

Guide for the Implementation of Gender-Neutral Toilets

The aim of this guide is to explain how and why colleges, faculties and other university institutions should provide gender-neutral toilets and changing facilities.

Summarised recommendations:

- To degender toilets in colleges, faculties and university buildings such that all single stall cubicles are gender-neutral.
- To provide gender-neutral changing areas in college and university-owned sporting areas.
- To ensure that in any future building works that may involve toilet or changing facilities, said facilities are either completely gender-neutral or gender-neutral accessible cubicles are provided.

Practical methods of implementation:

- The signs on the toilets would be changed to signs simply saying 'Toilet', 'Toilets' or 'WC' (if a toilet has urinals, it can also be useful to change the sign as 'Toilets & Urinals', 'Cubicles & Urinals' or equivalent symbols).
- Toilets marked as 'Men' to be changed would all need sanitary bins in the cubicles (or a sign saying whether the bins are present or absent).
- A lock will be placed on the entrance of toilets for which there is only one cubicle where there may also be a separate sink/queuing area.
- Single gender-neutral cubicles would need to be provided where there are changing facilities that lack this option.

Grounds for proposal:

There are many existing non-binary (people who do not identify as either male or female, or have fluid genders), trans (people who do not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth), and intersex (people who are born with a sexual anatomy that does not fit the traditional definitions of male or female) students in the university, for whom more accessible gender-neutral facilities would provide a safe, judgment-free space to use the toilet. In the 2018 Big Cambridge LGBT+ Survey organised by CUSU LGBT+, out of 400 respondents, 71 identified as trans or non-binary. Stonewall (an organisation working for LGBT+ rights and welfare) estimates that there are between 300,000 and 500,000 trans people in the UK. In Cambridge, this would translate to 100 to 150 students - hardly a negligible number. Furthermore, providing non-binary students with a gender-neutral facility is protected under the Equality Act 2010; denying them the use of these constitutes discrimination, even if it is unintentional.

Unnecessary gendering of facilities can be harmful to non-binary students – the more gender-neutral facilities, the more accessible these facilities are to people across the college. It is unfair to direct students, staff and visitors who may require gender-neutral toilets large distances, and this can be circumvented by degendering as many toilets as possible. From an access perspective, child protection regulations prevent the direction of potential applicants to spaces classed as residential within colleges (unless that person is accompanied by a DBS checked member of the college). Given a significant part of access work is with minority groups

(e.g. non-binary/intersex people) more facilities are needed to cater for them, be they guests or prospective applicants attending school visits or open days.

The introduction of gender-neutral toilets would also be a small, yet meaningful sign of increased recognition for all non-binary, trans and intersex people who may pass through the university, whether they are members of the university or not. If more easily-accessible gender-neutral toilets were provided, it would send a welcoming message to prospective applicants from trans, intersex and non-binary backgrounds.

Colleges which have already taken action on this front and have more publicly accessible gender-neutral toilets include, but are not limited to: Corpus Christi, Homerton, Hughes Hall, King's, Murray Edwards, Sidney Sussex, and St Catharine's. Corpus Christi has successfully de-gendered all its undergraduate toilets and all other colleges could be looking to follow its example; every college can still do more, even if they have - thankfully - started taking steps towards implementing more gender-neutral bathrooms.

Furthermore, many non-binary students may be driven to use the non-gendered disabled toilets for practical reasons if less accessible options are given, and this could increase traffic to disabled toilets, inconveniencing disabled students. It is obvious that simply having disabled toilets as gender-neutral facilities is inadequate for both groups. However, allowing non-binary/intersex students to use the disabled toilet would be better than having no provision.

In a scenario where some students oppose such a change, it should be explained that trans people have a right to use the facilities and are no more threat than other users. In the particular case of AMAB (assigned male at birth) people, they may face more violence and aggression in using binary toilets compared to the use of gender-neutral toilets (due to gender policing on the basis of their appearance). If gender-neutral toilets are provided on top of binary toilets, it is also important that trans men and women are not rejected from binary toilets and forced to use gender-neutral facilities; they have the right to use any facility which represents their own gender identity.

There are further accessibility advantages to providing gender-neutral changing areas. A report by Sarah Gibson (former CUSU LGBT+ President, 2015-2016) into Transgender and Intersex Sports Provision highlights the issues at hand:

“Trans and intersex people frequently display concern over exposing their body in public. This may be because the characteristics of their body do not match with those of their preferred gender or because their body does not match either binary gender. There is significant fear that they will face discrimination and possibly physical assault if this is seen by those around them. This is particularly relevant to those who are assigned male at birth using a designate female changing room, as those around them may view them as potential aggressors.

“In the 2013 CUSU LGBT+ survey, Trans* Inclusion in Sport, it was found that 80% of respondents would happily use gender-neutral single stalls most or all of the time, but only 45% of respondents would be happy using gender-neutral communal changing facilities. This suggests that providing gender-neutral single stalls and private showers would be sufficient to meet the needs of all.”

Beyond this, there are also benefits to cisgender (people who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth) students - proximity to the nearest toilet and reduced waiting times are of great importance. In some areas there may only be a male or a female toilet, which can mean many people must travel longer distances which could inconvenience students making use of study facilities.

The rebranding of toilets to make them gender-neutral would be a small, but deeply significant step, towards making the university a truly inclusive environment.

Guide written by the CUSU LGBT+ committee.

