# SCURL Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Glossary

## Introduction

This glossary has been developed by a working group of the SCURL Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Network. The glossary aims to raise awareness of positive and inclusive terminology to provide SCURL members with some practical recommendations on the language used to confidently deliver, describe or promote library services. We do not seek to be exhaustive in our approach, recognising that there are other resources providing more in-depth coverage (see Section 4).

We recognise that the language people use to describe themselves can be very personal and will vary from one person to the next. This glossary sets out key terms in current usage as well as a set of principles designed to apply at a higher level to recognize the differences between people and the changes in language use over time.

We welcome any feedback or suggestions. Please use the [Contact us](https://www.scurl.ac.uk/contact) form on the SCURL website.

## Embedding the Principle of Inclusive Language

A general principle of good practice in choice of terminology is to use language that includes all persons in its references and does not assume any characteristics or preferences of the intended audience. We have borne this in mind when producing this glossary. Some concepts to consider are:

[Nothing about us without us](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nothing_about_us_without_us)

[People-first language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People-first_language)

[Gender neutrality](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_neutrality) / avoiding [misgendering](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/misgender)

There are some important overarching considerations when making language choices. These include:

[Othering](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Other_%28philosophy%29), in which chosen language may exclude people who do not fit the perceived norms of the social group.

[Privilege](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_privilege), in which chosen language may make assumptions about access to resources that may in fact only be available to certain (more privileged) individuals/groups and less available to other (less privileged) individuals/groups.

[Ableism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ableism), in which chosen language may devalue people with disabilities, their identities or challenges.

1. Glossary of Terms

**Accessibility**

In general terms, accessibility refers to the extent to which a facility or service can be used by people with disabilities. Examples within a library context include self-opening doors or elevators to access upper levels.

Web accessibility is the practice of ensuring that web content does not present any barriers to access or interaction for disabled individuals. Libraries may use assistive technologies, such as screen readers or Braille terminals, to improve access to electronic resources. Any web content created by libraries should conform to standard [*BS 8878:2010 Web accessibility. Code of practice*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BS_8878) which is consistent with the Equality Act 2010.

**AFAB/AMAB**

Acronyms that describe sex assigned at birth - Assigned Female at Birth/Assigned Male at Birth.

**Ally**

A person who supports and advocates for under-represented groups though not identifying as being a member of that group themselves.

**Antiracism/anti-racist**

Antiracism refers to the behaviour of actively challenging racist processes and attitudes and advocating for positive changes in policies and practices that may have racist elements. This is distinguished from the more passive position of being non-racist by taking direct action against racism.

**BAME, BME, and ME**

Abbreviations of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME), Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and Minority Ethnic (ME). The latter is less common but has been used in recent Scottish government policy documents in relation to EDI. Views and preferences differ on the use of these terms. Many institutions will have a preferred term. Libraries should check local policies for guidance.

**BIPOC**

An abbreviation that stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour. Libraries should check institution-level policies for guidance.

**Black**

Of or related to persons having ethnic origins in the African continent, persons belonging to the African Diaspora. (Source: [University of Washington – School of Public Health – ED&I Glossary](https://epi.washington.edu/sites/default/files/website_documents/DEI%20Glossary_Formatted_20190711.pdf))

**Cisgender / cis**

A term that can be used to describe people whose gender identity corresponds to the sex registered at birth. Non-trans or not transgender can also be used.

**Content warning / trigger warning / advisory note / content note**

These terms are used to describe statements given before presenting material that disclose that the content covered may be sensitive in nature. Many libraries now add such statements to materials or at a whole collection level, using a variety of terms to describe the process. Frequently seen on social media or informal communications such as blog posts or in abbreviated forms (e.g. CW, TW, CN).

**Deadnaming**

Deadnaming occurs when someone calls an individual by a name that they no longer wish to use or be associated with, for example their birth name. Deadnaming is a term most often associated with trans people who have changed their name or who are in the process of choosing a new name as part of their transition. (Source: [Stonewall Glossary of Terms](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/list-lgbtq-terms#c))

**D/deaf**

In the UK, the term 'deaf' is used to refer to all levels of deafness. People who describe themselves as deaf are likely to be profoundly deaf. People who have retained a considerable degree of hearing might refer to themselves as 'partially deaf'. People who have experienced hearing loss throughout life may describe themselves as 'deafened' or 'hard of hearing'.

Those who refer to themselves as 'Deaf' with a capital D view themselves as culturally deaf; generally sign language will be their first language and they will identify as part of the Deaf community. (Source: [Glasgow Caledonian University](https://www.gcu.ac.uk/currentstudents/support/disabilityservice/sensoryimpairments/whatisddeaf))

**Decolonisation**

Decolonisation involves identifying colonial systems, structures and relationships, and working to challenge those systems. It is not ‘integration’ or simply the token inclusion of the intellectual achievements of non-white cultures. Rather, it involves a paradigm shift from a culture of exclusion and denial to the making of space for other political philosophies and knowledge systems. It’s a culture shift to think more widely about why common knowledge is what it is, and in so doing adjusting cultural perceptions and power relations in real and significant ways. (Source: [University of Keele Manifesto for Decolonising the Curriculum](https://www.keele.ac.uk/equalitydiversity/equalityframeworksandactivities/equalityawardsandreports/equalityawards/raceequalitycharter/keeledecolonisingthecurriculumnetwork/#keele-manifesto-for-decolonising-the-curriculum))

**Diaspora**

A dispersion of a people, language, or culture that was formerly concentrated in one place, to scatter, to displace, to live in separated communities. The African Diaspora is the voluntary and involuntary movement of Africans and their descendants to various parts of the world during the modern and pre-modern periods. (Source: [DePaul University Centre for Black Diaspora](https://las.depaul.edu/centers-and-institutes/center-for-black-diaspora/about/Pages/defining-diaspora.aspx))

**Disability**

Under section 6 of the Equality Act 2010, Disability is defined in the following way: “A person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

As per the social model of disability, disability is said to result from the interaction between persons with impairments and the attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. (Source: [University of York](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XPuYSXZ14oHiRUwRM-tzWY4bbfurP2KrSx6vuT2omjw/edit))

**Disabled person and disabled people**

In the UK the term “disabled person” is used rather than “person with a disability”. Disability is not a description of a personal characteristic. A disabled person is not a ‘person with a disability’ as the person does not own the disability in the way that you might be ‘a person with brown hair’, a person is instead ‘dis-abled’ by the barriers they encounter in their external environment. Consequently, the opposite of ‘disabled’ is not ‘able-bodied’ or ‘abled’, but ‘non-disabled’ or ‘enabled’. (Source: [University of York](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XPuYSXZ14oHiRUwRM-tzWY4bbfurP2KrSx6vuT2omjw/edit))

**Dual or Mixed Heritage**

This term is used to refer to an individual who has parents from different ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds, and it is increasingly used instead of the term ‘mixed race’. (Source: [University of York](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XPuYSXZ14oHiRUwRM-tzWY4bbfurP2KrSx6vuT2omjw/edit))

**Ethnicity**

Race and ethnicity are often used interchangeably but it is useful to be clear about the difference. As described below, race is a socially constructed term without biological merit that has historically been used to categorise different groups of people based on perceived physical differences.

A 1983 House of Lords decision that suggests an ethnic group would have the following features:

* a long shared history of which the group is conscious as distinguishing it from other groups and the memory of which it keeps alive
* a cultural tradition of its own including family and social manners, often but not necessarily associated with religious observance
* a common, however distant, geographical origin
* a common language and literature

It is important to remember that everyone has an ethnicity. Bhavnani et al (*Tackling the Roots of Racism*, 2005, p. 213) point out that it is common in British culture for 'ethnic' to be wrongly used as synonymous with non-white or not-western, for example with 'ethnic clothes' or 'ethnic restaurants'. (Source [AdvancedHE: Use of language: race and ethnicity](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/using-data-and-evidence/use-of-language-race-ethnicity#Ethnicity))

**Gender or Gender identity**

Often expressed in terms of masculinity and femininity, gender is largely culturally determined and is assumed from the sex assigned at birth. A person’s gender identity is an innate sense of their own gender, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth. (Source: [Stonewall: List of LGBTQ+ Terms](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/list-lgbtq-terms))

**Gender neutral**

Often used to refer to non-gendered facilities (e.g. gender neutral toilets) as well as non-discriminatory, neutral language that may be used instead of gendered language and pronouns. For example, when referring to people, gender neutral language would tend to use ‘they’, ‘them’ or ‘their’ rather than ‘she/he’, ‘hers/his’ etc. (Source: [University of York](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XPuYSXZ14oHiRUwRM-tzWY4bbfurP2KrSx6vuT2omjw/edit))

**Gypsy / Roma / Traveller**

‘Gypsy, Roma and Traveller’ has been used to describe a range of ethnic groups or people with nomadic ways of life who are not from a specific ethnicity.

In the UK, it is common in data collections to differentiate between:

* Gypsies (including English Gypsies, Scottish Gypsies or Travellers, Welsh Gypsies and other Romany people)
* Irish Travellers (who have specific Irish roots)
* Roma, understood to be more recent migrants from Central and Eastern Europe

The term Traveller can also encompass groups that travel. This includes, but is not limited to, New Travellers, Boaters, Bargees and Showpeople. (Source: [gov.uk: Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicity summary](https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/summaries/gypsy-roma-irish-traveller))

**Impairment**

The word impairment can be used to help describe the specific grounds on which an individual is disabled. For instance, someone who is disabled may have a visual or mobility impairment.

It is considered impolite to refer to someone with hearing loss or who is D/deaf as having a hearing impairment, it is instead better to use ‘hard-of-hearing’. (Source: [University of York](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XPuYSXZ14oHiRUwRM-tzWY4bbfurP2KrSx6vuT2omjw/edit))

**Intersectionality**

A theory coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American civil rights activist, intersectionality refers to the intertwining of social identities like gender, race, ethnicity, social class, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity that causes unique opportunities, barriers, experiences or social inequality. (Source: [UKRI](https://www.ukri.org/publications/ukri-glossary-of-edi-terms/ukri-glossary-of-edi-terms/) & [University of York](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XPuYSXZ14oHiRUwRM-tzWY4bbfurP2KrSx6vuT2omjw/edit))

**Learning disabilities and learning differences**

A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities which affects someone for their whole life.

People with a learning disability tend to take longer to learn and may need support to develop new skills, understand complicated information and interact with other people. (Source: [Mencap: What Is a Learning Disability](https://www.mencap.org.uk/learning-disability-explained/what-learning-disability))

Learning difficulties or differences is distinct from learning disabilities as they do not affect general intelligence. There are many different types of learning difficulty, some of the more well known are dyslexia, attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyspraxia and dyscalculia. A person can have one, or a combination. (Source: [Mencap: Learning Difficulties).](https://www.mencap.org.uk/learning-disability-explained/learning-difficulties)

**LGBTQ+**

Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. The Q generally stands for queer when LGBTQ organizations, leaders, and media use the acronym. In settings offering support for youth, it can also stand for questioning. LGBT and LGBTQ are also used, but the added + recognises all non-straight, non-cisgender identities. Both are acceptable, as are other versions of this acronym. The term "gay community" should be avoided, as it does not accurately reflect the diversity of the community. Rather, LGBTQ community or LGBTQ+ community are recommended. (Source: [Stonewall](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/list-lgbtq-terms) & [GLAAD](https://www.glaad.org/reference/terms))

**Marginalised**

A term to describe communities that may have societal disadvantages placed upon them, often based on their identity or social class. People may belong to more than one marginalised community (Source: [LGBT Foundation](https://lgbt.foundation/news/how-to-be-an-ally-to-trans-people/298))

**Mental health and mental illness**

In many ways, mental health is just like physical health: everybody has it and we need to take care of it. Good mental health means being generally able to think, feel and react in the ways that individuals need and want to live their life. Going through a period of poor mental health means that feeling, thinking and reacting can become difficult, or even impossible, to cope with. There can be specific diagnoses of a particular type of mental health problem or not. Everyone’s experience is different and can change at different times. For more information, please see [SAMH’s Understanding Mental Health Problems](https://www.samh.org.uk/documents/SAMh_Understanding_Mental_Health_Problems.pdf). (Source: [SAMH](https://www.samh.org.uk/documents/SAMh_Understanding_Mental_Health_Problems.pdf))

**Microaggressions**

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. (Source: [Derald Wing Sue: Microaggressions in Everyday Life](https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201011/microaggressions-more-just-race), via the book Overcoming Everyday Racism by Susan Cousins.)

**Minority ethnic**

Minority ethnic refers to individuals and groups who are in the minority within a larger population based on certain characteristics and who are often subject to differential treatment.

The term Ethnic Minority is discouraged, as this places the emphasis on ethnicity being the main issue. However, the term Minority Ethnic highlights the fact that everyone has an ethnicity and the issues being referred to relate to minority groups in a UK context and the discrimination and barriers that they face. (Source: [AdvancedHE: Use of language: race and ethnicity)](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/using-data-and-evidence/use-of-language-race-ethnicity#Ethnicity)

**Misgendering**

Misgendering’ is the term used when someone refers to a trans person using terms linked to the gender they were assigned at birth, instead of their real gender (for example by using terms like ‘man’, ‘woman’ or using pronouns incorrectly).

When done deliberately, deadnaming and misgendering are both deeply hurtful to trans people. (Source: [Stonewall: The Truth about Trans)](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/the-truth-about-trans)

**Neurodiversity / neurodivergent**

Being neurodivergent means that an individual may think and learn in a different way to others. Neurodiversity has a wide spectrum that covers a range of hidden neurological conditions, such as but not limited to autism spectrum, dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, Tourette’s and social anxiety.

For some people, their neurodivergence can mean that they are better at some things than many other people and for others additional support or adjustments are required.

When discussing individuals, use the term neurodivergent. Neurodiversity refers to the diversity of human minds, the infinite variations of neurocognitive functioning within the human race as a whole. (Source: [The Donaldson Trust](https://www.donaldsons.org.uk/neurodiversity/#what-is-neuro))

**Nonbinary / gender non-conforming**

These are broad terms used by and to refer to some people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the binary categories of man and woman.

Nonbinary is a term that refers to people whose gender is not completely and exclusively male or female. They can identify with not having gender at all, with both binary genders, with a third identity, or an identity which can change over time. Nonbinary people fall under the transgender umbrella and nonbinary is an umbrella term itself, although some people use it to describe their specific gender identity too.

Several terms are used to describe a gender identity that is outside of the binary male or female categories, with nonbinary being one of the most common. Other terms include genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, bigender, pangender, among others. None of these terms mean exactly the same thing, but all speak to an experience of gender identity that is not simply male or female.

It should be noted that, just as with trans men and trans women, nonbinary people transition and live their lives in various ways and this may or may not include medically transitioning (ie taking hormones or undergoing surgeries). (Source: University of York)

**Non-disabled**

The opposite of disabled, non-disabled refers to a person who is not ‘dis-abled’ by the external barriers they encounter in the world as a result of a long-term mental or physical health condition or impairment. ([Source: University of York](https://www.york.ac.uk/about/equality/edi-glossary-terminology/disability/))

**People of colour (POC)**

The term ‘People of Colour’ is an American import that is now used more commonly in the UK, and is used to refer to racial groups and individuals who are non-white.

It is important however to note that the term People of Colour is problematic and is not fully representative of all minority ethnic groups and individuals, who for instance would not necessarily choose to identify with this term and may instead reject it. (Source: University of York)

**Pronouns**

Words we use to refer to people’s gender in conversation - for example, ‘he’ or ‘she’. Some people may prefer others to refer to them in gender neutral language and use pronouns such as they/their and ze/zir. (Source: Stonewall)

**Protected characteristic**

These are the characteristics it is against the law to discriminate against someone because of within the Equality Act 2010:

* Age
* Disability
* Gender reassignment
* Marriage and civil partnership
* Pregnancy and maternity
* Race
* Religion or belief
* Sex
* Sexual orientation

(Source: Equality Act 2010)

**Race**

As identified in the Equality Act 2010, race is one of the nine protected characteristics. It refers to a group of people defined by their colour, nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origins. (Source: [University of York](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XPuYSXZ14oHiRUwRM-tzWY4bbfurP2KrSx6vuT2omjw/edit))

Many organisations put the word ‘race’ in inverted commas to emphasise the fact that it is a social construct (Bhavnani et al. 2005, Tackling the roots of racism). Sometimes organisations will use the terms race and ethnicity very frequently and therefore choose not to use inverted commas. Please see your institutions’ style guide (if it has one) for information.

**Refugee**

Someone who is in need of protection and would be at risk of persecution if they returned home. Under international law the word “refugee” has a very precise meaning and refers to someone who: “…owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country…” (United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees, 1951). (Source: [University of York](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XPuYSXZ14oHiRUwRM-tzWY4bbfurP2KrSx6vuT2omjw/edit))

**Sensory disability**

A sensory disability is a disability of the senses (for example, sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste). As 95% of the information about the world around us comes from our sight and hearing, a sensory disability can affect how a person gathers information from the world around them.

Examples of sensory disability are: blindness and low vision, hearing loss. ([Source: University of York](https://www.york.ac.uk/about/equality/edi-glossary-terminology/disability/))

**Sight loss**

When a person experiences some degree of irretrievable loss of vision, which cannot be corrected using glasses or contact lenses. It can also be referred to as a visual impairment. There are two main categories of sight loss: partially sighted, or sight impaired, where the level of sight loss is moderate; or severe sight impairment, where the level of sight loss is so severe that a person is unable to complete any activities that rely on eyesight and who may therefore be blind. ([Source: University of York](https://www.york.ac.uk/about/equality/edi-glossary-terminology/disability/))

**Systemic/ structural / institutional racism**

Systemic/structural/institutional racism refers specifically to the ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional policies may never mention a particular racial group, but their effect is to create proportionate advantages for some ethnic groups, most often white, and oppression or disadvantage for people from minoritised ethnicities. (Source: [University of York](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XPuYSXZ14oHiRUwRM-tzWY4bbfurP2KrSx6vuT2omjw/edit))

**Trans and transgender**

Trans and transgender are words often used interchangeably as inclusive umbrella terms used to refer to people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the legal sex (male or female) assigned to them at birth. It can also include someone who does not identify as male or female (nonbinary) or someone who is outside any gender definition (agender, androgynous).

An individual does not need to undergo gender reassignment, hormonal treatment or surgery, in order to be considered as trans or transgender. Trans is included in the Equality Act 2010 as one of the nine protected characteristics, listed under gender reassignment.

Trans people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including (but not limited to) transgender, transsexual, genderqueer (GQ), genderfluid, nonbinary, gender-variant, crossdresser, genderless, agender, nongender, third gender, bigender, trans man, trans woman, trans masculine, trans feminine and neutrois.

It is important to note that not all people that can be included in the umbrella term ‘Trans’ or ‘Transgender’ will choose to associate with it or refer to themselves in this way. For example, someone who has transitioned to another gender, ie from a man to a woman, may not identify as a trans woman, but may instead simply refer to herself and her identity as a woman. (Source: [University of York](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XPuYSXZ14oHiRUwRM-tzWY4bbfurP2KrSx6vuT2omjw/edit))

**Trans man**

A term used to describe someone who was assigned female at birth but who identifies and lives as a man. The terms ‘female-to-male’ or ‘FtM’ are shorthand for indicating the direction of a person’s transition. These terms can be seen as offensive, while some people may use them to describe themselves. (Source: [University of York](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XPuYSXZ14oHiRUwRM-tzWY4bbfurP2KrSx6vuT2omjw/edit))

**Trans woman**

A term used to describe someone who was assigned male at birth but who identifies and lives as a woman. The terms ‘male-to-female’ or ‘MtF’ are shorthand for indicating the direction of a person’s transition. These terms can be seen as offensive, while some people may use them to describe themselves. (Source: [University of York](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XPuYSXZ14oHiRUwRM-tzWY4bbfurP2KrSx6vuT2omjw/edit))

**Underrepresented group**

A person or group of people who are insufficiently or inadequately represented (holding a smaller percentage within a significant subgroup than the subset holds in the general population). (Source: UKRI)

**Wheelchair user**

An individual who uses a wheelchair either some or all of the time in order to assist them when moving around. This may be due to a temporary injury or a disability or health condition, resulting in their mobility being impaired. It refers to all types of wheelchairs including motorised wheelchairs. It is important to note that the term ‘wheelchair bound’ is no longer considered appropriate and may be viewed as offensive. ([Source: University of York](https://www.york.ac.uk/about/equality/edi-glossary-terminology/disability/))

## Recommended resources

**Glossaries for further reading**

AdvancedHE: [Use of Language: Race and Ethnicity](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/using-data-and-evidence/use-of-language-race-ethnicity)

ALA: [The Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services (ODLOS) Glossary of Terms](https://www.ala.org/aboutala/odlos-glossary-terms)

Athena Swan Ireland: [EDI Literacy Glossary](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/athena-swan-ireland-edi-literacy-glossary)

GLAAD Media Reference Guide: [LGBTQ Glossary](https://www.glaad.org/reference/terms)

NHS Kent and Medway: [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Glossary of Terms](https://www.kmpt.nhs.uk/media/3325/edi-glossary-of-terms.pdf)

Stonewall: [List of LGBTQ+ terms](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/list-lgbtq-terms)

UKRI: [Glossary of EDI terms](https://www.ukri.org/publications/ukri-glossary-of-edi-terms/)

University of York: [Glossary of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Terminology](https://www.york.ac.uk/about/equality/edi-glossary-terminology/)

**Other resources**

[Homosaurus: international linked data vocabulary](https://homosaurus.org/) (a good source for alternative subject headings / controlled vocabulary)

Inclusive Terminology Glossary by Carissa Chew: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1JlZG0zmzlzPauwqJ5JxxUajf5hYkD0ta>