of contact. The individual may wish to be accompanied to that meeting. Some suggestions for an initial conversation are included in appendix 1.

3. Recognising self-determined gender and preferred name changes

- 3.1** Alongside recognising a person's self-determined gender one of the first steps in transitioning will be using a preferred name. The University does not require formal written notification of transition for an individual to have their self-determined gender recognised and for their preferred name used. Keeping a record of a date when disclosure took place maybe helpful for an individual to show when they formally began living in their self-determined gender.
- 3.2** Using an individual's preferred name is an important part of a person's identity and should be used as soon as the individual notifies the University of a change in their name. This maybe a topic in an initial discussion along with updating University records and mutually agreed individuals across the University. Discussions should also cover use of preferred salutations i.e. Prof, Dr, Mr, Mrs, Ms, Mx.
- 3.3** Formal documentation is not required to enable changes to the University's employee or student records. Employees can access iHR and make changes themselves. It is worth noting that where employees can use self-service to update personal information this will not impact on payroll. Students can request changes are made via the [Student Service Centre](#) changes to email addresses can be directed to the IS Help Desk.
- 3.4** There are some instances where the University requires documentation to prove a change in legal name to allow the issuing of documentation such as degree certificates. In such instances proof of name can be provided by Deed Poll certificate, passport, or gender recognition certificate.
- 3.5** **Not all individuals undergoing gender reassignment obtain a gender recognition certificate. It is therefore not appropriate for this form of identification to be the only stipulated form of identification to support a change in legal name.**
- 3.6** Other work-related organisations such as an individual's pension provider or visa bodies may also require formal documentation to make the necessary alterations. Advice and information will be available from the relevant organisation. It may be appropriate for the University to assist this process with a signed letter from Human Resources to confirm a legal change of name and the date that the formal change came into effect.
- 3.7** On occasion external bodies may also require additional supporting documentation (for example providing relevant information to support a visa application) if materials include more than one name. The University will be led by these external requirements and work with individuals to find the best solution.

4. Confidentiality and Information Sharing

- 4.1** Individual disclosure of transitioning or the intention to transition must be treated confidentially, with all information held securely and strictly on a need to see basis

accordance with data protection provisions. Any sharing of information with other members of the University community or third parties can only be taken forward with the written consent of the individual.

- 4.2** The individual must be informed and approve, in writing, all information sharing as well as the content and purpose of the information to be shared.
- 4.3** Consistent with the content of this guidance, the decision to disclose and the sharing of information should be led by the individual.

5. Support and Welfare

- 5.1** The transition process will be different for each individual. Some people may wish to involve their workplace/place of study as little as possible with networks and support systems in place in their personal life. Others may require more support. Employee counselling is available via self-referral by telephone and HR referral for face-to-face contact⁴. Student support is available through Student Wellbeing Services.
- 5.2** Those who are responding to a disclosure of gender transition may also need support to help respond to individual needs and at times managing the transition in the workplace or study environment. Each circumstance will be different and for support in work related matters make use of your HR contact. Student related advice can also be found via Student Wellbeing Services.
- 5.3** The University's Equality and Diversity Partner is also available to those transitioning and those responding to individual's needs.
- 5.4** Contact details are contacted in Appendix 2.

⁴ Where employees are accessing counselling services HR involvement is limited to categorising counselling contact as personal or work related.

6. Appendix 1: Holding an initial conversation

6.1 All circumstances of disclosure will be different. You may be the individual's line manager, HR contact, student contact or trusted peer. It is important that you understand your role to the individual so that you can best provide support.

6.2 If you are a trusted peer it will be important to provide encouragement to the individual to have a conversation with relevant contacts for employees (HR contact or line manager) or students (Academic mentor or student support). It may also be appropriate to encourage contact with the University's Equality and Diversity Partner in the first instance.

6.3 As a line manager, HR contact or student contact your role will be to listen to the individual and provide some pointers to 'what next'. An initial meeting will not cover all aspects of an individual's circumstances but should provide confidence that the University is supportive.

6.4 Some practical considerations and areas that could be explored in a first discussion are detailed below:

- Ensure the meeting takes place in a private and safe space.
- Create an open environment for the meeting, allowing sufficient time for discussion.
- It will be helpful to use gender neutral language and to establish how the individual would like to be referred. They may wish either use or avoid gendered titles and your approach should be led by them.
- Allow the individual to lead the conversation, ensuring they understand that the conversation is confidential and any information will be kept confidential and shared only with mutually agreed other parties.
- Reassure the individual that they are protected by University policies and procedures as well as legally. Establish early that the individual should report any issues.
- Do not ask invasive questions, allow the individual to disclose at their pace.
- Do ask if they have access to networks and support out with the University, it is helpful to better understand if individuals have good support systems in place or are isolated so that the University can respond appropriately.
- Do ask about facilities in their workplace/study space, is there a need for improvements particularly to toilets/changing facilities?
- Do ask how they anticipate their transition impacting on their work/study. This may include some discussion of medical matters which will be at the individual's discretion.
- Do establish a desire for ongoing communication to keep the University updated of any critical dates to help manage their personal, study or work needs and the University's business requirements.
- Do ask the individual how they would like to proceed:

- Are they at a stage of thinking about disclosing more widely?
 - Would they like assistance in disclosing to others? E.g. would they prefer to manage their disclosure themselves or would they appreciate pre-discussion with key agreed individuals
 - Are they at a stage where they would like to change University records? They may wish to handle this themselves or have someone else take forward this work on their behalf.
 - As an employee they will have access to their own personal information via iHR
 - As a student contact will need to be made with the Student Service Centre?
 - Are they at a stage where they would like to formally note a preferred name?
 - Do they have thoughts on the level on contact they would like with the University going forward?
 - Do they need support in future disclosure?
- Do ask the individual if they have had any thoughts on the level of support they would like from the University.
 - Do ask the Individual to give thought to an action plan created with them and agreed other parties to give a clear outline of how the individual and the University will work together over the transition period.
 - Do suggest that an informal note of the meeting will be sent to them, in a timely manner, so that both parties can agree the discussion that took place and any actions arising. An agreed note of the meeting as well as actions arising can be the basis of agreed activity going forward including, where necessary, limited information sharing.
 - Do listen fully to the individual. Some of the issues presented may not be related directly to the transition process and be general life difficulties such as exam stress. Make sure you are clear on what the individual is telling you to help with onward referral.
 - Do follow-up with the individual after the meeting to 'check-in' and allow the individual to set the tone/pace of future contact.

7. Appendix 2: Relevant Contacts

Initial enquiry emails can be sent to the following contacts.

Matters for consideration	Responsible Area	Contact
Data protection	Information Governance	dataprotection@hw.ac.uk
Changes to Degree Certificate	Student Service Centre	studentcentre@hw.ac.uk
Changes to email address	Information Services	ISHelp@hw.ac.uk
Changes to personal documents verifying Right to Work	HR	hrhelp@hw.ac.uk
Access to Employee Counselling	HR	hrhelp@hw.ac.uk
Examination issues	Student Service Centre	studentcentre@hw.ac.uk
Changes to facilities Inc. toilets/changing rooms	Estates	EstatesMaintenance@hw.ac.uk
Issues relating to health and safety	Health and Safety	Healthandsafety@hw.ac.uk
Changes relating to driving licence or travel documents when driving or travelling on university business	Risk and Assurance Services	assurance@hw.ac.uk
iHR	Human Resources	hrhelp@hw.ac.uk
Reissuing Library Card	IS	
Reissuing Matriculation Card	Student Service Centre	studentcentre@hw.ac.uk
Updating Oriam	Oriam	hello@oriam.ac.uk
Issue relating to sports club membership Sports Union	Sports Union	supresident@hw.ac.uk
Student advice and information	Advice Hub	Advice.hub@hw.ac.uk
	Student Wellbeing Services	StudentWellbeing@hw.ac.uk
Student records updates	Student Service Centre	studentcentre@hw.ac.uk
Student Union	Student Union	union.vpwellbeing@hw.ac.uk

Website updates	Corporate Communications/IS	ISHelp@hw.ac.uk
Other	Equality and Diversity	equality@hw.ac.uk

8. Appendix 3: Sources and Additional Information

Equality Challenge Unit: Supporting a student or employee who is transitioning

www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/external/supporting-a-student-or-member-of-staff-who-is-transitioning.pdf

Equality Challenge Unit: Trans Equality Policy Statement

www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Trans-equality-policy-statement.pdf

Equality Challenge Unit: Checklist: Supporting a Trans staff member or student

www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Checklist-Supporting-trans-staff-or-students.pdf

Gender Neutral Language

www.skillsyouneed.com/write/gender-neutral-language.html

www.extension.harvard.edu/professional-development/blog/inclusive-language-four-easy-steps

University of Cambridge Guidance on Gender Reassignment

www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/files/gender_reassignment_staff.pdf

Warwick University: Using Gender Neutral Language

https://warwick.ac.uk/services/equalops/getinvolved/initiatives/lgbtua/gender_neutral_language.pdf