



Royal Conservatoire
of Scotland

Guidance on Pronouns Sharing

Introduction

We all use pronouns as part of everyday conversation.

Gender pronouns (such as 'he/him/his' or 'she/her/hers') are the way that we constantly refer to one another's gender identity – except we often do not think a whole lot about them.

We frequently, and likely subconsciously, assume a person's gender based on their outward appearance and expression, and 'assign' a pronoun.

However, our inference as to that person's gender identity may not be correct. Everyone deserves to have their chosen pronouns respected in their place of work or study. Some students and staff may use pronouns that are non-traditional to some of us, such as 'they, them and theirs' instead of, or as well as, 'he, him and his' or 'she, her and hers'. You may see people using a combination of pronouns, e.g., he/they, she/they; in this case the individual uses both sets of pronouns interchangeably.

The question about sharing pronouns in a group setting (and among individuals too) in institutions is one that has been regularly raised and there is no simple answer to this question. This briefing is to guide us on how to appropriately share pronouns or facilitate others to do so in the context of advancing equality, diversity, and inclusion. The guide is not set in a tablet of stone - it is to enable a discussion about this issue with a view to improve the sharing of pronouns in a way people feel comfortable with.

The guidance has been based on a review of and in consultation with:

- Practices/approaches of other educational institutions, LGBTQI+, legal, human rights and equality organisations
- Recommendations and personal opinions and experiences of EDI advocates, campaigners and educators and people identifying as trans, gender diverse or non-binary within and beyond the Conservatoire

Approaches:

- **Voluntary** – Everyone should feel free to share their pronouns of their own volition (including especially if they are a transgender, gender diverse or non-binary person). It is a way for people to demonstrate or signpost their identity, but also their own way of encouraging others to do so without being pressured. If you are in a group leader position (facilitator, meeting chair, tutor, lecturer etc) and you feel comfortable to share your pronouns, then do so as this would achieve these outcomes and demonstrate that a space or setting respects trans and non-binary people.
- **Not Mandatory** – If as a leader in a group setting or space you feel comfortable to share your pronouns, you should make it categorically clear that it is optional if others

want to follow suit. By doing so, you provide people an opportunity, who want to but are not sure, to do so without any pressure or embarrassment. Another way to share your pronouns, as a person in authority or position of power, is by using non-verbal ways – providing opportunities to write them **on stickers, nametags, badges, zoom/teams tags**. Some people (particularly those younger and or new to a particular pronoun, gender, or space as well as those transitioning) may find this more comfortable than loudly disclosing their pronouns in a group setting.

- **Other ways** – You can also email students or staff in advance, asking them to communicate with you if they would like you to know their correct pronouns on the first day of class/ work or at any other time. The aim is to create a way and time for students or staff to share throughout the academic year. It also communicates to them that you understand the importance of pronouns, privacy and about not making assumptions about others' identities.

Pronouns in a Pre-HE setting:

In August 2021, the Scottish Government published "[Supporting transgender young people in schools: guidance for Scottish schools](#)", which contains comprehensive guidance on how trans and non-binary children and young people should be supported within and throughout the school system, including the fact that it is the right and respectful approach to use a young person or child's preferred pronoun.

Given this is new policy guidance in an emerging area of public understanding some parents/carers, specifically of minors, may see pronoun sharing to be confusing and or inappropriate for their child. Some students (minors) too may find confusing the use of a pronoun by a staff member that does not conform to a perceived gender identity or one not assigned to them at birth. Some parents/carers may therefore express concern and even protest pronoun sharing in this respect. If this happens, the following response is recommended:

1. Have a conversation with parents/carers to understand their concerns and explain/dispel any misconceptions and to improve understanding of the intersectional relationship of transgender, equality and diversity issues. This should be situated in the context of the role of educational institutions and their staff to promote positive attitudes and behaviours towards diversity and inclusion in their students and staff within and beyond the learning environment. Alternatively, you can seek guidance from the EDI Team in the first instance.
2. No staff member should feel compelled to use the pronoun assigned to them at birth simply to make parents/carers and indeed students feel more comfortable. Doing so may breach their own human rights and equality legislation. More importantly, it is a position that will be unsustainable in so far as we cannot prevent other students from using similar pronouns to express their gender identity if so desired. Again, we can contextualise this line of reasoning in relation to our legal duty under the Equality Act (2010), the Gender Recognition Act (2004) and the Human Rights Act (1998).

It's helpful to remember:

- Some people say they won't use 'they/them' as singular pronouns because they don't believe it to be grammatically correct. The use of they/them is acceptable and commonly used in everyday language, particularly with reference to people who identify as non-binary and/or gender diverse.
- Not everyone is in the same place in terms of figuring out who they are in terms of identity, so patience and an understanding that this area may be challenging new territory to individuals is helpful. Those who are unsure of their gender identity may feel uncomfortable around choosing a pronoun. Additionally, those whose gender presentation may not match their gender identity may feel that they are in a new and possibly unsafe environment. It is the responsibility of the leader/authority figure in power to make that space safe and welcoming.
- Individuals should be given the opportunity to disclose their pronouns individually to lecturers and managers (in an interaction other than in the wider group), and have the chance at that point to disclose whether they would like that information to be shared with other individuals and the wider group or where and when they would like that pronoun to be used. i.e., a student or staff member may have begun a transition away from their previous gender identity and pronoun and only wish that to be shared with others when they feel more confident that they would like to be addressed that way by others.
- MS Teams as a platform for classes and meetings doesn't support the displaying of pronouns. Staff may therefore consider using Zoom instead, as its settings allow for individuals to display their pronouns.
- Whilst pronoun sharing is about respect and acknowledging that each person's gender is valid, we should also understand that gender pronouns can be sensitive information for some people and that some will not be comfortable disclosing their gender pronouns to a group of strangers or colleagues.
- You may accidentally use a pronoun which differs from a person's chosen one. If this does occur, then apologise as soon as you realise your mistake. Students know we are only human and such mistakes happen. However, repeated use of the wrong pronoun will be seen as deliberate. That's not acceptable behaviour and will be very upsetting to the individual concerned.

If you have any questions about the content of this guidance document, please contact the EDI Team: Roz Caplan: r.caplan@rcs.ac.uk or Amadu Khan: a.khan@rcs.ac.uk

You may also find it useful to contact the Trans Student Union: BDown@rcs.ac.uk

Useful resources:

[Law Society – Using Pronouns in the Workplace](#)
[NUS – Pronouns](#)

[Scottish Trans Alliance – Use of Pronouns](#)

[Sharing Pronouns at Work](#)

[Stonewall – International Pronouns Day](#)

[“Supporting transgender young people in schools: guidance for Scottish schools”](#)

[Non-binary Journeys – You-tube video](#)

[Gay Times “Why do Pronouns Matter to Today’s LGBTQ Generation?”](#)