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Leading learning and skills

# Equality and Diversity: Fact file 5

Motives, meaning and  
manners

**March 2006**

Of interest to all Learning and Skills Council staff

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## Introduction

The Learning Skills Council is committed to mainstreaming equality and diversity. As part of this commitment we are continuing to build on the information provided through our fact files. This booklet aims to help you feel confident about communicating with your colleagues in a way that respects their individuality.

The following are some basic principles which we all need to consider.

- Regardless of any group we might consider that we belong to, we all have different opinions about language and particular words that we either like or dislike.
- Terminology changes over time, as do perceptions of the suitability of terms.
- Some terms are definitely offensive and should never be used.
- We all have the right to say if we find a particular word or phrase offensive.
- If an individual ever tells you that he or she finds a word or phrase offensive, you should apologise immediately (regardless of the fact that you did not mean to cause offence) and not use the word or phrase with that person or anyone else you might reasonably expect to be offended by it.

We need to be aware of our own prejudices and the assumptions we make, sometimes unwittingly, but which nevertheless can be quite damaging to relationships with colleagues. In a workplace which celebrates differences, employees will be working towards shared goals. Difficulties arise when the differences appear to be the focus of attention. This booklet aims to give employees guidance on words and behaviours to use, whilst helping

employees to communicate with colleagues using language and terminology that they prefer and therefore helping to make the LSC a positive place to work.

Please use this booklet as guidance and remember that there are no hard and fast rules. Only individuals can guide you towards respecting their individuality in a way that works best for them.

### Creating a safe environment

Whilst some aspects of individuality are physically obvious (for example gender), many are not (for example religion, sexual orientation or a hidden disability). Part of the collective responsibility we all share, in making the LSC a truly inclusive workplace, is to create an environment in our own immediate area where people feel safe to share information about their individual situation should they wish to. We all have a part to play in fostering a culture of mutual respect, support and understanding such that individuals feel it is acceptable to share information about themselves as people, rather than just as LSC employees, should they feel it appropriate to do so.

# Disability

## Communication and understanding difference

We need to be aware of the context of how language is used when considering disability.

We need to be aware of the implications of how individuals adapt to fit the world and how the work environment can restrict access to work for some people with a disability.

### Examples of how society creates barriers for disabled people

- Inaccessible transport
- Isolated families
- No lifts, ramps or induction loops
- Prejudiced attitudes
- Poor job prospects
- Badly designed buildings
- Hypocrisy
- No parking spaces
- Segregated education
- Poverty and low income
- Lack of enablers

## Language around disability

Words to be avoided	Why	Recommended alternative
Victim of	It suggests that the condition is identified before the person	Person who has or has experienced
Crippled by	As above	Person who has or person with
Suffering from	As above	Person who has or with
Afflicted by	As above	Person who has or with
Wheelchair-bound	It suggests that the individual is fixed to the wheelchair	Wheelchair user or person with a wheelchair
Handicap	The term originates from "cap in hand" and is offensive to many people with disabilities, as it implies begging or the need to get help through charity	Person with a disability or disabled person (note that he or she is a person first, and someone who has a disability second)
Mental handicap	This is an intellectual impairment and should not be confused with mental illness	Person with a learning difficulty
Mental illness	People who have experienced mental health problems	Mental health problems or stress-related illness, or referred to as a user of mental health services
Invalid	Means literally not valid or worthless	Person with disability or people with disabilities
Deaf and dumb	Implies that a deaf person is also stupid and is very offensive	Deaf without speech
Deaf or blind	Sensory impairments are specific	Has a sensory impairment
Deaf/blind	People may have more than one impairment	People who are both deaf and blind are also referred to as dual sensory impaired

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Words to be avoided	Why	Recommended alternative
The disabled	Suggests that there is a homogenous group and that all disabled people are the same	Disabled people or people with disabilities
Disabled toilets	Suggests that these are only for the use of disabled people	Accessible toilets
Carers	Could be family members, which is in addition to their role as mother, father, son, and so on.	Don't confuse with paid support – these people should be referred to as personal assistants
Disabled parking bays	Specified places which are accessible or nearer to an entrance	Should be parking for orange or blue badge holders, or parking for disabled drivers or passengers or accessible parking bays
Able-bodied or normal	Suggests that people with any form of disability are "abnormal" in some way	Non-disabled person
Epileptic, dyslexic and so on		Person with (or person who has) epilepsy, dyslexia and so on

**DON'T EVER SAY:**

Spastic, cripple, retarded, defective, mentally deficient, handicapped or Mongol.

**Preferable language**

- Always use the phrase "person with a disability" or "disabled person". If in doubt, ask the person how he or she would be prefer to be referred to.
- Avoid relating to a person's condition as a primary state, for example, a person with arthritis is not "an arthritic" in the same way that you would not refer to someone as "freckled", but rather someone with freckles.
- It is also important to realise that individuals who have the same condition do not necessarily display symptoms in the same way.
- Avoid attaching labels to people with or without disabilities. For example, the word "normal" has no real meaning: we are all different.

- Some people with disabilities may need help. Avoid using the term "care", which has negative implications, and use, instead, the terms "assist", "enable", "facilitate". This will send out the message that people with disabilities are independent and able to take control of their own needs.

**General behaviour and common courtesies**

**Visual impairments**

- When welcoming a person with a visual impairment to a room they have not been in previously, give a brief explanation of the layout. If you have to leave someone with a visual impairment in an unfamiliar place, try to make sure that they have some form of physical contact nearby, for example a chair or a table, and make sure that they are standing in a safe area, such as not behind a door, in a busy corridor or near the top of a flight of stairs.
- If you are guiding someone with a visual impairment, allow them to hold your arm, rather than grabbing theirs, as this allows them to remain in control.

- If, while you are guiding them, you have to navigate stairs, indicate to them whether the stairs are going up or down.
  - When talking to a person with a visual impairment, always introduce yourself and the people with you, including their relative positions in the room, for example: "On your left is Melanie Green." If it is a group environment (for example a meeting or training session) give a vocal cue as to whom you are addressing by announcing the name of the person to whom you are speaking.
  - Advise them when you leave, as they may not be aware, especially in a noisy environment.
  - When guiding someone, give clear instructions or descriptions, for example, "This is a step down", not merely, "This is a step".
  - Resist the temptation to ask negative or intrusive questions, for example, "What's wrong with you?" When you meet someone, it is always better to ask positive questions. For example, "Are you familiar with this meeting room?", or "Do you want any assistance or guidance?"
  - Do not be embarrassed should you use a common expression such as "see you later" and then realise that it may obliquely relate to a person's impairment – for example, discussing programmes you may have watched on television last night.
  - If you want to shake hands, the person with a visual impairment may not have the visual capacity to realise that you have put your hand out to them, so lightly touch their hand with yours to let them know that you have.
  - Identify yourself by name each time you meet someone with a visual impairment until they get to know you well enough to recognise you by the sound of your voice.
  - If you are speaking to someone who is partially sighted, try to stand still while you are talking to them. It may be difficult for them to maintain eye contact with you if you move around too much.
  - Do not shout at a person who has a visual impairment – they can hear you!
  - If the person with a visual impairment is supported by a guide dog:
    - Do not touch the guide dog without the permission of the individual it is assisting.
    - Do not make noises at, or talk to, the guide dog as this may distract it from doing its job – remember, it is working.
    - Do not feed the guide dog treats or titbits without the permission of the individual it is assisting.
    - Do not be offended if the individual does not wish to discuss his or her disability or the nature of the assistance the guide dog provides.
- ### Wheelchair users
- Do not lean on a person's wheelchair; the chair is part of the person's body space. Try where possible to make eye contact with a wheelchair user by bringing a chair nearby so that you are both on the same level and by bending down slightly – this avoids the wheelchair user straining their neck. Try to avoid crouching, as this can appear patronising.
  - Do go through a door first and then hold it open for the person to follow.
  - Do not grab the back of a person's wheelchair to push them along – unless they ask you to do so. In many cases wheelchair users can manage to get around without help; however, if they need help they will undoubtedly ask for it.
  - Do not talk to the person through any carer they have with them, for example, don't ask "Does he take sugar?"

## Hearing impairments

- If you are with a person who has a hearing impairment, resist the temptation to shout, as shouting can distort sound through hearing aids and can inhibit the person's ability to lip read. It may be worth having a pen and paper handy so that if they can't hear what you say, you can write it down.
- If you are with someone who can lip read (only three out of 10 words are visible on the lips), do the following:
  - Look directly at them.
  - Keep the normal speech rhythm, but slow down slightly.
  - Keep your head fairly still when speaking.
  - Use facial expression, body language and gestures where appropriate.
  - Ensure that your mouth is not hidden behind your hand, beard, or cigarette and that you are not chewing.
- Remember to face the individual, speak slightly more slowly than normal pace, but not so slowly that it distorts your speech, and enunciate your words clearly, but not in an exaggerated manner.
- Make sure that there is sufficient light on your face when you are speaking.
- Do not make assumptions about the person's ability to communicate or the way in which they do it. Always ascertain which communications medium the person intends to use. If a sentence is unheard or misunderstood, as a last resort write it down.
- Many people who have a hearing impairment can lip read very well – and remember to use your hands (away from your mouth), body movements and facial expression to help them understand you. Also remember that your facial expressions will reflect how you are communicating. Don't shout unless you would do so to anyone else in the same situation.
- If a sign language interpreter is present, remember to maintain eye contact with the person you are meeting, rather than the interpreter. You may, however, want to look at the interpreter occasionally just to make sure that they are keeping pace with what you are saying.
- Do not assume that everyone who is hearing impaired can lip read. Always find out or ask the person in advance or before the meeting. Update the person regularly on what is going on, whether it is the fire alarm or social interaction.
- If you need to attract the attention of a person who has a hearing impairment, alternative approaches are a light tap on their shoulder or waving a hand in their field of vision if you are not close enough to tap their shoulder.

## Speech impairments

- Be patient; allow the person time to complete what they wish to say.
- Some may wish to communicate via a computer with a speech synthesiser.
- Do not correct the speech, or try to speak for, someone with speech impairment if their speech is slow.
- Resist the temptation, no matter how well intentioned, to finish their sentences for them.
- If you do not understand what a person with speech impairment has said, do not be afraid to ask them to repeat themselves. Remain patient, but do not pretend to understand if you don't. It is surely preferable to ask them to say it again than for them to be patronised or misunderstood.

### Other mobility difficulties

- Give the person plenty of time to get from A to B and moderate your pace to his or hers.
- Never take the person's arm to help unless he or she has asked you to do this.
- If the person uses stick(s), do not take these away when he or she sits down.

### Loss of limb, finger and so on

- Don't patronise the individual, for example "You cope really well with just one arm".
- Do not make assumptions, for example "I suppose losing a finger has meant you can't type".

### Hidden disabilities

- Avoid discussing the individual's condition in front of others – respect confidentiality.
- Some individuals may need privacy to take medication, including injections; other may need a place to rest during the day.
- Whilst it may not be obvious why, some people may request particular support or facilities (for example, access to an accessible toilet). Trust and respect their judgement without pressing them to explain the reason why. Accept that they have a legitimate disability or medical reason for making the request, without putting them in the potentially difficult or embarrassing position of having to explain their individual circumstances.

### General

- Make sure that all the information produced for the public can be made available to all. Think about: large print, Braille, audio tape, minicom, sign language, videos and targeting organisations who represent people with disabilities.
- Do not make assumptions about an individual's ability to do certain things. Disabled people develop their own methods of overcoming the everyday problems they encounter.
- Do not assume that just because impairment is not visible, it does not exist. Many disabled people with hidden impairments can experience a lot of discrimination. The majority of disabled people don't use wheelchairs. Avoid making the assumption that "They don't look disabled, so they must be OK".
- Do not treat disabled people as you would any other person (such as an adult woman or man, not as a child). They are a person first, and someone with a disability second.
- Ask the person if they need assistance, give it if they request it and believe the person if they say they can manage!
- Do not assume that an offer of assistance will automatically be welcome. Wait for the offer to be accepted and follow the instructions given.
- Do not avoid talking to people with disabilities just because you have a fear of saying the wrong thing. Relax, speak normally and stand in front to allow eye contact to be made, in the same way you would when talking to anyone else. Respect personal space and boundaries.

- Make sure that the disabled person has clear information about access restrictions and fire exits when visiting your building or organisation. If the building or a particular meeting room is not accessible, give the person an alternative choice.
- Always make sure that any accessible toilet is preserved and not used as a storage area, even on a temporary basis.
- If trying to find a suitable venue for meetings or seminars, consult with local disabled people's organisations that may have experience of suitable venues and their accessibility. Also, contact the local authority access officer for information.
- Always ask meeting delegates to let you know about any additional requirements they may have; this will help you plan effectively to meet their needs and indeed make any reasonable adjustments that may be required. This will enable you to pass on relevant information – for the purpose of meeting any particular needs – whilst bearing in mind issues of confidentiality and sensitivity.
- When considering "housekeeping" issues, we need to consider any additional needs that visitors or delegates may have of which we are unaware – for example, signposting accessible facilities as standard practice.

## Age

Age diversity at work means employing people of all ages, and not discriminating against someone because of how old they are. Think about the restrictions you may put on yourself and the team by limiting the age profile of your team.

### Good practice

- Make sure you recruit based on skills, ability and potential.
- Ask positive questions about what the individual can do.
- Make sure that your selection decision is based on skills and ability.
- Always promote based on the ability or potential of the individual, using the recruitment and selection policy.
- Encourage all employees to participate in training and development; discuss as part of the employee performance management reviews.
- If you need to apply a redundancy policy, make sure selection criteria are unbiased and linked to the organisational skills profile.
- When offering retirement, consider the needs of the individual as well as the business needs.
- Do not assume that because of the individual's age, they are unable to do something or that they are unwilling to learn.
- Demonstrate a genuine commitment of management to put these principles into practice and communicate it throughout the organisation.

- Measure success through monitoring the workforce.
- Consult with individuals or consider all team members' needs when planning events or team days; ensure that all members can participate, and value the experience they all may bring.

## Ethnicity, religion and belief

### Communication

We all have preferences on how we would like to be communicated with, but the basic principle is that we communicate with each other in a respectful manner. Some colleagues have different customs and practices, which require them to request time off at short notice or prefer to eat particular food or food prepared in a specific way.

Individuals from ethnic groups may have different religious customs and practices, which may affect their holiday requirements or the request for time off at short notice, for example, funeral practices.

Be careful not to make assumptions and judgements about the individual based on their specific requests – for example, special time off for funeral arrangements. Encourage all employees to feel they can be open and comfortable about the requests they may make. There are also religious obligations in relation to birth, coming of age, marriage and death, which can vary according to religion, culture and position in the family and, again, it is best to try to find ways to give everyone fair treatment that involves taking differences into account.

This does not affect the individual's ability to do the job but may require understanding from colleagues.

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations were introduced in December 2003 and employers need to be aware of some areas which may affect individuals such as dress codes, break policies, recruitment and job applications, flexible scheduling, rescheduling, religious leave and use of accommodation issues that may arise at social events.

Key to success in supporting employees will be consultation and an open dialogue to understand employees' needs.

If you want to know more about or understand the individual, don't be afraid to ask them about their background in a polite and professional manner.

Individuals may have a preference about how they are addressed. If you get it wrong, apologise and ask what the correct manner should be.

### Good practice

Don't make assumptions about individuals' beliefs and practices. If in doubt, ask.

### Dress code and appearance

Many religious and cultural traditions require particular dress, for example wearing the hair in a certain way, not cutting the hair, wearing head coverings such as hijabs, turbans and Yarmulke, wearing long or modest clothing which covers the body and wearing particular jewellery like the Sikh Kara, or bracelet. In most cases these should not be in conflict with office dress codes, uniforms, or health and safety, but sensitivity and flexibility should be shown and efforts made to accommodate the wearing of religious dress safely.

**Religious observances**

Reasonable accommodation could include:

- adjustments to working hours or days
- use of floating or optional holidays
- use of lunch time in exchange for early finish (within health and safety guidelines)
- staggered work hours
- flexible working arrangements, for example flexibility in start and finish times might help devout Jews who wish to leave work early on Fridays for Shabbat; allowing Muslims an extended lunch break on Fridays (making up the time across the rest of the week) would enable those who wish to attend the collective midday Friday prayers to do so
- swapping holidays
- providing facilities such as a prayer or quiet room.

**Recruitment and job applications**

- Forms should not ask questions about availability to work, where it may reveal an applicant's creed.
- Try to be flexible about interview dates.
- Be aware that some applicants will avoid eye contact for cultural reasons.
- Be aware that some applicants may not wish to shake hands; interviewers should take their cue from the applicant.
- Be aware that some applicants will look and dress differently from expectations.
- Advertise in appropriate media where practicable.

**Religious leave**

Managers should consult with employees about their religious leave requirements over the coming year. Dates for some religious festivals are approximate, as they are based on lunar observation and may change from year to year, or according to different doctrines or local customs.

Requests may also be made to work on public holidays in place of the individual's religious holidays.

When considering these requests managers should take into consideration:

- approving annual leave, time off in lieu, unpaid leave, and/or flexible working arrangements
- availability and access of the work location.

Other requests may include time off at short notice for funerals, depending on the employee's religion and cultural practice.

**Social interaction**

Ask for people's first names and family names, not their Christian name. Ask how they wish to be addressed and how their name should be pronounced. Not everyone has a surname or family name in the Anglo-Saxon sense of family name, nor will this always come last.

Consideration should be given where company events are held outside working hours; the following are guidelines to consider when making arrangements:

- Availability of alcohol – is it appropriate to be served?
- Ask for any particular dietary requirements.
- Keep religious food such as Kosher meat away from other food and ensure that food is clearly labelled.

People who decline social invitations have the right to do so without the need to justify themselves or give a reason; be aware that undue pressure can cause embarrassment and discomfort.

## Gender

### Communication

Be aware of gender bias in language, such as:

Words and phrases to avoid	Alternatives
Headmaster or headmistress	Head teacher
Manageress	Manager
Chairman, chairwoman or chairperson	Chair
Fireman	Fire-fighter
Male secretary	Secretary
Foreman	Supervisor
Male nurse	Nurse
Manpower	Personnel, employees
Best man for the job	Best person for the job
Housewife	Homemaker, shopper, consumer – depending on the context
Man in the street	Ordinary people, average person
Layman	Layperson
Mankind	Humanity, human kind, men and women
Master or mastered	Perfect or perfected

### Good practice

Be aware of equal pay issues in association with gender. These should be considered at the following stages of working cycle:

- starting
- promotion
- performance
- grading
- progression
- bonus
- working time.

Where a female is on maternity leave, make sure you keep her in touch with what is happening in the organisation.

Don't make assumptions about the individual's ability whilst they are pregnant. If in doubt, ask.

## Addressing sexual orientation

### Definitions

Sexuality	That part of a person's identity that encompasses their experience of sexual attraction and activity.
Sexual orientation	The identification of an individual on the basis of whether he or she is sexually attracted to people of the other sex or same sex or both sexes.
Gay	Preferred, self-chosen term. Individuals whose primary sexual attraction and activity are (or would be) with members of the same sex. This term is most commonly used to refer to men.
Lesbian	Preferred, self-chosen term. Women whose primary sexual attraction and activity are (or would be) with women.
Bisexual	Person with a sexual orientation towards both men and women.
Heterosexual	Individuals whose primary sexual attraction and activity are (or would be) with members of the other sex.
LGB	An acceptable acronym for lesbian, gay and bisexual people.
LGBT	An acceptable acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.
Out	People who have acknowledged their sexual identity to themselves and have told others. It often involves the individual being publicly open about being lesbian, gay or bisexual.
Outing	Publicly declaring another person's sexuality without their permission. A lesbian, gay or bisexual person may "out" themselves.
Homophobia	Prejudice and hostility against same-sex relationships.
Heterosexism	The (unquestioned) presumption that everyone is heterosexual. This can put non-heterosexual people into the awkward position of having to conceal or reveal their sexual orientation.

### Communication

Legislation implemented in December 2003 brought employees' sexual orientation onto the agenda. The legislation applies to employment and vocational training and covers both direct and indirect discrimination, victimisation and harassment.

The following is a brief guide to the issues to be aware of as colleagues and managers.

- Don't make assumptions about sexuality.
- Beware of stereotyping and homophobic comments made.
- Don't work from a starting assumption of heterosexuality – for example, automatically using the term boyfriend or girlfriend or husband or wife to describe someone's partner.
- Understand the effects of "being in the closet". Being lesbian, gay or bisexual and not feeling able to tell anybody at work can put constant pressure on an individual and have a negative effect on them and their work.
- Recognise the benefits of "coming out". People do "come out" to their colleagues and many experience overwhelming relief.

- Know your own people. Create a culture in your workplace where people feel safe to "come out". Although this is easier said than done, part of this can be done through training managers to make the right people decisions.
- Raise awareness. Discrimination can sometimes be unwitting and offence can be caused through ignorance.
- The employer can support a lesbian and gay network. An employee network is a useful way for sexual minorities to provide support for one another – and also to become aware of others in the same situation, as invisibility can be a significant issue.
- Make sure support from top managers. Get senior managers to act as diversity champions for the different groups in the organisation, and make sure that there is a champion for sexual minorities.

Words to be avoided	Why	Recommended alternative
Homosexual	Considered by some in the lesbian, gay and bisexual community to be a derogatory and offensive term. It originates from a medical definition when same-sex attraction or relationships were construed as mental illness.	Gay, lesbian, gay man or woman, bisexual, bisexual man or woman or the acronym LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual).
Sexual preference	This phrase has been used to imply that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is a choice that LGB people should "unchoose".	Sexual orientation

## Transpeople

These are separate issues from sexual orientation (the term that indicates sexual attraction to persons of the same, opposite or same and opposite sex) and should not be confused in any way.

The following helps to define terminology and the use of appropriate language.

- **Transgender:** an all-encompassing term to cover transsexuals, transvestites and cross-dressers. More specifically it can refer to someone who experiences “gender dysphoria” between their sexed body and society's construction of gender role. Can also refer to someone who consciously “plays with” gender or sex role norms. A transgender person may or may not choose to alter their body with hormone therapy or surgery.
- **Transsexual:** an older, more medical term for a person who feels a consistent and overwhelming desire to fulfil their life as a member of the opposite sex.
- **Transvestite:** A clinical term for a cross-dresser. A person who dresses in the clothing of the opposite gender. Generally, these persons do not wish to alter their body.

On the whole, once transpeople have completed transition to their new gender, many do not consider themselves transsexual or transgendered – their condition has been treated and they are now in the right gender and role, with a body to match.

## Related publications

Other useful publications in this suite of literature include:

Equality and Diversity: Fact file 1 – *Introduction to equality and diversity*  
LSC-I-NAT-060136

Equality and Diversity: Fact file 2 – *Recognising discrimination and promoting equality*  
LSC-I-NAT-060137

Equality and Diversity: Fact file 3 – *What can I do to promote equality and diversity?*  
LSC-I-NAT-060138

Equality and Diversity: Fact file 4 – *What you need to know*  
LSC-I-NAT-060139

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**Contact**

If you have any queries regarding equality and diversity please contact the member of staff responsible for this area of work in your office or region.

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